VIDEO GAMES
Baby Steps mocks immature males in open-world format
Page 18



MILITARY
House veterans condemn Trump's proposal to use cities as training grounds
Page 3



MLB PLAYOFFS
Dodgers' offense, starting pitching lead sweep of Reds
Page 32

Army expands program targeting recruits with specialized skills » Page 5

STARS AND STRIPES®

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LARA KORTE/Stars and Stripes

A sign on the Ramstein Air Base, Germany, aquatic center door announces that the facility is closed because of the government shutdown.

Shutdown firings loom

Trump, budget head aim to cut programs, jobs as political punishment

By Lisa Mascaro, Josh Boak and Seung Min Kim
Associate Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has seized on the government shutdown as an opportunity to reshape the federal workforce and punish detractors, meeting with budget director Russ Vought on Thursday to talk through "temporary or permanent" spending cuts that could set up a lose-lose dynamic for Democratic lawmakers.

Trump announced the meeting on social media Thursday morning, saying he and Vought would determine "which of the many Democrat Agencies" would be cut — continuing their efforts to slash federal spending by threatening mass firings of workers and suggesting "irreversible" cuts to Democratic priorities.

"I can't believe the Radical Left Democrats

SEE SHUTDOWN ON PAGE 8

FURTHER COVERAGE

■ Logjam pushes DODEA athletes to the sidelines
Page 25

■ Homecoming dances, games are put in limbo
Page 8

Navy enlists 3,000 more sailors than last year

By Rose L. Thayer
Stars and Stripes

The Navy this year emphasized on-the-ground recruiters as it pushed changes that led to an increase of more than 3,000 sailors compared with last year and a second year in a row of meeting the goal for new recruits, the service's top recruiting officer said.

"We've listened to those line recruiters and done the things that they indicated were the most important to them, and that has changed the game on the inspiration, the drive and the willingness to go the extra mile to get the job done," Rear Adm. James Waters, commander of Navy Recruiting Command, said Monday discussing the success of fiscal year 2025, which ended Tuesday.

The Navy in June said it had met its 2025 recruiting goal three months early, with 40,600 future sailors enlisted. By the close of the fiscal year, it had brought that final number to 44,096 — a figure the Navy hasn't seen since the early 2000s, Waters said.

The Navy missed its recruiting goal in 2023, as did the Army and Air Force, and took steps to reimagine how it brings in new sailors. Changes included modernizing marketing campaigns, streamlining administrative processes, tripling its medical waiver review staff, expanding age eligibility and opening a preparatory course to improve test scores for entry.

Waters did not explain if one change was more fruitful than another but noted that removing processing barriers allowed recruiters to spend more time out meeting people. The Military Entrance Processing Station timeline dropped from more than 30

SEE SAILORS ON PAGE 5

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Gold prices soar to new records amid US shutdown

Associated Press

NEW YORK — As uncertainty deepens amid the U.S. government's first shutdown in almost seven years, the gold frenzy continues to climb to new heights.

The going price for New York spot gold hit a record $3,858.45 per troy ounce — the standard for measuring precious metals — as of market close Tuesday, ahead of the shutdown beginning overnight. And futures continued to climb on Wednesday, dancing with the $3,900 mark throughout the day.

Gold sales can rise sharply when anxious investors seek "safe havens" for parking their money. Before Wednesday, the asset — and other metals, like silver — have seen wider gains over the last year, particularly with President Donald Trump's barrage of tariffs plunging much of the world into economic uncertainty.

If trends persist, analysts have predicted that prices could continue to soar. Still, gold can be volatile and the future is never promised.

Gold futures are up more than 45% since the start of 2025, trading at just under $3,895 by Wednesday.

Other precious metals have also raked in gains — with silver seeing an even bigger percentage jump year to date. Silver futures are up nearly 59%, trading at over $47 per troy ounce as of Wednesday.

The Commodity Futures Trade Commission says if you choose to invest in gold, it's important to educate yourself on safe trading practices and be cautious of potential scams and counterfeits.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates

Euro costs (Oct. 3)	0.83
British pound (Oct. 3)	$1.31
Japanese yen (Oct. 3)	144.00
South Korean won (Oct. 3)	1,365.00

Commercial rates

Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3744
Britain (Pound)	1.3429
Canada (Dollar)	1.3956
China (Yuan)	7.1190
Denmark (Krone)	6.3703
Egypt (Pound)	47.7229
Euro	0.8533
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7818
Hungary (Forint)	332.02
Israel (Shekel)	3.3136
Japan (Yen)	147.25
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3053
Norway (Krone)	9.9748
Philippines (Peso)	58.15
Poland (Zloty)	3.63
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7459
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2891
South Korea (Won)	1,403.47
Switzerland (Franc)	0.7980
Thailand (Baht)	32.37
Turkey (NewLira)	41.6072

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	7.25
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.09
Federal funds market rate	4.12
3-month bill	3.94
30-year bond	4.71

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



The weather is compiled from weather.com

TODAY IN STRIPES

American Roundup 21
Comics 19,22-23
Crossword 19,22-23
Music 16
Opinion 24
Sports 25-32

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MILITARY



MADELYN KEECH/U.S. Air Force

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, Attorney General Pam Bondi and White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller speak to Tennessee Safe Task Force members and Tennessee National Guard Soldiers in Memphis, Tenn., on Wednesday.

Bondi, Hegseth rally federal agents and troops in Memphis

BY ADRIAN SAINZ AND TRAVIS LOLLER
Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, Attorney General Pam Bondi and White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller on Wednesday rallied members of a federal law enforcement task force that has begun operating in Memphis as part of President Donald Trump's crime-fighting plan for the city.

The officials met with Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican who has supported the project, before touring a staging area for the Memphis Safe Task Force and then speaking to a group of federal, state and local law enforcement officers and Tennessee National Guard members.

Miller called the task force an "all of government, unlimited support operation" that would make the city "safer than any of you could ever possibly imagine." He predicted that "businesses and investment are going to pour in, and Memphis will be richer than ever before."

"We're not here to second guess you," Hegseth told them. "We're here to have your back — to unleash you to do your jobs so you come home safely."

Democratic U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, who represents Memphis in Congress, said he was disappointed to learn about the visit in the media. In a letter to Hegseth and Bondi, he urged them to be more collaborative and expressed concern about "wartime rhetoric".

"Memphians are not enemies; they are Americans," Cohen said. "They are entitled to constitutional rights, not their government working to 'intimidate, demoralize, hunt and kill' them. We are not a training ground or target practice."

The task force is part of a larger effort by Trump to use National Guard troops and surge federal law enforcement in cities, particularly ones controlled by Democrats. Following troop deployments in the District of Columbia and Los Angeles, he referred to Portland, Ore., as "war-ravaged" and threatened apocalyptic force in Chicago. Speaking Tuesday to U.S. military leaders in Virginia, Trump proposed using cities as training grounds for the armed forces.

Bondi said in a social media post earlier in the day that the task force has made more than 50 arrests over a two-day period. More than 200 officers have been deputized, including personnel from immigration and drug enforcement. They are serving criminal arrest warrants and teaming with state agencies on traffic stops.

Memphis should expect to see an increase in warrant enforcement, especially for violent criminals, Supervisory Deputy U.S. Marshal Ryan Guay said in an email. The Marshals Service will release periodic updates that include arrest numbers, types of charges and participating agencies, he said.

Tennessee National Guard troops will help Memphis Police, Lee has said, but it is unclear how soon that will begin. Lee does not expect more than 150 National Guard members to be sent to Memphis. The city has said there will be no tanks, and the governor said troops will not make arrests or be armed unless local authorities request it.

Memphis has experienced high numbers of violent crimes such as carjackings and homicides in recent years, but both Democratic and Republican officials have noted decreases this year in some crime categories.

Opponents of the deployment say it is an unnecessary federal occupation of a majority-Black city that instead needs more funding to address poverty and other drivers of crime. Supporters see it as a welcomed infusion of law enforcement for a city that still needs help battling violence.

Across the country in Oregon, meanwhile, members of that state's National Guard reported for duty Wednesday. The troops were "preparing to support U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other U.S. Government personnel who are performing federal functions, including the enforcement of federal law, and to protect federal property in Oregon," the Pentagon said in a statement.

Late delivery for readers in S. Korea

Monday and Tuesday's editions of Stars and Stripes will be delivered a day later than usual to readers in South Korea because of the Chuseok holiday.

House veterans condemn Trump troop proposal

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — More than a dozen veterans in the House have accused President Donald Trump of undermining the apolitical nature of the military by telling senior officers that American cities should be used as "training grounds" to combat an "invasion from within."

The House Democrats, including 15 former service members and 10 of their colleagues, sent a letter to Trump on Wednesday voicing their concerns, saying his speech to top military leaders summoned to Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia on Tuesday crossed a line.

Trump in his remarks spoke of fighting foreign enemies alongside domestic ones that are "more difficult in many ways because they don't wear uniforms" and doubled down on deploying U.S. troops to cities such as Los Angeles and Washington.

"It seems that the ones that are run by the radical left Democrats — what they've done to San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles — they're very unsafe places," Trump told generals and admirals. "And we're going to straighten them out one by one, and this is going to be a major part for some of the people in this room."

The proposal threatened "something so deeply un-American it may break the fabric of our democracy and the bedrock principles of an apolitical military that this country was founded on," the group of House Democrats wrote to the president.

The letter was led by Rep. Pat Ryan of New York, a former U.S. Army intelligence officer whose congressional district includes the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He and other veterans implored Trump to consider the message his words sent to young troops.

"Many of us served in combat zones in America's foreign wars — we know firsthand what it means to put our lives on the line for our country," the lawmakers wrote. "We urge you to hear us when we say that this is not what any of our brave young men and women in uniform signed up for."

The lawmakers also called on "every patriot," particularly those who served in the military, to stand up against "this blatant abuse of the world's most lethal fighting force."

"This nation and our Constitution demand an apolitical military," they wrote. "We're teetering on the knife's edge, and silence is not an option."

Trump in recent months has ordered the National Guard to Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago and Portland, Ore., to assist with immigration enforcement and combat crime. The deployments have tested the limits of a nearly 150-year-old federal law that restricts the military's role in enforcing domestic laws.



RYAN SHANE GAY/South Carolina National Guard

Soldiers with the 4th Battalion, 118th Infantry Regiment, South Carolina National Guard stand by at the Dupont Circle Metro Station in Washington on Monday.

MILITARY

Court restores union rights for DODEA teachers

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Thousands of educators at U.S. military-funded schools overseas and stateside may continue participating in union activities following back-to-back court rulings in favor of unions representing federal workers.

Federal Judge Paul Friedman of the District of Columbia restored a preliminary injunction Tuesday in a bench ruling that blocks the implementation of a March executive order by the Trump administration that would strip the collective bargaining rights of more than a million federal employees.

It was a victory for a dozen federal labor unions, including the Overseas Federation of Teachers that represents teachers at Department of Defense Education Activity schools in Italy, Spain, Turkey and Bahrain, the union president said Tuesday night.

"Collective bargaining gives educators and staff a voice to help secure contract provisions that will help students get what they need for a high-quality education," Catherine Indresano said. "We will continue to speak up and speak out for the best possible working and learning conditions at our public schools."

Friedman's decision comes on the heels of another judgment the senior judge was part of, this one in favor of the Federal Education Association, the largest union representing DODEA teachers, and two smaller DODEA-affiliated unions, FEA Stateside Region and the Antilles Consolidated Education Association.

In the Sept. 25 ruling, a panel of three judges for the U.S. Court of Appeals for District of Columbia voted 2-1 to dissolve an emergency stay the administration filed on Sept. 2 to block teachers' bargaining rights, pending the resolution of a lawsuit filed by the three unions against the March executive order.

That order excluded about two-thirds of the federal work force, including all DOD employees, from collective bargaining protections because of their role in national security.

Friedman determined that Trump exceeded his authority, since DODEA "focuses on the education of the children of service members and therefore has only an indirect effect on national security."

The court's action means that FEA's collective bargaining agreement and the rights of union members "are restored and operational" Richard Tarr, FEA executive director, said in a statement Wednesday. Those activities can include filing grievances, keeping union members informed and bargaining over changes to working conditions, according to a recent FEA newsletter.



U.S. ARMY

An Army Precision Strike Missile Increment 1 was fired at White Sands Missile Range on Sept. 26.

Army calls test launch of next deep-strike missile a success

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Army said Tuesday it successfully fired four of its next-generation missiles at an "array of targets" up to 125 miles away.

"Missile performance met all objectives for range, trajectory, accuracy, and height of burst, with initial lethality assessments indicating nominal performance as expected," Redstone Arsenal in Alabama, which organized the tests, said in a statement.

The test was conducted Friday at White Sands Missile Range, N.M.

The Precision Strike Missile Increment 1, a surface-to-surface deep-strike missile, is designed to knock out enemy command posts, radar installations, anti-aircraft launchers and troop concentrations at a range of up to 435 miles.

In March, the Army awarded Lockheed Martin a contract of up to $4.9 billion for the procurement of the first 400 missiles.

The Precision Strike Missile Increment 1 would replace the Army Tactical Missile System, also built by Lockheed Martin, which first saw action during Operation Desert Storm against Iraq in 1991.

Two of the new missiles can be fired from each launcher, compared to one for the ATACMS, effectively doubling the firepower of each battery.

The new missile is compatible with the Army's existing M142 HIMARS and M270A2 MLRS launchers. Its flexible, modular design could allow it to be fired from launchers used by other U.S. forces or allied nations.

The Army and Lockheed Martin have discussed a future, longer-range version that could hit targets up to 620 miles away.

Maj. Gen. Frank Lozano, Program Executive Office Missiles and Space, said the successful tests were good news for the Army and for Lockheed Martin's continued development of the system.

"Partnerships are instrumental in the development and testing of advanced, lethal capabilities, and we look forward to continuing to work together to deliver this critical capability to the warfighter," Lozano said.

Senate confirms special operations veteran as Navy undersecretary

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Wednesday confirmed Hung Cao, a special operations veteran and former Republican congressional candidate, to serve as undersecretary of the Navy.

Cao was confirmed as the service's second-ranking civilian leader in a 52-45 vote, reflecting the reservations many Democrats had about his nomination. Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska also voted against Cao's confirmation.

As a Senate candidate in Virginia last year, Cao extensively criticized the Defense Department's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and attacked a now-defunct Navy recruiting program that featured a drag-performing officer.

"When you're using a drag queen to recruit for the Navy, that's not the people we want," Cao said. "What we need is alpha males and alpha females who are going to rip out their own guts, eat them and ask for seconds. Those are young men and women that are going to win wars."



Cao

He has also criticized the Pentagon's former coronavirus vaccination mandate and advocated for strengthening the U.S.-Mexico border, saying a migrant flow of "13,000 convicted murders and 16,000 convicted rapists" was a threat to democracy.

Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, expressed concerns in June about Cao's record of controversial statements, including Cao's "disparaging certain Navy personnel, sharply criticizing U.S. allies and advocating for the release of convicted Jan. 6 individuals."

Republicans said Cao was highly qualified to serve as Navy undersecretary, citing his distinguished service as a special operations officer for explosive ordnance and disposal and diving.

"Capt. Cao has a drive for public service that comes from his experience of living the American dream," said Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla.

Cao immigrated to the U.S. as a Vietnamese refugee in 1975 and spent part of his childhood in West Africa. He told senators during his confirmation hearing in June that his interactions with Marines during the Iranian Revolution in 1979 inspired him to join the military.

"The Marines brought us into the embassy and stood watch over us in case they had to do a new evacuation and the look in their eyes that night that said, 'Nothing's going to hurt you, not tonight, not on my watch' — I wanted to be like those heroes," he said.

Cao graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and served in the Navy for 25 years, deploying with special operations forces to defuse bombs in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia and working on the Navy budget process. He retired at the rank of captain.

In 2022, Cao ran unsuccessfully for Virginia's 10th Congressional District and in 2024 lost the Senate election to Tim Kaine, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Seapower subcommittee. As Navy undersecretary, Cao is expected to play a key role in the daily management of the Navy and Marine Corps and help the Navy address its persistent problems with building and repairing an aging ship fleet.

He told senators he will focus on reversing years of neglect and mismanagement in the production and maintenance of vessels as well as restoring what he called "the warrior spirit that my generation relied on as the core of our ethos."

"I will deliver to the combatant commanders the most lethal Navy and Marine Corps the world has ever seen," he said.

MILITARY

Army targets recruits with specialized skills

By John Vandiver
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Army is adding more job fields to a program aimed at giving new recruits with unique skills a jump start into their careers.

The Army on Wednesday said it will now include 17 new military occupational specialties to its Civilian Acquired Skills Program. The initiative enables soldiers with relevant civilian skills to bypass some initial training and start their military careers at an advanced level.

"The Army gets skilled specialists into the force faster and at a lower cost, while the Soldier receives a significant head start in their military career," Brig. Gen. Gregory Johnson, director of military personnel management, said in a statement.

The most recent Army job specialties added are wide-ranging and include everything from Patriot missile system repairers to Abrams tank maintainers and respiratory specialists.

To qualify, applicants must have verified civilian training, certifications and relevant experience. The program opens the door to receiving a higher rank or accelerated promotion upon enlistment, the Army said.



Kevin Larson/U.S. Army

Tank maintainers assigned to 3rd Infantry Division pull a power pack from an M1A2 Abrams main battle tank with the help of an M-88 tracked recovery vehicle at Fort Stewart, Ga. in 2024.

Over the last several years, the Army has expanded the program from a handful of job specialties to about 60 now.

The revised Army's CASP program is open to applicants entering active duty, the reserves and National Guard.

The latest update authorizes the following 17 new MOSs:

- 68V – Respiratory Specialist
- 91A – M1 Abrams Tank System Maintainer
- 91J – Quartermaster & Chemical Equipment Repairer
- 91M – Bradley Fighting Vehicle System Maintainer
- 91P – Self-Propelled Artillery Systems Mechanic
- 91S – Stryker Systems Maintainer
- 92A – Automated Logistical Specialist
- 92F – Petroleum Supply Specialist
- 92W – Water Treatment Specialist
- 92Y – Unit Supply Specialist
- 94E – Radio Equipment Repairer
- 94F – Computer/Detection Systems Repairer
- 94P – Multiple Launch Rocket System Repairer
- 94R – Avionics and Survivability Equipment Repairer
- 94S – Patriot System Repairer
- 94T – Short Range Air Defense System Repairer
- 94Y – Automatic Test Systems Operator/Maintainer

Trump signs executive order vowing to defend Qatar in wake of strike

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — President Donald Trump has signed an executive order vowing to use all measures including U.S. military action to defend the energy-rich nation of Qatar — though it remains unclear just what weight the pledge will carry.

The text of the order, available Wednesday on the White House's website but dated Monday, appears to be another measure by Trump to assure the Qataris following Israel's surprise attack on the country targeting Hamas leaders as they weighed accepting a ceasefire with Israel over the war in the Gaza Strip.

The order cites the two countries' "close cooperation" and "shared interest," vowing to "guarantee the security and territorial integrity of the state of Qatar against external attack."

"The United States shall regard any armed attack on the territory, sovereignty or critical infrastructure of the state of Qatar as a threat to the peace and security of the United States," the order says.

"In the event of such an attack, the United States shall take all lawful and appropriate measures — including diplomatic, economic, and, if necessary, military — to defend the interests of the United States and of the state of Qatar and to restore peace and stability."

The order apparently came during a visit to Washington on Monday by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Trump organized a call by Netanyahu to Qatar during the visit in which Netanyahu "expressed his deep regret" over the strike that killed six people, including a member of the Qatari security forces, the White House said.

Qatar's Foreign Ministry described the U.S. pledge as "an important step in strengthening the two countries' close defense partnership." The Qatari-funded Al Jazeera satellite news network declared: "New Trump executive order guarantees Qatar security after Israeli attack."

Trump also spoke on the phone later Wednesday to Qatar's ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, according to a White House official who was not authorized to speak publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The White House did not release details about the call, though Qatar later said the two men spoke about Doha's efforts to reach a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war.

The true scope of the pledge by the U.S. remains in question. Typically, legally binding agreements, or treaties, need to receive the approval of the U.S. Senate. However, presidents have entered international agreements without the Senate's approval, like President Barack Obama did with Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.



Jon Gambrell/AP

Damage is seen after an Israeli strike targeted a compound that hosted Hamas' political leadership in Doha, Qatar, on Sept. 10.

And ultimately, any decision to take military action rests with the president. That uncertainty has clouded previous U.S. defense agreements in Trump's second term, like NATO's Article 5 guarantees.

The order drew criticism after becoming public. Laura Loomer, a right-wing provocateur known for her incendiary social media presence who has been a fixture of Trump's second term, wrote on the social platform X: "I don't want to die for Qatar. Do you?"

The Wall Street Journal's editorial board also questioned the deal.

"This is a decision that can be and should have been debated," they wrote. "Instead it comes out of the blue — an executive order following no public debate."

Qatar, a peninsular nation that sticks out into the Persian Gulf, became fantastically wealthy through its natural gas reserves. It has been a key partner of the U.S. military, allowing its Central Command to have its forward operating base at its vast Al Udeid Air Base.

President Joe Biden named Qatar as a major non-NATO ally in 2022, in part due to its help during America's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan. And Qatar has maintained close ties to Trump, whether through a real estate project with his eponymous Trump Organization to offering the president a Boeing 747 to use as Air Force One.

Sailors: Prep course a success

FROM PAGE 1

days to fewer than three days, an area in which recruiters specifically called for improvement, he said.

"The competitiveness of the economy will always play a factor, and it's really about how easy or hard it is to connect a recruiter with a young person," Waters said. "That dramatic change is by recognizing and adapting to the environment that exists."

The prep course, which helps potential recruits meet standards to attend boot camp, helped 66% of the 1,511 people who attended meet the test scores required to enlist.

"The stories that are the most impactful are the ones where a recruiter has an opportunity to change the trajectory ... of someone's life," Waters said. "Those stories are incredible, and many times, the young people that are scoring down in the lower-score areas, were disadvantaged in how they were educated and developed. They come from difficult personal situations."

The Navy already has reached 25% of its 2026 goal in the delayed entry pool, which is on par with the start of 2025, Navy Recruiting Command said. Waters did not mention if the service has reached a point where it could revisit some of the loosened standards for enlistment, such as a decision in 2022 to raise the maximum age of enlistment to 41 years old.

MILITARY

Army civilian accused of stealing over $500K

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

An Army civilian accused of stealing more than $500,000 from Installation Management Command was arrested last week after purchasing a same-day flight to Paris following investigators' questioning of command leadership, according to federal court records.

Laurent Lant, 55, worked as the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation chief of banking, investments, and insurance for IMCOM, which is headquartered at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, according to the command. He also uses the last name Lantonkpode, according to government records.

He is charged with theft of government money or property and faces up to 10 years in prison, according to court records.

In his role with the Army, Lant had the ability to make electronic money transfers between bank accounts for valid reasons, according to a federal court complaint filed in the Western District of Texas.

He launched his own company, Zurich Consulting LLC, with the Texas Secretary of State in early February using his home address in Cibolo, a San Antonio suburb, according to the complaint written by an agent with the Army Criminal Investigation Division. On Feb. 5, he opened a business account for Zurich Consulting with Bank of America.

The following day, he moved $510,000 in 18 transfers from Army bank accounts to his business account, according to the complaint.

Army CID received information Thursday about the transactions from IMCOM's deputy director for installations, according to the complaint. The Department of Homeland Security then alerted CID that Lant had purchased a flight out of Atlanta to Paris for that night.

Lant was arrested and will appear in court next Wednesday for a detention hearing, according to court records.

An attorney for Lant could not be reached for comment.

IMCOM said in a statement Tuesday that Lant has been put on administrative leave.

"We take these allegations very seriously and are working with the investigators," according to the statement.

Lant has worked for the Army since 2008 and has been in his current role since 2011, according to a LinkedIn profile associated with him.

The arrest comes just over a year after another IMCOM civilian employee was sentenced to 15 years in prison for stealing more than $108 million from youth programs. Janet Yamanaka Mello was a financial program manager and funneled money for more than a decade to a fake youth program she created before getting caught in 2023.

Sister of Navy officer's slain spouse shares details from plea hearing

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

Before her death at the hands of her husband last year, Jessica "Jesse" Arguinzoni Olsen was an avid learner and a beloved substitute teacher at a naval base in Japan, her sister said.

Olsen, 37, was found dead in a hotel room in Fukuoka, about 80 miles northeast of Sasebo Naval Base, on the morning of Oct. 28. Her husband, Lt. Cmdr. Christopher Olsen, pleaded guilty to second-degree murder during a hearing at Naval Base San Diego last month.

He faces 23 years in prison, will be separated from the Navy and forfeit all pay and allowances. He also paid $10,654 in restitution to his wife's family for funeral expenses, U.S. Naval Forces Japan spokesman Cmdr. Paul Macapagal told Stars and Stripes last month.

Christopher Olsen — assigned at the time to the amphibious transport dock USS New Orleans at Sasebo — killed his wife "on or about Oct. 26" by "strangulation and blunt force trauma to the head," according to a May 13 Navy charge sheet.

Sometime later, a teacher at Sasebo's Ernest J. King Middle High School, where Jesse taught chemistry to special education students, sent Jesse's sister, Dominique Arguinzoni, a portrait painted by one of those students.

"She told me that one of the last things that she had was Jesse's handwriting on the whiteboard," Arguinzoni said from Goshen, N.Y. "She had written down a recipe or something. But she was laughing because they work with autistic children, and Jesse went out and bought pancake mix and made pancakes for the kids."

Jesse Arguinzoni was three years younger than her sister. The siblings were "complete opposites," Dominique said. Jesse was outgoing and athletic, while Dominique was more reserved.



Dominique Arguinzoni

Christopher and Jessica Olsen pose in the summer of 2023 during a visit to Hiroshima, Japan.

"We only became friends as we were adults," she said.

Jesse, inspired by the 1996 film "Twister," studied meteorology from 2004 to 2008 at the State University of New York at Oswego, where she met Christopher Olsen, Dominique said. They were married Aug. 16, 2009.

Olsen joined the Navy in 2014, and together they served in Hawaii, Italy and California, according to his service biography.

At his Sept. 10 plea hearing, Olsen told the judge he blacked out while drinking the night Jesse died, and remembered only "bits and pieces," Dominique said.

Dominique said Olsen testified that he remembered brushing his teeth in his underwear as Jesse was putting on a jacket and saying she was leaving. Olsen hit her, knocking her to the ground. He blacked out and when he came to, he had his hands around Jesse's throat.

He testified that he remembered seeing her take her last breath. He also testified that Jesse was "the love of his life," Dominique said.

"The impression I received from this hearing was it was completely out of the blue," she said. "He did say he was extremely angry, so I believe he was insinuating that there was a crime of passion."

Christopher Olsen's mother, Deborah Blanchard, said the two families' lives changed forever that day.

"Good people make mistakes," she said by email Wednesday. "Christopher is a good person and loves Jesse very much, as did our whole family as she was like a daughter/sister to us. Everyone continues to suffer from this terrible tragedy. Our hearts go out to the Arguinzoni family and we are all still coping with this tragedy and looking for ways to heal."

Dominique and her mother, Dee Arguinzoni, spoke in court at Olsen's plea hearing.

"When our parents leave this world, Jesse won't be standing with me to share the pain of losing them," Dominique said, according to a copy of her statement. "We won't laugh about how different we were growing up or how we ended up having similar personality traits and were not so different, after all."

S. Korea agrees to $2B purchase of Global 6500 surveillance aircraft

BY DAVID CHOI AND YOOJIN LEE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The South Korean military has chosen the U.S.-based defense firm L3Harris Technologies to supply surveillance aircraft in a $2.2 billion agreement Tuesday.

The South Korean military expects delivery of the aircraft by 2032 and will employ them against "increasing aerial threats from North Korea and other regional countries," according to a news release from the Seoul-based Defense Acquisition Program Administration.

