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Air Force wants to use Cybertrucks as targets

BY LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Air Force wants to purchase two Tesla Cybertrucks as targets for precision-guided munitions, citing concerns that adversaries may start using them in the future.

Federal contracting documents posted online show the trucks as part of a larger buy of 33 vehicles that will be sent to White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico to support U.S. Special Operations Command.

The Air Force didn't specify makes for the other 31 vehicles on its wish list — which includes sedans, Bongo trucks, pickup trucks and SUVs — but singled out the Cybertruck because of its unique build, which makes it tougher to destroy.

The truck doesn't sustain the amount of damage expected from a major impact, the Air Force wrote, and tests need to reflect real-world situations.

"The Cybertruck's aggressively angular and futuristic design, paired with its unpainted stainless steel exoskeleton, sets it apart from competitors typically using painted steel or aluminum bodies," the Air Force wrote in con-

SEE PRACTICE ON PAGE 5



TESLA

The Air Force plans to buy two Tesla Cybertrucks to use as targets, according to contracting documents Wednesday.



LEWIS M. LEVINE/AP

Sgt. Quornelius Radford, a suspect in the shooting of five soldiers at Fort Stewart, is escorted by military police into a booking room at the Liberty County Jail in Hinesville, Ga., on Wednesday.

Soldiers tackled shooter

Fort Stewart commander commends quick action to subdue suspect

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

When Army Sgt. Aaron Turner heard gunshots at Fort Stewart echoing inside his battalion headquarters building on Wednesday, he ran toward them, tackling the shooter and knocking the pistol away from him, officials at the Georgia post said.

Another soldier, Master Sgt. Justin Thomas, piled on top of Turner, pinning down the assailant and ending the shooting that left five other soldiers wounded. Unarmed and without pro-

■ Attack raises questions about US military's long-standing gun policies **Page 4**

tective gear, the noncommissioned officers held down the accused shooter — Sgt. Quornelius Radford — until law enforcement officers arrived and arrested him.

Meanwhile, other members of the 703rd Bri-

gade Support Battalion's headquarters company, which is part of the 3rd Infantry Division's 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, started treating the five soldiers who had been shot during the 11 a.m. attack, said Brig. Gen. John Lubas, the commander of the 3rd ID and Fort Stewart's top officer.

"No one hesitated," he told reporters Thursday. "These soldiers ... immediately started applying first aid and, most importantly,

SEE SHOOTER ON PAGE 4

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	Azores	..	..	\$4.342	..
Germany	\$3.570	\$4.135	\$4.484	\$4.230	Change in price	..	..	+2.2 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.881	\$5.465	\$5.283	Turkey	..	..	\$4.134	\$3.880*
U.K.	..	\$4.147	\$4.496	\$4.242	Change in price	..	..	+2.2 cents	-0.5 cents

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Aug. 8. The change in price is from Aug. 1.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	South Korea	\$3.239	..	\$4.149	\$3.899
Japan	..	\$4.119	..	\$3.869	Change in price	+2.0 cents	..	+2.0 cents	No change
Okinawa	\$3.309	..	..	\$3.869	Guam	\$3.259**	\$3.829	\$4.179	..
Change in price	+2.0 cents	..	..	No change	Change in price	+1.0 cents	+2.0 cents	+2.0 cents	..

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
Pacific prices for the week of Aug. 8-14

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Aug. 8)	0.84	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3743
British pound (Aug. 8)	\$1.31	Britain (Pound)	1.3421
Japanese yen (Aug. 8)	144.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.3749
South Korean won (Aug. 8)	1351.00	China (Yuan)	7.1828
		Denmark (Krone)	6.4109
		Egypt (Pound)	48.5170
		Euro	0.8589
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8496
		Hungary (Forint)	340.84
		Israel (Shekel)	3.4128
		Japan (Yen)	147.30
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3050
		Norway (Krone)	10.2308
		Philippines (Peso)	57.10
		Poland (Zloty)	3.65
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7485
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.2840
		South Korea (Won)	1384.93

(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	4.24
30-year bond	4.82

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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MILITARY

Soldier charged in attempted leak to Russia

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — A 22-year-old Fort Bliss soldier was arrested Wednesday after attempting to provide Russia with military combat operations and details on Army tanks that he gained through his top-secret security clearance.

Spc. Taylor Adam Lee is charged with attempting to transmit national defense information to a foreign adversary and exporting controlled technical data without a license, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas.

Lee had his first appearance in federal court Wednesday following his arrest by FBI agents in El Paso.

"The USA is not happy with me for trying to expose their weaknesses."

Taylor Adam Lee
according to federal prosecutors

He served as a tank crewmember with the 1st Armored Division, which uses tanks and other armored vehicles, according to Fort Bliss. In this job, Lee would have access to and knowledge of tank functions, strengths, weaknesses and standard operations.

"This arrest is an alarming re-



Lee

in a statement.

Beginning in May, Lee tried to provide his Army credentials and send U.S. defense information to Russia's Ministry of Defense.

In June, Lee used the internet to send technical information on the M1A2 Abrams tank to the Russian Federation and offer his assistance, according to federal prosecutors.

"The USA is not happy with me

minder of the serious threat facing our U.S. Army," Brig. Gen. Sean Stinchon, commander of the Army Counterintelligence Command, said

for trying to expose their weaknesses," federal prosecutors said he told the Russians. "At this point I'd even volunteer to assist the Russian Federation when I'm there in any way."

The next month, Lee had an in-person meeting with a person he believed represented the Russian government and handed over a digital storage device, which he said held documents and information on the Abrams tank, another armored fighting vehicle used by the U.S. military, and combat operations.

Lee did not have the authorization to provide the information and throughout the meeting, he said the information on the digital storage

device was sensitive and likely classified.

During and after the July meeting, Lee said he would get a specific piece of hardware from inside an Abrams tank for the Russian government.

On July 31, he delivered what appeared to be the hardware to a storage unit in El Paso.

Afterward, he sent a message to his Russian government contact that read, "Mission accomplished."

"Our enemies, both foreign and domestic, should be aware that we diligently investigate and aggressively prosecute these cases," U.S. Attorney Justin Simmons for the Western District of Texas, said in a statement.

Migrants to be housed at Fort Bliss starting Aug. 17

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A detention facility constructed out of tents at Fort Bliss will begin housing migrants detained by federal agents on Aug. 17, Immigration and Customs Enforcement said Tuesday.

It will open with an operational capacity of 1,000 beds and can be expanded to 5,000, said Leticia Zamarripa, spokeswoman for ICE operations in El Paso, where Fort Bliss is located.

The facility, known as Camp East Montana, will house single adults who are in legal proceedings for removal from the U.S. or have final orders for deportation.

ICE "sorely needs" the space to keep pace with increased arrests and immigration enforcement, Zamarripa said.

Across the United States, ICE in July averaged roughly 57,800 adults in detention, according to agency data.

That is about 1,000 more from the previous month and about 17,000 more than when President Donald Trump took office in January.

Trump has pushed for more arrests of migrants who are in the



El Paso Times

A detention facility for migrants at Fort Bliss, Texas, will have an operational capacity of 1,000 beds and can be expanded to 5,000, said Leticia Zamarripa, spokeswoman for ICE in El Paso.

U.S. without authorization, leading the Department of Homeland Security to seek temporary facilities to house those arrested.

"ICE is using Camp East Montana to help decompress ICE detention facilities in other regions," Zamarripa said.

ICE air operations will conduct deportations at the facility, she said.

Once the detention facility reaches its initial capacity of 1,000

people, it can scale up by 250 beds a week until it reaches 3,000, Zamarripa said.

Those inside have access to everything a traditional ICE detention facility offers, including access to legal representation and a law library, access to visitation, recreational space, medical treatment space and nutritionally balanced meals. It also provides necessary accommodations for disabilities, diet and religious be-

liefs, she said.

The Army, which is responsible for managing the \$1.24 billion contract for the ICE facility, awarded the job of building and operating the site to Virginia-based company Acquisition Logistics on July 18, according to the Pentagon.

The contract runs through Sept. 30, 2027, and the Army has already funded \$232 million for the work now underway.

While soldiers stationed at Fort Bliss are not involved with the operations of the facility, National Guard troops in 20 states, including Texas, are being asked to help ICE at detention facilities.

Up to 1,700 Guard troops could be activated by the end of August to work directly with migrants by providing transportation, processing those detained and other clerical and logistical work, according to the Pentagon.

Heat forces US, S. Korea to postpone half of military exercise

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — A blistering heat wave sweeping across the Korean Peninsula has forced the U.S. and South Korean militaries to postpone half of their field training drills this month, scaling back one of their largest annual joint exercises, spokesmen for both countries said Thursday.

Ulchi Freedom Shield — the second of two major joint exercises held each year — is scheduled to take place Aug. 18-28, said U.S. Forces Korea spokesman Army

Col. Ryan Donald and South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesman army Col. Lee Sung Joon.

Of the 40 planned field training drills, half have been postponed to next month due to extreme heat, Lee said. Drills involving computer simulations and overseas U.S. military assets will proceed as planned this month, he added.

Postponing some training will allow the militaries to maintain readiness without prioritizing deadlines over safety, Lee said.

August is typically the hottest month in South Korea. Last month

was the country's second-hottest July since 1973, with an average temperature of 80.7 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the Korea Meteorological Administration.

Since May 20, at least 20 heat-related deaths have been reported, and approximately 3,300 people have been treated in hospital emergency rooms for heat-related illnesses, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency said Wednesday.

Around 18,000 South Korean troops are expected to participate in Ulchi Freedom Shield, down

from 19,000 last year, Lee said. The number of U.S. troops will be "similar to past" exercises, Donald added. USFK does not publicly release troop figures due to operational security concerns.

"Every [exercise] is different" and addresses evolving threats on the modern-day battlefield, Donald said.

The joint drills, which will take place across land, air, sea, space and cyberspace, will include scenarios informed by the wars in Ukraine and between Israel and Iran, he said.

"What's important to remember is the quality of the training that will occur ... because what this does is build our readiness and strengthens our posture to defend [South Korea] against any threat or any adversary," Donald said.

Lee and Donald characterized the exercise as routine and defensive, a position North Korea does not share. Pyongyang routinely denounces joint drills. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has previously ordered concurrent military exercises in response.

MILITARY

Shooting raises questions about gun policies

By SAFIYAH RIDDLE
AP/Report For America

A shooting that injured five soldiers at one of the country's largest military bases on Wednesday has resurfaced questions about a long-standing Army policy that largely prevents service members from carrying personal weapons on military installations.

Soldiers in the area who witnessed the shooting at Fort Stewart in Georgia "immediately and without hesitation" tackled the shooter to subdue him before law enforcement arrived, Brig. Gen. John Lubas said at a news conference Wednesday.

But they didn't have firearms to shoot back because of a policy first enacted decades ago to ensure safety by limiting armed

members on Army bases to military police. The suspect in the shooting, logistics Sgt. Quornelius Radford, used a personal weapon, Lubas said.

Questions about why soldiers didn't have weapons were buzzing online after at least one video of the incident on social media appears to show service members in uniform running to safety amid a lockdown that lasted about an hour, instead of firing back at the shooter.

While some have questioned why many service members in the area during the shooting didn't use weapons to defend themselves, others have questioned whether existing regulations do enough to prevent shootings on bases. The shooting is the

latest in a growing list of violent incidents at American military installations over the years — some claiming upward of a dozen lives.

Experts say that there are reasons for long-standing regulations on military bases, despite their limitations.

Department of Defense policy prohibits military personnel from carrying personal weapons on base without permission from a senior commander, and there is a strict protocol for how the firearm must be stored.

Typically, military personnel must officially check their guns out of secure storage to go to on-base hunting areas or shooting ranges, and then check all firearms back in promptly after its

sanctioned use. Military police are often the only armed personnel on base, outside of shooting ranges, hunting areas or in training, where soldiers can wield their service weapons without ammunition.

The federal policy leaves little room for local commanders to use discretion about how the policy is enforced. That means the regulation applies even in Georgia, a state with some of the most lax gun regulations in the country, where Fort Stewart is located.

Robert Capovilla, a founding partner for one of the largest military law firms in the country, strongly believes in the Second Amendment. But he said that the strict firearm policies on military bases exist for a reason.

"A lot of these installations are involved in top-secret operations, dealing with top-secret information, and because of that you need a heightened security," said Capovilla, a former military prosecutor and defense attorney. "You simply don't want folks walking around a federal installation with personal weapons."

He said he has traveled to "nearly every single major military installation" in North America for his work. Whenever he visits an installation, he said armed military police have a visible presence almost constantly on base. He added that he doesn't believe Wednesday's shooting could have been prevented if military personnel had been armed at the time.

Shooter: Leaders hail response to assault

FROM PAGE 1

stopped the bleeding. And when we spoke to the surgeons in the hospitals, it was clear that the actions they took primarily stopping that bleeding before they were loaded up in ambulances ... certainly saved lives."

By Thursday morning, three of the five gunshot victims had been released from area hospitals and the other two victims were recovering from surgeries, the general said. They were expected to make full recoveries, though one victim — a female soldier — was expected to remain in Savannah's Memorial Medical Center for at least several days and had "a bit of a longer road to recovery," Lubas added.

Turner, Thomas and four other soldiers — 1st Sgt. Joshua Arnold, Staff Sgt. Melissa Taylor, Staff Sgt. Robert Pacheco and Sgt. Eve Rodarte — were awarded Meritorious Service Medals by Army Secretary Dan Driscoll on Thursday for their heroic, life-saving actions amid the shooting spree. The Meritorious Service Medal recognizes outstanding noncombat service and is equivalent in rank to the Bronze Star Medal.

Driscoll said he traveled to Fort Stewart to meet with the heroes who stopped the attack and the soldiers who were shot. The Army's top civilian praised those who responded to the assault and said he was especially impressed they and other members of their unit were back to work at the day after the attack.

"We have gone through some terrible things as a nation, and it has historically been the American soldier who has been there in moments that are terrible," Driscoll said moments before awarding the soldiers the medals. "And I just want to tell you how incredibly proud I am that you're all here

today. There are not a lot of institutions and not a lot of people like you that could go through what you just did yesterday and then come back to work today and do [physical training] — that grit, that resilience, it matters."

Arnold, the top enlisted leader for the 703rd's headquarters company and a combat veteran, said his years of military training immediately took over when he realized the pops he was hearing were gunshots. According to his award citation, Arnold "demonstrated extraordinary selflessness and leadership by providing immediate aid to soldiers in peril during an active-shooter incident, including stopping bleeding to a fellow wounded first sergeant."

"I really didn't process that it was a gunshot at first, and then it took a moment to kick in: 'That was a gunshot. That was a gunshot.' I started yelling through the hallways, there were gunshots," said Arnold, who has been with the unit since January 2023. "... Training kicked in, mind kicked in and you just go to work."

Taylor, a career counselor and retention sergeant for the unit, said she did not hear the first several gunshots, but she heard Arnold screaming down the hall.

"I popped out into the hallway to see what was going on, and I heard him yelling about there being smoke, and I saw the smoke at the end of the hallway, and I noticed there was a soldier laying on the ground, so I immediately sprinted over to the soldier and started rendering aid," Taylor recalled.

Despite more gunshots while she was responding to the wounded soldier, Taylor, a former combat medic, said she was not scared in the moment.

"You have adrenaline," she said. "And ... I have been in these types of situations before, where

I've had to render aid to someone with gunshot wounds. So, I had a little bit of experience that I believe helped get me through that situation."

Arnold said he had begun to process the shooting in the hours afterward. His top priority, he said, was making certain the younger troopers in the unit were taken care of after the tragedy.

"Friends were shot, bad things happened," he said. "I'm going to continue to take care of my soldiers, and I'm going to continue to move forward."

Driscoll, an Iraq war veteran, told the soldiers that it would likely take time to fully process the incident, and he encouraged them to seek counseling or use other resources to help cope with the tragedy.

"These kinds of moments — especially if you've deployed, we've gotten to see them more frequently — the trauma from them often doesn't hit for weeks or months," he said. "It doesn't come as quickly as you might think. So, we try to encourage for all of our soldiers is to speak up, lean on each other, lean on your leadership, and we will provide the resources, the care and the love that they need to recover."

Driscoll and other officials declined to speak about what might have motivated Radford to bring a personal weapon into his unit's office and open fire on soldiers with whom he served in same unit. The investigation was ongoing, and Criminal Investigation Division agents on Thursday morning were still on the scene of the attack in Fort Stewart's 2nd Brigade Combat Team complex, said Ryan O'Connor, the special agent in charge of CID's southeast field office.

Radford, 28, of Jacksonville, Fla., was being held Thursday in



BERNABE LOPEZ/U.S. Army

Soldiers assigned to the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team stand at attention to receive the Meritorious Service Medal during an award ceremony to recognize their bravery in intervening during the Fort Stewart shooting on Wednesday.

the Liberty County jail nearby Fort Stewart, O'Connor said. He had not yet been formally charged in the attack, as prosecutors with the Army's Special Trial Counsel work through the military's complex legal process.

O'Connor said Radford would likely be transferred into a military jail after he was charged in the shooting.

Radford was an automated logistics sergeant who had been assigned to Fort Stewart since 2022. Officials said he had no history of disciplinary issues in the military, but he had been arrested by civilian law enforcement in May for drunken driving. Lubas said his unit was not aware of that arrest prior to the shooting on Wednesday.

Lt. Col. Mike Sanford, the commander of the 703rd Brigade Support Battalion, said he knew Radford and had seen no warning signs or behavioral issues that could have led anyone to predict the attack.

Radford had sought a transfer out of the Fort Stewart unit and had told his family members that he had faced racism from his fellow soldiers, his father, Eddie

Radford, told The New York Times.

The elder Radford said he did not know what would have motivated the assault and told the Times that his son had not suffered from any recent mental health issues.

The father also said his son had sent a cryptic message to an aunt shortly before the shooting. The aunt told him that his son had written "he loved everybody, and that he'll be in a better place because he was about to go and do something."

Driscoll said Thursday that he had promised the victims that "justice would be brought" in the case. He said he had also told them he was thankful for the six soldiers who went above and beyond to ensure the tragedy was not worse.

"They are everything that is good about this nation," the Army secretary said. "They acted in a way that I think all of us hoped we would under fire, but they did it. And so, we are just so incredibly proud of them. We are so grateful for them. And one of the things we told them and their colleagues is that we will stand with them as long as we need to, to get them back where they need to be."

MILITARY

Germany builds new camp at US training site

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — A vast U.S. Army training ground in rural Bavaria is set to become home to a new camp offering German soldiers better facilities and more billets.

Located in the Camp Normandy part of the Grafenwoehr Training Area, the German army complex will feature over a dozen buildings, commander Lt. Col. Florian Rommel said Thursday.

A groundbreaking was held July 28 and crews have started tearing down some of the steel maintenance facilities in the area. Soon, they will begin leveling the terrain and installing sewer, water and power lines.

Construction work includes temporary barracks, a medical center, maintenance and dining facilities, range support, warehouses and even a relocated headquarters from Tower Barracks.

“My capacity will go up, which will enable us to use more ranges in the times I have priority on (the training area),” Rommel said. “On the other hand, we will get a better standard of accommodation.”

The German armed forces receive 23% of the training time per year at Grafenwoehr, Rommel said.

They have priority for 12 weeks, during which soldiers can access any range they need.

Most of the German units using the new camp will come from the surrounding area, such as Tank Brigade 12 from Cham.

Replacing the current facilities from the 1950s will increase the Germans’ training capacity from about 700 soldiers to about 1,100 at



MATTHEW M. BURKE/Stars and Stripes

Lt. Col. Florian Rommel, commander of the German armed forces’ Grafenwoehr Training Area headquarters, looks over plans for a new camp in Grafenwoehr, Germany, on Thursday.

a time, Rommel said.

The current buildings are cramped, there are limited bathrooms and the dining hall is in serious disrepair, Rommel said. The new camp is expected to cost approximately \$210 million and be completed by 2032.

A short distance away, the U.S. Army is building its own set of support facilities for rotational training units called the Operational Readiness Training Complex.

It will replace facilities at Camps Aachen, Normandy, Alger and Kasserine and is expected to be completed by February 2029. It will include headquarters buildings and barracks, as well as maintenance and dining facilities to support a full brigade.

Training areas, especially Grafenwoehr, are crucial for the operational readiness of German and allied militaries, Brig. Gen. Michael Oberneyer, commander of the German armed forces’ Domestic Division, said in a July 28 statement.

“Without operational armed forces, deterrence cannot be guaranteed,” Oberneyer added.

Stars and Stripes reporter Marcus Kloeckner contributed to this report.

Practice: Enemies may use trucks

FROM PAGE 1

tract documents. “Additionally, its 48V electrical architecture provides superior power and efficiency, a feature that rivals are only beginning to develop.”

When Tesla CEO Elon Musk unveiled the long-anticipated futuristic pickup truck in 2019, the bulky build drew comparisons to tanks and armored vehicles.

Musk said the body was built from the same stainless steel alloy used in SpaceX rockets. He also said the windows were unbreakable — a claim disproven on stage when Tesla’s chief designer threw a metal ball and broke two windows.

Tesla later posted a YouTube video showing the Cybertruck’s exoskeleton withstanding gunfire

from a tommy gun, pistol and shotgun.

The Air Force didn’t specify which adversaries it thinks may use Cybertrucks. In 2024, the strongman leader of the Russian republic of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, posted a video of a gun-mounted Cybertruck that he said had been sent to the front lines of Russia’s war in Ukraine.

A new Cybertruck costs between \$70,000 and \$80,000, with the top-tier “Cyberbeast” variant topping \$100,000.

Federal documents didn’t specify how much the Air Force is willing to pay for the targets but noted that they don’t need to be in working condition. For testing and training, they just need to have working tires and be able to roll.

‘Fit box’ brings gym-style workouts to Navy in Naples

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Sailors at Naval Support Activity Naples looking to keep fit now have a new option to get an outdoor workout, without giving up weights and other typical gym equipment.

On Monday, Navy Morale, Welfare and Recreation Naples opened an outdoor training center, or “fit box,” at the base’s Capodichino site.

The box, actually a converted cargo container, features barbells, weights, sleds, kettlebells, a climbing rope, pullup bars and other fitness equipment needed to keep sailors ready for the tactical demands of their job, said Austin Holmes, MWR Naples fitness director.

The pop-up outdoor gym enables MWR “to reach out and get more active duty (sailors) engaged and hopefully at optimal level,” Holmes said.

Two more boxes are located at the base’s Support Site, which includes family and unaccompanied housing, and another is at an NSA Naples detachment in the Italian town of Gaeta, he added.

In March, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered a rapid services-wide review of physical fitness, body composition and grooming standards.

In June, the Army adopted a new fitness test that introduced “updated scoring standards that emphasize readiness and combat effectiveness,” the service said in a June 6 statement.

The Air Force also is preparing major changes to its physical fitness assessments as an effort to “revive the warrior ethos,” an Air Force spokesperson told Stars and Stripes in June.

It wasn’t clear Thursday whether the Navy was considering changes to its physical fitness standards.

The fit boxes in Naples, which are sold by the veteran-owned company BeaverFitUSA and cost about \$56,000 each, are unlocked and not staffed. Sailors and other community members ages 12 and older have access at most any time of the day or night by signing in through a QR code.

Operating hours at each box vary depending on the availability of lighting and other factors. For example, the box at Capodichino is open 24 hours daily, while one at Support Site is open only from sunup to sundown until lighting can be installed.



PHOTOS BY ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

Lt. Carston Swenson does lunges Thursday at the Capodichino site’s “fit box” at Naval Support Activity Naples, Italy.

A second box on Support Site that is solely for use by service members will open after fencing and a lock are installed, Holmes said.

Holmes said the program allows sailors to vary their workout setting, offering an improved training experience. It also helps to better prepare them for the challenging environmental conditions, such as extreme heat or cold, that they may encounter in various locations or in combat, Holmes said.

The boxes support Navy Operational Fitness and Fueling System objectives, which aim to guide sailors on effective training techniques and healthy nutrition, he said.

A crowded gym and the opportunity to train outdoors were what brought Lt. Carston Swenson to the fit box at Capodichino for a noon workout on Thursday.

“It’s just nice to be outside in the daytime,” said Swenson, who plans to use the box regularly.

Stars and Stripes reporters Wyatt Olson and Zade Vadnais contributed to this report.



“Fit boxes” at Naval Support Activity Naples, Italy, feature barbells, weights, kettlebells and other training equipment. The pop-up outdoor gyms offer sailors at the base the ability to vary their workout environment.

PACIFIC

In rare call-up, Marines tested in S. Korea drill

Reservists trained with Korean marines in joint amphibious assault exercises

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

POHANG, South Korea — Reserve Marines from California sampled South Korea's sweltering summer heat this week during a mock amphibious assault on Pohang Beach, part of their first active-duty call-up in five years.

About 500 members of 2nd Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division joined 500 South Korean marines for the capstone drill of the month-long Korean Marine Exercise Program, which kicked off July 15.

The Marines of 2/23 were activated on Nov. 1 from their headquarters in Pasadena, Calif., under the Corps' one-year unit deployment program. They spent six months training at the Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms before deploying to support the Okinawa-based III Marine Expeditionary Force.

On Wednesday at the beachhead, about 150 miles south of Se-

oul, Marines armed with M4 rifles and 81 mm mortars established a security perimeter atop a sand dune, simulating an advance force as they waited for 10 South Korean amphibious assault vehicles to arrive off the southeastern coast.

After the South Koreans disembarked, they joined their U.S. counterparts in securing a simulated helicopter landing zone on a nearby grassy hill, where they awaited pickup from South Korean MUH-1 Marineon and U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopters.

But their rides never came; a thunderstorm alert canceled the flights.

The overcast skies offered little protection from the 91-degree heat and dense humidity. The Marines, some of whom took refuge under nearby bridges and trees, were blessed with a brief afternoon rain shower.

"It's definitely a different heat," Cpl. Alexandro Omega, a rifleman, told Stars and Stripes at the



South Korean marines charge out of amphibious assault vehicles during Korean Marine Exercise Program drills.



PHOTOS BY DAVID CHOI/Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines establish security around a beachhead during the Korean Marine Exercise Program in Pohang, South Korea, on Wednesday.

"Going out with a unit that's from a different country is mind-opening."

Cpl. Alexandro Omega
U.S. Marine Corps

site.

Despite the weather, Omega said he enjoyed learning about the South Korean marines' squad-level tactics.

"It's definitely something that I've never experienced before," he said. "Going out with a unit that's from a different country is mind-opening because they do things a certain way that we don't, and we do things a way that they don't."

Lt. Col. Davis Gooding, commander of the 2/23, called the exercise a return to fundamentals.

"It's a very strenuous environment to train in for 20 hours a day, with gear, moving sometimes 10 to



U.S. Marines move to a simulated helicopter landing zone during the Korean Marine Exercise Program.

20 miles a day on foot," he said.

Gooding noted that large-scale amphibious exercises like Wednesday's are less common in Japan due to limited space.

The Korean Marine Exercise Program is one of several joint drills conducted annually between the U.S. and South Korean militaries. The allies carried out the Freedom Shield exercise March 10-20 and typically hold UI-

chi Freedom Shield in August.

U.S. Forces Korea — the command overseeing the 28,500 American troops in the country — characterizes the joint training as defensive and critical to maintaining the alliance with Seoul.

North Korea, which has long condemned the drills as rehearsals for an invasion, has pledged to strengthen its military in response.

Pa. Air National Guard master sergeant dies snorkeling on Tinian

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

A member of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard died this week in a snorkeling accident on Tinian, in the Northern Mariana Islands, according to local news reports and the state governor's office.

Master Sgt. Elizabeth Lohrmann, 45, of the 193rd Special Operations Wing, died Sunday, according to an online report Thursday in the Wyoming County Press Examiner. The newspaper cited statements from the wing and the Pennsylvania National Guard.

Lohrmann, of Kingsley, Pa., was deployed to Guam at the time, the report said.

Spokespeople from the wing and Guard were unavailable by email or phone after regular business hours Wednesday in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro on Tuesday ordered flags in Susquehanna County, where Lohrmann lived, flown at half-staff in her honor and until her interment, according to a notice posted online that day by the state Department of General Services.

Wing commander Col. Robert Noren said the wing was saddened by Lohrmann's death, according to a statement attributed to him by the newspaper. The wing suspended all flying operations on Tuesday, the statement said.

Guam is one site for the Resolute Force Pacific 2025 exercise involving approximately 400 U.S. and coalition aircraft, more than 12,000 service members and more than 50 locations across the Indo-Pacific.

Pacific Air Forces could not be reached Thursday to confirm that

the Pennsylvania Guard unit was involved. The exercise concludes Friday.

Raeleigh Studio, a yoga studio in Kingsley, posted a tribute to Lohrmann, a yoga instructor there in civilian life, according to the studio's post.

The studio described Lohrmann and her husband as "empty nesters" who explored the local trails with their dogs and had a passion for pickleball.

"We will forever miss the light she brought to the studio," the post said.



INSTAGRAM

Master Sgt. Elizabeth Lohrmann

PACIFIC

Air Force activates new munitions squadron

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

On an Air Force base in northern Japan, a newly formed squadron of bomb builders has begun assembling munitions in anticipation of a new era in regional airpower.

Activated on June 17, the 35th Munitions Squadron is composed of 225 airmen who were previously assigned to Misawa Air Base's maintenance squadron.

Known informally as "the Tanukis," a reference to Japan's wild raccoon dogs, the unit is preparing for the arrival of F-35A Lightning II stealth fighters, part of a larger modernization effort by the U.S. military across Japan.

The new squadron reflects Misawa's growing role as a strategic hub for fifth-generation aircraft and deepens the integration between U.S. and Japanese forces stationed there. The Japan Air Self-Defense Force, which shares the base with its American counterparts, has operated its own fleet of F-35As at Misawa since 2018.

Last year, the Pentagon announced plans to deploy 48 F-35As to Misawa, replacing 36 F-16 Fighting Falcons stationed there. An unspecified number of F-16s relocated from Misawa to Osan Air Base, South Korea in late June, Osan's 51st Fighter Wing said at the time.

Japanese government officials have said the stealth jets are expected to arrive in spring.

Capt. Angel Valles, the munitions squadron's operations director, expressed hope that the F-35 deployment would allow for closer collaboration with Japanese bomb builders.

"The Japanese have their own munitions team," he said in a



ANDRE MEDINA/U.S. Air Force

Airman 1st Class Zayra Perez, left, and Senior Airman Makayla Killian, both of the 35th Munitions Squadron, disassemble a bomb during training at Misawa Air Base, Japan, on Thursday.

phone interview Thursday alongside several of his team members. "We are hoping that when the F-35s arrive we can integrate more with them."

Valles envisions a future in which American and Japanese forces could share responsibilities for building and maintaining each other's weaponry.

"We want to get to the point where we can build munitions for [Japanese] aircraft and they can build munitions for ours," he said.

The stealth fighters' deploy-

ment to Misawa is part of a sweeping U.S. force realignment in Japan, which also includes the stationing of F-15EX Eagles on Okinawa and the replacement of Navy F/A-18 Super Hornets with F-35Cs at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni.

In a statement released July 3, 2024, the Defense Department said the plan — coordinated with the Japanese government — represents more than \$10 billion in capability investments designed to enhance the U.S.-Japan alliance,

strengthen deterrence, and promote peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

The move comes as the United States refines its military posture in response to China, which was identified in the Pentagon's 2022 National Defense Strategy as a "pacing challenge" due to its assertive presence in the East and South China Seas.

"The Department's plan to station the Joint Force's most advanced tactical aircraft in Japan demonstrates the ironclad U.S.

commitment to the defense of Japan and both countries' shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region," the Pentagon said in its statement.

At the ground level, the airmen of the 35th Munitions Squadron are already working to meet the demands of the future. From 5.56 mm rounds to 2,000-pound bombs, the squadron is responsible for producing and maintaining a wide range of weaponry, Tech. Sgt. Julia Danke-Garcia, a unit section chief, said in Thursday's phone interview.

But the arrival of the F-35s will likely change how they operate, said 1st Lt. Cole Petresu-Boboc, a munitions production leader.

"Until the F-35s get here we won't know or fully understand what that means," he said. "We are just prepared for when they get here."

Part of that preparation includes training for agile combat employment, or ACE, a key Air Force doctrine that emphasizes rapid dispersal of aircraft to a network of smaller airfields, making them harder to target in a potential conflict.

For bomb builders, this means being able to operate in austere environments.

Over the past two weeks, 16 airmen and two trainers have been assembling and disassembling satellite-guided bombs at Misawa under field-like conditions — a rehearsal for the types of challenges they may face in the real world.

"You can take a four-man crew and put them on a remote island with a trailer and tools, and they can build munitions and load them on aircraft," Petresu-Boboc said.

