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Trump OKs European peace force for Ukraine

By Lorne Cook
Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The greenlight given by President Donald Trump on U.S. backup for a European-led force to police any future peace agreement in Ukraine ahead of his summit with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Friday vastly improves the likelihood it might succeed.

The effectiveness of the operation, drawn up by the so-called coalition of the willing of around 30 countries supporting Ukraine, hinges on U.S. backup with airpower or other military equipment that European armed forces do not have, or only in short supply.

EU leaders regularly have underlined how the United States is "crucial" to the success of the security operation dubbed Multinational Force Ukraine. But the Trump administration has long refused to commit, perhaps keeping its participation on hold as leverage in talks with Russia.

After a meeting Wednesday between Trump and European leaders, European Council President Antonio Costa welcomed "the readiness of the United States to share with Europe the efforts to reinforce security conditions once we obtain a durable and just peace for Ukraine."

French President Emmanuel Macron said Trump had insisted NATO must not be part of these security guarantees, but the U.S. leader agreed "the United States and all the (other) parties involved should take part."

"It's a very important clarification," Macron said.

Trump did not publicly confirm he would allow U.S. backup, and

SEE FORCE ON PAGE 7

Eric Kayne/Stars and Stripes

National Guardsmen patrol the National Mall near the U.S. Capitol on Thursday, in Washington.

Agents, troops hit DC streets

Protesters rally at checkpoint as 30-day patrol in capital begins

By Meagan Flynn, Jenny Gathright, Emma Uber and Erin Cox
The Washington Post

A split screen emerged in the first days of President Donald Trump's deployment of federal law enforcement and the National Guard onto D.C. streets: rhetoric from the president painting the city as a crime-addled wasteland, which D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser, a democrat, condemned, and, on the ground, a surge in federal resources bolstering D.C. police — which she and the police chief welcomed.

Jose Luis Magana/AP

A protester holds a sign as Department of Homeland Security Investigations agents join D.C. officers as they conduct traffic checks.

The impact of Trump's federal actions came into view Tuesday night, with National Guard troops on the ground and agents from numerous federal agencies roaming D.C. streets from the National Mall to busy corridors in Columbia Heights. At a Wednesday evening checkpoint in Northwest Washington, local and federal officers, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, pulled over drivers for seat belt violations or broken taillights, as

SEE STREETS ON PAGE 8

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Germany	$3.548	$4.114	$4.468	$4.184
Change in price	-2.2 cents	-2.1 cents	-1.6 cents	-4.6 cents
Netherlands	..	$4.878	$5.462	$5.205
Change in price	..	-0.3 cents	-0.3 cents	-7.8 cents
U.K.	..	$4.126	$4.480	$4.196
Change in price	..	-2.1 cents	-1.6 cents	-4.6 cents
Azores	..	..	$4.326	..
Change in price	..	..	-1.6 cents	..
Turkey	..	..	$4.118	$3.834*
Change in price	..	..	-1.6 cents	-5.4 cents

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Aug. 15. The change in price is from Aug. 8.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Japan	..	$4.099	..	$3.809
Change in price	..	-2.0 cents	..	-6.0 cents
Okinawa	$3.299	..	..	$3.809
Change in price	-1.0 cents	..	..	-6.0 cents
South Korea	$3.209	..	$4.129	$3.839
Change in price	-3.0 cents	..	-2.0 cents	-6.0 cents
Guam	$3.229**	$3.799	$4.149	..
Change in price	-3.0 cents	-3.0 cents	-3.0 cents	..

***DieselEFD **Midgrade**
Pacific prices for the week of Aug. 15-21

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (Aug. 15)	0.83
British pound (Aug. 15)	$1.32
Japanese yen (Aug. 15)	144.00
South Korean won (Aug. 15)	1,346.00

Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3744
Britain (Pound)	1.3536
Canada (Dollar)	1.3809
China (Yuan)	7.1743
Denmark (Krone)	6.4048
Egypt (Pound)	48.3041
Euro	0.8581
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8358
Hungary (Forint)	339.35
Israel (Shekel)	3.3819
Japan (Yen)	147.39
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3051
Norway (Krone)	10.2271
Philippines (Peso)	56.93
Poland (Zloty)	3.65
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7479
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2839
South Korea (Won)	1389.83
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8075
Thailand (Baht)	32.46
Turkey (NewLira)	40.7736

(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	4.21
30-year bond	4.83

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

FRIDAY IN EUROPE

SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

The weather is compiled from weather.com

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MILITARY

US denies China's claim about shoal incident

By Alex Wilson
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The U.S. 7th Fleet rejected as "false" a claim by China this week that its forces drove a U.S. destroyer away from a contested atoll in the South China Sea.

China's Southern Theater Command on Wednesday said it ordered its forces to "track, monitor, warn and expel" the guided-missile destroyer USS Higgins from waters near Scarborough Shoal, a feature claimed by China, Taiwan and the Philippines.

"The US military's actions seriously violated China's sovereignty and security, seriously undermined peace and stability in the South China Sea and violated international law and basic norms governing international relations," wrote spokesman Senior Capt. He Tiecheng on the command's Weibo social media page.

The 7th Fleet, based at Yokosuka Naval Base, said the Higgins conducted a freedom of navigation operation near the shoal and left the area on its own accord.

Fleet spokeswoman Lt. Sarah Merrill called Beijing's claim "false" and said that the Higgins operated within international legal standards, she told Stars and Stripes by email Thursday.

"The United States is defending its right to fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows, as USS Higgins did here," Merrill wrote. "Nothing China says otherwise will deter us."

Kira Ducato/U.S. Marine Corps

The guided-missile destroyer USS Higgins, seen here in the Philippine Sea on April 24, conducted a freedom-of-navigation operation near the contested Scarborough Shoal on Aug. 14.

The Higgins went within 13 miles of the shoal, close to the edge of territorial waters, she said.

Scarborough Shoal, known in China as Huangyan Island, is claimed by China, Taiwan and the Philippines.

Monday, a Chinese warship collided with a Chinese coast guard vessel in pursuit of Philippine coast guard and fishing vessels in the same area, The Associated Press reported Tuesday.

The littoral combat ship USS Cincinnati and the Higgins were briefly deployed Wednesday to Scarborough Shoal, according to a post that day on social media platform X by Philippine coast guard Commodore Jay Tarriela.

Tarriela cited U.S. officials and a Philippine surveillance flight.

Four Chinese coast guard ships and six Chinese maritime militia boats were also spotted near the shoal, according to Tarriela. Another Chinese vessel, a navy frigate, shadowed the Higgins and Cincinnati during the operation, he said.

The U.S. regularly conducts freedom of navigation patrols in the South China Sea, where several countries ringing the sea have overlapping claims to maritime features.

The patrols are typically a challenge to what the U.S. Navy describes as "unlawful restrictions" on innocent passage.

"China and Taiwan each purport to require, in violation of international law, either permission or advance notification before a military vessel or warship engages in 'innocent passage' through their territorial sea," Merrill wrote.

Under the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, any ship is allowed to pass through territorial waters if its actions are not "prejudicial to the peace, good order or security" of the country in question.

The U.S. often cites the convention as the legal basis for its actions in the South China Sea, but it is one of the few U.N. member states that has not ratified it.

Chinese vessels set new record for presence near Senkakus

By Brian McElhiney and Keishi Koja
Stars and Stripes

ABOARD THE PS MIZUKI, Okinawa — China and Japan remain locked in a game of cat-and-mouse near the Senkaku Islands, with China this year setting another record for the number of consecutive days its vessels have sailed near the disputed islets in the East China Sea.

As of Thursday, Chinese vessels have been spotted on 269 consecutive days within the Senkakus' contiguous zone, a 24-mile-wide band beyond the 12-mile territorial limit, a coast guard spokesman said by phone that day.

The previous record was 215 days between Dec. 22, 2023, and July 23, 2024.

The chain of five islets and three rocky protrusions are administered by Japan but also claimed by China and Taiwan. They are a flashpoint between Japan and China.

Chinese vessels have entered the territorial limit 20 times since Jan. 1, prompting Japan's coast guard to send its own vessels to meet them, the spokesman said.

China's vessels have started to become more aggressive, but Japan's coast guard has not escalated its approach to deterring vessels that enter its territorial waters, Naha Coast Guard Office director Momotoshi Saisho said.

During an Aug. 8 media tour aboard the PS Mizuki at Naha New Port, Saisho touched on the coast guard response to those incursions.

The longest stay inside territorial waters around the Senkakus occurred in March when a Chinese coast guard vessel lingered for 92 hours and eight minutes, according to a news release at the time.

On May 3, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force scrambled fighters in response to a helicopter launched from a Chinese coast guard vessel inside the Senkakus' territorial limit, according to a Ministry of Defense news release at the time. The helicopter flight lasted about 15 minutes.

Since 2015, some Chinese coast guard ships approaching the Senkakus are armed with deck-mounted machine guns, according to the Ministry of Defense 2025 white paper.

The Mizuki is armed with a 20 mm machine gun, Saisho said. However, the coast guard does not fire at intruding vessels, the spokesman said Thursday.

Keishi Koja/Stars and Stripe

An electronic signboard used to flash warning messages at vessels sailing near Japan's territory hang from the starboard side of the coast guard vessel PS Mizuki, at Naha New Port, Okinawa, Japan, Aug. 8.

The Mizuki, about 150 feet long and weighing 195 tons, was one of two coast guard patrol vessels rammed by a Chinese fishing boat in the Senkaku territorial waters in September 2010.

Japan accused the fishermen of intentionally causing the collision.

The Mizuki is usually dispatched to meet Chinese fishing vessels, Saisho said.

The coast guard will always dispatch a "larger number" of ships than the intruding force.

"The vessels that are dispatched to the Senkakus and other intrusion cases might be selected depending on the size and number of the ships of the opponent," he said.

Japan's coast guard vessels will flash messages in Chinese, English, Korean, Russian or other languages on a large electronic signboards, which hang on both sides of the Mizuki.

"In Hokkaido you might need Russian; around Kyushu it might be Korean," Saisho said. "In Okinawa, we usually first warn in English and then in Chinese, depending on the boat that is intruding."

Messages may begin with, "Immediately leave Japan's territorial waters," and progress in urgency to, "We will sail alongside you and board your vessel," or, "We will start firing water cannons," according to information posted in the ship's control room.

However, the coast guard has "never fired warning shots or shot water cannons at Chinese vessels around the Senkakus," the spokesman said Thursday.

Some Japanese government officials may speak to the press only on condition of anonymity.

PACIFIC

N. Korea denies loudspeaker removal claim

By David Choi and Yoojin Lee
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The influential sister of North Korea's leader on Thursday denied as a "red herring" a claim that her country had dismantled some of the propaganda loudspeakers along its border with South Korea, according to state media.

Kim Yo Jong labeled as "unfounded unilateral supposition" the recent report by South Korea's military that North Korea removed some of its loudspeakers along the Demilitarized Zone, according to the Korean Central News Agency.

Kim is North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's sister and a member of North Korea's ruling council, the State Affairs Commission.

South Korea is "misleading the public … by saying that we have removed the loudspeakers," she said, according to KCNA. "We have never removed loudspeakers installed on the border area and are not willing to remove them."

South Korea's military reported Aug. 9 that it detected North Korean forces dismantling their loudspeakers along the 160-mile DMZ. Five days earlier, the South's military had begun removing loudspeakers on its side of the border in hopes of de-escalating tensions between their countries.

South Korea silenced its loudspeakers on June 11; the North also ceased broadcasting later that day.

South Korean army Col. Lee Sung Joon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesman, declined to go into detail at a news conference Thursday but said "the military has explained the facts of what we observed."

"It is difficult to explain their intentions here," he said of Kim Yo Jong's latest statement. "North Korea has repeatedly made false claims."

South Korean President Lee Jae-myung at a Cabinet meeting Tuesday reiterated the North was dismantling some of its loudspeakers and said he hoped it was the first step to "reopen dialogue and communication between the two Koreas."

Since the 1950-53 Korean War, North and South Korea have aimed propaganda loudspeakers at each other to demoralize opposing forces stationed at the DMZ.

North Korea's loudspeakers typically broadcasted political monologues criticizing the South and the United States; the South's broadcasts include pop music, weather reports and recent news.

The lack of direct communication between Pyongyang and Seoul could be contributing to the opposing claims, said Lim Jae-Cheon, a Korea University diplomacy studies professor, by phone Thursday.

"It seems that South Korea may be over-interpreting even small movements by the North," he said. "On the other hand, North Korea appears to make decisions based on its own judgment, such as halting loudspeaker broadcasts."

Homeschoolers at base in South Korea prep for a new year

By Eric Mendiola
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — With a new school year only days away, about 30 homeschooled children took over a corner of the massive Collier Community Fitness Center here recently for their own back-to-school event.

They wielded water toys, stood still for face painting and drew in chalk while their parents chatted and dined on a potluck lunch at the Aug. 9 get-together.

"I feel like homeschoolers and their families and the work that the kids do and the moms do, they deserve to be celebrated just as much as public-school kids," said Serena Hanlon, a homeschooling mother of three.

Hanlon said she organized the event for the Camp Humphreys Christian Homeschool Co-op, which sponsored the event for all homeschool families at Humphreys.

Homeschooling is a well-established practice in the U.S. military, even though the Defense Department schools for military families were rated higher than average last year on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

About 12% of U.S. military families homeschool their children, twice the 6% rate among the U.S. civilian population, according to a 2023-24 study by the Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

Why military families choose to homeschool their children is not well understood, according to the Johns Hopkins survey, but parents at the Humphreys event voiced a few reasons of their own.

"The main reason I homeschool is just for more time with the kids," said Nesha Havili at the event.

Havili homeschools her four children.

Neither she nor Hanlon are members of the Christian Homeschool Co-op, they said.

The opportunity to maintain their own academic records is a plus for military families that change duty stations frequently, along with setting their own schedules, spending more time with their children and, for some, including religious instruction in their curriculum, according to Hanlon.

Trevares Johnson/Stars and Stripes

Nesha Havili and her son Liam at the photo booth during a homeschool back-to-school event at Camp Humphreys, South Korea,on Aug 9.

In May, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered a review across all services of the support provided by the DOD to homeschooling families, "as well as best practices, including the feasibility of providing facilities or access to other resources for those students," according to the order.

"Homeschooling offers an individualized approach for students and highlights the significant role parents play in the educational process," the order states.

Hegseth's order did not set a deadline for the review.

Hanlon also runs several Facebook groups in support of homeschooling families, including Wild and Blooming Camp Humphreys Co-Op, which meets biweekly for nature lessons outside Humphreys and other events, and Where the Wild Readers Are, a children's book club.

Hanlon said she and her husband, Capt. Hunter Hanlon of the 2nd Infantry Division, would like to organize a group to advocate for homeschooling military families once they return to the U.S.

"I want to make it bigger than what it is, and just more official and follow what stateside guidelines are," she said. "I love doing this so much and it's giving me practice for when I want to do something bigger."

US, Philippines discuss more missile system deployments

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — The United States is discussing the possible deployment of more missile launchers to the Philippines to strengthen deterrence against aggression in the disputed South China Sea and other Asian security hotspots, but no final decision has been reached by both sides, Manila's ambassador to Washington said Thursday.

The U.S. military delivered a mid-range missile system called the Typhon, a land-based weapon that can fire the Standard Missile-6 and the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile, to the northern Philippines as part of joint combat exercises in April last year.

That was followed by the transport by the U.S. military of an anti-ship missile launcher in April this year to the northernmost Philippine province of Batanes, just a sea border away from Taiwan.

Beijing strongly protested the installation of the U.S. missile systems, saying they were aimed at containing China's rise and warning that these would threaten regional stability.

China has asked the Philippines to withdraw the missile launchers from its territory, but officials led by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. had rejected the demand.

Ambassador Jose Manuel Romualdez said without elaborating that the possible deployment by the U.S. of more Navy Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System or NMESIS missile launchers "was being discussed for consideration by both sides."

The anti-ship missile systems could be installed along Philippine coastal regions facing the South China Sea and outlying regions to beef up deterrence against aggression, he said.

"This is part of the strong U.S. and Philippines defense partnership," Romualdez said.

VETERANS

1M medical records breached in DaVita hack

By Linda F. Hersey
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A national dialysis center that contracts with the Department of Veterans Affairs was the target of a ransomware attack breaching veterans medical records containing Social Security numbers, test results and health insurance information.

DaVita — a major provider of care for patients with kidney disease — disclosed approximately 1 million medical records were exposed in the cyberattack, including the health information of veterans receiving VA-covered dialysis and lab services in their communities.

DaVita provided details about patient information potentially compromised in notifications to attorneys general in several states, according to HIPAA Journal, which posts regulatory updates on the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

For the first quarter of 2025, the VA paid $206 million to DaVita to provide dialysis and lab testing services, according to USASpending.gov, a government website on federal spending, including contracts, grants and loans.

The cyberattack hit DaVita's own internal computer systems exposing some sensitive information from VA patient records, the VA said.

Patient names, images of checks and tax identification numbers might have been exposed in some of the patient files, DaVita said in an announcement.

"Throughout our response to this matter, patient care delivery has continued. At this time, all major network servers and systems that were impacted have been restored in a secure manner," the company said.

Neither the VA nor DaVita would discuss the scope of the cyberattack or the number of veterans' records accessed.

"Currently, forensic investigators and the FBI continue their work to determine the extent of the breach," the VA said in a written statement.

DaVita provides dialysis and lab services for patients with kidney failure who typically require up to three treatments a week, according to the company.

The majority of VA patients with end-stage renal disease — or kidney failure — receive their dialysis and lab tests from community providers, the VA said. Approximately 80% of VA patients received their treatment from community health care providers in fiscal 2021 and 2022, the VA said.

End-stage renal disease is more common in veterans than in the general population and requires dialysis or a kidney transplant. About 13,000 new cases are diagnosed each year, the VA said.

DaVita Inc. is one of the nation's largest providers of outpatient dialysis treatments and lab testing services, according to the Securities and Exchange Commission.

It processes more than 21 million lab specimens yearly for kidney dialysis patients. DaVita operates more than 2,675 outpatient dialysis centers in 43 states.

The data breach affects records of veterans who receive their dialysis and related lab services through the VA Veteran Community Care Program, according to VA.

Overall, the VA cares for about 600,000 veterans with chronic kidney disease, which develops when the kidneys are damaged and unable to properly filter waste and fluids from the blood.

Dialysis filters toxins from the body when the kidneys no longer function properly.

Demand for kidney dialysis and testing services is growing, and the agency has limited capacity, according to the VA. One in seven Americans is affected by kidney disease, but it impacts approximately one in six veterans, according to the American Kidney Fund.

Veterans impacted by the data breach will be notified and offered up to 12 months of free online monitoring for protection against identity theft through Experian, a national credit rating service, the VA said.

The VA Veteran Community Care Program is a network of private health care providers that serve veterans when the VA cannot provide the health services close to home and in a timely manner.

DaVita first announced the incident this spring in an SEC filing. DaVita said it was targeted in a ransomware attack that had encrypted parts of its network.

VA's own internal computer systems were not affected in the computer hack, the VA said.

DOJ: Woman stole $148K from vets

By Lara Korte
Stars and Stripes

A Cincinnati woman has been arrested on allegations of stealing money that she managed for U.S. military veterans, the Justice Department said.

Ishwanzya Rivers, 46, is accused of stealing $148,000 from four elderly or ill veterans, federal officials said in a statement Wednesday. She used the funds to subsidize shopping, restaurant visits and trips to Montego Bay, London and the Maldives, among other locations, the statement said.

Rivers stole at least $133,000 from one elderly, terminally ill veteran who lived at the VA hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio, the DOJ said, spending the victim's money at least 45 times from June 2021 through November 2022.

She stole smaller sums from three other elderly or sick veterans, the Justice Department alleged. Rivers has been charged with misappropriating funds as a fiduciary and making false statements. Both are federal crimes that can be punished by up to five years in prison.

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MILITARY

Study recommends reduction of duty codes

Confusion among Guard troops, reservists cited

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

The dozens of Pentagon duty codes for National Guard members and reservists cause confusion and should be slashed to just four, according to a new Defense Department-commissioned report.

The change would make pay and benefits more predictable for reserve component service members, improve budgetary planning and encourage volunteerism, according to the Rand Corp. report released Tuesday.

"The system's complexity and inflexibility prevent National Guard and Reserve members from being used in an optimal way," researchers said.

As Guard members and reservists move to different types of duty assignments, pay and benefits often change and may be delayed, according to the report.

There are currently 29 involuntary and voluntary status distinctions under 27 different sections of federal law, covering mobilization orders, training drills, funeral honors, sexual assault response and other duties.

Rand recommended reducing these to four categories: contingency duty, training and support, reserve component duty and remote assignments.

Having a wide array of duties under broad categories would make it easier to bounce between jobs, making volunteerism more likely, the report said.

Efforts to reform the duty status system stretch back to 2002 but gained momentum after a 2015 helicopter crash in the the Gulf of Mexico that killed four guardsmen and seven Marines.

The Guardsmen's families received "considerably less" in survivor payments because the soldiers were designated for inactive duty training that day.

The issue was fixed in a later defense bill, but broader inconsistencies remain, the report said.

Congress instructed DOD in the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act to study the issue., and Rand was brought in to assist a DOD working group.

Besides consolidating duty categories, the report recommended aligning order-writing, accounting and compensation systems across the military services. DOD must then ensure complete adoption across the services and overcome resistance to reverting to the old system, it said.

Adopting the recommendations would save an estimated $68.8 million in fiscal 2018 dollars annually and $344.1 million over five years under the Future Years Defense Program, the report said.

TIMOTHY LEDDICK/U.S. Air Force

Air Force reservists of the 911th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron take a group photo after an exercise at Leuchars Station, Scotland, in June 2024. A Rand Corp. report released Tuesday says the Pentagon should overhaul its duty status system for Guard members and reservists to reduce confusion and better standardize pay and benefits.

Marines investigate after recruit shot in training-related incident at Parris Island

BY KARL PUCKETT
The Island Packet

A Marine recruit at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island was injured after being shot in the leg during a marksmanship training exercise on the firing range.

The recruit, assigned to a Recruit Training Regiment, was airlifted from the base's location in Port Royal to a Savannah hospital.

Beyond those details, little else is known about this incident including specifics of how the shooting occurred, his or her medical status, the name or age of the victim or the hometown. It is standard operating procedure for the Marines to delay the release of any information until hours after the family has been notified.

Immediate medical attention was provided on site and the recruit was stabilized and then airlifted to Memorial Health University Medical Center in Savannah for further treatment.

"It is under investigation and would be premature to speculate on any details," said Chief Warrant Officer Bobby Yarbrough, a Recruit Depot spokesman. The Marines said they "are committed to a thorough and transparent review of the incident."

About 16,000 enlisted recruits a year train to be Marines at the 8,000-acre island base in Port Royal, one of two bases in the country where recruits train to become Marines. The other is at Marine Corps Base Pendleton near San Diego.

In phase two of recruit training, recruits receive formal instruction and develop skills necessary to maintain and accurately fire the M16-A4 on four live-fire rifle ranges, according to the Marines.

Navy relieves commanding officer of reserve readiness center in San Diego

Stars and Stripes

The commanding officer of Naval Information Force Reserve Readiness Center San Diego was relieved of duty on Tuesday.

A Navy news release cited a loss of confidence in Capt. Russell A. Herrell's ability to command. The term "loss of confidence" is frequently used by the military when specific reasons are not disclosed for the removal of a commander. The Navy did not give specifics for Herrell's removal.

The readiness center provides administrative support to attached units, according to the release. It is a subordinate command of Naval Information Force Reserve, which is based in Fort Worth, Texas.

The command's chief of staff, Capt. Mark Meade, has been temporarily assigned as REDCEN San Diego's commanding officer, per the release.

US approves potential $346M weapons sale to boost Nigerian security

Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria — The U.S. State Department approved a possible $346 million weapons sale to Nigeria to help improve security in the sub-Saharan country, the Pentagon said Wednesday.

Congress was notified and would need to approve the sale, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency said in a statement. The agency is a division of the Department of Defense body that provides technical assistance and oversees transfers of defense equipment.

The weapons requested by Nigeria include munitions, bombs and rockets.

A resurgence of attacks by Boko Haram, Nigeria's homegrown jihadist group, has shaken Nigeria's northeast. The group took up arms in 2009 to fight Western education and impose its radical version of Islamic law. In recent months, Islamic extremists have repeatedly overrun military outposts, mined roads with bombs and raided civilian communities, raising fears of a possible return to the peak insecurity of the Boko Haram era despite the military's claims of success against them.

The conflict, which has spread into Nigeria's northern neighbors, has claimed about 35,000 civilian lives and displaced more than 2 million people in the country's northeastern region, according to the U.N.

