MOVIES: Jurassic dinosaurs get fitting 'Rebirth' **Pages 16-17**

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EUROPE & PACIFIC WEEKEND EDITION

MLB
Kershaw hits 3K strikeouts; 20th to do so
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GIANNA GRONOWSKI/Stars and Stripes

Army soldiers march along the streets of Washington, D.C., for the U.S. Army's 250th anniversary parade June 14. A new mandate introduced by a group of lawmakers pushes for all boots worn by U.S. troops to be made in the United States.

Legislation requires American-made boots for all troops

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — All service members would wear combat boots manufactured entirely in America and made with U.S.-sourced materials under a new bill introduced by a bipartisan group of lawmakers.

The legislation aims to ensure troops are equipped with "high-quality, safe and reliable" footwear and seeks to reduce reliance on foreign supply chains that have flooded the market with cheap, imported boots.

Defense Department regulations now allow troops to purchase foreign-made boots that have the appearance of regulation boots but fall "far short in quality and durability," according to lawmakers.

"Ensuring our military's readiness means every part of our service members' uniforms must be functional, reliable and safe — and that we can surge supplies in crisis or conflict," said Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., an Army combat veteran.

> **"American warfighters should be supplied American gear, including footwear."**
>
> **U.S. Rep. Jared Golden**
> D-Maine

Rep. Nikki Budzinski, D-Ill., said a military boot manufacturer in her district — Belleville Boots — has faced unfair competition from countries such as China, undercutting jobs and posing a threat to national security.

"This legislation will safeguard our service members while supporting good-paying manufacturing jobs in Belleville and across the country," she said.

The Better Outfitting Our Troops, or BOOTS, Act mandates all boots worn by troops, including optional boots that serve as alternatives to the military's standard-issue boot, are 100% made and sourced in the United States or are compliant with the Berry Amendment. The amendment requires the Pentagon to give purchasing preference to clothing produced in the United States.

Bill McCann, the executive director of the U.S. Footwear Manufacturers Association, said the introduced legislation closes a gap in

SEE SOLE ON PAGE 6

DOD says Iran nukes set back up to 2 years

BY MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Pentagon officials have assessed Iran's nuclear program has been set back by one to two years because of the recent U.S. bombing raid on three major facilities in that country, a Defense Department spokesman said Wednesday.

"I think we're thinking probably closer to two years, like degraded their program by two years," chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said. "What we've seen, in fact just universally among our allies, was them congratulating the United States ... on that bold operation and the idea that American action in Iran has set the conditions for global stability."

Parnell

Beginning overnight June 20 and into June 21, the U.S. attacked Iranian nuclear facilities at Fordo, Isfahan and Natanz in a mission dubbed Operation Midnight Hammer. Seven B-2 Spirit stealth bombers flew 18-hour flights with minimal communications to the target area, where they launched more than a dozen bunker-buster bombs on the sites meant to penetrate and destroy the underground facilities.

At Fordo, six bombs were dropped, in part to blow concrete caps off the facility's ventilation shafts put in place by the Iranians in an effort to prevent the attack. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said June 22 that the bombs went "exactly where they were in-

SEE NUKES ON PAGE 6

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Germany	$3.594	$4.155	$4.510	$4.157
Change in price	-4.9 cents	-0.5 cents	-4.8 cents	-4.8 cents
Netherlands	..	$4.888	$5.478	$5.478
Change in price	..	-0.7 cents	-6.4 cents	+18.8 cents
U.K.	..	$4.167	$4.522	$4.169
Change in price	..	-0.5 cents	-4.8 cents	-4.8 cents
Azores	..	..	$4.368	..
Change in price	..	..	-4.8 cents	..
Turkey	..	..	$4.160	$4.350*
Change in price	..	..	-4.8 cents	+24.6 cents

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective July 4. The change in price is from June 27.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Japan	..	$4.149	..	$3.789
Change in price	..	-5.0 cents	..	-5.0 cents
Okinawa	$3.319	..	..	$3.789
Change in price	No change	..	..	-5.0 cents
South Korea	$3.259	..	$4.179	$3.819
Change in price	-5.0 cents	..	-4.0 cents	-5.0 cents
Guam	$3.289**	$3.849	$4.199	..
Change in price	-5.0 cents	-5.0 cents	-5.0 cents	..

***DieselEFD **Midgrade**
Pacific prices for the week of July 4-10

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates

Euro costs (July 4)	0.83
British pound (July 4)	$1.34
Japanese yen (July 4)	140.00
South Korean won (July 4)	1,322.00

Commercial rates

Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769
Britain (Pound)	1.3659
Canada (Dollar)	1.3573
China (Yuan)	7.1649
Denmark (Krone)	6.3353
Egypt (Pound)	49.3288
Euro	0.8491
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8498
Hungary (Forint)	339.00
Israel (Shekel)	3.3387
Japan (Yen)	144.70
Kuwait(Dinar)	0.3047
Norway (Krone)	10.0569
Philippines (Peso)	56.38
Poland (Zloty)	3.60
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7460
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2738
South Korea (Won)	1,362.72
Switzerland (Franc)	0.7942
Thailand (Baht)	32.37
Turkey (NewLira)	39.8206

(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	7.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.33
Federal funds market rate	4.38
3-month bill	4.35
30-year bond	4.81

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

FRIDAY IN EUROPE

SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

The weather is compiled from weather.com

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MILITARY

Move to halt weapons to Ukraine scrutinized

By Courtney McBride and Jamie Tarabay
Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon came under criticism Wednesday for its decision to halt sending air defense missiles to Ukraine, with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle arguing that move was shortsighted at a time when Russia has ramped up its missile and drone barrages.

They challenged the Pentagon's argument that the pause is necessary while the U.S. reviews its stockpiles and weighs the need to save weapons for other threats. While stockpile numbers are classified, the weapons Ukraine needs most aren't urgently required elsewhere and there was no immediate need to deny the country weapons that were already on their way, they said.

"I understand there are threats in the Indo-Pacific area and in the Middle East and we should be replenishing stockpiles but the solution is to produce more, not withhold it from Ukraine," Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a Connecticut Democrat, said in an interview.

Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, a Pennsylvania Republican and outspoken defender of Ukraine, demanded an emergency briefing from the administration on its decision to withhold what he called "urgent, life-saving military assistance."

The decision to suspend some deliveries of air-defense missiles and artillery shells caught Ukraine and its allies off guard, especially since it came just days after President Donald Trump suggested he'd be willing to send more Patriot missiles to Ukraine. It was cast as part of a broader review aimed at helping the U.S. achieve its goals in Ukraine while maintaining readiness elsewhere.

Critics characterized it as a political decision from a White House that has called for an end to the war but also refused to impose fresh sanctions on Putin or approve new funding for Ukraine. Trump has also repeatedly criticized President Volodymyr Zelenskyy — including in an Oval Office meeting earlier this year that descended into a shouting match. After that flare-up, he briefly suspended weapons deliveries and intelligence sharing.

Evgeniy Maloletka/AP

Ukrainian servicemen prepare to fire a U.S.-supplied M777 howitzer in Kharkiv region, Ukraine, in 2022. Artillery rounds are among the items the Pentagon plans to withhold from Ukraine.

One NATO ally is pressing the Defense Department to reconsider the move, according to a European official familiar with the matter who asked not to be identified discussing private deliberations. A U.S. lawmaker, who also asked not to be identified, was told the weapons weren't being diverted elsewhere, suggesting the pause was only temporary.

But many officials were still seeking answers about a move that caused confusion within the administration as well. Two people familiar with the matter said that even the State Department hadn't been consulted about the decision.

In a guest essay for the New York Times, former President Joe Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said the main target of the pause, a program known as the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, uses federal funds to buy weapons directly from manufacturers for delivery to Ukraine.

Under the program, the Pentagon has also been able to replace what it sends to Ukraine with newer munitions.

The USAI deliveries "are sourced from procurement contracts, not from the Pentagon's stockpiles, and are distinct from orders for the U.S. military," Sullivan wrote. "The administration may not want to say it, but the reality appears to be that the president is winding down U.S. security assistance to Ukraine."

Blumenthal and others said the move runs contrary to Trump's goal of ending the war and gives Russia an advantage.

Trump has stated repeatedly his desire to bring about a permanent end to the war and has called on President Vladimir Putin to do so.

Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said the decision was part of a broader ongoing review of where the U.S. sends munitions. He declined to give details of the halt.

The administration has yet to give a full accounting of the weapons it's halted, but reports said they include Patriot missiles, artillery shells, Stinger air-defense systems and Hellfire missiles. Russia has ramped up long-range strikes, particularly with Shahed-136 attack UAVs, targeting Ukrainian population centers. In June, Russia launched 33% more Shahed-136 drones than in May, according to Ukrainian air force data.

European partners have provided some air defense systems to Ukraine that can intercept Shahed drones and cruise missiles, but are "useless against Russian ballistic missiles," said Bloomberg Economics geoeconomics analyst Alex Kokcharov.

The move to halt these weapons deliveries "is inconsistent with a number of very strong steps that President Trump and his team took last week," said John Herbst, senior director of the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center. That was a reference to an agreement made at a NATO summit to boost defense and related infrastructure spending to 5% of GDP.

Russia welcomed the halt in weapons deliveries, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov saying the decision will bring a settlement closer.

"Putin will view this Pentagon decision as a green light to ignore Trump's warnings to stop," said retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Fourth military zone is established in Arizona under the Marine Corps

By Rose L. Thayer
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — The military established this week a fourth defense zone along the U.S. border with Mexico — creating a strip of land in Arizona where anyone crossing the border is subject to charges of trespassing on military property as well as border crossing violations.

The Yuma National Defense Area is a 140-mile extension of Marine Corps Air Station Yuma and includes federal property near the Barry M. Goldwater Air Force Range southwest of Phoenix, chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said Wednesday during a news briefing.

Similar defense areas already exist in Texas and New Mexico and will "continue to enhance the department's ability to protect the southern border from unlawful entry," he said.

Creating these military areas allows troops to conduct law enforcement activities just as they would at any other military base, including temporary detention, searches and crowd-control operations.

However, officials with the Joint Task Force Southern Border have said troops continue to allow Customs and Border Protection agents to take the lead as often as possible. Troops have only temporarily detained four of the 450 people detected as trespassing in the roughly two months since patrols began in defense areas in New Mexico and Texas, said Maj. Geoffrey Carmichael, spokesman for the task force, which was established at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., soon after President Donald Trump returned to the White House in late January.

The defense areas are just one part of Trump's ramped-up border security measures that aim to have no unauthorized crossings across the southern border. Roughly 8,500 troops are deployed under the task force, working primarily to detect possible illegal activity along the border. This includes the use of the Army's Stryker combat vehicles that have cameras able to observe a two-mile radius.

"We have made incredible progress and will continue to work towards achieving 100% operational control of the border," Parnell said.

Those troops have conducted about 3,500 patrols, including about 150 in coordination with Customs and Border Protection and Mexican military on the other side of the border, he said.

The New Mexico National Defense Area, established more than two months ago, was the first of these narrow military zones that have been created. It's roughly 60 feet wide and encompasses about 170 square miles of noncontiguous land. It falls under the Army's Fort Huachuca.

Erica Esterly/U.S. Army

Army Sgt. Georgiana John and Sgt. Ashanti Boatwright dismount during a patrol along the protective barrier in Yuma, Ariz., on June 27.

The El Paso National Defense Area soon followed as part of Fort Bliss in Texas. It includes more than 50 miles of border land from the state's western edge to the town of Fort Hancock, according to the task force.

Last week, the military confirmed the South Texas National Defense Area as part of Joint Base San Antonio. It was the first such zone to belong to an Air Force installation.

It includes 250 miles of federal property along the Rio Grande, Parnell said.

Detection and monitoring operations have not begun in the two new areas in south Texas and Arizona, Carmichael said.

MILITARY

Air Force set test Pacific maneuver strategy

By Brian McElhiney
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Air Force will begin its largest joint multinational exercise in the western Pacific next week to stress-test its maneuver concept for modern warfare.

Resolute Force Pacific starts Thursday, Pacific Air Forces spokesman Capt. Gerald Peden said by phone Wednesday from Hawaii.

About 3,100 Japanese troops and 50 aircraft will join the exercise, scheduled to run through Aug. 4, according to a Japan Air Self-Defense Force news release Monday.

About 2,000 U.S. service members are expected to participate, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Allvin said in a May 2 letter to airmen. Another 350 aircraft are expected to take part, according to an unsigned email Thursday from Pacific Air Forces.

The exercise will stress test the concept of agile combat employment, logistics under fire and the ability to generate combat power from multiple locations, according to a Pacific Air Forces news release March 5. The aim of Resolute Force Pacific is to ensure U.S. forces can operate effectively in a real-world fight, according to the release.

Tala Hunt/U.S. Air Force

U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Isaiah Eyeland of the 90th Fighter Generation Squadron salutes an F-22 Raptor pilot June 3, in Alaska during preparations for Exercise Resolute Force Pacific.

Agile combat employment is the Air Force doctrine that calls for operations to shift from centralized air hubs to a network of smaller, dispersed sites or base clusters.

"The days of operating from secure, fixed bases are over," Pacific Air Forces commander Gen. Kevin Schneider said in March during the Air & Space Force Association's Warfare Symposium, according to the Pacific Air Forces release.

"The Indo-Pacific's vast distances and evolving threats demand a flexible, resilient force that can operate from multiple, dispersed locations under contested conditions."

Resolute Force Pacific will include U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Pacific Air Forces, Marine Forces Pacific, Pacific Fleet, Air Force Special Operations Command, Air Mobility Command, Air Education and Training Command and U.S. Space Force elements, according to Pacific Air Forces' email.

Air Mobility Command's Mobility Guardian exercise, Special Operations Command's Emerald Warrior, Resolute Space and Bamboo Eagle 25-3 will be incorporated into the larger exercise, the email states.

Details about specific aircraft will be released during the exercise, according to the email. But the exercise is expected to include fifth-generation fighters, command and control aircraft and airlift and air refueling aircraft, Pacific Air Forces deputy commander Lt. Gen. Laura Lenderman said during at the AFCEA TechNet Indo-Pacific conference in Honolulu on Oct. 23

The exercise will take place in approximately 25 locations, Lenderman said.

Japan's forces will train in air defense combat, fighter deployment, airfield repair, aeromedical evacuation at its own bases and U.S. bases around Japan, according to the Air Self-Defense Force release.

Pacific Air Forces declined to identify other nations participating in the exercise.

Schneider in March said the exercise is proof of increased cooperation with Australia, South Korea and the Philippines.

The exercise is not meant as a response to "any current events, conflicts or countries," Pacific Air Forces' email states.

However, Lenderman cited North Korea's ballistic and cruise missile arsenals, Russia's long-range bomber missions, and the growth of China's military and its aggressive actions in the Indo-Pacific as among the "complex challenges that we face in the Indo-Pacific theater."

Stars and Stripes reporter Keishi Koja contributed to this report.

Online dashboard sought to track chemical cleanups at installations

By Linda F. Hersey
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Cleanups of cancer-causing chemicals by the Defense Department at hundreds of military installations across the nation would be tracked through a public dashboard and an "acceleration strategy" for higher risk sites would be monitored by lawmakers, according to newly proposed legislation.

Reps. Jack Bergman, R-Mich., and Kristen McDonald Rivet, D-Mich., the bill's sponsors, said the legislation will yield site-specific information about contamination from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances at more than 600 military sites and surrounding communities across the country.

The Military PFAS Transparency Act instructs the Defense Department to improve disclosures about PFAS investigations and cleanups through enhanced public outreach and annual reports to Congress.

"The bill requires DOD to commit to more efficient cleanup strategies. These strategies will prioritize cleanup based on risk, increase lab testing capacity and set standards for evaluating cleanup efforts," the lawmakers said in a statement.

The legislation is expected to be introduced as an amendment to the fiscal 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, the annual must-pass bill that sets Congress' policy and spending priorities for the Pentagon, according to Bergman's office.

Known as "forever chemicals," PFAS are a large group of synthetic chemicals that persist in the water, soil and air for decades after being released, according to the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, a federal research agency.

The Defense Department's plan for PFAS cleanup "consists of following the CERCLA process to investigate releases, prioritize responses, and determine appropriate cleanup actions based on risk to human health and the environment," according to the agency. "The process ensures that facilities take and document a consistent, systematic, and thorough approach to investigate and cleanup releases."

Air National Guard

Air Force fire protection specialists from the New Jersey Air National Guard's 177th Fighter Wing douse a simulated ship fire with foam during a training exercise at the Military Sealift Command Training Center East in Freehold, N.J.

CERCLA is the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980, also known as "Superfund," the federal cleanup law, according to the Defense Department.

PFAS chemicals have been detected in drinking water and ground water in and around military bases, according to according to a July 2024 report by the Government Accountability Office that examined the Defense Department's efforts to transition away from using PFAs in firefighting foams.

The Defense Department is phasing out PFAS in firefighting foams because of the potential harm from exposure to human health that includes cancer and liver damage, the report said.

DOD health agency reverses policy on rape kit exams for civilians living overseas

By Lara Korte
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Defense Department civilian workers and contractors stationed overseas can once again undergo rape kit exams at U.S. military medical facilities, following a reversal of a short-lived policy that had restricted their access to such care.

In recent weeks the Military Health System rescinded a March 13 directive to medical providers that limited rape test kits at overseas military treatment facilities to people enrolled in Tricare, the military's health insurance program.

That policy effectively excluded most DOD civilian workers who aren't spouses or dependents of service members.

It required those civilians to seek forensic evidence collection at foreign clinics, which have different standards for processing evidence. Such evidence would be easier to discredit at court-martial, according to defense attorneys who spoke with Stars and Stripes in April.

On June 20, the acting assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, Dr. Stephen Ferrara, reversed the policy.

The updated guidance permits adult civilians who aren't enrolled in Tricare to receive emergency medical treatment, including forensic exams and limited follow-up care, for up to 30 days after a sexual assault. Tricare will cover the cost and the patient will not be billed for services.

"This will ensure non-beneficiaries seeking care at an MTF have access to the care they need following a sexual assault," a Military Health System officials said in response to questions Wednesday.

About 35,000 federal civilian employees support 172,000 active-duty service members stationed overseas, according to Defense Department data from December 2024, with the largest civilian populations living in Germany, Japan and South Korea.

The U.S. military has detailed protocols for handling evidence after an assault allegation, including rules about the chain of custody. But outside the military, collection methods can vary by country, and different cultural attitudes around sexual assault could dissuade victims from seeking help off base.

The Military Health System is working on additional implementation guidance, according to the command.

MILITARY

JON SOUCY / National Guard

Sgt. 1st Class Andres Agag, center, with the California Army National Guard plays the role of an aggressive demonstrator during riot and crowd-control training last month at Joint Forces Training Base, Calif.

150 National Guard troops moved from LA to help battle wildfires

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Roughly 150 California National Guard troops guarding federal property and protecting federal agents in Los Angeles have been reassigned to help prepare for wildfire season.

The troops were among more than 4,000 Guard members and 700 active-duty Marines sent to the city by President Donald Trump as immigration-related protests in early June swelled near a federal building in the downtown area. Trump authorized the deployment for 60 days.

Gov. Gavin Newsom fought with Trump over deploying the troops, arguing state and local law enforcement could handle the protests. He said in a statement Tuesday getting the Guard troops back was "critical" to get wildfire prevention projects moving again.

"These men and women signed up to serve — not to be Trump's political props. Letting a few of them return to fight fires is a step in the right direction, but thousands of soldiers are still being blocked from their real work as police officers, paramedics, summer schoolteachers and public servants. It's time to send them all home," Newsom said.

The reduction in Guard troops was recommended by Air Force Gen. Gregory Guillot, commander of U.S. Northern Command, and was approved by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, according to NORTHCOM, the joint command overseeing the LA mission.

The 4,000 Guard troops and 700 Marines on duty leave the mission "appropriately sourced," NORTHCOM said.

The Marines are primarily protecting federal buildings, though the command declined to say how many. The Guard troops are protecting federal law enforcement agents as they conduct arrests throughout the city by creating a security perimeter. The command did not say how frequently this work is carried out.

The Marines originally sent to LA were from 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment out of Twentynine Palms. They have since been replaced by the same number of troops from 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, according to Army North, the headquarters managing the on-the-ground operations.

The troops of 2nd Battalion were needed to prepare for an upcoming deployment to the Pacific, according to the 1st Marine Division.

The National Guard troops relieved from the mission are full-time wildland firefighters with a specialized crew that partners with state firefighters to battle blazes and to serve in prevention efforts, according to the California Military Department.

More than half of that team was diverted to Los Angeles, Newsom said.

Another roughly 140 Guard troops diverted to the LA mission came from a counterdrug task force working at ports of entry and across the state to combat transnational criminal activity and seize illegal drugs, Newsom said.

Air Force halts planned rocket landing on atoll

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The Department of the Air Force has suspended plans to use an isolated Pacific island as a test site for landing rockets as it considers alternative sites.

The service had chosen Johnston Atoll, an unincorporated U.S. territory about 700 nautical miles southwest of Honolulu, for testing a program using rockets to rapidly deliver tons of cargo around the globe.

The Air Force had announced in the Federal Register in March that it was undertaking an environmental assessment for the construction of two rocket landing pads on the atoll.

It anticipated issuing a draft assessment by April, but publication was delayed as opposition to the plan by environmental groups surged. A petition calling for the Air Force to abandon the plan had garnered 3,884 signatures as of Wednesday.

"The Department of the Air Force has elected to hold the preparation of the Johnston Atoll Environmental Assessment for a proposed rocket cargo landing demonstration on Johnston Atoll in abeyance while the service explores alternative options for implementation of the rocket cargo Vanguard program at a location other than Johnston Atoll," Laurel Falls, an Air Force spokeswoman, said by email Wednesday.

"A notification will be published via Federal Register if the DAF decides to restart the action or ultimately cancel the Environmental Assessment," she said.

Falls was unable to provide a reason for the expanded site search during a phone interview Wednesday.

The environmental assessment would have evaluated the impact of construction and operation of two landing pads at Johnston Atoll for up to 10 re-entry landings per year over four consecutive years.

"Current military modes of transportation require days to weeks of planning and logistics to provide materiel to distant locations at the time and place of need," the Air Force said in explaining the need for the rocket program in the Federal Register notice.

The rocket cargo program would use commercial rockets, such as those made by Elon Musk's Space X, although the Air Force has not announced industry partners.

The Air Force had also considered building the landing pads on Kwajalein Atoll, Midway Island and Wake Island, all of which have ongoing operations by the U.S. military.

Johnston Atoll has also had a long history of military operations — and extensive contamination as a result.

In the 1950s and 1960s, it was used for numerous missile launches during nuclear weapons testing. Launch failures during several of those tests led to plutonium contamination on the atoll.

The Pacific Islands Heritage Coalition, which launched the change.org petition, said in a March 13 news release that building the launch pads on Johnston "only continues decades of harm and abuse to a place that is culturally and biologically tied to us as Pacific people."

South Korean navy starts using Poseidon patrol planes

BY DAVID CHOI AND YOOJIN LEE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — Six P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol planes were inaugurated into South Korea's navy Thursday in hopes of better detecting sea-based threats in and around the Korean Peninsula.

The twin-engine aircraft, delivered in June 2024, began flying for the South Korean navy Thursday, according to a news release.

South Korean pilots, crew members and mechanics familiarized themselves with the aircraft for a year before reporting to the fleet for operations, according to the navy.

South Korea navy

A South Korean navy P-8A Poseidon in Pohang, South Korea.

South Korea's military purchased six Poseidons from the United States for roughly $1.6 billion in 2018. The aircraft is to replace the South Korean navy's aging fleet of P-3 Orions, which have been in service since 1995.

All P-3 flights in South Korea were paused May 29, after one of the jets crashed into the side of a mountain in Pohang, about 170 miles southeast of Seoul. All four crew members were killed.

The U.S. began replacing its P-3s with the P-8As in 2012. The Navy operates around 120 P-8As as of last year, according to the service's website.

Based on Boeing's 737-800, the P-8A can fly at a maximum altitude of 41,000 feet and has a top speed of 490 knots, according to the company's website.

While its primary purpose is for maritime surveillance and submarine detection, the Poseidon can be equipped with anti-submarine torpedoes and Harpoon anti-ship missiles.

The P-8A's introduction comes after North Korea flexed its maritime might in recent months.

On March 8, the state-run Korean Central News Agency reported the military was building its first nuclear-powered submarine and published photos of leader Kim Jong Un inspecting the supposed vessel at an undisclosed location.

The communist regime operates nearly 100 diesel-powered submarines, according to the South's military, which have a limited range and are easier to detect compared to its nuclear-powered counterpart.

MILITARY

Army to end mental health program for kids

Service cites cost savings, says other efforts to help families overseas remain in place

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — The Army will save almost $5 million annually by cutting a program that for decades has provided mental health services to children of U.S. military and civilian families based overseas, where such support is already limited.

The decision to eliminate the Adolescent Support and Counseling Services after the 2025-26 school year follows a federal watchdog agency report's findings that Department of Defense Education Activity schools are overwhelmed by a surge in student mental health concerns, especially suicidal behavior.

The decision was made to eliminate the $4.9 million program because "similar services exist," Army officials at the Pentagon said in a statement following questions by Stars and Stripes.

The statement named military and family life counselors and school-based behavioral health counselors as two examples.

The contract for the ASACS program expired at the end of June, but the Army opted to continue it with reduced staffing for one more school year to allow time for coordination of alternate services, Lt. Col. Ruth Castro, an Army spokeswoman, said Thursday.

ASACS is one of three Pentagon-sponsored programs that supplement DODEA mental health services in some schools. Program counselors treat conditions such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, trauma and stress and attention deficit/anxiety disorder, according to the Government Accountability Office report.

JENNIFER H. SVAN/Stars and Stripes

Students head to class at a Department of Defense Education Activity school in Germany. The Army is reducing staffing for the Adolescent Support and Counseling Services this school year and will eliminate the program entirely by next school year.

All ASACS counselors are employed overseas except for one stateside program manager, the Army said in a statement this week. ASACS will continue with 14 counselors this school year, down from 23 as of March, according to the Army.

ASACS staff provided counseling services to 1,079 students during the 2024-25 school year, the Army said.

DODEA "will continue to collaborate with military and community partners to provide coordinated services that meet the evolving needs of our students and families," agency spokeswoman Jessica Tackaberry said in response to questions about the shuttering of the ASACS program.

The Army in its decision also cited DODEA's plans to add 21 school psychologists during the upcoming school year.

DODEA said last month that the number could vary based on enrollment and current staffing levels.

But the additional hires still leave DODEA far short of the target ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500 students set by the National Association of School Psychologists, according to the GAO report.

In the spring, DODEA's ratio was 1:832, according to the GAO. The new hires would reduce that to 1:753, getting it 16% closer to the suggested standard.

DODEA school psychologists are "focused on enhancing access to education," Tackaberry said.

"Their scope is intentionally limited to school-based, short-term support aligned with educational outcomes," she said.

Their responsibilities include behavioral consultation, academic interventions, crisis response and special education assessments.

Leaders with the nonprofit National Military Family Advocacy Organization, which works to protect the rights of military families, said mental health support is especially vital for military families overseas, where access to resources is often very limited.

In many overseas military communities, military behavioral health clinics are short-staffed and even routine medical checkups can be difficult to get off base because of high demand.

"We are acutely aware of the obstacles and service gaps that significantly affect our military children," said retired Air Force Col. Penny Bailey, the group's president. "Many victims have expressed urgent concerns about the lack of mental health counseling available to military children during times of abuse, separation, divorce, and loss."

Bailey said DODEA's plan to add school psychologists is encouraging. But if they don't provide the same services as ASACS, "it could have a significantly negative impact on the military children," she said.

DODEA policy states that if students need intensive therapy, they should be referred to a clinical mental health provider, according to the GAO report, which found that 1 in 50 students at DODEA schools was assessed for suicide risk in each of the past two school years.

DODEA school psychologists and counselors told GAO evaluators of workload constraints and staffing shortages, which they said prevented them from attending to all but the most urgent student needs.

The roughly 200 military and family life counselors assigned to DODEA schools provide nonclinical counseling support, according to the GAO.

The Defense Health Agency also offers clinical mental health services in some DODEA schools. In the spring, 25 behavioral health providers were assisting DODEA schools, the GAO report said.

Army officials at the Pentagon provided a list of other mental health resources DODEA students can use.

Among them is Military OneSource, which provides free individual counseling for children ages 13-17 and family counseling sessions for children 6-12 with a parent present. Phone, video, online and in-person options are available.

Also, most U.S. private health insurance companies provide confidential, remote counseling services to beneficiaries overseas, the Army said.

Nukes: DOD doubles down on assessment of Iranian program

FROM PAGE 1

tended to go" and the mission was a "historically successful attack."

Parnell added Wednesday that the Pentagon still maintains the strikes left the sites "completely obliterated." He did not provide further information on how such as assessment was reached.

Initial reports on the strike indicated Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium was not destroyed and intelligence suggested uranium was moved from sites prior to the U.S. strikes. A preliminary report from the Defense Intelligence Agency, a part of the Defense Department, assessed in the days following that the airstrikes set Iran's nuclear program back by months but did not eliminate it.

The Pentagon's top leaders held a news briefing last week to emphasize how effective the military mission was and show the destruction that it caused.

"Ultimately, we're here to clarify what these weapons are capable of, which anyone with … two eyes, some ears and a brain can recognize that kind of firepower with that specificity at that location and others, is going to have a devastating effect," Hegseth told reporters during the news conference at the time.

More than 125 aircraft participated in the mission, including the B-2 bombers, fighter jets, refueling planes and surveillance aircraft. A U.S. submarine also launched more than two dozen Tomahawk cruise missiles on infrastructure targets at the Isfahan site.

Rafael Mariano Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said Iran could begin producing enriched uranium again in "a matter of months" as damage caused by U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities was "severe" but "not total."

Parnell on Wednesday said: "Our assessment of Iran's nuclear program remains unchanged."

"We believe that sending bombers from Missouri, 36 hours on a mission, not a single shot fired at them took a very strong psychological toll on Iranian leadership. It's not just enriched uranium or centrifuges or things like that," he said. "We destroyed the components that they would need to build a bomb. We believe that Iran's nuclear capability has been severely degraded, perhaps even their ambition to build a bomb."

Sole: Sponsors say bill aims to avoid supply disruptions in times of crisis

FROM PAGE 1

the Berry Amendment by requiring all military footwear sold through DOD exchanges to be domestically sourced.

"Alarmingly, up to 50% of our service members currently wear foreign-made 'optional' boots, primarily from China and Vietnam, while on duty," McCann wrote in a letter to President Donald Trump in May.

Lawmakers said the influx of foreign-made boots has led to a decrease in quality and undermined the domestic defense supply chain to the point that it would be too fragile to meet demand in the event of a major conflict.

The Pentagon is orienting itself to counter Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific region and expects Beijing to potentially use military force to bring Taiwan under its control.

"This bipartisan bill would help avoid supply disruptions in times of crisis, create more jobs and investment domestically and better outfit our nation's troops," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine.

Sponsors of the bill include Duckworth, Collins and Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, as well as Budzinski, and Reps. Mike Bost, R-Ill., and Jared Golden, D-Maine.

Golden, a Marine Corps veteran who completed two combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, said the legislation was good for service members, jobs and domestic manufacturing.

"American warfighters should be supplied American gear," he said, "including footwear."

NATION

Jeffries stalls House vote on Trump's bill

By Lisa Mascaro, Mary Clare Jalonick and Leah Askarinam
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans pushed back on track Thursday toward passing President Donald Trump's $4.5 trillion tax breaks and spending cuts bill before a Fourth of July deadline after a record eight-hour plus speech against the package by the Democratic leader.

Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York seized the floor in the early morning and kept speaking out into the afternoon arguing against the bill's cuts to health care and food stamps and other programs in what he called Trump's "big ugly bill."

"We're better than this," Jeffries said. And as Democrats, he said, "We want no part of it."

Utilizing a leader's prerogative in the chamber for unlimited debate, he read letter after letter from Americans writing about how they depended on the safety net programs and would be harmed by cuts.

Tensions ran high. As he finished, fellow Democrats chanted his name. But a top Republican, Rep. Jason Smith of Missouri, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee that drafted the tax bill, called it "a bunch of hogwash."

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., Johnson promised his own speech would be short, as lawmakers worked to finish up the bill after another chaotic day, and night, at the Capitol.

"We have a big job to finish," Johnson said. "With one big beautiful bill we are going to make this country stronger, safer and more prosperous than ever before."

The outcome would be a milestone for the president and his party, compiling a long list of their priorities into what they call his "one big beautiful bill," an 800-plus page package. With Democrats unified in opposition, the bill will become a defining measure of Trump's return to the White House, with the sweep of Republican control of Congress.

Rod Lamkey Jr./AP

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., left, speaks in the House chamber prior to the final vote for President Donald Trump's bill of tax breaks and spending cuts at the Capitol, Thursday, in Washington.

Tax breaks, aid cuts

At its core: $4.5 trillion in tax breaks enacted in Trump's first term in 2017 that would expire if Congress failed to act, along with new ones. This includes allowing workers to deduct tips and overtime pay, and a $6,000 deduction for most older adults earning less than $75,000 a year.

It provides some $350 billion for national security, Trump's deportation agenda and development of the "Golden Dome" defensive system over the United States.

To help offset the costs of lost tax revenue, the package has $1.2 trillion in cutbacks to the Medicaid health care and food stamps, largely by imposing new work requirements, including for some parents and older people, and a massive rollback of green energy investments.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates the proposal will add $3.3 trillion to the nation's debt over the decade and 11.8 million more people will go without health coverage.

"This was a generational opportunity to deliver the most comprehensive and consequential set of conservative reforms in modern history, and that's exactly what we're doing," said Rep. Jodey Arrington, R-Texas, the House Budget Committee chairman.

Democrats united

Democrats unified against the bill as a tax giveaway to the rich paid for on the backs of the most vulnerable in society, what they called "trickle down cruelty."

"Have you no shame?" said Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee.

Republicans have struggled mightily with the bill nearly every step of the way in the House and Senate, often succeeding only by the narrowest of margins: just one vote. In the Senate, Vice President JD Vance broke the tie vote. The slim 220-212 majority in the House leaves Republicans little room for defections.

Political cost of saying no

In some ways, the bill became too big to fail, in part because Republicans found it difficult to buck Trump.

As Wednesday's stalled floor action dragged overnight, Trump railed against the delays.

"What are the Republicans waiting for???" the president said in a midnight post. "What are you trying to prove???"

Johnson relied heavily on White House Cabinet secretaries, lawyers and others to satisfy skeptical GOP holdouts. Moderate Republicans worried about the severity of cuts while conservatives pressed for steeper reductions. Lawmakers said they were being told the administration could provide executive actions, projects or other provisions in their districts back home.

The alternative was clear. Republicans who staked out opposition to the bill, including Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, and Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, were being warned by Trump's well-funded political operation. Tillis soon after announced he would not seek reelection.

Rollback of past agendas

In many ways, the package is a repudiation of the agendas of the last two Democratic presidents, a chiseling away at the Medicaid expansion from Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act and a pullback of Joe Biden's climate change strategies in the Inflation Reduction Act.

Democrats say cuts to Medicaid, which 80 million Americans rely on, would result in lives lost. Food stamps that help feed more than 40 million people would "rip food from the mouths of hungry children, hungry veterans and hungry seniors," Jeffries said.

Republicans say the tax breaks will prevent a tax increase on households and grow the economy. They maintain they are trying to rightsize the safety net programs for the population they were initially designed to serve, mainly pregnant women, the disabled and children, and root out what they describe as waste, fraud and abuse.

The Tax Policy Center, which provides nonpartisan analysis of tax and budget policy, projected the bill would result next year in a $150 tax break for the lowest quintile of Americans, a $1,750 tax cut for the middle quintile and a $10,950 tax cut for the top quintile. That's compared with what they would face if the 2017 tax cuts expired.

Supreme Court to hear case about transgender students in sports

By Mark Sherman
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court agreed Thursday to hear a case over state restrictions on which school sports teams transgender students can join.

Just two weeks after upholding a ban on gender-affirming care for transgender youth, the justices said they will review lower court rulings in favor of transgender athletes in Idaho and West Virginia.

The nationwide battle over the participation of transgender girls on girls sports teams has played out at both the state and federal levels as Republicans have leveraged the issue as a fight for athletic fairness for women and girls.

More than two dozen states have enacted laws barring transgender women and girls from participating in certain sports competitions. Some policies have been blocked in court.

At the federal level, the Trump administration has filed lawsuits and launched investigations over state and school policies that have allowed transgender athletes to compete freely. This week, the University of Pennsylvania modified a trio of school records set by transgender swimmer Lia Thomas and said it would apologize to female athletes "disadvantaged" by her participation on the women's swimming team, part of a resolution of a federal civil rights case.