Yokota airmen to again shoulder base's portable Japanese shrine

By JEREMY STILLWAGNER
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — For the first time in five years, airmen volunteers from this airlift hub in western Tokyo will shoulder a mikoshi and take part in an annual Japanese festival in one their host cities.

In Shinto, a religion unique to Japan, a mikoshi is a portable shrine, or palanquin, in which a local deity is carried during local festivals and other events.

"I'm super excited. I know it's going to be really hard work carrying something essentially the size of a small car, but I'm really looking forward to it," Staff Sgt. Amanda Tripp, a radio frequencies supervisor for the 374th Communications Squadron, said Wednesday. "The fact that this is the first time in five years, I'm hoping it

goes well enough that they invite us all out again next year."

This year, Yokota's own mikoshi is returning to the Tanabata festival in Fussa city that starts Friday.

Tanabata, or the Star Festival, celebrates two lovers, Orihime and Hikoboshi, who are represented by the stars Vega and Altair and are separated by the Milky Way. They can meet only on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, which typically falls in early August.

The festival was canceled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Yokota's mikoshi was put on display at the base's passenger terminal, according to a news release Wednesday from the 374th Airlift Wing.

The mikoshi weighs several hundred pounds. The wing said it

requires 20 to 25 people to carry and 60 volunteers will take turns shouldering it.

Fussa's Tanabata festival returned in 2023. Yokota planned to participate last year, but the beams required to carry the mikoshi were misplaced, according to the wing's release.

Shotaro Takeuchi, a finish carpenter with the 374th Civil Engineer Squadron, led the team that replaced the beams and attached them to the portable shrine.

"I felt a kind of very heavy responsibility," he said Thursday. "For me to touch the history of Yokota, I was very honored."

Yokota has a long history of participating and attending festivals in Fussa, one of several municipalities that surround the base. Airmen have been attending the Tanabata festival since 1958 and



YASUO OSAKABE/U.S. Air Force

Airmen with Yokota Air Base's 374th Airlift Wing carry a mikoshi, a portable Shinto shrine, during the annual Tanabata festival in Fussa, Japan, in August 2018.

carrying mikoshis for local groups since 1978.

Yokota's mikoshi was built in 2000, marking the base's official involvement in the annual Tanabata festival, according to the

wing.

"I like going to the festivals, and I thought it would be really cool to carry one of the mikoshis because of the shrine's importance," Tripp said.

NATION

Putin seeks Trump summit as deadline looms

BY DASHA LITVINOVA,
BARRY HATTON
AND MICHELLE PRICE
Associated Press



MIKHAIL METZEL/AP

Russian President Vladimir Putin attends a meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, Tuesday.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday he hopes to meet next week with President Donald Trump, possibly in the United Arab Emirates, although a White House official cast doubt on the summit occurring unless the Kremlin leader also agreed to a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Putin's announcement came on the eve of a White House deadline for Moscow to show progress toward ending the 3-year-old war in Ukraine or suffer additional economic sanctions.

The U.S. was still expected to impose those sanctions Friday on Russia, according to a White House official who was not authorized to speak publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

was for Zelenskyy to be present at the possible U.S.-Russia summit or at a subsequent meeting.

Speaking of possible direct talks with Zelenskyy, Putin said he has mentioned several times that he was not against it.

The Kremlin has previously said that Putin and Zelenskyy should meet only when an agreement negotiated by their delegations is close.

Although Putin said the United Arab Emirates was one possible venue, no location or other details had been determined Thursday morning, according to the White House official.

Ukraine fears being sidelined by direct negotiations between Washington and Moscow, and Zelenskyy said he had phone conversations with several European leaders Thursday amid a flurry of diplomatic activity.

European countries have

pledged to back Ukraine for as long as it takes to defeat Russia's invasion.

Putin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov, earlier brushed aside the possibility of Zelenskyy joining the summit, something the White House said Trump was ready to consider. Putin has spurned Zelenskyy's previous offers of a meeting to clinch a breakthrough.

Putin made the announcement in the Kremlin about a possible meeting with Trump after meeting with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the president of the UAE.

Asked who initiated the possible talks, Putin said that didn't matter and "both sides expressed an interest."

Kirill Dmitriev, the head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund who met with U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff on Wednesday, said a

Trump-Putin meeting would allow Moscow to "clearly convey its position," and he hoped a summit would include discussions on mutually beneficial economic issues, including joint investments in areas such as rare earth elements.

The meeting would be the first U.S.-Russia summit since 2021, when former President Joe Biden met Putin in Geneva.

It would be a significant milestone toward Trump's effort to end the war, although there's no guarantee it would stop the fighting since Moscow and Kyiv remain far apart on their conditions for peace.

Months of U.S.-led efforts have yielded no progress on stopping Russia's invasion of its neighbor. The war has killed tens of thousands of troops on both sides and more than 12,000 Ukrainian civilians, according to the United Nations.

Ultra-processed foods make up half of American's calories

BY JONEL ALECCIA
Associated Press

Most Americans get more than half their calories from ultra-processed foods, those super-tasty, energy-dense foods typically full of sugar, salt and unhealthy fats, according to a new federal report.

Nutrition research has shown for years that ultra-processed foods make up a big chunk of the U.S. diet, especially for kids and teens.

For the first time, however, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed those high levels of consumption, using dietary data collected from August 2021 to August 2023.

The report comes amid growing scrutiny of such foods by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who blames them for causing chronic disease.

"We are poisoning ourselves, and it's coming principally from these ultra-processed foods," Kennedy told Fox News earlier this year.

Overall, about 55% of total calories consumed by Americans age 1 and older came from ultra-processed foods during that period, according to the report. For adults,



MARK LENNIHAN/AP

Potato chips are displayed at a store in New York, March 25, 2021.

ultra-processed foods made up about 53% of total calories consumed, but for kids through age 18, it was nearly 62%.

The top sources included burgers and sandwiches, sweet baked goods, savory snacks, pizza and sweetened drinks.

Young children consumed fewer calories from ultra-processed foods than older kids, the report found. Adults 60 and older consumed fewer calories from those sources than younger adults. Low-income adults consumed more ultra-processed foods than those

with higher incomes.

The results were not surprising, said co-author Anne Williams, a CDC nutrition expert.

What was surprising was that consumption of ultra-processed foods appeared to dip slightly over the past decade.

Among adults, total calories from those sources fell from about 56% in 2013-14 and from nearly 66% for kids in 2017-18.

Concern over ultra-processed foods' health effects has been growing for years, but finding solutions has been difficult. Many studies have linked them to obesity, diabetes and heart disease, but they haven't been able to prove that the foods directly cause those chronic health problems.

One small but influential study found that even when diets were matched for calories, sugar, fat, fiber and micronutrients, people consumed more calories and gained more weight when they ate ultra-processed foods.

Research published this week in the journal *Nature* found that participants in a clinical trial lost twice as much weight when they ate minimally processed foods — such as pasta, chicken, fruits and

vegetables — than ultra-processed foods, even those matched for nutrition components and considered healthy, such as ready-to-heat frozen meals, protein bars and shakes.

Part of the problem is simply defining ultra-processed foods.

The new CDC report used the most common definition based on the four-tier Nova system developed by Brazilian researchers that classifies foods according to the amount of processing they undergo. Such foods tend to be "hyper-palatable, energy-dense, low in dietary fiber and contain little or no whole foods, while having high amounts of salt, sweeteners and unhealthy fats," the CDC report said.

In the meantime, Americans should try to reduce ultra-processed foods in their daily diets, said Andrea Deierlein, a nutrition expert at New York University. For instance, instead of instant oatmeal that may contain added sugar, sodium, artificial colors and preservatives, use plain oats sweetened with honey or maple syrup. Read food packages and nutrition information, she suggested.

Rushing floodwater from heavy rain kills 2 in North Carolina

Associated Press

SPRING HOPE, N.C. — Two people were found dead in central North Carolina after they and a police officer trying to save them were swept away in rushing floodwaters, authorities said Wednesday.

Another cluster of storms was dumping rain on the region Thurs-

day, a day after a 24-year-old woman and 55-year-old man were found dead when flooding on a section of highway receded, according to police in the town of Spring Hope.

Some communities had been under flash flood warnings and advisories Wednesday while as much as 5 inches of rain fell in

parts of the Raleigh and Durham areas.

The woman and man, both from the small town of Louisburg, had been trapped in a vehicle that was pushed into a ditch filled with about 6 feet of fast-moving floodwater, police said. The woman was climbing out of the roof when she fell into the water and an offi-

cer jumped in to save her, police said.

The strong current swept away the woman, the man and the officer. The officer managed to escape unharmed as the man and woman disappeared.

The storm's pathway over central North Carolina follows Tropical Storm Chantal's flooding in

parts of the region last month. Public assistance damage estimates are already more than \$42 million, according to Gov. Josh Stein's office. Stein also issued a state disaster declaration Tuesday for eight counties because of Chantal damage, meaning residents can seek out state financial aid.

NATION

Trump's tariffs on dozens of countries in place

By JOSH BOAK

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump began imposing higher import taxes on dozens of countries Thursday just as the economic fallout of his monthslong tariff threats has begun to cause visible damage to the U.S. economy.

Just after midnight, goods from more than 60 countries and the European Union became subject to tariff rates of 10% or higher. Products from the EU, Japan and South Korea are taxed at 15%, while imports from Taiwan, Vietnam and Bangladesh are taxed at 20%. Trump also expects the EU, Japan and South Korea to invest hundreds of billions of dollars in the United States.

"I think the growth is going to be unprecedented," Trump said Wednesday. He said the U.S. was "taking in hundreds of billions of dollars in tariffs," but did not provide a specific figure for revenues because "we don't even know what the final number is" regarding the rates.

Despite the uncertainty, the White House is confident that the onset of his tariffs will provide clarity about the path for the world's largest economy. Now that companies understand the direction the U.S. is headed, the Republican administration believes it can ramp up new investments and jump-start hiring in ways that can rebalance America as a manufacturing power.

So far, however, there are signs of self-inflicted wounds to the U.S. as companies and consumers brace for the impact of the new taxes. Hiring began to stall, inflationary pressures crept upward and home values in key markets



FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

The Statue of Liberty is seen near Port Liberty Terminals, Wednesday, in New York. These import sites may show visible signs of the economy as it reacts to the broad tariffs.

started to decline after the initial tariff rollout in April, said John Silvia, CEO of Dynamic Economic Strategy.

"A less productive economy requires fewer workers," Silvia said. "But there is more, the higher tariff prices lower workers' real wages. The economy has become less

productive, and firms cannot pay the same real wages as before. Actions have consequences."

Many economists say the risk is that the American economy is steadily eroded.

"It's going to be fine sand in the gears and slow things down," said Brad Jensen, a professor at

Georgetown University.

Trump has promoted the tariffs as a way to reduce America's persistent trade deficit. But importers tried to avoid the taxes by bringing in more goods before the tariffs took effect. As a result, the \$582.7 billion trade imbalance for the first half of the year was 38%

higher than in 2024.

Total construction spending has dropped 2.9% over the past year.

Germany, which sends 10% of its exports to the U.S. market, saw industrial production sag 1.9% in June as Trump's earlier rounds of tariffs took hold.

"The new tariffs will clearly weigh on economic growth," said Carsten Brzeski, global chief of macro for ING bank.

The lead-up to Thursday fit the slapdash nature of Trump's tariffs, which have been rolled out, walked back, delayed, increased, imposed by letter and renegotiated.

Trump on Wednesday announced additional 25% tariffs to be imposed on India because of its purchases of Russian oil, bringing its total import taxes to 50%.

A leading group of Indian exporters said that will affect nearly 55% of the country's outbound shipments to America and force exporters to lose long-standing clients.

"Absorbing this sudden cost escalation is simply not viable. Margins are already thin," S.C. Ralhan, president of the Federation of Indian Export Organizations, said in a statement.

The Swiss executive branch, the Federal Council, was expected to meet Thursday after President Karin Keller-Sutter and other Swiss officials returned from a hastily arranged trip to Washington in a failed bid to avert a 39% U.S. tariffs on Swiss goods.

Import taxes are still coming on pharmaceutical drugs, and Trump announced 100% tariffs on computer chips. That could leave the U.S. economy in a place of suspended animation as it awaits the impact.

President plans 100% tariff on computer chips to grow US production

By JOSH BOAK

AND MICHAEL LIEDTKE

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he will impose a 100% tariff on computer chips, raising the specter of higher prices for electronics, autos, household appliances and other essential products dependent on the processors powering the digital age.

"We'll be putting a tariff of approximately 100% on chips and semiconductors," Trump said in the Oval Office while meeting with Apple CEO Tim Cook. "But if you're building in the United States of America, there's no charge."

The announcement came more than three months after Trump temporarily exempted most electronics from his administration's most onerous tariffs.

The Republican president said companies that make computer chips in the U.S. would be spared the import tax. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a shortage of computer chips increased the price of autos and contributed to higher inflation.

Investors seemed to interpret the potential tariff exemptions as a positive for Apple and other major tech companies that have been making huge financial commitments to manufacture more chips and other components in the U.S..

Big Tech already has made collective commitments to invest about \$1.5 trillion in the U.S. since Trump moved back into the White House in January. That figure includes a \$600 billion promise from Apple after the iPhone maker boosted its commitment by tacking another \$100 billion on to a previous commitment made in

February.

Now the question is whether the deal brokered between Cook and Trump will be enough to insulate the millions of iPhones made in China and India from the tariffs that the administration has already imposed and reduce the pressure on the company to raise prices on the new models expected to be unveiled next month.

Wall Street certainly seems to think so. After Apple's stock price gained 5% in Wednesday regular trading sessions, the shares rose by another 3% in extended trading after Trump announced some tech companies won't be hit with the latest tariffs while Cook stood alongside him.

The shares of AI chipmaker Nvidia, which also has recently made big commitments to the U.S., rose slightly in extended trading to add to the \$1 trillion gain

in market value the Silicon Valley company has made since the start of Trump's second administration.

The stock price of computer chip pioneer Intel, which has fallen on hard times, also climbed in extended trading.

Inquiries sent to Nvidia and Intel were not immediately answered. The chip industry's main trade group, the Semiconductor Industry Association, declined to comment on Trump's latest tariffs.

Demand for computer chips has been climbing worldwide, with sales increasing 19.6% in the year-ended in June, according to the World Semiconductor Trade Statistics organization.

Trump's tariff threats mark a significant break from existing plans to revive computer chip production in the U.S. that were drawn up during the administra-

tion of President Joe Biden.

Since taking over from Biden, Trump has been deploying tariffs to incentivize more domestic production. Essentially, the president is betting that the threat of dramatically higher chip costs would force most companies to open factories domestically, despite the risk that tariffs could squeeze corporate profits and push up prices for mobile phones, TVs and refrigerators.

By contrast, the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act that Biden signed into law in 2022 provided more than \$50 billion to support new computer chip plants, fund research and train workers for the industry. The mix of funding support, tax credits and other financial incentives were meant to draw in private investment, a strategy that Trump has vocally opposed.

NATION

ICE removes age limits for new recruits

By REBECCA SANTANA
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Department of Homeland Security said Wednesday that it is removing age limits for new hires at the agency responsible for immigration enforcement, as it aims to expand hiring after a massive infusion of cash from Congress.

The department said in a news release that it would waive age limits for new applicants so “even more patriots will qualify to join ICE.”

The agency is at the center of the Trump administration’s ef-

forts to carry out President Donald Trump’s mass deportation agenda. Earlier this summer Congress passed a spending bill that gives ICE money to hire 10,000 more staff.

Currently, ICE applicants must be 21 years old and no older than 37 or 40, depending on what position they are applying for.

In an interview with Fox & Friends, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said applicants could be as young as 18.

“We no longer have a cap on how old you can be or you can continue at age 18, sign up for ICE and

join us and be a part of it. We’ll get you trained and ready to be equipped to go out on the streets and help protect families,” Noem said.

The department said all recruits would have to go through medical and drug screening and complete a physical fitness test.

The agency promoted the age-limit changes on social media with enthusiastic tones, casting the immigration-enforcement efforts as not only patriotic but also epic and even cinematic.

One post was accompanied by an image that looked like a recruit-

ing poster showing images of a young man and an older man, both wearing military style tactical gear and holding weapons with the words “NO AGE CAP JOIN ICE NOW” emblazoned on the bottom. “We’re taking father/son bonding to a whole new level,” it said.

Another showed an advertisement for a Ford Club Wagon — a large van once popular for how many people it could carry — with the words: “Think about how many criminal illegal aliens you could fit in this bad boy?”

Written at the bottom of the im-

age was the words “Want to deport illegals with your absolute boys?” Absolute boys is a slang term used to praise someone.

ICE earlier announced a recruiting campaign aimed at finding and hiring the deportation officers, investigators and lawyers it will need to meet its hiring goals.

As part of that campaign the agency is offering an eye-catching bonus of up to \$50,000 for new recruits as well as other benefits like student loan forgiveness and abundant overtime for deportation officers.

Confederate statue to be fixed, returned to Arlington

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A memorial commemorating Confederate soldiers will be reinstated to Arlington National Cemetery after it was removed as part of an effort to eliminate references to the Confederacy from military bases and assets.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Tuesday that the statue, which he referred to as “The Reconciliation Monument,” will “rightfully” return to its former location near the burial site of its sculptor, the Confederate veteran Moses Ezekiel.

The monument, commonly called the “Confederate Memorial,” was taken down in December 2023 on the recommendation of an independent commission convened by Congress.

The statue will return to Arlington in 2027 after refurbishment at a cost of about \$10 million, according to the Army.

“It never should have been taken down by woke lemmings,” Hegseth wrote in a post on X announcing the memorial’s reinstatement. “Unlike the Left, we don’t believe in erasing American history — we honor it.”

The commission said the statue offered a “nostalgic, mythologized vision of the Confederacy, including highly sanitized depictions of slavery” and misleadingly featured the coats of arms of several non-Confederate states to inflate the Confederacy’s size, support and significance.

Unveiled in 1914, the memorial depicts a bronze woman and mythical gods alongside Southern soldiers and civilians, including an enslaved man following his owner to war and an enslaved woman depicted as a “mammy” holding the child of a white officer.

A Latin inscription on the monument construes the South’s secession as a “Lost Cause” — an interpretation of the Civil War that romanticizes the Confederacy and



ELIZABETH FRASER/U.S. Army

Workers remove the Confederate Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery in December 2023.

its motivations while downplaying slavery as a root cause of the war.

The granite base and foundation of the memorial have remained at Arlington to avoid disturbing surrounding graves. The rest of the monument is being stored at a secure Defense Department facility in Virginia.

Its removal was part of a response to the racial justice protests that consumed American cities in 2020. That year, lawmakers voted over the objection of President Donald Trump to create a renaming commission specifically

to review military assets honoring the Confederacy.

Since returning to the presidency, Trump has taken steps to undo efforts to reexamine American history and the way it is presented. Hegseth in recent months has reverted the names of seven Army bases to match the historical Confederate figures after which they were named.

“This is something that we’ve been proud to do, something that’s important for the morale of the Army,” Hegseth told senators in June. “And those communities ap-

preciate that we’ve returned it back to what it was instead of trying to play this game of erasing names.”

Confederate soldiers were barred from interment at Arlington Cemetery for decades until Congress passed a bill in 1900 designating a special area for their remains. In 1906, the United Daughters of the Confederacy began the effort to erect a memorial in the Confederate section.

Stars and Stripes reporter Matthew Adams contributed to this story.

National Weather Service to fill 450 jobs

Associated Press

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will hire as many as 450 people to shore up the National Weather Service after deep cuts this spring raised concern about dangerous understaffing, the Trump administration confirmed Wednesday.

NOAA was granted permission to fill critical positions at its weather arm, including openings for meteorologists, hydrologists and electronics technicians, Trump administration officials said. The hirings are part of an exemption to a freeze on federal hiring in place through at least Oct. 15.

NOAA declined to comment. The Department of Government Efficiency has gutted NOAA and the National Weather Service, which are key for the nation’s daily weather forecasts, severe storm warnings, climate monitoring and more. Hundreds of NOAA forecasters and other employees have been cut, and NWS offices around the country have had a number of vacancies. The administration has also weighed ending the sharing of satellite data that is key to effective storm tracking and stopped tracking the cost of climate change-fueled weather disasters.

Meteorologists and climate scientists have warned of consequences with fewer workers in positions that are crucial, especially as the hurricane season got underway.

After deadly flash flooding that killed over 130 people in Texas last month, some local officials and Democrats suggested that the deep staffing cuts may have contributed to endangering lives, though others defended the agency’s work.

NATION

Massive central California wildfire keeps growing

Associated Press

SANTA MARIA, Calif. — Rising temperatures on Wednesday posed new challenges for firefighters who have made incremental progress against a massive wildfire in central California that injured four people as it became the biggest blaze in the state so far this year.

More than 870 remote homes and other structures at the northern edge of Los Padres National Forest are threatened by the Gifford Fire,

which grew only slightly overnight after burning out of control for days.

The fire has scorched at least 131 square miles of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties, with just 9% containment. It surpassed the 126-square mile Madre Fire, which erupted last month in southeastern San Luis Obispo County, as the state's largest fire of 2025.

Crews working in steep, inaccessible terrain were dealing with temperatures in the mid-90s on

Wednesday and above 100 on Thursday, said Capt. Scott Safechuck with the Santa Barbara County Fire Department.

"We have hot weather, and we have low relative humidity," Safechuck said Wednesday. "So we expect extreme fire behavior." Luckily, winds are expected to remain relatively calm, he said.

Wildfire risk will be elevated through the weekend across much of inland California as the heat wave

intensifies. The southern part of the state has seen very little rain, drying out vegetation and making it "ripe to burn," the National Weather Service for Los Angeles warned in a statement. Triple-digit temperatures are forecast for the Sacramento Valley.

A dozen major blazes are burning statewide, and officials warn the threat will only grow in August and September, typically the most dangerous months for wildfires.

Across the Sierra and northern parts of California, months of little to no rain are "pushing conditions toward critical levels faster than usual," according to a wildfire forecast by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire.

"In Southern California, the threat is driven by persistent drought, high grass loads, and weakening coastal moisture," Cal Fire said.



RICK BOWMER/AP

Damage from wildfires is seen in Lahaina, Hawaii, in August 2023.

Studies tie unrecognized deaths, health problems to Maui and LA wildfires

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The toll of wildfires is usually counted in acres burnt, property destroyed and lives lost to smoke and flames. But three studies published Wednesday suggest the cost to human health from the Maui and Los Angeles wildfires was substantially higher.

Two of the papers explore what happened after the Hawaii fire in August 2023 — one of the deadliest U.S. wildfires in a century. A third looks at the Los Angeles wildfires earlier this year.

The Maui fire was directly blamed for more than 100 deaths. But it also left 1 in 5 with lung damage and as many as half with symptoms of depression, the new research found. The month of the fire saw 13 suicide and overdose deaths, translating to nearly double the normal suicide and overdose death rates.

The study of the Los Angeles fires concluded that in addition to at least 30 deaths attributed to the fire, more than 400 other deaths could be blamed on the event, due to interruptions in health care and other factors.

The studies, published in two American Medical Association journals, add "a really important piece to the understanding of the

true health risks from these extreme climatic events," said Dr. Jonathan Patz, a University of Wisconsin environmental public health researcher who was not involved in the papers.

The results conform with existing understanding of the effects of extreme weather events, some experts said.

How to track the indirect impacts of disastrous events has been a continuing subject of academic research and even legislative proposals. There have been estimates of deaths caused by extreme heat, as well as research into the large-scale toll of wildfires driven by climate change.

"But this hones in, especially on (specific) fires," Patz said.

One of the studies, co-led by Ruben Juarez of the University of Hawaii, looked at more than 1,100 adults six to 14 months after the Maui fire. It found lower lung function in people in areas close to the fire compared with those in lower-exposure areas. Overall, about 22% had below-normal lung function.

"It's a stark reminder that wildfires can leave an invisible but lasting scar on respiratory health, long after the flames are gone," Juarez said, in an email, noting that this Friday marks two years since the fire.

Gaming platform Roblox faces flood of sexploitation lawsuits from parents

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

ATLANTA — A DeKalb County mother is the first of many Georgia parents to sue online gaming company Roblox alleging it puts profit before safety and allows predators to target and abuse children, her attorney says.

The mother's lawsuit, filed Monday in Gwinnett County State Court, claims Roblox is liable for the sexual exploitation, or sexploitation, of her 9-year-old son, who was groomed through the company's online gaming platform. The boy was sent pornographic content, harassed and coerced into sending explicit images of himself to adults posing on Roblox as children, the suit says.

Matthew Dolman, an attorney representing the mother, said Roblox is about to face a flood of similar cases across the country. He said several others involving Atlanta-area families will be filed in coming weeks and he expects there to be around 150 such cases nationally within a few months.

"Roblox is the worst," Dolman said in comparison to other interactive online platforms. "Roblox has just continued to materially misrepresent facts and state that this is a safe product, knowing full well there's a number of law enforcement investigations, arrests and documented incidents of perpetrators not only grooming children, but actually meeting up with

the children."

Several reported incidents of children being exploited through Roblox by predators are included in the DeKalb mother's complaint. They include the arrest in 2022 of a Clayton County man accused of luring a 13-year-old girl from Kansas to his home and raping her.

A spokesperson for Roblox said they cannot comment on pending litigation, though the company is "deeply committed" to the safety of its millions of users. They said Roblox continuously monitors and addresses inappropriate content and behavior and partners with law enforcement and other organizations to combat the sexual exploitation of children.

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WORLD

Netanyahu to seek approval for expanded Gaza offensive

By MELANIE LIDMAN
AND WAFAA SHURAF
Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — The Israeli Security Cabinet was set to meet Thursday to discuss a possible expansion of military operations in the Gaza Strip, a move that would draw fierce opposition internationally and from many in Israel, including the families of hostages held by Hamas.

An Israeli official said the Security Cabinet was expected to hold a lengthy debate and approve an expanded military plan to conquer all or parts of Gaza not yet under Israeli control. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity pending a formal decision, said that whatever is approved would be implemented gradually to increase pressure on Hamas.

In Gaza, where Israel's 22-month offensive has already killed tens of thousands of people, displaced most of the population, destroyed vast areas and caused severe and widespread hunger, Palestinians braced for further misery.

"There is nothing left to occupy," said Maysaa al-Heila, who is living in a displacement camp. "There is no Gaza left."

At least 42 Palestinians were killed in Israeli airstrikes and shootings across southern Gaza on Thursday, according to local hospitals.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been meeting this week with advisers to discuss what his

office said are ways to "further achieve Israel's goals in Gaza" after the breakdown of ceasefire talks last month.

Expanding military operations would further isolate Israel internationally, after several of its closest Western allies have called on it to end the war and facilitate more humanitarian aid. In Israel, families of the hostages have called for mass protests Thursday, fearing an escalation could doom their loved ones.

Hamas-led militants abducted 251 people and killed around 1,200 in the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war. Most of the hostages have been released in ceasefires or other deals but 50 remain inside Gaza, around 20 of them believed by Israel to be alive.

Almost two dozen relatives of hostages set sail from southern Israel toward the maritime border with Gaza on Thursday, where they broadcast messages from loudspeakers.

Yehuda Cohen, the father of Nimrod Cohen, an Israeli soldier held in Gaza, said from the boat that Netanyahu is prolonging the war to satisfy extremists in his governing coalition. Netanyahu's far-right allies want to escalate the war, relocate most of Gaza's population to other countries and reestablish Jewish settlements that were dismantled in 2005.

"Netanyahu is working only for himself," Cohen said, pleading with the international community to put pressure on the prime min-

ister to stop the war and save his son.

Israel's military offensive has killed over 61,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were fighters or civilians. The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government and staffed by medical professionals who keep and share detailed records.

The United Nations and independent experts view the ministry's figures as the most reliable estimate of casualties. Israel has disputed them without offering a toll of its own.

Of the 42 people killed on Thursday, 13 were heading toward a distribution site run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a U.S.- and Israeli-backed private contractor, according to hospital records. At least 50 people were wounded, many from gunshots.

Neither the GHF nor the Israeli military immediately commented on the strikes or shootings. The GHF sites are in military zones off limits to independent media.

Hundreds of people have been killed by Israeli fire in recent weeks while heading to GHF sites and in chaotic scenes around U.N. convoys, most of which are overwhelmed by looters and crowds of hungry people. The U.N. human rights office, witnesses and health officials have offered similar accounts of the near-daily shootings going back to May, when Israel lifted a complete 2½ month blockade.

Arrest sought for wife of jailed ex-President Yoon

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korean investigators on Thursday requested a warrant to arrest the wife of jailed former President Yoon Suk Yeol, a day after questioning her over suspicions including bribery, stock manipulation and political influence-peddling.

Yoon, for the second time in a week, resisted an attempt to compel him to appear for questioning in his wife's case, forcing prison officials to abandon their efforts after an hourlong struggle due to concerns of injury, the investigators said. The detention warrant for Yoon expires Thursday.

The investigation targeting Yoon's wife, Kim Keon Hee, is one of three separate special prosecutor probes launched under the government of new liberal President Lee Jae Myung related to Yoon, who was removed from office in April and rearrested last month over his brief imposition of martial law in December.

The investigation team questioned Kim for about seven hours on Wednesday on various allegations, including claims that Yoon and Kim exerted undue influence over the conservative party's candidate nominations for a parliamentary by-election in 2022.

Kim is also suspected of receiving a necklace and other gifts through a fortuneteller acting as an intermediary for a Unification Church official seeking business

favours, and of possible involvement in a stock price manipulation scheme.

The team said they listed multiple charges in the warrant request for Kim, including violations of financial market and political funding laws and acceptance of bribes.

In her brief comments to reporters as she appeared for questioning on Wednesday, Kim issued a vague apology for causing public concern but also hinted that she would deny the accusations against her, calling herself "someone insignificant."

Yoon, who faces a high-stakes trial on rebellion and other charges, previously resisted an attempt by investigators on Friday last week to bring him to their office for questioning over his wife. Investigators said he took off his prison uniform and lay down on the floor of his cell in his underwear until they gave up.

Investigators were less specific about Yoon's actions on Thursday but said he "strongly resisted" and that there were concerns that he might be injured if the struggle continued.

The Justice Ministry said Yoon complained of shoulder pain following the detention attempt that involved unspecified "physical force," but that a medical examination found no health issues.

Yoon's lawyers criticized the repeated efforts to force him to appear for questioning, stating that he has already made clear his intention to exercise his right to remain silent and accusing investigators of infringing upon his rights in order to publicly shame him.



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WEEKEND



Buddy Guy keeping the blues alive

Music, Pages 28-29

Horror and humor

Nuanced late-summer thriller 'Weapons' might just be the scariest film of the year

Movies, Pages 15-16



WARNER BROS. PICTURES/AP

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Real or AI?

Here are some things to check if you want to know whether a song is human-made

By **KELVIN CHAN**
Associated Press

Is it The Velvet Underground or Velvet Sundown? The fictitious rock group Velvet Sundown, which comes complete with AI-generated music, lyrics and album art, is stoking debate about how the new technology is blurring the line between the real and synthetic in the music industry, and whether creators should be transparent with their audience.

Computer software is widely used in music production, and artificial intelligence is just the latest tool that disc jockeys, music producers and others have added to their production pipeline. But the rise of AI song generators such as Suno and Udio is set to transform the industry because they allow anyone to create songs with just a few prompts.

While some people do not care whether they're listening to AI-generated music, others might be curious to know.

If you encounter a new song that leaves you wondering whether it's 100% made with AI, there are some methods that could reveal how it was created:

Do a background check

If you're wondering who's behind a song, try some old-fashioned detective work.

The "most obvious cues" come from "external factors," said Manuel Moussallam, head of research and development at streaming service Deezer.

Does the band or artist have social media accounts? Lack of a

social presence might indicate there's no one there. If they do exist online, examine the kind of content they post and how long it goes back.

Is there any sign that the artist or band exists in real life? Are there any upcoming concerts and can you buy a ticket for a gig? Is there footage of past concerts on YouTube? Has an established record label released their singles or albums?

Try going to the source. Song creators often — but not always — publish their generated tunes on the Suno or Udio platforms, where they can be found by other users.

The catch is that you'll have to sign up for an account to get access. Users can look up songs by track name or the creator's handle, and browse genres and playlists. But it can still be difficult to spot a song, especially if you don't know the name of the song or creator.

Song tags

Deezer has been flagging albums containing AI-generated songs, as part of its efforts to be more transparent as it battles streaming fraudsters looking to make quick money through royalty payments.

The Deezer app and website will notify listeners with an on-screen label — "AI-generated content" — to point out that some tracks on an album were created with song generators.

The company's CEO says the system relies on in-house technology to detect subtle but recognizable patterns found in all



iStock

audio created by AI song generators. The company hasn't specified how many songs it has tagged since it rolled out the feature in June, but says up to 18% of songs uploaded to its platform each day are AI-generated.

Song scanners

There are a few third-party services available online that promise to determine whether a song is human-made or generated by AI.