Apart from the insurgency in the northeast, Africa's most populous country also faces serious security challenges in the north-central and northwest regions, where hundreds have been killed and injured in recent months.

"The proposed sale will improve Nigeria's capability to meet current and future threats through operations against terrorist organizations and to counter illicit trafficking in Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea," the Pentagon said Wednesday. "There will be no adverse impact on U.S. defense readiness as a result of this proposed sale."

WAR IN UKRAINE

Zelenskyy, UK leader meet ahead of summit

European powers say discussions eased concerns that Trump, Putin will ignore them

BY PAN PYLAS
Associated Press

LONDON — U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer welcomed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to London on Thursday in a show of British support for Ukraine a day before a critical U.S.-Russia summit is set to take place in Alaska.

The two embraced warmly outside Starmer's offices at 10 Downing Street without making any comments. Around an hour later, Starmer walked Zelenskyy back to his waiting car, and the two leaders shared another embrace as the Ukrainian president departed.

Zelenskyy's trip to the British capital came a day after he took part in virtual meetings from Berlin with U.S. President Donald Trump and the leaders of several European countries.

Those leaders said that Trump had assured them that he would make a priority of trying to achieve a ceasefire in Ukraine when he meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday in Anchorage.

Both Zelenskyy and the Europeans have worried that the bilateral U.S.-Russia summit would leave them and their interests sidelined, and that any conclusions reached could favor Moscow and leave Ukraine and Europe's future security in jeopardy.

Yet some of those leaders, like German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and French President Emmanuel Macron, praised Wednesday's video conference with Trump as constructive. Speaking after the meetings to reporters, Trump warned of "very severe consequences" for Russia, if Putin doesn't agree to stop the war against Ukraine after Friday's meeting.

The Kremlin on Thursday said that the meeting between Trump and Putin in Alaska will start at 11:30 a.m. local time. Putin's foreign policy adviser, Yuri Ushakov, told reporters that Trump and Putin will first sit down for a one-on-one meeting followed by a meeting between the two delegations, and then talks will continue over "a working breakfast."

ANDRII MARIENKO/AP

A soldier with Ukraine's 30th Mechanized Brigade prepares to fire a howitzer toward Russian positions on the front line near near Kharkiv, Ukraine, on Wednesday.

Putin on Thursday held a meeting with top government officials on the upcoming summit. In a video released by the Kremlin, he said that the Trump administration was making "quite energetic and sincere efforts to stop the hostilities" and to "reach agreements that are of interest to all parties involved in this conflict."

Putin also suggested that agreements could be reached with the U.S. on nuclear arms control.

Starmer said on Wednesday that the Alaska summit could be a path to a ceasefire in Ukraine, but also alluded to European concerns that Trump may strike a deal that forces Ukraine to cede territory to Russia. He warned that Western allies must be prepared to step up pressure on Russia if necessary.

During a call on Wednesday among leaders of countries involved in the "coalition of the willing" — those that are prepared to help police any future peace agreement between Moscow and Kyiv — Starmer stressed that any ceasefire deal must protect the "territorial integrity" of Ukraine.

"International borders cannot be, and must not be changed by force," he said.

Kyiv has long insisted that safeguards against future Russian attacks provided by its Western allies would be a precondition for achieving a durable end to the fighting in Ukraine. Yet many Western governments have been hesitant to commit to engaging their military personnel.

Countries in the "coalition of the willing," which include France and the U.K., have been trying for months to secure U.S. security backing should it be required. Following Wednesday's virtual meetings, Macron said that Trump told the assembled leaders that while NATO mustn't be part of future security guarantees, "the United States and all the parties involved should take part."

"It's a very important clarification that we have received," Macron said.

Trump didn't reference any U.S. commitments to providing security guarantees during his comments to reporters on Wednesday.

With another high-level meeting on their country's future on the horizon, some Ukrainians expressed skepticism that any breakthroughs would be achieved during Friday's U.S.-Russia summit.

Oleksandra Kozlova, 39, who works at a digital agency in Kyiv, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that she believes Ukrainians "have already lost hope" that meaningful progress can be made on ending the nearly 3½-year-old war.

"I don't think this round will be decisive," she said. "There have already been enough meetings and negotiations promising us, ordinary people, that something will be resolved, that things will get better, that the war will end. Unfortunately, this has not happened, so personally I don't see any changes coming."

Anton Vyshniak, a car salesman in Kyiv, said that Ukraine's priority now should be saving the lives of its military service members, even at the expense of making territorial concessions.

"At the moment, the most important thing is to preserve the lives of male and female military personnel. After all, there are not many human resources left," he said. "Borders are borders, but human lives are priceless. Therefore, some principles can be disregarded here."

Zelenskyy said on Thursday that Ukraine had secured the release of 84 people from Russian captivity, including both soldiers and civilians.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said Thursday that it too had received 84 soldiers as part of a prisoner of war exchange.

Force: Details of what the US might contribute are unknown

FROM PAGE 1

no details of possible U.S. support were made public, but U.S. Vice President JD Vance sat in on the coalition meeting for the first time.

More than 200 military planners have worked for months on ways to ensure a future peace should the war, now in its fourth year, finally halt. Ukraine's armed forces also have been involved, and British personnel have led reconnaissance work inside Ukraine.

The exact size of the force has not been made public, although Britain has said it could number 10,000 to 30,000 troops. It must be enough to deter Russian forces, but also of a realistic size for nations that shrank their militaries after the Cold War and are now rearming.

The "reassurance" force's mission "will be to strengthen Ukraine's defenses on the land, at sea, and in the air because the Ukrainian Armed Forces are the best deterrent against future Russian aggression," U.K. Defence Secretary John Healey told lawmakers last month.

"It will secure Ukraine's skies by using aircraft," Healey said, "and it will support safer seas by bolstering the Black Sea Task Force with additional specialist teams."

Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey launched that naval force a year ago to deal with mines in Black Sea waters.

The force initially will have its headquarters in Paris before moving to London next year. A coordination headquarters in Kyiv will be involved once hostilities cease and it deploys.

European efforts to set up the force have been seen as a first test of the Continent's willingness to defend itself and its interests, given Trump administration warnings that Europe must take care of its own security and that of Ukraine in future.

Still, U.S. forces clearly provide a deterrent that the Europeans cannot muster.

Details of what the U.S. might contribute were unknown, and Trump has changed his mind in the past, so it remains to be seen whether this signal will be enough to persuade more countries within the coalition to provide troops.

Greece has publicly rejected doing so. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said last month that those discussions were "somewhat divisive" and distracted from the goal of ending the war as soon as possible.

Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has said Rome won't contribute troops, but she previously has underlined the importance of working with the U.S. on ending the conflict and called for the participation of an American delegation in force coordination meetings.

NATO membership would be Ukraine's best security guarantee, but the Trump administration took that possibility off the table in February.

Putin is deeply opposed to Ukraine joining the world's biggest military alliance, and some allies fear it might drag NATO into a broader war with nuclear armed Russia.

NATION

Streets: DC officials, residents respond to federal takeover

FROM PAGE 1

protesters shouted at them.

The White House said the overnight operation would soon become a 24/7 affair, with a significantly greater National Guard presence — and Trump said he intended to ask Congress to extend the emergency allowing him to federalize D.C. police beyond 30 days.

"We're going to be asking for extensions on that — long-term extensions, because you can't have 30 days," Trump said Wednesday, adding that his administration would be pushing a crime bill to use the city as "a very positive example."

Spokespeople for Bowser and Attorney General Brian Schwalb, a Democrat, declined to comment.

Trump's executive action represents the most extraordinary federal intervention into the city's home rule in decades, coming as violent crime is at 30-year lows following a historic spike in 2023, according to D.C. police data.

So far, top D.C. officials said, the order was playing out as more of a collaborative partnership, even as they feared that Trump's repeated denigrations of the nation's capital as a dirty city unsafe for residents and visitors could do permanent damage to its image on the national stage.

Bowser encapsulated the parallel reactions as she deployed dual messaging in two public appearances over the course of 15 hours between Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning.

Speaking to community leaders on Zoom on Tuesday night, Bowser called Trump's actions an "authoritarian push" in her firmest condemnation yet, as she began to more forcefully dispute the disparaging characterization of the District that Trump has repeatedly painted.

"We don't live in a dirty city. We are not 700,000 scumbags and punks. We don't have neighborhoods that should be bulldozed. We have to be clear about our story," Bowser said.

She said "we need to do what we can in our space, in our lane, to protect our city and protect our autonomy" to "get to the other side of this guy."

But appearing on FOX5 on Wednesday morning, a more tempered Bowser, along with D.C. Police Chief Pamela A. Smith, said a boost in law enforcement efforts from federal partners could help the city further drive down crime and get more guns off the street — mirroring the kind of pragmatic approach the mayor presiding over the deep-blue city has taken for months in the second Trump administration.

"What we want to do is make sure this federal surge is useful for us, and that's what the chief has been very, very good in working to accomplish," Bowser said.

MARK SCHIEFELBEIN/AP

A child watches as officers with the Drug Enforcement Administration patrol along the National Mall Wednesday in Washington.

JACQUELYN MARTIN/AP

Items belonging to the homeless are removed from a tent encampment, Thursday, where people who are homeless had been living in Washington.

"You're talking about 500 additional personnel in the District of Columbia," Smith said. "We're down in numbers with our D.C. police officers. So this enhanced presence is going to impact us in a positive way."

D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson, Democrat, said in an interview Wednesday that there were "two realities" at play: one asserted from the White House lectern, where Trump said the federal takeover of D.C. police would rescue the city from "crime, bloodshed, bedlam and squalor" — and the other being "what's actually happening."

By all indications, he said, federal agencies were not "trying to boss MPD" around and, in fact, were soliciting ideas about how they could be helpful — the type of collaboration Mendelson said he agreed with Bowser is welcome. Smith said Tuesday that she provided a strategic plan to Drug Enforcement Administration head Terry Cole, whom Trump tapped to oversee D.C. police.

"I think collaborating with MPD and providing additional resources can only be for the good," Mendelson said. "But the president has a national platform, and he's painted the city as a cesspool of crime. We know that's not true, but that is damaging to the city."

Trump continued targeting D.C. on Wednesday as he touted his mission to make the city "safe and beautiful" during an unrelated event at the Kennedy Center. He said he expected Republicans to "unanimously" approve an extension of the emergency in D.C. through a joint resolution — although resolutions are typically subject to the Senate filibuster and would require support of Democrats. But, he added, "I don't want to call a national emergency — if I have to I will," suggesting he could consider an alternative route to go around Congress.

Trump said that his administration was working with D.C. police and Bowser — "a very nice woman" — but that "we got to do the job."

The strategy guiding the federal law enforcement surge seemed to be in flux Wednesday. The surge has surpassed 100 arrests since the operation began last Thursday, according to a White House official. The tally from the White House includes serving 10 warrants and 23 immigration enforcement actions.

A White House official said Wednesday that there was no estimate of how many National Guard troops were expected to be in D.C. on Wednesday night, although they had originally said more than 400. "Operational details are constantly subject to change," they said.

When it comes to measuring the federal operation's success, Bowser said on FOX5 that in her meeting with Attorney General Pam Bondi and other federal partners Wednesday, no clear metric for success was offered.

She said it could include sweeping more illegal guns off the street.

"We certainly want to know what we're being measured against, and they regard it as a success to have more presence and to take more guns off the street, and we do too. That's what MPD works on every single day, is taking more guns off the street."

Agents and officers detailed to the surge have received assignments on a day-to-day basis, according to multiple people familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss operational details. In most cases, federal agents less familiar with policing the city have been paired with D.C. police officers or officers with the U.S. Secret Service Uniformed Division, the people said. About 130 FBI agents have been detailed to the effort, including agents dispatched on temporary assignments from the bureau's Philadelphia and Baltimore field offices, two people said.

On the first two nights of the operation, they conducted joint patrols with D.C. police officers or assisted in arrests tied to open warrants. FBI Director Kash Patel said on X that agents have been involved with local partners in making at least 18 arrests since Monday evening, including apprehending one suspect wanted for murder as well others wanted for DUI, theft, assault and violating a restraining order. Agents also detained several people for illegal gun possession, he said.

Roughly half of the 800 National Guard troops who were mobilized have processed in, and some of those troops are already on D.C. streets, said an Army official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide additional details that had not yet been made public. Those troops began working Tuesday night near the U.S. Park Police station in Anacostia Park and on patrols near high-visibility areas including the national monuments. The troops were not carrying guns but had weapons available if needed, the official said.

The use of the National Guard brings to bear the threats that Trump has lobbed at the city's autonomy for months and, critics fear, exposes residents to potentially unpredictable encounters with a domestically deployed military force.

While the National Guard was preparing to activate, Bowser spent an hour Tuesday night answering residents' questions in a video chat live-streamed on social media. She acknowledged that she did not know exactly how the federal resources would be deployed, but she said her expectation was that the National Guard troops would be deployed to federal parks, monuments and federal buildings, while federal law enforcement would be deployed to higher-crime areas of the city.

NATION

Smithsonian to review exhibits, policies

By Annie Ma
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House is ordering a wide-ranging review of the Smithsonian museums and exhibitions ahead of the country's 250th birthday with a goal of aligning the institution's content with President Donald Trump's interpretation of American history.

In a letter sent Tuesday to Smithsonian Institution Secretary Lonnie Bunch III, the White House laid out in detail the steps it expects the organization to take as part of the announced review. The examination will look at all public-facing content, such as social media, exhibition text and educational materials, to "assess tone, historical framing, and alignment with American ideals," according to the letter.

"This initiative aims to ensure alignment with the President's directive to celebrate American exceptionalism, remove divisive or partisan narratives, and restore confidence in our shared cultural institutions," the letter said.

The Smithsonian said it remained committed to "scholarly excellence, rigorous research, and the accurate, factual presentation of history."

"We are reviewing the letter with this commitment in mind and will continue to collaborate constructively with the White House, Congress, and our governing Board of Regents," it said in a statement.

Maansi Srivastava/For the Washington Post

An exhibition at the National Museum of American History in March explores social movements that shaped the United States.

The review, first reported by The Wall Street Journal, is the latest attempt by the president to bring the country's cultural institutions in line with his vision. In March, Trump signed an executive order titled "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History," which accused the Smithsonian of coming under the influence of a "divisive, race-centered ideology" and called upon it to "remove improper ideology" from the institution's museums.

In February, Trump removed the Kennedy Center's Board of Trustees, replaced them with his supporters and named himself chairman. He vowed to end events featuring performers in drag, indicating he would take on a larger role in dictating the institution's programming schedule.

The review of the Smithsonian will initially focus on eight museums — the National Museum of American History, the National Museum of Natural History, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the National Museum of the American Indian, the National Air and Space Museum, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the National Portrait Gallery and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

The letter said additional museums would be reviewed in subsequent phases.

Civil rights leaders have criticized the administration's particular focus on the National Museum of African American History and Culture as efforts to minimize Black Americans' contributions to the country and to recast the obstacles they faced throughout history.

The Smithsonian has repeatedly denied allegations that it has changed or removed exhibit details in response to pressure from the administration. Recently, the institution removed references to Trump's two impeachments from an exhibit on the American presidency.

A spokesman for the museum said the references, which were added in 2021, were intended to be a temporary measure and said a future exhibit would include details on all presidential impeachments.

Texas students injured in bus rollover on first day of school

Associated Press

LEANDER, Texas — A Texas school bus carrying more than 40 students on Wednesday rolled over after veering off a rural road on the first day of class, injuring multiple students, authorities said.

At least one person has life-threatening injuries, while two others have "potentially life-threatening injuries," Assistant Chief Kevin Parker, with Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services, said during a news conference.

The bus was traveling on a rural stretch of two-lane road when it veered off the right side "for an unknown reason" and rolled over, said Department of Public Safety Sgt. Billy Ray.

He later said in a Wednesday night statement that it was raining when the crash happened and "it is unclear if weather had a factor." The crash is being investigated.

School and emergency officials said the bus had 42 children, and the driver along with 15 students were transported to hospitals. Officials did not say if the person with life-threatening injuries was a student or the driver.

Jay Janner, Austin American-Statesman/AP

State troopers work at the scene after a bus carrying students rolled over in Leander, Texas, on Wednesday.

The bus for Leander Independent School District was carrying primarily elementary school students, Superintendent Bruce Gearing said. The crash happened shortly after school let out, and no students had been dropped off yet.

The bus is a 2024 model and is equipped with state-mandated seat belts that the children are required to wear, Gearing said.

"We want each of those students and their families to know that our prayers are with them, our thoughts are with them and we will do everything that we can in our power to support them," he said.

Melania demands Hunter Biden retract his Epstein comments

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — First lady Melania Trump demanded that Hunter Biden retract comments linking her to sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein and threatened to sue if he does not.

Trump takes issue with two comments Biden, son of former President Joe Biden, made in an interview this month with British journalist Andrew Callaghan. He alleged that Epstein introduced the first lady to now-President Donald Trump.

The statements are false, defamatory and "extremely salacious," Melania Trump's lawyer, Alejandro Brito, wrote in a letter to Biden. Biden's remarks were widely disseminated on social media and reported by media outlets around the world, causing the first lady "to suffer overwhelming financial and reputational harm," he wrote.

Biden made the Epstein comments during a sprawling interview in which he lashed out at "elites" and others in the Democratic Party he says undermined his father before he dropped out of last year's presidential campaign.

Biden

"Epstein introduced Melania to Trump. The connections are, like, so wide and deep," Biden said in one of the comments Trump disputes. Biden attributed the claim to author Michael Wolff, whom Donald Trump disparaged in June as a "Third Rate Reporter." He has accused Wolff of making up stories to sell books.

The first lady's threats echo a favored strategy of her husband, who has aggressively used litigation to go after critics. Public figures like the Trumps face a high bar to succeed in a defamation lawsuit. The president and first lady have long said they were introduced by Paolo Zampolli, a modeling agent, at a New York Fashion Week party in 1998.

NATION

THE (COLUMBIA, S.C.) STATE/TNS

Officials at the Savannah River Site, near Aiken, S.C., recently shared that four different wasp nests were found near a highly contaminated area of the property. They say there is no threat to the public.

Radioactive wasp nests spark questions

BY SAMMY FRETWELL
The (Columbia, S.C.) State

COLUMBIA, S.C. — As word spreads about the discovery of radioactive wasp nests at a South Carolina nuclear weapons complex, some researchers and environmental activists are urging the government to provide more details about the finding.

So far, officials with the Savannah River Site have issued a basic statement saying that four different wasp nests were found on a post near a highly contaminated section of the property last month. But they have said there is no threat to the public.

They've said wasps were lightly contaminated and were unlikely to spread toxins off the 310-square mile site.

Still, plenty of questions remain, including the types of radioactive material found in the nests, University of South Carolina biologist Tim Mousseau said.

"There's insufficient information to really kind of determine the risks and the hazards," said Mousseau, who has extensive experience studying the effects of radioactivity on plants and animals around the world.

Based on the SRS answers, for instance, it's not clear whether the wasp nests were contaminated by a new leak at the weapons complex, he said.

A new leak could indicate emerging contamination threats that need to be addressed. The nests were found in an area where large tanks store toxic nuclear material.

"If this reflects new leakage or new releases of pollutants that haven't been documented, then this is a sentinel of potential issues related to the long-term storage of this nuclear waste, which is an ongoing issue at all … sites that were involved in and continue to be involved in the processing of materials mostly for national security purposes." Mousseau said.

Man accused of faking death to avoid charges found guilty

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — A Rhode Island man accused of faking his death and fleeing the United States to evade rape charges was found guilty Wednesday of sexually assaulting a former girlfriend in his first of two Utah trials.

A jury in Salt Lake County found Nicholas Rossi guilty of a 2008 rape after a three-day trial in which his accuser and her parents took the stand. The verdict came hours after Rossi, 38, declined to testify on his own behalf. He will be sentenced in the case on Oct. 20 and is set to stand trial in September for another rape charge in Utah County.

Rossi

First-degree felony rape carries a punishment in Utah of five years to life in prison, said Salt Lake County District Attorney Sim Gill.

"We are grateful to the survivor in this case for her willingness to come forward, years after this attack took place," Gill said in a statement Wednesday night. "We appreciate her patience as we worked to bring the defendant back to Salt Lake County so that this trial could take place and she could get justice. It took courage and bravery to take the stand and confront her attacker to hold him accountable."

Utah authorities began searching for Rossi, whose legal name is Nicholas Alahverdian, when he was identified through a decade-old DNA rape kit in 2018.

He was among thousands of rape suspects identified and later charged when the state made a push to clear its rape kit backlog.

Months after he was charged in Utah County, an online obituary claimed Rossi had died on Feb. 29, 2020, of late-stage non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

But police in his home state of Rhode Island, along with his former lawyer and a former foster family, cast doubt on whether he was dead. He was arrested in Scotland the following year while receiving treatment for COVID-19 after hospital staff in Glasgow recognized his distinctive tattoos from an Interpol notice.

Rossi was extradited to Utah in January 2024 while insisting he was an Irish orphan named Arthur Knight who was being framed. Investigators say they identified at least a dozen aliases Rossi used over the years to evade capture.

He appeared in court this week in a wheelchair, wearing a suit and tie and using an oxygen tank.

Throughout the trial, prosecutors painted a picture of an intelligent man who used his charm to take advantage of a vulnerable young woman. She was living with her parents and recovering from a traumatic brain injury when she responded to a personal ad Rossi posted on Craigslist. They began dating and were engaged within about two weeks.

On Monday, the woman described being asked to pay for their dates, cover Rossi's car repairs, lend him $1,000 so he wouldn't be evicted from his apartment and take on debt to buy their engagement rings.

He grew hostile soon after their engagement and raped her in his bedroom one night after she drove him home, she testified.

The woman said dismissive comments from her parents convinced her not to go to the police at the time. She came forward a decade later after she saw him in the news and learned he was accused of another rape from the same year.

Rossi's lawyers sought to convince the jury that his accuser built up years of resentment after he made her foot the bill for everything in their monthlong relationship. They argued she accused him of rape to get back at him years later when he was getting media attention.

Rossi's accuser in the Utah County case did, however, go to the police at the time. She took the stand Tuesday to testify about her own experiences with Rossi — though he will not stand trial for that rape charge until next month.

Rossi is accused of attacking the second woman, another former girlfriend, at his apartment in Orem in September 2008 after she came over to collect money she said he stole from her to buy a computer.

When police initially interviewed Rossi, he claimed she had raped him and threatened to have him killed.

Rossi grew up in foster homes in Rhode Island and had returned there before allegedly faking his death. He was previously wanted in the state for failing to register as a sex offender.

The FBI has said he also faces fraud charges in Ohio, where he was convicted of sex-related charges in 2008.

'Frankenstein bunnies' with 'horns' spotted in Colorado

Associated Press

DENVER — A group of rabbits in Colorado with grotesque, horn-like growths may seem straight out of a low-budget horror film, but scientists say there's no reason to be spooked — the furry creatures merely have a relatively common virus.

The cottontails recently spotted in Fort Collins are infected with the mostly harmless Shope papillomavirus, which causes wart-like growths that protrude from their faces like metastasizing horns.

Viral photos have inspired a flurry of unflattering nicknames, including "Frankenstein bunnies," "demon rabbits" and "zombie rabbits." But their affliction is nothing new, with the virus inspiring ancient folklore and fueling scientific research nearly 100 years ago.

The virus likely influenced the centuries-old jackalope myth in North America, which told of a rabbit with antlers or horns, among other animal variations. The disease in rabbits also contributed to scientists' knowledge about the connection between viruses and cancer, such as the human papillomavirus that causes cervical cancer.

The virus in rabbits was named after Dr. Richard E. Shope, a professor at The Rockefeller University who discovered the disease in cottontails in the 1930s.

News about the rabbit sightings in Fort Collins, 65 miles north of Denver, started getting attention after residents started spotting them around town and posting pictures.

Kara Van Hoose, a spokesperson for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that the agency has been getting calls about the rabbits seen in Fort Collins.

But she said that it's not uncommon to see infected rabbits, especially in the summer, when the fleas and ticks that spread the virus are most active. The virus can spread from rabbit to rabbit but not to other species, including humans and pets, she said.

The growths resemble warts but can look like horns if they grow longer, Van Hoose said. The growths don't harm rabbits unless they grow on their eyes or mouths and interfere with eating. Rabbits' immune systems are able to fight the virus and, once they do, the growths will disappear, she said.

DR. RACHEL RUDEN/AP

This photo provided by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources shows a deceased Eastern cottontail rabbit infected with Shope papillomavirus in October 2021.

NATION

Appeals court rules foreign aid can be terminated or suspended

By Michael Kunzelman
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A divided panel of appeals court judges ruled Wednesday that the Trump administration can suspend or terminate billions of dollars of congressionally appropriated funding for foreign aid.