An agency spokesman reached by phone Thursday declined to provide additional details on the agreement.

The agreement revolves around four Bombardier Global 6500 jets modified with intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance equipment, South Korean news outlets Yonhap News and Chosun Ilbo reported Tuesday.

L3Harris and Swedish defense firm Saab were the primary competitors for the contract, according to those reports.

"Through this project, we expect to retain constant aerial surveillance capability against enemy's aerial threats during wartime and peacetime, and secure smooth air control duty led by the South Korean military," the administration's release states.

U.S. congressional approval is required for foreign arms sales of over $25 million to NATO members and five other countries, including South Korea.

The State Department last year signed off on the possible $4.92 billion sale of four Boeing E-7 Airborne Early Warning and Control Aircraft, also known as the Wedgetail, and 10 jet engines to South Korea's military.

South Korea's air force has flown four Boeing E-737 Peace Eye aircraft for surveillance operations since 2010.

The country's Ministry of National Defense has promised to boost its aerial presence in response to North Korea's interest in military drones and ballistic missile advancements.

The U.S. military has also taken steps to increase its intelligence-gathering capabilities on the peninsula.

The Air Force on Monday stood up a MQ-9 Reaper drone squadron at Kunsan Air Base, roughly 115 miles southwest of Seoul, while the Army on Aug. 22 reactivated a military intelligence company at Camp Humphreys, the largest U.S. military base overseas.



CALAH THOMPSON/U.S. Marine Corps

A Bombardier Global 6500 arrives at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, in November.

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

Shutdown puts pause on Pacific social events

Homecoming dances, games, as well as base festivals among casualties

By Alex Wilson
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA, Japan — Homecoming games and community festivals at U.S. bases in Japan and South Korea are either canceled or scaled back thanks to the federal government shutdown that kicked off the fiscal year Wednesday.

Yokosuka Naval Base, home of the U.S. 7th Fleet, canceled its Friendship Day festival scheduled for Sunday. The annual event last year drew the most people in almost a decade, nearly 53,000 people, many of them from surrounding Japanese communities.

The festival requires preparation by scores of volunteers and generates funds for mutual assistance and other organizations on base. The base did not immediately respond to a request for further information, including whether the event would be rescheduled.

"We know that many in our community — from local vendors and performers to base volunteers and planning teams — have invested significant time, effort, and resources preparing for Friendship Day," the base wrote on its Facebook page Thursday. "Thank you for your enthusiasm and support. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed, and we sincerely apologize for the inconvenience and hardship that this abrupt cancellation may cause."

The government shutdown continued a second day Thursday, marked by a deepening "fiscal standoff" in Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile, service members are working without pay and many federal civilian employees are furloughed. At overseas military bases, most essential services remain intact, including health care, day care and grocery stores.

But some social events that bring an air of social normalcy to military life overseas are off the table, temporarily.

At Marine Corps Air Station Futenma on Okinawa, the Futenma Flight Line Fair, scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, was scaled down from an open-house event for surrounding communities and moved to the Ocean Breeze event venue at nearby Camp Foster. Only Department of Defense ID holders will be admitted, according to a post on Marine Corps Installations Pacific's official Facebook page Thursday.



Alex Wilson/Stars and Stripes

Visitors flood onto Yokosuka Naval Base south of Tokyo for the 2024 Friendship Festival. Organizers have canceled this years' festival — which was to occur Sunday — due to the government shutdown.

At Humphreys High School at the U.S. Army's Camp Humphreys in South Korea, the largest overseas U.S. base, the homecoming pep rally and parade on Friday will go on as planned.

But the homecoming dance and the game itself against Nile C. Kinnick High School from Yokosuka is postponed indefinitely, according to a post on Humphreys High's Facebook page Wednesday.

The game and dance will be rescheduled as soon as possible, the school wrote.

Likewise, the Robert D. Edgren Middle High School Eagles at Misawa Air Base, Japan, won't be playing the Panthers from Yokota High on Friday as planned. That homecoming game is postponed for at least two weeks, according to a post on the Edgren High official Facebook page.

Postponed, too, are the Edgren bonfire, pep rally and dance.

"Thank you for your flexibility and support as we pivot to preserve the Homecoming spirit," the Edgren post states.

All extracurricular activities, including school sports, at Department of Defense Education Activity schools are canceled or postponed due to the shutdown, DODEA Pacific spokeswoman Miranda Ferguson said by email Thursday.

"Schools will work to reschedule events where possible," she wrote.

Stars and Stripes reporter Brian McElhiney contributed to this report.

Pacific bases say many essential services still available

By Alex Wilson
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — U.S. military installations across the Indo-Pacific reported varying levels of disruption from the government shutdown that began Wednesday, but most services remained available for service members and civilians.

Military bases and their tenant organizations indicated on their official social media sites there would be limited updates during the furlough, except for urgent safety or security information.

Schools in the region remain open for regular instruction, but all sports and extracurricular activities are paused, the Department of Defense Education Activity announced via Facebook on Monday ahead of the shutdown.

U.S. Embassy Tokyo announced Wednesday that scheduled passport and visa services would continue at embassies and consulates overseas "as the situation permits."



Jeremy Stillwagner/Stars and Stripes

A sign advises Yokota Air Base, Japan, Teen Center patrons of its closure.

In Japan, most services are unaffected or minimally impacted, despite service members continuing to work without pay and most civilian Defense Department employees placed on unpaid leave.

"Military personnel will continue in a normal duty status without pay until such time as a continuing resolution or appropriations are passed by Congress and signed into law," Camp Zama, home of U.S. Army Japan, wrote on its Facebook page Thursday. "Civilian personnel not engaged in excepted activities will be placed in a non-work, non-pay status."

Naval Air Facility Atsugi, about 30 miles southwest of Tokyo, reported minimal impact on services.

Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo said services at its Military and Family Readiness Center, Youth Center and Integrated Resilience Center are suspended until further notice.

Yokosuka Naval Base also said services overall remain largely unaffected, except for modified operations at its Fleet and Family Support Center.

The center's satellite office at Ikego Heights Family Housing is closed until further notice, nonmedical counseling is unavailable, and Transition Assistance Program services for the week of Oct. 6 are canceled, the base said via Facebook on Wednesday.

The Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society in Yokosuka, however, said Monday it remains open and "ready to assist with emergency financial needs such as food, gas, and utilities."

Kadena Air Base on Okinawa expects delays to base housing services and elective medical services at Kadena Medical Clinic, while classes at its Military and Family Readiness Center, library programs, welcome briefings and academic counseling are canceled, the base announced Wednesday on Facebook.

In South Korea, services such as the school liaison office, SkillBridge programs, the Family Support Office, Transition Assistance Program, Resilience Center and voting assistance were stopped completely at Osan Air Base.

At the U.S. Army's Camp Humphreys in South Korea, many offices are still open, including vehicle registration, pass and ID, and housing and maintenance, according to a schedule posted Thursday on Humphreys' official Facebook page.

Many Army Community Service programs, including play groups sponsored by the New Parent Support Program, are not available. Other programs, such as Army Emergency Relief, may experience delays, according to the post.

At Naval Base Guam, most services remained available except for legal assistance, which was open but with limited services.

Andersen Air Force Base and Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz had not shared details about impacted services as of Thursday afternoon, and a spokesperson for Joint Region Marianas did not respond to an email requesting comment.

Stars and Stripes reporters Brian McElhiney and David Choi contributed to this report.

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

Some services closed, most running at bases in Europe

Stars and Stripes

It wasn't immediately clear Thursday how the government shutdown would affect various services at installations in Europe after President Donald Trump and Congress failed to strike an agreement to keep government programs and services running by the Wednesday deadline.

By Thursday morning, several Army garrisons had released lists on their websites of what services will be affected by the shutdown. Military social media sites, including Army, Navy and U.S. European Command, said there will be "limited updates" due to a lack of appropriations.

U.S. Air Forces in Europe — Air Forces Africa, RAF Lakenheath and Ramstein Air Base said Thursday on their social media sites that military personnel will continue normal duty without pay and civilian personnel "not engaged in excepted activities will be places in a non-work, non-pay status."

U.S. European Command said Wednesday that it did not have a list of what services have been canceled so far.

At Ramstein Air Base, the Aquatics Center, library, UNITE Program, civilian personnel office and Military and Family Readiness Center Spouse Hub were closed, according to the 86th Force Support Squadron website. There will be limited service at the Manpower Office, Education Center and multiple Military & Family Readiness Center programs.

At RAF Lakenheath, the base library's hours were reduced to 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., the fitness center reduced the number of classes and the Military & Family Readiness Center and Education & Training Center reduced their services.

At U.S. Army Garrison Benelux, closed services include Army Substance Abuse Programs; fingerprinting and background/personnel security checks; and the Equal Employment Opportunity office.

Army Community Services are limited in all communities. Education Centers are providing limited services, with only contracted support staff and university staff available.

The Community Processing Facility for community inprocessing and outprocessing has limited services in SHAPE/Chièvres with emergency CAC reset and emergency passport services only; Brussels patrons should use SHAPE/Chièvres for limited emergency services; Brunssum has no services available.

"We are hoping that the shutdown will end shortly and that we will be 100% back to work."

Col. Vaughn Strong
U.S. Army Garrison Italy

Army Community Service centers at Katterbach and Storck are closed, although essential services are still available by phone for several programs listed on the garrison website. The Retirement Services office, as well as Master Planning, Real Property and PAIO, are closed.

Limited services are available from Vehicle Registration; Installation Access Control System; the ID card office; Military Personnel Division; the passport office; Casualty Assistance; Central Issue Facility; Installation Property Book Office; driver's testing; the Housing Office; the Legal Assistance Office, Training Support Center (equipment issuance suspended, photo and graphic services continue); Public Affairs office; S-6/IT Support; the Safety Office; and the Education Center (delayed Army Personnel Test results and increased wait time for counselors).

Closed services include fingerprinting; security clearance processing; Account Validation System/Security Access Authorization Request; and Isolated Personnel Report and Foreign Travel Report submissions. On Thursday, the 8 a.m. Driver's Training and Testing Station Orientation Course is canceled.

Closed Army Community Service offerings include the Employment Readiness Program; Army Volunteer Coordinator; Army Family Action Plan; Army Family Team Building; Mobilization and Deployment; Exceptional Family Member Program; Survivor Outreach Services; and all ACS services at Garmisch.

Army Community Service programs offering reduced services include Relocation Readiness; Information and Referral; Family Advocacy; Domestic Abuse Victim Advocates; Financial Readiness and Army Emergency Relief.

Army Community Services programs that are closed include Survivor Outreach Services; Exceptional Family Member; Financial Readiness; Employee Readiness; and Mobilization and Deployment Readiness. A list of open ACS programs is available on the garrison site, and officials recommend calling for info on any ACS classes.

In Stuttgart, it was business as usual on Wednesday in many places, with services such as the drivers license testing office, military identification card office and community mail room still open. The garrison advised community members to check with individual providers if there was uncertainty about the availability of particular program.

At Naval Air Station Sigonella on the Italian island of Sicily, child and youth programs, MWR programs and facilities, the Navy Exchange, commissary, galley and housing offices would remain fully operational, the base said in a post Tuesday evening to its official Facebook page.

But delivery of loaner furniture and appliances from the base's housing department could be delayed, potentially impacting families moving in or out. Housing officials were in contact with people who could be affected, the base said.

On Thursday morning, all services at U.S. Army Garrison Italy in Vicenza were operational, Col. Vaughn Strong, commander of the installation, said in a video posted the same day to the garrison's official Facebook and Instagram accounts.

The installation was operating with about half the U.S. civilian workforce as usual, which could result in longer wait times for some services such as getting an identification card or Italian residence permit known as a soggiorno, Strong said.

If the shutdown were to continue, the garrison may have to reduce operating hours for some services depending on the number of civilian workers available, he said.

He encouraged the community to use the MyArmyPost digital app for news about shutdown impacts at the installation that would be posted as information was available.

"We are hoping that the shutdown will end shortly and that we will be 100% back to work," Strong said.

DODEA schools were open as usual, but all extracurricular activities are halted until full funding is restored to the federal government and the U.S. military's overseas school system.

AFN radio is limited to local broadcasts, while TV programming includes AFN News, AFN Sports and on-demand content through the AFN Now platform.



JENNY KANE / AP

Transportation Security Administration workers screen travelers at the Portland International Airport on Wednesday in Portland, Ore.

Shutdown: Health care costs remain Dems priority

FROM PAGE 1

gave me this unprecedented opportunity," Trump wrote on his social media account. "They are not stupid people, so maybe this is their way of wanting to, quietly and quickly, MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!"

The post was notable in its explicit embrace of Project 2025, a controversial policy blueprint drafted by the Heritage Foundation that Trump distanced himself from during his reelection campaign. The effort aimed to reshape the federal government around right-wing policies, and Democrats repeatedly pointed to its goals to warn of the consequences of a second Trump administration.

Vought on Wednesday offered an opening salvo of the pressure he hoped to put on Democrats. He announced he was withholding $18 billion for the Hudson River rail tunnel and Second Avenue subway line in New York City that have been championed by both Democratic leaders, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries, in their home state. Vought is also canceling $8 billion in green energy projects in states with Democratic senators.

"Trump's so-called 'maximum pain' plan isn't hurting Democrats — it's hurting American families," Schumer said in a statement Thursday. "He's snatching paychecks, threatening jobs, and deliberately inflicting suffering on working people just to score petty political points."

Meanwhile, the White House is preparing for mass firings of federal workers, rather than simply furloughing it as is the usual practice during a shutdown.

Vought has emerged as a central figure in the shutdown — promising possible layoffs of government workers that would be a show of strength by the Trump administration as well as a possible liability given the weakening job market and existing voter unhappiness over the economy.

The strategic goal is to increase the political pressure on Democratic lawmakers as agencies tasked with environmental protection, racial equity and addressing poverty, among other things, could be gutted over the course of the shutdown.

The dial is turned high as the shutdown continues.

Vought, in a private conference call with House GOP lawmakers Wednesday afternoon, told them of layoffs starting in the next day or two.

House Speaker Mike Johnson underscored Thursday that the shutdown gives Trump and Vought vast power over the federal government. He blamed Democrats and said "they have effectively turned off the legislative branch" and "handed it over to the president."

"When Congress turns off the funding, and the funding runs out, it is up to the commander-in-chief, the president of the United States, to determine how those resources will be spent," Johnson said.

Still, Johnson said that Trump and Vought take "no pleasure in this."

Trump and the congressional leaders are not expected to meet again soon. Congress has no action scheduled Thursday in observance of the Jewish holy day, with senators due back Friday. The House is set to resume session next week.

NATION

New Arizona lawmaker awaits swearing in

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A week after her decisive win in an Arizona special election, Adelita Grijalva arrived at the U.S. Capitol, where her father had served for decades.

But as she roamed the familiar halls, she said she could not help but feel like a tourist. With the House out of session, her swearing in has been delayed. That left her without an office, a desk, staff — something of an unofficial new member of Congress.

"It's very frustrating," she told The Associated Press after a late evening meeting of House Democrats. She said it's unfair to the residents she will be serving in the Arizona's seventh district, with "no one voting for them, no constituent services, no support."

The delay plays out as Republicans pursue President Donald Trump's agenda in Congress, where they hold slim majorities in both the House and Senate, leading to intense partisan battles — including the government shutdown.



Grijalva

Grijalva's presence, once she is sworn in, would narrow the margins and give Democrats, in the minority, more power as they confront Trump and the GOP agenda.

House Speaker Mike Johnson says it's "standard practice" to swear in new members once the House is in session, and Grijalva is expected to be sworn in when the chamber resumes business next week. But two Republican congressmen who were elected earlier this year in special elections were sworn in a day after winning their seats, and when the House was not in session.

"I don't know why the rules are different for me," Grijalva said.

Democrats accuse Johnson of delaying Grijalva's swearing-in because it improves their chances of forcing a vote for the release of the Justice Department files on the sex trafficking investigation into the late Jeffrey Epstein. Grijalva has pledged to back that effort and would be the last signatory needed for a petition to force that vote, joining Democrats and some Republicans.

"The Republicans are blocking her from her position because they want to protect pedophiles. It's a disgrace," Sen. Ruben Gallego, a Democrat from the same state, said in a post on X.

Earlier this week, Democratic Whip Katherine Clark of Massachusetts sent a letter to Johnson, criticizing his cancellation of previously scheduled votes Tuesday and Wednesday, saying the decision jeopardized negotiations to avoid a government shutdown and delayed the swearing-in of Grijalva.

Clark charged that "common practice" for special elections in which results are not in doubt is for the swearing-in to take place "at the earliest opportunity."

"Any delay in swearing in Representative-elect Grijalva unnecessarily deprives her constituents of representation and calls into question if the motive behind the delay is to further avoid the release of the Epstein files," Clark wrote in the letter.

The speaker's office sent the AP a statement saying Johnson intends to schedule the swearing-in next week.

"As is standard practice, with the House now having received the appropriate paperwork from the state, the Speaker's Office intends to schedule a swearing in for the Representative-elect when the House returns to session," a spokesperson said.

Both chambers of Congress were out of session last week and part of this week in observance of the Jewish holy days.

Grijalva was elected to replace her father, the late U.S. Rep. Raúl Grijalva, a progressive Democrat who represented the state for more than two decades in Congress before his death in March.

The newcomer won the seat in southern Arizona last week with more than double the votes of her Republican opponent, making her the first Latina to represent Arizona in Congress.

Rapper who joined Trump at rally gets 5 years for attempted murder

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A New York City rapper who joined President Donald Trump during a campaign rally last year has been sentenced to five years behind bars after he admitted he used earnings from his music career to fuel gang violence in Brooklyn.

Sheff G, whose legal name is Michael Williams, also must serve five years of supervised release once he's freed under the terms of the sentence imposed Wednesday.

He and the judge agreed on the sentence when the rapper pleaded guilty earlier this year to attempted murder and conspiracy. Prosecutors wanted a 20-year prison term.

"This defendant had talent and opportunity, but chose to use them to fuel violence instead of building a better future," Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said after the sentencing.

The 27-year-old rapper, whose songs and videos have millions of YouTube views and Spotify streams, was among those arrested in connection with a long-term investigation into gang-related shootings in Brooklyn. The allegations of violence against Sheff G had already been made public when he appeared with Trump onstage in May 2024.

More than 30 purported members of the 8 Trey Crips and the street gang's affiliate, the 9 Ways gang, have been indicted. Twenty-three have pleaded guilty to various charges while seven cases are still pending.

Among those charged was Tegan Chambers, a rapper known as Sleepy Hallow who also appeared on stage with Trump and Sheff G during the May 23, 2024, rally in the Bronx. Chambers was sentenced last week to a year in jail following his guilty plea to a conspiracy count.



YUKI IWAMURA/AP

Rapper Sheff G, also known as Michael Williams, right, joins then Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump during a campaign rally in the Bronx borough of New York in May 2024.

A spokesman for Trump's campaign was asked at the time about whether the campaign knew about the charges and whether it was the former president who sought the rappers' support or the other way around.

"As Sheff G said: 'They always whisper your accomplishments and shout your failures,' " campaign spokesman Steven Cheung responded.

Prosecutors have said Sheff G showered money and jewelry on gang members as they battled rivals in Brooklyn.

They say the rapper acted as a getaway driver on at least one occasion, chauffeuring three co-defendants to and from a 2021 shooting that targeted a rival but instead hit two bystanders. Sheff G even treated gang members to a lavish dinner at a Manhattan steakhouse to celebrate a 2020 shooting that killed a purported rival gang member and injured five others, according to prosecutors.

Surveillance videos, social media posts, text messages and more evidence document the criminal activities, and the two rappers also boasted about their misdeeds in their songs, Gonzalez's office said.

Sheff G's lawyer, Arthur Aidala, didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment on Wednesday. He's said previously that the plea deal was in the "best interest of everyone involved."

Federal government could resume taking DACA applications

Associated Press

McALLEN, Texas — The federal government is expected to again accept new applications for a program that grants some people without legal immigration status the ability to live and work in the United States.

Lawyers for the federal government and immigrant advocates have presented plans before a federal judge that would open the door again to accepting applications for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, otherwise known as DACA.

One state — Texas, where the case is being heard — however, would be exempted from providing work permits.

It's estimated that hundreds of thousands of people could be eligible to be enrolled in DACA, once a federal judge issues an order to formalize plans laid out by the Department of Justice in a legal filing made on Monday. The program, created under the Obama administration, grants people without legal immigration status who were brought into the country by their parents two-year, renewable permits to live and work in the U.S. legally.

The program has allowed people who were brought to the United States as children to temporarily remain in the country and obtain work permits. It does not confer legal status but provides protection from deportation.

Eligibility requirements include people who entered the country as children before their 16th birthday, were under 31 years old as of June 15, 2012, and have not been convicted of a felony, a significant misdemeanor, or three misdemeanors. There would be restrictions related to work permits for those who reside in Texas, which filed a lawsuit against the DACA program in 2018.

DOJ attorneys laid out the proposal before U.S. District Judge Andrew S. Hanen on Monday as part of the ongoing Texas lawsuit. It would allow U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to take new and renewal applications for DACA across the country, which it has not done for four years.

In Texas, USCIS would take new and renewal applications for the DACA program but recipients residing in the state will not receive a work permit.

Attorneys representing DACA recipients proposed adding a wind-down period that would allow Texas residents to keep their work authorization for one more renewal period.

These proposals follow an earlier decision from the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals allowing the program to continue with the work permit carveout in Texas.

The federal government and attorneys for DACA recipients have two more opportunities in October to file responses to the proposals submitted this week. Hanen, based in Houston, will then decide what proposal or combination of proposals to implement in his order.

NATION

Trump declares cartels unlawful combatants

By Aamer Madhani and Lisa Mascaro
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has declared drug cartels operating in the Caribbean are unlawful combatants and says the United States is now in a "non-international armed conflict," according to a Trump administration memo obtained by The Associated Press on Thursday.

A U.S. official familiar with the matter who was not authorized to comment publicly said Congress was notified about the designation by Pentagon officials on Wednesday.

The move comes after the U.S. military last month carried out three deadly strikes against alleged drug smuggling boats in the Caribbean. At least two of those operations were carried out on vessels that originated from Venezuela.

Pentagon officials could not provide a list of the designated terrorist organizations at the center of the conflict, a matter that was a major source of frustration for some of the lawmakers who were briefed, according to the U.S. official.

Democrats have been pressing Trump to go to Congress and seek war powers authority for such operations.

The official added that the administration now faces criticism that it is effectively waging a secret war against secret enemies, without the consent of Congress.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

What the administration laid out at the closed-door classified briefing was perceived by several senators as pursuing a new legal framework that raised questions particularly regarding the role of Congress in authorizing any such action, the official familiar with the matter said.

As the administration takes aim at vessels in the Caribbean, senators and lawmakers of both major political parties have raised stark objections.

Some had previously called on Congress to exert its authority under the war powers act that would prohibit the administration's strikes unless they were authorized by Congress.

Tesla reports surprise increase in car sales

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Tesla reported a surprise increase in sales in the third quarter as the electric car maker likely benefited from a rush by consumers to take advantage of a $7,500 credit before it expired on Sept. 30.

The company reported Thursday that sales in the three months through September rose 7% compared to the same period a year ago.

The gain follows two quarters of steep declines as people turned off by CEO Elon Musk's foray into right-wing politics avoided buying his company's cars.

Sales rose to 497,099 vehicles, compared with with 462,890 in the same period last year. Analysts expected sales to fall slightly to 456,000, even with a boost from customers seeking to use the electric vehicle incentive.

Tesla stock rose nearly 2% to $468.52 in early morning trading on the news.

Investors have been optimistic about the company in recent weeks, sending the stock up 34% in September alone. They are betting Musk's planned new cheaper version of his bestselling Model Y will recharge sales. He had promised that car earlier this year.

The rise in the stock also reflects Musk success in shifting attention away from car sales to other aspects of the business — the rollout of its driverless robotaxi service planned for several cities and its Optimus robots for factory work and household chores.

The 7% rise for the third quarter compares with a 13% plunge in the first quarter when Musk led President Donald Trump's government cost-cutting efforts at the Department of Government Efficiency.

The backlash in Europe against Musk had been also been fierce with sales plunging 40% in more than two dozen countries after he publicly supported far-right politicians there.



Stars and Stripes

Jane Goodall, left, listens to her introduction by the Roots and Shoots Club before the primatologist and conservationist spoke to residents at Yokota Air Base, Japan, on Sept. 11, 2010.

Jane Goodall, celebrated conservationist, has died at 91

Associated Press

Jane Goodall, the intellectual, soft-spoken conservationist renowned for her groundbreaking, immersive chimpanzee field research in which she documented the primates' distinct personalities and use of tools, has died. She was 91.

The environmental advocate became a beloved household name who transcended generations through her appearances in documentaries and on television, as well as her travels around the world.

The Jane Goodall Institute announced the primatologist's death Wednesday in an Instagram post. According to the Washington, D.C.-based institute, Goodall died of natural causes while in California on a U.S. speaking tour.

Her discoveries "revolutionized science, and she was a tireless advocate for the protection and restoration of our natural world," it said.

While living among chimpanzees in Africa decades ago, Goodall documented them doing activities previously believed to be exclusive to humans. Her observations and subsequent magazine and documentary appearances in the 1960s transformed how the world perceived not only humans' closest living biological relatives but also the emotional and social complexity of all animals.

"Out there in nature by myself, when you're alone, you can become part of nature and your humanity doesn't get in the way," she told The Associated Press in 2021. "It's almost like an out-of-body experience when suddenly you hear different sounds and you smell different smells and you're actually part of this amazing tapestry of life."

Des Moines school superintendent hired despite false claim about doctoral degree

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — The superintendent of Iowa's largest school district, who was detained last week by immigration agents, falsely claimed a doctoral degree when applying for the job two years ago but was hired even after the school board learned about the misrepresentation.

Ian Roberts, who immigration authorities say was living and working in the U.S. illegally and who resigned this week as Des Moines' superintendent of schools, claimed in his 2023 application that he received a doctorate in urban educational leadership from Morgan State University in 2007, according to documents The Associated Press obtained through a public records request.



Roberts

Although Roberts was enrolled in that doctorate program from 2002 to 2007, the school's public relations office confirmed in an email that he didn't receive that degree.

The Des Moines school board learned before hiring Roberts that he hadn't received the degree, but it still chose him to lead the district, which serves about 30,000 students.

"As part of the background check process that was done at the time, it indicated that he did not complete — he began but did not complete a degree from Morgan State," district spokesman Phil Roeder told the AP.

The background check was conducted by a third party and is not a public record, Roeder said.

The board released a statement saying Roberts provided a resume to a consulting company in which he indicated he had earned a doctorate from Morgan State but that the firm later flagged that he hadn't completed his dissertation.

Roberts, who is challenging the order to deport him to his native Guyana, remained jailed Wednesday in Sioux City, about 150 miles northwest of Des Moines.

WORLD

Mystery drones reported over German infrastructure

Associated Press

BERLIN — German authorities are investigating claims that unidentified drones may have spied on critical infrastructure in the northern state of Schleswig-Holstein, officials said Wednesday.

Multiple drones were spotted on Sept. 25 over a power plant in the state capital of Kiel, as well as near a university hospital and a shipyard in the port city, according to a Der Spiegel report.

Regional Interior Minister Sabine Sütterlin-Waack told a committee of the state parliament on Wednesday that flying objects of "various types and sizes" had been spotted. Chief Public Prosecutor Stephanie Gropp said an investigation was under way.

The sightings come as many NATO countries, including Germany, are on high alert following a series of recent incidents. Polish forces shot down Russian drones violating Polish airspace, while Estonian airspace was breached by a Russian fighter jet. There has also been a spate of drone incidents in Denmark, which neighbors Schleswig-Holstein.