I uploaded a few songs I generated to the online detector from IRCAM Amplify, a subsidiary of French music and sound research institute IRCAM. It said the probability that they were AI-generated ranged from 81.8% to 98% and accurately deduced that they were made with Suno.

As a cross-check, I also uploaded some old MP3s from my song library, which got a very low AI probability score.

But a handful of results shouldn't be taken as a sign of overall accuracy.

"The AI detector can make mistakes. It is recommended to

verify the results," the detector warns.

The drawback with IRCAM's tool is that you can't paste links to songs, so you can't check tunes that you can only hear on a streaming service.

There are a few other websites that let you both upload song files and paste Spotify links for analysis, but they have their own limitations. When I tried them out for this story, the results were either inconclusive or flagged some AI songs as human-made and vice versa.

Check the lyrics

AI song tools can churn out both music and lyrics. Many serious users like to write their own words and plug them in because they've discovered that AI-generated lyrics tend to be bad.

Casual users, though, might prefer to just let the machine write them. So bad rhyming schemes or repetitive lyrical structures might be a clue that a song is not human-made. But it's subjective.

Some users report that Suno tends to use certain words in its lyrics like "neon," "shadows" or "whispers."

If a song includes these words, it's "a dead giveaway" that it's AI, said Lukas Rams, a Philadelphia-area resident. He has used Suno to create three albums for his AI band Sleeping with Wolves but writes his own lyrics. "I don't know why; it loves to put neon in everything."

No easy answers

AI technology is improving so quickly that there's no foolproof way to determine if content is real or not, and experts say you can't just rely on your ear.

"In general, it can be difficult to tell if a track is AI-generated just from listening, and it's only becoming more challenging as the technology gets increasingly advanced," said Moussallam of Deezer. "Generative models such as Suno and Udio are constantly changing, meaning that old identifiers — such as vocals having a distinctive reverb — are not necessarily valid anymore."

Accentum Open true wireless earbuds a winner

By **GREGG ELLMAN**
Tribune News Service

It's a safe bet that when I open a product from Sennheiser, the sound quality will be top-notch. So it shouldn't come as a surprise when I say its new Accentum Open true wireless earbuds are a winner for a variety of reasons.

First and foremost is the sound, which Sennheiser has been known for since its inception in 1945. I'll do the math for you: 80 years. Each of Accentum Open's true wireless earbuds has an 11 mm dynamic driver, which pumps clear, crisp sound into your ears with Sennheiser's renowned tuning.

Sound is most important, but if the earbuds aren't comfortable, it doesn't matter. Accentum Open are designed with a universal fit that gives users the comfort they need. This prevents ear fatigue, allowing all-day use. The weight is a significant contributor to ergonomic comfort, with each stem-styled earbud weighing 4.4 grams or 0.155 ounces.

Inside is Bluetooth 5.3, which also supports multipoint



SENNHEISER/TNS

The Sennheiser Accentum Open true wireless earbuds are comfortable, have great sound and have an IPX4 splash resistance rating. They come in black and cream.

connectivity, allowing them to be connected to up to eight devices and enabling seamless switching between laptops, smartphones or tablets. With the built-in dual-beam-

forming microphones, the quality of hands-free calls will be crystal clear, with minimal background noise.

You'll get about 6 hours of playback before a charge is needed in the portable charging case. Fast charging will yield about 1 hour of use from a 10-minute charge. And you can go a total of about 28 hours before the case itself needs a USB-C charge.

The app-free Accentum Open true wireless earbuds are poolside safe with an IPX4 splash resistance rating, which also makes them safe for workouts. They are built with my favorite feature, smart pause: When an earbud is removed, the music pauses, and it resumes playing when the earbud is put back in.

Tone prompts alert you to features such as power on/off, pairing, low battery, etc. There is no need to turn them on; they automatically activate when removed from the charging case. To turn them off, return them to the case. Adjusting the volume, taking calls and selecting music are done with responsive touch controls.

Online: sennheiser-hearing.com; \$129.95, available in black or cream

WEEKEND: MOVIES



WARNER BROS. PICTURES/AP photos

“Weapons,” about the mysterious disappearance of all but one child from the same classroom on the same night, blends horror and humor. Shown above and below, Cary Christopher as Alex Lilly. Director Zach Cregger says that in order to ensure that the balance worked, he had to strip away any intentionality behind the humor.

Authentic reactions to chaos

Characters, setting give genre-bending ‘Weapons’ a depth that is rare in horror

BY ITZEL LUNA
Associated Press

If there’s one thing Zach Cregger learned while writing and directing his upcoming horror movie “Weapons,” it’s that the best laughs won’t come from the jokes he writes.

The film follows Cregger’s 2022 solo directorial debut “Barbarian,” the widely celebrated genre-bending horror. This time, the young director bends even more, spinning a town into chaos when all children but one from the same classroom mysteriously vanish, leaving a trail of questions in their place.

The Warner Bros. release, now in select on-base theaters, is as creepy as it is hilarious — a delicate balance that required Cregger to strip any intentionality behind his humor, he told The Associated Press.

“If the humor is coming from an authentic reaction that a character’s having, then it works,” Cregger said. “There’s a lot of jokes that didn’t make it into the movie that I thought were going to be so funny. And then we did a test screening, and nobody laughed and I’m like, OK, it’s gotta go.”

Paranoia runs deep in the film. The town’s heartbroken parents are represented by Josh Brolin’s character, Archer Graff, whose son was among the missing. The students’ teacher Justine Gandy, played by Julia Garner, is determined to solve the mystery, despite parents blaming her for the disappearances.

The humor here comes naturally, Cregger said, as characters navigate the absurd events happening around them.

“You’re not playing for the laugh, otherwise you lose the laugh,” said Brolin, whose character stumbles through his grief, a state ripe for what he called genuine and “embarrassingly funny” moments.

Town’s unrest puts a mirror up to society

If 17 kids up and ran out of their homes at 2:17 a.m. one

morning with no trace, what would a community do? That question drove “Weapons,” painting a picture of a town left reeling by the mystery.

The film’s setting — the fictional small town of Maybrook, Ill. — is just as integral to the plot as any of its main characters. The town feels hyperrealistic, a core aspect of the movie’s ability to blend humor and horror, two genres that Garner said are “opposite sides of the same coin.”

“It’s funny because this isn’t even like a proper horror film,” Garner said. “It has comedic elements and has horror elements, but it’s kind of its own genre, in a way.”

The town’s reactions to tragedy and shock were intentionally meant to feel oddly realistic, Cregger said. Parents are outraged, storming into town halls and angrily demanding answers from the police, the school and, most pointedly, the students’ teacher. Yet when Garner’s character is attacked in broad daylight, bystanders and store owners hardly bat an eye, a level of indifference that Cregger said is just as realistic as the parental outrage.

“We definitely have a, ‘Whoa, not my problem,’ kind of a thing when chaos is occurring, because we see it so much on TV that I think we’re able to just kind of tune it out, even when it’s happening in front of us,” Cregger said. “Living in America, I’ve seen crazy things happen with my own eyes right in front of me, and I’ve just kept walking for better or worse, so I don’t know, it feels real.”

‘Weapons’ relies on imperfect characters

Brolin — who’s found wide-reaching success across Hollywood, from the 1985 classic “The Goonies” to the Marvel universe — initially hesitated when approached for the film. As a father of four, facing his worst nightmare — losing his children — was “not something I want to show up to work for,” he said.

But “Weapons” lends the characters a layer of depth that allowed horror, a genre he said is typically treated as



cosmetic, to suddenly have “depth, and humor and absurdity,” which, coupled with his own adult daughter’s love of “Barbarian,” was enough to convince him to sign on.

The movie subtly mocks suburban life, as goriness and horror occur under the sights of nosy neighbors, corrupt police departments and struggling relationships.

Each character that drives the plot forward is just as flawed as they are victims of tragedy. Gandy, the schoolteacher, is harassed by parents for her missing students but is secretly battling alcoholism. Archer, the heartbroken father, is failing in his job and his marriage as he navigates his son’s absence. Paul Morgan, played by Alden Ehrenreich, is a local beat police officer with secrets of his own.

“Every character is perceived in a certain way and then every character breaks,” Brolin said. “It all comes down to this very base thing: What if you lost the thing that you value the most? How do you deal?”

For Ehrenreich, who’s found success in dramas, notably as a young Han Solo, “Weapons” offered a different pace, but its horror wasn’t what drew him in. Rather, he was captivated by the film’s depth and weirdness.

“The weird resonance, the weird opening voice-over, the way it was written and the kind of emotional brokenness of these characters and the depth that I felt was in the writing, that was as deep as any drama I’ve read in years,” Ehrenreich said.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

‘Weapons’ a dark riddle

Plot, cinematography, implications make Cregger film scariest of year

By **KATIE WALSH**
Tribune News Service

Zach Cregger’s “Weapons” opens with a mystery that sounds like a math word problem: If 17 children left their homes and disappeared at 2:17 in the morning, and there’s only one kid and one teacher left in their classroom — who is to blame? Because someone has to be at fault.

To puzzle through this particularly dark riddle with maximum mysteriousness, writer/director Cregger follows the main characters through the aftermath of this peculiar event. The first person he follows is the teacher, Justine (Julia Garner); the last, the student, Alex (Cary Christopher). In between, we ride along with Archer (Josh Brolin), the angry, grieving father of one of the missing kids; Marcus (Benedict Wong), the school principal; Paul (Alden Ehrenreich), a local cop; and James (Austin Abrams), the town junkie.

Cregger used a similar kind of perspective-swapping to great effect in his 2022 horror sensation “Barbarian,” crashing from one subjective storyline to the next at moments of maximum tension. Confusion and grief about the case of the missing kids spirals into anger and harassment, spilling into and mixing with the mess of the characters’

own personal lives, their preexisting conditions. Each storyline ends with a violent cliff-hanger or strange event that haunts the next strand and keeps suspense at a fever pitch.

Cregger and cinematographer Larkin Seiple emphasize this internal structure with a visual motif in which the camera follows these characters using long, thoughtfully choreographed shots, such as when Justine enters a liquor store to pick up a couple of bottles of vodka after a tense parent meeting at school.

Sometimes the camera pushes in on the characters threateningly, like an unseen force, or pulls them forward in space, creating a sense of propulsive momentum. As the violence intensifies, Seiple places the camera in surprising places, like when it’s attached to doors that move with the action. The entire film is a masterpiece of camera blocking and long, unyielding shots that wind through the town of Maybrook with these characters.

Both Justine and Archer, at odds with each other initially, find a sense of purpose for their restless energy in investigating the disappearance themselves. Justine follows her one remaining student, Alex, around town, even as she’s painted as a pariah by the parents, and struggles with her own issues surrounding

booze and sex.

Archer, a building contractor with an anger problem, decides to problem-solve his son’s disappearance with the tools at his disposal. Neither he nor Justine is entirely trustworthy, but through dogged determination, each finds the cracks and chases them down.

Meanwhile, Paul is locked in a game of cat-and-mouse with James, while struggling with his own relationship and sobriety, and James is just trying to score some cash so he can secure his next fix. The kids of this town might have gone missing, but the adults were struggling long before this crisis.

To fully unpack “Weapons” in all of its deliciously creepy and shocking glory would spoil all the fun, and like “Barbarian” it is best to go in as cold as possible, to allow Cregger’s twisted tale to simply spill over you.

With his second horror film (he directed two comedy features and numerous TV episodes as a member of the comedy troupe The Whitest Kids U’ Know), Cregger proves himself to be an expert with tone, blending terror and humor masterfully. In casting, he peppers the ensemble with comedy stars in supporting roles, such as June Diane Raphael, Whitmer Thomas and Clayton Farris, who add to the



WARNER BROS. PICTURES/AP

Schoolteacher Justine (Julia Garner), left, and parent Archer (Josh Brolin) are initially at odds in “Weapons” after most of her students, including his own child, disappear one night.

absurd and inexplicable atmosphere. Meanwhile, Abrams might deliver the best and most compellingly authentic performance of the entire company.

With “Weapons,” Cregger establishes himself as the foremost purveyor of wicked and witchy contemporary fables that play like demonic urban legends: Did you hear about the Airbnb with the creepy basement? The one about the kids who left their homes in the middle of the night?

There’s also enough cultural allegory in “Barbarian” and “Weapons” to make these films feel meaty, like a full meal, but Cregger doesn’t spoon-feed metaphor to the audience. What he’s trying to say about the world through “Weapons” — about children, and their relationship

with and function to older generations — feels incisive, but never obvious. The ideas here are bigger, and scarier, than just what we experience during the film (which is really very scary).

It’s exciting to see a newer horror voice like Cregger not just maintain his momentum in filmmaking craft but also hit the gas on his ideas. “Weapons” is remarkably captivating because it’s the scariest movie of the year, not just for what happens on screen, but for the larger implications he suggests. It’s the kind of film that leaves the theater with you, whether you want it to or not.

“Weapons” is rated R for strong bloody violence and grisly images, language throughout, some sexual content and drug use. Running time: 128 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

‘The Pickup’ is implausible, predictable and yet fun to watchBy **ROBERT LLOYD**
Los Angeles Times

Once upon a time, movie houses were full of all sorts of pictures — big pictures, little pictures, A pictures, B pictures, smart pictures, silly pictures. Nowadays, with the film business contracting around blockbusters, the little pictures, the B pictures and the silly pictures have deserted the theaters for television which, in its streaming multiplicity, has room to absorb them. The current theatrical market can only bear so many Adam Sandler movies, but Netflix is happy to show as many as he wants to make.

When it comes to critical attention, these features will often fall through the cracks, like a body in a jurisdictional dispute between the police and sheriff’s departments, all the easier as their caseloads are already too heavy and maybe this one doesn’t seem worth the time. Still, sometimes something calls the reviewer’s name, and the combination of Eddie Murphy, Pete Davidson, Eva Longoria and Keke Palmer in the Prime Video heist comedy “The Pickup” at least looked promising. That it is at once implausible, overcomplicated and predictable does not, after all, set it apart from most caper films.

Murphy and Davidson play Russell and Travis, respectively, security guards who work for an armored car company, picking up bags of money from around northern New Jersey and bringing them to the bank. Russell is a legend around the office, where he nevertheless has to take guff from his boss (Andrew Dice Clay as, essentially, Andrew Dice Clay). Travis is a well-meaning screwup who comes from a family of cops but can’t get a place on the police force. (He is good with math, though, which will come in handy when math needs to be done.)



AMAZON MGM STUDIOS/TNS

Eddie Murphy, left, and Pete Davidson play security guards for an armored car company in “The Pickup.”

The film takes place on the day of Russell’s 25th wedding anniversary; after a quarter century his wife, Natalie (Longoria), doesn’t seem at all tired of him, though she is a little tired of his job. (There is talk of opening a “sweet little bed and breakfast” and not the “air” sort.) Anxious to finish his shift in time for a celebratory dinner, he finds himself teamed with Travis, “the annoying new kid,” a chatterbox who conversely reveres Russell as a god.

We have earlier seen Travis pull a gun on Zoe (Keke Palmer), under the impression she was attempting to rob a bank. (She handed him a note with her phone number on it, which he didn’t bother to read.) Nevertheless, she might as well have had “Danger” written in lipstick on her forehead. Although Travis, overwhelmed by the attention she’s paying him, is too smitten to see it. You will

not be fooled, however, and will be less than surprised when she appears with a couple of thugs — Jack Kesey, as Banner, is the movie’s only real villain — on a stretch of country road to commandeer the armored car.

A low-key Murphy, whose “Beverly Hills Cop: Axel F” sequel was released straight-to-streaming by Netflix last year, is the responsible adult here. Davidson, the Jerry Lewis to his Dean Martin, portrays a sentimentalized version of the idiots he sometimes plays. The substance of their more substantial conversations, when they have them, is change.

Russell: “I’m not retiring, I’m moving on to a new career.”

Travis: “You’re pivoting. This late? ... Your generation can’t pivot.”

Written by Matt Mider and Kevin Burrows and directed by Tim Story (“Barbershop,” “Ride Along”), with the 20th-century wipes and countdown clocks and stylized titles no 21st-century heist film is allowed, “The Pickup” makes mathematical sense even as real-world sense eludes it, and generates some actual tension on the way to its inevitable happy ending. Many of its 94 minutes are occupied with well-mounted car chases, stunts and gunfights, obviating the need for character development, past the traditional foes-become-friends dynamic. But the cast does not treat the material with contempt, and though no one is stretching any harder than a house cat waking from a nap, they’re pros and pretend not to notice when the film gets ridiculous or runs into a plot hole. You’ll possibly notice, but may not mind.

“The Pickup” is rated R for language throughout, some sexual references and violence. Running time: 94 minutes. Now streaming on Prime Video.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEW

Lohan, Curtis return for body-swap sequel

'Freakier Friday' is amiable, joyful but convoluted and tries too hard to up the ante

BY JOCELYN NOVECK
Associated Press

It's a tale as old as time — or at least, a tale Hollywood loves to tell again and again: body-swapping. It's magical. It's comical. It carries heart-warming messages about walking in another's shoes, and learning about oneself along the way.

So it's hardly surprising that "Freaky Friday," the 2003 version of the 1972 Mary Rodgers novel starring Lindsay Lohan and Jamie Lee Curtis, was a hit. Lohan was endearing and charismatic as an appealing, mildly turbulent teenager, and Curtis was a comic hoot as her control-freak therapist mom.

And while there were a few misfires — the stereotypical Asian representation has aged badly — the film was powered by an easy chemistry between the two stars. So why not revisit the story in 2025? Sequels are often made for far less compelling reasons.

The chief weakness of "Freakier Friday" — which brings Curtis and Lohan back for an amiable, often joyful and certainly chaotic reunion — is that while it hews overly closely to the structure, storyline and even dialogue of the original, it tries too hard to up the ante. The comedy is thus a bit more manic, and the plot machinations more overwrought (or sometimes distractingly silly).

Then there's the double body-swapping. Because one major swap isn't enough, here we have two sets of swappers — a quixotic quartet of lives disrupted during



Tess (Jamie Lee Curtis), left, and Anna (Lindsay Lohan) switch bodies with Lily (Sophia Hammons, left inset) and Harper (Julia Butters, right inset), respectively, in "Freakier Friday," before Harper and Lily are to become sisters after Anna marries Lily's dad.

Disney

the lead-up to, yes, another wedding! The problem is that sometimes, it's actually hard to keep track of who's inhabiting whom, and therefore why they're doing what.

Not to say that "Freakier Friday," directed with gusto by Nisha Ganatra, doesn't have moments of comic glee. I'll admit to laughing out loud — with everyone else older than 30 near me — when two teens were trying to locate an adult contact and one of them pulled up Facebook, explaining: "It's like a database of old people!" Touché, guys.

These "youngsters" are actually Lohan and Curtis, playing ninth graders trapped in adult bodies. Before we get to that, though: We begin 22 years after we last saw Lohan's Anna, playing electric guitar at her mom's wedding. Now a single mom

herself with a job managing a young pop star, she's trying to get her daughter up for school. Harper (the excellent Julia Butters) is — surprise! — an appealing, mildly turbulent teenager. And just like Anna two decades ago, she keeps people out of her bedroom. "Prepare to be triggered!" Anna yells before barging in. (The dialogue has been duly updated for the present time.)

Driving to school drop-off, Anna is joined by her mom, Tess (Curtis), who has stylish gray hair now and is still a practicing therapist, podcaster and author whose latest topic is "Rebelling with Respect." Dropping Harper off, Anna calls out "Make good choices!" — just what mom Tess used to say, natch.

At school, Harper butts heads with transfer student Lily (Sophia Hammons),

a budding fashion designer who hails from Britain and is very snooty. Anna is called to see the principal. There, she meets Lily's dishy chef dad Eric (Manny Jacinto), and the two flirt so intensely, the principal herself makes them a dinner reservation.

All it takes is one cute dating montage, and poof, Anna and Eric are engaged. But things are still bad between Harper and Lily, whose animosity triggers a weirdly violent, all-school food fight on bake sale day. But they all have a bachelorette party to attend. There, a wacky fortune teller and barista and business-card maker — Vanessa Bayer, in a cameo that perhaps, no definitely goes on too long — reads their palms. And then the earth starts shaking.

"Freaky" fans know what happens next. The four awaken the next morning, each inhabiting someone else. Anna is Harper. Tess is Lily. Harper is Anna. Lily is Tess. We'll be testing you on this later! Seriously, it's easy to lose the thread. Also, one wonders: why doesn't Lily's British accent travel with her to Tess' body? If Curtis suddenly had a British accent, the pairing would make a lot more sense.

It all barrels toward a conclusion that we won't spoil. Will the wedding be derailed by the efforts of Lily and Harper? Will that derailment be temporary? Will the sisters-to-be reach an understanding? Will Lohan get to play the electric guitar? Will everyone grow to appreciate each other?

That last question, we can answer. Of course they will. Whoever they are, and whatever they just did.

"Freakier Friday" is rated PG for thematic elements, rude humor, language and some suggestive references. Running time: 111 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

Switch it up with these other Lohan films

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

"Freakier Friday" marks a triumphant big-screen comeback for Lindsay Lohan, the irrepressible star of "Mean Girls" and more, who endured her fair share of tabloid scrutiny and infamy. Her charming and spunky screen presence made her a child and teenage star, but she stumbled through a rocky patch in her 20s with misguided life and career choices. But with "Freakier Friday" in theaters, it's the perfect time to trace her career through her filmography, including all the ups and downs.

Audiences first fell in love with Lohan in Nancy Meyers' 1998 film "The Parent Trap," playing long-lost twins Annie and Hallie, who meet at summer camp and swap places to get their parents back together. The film is a remake of the 1961 original starring Hayley Mills. Stream it on Disney+ or rent it elsewhere.

Lohan went on to huge success in another Disney movie, "Freaky Friday" (2003), another remake (of the 1976 film), opposite Jamie Lee Curtis (streaming on Disney+). This film, coupled with the 2004 film "Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen" (streaming on Disney+), set the stage for her mainstream breakout performance in "Mean Girls," written by Tina Fey and directed by Mark Waters (who also directed "Freaky Friday"). It's hard to overstate what a cultural phenomenon "Mean Girls" was at the time — and remains so — but it was the apex of monoculture in that era, and launched Lohan to superstardom, along with co-stars Rachel McAdams and Amanda Seyfried. Stream "Mean Girls" on Paramount+, Kanopy or Peacock.

A tabloid mainstay by this time, the first inklings of Lohan's behavioral issues cropped up during the filming of "Herbie: Fully Loaded," when she was often late or absent. Based on the "Herbie" film series that originated in the 1960s, about a sentient car, this was the last "Herbie" film (for now), and co-stars Justin Long, Breckin Meyer, Matt Dillon and Michael Keaton. Stream "Herbie: Fully Loaded" on Disney+.

Lohan squeezed in a few films with iconic directors, including Robert Altman with "A Prairie Home Companion" in 2006 (streaming on Kanopy or Tubi), and with Garry Marshall in "Georgia Rule" (2007), opposite Jane Fonda (Prime Video, Hulu, Kanopy, Tubi).

But 2007 began the start of her questionable film choices, with the horror film "I Know Who Killed Me," in which Lohan plays the victim of a serial killer, whose hand and leg are amputated. But she's also got a dual personality, as both aspiring pianist/writer Aubrey, and down-on-her-luck stripper Dakota. Directed by Chris Sivertson, "I Know Who Killed Me" is a camp curio legendary on the Lohan filmography. Rent it on all digital platforms.

In 2012, she made the TV movie "Liz & Dick" about the marriage of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Lohan starred as Taylor opposite Grant Bowler's Burton. Stream it on Kanopy. A year later, she starred in the bizarre Paul Schrader film "The Canyons," written by Bret Easton Ellis, and co-starring adult film actor James Deen — another film that can only be described as a "camp curio." Stream it on Kanopy, Mubi or AMC+.

After several years off, during which she operated a



PARAMOUNT PICTURES/TNS

From left, Lindsay Lohan, Amanda Seyfried, Lacey Chabert and Rachel McAdams in 2004's "Mean Girls."

nightclub in Mykonos (depicted on the reality show "Lindsay Lohan's Beach Club," streaming on Paramount+), she launched a comeback on the small (streaming) screen, starring in several Netflix original seasonal romance films. In 2022, she starred in "Falling for Christmas" opposite Chord Overstreet, playing, obviously, an heiress who suffers from amnesia after a skiing accident. "Irish Wish" from 2024 sees Lohan starring as a bridesmaid who travels to her best friend's wedding in Ireland (the best friend is marrying her former flame), and in "Our Little Secret" (2024), she plays a woman who finds out that her new boyfriend's sister's new boyfriend is her ex (catch that). Stream them all on Netflix.

Finally, Lohan's iconic "Mean Girls," which was made into a Broadway musical and then back into a movie again, gave her the opportunity to make a cameo in the remake of the film that made her a star, some 20 years ago.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

The '80s cult classic that refuses to die

Diane Franklin of 'Better Off Dead' talks about the legacy of the film, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this month

BY AARON KIDD
Stars and Stripes

Reviews could have been better when "Better Off Dead" premiered in theaters on Aug. 23, 1985.

Siskel & Ebert gave it "two thumbs down." The Hollywood Reporter called it a "crude, cartoonish comedy." Its star, John Cusack, walked out of an early screening, disillusioned by the final product.

Few could have predicted that writer-director Savage Steve Holland's surreal teen heartbreak comedy — peppered with Claymation hamburgers, a persistent paperboy demanding "two dollars" and a skiing-on-one-ski duel to the death — would become one of the most beloved films of the 1980s.

But 40 years on, "Better Off Dead" remains as quotable and charming as ever, with a fan base that continues to grow. It broke into HBO Max's streaming top 10 this summer, and a special 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray was released on Aug. 5.

At the heart of the film's legacy is Monique Junot, a French exchange student with a quiet strength and a mean throwing arm, played by Diane Franklin. She's known for other '80s classics, including "The Last American Virgin" and "Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure."

"When 'Better Off Dead' came out, we thought it was going to be really big," she told Stars and Stripes in a recent Zoom interview. "We thought it was, because even the script made us laugh out loud. People didn't get it immediately, but now they really do. It was a sleeper."

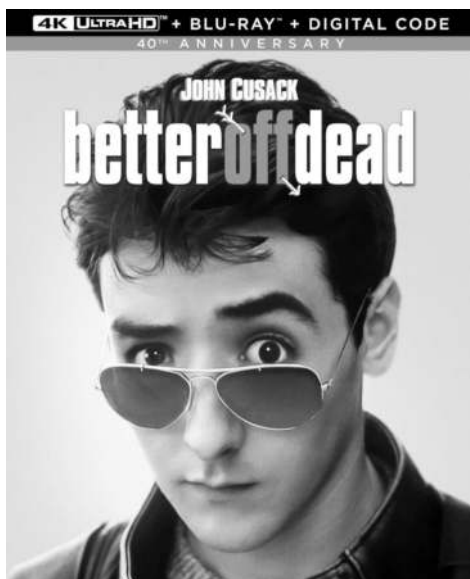
The lasting power of Monique

Franklin — a first-generation American whose Viennese father fought for the Allies in World War II — has long embraced her connection to the film and its fans. In 2022, she self-published "The Excellent COMEDY of the Last American French-Exchange Babe of the 80s" — a look at her experiences making "Better Off Dead."

The memoir details not only the shoot's whimsical, spontaneous energy but also the challenges of breaking through in an industry that often values image over originality.

Franklin's Monique — a Dodgers-loving, mechanically savvy girl who communicates more with her actions than her words — offered a refreshing counterpoint to the typical ingénue roles of the time.

"All of the characters I had played up to



A special 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray was released Aug. 5, just in time for the film's 40th anniversary.

that point were either manipulative or evil," she said. "This was the first time I was able to play a role model."

Monique helped shape a generation's image of what a romantic heroine could be — independent, curious and quietly powerful.

"What I really love about Monique — she is athletic, she has a sense of humor, she has her own sense of style," Franklin said. "She knows when to talk and when not to talk. I think there's a lot to be learned from that character. A lot of women come up to me and say, 'You were the one I modeled myself after.'"

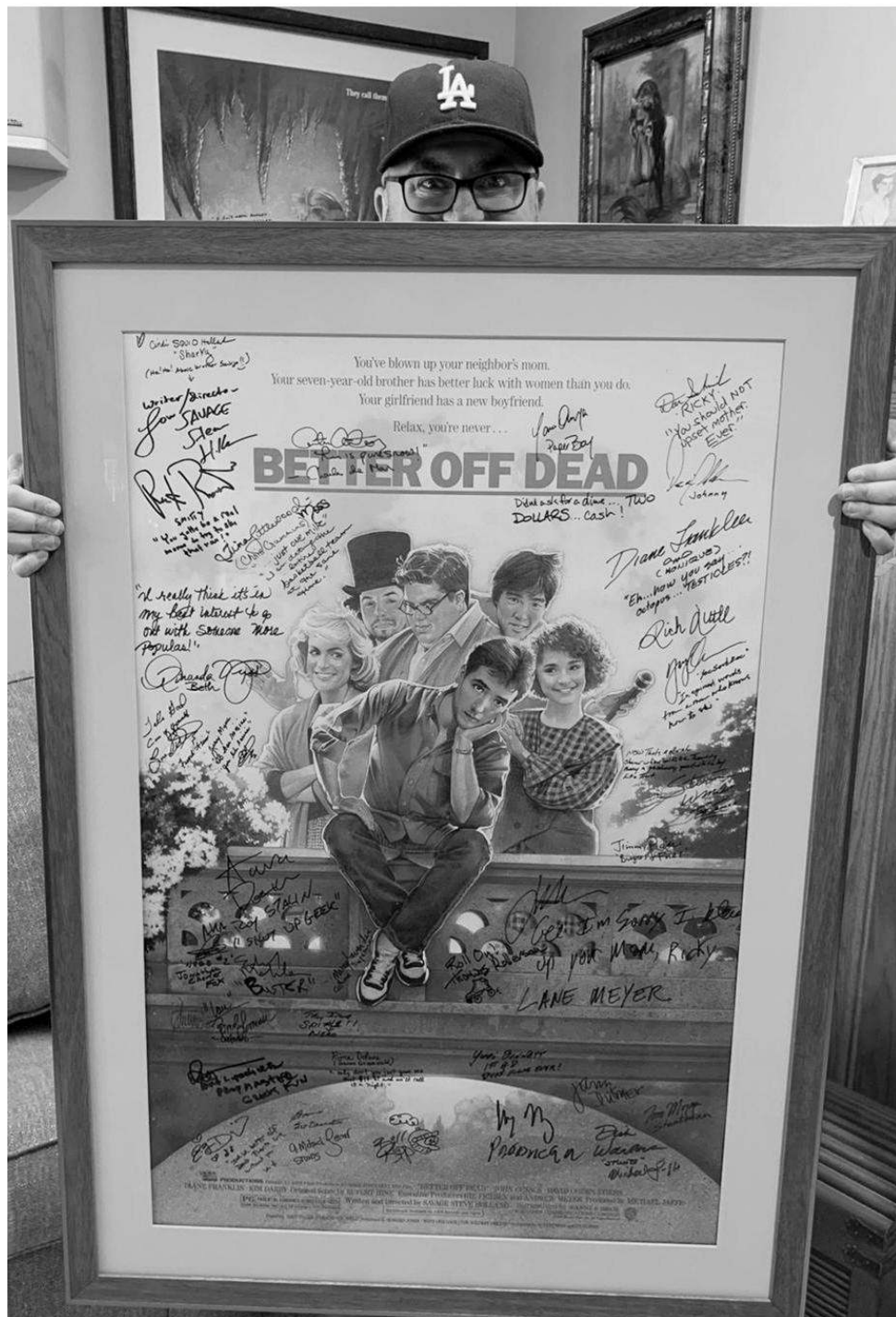
From flop to favorite

Though it grossed more than \$10 million on a \$3.5 million budget, "Better Off Dead" was considered a box-office disappointment. Many critics didn't know what to make of its animated interludes and recurring gags.

Still, Franklin said the cast and crew knew they were doing something special.

"Every actor who worked on that film was begging to be in it, because it was so unusual to do a comedy that had no gratuitous nudity, no bad language, no violence," she said. "Actors like Vincent Schiavelli, who did 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,' wanted to be in the film. That's how refreshing it was."

A blend of sincerity and absurdity has helped "Better Off Dead" endure. This year, in honor of the film's 40th anniversary, Franklin will participate in sever-



"Better Off Dead" superfan Brian Keil poses with his poster, signed by dozens of the 1980s cult comedy's cast and crew members.

al special screenings and events, including The Sands Rocks, a Nov. 3-8 festival in Cancun, Mexico, that will reunite "Better Off Dead" cast members.

"It's going to be myself, Amanda Wyss, who played Beth, and John Cusack, who's never done a 'Better Off Dead' event," Franklin said. "And one more guest — maybe it's the paperboy. Maybe it's [Aaron] Dozier, who played Stalin. We'll be finding out."