Two of three judges from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit concluded that grant recipients challenging the freeze did not meet the requirements for a preliminary injunction restoring the flow of money.

In January, on the first day of his second term in the White House, Republican President Donald Trump issued an executive order directing the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development to freeze spending on foreign aid.

After groups of grant recipients sued to challenge that order, U.S. District Judge Amir Ali ordered the administration to release the full amount of foreign assistance that Congress had appropriated for the 2024 budget year.

The appeal court's majority partially vacated Ali's order.

Judges Karen LeCraft Henderson and Gregory Katsas concluded that the plaintiffs did not have a valid legal basis for the court to hear their claims. The ruling was not on the merits of whether the government unconstitutionally infringed on Congress' spending powers.

"The parties also dispute the scope of the district court's remedy but we need not resolve it ... because the grantees have failed to satisfy the requirements for a preliminary injunction in any event," Henderson wrote.

Judge Florence Pan, who dissented, said the Supreme Court has held "in no uncertain terms" that the president does not have the authority to disobey laws for policy reasons.

"Yet that is what the majority enables today," Pan wrote. "The majority opinion thus misconstrues the separation-of-powers claim brought by the grantees, misapplies precedent, and allows Executive Branch officials to evade judicial review of constitutionally impermissible actions."

The money at issue includes nearly $4 billion for USAID to spend on global health programs and more than $6 billion for HIV and AIDS programs.

Trump has portrayed the foreign aid as wasteful spending that does not align with his foreign policy goals.

Henderson was nominated to the court by Republican President George H.W. Bush. Katsas was nominated by Trump. Pan was nominated by Democratic President Joe Biden.

US producer prices surge in July amid Trump tariffs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. wholesale inflation surged unexpectedly last month, signaling that President Donald Trump's sweeping taxes on imports are pushing costs up and that higher prices for consumers may be on the way.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that its producer price index — which measures inflation before it hits consumers— rose 0.9% last month from June, biggest jump in more than three years.

Compared with a year earlier, wholesale prices rose 3.3%.

The numbers were much higher than economists had expected.

Prices rose faster for producers than consumers last month, suggesting that U.S. importers may, for now, be eating the cost of Trump's tariffs rather than passing them on to customers.

That may not last.

"It will only be a matter of time before producers pass their higher tariff-related costs onto the backs of inflation-weary consumers," wrote Christopher Rupkey, chief economist at fwdbonds, a financial markets research firm.

Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core producer prices rose 0.9% from June, biggest month-over-month jump since March 2022.

Compared with a year ago, core wholesale prices rose 3.7% after posting a 2.6% year-over-year jump in June.

Firefighters in California battle a fast-moving blaze

Associated Press

GORMAN, Calif. — Firefighters scrambled to control a fast-moving wildfire that erupted Thursday morning in hills along Interstate 5 in northwestern Los Angeles County, officials said.

The King Fire has swiftly charred about 400 acres of tinder-dry brush in a lightly populated area about 60 miles north of downtown LA.

An RV park was ordered to shelter in place and residents of remote homes were under evacuation warnings. The fire was 5% contained as of 6 a.m., according to the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

The California Highway Patrol closed some highway lanes as crews battled the flames. Off- and on-ramps were closed at Smokey Bear Road, along with several surrounding roads just north of Pyramid Lake in a mountainous area known for hiking and boating.

The blaze is burning a few miles north of the Canyon Fire, which prompted evacuations, destroyed seven structures and injured three firefighters after breaking out Aug. 7. That fire was 97% contained Wednesday after charring about 8 square miles of LA and Ventura counties.

WORLD

Israel announces new settlement in West Bank area

Associated Press

MAALE ADUMIM, West Bank — Israel's far-right finance minister announced approval of contentious new settlement construction in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on Thursday, which Palestinians and rights groups worry will scuttle plans for a future Palestinian state by effectively cutting the West Bank into two separate parts.

The announcement comes as many countries, including Australia, Britain, France, and Canada said they would recognize a Palestinian state in September.

"This reality finally buries the idea of a Palestinian state, because there is nothing to recognize and no one to recognize," said Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich during a ceremony on Thursday. "Anyone in the world who tries today to recognize a Palestinian state — will receive an answer from us on the ground," he said. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not publicly comment on the plan on Thursday, but he has touted it in the past.

Development in E1, an open tract of land east of Jerusalem, has been under consideration for more than two decades, but was frozen due to U.S. pressure during previous administrations. On Thursday, Smotrich praised President Donald Trump and U.S. ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee as "true friends of Israel as we have never had before."

The E1 plan is expected to receive final approval Aug. 20, capping off 20 years of bureaucratic wrangling. The planning committee on Aug. 6 rejected all of the petitions to stop the construction filed by rights groups and activists.

While some bureaucratic steps remain, if the process moves quickly, infrastructure work could begin in the next few months and construction of homes could start in around a year.

The approval is a "colonial, expansionist, and racist move," Ahmed al Deek, the political adviser to the minister of Palestinian Foreign Affairs, told The Associated Press on Thursday.

"It falls within the framework of the extremist Israeli government's plans to undermine any possibility of establishing a Palestinian state on the ground, to fragment the West Bank, and to separate its southern part from the center and the north," al Deek said.

Rights groups also swiftly condemned the plan. Peace Now called it "deadly for the future of Israel and for any chance of achieving a peaceful two-state solution" which is "guaranteeing many more years of bloodshed."

S. Korean court rejects US composer's copyright claim over 'Baby Shark' tune

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's Supreme Court rejected a $21,600 damage claim Thursday by an American composer who accused a South Korean kids content company of plagiarizing his version of "Baby Shark," ending a six-year legal battle over the globally popular tune known for its catchy "doo doo doo doo doo doo" hook.

The top court upheld lower court rulings dating back to 2021 and 2023 that found no sufficient grounds to conclude the company, Pinkfong, infringed on Jonathan Wright's copyright.

Wright, also known as Johnny Only, released his version in 2011, four years before Pinkfong's, but both were based on a traditional melody popular for years at children's summer camps in the United States.

The courts ruled Wright's version did not differ enough from the original melody to qualify as an original creative work eligible for copyright protection, and that Pinkfong's song had clear differences from Wright's.

The Supreme Court said its ruling reaffirms the established legal principle on existing folk tunes as derivative work.

"The Supreme Court accepts the lower court's finding that the plaintiff's song did not involve substantial modifications to the folk tune related to the case to the extent that it could be regarded, by common social standards, as a separate work," it said in a statement.

AHN YOUNG-JOON/AP

People walk near Pinkfong characters, from the South Korean kids' content company, during a coronavirus prevention campaign at City Hall Plaza in Seoul, in 2020. The writing on the character's mask reads, "Thank you so much."

Pinkfong said in a statement to The Associated Press that the ruling confirmed its version of "Baby Shark" was based on a "traditional singalong chant" that was in the public domain.

The company said it gave the tune a fresh twist by adding "an upbeat rhythm and catchy melody, turning it into the pop culture icon it is today."

Chong Kyong-sok, Wright's South Korean attorney, said he hadn't received the full version of the court's ruling yet, but called the outcome "a little disappointing."

"Anyway, the matter is now settled," he said. "It's our work that came out first, so we can handle the licensing on our side and I guess we then each go our separate ways."

Pinkfong's Baby Shark became a global phenomenon after it was released on YouTube in 2015, with the original "Baby Shark Dance" video now exceeding 16 billion views and peaking at No. 32 on the Billboard Hot 100.

Pro-Russia hackers blamed in Norwegian dam sabotage

Associated Press

Russian hackers are likely behind suspected sabotage at a dam in Norway in April that affected water flows, police officials told Norwegian media on Wednesday.

The director of the Norwegian Police Security Service, Beate Gangås, said cyberattacks are increasingly being carried out against Western nations to stoke fear and unrest.

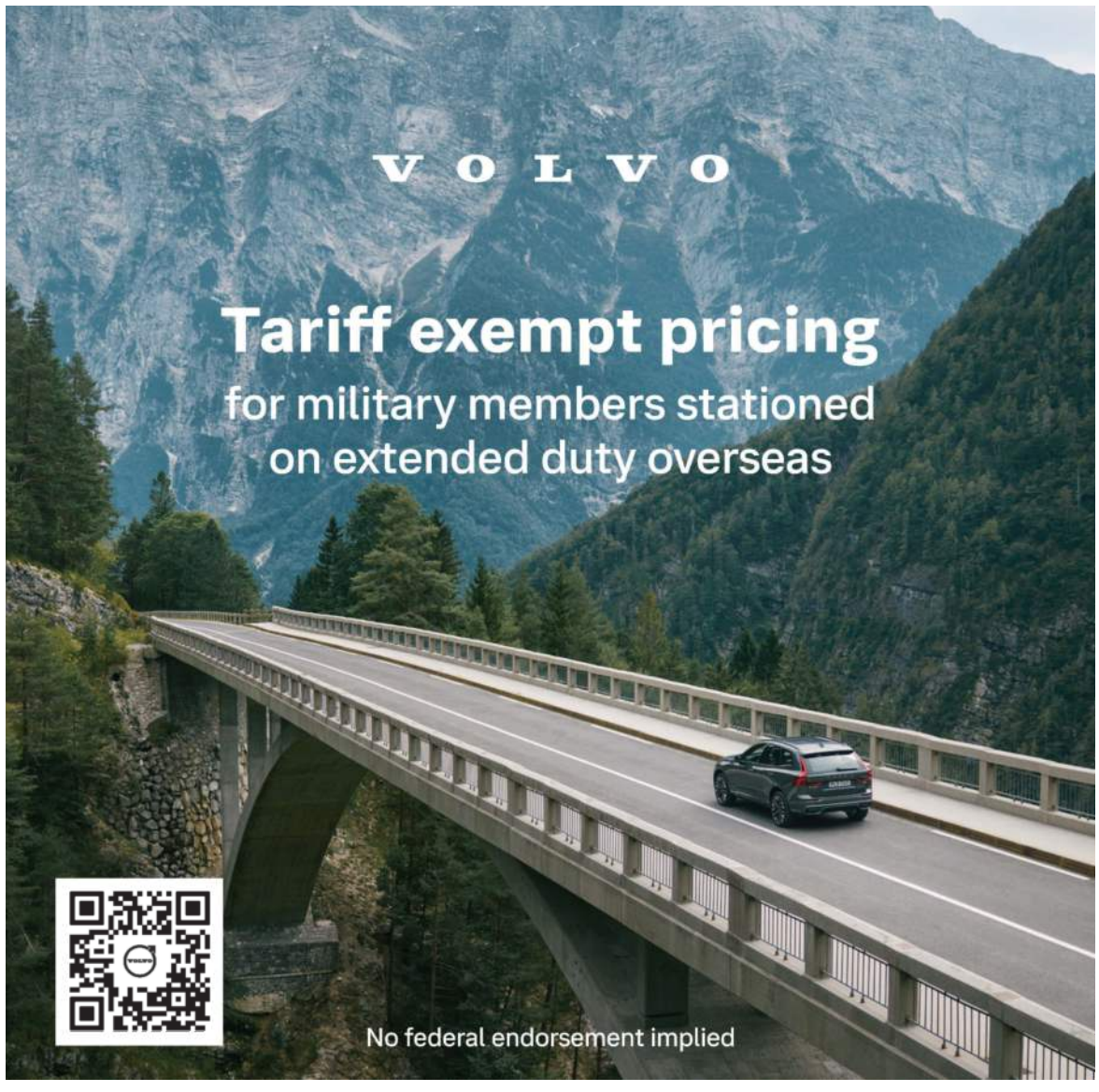
The Associated Press has plotted over 70 incidents on a map tracking a campaign of disruption across Europe blamed on Russia, which Western officials have described as "reckless." Since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, Western officials have accused Russia and its proxies of staging dozens of attacks and other incidents, ranging from vandalism to arson and attempted assassination.

Intelligence officials told the AP that the campaign is becoming more violent.

During the April incident, hackers gained access to a digital system which remotely controls one of the dam's valves and opened it to increase the water flow, NRK said. The valve was open for around four hours but did not pose a danger to the surrounding area.

A three-minute long video showing the dam's control panel and a mark identifying a pro-Russian cybercriminal group was published on Telegram in April, police attorney Terje Nedrebø Michelsen told NRK.

Similar videos have circulated on social media, but the announcement by Norwegian police marked the first time since 2022 that officials have publicly suggested pro-Russian hackers may have successfully targeted critical water infrastructure in Europe.



WEEKEND

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WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Your junk, but Gen Z treasure

Why Y2K fashion is making a resurgence and how to make a profit off its comeback

BY NICKY ANDREWS
Associated Press

From Juicy Couture sweat sets and low-rise, bedazzled jeans to chunky belts and baby tees, early 2000s fashion is all the rage again. That potentially makes that old box of clothes in the back of your closet a sitting cash cow.

Generation Z — born from about 1997 to 2012 — has taken to the Y2K aesthetic that makes many millennials cringe. (Y2K is short for the year 2000.)

Fashion-forward college students and TikTok influencers are flaunting the miniskirts, chunky sandals and other bright, brand-heavy and borderline tacky items they likely bought secondhand.

Jackson Mangum, a 24-year-old tailor in Eugene, Ore., said that while he has distanced himself from Y2K and found his own personal style, his wardrobe still has influences of it, including baggy camo shorts, flared jeans and big, funky sunglasses.

"I'm usually not Y2K but I appreciate Y2K style. I think it's cool," said Mangum, who showcases his work on his Instagram account, @wornandtornattire.

"The baggy jeans, different pops of pink and the chrome shades — it's easy to go anywhere and be able to find things that fit into that niche. Throwing it together is easier than throwing together a full vintage outfit."

Boomers emptying their millennials' closets

One reason for the Y2K resurgence is a 20-year cycle often seen in fashion history, experts say.

"Prior to Y2K styles being back, we saw a lot of '90s styles being back," New York City-based fashion historian Emma McClendon said.

Lauren Downing Peters, an associate professor of fashion studies at Columbia College Chicago, said the Y2K resurgence could be a result of boomers downsizing their homes and purging their millennial children's old belongings.

"The 20-year duration is just long enough for a younger generation to be able to find the fashions of their parents' generation, something that they can remember but only in the abstract, as quaint or interesting and kind of available for reinterpretation and adoption in their 20s," she said.

The 2000s and the 2020s have a lot in common

In addition, both experts drew parallels between the political and social dynamics of the two decades, such as technology booms and catastrophic events.

"At the start of the 2000s we had 9/11, we had a restructuring of how people thought about the world, how people thought about themselves, how people thought about politics," McClendon said. "I think the global pandemic can be a really interesting comparative to that restructuring."

The growth of the internet and social media in the 2000s mirrors the development of artificial intelligence today, she said. At the same time, the 2000s may represent a time relatively free of social media and interconnectivity, which could appeal to Gen Z, who have grown up in the age of the internet.

"That is kind of the appeal behind vintage-inspired fashion trends — this idea that things were better back then," she said.

So, what can you get for that old pair of jeans?

Jocelyn Brown, who owns the online resale shop Arkival Storehouse, earns a living off this nostalgia by purchasing vintage clothes from thrift stores and antique malls, upcycling them and reselling them online.

Anyone trying to turn a profit on old clothes, she said, can use online channels and apps like Depop, Poshmark, ThredUp, TikTok and Instagram to sell and trade. Brown also suggests selling at flea markets.

She advises sellers to cater to the audience buying.

"People really like when something is curated and it feels like an experience," said Brown, who lives in Chicago. "I'm really specific about what I put on my racks, and I may have more than what I bring ... or I separate it out into different collections."

PHOTOS BY NICKY ANDREWS/AP

A pair of platform mule shoes and a bright blue bag for sale July 12 at Apocalypse, a buy, sell and trade store in Boulder, Colo.

A variety of clothing and footwear is displayed at Apocalypse. About 75% of the inventory the store buys is early 2000s fashion. For every item bought, the seller receives either 30% cash or 50% store credit of the resale price.

Resale stores are another option. Nell Tercek, an assistant manager at Apocalypse, a resale shop in Boulder, Colo., said about 75% of the inventory the store buys is from Y2K.

Staff specifically watch out for microminiskirts, vintage Victoria's Secret lingerie tanks and baby tees, she said. For every item bought, the seller receives either 30% cash or 50% store credit of the resale price.

"Y2K style is really flashy and very exciting and visually enticing," Tercek said. "Physical expression is really important right now due to the circumstances of the world. People are wanting to show who they are authentically and be able to experiment with clothing."

Downing Peters sees "logo-mania and the resurgence of a lot of these cherished Y2K brands. Like, much to my horror, I'm seeing students wearing Von Dutch again and True Religion jeans, brands that I cared a lot about when I was younger."

The Earth-friendly appeal of buying used

The sustainable nature of buying secondhand also appeals to consumers, the experts said.

Gen Z has "this awareness of fashion sustainability and the ills of mainstream mass fashion, and the idea that you can shop responsibly by shopping secondhand without sacrificing style and individuality," Downing Peters said.

Brown said she is sometimes hesitant to resell Y2K-era clothing because some was made poorly during the industry's fast-fashion economics then. However, she emphasized, Y2K-era denim is much higher quality that current-day denim, making it more valuable.

Looking ahead, Brown believes Y2K pieces will remain in consumer's closets but will be styled in a more individualized way.

"People will take bits and pieces of Y2K style with them and add it to just their overall style," she said.

As for what comes next? McClendon says 2010s style could be on the horizon, so hold on to those infinity scarves, skinny jeans or combat boots you may have tucked away.

POP Clip from SoundPEATS doesn't go in the ear canals

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

When I first opened the SoundPEATS POP Clip earbuds (on sale for $39.99 from $59.99), I thought they looked different. After hearing them, I thought "Wow, what a great set of earbuds for a great price."

The open-ear design allows you to hear the sound loud and clear, without anything going into your ear canal; you still hear everything along with your surroundings, making them ideal if you're a street runner or anywhere you want to hear the environment.

Open-ear earbuds won't give you the head-banging sound that other more powerful (and expensive) earbuds deliver. Instead, you get good sound quality. They use Bluetooth 5.4, which allows them to be connected to a pair of devices simultaneously.

I used the ergonomically designed and sweat-proof (IPX5) POP Clip earbuds on a few bike rides, nighttime dog walks and quick grocery store trips. They did exactly what they're touted for, letting me listen to music while biking and attending baseball games, while also being able to hear cars, shoppers and other surrounding sounds.

It's also worth noting that POP Clip earbuds do not have over-the-ear earhooks. Instead, they clip onto the side of your ears, which is a big deal to bikers. Their design did not interfere with my helmet or prescription sunglasses.

The POP Clip earbuds weigh 0.17 ounces each and are rated for an 8-hour playtime and up to 30 hours with the included USB-C charging storage case. Inside each earbud is a 10.8 mm dual-magnet driver. On-ear controls performed well for pausing music, adjusting volume and accessing voice assistants.

The sound is clear with a nice amount of bass, which is perfect for open-ear sound. The PeatsAudio app can be used to customize the sound. The app also features earbud tracking, displaying the last known location and triggering a beeping alert to help locate them if they're within 50 meters.

Online: soundpeats.com

SOUNDPEATS/TNS

The SoundPEATS POP Clip earbuds don't go into your ear canals but rather clip onto the outside of your ears. You'll get 8 hours of playtime and up to 30 hours with the included USB-C charging case.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Sega

Inspired by Japanese black-ink brushstroke paintings, Shinobi: Art of Vengeance breathes new life into the action arcade series. The game is part of Sega's attempt to revive classic franchises from the 1990s by contracting passionate studios, like Paris-based LizardCube.

New Shinobi embraces hand-drawn gaming

Art of Vengeance revives franchise, returns to the Sega classic's 2D roots with stylish art and aggressive gameplay

By Gene Park
The Washington Post

There's a myth that true immersion into video games requires three dimensions: Sidescrollers are good for nostalgia, but the future belongs to photorealistic 3D worlds.

But a range of recent games like indie darling Hollow Knight are proving millennia-old, 2D hand-drawn art will endure in video games. Ben Fiquet, a Parisian artist who founded game studio Lizardcube, now contracted by Sega in the Japanese firm's efforts to revive languishing intellectual property from its troves, remains dedicated to the craft. Fiquet is creative director for Sega's new title Shinobi: Art of Vengeance, scheduled for release Aug. 29.

Fiquet says he created Lizardcube to be a beacon of light for 2D animation in gaming, inspired by award-winning '90s game developer Dave Perry, who created that era's visually stunning Earthworm Jim. The studio's effort is backed up by several critically acclaimed 2D games with Sega's Streets of Rage 4 and the Wonder Boy series.

"The inherent power of 2D lies in its straightforward simplicity: the artist's vision brought directly to life," Fiquet tells The Post. "There are no tricks or deceptions, just pure craft. While it can be challenging to elicit player emotion, I believe 2D can resonate more deeply, strongly and lastingly."

Sega of America visited The Washington Post newsroom with a PlayStation 5 console and an early copy of Shinobi: Art of Vengeance. The publishers believe the game speaks for itself once in the player's hands, and they're correct. The feel of the game requires the mental agility and focus of a fighting game, with a free-flowing combat system that includes juggling combination attacks in the air, counters and follow-up techniques like rolls and dive kicks.

Sega knew Lizardcube was perfect thanks to the studio's success in translating the arcade brawler Streets of Rage 4 for the 21st century while retaining its crunchy spirit. Kagasei Shimomura, director of Sega's content production department, has been a producer since the company's golden era of the 1990s. As part of the now defunct Sega Ages project, which brought classic titles to modern platforms, he's been a key figure in keeping Sega franchises alive after the turn of the century, when Sega famously exited the video game console business in 2001 to become a publisher and developer for other platforms.

The company is most famous for creating Sonic the Hedgehog, but in recent years, its found success in role-playing games focused on Japanese culture with the Like a Dragon series, focused on yakuza life and the multimillion selling Persona series,which features young adult fantasy adventures. This success gave Sega newfound confidence in reviving classic franchises from its golden era.

"When launching the Ages project, our first task was to select a series to bring back, and the one that always came to mind was Shinobi," Shimomura said. In 2023, Sega announced a full-court press of franchise revivals across the company, and Shimomura once again made reviving Shinobi his priority.

"And when it came to bringing that title to life, only one name came to mind: Lizardcube," he continued. "I contacted them right away and was surprised to learn that they were also very passionate about the Shinobi series and had hoped to work on a game someday. That settled it for me. Lizardcube was a must-have developer for the new Shinobi title."

The company has tried a dozen times to revive the Shinobi series, including an ambitious dalliance into 3D gaming with a 2003 PlayStation 2 title that was well received but saw limited success. Lizardcube's entry will be the first Shinobi game in 14 years, and its return to the two-dimensional plane is deliberate.

"Sega's revival project is guided by the principle of lore meeting innovation," Shimomura said. "This means we don't simply enhance the visuals of past titles, instead we break down the original works to their very core, redefine their inherent appeal and combine them with new elements that will excite today's players."

One of the consistent features passed down from Shinobi's arcade lineage is punishing difficulty. But in a welcome move for anyone hoping for a more relaxing time, Lizardcube's game provides multiple options to make the experience easier, including giving the player's iconic white-clad ninja protagonist Joe Musashi the ability to hit harder while taking more damage.

The game features stunning layered backgrounds depicting futuristic mashups of Japanese traditional and urban environments, including busy cityscapes dotted with digital and street artwork. A robust skill tree can be filled out with many collectibles found through battles and exploration within a surprisingly nonlinear level design that pushes players against every axis of the map. It also includes arcade-like challenges for a more focused experience on platforming and action without any narrative beats.

The animation is exceptionally fluid, highlighted by lovely black-ink brushstrokes of traditional Japanese paintings. Creating evocative and immersive images with 2D hand-drawn art is a different kind of challenge from making 3D games, Fiquet said.

"While not overly complex, it demands skilled artists and a pipeline capable of handling it," he said. "Most modern hardware is optimized for rendering intricate 3D assets, but managing thousands of stacked images presents a different challenge." In many ways 2D renderings are less flexible, he said, "requiring all decisions to be made well in advance."

Shinobi: Art of Vengeance is shaping up to be a vanguard title for Sega's efforts to galvanize its arcade roots. More broadly, and considering Lizardcube's pedigree and passion, it'll be another brushstroke in 2D art's durability even in the fast-evolving medium of video games.

Platforms: PC, Nintendo Switch, Playstation 4/5, Xbox One, Xbox X/S

Online: asia.sega.com/shinobi-art-of-vengeance/en

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Preserving, enhancing Schulz's legacy

Apple TV+ special the 1st 'Peanuts' musical in 35 years

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Charlie Brown and Snoopy go to sleepaway camp in a new, bittersweet Apple TV+ special fueled by a pair of Emmy Award-nominated songwriters that's being billed as the first "Peanuts" musical in 35 years.