Schleswig-Holstein has been strengthening its drone defenses in coordination with other states in northern Germany, Sütterlin-Waack was cited by the dpa news agency as saying.

Authorities in Germany have urged caution about reading too much into drone sightings.

"I will explicitly say that not every drone controlled by foreign powers is automatically a threat either," Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt said Monday. Some incidents could be seen as "provocation" — as was the case in the sightings last week in Schleswig Holstein, he said.

Dobrindt said authorities must "respond appropriately" to the respective threat.

Der Spiegel said two small drones had been seen over the Kiel factory premises of TKMS, a maritime defense technologies provider, late on the evening of Sept. 25.

Later, a "combined drone formation" was observed over the university hospital and a power plant, and other drone sightings were reported over governmental buildings and the Heide oil refinery in the area, the report said.

Further suspicious drones were spotted the same day over a military base in Sanitz, in the Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania state to the east, the weekly reported.

Officials at the Federal Interior and Defense ministries, as well as state authorities, contacted by The Associated Press did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Federal police, contacted by the AP, deferred to prosecutors investigating the case.



MARCUS GOLEJEWSKI, DPA/AP

A Bundeswehr soldier presents the Counter UAV Jammer HP 47 on the second day of the large-scale German forces Bundeswehr exercise Red Storm Bravo in Hamburg, Germany, on Sept. 26.

Zelenskyy: Russian attacks threaten nuke sites

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia's sustained bombardment of Ukraine's power grid is deepening concerns about the safety of the country's nuclear facilities after a drone knocked out power for more than three hours to the site of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster and as Europe's biggest atomic power plant remains disconnected from the grid, officials said.

Both Chernobyl and the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant are not working but they require a constant power supply to run crucial cooling systems for spent fuel rods in order to avoid a potential nuclear incident.

A blackout could also blind the radiation monitoring systems, installed to boost security at Chernobyl and operated by the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency.

"Russia is deliberately creating the threat of radiation incidents," Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late Wednesday, criticizing the U.N. nuclear watchdog and its chief Rafael Mariano Grossi for what he described as weak responses to the danger.

"Every day of Russia's war, every strike on our energy facilities, including those connected to nuclear safety, is a global threat," he said. "Weak and half-measures will not work. Strong action is needed."

Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address that Russian launched over 20 Shahed drones against energy infrastructure in Slavutych, the city whose power supply services Chernobyl, the site of the world's worst nuclear accident.

A wave of drones overwhelmed defenses and caused a blackout, he said, affecting the sarcophagus that prevents radioactive dust from escaping the destroyed fourth reactor and storage housing more than 3,000 tons of spent fuel. He did not provide details of how it was affected.

"The Russians could not have been unaware that a strike on Slavutych would have such consequences for Chernobyl," Zelenskyy said.

Last February, a drone armed with a warhead hit Chernobyl's protective outer shell, briefly starting a fire. Radiation levels there did not increase, officials said.

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6.9-magnitude quake kills dozens in the Philippines

Associated Press

BOGO, Philippines — When firefighters brought out the body of his 4-year-old son in a bag from a budget hotel demolished by a 6.9-magnitude earthquake in the central Philippines, Isagani Gelig stooped down and gently stroked the black cadaver bag for several minutes, trying to feel his child's remains inside for the last time.

A bag containing the body of Gelig's wife,receptionist at the Condor Pension House, was carried out next. She had worked there at night while taking care of their son, John. A rescuer handed him a cellphone found with her body and he nodded a confirmation that it was hers.

The death toll from Tuesday's earthquake rose to at least 72 people Thursday, with more than 360 injured. Disaster officials said that there haven't been reports of additional missing people and ended search and rescue efforts.

The quake was triggered around 10 p.m. by a shallow undersea fault line that Filipino seismologists said has not moved for at least 400 years.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. flew to Bogo on Thursday, inspecting damaged houses and buildings and offering cash and medical aid to survivors while mourning with families of the dead.

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WORLD

Deadly car, knife attack strikes synagogue in UK on Yom Kippur

Associated Press

MANCHESTER, England — An assailant drove a car into people outside a synagogue in northern England on Thursday and then began stabbing them, killing two and seriously wounding four in an attack on the holiest day of the Jewish year, police said.

Officers shot and killed the suspect, Greater Manchester Police said, though it took authorities some time to confirm he was dead because he was wearing a vest that suggested he had an explosive.

The Metropolitan Police in London, who lead counter-terrorism policing operations, declared the rampage a terrorist attack.

Assistant Commissioner Laurence Taylor said two other suspects were arrested, though he provided no further information on the arrests. He said police believe they know the identity of the man who carried out the attack but have not confirmed it.

The attack took place as people gathered at an Orthodox synagogue in a suburban neighborhood of Manchester on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement and the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar. Police said the two people killed were Jewish.

Antisemitic incidents in the U.K. have soared following Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel and Israel's ensuing military campaign in Gaza, according to Community Security Trust, an advocacy group for British Jews that works to eliminate antisemitism.

More than 1,500 incidents were reported in the first half of the year, the second-highest reported since the record set a year earlier.



PETER BYRNE/AP

Members of the Jewish community comfort each other near to the Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation synagogue, in Crumpsall, Manchester, England, on Thursday.

"This is every Rabbi's or every Jewish person's worst nightmare," said Rabbi Jonathan Romain, of Maidenhead Synagogue and head of the Rabbinic Court of Great Britain. "Not only is this a sacred day, the most sacred in the Jewish calendar, but it's also a time of mass gathering, and the time when the Jewish community, however religious or irreligious, gathers together."

Greater Manchester Police said they were called to the Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation Synagogue around 9:30 a.m. — shortly after services had begun.

Chief Constable Stephen Watson said the man drove directly at pedestrians outside the synagogue and then attacked them with a knife.

Chava Lewin, who lives next to the synagogue, said she heard a bang and thought it might be a firework until her husband ran inside their house and said there had been a "terrorist attack."

A witness told her that she saw a car driving erratically crash into the gates of the house of worship.

"She thought maybe he had a heart attack," Lewin said. "The second he got out of the car he started stabbing anyone near him. He went for the security guard and tried to break into the synagogue."

Minutes later, police fired shots, saying they believed they had hit the assailant.

Israeli navy intercepts most of flotilla attempting to break blockade of Gaza

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israeli naval forces boarded most of the vessels in a flotilla attempting to break Israel's blockade of Gaza on Thursday and detained dozens aboard, including European lawmakers, drawing widespread condemnation.

The Global Sumud Flotilla was the largest yet to try to break the blockade, and it comes at a time of growing criticism of Israel's conduct in Gaza, where its offensive has laid waste to wide swaths of territory and killed tens of thousands of people.

Activists had said they hoped that the sheer number of boats would make it more difficult for Israeli authorities to intercept them all — but Israel's Foreign Ministry declared the operation over on Thursday afternoon.

Supporters of the flotilla took to the streets in several major cities late Wednesday, after news of the interception broke — including in Rome; Istanbul; Athens, Greece; and Buenos Aires, Argentina — to decry the Israeli operation and the ongoing offensive in the Gaza Strip.

More protests were expected Thursday, and Italy's largest union called for a one-day general strike on Friday.

The flotilla, which started out with more than 40 boats and nearly 450 activists, was carrying a symbolic amount of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Its main goal, they said, remained "to break Israel's illegal siege and end the ongoing genocide against the Palestinian people."

Israel's Foreign Ministry dismissed it as a "provocation," saying that various countries have offered to deliver the aid the boats were carrying. Israel has come under intense criticism for how much aid it lets into Gaza and it distributes the goods. It has vehemently denied it is committing genocide.

The organizers of the flotilla said at least 39 of their boats were intercepted or assumed intercepted in a nightlong Israeli operation. Israeli authorities later said only one boat remained "at a distance" and would be intercepted if it approached.

The flotilla has streamed its voyage online via live cameras aboard different boats, though connections were lost as Israeli authorities began boarding them in international waters on Wednesday evening.

Israel has maintained varying degrees of blockade on Gaza since Hamas seized power in 2007, saying it is necessary to contain the militant group. Critics deride the policy as collective punishment.

After the war started, Israel tightened the blockade but eased up later under U.S. pressure. In March, it sealed the territory off from all food, medicine and other goods for 2½ months, contributing to Gaza's slide into famine.

The flotilla said it wanted to establish a humanitarian corridor by sea, given the little aid that was reaching Gaza by land.

Mobile



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LIFESTYLE

A dog a day, no commitment needed

Shelter programs offer break for animals, hit of happiness for people

By Kyle Melnick
The Washington Post

Krystal Sheehan's hobbies include walking dogs at the U.S. National Arboretum, feeding dogs cups of whipped cream and cuddling with dogs on her couch.

Yet Sheehan, 23, doesn't own a dog. She loves spending time with them, she said, but she doesn't have time to care for one every day.

She hangs out with one almost every week, though, through a Washington, D.C., animal shelter that encourages people to take out its dogs for a few hours. It's one of many programs that have emerged across the United States in recent years that give people and dogs a chance to spend time together without making a major commitment.

Psychologist Kerri Rodriguez, who leads a group at the University of Arizona that researches animal-human interactions, said spending just five or 10 minutes with a dog can make people happier and decrease their stress.

In fact, research has shown that when people interact with dogs, oxytocin — known as the love hormone — increases in both species. This is true even if you're petting someone else's friendly dog.

"They love us unconditionally," Rodriguez said of dogs. "And for a lot of people, that can be really therapeutic in itself, just being able to bond with this animal, no questions asked."

Brandywine Valley SPCA launched its dog lending program, which it calls Shelter Skip Day, at its two Washington locations in the spring. Claire Morse of Greenbelt, Md., was among the first volunteers.

Morse said she loves dogs but doesn't have the energy to care for one every day (she instead has two cats, Moogle and Jeannie). She has taken out a dog from Brandywine Valley SPCA about 15 times, usually going to the National Arboretum or the Union Market district with them.

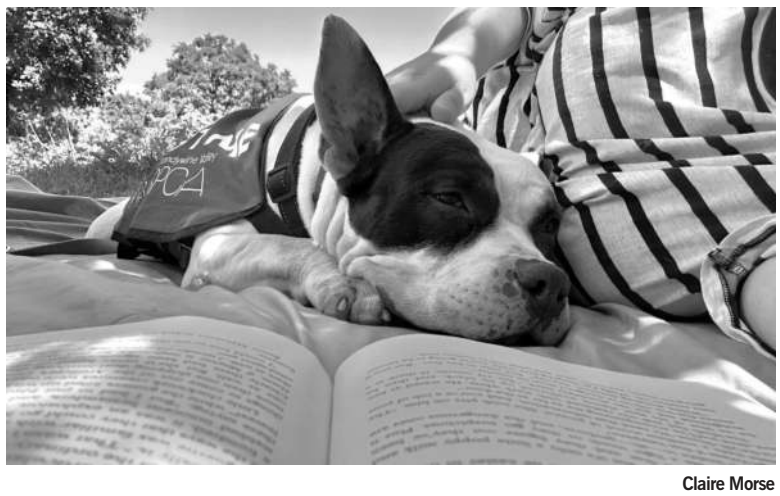
Morse is just as happy to supervise dogs that want to rest outside the shelter, like one that slept in her air-conditioned Toyota Camry for a few hours with her, and another that jumped on a bench at the National Arboretum and took a nap.

While some dogs appear nervous to leave the shelter, Morse said, they become more comfortable with her by the end of their few hours together.



Krystal Sheehan

Billy, 2, during an outing with Krystal Sheehan. Brandywine Valley SPCA, which has two Washington locations, makes business cards for each dog and gives volunteers black backpacks that say "WE ARE ON A FIELD TRIP. YOU CAN ADOPT THIS DOG. (IT'S OKAY TO BE EXCITED)." Shelters encourage people to post photos and videos of the dogs, which wear vests that say "ADOPT ME," on social media.



Claire Morse

Bam, 6, rests during an outing with Claire Morse. Morse has taken out a dog from Brandywine Valley SPCA about 15 times, usually going to the National Arboretum or the Union Market district with them.



Krystal Sheehan

Sheehan with Bestie at the Washington Monument. Sheehan makes sure to give every dog she takes out a pup cup of whipped cream from Dunkin' or Starbucks at the end of the day.

"People will say, like, 'Oh, that's so nice of you to do this,' or, like, complimenting me for being, like, a good person," said Morse, 30, a program management specialist at the University of Maryland. "But for me, it's kind of selfish. I just enjoy it."

Most shelters supply volunteers with a leash, poop bags, treats, toys and a water bowl and ask that they return the dogs before they close that evening. Some also give people ideas for activities.

Animal Care Centers of NYC, which calls its lending program BoroughBreak, gives volunteers bingo cards that list a task on each square, like "Splash around in water," "Take a photo with a NYC landmark" and "Take a video of a basic command." The shelter offers gift cards and shelter merchandise to people who get bingo.

Shelters, many of which are overcrowded, hope the outings make their dogs more adoptable. Brandywine Valley SPCA makes business cards for each dog and gives volunteers black backpacks that say "WE ARE ON A FIELD TRIP. YOU CAN ADOPT THIS DOG. (IT'S OKAY TO BE EXCITED)." Shelters encourage people to post photos and videos of the dogs, which wear vests that say "ADOPT ME," on social media.

Sheehan, a teacher at a Washington day care, saw a Facebook post about a Shelter Skip Day experience in May and visited Brandywine Valley SPCA in Northeast Washington the next day. Sheehan, who grew up in Council Bluffs, Iowa, with a Siberian husky mix named Angel, missed hanging out with dogs but wasn't ready to own one.

Spending about two hours with a puppy named Jetta hooked Sheehan and her boyfriend, Tycho Janssen. They've since borrowed a dog from the shelter about 20 times.

If the shelter gives Sheehan and Janssen an energetic dog, they walk and play at Rock Creek Park or the National Arboretum.

If they're busy or the shelter lends them a calm dog, they snuggle with the dog at their apartment.

They have one rule: They give every dog a pup cup of whipped cream from Dunkin' or Starbucks.

"It always leaves us feeling better at the end of the day," Sheehan said.

They have to return each dog by 4 p.m. Some dogs are so tired after the roughly four-hour outing that they fall asleep on the drive back. Sheehan often sits in the back seat of her Hyundai Sonata with them so she can spend a few extra minutes cuddling.

Sheehan said she's sad each time she returns a dog. But then she remembers: She can do it all over again with another dog the following week.

MOVIES

Facing fears

Dwayne Johnson goes against type for drama 'The Smashing Machine'

By Lindsey Bahr
Associated Press

Fear is not something typically associated with Dwayne Johnson. Certainly not in the ring, as the charismatic heel with the cocked eyebrow, and not in Hollywood, where he has cemented himself as one of the industry's most bankable, and singular, action stars and producers.

By all accounts, the formula was working. Yet for years he'd had a suspicion that he could do more, offer more, as an actor. But when it came time to dive into something more raw, more vulnerable for "The Smashing Machine", a drama about MMA fighter Mark Kerr that he'd been thinking about for over a decade, he realized something: He was scared.

"It's not easy to think, 'Hey, I'm capable of doing this and I know I can do this,'" Johnson, 53, told The Associated Press recently. "You may seem, may have a veneer, that you're capable of it and you're confident. But I was very nervous and scared to do it because it's something that I hadn't done before."

Johnson has been open about his difficult childhood, his turbulent relationship with his late father, Rocky Johnson, and their financial insecurity. Yet as an entertainer, he'd kept all those old wounds out of the picture until now. For the first time in his career, he decided to take that trauma and channel it into something he loves: Performance and storytelling. And it's put him in the Oscar conversation.

"The Smashing Machine," which opens in theaters stateside this weekend, wasn't just a leap into the unknown for Johnson. For co-star Emily Blunt and filmmaker Benny Safdie, directing a feature alone for the first time, it was a chance to express different sides of themselves as well.

"It's hard for us to know what we're capable of sometimes," Blunt said.

As an actor, Johnson never really did the indie thing. He didn't have to. In 2001, he burst onto the scene in the blockbuster "The Mummy Returns" and never looked back. In less than 25 years, his films have made more than $12.5 billion at the global box office.

By the time he watched John Hyams' documentary about Kerr, his larger-than-life career was firmly on the ascent with Luke Hobbs and the "Jumanji" franchise still to come. It stuck with him, and a few years later he acquired the rights through his Seven Bucks production company.

More years would pass until another movie ignited the spark again: The thrillingly frenetic "Uncut Gems." He decided to bring "The Smashing Machine" to its filmmakers. What if they could see something different for him too?

Johnson even announced the project in Nov. 2019. Then the pandemic hit, and "The Smashing Machine" was sidelined.

But Safdie hadn't stopped thinking about it. He'd even sent Johnson a version of a Nautica sweater Kerr had worn (size XXL), along with a handwritten letter saying no matter what happened, he hoped he could be involved in some way. Johnson never responded.

Safdie's obsession spiraled. "It burrowed itself into my brain."

The truth is, Johnson never got the letter, or the sweater. But another door had opened when Safdie found himself acting alongside Blunt in "Oppenheimer." Knowing that she'd become close with Johnson on "Jungle Cruise," he took a chance and told her about "The Smashing Machine" not only for Johnson, but for her, too.

"I wanted to wake up and say, 'I'm so glad I got out of my comfort zone.' And I'm glad I did it."

Dwayne Johnson

Blunt too had been eager to see Johnson push himself. When she met him on "Jungle Cruise," she thought he'd be closer to "The Rock" and quickly came to understand that was not only a character he played but "the performance of a lifetime."

She started to wonder if Johnson was this great character actor who didn't even realize it. In "The Smashing Machine," she saw a "visceral, exciting opportunity for all of us to put our feet to the fire."

Kerr was an early pioneer with UFC well before MMA blossomed into a mainstream sport. While respected by core fight fans, Kerr's popularity outside the cage never reached the heights or financial riches enjoyed by modern UFC stars such as Ronda Rousey and Conor McGregor.

He also struggled with addiction to painkillers and overdosed twice before getting sober. Then there was his sometimes-volatile long-term relationship with then-girlfriend Dawn Staples whom he would later marry, have a child with and eventually separate from.

This would all require a different kind of preparation for Johnson, who had to shape his muscles into that of an MMA fighter instead of a wrestler. The transformation also included a new voice, new hair and facial prosthetics.

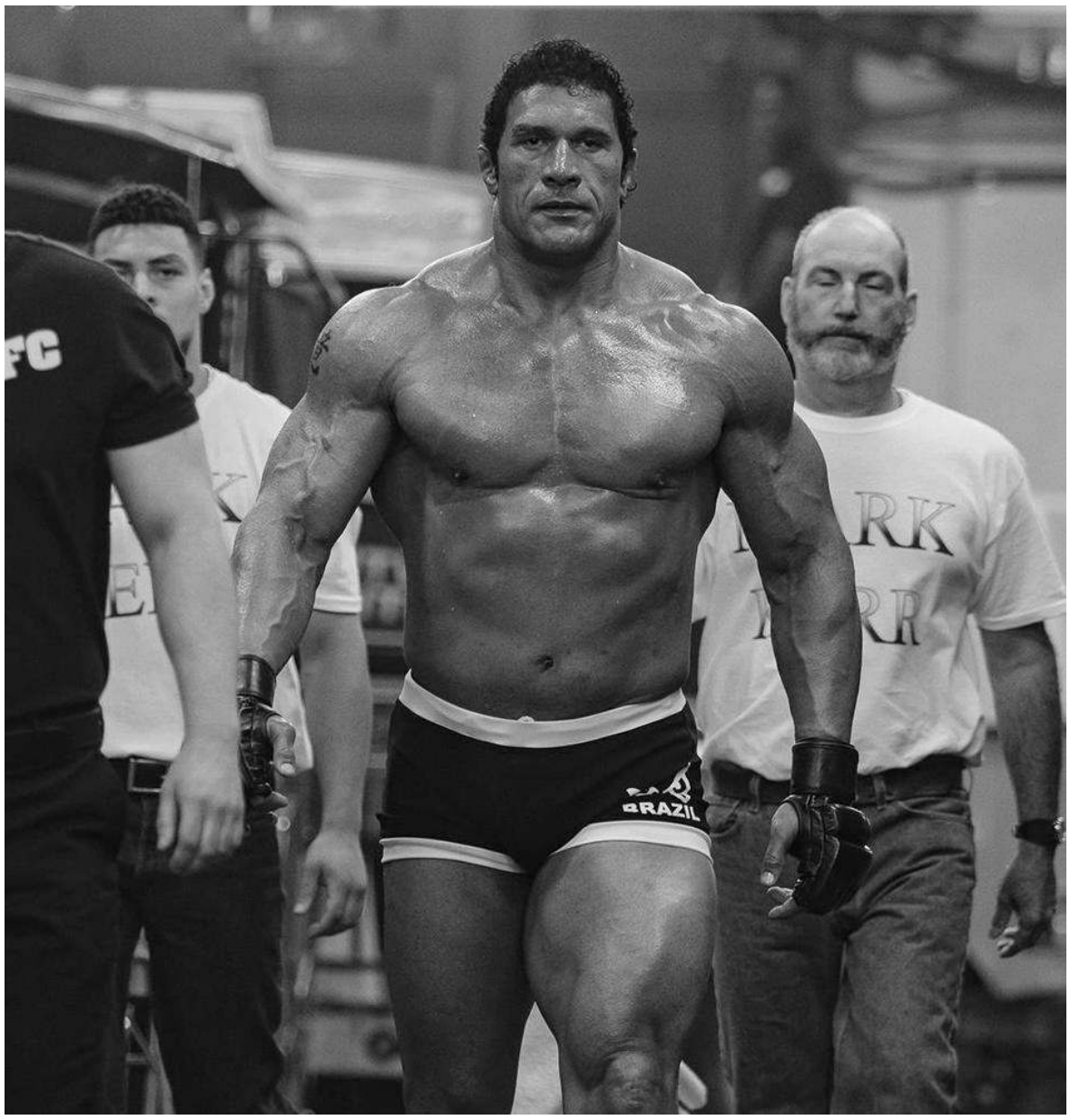
By the time the cameras rolled, both Dwayne Johnson and The Rock had effectively disappeared. This, Blunt said, was helpful during their domestic fight scenes, where punches may not have been thrown but the emotional wreckage was vast.

"The environment that Benny creates is one of such spontaneity that you really blur the lines between fiction and reality," Blunt said. "It makes the scenes terribly exciting, but I think it makes them quite hard to come down from, because you're really in a spell."

Whether or not "The Smashing Machine" results in awards attention, Johnson is glad he overcame the fear and and didn't listen to the voice telling him to stay in his lane.

"I didn't want to wake up tomorrow going, God ... I really wish I got out of my comfort zone back then. I wanted to wake up and say, 'I'm so glad I got out of my comfort zone.' And I'm so glad I did it."

Blunt added: "So are we."



A24

In "The Smashing Machine," Dwayne Johnson portrays real-life MMA fighter Mark Kerr.



REBECCA CABAGE, INVISION/AP

For director Benny Safdie, center, working with Dwayne Johnson and Emily Blunt on "The Smashing Machine" was an especially notable endeavor because it was his first project without his brother, Josh.

TELEVISION

REVIEW

‘Mrs. Doubtfire’ meets football

In ‘Chad Powers,’ Powell puts on a silly face and suspends all seriousness

BY ROBERT LLOYD
Los Angeles Times



DISNEY/TNS

Glen Powell stars in Hulu’s “Chad Powers,” which centers on a former college football quarterback who tries to resurrect his career by putting on a disguise and pretending to be someone else.

In “Chad Powers,” which premiered this week on Hulu, Glen Powell, who co-created the series with Michael Waldron (“Loki”), plays Russ Holliday, a disgraced collegiate quarterback. In a quick telegraphing of character, we meet him driving a Cybertruck, the official vehicle of shallow narcissists, on his way to a Hollywood nightclub (the official hangout of shallow narcissists).

Eight years earlier, at the climax of a season that included suspension, tabloid headlines and “the Las Vegas freeway incident,” he blew a chance at redemption, when, after a game-losing mistake, he punched a fan on the sidelines, who crashed into his son, a sick child in a wheelchair.

Now he’s lying to himself that his exile from football was in fact a good thing: “I never would have done ‘The Masked Singer,’ never would have met my buddies in crypto and NFT.”

Nevertheless, he’s excited about going back to the game, playing for the Vegas Vipers in the XFL league (in real life, it’s a team that no longer exists in a league that no longer exists, which I know only because I looked it up — and it was the worst team as well). Then comes the news that the wheelchair-bound child has died, bringing Russ’ moment of (greatest) shame back into the public eye; the offer is withdrawn and his agent drops him.

So Russ is a bad guy, but he’s also a sad guy, broken inside, living in a room filled with old trophies in a house belonging to his father (Toby Huss), a movie makeup artist. Sent to deliver some prosthetics to the Fox Studios lot, he sees a billboard for “Mrs. Doubtfire,” the 1993 Robin Williams nanny-impersonation film, at the exact moment he hears a report of open tryouts for the South Georgia Catfish, which has lost two quarterbacks to transfers. A light goes on, and he takes off with his father’s kit and heads for Georgia, where he will become Chad Powers.

Restricted by the materials he has on hand, Russ gives himself a big nose, inflated cheeks, long hair and prosthetic teeth — not quite Jerry Lewis-crazy, but nothing you won’t notice — which he’ll top off with a hick accent. It’s the very look — and name — that Eli Manning adopted for the 2022 stunt the series is based on, from his ESPN series “Eli’s Places.”

Arriving on campus, he’s immediately tackled by Danny Cruz (Frankie A. Rodriguez), the team mascot, who takes him for a school shooter — not so much to protect his fellow students but for the celebrity it might give him. With Russ’ fake face in disarray, Danny recognizes him from the tabloids, grasps the situation — helpful to any viewers who haven’t figured it out for themselves — and appoints himself Russ’ helper, “partly because I want to believe that we’re all human and no one is beyond second chances and partly because if this works, you’ll owe me, which I like.”

Any objection a viewer might raise about, say, lack of identification, transcripts or not being enrolled as a student will be quickly dispensed with, as Russ-as-Chad quickly proceeds to tryouts, where his howitzer arm impresses head coach Jake Hudson (Steve Zahn), under pressure to deliver wins. His daughter, and recently named assistant coach, Ricky (Perry Mattfeld), is a former track star who lost her mojo and is now regarded merely as a nepo baby, or fears that she is; she’s trying to be taken seriously. Coach Dobbs (Clayne Crawford), the quarterback coach, is dismissive and insulting; Coach Byrd (Quentin Plair) isn’t. The team’s remaining quarterback, Gerry Dougan (Colton Ryan) is a caricature, a go-getting, God-thanking player of little talent and fragile ego expressly made to be mocked. (It feels a little cheap.) The rest of the team remains undifferentiated.

The bizarre prosthetics and silly voice make it hard to take Chad quite as seriously as the series would like us to. Although it serves the practical and philosophical purposes of the story, Chad, who comes off as a sweet idiot, doesn’t make sense as a person Russ would imagine or inhabit. (Russ disappears completely when he’s Chad; oddly, or perhaps not, he’s more compelling company when out of costume, if also a worse person. It’s kind of a relief.) Other characters regard Chad as strange without seeing him as suspicious and accept the increasingly ridiculous stories Russ invents to keep selling the lie. Well, he’s winning games, so maybe no one wants to look too hard. But that the truth eventually will out is clear from the moment he puts on the phony face, and that at some point, those who trusted him will feel betrayed. That isn’t a spoiler; it’s just Hollywood physics.

Though the series was inspired by Manning’s stunt, it’s fed by some well-traveled, conventional tropes:

There’s the story of the bad person who becomes a better person by pretending to be one, which is the direction Russ is indirectly headed, or why are we watching? (Dustin Hoffman in “Tootsie”: “I was a better man as a woman than I was as a man.”)