A throughline

In recent years, Franklin has leaned into her '80s legacy by making convention appearances, narrating retrospectives and starring in indie film projects that wink at her past.

"Bampire" — a campy, Bambi-inspired creature feature in the vein of "Winnie-the-Pooh: Blood and Honey" — is slated for release this year.

"Yes, Bambi is a vampire," she said on fellow actor Patrick Labyorteaux's podcast in February. "It is not a kids movie. It is very adult."

She's also written two other memoirs that expand on her time in Hollywood and offer reflections on fame, feminism and film.

Franklin's warmth and enthusiasm remain a throughline for a film that, against all odds, keeps finding its way into people's hearts.

"Everyone who loves 'Better Off Dead' is genuinely a nice person," she told Stars and Stripes. "To get that sense of humor, you have to be able to laugh at yourself — it's brought me a lot of great fans."

Signed copies of Franklin's memoirs and other memorabilia can be obtained through her website, diane franklin.com.

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"Every actor who worked on that film was begging to be in it, because it was so unusual to do a comedy that had no gratuitous nudity, no bad language, no violence ... That's how refreshing it was."

Diane Franklin
Monique Junot in "Better Off Dead"

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



JANZEN MADSEN/AP

In the Roblox game called *Grow a Garden*, players can fill a plot of land with plants and animals, harvest and sell, trade or steal each other's bounty.

Roblox's *Grow a Garden* blooming

Teenager's game goes viral for its relaxing vibe, Minecraftlike aesthetic and soundtrack of classical tunes

By BARBARA ORTUTAY
Associated Press

Whether it serves as a chill escape from the onslaught of the real world or simply a way to beat vacation doldrums, a viral Roblox game about gardening has become the surprise hit of the summer.

Grow a Garden, created by a 16-year-old in a few days, has shattered records for the most concurrent players of any game in history, beating out video games that take years and millions of dollars to develop.

And there's no one to shoot, fight or race. If your last attempt at cultivating vegetables was *FarmVille* in 2010, don't worry — your tomatoes will grow even if you never water them.

Grow a Garden is as simple as its name suggests — players can fill a plot of land with plants and animals, harvest and sell, trade or steal each others' bounty. The game is low stress, with an aesthetic reminiscent of *Minecraft* and a soundtrack of soothing classical tunes such as Mozart's "Rondo Alla Turca" playing in the background. Its popularity has further cemented Roblox's place not just in the gaming world but in popular culture — for better or for worse, it's where the kids hang out.

"The word I keep hearing used over and over to describe this particular game is that it's chill, which is just such a nice alternative. I get a lot of sort of that *Animal Crossing* vibe from it. You know, like you can check in, you can check your gardens, you can get some new seeds, you can plant them," said Becky Bozdech, editorial director at the nonprofit Common Sense Media. "I have an 11-year-old son who (plays it) and he says to him the big difference is that a lot of games have a big giant objective that you have to do, but in *Grow a Garden*, you can just kind of hang out and do what you want."

Coincidence or not, *Grow a Garden* soared to popularity around the same time that Take-Two Interactive announced it would delay the launch of its wildly anti-



AP

To play *Grow a Garden*, you will need a Roblox account. While it's possible to play without spending real money, it will take longer.

pated *Grand Theft Auto 6* until next year. In late June, the gardening game logged 21.6 million concurrent players, surpassing *Fortnite*'s previous record of 15.2 million according to Roblox. Analysts who follow Roblox's stock say *Grow a Garden* is helping boost the company's revenue and will push the company's quarterly earnings numbers above Wall Street's expectations.

While it's not clear if the GTA audience flocked to this simple gardening game to pass the time until then, the timing reignited the age-old debate about who gamers are and what titles are taken seriously by the video game establishment. It happened with *Candy Crush*, with puzzle games, with *Animal Crossing*. Are people who play cozy games true gamers? Or is the title reserved for the folks who shoot enemies in *Call of Duty* or drive around creating mayhem in GTA?

"There's a huge percentage of gamers that play Roblox and the actual industry just views it as, like, this esoterically immature platform of weird gameplay habits," said Janzen Madsen, the New Zealand-based CEO and founder of *Splitting Point* studios, which acquired the game

from its teenage creator. "Well, I actually think in five years this is what player expectation is gonna be. And because you guys haven't embraced it, like, you're not gonna know how to make games."

To start growing your garden, you'll need a Roblox account. The game will start you out with an empty plot and some money — shekles — and a starter seed. From there, you can plant seeds, harvest and sell your crops and buy more seeds, animals or tools for your garden. While it is possible to play the game without spending real-world money, it will take longer. Once you sell enough crops, you earn money to buy more expensive seeds beyond basic carrots and blueberries.

"For me, I just, I really want to get all the rarest stuff. I'm a completionist, so I want everything, and that's what's fun for me," said Leah Ashe, a YouTuber who plays *Grow a Garden* and other popular games for an audience of 5.3 million. "It's really cool because you can come together because the seed shop is global, so everybody's shop is the exact same. So you can work with other people and be like, 'Oh my gosh, the sugar apple is in stock. Get online!' The seed shop updates every five minutes, so there's always something pulling you back into the game."

For Roblox, which has faced a backlash for not doing enough to protect kids on its gaming service, *Grow a Garden* has served as something of a reprieve — along with new safety measures such as chat restrictions and privacy tools.

New players get help from more established peers who send them gifts and let them know when rare seeds become available in the seed shop.

Bozdech said that "if you have the right supervision and guidance," Roblox can be a positive experience for kids, allowing them to create their own designs or practice coding, for instance.

"Something like *Grow a Garden*, particularly, is a nice opportunity maybe for parents and kids to play together," she said.

And perhaps the slow cultivating of a magical garden can benefit parents, too.

"It's hitting a nerve, you know?" Bozdech said. "People need an escape from the world; I think we all do."

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Savoring Europe's culture of cheese

For a cheese lover, savoring Europe means savoring its cheeses — they're not only part of the cuisine, they're part of the culture. And some cultures — including French, Dutch and Greek — are particularly pleasing for the cheesing.

France

In France, a love for beauty and tradition includes a fondness for artisan cheese that comes in wedges, cylinders, balls and mini hockey pucks; and they're sometimes powdered white, gray or burnt marshmallow.

Here, the cheese course is served just before (or instead of) dessert. It not only helps with digestion, it also gives you a great opportunity to sample the tasty regional cheeses — and time to finish up your wine. Between cow, goat and sheep cheeses, the French produce more than 400 different varieties. Many restaurants offer a platter of cheeses, from which you choose a few. Whether at a restaurant or cheese shop, try at least four types: a hard cheese (such as Cantal), a flowery cheese (perhaps Brie or Camembert), a blue or Roquefort cheese and a goat cheese.

Be sure to go local. On your way to the châteaux in the Loire Valley, look for signs that say fromage de chèvres fermier (farmer's goat cheese). Or head to the Alps looking for les alpages, where you can taste hard, strong Beaufort or

Gruyère-like Comté — and meet cheesemakers proud to show off their traditions.

Netherlands

The Dutch are probably better known for their cheese than for any other food, and are among the world's top cheese exporters. To sample their cheese culture, visit Alkmaar (and its Friday morning market, running from April to August) or Edam (Wednesday morning market in July and August). Both cities are a short train ride away from Amsterdam.



Rick Steves

Alkmaar is Holland's cheese capital (and, perhaps, the unofficial capital of high cholesterol). This delightful city has zesty cheese-loving spirit, and is home to what is probably the Netherlands' best cheese museum ... and in this country, that's saying something. The museum is in Alkmaar's biggest building, the richly decorated Weigh House, used since the 16th century for weighing cheese.

Though Alkmaar is enjoyable any time, there's no better time to sample a sliver of this proud wedge of Dutch culture than during market time. Early in the morning, cheesemakers line up their giant orange wheels in neat rows on the square. Prospective buyers (mostly wholesalers) examine and sample the cheeses and



CAMERON HEWITT/Rick Steves' Europe

At the Friday market in Alkmaar in the Netherlands, carriers use a "cheese-barrow" to bring wheels to and from the Weigh House, just as they have for centuries.

make their selections. Then the cheese is sold off with much fanfare, as an emcee narrates the action in Dutch and English.

During the Wednesday market in the cheesemaking village of Edam, farmers bring their cheese by boat and horse to the center of town, where it's weighed and traded by Edamers in traditional garb. Edam cheese comes in softball-size rounds covered with red wax, so it travels well without refrigeration. Young Edam cheese is extremely mild, but it gets firmer and more flavorful with age.

Greece

Some studies show that Greece has the highest per-capita cheese consumption in the world — over 60 pounds a year. That's mostly feta, which serves as one of the four staples here, along with olives, tomatoes and crispy phyllo dough. Protected by EU regulations, Greek feta is made with sheep's milk, although a small percentage

of goat's milk can be added (but never cow's milk). As you travel around Greece, you'll notice that feta in the Peloponnese is dryer and crumbly, while feta made in Macedonia is mild, soft and creamy. Even in big-city Athens, many markets still sell feta from the barrel — and you'll find feta in everything from salad and sandwiches to savory pies and dips. Sampling endless variations on Greek salad, with its ripe vegetables under an enticing slab of feta and drizzled in olive oil, never gets old to me.

Greeks don't live by feta alone. Graviera, a hard cheese made in Crete from sheep's milk, tastes sweet and nutty, almost like a fine Swiss cheese. Kasseri, a mild yellow cheese made from either sheep or goat's milk, is the most popular Greek cheese after feta.

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European shoreline festivals pose question: water you waiting for?

Of all the countless special places to be on a sunny summer's day, it's hard to beat a location on the shores of a clean and swimmable lake. And where there's a city or town set in an enviable waterside location, it's a pretty safe bet that a fest or party worth attending figures into its annual calendar of events. Here are a few events to check out this weekend and the weeks to come:

Echternach, Luxembourg: In a natural green amphitheater surrounded by hills, the e-Lake festival offers three days of electronic music across two stages. From Aug. 8-10, an anticipated 20,000 music fans will revel to the sounds of up-and-coming and established artists and music spun by DJs. Saturday's program traditionally features an international lineup; on Sunday, performers from Luxembourg take to the stage.



Karen Bradbury

While entry to the festival itself is free, anticipate parking fees (10 euros per vehicle). The only camping available is offsite. The festival kicks off at 6 p.m. on Friday and closes late on Sunday evening. Online: e-lake.lu

Konstanz, Germany: Germany's largest city on the shores of Lake Constance, or the Bodensee as it's known locally, hosts one of its biggest bashes of the summer on Saturday. The Seenachtfest offers a two-mile promenade packed with action brought on by dancers, acrobats, water-skiers, musicians and vendors selling souvenirs and tasty fare. The evening's crowning glory is a display of fireworks that reflects from the water to stunning effect. There's a good reason to make the trip this year—organizers state this is probably the last year the fest will be staged at such a scale and with the fireworks.



iStock

The Seenachtfest on the shores of Lake Constance on Aug. 9 ends with a glorious display of fireworks.

The Lake Night Festival begins at 3 p.m. Adult admission costs 23.90 euros; entry for ages 6-13 is 4 euros; children 5 and under enter free. Online: seenachtfest.de

Zurich, Switzerland: One of Europe's most important financial centers also hosts what's billed as the world's largest techno party. Each year in August, hundreds of thousands of electronic and techno music fans make the pilgrimage to the shores of Lake Zurich, eager to be part of the Street Parade. On Saturday, party people will come together once again to take in the sounds of house, drum'n' bass, dubstep, trance, techno and genres that defy easy labels. The beating heart of the fest is made up of the so-called Love Mobiles, decked-out trucks that serve as mobile stages for artists and DJs. The 30 Love Mobiles

are complemented by an additional eight static stages. The festival kicks off at 1 p.m. and goes until midnight. Entry is free. Online: streetparade.com

Limone del Garda, Italy: Each year on the eve of the Italian national holiday known as Ferragosto, the town of Limone sul Garda basks in a sunny glow. On Aug. 14, Yellow Night transforms the promenade on the shores of Lake Garda into an all-ages party zone featuring concerts, shows, plenty of food and drink stands and a fireworks display. The fun begins at 8 p.m.; entry is free. Online: tinyurl.com/mrxn2fz6

Faak am See, Austria: The Austrian state of Carinthia, inched up to Italy and Slovenia and known for its lakes and mountains, makes a breathtaking backdrop to one of Europe's largest gatherings of Harley-Davidson fans. From Sept. 2-7, the lake known as Faaker See will be considerably less than tranquil as hundreds of thousands of bikers and enthusiasts of the Harley label ride through the scenic highways of the eastern Alps by day and partying by night. A highlight of the week's activities is the Harley parade, scheduled to kick off at noon on Sept. 6. The route passes along the Faaker See, through the city of Villach and around another lake, the Ossiacher See, before returning to its home base lake. Event participants can choose to camp or take advantage of motels that cater to a riding clientele. Online: bikeweek.at/en

Bardolino, Italy: Wines made from grapes grown on the hills surrounding Lake Garda are the stars of the Festa dell'Uva e del Vino. From Oct. 2-6, an estimated 100,000 visitors will turn out for regional foods, live music and the area's acclaimed red wines. Open cellars, concerts and crafts stands complete the scene. Fireworks set to music go off at 10 p.m. Oct. 6. Online: tinyurl.com/4cyu5ktb

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Making matrimony a real trip

More US couples seeking unique experiences are getting married abroad

BY DARIO ARTALE
AND DAVID BILLER
Associated Press

James Atkinson and Samantha Fortino toured a Tuscan vineyard and learned to make pasta and a Bolognese sauce alongside their family and friends in Florence. Atkinson discovered a penchant for Chianti, while Fortino fell for Italy's Hugo Spritz — a cocktail that posed no risk of staining her wedding dress on July 24.

Italy has hosted a number of star-studded weddings in the past decade, most recently Jeff Bezos and Lauren Sánchez's extravaganza in Venice. Away from the spotlight, tens of thousands of ordinary Americans have set their sights on the country for their special day in recent years.

"Weddings in America can be a little too grand and a little bit too big and it ends up not really being about the couple," said Fortino, 28, a neonatal nurse from Skaneateles, N.Y. "We both just really wanted something intimate and meaningful."

Over 15,000 foreign couples wed in Italy last year, up 64% from 2019, the year before the pandemic, according to market research from the Center of Tourist Studies of Florence. Growth was led by U.S. couples, who account for almost one-third of that total.

Italy was the top international destination for American couples after Mexico, according to Maryland-based wedding planning website The Knot.

For many Americans, Italy embodies the simple, beautiful romance of a bygone era. The weather is balmy and its varied landscapes, from the sea to the mountains, stunning. The food is familiar and crowd-pleasing. But perhaps the biggest driver of the recent uptick is ample opportunity for a range of outings, which together with the wedding event are alluring for those on a quest for unique, memorable moments — part of a consumer trend termed "the experience economy."

"In the United States, everything is just more expensive for one night and we wanted to make an experience, so we did two nights here," said Atkinson, 31, who owns a concrete company. "It just seemed like way more worth it to us to do that and make a trip out of it with our family, our loved ones."

'Nobody cancels'

One guest who had never visited Italy was ecstatic about the invite, and took advantage to tack on side trips, first to Venice and then with the wedding crew to Cinque Terre. Another, Gary Prochna, nearly didn't attend because of work piling up at his paving company. He eventually came around and was floored by the venue — a 15th-century villa with a sweeping view over Florence and its famous Duomo.

"I got married in the United States and our venue was very nice. I thought — until



A bride poses for photos in front of Rome's Pantheon, June 28, 2013. More than 15,000 foreign couples wed in Italy in 2024, up 64% from 2019, according to market research from the Center of Tourist Studies of Florence. Growth was led by U.S. couples, who account for almost one-third of that total.



Jeff Bezos, center left, and Lauren Sánchez, center right, leave for their prewedding reception, in Venice, Italy, June 26.

this moment — we had the best wedding," said Prochna, 68, adding that he now hopes his daughters will get hitched abroad.

More than half of Americans surveyed by Mastercard in January 2024 said they prefer to spend their money on memory-making experiences, and more than a third said they'd plan a whole trip around one particular experience.

Marcy Blum, a prominent luxury event planner based in Manhattan, said almost 90% of the weddings she plans abroad are in Italy.

"The reason Italy is so popular is be-

cause that's where your guests want to go," she said. "You send an invitation that you're getting married in Capri or Positano and everybody comes. Everybody. They want to come. Nobody cancels."

Jack Ezon, CEO of Embark Beyond, a luxury travel and destination event service also based in Manhattan, said 60% of his company's events were outside the U.S. before the pandemic. Today it's almost 90%, nearly all split evenly between Italy and France.

The threat of tariffs under President Donald Trump has given destination weddings a boost. Ezon has moved six events

from the U.S. to Europe this year, because people were afraid tariffs on alcohol would cause their bar bill to explode.

Cost comparison

The shift to destinations has benefited planners with networks across Italy and local vendors. According to Wedding Italy, the husband-and-wife team who put on the Atkinson wedding, American clients spend three times as much as Italians, due to more elaborate wedding decor and other events in their multiday lineup.

Average spending on hometown weddings in the U.S. was \$32,000 last year, according to The Knot. By comparison, foreigners' weddings in Italy cost an average 61,500 euros (\$70,600) and typically have dozens fewer guests, the Center of Tourist Studies of Florence's data showed.

In the garden where the Atkinsons held their service, cypress trees swayed in the wind as the bride emerged from the chapel, beaming in her lace mermaid-silhouette gown. She walked down the aisle as speakers played the theme song to "Star Wars." It was her sneaky trick to make the groom cry, and it worked like a charm.

Before the exchange of rings, before the lovebirds threw their arms around one another, their officiant said:

"Traditionally I would ask: Is there any reason why this couple shouldn't be married? But for goodness' sake — we all flew to Italy and can't get our points back! So instead I'll ask: Who here approves of this union?"

Cheers all around.

AP

LUCA BRUNO/AP

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



CHRISSEY YATES/Stars and Stripes

The exterior of the Leica World complex in Wetzlar, Germany, showing the building housing the Ernst Leitz Museum. The balcony is shaped like a camera viewfinder. The complex also includes the company headquarters, a hotel, café and nature trail.

Leitz up your life in Wetzlar, Germany

Leica museum is part selfie station, part intro-to-photography class

BY CHRISSEY YATES
Stars and Stripes

As I drove up to the Ernst Leitz Museum, my shutterbug friend pointed up at the building and said, “Oh, it’s shaped like a camera! Look, that’s the viewfinder!”

As I rounded the building to park, she added, “And that’s the lens!” I smugly knew that my choice of Wetzlar, the birthplace of the famous Leica handcrafted camera, was the perfect tour stop for her first trip to Germany.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the debut of the Leica I, the first mass-produced 35 mm camera. Centenary events are being held worldwide from Milan to Tokyo to Dubai.

The museum, about an hour’s drive north of Frankfurt, is part of the Leica World at Leitz Park industrial park, which includes the company headquarters, the Ernst Leitz Hotel, Café Leitz, a nature trail and more.

While planning our trip, I decided we needed a more curated museum experience than the regular entry fee of 11 euros provides.

For 149 euros, we did the “Max: A Day at Leica World” experience. That eye-watering price included a VIP tour for two in English, a reservation for coffee and cake at Café Leitz and — most importantly — a Leica camera rental of our choice.

On the QT

Address: Am Leitz-Park 6, Wetzlar, Germany
Cost: HQ entry is free; museum entry is 11 euros for adults, free for children 8 and younger, 24 euros for families.
Hours: Daily, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; Café Leitz, Tuesday-Sunday, 11:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; canteen, Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m.-10 a.m. and 11:45 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
Information: leicawelt.com/en

Chrissy Yates

After handing each of us a red-dot Leica pin, our guide explained that Leica is a portmanteau of company founder Leitz’s name and the word “camera.” Then we crossed the street to the production and administration building, which is shaped like a roll of film.

This side of the complex includes the Leica Galerie Wetzlar. While interesting, that side of the Leitz Park is more for Leica enthusiasts, people who wouldn’t mind spending several months of mortgage payments on a camera.

I found what was inside the museum far more accessible. While the ground floor is dedicated to a large exhibition of award-winning photography — at the time of our visit, it was street photography — it gets more fun and interactive upstairs.

First, though, you need to download the Leica app. There you can learn more about the industrial park, but most impor-

tantly create and access your personal image gallery.

Then a series of glass placards teaches photography basics such as the golden ratio, rule of thirds, focal length, exposure and more, a perfect primer for me as a journalist. It turns out the camera lens we saw from the parking lot has an aperture that slowly opens and closes.

Our guide walked us through the various Leica photo stations. They were self-explanatory, with instructions that toggled easily between German and English. Then we rushed to end the tour so we could make our reserved time slot at the café.

After our refreshments, it was finally time to visit the Leica store for our rental. My friend really wanted to try her hand at black-and-white photography, so we picked up the M11 Monochrom.

The sales staff was great and showed how to use the range finder to manually focus. I was a bit annoyed that we were asked if we’d brought an SD card, as apparently that was the only way to take our photos home. Luckily, I had one in my hobbyist camera.

At the salesperson’s suggestion we headed to the nature trail. There, we attempted to re-create Thomas Hoepker’s 1966 photo of Muhammad Ali punching toward the camera. It’s part of the “36 Aus 100” permanent exhibition in the Leica Galerie Wetzlar.



CHRISSEY YATES/Stars and Stripes

The first interactive exhibit in the Ernst Leitz Museum teaches visitors some of the basic concepts of photography and has an aperture, right, that opens and closes to demonstrate focal point and light exposure.



Elizabeth Enockson

A photo station at the Ernst Leitz Museum lets visitors adjust various light settings for self-portraits.

The exhibition consists of a selection of 36 photos from the past 100 years that the company says “have made photographic history and helped establish the myth of the Leica brand.”

Despite being a southpaw, I took a few right jabs at the camera. But I think you can see the fear in my eyes of getting too close to something that retails for more than \$10,000.

Then we switched sides and I took blurry photos of her as I struggled to line up the image in the range finder. Sadly, my best shots were of my feet and a stack of logs. But in spite of the results, I still had a lot of fun in the attempt.

After returning the camera, we revisited the museum’s various photo stations to create self-portraits. My favorite station was a photo booth-style room with a one-way mirror and a camera behind it surrounded by lights.

Museum visitors sit at the bench and use a panel of switches on the side to play with the

brightness, direction, amount and source of the light.

Yet another room lets visitors turn on giant fans and adjust the airflow speed and direction to get a perfect windblown look for an Instagram profile.

There is also a “digital darkroom” where visitors can take one of the photos from their gallery and go through the steps of analog film development.

A QR code at each station transfers images to the Leica app, and visitors have 14 days to download them before they’re deleted from the virtual gallery.

No modern museum experience is complete without a visit to the gift shop, which you must enter to print out your free photo souvenir.

The shop offers books on photography, posters of Leica cameras and my favorite memento, a 3D-puzzle Leica I. At 80 euros, it’s the only Leica I’ll be able to afford — for now.

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WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

A fresh take on Turkish comfort food

Mediterranean grilled vegetables the quiet backbone of menu at Lalé, which punches above its weight in flavor, hospitality

By ZADE VADNAIS
Stars and Stripes

Döner joints are everywhere in the Kaiserslautern area, and for good reason. Germany is home to more than 3 million people of Turkish descent, many of whom have shaped the country's fast-casual food scene over generations. And while döner, falafel and börek are common, finding a spot that serves homestyle, whole food-based Turkish meals rather than solely street food takes a little more digging.

For my family, that search ended years ago with Lalé, a small restaurant in Enkenbach-Alsenborn that's long punched above its weight in both flavor and hospitality.

We lived in Turkey for four years when I was a kid, and the food made a lasting impression. When my parents moved to Kaiserslautern in 2014, they immediately started looking for a place that reminded them of what they had grown used to, and Lalé delivered.

They've since moved away, but every visit back includes a meal there. So when my husband and I relocated to the area earlier this year, it was at the top of the recommendation list.

My friend Marc, who lived in Istanbul as recently as 2022, agrees: Lalé has the best Turkish food in the area.

We first visited in January and instantly felt at ease. Families filtered in, regulars chatted with staff and takeout orders flowed steadily.

Spotting that we were new, a server came over and offered to walk us through the menu. That kind of hospitality goes a long way and is a big part of the reason we keep going back.

On a recent trip, we started with a pide, a boat-shaped flatbread often compared to pizza but distinctly Turkish in flavor and form.

Ours was filled with spinach and beyaz peynir, a brined white cheese similar to feta but with a milder flavor and creamier texture.

The stuffed flatbread is served with a yogurt-based süzme sauce and is always a crowd-pleaser. It's ideal for sharing and packed with gentle, tangy flavor.

My husband went with his usual: a dürüm, or flatbread wrap, stuffed with grilled Mediterranean vegetables — smoky zucchini, sweet peppers, onions and tomatoes — wrapped in soft lavash with more süzme on the side.

No matter how they're served,



PHOTOS BY ZADE VADNAIS/Stars and Stripes

Normally served on flatbread or wrapped in lavash, the köfte at Lalé in Enkenbach-Alsenborn, Germany, can be served on a hamburger bun in a nod to culinary trends in its native Turkey.



Stuffed with zucchini, peppers, lettuce, onions and tomatoes, the grilled Mediterranean vegetable dürüm is wrapped in lavash and served with a yogurt-based süzme sauce.



Baked with spinach and beyaz peynir, a mild white cheese, the pide appetizer at Lalé is served with süzme sauce.



The vegetarian kumpir at Lalé is a flattened baked potato topped with grilled veggies and kisir, a bulgur salad.

quietly the backbone of the menu.

The simplicity speaks to the quality of Lalé's ingredients, many of which are sold at Efes, the family's small market two doors down. With infused olive oils, fresh herbs, produce and deli-style antipasti, the store

offers a snapshot of the same unpretentious, high-quality ingredients that make the restaurant satisfying.

I asked our server for a recommendation and was offered köfte, a classic dish of seasoned ground beef or lamb shaped into small meatballs. He said he'd serve it



Lalé, near Kaiserslautern, serves homestyle Turkish dishes in a casual, family-friendly setting.



Lalé

Address: Hauptstrasse 22, Enkenbach-Alsenborn, Germany

Hours: Monday through Friday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m.; closed weekends.

Prices: Main dishes range from 7 to 17.50 euros.

Information: www.lale-enkenbach.de

Zade Vadnais

"the way we eat it in Istanbul."

It arrived stacked in a hamburger bun. Not exactly traditional, but a rising trend in Turkish cities, according to Marc. The spiced meatballs were buried under hot sauce, cheese, onions and lettuce, then topped with a charred green pepper for a smoky-sweet balance.

I can see why this would normally be served as a dürüm. As a sandwich, it was definitely a fork-and-knife situation but absolutely worth the mess. It was all the best parts of a meatball sub and a crunchy shaved salad enriched with Turkish flair.

Another time, we split the kumpir, a loaded baked potato topped with grilled veggies and kisir, a tomatoey bulgur salad. Served with a simple side salad and more yogurt sauce, it was rich, cozy and deeply satisfying.

Meals here are capped off with complimentary rose-flavored Turkish delight. While not made in-house, it's a thoughtful touch and a light, playful way to sample one of Turkey's most iconic and offbeat flavors.

The prices are also tough to beat. All three of us were stuffed for less than 35 euros on that most recent trip.

It was the kind of meal that reminds you why you keep coming back. And in my case, why my parents did, too.

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WEEKEND: TRAVEL



PHOTOS BY SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

Museum of Brisbane tour guide Brian Ogden and marketing manager Rachel Murphy visit the Australian city's King George Square on July 22.

The best of Brisbane

Walking tour highlights America's WWII troop buildup in Australian city

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

American service members in Australia can find remnants of their World War II predecessors in the center of one of the country's largest cities. Brisbane, in the eastern state of Queensland, has served as a hub for some of the 35,000 troops from the United States, Australia and 17 other nations during the Talisman Sabre exercise that began July 13 and wrapped up Aug. 4.

At the start of World War II, 330,000 people living in the city were joined by almost as many foreign troops, including Dutch soldiers, retreating from Japan's advance through the Pacific.

Around a million American soldiers passed through Australia during the war, said Brian Ogden, a guide with the Museum of Brisbane's Walking in Wartime tour.

The tour starts at the museum, on the third floor of Brisbane City Hall, a short taxi ride from Gallipoli Barracks or a slightly longer ride from Royal Australian Air Force Base Amberley.

The 90-minute tour takes in nearby spots familiar to American forces during the war.

The first stop is the city hall's basement, where the wall of what was once a public toilet includes graffiti drawn by

U.S. troops during the war.

Across King George Square stands the Albert Street Uniting Church, where many U.S. service members married local brides, Ogden told Stars and Stripes in front of the building on July 22.

"This church held 16 weddings a day during the war," he said. "Around 7,000 Queensland women married Americans and moved to the U.S. after the war."

So many Australian women married GIs that the U.S. legislators passed a law in 1945 to help them move to America, he said.

Wartime troops packed local theaters and hotels to see entertainers who flew out from the U.S., Ogden said.

"They would bring out the latest jazz and dance band music," he said. "After the war, the jazz scene in Brisbane was more advanced than in larger cities such as Sydney and Melbourne."

Film stars such as Gary Cooper, John Wayne and Bob Hope stopped in Brisbane to entertain the troops and first lady Eleanor Roosevelt gave a speech at the city hall, Ogden said.

Brisbane's sprawl was an advantage when it came to accommodating troops. The town was second only to Los Angeles in land area in 1939.

The Americans built new airfields and camped out at



Brisbane City Hall was the Australian city's tallest building during World War II.

showgrounds and racecourses around Brisbane, Ogden said. The town had a busy port, where more than 700 ships docked from 1938 to 1939.

A convoy bound for Manila diverted to Brisbane after

SEE BRISBANE ON PAGE 25

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY JEREMY STILLWAGNER/Stars and Stripes

An avocado cheeseburger with egg from 9 Hamburger & Dining Bar in Tokyo. Customization is encouraged, which can make for a tall treat.

Stacking the flavor

Modest Tokyo hideaway 9 Hamburger offers tasty customization

BY JEREMY STILLWAGNER
Stars and Stripes

A few blocks from Tabata Station, far from central Tokyo's neon sprawl, a humble storefront marked 9 Hamburger & Dining Bar quietly opens its doors for just a few hours each day.

Blink and you might miss it, but this is where burger dreams are built, one glorious beef patty at a time.

Inside, the space is as intimate as a jazz bar — maybe 20 seats total, most of them lining the counter. There are two small tables tucked in the back.

Open briefly in the morning and again around midday, 9 Hamburger & Dining Bar offers a rotating menu of breakfast sandwiches and light bites for people heading to work, before closing to prepare for the inevitable lunch crowd.

The Kanki Burger, its best-seller, is an ode to excess done right, featuring a thick, juicy patty crowned with a substantial slab of bacon.

With the exception of the sweet-and-savory Maple Bacon Cheeseburger, every hamburger is layered with lettuce, tomato and the house's twin signature sauces — one a tangy blend of ketchup, mayo, relish and French mustard; the other a creamy mix of mayo, honey and whole-grain mustard.

Each burger comes with a side of fresh potato wedges that should leave you comfortably full.

Customization is encouraged. Want egg? Add it. Avocado? You got it. Double bacon? Don't be shy. Depending on how many extras you have the staff pile on, the burgers can get quite tall and messy. Thankfully, there are burger wrappers nearby to keep your meal manageable.

Beverage options range from soda and coffee to craft beer and wine, and there are English menus available, a rarity in this residential stretch of Tokyo.

9 Hamburger & Dining Bar is not a destination restaurant in the traditional sense. You won't find sweeping city views. But for



9 Hamburger & Dining Bar

Location: 2-8-3 Higashi Tabata, Kita City, Tokyo 114-0013

Hours: Open 6 a.m.-9:30 a.m. Tuesday-Saturday; 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. on weekdays; and 11:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. on weekends. Closed Monday.

Prices: Most items range from 800 yen to 2,000 yen (\$5.30 to \$13.25)

Dress: Casual

Directions: At Tabata Station, take the North Exit, cross the street and turn right. At the intersection, take the ramp to street level. Cross and continue straight for about a minute. The restaurant will be on the right.

Information: 080-4924-2629; www.instagram.com/nine9tabata

Jeremy Stillwagner

those who seek it out — and time it right — it's well worth the effort.

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Brisbane: MacArthur's former headquarters now a museum

FROM PAGE 24

Japan invaded the Philippines, Ogden said.

Modern-day Brisbane, home to 2.7 million, boasts a skyline of glittering skyscrapers that dwarf the tallest buildings of the 1940s.

Back then, the city hall was the most prominent structure in a town where the largest buildings were theaters, banks and cathedrals, Ogden said.

ANZAC Square, a short walk from the museum, was created in 1930 to honor the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps' service in World War I. Tributes to those who fought in World War II and other conflicts have been added.