"My motivation has always been to preserve and enhance my dad's legacy," says co-writer Craig Schulz, a son of the iconic comic strip "Peanuts" creator Charles M. Schulz. "So it's really an honor to get to play with these kids."

"Snoopy Presents: A Summer Musical," which premieres this weekend, features five songs — two by Jeff Morrow, Alan Zachary and Michael Weiner — and three by Ben Folds.

"If someone asked me to write for a stupid kids thing, I would find it difficult because I don't like talking down to anyone, much less kids," Folds says. "'Peanuts' isn't like that. We're working in very rich, fertile soil."

What's the special about?

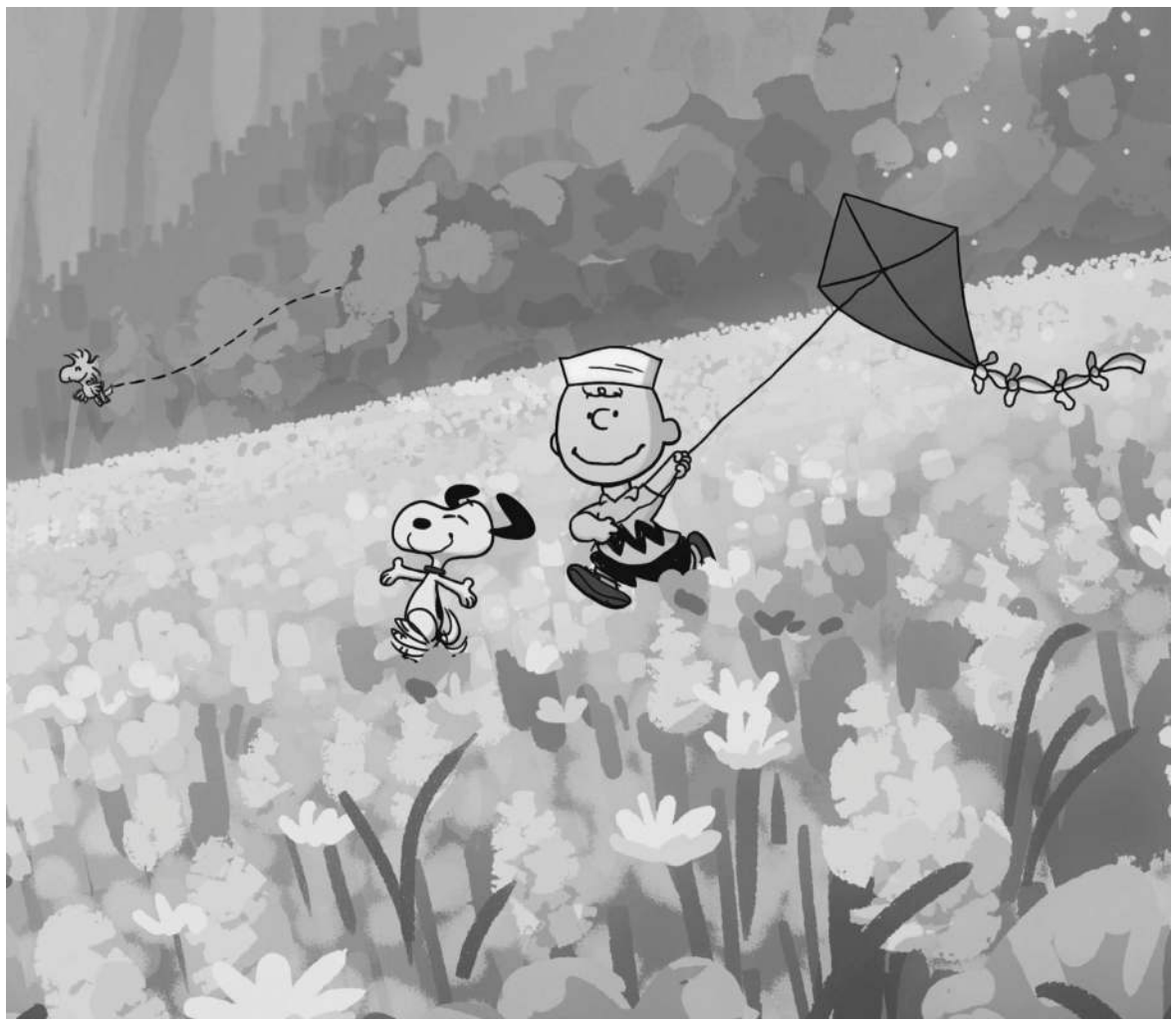
The special opens with the kids getting ready to catch the bus to Cloverhill Ranch camp, but Sally isn't so sure it's going to be great. "Honestly, big brother, I could stay home," she says.

Sally is initially intimidated by the camp's inside jokes and rituals and turned off by the insects, the endless climbing, no TV, cold lake water and lumpy beds.

"You wake at dawn / Like you would in jail," she sings in the song "A Place Like This." "The food's not what you'd call upscale / This whole endeavor, an epic fail / And that's being diplomatic."

Trust "Peanuts" to explore reluctance to leave home and fear of change. Craig Schulz, who co-wrote the script with his son, Bryan, and Cornelius Uliano, channeled some of his own childhood.

"Cloverhill Ranch actually is a takeoff of the one in Santa Rosa called Cloverleaf that I went to as a child and hated. I bailed out after a week and went home," he says. "So many connections in the film kind of date back to my childhood that we weaved into the film."



APPLE TV+/AP photos

Snoopy and Charlie Brown in a scene from "Snoopy Presents: A Summer Musical." In the new special, Charlie Brown is excited to go to Cloverhill Ranch sleepaway camp, but his sister Sally is not, initially. As she warms up to the place, Charlie Brown learns that his beloved camp is struggling and wants to save it.

"Charlie Brown is different in this special. He's really happy. He loves this place. And so that's why when we get to that scene it's so effective because he returned back to the zero we sort of know him traditionally," says director Erik Wiese of weather threatening to cancel Charlie Brown's fundraising concert to save the camp and sending him into a "good grief" spiral.

While Sally warms to camp, Snoopy discovers what he thinks is a treasure map that will transform him into a wealthy pooch, one who will lay on top of a gold dog house. And Charlie Brown learns that this summer will be the last for his beloved but struggling camp — unless he does something.

"I guess your generation would rather sit in front of the television than sit under the stars," he tells Sally. "We have to protect these kinds of places because once they're gone, they're gone forever."

A concert to save camp

Charlie Brown comes up with the idea to invite generations of campgoers back for a fundraising concert, but the skies darken on the big day, threatening to cancel the event and sending him into a "good grief" spiral.

"Charlie Brown is different in this special," says director Erik Wiese. "He's really happy. He loves this place. And so that's why when we get to that scene it's so effective because he returned back to the zero we sort of know him traditionally."

Folds supplies the lovely, last three songs — "When We Were Light," "Look Up, Charlie Brown" and "Leave It Better" — and credits his songwriting collaborators for setting the stage.

"I entered when those first two songs existed, and I get to just sort of step in at the point where things get really complex and melancholic," he says.

This October marks the 75th anniversary of "Peanuts," and the musical arrives with a boatload of branding, from tote bags by Coach to shoes by Crocs and Starbucks mugs.

Craig Schulz is already at work on a second animated musical with his son, having long ago fallen in love with the family business.

"I used to always wonder how in the world my dad could go to the office every day for 50 years and write a comic strip every day," he says, comparing it to the "I Love Lucy" episode with Lucy trying to keep up with a chocolate conveyor belt.

"Then I came to realize that he had his family of five kids, but I really think he enjoyed going to the studio and working with the 'Peanuts' characters even more so than his real family. He got to go in there and embrace them, draw them, make him happy, sad, whatever. It was a world that I don't think he could ever leave."

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEW

UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

From left: Gage Munroe, Paisley Cadorath, Bob Odenkirk, Christopher Lloyd and Connie Nielsen are a family trying to get away from it all — unsuccessfully — in "Nobody 2."

Unoriginal 'Nobody 2' misses target

Hyperviolent Odenkirk action vehicle fails to recapture surprising appeal of original 'dadsploitation flick'

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

Just about anyone can be an action hero when production company 87North — the team behind the "John Wick" franchise — is behind the camera. They proved that in 2021 when they made comedian and "Better Call Saul" star Bob Odenkirk a surprise badass in the hyperviolent dadsploitation flick "Nobody."

Odenkirk played Hutch, a suburban dad and corporate stooge with a surprising past, who is unable to keep a lid on his instincts, like a kettle boiling over, when his family is threatened.

In the sequel, "Nobody 2," Hutch has found his groove, and once again he's fallen into a routine of quotidian drudgery, delivering brutality day in and day out, in an attempt to pay off his debt — not that the script by Derek Kolstad and Aaron Rabin recaps anything from the first film. But all you need to know is that Hutch is a dad, his job is violence, and he needs a break.

Desperate to save his marriage and family, Hutch decides to take his wife, Becca (Connie Nielsen), and kids Sammy (Paisley Cadorath) and Brady (Gage Munroe), as well as his wacky former FBI agent dad (Christopher Lloyd), on a summer break trip to one of his beloved childhood haunts: Plummerville Tiki Rush, a ramshackle water park somewhere in the Upper Midwest. He's trying to get away from it all, but as his handler The Butcher (Colin Salmon) reminds him, "Wherever you go, there you are."

And there Hutch goes. Try as he might to take a break from himself, he can't escape his true nature when a scuffle breaks out at an arcade and a security guard swats Sammy.

The resulting brawl, set to the Offspring's "Come Out and Play," is one of the best moments of "Nobody 2" — funny, colorful, innovative. Hutch's greatest strength is his MacGyver-like ability to use every tool and random object around him in service of violence, and he plays Whack-a-Mole with the guard's head.

Much like that other Kolstad-scripted character, John Wick, Hutch is a reluctant warrior, desperate to avoid using his skills, but seemingly unable to stop, whether by obligation or training.

But where Wick is brooding and operatic, "Nobody" is cheeky and irreverent, because 87North shapes its action franchises to the star, not the other way around.

"Nobody 2" maintains that sense of humor, now with Timo Tjahjanto taking over directing duties from Ilya Naishuller.

But 87North also has a house style now, both aesthetically and thematically, and both "Nobody 2" and Tjahjanto fall prey to that formula. There are a few great action sequences that utilize Hutch's inventive thinking and emphasize the incongruity of his skills. The camera will follow the impact of a smash, the swing of a punch, and the violence is satisfyingly crunchy as usual.

But the script itself feels dashed off like an afterthought, reverse-engineered around a few key set pieces in the amusement park.

What works about these movies is Odenkirk, his pained expression as he resorts to inflicting pain and destruction, his blackout rage mode when protecting his family. The first antagonist they introduce, a bootlegger named Henry (John Ortiz), who is also an overprotective dad, matches that energy perfectly.

So why, then, do Kolstad and Rabin jettison that villain who fits the rural setting for a slick, glamorous gangster that is Sharon Stone in a three-piece suit? As a psychopathic mob boss with a French bulldog puppy and 87North regular Daniel Bernhardt as her right-hand man, Stone is certainly having fun, but her character, Lendani, feels wildly out of place.

"Nobody 2," which plays on the juxtaposition of the suburban and the superviolent, works when it's Hutch facing off with the redneck good ol' boys on a duck boat, not when he's going through the motions with an elite villain who feels like she's "from the world of John Wick." It's like their wires got crossed in the writing, and the Lendani plot feels forced, sludgy and totally unnecessary.

However, everyone seems to be having a good time, from Stone to Ortiz to Colin Hanks as a mean sheriff with a bad haircut, and especially RZA as Hutch's brother Harry, in full ninja nerd mode. At 89 minutes, with a few pops of amusement and levity, there are worse ways to spend an August afternoon. Yet the story feels so thin, the script so rote, that it's a disappointment from the surprising appeal of the first film.

All the elements were there to make "Nobody 2" a great sequel — it just seems like nobody really thought about what makes the original really work.

"Nobody 2" is rated R for strong bloody violence, and language throughout. Running time: 89 minutes. Now playing at select on-base theaters.

Porto, Portugal's salty 'second city'

Porto, the hub of northern Portugal, is a prime example of a national "second city." Over several generations, many of Europe's Industrial Age powerhouses fell into decline — not unlike America's Rust Belt — while their elegant "first city" counterparts enjoyed the luster of the Information Age. But over the past decade or so, the rust has become a trendy accessory in places like Porto, and industrial ruins have turned bohemian chic.

Just three hours from Lisbon by train, Porto is fiercely proud of what distinguishes it from the national capital as it ages happily along the Douro River — along with most of the world's port wine.

Porto seems entirely made of granite — even its Romanesque cathedral is stout and stony. But the city's inviting shopping streets are ornamented with playful architectural touches and lovely blue-tiled facades. Spared by the 1755 earthquake that toppled Lisbon, Porto is charmingly well preserved, and the city has kept its Old World atmosphere.

The city comes with the steady sea breeze, seagull soundtrack and ever-changing weather that you'd expect from an oceanside city. You're likely to get simultaneous sun and rain at least once during your visit.

The two biggest draws here are the photogenic riverfront Ribeira quarter and the tourable port-wine lodges just across the river in Vila Nova de Gaia. (Aficionados of port — or of dramatic scenery — can use Porto as a springboard for visiting the nearby Douro Valley, where grapes grow on steep stone terraces.) But the city also boasts a thriving food scene — including one of my favorite market halls anywhere, bustling shopping streets, architecturally lavish churches, narrow cobbled lanes and a handful of museums worth a look.

Rick Steves

The Ribeira (literally "riverbank") district is the city's most colorful and touristy quarter. Strolling the Ribeira embankment, while popping in and out of shops that line the way, is Porto's best lazy-afternoon activity.

Downtown Porto is compact but steep, making distances seem longer. Foot-weary travelers can take one of the "Six Bridges" cruises (operated by several different companies) that leave continually from the Ribeira riverfront. These relaxing one-hour excursions float up and down the Douro River, offering a fine orientation and glimpses of all of Porto's bridges — most notably the majestic steel Ponte Dona Maria Pia, artfully designed by Gustav Eiffel, architect of Paris' famous landmark.

DOMINIC ARIZONA BONUCCELLI/Rick Steves' Europe

Traditional rabelo boats, which were once used to deliver port wine from the Douro Valley, line Porto's harbor at sunset.

For wine connoisseurs, touring a port-wine "lodge" — where the wine ages for years — and sampling the product is a must. Port is a medium-sweet wine, usually taken as a digestif after dinner. For some, port is an acquired taste — but it's one worth cultivating. As I always say, "Any port in a storm ..."

In the district of Vila Nova de Gaia, you can choose between 18 lodges that are open for touring and tasting. At any lodge, the procedure is about the same; travelers can simply show up and ask for a tour. Sandeman, the most high-profile company, is sort of the Budweiser of port — a good first stop for novices.

While the wine-cellar experience can be unforgettable, consider splurging for a convivial, romantic and port-centric gourmet dinner at one of several fine port-tasting rooms in downtown Porto. I particularly like Kopke, with a helpful staff and an elegant waterfront space away from the crowds.

In addition to wine tasting, Porto offers many food tours. Like similar tours that are trendy throughout Europe these days, they include roughly five or six stops, spread out over about three or four hours and about a mile's walk. They're not cheap, but they're a good value considering that you get a full meal as well as plenty of cultural insights from an engaging guide.

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Squeeze the last out of summer at these German wine fests

While Germany's known as a land of beer, the country's ability to produce some of the world's most highly regarded wines, particularly whites, is no less cause for celebration. And celebrate they do, particularly as harvest time draws near. Germany's wines are produced in 13 officially designated wine regions, all but two of which are clustered in the southwest of the country. Here's a look, by region, at some upcoming wine festivals sure to make the waning days of summer more memorable:

Rheingau: The Rheingau wine-growing region, stretching along the Rhine roughly between Wiesbaden and Rüdesheim, is known for scenic vistas and stellar wines, particularly its Rieslings. These wines are just one of the many attractions of the Rheingauer Weinwoche, 10 days given to celebrating wine culture in the heart of Hesse's capital of Wiesbaden. In the shadow of the towering, neo-Gothic red brick market church, the masses come out to enjoy thirst-quenching white wines and spritzers, sparkling Sekts, gourmet fare and live music in styles ranging from Latin jazz to Irish dance. This year's edition of the fest continues through Sunday. Online: tinyurl.com/3hddb5wr

Karen Bradbury

Rheinhessen: Located to the west of the Rhine between Mainz and Worms, Rheinhessen, Germany's largest wine-growing region, produces mostly white wines, Riesling, Müller-Thurgau and Silvaner among them. Sampling a great cross-section of these varieties is made easy by attending the Mainzer Weinmarkt, a wine fest set in a verdant park on the outskirts of town and running Aug. 28-31 and Sept. 4-7. Unique features of this wine fest include an artist's market set in a rose garden and a children's zone offering crafts, face painting and other fun (Sundays only). Online: mainzer-weinmarkt.de

iStock

Celebrate Germany's finest wines at a local festival.

Mosel: Germany's oldest winemaking region features a twisting, turning river, idyllic villages and astoundingly steep slopes. The region produces mostly whites, Rieslings in particular; those grown on slate soil have a distinctive, mineral taste. A great place to try them is Bernkastel-Kues, a town bursting with half-timbered houses and medieval flair, during the Middle Mosel Wine Festival Sept. 4-8. The region's largest fest has the usual stands offering food and drink as well as events that include the crowning of the new wine queen, a fireworks display (9 p.m. Sept. 6) and a vintner's parade (2 p.m. Sept. 7). Live music on three stages and amusement-park style rides round out the offerings. Online: tinyurl.com/56w255f7

Ahr: In contrast to most other German wine regions, Ahr produces overwhelmingly red wine grapes, most of which are Spätburgunder (known elsewhere as pinot noir). These, among other varieties, can be sampled in Ahrweiler during the town's biggest annual event, the Ahrweiler Weinwochen. From Sept. 5-7 and Sept. 12-14, the market square, nestled within remarkably intact medieval walls, is the place to enjoy sweet and savory treats, live music, guided tastings and more. A vintner's parade begins at 3 p.m. Sept. 7. Online: tinyurl.com/3uy5emw5

Württemberg: This wine region stretching roughly between Stuttgart and Heilbronn along the Neckar River and its tributaries is mostly given to red wines, particularly Trollinger, a late-ripening variety with a taste reminiscent of currants and strawberries. This will be the drink of choice for many of the approximately 300,000 visitors to the Heilbronn Wine Village, slated for Sept. 11-20. In addition to more than 350 quality wines, including plenty of sparkling ones, festgoers can enjoy live music, guided tastings and hikes through the surrounding vineyards. At 5 p.m. Sept. 11, those at the opening ceremony led by the mayor and wine queen are treated to a free pour of wine with which to toast to a successful, convivial fest. Online: tinyurl.com/3k9eab8d

Pfalz: This sun-kissed region north of the Alsace region of France produces nearly as much red wine as it does white. The most common red is the highly drinkable, uncomplicated Dornfelder, followed by Spätburgunder. These, alongside Rieslings, will be quaffed in vast quantities at the Dürkheimer Wurstmarkt in Bad Dürkheim, commonly referred to as the world's largest wine fest. From Sept. 12-16 and Sept. 19-22, more than half a million visitors will once again flock to this handsome spa town to sip wines and wine spritzes, feast on festival foods, dance to live music, shop market stalls and ride rides. Online: tinyurl.com/ybbacxck

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

PHOTOS BY NATACHA PISARENKO/AP

Workers in Pilar, Argentina, build a miniature version of Mairinque, Brazil, on June 25 as part of Miniatur Wunderland, a museum in Hamburg, Germany, that houses the largest model train set in the world.

It's a small, but realistic, world after all

Miniatur Wunderland in Hamburg developing new exhibits but making sure to include social, political ills

BY MELINA WALLING
Associated Press

Watching his dad make a brand-new miniature train car look old, placing the wooden parts to weather in the sun and rain, pulled Peter Martínez into the world of miniatures. He recalls his father, who made model trains mostly for collectors or hobbyists, wondering why anyone would pay him to do what he thought was the most fun part of the hobby.

"But luckily they did, and we were able to build an industry around it," Martínez said.

The Argentine family business, United Scale Arts, is now partnering with Germany's Miniatur Wunderland, a museum that houses the largest model train set in the world, to develop new exhibits depicting parts of South America, including the Amazon rainforest and Atacama Desert. But with miniature power comes great responsibility — and both Martínez's company and the museum are determined that the miniature world reflect both the good and bad of the real thing.

So alongside the perfectly shaded rocks and trees, they depict poverty, crime and environmental degradation. In the exhibits already running in Hamburg, built by a team that has grown over the years to hundreds of people, it means that tiny trains pull tiny coal cars into a mining town, but also, on a city bridge, a tiny semitruck hauls the tiny giant blade of a wind turbine.

And the builders say it means the new models won't shy away from illustrating real life in the Amazon: they will include scenes of illegal mining, deforestation and forest fires.

"These are social problems that exist in the real world, and we need to show them also in the models, because I think it's important not to make this kind of idealistic view of the world, but also to show reality and to use these tools as a learning experience for everyone that visits the Wunderland," Martínez said.

Visitors have a lot to see in the multistory warehouse

Above, miniature mines and below, miniature graffiti.

that is Wunderland. From Las Vegas to Miami Beach, from Rio de Janeiro to Monaco, cars zoom past tiny replicas of buildings as throngs of people, with heads smaller than your fingernail, mill about famous landmarks.

Cargo ships dominate the glasslike surface of a tiny bay as they chug in with their deliveries. Planes taxi down the runway of an airport. And of course, plenty of trains roll through every landscape to the delight of kids and adults alike.

Twin brothers Gerrit and Frederik Braun joined with business partner Stephan Hertz and took out a loan to create Miniatur Wunderland after they left the nightclub business.

Frederik had visited a model railroad shop in Zurich, called his brother and suggested they create their own — but a whole lot bigger.

Gerrit laughed at first. Unlike his brother, he loved the nightclub. But he eventually agreed and now can't imagine doing anything else.

"It's a dream come true that we sit here 25 years later, and playing all day," he said, chuckling.

But he takes the work seriously. The brothers came up with most of the initial plans for the museum within two weeks, Gerrit said. It's grown in scope and ambition since then.

"Ten years ago, we were looking to the old section and saw the real world has changed in this time," Gerrit said. They realized they needed to update the exhibits to include technologies like electric cars, wind turbines, nuclear power and more. "I have children, and I believe in global warming and I'm sure that we have done it ... So if you believe in this, and you have the possibility to show the images, why not?"

There's no one process by which the designers and model builders decide what to include in their models, but as they have added to the collection, they haven't shied away from depicting technology or from political or contentious topics.

In 2017, during Donald Trump's first term as U.S. president, the Wunderland put up a model concrete wall with barbed wire around the section with the American landscapes.

In 2019, Wunderland launched a scathing exhibit on the treatment of animals in large-scale farming that sparked deep criticism from the agriculture industry.

Next came weeks of conversation, farm visits and the eventual launch of a special exhibit aimed at depicting the current reality of pig farming, featuring industrial production and organic farms.

They're usually striving to depict the world exactly as it is. But building models also reminds Gerrit that "you can build the world a little bit like you want," he said.

It's an art form that can have practical purposes but also can capture longing, nostalgia or other feelings about a particular time or place, said Kit Maxwell, a curator with The Art Institute of Chicago, which houses the popular Thorne Miniature Rooms.

"One of the most compelling things about these rooms is that you imagine yourself in them," he said.

Aware of that power of imagination, Martínez also said builders have to be careful not to unfairly cast countries in a bad light as they seek to include imperfections.

"You need to kind of balance, when you show the bad things in contrast with the good things, that they are not overdone or they are not too much," he said. "You want also that the people that go there have a good time and not get really sad after seeing this model."

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

PORTO CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU/TNS

Porto's housing stock spans the centuries, and housing costs are lower in Portugal than in other developed countries, but tourists and people seeking residency are changing the nature of neighborhoods as apartments are turned into short-term Airbnbs.

GEORGE HOBICA/TNS

Porto's streets and sidewalks are paved with small pieces of white and black limestone, sometimes granite, while the houses are topped with red tiles and the facades clad with blue and white ceramics.

Portugal is the place to be

Why a Tribune News Service writer decided to visit the coastal European country and why 'everyone' is moving there

BY GEORGE HOBICA
Tribune News Service

When I told my friend Justin that I was going to visit Portugal, he asked me, "Why is everyone going to Portugal?"

People travel for many reasons, but visiting friends and relatives (VFR in industry-speak) is one of the largest and most resilient segments of the travel industry. Travelers spend over $400 billion a year doing it.

And it was the primary reason for my trip to Portugal. I'd been promising to visit my friend Bill, who had became an "everyone" like thousands of Americans in recent years who have relocated to the coastal European country.

I also planned to visit my friend John, whom I first met in junior high school more than 50 years ago. He was planning to visit the country with his son, yet another person planning to join "everyone" moving there.