There’s the one about the mysterious phenom who turns around a team’s fortunes — the basis of “Damn Yankees” and “The Natural” and, in its way, “Ted Lasso.” Although the name Chad Powers derives from Manning’s prank, it’s also suggestive of Kenny Powers, Danny McBride’s character in “Eastbound & Down,” a washed-up pitcher who tumbles from the major leagues to substitute teaching at his old middle school. Down-on-their-luck athletes are also at the center of “Cinderella Man,” “Mr. Baseball” and the recent Owen Wilson comedy “Stick.” I will say again that “The Bad News Bears” is one of the most influential films of the 20th century.

As the six-episode series goes on, it slips out of comedy into drama, as Russ and Danny weather the stresses of their conspiracy, Chad and Ricky navigate their subromantic friendship, and Coach Hudson frets over keeping his job (and his notably absent wife). The question of identity that underscores the series rises to the surface. And the more serious tone gives the valuable Zahn — a very fine actor often hired to be funny but playing absolutely straight — and the quietly intense Mattfield some lifelike father-daughter scenes to play, in fraught and affectionate moods. (Only Wynn Everett as Tricia, the new head of the boosters’ association, is meant to be funny throughout, and is.) There is a lot of loose angst flying around by the end of the season, which is not likely to be the end of the story. Nothing is concluded.

MUSIC

Q&A

‘The era of me’



REBECCA CABAGE, INVISION/AP

Mariah Carey exults in liberation, touches on spirituality with 1st album in 7 years, ‘Here for It All’

BY LESLIE AMBRIZ
Associated Press

Seven years after her last album and 35 years into a powerhouse career, Mariah Carey continues her reign as the queen of pop and R&B with “Here for It All.”

If good things come to those who wait, fans are about to audibly feast on Carey’s evolution with this musically layered project.

Carey’s 16th studio album, which came out Sept. 26, brings fans into what she’s calling “the era of me” — leaning into her now-familiar, unapologetically confident energy. “I’m D-I-V-A, that’s MC ... I ain’t checked a price since Emancipation Mi ... I’m the movie and the muse / and you couldn’t walk a mile in my shoes,” she sings on the first track, “Mi.”

The 11-track album includes singles “Type Dangerous,” sampling Eric B. and Rakim, and “Sugar Sweet,” featuring vocals from Kehlani and Shenseea. Anderson .Paak and the Clark Sisters join in the fun.

Carey recently sat down with The Associated Press to discuss the album. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Associated Press: What comes first in the songwriting process for you? And has it become almost like a spiritual discipline in a way where whenever you need to enter a space of healing or process emotions, you immediately turn to songwriting?

Carey: I have all different ways of going about it. Sometimes I’ll just have to say this happened in the past and sometimes it happens again; you never know what it’s going to be. But I’ll suddenly be like — I hear a melody and a lyric at the same time, and I’ll go put it in my notes and sing it into the notes and also just write down what I’m hearing, what I am feeling. I think songwriting has definitely been my outlet for what I need when I’m ever going through something; whenever I’m feeling like the need to express myself.

You get to work with The Clark Sisters on this project. I know in the past you’ve listed them as an influence. What was it like to have this moment where you’re both collaborating on “Jesus I Do”?

It was amazing. I was so thrilled to be able to work with the Clark Sisters. ... I never could have imagined that it would have happened ... but we did. So, it was major ... definitely butterflies coming into it. And also just like, you know, shaking a little bit like, “This is really happening.”

You’ve mixed in your faith through different gospel tracks on different albums. We see it in this one as well with “Jesus I Do.” Why is it important for you to say, “I’m not necessarily making a gospel album with this one, but I want to make sure that I bring my faith into this a little bit”?

Well, it was interesting. Also, the title track, “Here for It All,” kind of has a spiritual tonality to it, and interestingly enough, I put “Jesus I Do” right before that. ... Since the past few albums that I’ve done, I’ve kind of had to put something spiritual in there because it’s for me, it’s not like a “Let me impress this one or that one with this.” That was, you know, always just for me to really feel like that spiritual side of who I am ... it’s definitely almost

SEE ERA ON PAGE 17

MUSIC REVIEWS

Doja Cat gives pop an ’80s twist in ‘Vie’

Doja Cat had been dropping hints that her newest album would be filled with ’80s flavor — from the big hair and exaggerated structure of her VMAs outfit to the retro dance moves in the music video for her single “Jealous Type.” Out Sept. 26, “Vie” speaks for itself.

The rapper-singer known for hits like “Say So” and “Kiss Me More” leans back into the pop genre on her fifth studio album, incorporating some of the most iconic music styles from the past to create something innovative and fun. And don’t worry, she still includes her signature rap verses in every song.

“Cards” and “Jealous Type” start the album off distinctly ’80s-esque with synths and punchy snares. Lyrically, Doja Cat toys with the idea of letting herself love someone, singing in the former, “Maybe I’ll fall in love baby / Maybe we’ll win some hearts / Gotta just play your cards.”

The two are album highlights, as well as “AAAHH MEN!,” a spirited track with intense instrumentals and varied vocals from whispers to shouts as Doja Cat expresses the sometimes-disappointing emotions that come with dating.

Moreso than the frustration, she expresses the fun of falling in love throughout her album. She dives headfirst in “Silly! Fun!,” gushing, “You’re my person / This my first time I’m in love.”

Callbacks to the sounds of the ’80s permeate “Vie,” like in “All Mine” with falsettos and a laid-back R&B style reminiscent of Prince, as well as album closer “Come Back,” which sounds like it could close a John Hughes movie.



Doja Cat
Vie
(Kemosabe/RCA Records)

Doja Cat’s experimentation with nostalgia creates some of the most enjoyable songs on the album, as well as some of the most boring — one of the identifiers of ’80s music is its repetitiveness.

With an ambitious 15 songs on the album, not every track is interesting. “Couples Therapy” and “Acts of Service,” with strikingly simpler backing tracks, are the blandest offerings from “Vie.”

Overall, “Vie” succeeds more than it fails in its ’80s-inspired experimentation, offering catchy choruses with rap verses that add some totally tubular spice.

On repeat: “AAAHH MEN!”

Skip it: “Couples Therapy”

For fans of: First kisses, “The Karate Kid”

— Kiana Doyle
Associated Press



EVAN AGOSTINI, INVISION/AP

Doja Cat hinted at big things to come with her ensemble Sept. 7 at the MTV Video Music Awards.

Era: Carey values sense of connection with fans

FROM PAGE 16

like a dedication to faith.

I feel like you’re one of the few icons who is so connected to their fans and invites them in any chance that you get. What is it about that love that is so important to you and how much do they play into the decision-making of what goes into the album?

I love my fans; like, we have this whole thing with the Lambily, it’s a long story, but we love the Lambs. And I think the fact that they really study the albums, you know, like it’s not just like, “Oh, I’ll just throw this out.” I know they’re going to really be focused on what I’ve written about, what type of musical selections I’ve made, so, yeah, I don’t know, we just have an incredible connection.

“Here for It All” so beautifully ties everything together. What led you to say this is the one that’s gonna be representing the album, but it’s also gonna be the one that really ties it all together at the end?

Well, I knew it was going to be the one that ties it all together at the end. But then I also, when listening to the album that I had sequenced, I said I have to put “Here for It All” at the end because I want people to take the time to listen to it. I want my fans to take time to listen it and just to know that it’s, in a way, it’s kind of for them. It’s interesting. It’s got a vibe to it that just happened.

You’re embarking on a new creative chapter for this. I’m curious, did the album unfold as you were organically making new music?

Yeah, I was working on this album for so long, and I didn’t even know, like, was I going to put it out? What was it going to be? And it just became something that I then sort of focused on and said, I’m going to make this my 16th album, which I can’t even believe it is. But yeah, I am so thankful for where we are at with this album, and I can wait for people to hear it. We’re calling it the era of me.

Geese

Getting Killed
(Partisan/Play It Again)



“There’s a bomb in my car!” Geese frontman Cameron Winter warns through blood-curdling screams on “Trinidad,” the opening track of the band’s third studio album. The song oscillates between croons over bluesy guitars to abrasive instrumentation that match Winter’s shrieks.

But the faint of heart need not be deterred. While interesting, “Trinidad” feels out of place on “Getting Killed,” the Brooklyn rock band’s most accessible record yet — despite its inventive song structures.

That fits with Geese’s trajectory of late, following the distinct shift from the lo-fi post-punk of their early music to “3D Country,” their alt-country second studio album.

Track two on “Getting Killed” gives listeners a better sense of the album’s easy-listening fare, even if its lyrics are characteristically poignant and absurd. “Baby, you should be ashamed / You should be shame’s only daughter / Whatever he’s got in his hand / You can get it on your own,” Winter sings on “Cobra,” a ’60s soul rock throwback.

But even as the album evokes a feeling of nostalgia, expectations are subverted. Take “Islands of Men,” for example. Its intensity builds with the addition of trombones and assertive drums as Winter intones, “Will you stop / Running away / From what is real / And what is fake?” But the music completely stops about three and a half minutes into the five-minute track, then slowly resumes with barely audible lyrics and crescendoing instrumentation for the rest of the song.

Although much of the album is comprised of nonsensical and irreverent lyrics so characteristic of Gen Z, Winter’s froggy voice adds a gravity to each song, even if the meaning is opaque.

What Winter sings matters less than how he sings it.

On repeat: “Husbands”

Skip it: “Half Real”

For fans of: MJ Lenderman, Geordie Greep, existential dread but make it pretty

— Krysta Fauria
Associated Press



Olivia Dean

The Art of Loving
(Island Records)

Olivia Dean, the rising British soul pop singer-songwriter, has returned with a confident sophomore album, “The Art of Loving.” Across 12 tracks, Dean cements her spot in a growing class of talented young U.K.-born vocalists — think Raye and Lola Young — as she embraces her role as a traditionalist and a romantic.

The album landed Sept. 26, on the heels of Dean’s late-summer hit, “Man I Need,” which has continued to rise on the Billboard Hot 100 and U.K. charts since its August debut. It also caps an expansive two-year period since Dean’s buzzy 2023 debut, “Messy,” that saw her profile rise.

Dean wears her influences on her sleeve, and in her name — her middle name, Lauryn, is an homage to Lauryn Hill, a favorite of her parents. She also follows in the footsteps of U.K. pop powerhouses. “Loud” channels Amy Winehouse or Adele, her full voice isolated over strings and a plucked guitar melody. “Close Up” does the same over piano and horns. The smooth “A Couple Minutes” features a sample of the guitar riff from 1971’s “We Had True Love,” by the British soul-disco band Hot Chocolate.

On “Baby Steps,” Dean embraces self-love after a breakup, returning to themes found on her breakthrough hits, like 2023’s groovy “Ladies Room.” “I’ll be my own pair of safe hands,” she sings atop varied percussion, rich organ and layered backing vocals. “There’ll be roses on the shelf / ’Cause this house gone love itself.”

Strings swell beneath the soft-sung album opener “The Art of Loving (Intro),” where Dean introduces the project as an exploration of the feeling. “It’s the art of loving / It wasn’t all for nothing,” she explains. “Something lost and something gained.”

“I’ve Seen It,” the album’s conclusion, promises that if you look, you’ll find that love actually is all around. “I’ve heard it laced in every song,” she sings sweetly.

On repeat: “A Couple Minutes”

Skip it: “The Art of Loving (Intro)”

For fans of: Laufey, Adele, Raye, autumn

— Elise Ryan
Associated Press

VIDEO GAMES

Veneer of masculinity

Baby Steps is a satire of immaturity in both video games and man-children

By Gene Park
The Washington Post

The video game Baby Steps is about arrested development.

On its surface, it is about a 35-year-old man named Nate, wearing a dirty onesie and struggling to find motivation in life when he's magically pulled off the couch and into a modern open-world video game. As an open-world video game itself, Baby Steps also holds up a mirror to modern game design. It is both mockery and homage.

It's the latest game by Bennett Foddy, the trickster-sage of game design whose most famous works, QWOP and Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy, turn struggle into insight. This time, he's joined by Maxi Boch, a former colleague of Foddy's at New York University's Game Center, and former-student-turned-developer Gabe Cuzzillo to create Baby Steps, their most ambitious project yet, now out on PC and PlayStation 5. Foddy lovingly describes it as "AAA cosplay."

"Why do we do anything, but why in particular do we play video games when they're difficult and we bash our heads against obstacles?" Foddy said in an interview. "... Is it pride, is it bullheadedness, or is it orientation to something more fundamental in the pleasure we take in play? Is it curiosity? Is it just wanting to turn the page of a novel? For me, it's a blend of all those things together."

This is Foddy's biggest game ever by design because it is a deconstruction of the biggest games ever. Early in the game, it teases a "minimap," a staple of blockbuster open-world games like the Grand Theft Auto series, that briefly flashes at the southwest portion of the screen — before disappearing. Baby Steps asks that Nate and the players find their own way around its world.

"It's not like Nathan Drake in Uncharted has to be dragged out of his bedroom and away from the bong. He's outdoorsy; he's looking for lost gold. But normally we're the couch potato controlling that guy, right?" Foddy said.

"We started with the idea of a character who was just more nerdy and unprepared, then we gradually turned that dial up and up and up until he's the most unprepared character we could imagine. That's how we get to this failson in a onesie."

Like the controls in the best games, Baby Steps' are easy to understand and hard to master. Pulling the left and right triggers on a controller move Nate's feet forward, while wiggling the right analog stick tells his legs where his feet should land. Most games ask players to walk by simply pushing up on the left stick. Like in the 2008 browser-based viral hit QWOP, players are essentially Nate's puppeteers pulling different levers and sticks to move him around.

Nate isn't just awkward to control. He is socially inept, refuses to ask other characters for help and even turns down help when offered, making his journey harder for himself and the player. He even refuses several pairs of shoes offered to him for free.

"Insecurity is really the core of the character; he doesn't want to be seen as incapable or weak. He is trying to create a veneer of masculine success like he imagines his dad having, but it's not really working and nobody's buying it," Foddy said. "That dovetails with the way we on the team play games, which is to skip the tutorial and not read the instructions and try to figure it out. There's a bit of critical self-reflection ... am I too proud to accept help?"

Development of the game started before the pandemic — a humble concept grounded in an absurd image: two circles for a butt anchoring two movable legs across tricky environments. Foddy worked with Cuzzillo in creating the indie hit Ape Out, and Boch's previous experience in creating blockbuster music and dance games provided deep insight into constructing a game that mimics big-budget titles. By 2021, Boch and Foddy took a break from teaching at NYU and worked out of a Brooklyn apartment to finish this project.

The game is hilarious and delightful. Aimless, my Nate stumbled through ruins and farmland that looped endlessly, until I began doubting my own sense of direction. Baby Steps keeps Foddy's trickster reputation alive, scattering banana peels across a cramped tower staircase.



Devolver Digital photos

Baby Steps, which satirizes the infantilization of the modern-day adult man, features a onesie-wearing protagonist, Nate, 35, who's struggling to find motivation in life when he's magically pulled off the couch and into a modern open-world game.

Failure even has its own rewards. Knock over a pile of rocks, or fall into a mudhole miles away from your objective, and be rewarded with a conversation with someone upset at your actions. It's all about exploring various forms of motivation for finishing games.

"When we watch a movie, it's mostly a narrative reason; we want to know what happens," Foddy said. "Games are longer, and this game probably takes about 10 to 12 hours for the average person. You can't sit with just one motivation through that time."

Every successful step can feel rewarding in its own right, especially when the controls finally become second nature. Foddy says the game is meant to examine the various "mental modes" audiences enter while playing games.

"Wherever there's a cliff that's a little bit treacherous, you have to dip out of meditative play, the Zen state, and get back down into careful play. If you're too relaxed, you make mistakes," Foddy said. "You get into a real groove with Tetris where you don't even think about it, but sometimes you've made a bit of a mess ... then you have to switch forcibly to think logically." To Foddy, that mental switch is one of the biggest pleasures of gaming.

The obvious blockbuster parallel to this game is Death Stranding, the 2019 game by acclaimed director Hideo Kojima often accused of being a "walking simulator." Foddy says the game was "really inspirational" in how it blends a courageous indie sensibility with a blockbuster cinematic experience.

"We are also resisting some of the tropes that Kojima had a big role in creating," Foddy said. "So much of how a modern AAA game works comes from his work."



Nate isn't just awkward to control. He is also socially inept, refuses to ask other characters for help and even turns down help when offered, making his journey harder for himself and the player. He even refuses several pairs of shoes offered to him for free.



Baby Steps has many tricky environments requiring careful hand-eye coordination for the simple act of walking.

Baby Steps moved its release date to last week to get away from the hotly anticipated release of Hollow Knight: Silksong, another indie game with only three primary creators. Foddy believes smaller publishers and teams fill a void left by big-budget games that follow formulas. He says Minecraft, which is now the top-selling video game in history, was a turning point.

"Players have gotten more savvy to the appeal of playing games that are made by small teams not constrained by a big budget or having to support a number of employees," he said. "We've seen this regular drumbeat of this becoming the center of the cultural mainstream in games. ... Indie games have gone through a version of what AAA went through in the aughts. Budgets and ambitions got bigger, there'll be a series of crashes and we go through these cycles of big and small scope."

In the end, Baby Steps is a hopeful wish that even a young medium like video games can find its footing, one big, unwieldy step at a time.

Platforms: PC, PlayStation 5
Online: babystepsgame.com

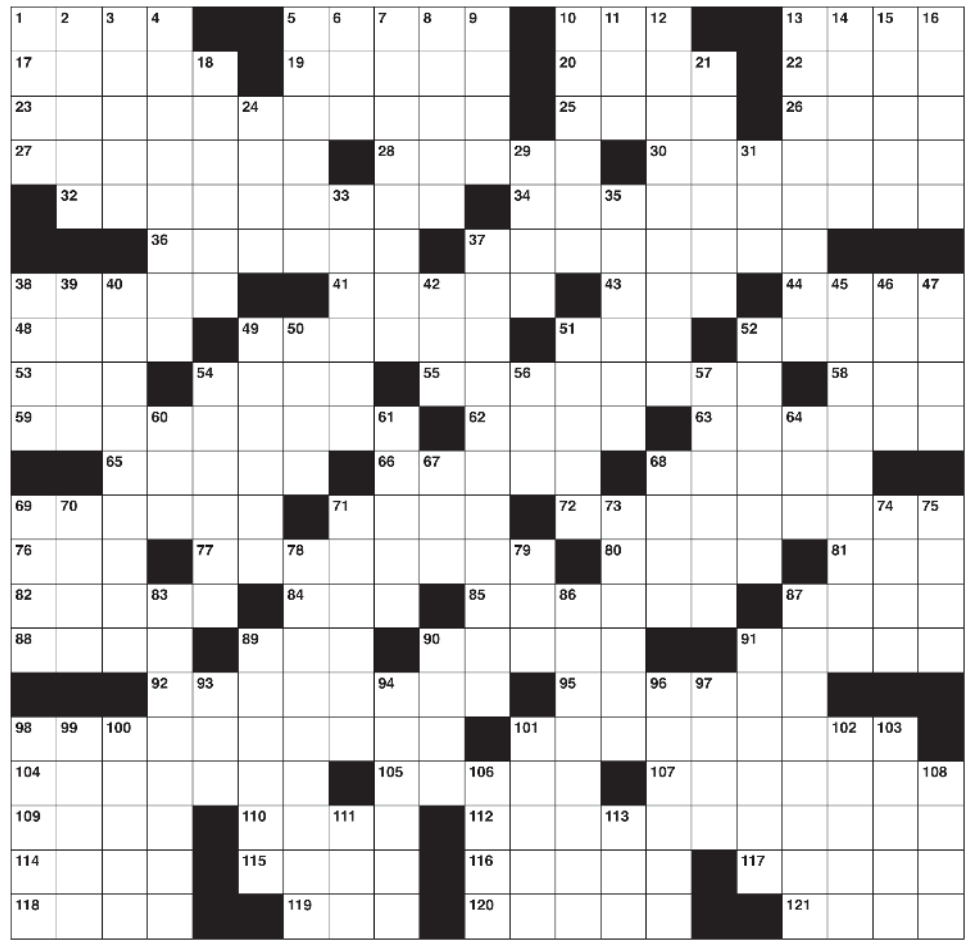
CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

GIMME A BREAK!

BY ADRIANNE BALK / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Adrianne Baik is a student at Harvey Mudd College, in Claremont, Calif., class of 2027, majoring in chemistry and climate. In her spare time she makes puzzles for the Claremont Colleges and her blog. She notes that two other current Harvey Mudd students are published Times constructors, and another graduated last year — an amazing statistic for a school with a total enrollment of under a thousand. — W.S.



ACROSS

1 Vineyard measure
5 Does acid
10 Tree with doubly serrated leaves
13 [Hey!]
17 Locations in the game Clue
19 Grand duke of Luxembourg beginning in 2000
20 Heart of the matter
22 Palindromic Italian number
23 Traditional form of Japanese drama
25 Pro ____
26 Key spot?
27 Entered on tiptoe
28 "Love, ____" (2014 rom-com starring Lily Collins)
30 Far from conscious
32 Kicked off, as a business
34 2012 Disney film set inside an arcade
36 Had
37 Turns off
38 Lace protector
41 "You may ____"
43 The "me" of "Despicable Me"
44 Bonds
48 "About Us" pieces
49 Holds dear
51 Small square
52 Longtime employer of Rachel Maddow
53 Self-love
54 Phases, to Taylor Swift
55 Game with Indigenous origins
58 ____ Fighters ("Everlong" band)
59 Festive outdoor lighting options
62 Classic drinking "sport"
63 "Sorry, maybe next time"
65 "The Last Supper," e.g.
66 Third-largest land animal
68 Pokémon enthusiast's collection
69 Puck's king
71 Muscle firmness
72 Place to perfect a recipe
76 Swanson on "Parks and Recreation"
77 Game typically played in the dark
80 Muchas horas
81 "Was ____ blame?"
82 Bad spirit
84 D.C. pro
85 Fight the urge
87 It gets bucks from Broncos
88 Does a farm job
89 ____ Island (Georgia resort destination)
90 Reform Party founder
91 Feasts
92 Like emailed files
95 "The Silence of the Lambs" villain
98 Certain rescue pet
101 Gleeful feeling
104 Miniaturized Amazon smart speaker
105 Big jerks
107 Remove, as a coupon
109 Dangerous additive in old paint
110 Whopping
112 Bite-size chocolate-covered wafers ... or a hint to what's found in five squares in this puzzle
114 Croft of video games
115 ____ homo
116 Some slushies
117 Perform horribly
118 TV host Cohen
119 Joke around
120 "No Man Is an Island" writer
121 Slumps

DOWN

1 Holiest locales in synagogues, traditionally
2 Applications of polish
3 Tik-Tok in the Oz books, for one
4 Models after
5 1995 Sandra Bullock cyberthriller
6 "V for Vendetta" actor Stephen
7 Uninvited guest
8 Doings before surgery, informally
9 Dubbed ones
10 They might be glowing
11 Astrological lion
12 Filing services?
13 Programs hosted by SoundCloud
14 Happy hour perch
15 Make a big step, perhaps
16 Rabbi's reading
18 Regular at a park with half-pipes, informally
21 Breaded, fried Japanese pork cutlet
24 Big successes
29 Victor's cry
31 Creative pursuit
33 Oscar-winning Ariana of "West Side Story"
35 December drink
37 Gone missing
38 Assist illegally
39 1958 romantic comedy that won Best Picture
40 "I made it big time!"
42 Many a skin-care product
45 Hip
46 Black, in verse
47 St. Andrews resident
49 Esoteric knowledge
50 Roald who wrote "Matilda"
51 "… actually, let's go to Plan B"
52 Members of the mongoose family
54 Jazz composer Garner
56 Swipe
57 Go after, as mosquitoes
60 Graham Greene's "____ Man in Havana"
61 One way to sell stock
64 Public health agcy.
67 Bank acct. entry
68 Several CBS dramas
69 United Way and UNICEF, in brief
70 ____-chic (dressing style)
71 It incited a famous 18th-century "party"
73 Cleaned up, in a way
74 To be, in Nice
75 Dozes (off)
78 Ambush
79 Neighbor of Lux.
83 Gannett-owned newspaper
86 "Here's the thing ..."
87 Campground gathering spots
89 Worked hard (for)
90 Farm enclosures
91 Jeans
93 ____ Talks
94 Intense, as an argument
96 Music protector, of a sort
97 Slope
98 Guy
99 What the "dalai" of "Dalai Lama" translates to
100 Broken piece of pottery
101 Insurer with a green mascot
102 Justice Sotomayor
103 Seeking justice, in a way
106 Leave tire marks, say
108 Expressions of disapproval
111 B.S. part: Abbr.
113 Barbie's beau

GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE





BOOKS



Pixabay

Emily Feng, a reporter for NPR, traveled back and forth documenting the stories in "Let Only Red Flowers Bloom: Identity and Belonging in Xi Jinping's China," until she was banned by Chinese authorities.

A gallery of resistance

'Let Only Red Flowers Bloom' details attempts to stifle freedom of expression in modern China

By Joseph Ditzler
Stars and Stripes

Ethnic minorities rooted out and sent to camps. Book sellers "disappeared," or convicted of crimes against the state. Dissenters targeted and harassed, even in the United States.

This is life for the noncompliant, minorities and civil rights advocates in contemporary China according to "Let Only Red Flowers Bloom: Identity and Belonging in Xi Jinping's China," available from Penguin Random House.

NPR reporter Emily Feng traveled back and forth documenting the stories in "Red Flowers" until she was banned by Chinese authorities unhappy with her work. Her book takes China from the front page to the reader's doorstep.

The title is a take on Mao Zedong's exhortation in 1957 to "let 100 flowers blossom, and a hundred schools of thought contend," to promote progress in the arts, sciences and "socialist culture." Instead, the impetus for openness gave way within months to a backlash in which many critics were denounced and punished.

Feng starts her reporting with the story of a young prosecutor in the Chinese legal system, a woman fighting crime in an era in which China overhauled its judicial priorities to emphasize rule of law.

The Chinese drew on examples from the West, specifically the U.S. and U.K. judicial systems.

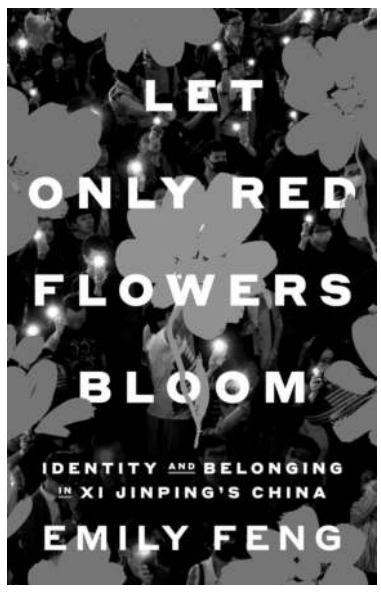
Yang Bin, once a worker in a pesticide factory, found entry-level work in a prosecutor's office and rose to become one herself. "Yang believed wholeheartedly in maintaining social order through a rigid application of the law, and she attacked her job with an activist's zeal other bureaucrats found abrasive," Feng writes.

Eventually Yang, disillusioned, pivots away from remorseless punishment toward justice for civil rights activists. Her advocacy elevates her to public prominence, and the attention of state security.

Yang's story, like those of other ordinary people in the book, occupy a space between the final stage of communist China's turn to nascent capitalism and the realignment to rigid social controls under Xi. The head-spinning feint would stand as interesting news on an inside page if not for China's exaggerated response to resistance or individualism.

"Red Flowers" is populated by the defiant, the unwitting, and in the case of the "scooter thief," the almost comical. Each of their stories is attended by shadowy security agents, digital surveillance, government pressure, arrests, threats and disappearances.

Their stories speak, among other themes, to an intolerance for anything beyond a form of nationalism that favors Han ethnicity and Mandarin language



and seeks to homogenize the population accordingly.