Republican President Donald Trump also has acted aggressively in other areas involving transgender people, including removing transgender troops from military service. In May, the Supreme Court allowed the ouster of transgender service members to proceed, reversing lower courts that had blocked it.

The new case will be argued in the fall.

West Virginia is appealing a lower-court ruling that found the ban violates the rights of Becky Pepper-Jackson, who has been taking puberty-blocking medication and has publicly identified as a girl since she was in the third grade. Pepper-Jackson sued the state when she in was middle school because she wanted to compete on the cross country and track teams.

This past school year, Pepper-Jackson qualified for the West Virginia girls high school state track meet, finishing third in the discus throw and eighth in the shot put in the Class AAA division.

The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled for Pepper-Jackson in two areas, under the Constitution's equal protection clause and the landmark federal law known as Title IX that forbids sex discrimination in education.

Idaho in 2020 became the first state in the nation to ban transgender women and girls from playing on women's sports teams sponsored by public schools, colleges and universities.

The American Civil Liberties Union and the women's rights group Legal Voice sued Idaho on behalf of Lindsay Hecox, who hoped to run for Boise State University.

The state asked for Supreme Court review after lower courts blocked the state's ban while the lawsuit continues.

The justices did not act on a third case from Arizona that raises the same issue.

NATION

GREGORY BULL/AP

Volunteer Karen Parker walks along a road next to the border wall separating Mexico and the United States in Jacumba Hot Springs, Calif., in January. A federal judge said Wednesday that an order by President Donald Trump suspending asylum access at the southern border was unlawful.

Judge: Trump's order that bars asylum access at border is illegal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge said Wednesday that an order by President Donald Trump suspending asylum access at the southern border was unlawful, throwing into doubt one of the key pillars of the president's plan to crack down on migration at the southern border. But he put the ruling on hold for two weeks to give the government time to appeal.

In an order Jan. 20, Trump declared that the situation at the southern border constitutes an invasion of America and that he was "suspending the physical entry" of migrants and their ability to seek asylum until he decides it is over.

U.S. District Judge Randolph Moss in Washington said his order blocking Trump's policy will take effect July 16, giving the Trump administration time to appeal.

Moss wrote that neither the Constitution nor immigration law gives the president "an extra-statutory, extra-regulatory regime for repatriating or removing individuals from the United States, without an opportunity to apply for asylum" or other humanitarian protections.

The Homeland Security Department did not immediately respond to a request but an appeal is likely. The president and his aides have repeatedly attacked court rulings that undermine his policies as judicial overreach.

Moss, who was appointed by President Barack Obama, acknowledged that the government faces "enormous challenges" at the southern border and an "overwhelming backlog" of asylum claims. But he returned several times in his 128-page ruling to his opinion that the president is not entitled to prohibit asylum.

Lee Gelernt, who argued the case for the American Civil Liberties Union, called the ruling a significant win.

"The decision means there will be protection for those fleeing horrific danger and that the president cannot ignore laws passed by Congress simply by claiming that asylum seekers are engaged in an invasion," he said.

Trump and his allies say the asylum system has been abused. They argue that it draws people who know it will take years to adjudicate their claims in the country's backlogged immigration courts during which they can work and live in America.

But supporters argue that the right to seek asylum is guaranteed in U.S. law and international commitments — even for those who cross the border illegally. They say that asylum is a vital protection for people fleeing persecution — a protection guaranteed by Congress that even the president doesn't have the authority to ignore.

People seeking asylum must demonstrate a fear of persecution on a fairly narrow grounds of race, religion, nationality, or by belonging to a particular social or political group.

Administration says some grants aided 'leftwing agenda'

BY BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS
Associated Press

The Trump administration has accused states and schools of using federal education grants earmarked for immigrants' children and low-income students to help fund "a radical leftwing agenda."

The administration this week withheld more than $6 billion intended for after-school and summer programs, English language instruction, adult literacy and more, saying it would review the grants to ensure they align with President Donald Trump's priorities. The freeze sent schools and summer camp providers scrambling to determine whether they can still provide programs like day camps this summer or after-hours child care this fall.

On Wednesday, the Office of Management and Budget said an initial review showed schools used some of the money to support immigrants in the country illegally or promote LGBTQ+ inclusion. The administration said it hadn't made any final decisions about whether to withhold or release individual grants.

"Many of these grant programs have been grossly misused to subsidize a radical leftwing agenda," the Office of Management and Budget said in a statement.

It said New York schools had used money for English language instruction to promote organizations that advocate for immigrants in the country illegally. Washington state used the money to direct immigrants without legal status toward scholarships the Trump administration says were "intended for American students." Grant funds also were used for a seminar on "queer resistance in the arts," the office said.

Officials from New York and Washington state didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

Advocates for low-income and immigrant children connected the grant freeze to the Trump administration's larger crackdown on immigrants. Two of the federal programs put on hold were appropriated by Congress to help support English proficiency of students still learning the language and migrant children who move with their parents to follow agricultural and other jobs.

School districts use the $890 million earmarked for English learners in a wide range of purposes, from training teachers' aides who work with English learners, to running summer schools designed for them, to hiring family liaisons who speak the parents' native languages. The $375 million appropriated for migrant education is often used to hire dedicated teachers to travel close to where students live.

By "cherrypicking extreme examples," the administration is seeking to conflate all students learning English with people who are in the country illegally, said Amaya Garcia, who directs education research at New America, a left-leaning think tank in Washington, D.C.

In reality, the majority of English learners in public schools were born in the United States, according to data from the Migration Policy Institute.

"The way they're framing it is that we're using this money for undocumented students and families," said Margarita Machado-Casas, president of the National Association of Bilingual Educators. "It's a distraction. A distraction from what's actually happening: that 5.3 million English learners who speak lots of different languages, not just Spanish, will suffer."

FDA official restricted COVID vaccine approvals against staff advice

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The government's top vaccine official working under Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. recently restricted the approval of two COVID-19 vaccines, disregarding recommendations from government scientists, according to federal documents released Wednesday.

The new memos from the Food and Drug Administration show how the agency's vaccine chief, Dr. Vinay Prasad, personally intervened to place restrictions on COVID shots from vaccine makers Novavax and Moderna. Both vaccines were approved by the FDA in May after months of analysis by rank-and-file FDA reviewers.

But internal correspondence show Prasad disagreed with staffers who planned to approve the shots for everyone 12 and older, similar to previous COVID vaccines. The scientists had concluded the benefit from the vaccines and the risk of COVID-19 outweighed the risk of possible side effects, which are rare.

Instead Prasad decided the shots should be limited to those who face special risks from the virus— seniors or children and adults with underlying medical issues.

Prasad explained that the COVID vaccine benefits must be reconsidered in light of falling rates of death and hospitalization and the possibility for vaccine side effects. It's the latest in a series of vaccine restrictions imposed by officials working under Kennedy, who has long questioned the benefits of vaccines.

"Even rare vaccination related harms both known and unknown now have higher chance of outweighing potential benefits" Prasad wrote in a five-page memo explaining his decision.

COVID-19 remains a public health threat, resulting in 32,000 to 51,000 U.S. deaths and more than 250,000 hospitalizations since last fall, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Most at risk for hospitalization are seniors and children under 2 — especially infants under 6 months.

Top FDA leaders are typically not involved in the review of individual products. Officials like Prasad can overrule staffers, but such cases are rare and often controversial.

Prasad was hired to lead the FDA's vaccine center in May, after the previous director, Dr. Peter Marks, was forced to resign over disagreements with Kennedy. An academic researcher specializing in cancer therapies, Prasad came to prominence during the pandemic for criticizing public health measures, including the FDA's approval of COVID boosters for healthy adults and children.

NATION

Idaho stabber takes plea deal, admits guilt

By Jesse Bedayn and Gene Johnson
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — A criminal justice student who avoided a potential death sentence by pleading guilty Wednesday to the brutal stabbing deaths of four University of Idaho students carefully planned the attack for months and took multiple steps to cover his tracks, the lead prosecutor said.

Bryan Kohberger, who was a graduate student at nearby Washington State University, pleaded guilty to murder in the killings that terrified the Idaho campus and set off a nationwide search, which ended weeks later when he was arrested in Pennsylvania.

Kohberger remained impassive as he admitted to breaking into a rental home through a kitchen sliding door and killing the four friends who appeared to have no connection with him.

Prosecutors did not reveal a motive behind the slayings.

The killings initially baffled law enforcement and unnerved the rural college town of Moscow, which hadn't seen a murder in five years until Kaylee Goncalves, Ethan Chapin, Xana Kernodle and Madison Mogen were found dead near campus on Nov. 13, 2022. Autopsies showed each was stabbed multiple times.

In the two years since Kohberger's arrest, his attorneys unsuccessfully attempted to bar prosecutors from seeking the death penalty and challenged DNA evidence, leaving a plea deal their final alternative to spare his life before the start of a trial in August.

At least one of the families opposed the plea deal that calls for Kohberger to serve four life sentences and removes his ability to appeal.

But others supported the agreement, saying they were ready to begin healing.

The plea hearing provided a few new details about the killings but key questions remained, including why Kohberger spared two other roommates.

Kohberger

After breaking into the home, he climbed to the third floor where he first killed Mogen and Goncalves together, Latah County Prosecuting Attorney Bill Thompson said Wednesday.

He then ran into Kernodle, who was still awake after getting a Door Dash order, and stabbed her and her boyfriend, Chapin, who was still asleep, Thompson said. There were no signs of sexual assault, he said.

Police have said they used genetic genealogy to identify Kohberger as a possible suspect and accessed cellphone data to pinpoint his movements the night of the killings.

At the time, Kohberger had just completed his first semester at Washington State and was a teaching assistant in the criminology program. Kohberger was arrested in Pennsylvania, where his parents lived, weeks later.

Thompson said investigators recovered a Q-tip from the garbage at his parents' house to match Kohberger's DNA to genetic material from a knife sheath found at the crime scene.

Authorities have said cellphone data and surveillance video show that Kohberger visited the victims' neighborhood at least a dozen times before the killings, and that he traveled in the same area that night.

The Goncalves family opposed the agreement and sought to stop it.

They also argued that any deal should have required Kohberger to make a full confession, detail the facts of what happened and provide the location of the murder weapon.

"We deserve to know when the beginning of the end was," they wrote in a Facebook post.

Kaylee Goncalves' father, Steve Goncalves, left the courthouse before Kohberger entered the courtroom. "I'm just getting out of this zoo," he told reporters.

The family of Chapin — one of three triplets who attended the university together — supports the deal, their spokesperson, Christina Teves, said this week.

Attorney Leander James read a statement from Mogen's mother and stepfather after the guilty pleas that said they supported the agreement.

"While we know there are some who do not support it, we ask that they respect our belief that this is the best outcome for the victims, their families and the state of Idaho," the family said.

"We now embark on a new path," they said.

"We embark on a path of hope and healing."

7 missing after explosions, blaze at California fireworks warehouse

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Rescue crews were searching on Thursday for seven people still missing days after an explosion at a fireworks warehouse in Northern California shook a tiny farming community and forced the cancellation of nearby July Fourth celebrations.

Family members gathered near a sheriff's checkpoint about a mile from the blast site in rural Esparto, hoping for news about their loved ones. Syanna Ruiz, who is pregnant, said her boyfriend, 18-year-old Jesus Ramos, was working his first day at the warehouse when the explosion occurred.

"I'm just praying to God that some way, somehow, they're OK," Ruiz told the Sacramento Bee on Wednesday.

People were urged to avoid the area after the Tuesday night blast, which set off a barrage of fireworks and caused a massive blaze that led to other spot fires and collapsed the building in Yolo County about 40 miles northwest of Sacramento.

Two people were injured and received medical care, Esparto Fire Chief Curtis Lawrence said at a news conference Wednesday. Lawrence provided no further information other than to say the two were "OK," and it wasn't known if the victims worked at the facility.

Emergency crews and investigators were working with the property's owner and monitoring the area using drones to find the missing individuals, said the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire. It was not immediately clear if those missing worked at the warehouse or lived nearby.

The cause of the explosion was under investigation.

In a statement, the management of the business, Devastating Pyrotechnics, thanked law enforcement and emergency personnel for their swift response.

"Our hearts and thoughts are with those we lost, their families, and everyone impacted in our community," the statement said. "Our focus will remain on those directly impacted by this tragedy, and we will cooperate fully with the proper authorities in their investigation."

The property is owned by "an active pyrotechnic license holder," Cal Fire said in a statement Wednesday. "This type of incident is very rare, as facilities like this are required to not only follow our stringent California pyrotechnic requirements, but also federal explosive storage requirements."

The fire was held at nearly 80 acres after scorching surrounding agricultural fields, officials said.

Nisa Gutierrez told the Sacramento CBS affiliate KOVR-TV that the blast was so strong it blew open the doors of her home, damaging the door frames. She and her daughter were in their yard and were nearly knocked over as their pony and goats scattered. "We hear like a big boom, and feel the wave," Gutierrez said. "I thought it was a bomb."

KENT PORTER/AP
Fireworks explode at a warehouse, near Esparto, Calif., Tuesday.

The scene remained hazardous, with explosions continuing into the evening on Wednesday, Cal Fire said in a statement.

Microsoft's largest layoff in years hits Xbox, and other divisions

Associated Press

Microsoft is laying off thousands of workers, its second mass layoff in months and its largest in more than two years.

The tech giant began sending out layoff notices Wednesday that hit the company's Xbox video game business and other divisions.

The company declined to say how many people would be laid off but said that it will comprise less than 4% of the workforce it had a year ago.

Microsoft said the cuts will affect multiple teams around the world, including its sales division.

"We continue to implement organizational changes necessary to best position the company and teams for success in a dynamic marketplace," it said in a statement.

Xbox CEO Phil Spencer also sent a memo to employees Wednesday that said the cuts would position the video game business "for enduring success and allow us to focus on strategic growth areas."

It would also "follow Microsoft's lead in removing layers of management to increase agility and effectiveness," Spencer wrote.

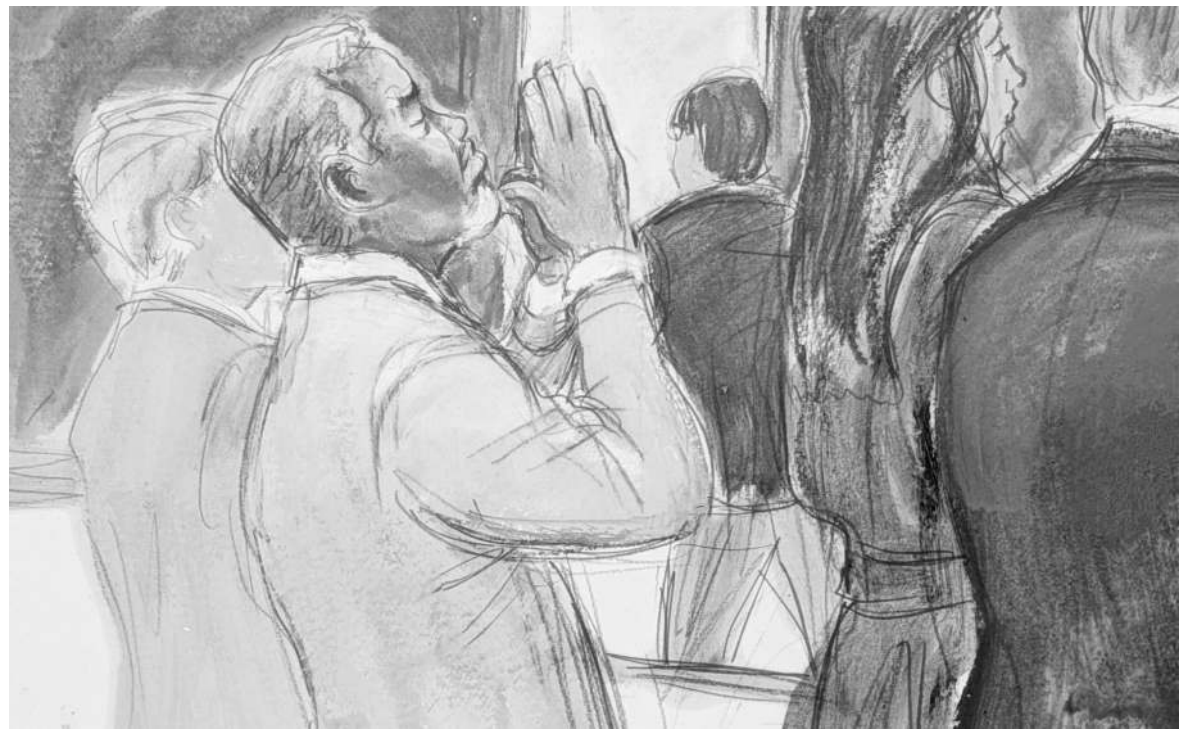
Microsoft employed 228,000 full-time workers as of last June, the last time it reported its annual headcount.

The company said Wednesday that its latest layoffs would cut close to 4% of that workforce, which would be about 9,000 people. But it has already had at least three layoffs this year and it's unlikely that new hiring has matched the amount lost.

Until now, this year's biggest layoff was in May, when Microsoft began laying off about 6,000 workers, nearly 3% of its global workforce and its largest job cuts in more than two years as the company spent heavily on artificial intelligence.

NATION

‘Diddy’ may have easier time with his redemption



ELIZABETH WILLIAMS/AP

In this courtroom sketch, Sean “Diddy” Combs reacts Wednesday after he was convicted of prostitution-related offenses but acquitted of sex trafficking and racketeering charges that could have put him behind bars for life, in Manhattan federal court in New York.

BY ITZEL LUNA AND ANDREW DALTON
Associated Press

For nearly two years, a nearly nonstop parade of allegations and revelations has ravaged and unraveled Sean “Diddy” Combs’ carefully cultivated reputation as an affable celebrity entrepreneur, A-list party host, Grammy-winning artist and music executive, brand ambassador and reality TV star.

It culminated in a verdict Wednesday that saw Combs acquitted of the most serious sex trafficking charges, though guilty of two lesser ones. The stratospheric heights of his previous life may be impossible to regain, but the question remains whether a partial conviction could mean a partial public rehabilitation, or if too much damage has been done.

“Combs managed to avoid becoming the next R. Kelly,” said Evan Nierman, CEO and president of crisis public relations firm Red Banyan, referring to the R&B superstar convicted of similar sex trafficking charges as those that Combs beat.

Combs, 55, has yet to be sentenced and faces the likelihood of prison time, but he no longer faces the prospect of spending most of the rest of his life behind bars. While the law allows for a prison sentence of up to 10 years, the lawyers in the case said in court filings that guidelines suggest a term that could be as short as 21 months or last more than five years.

“This is a very positive outcome overall for him. And it does give him an opportunity to try to rebuild his life,” Nierman said. “It won’t be the same, but at least he’s likely going to be out there in the world and able to move forward.”

Moving on from the jokes

The case had a broad reach across media that made Combs a punchline as much as a villain. Talk shows, “Saturday Night Live” and social media posters milked it for jokes about “freak-offs” and the voluminous amounts of baby oil he had for the sex marathons.

“There are definitely terms which have now become part of the popular lexicon that never existed pre-Diddy trial, including things like ‘freak-off,’” Nierman said. “The images that were painted in the trial and some of the evidence that was introduced is going to stick with him for a long time.”

Danny Deraney, who has worked in crisis communications for celebrities as CEO of Deraney Public Relations, agreed.

“The jokes will haunt him forever,” Deraney said.

Managing public narratives — something Combs has previously excelled at — will be essential. He could cast himself as a tough survivor who took on the feds and came out ahead, or as a contrite Christian seeking redemption, or both.

“It’s a powerful thing for the hip-hop mogul to go public and brag that he beat the rap and that the feds tried to come after him and they failed,” Nierman said. “I could definitely see him leaning into that.”

Nierman said the fight “now will become part of the Sean Combs mythology.”

Combs fell to his knees and prayed in the courtroom after he was acquitted Wednesday of sex trafficking and racketeering charges. The moment by all accounts was spontaneous but could also be read as the start of a revival narrative.

“No matter what you’re accused of, it’s what you do to redeem yourself on the way back,” Deraney said. “Is he redeemable? Those are still heavy charges he was guilty of. It’s tough to say; people have had these charges hanging over their heads and were able to move on.”

The long fall

Combs has been behind bars since his September arrest and will remain jailed while he awaits sentencing.

His long reputational fall began when his former longtime girlfriend and R&B singer Cassie, the criminal trial’s key witness, sued him in November 2023, alleging years of sexual and physical abuse. He settled the next day for $20 million, but the lawsuit set off a storm of similar allegations from other women and men. Most of the lawsuits are still pending.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they have been sexually abused unless they come forward publicly, as Cassie, born Casandra Ventura, has.

The revelation last year of a major federal sex trafficking investigation on the day of a bicoastal raid of Combs’ houses took the allegations to another level of seriousness and public knowledge. The later revelation that feds had seized 1,000 bottles of baby oil and other lubricant entered the popular culture immediately.

Fellow celebrities were called out for past Diddy associations — though no others were implicated in the criminal allegations.

The May 2024 leak of a video of Combs beating Cassie in a Los Angeles hotel hallway eight years earlier was arguably just as damaging, if not more, than the initial wave of allegations. It brought a rare public apology, in an earnestly presented Instagram video two days later.

Nierman called the video, shown at trial, “something people aren’t just going to forget.”

Shortly after Combs’ apology, New York City Mayor Eric Adams requested he return a key to the city he’d gotten at a ceremony in 2023.

Howard University rescinded an honorary degree it had awarded him and ended a scholarship program in his name. He sold off his stake in Revolt, the media company he’d founded more than a decade earlier.

Combs is not about to get the key, or the degree, back. But he could pick up the pieces of his reputation to salvage something from it.

Deraney said it may require “some kind of come-to-Jesus moment where he owns up to it.”

“Really what it’s going to come down to is if he goes to prison, will it change him?” Deraney said. “Has he changed at all during this whole processes? I don’t know.”

US employers added surprising 147,000 jobs last month

BY PAUL WISEMAN
Associated Press

U.S. employers added 147,000 jobs in June as the American labor market continues to show surprising resilience despite uncertainty over President Donald Trump’s economic policies. The unemployment rate ticked down to 4.1% from 4.2% in May, the Labor Department said Thursday.

Hiring rose modestly from a revised 144,000 in May and beat economists expectations of fewer than 118,000 new jobs and a rise in the unemployment rate

The U.S. job market has cooled considerably from red-hot days of 2021-23 when the economy bounced back with unexpected strength from COVID-19 lockdowns and companies were desperate for workers. So far this year, employers have added an average 130,000 jobs a month, down from 168,000 in 2024 and an average 400,000 from 2021 through 2023.

But the June numbers were surprisingly strong. Health care jobs increased by 39,000. State governments added 47,000 workers and local governments 33,000. But the federal government lost 7,000, probably reflecting Trump’s hiring freeze. Manufacturers shed 7,000 jobs.

Labor Department revisions added 16,000 jobs to April and June payrolls. The number of unemployed people fell by 222,000.

Average hourly wages came in cooler than forecasters expected, rising 0.2% from May and 3.7% from a year earlier. The year-over-year number is inching closer to the 3.5% year-over-year number considered consistent with the Federal Reserve’s 2% inflation target.

The U.S. labor force — the count of those working and looking for work — fell by 130,000 last month following a 625,000 drop in May. Economists expect Trump’s immigration deportations — and the fear of them — to push foreign workers out of the labor force.

Hiring decelerated after the Fed raised its benchmark interest rate 11 times in 2022 and 2023. But the economy did not collapse, defying widespread predictions that the higher borrowing costs would cause a recession. Companies kept hiring, just at a more modest pace.

Employers are now contending with fallout from Trump’s policies, especially his aggressive use of import taxes — tariffs.

Mainstream economists say that tariffs raise prices for businesses and consumers alike and make the economy less efficient by reducing competition. They also invite retaliatory tariffs from other countries, hurting U.S. exporters.

The erratic way that Trump has rolled out his tariffs — announcing and then suspending them, then coming up with new ones — has left businesses bewildered.

The upside surprise in June payrolls likely will encourage the Fed to continue its wait-and-see policy of leaving rates unchanged until it has a better idea of how Trump’s tariffs and other policies will affect inflation and the job market. The Fed cut rates three times last year after inflation cooled but has turned cautious in 2025.

WORLD

Top Russian naval commander killed by Ukraine strike

By Francesca Ebel
The Washington Post

A top, decorated Russian naval commander has been killed in Russia's Kursk region, Russia said Thursday, one of its highest-ranking officers killed in the conflict with Ukraine to date.

Maj. Gen. Mikhail Gudkov was the deputy commander in chief of the navy and led a brigade battling Ukrainian forces.

The Defense Ministry confirmed Thursday that Gudkov died while "working" in the border area in the Kursk region, near Ukraine. Gudkov was reportedly killed Tuesday night.

In August 2024, Ukraine led a major operation, capturing and occupying a large part of the Kursk region for nine months until the area was mostly retaken by Russian forces in the spring.

Ukrainian forces have since remained on a sliver of land at the border where fighting has continued.

Oleg Kozhemyako, the governor of Primorye, a far eastern Russian region, confirmed Gudkov's death in a statement posted to the Telegram messaging app. Gudkov had commanded the 155th Marine Brigade, which was stationed in Primorye, before being appointed to the leadership of the navy.

The governor, who was personally acquainted with Gudkov, wrote that he died "while performing his duty as an officer together with his fellow soldiers."

"He was a strong-spirited warrior who did not imagine himself anywhere but the navy," Kozhemyako wrote. "Having become deputy commander in chief of the navy, he did not stop personally visiting the positions of our marines."

The governor of the Kursk region, Alexander Khinshtein, also confirmed on Telegram that Gudkov had "tragically died while performing his military duty."

According to Russian news reports, President Vladimir Putin appointed Gudkov to the post of deputy commander at the end of March during a visit to the Arkhangelsk nuclear cruiser.

In fall of 2023, Gudkov, who then held the rank of colonel, was awarded the "Hero of Russia" medal "for courage, heroism and skillful command of subordinate formations" in the combat zone.

According to Reuters, unofficial Russian and Ukrainian military Telegram channels reported earlier that Gudkov was killed along with 10 other service members in a Ukrainian attack on a command post in Korenevo in the Kursk region.

Dozens of Palestinians, many who were waiting for aid, killed in Gaza

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Airstrikes and shootings killed 94 Palestinians in Gaza overnight, including 45 who were attempting to get much-needed humanitarian aid, hospitals and the Health Ministry said Thursday.

Israel's military did not immediately comment on the strikes.

Five people were killed while outside sites associated with the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, the newly-created, secretive American organization backed by Israel to feed the Gaza Strip's population, while 40 others were killed waiting for aid in other locations across the Gaza Strip.

On Thursday, human rights organization Amnesty International issued a report claiming Israel and the GHF use starvation tactics against Palestinians to continue to commit genocide in the Gaza Strip.

Dozens of people were killed in airstrikes that pounded the Strip on Wednesday night and Thursday morning, including 15 people killed in strikes that hit tents in the sprawling Muwasi zone, where many displaced Palestinians are sheltering. A separate strike on a school in Gaza City sheltering displaced people also killed 15 people.

Gaza's Health Ministry said the number of Palestinians killed in Gaza has passed 57,000 since the war began on Oct. 7, 2023. The toll includes 223 people who had been missing but have now been declared dead. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its death count but says that more than half of the dead are women and children.

Jehad Alshrafi/AP

Wounded Palestinians are brought to Shifa Hospital in Gaza City after being injured while on their way to an aid distribution center on Thursday.

The deaths come as Israel and Hamas inch closer to a possible ceasefire that would end the 21-month war.

Trump said Tuesday that Israel had agreed on terms for a 60-day ceasefire in Gaza and urged Hamas to accept the deal before conditions worsen. But Hamas' response, which emphasized its demand that the war end, raised questions about whether the latest offer could materialize into an actual pause in fighting.

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WORLD

‘Lovebugs’ return in swarms to S. Korea, blanket mountain peak

By Hyung-Jin Kim
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Swarms of “lovebugs” are back in South Korea, blanketing a mountain peak, entering houses and sticking to car windows.

Flying attached to one another while mating, the insects, known to scientists as Plecia nearctica, are also called united bugs, double-headed bugs or honeymoon flies.

Lovebugs were first detected in large numbers in northwestern Seoul in 2022. Now, hordes of lovebugs appear throughout the city and some nearby areas, mainly between late June and early July each year.

The insects do not transmit diseases or sting humans, but there have been increasing public complaints about lovebugs sticking to car windows and the walls of houses, restaurants and subway trains.

Clouds of lovebugs recently hovered over the peak of Gyeyang Mountain in Incheon city, just west of Seoul. The lovebugs swarmed observation decks as workers constantly shoveled dead insects from the ground, according to videos shown on local TV stations.

“Compared with the past two years, the number of lovebugs sharply surged last weekend at the mountain,” Gyeyang district official Wang Hyeon-jeong said Tuesday.

The 1,295-feet mountain has likely provided the type of hot, humid weather conditions in which lovebugs thrive, the Environment Ministry said, possibly leading to the insect population surge.

In Seoul and other areas, it is not yet clear whether there have been more lovebugs than in previous years. The ministry said it will review the seriousness of this year’s case after the insects disappear, likely by mid-July.

South Korean officials view lovebugs as beneficial insects, saying they help pollinate flowers as their larvae convert plant materials into organic components. They said they avoid chemical pesticides when coping with the large insect population, instead spraying them with water and using stick pads.

Im Soon-shuck, Yonhap/AP

A woman tries to avoid a swarm of lovebugs on the summit of Mount Gyeyang in Incheon, South Korea, on Monday.

Many experts say the flow of lovebugs to South Korea, likely from China, is associated with the country’s warming temperature and is linked to climate change.

Kurdish fighters in Iraq to hand over weapons in peace process

Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq — A Kurdish militant group that has waged a long-running insurgency in Turkey announced Thursday its fighters in northern Iraq will begin handing over their weapons, marking the first concrete step toward disarmament as part of a peace process.

The Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, announced in May it would disband and renounce armed conflict, ending four decades of hostilities. The move came after PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who has been imprisoned on an island near Istanbul since 1999, urged his group in February to convene a congress and formally disband and disarm.

Ocalan, 76, continues to wield significant influence in the Kurdish movement despite his 25-year imprisonment.

His call to end the fighting marked a pivotal step toward ending the decades-long conflict that has claimed tens of thousands of lives since the 1980s.

In the latest development, “a group of guerrilla fighters will come down from the mountains and will bid farewell to their arms in an effort to declare their good will for peace and democratic politics,” the PKK said in a statement Thursday.

The ceremony, which is expected to take place between July 10 and July 12 in the city of Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq’s semi-autonomous Kurdish region, will be the first concrete move toward disarmament.

An Iraqi Kurdish official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly, said around 40 PKK members are expected to hand over their light weapons to the regional government.

The regional government is dominated by two parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, with the KDP overseeing the regional capital, Irbil, and the city of Dohuk. The PUK governs Sulaymaniyah.

The KDP has good relations with Turkey and has been at odds with the PKK, while the PUK is closer to the PKK.

In Turkey on Monday, Omer Celik, a spokesperson for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party, or AKP, said the PKK could begin handing over arms “within days,” but did not provide details. Celik added that Erdogan would meet with members of the pro-Kurdish party next week to discuss the peace effort.

There was no immediate statement from Turkey’s government on Thursday’s announcement.

The PKK has long maintained bases in the mountains of northern Iraq. Turkish forces have launched offensives and airstrikes against the PKK in Iraq and have set up bases in the area. Scores of villages have emptied as a result.

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WEEKEND

‘Jurassic World: Rebirth’ an enjoyable reboot

Movies, Pages 16-17

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER HAMLIN/AP

Summer sounds

Shining a light on which songs, artists typify the season in 2025

Music, Pages 28-29

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WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Finding felines

Technology can help you keep tabs on your furry friends

BY KELVIN CHAN
Associated Press

KELVIN CHAN/AP photos

Chipolo advises that its round plastic Bluetooth trackers are only for "in-house pets like house-trained cats and smaller dogs" and warns against using them on "larger dog breeds and outdoor cats."

A common refrain in my household is, "Have you seen the cats?" because our two felines, Maple and Juniper, can venture outside through a flap in the backdoor. Like many other London house cats, they're free to come and go, roaming the surrounding backyards and beyond, equipped with microchips to identify them if they get lost.

If your cat likes to prowl outdoors for long stretches, or your dog has a tendency to run off, it can be distressing when they don't return as expected.

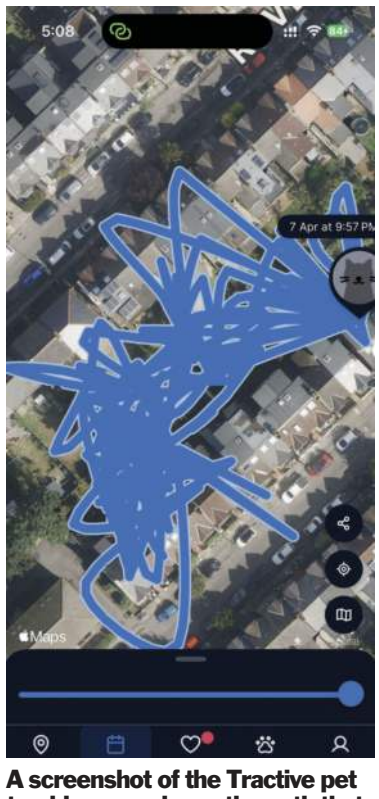
If you're worried about your furry friend's whereabouts, technology can help you keep tabs on them.

Dedicated pet trackers are collar-worn devices that typically use GPS signals to pinpoint the location of the animal wearing them. They use a 4G cellphone signal or your home Wi-Fi connection to relay the position to a smartphone app.

There are many products on the market. Tractive, Jiobit and Pawfit are among brands that offer trackers for both dogs and cats. Devices for the latter are generally smaller and lighter.

Dog trackers with integrated collars are available from Fi and Whistle. PetTracer is a cat collar that uses both GPS and radio signals from a home base station. FitBark, also for dogs, has an Apple Watch app to monitor location and other activity.

Garmin has a range of GPS dog collars that work with handheld devices resembling walkie-talkies, but they're pricey and aimed at outdoors enthusiasts like hunters.



A screenshot of the Tractive pet tracking app shows the path that a cat has taken in a London neighborhood on May 29.

Most trackers let you designate a safe zone on a map, usually your house and surrounding area, and alert you if your pet has left it.

They usually operate on the 4G LTE spectrum commonly used by wireless carriers. It typically has the longest range of any cellular signal, said Andrew Bleiman, Tractive's executive vice president for North America.

That means strong connectivity in most of Europe and North America "unless you're in a really far-flung place like the middle of a national park," Bleiman said.

Exact price depends on brand and model. Most devices sell for less than $100. However, keep in mind you'll also have to pay a subscription fee for the cell service to function.

While that could cost $100 or more a year, for some pet owners, it's worth the peace of mind, Bleiman said.

The collars usually have a built-in rechargeable battery, but battery life varies. Most will last at least two to three days before they need charging, and a lot longer in ideal conditions.

One big factor is signal strength. The battery will drain faster if the device has to work harder to pick up the GPS or connect to Wi-Fi. Some save power by not sending coordinates in the safe zone.

If you can't find your pet's exact location, or the device gets lost, Tractive has a "radar" feature to pinpoint it with your phone's Bluetooth. Other brands have similar features.

Bleiman recommends using a harness for cats that don't like collars.

It's common for cats and dogs to be implanted with microchips, with the details added to a database. That makes it much easier to reunite owners with lost dogs and cats, even if they've strayed hundreds of miles away or gone missing for years.

Pet microchips, about the size of a grain of rice implanted just below the skin, are legally required in some European countries. There's no federal law in the U.S., though some places like Hawaii now require them, so check with state or local authorities.

But there's some confusion about what microchips can do. Because they don't have a power supply, they can't be tracked in real time. Whoever finds your pet would need to take it to a vet or a shelter to scan the device for contact details.

Many pet owners use Bluetooth trackers like Apple's Air Tags, Samsung's SmartTags or similar devices from Tile, Cube and Chipolo, which rely on low-power signals relayed by passing smartphones.

Bluetooth trackers have a range of 100 to 500 feet, depending on the model. The batteries last for months, if not longer, and no subscription is needed.

However, they're not specifically marketed for pets. That hasn't stopped pet owners, judging from many recommendations they've posted in online forums.

Chipolo advises that its round plastic trackers are only for "in-house pets like house-trained cats and smaller dogs" and warns against using them on "larger dog breeds and outdoor cats."

Still, they can be a solution for some pet owners.

"Bluetooth is a totally reasonable solution if you're in a downtown urban core," Bleiman said. "But pets move fast. And if you're in a wooded park, or you're in a suburban area — let alone a more rural or wilderness area — it's pretty unlikely your pet is going to be close to a Bluetooth device."