Nearby stands a multistory building that housed an American Post Exchange during the war.

On Thanksgiving Day 1942, U.S. Army Pvt. James Stein had an altercation with some Australian soldiers nearby, Ogden said.

A group of U.S. military police got involved, and eventually hundreds of Australian troops and American MPs were facing off in front of the exchange, he said.

The fighting escalated to the point where a blast from an MP's shotgun killed one Australian and injured eight others, he said.

The last stop on the tour is the MacArthur Museum, formerly the headquarters of then-U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

MacArthur's wartime office in Brisbane's historic AMP building looks exactly like it did when it was the focal point for the Pacific campaign.

The U.S. 7th Fleet, now headquartered at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, was formed there on March 15, 1943.

The museum, which opened in 2004, includes exhibits detailing MacArthur's time in Brisbane and the city's role in World War II.



MacArthur Museum Brisbane is housed in the historic AMP building, which served as Gen. Douglas MacArthur's headquarters during World War II.

Walking in Wartime tour

Directions: Brisbane City Hall is about a quarter-mile walk along Ann Street from the city's Central Station.

Times: Walking in Wartime tours take places between 10:30 a.m. and noon on select Sundays.

Costs: \$35 per person for an up-to-12-person tour, plus a booking fee.

Food: The historic Shingle Inn on the ground floor of Brisbane City Hall serves coffee and snacks.

Information: Online: museumofbrisbane.com.au/whats-on/walking-in-wartime

Seth Robson



PHOTOS BY SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

ANZAC Square in Brisbane pays tribute to Australian troops who served in overseas conflicts.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL



The Japan News

The Ohama Sumo Stadium in Sakai Ward, Sakai, was built in 1981 and has been the site of many amateur sumo events from school-aged tournaments to international competitions.

Japan's 'sacred site' of amateur sumo

Ohama Sumo Stadium in Sakai features full-scale dohyo ring in an area with a long, proud history of the sport

BY IKUKO MITSUDA
Japan News

If the Ryogoku Kokugikan arena in Tokyo is considered the holy ground of professional sumo, the Ohama Sumo Stadium in Sakai is regarded as the holy ground of amateur sumo. The stadium features a permanent, full-scale dohyo ring and can accommodate 2,400 spectators, making it one of the largest sumo arenas in the country.

Countless memorable matches have been fought in this ring. National collegiate championships are held here (alternating with Ryogoku Kokugikan), and it was here that yokozuna Onosato, then a student at Nippon Sport Science University, won the championship, becoming the university amateur sumo champion.

"This is a sumo arena where wrestlers from all over the country aspire to compete," said Satoshi Abe, who has fought in the ring himself. "I felt proud of standing on this dohyo surrounded by the cheers of local people."

Abe won titles including National Student Sumo Championship by Weight Class during his time at Kindai University. Now 46, he is the coach of the university's sumo club.

In addition to student sumo, the venue hosts tournaments for corporate teams, women, elementary and junior high school

students and international competitions, earning it a reputation as a sacred site for amateur sumo.

First student tournament

According to records from the Japan student sumo federation and other sources, the area around the stadium developed as a resort area in the early 20th century. Student sumo began as a beach event. The first national collegiate sumo championship was held in 1919.

During World War II, the event was suspended, and the dohyo was dismantled. After the war, there was a growing movement to revive the ring. In 1981, the Japan Sumo Federation received land from the city of Sakai and built the current domed sumo arena.

"For children, who rarely play barefoot on the ground these days, wrestling on the dohyo is an invaluable experience," said Hitoshi Hatanaka, 59, who instructs children at the city's youth sumo club. "I hope they train hard and compete in Ohama someday."

Sumo shown to the world

The connection between Sakai and sumo is deep. According to the Sakai City Museum, sumo was performed as a ritual at Sumiyoshi Taisha shrine in neighboring Osaka City and flourished as entertain-

ment in Sakai from the 18th century. The culture has been now taken overseas.

In May, the city launched a participatory event at which tourists can try their hand at throwing salt on the dohyo as sumo wrestlers ritually do before their fights. Private tourism agencies formed a committee and held the first such program oriented toward foreigners on July 7, which attracted about 30 people.

At the event, a group of former wrestlers explained the history, rules and gestures of sumo and demonstrated matches on the ring. Participants tried their hand at sumo stomping and practice matches.

Ohama Sumo Stadium is a 10-minute walk from Sakai Station on the Nankai Line or a 5-minute walk from the Ohama-Nakamachi stop on the bus that leaves from Sakaihigashi Station on the Nankai Koya Line.

Barbarian on a bridge

The area near the stadium overlooking Old Sakai Harbor retains the remnants of a city from Japan's medieval period, where wealthy merchants surrounded the town with moats for protection.

Sightseeing boats operate around the moat ruins in spring and autumn. One popular sight is Nambanjin-zo (Statue of the Barbarian from the South), a figure of a Portuguese man in old-fashioned armor

standing on the Nambanbashi bridge near the boarding area.

According to the city, which manages the statue, it was created in 1987 as part of the bridge constructed by Nankai Electric Railway Co.

Kango Cruise Sakai, a nonprofit organization that operates the boats, asked the public to suggest a nickname for the statue, and it was decided in February 2024 to call it Hashinoue Porutonosuke — or "Poruto-kun" for short.

Visitors can write their wishes on ribbons and tie them to the bridge.

"We want to promote the statue as a tourist attraction," NPO chairman Shin Takasugi, 59, said.

Café near stadium

Mori no Cafe, located in front of the Ohama Gymnasium near the sumo stadium, opened three years ago. Staff who work under the continuous employment support service for people with disabilities cook, serve and create the café's menu.

It offers a daily lunch special that comes with main dishes such as spring rolls and fried chicken for 700 yen as well as beverages and ice cream.

Customers can eat in the bright interior or buy meals to go.

The café is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. It is closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Q&A



AP

Three of the bestsellers Whelan has narrated: “The Women” by Kristin Hannah, “Atmosphere” by Taylor Jenkins Reid and “Great Big Beautiful Life” by Emily Henry.

Born to narrate

Julia Whelan says recording audiobooks is ‘everything that I love and that I’m good at and everything I want to be doing’

By ALICIA RANCILIO
Associated Press

Chances are, you’ve heard Julia Whelan’s voice. She’s the award-winning narrator behind more than 600 audiobooks by a long list of bestselling authors including Taylor Jenkins Reid, Emily Henry, Michael Crichton, V.E. Schwab and Kristin Hannah. She’s also narrated long-form articles for The New Yorker, The Atlantic and Vanity Fair.

You may have read her own writing, too. Whelan’s first novel, 2018’s “My Oxford Year,” has been adapted to a Netflix film, out this month, starring Sofia Carson. The story actually began as a screenplay by Allison Burnett and had been gestating in development for years. Whelan was brought in to help with the script

because she had studied abroad at Oxford her junior year of college. Producers then asked if she thought it would make a good book.

“I was like, ‘Nothing has ever wanted to be a book more. Please let me do this,’” she recalls.

It ended up an international bestseller. Her second novel, 2022’s “Thank You For Listening,” was critically praised. (“Thank You For Listening” is about a former actor-turned-audiobook narrator who falls in love with another audiobook narrator.)

You may have even seen Whelan on TV — she began her career as a child actor, with roles in “Fifteen and Pregnant” and on the series “Once and Again.” Despite her various pursuits, though, she has no plans to leave narration behind.

“I feel like I was born to do it,” she said. “It’s everything that I love and that I’m good at and everything I want to be doing.”

That’s a good thing, because the audiobook industry is growing. Statista projects this year it will reach \$9.84 billion because of smartphones, the increased popularity

of audio content and people’s desire to multitask.

Despite the appetite for audiobooks, for narrators, “the financial aspect makes zero sense,” Whelan says. She’s founded her own publishing company, Audiobrary, to help narrators get paid more fairly.

Whelan, who has narrated as many as 70 books in one year, spoke to The Associated Press about the audiobook industry, Audiobrary and her own writing. Answers are edited for clarity and brevity:

Associated Press: Why did you start your own audiobook publishing company?

Whelan: The only reason I was doing 70 books a year was because that’s how many books you have to do when you’re first starting out to keep your head above water because the rates are low. It would be OK if there were a kickback for success, but narrators don’t get royalties. As we’ve seen the industry grow and as we’ve seen the cache of certain narrators expand, and we know listeners will seek out audiobooks that their favorite narrators record, it doesn’t make sense to me that we should be cut out of the long-term financial benefit of success. Audiobrary does a profit-share model with writers, who I also feel don’t get enough percentage of the pie, and a royalty share for narrators. We are also a direct-to-consumer retail channel, so when you buy directly from us, you’re not giving 50-75% of that sale to a retailer. You’re giving it directly to the people who made the product.

How do you prepare before narrating?

I create character lists. I create pronunciation lists, and I do the necessary research for that. The prep time can vary book to book significantly, depending on how complicated the book is.

If you feel a cold coming on, do you panic? Do you have to protect your voice?

It ruins everything. I’m probably the only person left who wears a mask on a plane at this point, but everything falls apart if I get sick. You’re messed up for three or four months. Everything just gets delayed, especially when I was doing 70 books a year; there’s no room for error.

There are big-name celebrities who narrate audiobooks. Do you worry about them taking jobs?

At this point, there’s still enough work to



REBECCA CABAGE, INVISION/AP

Julia Whelan poses for a portrait on July 24 in Los Angeles. Whelan has narrated more than 600 audiobooks and written two novels, including bestseller “My Oxford Year.”

go around, and they are doing the books that have the budget, frankly, to use them. But I think that audiobook fans — not your casual audiobook user, but fans — have favorite narrators, and they’re going to look for books by those narrators. So, in stunt-casting situations, sometimes someone is incredible at it, and they are perfect for the book. But sometimes it feels like a very craven, just marketing ploy. I don’t feel infringed upon by them, but I do worry about a future situation where most of the work is going to AI. I don’t lie awake at night worried, but everyone’s threatened right now. It’s very, very hard to even begin to predict what the future could look like.

What do you say to people who are almost sheepish about admitting to listening to an audiobook instead of reading it?

I think the kids would say that it’s ableist to say that if you didn’t read a book with your eyeballs, then you didn’t read it, considering many people have many limitations that would prevent them from

physically reading a book. So then are you telling them they’ve never read a book before? Actual data and studies show that listening to a book actually triggers the same response in the brain as reading it, and that the interpretation and understanding of that book is on par with having read it.

When do you see yourself writing another novel?

There’s been about four ideas that are constantly in rotation, but I think I’ve narrowed it down. I think I’m ready to at least start exploring one of them at the beginning of next year.

Do you think “Thank You for Listening” could ever be adapted for the screen?

I very much think we could. I have said no up to this point because, this time around, I want to be very creatively involved. There’s just too many things about audiobooks that someone could get wrong not knowing anything about the industry. I want to be involved, so I’m willing to hold onto it until the right situation comes along.

WEEKEND: MUSIC



Ain't done yet

In 'Sinners' and his music, Buddy Guy is keeping the blues alive. It hasn't been easy.

BY MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

For Buddy Guy — a stalwart and staunch defender of the blues — there's nothing more important than keeping his chosen genre at the forefront of conversation. It comes naturally: Guy is one of America's greatest guitar players, a singular artist with a thick roster of A-list super fans — Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page and Gary Clark Jr. among them.

The list also includes innovative writer and director Ryan Coogler, who tapped Guy for his critically acclaimed film "Sinners" this year, and artists like Peter Dinklage and the Eagles' Joe Walsh, who feature on his new album, "Ain't Done with the Blues." It was released July 30, on Guy's 89th birthday.

For the eight-time Grammy Award-winning musician, those recognitions aren't priority. The longevity of the music that made his life is his primary concern. "Like I promised B.B. King, Muddy Waters and all of them," he tells The Associated Press over the phone, "I do the best I can to keep the blues alive."

He's concerned that radio stations no longer play the blues, and that the genre might miss out on connecting with younger listeners. It's one of the reasons "Ain't Done with the Blues" is a strong collection of classics that run the risk of being forgotten — like on the album closer "Talk to Your Daughter," a rendition of the J.B. Lenoir tune.

In Guy's performance, there's an undeniable universality. "Blues is based on everyday life," he says. "A good time or a bad time."

Or, another way Guy explains it: "Music is like a bowl of real good gumbo. They got all kinds of meat in there. You got chicken in

Buddy Guy poses for a portrait at Buddy Guy's Legends in Chicago on July 24. It has been a good year for the blues and for Guy, one of its most legendary practitioners, who turned 89 on July 30.

NAM Y. HUH/AP

SEE BLUES ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC



NAM Y. HUH/AP

Buddy Guy participated in the Ryan Coogler film "Sinners" to help raise the profile of blues music. The strategy has paid off.

Blues: Genre got boost from film's success

FROM PAGE 28

there, you got sausage in there. You got a seafood in it. ... When we play music, we put everything in there."

It's resonating. In its 2025 midyear report, Luminate, an industry data and analytics company, found that U.S. on-demand audio streams of blues music has climbed this year due to the success of "Sinners."

Jaime Marconette, Luminate's vice president of music insights and industry relations, describes the current moment as a "re-surgence of the blues," following "Sinners."

"Several artists featured on the film's soundtrack, which includes works from real-life blues, folk and country musicians, saw spikes the week of the film's theatrical release," he explains. "And they're all enjoying a sustained rise in listenership even two-plus months following release."

Guy has noticed the shift, too. "I walk in the grocery store or the drugstore and people recognize me. 'Man, you know, I heard that 'Sinners' music, man. Man, it sounds good,'" he says. "They ain't never gonna come in and say, 'I heard it on the radio.'"

That's part of the reason why Guy decided to participate in the movie in the first place. "I hope this will give the blues a boost, because my worry right now is, like I said, a young person don't know how good a gumbo is — you've got to taste it."

For now, he's excited to see how people respond to his new album, "Ain't Done with the Blues" — but he's not listening to it.

"I listen to everything but Buddy Guy," he says. "I already know Buddy Guy. I can't learn anything from that."

Having fun, fighting burnout

On her sophomore album, 'Bite Me,' Rapp punches back

BY ELISE RYAN
Associated Press

Reneé Rapp was clear about her intentions for her sophomore album, "Bite Me," from the start.

"I wanted to love this," Rapp says. "I wanted to be able to walk away from this and be so proud of myself and impressed, no matter what anybody else thought." Her debut, 2023's "Snow Angel," was an experiment in figuring out her sound (a mix of pop, R&B and heart-wrenching ballads), and assembling a collection of songs that worked together. This album, released Aug. 1, offered the chance to do it again, with an eye toward how her life had changed in the intervening years.

"That intention, and also wanting to prove it to myself, was really grueling," Rapp told The Associated Press. "And also really fun."

The writing process gave Rapp, 25, an outlet to work through the burnout-inducing whirlwind that was her career in those two years. Uncharacteristically restrained in its vocal styling, the album's lead single, "Leave Me Alone," is strikingly open — clever zingers allude to her departure from HBO's "Sex Lives of College Girls," the media frenzy that surrounded her turn as Regina in the 2024 remake of "Mean Girls," and the external pressure she felt to put out more music after the positive reception of "Snow Angel." Basically, anything that's been said about her in the last few years? She reframes it, poking fun at her reputation and the industry.

"Leave Me Alone" felt like a proper introduction to the album, Rapp says, and "Bite Me" — both a warning and a tease — the appropriate title. Paris Hilton and Monica Lewinsky were among the famous faces that teased the album upon its announcement, donning merch emblazoned with the title in bold print. Rapp herself posed in front of a newsstand filled with mock tabloids depicting her as a diva, concealed behind big sunglasses and a fur coat, to promote the second single, "Mad." ("That's a Rapp!" the headline read.)

"It really feels just like a time capsule of those two years of my life, a lot having to do with the business and the industry and people's expectations of me," Rapp says of the album. "And



REBECCA CABAGE, INVISION/AP

Reneé Rapp, 25, wrestles with mixed emotions and the burnout-inducing whirlwind that was her career the past two years on her sophomore album, "Bite Me."



INTERSCOPE RECORDS/AP

"I wanted to be able to walk away from this and be so proud of myself and impressed, no matter what anybody else thought."

Reneé Rapp
on "Bite Me," her follow-up to 2023's "Snow Angel"

then also me wanting things for myself and being confused where those two roads diverge."

Rapp's confidence and humor is evident across the album, just as it is on stage — "I write lyrics in the way that I talk," she says.

Many of the tracks tackle the destabilizing emotions that accompany the beginning and end of relationships, whether platonic or romantic, and how her now-very public career has amplified the challenges of creating, and maintaining, those connections.

"I'm so surrounded all the time, but I feel so lonely, and it feels really heavy and isolating. And I think a lot of that is just being an artist. And I also think a lot of that is just, like, the nature of, like, the business, for better or for worse," she says. The can't-be-bothered attitude heard on "Leave Me Alone" is countered by the ache of "That's So Funny," which recounts the end of a deeply affecting, but ultimately toxic, friendship in Rapp's signature soaring vocals.

That doesn't mean Rapp isn't also having fun. The cheeky "At Least I'm Hot" features Rapp's girlfriend, the singer and guitarist Towa Bird. "I love when artists give you a clue into their lives, and the people who make their lives full," Rapp said. The track, she says, is also just funny: "Who better to put on that than, like, the funniest person alive?"

The album's mix of emotions — heartache followed by the rush of a new crush, the impostor syndrome that accompanies the thrill of success — is something the AP Breakthrough Entertainer alum has been exploring since her 2022 EP, "Everything to Everyone." She wants listeners to feel the conflict, too — and know

that they aren't alone in experiencing it.

In June, Rapp served as a grand marshal of the World Pride parade in Washington, D.C., alongside Laverne Cox and Deacon Maccubbin. "It can be difficult to feel resilient and empowered as a queer person," Rapp said. "Because World Pride was in D.C., I was like, well, I can't not be there." She recalled a conversation with Cox, who dispelled some of Rapp's fears of coming off as self-important in the role by emphasizing the power of showing up, and showing face. "Right now, when everything is so under attack, which it pretty much always is, it feels like that's the time to be really loud."

Rapp will launch the North American leg of her "Bite Me" tour at the iconic Red Rocks Amphitheater in September before making stops at New York's Madison Square Garden and as a headliner at the Toronto stop of the All Things Go Festival. She'll tour Europe in March.

As she readies for fans to hear the album, she hopes it offers them some reprieve. "I hope that the weight of the world doesn't feel as massive," she said. "It's really easy to obsess over everything and be constantly lost in your head."

Giving them a glimpse into hers, she hopes, is empowering — and fun: "It's just, it feels like a big party that like everybody wants in on."

WEEKEND: TELEVISION REVIEW



Netflix

Right, Leanne Morgan as Leanne, and left, Kristen Johnston as her sister Carol, in the Netflix sitcom “Leanne,” about a newly single mature woman.

‘Leanne’ as conventional as can be

Stand-up comic Morgan gives honest performance as mature woman starting over in Netflix sitcom full of good company

BY ROBERT LLOYD
Los Angeles Times

The practice of building a situation comedy around a stand-up comedian is hallowed television practice, going back to Jack Benny and Danny Thomas and running forward through Bob Newhart, Roseanne Barr, Jerry Seinfeld, Ellen DeGeneres, George Lopez and Martin Lawrence, among others. These “based on the comedy” shows are predicated on the not unreasonable and frequently demonstrable idea that the star comes with a built-in audience — the show and the character usually share their name — and that a person who is good at telling stories onstage might be a good fit for the multicamera TV stage. This hasn’t been true of every comic given a show; even someone as reliably hilarious as John Mulaney was an uneasy fit for the form.

“Leanne,” which premiered July 31 on Netflix, stars Leanne Morgan, a 25-year overnight sensation from Knoxville, Tenn., whose star rose above the cultural horizon when she was already most of her way through her 50s. (She is 59 now.) Co-creator Chuck Lorre (with Morgan and Susan McMartin), the man behind “Cybill,” “Dharma & Greg,” “Two and a Half Men” and “The Big Bang Theory,” earlier built “Grace Under Fire” around another Southern stand-up, Brett Butler. The premise here is essentially: newly single mature woman in a sitcom.

If the people around her are mostly types into which the players pour themselves, Morgan is more a person into which a character has been inserted. TV Leanne is not exactly Real Leanne, who is to all appearances happily married; is on tour through the year (under the title “Just Getting Started”); has starred in a Netflix special, “I’m Every Woman”; published a book, “What in the World?! A Southern Woman’s Guide to Laughing at Life’s Unexpected Curveballs and Beautiful Blessings”; and,

obviously, is starring in this situation comedy. Other than living in Knoxville, having children and grandchildren and representing someone more or less her own age, she is not playing herself; yet there’s an honesty to her performance, possibly not unrelated to her being new at this. (Her only previous screen credit is a supporting role in this year’s Will Ferrell and Reese Witherspoon meh Prime Video rom-com “You’re Cordially Invited.”) Even the hackiest jokes sound less hacky in her mouth, perhaps because she doesn’t strain to sell them. Her delivery tends toward the soft and musical, and that she is using her own accent, which, to a Californian’s ear, plays charming variations on vowels, is all to the good.

As we begin, Leanne, the character, is primarily defined, like negative space, by the figures around her. There is a husband, Bill (Ryan Stiles), who has just left her for a younger woman, an event so fresh that only her sister, Carol (Kristen Johnston), knows; single, twice-divorced, up for fun, Carol regards herself as sophisticated because she once lived in Chicago. Daughter Josie (Hannah Pilkes) is a little wild, but not particularly troublesome; in any case, no one pays her much attention. Son Tyler (Graham Rogers), upon whom Leanne dotes, works for his father, who owns three recreational vehicle emporiums — accounting for the nice house that’s the series’ main set — and comes equipped with a mostly off-screen pregnant wife, Nora (Annie Gonzalez); he feels oppressed, but perhaps he’s just tired. Leanne’s parents, John (Blake Clark) and Margaret (Celia Weston), are around for grousing and goofiness, respectively. Across the street lives Mary (Jayma Mays), the embodiment of nosy propriety in a town that can’t keep a secret.

Leanne recalls how back in the ’80s, she was “cute” and desirable “because I had hormones, and hair spray, and a VW bug with a pullout cassette player.” (This is also a motif in Morgan’s stand-up.) Now she’s careful and proper, and can barely bring herself to chastely kiss the nice

FBI agent, Andrew (Tim Daly), a potential romance. (Morgan said on the “Today” show that Daly was in fact the first man she’d kissed apart from her husband in 33 years. Art and life.) One hopes he won’t turn out to be a murderer, which would 80% be the case if this were a mystery. But I reckon we’re safe.

Younger viewers who find themselves here may be put off by jokes about hot flashes, pelvic exercises, enlarged prostates and such and perhaps especially by sex jokes in the mouths of old — well, older — people. (I feel you there, youngsters.) The representative demographic may chuckle knowingly, or not.

Here is Leanne, flirting with Andrew in their first encounter:

Andrew (swallowing some pills): “I had to have a thing and now I have to take these things every four hours or I might have to have ... another thing.”

Leanne (sweetly): “I got things. My purse is a little Walgreens with a cute strap.”

Every fourth or fifth joke has the air of having been hammered out on an anvil, and a few might have been better left in the smithery. Yet I like this show, in no small part but not entirely because I like Morgan — the way she says “spaseba, that’s Russian for thank-you” to a bartender handing her a vodka, and sings a bit of the Human League’s “Don’t You Want Me” to herself.

The company, which supports the star with veterans of “Third Rock from the Sun,” “The Drew Carey Show” and “Wings,” is generally good company, and I’m happy to see that “Leanne” has a broadcast-style 18-episode season, time being an American sitcom’s best friend. (I would give it a few episodes to make up your mind.)

Apart from the star herself, the show is as conventional as can be. A character embarking on a new chapter is, of course, the starting point of every third sitcom ever made, but given that many of us have either had to start new chapters or wish we could, it’s a suitable way to start.

WEEKEND: TELEVISION REVIEW

A passion project about Hawaii history

'Chief of War' overstuffed and corny at times but also well-researched, well-acted and thoughtfully designed

BY ROBERT LLOYD

Los Angeles Times

A slow-paced, fact-based period drama of war and love in pre-colonial Hawaii, "Chief of War," which premiered Aug. 1 on Apple TV+, presents co-creator and star Jason Momoa as the late-18th century warrior Ka'iana in a story set at the intersection of the island kingdoms and the arrival of European colonists. It's clearly a passion project, and like many passion projects, it can go overboard at times, grow overstuffed, not to say oversolemn — though solemnity, to be sure, is appropriate to the history. But the passion shows through, and the stuff is interesting — nothing you see every day, for sure.

Hawaii, of course, was a cultural touchstone, an obsession among continental Americans, long before it became the 50th state. Ukuleles. Steel guitars. Elvis Presley in "Blue Hawaii" and "Paradise, Hawaiian Style," not to mention "Aloha from Hawaii via Satellite." The Brady Bunch traveled there, and so did Dennis the Menace in a comic book I once owned. "Magnum P.I.," "Hawaii Five-0," "The White Lotus," Season 1. Hawaiian Punch (created in 1934), which mixed orange, pineapple, passion fruit, guava and papaya flavors, and is still available at a store near you in at least 14 variations. Tiki bars. Suburban luaus. Walt Disney's Enchanted Tiki Room, where the birds sing words and the flowers croon, presented by Dole. It goes on and on.

Momoa, who was born in Honolulu, raised in Iowa and returned to the islands for college, slipped into show business by way of "Baywatch Hawaii," followed by the Oahu-set hotel drama "North Shore." He played an alien in "Stargate Atlantis," Conan the Barbarian, Aquaman, of course, and twice hosted "Saturday Night Live" (and recently Ozzy Osbourne's swan song concert "Back to the Beginning"). It's not surprising that he'd want to stretch a little, to step away from genre projects, and represent the roots of his people in a respectful manner. One would call "Chief of War" well-researched, even if one was not at all aware of how much research was done. The ordinary viewer may need to take notes to keep things straight; titles notwithstanding, I wasn't always certain what island we were on, especially since characters might be living on or aligned with another, and because within an island, various "districts" might be at war, intramurally, as it were.

A comparison to "Shogun" is as good as inevitable, given the subtitled dialogue — most of the series is performed in Hawaiian — the encounters with outsiders, the ambitious monarchs and the warring factions. In the latter respects, the series also resembles "Game of Thrones," where Momoa portrayed chieftain Khal Drogo. And its opening might make you think of "The Lord of the Rings," as a woman's voice sets the story (a prophesied king will unite the endless, ending "a cycle of endless war"), introducing the island kingdoms of Kauai, Hawaii, Maui and Oahu, "separated by cunning chiefs and powerful gods."



Apple TV+ photos

In "Chief of War," now streaming on Apple TV+, Jason Momoa plays the late-18th century warrior Ka'iana, a war chief who leaves Maui, deserts its army and moves to Kauai with his two brothers and significant others to live a peaceful life there.

We're introduced to Ka'iana, a Maui war chief who has left that island, and more to the point, deserted its army, to live a peaceful life on Kauai with his two brothers Nahi' (Siua Ikale'o) and Namake (Te Kohe Tuhaka) and significant others Kupuohi (Te Ao o Hinepehinga) and Heke (Mainei Kinimaka). On the whole, given what follows, one would call this the superior lifestyle, and I would have been happy just to spend a little time in this world, with its plant-based architecture and fashions and cheeky local children getting into Ka'iana's stuff. But like a retired gunslinger in a Western movie, circumstances will not let him rest. (He will, in fact, sling a gun before the season is out.)

"A war chief who runs from war — you are a chief of contradictions," says Ka'ahumanu (Luciane Buchanan), a young Maui woman Ka'iana meets in a cave while he's on the run, where she's lying low from her councilor father (Moses Goods), who means to ship her to Hawaii to marry her to Kamehameha (Kaina Makua), in charge of the "god of war," a sort of military good-luck charm whose possession will be a major issue, though Kamehameha's own inclinations bend toward peace. But with crazy villains like King Kahekili (Temuera Morrison) and Keoua (Cliff Curtis), not to mention some rogue white sailors with their own dreams of conquest, that may have to wait.

A contemporary account describes the real-life Ka'iana as "near 6 feet 5 inches in stature, and the muscular form of his limbs was of a Herculean appearance," which is basically typecasting for Momoa. In many ways, "Chief of War" is another



A young Maui woman, Ka'ahumanu (Luciane Buchanan), whom Ka'iana meets in a cave while fleeing, describes him as a "chief of contradictions" for being a "war chief who runs from war."

superhero role for him, if a more emotionally busy one. He's the best fighter by miles, can catch a spear in his head, ride a shark (a drugged shark, but still) and whip out a laser stare calculated to make his enemies quake. But he also must grapple with family business, love stuff and getting people to listen to his better ideas.

Circumstances will lead Ka'iana into the ocean and onto a British sailing ship, where he will travel to Alaska and the Spanish East Indies, learn all about guns, which he regards as a potentially useful invention, and to speak English — John Young (Benjamin Hoetjes), a marooned sailor taken into the community, is teaching it back on Hawaii, and soon many characters are speaking English, even when it doesn't make any practical sense. And in a story in which "pale-skin" colonists meet and exploit Indigenous pop-

ulations, white racism necessarily gets a licking — "They do not see you as people," says Tony (James Udom), a Black man who befriends Ka'iana on his accidental voyage — including an actual licking.

Injecting a strain of anticipatory feminism, Momoa and his collaborator Thomas Pa'a Sibbett have taken care not only to incorporate women into their testosterone-heavy world (including Sisa Grey as a street-smart Hawaiian expat), but to give them interesting things to do — Kupuohi "was once a chiefess of war," Heke wants Nahi' to teach her how to fight — and wise things to say, e.g., "Men train their whole lives to be warriors but they fear being wrong more than they fear death." (So true.) There are gay characters, too, presented without comment.

The actors are appealing when they're meant to be, and very much unappealing when they're meant to be, but they're all excellent (including the nonprofessional Makua). The pacing can be pokey — elegiac, if you prefer — between the big action scenes, which can be disturbingly violent. (It can also be very violent when someone's just trying to make a point.) Filmed across Hawaii and New Zealand and thoughtfully designed, it's always a pleasure to look at, notwithstanding some dodgy CGI in the volcano scene. (Yes, there's a volcano.) There is one red-hued orgy scene (denoting villainy) too many — which is to say, there's one. The score, by Hans Zimmer and James Everingham, is Hollywood-obvious, and the series as a whole is not immune to corniness — but that is sometimes just another word for love.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

Rough night ahead? Try sleep banking

Snoozing for extra hours before a period of deprivation can help keep you more alert, improve performance

BY MEERI KIM
The Washington Post

In an ideal world, every night would offer a chance to recharge with long, restful slumber. But life happens, and things like working long or odd hours, taking care of a baby or a sick person or dealing with jet lag can stand in the way of a good night's sleep.

A lot of people try to catch up after losing sleep by getting extra hours over the following night or so.

But there's also something you can do ahead of time if you know you're in for a rough night or two. It's a preemptive approach known as "sleep banking," or snoozing extra hours leading up to a period of anticipated sleep loss.

Improvements in performance, alertness

Sleep banking has its roots in the military, where it was first investigated in 2009 as a possible strategy to reduce fatigue in soldiers before missions that made it difficult to sleep.

Small studies support the idea that banking sleep can improve performance and alertness during subsequent sleep restriction.

"I usually recommend that people go to bed an hour earlier and give themselves another hour to sleep in, so, like, a little bit on either end," said Tracy Rupp, the scientific director of the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine. "Whatever you can do to bolster those reserves and give yourself extra levels of restorative resources should have some benefit."

Experts also suggest trying the strategy before any event that takes a physical toll, such as surgery, childbirth or a marathon.

However, similar to catching up on lost slumber, sleep banking is not meant to replace consistent, quality rest.

"If you maximize your total amount of sleep leading into a short-term scenario where you know you're not going to get enough sleep, sleep banking can help mitigate the negative effects," said Christopher Depner, an assistant professor of health & kinesiology at the University of Utah. "But if you do it repetitively all the time, that type of a pattern can be really detrimental because you still suffer the consequences of not getting enough sleep."

Benefits of sleep banking

In 2009, Rupp and her colleagues at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research tested the effects of extending sleep on 24 civilian and active-duty military personnel ages 18 to 39. They were randomly assigned to either a sleep extension group who spent 10 hours in bed, or a control group who slept the usual amount per night for one week.

Afterward, participants went through a sleep restriction phase, where they could spend only three hours in bed for seven nights. Finally, they had a recovery period of eight hours in bed for five nights.

The researchers then administered tests to measure participants' alertness and performance. For alertness, the participants lay on a bed in a dark room, trying to stay awake for as long as possible. Falling asleep more quickly meant that a person was more objectively sleepy and thus less alert.

For performance, their reaction time was recorded by having them press a button as soon as a visual stimulus appeared on a screen. A shorter reaction time translated to a better performance on the test.

The results demonstrated that banking sleep not only improved both alertness and performance during subsequent sleep loss, but also facilitated a faster recovery.