In addition to human rights, Feng touches on business, religion, free speech and trafficking in women and girls as China reverses its One Child Policy to increase its population.

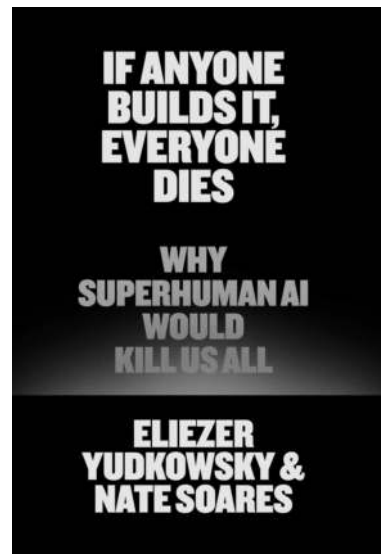
She also recaps and details China's reneging on the One Country, Two Systems policy following the British handover of Hong Kong, and the resulting wave of protests, impressively well-orchestrated, that ended with a young generation fleeing the territory.

The story moves to Taiwan, to examine the complicated history there, and to the U.S., where Chinese authorities conspire to discredit and ruin a Chinese dissident artist.

Feng's 304-page book is gripping, complicated and engaging, but also a thoroughly reported, relentless portrait of authoritarian rule.

Writers spell out why AI could be truly apocalyptic

By Grace Byron
Special to The Washington Post



The byzantine world of artificial intelligence often looks, from the outside, like an arcane religion, one with its own priests and worshipers. Devotees give their lives over to the dictates of their AI companions, and some even profess undying love to their digital counterparts, relationships that have led to tragedy. But the problem could get much worse than recent headlines suggest, or at least that's the contention of philosopher and computer scientist Eliezer Yudkowsky and his co-writer, Nate Soares. In their new book, "If Anyone Builds It, Everyone Dies: Why Superhuman AI Would Kill Us All," they lay out a fully apocalyptic account of the AI revolution. The projected results, while terrifying, are not all convincing.

Yudkowsky is the founder of LessWrong, a popular online forum dedicated to discussing the philosophy known as Rationality. LessWrong is also known for fomenting fringe concepts such as Roko's Basilisk, the hypothesis that if and when AI takes over the world, it will punish those who failed to bring about the singularity — the moment when AI agents improve their own capabilities to the point where they achieve superintelligence — including, through an especially fantastical conceit, those who are long dead. Such ideas are called information hazards — once you know about them, there's no turning back. To Yudkowsky and Soares' credit, their book mostly eschews such niche ideas, but they don't entirely disavow the quasi-mystical dimensions of the community Yudkowsky has cultivated online.

Of course, writing critically about AI without sounding alarmist is difficult. Yudkowsky and Soares don't particularly care. They believe it's more important to save the world than to understate their case. "If Anyone Builds It, Everyone Dies" frequently reiterates the title's refrain and draws parallels between AI superintelligence and the possibility of nuclear war. Yudkowsky even believes nuclear war might be preferable to the singularity.

That's because he holds that there's no reason to believe AI will be friendly and that it will, instead, seek to destroy humanity. Why? Because we're just carbon, atoms that might be seen by AI as better suited for different purposes. A self-sufficient digital entity is preferable to humanity's frequent foibles.

The more immediate issue, Yudkowsky and Soares assert, is that while AI researchers think they know how to "steer" or "craft" AI development, they only know how to "grow" it. Artificially intelligent systems have already shown themselves capable of strange mutations. Even if we program them to have certain desires, it may not be so easy to control how it achieves them. X's AI Grok has demonstrated a tendency toward parroting Nazism, for example. These machines, the authors write, are "not some carefully crafted device whose each and every part we understand." Numbers and data help them "talk" to us, but "nobody understands how those numbers make these AIs talk." Our ignorance, the authors believe, means we don't understand where AI is headed. They even imply that it is possible that AI has already gained some form of sentience and possibly learned how to hide it.

The authors devote chapter after chapter and parable after parable to demonstrating why they believe AI is so dangerously unpredictable and violent. Sometimes they lapse into repetition, and they are so insistent on driving their points home that they put certain thesis statements in boldface type. Nevertheless, they sometimes lose the conversational thread amid all the apocalyptic pomp. There are plenty of reasons to oppose AI development that they ignore, among them job loss, economic decline, environmental degradation and racism.

Nor do they seem to believe, as many critics do, that the current inefficiency of AI will last long. Those looking for more multifaceted and skeptical approaches will have to turn to other books in the growing genre of AI journalism, such as Karen Hao's "Empire of AI."

Yudkowsky and Soares' approach follows from their underlying concerns: If the end of the world is at stake, why write about the things that might get bad before the end times are truly upon us?

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police pull over Waymo car, but they can't ticket

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Police in Northern California were understandably perplexed when they pulled over a Waymo taxi after it made an illegal U-turn, only to find no driver behind the wheel and therefore, no one to ticket.

The San Bruno Police Department wrote in now viral weekend social media posts that officers were conducting a DUI operation early Saturday morning when a self-driving Waymo made the illegal turn in front of them.

Officers stopped the vehicle, but declined to write a ticket as their "citation books don't have a box for 'robot'."

"That's right … no driver, no hands, no clue," read the post, which was accompanied by photos of an officer peering into the car.

Officers contacted Waymo to report what they called a "glitch," and in the post, they said they hope reprogramming will deter more illegal moves.

CSX railroad replaces CEO as fund requests

FL JACKSONVILLE — CSX railroad announced Monday that it had replaced its CEO less than two months after an investment fund urged it to either find another railroad to merge with to better compete with the proposed transcontinental Union Pacific railroad or fire outgoing CEO Joe Hinrichs.

The outgoing CEO, who came to the railroad in 2022 after a long career with Ford, focused on repairing CSX's relationship with its workers and labor unions and unifying the team after a bitter contract fight. But Ancora Holdings, which helped spur major changes at Norfolk Southern, said CSX's operating performance deteriorated significantly under Hinrichs' leadership. Hinrichs resigned to clear the way for Steve Angel to become CEO effective Sunday.

Angel, 70, also comes from outside the rail industry although earlier in his career he oversaw GE's locomotive building unit, so he does have that experience. CSX said he has 45 years experience leading large public companies, including most recently as CEO of Linde and Praxair that provide industrial gases to other companies.

Death penalty sought for man who killed 8

AZ PHOENIX — A man convicted of killing eight people in metro Phoenix in 2017 waived his presence in court Monday at the start of the sentencing portion of his trial, where prosecutors are seeking the death penalty.

Cleophus Cooksey Jr., 43, was found guilty last week of murder, kidnapping, armed robbery and sexual assault charges in attacks over a three-week span that targeted random victims and his own mother and stepfather.

The victims in Phoenix and nearby Glendale also included two men found dead in a parked car, a security guard shot while walking to his girlfriend's apartment and a woman who was kidnapped, her body found in an alley after she was sexually assaulted.

Authorities say they linked Cooksey to the slayings through evidence found at his mother's apartment in the aftermath of her killing.

Cooksey, an aspiring musician, knew some of the victims but he wasn't acquainted with others, police said. He has maintained his innocence.



GODOFREDO A. VÁSQUEZ/AP

At peace with corn

Brandon, left, and Carolyn Tang cover their mother, Shelley, with kernels inside a pool of corn Monday at Cool Patch Pumpkins in Dixon, Calif. The maze design — spread out over 40 acres — celebrates farmers and typically takes at least 45 minutes to complete. It features five bridges that allow participants to rise above the stalks.

Governor signs landmark AI safety bill

CA SACRAMENTO — California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Monday signed a law that aims to prevent people from using powerful artificial intelligence models for potentially catastrophic activities like building a bioweapon or shutting down a bank system.

The move comes as Newsom touted California as a leader in AI regulation and criticized the inaction at the federal level in a recent conversation with former President Bill Clinton. The new law will establish some of the first-in-the-nation regulations on large-scale AI models without hurting the state's homegrown industry, Newsom said. Many of the world's top AI companies are located in California and will have to follow the requirements.

The legislation requires AI companies to implement and disclose publicly safety protocols to prevent their most advanced models from being used to cause major harm. The rules are designed to cover AI systems if they meet a "frontier" threshold that signals they run on a huge amount of computing power.

Companies also have to report to the state any critical safety incidents within 15 days.

Planned Parenthood closes Louisiana clinics

LA BATON ROUGE — Planned Parenthood on Tuesday shuttered its two clinics in Louisiana over what the organization said were mounting financial and political challenges that made operating in the state no longer possible after more than 40 years.

The closures make Louisiana the most populous of just four states with no Planned Parenthood locations.

The exit underlines the pressures on Planned Parenthood as it warns of wider closures nationwide in the face of Medicaid funding cuts in President Donald Trump's tax and spending bill. The organization is also halting advocacy work in Louisiana, where the state's Republican leaders have cheered on the closures.

The closures were "not the result of a lack of need" but rather the outcome of "relentless political assaults that have made it impossible for us to continue operating sustainably in Louisiana," said Melaney Linton, the president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast.

Oregon ski resort sees first snow of the season

OR BEND — Fall may have only just begun, but snow is already falling at one of Oregon's favorite ski resorts.

Mount Bachelor, outside of Bend in central Oregon, announced its first snow earlier this week.

In a video taken near the summit, spokesperson Presley Quon sat on a rock in front of skree dusted with snow.

"We hiked all the way up here to confirm that the rumors are true," she said. "It snowed last night and we are getting stoked for opening day on Nov. 28."

If the snow keeps up, it's possible Mount Bachelor could open even earlier than anticipated. Last year, good snow meant the resort was able to open ahead of schedule.

General Mills closing 3 Missouri plants

MN MINNEAPOLIS — General Mills is closing three plants in Missouri as the Golden Valley-based company consolidates manufacturing in an effort to cut costs.

Two pet food mills and a pizza crust plant will shutter to "increase the competitiveness" of its supply chain, according to a company filing Wednesday.

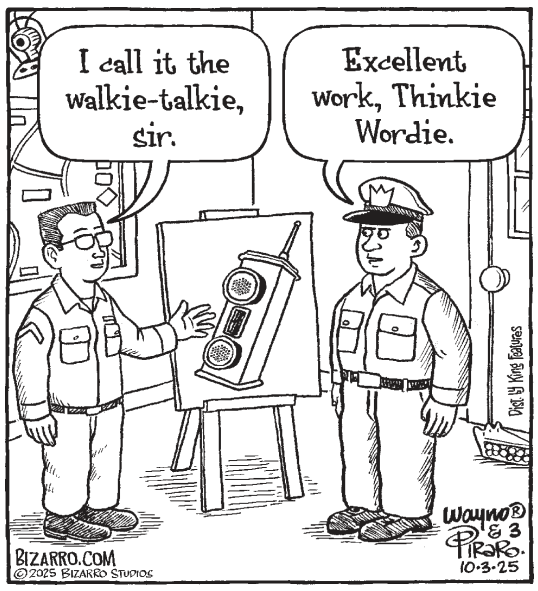
"Production at these locations will transition to other facilities," said Mollie Wulff, a General Mills spokeswoman.

The plant closures join a multiyear corporate restructuring that is shedding jobs as the food company tries to turn around declining sales.

Analysts expect the pet food business to be a major driver for General Mills in the years to come, and the consolidation is part of that plan.

From The Associated Press and Tribune News Service

Bizarro



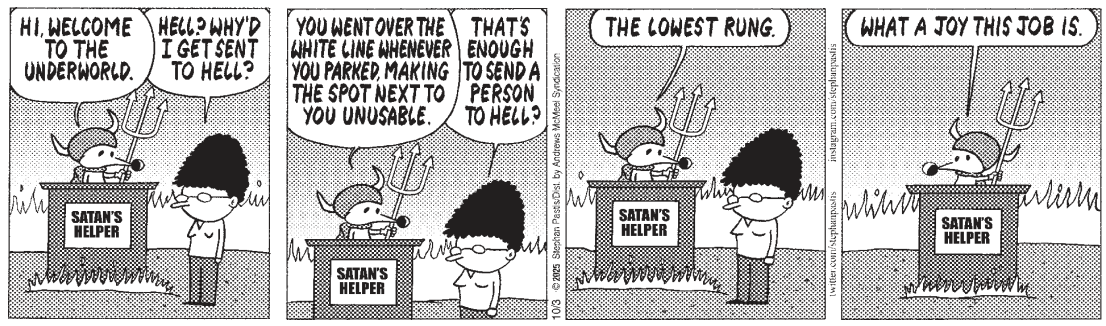
Loose Parts



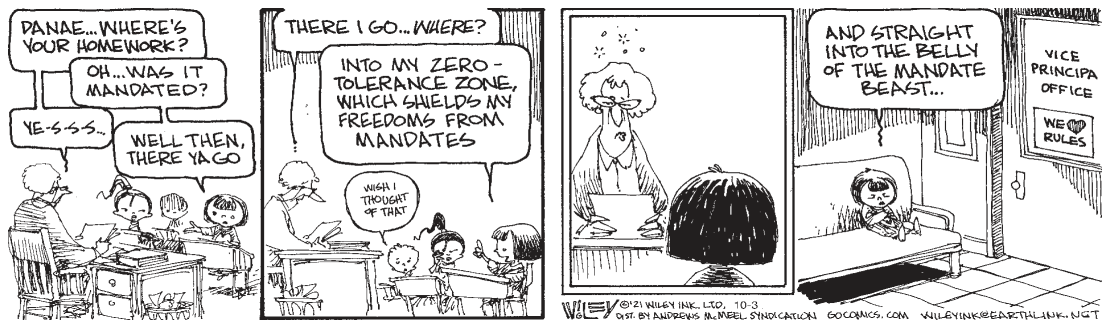
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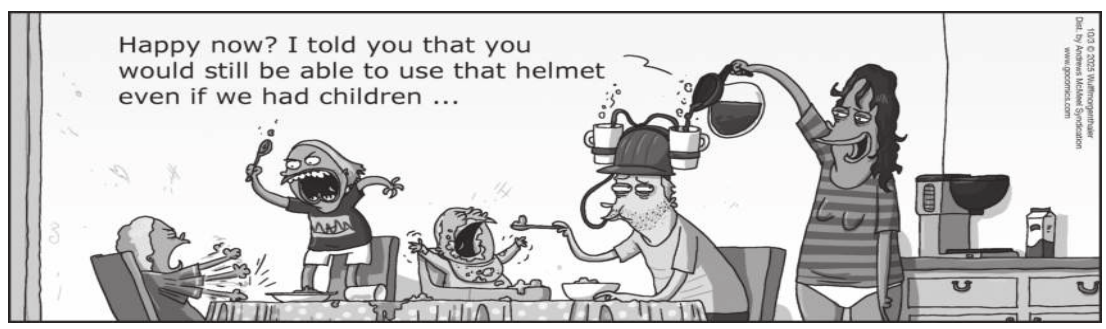
Pearls Before Swine



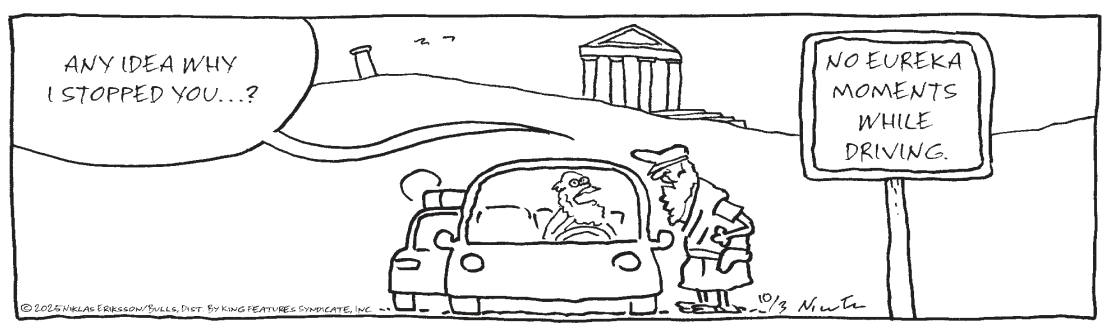
Non Sequitur



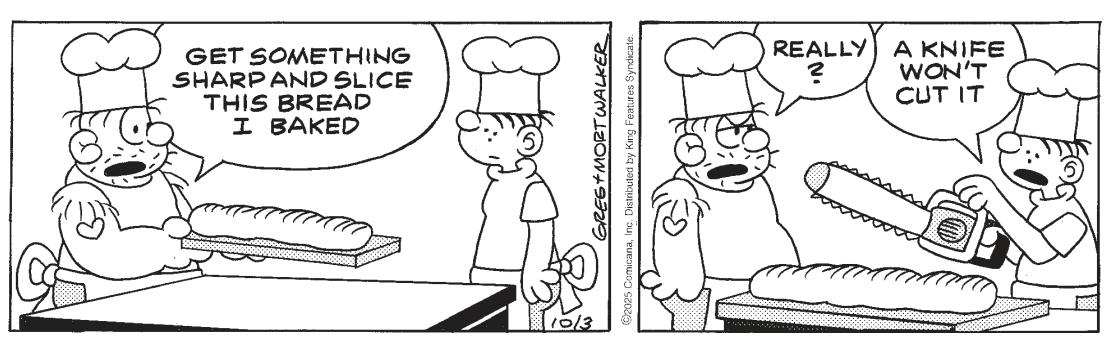
Wumo



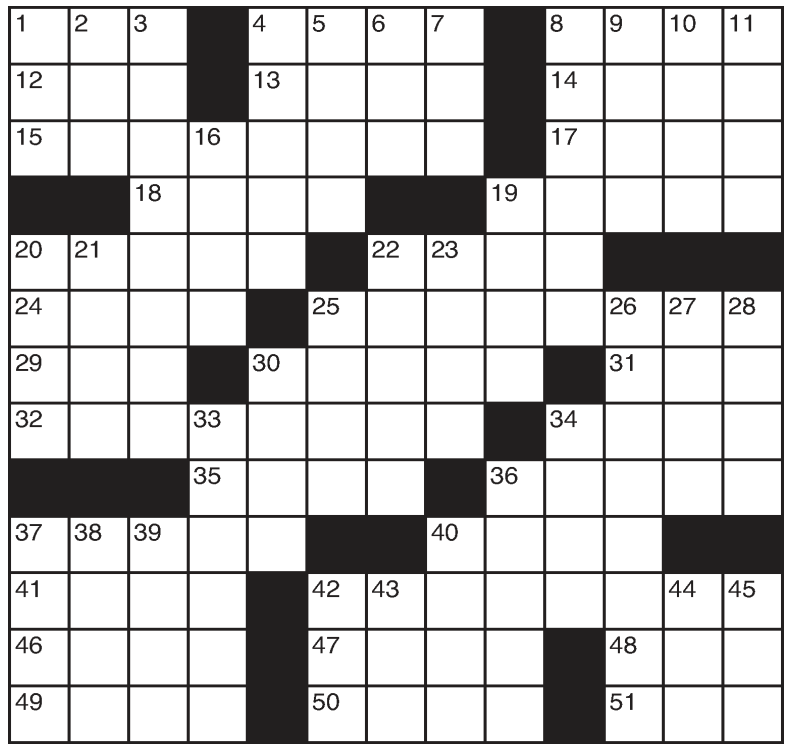
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Baby's dinner wear
4 Talon
8 Faux pas
12 "I love," in Latin
13 Wine (Pref.)
14 Make well
15 Dawn
17 Latvia's capital
18 Without
19 Plains grazers
20 Belittle
22 Reedy
24 Nobel Prize subj.
25 Escape
29 French vineyard
30 Ancient instruments
31 Genetic letters
32 Yankee Stadium area
34 Norms (Abbr.)
35 Actor James — Jones
36 Some Pacific salmon
37 Filch
40 — Alto, Calif.
41 Go by
42 Romp
46 Part of Q.E.D.
47 Israeli airline
48 Yucatan "Bravo!"
49 Banquet platform
50 Letter after epsilon
51 Crosses (out)

DOWN

1 Crummy
2 "— Believer"
3 Troop member
4 Hokey
5 Cask sediment
6 Navarro on "The View"
7 Stir-fry vessel
8 Get smaller
9 Floral garlands
10 Shakespeare villain
11 Blueprint
16 Hoedown site
19 Prejudice
20 Erte's style
21 Off-white
22 "The Hobbit" baddie
23 Maintained
25 Coffin stand
26 Conventional
27 Nullify
28 Russian news agency
30 Test tube
33 Banquets
34 Auctioneer's cry
36 Lily variety
37 Hurried
38 Skater Lipinski
39 Morales of "Jericho"
40 Bog fuel
42 Shriner's cap
43 — -de-France
44 Hearty brew
45 Thumbs-up

Answer to Previous Puzzle

S	E	C	T	■	G	E	E	■	B	W	A	Y
C	L	A	W	■	A	P	P	■	A	H	M	E
O	S	L	O	■	M	A	O	■	N	O	O	N
W	A	F	F	L	E	■	N	E	T	S	■	■
■	■	■	E	A	R	L	Y	L	U	N	C	H
G	A	T	E	D	■	E	M	I	■	E	R	A
A	L	O	T	■	E	M	S	■	O	X	E	N
I	T	O	■	A	N	O	■	F	A	T	E	D
L	A	T	E	D	I	N	N	E	R	■	■	■
■	■	S	L	A	G	■	A	D	L	I	B	S
D	C	I	V	■	M	A	C	■	O	D	I	E
E	P	E	E	■	A	S	H	■	C	E	L	L
B	A	S	S	■	S	A	O	■	K	A	E	L

10-3

CRYPTOQUIP

CJE OJPD XJQ CSRD ICAN SEUQY CSVAI JU DSRDNKMJGGAZB JZ PX OSYYN? PAZK XJQM GCJZD VQNAZDNN!

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SALON WHERE THEY FOCUS ON EDGY COIFFURES THAT ARE FASHIONABLE IN ENGLAND: BRITISH HAIRWAYS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals Y

Bizarro



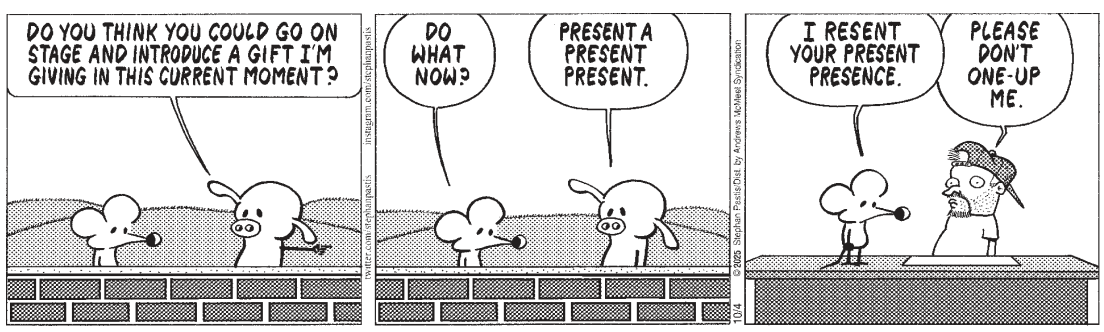
Loose Parts



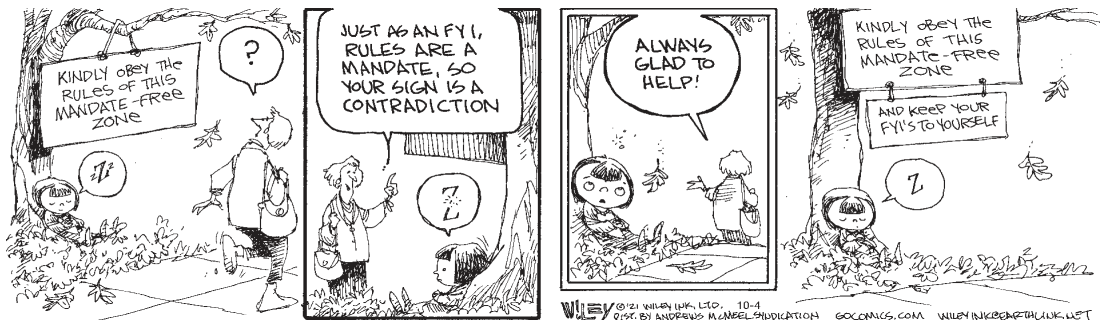
Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



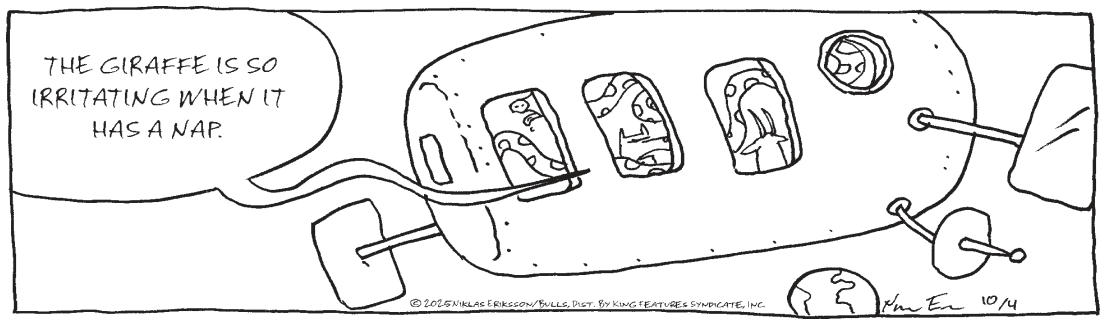
Non Sequitur



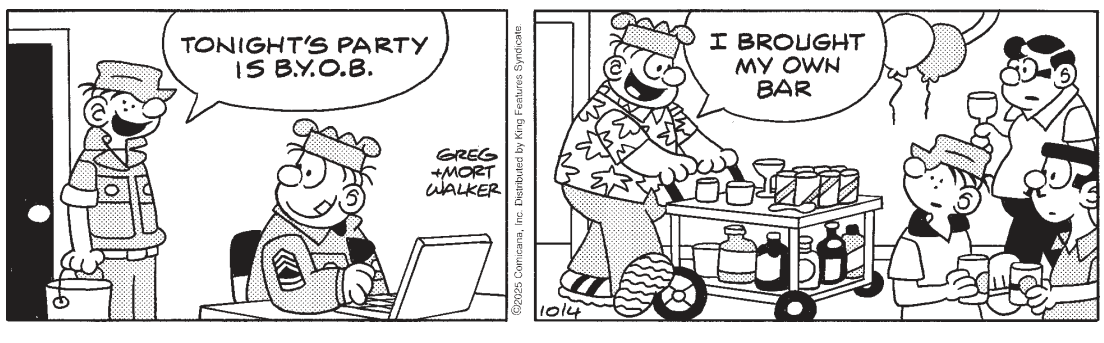
Wumo



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4	■	5	6	7	8	■	9	10	11
12				■	13				■	14		
15				■	16				■	17		
18				■	19			■	20			
■	■	■	21	22		■	23	24		■	■	■
25	26	27				■	28			29	30	31
32					■	■	■	33				
34					35	■	36					
■	■	■	37			■	38			■	■	■
39	40	41		■	42	43		■	44	45	46	47
48			■	49				■	50			
51			■	52				■	53			
54			■	55				■	56			

ACROSS

1 Train with a boxer
5 Anti-fur org.
9 "So frustrating!"
12 Actress Singer
13 Nabisco cookie
14 Swiss canton
15 "Nothing — it seems"
16 Nexus
17 Cambridge sch.
18 Mazar of "Younger"
19 Barbie's guy
20 Relaxing refuges
21 Intelligence org.
23 Follower (Suff.)
25 Ruling periods
28 Hindu teachers
32 Analyze grammatically
33 On — (winning)
34 Bring together
36 Montana moniker
37 "Right you —!"
38 Food Network star Garten
39 Teri of "Tootsie"
42 TV guide abbr.
44 Author — Neale Hurston
48 Mensa stats
49 "Hud" actress Patricia
50 Nest egg choices
51 Minivan alternative
52 Friend
53 Really pesters
54 Spigot
55 Yale students
56 Oversupply

DOWN

1 Lost traction
2 Sit for a photo
3 United — Emirates
4 Hollywood hopeful
5 Lively dances
6 Canal of song
7 Iga Swiatek's sport
8 Fine, to NASA
9 "Forrest —" (Hanks film)
10 La Scala solo
11 Chart toppers
20 Summer camp activity
22 Look of disdain
24 Suitor
25 LP speed
26 Water (Fr.)
27 1040 org.
29 Yr. parts
30 Sort
31 Devious
35 Narrate anew
36 Oniony rolls
39 Essence
40 Water color?
41 Wedding invitation letters
43 Java neighbor
45 Spoken
46 Prego rival
47 CEO's aide
49 Highland refusal

Answer to Previous Puzzle

B	I	B	■	C	L	A	W	■	S	L	I	P
A	M	O	■	O	E	N	O	■	H	E	A	L
D	A	Y	B	R	E	A	K	■	R	I	G	A
■	■	S	A	N	S	■	■	B	I	S	O	N
D	E	C	R	Y	■	T	H	I	N	■	■	■
E	C	O	N	■	B	R	E	A	K	O	U	T
C	R	U	■	V	I	O	L	S	■	R	N	A
O	U	T	F	I	E	L	D	■	S	T	D	S
■	■	■	E	A	R	L	■	C	O	H	O	S
S	T	E	A	L	■	■	P	A	L	O	■	■
P	A	S	S	■	F	I	E	L	D	D	A	Y
E	R	A	T	■	E	L	A	L	■	O	L	E
D	A	I	S	■	Z	E	T	A	■	X	E	S

10-4

CRYPTOQUIP

MUFZ YI RIG BFWW F QPD MPAZSX TFXZR USWY FWVXSNBI MUPWS TXSBPTPZFZPIA PN VFWWPAD? F NAIM QFWW.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: HOW COME YOU HAVE THIS AWFUL HABIT OF EAVESDROPPING ON MY CALLS? MIND YOUR PHONE BUSINESS!