Eufy Lawnbot can mow your grass by itself

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

Automation isn't a future concept; it's here. I write this as my lawn is being mowed with no humans involved.

The eufy Robot Lawn Mower E15 is a dream come true, to the extent that you indeed can sleep while mowing. And while the mower has a lot of technology inside, the parts you and I have to deal with, including setup and mapping, are pretty straightforward.

Some specifics on the eufy E15: It is wireless and no Real-Time Kinematic is needed for accuracy. It utilizes pure vision FSD technology, featuring high-precision cameras and intelligent algorithms. When you set up the mapping, it's amazing how accurately it detects obstacles, including stones, gardens and trees. Its vision-based system is used for navigation, and the E15 also has automapping capabilities to plan the mowing path.

The eufy companion app is the brain of the operation and has a user-friendly dashboard for most controls, including start, stop, mapping and editing the map. The app also allows you to set schedules for specific days and times to mow.

On a single charge, it will mow 0.2 of an acre and then return to its home to recharge, automatically completing the job after charging. Charging takes 90 to 110 minutes. You can set the cutting height anywhere from 0.98 inches to 2.95 inches with slopes up to 18 degrees.

I ran the mower on my front lawn, which is a flat square with a few garden obstacles in the middle. I was amazed at how quietly it ran (listed to have a noise level of 56dB). It came close to the edge of the fence and trees without making contact with any. On the E15 top, facing forward, is a stereo 3D camera, a Sementic artificial intelligence camera, an autofogger and an LED light.

Eufy does not recommend using the E15 to cut zoysia or St. Augustine grass.

Online: eufy.com; currently on sale for $1,499.99 (originally $1,799.99)

EUFY/TNS

An app tells eufy Robot Lawn Mower E15 how to cut your lawn.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

An uneven trip down memory lane

Remaster of Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny still flawed despite upgrades

BY GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

To see how far gaming has come, it's important to know where it has been. Over 20 years, visual fidelity has improved so much that it's harder to tell video games from live-action movies. The voice work has taken an enormous leap as the actors behind digital characters become stars in their own right, and the gameplay has been refined to the point that older titles feel clunky at times.

The quality is so much better that playing the remaster of Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny can be grating to those used to the likes of The Last of Us. But the Capcom sequel must be put in context. It was released at a time when having a protagonist that resembled a real-life actor was a novel idea and environments were static prerendered scenes rather than fully polygonal worlds. After all, the PlayStation 2 hardware could only handle so much.

CAPCOM/TNS photos

Above and below: Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny protagonist Jubei Yagyu was inspired by the late Japanese actor Yûsaku Matsuda. The remastered version of the game makes visuals passable by today's standards, though the blocky sausage fingers remain. Developers leveraged modern consoles' horsepower to upgrade the project around the edges. It supports high-definition screens and improved graphical touches to the character models.

A bigger scope

Back in 2002, protagonist Jubei Yagyu's revenge tale against Oda Nobunaga, the new leader of the demons, was cutting-edge graphically and cleverly used design to overcome the system's limitations. It was also a more ambitious title that took the core concept of a samurai defeating an army of evil and expanded it to include a village and a wider cast of characters.

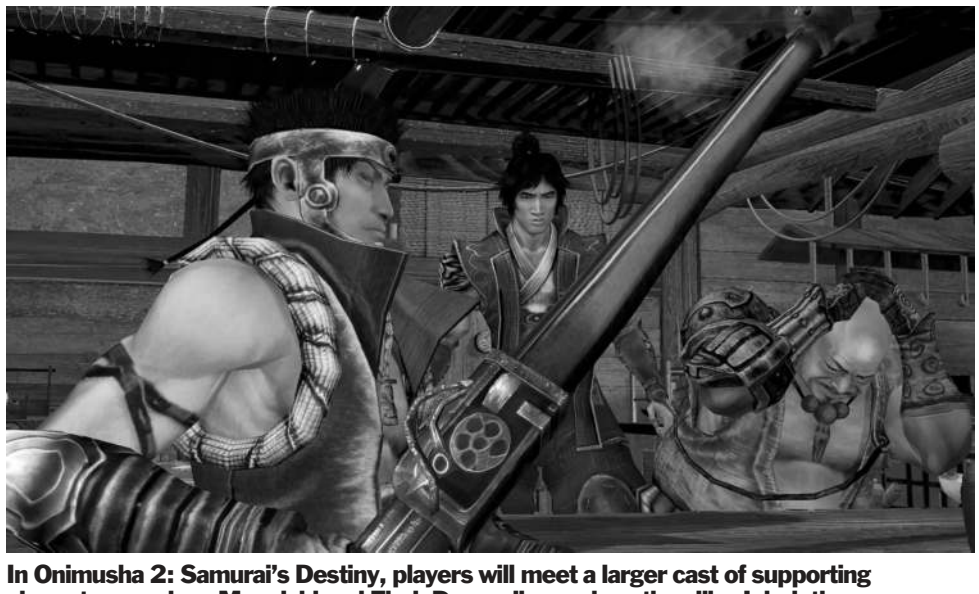
It's a bigger game in scope compared to the original, and thankfully, developers leveraged modern consoles' horsepower to upgrade the project around the edges. It supports high-definition screens and improved graphical touches to the character models, though the blocky sausage fingers remain. All of this makes visuals passable by today's standards. The campaign isn't a treat for the eyes, but it won't scar players' eyeballs, either.

Important upgrades

The best changes come in the control scheme and gameplay. Capcom modernizes the control scheme so that players don't have to deal with the infamous tank controls of this era. For purists who prefer them, they're tied to the directional pad, but Onimusha 2 works much better with the free movement of the left analog stick.

The team also modified the controls so that players spend less time in menus. Players can hit R3 to bring up a map to help them navigate the world, and they can switch weapons on the fly. Unfortunately, cycling through the arsenal still feels cumbersome, especially when enemies swarm players. It's often better to just pause the game and find the right weapon for the situation.

Although the controls were improved, Onimusha 2 is still a product of its generation. Moving around the world means controlling the protagonist, Jubei Yagyu, across flat images and those pictures constantly shift as players move to different parts of rooms. It's almost like playing a game through security cameras. It's disorienting, and players may not have a great angle on fighting foes who could be hiding behind corners or off camera.



In Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny, players will meet a larger cast of supporting characters such as Magoichi and Ekei. Depending on how they like Jubei, these supporting characters may show up to lend a hand in different parts of the adventure.

The free movement mitigates some of these issues, allowing players to dodge attacks, but again, the switching camera angles still present confusion and control issues.

Ahead of its time

Beyond that, Onimusha 2 has several forward-thinking ideas. It expands on the core combat with four elemental weapons and one secret armament. The swords, spear and hammer all have their advantages in combat, and players will have to switch among them to efficiently defeat enemies. When demons die, they release orbs that Jubei can absorb and use to upgrade his arsenal and armor. He even has an ability to transform into a more powerful ogre to deal heavy damage to adversaries.

More importantly, Jubei runs across four potential allies on his adventures. Players offer them gifts, and depending on how they like Jubei, the supporting cast will show up in different parts of the adventure to lend a hand. That makes each playthrough slightly different.

Although I appreciated the characters' backstories, the horrific English voice acting in Onimusha 2 blunted any of the drama, with some scenes coming off as cringey. The performances hinder but don't torpedo an adventure that is fun, but also joyously weird.

Modern AAA titles have a focus-grouped sameness to them. When one genre becomes successful, other developers ape that aesthetic, and that creates déjà vu projects that feel like an experience gamers have played before. Onimusha 2 is far from that. It's an unabashedly strange mix of historical fiction and the supernatural with the occasional robot thrown in. That type of energy is missing in a lot of current titles, and Capcom's remaster is a reminder that this vibrancy still exists in the past.

Platforms: PlayStation 4, PC, Nintendo Switch, Xbox One

Online: capcom-games.com/onimusha/2/en-us

WEEKEND: MOVIES

‘Can we start over?’

Spielberg recruits ‘Jurassic Park,’ ‘The Lost World’ writer Koepp to script ‘Rebirth’ of the multibillion-dollar franchise

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

EXT JUNGLE NIGHT
An eyeball, big, yellowish, distinctly inhuman, stares raptly between wooden slats, part of a large crate. The eye darts from side to side quickly, alert as hell.

So begins David Koepp’s script to 1993’s “Jurassic Park.” Like much of Koepp’s writing, it’s crisply terse and intensely visual. It doesn’t tell the director (in this case, Steven Spielberg) where to put the camera, but it nearly does.

“I asked Steven before we started: What are the limitations about what I can write?” Koepp recalls. “CGI hadn’t really been invented yet. He said: ‘Only your imagination.’”

Yet in the 32 years since penning the adaptation of Michael Crichton’s novel, Koepp has established himself as one of Hollywood’s top screenwriters not through the boundlessness of his imagination, but by his expertise in limiting it. Koepp is the master of the “bottle” movie — films hemmed in by a single location or condensed time frame. From David Fincher’s “Panic Room” (2002) to Steven Soderbergh’s “Presence” (2025), he excels at corralling stories into uncluttered, headlong movie narratives. Koepp can write anything — as long as there are parameters.

“The great film scholar and historian David Bordwell and I were talking about that concept once, and he said, ‘Because the world is too big?’ I said, ‘That’s it, exactly,’” Koepp says. “The world is too big. If I can put the camera anywhere I want, if anybody on the entire planet can appear in this film, if it can last 130 years, how do I even begin? It makes me want to take a nap. So I’ve always looked for bottles in which to put the delicious wine.”

Reining in ‘Jurassic World’

By some measure, the world of “Jurassic World” got too big. In the last entry, 2022’s not particularly well received “Jurassic World: Dominion,” the dinosaurs had spread across the planet.

“I don’t know where else to go with that,” Koepp says.

Koepp, a 62-year-old native of Pewaukee, Wis., hadn’t written a “Jurassic” movie since the second one, 1997’s “The Lost World.” Back then, Brian De Palma, with whom Koepp worked on “Carlito’s Way” and “Mission: Impossible,” took to calling him “dinosaur boy.” Koepp soon after moved on to other challenges. But when Spielberg called him up a few years ago and asked, “Do you have one more in you?” Koepp had one request: “Can we start over?”

“Jurassic World: Rebirth,” now in select on-base theaters, is a fresh start for one of Hollywood’s biggest multibillion-dollar franchises. It’s a new cast of characters (Scarlett Johansson, Mahershala Ali and Jonathan Bailey costar), a new director (Gareth Edwards) and a new storyline. But just as they were 32 years ago, the dinosaurs are again Koepp’s to play with.

“The first page reassured me,” Edwards says. “It said: ‘Written by David Koepp.’”

For many moviegoers, that opening credit has been a signal that what follows is likely to be smartly scripted, brightly paced and neatly situated. His script to Ron Howard’s 1994 news drama “The Paper” took place over 24 hours. “Secret Window” (2004) was set in an upstate New York cabin. Even bigger-scale films like “War of the Worlds” favor the fate of one family over global calamity.

“I hear those ideas and I get excited. OK, now I’m constrained,” Koepp says. “A structural or aesthetic constraint is like the Hayes Code. They had to come up with many other interesting ways to imply those people had sex, and that made for some really interesting storytelling.”

The two Stevens

Koepp’s bottles can fit either summer spectacles or low-budget indies. “Jurassic World: Rebirth” is the third film penned by Koepp just this year, following a nifty pair of thrillers with Soderbergh in “Presence” and “Black Bag.”

“Presence,” like “Panic Room,” stays within a family home, and it’s seen entirely from the perspective of a ghost. “Black Bag” deliciously combines marital drama with spy movie, organized around a dinner party and a polygraph test. Those films completed a zippy trilogy with Soderbergh, beginning with 2022’s blistering pandemic-set “Kimi.”

Much of Koepp’s career, particularly recently, run through the two Stevens: Soderbergh and Spielberg.

“What they have in common is they both would have absolutely killed it in the 1940s,” Koepp says. “In the studio system in the 1940s, if Jack Warner said ‘I’m putting you on the Wally Beery wrestling picture.’ Either one of them would have said, ‘Great, here’s what I’m going to do.’ They both share that sensibility of: How do we get this done?”

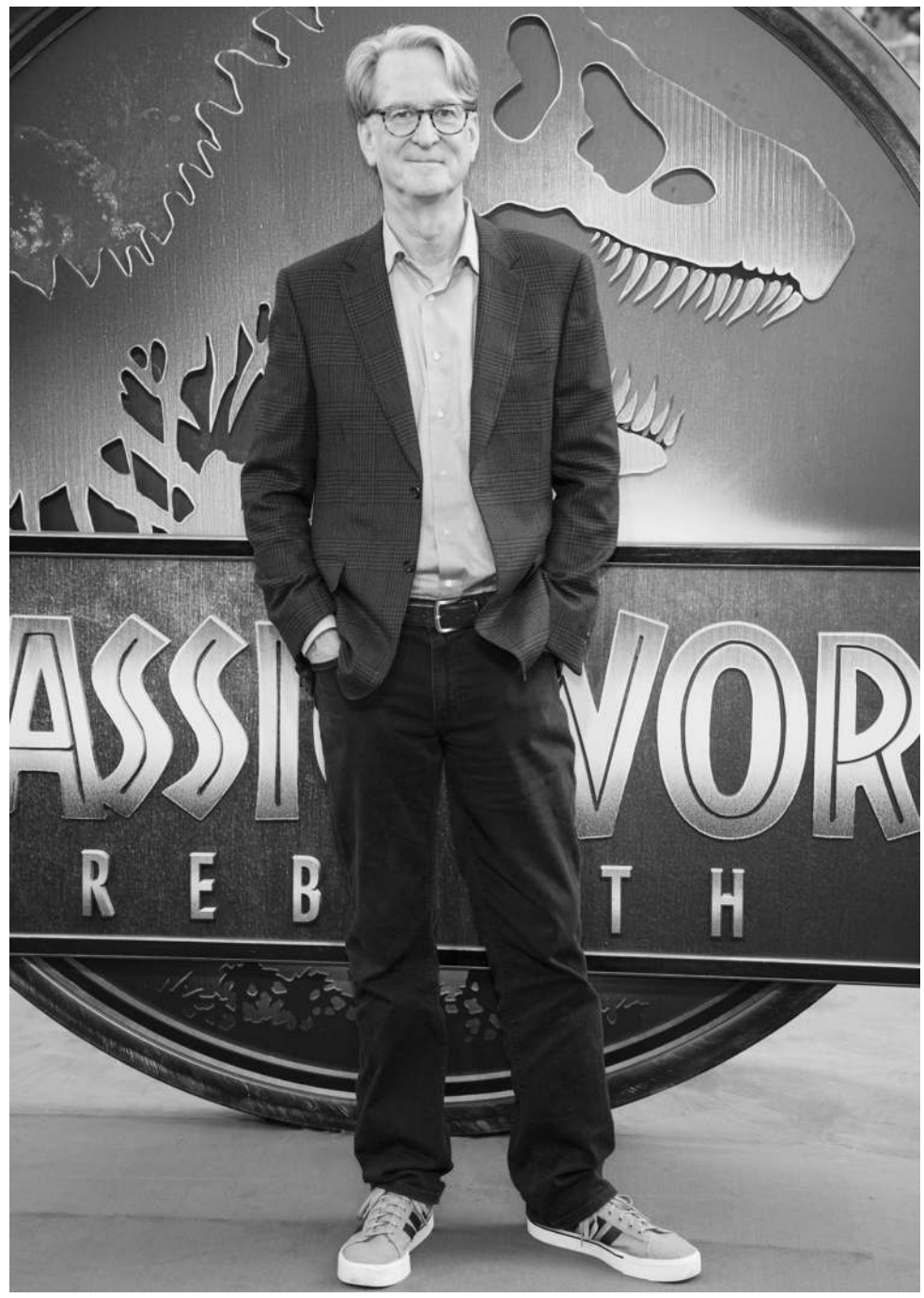
Spielberg and Koepp recently wrapped production on Spielberg’s untitled new science fiction film, said to be very meaningful to Spielberg. He gave a 50-page treatment to Koepp to turn into a script.

“It’s even more focused than I’ve ever seen him on a movie,” Koepp says. “There would be times — we’d be in different time zones — I’d wake up and there were 35 texts, and this went on for about a year. He’s as locked in on that movie as I’ve ever seen him, and he’s a guy who locks in.”

‘Your own ChatGPT’

For “Jurassic World: Rebirth,” Koepp wanted to reorder the franchise. Inspired by Chuck Jones’ “commandments” for the Road Runner cartoons (the Road Runner only says “meep meep”; all products are from the ACME Corporation, etc.), Koepp put down nine governing principles for the “Jurassic” franchise. They included things like “humor is oxygen” and that the dinosaurs are animals, not monsters.

A key to “Rebirth” was geographically herding the dinosaurs. In the new movie, they’ve clustered around the equator, drawn to the tropical environment. Like in “Jurassic Park,” the action takes place primarily on an island.



SCOTT A GARFITT, INVISION/AP

Screenwriter David Koepp, shown June 17 at the London premiere of “Jurassic World: Rebirth,” is the master of the “bottle” movie — films hemmed in by a single location or condensed time frame. Koepp says he loves narrative constraints.

Going into the project, director Edwards was warned about his screenwriter’s convictions.

“At the end of my meeting with Spielberg, he just smiled and said, “That’s great. If you think we were difficult, wait until you meet David Koepp,’” says Edwards, laughing.

But Edwards and Koepp quickly bonded over similar tastes in movies, like the original “King Kong,” a poster of which hangs in Koepp’s office. On set, Edwards would sometimes find the need for 30 seconds of new dialogue.

“Within like a minute, I’d get this perfectly written 30 second interaction that was on theme, funny, had a reversal in it — perfect,” Edwards says. “It was like having your own ChatGPT, but actually really good at writing.”

‘Everyone’s got a note’

In the summer, especially, it’s common to see a long list of names under the screenplay. Blockbuster-making is, increasingly, done by committee. The stakes are too high, the thinking goes, to leave it to one writer. But “Jurassic World: Rebirth” bears just Koepp’s credit.

“There’s an old saying: ‘No one of us is as dumb as all of us,’” Koepp says. “When you have eight or 10 people who have significant input into the script, the odds are stacked enormously against you. You’re trying to please a lot of different people, and it often doesn’t go well.”

Koepp prefers to — after research and outlining — let a movie topple out of his mind as rapidly as possible. “I like to gun it out and clean up the mess later,” he says.

But the string of “Presence,” “Black Bag” and “Jurassic World: Rebirth” may have tested even Koepp’s prodigious output. The intense period of writing, he says, meant five months without a day off. “I might have broke something,” he says, shaking his head.

Still, the three films also show a veteran screenwriter working in high gear, judiciously meting out details and keeping dinosaurs, ghosts and spies hurtling forward. Anything like a perfect script — for Koepp, that’s “Rosemary’s Baby” or “Jaws” — remains elusive. But even when you come close, there are always critics.

“After the first ‘Jurassic’ movie, a fifth-grade class all wrote letters to me, which was very nice,” Koepp recalls. “Then they wrote, ‘PS, when you do the next one, don’t have it take so long to get to the island.’ Everyone’s got a note!’”

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEW

UNIVERSAL PICTURES AND AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT/AP photos

"Jurassic World: Rebirth" is a sort-of heist movie with nods to past installments even as it forges a new future with new characters.

Dino franchise back on track

'Jurassic World: Rebirth' superbly reboots series by remembering what made original great

By Mark Kennedy
Associated Press

If you've lately been feeling that the "Jurassic Park" franchise has jumped an even more ancient creature — the shark — hold off any thoughts of extinction. Judging from the latest entry, there's still life in this old dino series.

"Jurassic World: Rebirth" captures the awe and majesty of the overgrown lizards that's been lacking for so many of the movies, which became just an endless cat-and-mouse in the dark between scared humans against T. rexes or raptors. "Jurassic World: Rebirth" lets in the daylight.

Credit goes to screenwriter David Koepp, who penned the original "Jurassic Park," and director Gareth Edwards, who knows a thing or two about giant reptiles as director of 2014's "Godzilla." They've returned the franchise to its winning roots.

"Jurassic World: Rebirth" has nods to the past even as it cuts a new future with new characters. It's a sort of heist movie with monsters that's set on the original decaying island research facility for the original, abandoned Jurassic Park.

Scarlett Johansson and Mahershala Ali — both unshowy and suggesting a sort of sibling chemistry — play security and extraction specialists (OK, mercenaries) hired to get what everyone wants from dinosaurs in these movies: DNA. In return, there's $10 million.

The movie is set five years after "Jurassic World: Dominion" and some three decades after dinosaurs were reanimated. They've lost their public fascination — a subtle nod perhaps to the films in the franchise — and have struggled with the climate, gathering at the equator.

The Big Pharma company ParkerGenix has come up with a blockbuster idea: Take DNA from three colossal Cretaceous-period creatures — the flying Quetzalcoatlus, the aquatic Mosasaurus and the land-based Titanosaurus — to cure cardiac disease. Wait, how does that work? Don't ask us; something about hemoglobin.

The trick is this: The dinos have to be alive when the DNA is extracted. Why? Because then there'd be no movie, silly. It would be a 10-minute sequence of a guy in a white coat and a syringe. This way, we celebrate three kinds of dinosaurs in three separate chapters.

The three-part quest at the heart of "Jurassic World: Rebirth" is interrupted by a family — a dad, his two daughters and a sketchy boyfriend — in a 45-foot sailboat that is capsized and need rescuing. They bring a dose of not-always-working humor and humanity to the extraction team, which also includes a too-easily-telegraphing baddie played by Rupert Friend — "I'm too smart to die" — and a museum-based paleontologist played by Jonathan Bailey.

The filmmakers include clever nods to other blockbusters — "Indiana Jones," "Star Wars," "Jaws" and "ET" — and thrillingly create a dinos-hunting-in-a-convenience-store sequence like a tribute to the original film's dinos-hunting-in-a-kitchen sequence. The shots overall are beautifully composed, from silhouettes on a boat in twilight to almost feeling the burn of the ropes as actors rappel down a 500-foot cliff face.

The creatures here are made glorious — from a dozing T. rex along a river bed to the ones twisting in the sea, pure muscle and heft. A highlight is a pair of long-tailed Titanosauruses entwining their necks as John Williams' familiar score plays.

Edwards' pacing is perfect, allowing dread to build with just the rustling of trees, and letting characters deepen between breathless, excellently filmed action sequences. The gorgeous landscape — Thailand's waterfalls, grassy plains, shoreline caves and mangrove swamps — should be used for a tourist campaign, as long as they remove the rapacious dinos.

Jonathan Bailey, left, plays a paleontologist and Scarlett Johansson is a mercenary.

As if all this weren't enough, there's a bonus bit at the end. The research facility that was abandoned years ago was cross-breeding dino species and making "genetically altered freaks" that still roam around. Some look like a turkey-bat-raptor hybrid — gross and scary — and one is a 20,000-pound T. rex with a misshapen head and a horrible roar. It's like getting an additional monster movie.

In many ways, the folks behind "Jurassic World: Rebirth" are trying to do the same thing as their mercenaries: Going back to the source code to recapture the magic of Steven Spielberg's 1993 blockbuster original. They've thrillingly succeeded.

"Jurassic World: Rebirth" is rated PG-13 for intense sequences of violence/action, bloody images, some suggestive references, language and a drug reference. Running time: 133 minutes. Now playing at select on-base theaters.

What others are saying

The bottom line, for any movie that purports to be a thrill ride, is whether the end result is thrilling — and I'd give a definite yes to that. Director Gareth Edwards and screenwriter David Koepp wisely keep the focus on the dinosaurs, and mix things up a bit: Much of "Jurassic World: Rebirth" takes place in water, and I am here to tell you that seeing a massive dinosaur swim underneath a small wooden boat can cause even a weathered old-school movie critic to write a few all-caps expletives in her notebook. The effects are uniformly effective — we believe these dinosaurs, even as we don't believe that any humans could be quite this clueless — and it all goes down perfectly nicely with popcorn, which is all you can ask of a "Jurassic" movie.

— Moira Macdonald
The Seattle Times

Remember the scenes in "King Kong" — the 1933 original or Peter Jackson's 2005 remake — where the ship's crew has to cross Kong Island while getting picked off by big, toothy carnivores? That's "Jurassic World: Rebirth" in a nutshell, and that's all it is. The surprise is how effective those sequences of peril are and how powerfully they hammer on a moviegoer's primordial brain stem, releasing a flood of fight-or-flight adrenaline. ... "Rebirth" recycles elements of the earlier movies, and, other than the news that T. Rexes can swim, it makes no claims to originality. It just wants to leave you thoroughly, happily wrung out by the end.

— Ty Burr
The Washington Post

Edwards and Koepp have delivered a competently and even frequently thrilling adventure, but one that lacks a compelling story and boasts only run-of-the-mill characters. ... At its best, "Rebirth" is an homage to movies including Spielberg's just-turned-50 classic "Jaws," "Alien" and the "Godzilla" series.

— Mark Meszoros
The News-Herald

Purists may nitpick, but fundamentally, "Rebirth" is a gorgeously rendered all-ages adventure film. ... If there are moments that don't quite hit right, the ones that do are impossible to forget. Remember, this is about having fun, and "Rebirth" is a blast.

— Katie Walsh
Tribune News Service

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

High body count, zero consequences

‘Heads of State’ starring Cena, Elba a serviceable, disposable buddy comedy

BY ANN HORNADAY
The Washington Post

On its shiny, happy surface, the action comedy “Heads of State” is so innocuously disposable that it barely merits attention, let alone critique. Anchored by two enormously appealing stars and unfailingly faithful to the strictures of the genre, this summertime programmer — scheduled just in time to divert filmgoers after they’ve seen “F1” and before “Superman” arrives in theaters — is the kind of cheerfully banal, easy lift that feels custom-made for airplane viewing: It might as well come with its own tray table in the open, unlocked position. (And it’s available only on Amazon, so ... same thing?)

John Cena plays U.S. President Will Derringer, a square-jawed, Schwarzenegger-esque former movie star whose biggest role — until the White House, at least — was in a franchise called “Water Cobra.” Idris Elba plays Sam Clarke, a saturnine British prime minister who very much did not support Derringer’s election; the two are headed to a NATO meeting in Trieste when they get word that a joint CIA-MI6 operation has gone awry, with the British agent Noel Bisset (Priyanka Chopra Jonas) having gone missing after the decimation of her team. Soon enough, Derringer and Clarke are joining forces in a globe-trotting mission to save Western democracy and their own skins; this is not a special relationship but a situational one, with Clarke’s cool English reserve continually butting up against Derringer’s can-do naivete.

Directed by Ilya Naishuller from a script by Josh Appelbaum, André Nemec and Harrison Query, “Heads of State” does a nimble job of going through the rote motions: As Derringer and Clarke bond on a road trip that takes them from London to Belarus to Poland and beyond, their bromance is metronomically punctuated by increasingly preposterous scenes of violence; standout scenes include a hair-raising stunt set aboard Air Force One (Harrison Ford, eat your heart out), as well as a pyrotechnical car chase involving the Beast, the bulletproof, heavily armored presidential state car.

Prime Video

John Cena, left, and Idris Elba star in “Heads of State,” which centers on a plot to destroy NATO.

Real-world adjacencies abound in “Heads of State,” which centers on a plot to destroy NATO — just days after a NATO summit that was notable for its leaders’ obeisance to the current U.S. president, himself a former reality TV star (and, at one point, an outspoken NATO critic). But don’t mistake “Heads of State” for a political satire a la “Mountainhead,” another small-screen feature that in another era would have played in theaters. The filmmakers here are more interested in alternating between cartoonish savagery and disarming sentimentalism.

Like Cena’s fictional president, that combination is quintessentially American, given a congenial sheen with lots of jokes and we’re-just-having-fun-here japes, never mind that the guns, grenades, rocket launchers and high-tech crossbows result in fiery carnage and an unholy body count, with nary an unseemly consequence. That’s just the kind of PG-13-friendly hypocrisy that is baked into a form of entertainment that Derringer insists on calling “cinema” (part of the fun of the movie is watching Cena’s super-jacked doofus name-check Wes Anderson and Bong Joon Ho). Carping about the promiscuous violence in “Heads of State” and its ilk is just the kind of scolding that makes Clarke’s character such a dreary old stick — a role that Elba leans into with handsome relish. He and Cena — whose self-aware humor is on high alert throughout — develop an easygoing chemistry, and they receive ample support from Jack Quaid, Carla Gugino and Sarah Niles, the last of whom is a bright spot in “F1.”

As a blithely likable blunt instrument, “Heads of State” gets the job done, justifying its anesthetized mayhem with a sweet-natured message about the importance of friendship, international alliances and institutional continuity. Lessons in filial loyalty come by way of fireballs and fusillades: President Derringer might call it cinema, but everybody else knows it’s only a movie.

“Heads of State” is rated PG-13 for sequences of strong violence/action, language and some smoking. Running time: 113 minutes. Available on Prime Video.

Disappointing sequel ‘The Old Guard 2’ treads water

BY MARK MEZSOROS
The News-Herald (Willoughby, Ohio)

“The Old Guard 2” is plagued by second-movie problems.

When “The Old Guard” arrived on Netflix in July 2020 — a time when, admittedly, a lot of us were still spending a lot of time cooped up inside, desperate for halfway-decent streaming entertainment — it was a largely welcome slice of supernatural action fare.

Based on a series of graphic novels of the same name by writer Greg Rucka and comic book artist Leandro Fernández, “The Old Guard” sees Charlize Theron portraying Andromache of Scythia, aka “Andy,” an immortal. She has fought the good fight for centuries, to humanity’s benefit, and these days leads a team of others who can’t be killed, including their newest recruit, Nile (KiKi Layne). At its conclusion, we learn Andy’s onetime partner, Quynh (Veronica Ngô), has been freed from her underwater sarcophagus, which could mean bad things.

“The Old Guard 2” — which debuted on Netflix this week — is less of the same.

Penned, like its predecessor, by Rucka, the sequel picks up with Andy dealing with the fact that, as a result of an event from the first film, she has lost her immortality.

NETFLIX/AP

Charlize Theron plays Andy, an immortal, in “The Old Guard 2,” based on a series of graphic novels.

Like her CIA operative pursuer-turned-ally, James Copley (Chiwetel Ejiofor), she not only can be killed but also (gasp!) gets a hangover when she drinks a lot.

She soon learns of Quynh’s resurfacing from former team member Booker (Matthias Schoenaerts), exiled for betraying the team and paid a visit by Quynh at the end of “The Old Guard.”

Quynh’s strings are being pulled by a mysterious new figure, Discord (Uma Thurman, “Pulp Fiction”), who’s briefly introduced in the film’s opening scene. Who she is and what she wants and why are eventually revealed.

In the meantime, Andy turns to an old friend, another newcomer to the narrative, Tuah (Henry Golding), an immortal who maintains and guards the group’s history.

Director Victoria Mahoney (“Yelling to the Sky”) helms this affair and struggles to find the rhythm established by the director of “The Old Guard,” Gina Prince-Bythewood. “The Old Guard 2” moves at a clunky pace, never allowing the viewer to get swept up in what’s happening.

Worse, Rucka’s screenplay fails to serve most of its characters.

It sure feels like everyone from Rucka to Mahoney to Theron, who’s counted among the movie’s producers, are following marching orders to prioritize setting up a yet-to-be-ordered third installment in the series. The ending is a particular bummer, as it is neither a satisfying conclusion to a part of the story nor a juicy cliffhanger.

“The Old Guard 2” is rated R for sequences of graphic violence and some language. Running time: 105 minutes. Now available on Netflix.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Always a fiesta in Sevilla, Spain

Sevilla, the capital of Spain's southern Andalucía region, is as soulful a place as I've ever been. It's a wonderful-to-be-alive kind of town, where the color of flamenco dresses, melodies from guitars, click of castanets and heat off the streets combine into an exhilarating hum.

The gateway to the New World in the 16th century, Sevilla boomed during Spain's golden age. The explorers Amerigo Vespucci and Ferdinand Magellan sailed from its great river harbor, discovering abundant sources of gold, silver, cocoa and tobacco. For a time, these New World riches turned Sevilla into Spain's largest and wealthiest city.

Today's Sevilla has its share of impressive sights, including the world's largest Gothic cathedral (with the tomb of Christopher Columbus) and a fantastic Moorish palace and garden (the Alcázar). But the top thing to experience here is the hum of street scenes and the city's unique traditions.

Sevilla swings easily from the sacred to the secular. Holy Week (between Palm Sunday and Easter) is celebrated with intense devotional fervor here. Over the course of the week, about 100 floats depicting some aspect of the Passion of Jesus are paraded over the cobblestones at all hours by the faithful.

Rick Steves

As the religious holiday wraps up, the mood shifts to party mode. A week or two after Easter, much of Sevilla packs into its vast fairgrounds for the April Fair. Countless tents line the lanes, each one a private party zone of a family, club or association. It's a week of all-nighters, with the focus on dancing, drinking and socializing.

Sevilla is the birthplace of another kind of party: flamenco. It's still the best place to experience this emotive dance-and-music form of snapping fingers, stamping feet and clicking castanets. Many of the concerts in town are designed for tourists, but they are real and riveting. If you stay up to the wee hours, you might be lucky enough to catch a late-night set in a casual bar.

RICK STEVES/Rick Steves' Europe

An "abacería" — part grocery store, part tapas bar — is the ideal place to rub elbows with locals.

Even food is a theatrical event in this town. The colorful tapas tradition got its start in Andalucía, and Sevilla is the region's noshing capital. Classic, old-school tapas bars are everywhere, but nowadays gourmet places, with spiffed-up decor and creative menus, are the rage. If you want a good "restaurant" experience, your best value is to find a trendy tapas bar that offers table seating and sit down to enjoy some raciones (shareable dinner plate-size portions).

I always learn something new when I travel. This time in Sevilla, my tapas guide demonstrated how quality jamón (cured ham), sliced thin, will stick to a plate when you upend it. I'm not sure what that has to do with quality, but one thing I am sure of: When in Spain, life's too short to eat mediocre jamón. At least once, pay extra for the best ham on the list (ibérico).

For a different twist on tapas, look for an abacería, an old-time grocery store that doubles as a tapas bar. The combination isn't completely unexpected, as many tapas chefs rely on Spain's high-quality canned foods in composing their tasty tidbits. Squeeze into the back room of one of these spots, and you're squeezing back in time.

Rubbing elbows with local eaters in an abacería, surrounded by tinned sardines and canned peaches, you'll feel like you're in on a secret ... almost as if it were a kind of Spanish speakeasy.

This article is used with the permission of Rick Steves' Europe (www.ricksteves.com). Rick Steves writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio and organizes European tours.

Adrenaline-fueled outdoor adventures await in Europe

While adults exploring Europe might swoon over its historical sites and cultural riches, a younger generation may want for nothing more than space to play and thrills to be had. Here are some ideas for adventurous and close-to-nature experiences this summer:

Mountain coasters: The German term "sommerrodelbahn" refers to a sledding track or toboggan run built into the contours of a steep hill or mountainside that can be used without snow or ice. After riding a chairlift or being towed uphill, chutes or rails carry carry riders swiftly downwards, reaching speeds of up to 25 miles per hour as they go.

Karen Bradbury

Germany's longest such attraction, the Hasenhorn Coaster, is in the Black Forest town of Todtnau. The nearly two-mile descent features enough bends and tummy-twisting drops to give even grown-ups a thrill. The attraction remains open year-round. Adults pay 14.50 euros for the up-and-down trip; a single ride for children ages 4 through 15 costs 12.50 euros. Online: hasenhorn-rodelbahn.de

Similar attractions can be found throughout Germany; other ones close to U.S. bases include the Sommerrodelbahn in Garmisch-Partenkirchen or the Eifel-Coaster Sommerrodelbahn in Gondorf, close to Spangdahlem. Those based in the United Kingdom have a single option: the Fforest Coaster in Betws-y-Coed, Wales. The alpine coaster is just one of many thrills available at the recreational facility known as Zip World; other possible experiences include ziplines, a freefall or taking a turn on a massive, five-passenger swing. Online: zipworld.co.uk

Ziplines: While acrophobics would rather give a miss to the Hirschgrund Zipline Area in Germany's Black Forest region, thrill-seekers will revel in this park built into the stunning natural landscape of the Kinzig Valley. Here, brave adventurers make their way along a circular route leading high above slopes and valleys, hills and streams. Each of the seven ziplines to be traversed has its own particular charm and character, but the biggest adrenaline kick is promised by the ride along the Gründlebahn. Towering 270 feet about ground and stretching a third of a mile long, the zipline is rated by many as the best single ride in the country. A trip along the parcourse accompanied by a guide (the only way to do it) costs 59 euros adults and 52 euros for youth ages 12-16. Reservations are essential. Online: hirschgrund-zipline.de

iStock

Germany has several mountain coaster tracks, for which gravity, not mechanics, provides the thrills.