But first I would stop in Boston to visit my sister, whom I hadn't seen in a while. She was not planning on moving to Portugal, but it happened that TAP Air Portugal was launching a nonstop flight from Boston to Porto, Portugal's second-largest city after Lisbon. So I booked a seat on the inaugural flight, boarded a plane from my home in New York City, had dinner at the Boston Harbor Hotel with my sis and then flew to Porto the same night. I thought this would be a perfect way to reconnect with three people I had neglected too long, while also trying to find out why so many people are moving to Portugal (I was genuinely curious).

First, let me make clear that saying "everyone" is going to Portugal is a bit of an exaggeration, but more than 21,000 Americans have moved there, either permanently or as temporary residents, in the past few years. They're the largest group of transplants, followed by the Chinese. Fifteen percent of the country's 10.6 million residents are from outside the country.

I had visited Lisbon once, in the 1980s, staying at what is now the Lapa Palace Hotel, then

SEE PORTUGAL ON PAGE 21

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Portugal: Visitors will appreciate affordability, crime rate, pace, sights

FROM PAGE 20

owned by the Orient-Express Hotels group, when it was affordable. Compared to the rest of Europe, Lisbon seemed like it had been left behind in a time warp, with its streets and sidewalks paved with tiny bits of stone and its vintage "elétricos" — the city's ancient tram lines made from wood and polished brass — weaving through narrow streets — as iconic as San Francisco's cable cars.

I rarely buy souvenirs, but I was enchanted by Portuguese majolica pottery, hand-painted in vibrant colors and depicting small woodland creatures, plants and flowers. Somehow I managed not to break anything bringing my treasures home.

So there I was again in Portugal, and I was glad to see that not much had changed, other than the influx of Americans and others.

Statistics help explain some of Portugal's appeal. Something called the Global Peace Index, an annual survey of crime and violence data compiled by the Australia-based Institute for Economics & Peace, ranks Portugal at No. 7, just below Switzerland (the lower rankings means safer). The U.S., however, is at 132, incredibly just ahead of Iran. Portugal's violent crime rate is one-tenth of the U.S. rate.

The day I arrived, a big soccer match was in town, and it was the last day of national elections (10 political parties are in the national assembly, and citizens can vote online). I have no idea which team or candidate won. The city was quiet. No demonstrations or postgame riots like you'd find in Paris or Philadelphia or Los Angeles or Washington. There were no roving gangs of disgruntled voters rampaging through the streets or mindless teenagers sacking retail stores just for fun. There was none of this in Porto. No sense that things were about to fall apart.

Then there's the slower pace, and better work-life balance. The Wall Street Journal reported recently that job listings in the U.S. increasingly stress the importance of working 70 or more hours a week. "If you're looking for work-life balance," one job listing states, "this isn't it."

And if you're looking for a stressful life, Portugal isn't it.

Health care is more affordable, with comprehensive private insurance premiums costing about $1,000 per year (public insurance is free).

English is widely spoken, in part thanks to the long presence, starting in the 16th century, of the English in the production of port wine.

The cost of living in Portugal is 36% less than in the U.S. according to a 2024 survey.

Portugal is "orderly and relaxed." My friend Bill summed it up when we met over brunch on my next-to-last day in his new country. "Every time I turn around, the Portuguese are off work celebrating another holiday. Meanwhile Americans are lucky to get two weeks off per year working at a job that offers no employment contract, which is standard. There's no social safety net in the U.S. Portugal has universal health care."

In Porto I took a walking tour with Bliss Tours (blisstours.pt, $27 per person), led by Porto native Duarte Vieira. I recommend it — and him. When I got back home I texted him to ask what he likes best about his country. He came back, "The weather, the food, but mostly the safe life." Again the safety thing. Maybe all those expatriates are moving to Portugal for some peace and quiet.

The thing he liked least? "The low salaries." Which helps to explain that 36% lower cost of living.

Not ready to move? There's still a lot to see and do.

Even though I went to see friends and family, in truth the visits were of necessity short and I had lots of free time. For the tourist there are 17 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Portugal — more per acre than in the U.K. or France. One of them is the historic center of Guimarães, a town a few miles north of Porto. I took a walking tour there. It was a feast for the eyes. Red-tiled roofs, streets and sidewalks paved with tiles known as calçada portuguesa, or Portuguese pavement, made from small pieces of white and black limestone, sometimes of basalt and granite. Narrow winding streets lined with tile-clad houses spanning in age from medieval times to the 19th century, with those cute little trams dating from the 1930s rattling and squealing past.

I visited some churches and cathedrals, of which Portugal has many. Braga Cathedral was started in the 12th century in a mishmash of styles — Romanesque, Baroque, Gothic and others. I was surprised to see so few visitors inside. My guide said that a recent admission charge (all of $2.30) was the reason, but I think it's just that relatively few people visit Braga compared to other cities in Europe with architectural jewels like this.

And that's the other thing about Portugal, especially the north where I stayed: It's not overtouristed, compared to much of Europe these days. That said, the very things that make Portugal so attractive to outsiders is making living there more difficult for the Portuguese. The influx of tourists and people seeking residency is driving up housing costs and changing the nature of neighborhoods, in Lisbon especially, as apartments are turned into short-term Airbnb rentals.

Porto is well known for port wine, although it's made in the surrounding countryside, with its hills covered in vines, offering many opportunities for tastings. I visited Quinta da Roêda, a vineyard owned by Croft Port, founded in 1588, in the Douro Valley (another World Heritage Site), where I took a cruise on the Douro River with Deltatur (deltatur.pt), a local tour provider offering 16 options starting at $35. Nearby, I took a cooking class at Quinta da Pacheca, a country hotel set amid extensive vineyards.

Also in Porto, I strolled through the Matosinhos Municipal Market, where dozens of vendors sell everything the sea has to offer. It made me wish there was something like that back home. The surrounding restaurants, such as Bistrô by Vila Foz where I dined, are happy to prepare your "catch" to order. I caught some jumbo shrimp, freshly caught not farmed, and huge.

Because Bill was staying there and highly recommended it, on my last night in Porto I checked into the Rosa Et Al (rosaetal.com), a six-suite town house hotel where the rooms are decorated with modern and vintage furniture and the daily brunch is a local favorite. It's also a deli and restaurant; I've never stayed anywhere quite like it. A bargain at about $140 per night. Bill took me on a walk of his favorite parts of the city and then dashed off to catch his bus back to Lisbon, two hours away. It was a short visit, but sometimes that's all you need.

That night I had dinner with John down the street from my hotel, also a short visit. He had just arrived in Porto and was hungry, but it was 10 p.m. and I wondered if anything was open. Walking not far we came across O Afonso, where every table was taken but one. As in Spain, people eat late here. We reminisced over a Porto specialty, francesinhas, which is basically a Portuguese adaptation of the French croque monsieur: layers of toasted bread and sliced beef, wet-cured ham, linguiça, or chipolata topped with melted cheese and served with a sauce of tomato and beer and fries. After 50 years, our memories had faded along with much else, but by combining what I remembered with what John remembered we were able to piece something together. At the end of the meal we were served a free glass of port wine and the proprietor shook our hands and thanked us for coming. The damage came to $22 per person including tax and service.

The next morning I packed and crossed the garden to the hotel's living room, where breakfast was supposed to be served, but even at 9 a.m. no one was stirring, so I left ("that's laid-back Portugal for you!" Bill texted later; they quickly refunded the prepaid $15 charge when I returned home). I was going to take the train to the airport ($3) but a car to the airport cost just $16. The line at border control was long but moved quickly, and the agent wished me a pleasant journey with a smile.

Time goes faster and faster as we get older, and sometimes we put off reconnecting with friends and family too long. It felt really good to see some people who meant something to me. Still, as much as I admire the advantages of living in Portugal, I will not be moving there, not quite yet anyway. But I will be making an effort to do more "VFR" travel. For me, it's the best reason to leave home.

PHOTOS BY GEORGE HOBICA/TNS

Portuguese majolica pottery, hand-painted in vibrant colors and signed by the artist, often depicts small woodland creatures, plants and flowers and is a favorite collectible.

Porto is well known for port wine and tastings are popular in the Douro Valley.

Braga Cathedral celebrates a range of architectural styles: Romanesque, Baroque, Gothic and others.

Behind glass

Underwater worlds of Marassi Aquarium in Bahrain provide calming influence, opportunity for reflection

BY SHANNON RENFROE
Stars and Stripes

Bahrain summers don't bring along the dry desert heat others assured me I'd experience here. You don't just move through the island kingdom's air in August; you wear it. Even respites like pool decks heat flip-flops to grill temperatures.

Finding something to do that didn't involve mall shopping was a challenge. Then someone mentioned that a new aquarium had opened inside one of those very malls.

It sounded like a gimmick. I was reminded of a zoo I visited in another country, where an exhibit included house cats. So I wasn't expecting much, maybe a few goldfish and a tired Nemo or two.

The entrance on the third floor of the high-end Marassi Mall stood out, with an immersive archway covered in vibrant coral reef and marine elements.

The aquarium is divided into different marine environments. Beside each tank, digital screens cycle through details about the fish inside. The information adds depth to the experience, reinforcing that the aquarium was built to inform and engage.

I even watched two divers suit up and slip into the trench habitat to make what looked like minor tank repairs. It was a relief that someone was actively caring for this world behind the glass.

Before reaching the exhibitions, a series of smaller aquariums line the hallway. There were longhorn cowfish drifting near coral, lionfish with striped fins moving slowly in place and moray eels tucked in rock crevices, only their heads visible.

Moorish idols swam in small groups, their black, white and yellow bodies easy to spot. These tanks allow you to see the details and quirks of fish most people would never otherwise notice.

The Rainforest Lagoon shifted the tone entirely. The fish were massive and looked more like the prehistoric ancestors of the others I'd seen.

A pale, thick-bodied fish hovered near the glass with a blank, almost terrified stare.

A gar with a crocodilian snout and scales like armor drifted just below the surface.

An arowana glided by with metallic stealth, and a monstrous catfish hugged the floor, its long whiskers fanned out like antennae.

The arapaima fish's scales can deflect piranha bites and its teeth are the stuff of nightmares. As it was being fed, the water's surface exploded with thrashing. I genuinely worried for the feeder's hand.

Some of the fish seemed off. Not physically, but emotionally, if fish can even feel that way.

A neon orange anthias, a species known to thrive in large schools, swam in a tank with other fish that weren't her kind in the same short loop, a vivid hot-pink square on its side like a misplaced label.

Marassi Aquarium

Address: Marassi Galleria Mall, Shop No. 4068, Bldg. 166, Road 264, Block 264, Bahrain
Hours: Saturday through Wednesday, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.; Thursday through Friday, 10 a.m.-11 p.m.
Prices: Regular pass, 6 dinars ($16); ultimate pass, 9 dinars; annual pass, 20 dinars
Information: www.marassiaquarium.bh; @marassiaquariumbahrain on Instagram

Shannon Renfroe

Another fish nestled deep in a rock crevice, unmoving. Maybe I was projecting, or maybe that's just the cost of safety. A friend who once built aquariums explained that many of these animals wouldn't survive in the wild.

Aquariums, he said, protect what's endangered, offering shelter, breeding programs and public education as a kind of insurance against extinction. Conservation depends on captivity. But maybe freedom and protection have always been two distinct kinds of survival.

Still, there was an absolute calm here I hadn't expected. The low lighting, the movement, the animals — all of it pulled me out of the heat and my mundane concerns.

There are studies showing that aquariums can lower heart rate and reduce stress. A 1999 Purdue University report even found that aquariums improved eating habits and behavior in Alzheimer's patients.

I went in skeptical, expecting a mall mildness. I left thinking about the intelligence of other species, what it means to frame nature behind glass in the name of preservation and how much I still don't know. I learned about creatures I'd never heard of before.

I kept thinking about a hybrid-looking ray from the Ocean Trench habitat. I'll probably think about it for the rest of my life. It was so deliberately still and it held my gaze, following me as I walked to the other side of the tank. Was it a coincidence, or did I catch a flicker of awareness? It made me stop and reconsider how we define connection.

I wasn't the only one pulled in. Families moved from tank to tank, kids glued to the glass, pointing, squealing, asking a hundred questions. There's something about the way sea life holds attention.

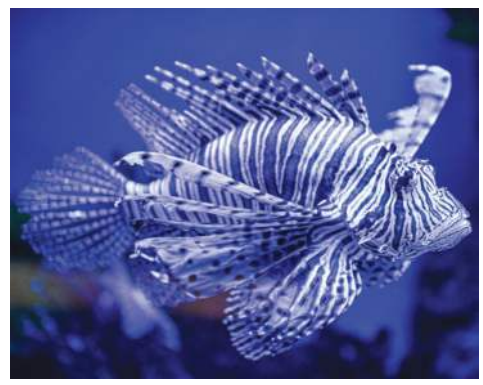
If you go, aim for a weekday, when it's quieter and easier to take your time. I'd bypass the on-site café in favor of the full lineup of mall options that offer better value.

And unless you're set on spending extra for the "ultimate pass," the standard admission provides plenty of access. It's surprisingly worth the stop — even if all you meant to do at the mall was grab a new pair of pants.

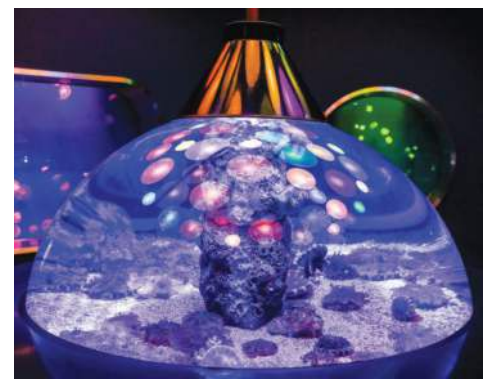
renfroe.shannon@stripes.com
@ShannonStripes

PHOTOS BY SHANNON RENFROE/Stars and Stripes

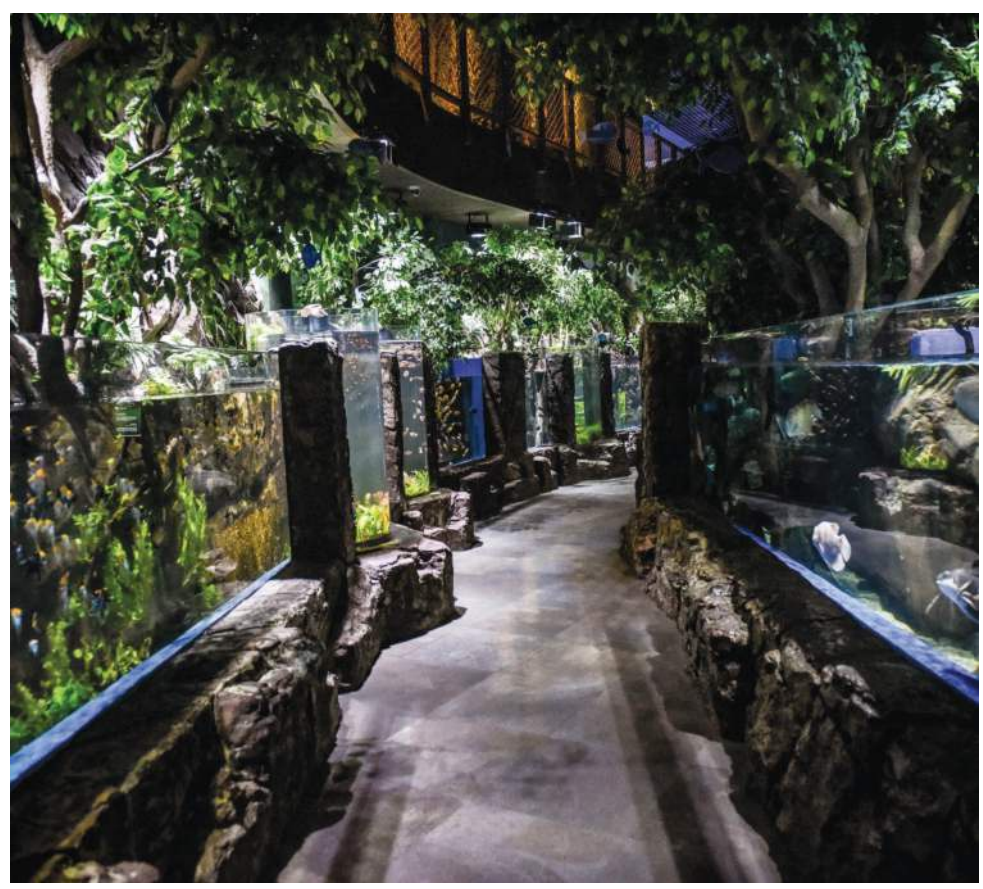
Tropical freshwater species, including angelfish and red-bellied pacu, share space in a densely stocked tank in the Rainforest Habitat at the Marassi Aquarium on the archipelago of Diyar Al Muharraq in Bahrain.



Lionfish with striped fins are another one of the tropical fish species on view at the Marassi Aquarium.



Lit from above, upside-down jellyfish rest motionless in futuristic dome tanks at the Marassi Aquarium.



The entrance to the Rainforest Habitat, one of three immersive zones at the Marassi Aquarium, features dense greenery and freshwater tanks. This section houses large, prehistoric fish species and leads to the deeper Ocean Trench habitat.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Bewitching beer garden

Poerrbacher Hof's old stone farm makes for charming county restaurant, courtyard

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Tucked away in a tiny farming village off the beaten path even by Kaiserslautern standards is a gem of a country restaurant serving up homestyle German staples and unique house and seasonal specialties.

The Poerrbacher Hof has long been a favorite of locals in the surrounding communities west of the city near Ramstein Air Base, according to a friend and frequent customer who's lived in the area for years.

Poerrbach, named after a stream that runs through a pasture, is connected to neighboring Schwedelbach by one of two narrow roads that wind a short, hilly distance between the two villages.

The restaurant maintains much of the rustic charm of the original 1886 stone farm it occupies. My favorite feature is the cobblestoned courtyard, centered on a stately plane tree, with leafy branches that shade most of the more than a dozen tables set up outdoors.

The addition of large clay pots bursting with flowers of various colors, ivy running along the restaurant's stone facade and a lounging black house cat make the beer garden one of the best places to sit for miles on a pleasant summer evening.

Of course, the garden's spell would be broken if the food didn't measure up. I've eaten at least four times at the restaurant, each time trying something new, and have never been disappointed.

A meal I still think about is the "ochsenfetzen," a plate of thinly sliced pieces of tender beef in herb butter with a side of sauteed potatoes, a baguette and salad. I don't typically eat much red meat and it's on the pricey side at 30.50 euros. But it was worth it for a special occasion.

On a recent outing with my 14-year-old son, I went meatless and tried the spinach dumplings, or semmelknöedel, which were about half the price of the beef.

The dish comes from a tradition in Germany to make bread roll dumplings with stale bread rather than letting it go to waste.

A cat suns itself on top of a brick wall in the beer garden at Poerrbacher Hof.

The Poerrbach dumplings kept the pleasantly bitter spinach balanced with browned butter sauce and Parmesan cheese.

Across the table, my son wolfed down his two hearty slices of schnitzel and a mountain of french fries before I could muster a "you can take some home if you can't eat it all."

We also tried the day's soup special, a dark brown broth with minced vegetables and two matzo balls. It tasted like something my Scottish grandmother would make for anyone in the family fighting a cold — minus the matzo balls.

The rest of the menu at Poerrbacher Hof is varied but concise. There are a few types of salads, either vegetarian or with a choice of turkey breast, salmon or beef. Fresh game from local hunting grounds provides the meat for sausage, liver dumplings or saumagen, a meat patty made with wild boar.

Other specialties include an omelet with vegetables and herbs, turkey steak in a mushroom cream sauce, baked king prawns on garlic spaghetti and a potato pancake covered with ham and Appenzeller cheese.

The restaurant has an extensive beverage menu of soft drinks, wine and beer. On our last visit, dessert specials included chocolate tart with strawberry yogurt and cream, and a lemon-rosemary sorbet in a Pfalz secco, or lightly sparkling wine. We were tempted but too full of schnitzel and dumplings.

Poerrbacher Hof also offers indoor dining in rooms hung with deer skulls and taxidermy work, creating an atmosphere that feels like a rustic hunting lodge.

The inside is cozy but not as charming as the beer garden, so my advice is to head over to Poerrbacher Hof before the weather turns. Make a reservation, as the courtyard tends to fill up on temperate days.

svan.jennifer@stripes.com
@stripesktown

PHOTOS BY JENNIFER H. SVAN/Stars and Stripes

A plane tree in the center of the beer garden at Poerrbacher Hof, a homestyle German restaurant near Schwedelbach, Germany, offers ample shade for patrons during the summer months. The country restaurant west of the city near Ramstein Air Base is a favorite of locals. It also has an indoor dining room.

AFTER HOURS GERMANY

Poerrbacher Hof

Address: Talstrasse 16, Schwedelbach, Germany
Hours: Thursday to Saturday from 5 p.m., kitchen closes at 9 p.m.; Sundays and German holidays, from 11 a.m.; kitchen 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 5-8 p.m. Closed Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.
Prices: Main dishes range from about 10.50 to 37.50 euros, with most in the 15-19 euro range. Kids meals cost up to 10 euros.
Information: www.poerrbacherhof.de; +49 6374-70776. Reservations recommended, can be made online or by phone.

Jennifer H. Svan

Semmelknöedel, which are spinach dumplings in a browned butter sauce heaped with Parmesan cheese, at Poerrbacher Hof are a unique twist on traditional German bread roll dumplings.

Traditional schnitzel at Poerrbacher Hof can satisfy a hearty appetite.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

PHOTOS BY JUAN KING/Stars and Stripes

The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center in southeastern Connecticut features many unique, life-sized dioramas showing the history of the Pequot Indians.

From Ice Age to 1780 farmstead

Pequot museum in Connecticut explores indigenous heritage in immersive fashion

BY JUAN KING
Stars and Stripes

In the woodlands of southeastern Connecticut, the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center offers a lifelike journey through the history of the Pequot people.

Located on the Mashantucket reservation, this three-level museum spans 85,000 square feet and features more than 10 permanent indoor exhibitions.

Opened in 1998, the facility is best known for its immersive, life-sized dioramas that depict the history and culture of the Pequot Indians, whose descendants continue to reside in the area.

The Pequot were historically divided into two tribes, the Paucatuck in the east and the Mashantucket in the west. Sometimes referred to as the "Fox people," though the museum does not explain the origin of the nickname, the Pequot were early traders with English and Dutch settlers in the 17th century.

The tribe's population was decimated during the Pequot War of 1637 in Mystic, brought on by conflict with European settlers and other tribes, as well as exposure to new diseases.

Visitors enter the museum on the second floor. Informational pamphlets are available at the ticket desk, and audio guide devices can be picked up before beginning a self-paced tour through exhibits featuring photographs, 17th-century artifacts, maps and a large topographical model of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation's reservation.

One of the first exhibits, Arrival of the People, showcases the tribe's creation story through the work of Native American artists. Nearby, dioramas illustrate cold-climate life, including a caribou hunt.

Prehistoric models on display include a mastodon, a preserved set of mastodon molars, dire wolves and other Ice Age creatures.

Glacial Crevasse and A World of Ice provide a glimpse into the Ice Age, featuring a walk-through faux glacier with dripping water and a small pool. Prehistoric models on display include a mastodon, a preserved set of mastodon molars, dire wolves and other Ice Age creatures.

The Changing Environment exhibit focuses on the tribe's adaptation to seasonal shifts, with displays of traditional hunting and farming tools. A large photo gallery features portraits of Pequot descendants, both past and present.

Among the highlights is the Pequot Village exhibit, housed in a large, dimly lit room filled with dioramas of daily tribal life such as fishing and food gathering. Life-size wigwams and huts feature dining and sleeping areas, and some structures allow visitors to walk inside.

A 30-minute film plays in the on-site theater, depicting the events that led to the Pequot War and the massacre of 1637. Outdoors, a two-acre 1780 Pequot Farmstead exhibit demonstrates farming and livestock practices from that era.

An observation tower made of glass and stone rises 185 feet, offering panoramic views of the reservation and surrounding forest.

The museum also features a gift shop with a wide range of items, including pottery, jewelry, local maple syrup and stuffed animal toys representing regional wildlife such as foxes.

Throughout the summer and fall, the museum hosts cultural, educational and recreational programs and workshops.

king.juan@stripes.com
@juanking_17

The facility gives a glimpse into the Ice Age, featuring a walk-through faux glacier with dripping water and a small pool.

Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center

Directions: 110 Pequot Trail, Mashantucket, CT 06338
Times: Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, except Sundays and Mondays.
Costs: $25 for adults; $20 for seniors 65 and older; $16 for ages 6 to 17; free for children 5 and younger.
Food: There is an onsite cafe.
Information: Phone: 860-396-6910; Online: pequotmuseum.org

Juan King

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

PHOTOS BY AARON KIDD/Stars and Stripes

The name may suggest a pair of British proprietors, but Two Brits Burger Bar in Tokyo is owned and operated by a genial Italian with a clear fondness for English pub fare and vintage Americana.

Calling all beefeaters

Two Brits Burger Bar successfully blends British, American and Japanese flavors amid cozy, kitschy splendor in Tokyo

BY AARON KIDD
Stars and Stripes

For those riding the rails into Tokyo from Camp Zama or Naval Air Facility Atsugi, the Odakyu Line is a familiar lifeline to the capital city.

Disembark at Kyodo Station in Setagaya, and within minutes on foot you'll arrive at Two Brits Burger Bar, an eclectic and cozy establishment that's become a favorite among locals and expats in search of something hearty and familiar.

The name may suggest a pair of British proprietors, but Two Brits is owned and operated by a genial Italian with a clear fondness for English pub fare and vintage Americana. Weathered typewriters and antique cameras compete for space with Union Jack flags and vinyl records, creating a dining area that feels like the attic of a well-traveled friend.

Start with the Triple Cheeseburger for 2,800 yen, or about $18.95. It's as excessive and satisfying as it sounds — three 100% beef patties layered with molten cheese, pickles and the house sauce, stacked high on a buttery bun. There's no lettuce or tomato to distract you when devouring this pure expression of burger maximalism.

For something local with a twist, the Teriyaki Burger layers a sweet-savory glaze over a pair of perfectly grilled patties crowned with a fried egg. It balances Japanese flavor with American heft for 1,950 yen.

The Fried Chicken Burger offers a crispy, juicy beef alternative at 1,600 yen. This thick slab of boneless, golden-fried chicken is spiked with barbecue sauce and tucked into a soft bun with lettuce and tomato.

Then there's the Fish and Chips for 1,700 yen. It's a standout for Tokyo — flaky, tender, flavorful white fish that's not over-battered. The chips are chunky and well-seasoned and served with a side of house tartar sauce.

The Triple Cheeseburger from Two Brits is as excessive and satisfying as it sounds.

Beyond these standouts, the menu includes several rotating specials.

To drink, there's a surprisingly deep bench. Choose from dozens of craft beers, from Japanese microbrews to European imports, and a wine list better than it needs to be. Service is warm and unrushed.

Whether you're on a day off from work or just passing through on your way to central Tokyo, Two Brits makes for a casual, satisfying stop — and one of the few places where fish and chips, teriyaki burgers and reggae on vinyl feel like natural companions.

kidd.aaron@stripes.com
@kiddaaron

Two Brits boasts a surprisingly deep bench of beverages. Choose from dozens of craft beers, from Japanese microbrews to European imports, and a wine list better than it needs to be.

AFTER HOURS JAPAN

Two Brits Burger Bar

Location: 1-21-22 Kyodo, Setagaya, Tokyo
Hours: Open 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily, expect Mondays. Closing time is 10 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.
Dress: Casual
Directions: A short walk from Kyodo Station on the Odakyu Line.
Information: 03-6413-5206; @two-britsburgerbar on Instagram

Aaron Kidd

The Fish and Chips from Two Brits Burger Bar is a standout offering for Tokyo — flaky, tender, flavorful white fish that's not overbattered. The chunky, well-seasoned chips are served with house tartar sauce.

Two Brits' Teriyaki Burger pairs Japanese flavor with American heft.

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

PHOTOS BY ALEX KENT/For the Washington Post

A mahjong player at Lucky Danger in Washington announces she's won the game by declaring "Mahjong!" The Chinatown-adjacent location has a backroom mahjong parlor.

'It feels like the culture is being seen'

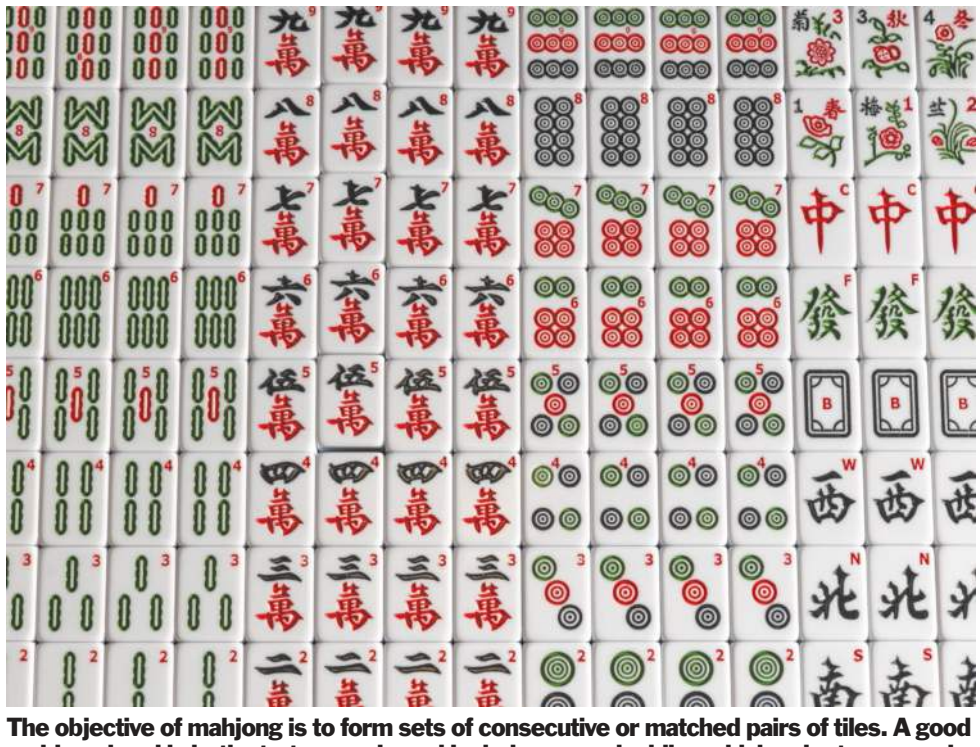
Interest in Chinese tile game mahjong is surging both in Washington and nationwide

BY MAURA JUDKIS
The Washington Post

Last February, my friend Fiona texted a question to me and two other friends: Who wants to learn how to play mahjong?

None of us — a group of millennial moms in our late 30s and early 40s — had ever played the game, often thought of as a retirement community pastime for Asian and Jewish grandparents. But we love a good pretext for cocktails and gossip. And we'd heard rumblings of a resurgence among women our age, won over by mahjong's combination of luck, skill and socialization. So Liz ordered a cheap set of tiles. We DoorDashed dinner from Chang Chang, then sat down to memorize a chart of Chinese numerals and watch a YouTube tutorial. A few rounds later, we were hooked, and before long, our group text had a new name: Momjong.

We were, it turned out, extremely on-trend. Interest in mahjong is surging in Washington and nationwide, thanks in part to a coterie of coaches and instructors, social media influencers and luxe spaces to play. New York hotels including the Ace and the Standard have hosted mahjong nights; mahjong influencers post videos of candy-colored tiles, over-the-top tablescapes and games set up on floating tables in swimming pools, or girls' nights in floral dresses, with plenty of wine.



The objective of mahjong is to form sets of consecutive or matched pairs of tiles. A good mahjong hand is both strategy and good luck, because deciding which pairs to pursue is informed by the random draw of tiles you are dealt and calculating your odds based on which tiles other players have discarded.

Celebrities have gotten into it, too: Meghan Sussex, née Markle, raved about her mahjong nights with friends — she calls them her "Maj Squad" — during her series, "With Love, Meghan." Actresses Julia Roberts, Sarah Jessica Parker and Amy Poehler have also discussed learning the game. Designer labels including Ralph Lauren and Hermes have designed luxury sets that cost thousands of dollars.

In our region, Joy by Seven Reasons in Chevy Chase, Md., hosts chic mahjong nights with instructors to help game newbies and a menu of mahjong-themed cocktails. And the new Chinatown-adjacent location of Lucky Danger has a backroom mahjong parlor with fancy auto-shuffling tables, decor inspired by the Jackie Chan movie "Rush Hour" and a special menu of overproof whiskeys. There are gameplay nights at the Capital Jewish Museum and the Martin Luther King Jr. library.

Lucky Danger chef Tim Ma grew up playing mahjong, and wanted to offer the game as a "culture passion project," he says. But the restaurant's mahjong classes, which are taught by his father, also named Tim Ma, have consistently sold out.

SEE MAHJONG ON PAGE 27

Mahjong: Camaraderie among reasons game is attracting new devotees

FROM PAGE 26

"It feels like the culture is being seen," Ma says.

I won't turn this story into a mahjong lesson, but to outline the basics: The objective of this game is to form sets of consecutive or matched pairs, much like gin rummy. A good mahjong hand is both strategy and good luck, because deciding which pairs to pursue is informed by the random draw of tiles you are dealt and calculating your odds based on which tiles other players have discarded. The first player to form a winning combination gets to declare "Mahjong!" and reveal his or her hand with a victorious flourish.

Mahjong was invented around the turn of the 20th century, an evolution of an older Chinese card game. In her book "Mahjong: House Rules From Across the Asian Diaspora," Nicole Wong, founder of the Mahjong Project, writes that the first documented appearance of a mahjong set in the United States was at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. The game trended in the U.S. in the 1920s after an executive who had lived in China introduced it to well-to-do friends in California. A group of Jewish American women who were fans of the game created the National Mah Jongg League in 1937, developing an American style of the game and creating a lasting affinity for it within a culture that, like the Chinese, was othered in America.

Mahjong had another resurgence with the 1993 film "The Joy Luck Club." And the current one has been building ever since a pivotal scene in 2018's "Crazy Rich Asians," in which the protagonist uses a game of mahjong to best her snobbish, wealthy mother-in-law-to-be.

Wong's book, a glossy-pink instruction manual and love letter to her family's favorite pastime, outlines tips for Chinese-style gameplay and the more than a dozen regional variations from countries throughout Southeast Asia. (The transliterated word, too, has a number of accepted spellings like mah-jongg, per the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.) The styles that seem to be most popular here in Washington are Chinese and American, which differ in their rules, scoring and number of tiles used. American mahjong is scored according to an annual card produced by the National Mah Jongg League. The card changes every year and is met with great anticipation and the occasional scandal: This year's contained a misprint.

After a few sessions of self-taught Chinese-style mahjong at home and an upgrade to a vintage Bakelite set gifted to Fiona by her mother-in-law, my friends and I wanted to level up. So Momjong headed to Lucky Danger's parlor, cocktails in hand — food isn't allowed in the Bakelite room to keep the tables nice — for a lesson with DC Mahj Collective, led by duo Sallie Routh and Mary Kate Craven, who were drawn to the game as a way to build community after becoming mothers.

"Chinese, American, Singaporean, whatever style of mahjong you're playing, it's a really sweet way to bring people together," Craven says. "I think connection is more important now than ever in a postpandemic landscape."

When I looked at the mahjong card that Routh and Craven handed to me, I felt like I was trying to decipher the enigma code. It was filled with lines of letters and numbers in different colors, all representing different combinations of tiles that can win mahjong, and divided into categories like "Quints," "Consecutive Runs" and "Winds-Dragons." Some of the 55 lines on the card look like this:

FF 123 4444 5555 (Any 3 suits, Any 5 Consec. Nos.)

FF 333 D 666 D 999 D (Any 3 Suits w Matching Dragons)

NNNN EEE WWW SSSS

That last one caught my eye, of course. N, E, W and S represented the tiles called winds, and their cardinal directions — north, east, west and south — but also spelled out "news," which charmed this journalist. *Wouldn't it be fun if I could win mahjong with NEWS?* I thought.

Routh and Craven broke down American-style mahjong's peculiarities in easily understandable ways, teaching us the language and etiquette of calling tiles when discarded, and claiming other players' tiles ("Two bam." "Five crack." "Soap." "Birdbam." "Pung.") and deciphering the card so that we would understand how to build winning hands. Fiona won twice. We felt like we were finally beginning to understand both styles.

PHOTOS BY ALEX KENT/For the Washington Post

Three generations of the Ma family, Tim Ma, Charlotte Ma and Tim Ma, supervise students as they learn to play mahjong at Lucky Danger near the Chinatown suburb of Washington. The game attracts players of various ages.

> **"Chinese, American, Singaporean, whatever style of mahjong you're playing, it's a really sweet way to bring people together. I think connection is more important now than ever in a postpandemic landscape."**
>
> **Mary Kate Craven**
> co-leader of DC Mahj Collective

The game can be strangely addicting, and everyone seems to have a different reason why they got hooked. For Wong, the author, it's nostalgia, as well as the tactile experience of playing.

"There's a real sensory part of this game, and so I do feel like memories kind of like, take hold in that," she said during a May book talk at the Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art. "You hear that sound" of the tiles clacking, "and you're just like, 'Oh my God, I'm 10 years old again, learning from my auntie how to play.'"

For Ma, it's the thrill of victory: "You're talking s— to each other," he says. When someone calls mahjong, "everybody turns over [their tiles] and looks at each other's hands like, 'How close were you?'"

For the ladies of DC Mahj Collective, it's the intergenerational aspect of the game. They frequently teach 20-somethings, and also septuagenarians. Study after study has shown that mahjong has a positive impact on cognition and socialization for people as they age, thanks to the problem-solving and socialization the game promotes.

"We have people come who are like, 'I want to learn to play with my grandmother, or my aunt, or my mom,'" Routh says.

The mahjong resurgence has not come without a few cringeworthy moments. In 2021, a Dallas company called the Mahjong Line founded by white women was accused of cultural appropriation for selling redesigned American-style mahjong tile sets that replaced all the Asian references with other pictures that the founders said more closely reflected their personalities.

"Everyone can play it, but I think once it's being taken and kind of like, claimed to be something of your own without that broader acknowledgment," it crosses a line, Wong said during her book talk.

Respect for the game's origins is an issue that dates back to the very beginning of mahjong's history in America: White Americans who played the game in the '20s often perpetuated Orientalist tropes, sometimes even dressing up in Chinese attire. I couldn't help but notice that many of the American-style mahjong brands with big followings on social media appeared to be white, Southern and preppy, like a sorority.

"When we were building our business, we were trying to very much respect the fact that we did not invent this game," says Routh, who is careful to emphasize mahjong's history and tradition in her teaching. "It didn't start with us."

The true test came two weeks later, when Fiona and I joined a mahjong night at Joy by Seven Reasons in Chevy Chase, where we were seated with two more advanced players. Allison and Blair, we learned, were regulars at this event, and had been taking lessons from longtime instructor Caryn Fagan, who began the evening with a quiz: "How many suits" of tiles are there?

Three.

"And the names of the suits are?" Crack, bam and dots.

"And the red dragon goes with?" Crack, and the green is bam, and the white dragon goes with dots, unless it's also a zero, and ... Fiona and I looked at each other with uncertainty.

But mahjong clacks, and then it clicks: Supervised by Fagan and her team of instructors, we were able to start pulling patterns out of our hands, making order out of chaos. Fiona won one round, Allison won another. Each new hand was a little puzzle to solve, a test of quick thinking and strategy, boosted by a little luck.

Mahjong is old-school, analog. When Fagan plays, she says, "I leave all my troubles at the door and focus on my hand ... I love the camaraderie of it, getting together with my friends. We share good things and bad things. We support each other."

I looked at my hand, which was shaping up to be a good one. Two joker tiles, and several winds. I drew another E. Discarded a seven dot. Drew another W. A third joker finally made it happen: NNNN EEE WWW SSSS.

"Mahjong!"

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Red Light Management

Rainbow Kitten Surprise, from left: Jess Haney, Ethan Goodpaster, Ela Melo and Darrick Keller. The band is set to release its next album Sept. 26 on Atlantic Records.

Stripped-back sound

Why Rainbow Kitten Surprise's forthcoming album, 'Bones,' is a 'spill-your-guts-out record'

By Mikael Wood
Los Angeles Times

Last year, the British dance musician known as Fred Again.. put out a feeler to the Nashville-based alt-rock band Rainbow Kitten Surprise about a possible collaboration. Ela Melo, who's fronted RKS since she and guitarist Darrick Keller formed the group over a decade ago as students at North Carolina's Appalachian State University, was intrigued by the invitation. "It's brilliant music," she says of Fred Again..'s soulful electronica.

So the singer and songwriter began sending ideas to the artist's team. "They'd be like, 'That's not it, but keep sending stuff,'" Melo recalls. Before long, she and her bandmates had written nine songs, then 32, then 48. "Eventually, we ended up with close to 160 songs because it just felt so good to write."

What happened with the Fred Again.. feature? "I don't know," Melo says with a laugh. "If he's still interested, we're still here."

One thing that happened was a new Rainbow Kitten Surprise album: "Bones," which the band has said will come out Sept. 26 from Atlantic Records. A 10-track collection produced by Jay Joyce, it's a quick and dirty follow-up to last year's "Love Hate Music Box," which ran for 22 tracks — including "Overtime," with Kacey Musgraves — and which took the band six years to complete. "This one kind of just came pouring out," Melo says from upstate New York on a recent afternoon between tour dates. The sound is raw yet tuneful, with scratchy electric guitars and whomping live drums in place of the synth-ier, more intricately layered productions of "Love Hate Music Box."

> **"It was the idea that we gotta be able to play this stuff — not build it and play it later, but play it right out of the gate."**
>
> **Ela Melo**
> Rainbow Kitten Surprise frontwoman, on the approach to recording a new album

Rounded out by guitarist Ethan Goodpaster and drummer Jess Haney, RKS had its rowdy live show in mind as it worked on "Bones," according to Melo. "It was the idea that we gotta be able to play this stuff — not build it and play it later, but play it right out of the gate," the singer says. (Next month, the band will log its fourth sold-out show at Colorado's Red Rocks Amphitheatre and perform at the annual Ohana festival in Dana Point.) Melo wrote many of the LP's songs on guitar, she says, which provided "a different energy" compared to writing on keyboards as she did for "Love Hate Music Box" and 2018's "How To: Friend, Love, Freefall."

The straightforward sound is matched by lyrics Melo describes as "way more direct" than RKS' earlier stuff. "It's a spill-your-guts-out record," she says, adding that for every song, she'd write a first verse, then ad lib the rest in the studio. In

SEE STRIPPED ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

Larry Niehues

Dan Auerbach, left, and Patrick Carney, of the Black Keys, recently released their 13th full-length LP.

Black Keys put a feel-good spin on their turbulent year

By James Pollard
Associated Press

The Ohio alt-rock band the Black Keys are finding their way home on their 13th full-length LP, "No Rain, No Flowers."

The journey hasn't been easy. Last year, the Grammy-winning duo underwent a fiery, public split with their management after their arena tour was unceremoniously canceled. But on "No Rain, No Flowers," guitarist and vocalist Dan Auerbach and drummer Patrick Carney put a feel-good spin on their recent career turbulence. The album pulls the raw blues, psychedelia, garage rock and roots music of their 23-year discography into a single package.

Discerning fans won't have to look hard for nods to their rough 2024. The opening track begins with a synthesizer-infused postpunk riff that leaves a sense of both inner peace and simmering resentment. After warning "There's evil people in this world / Live long enough and you will be burned," Auerbach's easygoing voice assures that "Baby, the damage is done / It won't be long 'til we're back in the sun."

The Black Keys
No Rain, No Flowers
(Warner Music)

Their fourth album in five years marks a return to the prolific pace they maintained early on in their career. Underdogs no more, the critically acclaimed duo's tenure shows itself on this album, in a mix of trusted creative partners and long-admired new collaborators.

And perhaps truer to their name, this iteration of the Black Keys includes a lot more piano. Auerbach and Carney say they've never worked with someone who writes on the piano like Rick Nowels, who appeared on Lana Del Rey 's Auerbach-produced album "Ultraviolence."

Hip-hop producer Scott Storch plays keyboard on the groovy "Babygirl," which is part-power pop, part-Rolling Stones with its sharp rhythmic piano and lyrical self-assertiveness. He's also on "Make You Mine," where Auerbach's upper register and a string section push the band as close to Bee Gees' disco as it will get.

But they're at their best with moody, trance-inducing tracks like "Down to Nothing," where Auerbach's guitar elicits the feeling of yearning that's remained a constant throughout their catalog.

The album leaves listeners with the twangy tones and folksier sounds of Nashville — where many of its contributors work and where Auerbach launched his Easy Eye Sound record label eight years ago. Music City songwriter Pat McLaughlin brings the same Americana sound of Auerbach's 2017 solo album to the penultimate track "A Little Too High," an upbeat stomper that evokes The Eagles.

Electronic backing vocals imbue the closer, "Neon Moon," with the same supernatural undercurrent as Kacey Musgraves' 2018 "Golden Hour" — both of which credit songwriter Daniel Tashian. Its natural imagery, however, is less complex. "You can find it in the southern sky," Auerbach sings, "By the light of the neon moon."

"Take me home / Back to you," the chorus repeats. "Take me home / Neon moon."

The Black Keys aren't quite home with this one. But they're certainly following the light.

Ethel Cain

Willoughby Tucker, I'll Always Love You (Amigo)

There's a video on YouTube of Angelo Badalamenti explaining how he wrote one of the iconic themes for the TV show "Twin Peaks." In the clip, the composer plays a keyboard and recounts the direction he received from the show's co-creator David Lynch, who imagined a dark woods with soft wind blowing through sycamores, animal sounds and a lonely girl emerging from behind the trees. "Just get me into that beautiful darkness," Badalamenti recalls Lynch saying.

The result was "Laura's Theme," the melody that establishes the morbid milieu and the innocence lost at the center of "Twin Peaks." When Lynch heard the theme for the first time, Badalamenti remembers him passionately crying out, "Oh, that's so beautiful … that's tearing my heart, I love that."

Ethel Cain loved it, too. The improbably popular experimental pop artist saw that video late last year and tracked down the same kind of synthesizers Badalamenti used on "Twin Peaks" for her new album, "Willoughby Tucker, I'll Always Love You."

Badalamenti and Lynch are gone now, but the beautiful darkness and heartrending love that the pair conjured for decades lives on in "Willoughby Tucker," and not just because of the shared gear. Cain is the true heir to Lynch as the musical artist most capable of capturing the beauty of all-consuming love, the terror of man's capacity for evil and the traumatic toll taken by both.

Cain is the alter ego of Hayden Anhedönia, the 27-year-old Florida-born artist who started releasing music under the alias in her early 20s. Her 2022 debut, "Preacher's Daughter," a Southern Gothic concept album on which Cain considered Christ, carnality and cannibalism, put her on the map. "Willoughby Tucker" serves as a thematic prequel, a deeper embrace of her musical fascinations and a defiant rejection of the expectations sparked by her rapid ascent.

On her debut, Cain blasted Americana through a haze of ambient music, worshiping in the echo of thundering drums and washes of distorted guitar. There's some of that on "Willoughby" but also songs simply strummed and wet with reverb, accompanied by fiddle from the fog and banjo from the bayou. Cain revels in long songs that defy the bite-sized, contextless consumption of internet-age listening.

Cain writes diaristic poetry and captures other-side-of-the-tracks imagery with devastating ease. "Willoughby" drips with the yearning of young love and the pain of your first real heartbreak. These are songs of childhood dreams dashed by industrial disaster; teenage death pacts; hospital room fantasias that race against the morning light; cries for help at the end of a downward spiral; paranoid thoughts that knock-knock-knock on Satan's door.

In Season 2 of "Twin Peaks," a man asks another what he fears most in the world, and he answers, "The possibility that love is not enough." For Cain, that's a grim certainty. On "Waco, Texas"— whose title evokes its own American doom — she sings, "Love is not enough in this world … I'd rather die than be anything but your girl."

— Chris Kelly
The Washington Post

Stripped: RKS' new album arriving amid rock resurgence

FROM PAGE 28

more than a few tunes, she sings about how relationships are affected by drinking and drugs. "It's interesting what comes out on the mic," says the frontwoman, who says she's been sober for about 10 months. "I feel like it's channeling some energy that I don't take part in anymore, though I do have fond memories of getting stoned on the Parkway in Boone, North Carolina."

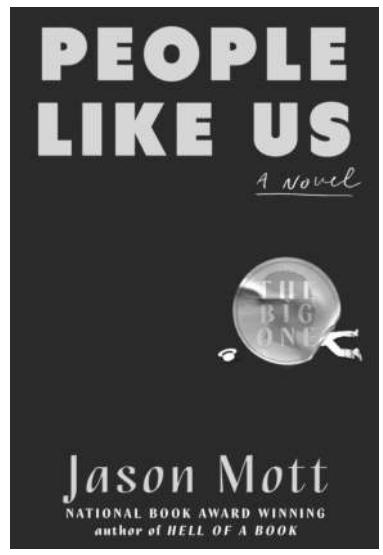
What inspired her life change? "I noticed that when I drank, I could be a little meaner — just say things I wouldn't normally say," she replies. "I realized I want control of that, and anything that removes some of that control is a no-go. It applies to music, as well. Being as regulated as you can possibly be opens you up to — this gets a little heady — but to other frequencies. Then you have the largest bandwidth to communicate your truth — maybe the truth — into a microphone."