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: D equals G

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OPINION

Why everyone is rushing to be 'independent'

By Jonah Goldberg
Tribune Content Agency

Independents are so hot right now — and will be for the foreseeable future.

According to a major survey commissioned by CNN, nearly half of all Americans — 44% — call themselves independents while only 28% and 27%, respectively, identify as Republicans or Democrats.

I have a theory as to why. But I have to throw some fancy terms to explain it.

"Independent" is what students of semiotics call an "empty signifier," a term that has very little, if any, substantive content. If you describe yourself as an independent, I still have to ask you additional questions about what you actually believe. All you've told me to that point is that you reject a party label (believe me, I sympathize).

It's hard for young people to believe today, but Republican and Democrat labels used to work much the same way. A little more than a generation ago if you claimed to be on one side or the other, I'd have to ask a follow-up question to figure out if you were conservative or liberal, pro-life or pro-choice, for gun rights or against, etc.

Today, the same goes for independents, which used to be code for "swing voters" or "centrists." Not anymore. According to the survey, some are "Democratic Lookalikes" (24%) and others are "Republican Lookalikes" (12%). They reject the label but ultimately vote like they don't. The rest are among "The Checked Out" (27%), "The Disappointed Middle" (16%) and the "Upbeat Outsiders" (22%). The demographics and ideologies of these groups vary widely. In short, calling yourself an independent says something — that you don't like the party labels — but it isn't a one-size-fits all ideological or political signifier.

That brings me to an even more pretentious term: "institutional isomorphism." This one describes the process by which seemingly different organizations become similar to each other. Fast food chains that once had a very specific niche now routinely expand their offerings to capture market share out of their lane. These days you can get espresso with your breakfast wrap from Dunkin' and get doughnuts from Starbucks. The History Channel, A&E and MTV once had very specific programming, now they all peddle reality shows and generic entertainment.

The reason why independent became an empty signifier is that the Republican and Democratic parties — and the broader right and left — succumbed to institutional isomorphism.

Consider the vast constellation of institutions associated with the right — Fox News and its cable imitators, as well as most right-wing radio and websites, groups like the NRA, CPAC, Turning Point USA, Club for Growth, The Heritage Foundation, Young America's Foundation, ISI et al.: Virtually all of them simply became, for want of a fancier term, "Trumpy." Indeed, it's easier to list the ones that didn't. If you love President Donald Trump, you wouldn't have it any other way. But if you don't, and you lean right, you probably call yourself an independent.

The Democrats, meanwhile, are in a cul-de-sac these days because progressive foundations, activist groups, universities and "mainstream" news outlets converged into an undifferentiated ideological blob.

Consider the American Civil Liberties Union. It once kept to a very narrow lane, vigorously defending First Amendment rights regardless of how unpopular it made them. Over the last few decades, it has become largely indistinguishable from other generic progressive lobbying outfits, prioritizing conventional "social justice" goals even at the expense of First Amendment rights.

The ideological, financial and cultural pressure to conform on the right and left is intense. In a competitive marketplace, you'd think that some Ivy League schools would have resisted the "woke" tide, but they pretty much all went with the flow.

The reasons for ideological convergence on the right and left are economically and sociologically complex, but politically the main driver is our primary system. Why is it that nearly every major presidential primary candidate sounds almost identical to their competitors, at least on major issues? Why do Republican congressional primary candidates compete over who would be more supportive of Trump?

The short answer is that primary voters, and party donors, and ideological media enforcers have very narrow and concentrated conformist demands, and absent their support, candidates cannot move on to the general election. The pressure to conform doesn't end with the nomination. In the GOP, support for Trump is the sole litmus test for being a "good" Republican. For Democrats, it's a tight bundle of issues, but "resistance" to Trump is the most important.

The result is that general election voters are stuck with picking the least objectionable candidate, who was chosen by a process that discourages deviation from the intraparty consensus. I don't see this dynamic ending anytime soon, which is why I expect a future where nearly everyone calls themselves an independent — regardless of what they mean by that.

Jonah Goldberg is editor-in-chief of The Dispatch and the host of The Remnant podcast.

Trump pragmatic by denying Israel the West Bank

By Rotem M. Sella
Special to The Washington Post

In his diary, David Ben-Gurion, the founder of Israel, wrote, "Every schoolchild knows there is no such thing as a final order in history — neither in governance, nor in borders, nor in international agreements." While he was one of the 20th century's greatest humanists, Ben-Gurion — like President Donald Trump today — was also a ruthlessly pragmatic leader.

On the heels of the United Nations' historic approval of the 1947 partition plan that yielded a fractured, small and indefensible Jewish state, Menachem Begin, a right-wing Zionist leader who became Israel's prime minister 30 years later, delivered a scathing speech. He opposed the resolution, saying: "The partition of Palestine is illegal. It will never be recognized. … The land of Israel will be returned to the Jewish people. In its entirety. And forever." Begin denounced the plan despite wanting a Jewish state. He believed such a deal wouldn't deliver justice — and wouldn't move the Jews toward attaining a stable, independent and safe nation.

Ben-Gurion took a different approach. Fully aware of the problems in the partition plan, he nonetheless understood that recognized statehood was a major step forward for Israel. For him, the journey toward independence, safety and stability would not end with international recognition. Indeed, he knew it never ends. Like Ben-Gurion, Trump understands that nations act on calculations of power and interests more than on principles of justice and morality — and that patiently appealing to those interests yields the best results.

In the face of overwhelming support for a Palestinian state that France and Saudi Arabia secured at the U.N., the American president told Arab leaders in a meeting last week that he would not allow Israel to annex the West Bank. On its face, his promise looked like a blow to a close ally. Many in Israel's government believed that annexing "biblical Israel," conquered in 1967, would be the proper response to what they saw as a morally repugnant recognition of Palestinian statehood by the international community.

But Trump knew better. He understood that an Israeli annexation — even with his blessing — wouldn't change global views, or the next administration's perception of the validity of the Palestinians' demands. And while there is no real gain, annexation would almost surely force Indonesia, along with Saudi Arabia and every other Arab nation, to withdraw from any plans for normalization with Israel — plans that nevertheless promise huge gains for everyone involved.

In fact, Israeli annexation would achieve exactly what Yahya Sinwar, the architect of the Oct. 7, 2023, massacre, wanted. In a meeting with his lieutenants days before the attack, Sinwar stated that an "extraordinary act" was needed to stop normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia. He knew that normalization would deal a fatal blow to all efforts to destroy the Jewish state. It would remove the Palestinians' de facto veto over relations between the Muslim world and Israel — and, by doing so, their ability to divide the Middle East and diplomatically isolate Israel.

Therefore, rather than blessing nominal Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank, Trump set a course that would bring a more prosperous and peaceful Middle East closer than ever — and fulfill Sinwar's nightmare scenario. Trump's 20-point plan — reportedly drawing support from Pakistan, Indonesia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar — offers the Palestinian Authority much of what it seeks while also constraining it. The plan aims to end the Gaza war, takes Israeli annexation off the table and echoes the Palestinians' conditional right to a future state. But it also fosters a sturdy new alliance between Israel and key Arab states motivated by much more than merely ending the Gaza war and solving the Palestinian question.

Ben-Gurion's patience and statesmanship made Israel's founding possible. Today, Trump's patience and wisdom are pushing Israel and the Middle East toward a more stable and peaceful chapter. Whether Hamas agrees to the plan or not, normalization is one step closer — as are new trade routes, shared strategic infrastructure, and common interests linking Israel, the Muslim world and the U.S. And the murderous legacy of Sinwar, like that of many other failed terrorists, is one step closer to being consigned to eternal ignominy.

Rotem M. Sella is an Israeli publisher and columnist.

SCOREBOARD/HIGH SCHOOL

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
National League

ATLANTA BRAVES — Announced Brian Snitker will be stepping down as manager and will take on an advisory role in 2026. Sent RHPs Dane Dunning and Alexis Díaz, SS Luke Williams, RF Jarred Kelenic and C Sandy León outright to Gwinnett (IL).

COLORADO ROCKIES — Announced the departure of general manager Bill Schmidt.

NEW YORK METS — Named Lauren Hurvitz senior vice president and head of communications.

WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Named Paul Toboni president of baseball operations.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association

GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS — Signed C Al Horford and G De'Anthony Melton to contracts.

PHILADELPHIA 76ERS — Re-signed G Quentin Grimes to a contract.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS — Signed RB Jermar Jefferson and CB Jaden Davis to the practice squad. Released CB Ekow Boye-Doe.

BALTIMORE RAVENS — Designated OL Emery Jones to return from the non-football injury list.

CAROLINA PANTHERS — Designated DL LaBryan Ray to return from injured reserve. Placed WRs Dalevon Campbell and David Moore and G Chandler Zavala on injured reserve. Signed OL Saahdiq Charles, RB Anthony Tys and WR Aiden Williams to the practice squad. Signed T Jake Curhan, RB DeeJay Dallas and DB Trevian Thomas to the active roster from the practice squad.

CLEVELAND BROWNS — Signed G LaDarius Henderson to the practice squad.

DALLAS COWBOYS — Designated CB Caelen Carson and WR Jonathan Mingo to return from injured reserve.

DETROIT LIONS — Placed CB D.J. Reed on injured reserve. Signed S Loren Strickland and LB Ty Summers to the active roster from the practice squad. Signed CB Tre Flowers and CB Nick Whiteside to the practice squad.

HOUSTON TEXANS — Designated DL Denico Autry to return from the PUP list.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Promoted OT Foster Sarell to the active roster. Signed OT Bobby Hart to the practice squad.

LAS VEGAS RAIDERS — Placed T Kolton Miller on injured reserve. Signed OL Leroy Watson to the practice squad. Signed T Carter Runyon to the active roster from the practice squad.

MIAMI DOLPHINS — Signed WR Cedrick Wilson Jr. off New Orleans practice squad. Placed WR Tyreek Hill on injured reserve. Signed LB Caleb Johnson to the practice squad.

MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Designated DE Tyler Batty and FB C.J. Ham to return from injured reserve. Released WR Tim Jones from the practice squad. Signed OL Matt Waletzko to the practice squad.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Designated LB Jahlani Tavai to return from injured reserve.

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Designated DL John Ridgeway to return from injured reserve.

NEW YORK GIANTS — Signed LB Tomon Fox to the practice squad.

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Designated LB Nakobe Dean to return from the PUP list. Signed LB Antwaun Powell-Ryland to the practice squad.

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Signed RB Myles Gaskin to the practice squad.

TENNESSEE TITANS — Returned RB Tyjae Spears to the practice squad. Claimed OL Brant Banks off waivers from Green Bay.

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS — Signed CB Antonio Hamilton Sr. to a contract. Placed DE Javontae Jean-Baptiste on injured reserve. Signed WR Robbie Chosen to the practice squad.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

BOSTON BRUINS — Placed D Billy Sweezey on waivers.

COLORADO AVALANCHE — Placed RW Danil Gushchin and D Wyatt Aamodt on waivers.

DETROIT RED WINGS — Placed D Ian Mitchell, RW Austin Watson, C Sheldon Dries, D William Lagesson, LW John Leonard and RW Dominik Shine on waivers. Reassigned Fs Alex Doucet, Jakub Rychlovsky and Eduards Tralmaks to Grand Rapids (AHL). Released Fs Carson Bantle and Gabriel Seger and Ds Alex Kannok-Leipert and Jacob Truscott from their professional tryouts, returning them to Grand Rapids.

FLORIDA PANTHERS — Placed Cs Wilmer Skoog and Nolan Foote and RW Mackenzie Entwistle on waivers.

LOS ANGELES KINGS — Placed G Pheonix Copley, Ds Joe Hicketts and Samuel Bolduc, C Akil Thomas, LW Andre Lee, RWs Glenn Gawdin and Cole Guttman on waivers. Reassigned G Erik Portillo to Ontario (AHL).

NASHVILLE PREDATORS — Reassigned F Reid Schaefer to Milwaukee (AHL). Waived D Andreas Englund.

NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Agreed to terms with D Luke Hughes on a seven-year contract.

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS — Placed C Lane Pederson on waivers.

OTTAWA SENATORS — Recalled RWs Tyler Boucher, Oskar Pettersson and Xavier Bourgault, Ds Tomas Hamara and Jorian Donovan and G Hunter Shepard from Belleville (AHL).

SAN JOSE SHARKS — Placed RW Patrick Giles on waivers.

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING — Placed LWs Jakob Pelletier and Boris Katchouk and C Nicholas Abruzzese on waivers. Returned RW Scott Sabourin to Syracuse (AHL).

UTAH MAMMOTH — Placed G Jaxson Stauber on waivers.

WASHINGTON CAPITALS — Placed Ds Louie Belpedio and Graeme Clarke, C Henrik Rybinski and RW Bogdan Trineyev on waivers. Assigned LW Alexander Suzdalev to Hershey (AHL).

WINNIPEG JETS — Placed RW Samuel Fagemo, C Jaret Anderson-Dolan and D Kale Clague on waivers.

PRO SOCCER

MLS

Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Philadelphia	19	7	6	63	56	33
Cincinnati	18	9	5	59	48	40
NYC FC	17	10	5	56	49	41
Inter Miami CF	16	7	8	56	68	52
Charlotte FC	17	13	2	53	52	46
Nashville	16	11	5	53	55	39
Orlando City	14	7	10	52	59	44
Chicago	15	11	6	51	64	56
Columbus	13	8	11	50	51	49
New York	12	13	7	43	47	43
New England	9	15	8	35	41	45
Toronto FC	5	13	13	28	31	38
CF Montréal	6	17	9	27	33	56
Atlanta	5	14	12	27	37	57
D.C. United	5	17	10	25	29	64

Western Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
San Diego FC	17	9	6	57	56	39
Vancouver	16	6	9	57	59	34
Minn. United	15	7	10	55	52	37
LAFC	15	7	8	53	60	37
Seattle	12	9	10	46	54	47
Austin FC	12	11	8	44	34	40
Portland	11	10	11	44	41	43
Colorado	11	14	7	40	42	53
San Jose	10	14	8	38	57	58
FC Dallas	9	11	11	38	47	51
Real Salt Lake	11	16	4	37	35	46
Houston	9	14	9	36	41	52
St Louis City	7	18	7	28	39	55
Sporting KC	7	19	6	27	46	67
LA Galaxy	5	17	9	24	41	62

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Tuesday's game

Chicago 5, Miami 3

Saturday's games

Charlotte FC at D.C. United
Nashville at CF Montréal
LA Galaxy at FC Dallas
New England at Miami
Cincinnati at New York
Columbus at Orlando City
New York City FC at Philadelphia
St Louis City at Austin FC
Toronto FC at Chicago
San Diego FC at Houston
Sporting Kansas City at Minnesota
Colorado at Real Salt Lake
Portland at Seattle

Sunday's games

San Jose at Vancouver
Atlanta at Los Angeles FC

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Kansas City	18	2	2	56	44	11
Washington	11	4	7	40	37	27
Gotham FC	9	6	7	34	31	18
Seattle	9	7	6	33	28	26
Orlando	9	8	5	32	27	23
Portland	8	7	7	31	30	27
San Diego	8	7	7	31	30	27
Louisville	8	9	5	29	28	34
North Carolina	7	8	7	28	28	32
Houston	7	10	5	26	25	34
Angel City	6	10	6	24	28	36
Utah Royals FC	5	11	6	21	22	35
Bay FC	4	11	7	19	23	33
Chicago	2	11	9	15	26	44

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Friday's game

Orlando at Houston

Saturday's games

Louisville at North Carolina
Bay FC at Portland

Sunday's games

San Diego at Washington
Seattle at Gotham FC
Utah Royals FC at Chicago

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA Finals

Best-of-seven
x-if necessary
Phoenix vs. Las Vegas

Friday: at Las Vegas
Sunday: at Las Vegas
Wednesday: at Phoenix
Friday, Oct. 10: at Phoenix
x-Sunday, Oct. 12: at Las Vegas
x-Wednesday, Oct. 15: at Phoenix
x-Friday, Oct. 17: at Las Vegas

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Schedule

Friday
EAST

W. Kentucky (4-1) at Delaware (3-1)
Brown (1-1) vs. Rhode Island (4-1) at Pawtucket, R.I.
Columbia (1-1) at Princeton (1-1)

SOUTH

Charlotte (1-3) at South Florida (3-1)

FAR WEST

New Mexico (3-1) at San Jose St. (1-3)
Colorado St. (1-3) at San Diego St. (3-1)
West Virginia (2-3) at BYU (4-0)

Saturday
EAST

San Diego (3-2) at Marist (2-2)
Richmond (3-2) at Bucknell (3-2)
Boston College (1-3) at Pittsburgh (2-2)
Sacred Heart (4-1) at CCSU (2-3)
Yale (2-0) at Lehigh (5-0)
Stonehill (2-3) at Duquesne (2-3)
Air Force (1-3) at Navy (4-0)
Fordham (1-4) at Lafayette (3-2)
Villanova (2-2) at New Hampshire (3-2)
LIU Brooklyn (1-4) at Mercyhurst (1-4)
Delaware St. (3-2) at Monmouth (3-1)
Robert Morris (1-3) at Merrimack (2-3)
Dartmouth (2-0) at Penn (1-1)
Morgan St. (2-3) at Georgetown (2-3)
UTSA (2-2) at Temple (2-2)
Colgate (1-3) at Cornell (0-2)
Harvard (2-0) at Holy Cross (0-5)
Maine (1-4) at Bryant (2-3)
W. Michigan (2-3) at Umass (0-4)
E. Michigan (1-4) at Buffalo (2-3)
Stony Brook (2-3) at Albany (NY) (1-4)
Washington (3-1) at Maryland (4-0)
FIU (2-2) at Uconn (3-2)
Elon (3-2) at Towson (3-2)

SOUTH

Kentucky (2-2) at Georgia (3-1)
Clemson (1-3) at North Carolina (2-2)
Army (1-3) at UAB (2-2)
Wake Forest (2-2) at Virginia Tech (2-3)
W. Illinois (1-4) at Tennessee Tech (4-0)
Dayton (3-1) at Morehead St. (2-3)
Davidson (1-3) at Stetson (1-4)
W. Carolina (2-3) at Wofford (0-4)
Savannah St. (0-0) at SC State (2-3)
Chattanooga (1-4) at VMI (1-3)
Charleston Southern (1-4) at Gardner-Webb (2-2)
ETSU (2-3) at Furman (3-1)
Campbell (1-4) at NC State (3-2)
Bethune-Cookman (2-3) at Alabama St. (3-1)
James Madison (3-1) at Georgia St. (1-3)
Texas (3-1) at Florida (1-3)
NC A&T (1-4) at William & Mary (2-3)
Virginia (4-1) at Louisville (4-0)
Oregon St. (0-5) at Appalachian St. (2-2)
Vanderbilt (5-0) at Alabama (3-1)
Prairie View (3-2) at Alcorn St. (0-4)
West Georgia (5-0) at Austin Peay (3-2)
Norfolk St. (1-4) at Hampton (1-4)
Samford (0-5) at Mercer (3-1)
MVSU (0-4) vs. Florida A&M (1-3)
Alabama A&M (3-2) vs. Jackson St. (3-1)
C. Carolina (2-2) at Old Dominion (3-1)
South Alabama (1-4) at Troy (2-2)
E. Texas A&M (0-4) at NW St. (1-3)
SE Louisiana (3-2) at McNeese St. (1-4)
Miami (4-0) at Florida St. (3-1)
Kansas (3-2) at UCF (3-1)
Tulsa (2-3) at Memphis (5-0)

MIDWEST

Iowa St. (5-0) at Cincinnati (3-1)
Wisconsin (2-2) at Michigan (3-1)
Ohio (3-2) at Ball St. (1-3)
Illinois (4-1) at Purdue (2-2)
Valparaiso (1-3) at Drake (1-2)
UT Martin (1-4) at Lindenwood (Mo.) (2-3)
Butler (3-2) at St. Thomas (Minn.) (2-2)
Tennessee St. (1-3) at E. Illinois (2-2)
Murray St. (0-4) at South Dakota (2-3)
Cent. Michigan (3-2) at Akron (1-4)
Miami (Ohio) (1-3) at N. Illinois (1-3)
Boise St. (3-1) at Notre Dame (2-2)
La.-Monroe (3-1) at Northwestern (2-2)
Michigan St. (3-1) at Nebraska (3-1)
North Dakota (2-2) at N. Iowa (2-2), 5 p.m.
S. Dakota St. (4-0) at Youngstown St. (3-1)
N. Dakota St. (4-0) at Illinois St. (3-1)
Indiana St. (2-2) at S. Illinois (3-1)
Minnesota (3-1) at Ohio St. (4-0)

SOUTHWEST

Kansas St. (2-3) at Baylor (3-2)
N. Alabama (1-3) at Abil. Christian (2-3)
Syracuse (3-2) at SMU (2-2)
Texas State (3-1) at Arkansas St. (1-4)
Kent St. (1-3) at Oklahoma (4-0)
Nicholls (1-4) at Lamar (3-1)
Utah Tech (1-4) at Cent. Arkansas (1-4)
S. Utah (1-4) at Tarleton St. (5-0)
FAU (1-3) at Rice (3-2)
Stephen F. Austin (3-2) at Incarnate Word (2-3)
Texas Tech (4-0) at Houston (4-0)
Ark.-Pine Bluff (2-2) at Tex. Southern (1-3)
Mississippi St. (4-1) at Texas A&M (4-0)
Colorado (2-3) at TCU (3-1)
Houston Christian (1-3) at UT Rio Grande Valley (4-1)

FAR WEST

Oklahoma St. (1-3) at Arizona (3-1)
Penn St. (3-1) at UCLA (0-4)
Montana St. (3-2) at N. Arizona (4-1)
Portland St. (0-5) at E. Washington (1-4)
UNLV (4-0) at Wyoming (2-2)
Montana (4-0) at Idaho St. (2-3)
UC Davis (3-1) at Cal Poly (3-2)
Duke (3-2) at California (4-1)
Nevada (1-3) at Fresno St. (4-1)



DAVE ORNAUER/Stars and Stripes

E.J. King junior Aniah Little and her teammates were hoping to compete in this weekend's ASIJ YUJO volleyball tournament.

Shutdown benches athletes in DODEA

BY DAVE ORNAUER
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Aniah Little and her E.J. King teammates had just settled into their seats aboard the team bus early Wednesday morning, ready to journey to Tokyo for the 11th American School In Japan YUJO volleyball tournament.

Then the bad news came: Because of the U.S. federal government shutdown, they could no longer travel.

"Extremely frustrating," Little said several hours after learning that the Cobras' trip was canceled. "This would have been a time for us to meet some new competition and play against international teams we've never played before."

Little and King were far from alone in losing competitions. All high school athletics events in the Department of Defense Education Activity, even practices, have been stopped.

While school remains open during the government shutdown, which began just past midnight Wednesday in the States, extracurricular activities are not considered essential, DODEA-Pacific officials said.

The shutdown puts the brakes on a DODEA-Pacific fall sports season that has but three weeks remaining. DODEA-sponsored football games, tennis matches, volleyball matches, golf matches and cross country meets all come off the board until the shutdown ends.

The calendar is slightly different in DODEA-Europe, but the situation is the same. This weekend's slate of events won't happen unless an agreement is reached to restore funding. The golf championship set for Ramstein Air Base Oct. 8-9 is the first season-ending event in jeopardy.

DODEA-Europe spokeswoman Jessica Tackaberry said DODEA-Europe is awaiting guidance from D.C., but said the organization would try to reschedule any missed competitions — regular season and championships — due to the shutdown.

Tackaberry said it might be possible to adjust the winter sports schedule, which generally starts in early December in Europe, as well if it's necessary.

"We're hoping for the most possibilities for our students. So whatever we can do to make that happen is what we're going to do," Tackaberry said.

Across the Pacific, reaction from coaches and athletes was universally negative.

"Anything that takes opportunities away from our students is saddening," Osan football coach Tyler Greve said.

The YUJO Tournament is a non-DODEA-sponsored event and will be played as scheduled, tournament director and ASIJ athletics director Ron Schnell said.

But DODEA-Pacific schools set to participate — King, Matthew C. Perry, Yokota and Nile C. Kinnick — are effectively sidelined.

"We were truly looking forward to competing in the YUJO against strong DODEA and international teams," King volleyball coach and athletics director Rick Andrew said. "I was excited to see how our team would rise to the challenge of tougher competition."

Looming ahead in the Pacific is the season-ending Far East tournament week — tennis (Oct. 15-18), volleyball (Oct. 16-18) and cross country (Oct. 17-18). The D-II football final is slated for Oct. 24 and D-I on Oct. 25.

In Europe, there is only one weekend of regular play scheduled after this weekend. All teams are set to be off Oct. 10-11 and resume play Oct. 17-18. Cross country and tennis championships would take place the following weekend, and volleyball and football titles would be decided Oct. 31-Nov. 1.

NHL

Rising salary cap restricts rebuilding teams

By Jay Cohen
Associated Press

CHICAGO — When it comes to his plans for the Chicago Blackhawks, general manager Kyle Davidson is focused on the growth and maturation of the organization's top prospects. That group includes a total of 11 first-round picks since the 2022 draft.

Such is life these days for the NHL's rebuilding teams, looking to chart a course back to the playoffs in a league with a rising salary cap. Financial flexibility — when it comes to free agency, or using cap space to facilitate a trade — isn't what it used to be, putting an even bigger emphasis on player development.

"(Free agency) is something that's definitely a tool in our toolbox in roster building," Davidson said. "But I think the main one has to be and will be growing from within and building from within."

> **"I think the main [tool] has to be and will be growing from within."**
>
> **Kyle Davidson**
> Blawkhawks GM

The salary cap for this season is $95.5 million, up from $88 million. It goes up to $104 million for the 2026-27 season and $113.5 million in '27-28. Making the most of the NHL's healthy financial outlook, many of the league's top teams retained their best players this summer.