One of the world's fastest ziplines can be found in Wales at the aforementioned Zip World. Velocity 2, embedded in Penrhyn Quarry in Snowdonia, allows its riders to achieve speeds of up to 100 miles per hour along its nearly mile-long course. The attraction's four parallel lines allow friends and family to experience the adrenaline rush simultaneously. A ride on Velocity 2 starts at 92 UK pounds ($126).

Those based in Italy can make way to the Dolomites for their high-flying adventures. The Adrenaline X-Treme Adventures park in San Vigilio di Marebbe is home to a series of seven ziplines that stretch over a combined distance of 2 miles. At one point, the void beneath one's feet is roughly the equivalent in height to a 30-story building. A guided adventure along the course costs 89 euros. Online: adrenalineadventures.it/en

Via Ferrata: A via ferrata, or "iron road" in Italian, is a fixed climbing route through mountainous terrain. Steel cables, ladders and other fixtures allow newbies to get a taste of the thrills experienced by more seasoned climbers. Helmets, clips and harnesses greatly reduces the chance of accidents and injury. Germany-based adventurers could opt for a two-mile trek along the Calmont Klettersteig, which passes through the Mosel Valley, home to some of the steepest vineyards in Europe. Walkers wishing to take on this particular hike should be sure of foot and not prone to dizziness. At just a half-hour's driving distance from the Geierlay Suspension Bridge, the two attractions would combine nicely as a fun-packed and inexpensive day out. Online: tinyurl.com/ 5b7z8c5d

Canyoning: The jumping, rappelling and climbing demanded by the sport of canyoning makes it the most active of our options. The LOLGarda outdoor activity provider uses northern Italy's Lake Garda and other smaller lakes such as Ledro, Idro and Tenno as its playgrounds. Adventurers are led through a course along one of the rivers that serve as feeders to the lakes. A four-hour trek along the Rio Nero costs 75 euros. Online: lol-garda.it/en

Canyoning can also be enjoyed near Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Canyoning-Tour provides three options. The "Who Made You" tour featuring slides, jumps and abseiling provides beginners with an introduction to the sport. A four- to five-hour tour including use of all necessary equipment goes for 109 euros. Tours for more advanced participants are also available. Online: canyoning-tour.de

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

The Taliban wants you to visit Afghanistan

Number of foreigners traveling to the country increasing, to the satisfaction of government reliant on tourism profits

BY ELENA BECATOROS
Associated Press

By plane, motorbike, camper van and even on bicycles, tourists are beginning to discover Afghanistan, with solo travelers and tour groups gradually venturing into a country that until recently was wracked by war.

And the country's Taliban government, which seized power more than three years ago but has yet to be formally recognized by any other nation, is more than happy to welcome them.

"The Afghan people are warm and welcoming and wish to host tourists from other countries and engage with them," Deputy Minister of Tourism Qudratullah Jamal told The Associated Press in an interview last month. "Tourism brings many benefits to a country. We have considered those benefits and aim for our nation to take full advantage of them."

AP photos

Women visit the Sakhi Shah-e Mardan Shrine in Kabul, Afghanistan, June 7, 2023. While dress and other types of restrictions are strictly enforced on Afghan women, they are more relaxed for foreigners.

A potentially lucrative industry

Tourism is a vital, multibillion-dollar industry for many countries.

Afghanistan's isolation on the international stage, largely because of the Taliban's restrictions on women and girls, has left much of its 41 million people mired in poverty. As it struggles to attract foreign investment, the lucrative potential of tourism is far from lost on the government.

"We are currently earning a considerable amount of revenue from this industry, and we are hopeful it will grow even more in the future," Jamal said, noting money spent by visitors can reach more layers of society than revenue from other industries. "We are optimistic this sector will evolve into a large economy, bringing significant benefits. It plays an important role in strengthening our national economy."

Trickle rather than a flood

Tourist visas are quick and easy to obtain and flights from major transit hubs such as Dubai and Istanbul operate several times a week. The government has even set up a training institute for men — and it is only for men — seeking jobs in the hospitality and tourism sector.

While visitor numbers are still very much a trickle rather than a flood, they are increasing. Nearly 9,000 foreign tourists visited Afghanistan last year, while nearly 3,000 people visited in the first three months of this year, Jamal said.

Four decades of near-continuous conflict kept nearly all vacationers away from this landlocked country of towering mountains, deep gorges and millennia of history.

The Taliban's takeover from a U.S.-backed government in August 2021 stunned the world and sent thousands of Afghans fleeing. But with the insurgency over, the bloodshed from frequent bombings and suicide attacks all but ended too.

Attacks still occur, however. An Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan remains active and gunmen killed six people, including three Spanish tourists, in a May 2024 attack in Bamiyan, one of the country's main tourist attractions where centuries-old giant Buddhas carved into the cliffs were blown up by the Taliban in 2001.

While Western countries still advise against travel to Afghanistan, a drop in violence from the two decades of U.S.-led military presence is indisputable, as the government is keen to point out.

"Afghanistan has gone through many years of war and hardship. Now, we want tourists to come and see the true traditions and customs of Afghans, to understand Afghan life, creativity and resilience," Jamal said, noting there was "comprehensive security across Afghanistan."

An ethical dilemma

Critics question the ethics of foreigners visiting Afghanistan for pleasure when its government discriminates so heavily against half the country's population.

Education beyond primary school level is banned for girls and women, and few professions are open to them. Women cannot enter parks, gardens or gyms.

Beauty salons are forbidden. Authorities dictate how women dress and have demanded they cover their faces in public, a decree still flouted by many, particularly in Kabul.

Some visitors say they contemplated the ethics, but ultimately wanted to see the situation for themselves.

French-Peruvian Illary Gomez said she and her British partner, James Liddiard, debated for about a year whether to drive through Afghanistan as part of their U.K.-to-Japan camper van journey.

"Some things didn't feel morally right," she said.

But once here, they said they found a warm, hospitable and welcoming people and beautiful landscapes. They didn't feel their presence was any form of support for the Taliban. By traveling, "you put money in the hands of the people, not the government," Liddiard said.

Building bridges

The treatment of women is particularly sensitive for government officials. Jamal declined to comment on the subject beyond saying male and female visitors were welcome.

"Those who respect our laws and traditions have already come and can continue to come," he said.

While most restrictions are strictly enforced on Afghan women, they are far more relaxed for foreigners. Although they must still wear a headscarf in public, foreign women are more likely to gain entry into some restricted areas such as parks and are rarely asked to cover their faces in public.

Opening the country to foreign visitors was also a way of building bridges, Jamal said.

"It is a great way to promote interaction between the people of different countries. It helps build international relations and is also beneficial for trade," he told the AP. "When foreigners come here, Afghans also learn a lot from them. In addition to expanding commerce, tourism also helps foster mutual understanding, cultural exchange and strengthens talents as people learn from one another."

A foreign traveler seeing the country with his own eyes "creates closeness, builds connections and fosters trust among people," Jamal said. "They will respect each other's culture and the distance between peoples will diminish.

"So this is not just economic development; it also brings spiritual and political benefits," he said.

"It is a great way to promote interaction between the people of different countries. It helps build international relations and is also beneficial for trade. When foreigners come here, Afghans also learn a lot from them. In addition to expanding commerce, tourism also helps foster mutual understanding, cultural exchange and strengthens talents as people learn from one another."

Deputy Minister of Tourism Qudratullah Jamal

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

PHOTOS BY BRENDAN MCCABE/For The Washington Post

Megan Carpenter, Chris Thomas and Lacia Sommars raise a toast with bottles of Underberg in Snappy's Small Bar in Washington, D.C.'s Petworth neighborhood. The German digestif is riding a recent wave of popularity at bars and taprooms in D.C. and around the United States.

Underberg: a sign of a good bar

Resurgent tiny bottles of German digestif important because of their status as a food

A 0.7-ounce bottle really is tiny.

BY TONY REHAGEN
Special to The Washington Post

The wall behind the bar at Lost Generation Brewing Company is a shrine to a distant time. A row of unmarked taps and the handwritten tap list are flanked by shelves sparsely adorned with backlit antiques. There's a gramophone, patinaed jazz-age horns, a manual typewriter, a candlestick telephone and a few dusty volumes of Fitzgerald, Hemingway and Gertrude Stein, who inspired the name of the brewery in Washington, D.C.'s Eckington neighborhood.

Beneath the relics of America's Roaring Twenties sits something that dates back much further and hails from much farther away. On the counter rests a small display of tiny bottles, each wrapped carefully in brown shipping paper and labeled with a green-and-white sticker that reads "Underberg." Inside is 0.7 ounces — 20 milliliters — of herbal bitters made in Rheinberg, Germany, since 1846.

Founder Hubert Underberg created his namesake product as a digestif, an alcoholic swallow served after a meal thought to aid digestion. But this liqueur isn't necessarily here to help your food-truck tacos settle. The reason these palm-sized bottles are popping up at breweries, dives and bars across the D.C. region and throughout the country — in countertop racks, miniature green delivery trucks and bandoliers hanging behind the bar — is in part a triumph of branding. But it's also something of a secret handshake among bartenders, brewers and beverage enthusiasts in the know.

"It's a nice little wink," says Jared Pulliam, head brewer and owner of Lost Generation. "You know when you see it; someone behind the bar is not new to being behind the bar. You can presume ownership has experience."

But the "secret" behind the wink-and-nod is actually a trick of the beverage trade, a long-standing regulatory loophole that makes this unassuming little bottle of 44% alcohol more of a necessity to brewers and bar owners than a novelty.

Herr Underberg originally concocted his German brand of bitters using herbs and botanicals from 43 countries, though the exact ingredients and extraction and distillation techniques are tightly kept secrets, known only to select members of five generations of Underbergs.

"It's all-natural; no added sugar," says Jeff Wells, Underberg brand ambassador for D.C., Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. "The recipe and processing methods have been secrets held and closely guarded by the Underberg family since 1846."

The Underberg label instructs that, unlike most digestifs, which are meant to be taken slowly after a filling meal, Underberg is "not to be sipped but taken all at once and quickly because of its aromatic strong taste." The label also boldly claims (if in very small print): "It is not a beverage."

In a sense, the United States government agrees. The Food and Drug Administration classifies Underberg as a food product, not an alcoholic drink, despite it consisting of nearly half alcohol (making it 88 proof). This helps explain why, even though it was sold in the U.S. starting in 1860, Underberg saw a domestic boost in popularity during Prohibition — because it was not, in fact, illegal.

This strange classification might explain Underberg's recent resurgence as well. When Lost Generation's Pulliam left his native D.C. for Sonoma, Calif., in 2014, to brew beer for Lagunitas, he noticed that all the bars and taprooms had Underberg behind the bar. In California, he was told, liquor licenses were hard to come by, so most establishments settled for permission to sell beer and wine. For drinkers looking for a shot in these places, Underberg provided a convenient and legal fix.

"My wife runs restaurants, and we knew all the bartenders," Pulliam said. "After work, we'd go grab a beer and everyone would do a round of Underberg. That's how I became indoctrinated."

Meanwhile, back in D.C., the green-labeled bottles began to sprout up throughout the metro area.

"It really picked up steam in 2016, and since then we've seen exponential growth," Wells said.

Area professionals push Underberg as an after-meal digestif, Wells said, but also as something you take before or during drinking to assist in digestion of beer. Some adherents swear by it as a preemptive hangover cure; others wait to slip it into their coffee as a hair-of-the-dog salve the next day. Barkeeps and mixologists all over have started incorporating Underberg into their mixed drinks, riding the recent wave of fascination with bitter-forward European-style cocktails (think Negroni).

For instance, Philadelphia's Human Robot brewery, which playfully refers to Underberg as a "liquid tummy rub" on its menu, puts the tiny bottle upside down in a minibottle of Fever-Tree ginger beer for a cocktail they call "Feverberg."

"The sweetness of the ginger beer cuts the bitterness," says Human Robot co-founder Jake Atkinson. "It looks good and works as a good-tasting cocktail. And it's really good for your tummy."

And of course, there are those who take the label at face value and down it in one swallow.

"People are always looking for that dare shot," said David Grenaldo, co-owner of Snappy's Small Bar in the Petworth neighborhood of D.C. "It's something you buy for all your friends to see their reaction. They're often surprised when it's not that bad."

Grenaldo also credits the company's loyalty program as a reason for the brand's success. Bars and individuals can turn in the tiny green caps in exchange for merchandise: 48 caps for a license plate holder; 384 for a mini 1930s-model Herb Mobile display; 480 for a green suede belt that holds 12 bottles.

"We have a couple thousand caps," Grenaldo said. "But we heard a rumor that they might come out with an Underberg Vespa for a million caps, so we're saving up."

When Pulliam returned to D.C. in 2019, Underberg was still scarce in the area. But when he opened Lost Generation, the District had a law that breweries could serve only their own beers at their taprooms — and Pulliam knew a way to add a shot to the menu. Not that it was ordered that frequently at the time.

"When someone ordered a round of beers and Underbergs, we always asked 'Where do you work?'" he says. "It was almost always someone in the industry."

Since then, Pulliam has spotted the little bottles behind the bars of more and more taprooms, breweries and restaurants. He rarely acknowledges the display, much less orders one of the tiny bottles. But all the same, he takes comfort in knowing that the odds are good that the person making the drink knows what they're doing.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

The castle in Eltville am Rhein, Germany, was built in the 14th century and partially destroyed by Sweden in the Thirty Years War. Today, it houses a museum in its tower and is surrounded by gardens. Most of its thousands of blooms are roses, which peak in June. Some varieties bloom for a few months afterward.

See, smell, taste what makes it special

The Rhine River town of Eltville am Rhein famous for both its blooms, sekt

BY MICHAEL ABRAMS
Stars and Stripes

Eltville am Rhein invites visitors to slow down, have a glass or two of wine and stroll through centuries of history along the banks of the Rhine River.

Germany's oldest town in the Rheingau region, Eltville is known not just for its sparkling wines but for its devotion to roses, which bloom through summer and into fall.

Eltville gained its city rights way back in 1332, and its castle overlooking the Rhine dates to the same time.

The best place to start exploring Eltville, which is just down the road from Wiesbaden, is the 14th-century Elector's Castle. It houses the tourist information office and a small museum.

But to get there you will likely pass another town attraction: a collection of half-timbered houses, some many centuries old.

Pick up a walking tour map of the town at the tourist office, then start climbing the 118 steps of the castle tower. There are four floors to check out, the second of which is called the Count's Hall and was once the living and working quarters.

Up a floor is an exhibition dedicated to Johannes Gensfleisch, better known as Gutenberg. The inventor of the printing press was born and died on the other side of the Rhine in Mainz, but had family in Eltville. And some of the earliest versions of his press were used here.

Keep climbing the stairs and you come to a room used for temporary exhibitions, the current one made up of works by local artists. From the top floor of the 78-foot-tall tower you get a view of the town, the vineyards and the Rhine.

On the descent, don't stop at the ground floor. Keep going down the spiral staircase until you reach the former dungeon, with its 8-foot-thick walls.

Back outside, it's time to stop and smell the flowers. Two wonderful gardens have been planted in what was once the castle moat. Most of its thousands of blooms are roses.

Although the peak is in June, many varieties bloom for a few months afterward.

Roses were big business in Eltville in the 19th century until the local industry faded after World War I. The planting of the castle roses began in 1979, and flower lovers have gotten to enjoy the thrill ever since.

Across the battlements is the nicely

SEE ELTVILLE ON PAGE 23

People enjoy a sunny day on Schwalbacherstrasse, a pedestrian shopping street in Eltville am Rhein, Germany. There are also shops on Erbacher Strasse.

On the QT

Location: Eltville is about 12 miles west of Wiesbaden's Clay Kaserne, and about 65 miles from Vogelweh in Kaiserslautern.
Hours: Tourist info office and Eltville Castle, 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. daily from April to October, and 11 a.m.-3:30 p.m. daily from November to March. Castle gardens, 9:30 a.m.-7 p.m. daily from April through mid-October, and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily the rest of the year.
Costs: Parking costs around 1.50 euros per hour at parking garages. Entrance to the castle tower is 3.50 euros for adults, 2.50 euros for people ages 12 to 18, and free for children 11 and under.
Information: Online: eltville.de

Michael Abrams

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Sorry, Soraya

Naples teahouse's Persian cuisine is nicely plated but misses mark on taste, freshness

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

There is no doubt that the best of southern Italian cooking can be found in Naples' plentiful trattorias and pizzerias. But sometimes you need to scratch a different itch and explore the city's other culinary options.

A yearning for Middle Eastern food recently led me to Soraya Persian Taberna and Tea House in the city's Centro Storico, or historical district.

The family-owned restaurant, opened about two years ago, features a wealth of Persian dishes from appetizers such as soups, dips and salads to beef, chicken and veal kebab platters with rice.

A dining companion and I recently arrived just before our 7:30 p.m. reservation to find a man, who turned out to be our server sitting outside looking at his cellphone and blithely unaware of our presence.

Inside, the restaurant was nicely decorated in a Persian teahouse theme, but the air seemed stale and had a slightly unpleasant odor.

That unpromising beginning behind us, we hoped our experience would improve. It didn't.

With several seemingly enticing appetizer options, we found it difficult to choose just one and eventually settled on two traditional Persian dishes.

The kashke bademjan arrived nicely plated, star-shaped and topped with walnuts. The mixture of fried eggplant, onion, garlic, mint and kashke, or whey, was served at room temperature with lavash bread on the side.

It was deftly seasoned, with no single ingredient overpowering the others. But the lavash had not been warmed as is typical in most restaurants.

We also ordered tahdig, fried lavash studded with rice on one side. The ultrathin bread was crispy but too oily, although the rice added a nice, chewy texture.

Each appetizer was passable but appeared not to have been recently made or consisting of stale ingredients. The portions were fine for two, but larger parties will want to consider ordering several dishes if the intent is to share.

For the main course, my dining companion ordered mirzaghasemi, an eggplant dip with roasted tomatoes accompanied by basmati rice and the option of eggs.

The eggplant dip was flavorful but virtually indistinguishable from the kashke bademjan, and the rice was too oily for her taste. The garnish of watery tomatoes was unpalatable, she said.

I ordered adaspolo, a rice dish featuring lentils and dried fruit accompanied by veal meatballs, which I asked him to omit because I'm a vegetarian. He happily obliged, but did not offer a substitute.

The dish arrived at room temperature generously accented with sultanas, slivered dates and nuts, such as walnuts. It was OK, but lacked freshness and flavor.

It also was concerning that the menu did not list the nuts, a serious omission for people with allergies.

We finished our meal with a sampling of the day's desserts: baklava flavored with rose water and a moist cake with almonds and pistachio cream.

Each arrived nicely plated. But the baklava was soggy and each dessert lacked any defining flavor.

Sadly, they were the highlight of the meal.

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AFTER HOURS ITALY

Soraya Persian Taberna and Tea House

Address: Via Michele Zannotti 11A, Naples, Italy
Hours: Tuesday-Thursday, 12:15-4 p.m. and 7-10:30 p.m.; Friday, 12:15-4 p.m. and 7-11:30 p.m.; Saturday, 12:30-4 p.m. and 7 p.m.-12:30 a.m.; Sunday, 12:30-4 p.m. Closed on Monday.
Prices: 5-17 euros for appetizers; 3-7 euros for sides; 13-17 euros for stews and meat/rice platters; 17-32.50 euros for kebab platters; 4-7 euros for desserts; 6-7 euros for wine by the glass or 17.50-27 euros by the bottle; 3-5 euros for beer; and 2.50-12 euros for water, soft drinks, teas and specialty drinks. Menu available in English.
Information: Phone: +39 329 166 8383, Instagram: @soraya.persian.taberna

Alison Bath

PHOTOS BY ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

Patrons at Soraya Persian Taberna and Tea House in Naples, Italy, are seated at tables in one of three intimate dining rooms decorated with Persian art, collectibles and fabrics.

This platter includes mirzaghasemi, a blend of eggplant and roasted tomatoes, with rice and optional eggs.

Adaspolo features rice with lentils and dried fruit, such as dates and raisins. It comes with optional veal meatballs.

Eltville: Wine industry part of town history in past as well as present

FROM PAGE 22

laid-out Amtsgarten, or official garden. It gets its name from when a local court was in the castle. Today it has more roses and a shady linden tree grove.

After leaving the castle, grab something to eat or drink at the marketplace. It features a fountain with water flowing from wine barrels loaded on a ship, a nod to the wine once transported downriver.

Afterward, stroll upriver along the Rhine promenade. Eventually you will come to Burg Crass, a castle built in the 11th and 12th centuries. Today it is the oldest building in Eltville, but then it was outside the town's medieval walls.

Back in town you will see the enormous Stadtturm, part of an old town gate. In the 18th century, it was the city prison.

Check out the shops on Erbacher Strasse and pedestrian Schwalbacherstrasse before heading back toward the river, past wineries and the St. Peter and Paul Church. Construction on the Catholic house of worship began in the mid-14th century.

Also, be sure to visit the wine tasting stand on the bank of the Rhine. Here, visitors can sample vintages produced in the town's wineries from the grapes of the famed Rheingau.

To get a fuller introduction to Eltville through sparkling wine, which Germans call sekt, go during the first weekend in July for the Sekt and Biedermeier Festival.

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PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

A narrow, half-timbered house-lined lane in Eltville am Rhein, Germany. The town is also famous for these old houses. Some are many centuries old.

Water flows from wine barrels on a fountain in the market square in Eltville am Rhein, Germany. The wine produced here was once shipped down the Rhine River in boats.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Photos by Kelly Agee

Fukasawa Tiny Museum is a private museum that's a 15-minute walk from Ajisai Mountain, known for its 10,000 hydrangeas.

Fairy-tale setting for tiny treasures

Museum in western Tokyo revives 1970s puppet magic

By Kelly Agee
For Stars and Stripes

The Fukasawa Tiny Museum, west of Yokota Air Base in the mountains of Akiruno city, is home to an enchanting collection of wooden figures — large and small — familiar to Japanese TV viewers from 45 years ago.

The museum preserves the gnome-like carvings — known as the Zizi Forest Fairies — created by sculptor Akimitsu Tomonaga for "The Tale of Purinpurin." The NHK puppet show followed Princess Purinpurin and her friends around the world in search of her hometown. It was broadcast in Japan from 1979 to 1982.

Fukasawa Tiny Museum is a private museum that's a 15-minute walk from Ajisai Mountain, known for its 10,000 hydrangeas.

As guests enter the short trail to the museum, they are greeted by wooden Zizi Forest Fairies. The gravel trail is surrounded by greenery and koi ponds built by Tomonaga. It is truly a fairy-tale setting — a great place to get away from the bustling streets of Tokyo.

Before entering the museum, guests exchange their shoes for slippers. The museum displays are only in Japanese, so have a smartphone camera translation app ready.

The museum has about 100 puppets from the show. Their amazing details have been well preserved since their stint on television.

The collection includes 50 handmade works — wooden carvings, block prints and lamps. Everything in the museum was created out of wood, paper or stone. Most of the carvings are nature-themed, including dioramas of the ZiZi Forest Fairies in wooden huts in the forest and carvings of animals.

After exploring the museum, guests can take a break for hot or cold coffee or tea in the museum's café. The drinks are served with a complimentary sweet potato pastry. All the wooden tables and chairs were handmade by Akimitsu.

It was nice to sit outside beside the koi pond and enjoy the sounds of nature while sipping tea.

The Fukasawa Tiny Museum preserves the gnome-like carvings created by sculptor Akimitsu Tomonaga for "The Tale of Purinpurin," a Japanese TV show.

The museum has about 100 puppets from "The Tale of Purinpurin," which was broadcast in Japan from 1979 to 1982.

On the QT

Directions: A 30-minute drive from Yokota Air Base, Japan, at 492 Fukasawa, Akiruno, Tokyo 190-0172.
Times: Open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday through Tuesday.
Costs: 500 yen
Food: An onsite café serves beverages with a complimentary sweet potato pastry.
Information: 042-595-0336

Kelly Agee

This soup fights heat with heat

Traditional Korean meal popular in summer is specialty of eatery near Camp Humphreys

BY YOOJIN LEE
Stars and Stripes

AFTER HOURS S. KOREA

At the height of South Korea's sweltering summer, lines stretch outside many local eateries as diners seek a centuries-old remedy for the heat: Samgyetang, or ginseng chicken soup.

The tradition centers on Boknal — the three hottest days of the lunar calendar: Chobok, Joongbok and Malbok — which usually fall between July and August. Rooted in Eastern philosophy and folk medicine, Boknal cuisine follows the belief of iyeolchiyeol, or "fighting heat with heat."

One popular destination near Camp Humphreys, Palace Black Hoof Mushroom Samgyetang, specializes in a variation of this nourishing broth that pays homage to royal court cuisine.

The restaurant's signature dish features a whole young chicken stuffed with a ball of herb-infused rice and simmered in a broth enriched by 16 medicinal ingredients, including stachys affinis, also known as Chinese artichoke.

Served piping hot in a traditional earthenware bowl that retains heat well beyond the final spoonful, this soup is both mild and fragrant. Salt is offered on the side, allowing diners to season to taste or to use as a dip for the tender chicken.

The rice — hidden inside the bird and infused with herbal flavor — is best enjoyed when spooned into a separate dish and dipped into the soup gradually.

Side dishes play an essential role. Crisp pickled radish and onions, fresh salad and classic kimchi help balance the menu's warmth with cool, acidic crunch. The experience becomes a rhythm: One sip of soup, one bite of a chilled side, and repeat.

Ingredients like ginseng and chicken promote restorative energy, replenishing nutrients lost through sweat and helping the body withstand extreme temperatures, according to traditional medicine. The inclusion of black hoof mushroom — revered for its immune-boosting and cognitive benefits — is a nod to the restaurant's aim of re-creating a dish fit for royalty.

Priced at 15,000 won (about $11) for a whole chicken and 10,000 won for a half portion, this meal is hearty and affordable.

But diners be warned: The kitchen closes from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., and the soup often sells out by early afternoon. On Boknal days, reservations are strongly recommended.

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PHOTOS BY YOOJIN LEE/Stars and Stripes

Palace Black Hoof Mushroom Samgyetang uses a broth enriched by 16 medicinal ingredients, including stachys affinis, also known as Chinese artichoke.

Palace Black Hoof Mushroom Samgyetang

Location: 72-5, Paengseongdaegyo-gil, Paengseong-eup, Pyeongtaek-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea
Hours: Open daily, except Sundays, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., with a break between 2:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.
Prices: From 10,000 won for one portion to 70,000 won for a huge pot that serves up to five.
Dress: Casual
Directions: A five-minute drive from the Yoon Gate at Camp Humphreys.
Information: 0507-1365-5016; no English menu

Yoojin Lee

Side dishes play an essential role for samgyetang. Crisp pickled radish and onions, fresh salad and classic kimchi help balance the menu's warmth with cool, acidic crunch.

Dried bay leaves add layers of flavor to Portuguese-style beef skewers

BY CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL
Associated Press

On the Portuguese island of Madeira, espetadas are made by threading chunks of beef onto fresh-cut branches of bay and cooking the skewers over the embers of a fire. The bay infuses the meat with its unique menthol notes while also releasing a heady aroma.

In this streamlined take on espetadas, we pulverize dried bay leaves in a spice grinder to make a seasoned salt, mix in garlic and olive oil, then use the mixture to season the meat before threading it onto metal skewers and grilling over charcoal or gas.

Though a bit unconventional, we add tomatoes to these skewers and also make a simple Madeira reduction to finish the dish. Seasoned with garlic and some of the bay salt, the glaze-like sauce bolsters the flavors of the beef.

Espetada-Style Grilled Garlic and Bay Beef Skewers

Start to finish: 45 minutes
Servings: 4 to 6

Ingredients

10 dried bay leaves, crumbled
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
6 medium garlic cloves, finely grated (about 1½ tablespoons)
1 tablespoon plus 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
2 pounds beef sirloin tips or flat iron steak, cut into 1½-inch cubes
12 cherry tomatoes
½ cup Madeira (cheap is fine)
2 tablespoons salted butter, cut into 2 pieces and chilled

Directions

In a spice grinder, combine the bay, 1½ teaspoons salt and 1 teaspoon pepper, then pulverize to a fine powder. Transfer to a small bowl. In a medium bowl, combine 2 teaspoons of the bay salt, 1 tablespoon of garlic and 1 tablespoon oil, then mash with a fork until combined. Add the beef and toss, rubbing the seasonings into the meat. Thread the beef onto four 10- to 12-inch metal skewers alternating with the tomatoes; set aside.

In a small saucepan over medium, heat the remaining 2 teaspoons oil and the remaining bay salt, stirring, until fragrant and sizzling, about 3 minutes. Add the remaining 1½ teaspoons garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant and sizzling, about 10 seconds. Add the Madeira and bring to a simmer, then reduce to low and cook, stirring, until reduced to 2 tablespoons. Cover and set aside off heat.

Prepare a charcoal or gas grill. For a charcoal grill, ignite a large chimney of coals, let burn until lightly ashed over, then distribute evenly over one side of the grill bed; open the bottom grill vents.

Heat the grill, covered, for 5 to 10 minutes, then clean and oil the grate. For a gas grill, turn all burners to high and heat, covered, for 15 minutes, then clean and oil the grate.

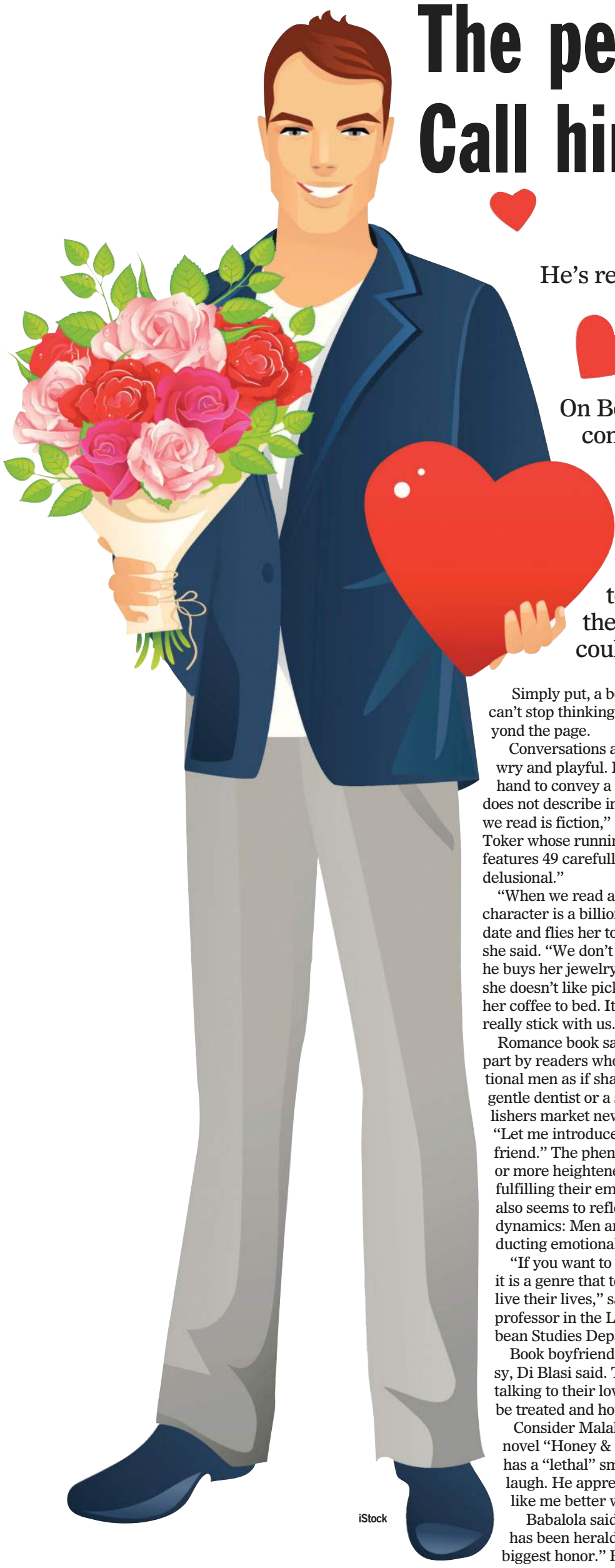
Place the skewers on the hot side of the grill (if using charcoal). Cook, uncovered, until the beef is lightly charred on both sides and the center of the thickest piece reaches 125°F for medium-rare, 10 to 14 minutes total, flipping once about halfway through.

Transfer to a platter, tent with foil and let rest while you make the sauce.

Set the pan with the Madeira reduction over medium and heat uncovered just until steaming. Remove from the heat, add the butter and swirl the pan until the butter is melted and the sauce is emulsified. Remove the meat from the skewers and drizzle with the sauce.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

The perfect man exists: Call him a 'book boyfriend'



iStock

By Jenny Singer
The Washington Post

He's respectful. He listens when she talks and remembers what she says. He would probably kill for her — and he would definitely die for her. Needless to say, he would not have to be begged to take out the trash.

He is what romance readers call a "book boyfriend." On BookTok and Bookstagram — the thriving social media communities dominated by romance and fantasy readers — the term has become ubiquitous. "Book boyfriend" describes characters who seem to have stridden, galloped or brooded onto the page from somewhere in the recesses of the reader's deepest desires. If you have ever closed your eyes and imagined waking up in Pemberley to a shirtless Fitzwilliam Darcy asking if you would do him the honor of accompanying him on a turn about the park, you could say that you've had a book boyfriend.

Simply put, a book boyfriend is a character you can't stop thinking about — and longing for — beyond the page.

Conversations about book boyfriends tend to be wry and playful. Readers use the term as shorthand to convey a particular reading experience. It does not describe imaginary friends. "We know what we read is fiction," said Jeanette Moreno, a BookToker whose running list of top book boyfriends features 49 carefully selected names. "We're not delusional."

"When we read a romance book, and the main character is a billionaire who takes a woman on a date and flies her to France, we know that's not real," she said. "We don't care that he's a billionaire or that he buys her jewelry. We care that he remembered she doesn't like pickles in her sandwich, and he takes her coffee to bed. It's the little thoughtful things that really stick with us."

Romance book sales continue to soar, bolstered in part by readers who pass around these lists of fictional men as if sharing the details of a particularly gentle dentist or a skilled massage therapist. Publishers market new romance books with the words, "Let me introduce you to your new book boyfriend." The phenomenon seems to speak to a new, or more heightened, way that some readers are fulfilling their emotional needs through fiction. It also seems to reflect strain in heterosexual dating dynamics: Men are from Mars; women are conducting emotional affairs with fictional astronauts.

"If you want to talk about what romance really is, it is a genre that tells us about how people want to live their lives," said Marcela Di Blasi, an assistant professor in the Latin American, Latinx and Caribbean Studies Department at Dartmouth.

Book boyfriends aren't just an escape into fantasy, Di Blasi said. They give readers a blueprint for talking to their loved ones about how they want to be treated and how they don't.

Consider Malakai, the romantic lead in the 2022 novel "Honey & Spice" by Bolu Babalola. Malakai has a "lethal" smile, and he makes the protagonist laugh. He appreciates her mind and tells her, "I like me better when I'm with you."

Babalola said that hearing that her character has been heralded as a book boyfriend is "the biggest honor." But she doesn't see the man she wrote as an exercise in fantasy.

"I want people to come away thinking that there's hope to find people like this in real life," Babalola said. "The things that I give a male protagonist, they are not far-fetched things: It's kindness, it's tenderness, it's seeing the woman as an individual and knowing her ambition."

Are fictional men, with their jutting cheekbones, thick wallets and bottomless wells of empathy, turning women off of flawed-yet-corporeal men? Female romance readers sometimes struggle with the question. Some men feel that book boyfriends have set an unreasonable ideal. Moreno said she hears from men all the time who tell women readers, "It's so hard for us because you compared us to the book characters that you read!" But are men really suffering from comparisons to their fictional counterparts?

Moreno says that in her actual dating life, few men do things as basic as offering to pay for coffee, holding a door open or texting her to ask if she got home safe. Reading about better men in novels, she said, "makes you think, 'Wait — no, I do deserve better!'"

Peeta Mellark of the Hunger Games series is considered an iconic book boyfriend for his yearning heart and strategic mind — so committed is he to Katniss that his love only wavers when the government injects him with a venomous mind-control substance.

On the other hand, book boyfriends in the "dark romance" genre commit acts that would send real boyfriends to prison. "I think readers are very aware that there is a difference between a fictional man on the page written by usually a woman or femme, and an actual human man who has been shaped by society," Di Blasi said.

Recently, Babalola gave a talk about her books at a high school. A student said she loved reading "Honey & Spice," and confessed: "It made me not want to date these guys in high school." If a guy wasn't going to act like her best friend, be fun to hang out with and add value to her life, what was the point?