During the sleep restriction phase, the extended sleep group — those who spent 10 hours in bed before the sleep restriction — outperformed the control group on both tests.

And during recovery, the extended sleep group had a much shorter average reaction time after only one night of good rest, and maintained a stable level of improved performance, whereas the control group needed all five nights to gradually improve.

"The extended group just did better. Their reaction time was faster, they weren't as objectively sleepy, and they also recovered more quickly," Rupp said. "We argue that sleep banking is not simply paying back sleep debt, but it's actually building up this reservoir of sorts that can be used later when needed."

A 2015 study of 14 healthy men reported similar findings, that six nights of extended sleep could improve alertness and reduce sleep pressure throughout a subsequent 21 hours of total sleep deprivation.

And a 2019 systematic review showed that banking sleep has a positive effect on performance, acute fatigue and the ability to stay awake. Participants in the five studies mentioned in the review included shift workers, electricians and medical residents.

"Physicians can go 24 hours without sleep because they're on call or held over, and a study found that banking sleep had a favorable impact on patient safety," said P. Daniel Patterson, associate professor of emergency medicine at the University of Pittsburgh, who wrote the review. "The main takeaway from this is, sleep banking is a good thing."

'Sleep really is medicine'

Sleep banking can lead to less fatigue and better performance for shift workers — people on night shifts, long-duration shifts or rotating shifts, Patterson said.

They consistently get less sleep than nonshift workers, and there are more cases of insomnia among people with this type of schedule than the general population. Shift work has also been associated with a higher risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes, several types of cancer and other health consequences.

"Sleep really is medicine," said Patterson, who analyzes how shift work affects the health and safety of emer-

gency medical services professionals. "There are so many positive things that happen when we sleep, physiologically, and from that perspective, the longer you can give your body to recover and rest, the better — especially for shift workers."

Patterson advises that "If you have the flexibility and the opportunity, trying it one or two days prior to your scheduled shifts can lead to some benefits."

Sleep banking for physically taxing events

Other research points to the benefits of sleep banking in preparation for other physically taxing events such as an operation or an athletic event.

A 2017 study found that participants who spent two extra hours in bed per night for one week before knee or hip replacement surgery reported less pain and made fewer requests for morphine than a control group.

And a 2019 study showed that endurance cyclists or triathletes who extended their sleep for three nights performed better on time trials compared with those who got a normal amount of sleep.

Tips for banking sleep

For many people, fitting in more hours of sleep into an already packed schedule isn't easy. But for those who want to try sleep banking, these strategies might help.

- Squeeze in extra sleep when you can. Use any available opportunity to load up on sleep. Even going to bed 30 minutes to an hour earlier for a few nights in a row might help. Rupp also suggests bookending your nighttime sleep by going to bed earlier and waking up later.

- Take advantage of naps. Studies on sleep banking haven't explored the effect of napping rather than extending nighttime sleep. But if you can't logistically extend nighttime sleep, naps could be worth trying. "We typically recommend people to take a half-hour nap, which is enough to get some sleep and feel more alert," Depner said.

- Don't overdo it. Sleep banking is meant to be a short-term solution for temporary sleep loss. But to stay healthy, adults should still try to get at least seven hours of sleep each night. Improvements in sleep hygiene and avoiding too much shift work, if possible, can also help optimize sleep duration and health.

WEEKEND: FAMILY



Jessica Martin

Children tend a garden bed in Islip Terrace, N.Y. Starting young and having ownership fosters lifelong interest.

How to grow gardeners

Parents can nurture lifelong love of outdoors by starting young, giving space

By JESSICA DAMIANO
Associated Press

When I was a kid, my friends and I spent long summer days outdoors, picking daisies, observing roly-poly (also known as pill) bugs, holding caterpillars and trying to catch fireflies.

It's still not hard to entice the under-5 set to make mud pies, smell flowers and eat string beans off the vine, but as children get older and turn to screens, nature exploration often falls to the bottom of their boredom-buster lists.

With a little creativity, however, parents can nurture an interest in the great outdoors and inspire a lifelong love for gardening. The key is starting kids young — and giving them ownership.

Let them pick the plants

Take children to the nursery and let each decide what they would like to grow. Annuals and perennials should be limited only by the site's conditions (sunny? poor drainage?) and their non-toxicity (children tend to put things in their mouths). Leaves and stems of tomato, potato and rhubarb, for instance, are toxic, so if you grow them, you'll need to monitor little ones.

Otherwise, let the kids have complete control. Vegetables should be ones they like to eat; they'll take pride in a meal that includes ingredients they grew themselves. Growing edibles can also play a role in influencing a lifetime of healthy food choices.

While you're at the nursery, pick up some child-size rakes, hoes, spades and gloves — or scout for used ones. Ordinary kitchen spoons can also be used for digging.

Let them lay out the garden and name it

Back at home, let each child use a yardstick to measure a 3-square-foot plot of land to call their own. If you don't have garden space, give them a container (be sure to poke drainage holes in the bottom).

Name the area or container for the child and let them design a sign that reads, for instance, "Olivia's Garden" or "Noah's Nasturtiums." Let them name their individual plants, too. They will feel protective over them and take pride in their growth.

Offer advice on plant care

Teach kids that gardens need to eat and drink like



Dina Colon

Nico Rivera, 4, and MaryAnna Rivera, 1½, water newly planted cucumber seedlings in Malverne, N.Y.

they do — and that gardens, too, get cranky when they're hungry or parched. Show them the symptoms, then let them figure out when their plants need water or fertilizer.

Observe the sun's movement across the sky together and, if possible, situate the plot where others can admire it.

Be available to offer advice, but don't insist on perfection: Teach children not to step on plants, but let them get dirty.

Mistakes are often the best teachers, so, if they insist, allow them to pick an unripe tomato. They will quickly learn that an unripe tomato doesn't taste as good as a ripe one, and that an early harvest is wasteful. The same goes for immature potatoes, garlic, carrots and radishes. These are the lessons that stick.

Hang a calendar somewhere visible — in their bedroom or on the refrigerator — to schedule watering and weeding. Let them take responsibility for checking it and alerting you when those tasks need to be done. Crossing off completed items will also impart a feeling of accomplishment — I know it does for me.

Gardening offers food and flowers, yes, but it also teaches patience, responsibility and the satisfaction that comes from nurturing something over an extended period. It's also relaxing and creates precious one-on-one time that they'll remember long after the flowers have faded. And that's the best harvest of all.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



My time in the deep end of sports participation

"C'mon! Pick it up if you wanna make the team!" my father bellowed over the "braaap-braaap-braaap" of his smoky Honda moped. I ran faster, my cheeks beet red from the August heat.

That was how I spent every morning during our family's two-week vacation the summer after high school graduation. My father, who had earned a football scholarship to college, was dead set on his children being college athletes.

My older brother had always been a natural athlete, and was recruited for track to the U.S. Naval Academy. But after a hellish plebe year, he quit the team to concentrate on academics. My father was furious.

"You would've competed against Herschel Walker!" Dad blared, not able to fathom giving up college sports.

I, on the other hand, was a squishy kid who collected puffy stickers, sang along to old records alone in my room, played with Barbies well into middle school and stuck blades of grass in my nose to make myself sneeze. Sure, I earned a third-place ribbon at church camp in the standing broad jump, but I was no athlete.

It wasn't until ninth grade, after my best friend dumped me for the pothead crowd, when I wandered into a swim team meeting.

"I swim I.M. What's your stroke?" asked Patti, a new ninth grade girl who would become my lifelong best friend.

"What's I.M.?" I asked, totally unaware that it stood for "individual medley," a basic competitive swimming term.

When I told Dad I'd joined swim team, he mumbled, "Hmm, good for you," barely looking up from his newspaper. That year, I was the worst one on the team. Despite my lack of ability, I loved the sense of belonging, camaraderie, team spirit, bus trips, team dinners, physical challenge and feeling that I was accomplishing something important.

At the season banquet, I cheered enthusiastically for my teammates who won awards, having no idea that I would receive one, too — Most Improved.

That recognition turbo-charged my motivation. By senior year, I was team captain and had broken a school breast-stroke record. Dad developed the same fervor for my swimming as he had my brother's sports. He lectured me after meets on improving and becoming a college swimmer. After graduation, he monitored my summer fitness regimen and made me run two miles beside his moped every morning.

I'd been accepted to Miami of Ohio, a Division I school. My skills weren't enough to attract recruiters at that level, so I tried out. There were two walk-on spots, and only two of us tried out. The other walk-on was better than me, but she quit after two weeks because practices were so hard.

They were hard, but I'd witnessed Dad's anger and disappointment when my brother quit. Once again, I was the worst one on the team and I had to stick it out.

Freshman year was a struggle. I woke at dawn for morning practices, and swam again in the afternoons, swimming nearly eight miles a day. I came to class with frozen hair, and developed serious ear infections. I wasn't on the travel team and was a "floater" for home meets. I was exhausted and out of my league. I never improved.

Dad came to the last home meet during Parents Weekend. Coach put me in 200 backstroke, my worst event. By my last two pool lengths, the crowd was sitting silently, just waiting for me to finish.

"If you wanna do something else next year, that's OK," my father said. Even he could see that it had gone too far.

Youth participation in sports offers scientifically proven health and psychological benefits.

However, like most things in life, balance is key.

The next fall, I joined a sorority and practiced a different skill — how to have fun in college.

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

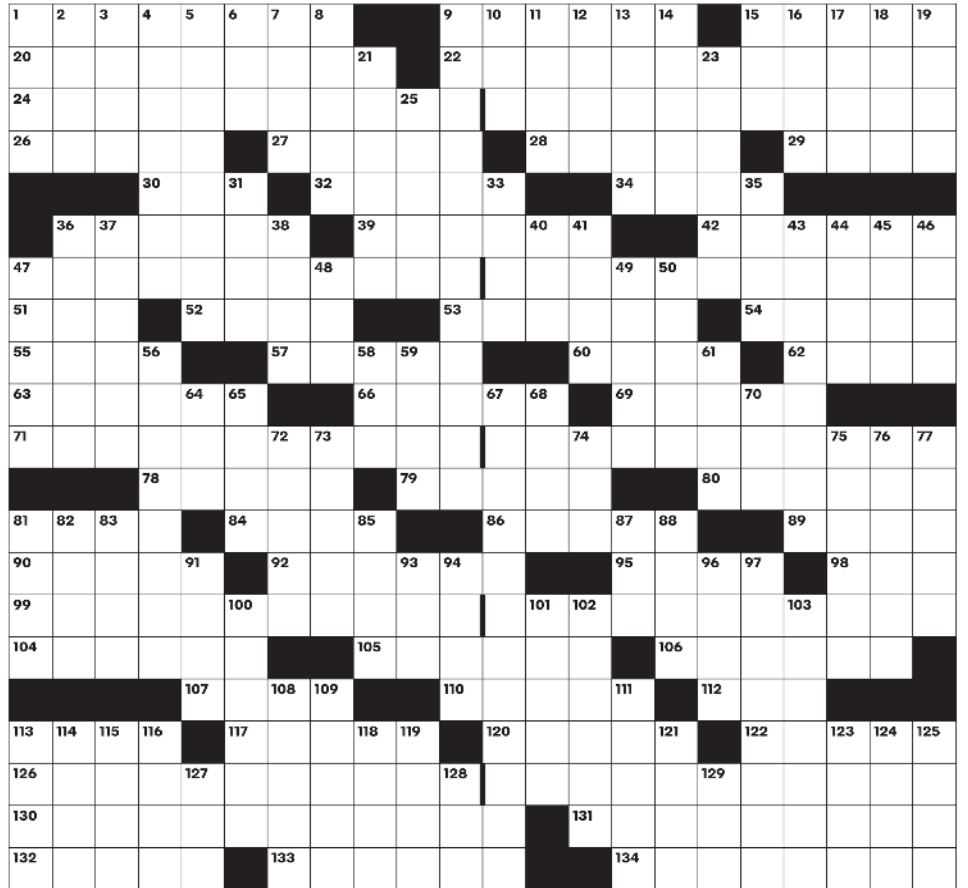
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

ARRANGED MARRIAGES

BY JOHN KUGELMAN / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

John Kugelman, of Gainesville, Va., is a software engineer specializing in cybersecurity. This is his 13th crossword for The Times. It has five carefully chosen, elegantly clued theme answers running across the grid. Each one made me say "wow." Also, note the lively answers at 9- and 67-Down, each crossing three theme lines. That's a sign of expert puzzle-making. — W.S.

- ACROSS**
- 1 Maintains, as a superstition
 - 9 Subject of the 2017 musical film "The Greatest Showman"
 - 15 "Same with me"
 - 20 Not funny
 - 22 Ralph Ellison novel about a nameless protagonist's journey in racist America
 - 24 Forgiving middle-aged dads for their dad jokes, say?
 - 26 Picket line?
 - 27 Bud in Cooperstown
 - 28 Dorm room staple food
 - 29 Cross-country conveyances
 - 30 Darth Vader's childhood nickname
 - 32 Inflexible
 - 34 Have away with words?
 - 36 Muppet of Mexican descent
 - 39 Knows just when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em, maybe
 - 42 Gives lip
 - 47 Attire for Larry Page and Sergey Brin when visiting Google incognito?
 - 51 Columbus sch.
 - 52 Carnage
 - 53 Down Easter
 - 54 One with a set of pipes
 - 55 Come out of one's shell
 - 57 Sherlock's sister on TV
 - 60 ___ bag
 - 62 Much-maligned 2019 movie about which one review said "It's 'Battlefield Earth' with whiskers"
 - 63 One of classical music's Three B's
 - 66 Landscaper's supply
 - 69 Tundra or taiga
 - 71 "You think that hunk of junk'll pass inspection? Please!"
 - 78 Trademarked refrigerator
 - 79 Uncle Sam's land, informally
 - 80 Lithé
 - 81 +/-
 - 84 Drink mixed in mixed drinks
 - 86 Handy
 - 89 Avatar of Vishnu
 - 90 Back in, in a way
 - 92 Try to hit in laser tag
 - 95 Older sister of Rachel, in Genesis
 - 98 Basic BASIC statements
 - 99 Real chess playa?
 - 104 Contemporary of Gauss and Faraday
 - 105 James who played Scotty on "Star Trek"
 - 106 "No ____, Bob"
 - 107 Part of une pièce de théâtre
 - 110 Plunderers of Rome
 - 112 Hindu honorific
 - 113 Clock toggle
 - 117 Hollowed out, as an apple
 - 120 Hogwarts's "Half-Blood Prince"
 - 122 Burnt pigment
 - 126 Greeting from a famous Italian character to a famous Italian American actress?
 - 130 DC power player in the late 1800s?
 - 131 Good thing to play in a trick-taking game
 - 132 Magical symbol
 - 133 Dispensing, with "out"
 - 134 Art lovers
- DOWN**
- 1 One always cooking up new ideas?
 - 2 Ritzy
 - 3 "That's my cue"
 - 4 ___ compensation (stock options, for instance)
 - 5 Revegetation, e.g.
 - 6 Canon option, in brief
 - 7 They may be Thai or chai
 - 8 Cuisinart competitor
 - 9 Noted rapper with an oxymoronic name
 - 10 Director Lee
 - 11 Traveler in no need of hotels, for short
 - 12 Columbian caravel
 - 13 "I'm your guy"
 - 14 Boggled down
 - 15 ___-right (political category)
 - 16 Twice tres
 - 17 Out of control
 - 18 Nail salon request, familiarly
 - 19 1980s band among Australia's all-time best-selling groups
 - 21 Quartz compound
 - 23 Cast out
 - 25 When doubled, "Sleep well"
 - 31 Langston Hughes poem that begins "___, sing America"
 - 33 Word with mine or dump
 - 35 ___ the Town (punny fast-food restaurant name)
 - 36 Vacation package offerer, perhaps
 - 37 Visionary?
 - 38 Lot unit
 - 40 Prefix with angular
 - 41 D.C. 100: Abbr.
 - 43 Mickey Mouse's boss in "Fantasia"
 - 44 Whale of a tale
 - 45 Géorgie, par exemple
 - 46 Identity thief's acquisitions, in brief
 - 47 The pyramids, essentially
 - 48 Stimp's TV pal
 - 49 Rookies
 - 50 Bond's man?
 - 56 Skill taught to Luke Skywalker
 - 58 Texter's gasp
 - 59 Feast with kalua pig
 - 61 Skedaddles
 - 64 ___ de Glace (glacier in the French Alps)
 - 65 Fr. holy women
 - 67 Desperate pursuit of fame, in modern lingo
 - 68 Weight
 - 70 Channel that popularized video jockeys
 - 72 Shower scrubber
 - 73 Split
 - 74 Mai ___
 - 75 TV friend of Jerry, George and Kramer
 - 76 Money for your money
 - 77 Slightest
 - 81 Black-and-white hunter
 - 82 Longtime NPR host Diane
 - 83 Part of a flight
 - 85 Bone-dry
 - 87 Business entity inits.
 - 88 Shriek cries
 - 91 Slimy veggie
 - 93 Brian who co-founded the Long Now Foundation
 - 94 In awe
 - 96 Chums, in Chamonix
 - 97 "Bah, humbug!"
 - 100 Nashville and New Orleans, for musicians
 - 101 Stomping ground
 - 102 Bringing up the rear
 - 103 [Yuck!]
 - 108 Sacred object
 - 109 Lose ground?
 - 111 Slash on a scoresheet
 - 113 Qts.
 - 114 When repeated, a tropical fish
 - 115 ___ rock (genre for Pink Floyd and Dream Theater, familiarly)
 - 116 Apt name for a narcissist?
 - 118 Release
 - 119 He loved Lucy
 - 121 Nesting pair in the Outback
 - 123 Army ___
 - 124 The Emerald Isle
 - 125 Photosensitive cells
 - 127 Seasoning for una margarita
 - 128 Bit of plasma
 - 129 One whose uniform bears the Star of Life, for short



GUNSTON STREET



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

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Raw milk sickens 21, including 6 children

FL TALLAHASSEE — Six children are among 21 people who have E. coli or campylobacter infections after consuming raw milk from a farm in Florida, public health officials said.

Seven people have been hospitalized, and at least two of them are suffering severe complications, the Florida Department of Health said.

It did not specify if any of the six infected children under 10 are among those being treated in hospitals, nor how many people were infected by E. coli, campylobacter or both bacteria.

“Sanitation practices in this farm are of particular concern due to the number of cases,” reads the state advisory, which did not identify the farm linked to the cluster of infections in northeast and central Florida.

Raw milk appears to be gaining in popularity, despite years of warnings about the health risks of drinking unpasteurized products. The Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said raw milk is one of the “riskiest” foods people can consume.

Agency warns wild pigs’ flesh turning ‘neon blue’

CA SALINAS — Dan Burton has trapped hundreds of wild pigs for clients of his wildlife control company in Salinas, but even he was startled when he cut one of them open and found blue meat inside.

“I’m not talking about a little blue,” said Burton, owner of Urban Trapping Wildlife Control. “I’m talking about neon blue, blueberry blue.”

Burton immediately relayed the disturbing discovery to Monterey County officials and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The agency is now warning trappers and hunters to keep an eye out for possibly contaminated wildlife in the area, and not to consume the tainted meat, over concerns the blue meat is a sign that the animal may have consumed poison.

The startling find suggests the wild animals have been exposed to anticoagulant rodenticide diphacinone, a popular poison used by farmers and agriculture companies.

Tooth of about 30-foot dinosaur found in creek

AL TUSCALOOSA — A “shiny” fossil found in an Alabama creek has been identified as the tooth of a large dinosaur that doesn’t quite belong at the site, experts said.

Hadrosaurs were land-dwellers, but the tooth surfaced in a spot that was underwater during the age of dinosaurs, according to the Alabama Museum of Natural History.



SEATTLE KRACKEN/AP

Bear-ly escaping

A brown bear splashes toward the NHL Kraken sea troll mascot known as Buoy, left, next to a fishing guide during the filming of a promotional video in a river outside Anchorage, Alaska, filmed June 25, and released to the public Wednesday.

The tooth was discovered in gravel by Dr. John Friel, director of the Alabama Museum of Natural History, as he accompanied a group of fossil enthusiasts to a creek about a 50-mile drive southwest from the University of Alabama campus in Tuscaloosa.

“When I first picked it up, I thought it was just another odd piece of bone that I would not be able to identify further. However, when I turned it over and saw that it had a shiny enameled surface with a distinctive texture, I was fairly certain it was a tooth.”

Two university paleontologists were included in the group that day, and both confirmed it was likely a hadrosaur tooth, he said.

Technically, it’s just the base of a tooth, but it is still more than a half inch long. Hadrosaurs were duck-billed herbivores that grew to about 30 to 50 feet in length.

University to lay off over 360 workers due to cuts

CA STANFORD — Stanford University will lay off at least 363 employees this fall as part of \$140 million in budget cuts driven by rising costs and changes in federal funding policies, including a steep revision to the endowment tax.

The layoffs will affect a wide range of staff roles, such as academic operations managers, IT business analysts, librarians, and administrative associates, accord-

ing to a WARN notice filed with the California Employment Development Department on July 31.

In a letter accompanying the notice, Stanford Vice President for Human Resources Elizabeth Zacharias cited “ongoing economic uncertainty in 2025,” which she said has created “serious operational and financial challenges for higher education institutions.”

Zacharias said anticipated reductions in federal research funding and the revised endowment tax structure are expected to have “significant budgetary consequences” for the university.

City has fewest homicides in recent memory this year

PA PHILADELPHIA — Philadelphia has recorded the fewest homicides in recent memory this year — a rate of violence that, after reaching record highs just three years ago, has plummeted to a pace the city has not seen since the 1960s.

Violence in the city began to decline in 2023, and it has continued to fall ever since.

Through July, 134 people were killed in homicides — a striking drop compared to the 319 people killed during the same period in 2021.

This year the city is on pace to record the fewest number of people shot in the last decade. And while the number of victims has declined only slightly compared to

last year, it has dropped by more than half compared to 2021, when the city’s gun violence peaked.

Gunman in NFL HQ attack suffered from concussion

CA LOS ANGELES — The mother of the man who killed four people at a Manhattan office tower home to the NFL told 911 dispatchers during a 2022 incident when he threatened to kill himself that he suffered from a sports-related concussion and other issues, new information released by Las Vegas police Tuesday revealed.

Shane Tamura, 27, had a documented history of mental health problems and carried a handwritten note in his wallet when he carried out the shooting that claimed he had chronic traumatic encephalopathy, known as CTE, investigators said.

He fatally shot three people in the building lobby before taking an elevator to the 33rd floor, killing a fourth victim and then ending his own life, according to police.

He accused the football league of hiding the dangers of brain injuries linked to contact sports. Tamura didn’t play professional football but played during his high school years in Southern California, where he grew up.

His mother told the dispatchers on Sept. 12, 2022, that her son was under a doctor’s care for “depres-

sion, concussion like sports concussion, chronic migraines, and insomnia.” She also said he was taking sleeping pills, smoking marijuana, and kept a gun in his backpack.

It was one of two incidents that led to Tamura being admitted to hospitals for mental health crises.

Man accused of killing 3 women indicted on fourth

OR PORTLAND — A man accused of killing three women in the Portland area and dumping their bodies has been indicted on a fourth murder charge, authorities said Tuesday.

A grand jury has indicted Jesse Lee Calhoun in the November 2022 death of 22-year-old Kristin Smith, Multnomah County District Attorney Nathan Vasquez said during a news conference. The new indictment, which comes roughly 2½ years after Smith’s remains were found, adds one count each of second-degree murder and abuse of a corpse to Calhoun’s case.

Calhoun was indicted last year in the deaths of Charity Perry, 24; Bridget Webster, 31; and Joanna Speaks, 32. He pleaded not guilty.

Police and prosecutors have shared little information in the case. The death of another woman during that time period is still being investigated, Vasquez said.



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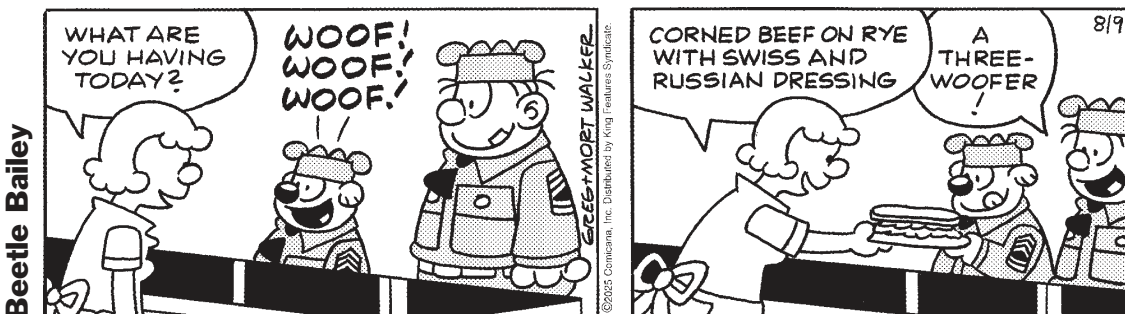
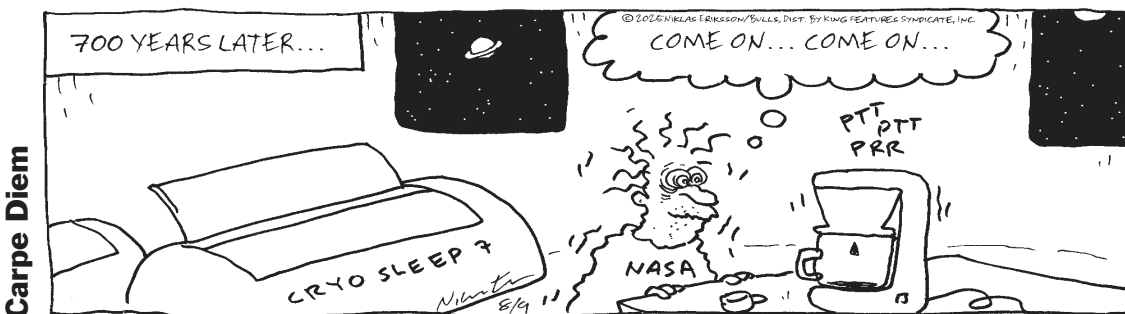
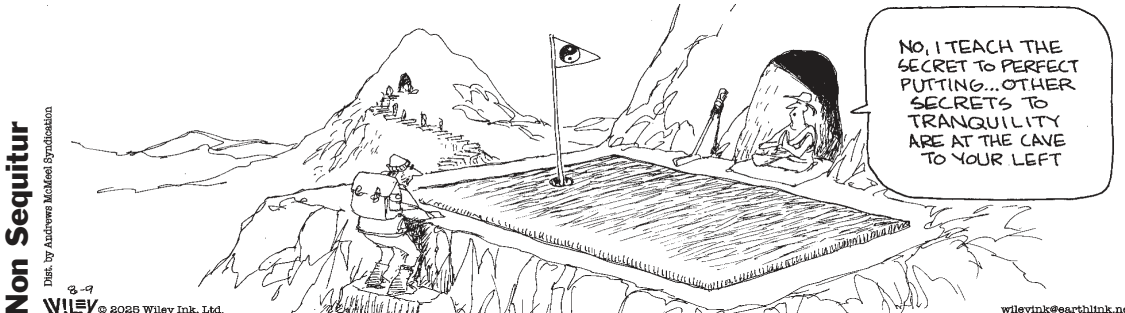
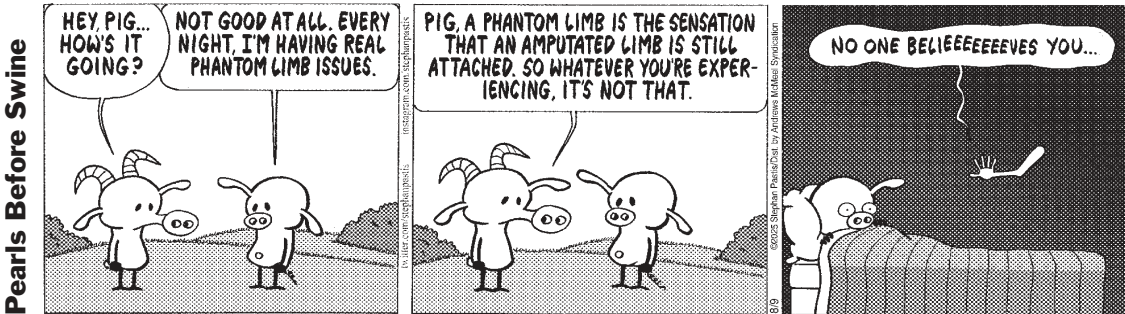
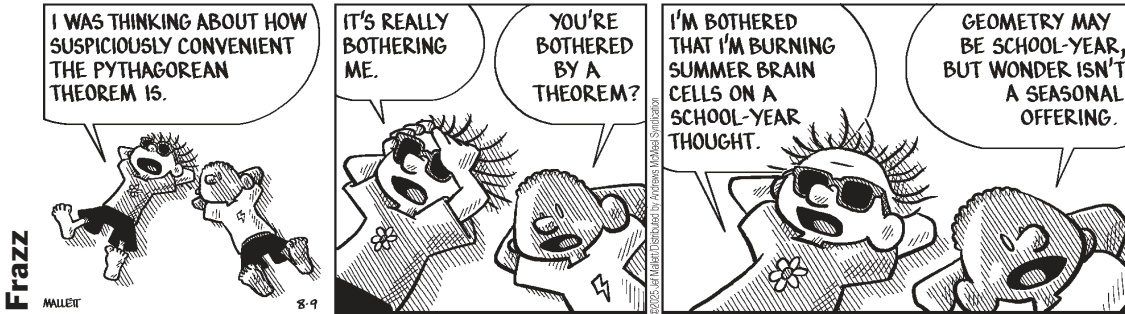
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Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
15					16					17		
18					19				20			
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25	26	27					28			29	30	31
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39	40	41			42	43			44	45	46	47
48					49					50		
51					52					53		
54					55					56		

ACROSS

- 1 Conspiracy
- 5 Band boosters
- 9 The Browns, on scoreboards
- 12 Slimming surgery, briefly
- 13 Bargain
- 14 Successful at-bat
- 15 Algerian port
- 16 — -bitty
- 17 Picnic crasher
- 18 Sandwich shop
- 19 Aachen article
- 20 Dress tag info
- 21 Espionage org.
- 23 Acapulco gold
- 25 Royal headgear
- 28 Oahu verandas
- 32 Hackneyed
- 33 Part of TNT
- 34 Hunting dog
- 36 Classic arcade game
- 37 Tours season
- 38 Wagerers' site (Abbr.)
- 39 Swerve
- 42 Highland hat
- 44 Clumsy lot
- 48 Stately tree
- 49 Kennel cry
- 50 Spoken
- 51 Tiara jewel
- 52 Regarding
- 53 "Her" actress Rooney

- 54 Fed. health law
- 55 Teensy bit
- 56 Leisurely

DOWN

- 1 Trudge
- 2 Old Italian money
- 3 October stone
- 4 Mixer with gin
- 5 Nike rival
- 6 Apportion
- 7 Beat cop's job
- 8 Devious
- 9 Spiced tea
- 10 Nickname of Mozart's Symphony No. 36
- 11 Diminutive suffix
- 20 Audible shock waves
- 22 Cove
- 24 Rushed toward
- 25 "Matlock" aier
- 26 Arctic explorer John
- 27 Toronto's prov.
- 29 Cash dispenser
- 30 Nest egg letters
- 31 Kiefer, to Donald
- 35 Examine anew
- 36 Tam topper
- 39 Star in Lyra
- 40 Power co. supply
- 41 Madame Bovary
- 43 Choir voice
- 45 Asia's — Sea
- 46 Gambling game
- 47 Shredded picnic dish
- 49 "Homegoing" author — Gyasi

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

8-9

CRYPTOQUIP

Q B Z D I P C P E D B Y M G D B T
 U Z A P J Y D T A T N T D Z V K T P U Z
 K P M N - B Z Y J T I Q P J G Y M N I P N
 X P E K I V T ? X P K K Y T U K P Q T J.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF PEOPLE ARE SNOOZING ON THE SURFACE OF A BILLIARD TABLE, YOU MIGHT CALL THEM POOL-DOZERS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals H

STARS AND STRIPES.

OPINION

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 Laura Law, Chief Operating Officer
 Lt. Col. Daniel "DQ" Quinlan, Europe commander
 John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
 Lt. Col. Lucas Crouch, Pacific commander
 John Albaugh, Pacific chief of staff

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Jacqueline Smith

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Will RFK Jr. end preventive care panel?

BY LEANA S. WEN

Special to The Washington Post

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s recent takeover of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's vaccine advisory committee was alarming enough. Now the health and human services secretary is reportedly considering something with potentially even greater impact: upending the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, the panel of independent experts that guides everything from chronic disease screenings to mental health wellness.