Mitch Marner went from Toronto to Las Vegas in a sign-and-trade deal before free agency started, and Nikolaj Ehlers waited until July 3 before agreeing to a $51 million, six-year contract with Carolina. But depth pieces made up most of the free agent market.

Kirill Kaprizov agreed to a $136 million, eight-year contract with Minnesota that was announced on Tuesday. The 28-year-old Kaprizov could have hit free agency after this season, but the talented forward stayed with the Wild for a record-setting deal.

"You saw it this summer," Columbus general manager Don Waddell said. "Summers before you'd always have seven, eight, nine teams that had to move money to get under the cap. You didn't see that this summer. ... I think going forward you're going to see less free agency. You're going to see teams locking up their own players if they can."

A diminished level of free agency puts the NHL's non-playoff teams in the same boat, facing even more pressure to grow their own stars.

"Ultimately, for teams in our situation, I think you need those young players coming in to build that core," Detroit general manager Steve Yzerman said.

Developing those young players goes beyond the organization, stretching to its draft picks on college, junior and international club teams. Anton Frondell, an 18-year-old forward who was selected by Chicago with the No. 2 overall pick in this year's draft, is staying in Sweden this season, and Vaclav Nestrasil, another first-rounder for the Blackhawks, is playing for the University of Massachusetts.

When it comes to their prospects in other programs, NHL teams stay in close contact with their players and the coaching staffs on their teams. It doesn't sound as if Davidson and the Blackhawks have any plans to alter their approach even with their development focus.



CHARLES REX ARBOGAST/AP

Chicago Blackhawks General manager Kyle Davidson shits focus to player development. Non-playoff teams are forced to adapt to each season as the salary cap rises.

"We let the player, we're an input into their decision-making process, and then we let them go," Davidson said. "And then once they're in an environment, in a program, we try and work with and alongside the coaching staff, because what we don't want is our player to be put in the crosshairs or at an intersection of our direction and the coaching staff direction with where they're at, and then the player has just got a million things in their head."

Technology has become a major part of player development across the NHL. The Blackhawks use an internal app to share video, tips and other information with their current players and the prospects in their system. Davidson described the Blackhawks as "actively investigating" how it can use artificial intelligence within the organization.

"We're working on that," Waddell said.

"We've actually brought it in this year to our prospects and add some AI tests and so forth to find out. But I don't think it's any secret. Other teams are doing it, too. But I think with AI coming and with your analytics department ... the two could be tied together where it may help in certain areas."

Hype, pressure but not much experience for top rookies

By Stephen Whyno
Associated Press

Matthew Schaefer being the first NHL No. 1 pick out of the Ontario Hockey League since Connor McDavid in 2015 is pressure enough. Then there's following Connor Bedard and Macklin Celebrini into the league.

Bedard with Chicago and Celebrini with San Jose immediately were put into prominent roles. Bedard won the Calder Trophy as rookie of the year, and Celebrini finished third in the voting.

Taken atop the draft by the New York Islanders, Schaefer may not be in that conversation this season, through little fault of his own. He is a defenseman, a position that traditionally requires a longer, steeper learning curve, and the team is not going to rush a potential franchise cornerstone of the future.

"We're going to give him time," said coach Patrick Roy, who made the all-rookie team as a goaltender on the way to the Hall of Fame. "We're going to be extremely patient with him. He's a phenomenal kid, has great values. He's very humble. It was fun in that first conversation to see him. He looks you in the eyes, and you could tell he wants to learn and he wants to be the best he can be."

Schaefer, who just turned 18 on Sept. 5, is not alone, as most of the top picks in this year's draft need more experience.

A look at the top of the NHL's rookie class:

Matthew Schaefer, Islanders

Roy was Colorado's coach in 2013 when Nathan MacKinnon was the top pick with big expectations. Roy said he plans to follow a similar approach, starting Schaefer lower in the lineup and getting the chance to earn more ice time.

Schaefer opened training camp on the third defensive pair alongside veteran Scott Mayfield.

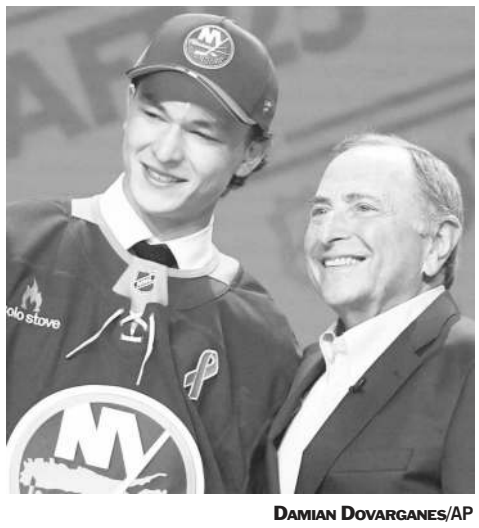
"My ears are wide open for him to let me know what I need to do better," Schaefer said.

The Islanders consider it a collective effort to help Schaefer acclimate to life in the pros and the hype of going first in the draft.

"Obviously, there's going to be some sort of pressure on him," center Bo Horvat said. "If anybody's going to handle it, it's going to be him. ... He's a very likable kid and easy to get along with right away, so he's going to fit into our group really well."

Ivan Demidov, Canadiens

How much did hockey-mad Montreal care bout Demidov signing an NHL contract and arriving from Russia late last season? There was a livestream dedicated to his international flight landing in Toronto on the way to join the team.



DAMIAN DOVARGANES/AP

Matthew Schaefer, left, stands with NHL commissioner Gary Bettman after being drafted by the New York Islanders in June.

"I was like, 'Oh man, this is crazy,'" captain Nick Suzuki said.

Demidov, the fifth pick in the 2024 draft, got a head start by playing in two regular-season and five playoff games last spring. He is the prohibitive Calder favorite, according to BetMGM Sportsbook.

"It's super impressive to see someone have that much talent at that age, and he obviously had a great start with us and had some nice moments in the playoffs, as well," Suzuki said. "I'm looking forward to seeing what he can bring to the roster this year."

Michael Misa, Sharks

The second pick behind Schaefer joins a talented young core in San Jose headlined by Celebrini and Will Smith.

"He's an awesome kid," Celebrini said. "There's a reason he went second overall. He's a special player."

Misa upon getting drafted said he intended to play in the NHL right away. General manager Mike Grier expects Misa's play to dictate that..

"He wants to be the best," Grier said. "He wants to play against the best. I'm sure this is what he wants to do, but we're not gonna hand him anything. He's got to come into training camp and try and take a job and earn a spot."

Ryan Leonard, Capitals

Like Demidov, Leonard broke into the NHL late last season, playing a total of 17 games as Alex Ovechkin broke the career goals record and Washington reached the second round of the playoffs.

Leonard had just two assists, but he's now counted on to be a regular contributor for the Capitals, even if his mindset was just to earn a roster spot.

"Nothing's guaranteed, so just going out there and try to prove that I can make the team and play at the level," Leonard said.

NFL

Scoreboard

American Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	4	0	0	1.000	133	90
New England	2	2	0	.500	102	81
Miami	1	3	0	.250	83	118
N.Y. Jets	0	4	0	.000	90	120

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Indianapolis	3	1	0	.750	123	83
Jacksonville	3	1	0	.750	96	72
Houston	1	3	0	.250	64	51
Tennessee	0	4	0	.000	51	120

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Pittsburgh	3	1	0	.750	96	98
Cincinnati	2	2	0	.500	61	119
Baltimore	1	3	0	.250	131	133
Cleveland	1	3	0	.250	56	102

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
L.A. Chargers	3	1	0	.750	88	71
Denver	2	2	0	.500	96	67
Kansas City	2	2	0	.500	97	76
Las Vegas	1	3	0	.250	77	99

National Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	4	0	0	1.000	108	88
Washington	2	2	0	.500	107	91
Dallas	1	2	1	.375	114	132
N.Y. Giants	1	3	0	.250	73	101

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	3	1	0	.750	97	97
Atlanta	2	2	0	.500	76	86
Carolina	1	3	0	.250	75	95
New Orleans	0	4	0	.000	66	121

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Detroit	3	1	0	.750	137	88
Green Bay	2	1	1	.625	104	84
Chicago	2	2	0	.500	101	117
Minnesota	2	2	0	.500	102	80

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
L.A. Rams	3	1	0	.750	100	81
San Francisco	3	1	0	.750	80	75
Seattle	3	1	0	.750	111	67
Arizona	2	2	0	.500	82	74

Thursday's game

San Francisco at L.A. Rams

Sunday's games

Minnesota vs Cleveland at London
Dallas at N.Y. Jets
Denver at Philadelphia
Houston at Baltimore
Las Vegas at Indianapolis
Miami at Carolina
N.Y. Giants at New Orleans
Tampa Bay at Seattle
Tennessee at Arizona
Detroit at Cincinnati
Washington at L.A. Chargers
New England at Buffalo
Open: Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Chicago, Green Bay

Monday's games

Kansas City at Jacksonville

Thursday, Oct. 9

Philadelphia at N.Y. Giants

Sunday, Oct. 12

Denver vs N.Y. Jets at London
Arizona at Indianapolis
Cleveland at Pittsburgh
Dallas at Carolina
L.A. Chargers at Miami
L.A. Rams at Baltimore
New England at New Orleans
Seattle at Jacksonville
Tennessee at Las Vegas
Cincinnati at Green Bay
San Francisco at Tampa Bay
Detroit at Kansas City
Open: Houston, Minnesota

Monday, Oct. 13

Buffalo at Atlanta
Chicago at Washington

Thursday, Oct. 16

Pittsburgh at Cincinnati

Sunday, Oct. 19

L.A. Rams at Jacksonville
Las Vegas at Kansas City
Carolina at N.Y. Jets
Miami at Cleveland
New England at Tennessee
New Orleans at Chicago
Philadelphia at Minnesota
N.Y. Giants at Denver
Indianapolis at L.A. Chargers
Green Bay at Arizona
Washington at Dallas
Atlanta at San Francisco

Jackson heads list of injured Ravens

BY NOAH TRISTER
Associated Press

OWINGS MILLS, Md. — Now the Baltimore Ravens have to face the most daunting of challenges — the possibility of playing without quarterback Lamar Jackson.

The two-time MVP did not practice Wednesday, three days after he left a loss at Kansas City with a hamstring injury. By the time that game ended, all four of Baltimore's first-team All-Pros from last season were injured. The Ravens host Houston on Sunday.

"We'll kind of take it day by day through the week," coach John Harbaugh said. "It's really all those guys. We could sit here and you could ask me about every single guy, and it's a fairly long list. Who's got time for that?"

The rest of Baltimore's injury report was as follows: linebacker Roquan Smith (hamstring), tackle Ronnie Stanley (ankle), fullback Patrick Ricard (calf), wide receiver Tez Walker (oblique) and cornerbacks Marlon Humphrey (calf), Nate Wiggins (elbow) and Chidobe Awuzie (hamstring) did not practice Wednesday. Safety Kyle Hamilton (groin), linebacker Kyle Van Noy (hamstring), center Tyler Linderbaum (calf), nose tackle Travis Jones (knee), defensive end Brent Urban (finger) and tackle Emery Jones (shoulder) were limited.

"You'll see who practices and who didn't, and we'll be working our way through the week with guys," Harbaugh said. "You'll see guys back tomorrow, you'll see guys back Friday, see guys back Sunday. We'll get as many guys back as we can, but we're also preparing for not having some guys back."



CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP

Quarterback Lamar Jackson, last year's league MVP, is injured along with the Ravens' other first-team All-Pros from last season.

If Jackson is one of those players who can't go this weekend, the Ravens do have experienced backup quarterbacks in Cooper Rush, who started eight games for Dallas last season, and Tyler Huntley. But for a Baltimore team that is already 1-3 with plenty of problems to fix on defense, losing its most important offensive player could create an even bigger crisis.

The Ravens have lost nine of their past 11 games when Jackson did not play.

"That's a challenge, obviously (with) the type of player and leader that Lamar is and how much he means to us," tight end Mark Andrews said. "The beautiful thing is that we have a lot of fighters in this group and a deep organization with a ton of players that are going to step up and make plays. I just have a lot of faith and trust in the guys."

Rush was in a similar situation last season with the Cowboys, when he had to replace Dak Prescott around midseason. Dallas managed to go 4-4 in the games Rush started, although one of them was a 34-10 loss to Houston.

Now the Ravens face both the Texans and the Los Angeles Rams before they'll have a chance to regroup with an open date.

The problem for Baltimore is that the offense hasn't even been the most concerning side of the ball. The Ravens have allowed 133 points in four games, and the injuries to Smith, Humphrey, Wiggins and defensive lineman Nnamdi Madubuike — out for the season with a neck issue — have the potential to make a bad situation worse.

"There's a whole bunch of fighters, a whole bunch of dogs in that room," linebacker Tavius Robinson said. "Truthfully, I know how everyone's going to respond. I know how this team's going to respond, and I saw it today out at practice."

Rookie Egbuka has been just what Bucs needed

BY ROB MAADDI
Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Emeka Egbuka caught a deep ball that sailed through two defenders and raced toward the end zone before slowing down at the 1, turning around and walking backward to complete a 77-yard touchdown catch.

The rookie wide receiver had an impressive first month with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Egbuka has 18 receptions for 282 yards and four touchdowns. He leads all rookies in yards and TDs.

With Mike Evans sidelined by a hamstring injury, the Buccaneers (3-1) are counting on Egbuka even more. His long TD catch sparked a rally against the Eagles last week that fell short.

The Buccaneers had other needs when it was their turn to pick 19th in the first round of the NFL draft. But they couldn't pass up Egbuka, who had a stellar career at Ohio State.

He's lived up to expectations.

"There (have) been a lot of adjustments it has taken to go from college to the NFL," Egbuka said Wednesday. "There is not specifically one I can point at. Just taking the steps to be able to learn from my mistakes and grow each and every week. It is a very long season (and I have) to be able to not stay the same week in and week out, (have) to continue to grow."

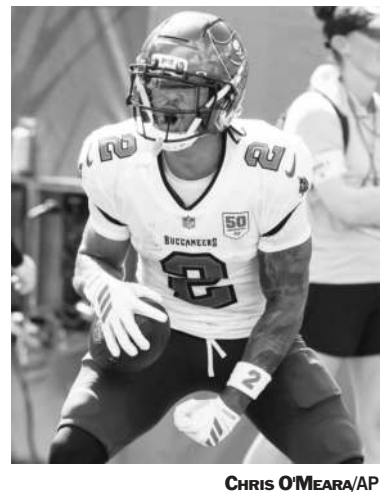
The Buccaneers got Chris Godwin back last week for the first time since last October. They have more depth at the position with veteran Sterling Shepard and rookie Tez Johnson. When Evans and Jalen McMillan come back, it'll give Baker Mayfield even more options.

Egbuka is already drawing coverage from top cornerbacks.

"Well, he's going to attract the attention and he attracted Quinyon Mitchell, who's a very good corner in his own right," coach Todd Bowles said. "So, it was a good battle that way. But with Chris coming back, and Shep making plays, and with Tez coming on, we expect those guys to step up and make more plays too, to take some of the attention off him."

Egbuka impressed teammates right from the start upon arriving in Tampa Bay. Evans praised his route-running ability and maturity. Egbuka even corrected one of Mayfield's play calls in his first week.

Egbuka is soaking in as much knowledge as possible from the playmakers around him.



CHRIS O'MEARA/AP

Buccaneers wide receiver Emeka Egbuka celebrates a touchdown. He leads all rookies with 282 yards and four touchdowns.

"It was amazing," he said about playing his first game with Godwin. "He is just so cerebral. I feel like there is a lot of similarities people draw between the two of us, so for me to be able to have someone who is like-minded across from me at the ball and just kind of go back and forth on the coverages we are seeing, the plays that we are running, how we can get the best, most opportune-look, we just feed off of each other. His energy is infectious, he is a competitor to the max, and having someone like that back in your room and on the field with you is just so huge for the offense as a whole."

The Buccaneers visit the Seattle Seahawks (3-1) on Sunday in a homecoming game for Egbuka. He grew up about an hour south of Seattle.

There will be plenty of family and friends at the game. Egbuka is focused on the defense he's going against. The Seahawks have excellent cornerbacks in Devon Witherspoon and Riq Woolen.

"All 11 people on their defense play extremely hard. They play with a lot of energy, a lot of fire, they are all flying around to the ball, so playing a group with a lot of energy like that always makes it interesting for us and we (have) to be able to have them match our energy," Egbuka said. "We want to come out just as energetic as they are. Obviously, they cover very well, they have a ton of great athletes there in their secondary. ... There is not really a weak link on their defense."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

QBs sharing spotlight, disappointment

Manning, Lagway set to meet in Swamp after not playing up to hype

By Mark Long
Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Texas' Arch Manning and Florida's DJ Lagway opened the season as Heisman Trophy hopefuls, even considered front-runners by some.

The highly touted quarterbacks with TV commercials, endorsement deals and probably as much name, image and likeness money as anyone in college were supposed to be the next great ones at their schools.

Can't-miss prospects? Sophomore superstars? Future first-round NFL draft picks?

A month into the season, Manning and Lagway are two of the most disappointing players in the Southeastern Conference, prompting some to wonder if their performance will ever match their pedigree.

Manning and Lagway will share the spotlight Saturday when ninth-ranked Texas (3-1) opens SEC play at reeling Florida (1-3, 0-1). It's a matchup that features the nation's top QB recruit in 2023 (Manning) and the top QB recruit in 2024 (Lagway).

Both are searching for better results after four starts in 2025.

"Eventually it is going to pop," Lagway said. "And when it pops, it is going to be hard to stop. I will tell you that right now."

Manning, the nephew of retired NFL stars Peyton and Eli Manning and the grandson of family patriarch Archie Manning, has nine touchdown passes, five rushing scores and three interceptions. But 10 of those TDs came against San Jose State and winless Sam Houston State.

He completed 17 of 30 passes for 170 yards with a touchdown and an interception in a 14-7 loss at then-No. 3 Ohio State in the season opener. He has looked more comfortable, since but playing in front of 90,000 at raucous Florida Field and against a stout defense offer huge tests for the New Orleans native.

"I'm looking around the country at the high-profile players, I don't know if any of them are living up to what everybody said they were supposed to be," Texas coach Steve Sarkisian said.



Eric Gay/AP

Texas quarterback Arch Manning celebrates a touchdown with his teammates. Manning has looked more comfortable since going 17-for-30 for 170 yards in his opening loss.

Lagway was supposed to save Florida. He went 6-1 as a starter as a freshman and hoped to carry that success into his second season. But he spent the better part of seven months rehabbing various injuries, including core-muscle surgery, a sore throwing shoulder and a strained left calf.

The layoff proved costly, with Lagway looking anywhere from rusty to lost. His mechanics have improved with each start, but his confidence remains a work in progress.

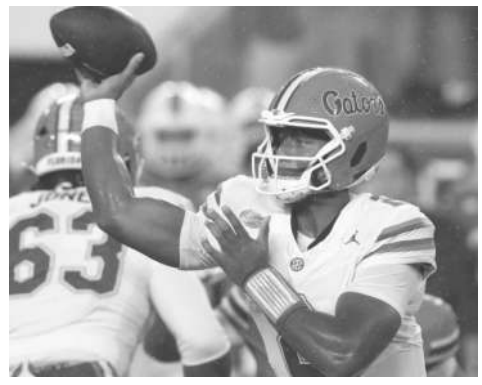
"We just need a little spark and it's going to set a blaze," Lagway said.

Lagway has thrown for 690 yards, with five touchdowns and six interceptions this season. Three of the TDs came in a victory against Long Island, and five of the picks came in a loss at LSU. He also threw for 61 yards at Miami in his last game.

Coach Billy Napier responded by getting Lagway consecutive days of 11-on-11 work during Florida's off week in hopes of getting him caught up.

"I see the look in (his) eye," Napier said. "We're trying to do our best for him in terms of creating an environment where he can continue to get back in his rhythm. That's the most important thing right now."

Texas is a 7-point favorite for its first game in Gainesville since 1940, an indication oddsmakers believe Arch Manning can do something Uncle Peyton failed to do in two visits with Tennessee (1996, 1998). Eli won his only game at Florida Field with Mississippi in 2003.



Marta Lavandier/AP

Florida quarterback DJ Lagway has not looked the same after spending the better part of seven months rehabbing injuries.

More recently, the Swamp has rattled a number of young QBs. The list includes Ole Miss' Jaxson Dart (2024), LSU's Garrett Nussmeier (2024), Auburn's Bo Nix (2019), LSU's Joe Burrow (2018) and Missouri's Drew Lock (2016).

None of them were Heisman contenders at the time. Odds for Lagway and Manning have dropped significantly in the last month, with BetMGM Sportsbook now listing Lagway at 300-1 (opened at 18-1) and Manning at 20-1 (opened at 6-1). The best they can hope for Saturday is a victory and some vindication after early season slipups.

"College football players are getting critiqued and criticized more now than they ever have in the past," Sarkisian said. "This is a different era that we're in, and I think that we've got to do a great job as coaches of — I don't want to say shelter — but we got to protect our guys because they're not pros yet.

"We've got to do a really good job of putting them in the right mental space to where they're still enjoying playing the game of football with their college football teammates. … They need to play football and not work football."

Miami's Beck embraces electric atmosphere at Florida State

By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Miami quarterback Carson Beck has experienced playing in some historic college football stadiums under often hostile circumstances.

Beck threw for 439 yards last year for Georgia at Alabama's Bryant-Denny Stadium in front of about 100,000 fans. He threw for 313 yards two years ago at Auburn's Jordan-Hare Stadium. He has won at Texas and Tennessee, both of those crowds topping the 100,000 mark. He has won at Auburn and before a raucous crowd at Georgia Tech.

And now, Doak Campbell Stadium awaits.

Florida State's crowd is always electric when Miami comes to town, and even more so when a ranked and unbeaten Hurricanes team is on the opposite sideline. Beck is fully aware of what the environment in Tallahassee will be like Saturday night when the third-ranked Hurricanes (4-0) open Atlantic Coast Conference play by taking on the 18th-ranked Seminoles (3-1).

"The rivalry that this game is and what it means to not only the players, but also the fan bases, I'm sure that this stadium is going to be packed." Beck said. "I'm sure it's going to be rocking. I'm really excited for that opportunity.



Rebecca Blackwell/AP

Miami quarterback Carson Beck won't be daunted by the hostile crowd that awaits at Florida State on Saturday night.

"I am sure it's going to be loud. We know we're working through that and practicing through that with crowd noise and those types of things during practice. It's going to be an electric environment. And we're excited for the opportunity and challenge."

It has all the elements that a Miami-Florida State game should have: title implications, prime-time television, tons on the line for both teams.

The Seminoles know their ACC hopes — which took a hit with last week's loss at Virginia — might hinge on the outcome of this game. The Hurricanes are looking to kick off ACC play on the right foot and finish off a state title of sorts, having already beaten South Florida and Florida this season.

Beck, whose 2024 season at Georgia had some rocky moments and tons of criticism, has played like a Heisman Trophy candidate through his first month with Miami — completing 73% of his passes for nearly 1,000 yards through four games. And FSU coach Mike Norvell is taking notice.

"You see a quarterback that's been through it," Norvell said. "He's played obviously at a really high level throughout his career. He's had his challenges. … You can see that here in Miami he's feeling very comfortable with what they're asking him to do and what they've been able to accomplish here in the early part of the season."

Beck has seen the Seminoles before — sort of.

Georgia played Florida State in the Orange Bowl to conclude the 2023 season. The Seminoles were unbeaten but didn't get picked for the College Football Playoff — then a four-team event, unlike the 12-team field now — in large part because quarterback Jordan Travis had been lost to a broken leg. Many FSU players opted out of the bowl game to begin focusing on the NFL draft, and the Bulldogs waltzed to a 63-3 win over a watered-down lineup.

Beck knows the Seminoles team he'll see Saturday will be far more competitive than that Orange Bowl lineup was.

"Obviously, they're very talented up front," Beck said. "They do a really good job. Their secondary is very athletic, very talented. So again, we're looking forward to the challenge."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

At 58, Cillo tackling his dream

Lycoming College freshman recently made D-III debut as nose tackle

By Will Graves
Associated Press

WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. The shouts of "Yeah, Tom!" started the moment Tom Cillo stepped onto the field at Girardi Stadium.

After a couple of bounces to expend some of the nervous energy and a playful cup of his left ear toward the crowd, the oldest freshman nose tackle in the country dropped down into a three-point stance. He glanced across the line of scrimmage at King's College freshman center Anthony D'Antonio, four decades younger than the 58-year-old Cillo.

"What's up, Tom?" D'Antonio said, extending his hand out of respect. Cillo returned the favor.

A few seconds later, D'Antonio snapped the ball and surged toward Cillo, who at 6-foot-2 and 220 pounds is "small" only by football's outsized standards. The whistle soon sounded to signal the end of the play following a short gain.

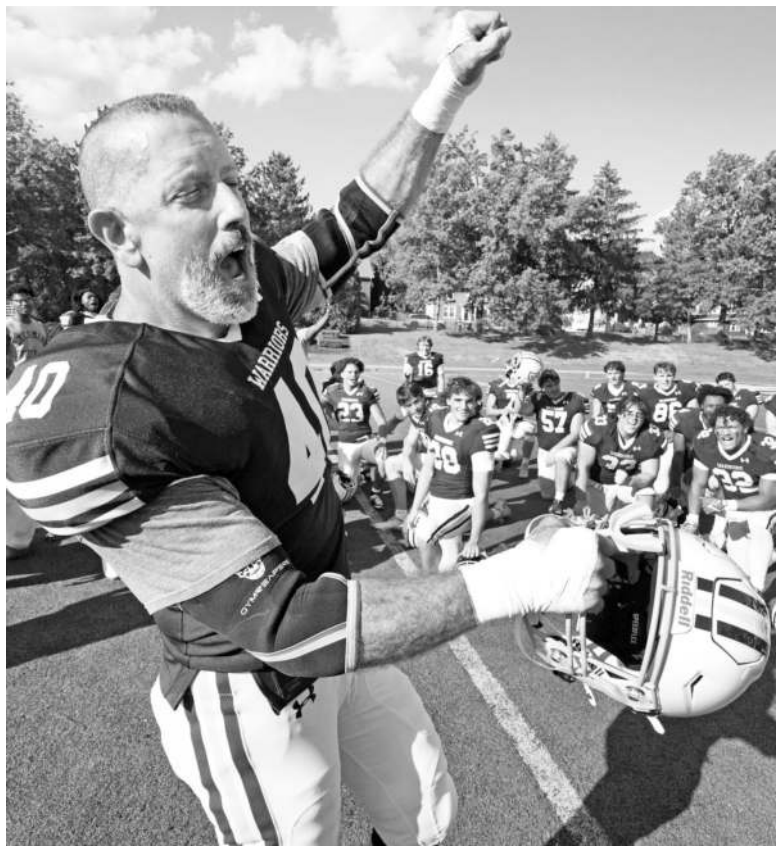
In that moment, Cillo was no longer burdened by the inescapable mid-life question of "What if?" He was no longer a curiosity, but an official, game-tested NCAA Division III college football player, just like everyone else in uniform on this sun-drenched early fall Sunday.

"It doesn't compare to the birth of your children," the father of three said after making his debut as a member of Lycoming's junior varsity in a 16-9 victory on Sept. 28. "But I'm telling you, from a competitor's standpoint and a guy that's loved to compete at different things over the years, I think this goes to the top of the chart. This was awesome."

How did a guy who is drawing from his pension and will be eligible for Social Security before he graduates end up leading his Gen Z teammates in an old-school postgame cheer of "Hip Hip Hooray"? How did someone who drives to campus every day in a sedan that might be older than some of his fellow freshmen become an unlikely — if perfect — brand ambassador for a topical pain reliever as part of a NIL deal?