Babalola was happy to hear a teenager articulate that you don't have to just accept whatever a man offers if it isn't what you really want. "At the crux of it, I just want women to maintain their standards," she said. "And here's the thing: I don't think it's necessarily 'high standards' to want a man who's kind, and loving, and tender."

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Friends who share a name

Kathleen West's new novel has fun with relatively simple concept

By Chris Hewitt
The Minnesota Star Tribune

If your name is Kathleen West and you're part of a class action suit or you've been mailed a coupon for new gutters or offered an exciting opportunity for a time-share in Lake Havasu City, Ariz., there's a decent chance the Minneapolis writer who shares your name has your mail.

"I have never met a Kathleen West in person, but I have a lot of emails for other Kathleens," said the ebullient West, over a Starbucks oat milk latte. "One time I got one that said I was named in a will and here are the sensitive financial details. So I thought: What would happen if I actually showed up at the family dinner I was mistakenly invited to?"

That notion inspired West's witty mystery "Making Friends Can Be Murder," in which all of the most important characters are named Sarah Jones.

"I started thinking, 'Who would join a group of same-namers? What kind of connections would they have?" asked West, who found similar groups on the internet. "One Kathleen West was a Josten's yearbook rep, so teachers would email me and say, 'I have a problem with page 37.' I felt very connected to them, since I'm a teacher, too."

Which got her thinking about what might happen if she actually met others with her name. The Sarahs in "Making Friends Can Be Murder" include a teenager who forms a club as part of her "Sarah Jones Project," two teachers, a nanny and a retired lawyer. Initially, they participate in group texts and yarn bombs but, when one of them is murdered, they decide to crack the case.

West

West helps us keep track of her Sarahs by identifying them by their ages: Thirty-nine, Thirty-four, Sixty-nine, etc. What with bodies mounting and the FBI questioning them, they have their hands full, but they have nothing on their author, who's married to attorney Dan West, has two sons and teaches seventh grade, in addition to writing four novels (previous books include "Are We There Yet?" and "Home or Away").

Her mom has described West, 47, as "intense," and she agrees.

"It's a pro and con about me as a person," said West. "I'm pretty rigid and disciplined and productive."

That means early bedtimes and wake-up times.

"I just get up in the morning before work and make myself sit there and write. If I have a deadline, it's 4:45-6:15," said West. "I can't stay up past 9 at night. It's always been that way. If I'm out with a friend, they know. I've left concerts at halftime before. Usually, I have a word count I have to hit — 1,000 words or whatever. If I hit it, I give myself a sticker."

Those stickers will sound familiar to anyone who had an elementary teacher for a parent. West keeps them in a notebook, where they mark her progress in the same way they can mark a student's. Even when she's not actually distributing stickers, West is thinking of them.

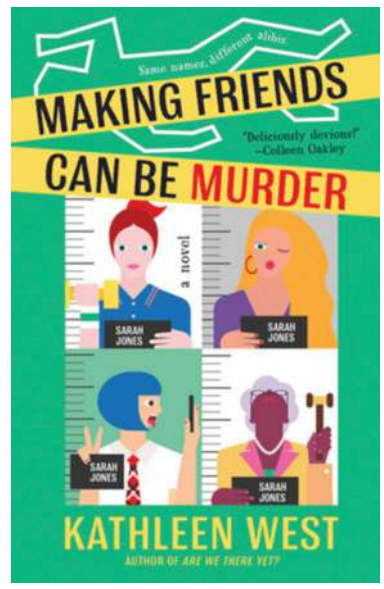
"I don't get an actual sticker, but I'm working with a coach who's helping me become a better teacher, and I'll sometimes say, 'Did I win a gold star for today?' Which makes me sound a little neurotic. Which is maybe accurate," jokes West.

Even with stickers as motivation, writing "Making Friends Can Be Murder" was not as breezy as its cozy, jokey tone might suggest. It was tricky to create a character who's a likable murderer, for instance. And, although none of the Sarahs is exactly like West, one does share a difficult biographical detail: the loss of a brother.

"The hardest part for me was my own mental state. My brother had died, and I had a lot of stops and starts, things that didn't work," said West.

The writer thought about giving up, even asking her agent if it would be possible to return her advance, but the discipline of sitting down to write every morning, whether or not she felt like it, helped her finish a book she's now "really happy with."

Another person who's happy



with it? West's mom, Miriam Williams.

"My third book, she was like, 'It's OK.' Or I think she said it wasn't her favorite," said West. "She loved these characters. I think she felt my second and third novels were too serious, but this one's lighter. So I went ahead and dedicated it to her."

When West's editor Kerry Donovan read the first draft, she pronounced it "optimistic, quirky and fun." West, who was thrilled, had a T-shirt made with that phrase on it, reminding her of the cast of Sarah Joneses she created.

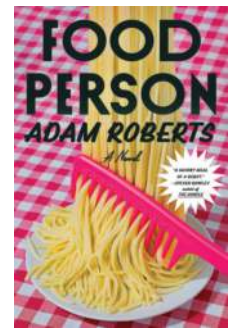
"I haven't thought it through or pitched my editor on any ideas. My agent advised me to write something different because we wouldn't know if a sequel was possible until this book came out and we saw how it did," said West, who's at work on a caper that involves NASA. "But my dream is to write a series. I love these people, and I would really like to revisit them."

'Food Person' a cozy comedy

By Chris Hewitt
The Minnesota Star Tribune

Adam Roberts, who has a food blog called "The Amateur Gourmet" and a podcast called "Lunch Therapy," makes his fiction debut with "Food Person," which the marketers would probably love to see referred to as "The Devil Wears Prada but with Food." And you know what? The book is a lot of fun, so let's go with it.

"Food Person" also has a kinship with the comic novels of Elinor Lipman, which are usually about a mildly screwed-up woman, probably Jewish and probably somewhere on the East Coast, who figures out her messy employment situation, makes things right with her meddling relatives and falls in love with Mr. Perfect.



In the novel, Isabella Pasternak is a New York food writer who is fired after a social media video goes south. Desperate for work, she agrees to ghostwrite a cookbook by a selfish actor/social media influencer who doesn't actually cook. Or eat.

Meanwhile, Isabella is being romanced by a hot chef and trying to figure out what's wrong with her mother, who buys mass quantities of expired food and tries to pawn the goods off on unhoused New Yorkers in the name of charity.

Roberts' blog and podcast seem to have kept him well connected to what's going on in the worlds of food and pop culture. "Food Person" has compelling behind-the-scenes details about the worlds of both influencers and food writers, which have in common — along with virtually every other job on the planet these days — the need to be telegenic and to strategically share enough personal "content" to constitute a "brand."

Roberts has nearly 87,000 Instagram followers, so he knows what he's talking about when describing gut-wrenching tragedies such as posting a meant-to-be-viral photo that goes nowhere.

As glib and amusing as it is, "Food Person" doesn't go especially deep on an emotional level.

As Isabella begins to understand that people wouldn't be able to shine in front of the camera without equally talented people who are content to stay behind it, there is a comforting sense that most readers already know these lessons.

'Murderland' digs into Northwest's serial killer problem

By Chris Hewitt
The Minnesota Star Tribune

Caroline Fraser has pulled a major switcheroo with her new book, "Murderland."

Fraser's last book, "Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder," won a Pulitzer Prize for its portrait of the folksy writer and her daughter, whom Fraser demonstrated was heavily involved in her mom's writing. But, whatever else he may have done, Pa Ingalls never ripped off anyone's face or assaulted them with a crowbar.

That's just the start for the people in "Murderland," including Ted Bundy, the Green River killer and others. A surprising number of them, it turns out, plied their trade in the Pacific Northwest — and, specifically, near Tacoma, Wash.

That's also where Fraser grew up. She thinks the area was so packed with killers in the '70s and '80s because of a copper smelting plant that belched lead, arsenic and other chemicals into the water and air.

There is scientific evidence to indicate that those metals can deform brains, but Fraser mostly doesn't offer the evidence in "Murderland."

Instead, she lays out harsh facts, in prose

that is indignant and even angry, tallying such a profusion of horrible crimes (homicidal and environmental) that some readers may cry "uncle."

In short, sharp segments, Fraser details hundreds of gruesome events. She also recounts Tacoma citizens (as well as residents of other smelter-adjacent areas) who died of painful diseases related to pollution.

Less germanely, she describes numerous violent accidents on a badly built bridge that connected Seattle to nearby Mercer Island and that Fraser believes is indicative of a lack of regard for human life.

As the title helpfully warns, "Murderland" is not for the faint of heart. Any connection between homicidal behavior and heavy metal poisoning may not be entirely clear yet, but Fraser wants to overwhelm us with a relentlessly awful series of data chunks. Mission accomplished.

Correlation is not causation, of course. But she links together threads that will fascinate you even if they're not exactly relevant:

Stephen King checked into the hotel he'd make famous in "The Shining" around the same time as Bundy kicked his murders into high gear? Interesting.

A weak Environmental Protection Agency made it easier for corporations to poison people? Also interesting.

Even if you're skeptical of Fraser's thesis, her book is often riveting. She has a terrific eye for telling — and, usually, horrifying — details. That's especially true of the parts about Bundy who, in Fraser's account, careens from one badly planned murder to another, barely holding down a series of surprisingly good jobs because he "spent so much time during the summer murdering people."

Fraser's book has outrage and attitude and, as in this example, good common sense:

"Recipes for making a serial killer may vary, including such ingredients as poverty, crude forceps deliveries, poor diet, physical and sexual abuse, brain damage and neglect. Many horrors play a role in warping these tortured souls, but what happens if we add a light dusting from the periodic table on top of all that trauma? How about a little lead in your tea?"

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Clockwise, from top left: Tate McRae; Leon Thomas; Sabrina Carpenter; Morgan Wallen; SZA and Kendrick Lamar; and Bad Bunny. Center: Lorde.

AP photos

Competition heating up

Predicting the hard-to-define song of the summer across multiple categories

By Maria Sherman
Associated Press

What makes a great song of the summer? Is it an up-tempo pop banger? Something with an earworm chorus? Does it need to feature the words "summer," "sunshine," or another synonym — "California" — in the title? How could anyone attempt a song of the summer after the late, great Beach Boy Brian Wilson composed them so expertly, anyway?

It very well may be subject to the eye (well, ear) of the beholder, but The Associated Press views the song of the summer as the one that takes over those warm months between June and August, the kind that blasts out of car speakers and at beach barbecues in equal measure. And that means many different things for many kinds of listeners.

So here are AP's song of the summer predictions across categories, with past victors for reference.

Song of the summer that inexplicably came out in January: "NUEVAYoL," Bad Bunny

A song of the summer doesn't actually have to arrive in summer, or even in spring. History has proved this time and time again, lest anyone forget that Olivia Rodrigo's "drivers license" hit at the top of the year in 2021. But this summer, like every summer, is about Bad Bunny. On his latest album, "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio pulls from Puerto Rico's rich musical history and hybridizes it. He does so from the very opener, "NUEVAYoL," which samples the fittingly named 1975 salsa hit from El Gran Combo, "Un Verano en Nueva York" ("A Summer in New York").

Past champion: "Boy's a Liar PT. 2," PinkPantheress, Ice Spice (2023)

Song of the summer for the chronically online: "Tonight," PinkPantheress

An internet hero releases another super hit: PinkPantheress' "Tonight" is an undeniable good time; all bassline house meets hyperpop vocals with a naughty chorus. The 24-year-old British singer-songwriter has proved she's got so much more to offer than a few

SEE SUMMER ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEW

Summer: Lorde returns to introspective electropop on breakup song of the season

FROM PAGE 28

viral hits — but her huge songs that blow up online? They tend to stay. That's more than can be said about past winners in this category.

Past champion: "Million Dollar Baby," Tommy Richman (2024)

Breakup song of the summer: "What Was That," Lorde

Lorde's first new single in four years recalls the clever synth-pop of her 2017 album "Melodrama," casting aside the folk detour of 2021's "Solar Power." "What Was That" is reserved revelation, introspective electropop that takes a measured look at a relationship's dissolution. It feels good, and bad, which is the point.

Past champion: "How Can You Mend a Broken Heart," Bee Gees (1971)

Song of the summer for the girls and all those who love them: "Gnarly," KATSEYE

KATSEYE, the global girl group born out of K-pop development techniques, are "Gnarly," and they'd like you to be, too. The song is asymmetrical pop with a cheerleading cadence and extensive, expensive product placement. You're here for the girls, or you're not. Gnarly!

Past champion: "Bills, Bills, Bills," Destiny's Child (1999)

Song for singles ready to mingle this summer: "WASSUP," Young Miko

Flirting is central to these hot months; no other season has a fling named after it. Puerto Rican rapper Young Miko knows this better than most, and her track "WASSUP" is all about charisma — and it doesn't hurt that it interpolates "Lollipop" by Lil Wayne featuring Static Major and "Chulin Culin Chunfly" by Voltio featuring Residente.

Past champion: "Buy U a Drank (Shawty Snappin')," T-Pain featuring Yung Joc (2007)

Song of the summer for those who love British boy ballads performed by an American: "Ordinary," Alex Warren

Last year brought Benson Boone's glossy soft pop-rock; this year, Alex Warren's "Ordinary" is inescapable. A big, inoffensive ballad with loosely religious themes, it is meticulously designed to the pull at heartstrings. And it does — the song hit No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100.

Past champion: "Beautiful Things," Benson Boone (2024)

Song of the summer for when you lose the beef but still have fight left in ya: "Nokia," Drake

For the last year, Drake has mostly made headlines for his rivalry with Kendrick Lamar, one of the biggest beefs in modern rap music history. He was no victor, but on "Nokia," he's certainly a winner. The song is a return to what Drizzy knows best: a massive rap-R&B-pop song for the ages, one that will live inside the minds of listeners for the whole year. Just, you know, replete with the nostalgic sounds of a Nokia ringtone.

Past champion: The difference here, of course, is that Drake won his beef with Meek Mill. But nonetheless: "Back to Back," Drake (2015)

The TikTok-approved, blast-of-dopamine song of the summer: "Boots on the Ground," 803Fresh

Social media is the wild west and inevitably sources its own song of the summer. Usually, there's an element of humor in the track — like 2023's "The Margarita Song" by That Chick Angel, Casa Di & Steve Terrell. This year is a bit different: 803Fresh's "Boots on the Ground" is an organic hit that centers a kind of soulful line dance — it's country-pop with trap hi-hats and fun for the whole family.

Past champion: "The Spark," Kabin Crew & Lisdoonvarna Crew (2024)

Song of the summer for it girls: "Fame Is a Gun," Addison Rae

Charli xcx fans, fear not. Addison Rae's debut album is stuffed with bejeweled, hypnotic pop songs for the post-"BRAT" crowd. Best of all is the Grimes-esque "Fame Is a Gun," a sunglasses-in-the-club banger with synthetic vocal textures and an unignorable chorus. For fashionable listeners, and those who aim to become more fabulous.

Past champion: "Bad Girls," Donna Summer (1979)

Song of the summer of revenge: "Manchild," Sabrina Carpenter

Does it sound strikingly similar to "Please, Please, Please" at times? Sure. But has Sabrina Carpenter cornered the market on country-tinged, satirical pop songs about heterofatalism, an internet neologism for those who find heterosexuality embarrassing and hopeless? Also, yes. But you know, with a wink, vengeance and a danceable quality. Amen, hey men!

Past champion: "Before He Cheats," Carrie Underwood (from her 2005 debut album, but released as a single in 2006)

Biggest song of the year, and therefore the default song of the summer: "Luther," Kendrick Lamar and SZA

Is a song released in November too dated to qualify for song of the summer? Perhaps. But here's the rub: Kendrick Lamar and SZA's "Luther" held the No. 1 spot on the Billboard Hot 100 for 13 weeks in 2025 — over half the year so far. Popularity makes the contender. It doesn't hurt that "Luther" is also one of the best songs of both this year and last, a tender R&B ballad that samples Luther Vandross and Cheryl Lynn's 1982 rendition of "If This World Were Mine." "Luther" has since been dethroned on the charts, but no other song has come close to its run this year.

Past champion: "Last Night," Morgan Wallen (2023)

Country crossover song of the summer: "What I Want," Morgan Wallen and Tate McRae

If terrestrial country radio is your leading metric for selecting the song of the summer, then Morgan Wallen's "I'm The Problem" is likely your pick. But a catchier track with true country crossover appeal is "What I Want" with Wallen and pop singer Tate McRae. It is the first time Wallen has featured a female vocalist on one of his songs. It's a rare embrace for the chart topper, who historically prefers to buck country duet tradition and double down on his vocal style — warm, muscular, masculine.

Past champion: "You're Still the One," Shania Twain (from her 1997 album, but released as a single in 1998)

Song of the summer released half a decade ago: "party 4 you," Charli xcx

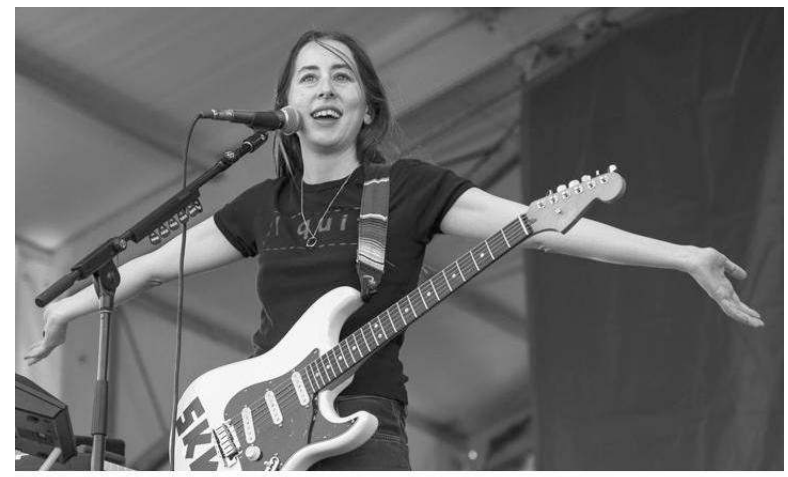
The data doesn't lie and what is old is new is old is new again. In the year after "BRAT" summer, desire for more Charli xcx is still strong. As a result, fans have dug up a cut from her 2020 album, "How I'm Feeling Now," and turned it into their own summer anthem … five years later. So much so, in fact, that Charli released a music video for it in May.

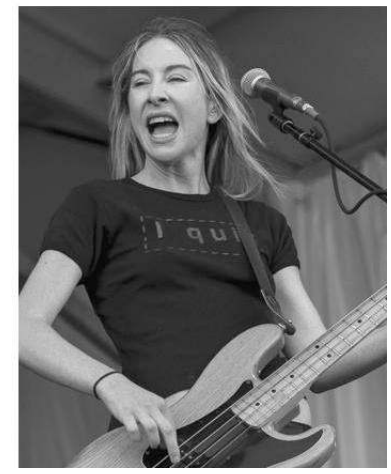
Past champion: "Cruel Summer," Taylor Swift (released in 2019, crowned song of the summer in 2023)

Song of the summer with a canine-themed title: "Mutt," Leon Thomas

Look, "Mutt" also arrived in 2024, but in 2025 — bolstered by a deluxe release and a recent Chris Brown remix — "Mutt" makes an easy song of the summer pick for some listeners. It's difficult to hear that chorus and not sing along: "She said, 'Take your time, what's the rush?' / I said, 'Baby, I'm a dog, I'm a mutt.'"

Past champion: "Bird Dog," The Everly Brothers (1958)





AP photos

Clockwise, from top: Alanna Haim, Este Haim and Danielle Haim, of the band HAIM, perform at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival on April 27. HAIM just released its fourth full-length album, "I Quit."

HAIM

I Quit (Columbia)

HAIM has declared this season to be "single-girl summer" and offered us the soundtrack. Heartsick never sounded so good.

"I Quit," the fourth full-length album from the trio, is a breakup collection that never gets too weepy. You can dance to a lot of it. Even the song "Cry," which name-checks the seven stages of grief, is an upbeat bop.

Six years after the trio released its jazzy, Lou Reed-y single "Summer Girl," the mood has somewhat soured this summer. Across 15 tracks, the songs are about fresh splits, old wounds and newfound independence.

"Now I'm gone / Quick as a gunshot / Born to run / Can't be held up," go the lyrics for the opening track "Gone," which samples from George Michael's anthem of liberty "Freedom! '90."

Sisters Este, Danielle and Alana Haim found themselves all single for the first time in a long time while making the album, looking back with equal parts venom and guilt. "You know I'm trying to change / 'Cause I know I'm not innocent," goes "Love You Right."

"The Farm" has a rootsy twang, "Down to be Wrong" has a Sheryl Crow vibe and "Take Me Back" has a Go-Go's feel. "Love You Right" is pure Fleetwood Mac harmonies, even making reference to a chain. "Spinning" is a slice of house bliss with overlapping harmonies, easily the most danceable Haim song since "I Want You Back." The wistful, warm "Million Years" leans into electronica.

The bluesy "Blood on the Street" has more vitriol ("I swear you wouldn't care / If I was covered in blood lying dead on the street") but ends with freedom: "Now the sun's up, I'm out, and that's that." "Relationships" is a standout, with Danielle Haim's falsetto exploring the agony of romantic ties and her sister's bass thumping.

But the best song has to be "Everybody's Trying to Figure Me Out," in which each Haim shines as tempos change and the song morphs from folk to indie rock to blissed-out '70s, with the final mantra: "You think you're gonna die / But you're not gonna die."

The album is co-produced by Danielle Haim and HAIM's frequent collaborator Rostam Batmanglij, formerly of Vampire Weekend. The trio's usual producer, Ariel Rechtshaid, split with Danielle Haim, which may account for the new energy.

The album closer, "Now It's Time," interpolates U2's industrial-pop song "Numb," adds cool drum rhythms and an Alanis Morissette-like strut, ending with an exhilarating jam session. "It's time / To let go," says the lyrics. Not to this album.

— Mark Kennedy
Associated Press

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

All 'Smoke' and mirrors

Apple TV+ series based on true story of arson investigator convicted of arson

APPLE TV+/AP photos

Arson investigator Dave Gudsen (Taron Egerton), left and below, teams up with a smart but troubled detective (Jurnee Smollett), right, to chase firebugs in the Pacific Northwest in "Smoke."

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Author and screenwriter Dennis Lehane has a healthy respect for the power of fire. He learned that the hard way — surviving a house fire in Boston in his 30s.

Lehane was living on the top floor of an apartment building when a propane tank on the roof exploded and started a blaze. The landlord was replacing the building's smoke detectors at the time so none were working. Lehane is lucky to be alive and he credits, in part, the flames:

"If you're trapped in fire — if you wake up and the building you're in is on fire — it's up to the fire at that point. It's really up to whims of the fire, whatever's going to happen to you. I find that lack of control fascinating."

Lehane, whose literary canon includes the novels-turned-movie hits "Gone, Baby, Gone" and "Mystic River," has turned to fire for his latest project — Apple TV+'s new nine-episode crime drama "Smoke."

It's based on the true story of a former arson investigator who was convicted in 1998 of serial arson, captured in part after he wrote a novel about a firefighter who was a serial arsonist. The case — chronicled in the 2021 podcast Firebug — sparked something in Lehane.

"I just thought, that's just the height of craziness. Like, you're not only in denial about who you are, you're so far in denial you're going to write a book about what a great guy you are and then use the fires that you set as the models for the fires in your book?" he says. "I can get in the zip code of that mindset; I cannot land on the street, though."

The show marks a reunion between Lehane, Greg Kinnear and Taron Egerton, who also worked together on the 2022 Apple TV+ series "Black Bird."

It also stars Jurnee Smollett, Anna Chlumsky and John Leguizamo, and boasts an original, eerie song by Radiohead's Thom Yorke called "Dialing In."

Egerton plays Dave Gudsen, an arson investigator in Umberland, a fictional town in the Pacific Northwest, who is chasing two separate firebugs. He's teamed up with a smart but troubled detective played by Smollett, who begin a game of cat and mouse.

If the setup sounds like it leads to a typical TV procedural, viewers who stick around get rewarded by a show that gets weirder and more complex, infused by Lehane's attraction to moral ambiguity.

"We walk with contradictions and I think that's the dramatic irony that Dennis is exploring." Smollett says. "These people are saying they're fighting to do the right thing and yet they're morally questionable. I think that's very relevant today."

Goofy and frightening

Edgerton's Dave, it's soon clear, is not who he appears to be and has an almost superhuman ability to compartmentalize aspects of his personal and private lives. He is both bombastic and insecure, goofy and frightening.

"Taron has endless reservoirs of talent to draw on. He's an extremely inspired actor," Lehane says. "He comes at it from the same place I come at it, which is, Taron won't take a role unless some part of it scares him. I won't tell a story unless some of it scares me."

Egerton said he relished a chance to show a different side of himself, rebelling a little at his safe, good-guy public persona after the success of his heroic turn in 2024's "Carry-On."

"You know what? I'm not that affable. I am sometimes, but I'm not some of the time," he says, laughing. "I think the thing I love about Dave is there is a tension between what the perception of him is and who he really is. And how can you ever really know who a person is?"

Adding to the series' allure is some of Lehane's street poetry, like the line: "Whatever you do, whatever you know, however much lifetime wisdom you've accrued, fire puts a lie to it all."

Playing with fire

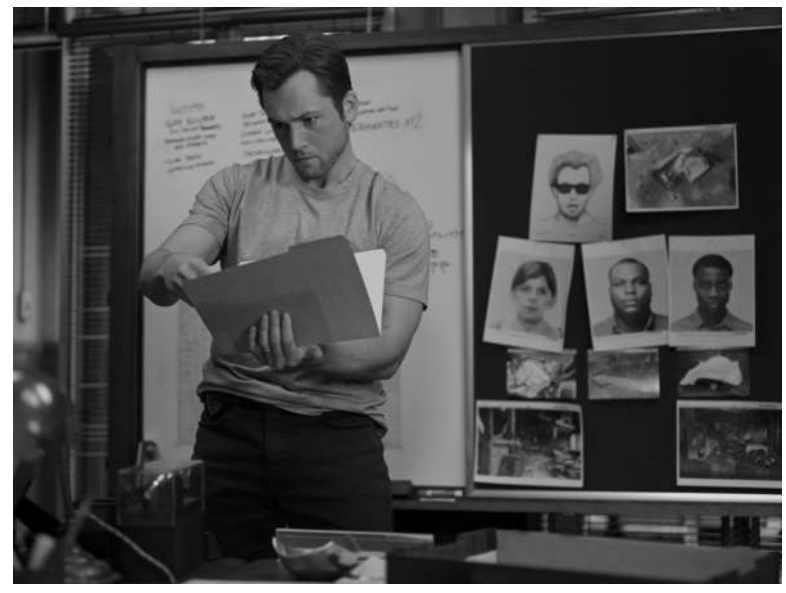
Smollett was onboard after an initial conversation with Lehane in which he said: "So many of us say we want to be happy, and yet we are drawn to the very thing that will destroy us." That was Smollett's entry point to her gloriously messy character.

Smollett's detective, a former Marine, refuses to be vulnerable, is excellent at her job, traumatized by a past experience with arson and not afraid to mess with anyone. Early on, she is shown taking a sledgehammer to her own home.

"She plays with fire," Smollett says. "She's living on the edge and has this mask and this guard up and walks around as if she's invincible because she's really just afraid."

Lehane says with "Smoke," he's drawn to people who invest in a narrative of who they choose to be rather than be true to who they really are.

"You don't know who they are because they don't know who they are," he says. "They're running from themselves; they're running from their true selves. And I felt like that's the interesting story here I'm trying to tell."



Greg Kinnear plays Harvey Englehart in the new Apple TV+ series. Kinnear previously worked with Egerton and "Smoke" screenwriter Dennis Lehane on the 2022 Apple TV+ series "Black Bird."

"You don't know who they are because they don't know who they are. They're running from themselves; they're running from their true selves. And I felt like that's the interesting story here I'm trying to tell."

Dennis Lehane
screenwriter, "Smoke"

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

‘I just care if she’s right’

PBS series ‘Patience’ introduces quirky, charismatic sleuth on the spectrum who helps York police department with cases

By Robert Lloyd
Los Angeles Times

Once upon a time, PBS was virtually the only portal through which British mysteries came to America. Jeremy Brett’s peerless Sherlock Holmes, two flavors of Miss Marple, David Suchet as Hercule Poirot, Roy Marsden and Martin Shaw successively as Adam Dalgliesh, “Inspector Morse” and its prequel “Endeavour,” Michael Gambon in “Maigret,” Helen Mirren in “Prime Suspect,” “Rumpole of the Bailey,” “Foyle’s War,” the Benedict Cumberbatch contemporized “Sherlock,” Alec Guinness in John LeCarre’s “Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy,” “Wallander” with Kenneth Branagh — classics, all. With the rise of cable, as channels looked abroad for content, there was eventually competition for shows, and in the streaming environment, with BritBox and Acorn TV wholly devoted to bringing U.K. content to the U.S., there is even more.

Meanwhile, PBS, which used to run “Mystery!” under its own flag, now has it booked as part of “Masterpiece.” Yet it still nabs some genre gems, often with something conceptually extra, recently including the meta “Magpie Murders” and its sequel, “Moonflower Murders.” Now comes “Patience,” an ingratiating episodic series coming Sunday to AFN-Spectrum, whose title character, played by Ella Maisy Purvis, is autistic (as is Purvis herself).

Adapted by Matt Baker from the French series “Astrid et Raphaëlle,” it stars Purvis as Patience Evans, a civilian clerk working in the seemingly uninhabited and endless archives of the York police department, where, by wheeling some shelves together, she has fashioned herself a little fortress of solitude in which she hides out with some pet mice. In the opening two-part episode, she detects a pattern linking a new and old murder, which brings her into the orbit of detective inspector Bea Metcalf (Laura Fraser), her juniors Jake Hunter (Nathan Welsh) and Will Akbari (Ali Ariaie) and their boss Calvin Baxter, played by Mark Benton, whom BritBox watchers will recognize from “Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators,” if considerably cleaned up and a little lighter.

While Bea sees the merits of bringing Patience into the investigation, Jake rejects her, both as an outsider and as “temperamentally unsuitable for this kind of work,” though — spoiler alert — he will come around. (It’s a friendly show.)

“I don’t care if she’s autistic,” detective Bea says, “I just care if she’s right.” (She is — mostly.) For her part, Patience tells Bea, “Your deductive leaps of logic can be haphazard and your notes are cursory,” but she admires her clearance rate, the best in the country.

Whether diagnosed (or diagnosable) or not, the quirky sleuth has been a feature of detective fiction since Holmes first whipped out a magnifying glass. Fans and scholars have retrospectively diagnosed the character as being on the spectrum, and you can easily find essays and discussions as to whether Poirot’s fastidiousness at least borders on obsessive-compulsive disorder. There are arguments pro and con, but some fraction of the neurodivergent community is happy to claim them as their own. In this century, television has given us “Monk,” “Bones,” “Professor T.” (also via PBS, and streaming from the website), the ongoing “Ludwig” and broadcast shows “Will Trent,” “Elsbeth” and “High Potential,” with heroes whose preternatural, if not pathological, focus amounts to a superpower. (Diane Kruger’s detective Sonya Cross on FX’s “The Bridge” is often held up as particularly true to life.) Of course, all fictional detectives, whether social, antisocial or introverted, tend to be superhuman to some degree, whatever personal challenges they might face, with a more original, more acute perception than their colleagues. That’s why we love them.

PBS/TNS

Ella Maisy Purvis plays the autistic Patience Evans, a civilian clerk at the York police department, in PBS’ new mystery series “Patience.” That Purvis, now 21 and diagnosed at 17, is herself autistic, suggests that, while she’s playing someone other than herself, the series is to some degree true to her own experience.

The opening episodes offer a primer in autism, conducted mainly by Patience’s godfather, retired detective Douglas Gilmour (Adrian Rawlins), with whom she lives, and Billy Thompson (Connor Curren), who leads an autism support group. (Curren is also autistic.) If it’s a little on the money in terms of dialogue, it’s useful information given that many are aware of autism without knowing much about it — it shows up more on TV because it shows up more in the zeitgeist, and screenwriters are always looking for a new angle. (It’s especially welcome here, given the ignorant remarks of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the current secretary of health, on the causes and experiences of autism.) Still, the neurotypical viewer might wonder how accurately the series portrays neurodivergence, and indeed, within the community, which is not homogeneous, one finds a multiplicity of views. (The series has already shown in the U.K.) That Purvis, now 21 and diagnosed at 17, is herself autistic, suggests that, while she is playing someone other than herself, the series is to some degree true to her own experience.

Patience carries two umbrellas in case one breaks. (It rains a lot in England, you know.) Building up to approaching Bea, she writes out what she wants to say in a conversational flowchart. She won’t cross a “police line, do not cross” tape unless ushered through, and she jumps from an elevator as soon as it becomes too crowded (and exceeds its legal capacity). She’s incapable of small talk (“Are you just being polite, or do you really want to know?” she asks Bea, when Bea asks how she is), but does point out that Bea’s socks are mismatched and tells cute forensic specialist Elliot Scott (Tom Lewis) that “Your surname’s a first name and your first name’s a surname,” though, to be picky about it, both names are first names and surnames. Still, it’s the beginning of something.

The mysteries are of the usual unusual sort common to cozy mysteries. (They can be a little sillier than they’re meant to, but it’s not fatal.) Why are apparently happy men killing themselves, on the fourth Friday of the month? One, set in a natural history museum, involves fossils; there’s a locked room mystery (with a mystery writer for a victim), which delights Patience, an Agatha Christie fan, and there’s a corpse that seemingly walks off a table in the morgue. Patience, who cannot resist an unsolved puzzle, is drawn reluctantly out of her shell, and Bea begins to notice things in her young son Alfie (an impressively individual Maxwell Whitelock) that remind her of Patience.

There are times when characters act less than reasonably, or less intelligently than their official position might indicate. If Patience is fast in making calculations and connections, the others can seem slow off the mark, and although everyone is on the case — in cop shows, teamwork typically makes the dream work — she makes the breakthroughs that lead to a solution. Of course, the very logic of the series demands she be invaluable, and in this regard, it’s no different from most mystery series, where one character is out ahead of everyone else in solving the crime.

Not everything makes perfect, or even imperfect, sense. But as always, the plots are there almost as a pretext to spend time with the characters, and the whole cast is good company. But Purvis especially, in spite of Patience’s self-containment, radiates quiet charisma — new-star power. A second season, happily, is already on the cards.

“Patience” premieres Sunday on AFN-Spectrum.

Fishing for a way to improve your health?

Eating seafood is good for your brain, eyes and heart, but 90% of adults in the US aren't eating enough of it

BY ANAHAD O'CONNOR
The Washington Post

iStock

Are you eating enough seafood? It's full of vitamins, minerals and protein, and it's an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids, a critical nutrient that our bodies need but can't produce. Studies suggest that eating fish is good for your brain, eye and cardiovascular health. Health authorities recommend that adults eat at least two servings every week, equivalent to about 8 ounces.

Yet 90% of U.S. adults eat so little seafood that they fall short of the recommendations. That's not entirely surprising. Dietitians say that many people don't know about the health benefits of eating seafood, or they may have concerns about the environmental impact and sustainability of commercial fishing. Some may be worried about exposure to mercury, a neurotoxin that's found throughout the ocean and that can accumulate in fish. Others may be concerned about the costs.

The seafood landscape can also be confusing. With so many options — from shrimp to salmon to canned tuna — how do you know which ones to eat?

According to experts, the best types of seafood are those that meet three criteria:

- Relatively low in mercury and high in omega-3 fats
- Sustainable
- Accessible and affordable

Here's what to know about seafood, including the healthiest types — and the ones you should reconsider and avoid altogether:

Why eating seafood can make you healthier

Fish is among the best sources of EPA and DHA, two omega-3 fatty acids that are known to reduce inflammation and promote brain and heart health.

"These types of fats are found in high concentrations in your brain, your eyes and your central nervous system," said Katherine Zeratsky, a registered dietitian nutritionist at the Mayo Clinic. "They're called essential fatty acids because we need them — and we have to get them from food."

In 2020, a meta-analysis of studies that followed more than 900,000 people for up to 30 years found that higher fish consumption was associated with a lower risk of developing heart disease and a lower likelihood of dying from the disease. Another meta-analysis of studies involving roughly 670,000 people found that those who ate the most seafood were less likely to die prematurely from any cause. People who on average ate the equivalent of about a half a serving of fish per day (roughly 2 ounces) were 12% less likely to die early.

The evidence is so compelling that the American Heart Association says that eating one to two servings of seafood per week can reduce the risk of heart disease, strokes and sudden cardiac death, "especially when seafood replaces the intake of less healthy foods."

What are the healthiest types of seafood?

According to dietitians and environmental experts, these are the best options:

Salmon

Both wild and farmed salmon are high in omega-3s and relatively low in toxins such as mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The dietitians we spoke to said that as far as nutrition goes, both are great choices.