With its fuzzy textures and unruly tempos, "Bones" arrives as rock seems to be resurging after years of domination by rappers and pop stars. Melo has no grand theories as to why, but she knows exactly when she started to believe that rock is back. "It was the opening track of 'Guts' by Olivia Rodrigo," she says of the former Disney kid's "All-American Bitch." "That kick drum hit me, and I was like, 'Ah man, I don't need an 808 and all the bells and whistles — I just need old-school guitars, bass and drums.' That s— hits."

WEEKEND: BOOK REVIEWS

Struggles of semi-fame, American identity

Jason Mott's 'People Like Us' a not-really-fictional account of life as award-winning writer



By Clare Solly
Associated Press

How does one follow up writing "A Hell of a Book" and winning the National Book Award?

If you're Jason Mott, you write a sort-of, not-really, by all legal terms fictionalized — according to the forward — autobiographical story about what life is like as a semi-famous writer.

Or actually you write two viewpoints: one about a writer running away from his roots that seem to be choking the life out of him and the other about a writer running to help soothe the roots that made him.

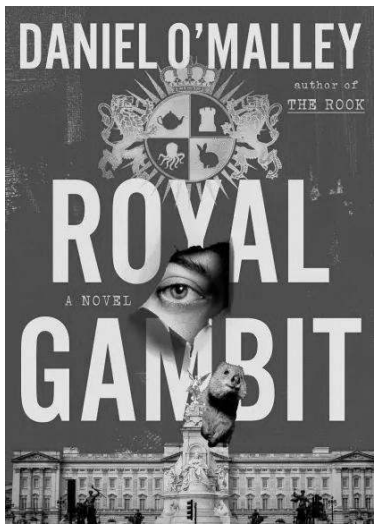
The first, a middle-aged man who wrote said award-winning novel, is constantly misrecognized because writers, even award-winning ones, don't have status like film stars. Sometimes he goes along with it and he agrees with them, for good reason; there is safety in being someone else. The second is a man who can't seem to outrun what it means to be American or a stalker who threatened to kill him, both showing up, often when least expected. This makes man No. 2 run not only from death and America but to seek out purchasing a gun, because his fame isn't able to protect him.

This novel, reminiscent of "The Invisible Man" and the works of Colson Whitehead and Ta-Nehisi Coates, has an inquisitive stance on things like time travel, sea monsters, death of loved ones and guns, and what each can do to a man, especially those who seem to be the referential mouthpiece of what it means to be an American today.

One man meanders through Minnesota, offering support to the masses through speaking engagements. The other lands what seems to be a dream job in "Europeland." Through old memories, the drudgery of book tours, the never-ending "what's next" endlessly questioning their creativity, both imagine what could be and what could have been. The flipping between the two men's viewpoints of the world and what it can offer is humorous one moment and tugs at the right heartstrings the next.

This roller-coaster ride filled with quips and wordplay personalizes some of the most tragic moments in America's recent history. The tragedy and pain through this never-ending climb to make sense of all that has come before, and all that will come after, is "like Sisyphus, a man who never misses leg day."

Filled with highlightable quotes and moments that make you stop and look around to see if anyone else is experiencing what you're reading, Mott's "People Like Us" echoes the pain and mystery of where life leads, the choices it hands us and the hope and desire for change.



Royal Gambit

Daniel O'Malley

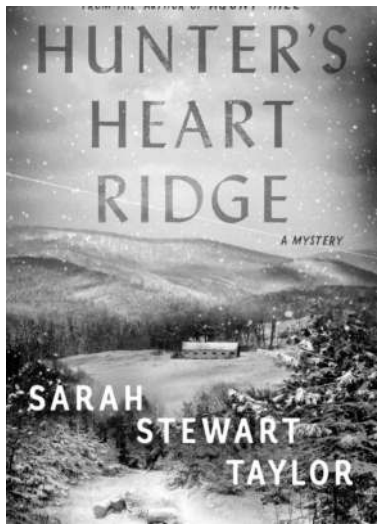
O'Malley returns to the world of his series he started with "The Rook" with this enjoyable and sometimes unwieldy novel about the supernatural operatives of a paranormal secret service investigating a string of bizarre murders.

"Gambit" centers around the aristocratic Lady Alexandra Mondegreen (Alix) and her investigation into the murder of her childhood friend, the Prince of Wales. Alix has the unique talent of being able to shatter bones with a touch of her hand.

O'Malley finds humor in showing how agents with strange and sometimes absurd powers (one senior official can turn into a stegosaurus at will) adhere to the same bureaucracy and hierarchies as any other government organization. Along with coming to work on time and navigating office politics, there is a chance you will be the victim of a dinosaur stampede or watch your colleague turn into a tree.

Alix also emerges as a compelling heroine, deeply committed to uncovering the truth.

— Connie Panzariello/AP



Hunter's Heart Ridge

Sarah Stewart Taylor

In 1965, as the Vietnam War escalates, a small group of wealthy, powerful men gather at a Vermont lodge to drink and hunt deer. Shortly after they arrive, one of their number, William Moulton, is found dead in the woods.

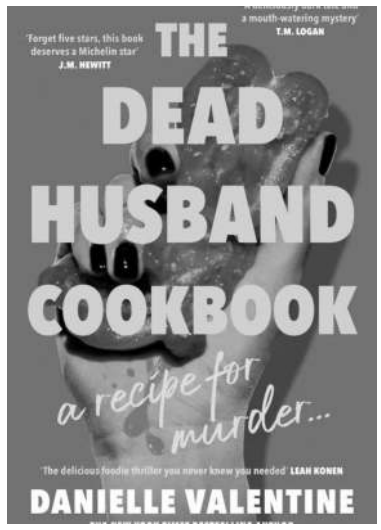
State Trooper Franklin Warren is dispatched to investigate. Warren promptly determines the man was murdered in an unusual way. He was stabbed through the heart, and then someone fired a rifle shot through the stab wound as if trying to conceal the cause of death.

As Warren proceeds with his investigation, it becomes evident that nearly everyone is lying to him about one thing or another.

Then a sudden, early season blizzard strikes, bringing down the telephone lines and stranding Warren with a house full of suspects.

The plot is clever and suspenseful, and as usual in Taylor's novels (this is her tenth), the settings are vividly drawn and the characters are quirky and memorable.

— Bruce DeSilva/AP



The Dead Husband Cookbook

Danielle Valentine

This book offers a thrilling look into the cutthroat world of culinary arts — and what makes the perfect recipe ... for murder.

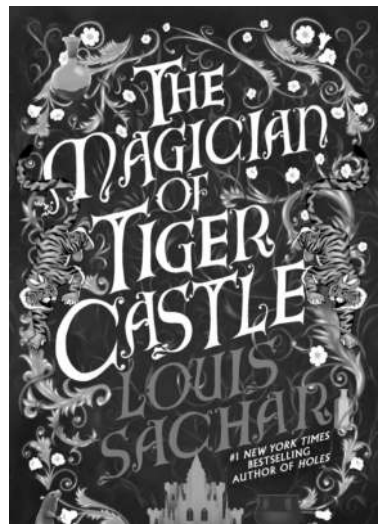
With a unique narrative structure that involves past and present day, tantalizing recipes, news clippings and excerpts from the antagonist's memoir, author Valentine is able to create an unsettling undertone and build up suspense to keep readers engaged until they reach the bone-chilling twist.

Valentine uses many well-known horror tropes including a remote farm house, animals screaming, whispering voices and rustling footsteps, but is still able to create a unique feeling of dread.

The use of recipes from the fictional memoir may create an immersive experience for some, but for others they may be disruptive.

With twists and turns until the end, Valentine is able to deliver a deliciously dark, macabre story that thriller and murder mystery fans will instantly devour.

— Fernanda Figueroa/AP



The Magician of Tiger Castle

Louis Sachar

Anatole isn't just any magician. He's the magician of Tiger Castle, whom the king of Esquaveta once declared to be the greatest magician in all the land.

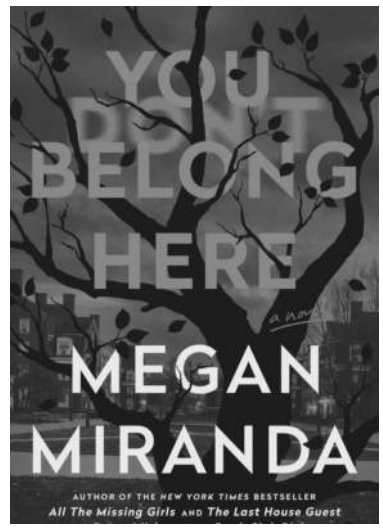
"The Magician of Tiger Castle" is Anatole's chance to set the record straight about what really happened in 1523 with the princess of Esquaveta, the apprentice scribe she fell in love with, the prince she was betrothed to, and the prisoner who was kept in the dungeon for 100 years.

It's the debut adult novel from Louis Sachar, author of the middle-grade novel "Holes" and the "Wayside School" series of memorably wacky vignettes.

The novel is told like a memoir, first-person. We quickly see that the magician is more of a misunderstood pioneer of medicine and modern science.

Anatole also dips into miniature medical history lessons. So, while you're following the story, you're also learning about why physicians once wore beaked masks and how leeches are still used in medicine today.

— Donna Edwards/AP



You Belong Here

Megan Miranda

Author Miranda treads overly familiar territory in this story of a woman forced to return to the town that once suspected her of involvement in a terrible crime — a plot that echoes the themes of her previous novels.

Twenty years ago, Beckett Bowery's college roommate lit a fire that killed two young men during a hazing ritual, and then seemingly vanished. Adalyn Vale's whereabouts remain a mystery in Wyatt Valley. Now, two decades later, Beckett's daughter, Delilah, enrolls at the school, drawing Beckett back into Wyatt Valley's web.

Miranda's 2016 adult debut, "All the Missing Girls," introduced her signature plot device: a woman haunted by tragedy, reluctantly returning to the scene of the crime, still the subject of small-town whispers and accusations. This book feels like a recycle of that plot.

The revelations in the last third of the book are rushed, hollow attempts at twists and lessen the impact of an ending that struck a genuinely poignant, tragic note.

— Connie Panzariello/AP

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

The Clairvoyants can read your mind

‘America’s Got Talent’ duo brings mentalism to global stage

By Cate Burtner
Los Angeles Times

It all started with a cup of coffee ... and a blindfolded clairvoyant. As he sat beside me in a café booth, mentalist Thommy Ten asked me to take out some items from my bag at random. Rummaging through pens and chargers, I wanted to find something that Amélie van Tass, his stage partner and wife, might struggle to predict as she faced away from us. I handed Ten my passport, my wallet and a bag of almonds.

Talking toward the wall, Van Tass said, “It’s an ID ... is that a passport?” She was right. “And it expires April 2033?” I didn’t even know that — I checked and apparently, it does.

Van Tass quickly guessed the bag of nuts. It was when she started accurately rattling off my license and Visa card numbers that the phrase “sixth sense” came to my mind.

The Clairvoyants perform mentalism, the branch of magic that encapsulates all things mind-reading, precognition and extrasensory perception. The duo’s performances are theatrical and often break the fourth wall. They choose audience members at random and can accurately guess their birthdays, their hotel room numbers and the exact dollar amount they won after a night in Las Vegas. Many shows incorporate their dog, crowd favorite Mr. Koni Hundini. Of the trio, he messes up the most, but the people “still love him,” Ten said.

Ten and Van Tass are best known for coming in second place on Season 11 of NBC’s “America’s Got Talent” in 2016. They also appeared on two “AGT” spinoffs. Since then, they’ve headlined tours and Vegas residencies, drawing international recognition in the magic world.

The couple took a brief break from performing in late 2024 to expand their family.

“It was always clear; we don’t want to give up our job,” Van Tass said. “They’re just part of the whole circus. We love to call it a circus because now we have two dogs and one baby.”

Ten and Van Tass’ 8-month-old baby boy joins the Clairvoyants in their travels but not on the stage.

“We try to be as normal as possible when we’re at home. We’re just Mom and Dad and not the Clairvoyants,” Van Tass said. Ten added, “Of course, we try to keep it comfortable for him, for the dogs and for us. We don’t go crazy with seven shows in seven states a week. We limit it to weekends now.”

It’s only fitting that the “circus” headed to Vegas for the Clairvoyants’ U.S. comeback. The duo recently joined “AGT” champion magician Shin Lim in his Vegas residency with an act that merged its mental magic with Lim’s sleight of hand. The Clairvoyants will hit the road once again in late October for a winter tour.

Beyond their innovative psychic acts, the Clairvoyants have always challenged stereotypes about magic shows.

“There’s always this picture of a magician and the assistant bringing tables in and out,” Ten said. “That’s the basic understanding of a magician. Our thing was always that we wanted to be equal on stage.”

Ten and Van Tass, both 38, bring different talents to the act.

“You do more of the magic, magic stuff,” Van Tass said to Ten. “And I’m more the mind reading and feeling and sensing things, which I think is a female thing too.”

The couple first crossed paths on a set in 2011 — they started brainstorming a two-person magic act the next day. Less than a year later, they performed their first show, “Second Sight.” It was the first step in carving out their niche, the modern, theatrical mentalism that has since become their signature act.

> **“We just want to take people and bring them into our magical world. Just let them forget everything and feel like kids again.”**
>
> **Amélie van Tass**
> one-half of The Clairvoyants

The Clairvoyants soon began touring Europe, expanding their routine into a full-length show within the year. In 2014, they brought the tour to America, where they joined “The Illusionists,” the world’s largest traveling magic show. Two years later, they went even bigger: “America’s Got Talent.”

Over four months on “AGT,” the Clairvoyants performed eight times and beat out more than 100,000 other contestants. The duo came in second, behind singer Grace VanderWaal. Every episode of their season of “AGT” ranked No. 1 in its NBC time slot.

“Suddenly, our season was watched by 16, 17 million viewers,” Ten said. With so many people tuning in and voting from home, the Clairvoyants became a household name.

They also returned in 2019 for the spinoff “America’s Got Talent: The Champions” and in 2024 for “America’s Got Talent: Fantasy League.” They were eliminated in the preliminary round on both shows.

“In our genre, mentalism, mind reading, it’s normally very small. Like in a parlor setting or a face-to-face thing,” Ten said.

GETTY IMAGES/TNS

Thommy Ten, left, and Amélie van Tass, of the Clairvoyants, shown in August 2021, came in second on Season 11 of “America’s Got Talent,” appeared on two spinoffs and have headlined tours in the U.S. and Europe as well as Las Vegas residencies.

“Our dream was always to make it big so we can perform in front of thousands of people. It should still feel like everybody’s part of it; everyone can be involved.”

While their “AGT” appearance opened doors to Broadway and tours worldwide, they aspired for more. From 2021 to 2022, the Clairvoyants performed 500 shows in one year. After the birth of their son, they performed five to 10 shows a week in Vegas. Their upcoming U.S. tour will take them cross-country over the holidays.

The fan base they built from “AGT” added a layer of both excitement and pressure, but it isn’t necessarily what keeps the Clairvoyants moving at such an impressive pace.

“We have performed in front of 20 people and were as excited as we would have been in front of 20,000 people,” Van Tass said. “I’m most excited when I know that there are good friends and family in the audience.”

The Clairvoyants didn’t just want a bigger audience, they needed one. Their spectacular stage performances couldn’t have possibly worked in the parlor rooms of the past. Highlights include Van Tass showcasing her mental magic while submerged in 2,000 liters of water, using a flamethrower and even being suspended in the air, à la Cirque du Soleil.

The Clairvoyants strive to make their show special to each audience member, every night.

“They make it possible that we can do what we do. Every single person deserves the best version and 100%,” Van Tass said.

Fans’ experiences are the key to keeping the magic alive — and confidential. Of course, the Clairvoyants can’t reveal their secrets, but that doesn’t stop viewers from speculating. One theory suggests that audience members are paid participants. But when a blindfolded Van Tass predicts what you have in hand, and you know you aren’t in on it, that theory falls apart.

Originally from Austria, the couple spends half the year performing in Europe and the other half in the U.S. — in Vegas or on tour. With German as their first language, English as their second and the “tiny bit of Spanish” Van Tass speaks, the Clairvoyants are prepared to acclimate.

“It’s important that at least we have a couple of words in different languages to adapt to people and to new countries,” Van Tass said.

Performing worldwide has earned the duo awards from across Europe and the U.S. In 2015 they were dubbed the World Champions of Mentalism by the FISM, one of the most respected international magic organizations. In 2017, the Academy of Magical Arts and the Magic Castle Hollywood voted Ten and Van Tass Stage Magicians of the Year. In 2020 they received the Mandrakes d’Or — France’s “Oscar of magic.”

From their pre-“AGT” tours to their Vegas residency, the Clairvoyants have a long streak of reading minds and blowing minds too. And the pair shows no signs of slowing down. Their ambitious winter tour aims to spread holiday magic from coast to coast.

“We just want to take people and bring them into our magical world,” Van Tass said. “Just let them forget everything and feel like kids again.”

What is your place in the universe?

Why the search for meaning can cause 'purpose anxiety' and what to do about it

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER HAMLIN/AP

Todd Kashdan, the founder of George Mason University's Well-Being Laboratory, says to think of purpose not as something that governs behavior but as a compass you can choose to follow, helping direct your energies toward a central life aim.

BY ALINA TUGEND
Associated Press

It has become such common advice that few question it: "Find your purpose." But rather than inspirational, it can feel like a burden.

How do I go about finding this, and what if I never do? This is "purpose anxiety" — the gnawing sense that one's life should have an overarching purpose, but it's unclear how to discover it.

"There's a lot of commands to find purpose, but not a lot of support to find purpose," said Michael Steger, a professor at Colorado State University and director of its Center for Meaning and Purpose.

How do you define 'purpose'?

The definition of purpose can be elastic. Can you have only one purpose, or can you have many? Does it have to involve service to others, or can it be something that consistently gives only you great pleasure and meaning?

Think of purpose not as something that governs behavior, but as a compass you can choose to follow, helping direct your energies toward a central life aim, says Todd Kashdan, a professor at George Mason University and founder of its Well-Being Laboratory. A sense of purpose can help "close that gap between who you are and what you ideally want to become," he said.

People can lead content, meaningful lives without ever articulating a sense of purpose, he emphasized.

There are many legitimate reasons for the advice given by parents, teachers, mentors and an array of online gurus that finding purpose is key to a good life. Research has shown that people who more strongly feel a sense of purpose tend to be physically and mentally healthier.

But the word has become so weighty that finding a purpose has, for many, become a source of angst.

The term "purpose anxiety" appears to have been coined in 2014 by a University of Pennsylvania graduate student, Larissa Rainey, and caught on. Author Elizabeth Gilbert, for example, best known for her memoir "Eat, Pray, Love," has spoken frequently about an unhealthy obsession over a "purposeful life." It is, she said in one interview, "the formula we've all been fed."

Some of the old guideposts are gone

People have always searched for life's meaning and purpose.

"Part of what it is to have a human consciousness is to think about our place in the universe," said Jody Day, a psychotherapist and author of "Living the Life Unexpected: How to Find Hope, Meaning and a Fulfilling Future without Children." "But a lot of the places that we've naturally found meaning in our culture in, say, the last hundred years are falling away."

Religion, for instance, often offered purpose and meaning to believers. But those who identify as religious has dropped significantly over the years (although that appears to be leveling off recently according to a 2025 survey by the Pew Research Center).

Other people traditionally found purpose in ensuring that their children had a better life than they did. Many don't have confidence that will be the case anymore, Day said.

As Steger said, "now we're stuck trying to do the harder thing, which is, one by one, figure out everything in the universe and how we fit."

Advice for alleviating the anxiety

You might begin, Steger said, by realizing that you don't have to pin down a purpose immediately; searching for purpose in itself helps generate meaning in life.

It entails "understanding who you are and what you have to work with, understanding what you care about, what you'd like to see be better, either in yourself or in the world" and then figuring out if you can make an impact, he added.

"In our culture, we are so outcome-focused and process-adverse," he said. "Probably my best advice is to take your time and be all right not always knowing."

Look to hobbies, jobs and community involvement

For Jordan Grumet, author of "The Purpose Code," there is big "P" Purpose and little "p" purpose, and too many people stress about finding the first and ignore the second.

"Big 'P' Purpose is goal-oriented — it's usually big and audacious, and often unattainable," he said. Social media, he said, "is full of people trying to voice that version of purpose on you so that they can make money."

Better, he said, to focus on little "p" purpose and pursuits that some might simply call hobbies — gardening, singing, collecting baseball cards. Or it can be found in a job, or volunteering.

"What could I do that would light me up and fill me up and be a good use of my time?" Grumet said.

It's not just for self-improvement, he said. When people do something they love, they attract people to them, which can help create communities.

Not all agree that hobbies and passions are the same as purpose. Reading books, Kashdan said, isn't a purpose in itself but can be a tool to discovering it: "They're just like fledgling seeds of, hey, something might be there that you might want to pursue with more depth and more gravity in your life."

When life throws you a curveball

Sometimes a traumatic event can change or create one's purpose in life. For example, Day assumed that her purpose would be to raise a family, but by her early 40s she knew she would not be able to have children.

"I felt so pointless as a human being because I wasn't a mother," she said, recalling the grief she felt.

But she ended up creating an online community for childless women called Gateway-Women.com. In rural Ireland, where she lives, she is also helping build an in-person group that brings people without children together as they age.

"I feel that to be alive in this time, and to have a platform and to be awake is an incredible privilege, and that is my purpose," she said.

WEEKEND: FAMILY

ZOË MEYERS/AP

Amal Alalim helps a student in a sewing class July 29 at Olive Community Services in Fullerton, Calif. The class was part of the organization's "Intergenerational Summer Camp."

Summer camp fills in gap

Nonprofit unites grandmas, kids to foster community and share skills, advice

BY JAIMIE DING
Associated Press

The smell of frying garlic and ginger is inescapable as it wafts through the room, while a row of fidgety kids watches an older woman in a blue plaid apron cooking in front of them.

"When I was growing up, my mom used to make this a lot," she says, showing a chicken stir fry recipe.

At this "Intergenerational Summer Camp" in a Southern California suburb, the grandmas are in charge. Every week, they teach a group of 8-to-14-year-olds how to cook a new dish and do a handicraft such as sewing, embroidering, clay jewelry and card marking.

"Isolation and loneliness is something that seniors are challenged with, and they love having younger people around them," said Zainab Hussain, a program manager at Olive Community Services, a nonprofit aimed at bringing older adults together that hosted the camp.

The camp was held at a community center in Fullerton, a city in Orange County that's home to a large Arab population, and many of the campers and grandmas come from those communities. In between activities, the small room bustled with energy as the girls chatted and munched on snacks. Some of the volunteer grandmas milled around and watched, content to just be around the youngsters.

In July, during the final week of camp, Janna Moten and her friends were learning how to use a sewing machine and make pouches.

"Slowly, slowly," one grandma chided as Moten stomped on the machine's pedal, causing the needle to rapidly jerk up and down.

She pressed her foot down again, gingerly, and managed to sew a straight line.

"Honestly, I'm just here for the food," the 9-year-old quipped. Still, she beamed as she showed the two pieces of fabric she sewed together and turned inside out, forming a rectangular pocket.

Moten said she's been practicing hand-stitching at home after learning embroidery a previous week.

"Sewing's pretty easy; it's just hard keeping the lines straight," she said. She added that her own grandma was stricter than the ones at summer camp.

Haqiqah Abdul Rahim, the instructor for sewing, said many kids don't learn these skills at school anymore through home economics classes, so they're "filling in a gap."

She stood in front of the room at the start of the activity, holding up various tools and explaining what they were: seam roller, thread snipper, rotary fabric cutter.

Rahim also doesn't get to spend a lot of time with her grandchildren because they don't live close.

"It is heartwarming to be able to interact with those who love being around you," Rahim said.

The kids have learned about kitchen safety and how to cook with a grandma's touch — such as mixing spices with water before adding them to a dish so they don't burn, or using fresh turmeric.

The summer camp was held in partnership with the Golden Connections Club, started by high school student Leena Albinali last year to foster interactions between teens and elders.

The 14-year-old lives with her grandma but realized other students didn't have the same opportunity to spend as much time with their grandparents. She also learned about ageism and other challenges faced by senior adults in one of her classes.

At monthly lunches, they invite seniors to the school and discuss topics where both groups can learn from each other, Albinali said.

"They treat us like we're their grandchildren," she said. The teens share what they know about artificial intelligence and its impact on their lives, and the elders share life stories and advice.