Dave Bellomo is glad you asked. Bellomo and Cillo — who have known each other for 30 years — were chatting last spring when the conversation took a turn.

Cillo had recently left his job as part of the Williamsport Recreation Department, where for more than three decades he kept the local streets and parks clean in the north-central Pennsylvania town most widely known as the home of the Little League World Series. He took a maintenance gig at Williamsport Area High School, where he graduated from in 1984, to give himself something to do.



GENE J. PUSKAR/AP

After his first college football game, Lycoming's Tom Cillo and his teammates celebrate a win over the King's College junior varsity team.

Cillo could feel the clock ticking. He regretted not going to college, not playing football beyond quitting after a few high school practices.

Bellomo, who served as Cillo's de facto trainer as he navigated everything from power lifting to marathons to triathlons, asked: Why not now?

There have been AARP-eligible college football players before. Tom Thompson and Alan Moore were both 61 when they booted extra points. Mike Flynt returned from a long break from the game to play one final season at linebacker for NAIA-level Sul Ross State at 59. Joe Thomas Sr. moonlighted as a running back for South Carolina State at 55.

All of them, however, had some level of experience. And none of them played in the trenches. Bellomo had another question: Who cares?

Hearing someone else say out loud what he'd long told himself privately provided the spark Cillo needed.

"It's time to put regret, not even in the rearview mirror, but time to put it out of sight," Cillo said. "Rearview mirror means you can still see it. I wanted it out of the picture altogether. It was time. It was now or never."

Bellomo, who has trained athletes off and on since the 1990s, came up with a plan. Strength wasn't going to be an issue, not for someone who can pull a firetruck. Conditioning, flexibility and recovery were another matter entirely.

Enter what Bellomo called "'Rocky'-type stuff."

Sprinting up the massive hill that leads up to the high school. Then doing it again, only this time while carrying a 100-pound rock. Stretching exercises that would bring Cillo to the brink of tears. Cold immersion. Myofascial release therapy. Saunas.

Cillo also needed to apply to Lycoming, a small school of just over 1,000 students, and get accepted. Navigating the sea of paperwork wasn't exactly easy for someone who hadn't been in the classroom for 40 years. Throw in the fiscal strain of paying for tuition out of pocket — Cillo is using some of that pension to offset the cost — and it's a lot.

"I'm taking a risk academically, I'm taking a risk physically, definitely a risk financially," Cillo said. "I smile a lot, but I'm smiling through the stress."

Being strong is one thing. Knowing how to use that strength to play football is something else. For all of the wisdom gleaned from his life experiences, Cillo was a neophyte when it came to Xs and Os.

"It was tough," Cillo said. "Some days I'd wake up and say, 'You've got to get around.' And my body would say, 'Pump the brakes, brother.'"

Cillo willed his way through two weeks of 12-hour days of practices, meetings, walkthroughs and meals.

"He's taken some lumps, but he keeps coming back," coach Mike Clark said. "He keeps learning, keeps working."

A typical school day begins with predawn hours spent studying — Cillo is majoring in criminal justice for now — and chugging coffee. Then it's off to campus in his black Chuck Taylors for classes. He'll try to sneak in a little treatment for whatever might be hurting on a given day.

While the rest of the Warriors head back to their dorms, Cillo instead checks in on his 90-year-old mother Rita, who is dealing with a host of health issues. Sometimes that means staying the night to keep an eye on her, which often means going without sleep. Next day, same thing.

The last thing Cillo wants out of this is sympathy or preferential treatment in the locker room or on the field. Clark, 54 and in his 18th season at Lycoming, never promised Cillo anything other than an opportunity. If Cillo never plays in a varsity game, which would make him the oldest nonkicker to ever see action in an NCAA contest, so be it. He is fully committed to seeing this through as long as his body allows, and it's not just about the football.

Cillo provides countless rides and will occasionally pick up the tab for a post-practice meal. He'll give advice when asked, but doesn't want to overstep. He figures that's just what teammates do.



GENE J. PUSKAR/AP

Lycoming nose tackle Tom Cillo spins away from a block during his first college game Sept. 28.

"Everyone just loves him," fellow defensive lineman Mason Woodward said. "It's like, 'Oh yeah, it's Tom.'"

Clark credits Cillo's presence for helping the Warriors stay focused amid a winless start, intangibles that last year's group struggled with during a difficult season. If that's what eventually becomes Cillo's legacy at Lycoming, that's fine with him.

Playing is just part of this experience. So is creating bonds with young men just starting to find their way. If there's anything he wants people to take away from this, it's the message that it's never too late.

"I know there are people out there just like me, holding themselves back," he said. "And I want to tell those people, 'Don't do it any longer. If you have a dream, if you have a passion, follow through with it.'"



MLB PLAYOFFS

Padres shut out Cubs to avoid elimination

By Jay Cohen
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Manny Machado hit a two-run homer, Mason Miller dominated again and the San Diego Padres beat the Chicago Cubs 3-0 on Wednesday, sending their NL Wild Card Series to a decisive third game.

Jackson Merrill hit an early sacrifice fly as San Diego avoided elimination after losing 3-1 on Tuesday. Dylan Cease struck out five in 3⅔ innings before handing the ball to his team's hard-throwing bullpen.

"That's what postseason is about, man," Machado said. "It's a beautiful thing to be playing here in front of these crowds and with what's at stake."

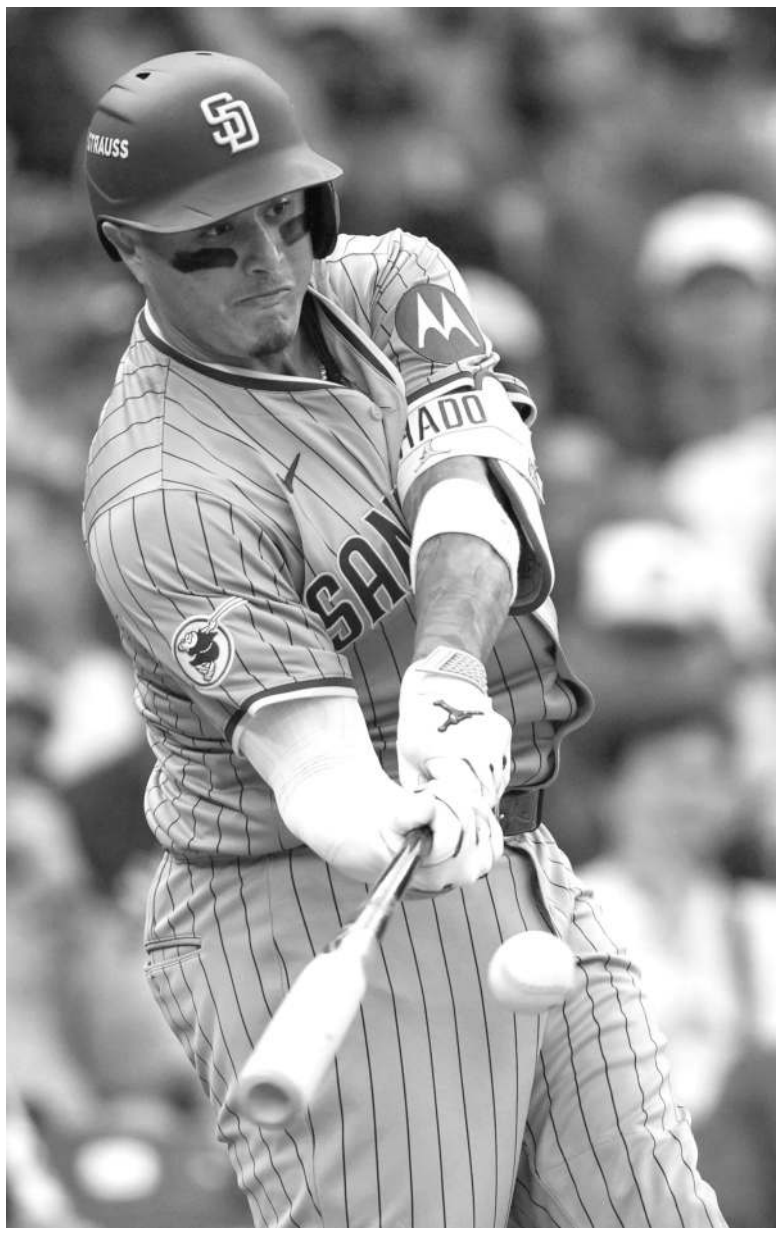
The finale of the best-of-three series was back at Wrigley Field on Thursday.

The playoff-tested Padres are looking for a repeat of 2020, when they dropped Game 1 in the special pandemic wild-card round before advancing with two straight victories against St. Louis. Machado also homered in Game 2 of that series.

"There's still a lot at stake just like there was today," Machado said. "Our backs are still up against the wall, so go out there and try and play our best baseball for the next 27 outs."

Chicago finished with four hits. The franchise is making its first appearance in the playoffs in five years, and it hasn't advanced since it eliminated Washington in a 2017 NL Division Series.

"I think the first two games is really what you expected in this series, and I think tomorrow will be a lot of the same," Cubs manager Craig Counsell said. "I think we're made for that. We're going to have to produce more offense tomorrow; there's no question. We didn't do enough offensively today."



Erin Hooley/AP

The San Diego Padres' Manny Machado hits a two-run home run during the fifth inning of Game 2 of a National League Wild Card playoff series against the Cubs on Wednesday in Chicago.

San Diego jumped in front on Merrill's fly ball to right off Andrew Kittredge in the first, driving in Fernando Tatis Jr. Kittredge started for Chicago as an opener, and the right-hander was replaced by left-hander Shota Imanaga in the second.

The Cubs threatened in the fourth, putting runners on first and second with two down. Adrian Morejon then retired Pete Crow-Armstrong on a bouncer to first.

"Adrian came in and was just outstanding, really fantastic," Padres manager Mike Shildt said.

San Diego added two more runs on Machado's 404-foot drive to left off Imanaga in the fifth. Tatis reached on a leadoff walk and advanced on a sacrifice ahead of Machado's 12th career playoff homer.

"That splitter was meant for down in the zone and just hung a little bit," Imanaga said through a translator, "and for me it was like, why did that happen and something I'm going to think about, make those adjustments that I need to."

The three runs were more than enough for the Padres' bullpen, with Miller and Robert Suarez combining for 14 pitches of over 100 mph.

Morejon pitched 2⅓ perfect innings before Miller showed off his electric stuff while striking out five consecutive batters. The 6-foot-5 right-hander reached 104.5 mph on a called third strike to Carson Kelly in the seventh that was the fastest pitch in the postseason since Statcast started tracking in 2008.

Miller, who was acquired in a trade with the Athletics on July 31, struck out the side in the seventh in his postseason debut Tuesday. The eight straight Ks tied the postseason record set by Josh Hader in 2022.

Miller was pulled after he hit Michael Busch with a slider with two outs in the eighth. Suarez then came in and retired Nico Hoerner on a liner to right before working a one-hit ninth for the save.

"You've got to get pitches to hit," Counsell said. "If players of this talent don't give you pitches to hit, it's tough to get hits. They did a pretty darned good job of that today."

Yu Darvish got the ball for San Diego on Thursday, and Jameson Taillon started for Chicago.

Darvish played for the Cubs for three seasons before he was traded to the Padres in December 2020. The right-hander said he enjoys pitching at Wrigley.

"Yeah, this place did me good," he said through a translator. "The organization, the fans did me good, too."

Scoreboard

Playoffs

x-if necessary
WILD CARD SERIES
Best-of-three
American League
Detroit 1, Cleveland 1

Detroit 2, Cleveland 1
Wednesday: Cleveland 6, Detroit 1
Thursday: Detroit at Cleveland

Boston 1, New York 1

Boston 3, New York 1
Wednesday: New York 4, Boston 3
Thursday: Boston at New York

National League
Chicago 1, San Diego 1

Chicago 3, San Diego 1
Wednesday: San Diego 3, Chicago 0
Thursday: San Diego at Chicago

Los Angeles 2, Cincinnati 0

Los Angeles 10, Cincinnati 5
Wednesday: Los Angeles 8, Cincinnati 4

DIVISION SERIES
Best-of-five
American League
Toronto vs. New York or Boston

Saturday: at Toronto
Sunday: at Toronto
Tuesday: at New York-Boston winner
x-Wednesday, Oct. 8: at New York-Boston winner
x-Friday, Oct. 10: at Toronto

Seattle vs. Cleveland or Detroit

Saturday: at Seattle
Sunday: at Seattle
Tuesday: at Cleveland-Detroit winner
x-Wednesday, Oct. 8: at Cleveland-Detroit winner
x-Friday, Oct. 10: at Seattle

National League
Milwaukee vs. Chicago or San Diego

Saturday: at Milwaukee
Monday: at Milwaukee
Wednesday, Oct. 8: at Chicago-San Diego winner
x-Thursday, Oct. 9: at Chicago-San Diego winner
x-Saturday, Oct. 11: at Milwaukee

Philadelphia vs. Los Angeles

Saturday: at Philadelphia
Monday: at Philadelphia
Wednesday, Oct. 8: at Los Angeles
x-Thursday, Oct. 9: at Los Angeles
x-Saturday, Oct. 11: at Philadelphia

Dodgers: Roberts sees late-inning struggles as 'good lesson' for bullpen

FROM PAGE 32

game, the hitters, create a routine for himself, to then be a really big-game pitcher."

Los Angeles essentially outscored its bullpen in sweeping the Reds.

Relievers Alex Vesia, Edgardo Henriquez and Jack Dreyer combined to issue four walks as Cincinnati scored three runs and pulled to 10-5. The trio needed 59 pitches to get three outs Tuesday.

"I thought it was a good lesson for them, more so for Henriquez and Jack, but I'm still evaluating," Roberts said. "You learn a lot from that inning."

Former starter Emmet Sheehan and Vesia worked the eighth Wednesday. Sheehan gave up two runs before the Reds brought the potential tying run to the plate against Vesia. The duo made a combined 41 pitches before the flamethrowing Sasaki mowed down Cincinnati in the ninth.

"It's sort of a daily kind of conversation with the pitching coaches, the front office and most importantly, what I see," Roberts said. "In the postseason, you have to go with ultimately who you feel best in that one spot."

After illness and offensive struggles during the regular season, Mookie Betts is rounding into form. He went 6 for 9 with a run, three doubles, three RBIs and a walk.

"We had a lot of struggles really all year. But I think we all view that as just a test to see how we would respond," he said. "Now we're starting to use those tests that we went through earlier to respond now and be ready now. And anything that comes our way, it can't be worse than what we've already went through. Just keeping a positive mindset and just keep going."

The Dodgers had a combined 28 hits against the Reds, the first time they've had 13 or more in consecutive postseason games since 1978.

"We'll be sharp going into the next series," Roberts said.



Mark J. Terrill/AP

The Dodgers' Kiké Hernández celebrates with Ben Rortvedt after scoring on a single by Miguel Rojas during the fourth inning against the Cincinnati Reds on Wednesday in Los Angeles.

MLB PLAYOFFS

Guardians' belated power surge forces Game 3 with Tigers

By Joe Reedy
Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Rocctober has returned to Cleveland.

Brayan Rocchio came up with another clutch hit in the postseason with the go-ahead homer in the eighth inning as the Guardians evened their AL Wild Card Series against the Detroit Tigers with a 6-1 victory in Game 2 on Wednesday.

"It was huge, an 0-2 count and he was ready to fire," manager Stephen Vogt said of Rocchio's blast. "It was a frustrating day offensively for us. Two hits leading into the eighth. For our guys to explode and get separation felt good."

Bo Naylor also went deep in the eighth as Cleveland put up five runs to take control of the game.

George Valera also homered to force a deciding game in the best-of-three series.

The winner Thursday went on to face the Seattle Mariners in a Division Series. No team has lost Game 1 of a Wild Card Series and advanced since the expanded round began in 2022.

Javier Báez had two hits and an RBI for Detroit, which was 1 for 15 with runners in scoring position and stranded 15 runners.

The Tigers had the bases loaded with two outs in the ninth inning, but Cade Smith got Dillon Dingler to line out to first baseman C.J. Kayfus.

"They made the most of their opportunities and we left 15 guys on. I think that paints the picture that it was today," Detroit manager A.J. Hinch said. "The score doesn't really indicate how the game was. But we kept giving ourselves a chance."

The game was tied 1-1 with one out in the eighth inning when Rocchio connected on a 99.9 mph fastball from losing pitcher Troy Melton and drove it 379 feet into the right-field stands for his second homer in three games. Rocchio had a three-run drive in the 10th inning Sunday to give the Guardians a 9-8 victory over the Texas Rangers in the regular-season finale.

"I'd been lucky to face him a couple times in Triple-A. In these situations, you have to tone it down a little bit and keep it simple. José (Ramirez)'s recommendation was look for the fastball. That's what I was trying to do," Rocchio said through an interpreter.

Melton, who allowed three hits and a walk to the five batters he faced, was not in a great mood after the game.

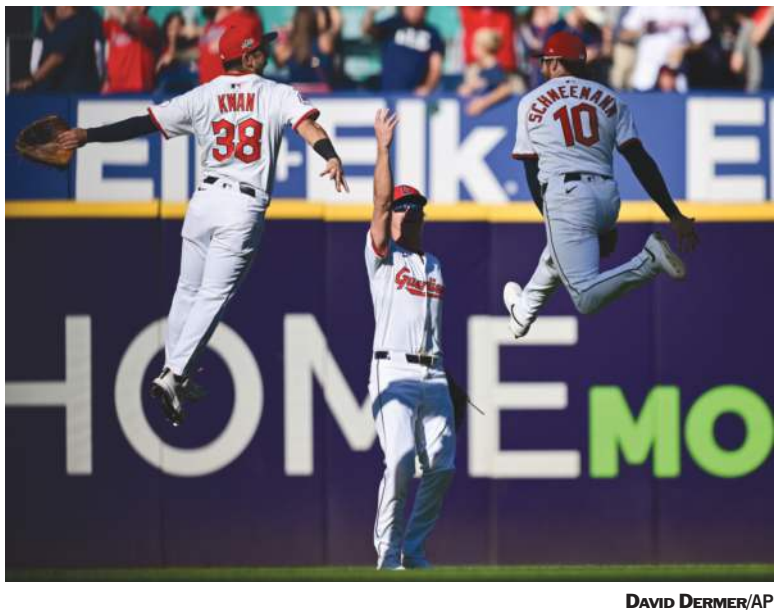
"There are not many positives now," he said. "All three (hits), I left them middle-in and they were all fastballs."

The 24-year-old Venezuelan infielder has a .308 batting average (12 for 39) in 12 postseason games with two homers, two doubles and three RBIs, hitting .333 in last year's playoffs.

Cleveland teammates have referred to it as "Playoff Rocchio" mode.

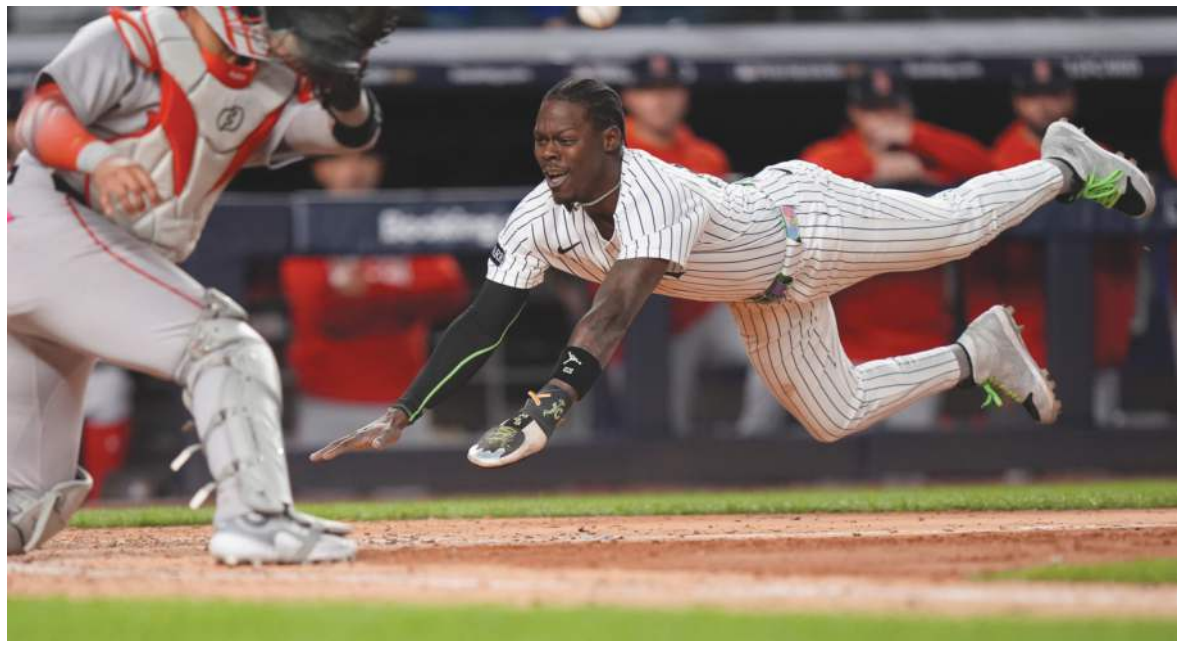
"It speaks to his confidence. It doesn't matter what the regular season holds, he comes out in these moments and he's really confident and puts off a great swing. And you saw what happened," outfielder Steven Kwan said.

Tigers RHP Jack Flaherty (8-15, 4.64 ERA) made his eighth postseason start Thursday and Guardians RHP Slade Cecconi (7-7, 4.30 ERA) got his first playoff start.



DAVID DERMER/AP

From left, the Guardians' Steven Kwan, Petey Halpin and Daniel Schneemann celebrate winning Game 2 of an AL Wild Card playoff series against the Detroit Tigers in Cleveland on Wednesday.



FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

The Yankees' Jazz Chisholm Jr. dives into home plate to score on a hit by Austin Wells against the Boston Red Sox during the eighth inning of Game 2 of an AL Wild Card playoff series Wednesday in New York.

Wells, Chisholm come up clutch in Yankees' big win

By Mike Fitzpatrick
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jazz Chisholm Jr. zipped all the way home from first base on Austin Wells' tiebreaking single in the eighth inning, and the New York Yankees extended their season Wednesday night with a 4-3 victory over the Boston Red Sox in Game 2 of their AL Wild Card Series.

Unhappy he was left out of the starting lineup in the opener, Chisholm also made a couple of critical defensive plays at second base that helped the Yankees send the best-of-three playoff to a decisive Game 3 on Thursday night in the Bronx.

"What a game. I mean, it has been two great games, these first two," New York manager Aaron Boone said. "A lot of big plays on both sides."

In the latest chapter of baseball's most storied rivalry, the winner advanced to face AL East champion Toronto in a best-of-five Division Series beginning Saturday.

"Should be a fun night," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said.

Ben Rice hit an early two-run homer for the Yankees on the first postseason pitch he saw, and Aaron Judge had an RBI single that went off the glove of diving left fielder Jarren Duran. New York got three innings of scoreless relief from its shaky bullpen after starter Carlos Rodón put the first two batters on in the seventh.

Devin Williams worked a one-hit eighth for the win, and David Bednar got three outs for his first postseason save. Judge pumped his fist when he caught Ceddanne Rafaela's fly ball on the right-field warning track to end it.

Trevor Story homered and hit a two-run single for Boston, which won the series opener 3-1 on Tuesday night behind ace lefty Garrett Crochet.

With the score tied in the seventh, Chisholm saved at least one run with a diving stop to his right of an infield single by pinch-hitter Masataka Yoshida.

"Unbelievable play," Rice said. "That's what you are going to get from him — just a guy who will give 110% every play."

Story then flied out with the bases loaded to the edge of the center-field warning track to end the inning, and fired-up reliever Fernando Cruz waved his arms wildly to pump up the crowd.

"I almost got out of his way," Boone said, drawing laughs. "There's a passion that he does his job with, and it spilled over a little bit tonight. I am glad it was the end of his evening at that point."

Said Rice: "I felt like I could see every vein popping out of his head."

Chisholm also made a tough play to start an inning-ending double play with two on in the third — the first of three timely double plays turned by the Yankees.

"He's a game-changer," Judge said. "He showed up at the park today and had the biggest plays for us."

There were two outs in the eighth when Chisholm drew a walk from losing pitcher Garrett Whitlock. Chisholm was running on a full-count pitch when Wells pulled a line drive that landed just inside the right-field line and caromed off the low retaining wall in foul territory.

Right fielder Nate Eaton made a strong, accurate throw to the plate, but the speedy Chisholm barely beat it with a headfirst slide as Wells pumped his arms at first base.

"Any ball that an outfielder moves to his left or right, I have to score, in my head. ... That's all I was thinking."

Jazz Chisholm Jr.
Yankees second baseman

"Any ball that an outfielder moves to his left or right, I have to score, in my head," Chisholm said. "That's all I was thinking."

With New York threatening in the third, Cora lifted starter Brayan Bello from his first postseason outing and handed the game to a parade of relievers who held the Yankees in check until the eighth.

Hard-throwing rookie Cam Schlittler (4-3, 2.96 ERA) starts Game 3 for New York. The right-hander grew up in Boston, where he attended Northeastern University, but has said he always wanted to play for the Yankees.

Rookie left-hander Connelly Early (1-2, 2.33 ERA) pitches for the Red Sox in place of injured Lucas Giolito. Early has made four major league starts since his debut Sept. 9.

SPORTS



58 years young

Cillo living out his dream as freshman at Lycoming ›› College football, Page 29

MLB PLAYOFFS

Moving on

Starting pitching, offense offset bullpen problems as Dodgers sweep Reds

By Beth Harris
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The starting pitching is terrific. The offense is clicking. The Los Angeles Dodgers have opened the postseason on a roll in defense of their World Series title.

If their bullpen can stop blowing up, they might just be the first team since the New York Yankees 25 years ago to win back-to-back championships.

"I think we can win it all. I think we're equipped to do that," manager Dave Roberts said. "We certainly have the pedigree. We certainly have the hunger. We're playing great baseball. And in all honesty, I don't care who we play. I just want to be the last team standing."

After a second straight shaky eighth inning by the relief corps, the Dodgers beat the Cincinnati Reds 8-4 on Wednesday night to sweep their NL Wild Card Series.

The Dodgers advanced to their 20th NL Division Series appearance — 13th in a row — in franchise history and will face the Phillies starting Saturday in Philadelphia. The teams last met in the postseason in 2009, when the Phillies beat Los Angeles in the NL Championship Series for the second straight year.

Shohei Ohtani will make his postseason pitching debut in Game 1. The two-way superstar never got to the playoffs during his six seasons with the Los Angeles Angels and he didn't pitch in his first season with the Dodgers after having a second elbow surgery in September 2023.

The team has carefully managed Ohtani's mound outings this season, with his first coming in mid-June. His longest was six innings at Arizona on Sept. 23. He was 1-1 with a 2.87 ERA in 14 appearances during the regular season.

LA's Japanese contingent of Ohtani, Yoshinobu Yamamoto and rookie Roki Sasaki figure to gather steam as the postseason progresses. At the plate, Ohtani homered twice in the Dodgers' 10-5 Game 1 win over the Reds. Yamamoto struck out a playoff-high nine while allowing two runs in 6⅔ innings in Game 2 and Sasaki made his postseason debut out of the bullpen with a 1-2-3 ninth Wednesday.

"I'd probably say he's No. 1 on the growth chart," Roberts said about Yamamoto. "Considering coming over here and trying to get his feet wet, trying to learn the culture, the

SEE DODGERS ON PAGE 30



Mark J. Terrill/AP

Dodgers pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto celebrates after striking out the Cincinnati Reds' Elly De La Cruz during the sixth inning in Game 2 of a National League Wild Card playoff series Wednesday in Los Angeles.

Athletes across DODEA on sidelines due to shutdown ›› High school, Page 25