Farmed salmon tends to be less expensive than wild salmon. But it does have some disadvantages. Studies have found that the amount of omega-3s and mercury in farmed salmon can vary widely, in part because it depends on what the fish were fed. Some types of farmed salmon are also farmed in ways that can be detrimental to the environment.

While farmed salmon can certainly be a good choice, wild salmon is almost always the better option.

"Wild salmon is a triple win because it's high in good fats, low in mercury and sustainable," said Sonya Lunder, the director of community science at the Natural Resources Defense Council and the author of a report on seafood consumption and mercury exposure for the Environmental Working Group.

For affordable options, look for canned wild salmon and frozen wild salmon burgers and fillets in the freezer section of your grocery store.

Sardines, anchovies and Atlantic mackerel

These small fish are a good choice for several reasons. Because they're low on the food chain, they're relatively low in mercury and other toxins (large predatory fish at the top of the food chain accumulate more contaminants). They're high in protein and omega-3 fats. And they tend to be sustainable because they reproduce more rapidly than larger fish species, said Zeratsky at the Mayo Clinic.

Rainbow trout

A single serving of rainbow trout contains more than an entire day's worth of vitamin D and vitamin B12, as well as large amounts of omega-3 fats, protein and minerals. It has a mild flavor that makes it easy to use in a variety of dishes. It's also a good choice for environmental reasons.

And it's relatively affordable. Just look for tinned rainbow trout and frozen rainbow trout fillets at your grocery store. One type of rainbow trout called steelhead actually looks and tastes a lot like salmon (and it usually costs less, too).

Mussels

Mussels are one of the unsung heroes of the seafood world. They're packed with protein, omega-3 fats, iron, zinc and vitamin B12. They're very low in mercury. You can usually buy them for between $5 and $10 a pound. And most of the mussels sold in stores and restaurants are farm-raised, which is environmentally sustainable. Mussels can also be surprisingly easy to prepare.

Oysters

Oysters are chock full of omega-3 fats, vitamins and minerals, and they're very low in mercury. Most oysters consumed in the United States are farm-raised and cultivated in a way that benefits the environment.

Raw oysters can carry potentially harmful bacteria. So it's best to cook them before eating them.

Which seafood should you reconsider?

Shrimp, tilapia and catfish

Shrimp, tilapia and catfish are among the most popular types of seafood consumed in America. They tend to be low in mercury and other contaminants — but they're also quite low in omega-3 fats compared with other types of seafood. These types of seafood are still nutritious and good sources of protein. But they're not nearly as good a seafood option as, say, salmon or sardines.

Tuna

One of the benefits of tuna is that it's high in omega-3 fats. But the downside is that some varieties contain a lot of mercury.

Most of the tuna consumed in America is skipjack — a type of "light" tuna — followed by albacore tuna. Skipjack and other types of light tuna generally have less mercury than albacore. But the mercury content of light tuna can vary wildly. In 2023, Consumer Reports analyzed mercury levels in many brands of canned tuna purchased at grocery stores and found that albacore tuna had on average three times as much mercury as canned light tuna. But some popular brands of light tuna had nearly as much mercury as albacore tuna.

What seafood should you avoid?

According to health authorities, the following fish are so high in mercury that you should avoid them altogether:

- King mackerel (different from Atlantic mackerel)
- Shark
- Marlin
- Orange roughy
- Swordfish
- Tilefish
- Bluefin and bigeye tuna

What if you're vegan, vegetarian or allergic?

Plant foods aren't good sources of EPA and DHA. But some plant foods do contain a different type of omega-3 fat called ALA, or alpha-linolenic acid.

Your body can convert ALA into EPA and DHA, but the process isn't very efficient, which is why it's generally best to get the latter directly from seafood if possible.

But if you can't eat seafood, then you can get plenty of ALA from the following plant foods:

- Walnuts
- Soybeans
- Flax seeds, chia seeds and hemp seeds
- Canola oil and soybean oil

Spinach and Brussels sprouts also contain ALA, although not as much as the foods listed above. Some other foods that contain modest amounts of omega-3 fats are eggs, meat and dairy. Studies have found that organic and grass-fed versions of dairy, eggs and meat typically have more omega-3s than the conventional versions of these foods.

WEEKEND: FAMILY

ALLISON ROBBERT/For The Washington Post

Kasey Zachmann talks with Santa on June 28 surrounded by neighbors in front of her home in Bethesda, Md.

Creating one last Christmas

Hundreds of neighbors rally for holiday-loving 9-year-old with cancer

BY MARISSA J. LANG AND AFIA BARRIE
The Washington Post

Kelley Zocks doesn't usually go all out for Christmas.

But on the last Saturday in June, following a week of dangerously hot temperatures in the D.C. region, Zocks dotted her Bethesda, Md., walkway with glowing luminaria, set up a red inflatable shopfront announcing "cookies for Santa," propped open lawn chairs and put on a Mrs. Claus costume and wig before loading up a cooler with dozens of chocolate ice pops. Frozen hot cocoa, if you will.

Hers was one of hundreds of households that signed up to celebrate Christmas in June for a little girl with cancer who might not make it to December. For miles, in the thick heat and humidity, neighbors dressed in holiday apparel gathered to watch the girl and her family wind through streets alight and glowing, like a scene out of a Christmas card.

It started with an email to neighbors from Alyssa Zachmann, whose 9-year-old daughter Kasey was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer four years ago.

"Kasey loves Christmas," Zachmann wrote June 21, "and we want to give her a chance to experience some Christmas joy, so we are hoping some houses in the neighborhood would be willing to put up Christmas lights next Saturday."

Zachmann knew that week was going to be a scorcher. She didn't expect anyone to go too far out of their way. Maybe some lights here and there, a few decorations on a front lawn or two. The houses nearby would be more than enough to make Kasey feel like Christmas had come early, she thought.

She made a spreadsheet to keep track, so the family could make sure to drive by each household that volunteered. But as the days passed, the number of names multiplied. By Saturday afternoon, the list had exceeded 270 homes from 11 neighborhoods up and down the D.C.-Maryland border.

In 2021, when Kasey was 5 years old, she was diagnosed with medulloblastoma, a type of brain cancer. Kasey underwent months of chemotherapy as she attended first grade.

At first, Alyssa Zachmann said, the family wasn't as public about Kasey's diagnosis. They held onto a quiet hope that she could beat back the disease and become one of the 6 in 10 children who, according to the National Institutes of Health, go on to survive a medulloblastoma diagnosis.

For a few months in 2022, the cancer appeared to be in remission. But then it returned.

Over the past four years, Kasey has endured 10 surgeries, dozens of rounds of radiation and an aggressive regimen of medication, including two clinical trials. In that time, Zachmann said, the community has gotten to know Kasey and her story.

This month, the Zachmanns learned that the cancer in Kasey's brain had spread to her lymph nodes — a rare progression. Doctors told them that Kasey didn't have much time.

Alyssa and Joe Zachmann began to think about what they could do for their daughter to make whatever time she had left as joyful as possible.

One idea rose to the top: What if we did Christmas, the family posited. In June.

Kasey's love of Christmas has never been contained to the holiday season.

She watches Christmas movies devotedly — Macaulay Culkin's "Home Alone" films are some of her favorites — and sings along to Christmas carols all year round. Her most-loved album, Gwen Stefani's "You Make It Feel Like Christmas," is on a near-constant rotation in the family's home.

Houses were draped with banners that read "Merry Christmas, Kasey!" Neighbors and local businesses propped up decorations and hung homemade ornaments in the Zachmanns' front yard.

Just after 8 p.m., Santa arrived with a "ho-ho-ho." Soon, the parade of cars set off. As evening fell, the Christmas celebration began to feel more like a summer block party.

As the Zachmanns drove past people stretched out on front porches and lawns, several neighbors came up to the back seat to give Kasey gifts and words of encouragement.

It went on and on for miles.

The Zachmann family, determined to see every home that put in the effort to deliver Christmas for Kasey, drove around for two hours.

Neighbors who spotted them shouted "Merry Christmas" and cheered. Some stayed outside to greet the family through squalls of rain.

Kasey was quiet in the back seat. Her small face looked out, taking in the lights.

Every so often, as the family passed another house, another neighbor, another display with Kasey's name draped across front doors and parked cars, Kasey let out a single breathless word: "Wow."

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari

Cost-effective vacation takes a toll on sanity

"Can I have that bed? Huh? Can I? Puh-leeese?" I begged my mother, pointing desperately to the sleeping compartment above the cab of our rented Winnebago RV. Permission was granted, and I could hardly contain my excitement.

Much like today, economic times were tough for my middle-class parents in the summer of 1979. My father believed renting an RV would make for a cost-effective family vacation, and would enable my older brother, a rising senior in high school, to visit a few colleges along the way.

My mother was hesitant due to motion sickness, but after assurances of a smooth ride from my father, she envisioned herself a traveling June Cleaver, serving cold cuts and Shasta in the spiffy mobile kitchen. My brother was concerned about the outdated eight-track tape player, until one of his buddies lent him a mixtape for the trip. I'd spent years playing with my Barbie Country Camper — although I had to pretend Barbie suffered a grizzly attack after my brother ripped the tent off the side — so for me, this trip was a dream come true.

After packing our belongings into the appropriate compartments, we were off.

My father hadn't fully backed out of the driveway when my mother grabbed the countertop to steady herself and yelled, "Stop! I feel sick!" Despite Mom's vision of serving us lunch over a game of Parcheesi on the convertible table, she spent the rest of the drive firmly planted in the passenger's seat where she could watch the road.

From my perch above the cab, I had a panoramic view, climbing down occasionally for a cold can of Tab from the refrigerator. My brother played cards at the table and sang along with mixtape hits like "Devil Went Down to Georgia" and "Ring My Bell." My parents settled in, and our golden retriever found a comfortable spot to nap. We were all beginning to enjoy the RV lifestyle.

Three days later, we were in pure hell.

We'd discovered that the slightest turn of the wheel caused the refrigerator to fly open, leaving pickle jars and soda cans rolling on the cabin floor. The constantly-looping eight-track tape was like an enhanced interrogation technique, especially during the high notes of "You Can Ring My Bell." Also, we learned that the air conditioner was not adequate to cool the cabin, making the living areas muggy at best, and my upper hideout a veritable sauna.

Camping stops were not idyllic. In an Annapolis KOA campground while visiting the Naval Academy, my father endured the gnat-infested heat to complete the complicated series of RV hookups, only to unhook it all so we could go out for seafood. At a scorching campground near Duke University, the water and lights in the shower house shut down promptly at 8 p.m., to the surprise of my father and brother, who had just lathered up. Another night, I whined incessantly when the cabin's finicky AC unit finally died, prompting nearby campers to yell, "Can't you keep her quiet?!"

After paying exorbitant prices at a Maryland gas station, my father inadvertently backed into the pump, ripping the spare tire cover. My brother tore a 6-inch hole in the vinyl interior upholstery when he forgot about a screwdriver in his back pocket. The piece de resistance happened in North Carolina, when my brother left a fish he had caught in a compartment under one of the seats, which wasn't discovered until we located the source of the stench two days later.

By the time we headed home from our summer vacation, our top-of-the-line RV looked more like a rolling ghetto careening down I-95, reeking of dead fish, with curtains flying out open windows, food rolling around the cabin floor and the ripped tire cover and dog's tongue flapping in the wind.

I decided that my Barbie Country Camper would soon be taking a trip — straight to the Goodwill.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

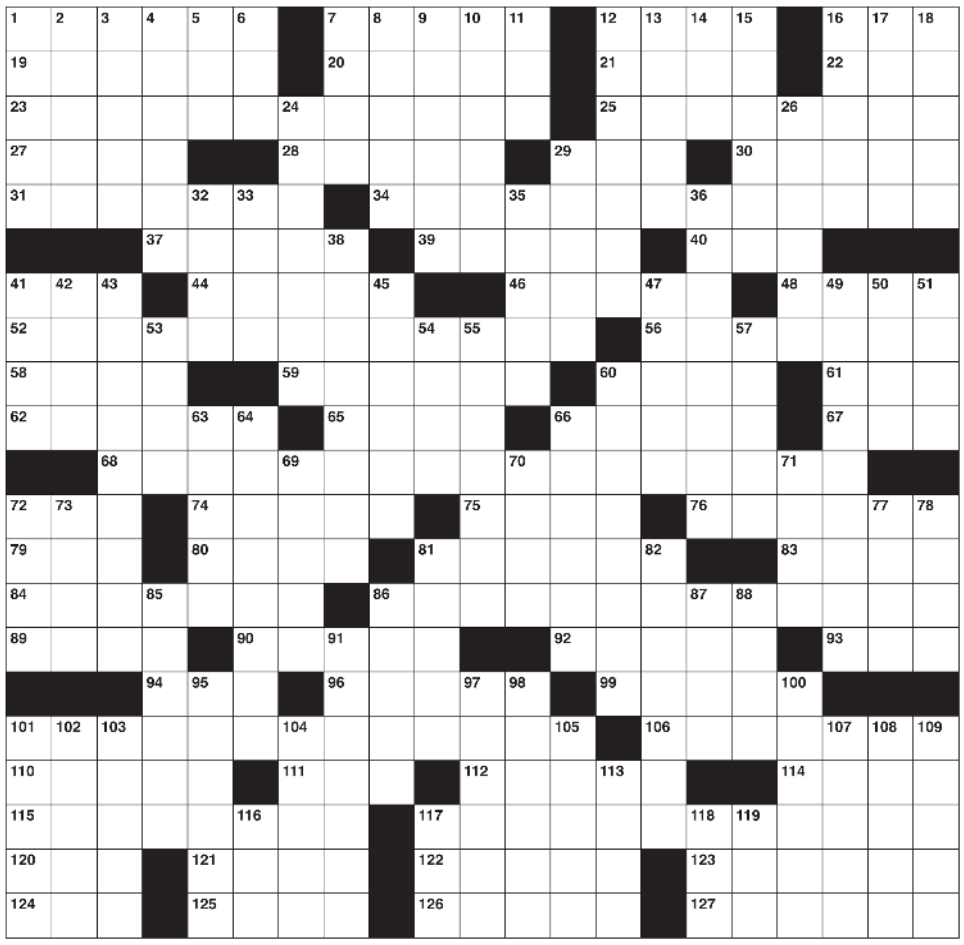
WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

BRINGING A PLUS ONE

BY RUTH BLOOMFIELD MARGOLIN AND HANNAH MARGOLIN / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Ruth Bloomfield Margolin, of Westfield, N.J., serves on several community philanthropic boards. Her daughter, Hannah Margolin, of Brooklyn, works for an older-adult-services nonprofit. Hannah says she has been solving crosswords with her mom since she was a tween. "My mom used to send me crosswords in the mail at summer camp, and she'd pre-fill the answers she knew I wouldn't know." Now they collaborate in constructing as well as solving. — W.S.



ACROSS

1 Large ____ Collider (facility in Geneva)
7 "We need to talk . . ."
12 Barnyard strutter
16 Lazy day attire, for short
19 Family elder in El Salvador
20 Bishop's deputy
21 Marine predator
22 Luau accessory
23 Make a partner's beard presentable for all the photos?
25 Poet hired to write the couple's vows in flowery verse?
27 Survey option
28 Responded to an alarm
29 Increment in an elephant's weight
30 Pancake with applesauce or sour cream
31 Trample
34 Cause of many headaches while planning the big day?
37 1980s tennis champ Ivan
39 Reeves of "The Matrix"
40 Suffix with Caesar
41 What's broken for a record?
44 Unagi catcher
46 Lay low?
48 "____ on Down the Road," song from "The Wiz"
52 Tool for a couple who intend to return everything and keep the money?
56 Where inner truth is seen clearly?
58 Pro ____
59 Start of a "RuPaul's Drag Race" farewell
60 Diamonds, for one
61 Airport alternative to EWR
62 Little nobodies
65 Pope who excommunicated Martin Luther
66 Response to winning a lottery, maybe
67 Milk source
68 Fancy headpiece ornament?
72 Much
74 Famous "Dr." who never practiced medicine
75 "____ is me, to have seen what I have seen": Ophelia
76 Mesmerized
79 In the style of
80 Weight of an empty container
81 Spread the word?
83 One side of the Bosporus
84 "Absolutely!"
86 Colorful sequined jacket that the groom chose to wear?
89 Mine find
90 Like some online purchases
92 Obsessed with
93 Major lobby in D.C.
94 Communication that goes without saying, for short
96 Trojan War king
99 Rugby scuffle
101 One ensuring that each family can invite the same number of guests?
106 Orthodox Jewish sect
110 What wispy swirling lines from a cartoon pie may represent
111 Umpire's call
112 Febreze competitor
114 Disembodied assistant
115 Animal's escort down the aisle?
117 Parent who foolishly wore stiletto heels to a garden event?
120 Popular 90-min. show
121 A bushel or a peck
122 Gather a bushel or a peck, perhaps
123 ____-weenie
124 Wee bit
125 PlayStation maker
126 Head over heels
127 Taxis, typically

DOWN

1 Lacks
2 Detest
3 One of music's Allman Brothers
4 Gender ____ (prebirth event)
5 Fútbol cheer
6 "King" Cole's first name
7 Declare
8 Lady Anne, at the beginning of "Richard III"
9 Rocker Ric
10 Like the Mario Kart games
11 Famous "Dr." who never practiced medicine
12 Piña colada vessel
13 Cousin of a chimp
14 Loops in, in brief
15 Mudslide component
16 Batter's position
17 Spasms
18 Menu heading
24 Manages
26 Dinosaur "from our imagination"
29 Thin-sounding
32 Off! ingredient
33 Real lulu
35 Milk source
36 Caboose
38 Terms of a contract?
41 Queue before Q
42 Get one's ducks in ____
43 Vintage racket?
45 Choral arrangement essentials
47 Community at the end of the line
49 Year-round, as tires
50 Starch-yielding palm
51 Parent of Shopping.com
53 Driver's warning
54 "Away with you!"
55 1099, e.g.
57 Stayed home for dinner
60 Filibuster components
63 Wallop
64 Without change
66 Young pigs
69 The "H" in HOMES
70 Overly precious
71 Lackluster
72 F that comes right after A, B, C and D
73 Additionally
77 Heap
78 "Look! I did it!"
81 Make a quick visit
82 One looking for a free ride
85 Adjusts sights
86 Jack on a nonfat diet
87 Awkwafina's given name
88 Hoofed creatures that sound up-to-date?
91 Galore
95 Social climber's obsession
97 Second-largest Portuguese-speaking country
98 Like the cheese in fondue
100 How one might feel when a crossword clue is tricky
101 Blue Ribbon beer
102 "The Hunger Games" venue
103 South Pole trailblazer Amundsen
104 Bagel option
105 Motorsports Hall-of-Famer Bobby
107 Character in "The Crown"
108 "Crocodile Hunter" Steve
109 Digs for data
113 "____ thy father and refuse thy name": Juliet
116 6, on a phone
117 Leo's movie studio
118 FWIW part
119 Helpful word on a class reunion name tag

GUNSTON STREET

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

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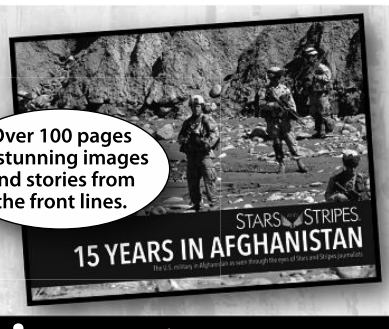

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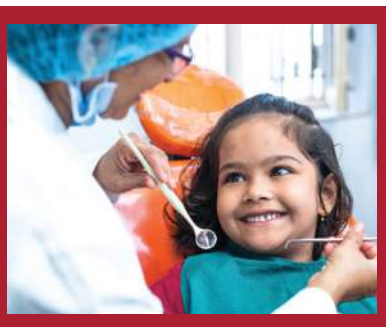

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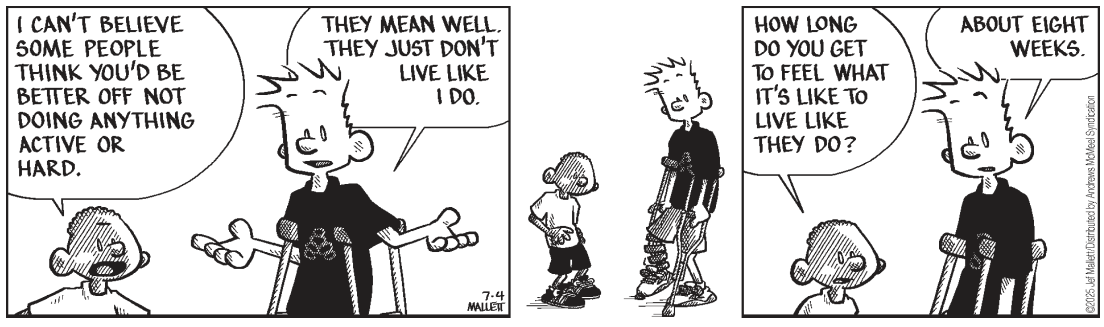
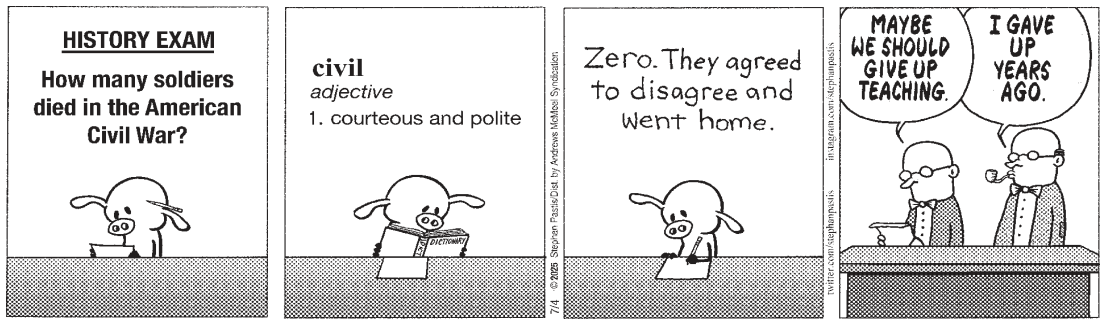
Bizarro

Loose Parts

Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



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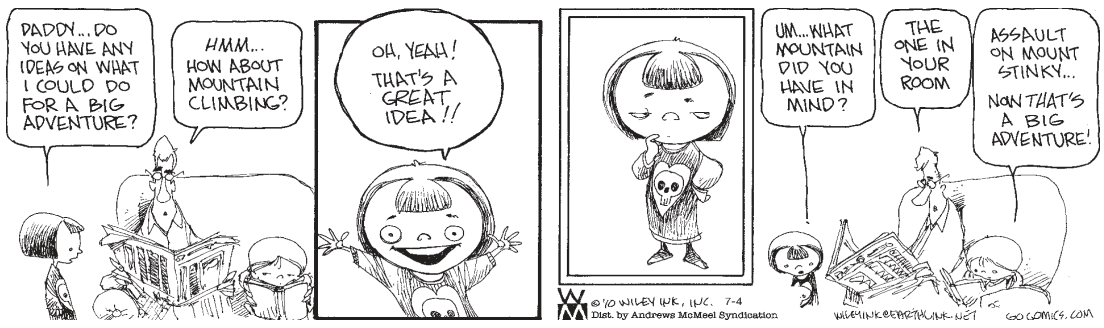
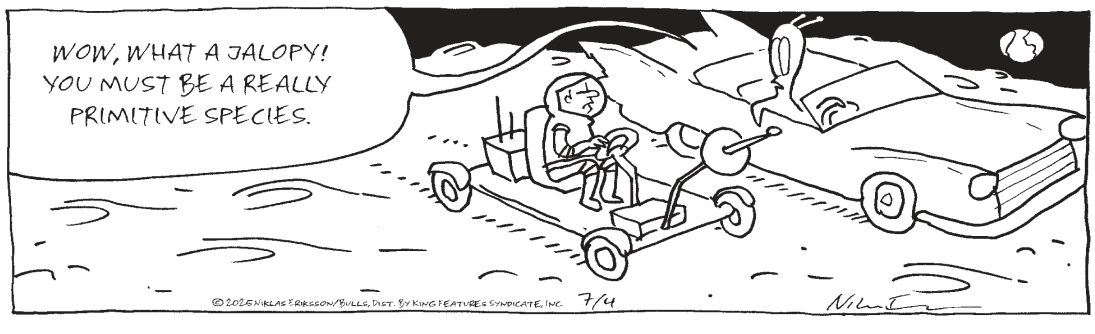
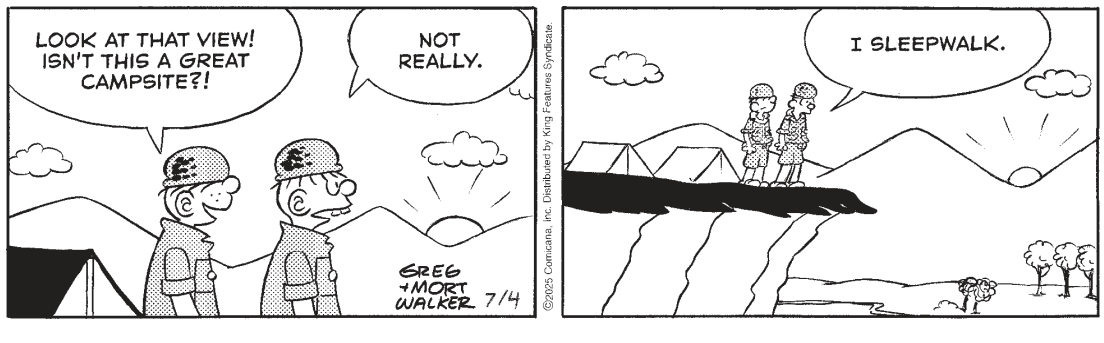


Wumo

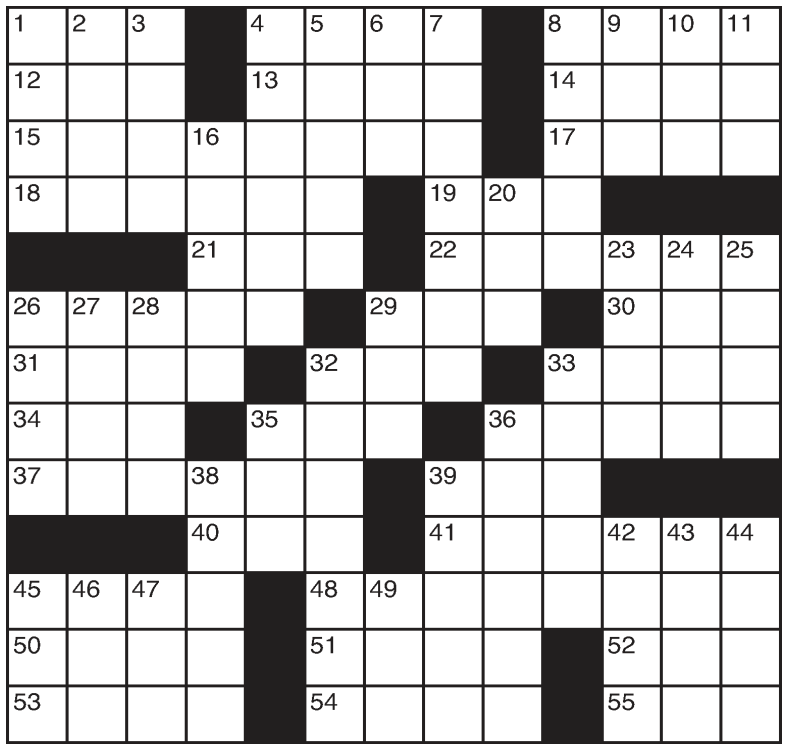
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 ER workers
4 Bits of butter
8 Chicago team
12 Pioneering ISP
13 Approximately
14 Unrepaired
15 Purist
17 Demolish
18 "Game of Thrones" actress Turner
19 Montreal street
21 Hosp. workers
22 Horse handler
26 Bond portrayer Daniel
29 Ram's mate
30 Greek mountain
31 Filches
32 TV spots
33 Detail, briefly
34 '50s president
35 Director Craven
36 Unemotional
37 Suspect in a whodunit
39 Corp. boss
40 Wall St. deal
41 Marsh birds
45 Toy on a string
48 Hand-held July 4th firework
50 Chop —
51 Storybook heavy
52 Stickum
53 Swedish soprano Jenny
54 "Chinatown" actress Diane
55 Reply (Abbr.)

DOWN

1 Church service
2 Inflict upon
3 Faux pas
4 Jabbing with an elbow
5 City in Provence
6 Mao — -tung
7 Woes
8 Insertion symbol
9 "Born in the —"
10 Occupation, for short
11 Away from NNW
16 Tennis great Evert
20 Employ
23 Slimming surgery, briefly
24 Idyllic place
25 Suggestive
26 First bed
27 Video-streaming brand
28 Help in a crime
29 Asner and Harris
32 Spray can
33 Baby bird?
35 Spider's creation
36 Become enraged
38 Andrew — Webber
39 Beet variety
42 Gymnast Korbut
43 Inert gas
44 "No seats" signs
45 Designer monogram
46 Parisian "yes"
47 Kyoto currency
49 Links org.

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

7-4 CRYPTOQUIP

J X A E X Q V Z R K B U B I P I W W B P R J B I G K F R S X R Z B P S V W S S B W G V U B O A O K R W R O K R O E R K V U ? Y G V Q Y B B S F V G G .

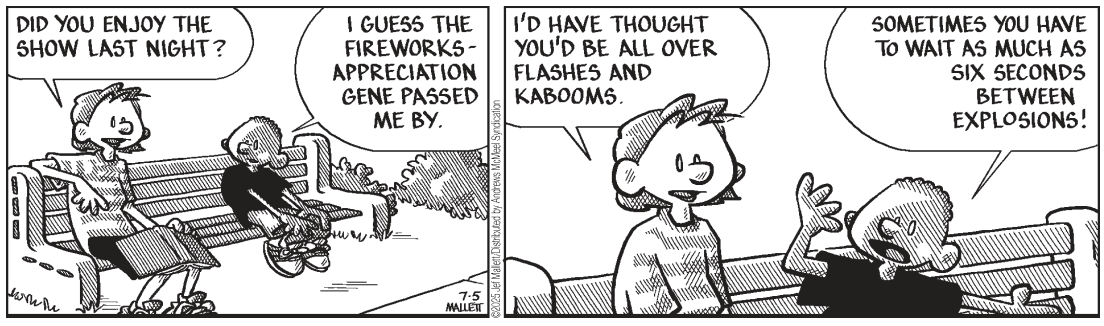
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: NEW YORK CITY STREET FULL OF SHOPS THAT SELL VERY PRICEY HOODED WINTER COATS: PARKA AVENUE.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals H

Bizarro

Loose Parts

Frazz



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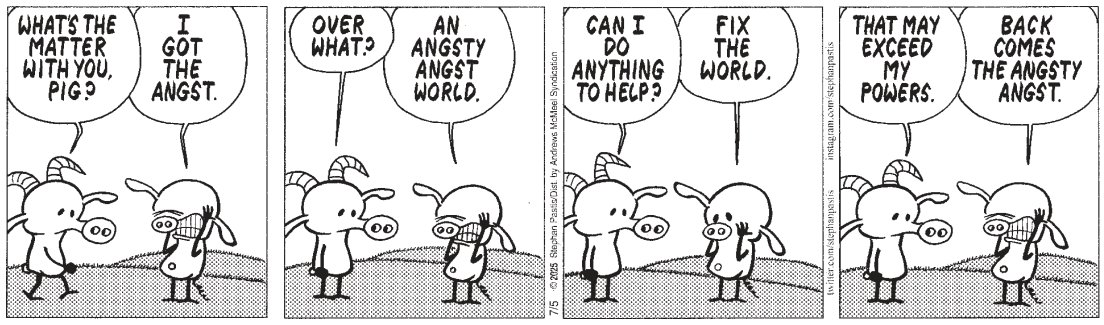
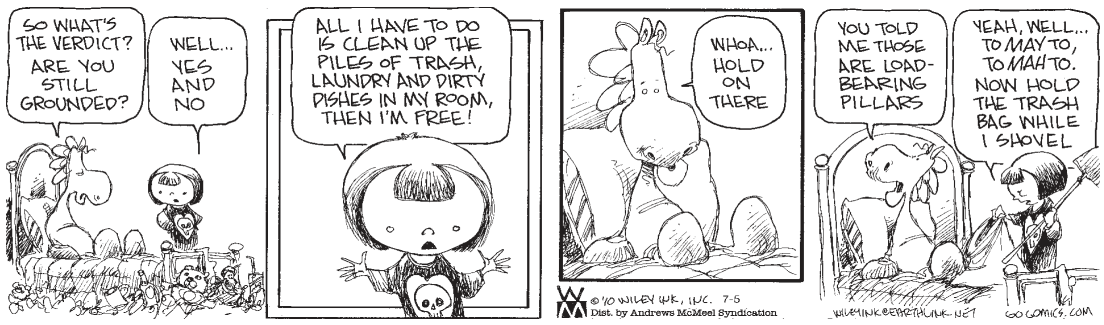


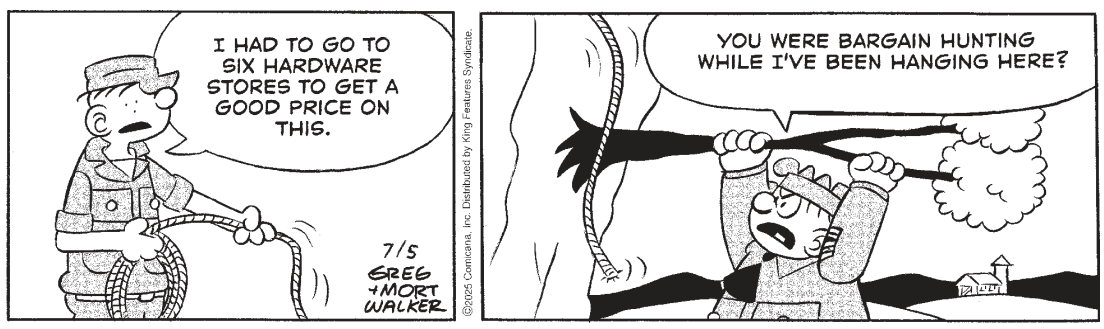
Non Sequitur



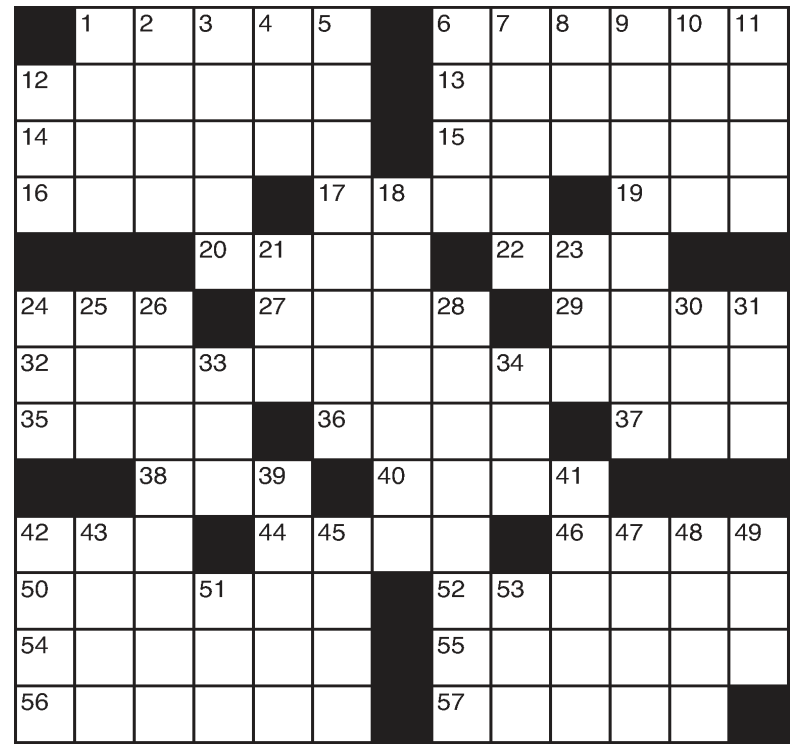
Wumo

Carpe Diem

Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Scarecrow stuffing
6 Vain person
12 Moolah
13 "Ed Wood" star Martin
14 Dayton denizen
15 Moocher
16 Heath
17 Duel tool
19 Enterprise letters
20 Mentor
22 Muppet eagle
24 Airline to Sweden
27 Burnsian turndowns
29 Life story?
32 Summer luncheon holders
35 Gratis
36 Model Heidi
37 Genre for Post Malone
38 Mosquito barrier
40 Burden
42 — glance
44 Compass point
46 Actress Jessica
50 Mount —, Israel
52 Legally prevent
54 Foolish talk
55 Logic
56 Appropriates
57 "— alive!"