Kennedy is planning to fire all 16 scientists and physicians on the task force, unnamed sources familiar with the matter told the Wall Street Journal and NBC News. If the reports are correct and Kennedy does take action, his legacy won't just be undermining vaccine policy; it will be the dismantling of the entire framework of evidence-based prevention.

An HHS spokesperson told me that "no final decision has been made on how the [task force] can better support HHS's mandate to Make America Healthy Again."

Americans might be surprised to learn that the task force's recommendations guide virtually every aspect of their annual checkup. Established more than 40 years ago, the panel helps clinicians decide what tests and preventive treatments to offer patients from birth to older adulthood. It gained additional significance after the passage of the Affordable Care Act, which required that recommended services be covered by most insurance plans.

A quick look through any of its approximately 100 guidelines illustrates the complexity of the task force's work. For every condition, its members analyze hundreds of studies and weigh not only an intervention's benefits

and harms, but also the strength of evidence supporting its use. They must consider how guidance should change based on age, sex, underlying medical conditions, family history and other risk factors. And they need to regularly revisit guidelines to account for advances in treatment and disease trends, each time clearly communicating their rationale so that clinicians can confidently discuss the changes with patients.

These updates often drive significant changes in medical practice. Take the task force's 2024 decision to lower the age at which most women should start mammograms from 50 to 40. One reason was the steady increase in younger women being diagnosed with cancer. Another was new research, including a large randomized-controlled trial showing that beginning mammograms at 40 reduced mortality. Indeed, this change alone could save as many as 25,000 lives.

The breadth of the body's recommendations reflects the questions clinicians face every day. Should adults not experiencing symptoms of heart issues get an electrocardiogram? Is screening for skin cancer or prostate cancer recommended? Who should be tested for HIV, hepatitis C and syphilis, and how often? What about mental health diagnoses such as depression and anxiety? As people age, should they receive tests for dementia, hearing loss and osteoporosis?

Bobby Mukkamala, president of the American Medical Association, told me that physicians rely on these guidelines "big time." It's just not possible for them to read every new publication on every disease. His members trust the task force's carefully vetted scientists to keep them up-to-date on changing evidence. Its credibility depends on objective,

methodological evaluation of the evidence. "We want to stick to science, and opinion isn't a part of science," he said.

There is no real backup if the task force loses public trust. Many medical organizations issue treatment guidelines specific to their area of expertise. But as Georges C. Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association, explained, no other entity issues preventive care guidelines that cross specialties. The panel was founded because the federal government is a trusted source to convene top experts and "bring a consensus to the nation," he said.

Both Mukkamala and Benjamin expressed dismay over what could happen if Kennedy does to the task force what he has already done with the CDC's vaccine advisory committee—namely, replace its scientists with handpicked allies with shaky credentials and glaring biases. The result could be a wholesale rollback of cancer, diabetes and infectious-disease testing. Some insurance companies could continue to cover these services, but others could use it as an excuse to restrict benefits.

Meanwhile, the task force could start green-lighting interventions with little or no evidence to support them. Organizations such as Benjamin's and Mukkamala's would do their best to counter misinformation, but they wouldn't be able to fill the void left by the task force.

Which might be the goal. If Kennedy succeeds in taking over the task force, doctors will lose their gold-standard reference, and the public will not know which "expert" to believe. The line between trusted physician and wellness influencer would all but disappear. What a way to "Make America Healthy Again."

Phrase was meant to increase trust in science

BY AARON E. CARROLL

Special to The Washington Post

The Trump administration's 2025 budget proposed slashing the National Science Foundation's funding by 55% and the National Institutes of Health's by nearly 40%, labeling many grants "wasteful." Meanwhile, recent surveys show public trust in scientists has dropped sharply, particularly among conservative voters, compared to pre-pandemic levels. The value of science itself is being openly challenged.

Scientists, unfortunately, are partially to blame. One of the scientific community's greatest contributing missteps was the very phrase meant to help: "Follow the science."

Intended to inspire confidence, it became a common refrain at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention briefings and part of Joe Biden's pandemic plan. But science is evidence, not instruction. Treating it as something definitive to be followed shut down dialogue and dismissed all critics as "anti-science."

To win back that trust, we need a new model of communication — one that clearly separates science from policy.

Science explains the facts as we currently understand them. Sound public policy, on the other hand, involves choices and trade-offs: balancing what we know, what we can reasonably predict and what outcomes we want to achieve.

We need to be honest about what science can and can't tell us. For example, studies tell us that vaccines are unmatched in preventing

many communicable diseases; they also tell us that undercooked eggs carry a risk of salmonella. These two scientific truths inform very different policy responses. One may justify mandating vaccines in schools; the other certainly doesn't justify banning sunny-side-up eggs.

Such nuance was often glossed over during the COVID-19 pandemic. At some point, health authorities settled on six feet of distance to limit viral spread. Why not five or Europe's one meter? Digging into the literature, as many did, yields very little evidence justifying that number. It seemed more like a guess or a compromise. Yet it was repeatedly presented and received as an absolute truth—essential and nonnegotiable.

Even when challenged, officials rarely acknowledged the trade-offs of rigid public health guidance. In a 2021 press briefing, for instance, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky was asked directly where the six-foot number came from and whether it had been studied alongside masking. She reaffirmed that the number was based on prior studies and said the CDC was "revisiting" the guidance but didn't concede it might have been arbitrary, despite the burden it placed on schools and communities. Such rigidity turned healthy skepticism into angry defiance.

In much of that communication, "follow the science" became a cudgel to dismiss criticism of policy as anti-science. But science rarely offers a single, uncontested answer. Officials could build more public trust by acknowledging that the same data can support different, reasonable interpretations.

This brings us to another badly needed shift: openly admitting the limits, uncertainty and complexity of scientific evidence.

By misrepresenting scientific uncertainty as certainty, we forfeit public trust. Communicating science as rigid, top-down rules rather than nuanced guidance sows confusion and skepticism. Science itself shows this to be true.

Without trust, more information doesn't solve the problem; it often makes it worse. Studies show that emphasizing fact-based corrections without restoring trust paradoxically entrenches false beliefs. When people who strongly believed the flu shot caused the flu were given corrective information from the CDC, they became less likely to be immunized.

How do we restore trust? As a pediatrician, I was taught to communicate with patients and parents openly and without judgment, to recognize complexity and uncertainty, and to build trust patiently, one conversation at a time.

Public communication about science deserves the same. Our engagement with the public must be based on three key principles: communicating through empathy rather than fear, transparency rather than false certainty and humility rather than authority.

That also means reckoning honestly with our mistakes, including the slogan "follow the science," when science alone rarely dictates what we should do.

Aaron E. Carroll, a pediatrician, is president and CEO of AcademyHealth, a nonpartisan group that advances evidence-based health policy.

SCOREBOARD/TENNIS

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL Major League Baseball American League

ATHLETICS — Reinstated RHP Tyler Ferguson from Las Vegas (PCL). Optioned RHP Eduarniel Nuñez to Las Vegas. Sent LHP Brady Basso on a rehab assignment to Las Vegas.

HOUSTON ASTROS — Reinstated RHP Spencer Arrighetti from the 60-day IL. Optioned RHP AJ Blubaugh to Sugar Land (PCL). Transferred 3B Isaac Paredes from the 10-day IL to the 60-day IL.

MINNESOTA TWINS — Activated RHP Brooks Kriske.

National League

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS — Transferred RHP Kevin Ginkel from the 15-day IL to the 60-day IL. Selected the contract of RHP Casey Kelly from Reno (PCL). Optioned LHP Kyle Nelson to Reno.

COLORADO ROCKIES — Reinstated 2B Adael Amador from Albuquerque (PCL). Placed 2B Thairo Estrada on the 10-day IL.

MIAMI MARLINS — Sent 2B Jack Winkler outright to Jacksonville (IL).

NEW YORK METS — Sent LHP Brandon Waddell on a rehab assignment to Syracuse (IL). Recalled RHP Justin Hagenman from Syracuse. Optioned RHP Dom Hamel to Syracuse.

PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Claimed RHP Jack Little off waivers from the Los Angeles Dodgers and assigned him to Indianapolis (IL).

SAN DIEGO PADRES — Released C Martin Maldonado. Sent CF Tyler Wade outright to El Paso (PCL).

WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Recalled RHP Cade Cavalli from Rochester (IL). Optioned RHP Andry Lara to Rochester.

BASKETBALL National Basketball Association

SAN ANTONIO SPURS — Re-signed F Harrison Ingram to a two-way contract.

FOOTBALL National Football League

NFL — Suspended Detroit S Tracy Walker III for 12 games.

BUFFALO BILLS — Signed LB Jimmy Ciarlo to a contract. Waived/injured LB Baylon Spector.

CHICAGO BEARS — Signed TE Thomas Gordon to a contract. Waived/injured TE Jordan Murray.

GREEN BAY PACKERS — Signed WR Isaiah Neyor to a contract. Placed T Travis Glover on injured reserve.

HOUSTON TEXANS — Signed WR Quintez Cephus to a contract.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Waived TE McCallan Castles.

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Re-signed QB Hunter Dekkers to a contract extension. Waived P Matthew Hayball.

SOCCER Major League Soccer

AUSTIN FC — Acquired a 2025 international roster slot from Philadelphia in exchange for \$50,000 in general allocation money.

DC UNITED — Acquired \$125,000 in 2026 general allocation money from Real Salt Lake in exchange for discovery priority for F Victor Olatunji.

FC DALLAS — Transferred D Marco Farfan to Club Tigris UANL (Liga MX).

LOS ANGELES FC — Acquired F Son Heung-min from Tottenham Hotspur (English Premier League) on a permanent transfer.

MINNESOTA UNITED — Signed F Luke Hille to a short-term contract.

SAN DIEGO FC — Acquired F Corey Baird from FC Cincinnati in exchange for \$50,000 in general allocation money.

National Women's Soccer League

DENVER SUMMIT FC — Named Nick Cushing head coach.

TENNIS

National Bank Open

Wednesday At Montreal
Surface: **Hardcourt outdoor**
Seedings in parentheses
Women's Singles Semifinals

Victoria Mboko, Canada, def. Elena Rybakina (9), Kazakhstan, 1-6, 7-5, 7-6 (4).
Naomi Osaka, Japan, def. Clara Tauson (16), Denmark, 6-2, 7-6 (7).

Women's Doubles Championship

McCartney Kessler and Coco Gauff, United States, def. Zhang Shuai, China, and Taylor Townsend (3), United States, 6-4, 1-6, 13-11.

National Bank Open

Wednesday At Toronto
Purse: **\$9,193,540**
Surface: **Hardcourt outdoor**
Seedings in parentheses
Men's Singles Semifinals

Karen Khachanov (11), Russia, def. Alexander Zverev (1), Germany, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (4).
Ben Shelton (4), United States, def. Taylor Fritz (2), United States, 6-4, 6-3.

Men's Doubles Semifinals

Neal Skupski and Joe Salisbury (6), Britain, def. Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni, Argentina, 7-6 (5), 6-2.

PRO FOOTBALL

NFL preseason

Thursday's games

Indianapolis at Baltimore
Cincinnati at Philadelphia
Las Vegas at Seattle

Friday's games

Cleveland at Carolina
Detroit at Atlanta
Washington at New England

Saturday's games

N.Y. Giants at Buffalo
Houston at Minnesota
Dallas at L.A. Rams
Pittsburgh at Jacksonville
Tennessee at Tampa Bay
Kansas City at Arizona
N.Y. Jets at Green Bay
Denver at San Francisco

Sunday's games

Miami at Chicago
New Orleans at L.A. Chargers

Friday, Aug. 15

Tennessee at Atlanta
Kansas City at Seattle

Saturday, Aug. 16

Carolina at Houston
Cleveland at Philadelphia
Green Bay at Indianapolis
Miami at Detroit
New England at Minnesota
San Francisco at Las Vegas
Baltimore at Dallas
L.A. Chargers at L.A. Rams
N.Y. Jets at N.Y. Giants
Tampa Bay at Pittsburgh
Arizona at Denver

Sunday, Aug. 17

Jacksonville at New Orleans
Buffalo at Chicago

Monday, Aug. 18

Cincinnati at Washington

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA

Eastern Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	19	10	.655	—
Atlanta	18	11	.621	1
Indiana	17	13	.567	2½
Washington	13	16	.448	6
Chicago	8	21	.276	11
Connecticut	5	23	.179	13½

Western Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	25	5	.833	—
Phoenix	18	11	.621	6½
Seattle	16	14	.533	9
Las Vegas	16	14	.533	9
Golden State	14	15	.483	10½
Los Angeles	13	15	.464	11
Dallas	8	22	.267	17

Tuesday's games

New York 85, Dallas 76
Chicago 78, Washington 64
Phoenix 82, Connecticut 66
Los Angeles 100, Indiana 91
Minnesota 91, Seattle 87

Wednesday's game

Las Vegas 78, Golden State 72

Thursday's games

Atlanta at Chicago
Connecticut at Los Angeles
Indiana at Phoenix

Friday's games

New York at Dallas
Washington at Minnesota
Seattle at Las Vegas

Saturday's games

Chicago at Indiana
Los Angeles at Golden State

Sunday's games

Minnesota at New York
Washington at Dallas
Atlanta at Phoenix
Seattle at Los Angeles
Connecticut at Las Vegas

AP SPORTLIGHT

Aug. 8

1936 — At the Berlin Olympics, the United States finishes 1-2-3 in the men's decathlon. Glenn Morris sets a world record with 7,900 points, followed by Robert Clark and Jack Parker.

1984 — Carl Lewis sets the Olympic record in the 200-meter race with a time of 19.80.

1992 — The Dream Team picks up its gold medal and Carl Lewis anchors a world-record 400-meter relay, winning his eighth gold medal in three Olympics.

2006 — Roger Goodell is chosen as the NFL's next commissioner. Favored for months to get the job, he is unanimously elected on the fifth ballot.

2010 — Los Angeles Sparks forward Tina Thompson scores 23 points to become the WNBA's all-time scoring leader in a 92-83 loss to the San Antonio Silver Stars. She surpasses Lisa Leslie's career total of

PRO SOCCER

MLS

Western Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
San Diego FC	14	7	4	46	48	32
Vancouver	13	5	6	45	42	26
Minn. United	12	5	8	44	42	28
Seattle	10	6	8	38	39	35
Portland	10	7	7	37	33	32
LAFC	10	6	6	36	39	28
Austin FC	9	8	6	33	21	26
Real Salt Lake	9	11	4	31	26	30
Colorado	8	11	6	30	31	39
San Jose	7	10	8	29	47	44
Houston	7	11	6	27	30	39
FC Dallas	6	11	7	25	35	45
Sporting KC	6	12	6	24	36	45
St Louis City	4	14	6	18	24	40
LA Galaxy	3	14	7	16	28	48

Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Philadelphia	15	5	5	50	43	24
Cincinnati	15	6	4	49	39	31
Nashville	14	6	5	47	42	26
Columbus	12	5	8	44	41	36
Inter Miami CF	12	4	6	42	49	34
Orlando City	11	6	8	41	46	33
Charlotte FC	12	11	2	38	43	39
NYC FC	11	8	5	38	34	29
Chicago	10	9	5	35	45	40
New York	9	10	6	33	39	36
New England	6	11	7	25	31	35
Toronto FC	5	13	6	21	25	32
Atlanta	4	11	9	21	29	45
D.C. United	4	14	7	19	22	49
CF Montréal	4	15	6	18	23	46

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

Saturday's games

Atlanta at CF Montréal
D.C. United at New England
Columbus at New York City FC
Toronto FC at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Los Angeles FC at Chicago
Portland at FC Dallas
Nashville at St Louis City
San Diego FC at Sporting Kansas City
Vancouver at San Jose

Sunday's games

Charlotte FC at Cincinnati
Colorado at Minnesota
Real Salt Lake at New York
Miami at Orlando City
Seattle at LA Galaxy

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Kansas City	12	2	0	36	31	10
Orlando	8	4	1	25	20	10
San Diego	7	3	4	25	25	16
Seattle	7	4	3	24	19	13
Washington	7	4	2	23	21	19
Portland	6	3	4	22	19	12
Louisville	6	6	2	20	19	24
Gotham FC	5	5	4	19	19	14
North Carolina	5	5	4	19	18	20
Bay FC	4	6	4	16	16	19
Angel City	4	7	3	15	20	26
Houston	3	8	3	12	15	24
Chicago	1	9	4	7	11	28
Utah Royals FC	1	10	2	5	11	29

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

Friday's games

North Carolina at Houston
Kansas City at Utah Royals FC

Saturday's games

Washington at Gotham FC
Louisville at Orlando
Angel City at San Diego

Sunday's games

Bay FC at Chicago
Seattle at Portland

Shelton into final with win over Fritz

Mboko, Osaka will face off in Montreal

Associated Press

TORONTO — Fourth-seeded Ben Shelton beat second-seeded Taylor Fritz 6-4, 6-3 in an all-American semifinal match Wednesday night in the National Bank Open.

Shelton will face 11th-seeded Karen Khachanov of Russia, a 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (4) winner over top-seeded Alexander Zverev of Germany in the first semifinal in Masters 1000 hard-court event.

“I’ve seen so many big improvements in my game this week, that’s what I’m most happy about, how I’m executing, how little I’m hesitating, how I’m returning,” Shelton said. “There are a lot of things to be proud about and beating two top-10 guys back-to-back is huge for me.”

The 22-year-old Shelton is seeking his third career ATP Tour title. He won in Tokyo on hard courts in 2023 and Houston last year on clay.

“I’m just really excited to see myself executing like this, not wondering if the shot is going to go in or out, but expecting it to go in,” Shelton said.

The 26-year-old Fritz has 10 career victories, winning this year on grass at Stuttgart and Eastbourne.

Khachanov, a seven-time tour winner, survived a match point.

“Today was a real close one,” Khachanov said “I was match-point down. If the ball touches the net and drops over we wouldn’t be talking now.”

Zverev, the 2017 champion with 24 tour titles, is No. 3 in the world.

Zverev was the top seed with top-ranked Jannik Sinner — the 2023 winner — and No. 2 Carlos Alcaraz skipping the expanded event.

In the WTA National Bank Open in Montreal, Canadian teenager Victoria Mboko rallied to beat ninth-seeded Elena Rybakina 1-6, 7-5, 7-6 (4) and reach the final where she’ll face Japanese star Naomi Osaka, a 6-2, 7-6 (7), winner over 16th-seeded Clara Tauson of Denmark in the second semifinal.

The 18-year-old Mboko dropped to the court after Rybakina’s shot sailed long on match point as the crowd — lined with “Allez Vicky” — erupted. Mboko saved a match point in the third set and broke Rybakina twice to force the tiebreaker.

“Incredible match, thank you to everyone for supporting me,” Mboko told the crowd in French.



CHRIS YOUNG, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

Ben Shelton, of the United States, celebrates after beating fellow American Taylor Fritz in the semifinals Wednesday.

“It was really difficult, but anything can happen.”

Mboko, ranked 85th in the world, is seeking her first WTA Tour title and trying to join Faye Urban (1969) and Bianca Andreescu (2019) as the only Canadians to win the home event in the open era.

“Playing in front of the home crowd, obviously, has its advantages,” Mboko said. “You always have everyone pumping you up as much as they can. It really pulls me through in the tough moments where I’m maybe not as positive. Really blessed to have that kind of support.”

Born in Charlotte, N.C., to Congolese parents, Mboko grew up in Toronto. She upset top-seeded Coco Gauff 6-1, 6-4 on Saturday to reach the quarterfinals, then topped Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 6-4, 6-2 on Monday. At 2 hours, 46 minutes, the match Wednesday was the longest of Mboko’s short tour career.

“I knew that she was a tough opponent,” Rybakina said. “She served really well in these important moments. It was a very close match, like a big fight. So it could go any way, but it went hers.”

Mboko overcame 11 double-faults and battled through a wrist injury after stumbling awkwardly to the ground in the second game of the third set. She’ll move up to at least 34th in the world after starting the year outside the top 300.

Osaka, the four-time Grand Slam champion who reached No. 1 in the world, continued her best performance in a WTA 1000 tournament since reaching the Miami final in 2022. She stepped for 15 months toward the end of that season and had daughter Shai in July 2023. She’s seeking her eighth title and her first since the 2021 Australian Open.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Georgia's standard remains same even with young roster

By CHARLES ODUM
Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. — Kirby Smart opened his 10th season as Georgia coach last week knowing he didn't have to worry about his message growing old with his players.

More than half of Georgia's players are starting their first or second years. Smart knows his lessons won't quickly sound stale for the defending Southeastern Conference champion Bulldogs. With only seven returning starters, Georgia opened practice with a long list of young players eager to seize their first starting jobs.

"We are young ... but we are hungry," Smart said. "We've got a team that's fun to coach. ... A lot of them haven't had an opportunity to play, and now this is their opportunity. Sometimes when you're coaching, it's a lot more exciting for guys when they're having their first time. Now that being said, the lack of experience sometimes can show, but we're going to try to get through that in camp."

A more experienced Georgia team finished 11-3 last season and No. 6 in The AP Top 25 final poll. It was the team's eighth consecutive top 10 finish under Smart, including back-to-back national championships in 2021 and 2022. Last season's SEC championship was Georgia's third with Smart.

Georgia returns only four starters on offense. That total includes two tight ends — Oscar Delp and Lawson Luckie, who made seven starts. Right tackle Earnest Greene III is the only returning starter on the offensive line. Wide receiver Dillon Bell is the fourth returning starter on offense.

Quarterback Gunner Stockton took over for injured Carson Beck in the second half of Georgia's 22-19 overtime win over Texas in the Southeastern Conference championship game. Stockton started in the Bulldogs' 23-10 loss to Notre Dame in the CFP semifinals.

Smart says Stockton is still competing with Ryan Pughli, but it

would be a major surprise if the junior doesn't start in Georgia's season opener against Marshall on Aug. 30. Following Beck's transfer to Miami, Stockton strengthened his hold on the job with a strong spring practice.

The defense includes only three starters: lineman Christen Miller, inside linebacker C.J. Allen and cornerback Daylen Everette.

Smart, 49, was asked if he still lives up to the team's 2025 motto: "fire, passion, energy."

"I feel it every day, because if you don't have it, it's hard to be successful," Smart said. "You can't keep up. Our staff has it. Our staff has great juice. We've had a chance to reenergize."

Delp was a freshman on Georgia's 2022 national championship team. He said he's motivated to help the Bulldogs win another title and has tried to share lessons from that team with new players.

"I came back for a reason," Delp said when asked why he didn't enter the NFL draft. "I want to have a great season."

"I know how it was when when we won games and we won national championships. I was here for that and so I just kind of share with them the standard and what those older guys were holding me to when I was younger. I just try to keep it the same, you know, the standard is the standard."

Offensive guard Micah Morris (6-4, 330) entered camp as a projected starter. The fifth-year senior was a fill-in starter last season. This is his long-awaited opportunity to be a full-time starter.

Morris, who has a nickname of "Big Mike" and a reputation as the strongest player on the team, said he never considered finding an opportunity to start at another school through a transfer.

"This is my home, this is where I committed," Morris said. "This is where I wanted to be when I was a 17-year-old kid. ... I knew I could develop here even if I wasn't starting."



REBECCA S. GRATZ/AP

Warren Sapp is the defensive pass-rush specialist for Colorado this season. He and other assistants who bring NFL playing and coaching experience make sure the Buffaloes are paying attention to details.

Sanders, staff boast tons of NFL experience, awards

By PAT GRAHAM
Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — Warren Sapp strictly enforces Colorado players being in straight lines while stretching at practice. Marshall Faulk harps over and over on proper footwork.

These two Hall of Fame players turned coaches are sticklers for the little things. That's on orders from the third member of their gold-coat club: Deion Sanders.

Sapp and Faulk are part of a Buffaloes coaching staff that boasts 160 years of total NFL experience (playing, coaching or covering). The crew runs a no-nonsense, tight-knit operation, which came in handy when Sanders was away and fighting bladder cancer. The coaching staff keeps reaffirming what Sanders always stresses — paying attention to the details.

"It's the little things that will make us great," explained Sapp, who is the defensive pass-rush specialist for the Buffaloes this season. "It's the tedious repetition of the little things, over and over and over again. That's what we do."

"He (Sanders) has so much other things on his plate. I figured I'd handle the little things. ... We really don't ask much of them, except, let's go to work and that's what we're going to do."

In addition to Sapp and Faulk, the list of coaches that Sanders has assembled with NFL experience includes offensive coordinator Pat Shurmur, defensive coordinator Robert Livingston, receivers coach Jason Phillips, defensive passing game coordinator/cornerbacks coach Kevin Mathis, defensive line coach Domata Peko, and offensive line coaches George Hegamin and Andre Gurode.

Combined — and, of course, counting Sanders — that's 27 Pro Bowls, five Super Bowl titles, an NFL MVP (Faulk), three Pro Football Hall of Famers (Sanders, Faulk, Sapp), two NFL defensive player of the year honors (Sapp, Sanders) and an NFL offensive player of the year recipient (Faulk, three times).

"When you have a whole bunch of guys that's been there and done that, and played in the league, it's definitely a blessing for us," Peko said. "Everyone kind of checks their egos at the door, and we all just try to collaborate together."

The Buffaloes may be adding more experience, too. Sanders said at Big 12 media day last month he's trying to bring in ex-NFL QB Byron Leftwich and former Vikings head coach Mike Zimmer to the staff.

"With those two added, that's 204 years of NFL experience," Sanders said, "and I want those years."

Faulk and Sapp were both in Canton, Ohio, last weekend for the Hall of Fame induction ceremony. There, they hung out with the greats of the game, with Sapp recording personal video messages from past players to show his impressionable Buffaloes.

"I just soak it up from them, and I bring it back to the babies, because just hearing it from me, they hear me all the time," said Sapp, who had 96 1/2 sacks over his 13-year-career. "But when John Randle was on (the video), and I can see their eyes pop up I got a whole new message. ... I'm going to give them everything I got."

For Faulk, being in Canton just reaffirmed his passion for football — and coaching.

"I literally sold popcorn in the

Superdome because I couldn't afford a ticket to watch the sorriest team in the '80s — the Saints," cracked Faulk, whose Buffaloes open the season Aug. 29 by hosting Georgia Tech. "I just love football and to be around the guys (in Canton) who gave me the opportunity to play this game and left the game in my hands, there's nothing like it."

"But it was the first time I'd been there and wanted to be somewhere else."

Namely, working with his fleet of running backs.

Sophomore Micah Welch was in the lunch room when he heard about the hiring of Faulk in February. Welch went home that night and pulled up some highlight footage.

"It was amazing," Welch said.

Faulk was dazzling on the field, a dual threat out of the backfield who spent his 12 seasons in the NFL with the Indianapolis Colts and the St. Louis Rams. He rushed for 12,279 yards and 100 TDs, while also catching 767 passes for 6,875 yards and 36 scores.

He's teaching his tailbacks the little things like footwork — "I'm a stickler for footwork," Faulk said — along with how they receive a handoff from their QB.

"After that, go be creative," Faulk said. "But we all start with the canvas and the paint brush the same way before we go make art."

For Faulk, it was an easy decision to join Sanders in Boulder. They've been longtime friends.

"Coming here not just to win games on the field, but to win the game off the field, which is to make sure that these young men in life become what they want to become," the 52-year-old Faulk said. "That's the important part."



MIKE STEWART/AP

Gunner Stockton is expected to be Georgia's starting quarterback after playing when Carson Beck was injured last season.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL/GOLF

Ohio State's QB competition still unsettled

By JOE REEDY
Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — After the first quarter of Ohio State's pre-season practices, the competition between Julian Sayin and Lincoln Kienholz for the starting quarterback spot remains too close to call.

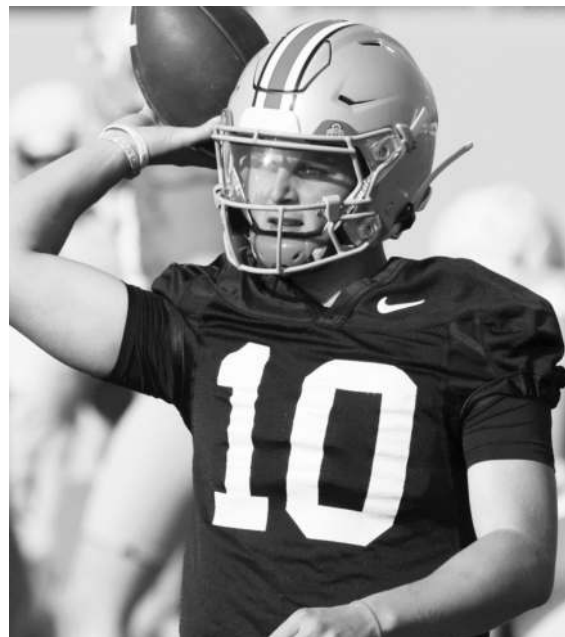
"The competition continues," coach Ryan Day said. "They both have had good moments and moments where they're growing. I will say I've been pleased with the progress. It's going to go right down to the wire."

"The positives of having a competition is that you know every day you got to bring it. The guys are always on edge, they're uncomfortable, they're working at it. I think that's healthy for the entire building."

A quarterback competition the season after winning the College Football Playoff championship is routine at Ohio State. The circumstances, though, are different.

In 2015, Cardale Jones and J.T. Barrett both had experience as they battled. Jones led the Buckeyes to the title when he started the Big Ten championship and both CFP games after Barrett broke his ankle against Michigan.

Sayin and Kienholz have a combined 34 pass attempts and 90 college snaps. They are competing to replace Will Howard, who transferred from Kansas State and threw for a Big Ten-high 4,010 yards and 35 touchdowns in leading the Buckeyes to their sixth na-



RICHARD W. RODRIGUEZ (LEFT), PAUL VERNON (RIGHT)/AP

Ohio State quarterbacks Lincoln Kienholz, left, and Julian Sayin are competing to be the starter. Neither has experience as they have combined for a total of 34 pass attempts and 90 college snaps.

tional title.

Quarterbacks coach Billy Fessler is looking for consistency, especially as the Buckeyes start getting more into situational scenarios during practices the next two weeks.

"We have to be great on third down and in the red zone. That's where quarterbacks make their money," Fessler said.

"We're in a spot where we're getting more and more of those situations every day. So it's an opportunity for those guys to go out and compete."

Sayin has shown better arm strength, though Kienholz has more athleticism after playing three sports in high school.

Sayin originally committed to Alabama as the top-rated quarterback in the Class of 2024 and was taking classes when Nick Saban retired. Sayin then entered the transfer portal last spring and came to Ohio State. He played in four games, including the CFP first-round contest against Tennessee, and was 5-for-12 for 84 yards and one touchdown while taking 27 snaps.

The sophomore is the slight favorite to emerge as the starter for the Aug. 30 opener against Texas, but he hasn't paid any attention to the outside hype.

"I feel like I'm developing in my footwork accuracy and mechanics. It's just all about building confidence. You make a great play, you start to build that confidence," Sayin said.

The last snaps Kienholz took in a game were in the 2023 Cotton Bowl against Missouri after starter Devin Brown was injured in the first half. Kienholz struggled, as

he completed only six of 17 passes for 86 yards.

However, the junior had a great offseason and was one of eight Ohio State players named an Iron Buckeye, which goes to players who excel during offseason workouts.

"As a freshman going in there, I didn't really know a whole lot. I didn't really know how protections worked and I mean, now that's something that I feel like I'm pretty good at, and I go out and execute that well," Kienholz said. "I've been in the offense for three years now, so it's something that I think just more time, more reps and film study, it's helped me get better."

Freshman Tavien St. Clair is also getting snaps, but is still getting up to speed with the offense. He did come in as an early enrollee and participated in spring practices.

Besides quarterback, Day and the coaching staff are looking for some of the positions to get an established starting group toward the end of the week. Day used a phrase from safeties coach Matt Guerrieri in comparing this week to the third round of a golf tournament, which is typically called moving day.

"This is moving week. We want to have our identity and it doesn't need to be in stone, but the players can tell us what we're doing and what our identity is coming out of this week," Day said.

Scheffler chose rest over practice, and now he's ready

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Scottie Scheffler returned home from his British Open victory, made a few brief appearances in New York and used the claret jug to get 15-month-old son Bennett into the men's grill at Royal Oaks in Dallas.

He is rested. The key for Scheffler, regardless of the tournament, is to be ready. But this is the time of the year, even with \$15 million at stake, not to be grinding on the range.

"At this point in the year, that extra practice is maybe only going to be draining for me a little bit, and that's something that I've learned to manage as my career has gone on," Scheffler said Wednesday after his pro-am round in the FedEx St. Jude Championship.

The tournament at TPC Southwind is the start of three straight FedEx Cup playoff events that culminate with the FedEx Cup title to whoever wins the Tour Championship.

In a revamped postseason, the \$25 million to the winner has been split up into three parts. Scheffler

already picked up \$10 million for leading the FedEx Cup in the regular season (along with \$8 million from the Comcast Business Top 10 bonus program).