DOWN

1 London district
2 Small combo
3 Corp. shake-up
4 Docs' org.
5 Sommelier's organizer
6 Choice word
7 Stares stupidly
8 Musician Yoko
9 Security digits
10 Droops
11 Calendar abbr.
12 Monk's title
18 Adobe dwellings
21 Numerical prefix
23 Fine, to NASA
24 Suntan lotion letters
25 Balloon filler
26 Plot outline
28 Ambles
30 "Give — rest!"
31 Recipe abbr.
33 Formerly known as
34 Dallas sch.
39 Social media post
41 Game show host Pat
42 Outlet letters
43 Tropical tuber
45 Right angles
47 Misplace
48 Life stories
49 Raggedy doll
51 Super Bowl VIP
53 PBS supporter

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

7-5 CRYPTOQUIP

NI B YZMA AI ZVVIDLZME EIR AI AGK XBUUKWA AIYM IM GZYZBB'W XBU BWTZMN? EIR GZN DK ZA "GBTI."

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHICH GAME DO YOU SUPPOSE WOULD BE THE MOST APT TO PLAY ON INDEPENDENCE DAY? FLAG FOOTBALL.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals I

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OPINION

America is overextended. Sequencing can help.

By A. Wess Mitchell
Special to The Washington Post

The "simultaneity problem," as it's known in military circles, has been the most serious grand strategic challenge facing the United States for some time now. The past two National Defense Strategies made clear that the U.S. is prepared to militarily confront only one major adversary, and that it should be China. And to do that, it needs to find ways of reducing U.S. commitments in Europe and the Middle East, ideally without producing intolerable risks in those theaters.

The evident success of the Israeli and U.S. strikes on Iran presents a heretofore unimaginable opportunity to break out of — or at least greatly mitigate — this dilemma.

In the wake of the recent strikes, Iran's capacity to draw the United States into a prolonged and draining conflict has been severely curtailed. It has lost the bulk of its air defenses, most of its drones and best fighter planes, perhaps as much as half of its ballistic missiles and all or a large part of its nuclear infrastructure. Its leadership cadres have been thinned out and the regime itself is greatly weakened. It will take quite some time for Iran to recover its ability to threaten the existing order in the Middle East.

Israel achieved its success by pursuing an approach known as strategic sequencing. Faced with an encircling array of enemies too powerful to defeat in unison, it employed a combination of bold strikes and creative diplomacy to neutralize them in turn, starting with the smaller ones and working its way up to the top threat. Doing so ensured that, when the main contest came, Israel would be able to concentrate its forces on the decisive spot while Iran would be deprived of the diversionary benefits of its friends and proxies.

Iran's prostration paves the way for the United States to pursue a similar strategy on a global scale. Except instead of relying on force backed by diplomacy, the U.S. approach should be the reverse: creative diplomacy, backed by the threat of overwhelming military power. Against Iran, for example, the Trump administration adhered to a "diplomacy first" approach, resorting to force only when that option had run its course.

Applying this sequencing logic requires the U.S. to avoid getting sucked into a deeper set of objectives in the Middle East. The worst thing the U.S. could do now would be to embark on a policy of regime change in Iran, as some are advocating. Instead, it should adhere to the narrow goal of removing Iran's nuclear capabilities. And it should resist calls to beef up permanent U.S. forces in the region and, as soon as possible, initiate a drawdown.

Sticking to "diplomacy first" is not a call for passivity. To the contrary, it will require persistence and attention. Several regional victories are within reach, including brokering a Turkish-Israeli understanding over Syria that prevents it from becoming the flash point for another conflict; completing the process of Israeli-Saudi normalization begun in the first Trump administration; and working with Sunni Arab states to close off avenues for the reemergence of Islamic State.

The overarching goal should be a regional balance of power that relies primarily on local forces to maintain stability.

With Iran licking its wounds, the administration would be in a strong position to turn its attention to its next-biggest problem: Russia. As with Iran, President Donald Trump has laid a predicate for diplomacy with Vladimir Putin. And like Iran, Putin has so far scorned the opening. But Iran's setbacks might improve the conditions for a diplomatic breakthrough. For the foreseeable future, Iran will be reorienting military munitions bound for Russia to meet its own desperate needs at home. Trump's recent success in bucking up NATO defense spending and his nod toward potentially renewing military support for Ukraine could provide further impetus for Putin to agree to serious talks. Even a temporary ceasefire would be a boon, as it would buy more time to pick up the pace of European rearmament, which is key to deterring future Russian adventurism.

In both the Middle East and Europe, the goal is not to solve these crises but to park them long enough to allow the United States and its allies to regain control of the clock. Indeed, the whole point of sequencing is to limit the likelihood that the U.S. military will be called upon to conduct big interventions of the sort that cost us so much blood and treasure in the past.

The overarching goal is to allow the United States to focus its attention — and power — on China. More U.S. ships in the Pacific means that Chinese leader Xi Jinping will be less likely to roll the dice on a cross-Strait invasion of Taiwan. Trump has proved his willingness to take bold steps to protect U.S. interests, and China respects power above all else. That translates into greater leverage for U.S. diplomacy in dealings with Xi — and greater credibility with Asian allies as the administration works to broker trade deals and present a common front vis-à-vis Beijing.

A successful sequencing strategy would seek to restore American credibility by realigning our military resources with the harsh realities of the international situation. In both the Middle East and Europe, frontline allies will need to be able to stand up to nearby rivals without heavy U.S. involvement. In Asia, given the relative might of China, the United States will have to bear more of the burden.

Sequencing is no substitute for getting America's defense-industrial base in better shape. But until that happens, it is America's best bet for making use of its considerable, but nevertheless limited, resources in a way that keeps it out of war in all three regions.

A. Wess Mitchell is a principal at the Marathon Initiative and served as assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasian affairs from 2017 to 2019.

The fact about Mamdani's win should worry Republicans

By Armin Thomas and Leon Sit
Special to The Washington Post

You shouldn't read too much into one mayoral election in New York City — let alone a Democratic primary — when it comes to gauging the broader political winds. But if there's one warning sign for Republicans, it's that national polling is starting to show discontent among two key groups that swung hard right for Donald Trump in 2024 and that helped power Zohran Mamdani's upset win: young people and Latinos.

Trump romped to victory in 2024 by promising to improve the cost of living after a spike in inflation and to reset immigration policy after a rapid influx of migrants. But recent polling shows that young and Latino voters have moved sharply against the president in *both* of these areas and are judging his performance harshly overall.

Based on five June polls measuring Trump's approval rating, the president's numbers among these groups have fallen far from his 2024 high-water mark. These negative ratings also stand out compared with movement among more "traditionally" Republican groups: white voters and voters over 65. For each of these groups, there was less of a shift in voting behavior last election. Trump's June approval with voters over 65 is only net negative by 6.5 points, while he is above water with whites by three points.

The issues bothering these groups notably connect to ones that Mamdani — who began his campaign by interviewing Trump voters in November — ran on. He promised to both make the city more affordable and protect migrants from Immigration and Customs Enforcement crackdowns.

On the issue of the economy, young people have a more unfavorable than favorable view of Trump's performance by a 25-point margin. With Latinos, it's 26 points. By contrast, the disapproval margin for voters over 65 is 7.5 points, and it's less than one point for white voters.

There's some overlap between these trends: Latino voters tend to skew younger in the electorate, as the demographic has grown quickly in size and electoral importance. A large number of voters cited economic pressure during the Biden presidency as their reason for switching parties — crediting the prior Trump presidency with a stronger economic climate. Approval ratings and voting behavior are not the same thing, of course, but these persistent negative ratings among the groups that swung the largest toward the president suggest that these voters are not feeling the economic relief they believed they would be getting.

On the issue of immigration, this divergence also persists. Young voters are more likely to have an unfavorable view of Trump on immigration than a favorable one by a margin of 18 points, and Latinos by 24 points, as the administration pursues a wide range of policies that have affected undocumented immigrants as well as foreign students, certain green-card holders, and people who have been temporarily allowed to live and work in the United States.

Democrats should nonetheless temper their expectations. Even with strong disapproval ratings among these groups, it is unlikely that they will swing back to being as Democratic as they were previously. Trump's approval is still higher with them than it was at a comparable point in his first term.

But Democrats also don't need to recover all their losses to have a strong performance in the midterms. Even a 1% better showing in House races overall would have secured them the speaker's gavel last year. The Republican Party will be making a mistake if it thinks it can take its newest voters for granted.

Armin Thomas and Leon Sit are partners at Split Ticket, an election data analysis firm.

SCOREBOARD/WIMBLEDON

TENNIS

Wimbledon

Wednesday
At All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club
London
Surface: Grass
Seedings in parentheses
Second Round
Men's Singles

Nicolas Jarry, Chile, def. Learner Tien, United States, 6-2, 6-2, 6-3.
Cameron Norrie, Britain, def. Frances Tiafoe (12), United States, 4-6, 6-4, 6-3, 7-5.
Joao Fonseca, Brazil, def. Jenson Brooksby, United States, 6-4, 5-7, 6-2, 6-4.
Adrian Mannarino, France, def. Valentin Royer, France, 6-4, 6-4, 5-7, 7-6 (1).
Karen Khachanov (17), Russia, def. Shintaro Mochizuki, Japan, 1-6, 7-6 (7), 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.
Nuno Borges, Portugal, def. Billy Harris, Britain, 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (7).
Andrey Rublev (14), Russia, def. Lloyd Harris, South Africa, 6-7 (1), 6-4, 7-6 (5), 6-3.
Carlos Alcaraz (2), Spain, def. Oliver Tarvet, Britain, 6-1, 6-4, 6-4.
Jordan Thompson, Australia, def. Benjamin Bonzi, France, 7-5, 6-7 (2), 4-6, 6-2, 6-4.
Kamil Majchrzak, Poland, def. Ethan Quinn, United States, 6-1, 6-4, 6-3.
Mattia Bellucci, Italy, def. Jiri Lehecka (23), Czechia, 7-6 (4), 6-1, 7-5.
Taylor Fritz (5), United States, def. Gabriel Diallo, Canada, 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (0), 4-6, 6-3.

Women's Singles

Sonay Kartal, Britain, def. Viktoriya Tomova, Bulgaria, 6-2, 6-2.
Madison Keys (6), United States, def. Olga Danilovic, Serbia, 6-4, 6-2.
Laura Siegemund, Germany, def. Leylah Annie Fernandez (29), Canada, 6-2, 6-3.
Aryna Sabalenka (1), Belarus, def. Marie Bouzkova, Czechia, 7-6 (4), 6-4.
Cristina Bucsa, Spain, def. Donna Vekic (22), Croatia, 6-1, 6-3.
Amanda Anisimova (13), United States, def. Renata Zarazua, Mexico, 6-4, 6-3.
Elise Mertens (24), Belgium, def. Ann Li, United States, 6-7 (5), 6-1, 6-2.
Dalma Galfi, Hungary, def. Beatriz Haddad Maia (21), Brazil, 7-6 (7), 6-1.
Linda Noskova (30), Czechia, def. Eva Lys, Germany, 6-2, 2-6, 6-3.
Solana Sierra, Argentina, def. Katie Boulter, Britain, 6-7 (7), 6-2, 6-1.
Diane Parry, France, def. Diana Shnaider (12), Russia, 6-4, 6-1.
Naomi Osaka, Japan, def. Katerina Siniakova, Czechia, 6-3, 6-2.
Emma Raducanu, Britain, def. Marketa Vondrousova, Czechia, 6-3, 6-3.
Kamilla Rakhimova, Russia, def. Jasmine Paolini (4), Italy, 4-6, 6-4, 6-4.
Elina Svitolina (14), Ukraine, def. Aliaksandra Sasnovich, Belarus, 6-2, 6-4.
Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, Russia, def. Ashlyn Krueger (31), United States, 7-6 (4), 6-4.

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League

ATHLETICS — Sent LF Miguel Andujar to Las Vegas (PCL) on a rehab assignment. Released LHP T.J. McFarland.
BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Designated RHP Matt Bowman for assignment. Agreed to terms with SS Jose Barrero on a minor league contract. Placed LHP Keegan Akin on the 15-day IL, retroactive to July 1. Selected the contract of RHP Corbin Martin from Norfolk (IL). Recalled RHP Yennier Cano from Norfolk.
BOSTON RED SOX — Recalled RHP Cooper Criswell from Worcester (IL).
CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Sent LHP Jared Shuster to Charlotte (IL) on a rehab assignment.
CLEVELAND GUARDIANS — Sent RHPs Paul Sewald and Trevor Stephan to Columbus (IL) on rehab assignments.
DETROIT TIGERS — Placed RHP Sawyer Gipson-Long on the 15-day IL, retroactive to June 29. Placed RF Kerry Carpenter on the 10-day IL, retroactive to June 30. Recalled SS Trey Sweeney from Toledo (IL). Recalled RHP Tyler Owens and LHP Bailey Horn from Toledo. Recalled RF Justyn-Henry Malloy from Toledo.
HOUSTON ASTROS — Placed 3B Luis Guillorme on the 10-day IL. Selected the contract of 3B Zack Short from Sugar Land (PCL).
MINNESOTA TWINS — Placed RHP Bailey Ober on the 15-day IL. Recalled LHP Kody Funderburk from St. Paul (IL). Sent 3B Jonah Bride outright to St. Paul.
NEW YORK YANKEES — Recalled RHP Clayton Beeter from Scranton/Wilkes-Barre. Designated RHP Geoff Hartlieb for assignment.
SEATTLE MARINERS — Selected the contract of LHP Joe Jacques from Tacoma (PCL). Optioned RHP Emerson Hancock to Tacoma. Sent RHP Zach Pop outright to Tacoma.
TEXAS RANGERS — Reinstated 1B Jake Burger from the 10-day IL. Optioned 3B Josh Jung to Round Rock (PCL).
TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Reinstated RHP Yimi Garcia from the 15-day IL. Optioned LHP Mason Fluharty to Buffalo (IL).

National League

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS — Agreed to terms with RHP Jake Woodford on a major league contract. Designated LHP Kyle Nelson for assignment. Optioned RHP Juan Morillo to Reno (PCL).
ATLANTA BRAVES — Activated LF Jurickson Profar. Reinstated RHP Daysbel Hernández from the 15-day IL. Designated LF Alex Verdugo for assignment. Placed RHP Spencer Schwellenbach on the 15-day IL retroactive to June 29. Recalled LHP Austin Cox from Gwinnett (IL). Optioned RHP Kevin Herget to Gwinnett.
CINCINNATI REDS — Recalled RHP Yosver Zulueta from Louisville (IL).
MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Sent LHP Nestor Cortes to Nashville (IL) on a rehab assignment. Recalled RHP Craig Yoho from Nashville.
NEW YORK METS — Recalled RHP Austin Warren from Syracuse (IL).
PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES — Recalled RHP Seth Johnson from Lehigh Valley (IL).
PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Activated RHP Dennis Santana.
SAN DIEGO PADRES — Optioned RHP Matt Waldron to El Paso (PCL). Recalled RHP Ron Marinaccio from El Paso. Selected the contract of RHP Eduarniel Nunez from El Paso.
SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Optioned RHP Carson Seymour to Sacramento (PCL). Recalled RHP Mason Black from Sacramento. Signed LHP Matt Gage.
ST. LOUIS CARDINALS — Sent RF Jordan Walker to Springfield (TL) on a rehab assignment.
WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Recalled RHP Andry Lara from Harrisburg (EL). Sent RHP Mason Thompson to Rochester (IL) on a rehab assignment.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association

DALLAS MAVERICKS — Signed F Cooper Flagg to a rookie scale contract.
MIAMI HEAT — Signed C Vladislav Goldin to a two-way contract.
MILWAUKEE BUCKS — Waived F Chris Livingston.
PHOENIX SUNS — Re-signed G Collin Gillespie to a contract.
SACRAMENTO KINGS — Signed C Maxime Raynaud to a contract.
UTAH JAZZ — Signed F Ace Bailey and G Walter Clayton Jr. to rookie scale contracts.

Women's National Basketball Association

CONNECTICUT SUN — Activated G Leila Lacan. Waived C Kariata Diaby.
DALLAS WINGS — Signed F Liatu King to a rest-of-season contract.
LOS ANGELES SPARKS — Released G Shey Peddy. Waived G Odyssey Sims.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Waived DB JT Woods. Signed CB Shaquill Griffin to a contract.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

MINNESOTA WILD — Signed F Bradley Marek to a one-year, entry-level contract. Signed G Cal Petersen to a one-year, one-way contract, F Nicolas Aube-Kubel to a one-year, two-way contract, D Ben Gleason to a one-year, two-way contract, D Matt Kiersted to a two-year, two-way contract, and F Tyler Pitlick to a two-year, two-way contract.
NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Acquired F Thomas Bordeleau from the San Jose Sharks in exchange for F Shane Bowers. Signed C Cody Glass to a two-year contract.
ST. LOUIS BLUES — Placed D Nick Leddy on waivers.
TAMP BAY LIGHTNING — Signed F Jakob Pelletier to a three-year contract.

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

ATLANTA UNITED — Signed D Enea Mihaj on a free transfer.
NEW YORK CITY FC — Loaned F Jovan Mijatovic to Oud-Heverlee Leuven (Belgian Pro League).
SAN DIEGO FC — Re-signed D Christopher McVey to a two-year contract extension through the 2027 season that includes a 2028 club option.

National Women's Soccer League

BOSTON LEGACY FC — Signed M Annie Karich to a two-year contract through 2027 with a 2028 option. Loaned M Annie Karich to an unnamed Liga MX team through the end of 2025.
ORLANDO PRIDE — Loaned F Amanda Allen to Halifax Tides FC (Canada's Northern Super League). Loaned D Brianna Martinez to Carolina Ascent FC (USL Super League). Loaned G Kat Asman to Lexington FC of the USL Super League through June 2026. Loaned F Marianna Larroquette to Lexington FC of the USL Super League through the end of the 2025 season. Loaned M Aryssa Mahrt to Spokane Zephyr of the USL Super League through the end of the 2025 season.

AP SPORTLIGHT

July 4

1975 — Billie Jean King beats Evonne Goolagong, 6-0, 6-1 for her sixth and final singles title at Wimbledon.
1980 — Nolan Ryan of the Houston Astros fans the Reds' Cesar Geronimo to become fourth MLB pitcher to reach 3,000 strikeouts.
2009 — Serena Williams beats her big sister Venus 7-6 (3), 6-2 for her third Wimbledon title and 11th Grand Slam championship. In the fourth all-Williams final at Wimbledon, Serena comes out on top for the third time.
2014 — Germany becomes the first country to reach the semifinals for a fourth straight World Cup by beating France 1-0 in a quarterfinal match.

PRO SOCCER

MLS

Western Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
San Diego FC	12	5	3	39	41	25
Vancouver	11	3	5	38	35	19
Minn. United	9	4	7	34	33	23
Portland	8	5	6	30	28	27
Seattle	8	6	5	29	27	25
San Jose	7	7	6	27	40	32
LAFC	7	5	5	26	30	24
Colorado	7	8	5	26	23	28
Austin FC	7	8	5	26	15	23
Houston	6	9	5	23	25	31
FC Dallas	5	8	6	21	26	35
Sporting KC	5	10	5	20	31	37
Real Salt Lake	5	10	4	19	19	26
St Louis City	3	11	6	15	19	31
LA Galaxy	1	13	6	9	19	42

Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Philadelphia	12	4	4	40	35	20
Cincinnati	12	5	3	39	31	26
Nashville	11	4	5	38	36	23
Columbus	10	3	7	37	33	26
Orlando City	9	5	6	33	37	26
Inter Miami CF	8	3	5	29	36	27
New York	8	7	5	29	32	24
Chicago	8	7	4	28	38	34
NYC FC	8	7	4	28	24	21
Charlotte FC	8	11	1	25	32	34
New England	6	6	6	24	24	21
D.C. United	4	10	6	18	17	39
Toronto FC	4	10	5	17	22	25
Atlanta	4	10	5	17	22	37
CF Montréal	3	12	5	14	17	36

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

Thursday's game

Toronto FC at New York City FC

Friday's games

Minnesota at FC Dallas
Sporting Kansas City at Colorado
Vancouver at LA Galaxy

Saturday's games

Orlando City at Charlotte FC
Chicago at Cincinnati
Atlanta at D.C. United
Miami at CF Montréal
Los Angeles FC at Austin FC
Philadelphia at Nashville
St Louis City at Real Salt Lake
New England at Portland
Houston at San Diego FC
New York at San Jose

Sunday's game

Columbus at Seattle

Wednesday, July 9

Miami at New England
Colorado at Los Angeles FC

Saturday, July 12

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

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA

Eastern Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	11	5	.688	—
Atlanta	11	6	.647	½
Indiana	8	8	.500	3
Washington	8	9	.471	3½
Chicago	5	11	.313	6
Connecticut	2	15	.118	9½

Western Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	14	2	.875	—
Phoenix	12	5	.706	2½
Seattle	10	7	.588	4½
Golden State	9	7	.563	5
Las Vegas	8	8	.500	6
Los Angeles	5	12	.294	9½
Dallas	5	13	.278	10

Wednesday's games

No games scheduled.

Thursday's games

Las Vegas at Indiana
Los Angeles at New York
Seattle at Atlanta
Phoenix at Dallas
Washington at Minnesota

Friday's games

No games scheduled.

ALASTAIR GRANT/AP

Novak Djokovic of Serbia reacts after beating Daniel Evans of Britain during their second-round match at Wimbledon on Thursday.

Djokovic reaches third round for record 19th time

BY MATTIAS KARÉN
Associated Press

LONDON — Novak Djokovic added another record to his name by reaching Wimbledon's third round for a 19th time with a 6-3, 6-2, 6-0 win over Dan Evans on Centre Court on Wednesday.

It was Djokovic's 99th match win at Wimbledon overall, and the 19 third-round appearances put him one ahead of Roger Federer for most by any man in the Open Era.

It's hardly the most prestigious record for Djokovic, whose 24 Grand Slam titles — including seven at Wimbledon — are the most by a male player. But he could at least use it to poke fun at his new, and much younger, main rivals.

"Nineteen times, that's a great stat," said the 38-year-old Djokovic. "That's probably almost as much as Sinner and Alcaraz have years in their lives."

Well, not quite.

Carlos Alcaraz, who beat Djokovic in the last two Wimbledon finals, is 22, while No. 1-ranked Jannik Sinner — who was playing later on Centre Court — is 23.

The growing rivalry between Sinner and Alcaraz — especially in the wake of their five-set final at the French Open last month — has helped tennis move on from the era of the Big Three, where Djokovic is the last man standing after Federer and Rafael Nadal retired.

But Djokovic is too focused on proving he can still win another Slam to sit back and reflect on everything he has accomplished at Wimbledon.

"I don't pause to reflect, to be honest. I don't have time," Djokovic said in an on-court interview. "I would like to. But I think that's going to come probably when I set the racket aside and then sip margarita on the beach with Federer and Nadal and just reflect on our rivalry and everything."

Against Evans, Djokovic failed to convert his first nine break points in the first set. But once he got the breakthrough for a 5-3 lead — raising both arms in the air as if to say "finally" — he went five-for-six on break points the rest of the way.

"You have these kinds of days where everything goes your way," said Djokovic, who didn't face a break point of his own until the final game. "Everything flows."

No. 7-seeded Mirra Andreeva and No. 10 Emma Navarro both advanced in straight sets. The 18-year-old Andreeva earned a 6-1, 7-6 (4) win over Lucia Bronzetti of Italy, and Navarro cruised past Veronika Kudermetova 6-1, 6-2. No. 11 Elena Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion, beat Maria Sakkari 6-3, 6-1.

In the men's draw, No. 11 Alex de Minaur ousted 115th-ranked Arthur Cazaux 4-6, 6-2, 6-4, 6-0 and 19th-seeded Gregor Dimitrov outlasted Corentin Moutet 7-5, 4-6, 7-5, 7-5.

Alcaraz, the two-time defending champion, faces 35-year-old Jan-Lennard Struff on Centre Court, before No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka faces British home favorite Emma Raducanu in the late match. Australian Open champion Madison Keys faces Laura Siegemund on No. 2 Court.

"You have these kinds of days where everything goes your way," said Djokovic, who didn't face a break point of his own until the final game. "Everything flows."

AUTO-RACING

Future of NASCAR's Chicago weekend unclear

BY JAY COHEN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — When it comes to NASCAR's upcoming return to downtown Chicago, Julie Giese has a long list of responsibilities. The track president is monitoring an ambitious construction schedule for the street course, to go along with everything else that goes into the busy weekend.

What happens next is going to have to wait.

The future of NASCAR in Chicago is murky going into its third edition on the first weekend in July. The three-year contract between the motorsports organization and the city that was announced in 2022 has two mutual options, and their fate is unclear.

Giese said there have been "good conversations" between NASCAR and the city, and there is time to work on the possibilities beyond the event.

"So really right now the focus is on let's execute a really great 2025," Giese said. "We'll continue to have the conversations with the city. But right now, honestly, the more consistent conversations are the planning conversations."

Jason Lee, a senior adviser to Mayor Brandon Johnson, praised NASCAR for its involvement in the community and its improvements with the event. He described almost parallel discussions going on inside of the organization and the city when it comes to the future of the partnership.

Johnson's predecessor, Lori Lightfoot, was in charge when the original agreement for the weekend was finalized.

"We remain available to have any conversations about the future," Lee said Monday. "I know they've been laser focused on executing this year's event because there are lessons they've learned that they want to apply. And I think some of that, whether you successfully do that, will play a role in how they want to proceed."

ERIN HOOLEY/AP

People walk past construction of the street course for the NASCAR races this week in downtown Chicago.

One possible change that could interest the city is moving to a different weekend, something it has previously discussed with NASCAR.

"It may make more sense to move that event to a different weekend where we don't have as many demands on our law enforcement and other emergency personnel," Lee told the AP. "And so that's definitely something that we've contemplated, but there is also some constraints in terms of other events in the city of Chicago and the NASCAR schedule."

The Athletic reported on June 18 that NASCAR was nearing an agreement to put a street race in the San Diego area next year. An announcement could come as soon as July.

Giese said her focus has been on Chicago. She also said she feels there is room for multiple street courses on NASCAR's calendar.

"We have multiple road course races on the schedule," she said. "So I mean ... I've not ever heard where it has to be one or the other. I mean there is room. This event, we went into it that first year knowing full well it was a proof of concept. And we showed that it is possible."

The Xfinity and Cup Series races in Chicago — held on a 12-turn, 2.2-mile course against the backdrop of Lake Michigan and Grant Park — are the main events in a festival-like weekend that also includes music and entertainment options.

It is geared as much to a new audience in one of NASCAR's most important regions as it is to the most ardent racing fans. NASCAR used to race at Chicagoland Speedway in Joliet, a 45-mile drive from downtown, but it pulled out after the 2019 season.

"This is a top-three market for us, worldwide frankly, for NASCAR fans," NASCAR executive Ben Kennedy said when the Chicago event was announced in 2022.

There was some concern for drivers and their teams about the course ahead of the first weekend, and it wasn't exactly warmly received by local businesses and residents because of the street closures in a heavily trafficked area for tourists in the summer.

But organizers have shrunk the construction schedule from 43 days in 2023 to 25 this year. Based on input from fans, they also have made adjustments to the race viewing areas and moved the concert stage to the start-finish line. Admission is free for kids 12 and under on Saturday and Sunday this year.

The weekend also has won over at least some people inside of NASCAR.

"This was very different. But now it's fun to see and hear from people in the industry that are coming in early, and they're going to just enjoy the city for a few days," Giese said. "The one piece that I hear from our drivers, especially, is they love just staying right at a hotel right across the street. They're walking across Michigan Avenue and they're at the course."

Quite often with an umbrella. Wet weather had a major effect on each of the first two editions. Heavy rain nearly scuttled the inaugural weekend, and last year's Cup Series race was shortened because of a rain delay and fading sunlight. When the drivers were on the course, the racing was compelling. Shane van Gisbergen outdueled Justin Haley and Chase Elliott on his way to a Cup victory in 2023, and Alex Bowman stopped an 80-race win drought last year.

"I think they've been up against it as far as conditions are concerned," Joe Gibbs Racing driver Denny Hamlin said. "The track has been good, it's been racy and has passing zones and the scenery is fantastic as far as the backdrop we are racing in. There's a lot of positives for the Chicago Street Race.

"It will probably move around in the future, but it's in the mold in which I would like to see any street race they continue to implement in the future."

Norris, Piastri take friendly F1 title rivalry to Norris' home course

BY JAMES ELLINGWORTH
Associated Press

The history of Formula 1 shows how vying for the title can turn the friendliest of teammates into bitter rivals.

So far, Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris are making it work at McLaren.

As Norris heads to his home race at Silverstone, he's hoping fans at the British Grand Prix show his Australian teammate some love, too.

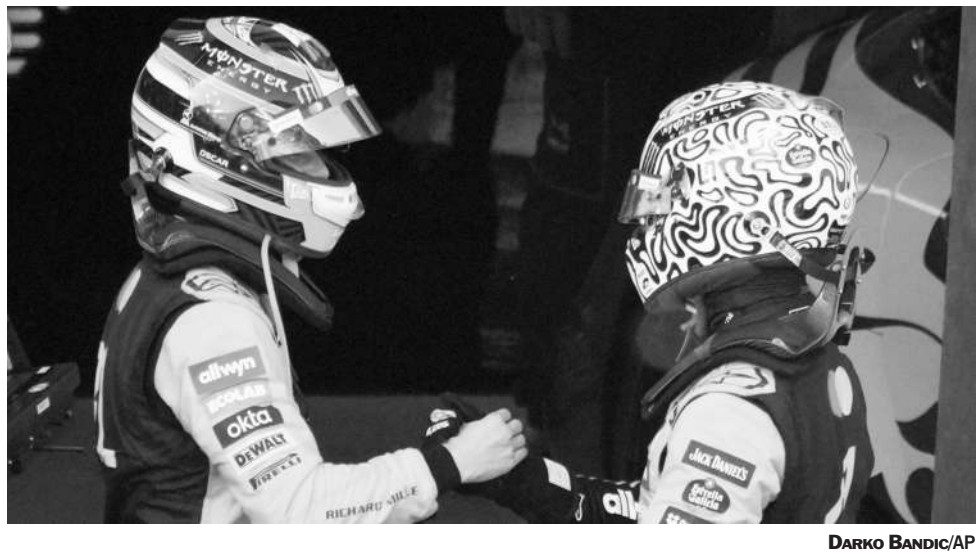
"The British fans are normally very accepting for all of us and especially for us as McLaren. So I think the first point should be for the fans to embrace everyone and support everyone," Norris said after his win at Sunday's Austrian Grand Prix when asked if there might be a hostile reception for Piastri.

Nine years ago, one of F1's most famous teammate rivalries came into focus at the Austrian Grand Prix, when childhood friends-turned-Mercedes teammates Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg collided on the last lap, one more incident in a relationship which had long been rocky.

There have been recent incidents in Norris' and Piastri's time together which potentially may have soured the relationship between other drivers.

In Canada, Norris clipped the back of Piastri's car on June 15 and hit the wall. Norris apologized.

On Sunday in Austria, Piastri attempted an over-optimistic lunge and narrowly missed hitting Norris. Piastri apologized.



DARKO BANDIC/AP

Second-placed McLaren driver Oscar Piastri of Australia give his congratulates to Lando Norris of Britain during the Formula One Grand Prix in Spielberg, Austria, Sunday.

"We both want to race hard and race fair, and it goes both ways," Norris said Sunday.

"(The incident in Canada is) something I wish never happened but it was nice that we could go out and have a good battle (in Austria) and push things to the limits," he said. "There were still some close moments, but nothing that was hopefully something that would make Andrea (Stella, McLaren's team principal) or the pit wall sweat too much."

In his third year with Britain-based McLaren, Piastri has some warm memories of the Silverstone crowd, but he's never been there before as a championship leader whose closest rival is the home hero.

"A couple of years ago they were chanting my name in the crowd, so that was unexpected. I'm not sure I'll quite get that again, which is fair enough," Piastri said. "Obviously I'm expecting there to be a lot more Lando fans than 'me' fans, but that's fair. It's it's his home race as well, so I think it'll be fine."

NBA

Off-court issues turn Beasley from assett to liability

By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press

Malik Beasley should be riding high right now, after a season where he became just the fifth player in NBA history to make at least 300 shots from 3-point range in a single season.

Instead, his future seems very uncertain.

He's a free agent and facing some serious off-court issues — including being part of an investigation surrounding what's believed to be unusual betting patterns on games and now some unrelated legal matters involving his personal finances.

Beasley was a key part of the Detroit Pistons this past season, averaging 16.3 points per game for a team that made the playoffs and was one of the feel-good stories in the NBA — winning 44 games after winning only 14 in the previous season.

Gambling-related probe

Beasley has not been charged with any crime. Federal investigators, who have not commented publicly, are looking into betting patterns surrounding some games Beasley played in during the 2023-24 season when he was with the Milwaukee Bucks.

It is similar to other investigations — such as the one that led to the banning of then-Toronto player Jontay Porter from the league. The Miami Heat's Terry Rozier was a subject of a similar probe surrounding part of his time with the Charlotte Hornets. Rozier was never charged and never faced any penalty from the NBA.

ESPN reported that one game in question surrounded Beasley's performance Jan. 31, 2024, and in particular whether he would get more or less than 2.5 rebounds. Bettors, ESPN was told, wagered large sums that he would not get that many rebounds. But Beasley got six rebounds that night, meaning those "under" bets did not pay out.

Off-court legal issues

News of the gambling probe broke Sunday, followed by news of lawsuits two days later — including one brought by a sports representation agency that is seeking more than $2 million in damages.

That suit, brought by Hazan Sports Management Group, says Beasley breached his contract and failed to fully repay a $650,000 advance, among other issues. He and that agency parted ways in recent months, even though it negotiated a $6 million contract for him to play with Detroit this past season.

Julia Demaree Nikhinson/AP

One of only two players who have made 1,000 3-pointers in the last four seasons, free agent guard Malik Beasley was set for a good payday this offseason until he became the subject of a gambling investigation.

"I have been with Malik for a long time, I have seen a lot of people around him come and go, but I have stayed away from any of his financial management or mismanagement or decisions he would make with money," Beasley's criminal defense lawyer, Steve Haney, told The Detroit News.

Other issues were revealed with rent payments, along with a settlement with a dentist and even a barber who works with a number of NBA players.

Current prospects

The NBA has seen a huge spike in dependency on the 3-point shot in recent years, and Beasley — who made 319 of them this past season, one back of Minnesota's Anthony Edwards for the most in the league — is an elite 3-point shooter.

Only two players have made more than 1,000 3s over the last four seasons. Golden State's Stephen Curry, the league's all-time 3-point king, is one. Beasley is the other.

This means Beasley should be in high demand, given the fact that he has a skill all teams crave. And the Pistons, according to a person with knowledge of the talks, were prepared to offer Beasley a three-year contract to stay. But given the seriousness of the issues that have come up in recent days, those talks cooled.

Outside of the off-court concerns, another problem is that very few teams have the means available under the salary cap to give a new player a contract in the range of what Beasley would be worth, which is probably in the $15 million annual range.

He may have to accept something much, much smaller — possibly even a minimum deal of about $3 million — to have a chance with a team next season.

Nets scoured globe for international 5-player draft class

By Brian Mahoney
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The wall across from the elevator leading to the Brooklyn Nets' practice court features a map of the world, where the home countries of their players and executives are noted.

Whoever has to update it had plenty of work after the NBA draft.

The Nets had five first-round picks and they scoured the globe to find the players for them. There's a Russian who played professionally in Spain before heading to college in Utah. Guards from France and Israel. Two players who represented Israeli national teams.

"To be honest, it's fantastic the way it just worked out," said Sean Marks, the team's general manager, who is from New Zealand.

"I mean, if you think about it, the game of basketball is such a worldly game, played all over the globe. You've heard about how the rest of the world is catching up to one of America's games. I won't comment on that. What I will say is there's talent everywhere and that's our job, is to bring in the best talent regardless of race, ethnicity and so forth."

Adam Hunger/AP

Egor Demin, left, celebrates after being selected eighth by the Brooklyn Nets in the first round of the NBA Draft June 25 in New York.

The new players were introduced Tuesday at Brooklyn's practice facility. The class includes No. 8 pick Egor Demin, a Russian guard who spent a season at BYU; No. 19 Nolan Traore of France; No. 26 Ben Saraf from Israel; No. 27 Danny Wolf from Michigan and No. 22 Drake Powell from North Carolina, whose rights Brooklyn acquired from Atlanta in a trade that still must be completed.

Some of them knew each other long before they sat at the same long podium along with Marks and coach Jordi Fernandez, who is from Spain and coached Canada's Olympic team.

Saraf and Wolf had practiced together before playing for Israeli teams. Demin, who spent time with Real Madrid's second team before college, knew all about Traore after he poured in 45 points against Barcelona in the semifinals of an under-18 tournament before Demin led his squad to victory in the championship game.

"That was really scary for us to get to this game knowing who he is," Demin said.

Now the Nets will see what they can all do together, though it might not look pretty with so many young players coming to a team that went 26-56 last season. Marks said the only expectation will be that the players go out and compete.

"There is a learning curve for sure, there's no question in that," Marks said. "You're looking at four 19-year-olds up here, so I have two boys myself older than them. So that just puts it in perspective, like just how young this group is and to me that's exciting. When you see the continuity we can have with this group and how they can build and how they can flourish over the next three, four, five years, it's going to be exciting."

Brooklyn is the most populous of New York's five boroughs and by itself would be one of the five biggest cities in the United States. It features large Jewish and Russian communities, so Saraf, Wolf and Demin could quickly become fan favorites.

"It was amazing. Got a lot of messages and a lot of love from the Jewish community here," Saraf said. "So it's going to be really exciting and I appreciate all the love I'm getting like in the streets and from the fans."

SOCCER/NBA

SCOTT KANE/AP

United States midfielder Diego Luna (10) celebrates after scoring a goal during the first half of a CONCACAF Gold Cup semifinal match against Guatemala on Wednesday in St. Louis.

US advances to final; coach bemoans pro-visitor crowd

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Mauricio Pochettino got a feel for what the U.S. men's national team still faces at times during home games: a crowd rooting for the opposition.

"It was like to play in Guatemala," the coach said after his team got two early goals from Diego Luna and hung on for a 2-1 win Wednesday night that advanced the Americans to the CONCACAF Gold Cup final. "That was good for our players because it was an atmosphere that we didn't expect."

The United States will play Mexico on Sunday in Houston, the Americans' last competitive match before next year's World Cup.

A sellout crowd of 22,423 at Energizer Park energized Los Chapines, who outshot the U.S. 20-12 and got an 80th-minute goal from Olger Escobar.

"That is football," Pochettino said. "When we say the connection in between the fans and the team, that is the connection that we'd like to see in the World Cup. That connection that makes you fly, because (of) the energy that translates."

U.S. players are used to some home matches where the support is overwhelmingly for the opponent.

"We're a country full of immigrants, so it was kind of expected for tonight," defender Chris Richards said. "It was good for some of the younger guys to kind of experience that tonight, but for us experienced guys, we went through World Cup qualifiers with the exact same stuff, so I think that was a good lesson that the team needed to learn."

An Argentine who played for his nation 20 times, Pochettino comes from a culture where soccer dominates life.

"I saw player of the Guatemala crying," he said. "That is the way that we need to feel, and our fans need to feel the same. It's not to come here and to enjoy the spectacle and if you lose, nothing happens. Yes, it happens a lot. Things happen because you play for your pride, you play for many, many things that I think I cannot tell you tonight. But I think it's good for our players .... I came from Argentina and in Argentina it's not the same win or lose. The consequences are massive.

"The rest of the opponents and the different countries," he added, "you play for survival, you play for food, you play for pride, you play for many things. It's not to go and enjoy and go home and laugh and that's it."

Luna has showed the hunger Pochettino wants. The 21-year-old impressed the coach when he continued playing with a broken nose during a January friendly against Costa Rica in which the Americans used a B team after training sessions with mostly Major League Soccer players that some fans nicknamed Camp Cupcake. He's become a regular in the Gold Cup and has three goals in his last two games.

"Diego was the example from January, how he is desperate to play for this shirt, for the national team and that is why now he is in the level that he showed," Pochettino said.

Striker Patrick Agyemang also has emerged from January camp to gain a starting berth at the Gold Cup, where many regulars are absent.

'Sometimes you say it's useless, people say it's useless," Pochettino said of the January camp. "It's not useless. I think it's important, important for the national team, important for the team and very important for the country."

Luna scored in the fourth and 15th minutes, the first with his left foot and the second with his right.

"I loved it. It was awesome, man," he said of the environment. "That's what every game should be like and I think that the Guatemalans should be very proud of the fan base that they have and the energy they bring."

Defender Tim Ream, who captained the U.S. in his hometown, said positive results will grow the fanbase.

"None of it's going to happen unless we win, unless we continue to win," he said. "For us, what's the hallmark of a U.S. team? It's fighting and togetherness. That's what we're finding and doing in this tournament. And it's not always going to be perfect. It's not going to always be pretty, but doing that fosters that connection with the fans, with the diehards, with the casuals, with everybody. And as long as we continue to do that, then that culture grows, the feelings grow, and the connections grow."

Ayton reportedly set to sign with Lakers

BY GREG BEACHAM
Associated Press

EL SEGUNDO, Calif. — Center Deandre Ayton has agreed to join the Los Angeles Lakers as a free agent, two people with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The people spoke on the condition of anonymity because the deal could not yet be announced between the Lakers and Ayton, the No. 1 overall pick in the 2018 NBA draft — two spots ahead of Luka Doncic.

The Portland Trail Blazers bought out Ayton's contract last weekend, and he has agreed to join Doncic and LeBron James on a deal for the upcoming season with a player option for 2026-27. He will be paid more than $25 million by the Blazers while playing for Los Angeles next year.

Ayton's arrival fills the Lakers' most glaring offseason need, providing a lob target for James and Doncic. And while Ayton isn't known as a defensive stopper, the 7-footer will provide the size in the middle LA has missed since trading Anthony Davis to Dallas for Doncic.

Ayton, who turns 27 this month, spent his first five NBA seasons with Phoenix before joining Portland two years ago as part of the three-team trade sending Damian Lillard to Milwaukee.

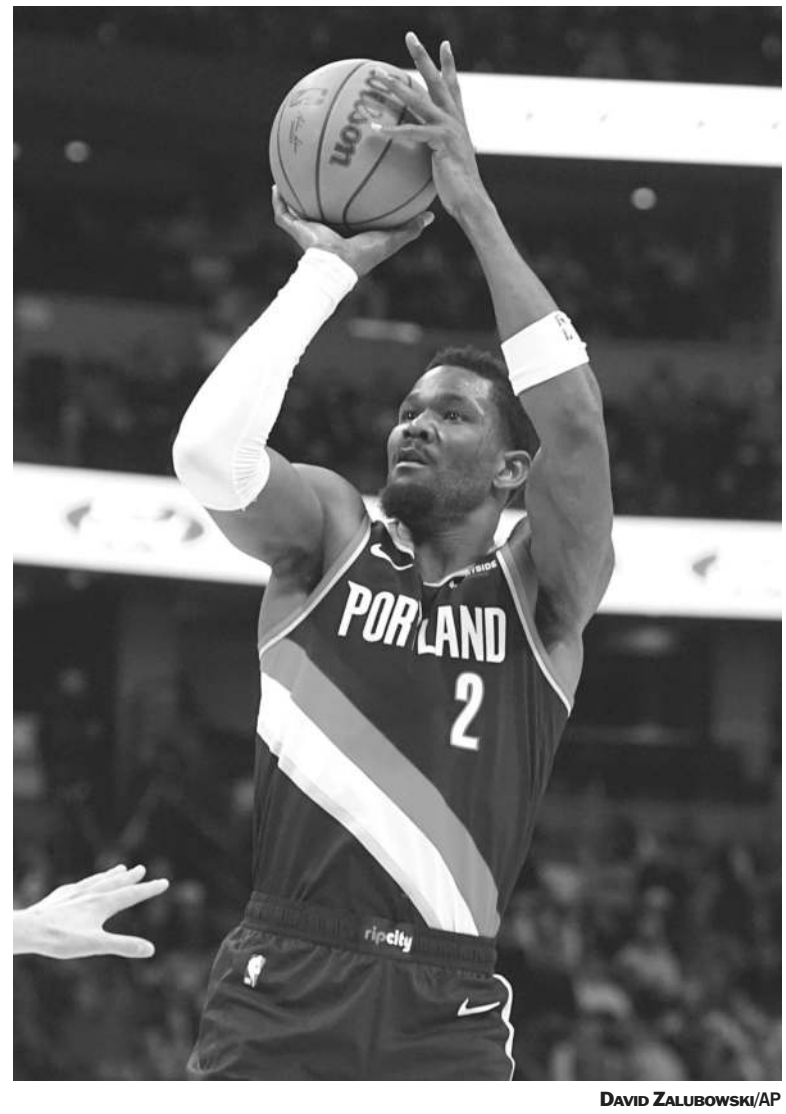
Ayton struggled at times with the Trail Blazers while playing for mediocre teams, but he has averaged 16.4 points and 10.5 rebounds during his seven NBA seasons while making 59% of his shots. He played only 40 games for Portland last season, getting sidelined for the rest of the year in February by a strained calf.

While he has never been an All-Star, Ayton is the only player to average a double-double in points and rebounds in his first seven NBA seasons since former Lakers center Dwight Howard did it more than a decade ago.

Ayton also knows Southern California after moving from the Bahamas to San Diego to play high school basketball. He went on to the University of Arizona before the Suns drafted him.

Los Angeles struggled without Davis in the paint last season, with Jaxson Hayes playing poorly enough to get benched by coach JJ Redick in their final two playoff games.

The Lakers were eliminated from the first round of the postseason by Minnesota in five games, with big man Rudy Gobert racking up 27 points and 24 rebounds in the clinching victory while LA largely played without a center.



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Deandre Ayton had his contract bought out by the Portland Trail Blazers, allowing him to sign with the Los Angeles Lakers as a free agent.

NHL

LM OTERO/AP

Canucks goaltender Thatcher Demko watches a shot go wide of the net in a game against Dallas. Vancouver kept their top goalie by extending Demko for $8.5 million a year through 2029.

Dwindling market prompts scramble to secure goalies

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

It is not a good time to be an NHL team in need of a goaltender.

Fewer than a dozen who played in the league last season were available as unrestricted free agents, Detroit acquired John Gibson from Anaheim over the weekend after years of trade rumors and that left a handful of veteran backups to sign Tuesday.

New Jersey kept Jake Allen, Thatcher Demko stayed in Vancouver, Philadelphia added Dan Vladar and the New York Islanders signed David Rittich.

"Really, you sort of take a look at the landscape and see what's out there," said Allen, who re-signed with the Devils for $9 million over five years. "Yeah, there were some spots, but at the same time, my situation in Jersey was good."

Two-time defending Western Conference champion Edmonton might have lost out in the game of musical goalies and could have little choice but to stick with Stuart Skinner and Calvin Pickard. They combined for a save percentage of .888 in the playoffs, ranking 13th out of 16 teams, dropping to .866 in the Stanley Cup Final loss to Florida.

Allen was not really an option for the Oilers because he wanted to stay on the East Coast regardless. They signed 31-year-old hometown product Matt Tompkins for two years at the league minimum $775,000.

The Canucks have a rare surplus at the most important position in hockey after extending Demko for $8.5 million a year through 2029. They also have Kevin Lankinen under contract at $4.5 million annually through 2030, and Arturs Silovs backstopped Abbotsford of the American Hockey League to the Calder Cup after playing well in the playoffs for Vancouver last year.

Demko is a franchise No. 1, so he's not going anywhere.

"Probably we have the best goalie tandem in the league," said winger Conor Garland, who also signed a long-term extension with the Canucks. "For Demmer just coming back being healthy and the presence he is in the room, what a competitor he is. He has kind of an aura about him of just being one of the top goalies in the league and how hard he practices and what that does for our room on a day-to-day basis having a guy like that, it's a huge impact."

Vladar, who turns 28 in August, signed for $6.7 million over the next two years to join the Flyers' mix. He figures to split time with Samuel Ersson.

Rittich joins the Islanders as depth behind unquestioned starter Ilya Sorokin. Semyon Varlamov is under contract for two more seasons but has been injured, and general manager Mathieu Darche got some insurance with the soon-to-be 34-year-old nicknamed "Big Save Dave."

"You can never have enough goalies," Darche said. "David is a veteran around the NHL. He's a very capable NHL goalie, so we're excited to have him."

Elsewhere in the Metropolitan Division, Carolina signed 25-year-old Amir Miftakhov after he put up some strong numbers in the KHL. With Frederik Andersen and Pyotr Kochetkov already in place, Miftakhov is a potential low-risk, high-reward addition at the league minimum of $775,000.

> **"It's important to have goaltending depth, and we look forward to having him in our organization."**
>
> **Hurricanes GM Eric Tulsky**
> on signing Amir Miftakhov

"Amir has put together a number of solid seasons in the KHL and is ready to return to professional hockey in North America," general manager Eric Tulsky said. "It's important to have goaltending depth, and we look forward to having him in our organization."

The Panthers signed recently acquired Daniil Tarasov for $1.05 million, with Vitek Vanecek heading to Utah for $1.5 million. Buffalo signed well-traveled Alex Lyon to a two-year deal worth $3 million, and Seattle added two-time Cup champion Matt Murray for $1 million for next season.

San Jose got Alexander Nedjelkovic from Pittsburgh for a 2028 third-round pick, with the goal of him pushing and helping young starter Yaroslav Askarov.

Gibson was the most proven netminder available. Days after changing places, he's not sure why the goalie market became so thin, but he's happy to be going to the Red Wings to perhaps revitalize his career at 31.

"It's a new chapter, fresh start, kind of going in excited to prove myself," Gibson said. "It's just an exciting opportunity to go to a team and an organization that really wants to get back and to playoff hockey."

Sought-after Ehlers looking at options

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

Nikolaj Ehlers remained unsigned going into the second day of NHL free agency, as the top player available weighed his options Wednesday and suitors awaited his decision that could be one of the final big moves of the offseason.

Ehlers was already a rarity as a sought-after free agent who let the opening day of free agency go by without signing a contract, opting instead to sit back and consider his options. Carolina, Tampa Bay and Washington were considered among the teams interested in pursuing the 29-year-old from Denmark who played his first nine seasons with Winnipeg.

"We've had talks with his agent," Hurricanes general manager Eric Tulsky said Tuesday. "He's taking his time to field offers. He's obviously a very popular person right now, and we're waiting to see where that goes."

Ehlers and his camp watched Tuesday as fellow winger Brock Boeser re-signed in Vancouver for just over $50 million and older forward Mikael Granlund got $7 million annually from Anaheim. With the salary cap increasing to a record amount to $95.5 million and a lack of high-end talent available, Ehlers could sign the most lucrative contract among players changing teams this summer.

Veteran defenseman Brent Burns agreed to terms with Colorado on a contract for next season. The 2017 Norris Trophy winner is 40 and past his prime, but he averaged nearly 23 minutes a game on Carolina's run to the Eastern Conference final and will likely only be asked to play in a third-pairing role with the Avalanche.

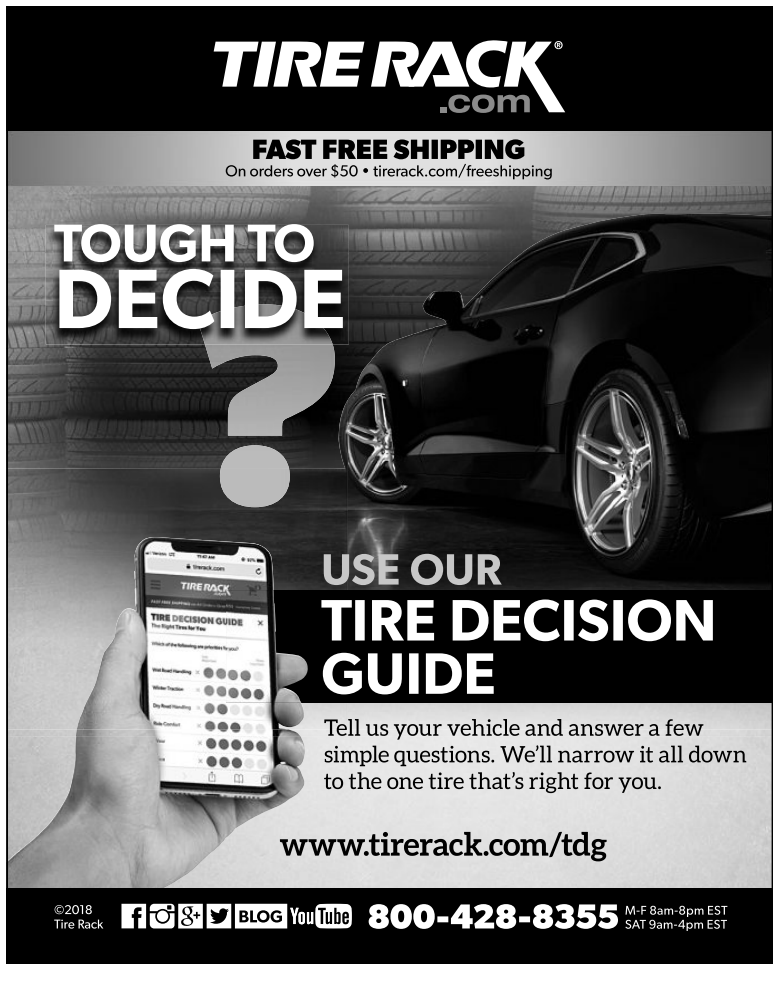
Burns is back in the West, where he spent his first 18 NHL seasons before the last three with the Hurricanes.

After signing Andrew Mangiapane late Tuesday night, Edmonton signed Curtis Lazar on Wednesday for the league minimum $775,000. They'll take spots of departing wingers Connor Brown and Corey Perry, who departed after back-to-back losses in the final.

"It's nice to have some new faces to come into your group," Oilers GM Stan Bowman said. "They bring a bit of a different energy. They weren't here last year when we made the (final) and the year before, so I think they're hungry to get that far in the playoffs."

The New York Islanders signed Maxim Shabanov after the KHL forward drew interest from multiple teams interested in bringing him to North America.

The New York Rangers agreed to terms with Taylor Raddysh on a two-year contract worth $3 million, New Jersey re-signed Cody Class for $5 million over the next two seasons, while Pittsburgh added Anthony Mantha for $2.5 million and Alexander Alexeyev for $775,000.



MLB

Misiorowski has 1st bad start in loss

BY MIKE FITZPATRICK
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jacob Misiorowski made everything look so easy in his first three major league starts.

Now he knows it's not.

The hard-throwing rookie finally got knocked around Wednesday, serving up back-to-back homers as the Milwaukee Brewers lost 7-3 to the New York Mets in the second game of a day-night doubleheader at Citi Field.

Barely touched by opposing batters since getting called up from the minors last month, Misiorowski (3-1) gave up five runs, five hits and three walks over 3⅔ innings in his fourth career outing. Brandon Nimmo connected for a grand slam in the second and a slumping Francisco Lindor followed with another longball off Misiorowski to give the Mets a 5-0 lead.

"He wasn't in sync tonight, for sure. You could see it early. He'd have it for one pitch and then you could just see the ball wasn't coming out of his fingers the same. You could see the frustration building," Brewers manager Pat Murphy said.

"That's too good of a team and too good of a lineup. (These are) the days you realize how good these guys are, all major league players. It's so tough to perform at the highest level and be consistent. But when you're off a little bit, it can be the difference, and Miz just wasn't in sync."

A touted prospect, the 6-foot-7 Misiorowski had more than lived up to the hype since his arrival.

FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

After posting a 1.13 ERA in his first three stars, Milwaukee Brewers pitcher Jacob Misiorowski got knocked around for the first time in his career, giving up five runs in 3⅔ innings against the New York Mets.

He began his career with 11 hitless innings and then a scoreless start in a win over Pirates ace Paul Skenes before a crowd of 42,774 in Milwaukee last week. The 23-year-old right-hander carried a perfect game into the seventh June 20 at Minnesota and racked up 19 strikeouts in his first 16 big league innings.

"He has amazing stuff," Nimmo said.

Misiorowski threw 62 pitches at least 100 mph in his first three games, and opposing batters were 3 for 49 (.061) against him — making him the first pitcher in the modern era (since 1900) to have as many wins as hits allowed through three career starts.

"He's really good. Crazy future ahead of him," Lindor said. "It's going to be fun to watch him and fun to play against him."

But on this night, Misiorowski walked consecutive batters with two outs in the second and was unable to corral a high comebacker off the bat of No. 9 hitter Hayden Senger.

The ball glanced off Misiorowski's glove and spun away from second baseman Brice Turang for an infield single that loaded the bases.

"There was a fastball at the bottom of the zone for a walk that I thought was there. But I thought, good spot, and maybe get it up a little bit more," Misiorowski said. "Just frustrated at myself for not making a play."

Nimmo pulled the next pitch, a 96 mph slider, to right field for his third career slam and second this season. Lindor then drove a 1-2 fastball to right-center for his 17th home run.

"I threw good pitches and they hit 'em. Plain and simple as that," Misiorowski said. "I mean, you're facing the best of the best. They're getting paid what they're getting paid for a reason."

Misiorowski said his problem was mechanical.

"My fingers were just a little too far on the right side of the ball, and it kind of spun a little different than I'm used to," he said. "I think I came back pretty well after that. ... I fixed it that next inning."

Murphy said Misiorowski didn't feel good while warming up in the bullpen, and that carried over to the game.

"His whole body was not in sync," the manager explained. "All the arms and legs, it's hard to sync it all up."

Misiorowski came out firing 100 mph fastballs, touching 102 mph against Lindor in the first inning — but it didn't last.

"He learned his lesson. He's ticked about it. Even some of the sequencing he's ticked about," Murphy said. "He can see it that there's just a really fine line between being dominant and being just OK."

Misiorowski, however, won't dwell on this disappointment.

"It's done. Use the old Tiger Woods approach and move on to the next hit. Move on to the next pitch. It is what it is. I got a loss but, oh well," he said. "It's frustrating. But at the same time like, young career, it's good figuring it out now. Not when we're in the playoffs and it matters most."

Tigers, Dodgers get 3 players each in All-Star lineups

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Los Angeles Dodgers will have three fan-elected starters in the All-Star Game, with first baseman Freddie Freeman and catcher Will Smith joining designated hitter Shohei Ohtani as winners in final ballot totals announced Wednesday.

Detroit will have three fan-picked starters for the first time since 2007 after second baseman Gleyber Torres along with outfielders Riley Greene and Javier Báez were voted in at their positions for the July 15 game at Atlanta's Truist Park.

Pete Crow-Armstrong and Kyle Tucker of the Chicago Cubs were picked for the NL outfield along with Ronald Acuña Jr. of the host Braves.

Arizona second baseman Ketel Marte, New York Mets shortstop Francisco Lindor and San Diego third baseman Manny Machado also were voted NL starters.

Seattle catcher Cal Raleigh, Toronto first baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Athletics shortstop Jacob Wilson. Cleveland third baseman José Ramírez and Baltimore designated hitter Ryan O'Hearn were picked as AL starters.

Wilson edged Kansas City's Bobby Witt Jr. 52% to 48% and will become just the second rookie shortstop to start an All-Star Game after Baltimore's Ron Hansen, who started both games in 1960. Wilson's father, Jack, was an All-Star for Pittsburgh in 2004.

There will be nine first-time starters for the second time in three years. Wilson will be joined by Greene, O'Hearn, Raleigh and Torres in the AL lineup and Crow-Armstrong, Lindor, Smith and Tucker in the NL lineup.

Báez edged the Los Angeles Angels' Mike Trout 26% to 24% in the closest vote, winning the third AL outfield slot.

New York Yankees outfielder Aaron Judge earned a starting spot last week as the top vote-getter in the first round, when Ohtani was picked as NL DH with the top total in his league. Under rules that began in 2022, voting is split into two stages, and the second phase ran from Monday to Thursday.

JULIA DEMAREE NIKHINSON/AP

Detroit Tigers outfielder Riley Greene was voted in as a starter for the All-Star game along with teammates Gleyber Torres and Javier Báez.

The Tigers' three elected starters for the 2007 game in San Francisco were catcher Iván Rodríguez, left fielder Magglio Ordóñez and second baseman Plácido Polanco.

Freeman is the senior All-Star, picked for the ninth time and his fifth as a starter. He will return to Atlanta, where he starred from 2010-21.

Machado and Judge were both selected for the seventh time — Judge all as a starter.

Guerrero, Judge, Marte, Ohtani and Ramírez were holdovers from last year's elected starters.

Pitchers and reserves will be announced Sunday.

Scoreboard

American League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	48	38	.558	—
Toronto	48	38	.558	—
Tampa Bay	48	39	.552	½
Boston	43	45	.489	6
Baltimore	37	49	.430	11

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	54	33	.621	—
Minnesota	41	45	.477	12½
Cleveland	40	44	.476	12½
Kansas City	40	47	.460	14
Chicago	28	58	.326	25½

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	52	34	.605	—
Seattle	45	41	.523	7
Texas	43	44	.494	9½
Los Angeles	42	43	.494	9½
Athletics	36	53	.404	17½

National League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	51	36	.586	—
New York	49	38	.563	2
Atlanta	39	46	.459	11
Miami	38	46	.452	11½
Washington	36	50	.419	14½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	51	35	.593	—
Milwaukee	48	38	.558	3
St. Louis	47	41	.534	5
Cincinnati	45	42	.517	6½
Pittsburgh	38	50	.432	14

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	55	32	.632	—
San Diego	46	40	.535	8½
San Francisco	46	41	.529	9
Arizona	43	43	.500	11½
Colorado	19	67	.221	35½

Wednesday's games

Pittsburgh 5, St. Louis 0
L.A. Dodgers 5, Chicago White Sox 4
San Diego 6-1, Philadelphia 4-5
Detroit 11-4, Washington 2-9
Milwaukee 7-3, N.Y. Mets 2-7
Boston 5-4, Cincinnati 3-8
Tampa Bay 6, Athletics 5
Minnesota 2, Miami 1
Atlanta 8, L.A. Angels 3
Toronto 11, N.Y. Yankees 9
Texas 6, Baltimore 0
Chicago Cubs 5, Cleveland 4
Houston 5, Colorado 3
Seattle 3, Kansas City 2
San Francisco 6, Arizona 5, 10 innings

Thursday's games

Minnesota at Miami
Houston at Colorado
Detroit at Washington
N.Y. Yankees at Toronto
Milwaukee at N.Y. Mets
L.A. Angels at Atlanta
Cleveland at Chicago Cubs
San Francisco at Arizona
Kansas City at Seattle
Chicago White Sox at L.A. Dodgers

Friday's games

Boston (Giolito 4-1) at Washington (Soroka 3-5)
Cincinnati (Abbott 7-1) at Philadelphia (Luzardo 7-4)
St. Louis (Mikolas 4-5) at Chicago Cubs (Rea 5-3)
N.Y. Yankees (Stroman 1-1) at N.Y. Mets (Blackburn 0-3)
Pittsburgh (Falter 6-3) at Seattle (Castillo 4-5)
Tampa Bay (Littell 7-7) at Minnesota (Paddack 3-7)
Texas (Rocker 3-4) at San Diego (Vásquez 3-4)
L.A. Angels (Hendricks 5-6) at Toronto (Lauer 4-1)
Detroit (TBD) at Cleveland (Cecconi 3-3)
Milwaukee (Priester 6-2) at Miami (Alcantara 4-8)
Baltimore (Morton 4-7) at Atlanta (TBD)
Chicago White Sox (Houser 3-2) at Colorado (Senzatela 3-11)
Houston (McCullers 1-3) at L.A. Dodgers (TBD)
Kansas City (Bubic 6-6) at Arizona (Rodriguez 3-4)
San Francisco (Verlander 0-5) at Athletics (Sears 6-7)

Saturday's games

Tampa Bay at Minnesota
St. Louis at Chicago Cubs
L.A. Angels at Toronto
Cincinnati at Philadelphia
Boston at Washington
Baltimore at Atlanta
Kansas City at Arizona
N.Y. Yankees at N.Y. Mets
Milwaukee at Miami
Detroit at Cleveland
Houston at L.A. Dodgers
Chicago White Sox at Colorado
Texas at San Diego
San Francisco at Athletics
Pittsburgh at Seattle

MLB

ON BASEBALL

Pitching longevity continues to fade fast

BY DAVID BRANDT
Associated Press

It's a big number for one of the biggest baseball stars of this generation — three-time Cy Young Award winner and Los Angeles Dodgers legend Clayton Kershaw has reached 3,000 strikeouts.

It's a time for celebration. It's also a time for wistful contemplation.

Are we nearing the end of these kinds of career celebrations — particularly for pitchers?

Kershaw is one of the final holdovers from his generation, one that included guys who threw at least 200 innings year after year, piling up wins and strikeouts thanks to consistent excellence. In his prime from 2010 to 2015, he led the National League in ERA five times, in strikeouts three times and wins twice.

His peak arguably came in 2014, when he finished with a 21-3 record, 1.77 ERA and 233 strikeouts to win both the Cy Young and Most Valuable Player in the National League.

Kershaw, now 37, isn't the same pitcher these days, though his success over the past month is a testament to the knowledge, grit and sheer willpower that only an 18-year veteran can possess. He is 4-0 with a 3.43 ERA through nine starts after Wednesday, providing an injury-riddled Dodgers rotation with a spark despite a fastball that barely hits 90 mph on a good day.

"He has given us a shot in the arm," manager Dave Roberts said. "We're sort of ailing on the starting pitching side. Coming in and giving us valuable innings. I just love that kind of edge that he gives on start day.

"We certainly feed off that."

Kershaw's twilight is coinciding with the final years of Verlander and Scherzer, and the trio is primed to join the Hall of Fame over the next decade. The group symbolizes what might be the last gasp of long-term excellence on the pitcher's mound.

GREGORY BULL/AP

At 29, San Diego Padres starter Dylan Cease, right, is the active strikeout leader among pitchers under 30, but his career total of 1,137 is far fewer than the 2,120 Clayton Kershaw had going into his age-30 season.

Verlander, 42, has won 262 games while Kershaw and Scherzer — who turns 41 this month — both sit at 216. After that, the career leaderboards fall off dramatically.

It's fair to wonder if any other pitcher ever will reach 200 career wins, much less 300, which was the gold standard for generations and last reached by the likes of Randy Johnson, Tom Glavine, Greg Maddux and Roger Clemens in the 2000s and 2010s.

Consider this: The current career wins leader for a pitcher under 30 is the 28-year-old Logan Webb, who has a grand total of 62.

Getting to 3,000 strikeouts is a little more realistic given the sport-wide increase in pitch velocity, but even that's in question. The Braves' Chris Sale (2,528 Ks) is 36 and could get there with a few more healthy seasons. The Yankees' Gerrit Cole (2,254) has a chance, too — if the 34-year-old can bounce back from elbow surgery.

But again, the list of pitchers piling up strikeouts in their 20s is conspicuously absent.

Dylan Cease, 29, is the under-30 leader with 1,137 career Ks, but he will likely need a decade of good health to get close. By comparison, Kershaw had 2,120 strikeouts entering his age-30 season.

There are some young, promising arms that might emerge in the future — think Paul Skenes and Tarik Skubal — but the trends aren't pointing in the right direction.

It seems like every few days, another star pitcher goes down to Tommy John elbow surgery or a similar procedure, leaving them out of action for at least a year.

Career-altering injuries have been a part of baseball forever, but this feels different.

To dominate in today's game, velocity is paramount. A big fastball used to be anything in the 90s just a few decades ago. Now, that number is closer to 100.

The big problem is that most human arms don't seem to be able to handle the stress — particularly for the lengthy amounts of time needed to chase 300 wins, 3,000 strikeouts or many of the other career milestones that once defined greatness.

Over the next generation, the metrics that determine which pitchers enter Cooperstown will likely change dramatically. Arizona righty Zac Gallen — who has 58 career wins and turns 30 in August — said last year that it's possible some pitchers from the current generation will be left out of the Hall of Fame as the definition of excellence changes.

It should be a fascinating transition.

But for at least one more night — in front of roughly 50,000 joyous fans — Kershaw carried the torch for traditional pitching greatness.

Enjoy it, because that light appears to be fading fast.

Strikeouts: Kershaw gets No. 3,000 on his season-high 100th pitch of night

FROM PAGE 48

"It's an incredible list," he said. "It's special to finally be in that group."

Capra, hitting ninth, was retired on four pitches, with plate umpire Jim Wolf calling the third strike on a slider, Kershaw's season-high 100th pitch of the night. Wolf is the brother of retired pitcher Randy Wolf, once a teammate of Kershaw's.

"I wanted it to come easy," Kershaw said. "I would much rather have got it done in the first."

Manager Dave Roberts had said before the game that he would manage the three-time Cy Young Award winner differently with the milestone within reach. That was apparent when Kershaw jogged out for the sixth to an ovation, having already tossed a season-high 92 pitches with just two strikeouts. He came into the game needing three to make history.

"I was going to give him every opportunity to do it at home," Roberts said. "You could see the emotion he had trying to get that third strike. It just happened the way it was supposed to happen."

Kershaw retired Lenyn Sosa on three pitches for No. 2,999 in the fifth. Sosa fouled off Kershaw's first two pitches before ending the inning by striking out on a 72 mph curveball.

In the third, Miguel Vargas took called strikes on his first two pitches before he swung and missed on another 72 mph curveball from his former Los Angeles teammate.

Chicago swung aggressively against Kershaw, who gave up a two-run homer to Austin Slater and two more runs as the White Sox led 4-2 after six innings.

"You could just feel it. They wanted it for me so bad," he said of the crowd. "You could feel the tension. They were trying to will me to do it."

Kershaw made history one batter after Dodgers third baseman Max Muncy was injured in tagging out Michael A. Taylor on a steal attempt. Muncy had to be helped off the field, barely able to put any weight on his left leg.

Kershaw has provided much-needed stability for LA's pitching staff, which has been decimated by injuries.

"It's just again a reminder for me, for anyone, to never bet against that guy," Roberts said before the game. "It doesn't matter — health, stuff — he's going to will himself to doing whatever the team needs."

Age and less dominant stuff has changed the way Kershaw does his job. He knows his consistency isn't the same but with the depth of the team's staff, he doesn't need to be perfect every outing.

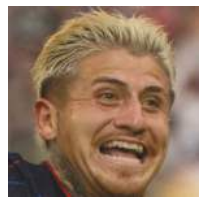
KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/AP

Clayton Kershaw became the third active pitcher to reach 3,000 strikeouts after Justin Verlander and Max Scherzer.

Kershaw no longer overpowers hitters the way he did during the height of his career, but he remains stubbornly determined and possesses a craftiness honed over two decades as well as a slider that still can fool.

"I've seen him grow more than any player," Roberts said. "Hasn't lost the compete, but I think that the world is not as black and white as he used to see it. I think that his edges are softer, I think that fatherhood, Father Time, does that to a person."

SPORTS



Hostile home

St. Louis crowd cheers for Guatemala, but US men advance to Gold Cup final » Soccer, Page 44

MLB

KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/AP

Dodgers pitcher Clayton Kershaw tips his cap to the crowd after recording his 3,000th career strikeout against the Chicago White Sox during the sixth inning Wednesday in Los Angeles.

Kershaw gets 3K strikeouts

Dodgers left-hander becomes 20th pitcher to achieve historic milestone

BY BETH HARRIS
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Clayton Kershaw was laboring in pursuit of his 3,000th strikeout. His pitch count soaring, he was down to the last batter he would face, needing one more swing and miss to become the 20th pitcher to reach the milestone.

"It's a little bit harder when you're actually trying to strike people out," he said, smiling. "I never really had to do that before."

Kershaw accomplished the feat when Vinny Capra of the Chicago White Sox took a slider for a called third strike for the final out of the sixth inning Wednesday night.

"I made it interesting. Made it take too long," Kershaw said. "Honestly, I didn't pitch that great tonight. The slider was so bad."

In his 18th season in Los Angeles, Kershaw joined Walter Johnson of the Washington Senators and Bob Gibson of the St. Louis Cardinals as the only pitchers with 3,000 or more strikeouts all for one team.

Freddie Freeman capped a three-run ninth by singling in Shohei Ohtani, giving the Dodgers a 5-4 win. Kershaw didn't get a decision.

The sellout crowd of 53,536 was on its feet roaring as the 37-year-old left-hander walked off the mound to end the sixth. Kershaw paused and doffed his cap, with teammates briefly holding off hugging him to allow him to soak in the cheers.

Kershaw waved to his wife Ellen and four children in the stands and then patted his chest and mouthed, "Thank you."

"I feel bad for Ellen. I know she was nervous," he said. "I made her last six innings out there just stressed out that I wasn't going to get it and have to go to Milwaukee to do it."

Kershaw shared a clubhouse toast with his teammates, coaches, training staff and front office executives.

"Just super thankful for tonight, super thankful for my teammates," he said. "I told my teammates individual awards are great, but if you don't have anybody to celebrate with it doesn't matter."

The game was delayed for nearly 6 minutes between pitches, a gap that included a tribute video.

Kershaw joined Justin Verlander of San Francisco (3,468) and Max Scherzer of Toronto (3,412) as the only active pitchers with that many. Kershaw is just the fourth left-hander in the club.

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