The FedEx Cup leader after the BMW Championship next week gets \$5 million, and the winner of the Tour Championship — all 30 players start from scratch this time — gets \$10 million.

The TPC Southwind is where Scheffler last missed a cut in 2022 (when the postseason was for the top 125 players, not the top 70). This year he comes to the postseason off a double major season — the PGA Championship and the British Open — and has finished in the top 10 in his last 11 tournaments dating to March.

It's safe to say his game is in reasonably good shape. Now it's about conserving energy for August stops in Memphis, Baltimore and Atlanta.

"I would say my prep week last week definitely looked a bit different than it would have looked before the Scottish Open (in July) and definitely looked a little bit different than it would have looked if you go back to the begin-



GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

Scottie Scheffler walks across the practice green at the St. Jude Championship on Wednesday, in Memphis, Tenn.

ning of the year when I was coming off injury," he said.

"So making sure I'm rested, ready to play," he said. "My game is in a good spot, and I feel like some extra practice at this point in the year can almost be detrimental in terms of just physical and mental fatigue."

Scheffler stopped in New York

for a brief appearance on the Jimmy Fallon Show and to attend the Happy Gilmore 2 premier. A lot of time included that silver claret jug he picked up from a dominant victory at Royal Portrush.

"We had a party two weeks ago at home with some of our friends, and everybody got to drink out of it. It was a lot of fun," Scheffler

said.

He also has brought golf's oldest trophy to his home course at Royal Oaks — Justin Leonard brought the claret jug to the course when he won the Open in 1997 — and there was one time he went with just his son.

"He whacked some golf balls around, and we hung out for a bit," Scheffler said. "I took him to the 19th hole with me, and I got some pretty funny pictures with Bennett sitting in the 19th hole at the men's only grill where you've got to be — I think you've got to be 19 to get in there, but I figured if we bring in a couple major championship trophies with us, they'll let the rules slide on that one."

And now it's back to work. The points are quadrupled for the postseason, but Scheffler has such a lead — and Rory McIlroy is sitting this one out — that he is assured of staying at No. 1.

This is one of the most important tournaments of the year because the top 50 after this week not only advance to the BMW Championship, they are assured of getting in all the \$20 million signature events next year.

MLB

Officiating barriers continue falling

Associated Press

This weekend, Jen Pawol will make history by becoming the first woman to umpire a Major League Baseball game. She's set to work the series between the Miami Marlins and Atlanta Braves.

The 48-year-old from New Jersey has worked spring training games over the last two years and in the minors since 2016.

Here's a look at other female officials who were the first on the floor, court or the field in prominent men's leagues:

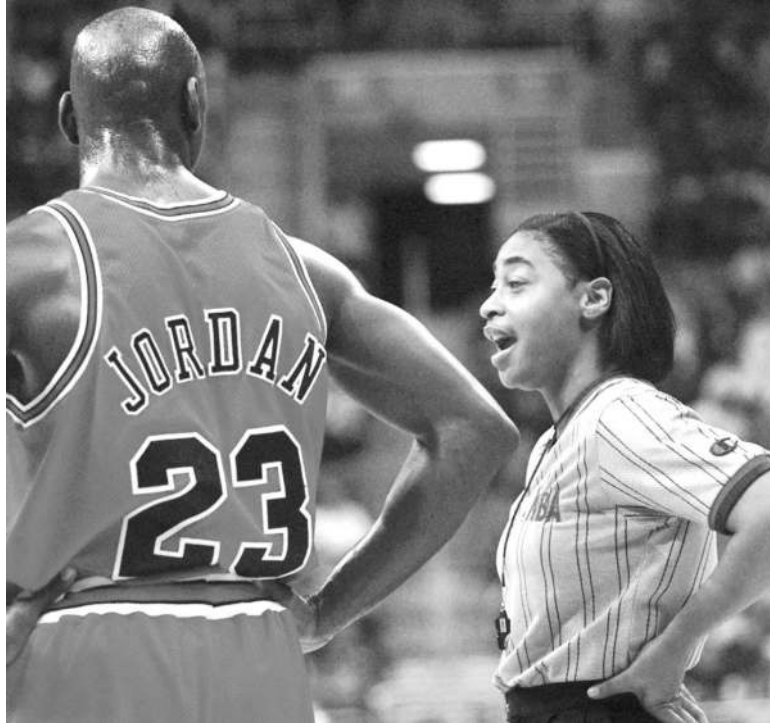
NFL

Shannon Eastin became the first female official in NFL history when she was a line judge during a preseason game in August 2012 between the Green Bay Packers and the Chargers, who were then in San Diego.

A month later, she became the first woman to be an official in an NFL regular-season game when she worked as the line judge in the Rams-Lions game. Eastin was among the replacement officials hired by the league during a lock-out of the regular officials.

The first woman to get a full-season job was Sarah Thomas, who was a line judge in 2015. Thomas also became the first woman to work a Super Bowl when she was part of the seven-person crew on Feb. 7, 2021, when Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers beat Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs, 31-9.

Thomas was already the first



MARK DUNCAN/AP

Referee Violet Palmer talks with Chicago star Michael Jordan during a game between the Bulls and Cavaliers on Nov. 11, 1997, in Cleveland.

woman to officiate a major college football game — and to work a bowl game.

NBA

Violet Palmer and Dee Kantner were hired by the NBA for the 1997 season. Palmer made her NBA debut on Oct. 31, 1997, when she was on the floor for the season opener between the Vancouver Grizzlies and the Dallas Mavericks. Palmer worked that night with Bill Oakes and Mark Wunderlich.

Kantner's first game was Nov. 5,

1997, when the Atlanta Hawks beat the Philadelphia 76ers 93-88. Kantner worked alongside Ron Garretson and Ed Middleton. Palmer retired in 2016, and Kantner is still officiating women's NCAA basketball.

NHL

The NHL has yet to have a female on-ice official for a regular season or Stanley Cup playoff game.

In the mid-1990s, Heather McDaniel received some national attention for officiating men's mi-

nor league games for the Central Hockey League and West Coast Hockey League. Two decades later, the NHL selected four female officials to work on the ice at the 2019 prospect tournaments. Katie Guay and Kelly Cooke served as referees, while Kirsten Welsh and Kendall Hanley worked as linesmen. It marked the first time women have officiated at the pre-training camp prospects tournament level.

There was a subtle change made before the 2023-24 season when "linesmen" became "linespersons," with women in the American Hockey League working their way up.

Men's World Cup

French referee Stéphanie Frapart made history in 2022 by becoming the first woman to be in charge of a men's World Cup match. The game between Germany at Costa Rica was held in Al Khor, Qatar.

Working the game with Frapart were two female assistants — Neuza Back of Brazil and Karen Diaz Medina of Mexico.

Men's NCAA tournament

Melanie Davis was the first woman to officiate a Division I NCAA men's tournament game when she was on the floor for a first-round matchup between San Diego State and Illinois on March 15, 2002.

Leading into the historical game, Davis had officiated men's contests in the Southwestern Athletic Conference.



JEFF ROBERSON/AP

Before becoming a full-time umpire, Jen Pawol was a three-time all-conference pick as a softball player at Hofstra and was on the USA Baseball women's national team in 2001.

lege while still playing on the side.

"I wasn't really satisfied," she said last year. "Coming off of a huge competitive career, just playing locally, I wasn't getting my fix. And I remember looking at the umpire and being like, 'I think that's it. I got to go for that.'"

After umpiring NCAA softball from 2010-16, she attended an MLB umpire tryout camp in 2015,

was invited to the Umpire Training Academy at Vero Beach, Fla., and was offered a job in the Gulf Coast League in 2016. She's been working in the minor leagues since, including for the 2023 Triple-A championship game.

MLB has 76 full-time staff umpires and uses fill-ins on crews for openings created by injuries and vacations.

Scoreboard

American League

East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Toronto	68	48	.586	—
Boston	64	52	.552	4
New York	61	54	.530	6½
Tampa Bay	57	59	.491	11
Baltimore	52	63	.452	15½

Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	66	50	.569	—
Cleveland	59	55	.518	6
Kansas City	57	58	.496	8½
Minnesota	54	60	.474	11
Chicago	42	72	.368	23

West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	64	51	.557	—
Seattle	62	53	.539	2
Texas	60	56	.517	4½
Los Angeles	55	60	.478	9
Athletics	50	66	.431	14½

National League

East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	65	49	.570	—
New York	63	52	.548	2½
Miami	56	57	.496	8½
Atlanta	47	66	.416	17½
Washington	45	68	.398	19½

Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	70	44	.614	—
Chicago	66	48	.579	4
Cincinnati	60	55	.522	10½
St. Louis	58	58	.500	13
Pittsburgh	49	66	.426	21½

West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	66	49	.574	—
San Diego	64	51	.557	2
San Francisco	58	57	.504	8
Arizona	54	61	.470	12
Colorado	30	84	.263	35½

Wednesday's games

San Francisco 4, Pittsburgh 2
 Baltimore 5, Philadelphia 1
 Cleveland 4, N.Y. Mets 1
 Minnesota 9, Detroit 4
 Chicago Cubs 6, Cincinnati 1
 N.Y. Yankees 3, Texas 2
 Toronto 20, Colorado 1
 Tampa Bay 5, L.A. Angels 4
 St. Louis 5, L.A. Dodgers 3
 Miami 6, Houston 4
 Washington 2, Athletics 1
 Kansas City 7, Boston 3
 Milwaukee 5, Atlanta 4
 San Diego 3, Arizona 2
 Seattle 8, Chicago White Sox 6

Thursday's games

Athletics at Washington
 Chicago White Sox at Seattle
 Cincinnati at Pittsburgh
 Miami at Atlanta

Friday's games

Cincinnati (Burns 0-3) at Pittsburgh (Keller 5-10)
 Athletics (Ginn 2-3) at Baltimore (Sugano 8-5)
 Houston (Brown 9-5) at N.Y. Yankees (Schlitter 1-2)
 L.A. Angels (Hendricks 6-8) at Detroit (Skubal 11-3)
 Miami (Cabrera 5-5) at Atlanta (Elder 4-8)
 Cleveland (Bibee 7-9) at Chicago White Sox (Civale 3-6)
 Philadelphia (Sánchez 10-3) at Texas (Kelly 9-6)
 Kansas City (Lugo 8-5) at Minnesota (Ryan 10-5)
 N.Y. Mets (Senga 7-3) at Milwaukee (Woodruff 3-0)
 Chicago Cubs (Boyd 11-4) at St. Louis (McGreevy 3-2)
 Colorado (Gomber 0-5) at Arizona (Galien 8-12)
 Boston (Buehler 6-6) at San Diego (Pivetta 11-3)
 Tampa Bay (Rasmussen 9-5) at Seattle (Castillo 8-6)
 Toronto (Scherzer 2-1) at L.A. Dodgers (Kershaw 5-2)
 Washington (Irvin 8-6) at San Francisco (Teng 0-1)

Saturday's games

Miami at Atlanta, 2
 Houston at N.Y. Yankees
 Washington at San Francisco
 L.A. Angels at Detroit
 Cincinnati at Pittsburgh
 Athletics at Baltimore
 Kansas City at Minnesota
 Cleveland at Chicago White Sox
 N.Y. Mets at Milwaukee
 Philadelphia at Texas
 Chicago Cubs at St. Louis
 Colorado at Arizona
 Boston at San Diego
 Toronto at L.A. Dodgers
 Tampa Bay at Seattle

History: Pawol has called games in minors since 2016

FROM PAGE 48

any women as on-ice officials.

"I think if she is a good enough umpire, obviously she deserves to be here," Toronto pitcher Kevin Gausman said.

Pawol in 2024 became the first woman to umpire big league spring training games since Ria Cortesio in 2007. Cortesio spent nine years in the minor leagues, including the last five in the Double-A Southern League, then was released after the 2007 season.

"We had seen her in spring training a lot," Philadelphia Phillies star Trea Turner said. "I don't know much about her or statistics or anything like that, but if she's doing a great job, I love seeing the opportunity for her, and I'm happy for her. I talked to her a little bit in spring training and she seems like a great person and I wish her all the best."

Pawol was an all-state softball and soccer player in New Jersey for three seasons in each sport at

"I remember looking at the umpire and being like, 'I think that's it. I got to go for that.'"

Jen Pawol
MLB umpire

West Milford High School. She went to Hofstra on a softball scholarship and became a three-time all-conference pick and was on the USA Baseball women's national team in 2001.

Pawol got a master's degree and was living in the Binghamton area of New York and taking teacher certification classes at Elmira Col-

MLB

HOF hopefuls Scherzer, Kershaw square off

By **BETH HARRIS**
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Max Scherzer vs. Clayton Kershaw sounds like an enticing postseason matchup in October. Fans won't have to wait that long. The likely Hall of Famers square off Friday in a rare contest between the most recent members of baseball's 3,000-strikeout club.

"You probably aren't going to see that very often these days," Los Angeles Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "I have a lot of respect for Max. It'll be good to see him and hopefully we can have our way with him."

Scherzer is, alongside his left-handed opponent, perhaps one of this generation's greatest pitchers. He and Kershaw have each won World Series titles and are three-time Cy Young Award winners. Scherzer, 41, is an eight-time All-Star, while the 37-year-old Kershaw has 11 All-Star appearances, including this year as a Legend Pick by Commissioner Rob Manfred.

Scherzer became the 19th member of the 3,000-strikeout club while pitching for the Dodgers in September 2021. Kershaw joined him as the 20th member last month. The duo, along with Justin Verlander, are the only active pitchers to reach the 3,000-strikeout mark.

"I loved playing with him. I love competing against him. I have all the respect in the world for him," Scherzer said from Colorado, where his Toronto Blue Jays earned a sweep this week. "We've been pitching for so long, you don't



JOSE JUAREZ, TOP, AND STEVEN SENNE, BOTTOM/AP

Max Scherzer, top, and Clayton Kershaw have both been active since 2008, ranking among baseball's longest tenured active players, and both have over 200 career wins and 3,000 strikeouts.

know how many more chances you are going to get at this, to face somebody of his ilk. This is what you dream of, facing the best. It should be a lot of fun."

But such a high-stakes duel doesn't always live up to the anticipation.

In September 2023, Scherzer and Verlander squared off for the first time in a matchup of 200-game winners. Scherzer, then with Texas, didn't make it to the fourth inning. Verlander, also a three-time Cy Young Award winner who was then with Houston, scattered six hits over seven innings.

Rookie left-hander Jack Dreyer has a locker just a few feet from Kershaw's in the Los Angeles clubhouse. He also played against



Scherzer last season in a rehab outing.

"The way they go about their business is what separates them. To an extent there's the talent, but

they also just work harder than everybody else, especially Kersh," Dreyer said. "It's not always easy to listen to guys if they're talking to you about how to get better but you

don't see them doing it. With him, it's just so easy because I see him working his butt off every single day. He's the easiest guy in the world to learn from."

Blue Jays bench coach Don Mattingly will be watching Scherzer and Kershaw, who he managed with the Dodgers from 2011-15.

"They work. They are detailed in what they want to do," Mattingly said.

Mattingly credits then-LA pitching coach Rick Honeycutt for helping Kershaw develop a slider to add to the primary fastball-changeup mix that he used early in his 18-year career.

"Just that two-pitch combo is tough. Umps miss that curveball because it is big. So they'd 'ball' it on him," Mattingly said. "Then he came with the slider, which really changed him, being able to get down under the right-hander. Speed them up a little bit, and then that curveball was kind of a putaway when he had that going."

Friday's series opener at Dodger Stadium is a matchup of division leaders. Toronto leads the AL East by four games over Boston. Los Angeles' NL West lead over San Diego has shriveled to two.

And that's ultimately what matters to Scherzer.

"If you start putting the importance on this matchup with them and put your attention toward this, you are going to overlook some other things," he said. "They won the World Series last year. They're the champs. You want a shot at the champs. You want to beat them. That's what this game is about."

Williams nearly pitches Guardians' first no-hitter in 44 years

By **JERRY BEACH**
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Two hard-hit comebackers in the first inning Wednesday afternoon had Gavin Williams worrying about the direction his start would take against the New York Mets.

Instead, the Guardians right-hander nearly made history.

Williams came within two outs of Cleveland's first no-hitter in 44 years before Juan Soto homered with one out in the ninth and Hunter Gaddis finished the combined one-hitter in a 4-1 win.

"Man, it was that close," Guardians manager Stephen Vogt said. "I thought he was going to get it."

Williams wasn't thinking no-hitter after an eventful first. Francisco Lindor's 107.2 mph liner on Williams' second pitch knocked off his glove — the right-hander scrambled for the loose ball and threw out the former Cleveland star — before Williams snared another liner by Pete Alonso for the final out.

"It scared me, I will say that," Williams said of Lindor's liner. "I thought I was going to have to change pants or something. And then Alonso did the same thing and I thought I was really going to have to."

Three walks over the next three innings raised his pitch count and seemed to make a no-hitter bid unlikely. But Williams, who was at 61 pitches after walking Brandon Nimmo with one out in the fourth, needed just 53 pitches to retire the next 15 batters.

"At one point I didn't even care about the pitch count," said Williams, whose previous career high for pitches was 109. "Didn't matter if I went 140."

Vogt had nobody warming in the ninth when Williams struck out Lindor before Soto homered just beyond the leaping grasp of centerfielder Angel Martínez.

"Man, I wish I could be like Spider-Man, get that ball," Martínez said.

With Gaddis warming, Williams retired Pete Alonso on a fly out before walking Nimmo for the third time. Gaddis needed just three pitches to get Mark Vientos to fly out and secure a Guardians win.

Williams finished at 126 pitches, the most in the majors since Alex Cobb threw 131 in a one-hit complete game for the San Francisco Giants on Aug. 29, 2023. His no-hit bid was the longest for Cleveland since Carlos Carrasco had his no-hitter broken up with two outs in the ninth inning by Tampa Bay's Joey Butler on July 1, 2015.

"With the four-run lead like that, you've



YUKI IWAMURA/AP

Cleveland Guardians pitcher Gavin Williams came within two outs of the franchise's first no-hitter since 1981 before giving up a home run to the New York Mets' Juan Soto.

got to let him go," Vogt said. "You don't know how many chances a pitcher's ever going to have to do it. So he was going to get to go the whole way."

The near no-hitter continued a breakout season for Williams, whose 2.08 ERA since May 3 is the lowest in the AL.

"Kind of Gavin Williams' coming-out party this year," Hedges said.

But the party to celebrate the end of the longest active no-hitter drought in the majors will have to wait. The Guardians have not thrown a no-hitter in their last 7,115 games dating back to May 15, 1981, when

Len Barker twirled the eighth perfect game of the modern era in a 3-0 win over the Toronto Blue Jays.

Barker watched the game from behind home plate at Cleveland's Progressive Field, where he was participating in a workout with the Guardians' corporate partners.

Still, to come so close to joining Barker in the history books was not an outcome Williams could have imagined in the first inning.

"Heck no," Williams said with a grin. "After that, I thought it was going to go one way. And it was not the way I thought."

NFL

Young QBs in focus while Commanders, Patriots share field

BY KYLE HIGHTOWER
Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Drake Maye isn't exactly measuring himself against Jayden Daniels.

But the New England Patriots quarterback is keeping tabs on what his Washington Commanders' counterpart — and others from their draft class — are up to heading into their second NFL seasons.

Maye and Daniels were on the field together Wednesday for a joint practice between the teams in advance of their preseason game Friday. For Maye, it was a reminder of the potential and expectations they both carry.

"I saw him out there. I congratulated him. What a year he had," Maye said.

"I think there's always in the back of your mind the draft class you came in with, and anytime you play him, especially, it's a little different. ... I think I'm just trying to worry about myself, but at the end of the day, keep up with those guys. Those guys are — him and Caleb (Williams) and Bo (Nix), those guys are good friends of

mine, and they're friends until we play each other."

Friday's game won't count in the standings and Washington will be approaching it as such, with Commanders coach Dan Quinn announcing before practice that Daniels will not play in the exhibition.

With backup Marcus Mariota also nursing a lower leg strain, quarterbacks Josh Johnson and Sam Hartman will handle the offense for Washington.

Receiver Terry McLaurin, who is on the physically unable to perform list with an ankle injury in addition to "holding in" as contract talks continue, was among the Commanders players that didn't make the trip.

But Maye is expected to see action, with first-year New England coach Mike Vrabel saying that all healthy players would receive at least some playing time.

During practice, Maye spread the ball around for multiple TD passes during some red zone situations.

But Washington's defense got the best of Maye later when his



CHARLES KRUPA/AP

Patriots quarterback Drake Maye, right, will get some action when New England hosts Washington on Friday. His draft-class counterpart, Jayden Daniels, will not play for the Commanders.



Daniels

pass to receiver DeMario Douglas was tipped by Commanders linebacker Bobby Wagner and intercepted by cornerback Mike Sainristil.

But Maye said he was pleased with the day overall.

"Anything is positive when you're moving the ball," Maye said. "It looked like some football out there against a different team. Felt good to get our operations done against somebody else. We did some no-huddle that I thought went well. So it's good for us to learn from it, watch it and kind of just build off of it."

While there was no tackling allowed during Wednesday's session, it didn't stop tempers from

flaring during a pair of scuffles.

The first featured just minor shoving between linemen. But the second, after Patriots rookie running back TreVeyon Henderson got tangled up with a Washington defender, caused players from both sidelines to rush the field as even Vrabel jumped into the ensuing scrum.

"That's just how the game goes. Two teams with very competitive coaches, and players are representative of their coach," Sainristil said. "We're out there competing and they're competing. But just being able to de-escalate situations before they get worse is very professional. Sometimes things happen. Guys start chirp-

ing. It's the game of football."

Maye liked the fire his teammates showed during the exchanges.

"That's what we're trying to build, I think, and it starts with the coach. The intensity, bringing it every day, taking no (nonsense) when we're out there on the field," he said. "But also, it comes to a time where, with our guys offensively, and getting over there and getting some tussles, and kind of having some penalties, and extra after the whistle can get us in trouble. But for mentality, I like it. I think that's what you want. I mean, I almost got in there, but I think maybe another day, maybe. We'll see."

Competition makes WR position to watch at Packers camp

BY STEVE MEGARGEE
Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Jayden Reed acknowledges that the Green Bay Packers receivers didn't perform quite the way they wanted last season.

That left them plenty motivated to take a step forward this season, even before the front office selected two more receivers in the first three rounds of the draft.

The additions of Texas' Matthew Golden — the first Green Bay wide receiver drafted in the first round since Javon Walker in 2002 — and TCU's Savion Williams have made the competition at receiver one of the biggest stories to watch around the Packers' training camp.

"We've got so many different guys who can do so many different things, which makes us so dynamic," said Reed, whose 55 catches for 857 yards last season led Green Bay in both categories. "I think that's always how our room has been. We've just added more talent to the room."

Christian Watson's eventual return from a torn anterior cruciate ligament will only add to that tal-



MATT LUDTKE/AP

Matthew Golden was the first wide receiver drafted by the Green Bay Packers in the first round since Javon Walker in 2002.

ent. Even with Watson expected to miss the start of the season, the Packers face plenty of hard choices in determining which receivers to keep on the 53-man roster.

Green Bay has enough depth at receiver that Bo Melton has spent much of the offseason working out at cornerback instead. Melton caught 24 passes for the Packers from 2023-24.

Green Bay's receivers were also

garnering plenty of attention last training camp after the Packers made a late-season surge in 2023 that resulted in a surprise divisional playoff appearance. The presence of Reed, Watson, Romeo Doubs and Dontayvion Wicks gave Green Bay plenty of young talent, even if there wasn't a clear-cut No. 1 option.

But they didn't show much improvement a year ago. While the

various statistical services offer different totals regarding dropped passes, Pro Football Reference says Packers quarterback Jordan Love had 7.3% of his attempts dropped last season. Only Daniel Jones had a higher rate of passes dropped.

"Not to the standard, for sure," Reed said. "I do think we made a lot of plays, but we left a lot of plays out there as well."

They've been making plenty of plays so far in camp.

Golden has been particularly impressive, showcasing his speed and demonstrating he has the traits of a future No. 1 receiver. Williams, drafted in the third round, is practicing as well after recovering from shoulder surgery that limited his offseason activity.

"It's starting to slow down for me," said Golden, the No. 23 overall pick in the draft. "It's starting to feel like I can go out there and just play and have fun, not have to think about what I need to do. It's just going out there getting open, knowing my assignment and alignment."

Some of Green Bay's returning receivers also have made an im-

pression.

Doubs, entering his fourth season, has produced plenty of highlights. He caught a deep touchdown pass from Love on Tuesday and followed that up with another long reception in one-on-one drills Wednesday.

"I just love where he's at mentally right now," Love said. "He's playing pretty lights-out right now and making a lot of good plays when the ball's in the air, which is one of those things that's expected from Rome. He's done that so many times."

Mecole Hardman, a three-time Super Bowl champion with the Kansas City Chiefs, signed with the Packers before they drafted Golden and Williams. Hardman has made plenty of plays as well, including a touchdown catch from Malik Willis on a fourth down play Tuesday.

"It's a very competitive room, a room that's hungry, a room that's going to work, that wants to play, that wants to make plays," Hardman said of the competition among the receivers. "When you get a room like that, I think the sky's the limit."

NFL

Playing both sides becoming routine for Jags' Hunter

By MARK LONG
Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Playing both sides of the ball is now part of Travis Hunter's regular practice routine with the Jacksonville Jaguars.

The 2024 Heisman Trophy winner and the second overall pick in this year's NFL draft played offense and defense during training camp Tuesday. He wore a teal, No. 12 jersey at receiver and then threw on a white, loose-fitting, No. 12 penny when it was time to line up at cornerback.

"It's funny seeing him (go) back and forth," quarterback Trevor Lawrence said. "It's pretty crazy. Never seen anything like it."

Hunter had a minor issue with the sideline swap. Offensive teammates grabbed his baggy covering on several occasions, which helped them keep Hunter at bay during running plays; it won't be a problem during games since he won't have to change jerseys.

Hunter first switched back and forth during a scrimmage Saturday night, playing 17 snaps with the first-team offense and 21 with the first-team defense. He got similar work Tuesday.

It's the kind of versatility Jacksonville envisioned when it gave up a second-round pick and a 2026 first-rounder to move up three spots and select Hunter.

"It might not be every single day, but I would say it would probably be a little bit more normal than not," coach Liam Coen said.

The Jaguars planned for months to get to the point where Hunter was working interchangeably on both sides. They used him solely at receiver to open organized team activities in May and then expanded his usage as the team stacked practices.

By the start of training camp last month, he was working a day

on offense and then a day on defense.

But getting him to do both within minutes, sometimes seconds, was the next step.

"Hopefully, more offense," Lawrence quipped. "Just the way he plays, the energy he plays with. Even just little things like interacting with the fans and the juice he brings into the stadium. That stuff does mean something."

"Not everyone necessarily has that personality, but he has something about him that's just special. The energy he brings and the energy he plays with and the joy and all that stuff — the way he runs around — it's fun to watch and it's fun to play with a guy like that. I think he's starting to play a lot faster now that he knows the system and can play free."

Hunter gives the small-market franchise more star power than it's had in decades — maybe ever.

He caught 96 passes for 1,258 yards and 15 touchdowns last season at Colorado and had 35 tackles, 11 pass breakups and four interceptions.

Jacksonville intends to use him primarily as a slot receiver on offense and as an outside cornerback in certain packages on defense. It's familiar territory for someone who played more snaps (1,461) than anyone else in college football in 2024.

It's unclear how much — if at all — Hunter will play in the preseason opener against Pittsburgh on Saturday. Coen and his staff are "still working through it." He even texted Steelers coach Mike Tomlin on Monday night to "get on the same page" regarding starters.

Coen was an assistant with the Los Angeles Rams, who rarely played starters, and with Tampa Bay, which played starters in the preseason in hopes of getting "some quality work."



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Travis Hunter runs through a drill at Jaguars training camp. The No. 2 overall pick is practicing with the first-team offense and defense.



CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP

Chiefs rookie offensive tackle Josh Simmons, right, and guard Jaylon Moore participate in a drill at training camp Tuesday. Simmons was drafted in the first round to bolster the left tackle spot.

Rookies helping Chiefs turn weaknesses into strengths

By DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. — After watching his Kansas City Chiefs get dismantled by the Philadelphia Eagles in the Super Bowl, general manager Brett Veach identified two specific areas where the three-time reigning AFC champions needed to improve.

One was left tackle, where a rotating cast struggled all season to protect Patrick Mahomes. The other was wide receiver, where injuries prevented Kansas City from ever having the group that they expected to have on the field.

Now, it appears two positions of weakness in February could be positions of strength by the season opener in September.

On the left side of the offensive line, Veach signed Jaylon Moore in free agency, then drafted Josh Simmons in the first round out of Ohio State. He was widely considered to be the most talented tackle prospect available, but a knee injury that robbed Simmons of most of last season also sent his stock falling, and allowed him to fall right into the Chiefs' lap at No. 32 overall.

Three weeks into training camp, not only has Simmons showed no lingering effects of last year's surgery, but he has routinely punished teammates in 1-on-1 drills, and solidified the starting job ahead of Saturday's preseason opener in Arizona.

"He's very talented, man. Very, very good rookie so far," right tackle Jawaan Taylor said. "He's been soaking up all the things

we've been teaching him — Coach (Andy) Heck, the players, the veterans, and I feel like he's going to have a great career here."

Kansas City needs him to have one.

The Chiefs haven't had a true franchise left tackle since Eric Fisher left after two Pro Bowls following the 2020 season, and that came back to haunt them, especially against the Eagles in February. Mahomes was sacked six times in the 40-22 Super Bowl loss.

In training camp, Simmons has consistently given Mahomes more time to throw, and that has resulted in the kinds of explosive downfield passing plays that have been absent from the Kansas City offense the past few years.

"First of all, he's getting a lot of reps, which I think is important for a rookie," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. "He's been in there and consistently showing up every day and working and not taking plays off or anything like that."

"But he's a worker," Reid continued. "I mean, he's willing to do it. It's just a matter of keep on going. But he's done a nice job with what we've asked him. He's working on all the fundamentals and techniques, so that's a challenge for him."

At the receiving end of those throws are not only the wide receivers that Mahomes expected to have last season, but a potentially improved group with the addition of fourth-round pick Jalen Royals.

Rashee Rice has shown no issues after a torn knee ligament cost him most of last season, while the shoulder injury that kept Mar-

quise Brown off the field for months has also healed. Throw in a year of growth for Xavier Worthy, their first-round pick last year, and the wide receiver group is deeper, faster and more potent than it has been in a while.

"Not to take anything away from any receivers that we've been with here or anywhere else (but) for me, this collective group of wide receivers from top to bottom is extremely competitive and talented," Kansas City offensive coordinator Matt Nagy said.

"I don't want to take for granted is JuJu Smith-Schuster. Unbelievable right now with what he is doing, as far as a leader in that room," Nagy added. "Watching guys out here in walkthroughs, he's taking these young guys and using his experience and giving his knowledge to them, and it is exciting because he is a great player. So from top down we have a lot of speed. The guys have knowledge, they're smart, they play fast and tough. Now, it is just the timing of Pat."

That timing has been on point so far, thanks in part to the voluntary passing camps the two-time MVP has run the past few years at his home in Texas. Most of the receivers on the roster show up for at least some of it, and that typically gives them a big jump on training camp, when they begin facing defenders rather than just air.

"In order for our offense to be great," Mahomes said, "you have to be able to complete those passes. It opens up everything else. ... If we can do that, I think it is really going to open up the offense and make us a better team in general."

SPORTS



Close race

Buckeyes still looking for QB to lead them in title defense » College football, Page 43



JEFF ROBERSON/AP

Jen Pawol has been an umpire in the minor leagues since 2016 and began calling spring training games in 2024 ahead of her historic promotion to the majors.

Called up to make history

Pawol will be MLB's 1st female umpire in Saturday's Marlins-Braves game

BY BEN WALKER
AND RONALD BLUM
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jen Pawol is set to become the first woman to umpire in Major League Baseball when she works games this weekend between the Miami Marlins and Atlanta Braves.

Pawol will work the bases in Saturday's

doubleheader at Truist Park and the plate Sunday, MLB told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

"This historic accomplishment in baseball is a reflection of Jen's hard work, dedication and love of the game," baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said in a statement. "She has earned this opportunity, and we are proud of the strong example she has set,

particularly for all the women and young girls who aspire to roles on the field."

Pawol, a 48-year-old from New Jersey, worked spring training games in 2024 and this year. She will become the fifth umpire to debut this year.

"Baseball's done a great job of being completely inclusive," Los Angeles Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "I'll be watch-

ing. It's good for the game."

MLB's move comes 28 years after the gender barrier for game officials was broken in the NBA, 10 years after the NFL hired its first full-time female official and three years after the men's soccer World Cup employed a female referee. The NHL still has not had

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Shelton, Mboko in final matches with wins » Tennis, Page 41