One of the most important things they've shared with Albinali is to live in the moment, something that's taken on new meaning for her.

"The people we have right now, they're not going to be with us forever," she said.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari

Home to me is wherever I'm able to grow a garden

"I like this one," I told my husband of eight months while inspecting an empty house on Fort Ord in California in 1994. The exterior was drab beige with dull brown trim, just like the other Army houses. But this one had something different.

Like the rest, it was coated in countless layers of government paint, the kitchen contained worn appliances and cheap Formica countertops, the heavy closet doors didn't slide smoothly on their ancient tracks and the concrete "patio nook" was a haven for spiders.

However, the house sat at the breezy top of Ardennes Circle like a sentinel, shaded by a huge Monterey pine. The best part was behind the house, where the scrubby lawn met a weedy, thorny perimeter separating base housing from a vast abandoned weapons range, and, according to rumor, mountain lions prowled among undischarged munitions.

There on the edge of unknown dangers was a tiny fenced garden. A 4-foot square of dry earth enclosed with ramshackle posts and chicken wire. It appeared that the last tenant hadn't used the garden, allowing vines to invade. Another tour of duty without caretaking, and the little pen would have disappeared into the enveloping brush.

I saw potential. As a newly married Navy wife who had come from a cramped D.C. Beltway apartment, I had a vision. To me, our new home would be a comfy place where things were made from scratch, and a vegetable garden fit perfectly into my cozy cross-stitched picture.

The only problem was, I wasn't a gardener. Or a cook, or a cross-stitcher, for that matter.

Nonetheless, I dug into my garden with vigor, planting seedlings of peppers, tomatoes and squash without bothering to read instructions about zones, planting distances, watering needs or fertilizing.

I don't recall how long it took for those vegetables to die, but they lived long enough for me to paint an intricate sign reading "Lisa's Garden" — letters shaped from colorful painted eggplants, carrots, tomatoes, broccoli and zucchini.

That sign went with us to Joint Analysis Center, Molesworth, England, where it hung beside another 4-foot patch behind our rented house. We'd moved in on a cold, rainy February day, so I began composting kitchen scraps in the plot, envisioning rich soil in a few months.

But I was busy with an infant, and never managed to plant vegetables that spring. Mother Nature took mercy, performing a small miracle. Tomato seeds from my composted kitchen scraps sprouted that June and grew into a massive tangle. Though unintended, I'd grown a productive garden patch.

Three tomato-rich years later, we moved to a Dutch Colonial on a cul-de-sac in Virginia Beach, shaded by towering loblolly pines. Without a sunny plot, I hung my garden sign near the curb and lined up potted vegetables in the gutter. When my "gutter garden" failed, my neighbor took mercy, sharing her extensive backyard garden, complete with raised beds, a watering system and plant supports.

At Patch Barracks in Germany, "home" was a fifth floor walk-up apartment. I nominated myself "Stairwell B Gardener," planting perennials beside the stoop, brightening the otherwise bleak building with a splash of cheerful color.

While in Naval Station Mayport, Fla., housing, I resorted to container gardening on the lanai, which produced only a few deformed tomatoes, but in Naval Station Newport, R.I., housing, I yielded my best harvests from an overcrowded triangular plot in our fenced backyard.

Finally, Francis retired from the Navy, and we bought a house where I've been planting gardens ever since.

I'm still not much of a gardener, but it's OK — I never really planted gardens to grow vegetables. No matter where the military sent our family to live, we planted ourselves and made it our home, rooting and blooming. Gardening was my way of nurturing hope, and growing my belief in tomorrow.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

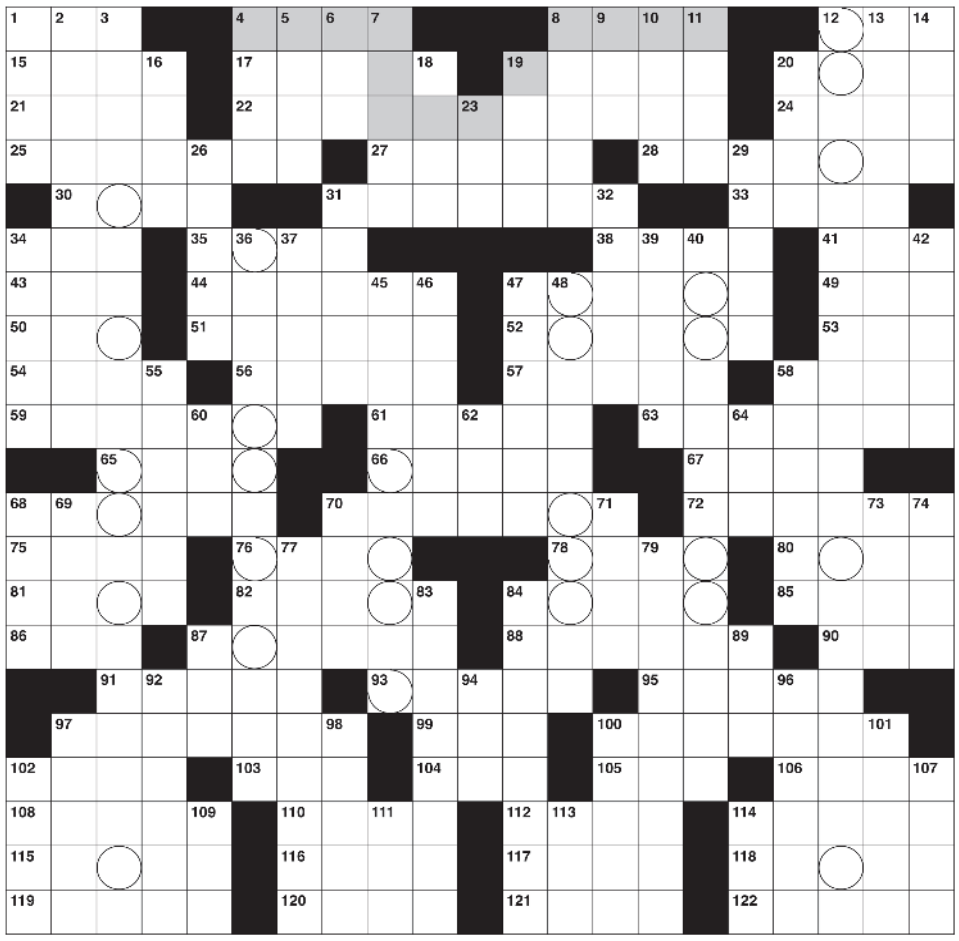
WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

HEAVENLY VOICES

BY JEREMY NEWTON / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Jeremy Newton, of Austin, Texas, is an engineering manager for a mobile-games company. This is his 30th crossword for The Times since 2008. He calls it "100 percent a love letter" for the puzzle's subject, which unfolds beautifully in multiple ways. Jeremy thanks "the crossword gods" that 22-Across, the figure that ties the whole thing together, could run through the heart of the shaded squares. — W.S.



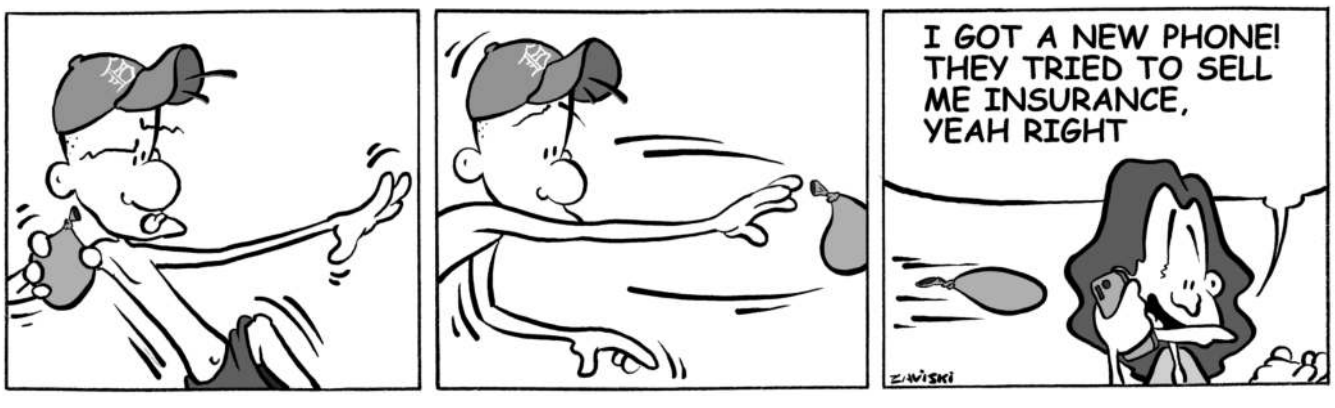
ACROSS

1 Final act of a play?
4 Iconic sci-fi setting spelled out in this puzzle's shaded squares
8 Skyrocket
12 "Reckon so!"
15 Working without ____
17 Seemingly forever
19 Some spa jobs, in brief
20 Manner of speaking
21 Like used BBQ pits
22 Member of this puzzle's shaded squares who might say "I cannot change the laws of physics, Captain!"
24 Like being late or cutting in line
25 Something clicked to add an attachment
27 Take up space
28 Kind of protagonist in "Lethal Weapon" or "Die Hard"
30 Swear
31 Digital investment choices, informally
33 Not much, as of wasabi
34 Narrowly get (by)
35 "Now that we're all here, please proceed"
38 Lab reports?
41 Overzealous sort
43 Got acquainted
44 D.M.V.-issued card authenticated by airport security
47 Build a stockpile
49 Didn't go fast?
50 Employee's status meaning "I'm currently away"
51 Take down a notch
52 Purveyors of provocative posts
53 8.5" x 11": Abbr.
54 Kris Kross No. 1 hit with the lyric "How high? Real high, 'cause I'm just so fly"
56 El presidente ousted in a 1955 coup
57 Danger
58 Cry from a victor
59 Type that tends to be right-leaning
61 Like quality vocals
63 Looks inside?
65 Drug-busting unit
66 City whose Fushimi Inari shrine features 10,000-plus red torii gates
67 Brother of Disney's Louie and Dewey Duck
68 Something hit to get fit
70 Hands-on professional?
72 Baseball team whose mascot is Wally the Green Monster
75 Seeing romantically
76 Humble hold 'em holding
78 "The Bear" streamer
80 Cold War weapon inits.
81 Beethoven's No. 8?
82 Line of luxury hotels
84 Takes to school, in a way
85 Cosmic explosion
86 It goes on the run
87 Be a wingman, e.g.
88 False
90 Inits. for this puzzle's shaded squares
91 Move like a supermodel
93 Unit of purity
95 Lower oneself
97 They study how knights move
99 Canyon's edge
100 On the ____ (raging)
102 Gone skinny-dipping, e.g.
103 Significant stretch
104 Mr. Turkey
105 Some window installations, informally
106 Warp-driven device
108 Major exporter of mangoes
110 One giving the highlights?
112 By dawn's early light?
114 Intending to, casually
115 Bring upon oneself
116 Wordlessly indicate "Please give me a hand"
117 "____ a broken heart" (Emily Dickinson poem)
118 Iron Man's suit, e.g.
119 "Fire away!"
120 False
121 Docking station
122 Some draft picks

DOWN

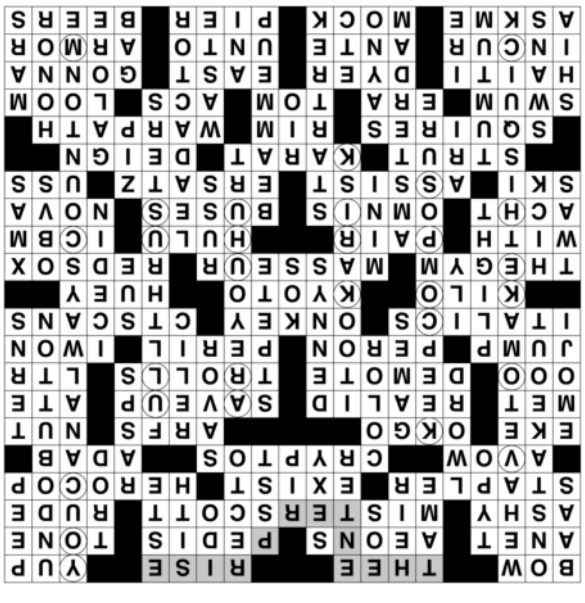
1 Some farm sounds
2 Camped nearby and surveilling, in police jargon
3 "Our window is closing for escape w-elocity!" as [circled letters] might say
4 Hardly spicy
5 Next in line
6 Goddess of daybreak
7 Fill in
8 Direct opposite of verso (found hidden in this clue!)
9 It's a promise
10 Enemy of the Jedi
11 By Juan's early light?
12 "Any time! I'm a doctor, not a do-nothing!" as [circled letters] might say
13 Way back?
14 Slight gripe, so to speak
16 Slip of the pen
18 Tantalizing
19 A low "Yo!"
20 Trampled (on)
23 Sound of a wardrobe malfunction
26 Euphemistic expression of commitment
29 Speaks roughly
31 Cherry or lime
32 Bask in
34 Reaction to a social media post, maybe
36 "Logic dictates that you control your emotions," as [circled letters] might say
37 Sneakily exploits
39 Thing of the past
40 "Stepping on the gas, Captain!" as [circled letters] might say
42 Seaside flock
45 "To protect my crew, the gamble was necessary," as [circled letters] might say
46 IHOP rival
47 Florida beach town, in brief
48 "We received a distress signal. Any injuries?" as [circled letters] might say
55 Tough spot
58 Stranded during a winter storm, say
60 Texter's sweet sentiment
62 Big hits, in brief
64 Make a case against?
68 Old-fashioned contraction
69 Backwoods bumpkin
70 Bite-size
71 Former Wisconsin senator Feingold
73 "Clearly!" in textspeak
74 Major e-tailing season
77 World capital with 400 kilometers of bike lanes
79 He might be carrying a big picture
83 This puzzle's theme
84 "I want to come back to the ship," as everyone circled in this puzzle seems to have said to 22-Across
87 NPR journalist Shapiro
89 Punch
92 Belly, in kidspeak
94 Carnival-themed Vegas hotel
96 In spades
97 Symbols of grace
98 Object
100 Garbage
101 "____ is more important than life" (Klingon proverb)
102 "Transformers" actor ____ LaBeouf
107 2004 landing site for Spirit
109 Land west of Eng.
111 "You get the gist": Abbr.
113 Alt-rocker DiFranco
114 Chinwag

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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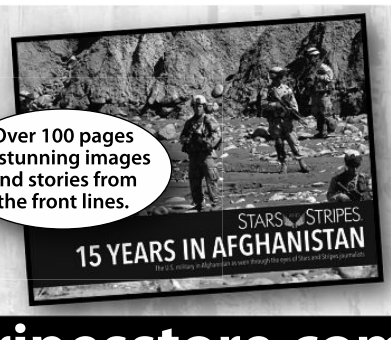

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SCIENCE

Barriers blunt Alaska glacial outburst damage

By Cedar Attanasio and Gene Johnson
Associated Press

New sandbag-style barriers installed along a river in Alaska's capital city held back record levels of flooding and prevented widespread damage after an ice dam at the nearby Mendenhall Glacier released a massive amount of rainwater and snowmelt downstream, officials said Wednesday.

Water pooled on several streets, in some yards and in some homes in Juneau after the Mendenhall River crested earlier in the day. But the water receded and by late afternoon officials had reopened affected areas to residents, many of whom evacuated ahead of peak water levels. There were no damage reports similar to the last two years, when flooding was rampant and some homes washed away.

The barriers have been a point of contention, with some homeowners in the flood zone objecting to their cost and suggesting officials should pursue a longer-term fix. But they "really have protected our community," Juneau City Manager Katie Koester told a news conference.

"If it weren't for them, we would have hundreds and hundreds of flooded homes," she said.

The Mendenhall Glacier is about 12 miles from Juneau, home to 30,000 people in southeast Alaska, and is a popular tourist attraction due to its proximity and easy access on walking trails. Homes on the city's outskirts are within miles of Mendenhall Lake, which sits below the glacier, and many front the Mendenhall River, into which the glacial outburst flowed.

Juneau, which is accessible only by boat and plane, is 570 miles southeast of Anchorage, Alaska's largest city. The flooding won't impact Friday's summit in Anchorage between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Flooding from the basin has become an annual concern since 2011 and has gotten worse in recent years. It happens because a smaller glacier near Mendenhall Glacier retreated — a casualty of the warming climate — and left a basin that fills with rainwater and snowmelt each spring and summer, dammed by the glacier.

When the water builds up enough pressure, it forces its way under or around the ice dam, enters Mendenhall Lake, and flows down the Mendenhall River.

The city saw successive years of record flooding in 2023 and 2024, with flooding extending farther into the Mendenhall Valley.

Last year, nearly 300 residences were damaged.

A large outburst can release some 15 billion gallons of water, according to the University of Alaska Southeast and Alaska Climate Adaptation Science Center. That's the equivalent of nearly 23,000 Olympic-size swimming pools. During last year's flood, the flow rate in the Mendenhall River was about half that of Niagara Falls, the researchers say.

Marc Lester, Anchorage Daily News/AP

People view Mendenhall Glacier from the visitors center area Aug. 3 in Juneau, Alaska.

City and Borough of Juneau/AP

Juneau city officials credit Hesco barriers erected along the river for blunting the impact of water and snowmelt from Mendenhall Glacier.

City officials responded to concerns from property owners this year by working with state, federal and tribal entities to install a temporary levee along roughly 2.5 miles of riverbank in an attempt to guard against widespread flooding. The 10,000 "Hesco" barriers are essentially giant, reinforced sandbags intended to protect more than 460 properties, said emergency manager Ryan O'Shaughnessy.

The Juneau Assembly required homeowners in the flood zone to cover 40% of the cost — about $6,300 each over 10 years. Additionally, a handful of homeowners were asked to chip in $50,000 toward reinforcing the river bank. About one-quarter of the residents formally objected, not enough to torpedo the project.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, some water seeped into yards through drains that had been installed under the barriers. In other spots, trees floating down the river struck and damaged the barriers, officials said.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is at the start of what's expected to be a yearslong process of studying conditions in the region and examining options for a more permanent solution, such as a levee.

Rising seas could put Easter Island's staties at risk by 2080

By Annika Hammerschlag
Associated Press

By the end of the century, rising sea levels could push powerful seasonal waves into Easter Island's 15 iconic moai statues, according to a new study published in the Journal of Cultural Heritage. About 50 other cultural sites in the area are also at risk from flooding.

"Sea level rise is real," said Noah Paoa, lead author of the study and a doctoral student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa's School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology. "It's not a distant threat."

Paoa, who is from Easter Island — known to its Indigenous people as Rapa Nui — and his colleagues built a high-resolution "digital twin" of the island's eastern coastline and ran computer models to simulate future wave impacts under various sea level rise scenarios. They then overlaid the results with maps of cultural sites to pinpoint which places could be inundated in the coming decades.

Esteban Felix/AP

Moai statues stand on Ahu Tongariki, Rapa Nui, or Easter Island, Chile, in 2022. A recent study determined that rising sea levels could reach the statues by 2080.

The findings show waves could reach Ahu Tongariki, the largest ceremonial platform on the island, as early as 2080. The site, home to the 15 towering moai, draws tens of thousands of visitors each year and is a cornerstone of the island's tourism economy.

Beyond its economic value, the ahu is deeply woven into Rapa Nui's cultural identity. It lies within Rapa Nui National Park, which encompasses much of the island and is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The roughly 900 moai statues across the island were built by the Rapa Nui people between the 10th and 16th centuries to honor important ancestors and chiefs.

The threat isn't unprecedented. In 1960, the largest earthquake ever recorded — a magnitude 9.5 off the coast of Chile — sent a tsunami surging across the Pacific.

It struck Rapa Nui and swept the already-toppled moai further inland, which damaged some of their features. The monument was restored in the 1990s.

While the study focuses on Rapa Nui, its conclusions echo a wider reality: cultural heritage sites worldwide are increasingly endangered by rising seas. A UNESCO report published last month found that about 50 World Heritage sites are highly exposed to coastal flooding.

In an email to The Associated Press, a UNESCO spokesperson said climate change is the biggest threat to UNESCO's World Heritage marine sites.

"In the Mediterranean and Africa, nearly three-quarters of coastal low-lying sites are now exposed to erosion and flooding due to accelerated sea level rise."

Possible defenses for Ahu Tongariki range from armoring the coastline and building breakwaters to relocating the monuments.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Rapper takes 10-hour Uber ride to concert

MD BALTIMORE — Atlanta-based rapper Jeezy would have missed his Baltimore concert at The Lyric if not for an Uber driver willing to drive him 10 hours to Charm City.

According to an Instagram post, Jeezy woke up before his Baltimore show on Aug. 1 to find that all flights to Baltimore and D.C. had been canceled due to weather.

His team arranged for a driver, but two hours into the trip, the driver hit an object on the highway in South Carolina, causing his gas tank to leak and forcing him to pull over at a nearby gas station.

Running out of options, Jeezy said he tried to arrange a jet from South Carolina, but the cancellations were still in effect.

An Uber driver, 28-year-old Tanner Donahoo, picked him up from the gas station to take him to the airport. Jeezy asked how much he would charge to drive him to Baltimore.

"Like [a] real one, he didn't hesitate and just kept driving," wrote Jeezy.

Donahoo told The Baltimore Sun that the 10-hour drive to Baltimore was the first ride he accepted on his shift that day.

He wouldn't disclose how much Jeezy paid him for the ride, but he did receive a backstage pass to the show, free merchandise and a paid-for stay at a hotel with the rest of his touring crew.

Jeezy even shared the story with the crowd at The Lyric, bringing Donahoo onstage, where he was met with cheers from the crowd.

Police find $30K worth of stolen Labubu dolls

CA CHINO — A police department in Southern California recovered about $30,000 worth of Labubu dolls that were stolen from a warehouse, the agency announced.

The collectible items have recently surged in popularity. The Labubus were stolen in a series of trips that spanned multiple days, the Chino Police Department said in a social media post. Two suspects, both minors, were later identified as workers at the warehouse, the department said.

Law enforcement found the items at a home in Upland, a city in the state's Inland Empire.

The announcement comes as authorities in Los Angeles County investigate a separate incident in which thieves stole about $7,000 worth of the toothy little monsters from a store in La Puente.

Spirit Airlines struggles to stay in business

NY NEW YORK — Just five months after emerging from Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, Spirit Airlines is warning about its future ability to stay in business.

Spirit Aviation Holdings, the budget carrier's parent company, says it has "substantial doubt" about its ability to continue as a going concern over the next year — which is accounting-speak for running out of money. In a quarterly report issued Monday, Spirit pointed to "adverse market conditions" that it's continued to face after a recent restructuring and other efforts to revive its business.

Despite cost-cutting efforts, Spirit on Monday stressed that it needs more cash. As a result, the company said it may also sell certain aircraft and real estate.

LM OTERO/AP

A little rain never hurt anyone

A grocery shopper endures a downpour in a parking lot Tuesday in Richardson, Texas, an inner suburb of Dallas.

Manatee sighted in cold New England waters

MA BOSTON — A manatee was recently spotted off the coast of Massachusetts for the first time in almost a decade and scientists want to monitor its condition to see if a rescue is necessary before it succumbs to the cold water or lack of food, they said Friday.

The threatened species, which makes its habitat in warmer southern Gulf waters in places like Florida, was first seen July 26 off the southwestern coast of Cape Cod in the area of Nantucket Sound.

A few days later, the animal was seen stranded on the tidal flats in Mattapoisett. Bystanders who found the manatee beached on the flats around sunrise pushed it back into the water, said Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries Protected Species Program Manager Erin Burke.

It hasn't been spotted since, Burke said, but a team with the International Fund for Animal Welfare is standing by to rescue the animal if it becomes necessary.

State senator tapped for lieutenant governor post

FL TALLAHASSEE — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has tapped Republican state Sen. Jay Collins to be his next lieutenant governor. It's a closely watched appointment by the two-term governor, who can't run for reelection in 2026 and has been working to cement his legacy as his time leading the state winds down.

If Collins, an Army combat veteran and nonprofit executive, decides to launch a bid to succeed DeSantis, the move could tee up another proxy fight between the popular GOP governor and President Donald Trump, who has already endorsed Republican U.S. Rep. Byron Donalds for the job.

In Florida, the lieutenant governor position is largely ceremonial with few official responsibilities, apart from taking over if the governor cannot serve.

Collins was first elected to Florida's Republican-dominated state Senate in 2022 and has been seen as one of DeSantis' key allies in the Legislature.

Born in Montana, Collins has talked openly about personal challenges he has overcome, including experiencing homelessness while in high school. He went on to join the Army Special Forces and ultimately lost a leg, but continued to serve five more years as a Green Beret post-amputation, according to a campaign biography.

3 firefighters hurt as century-old buildings burn

UT SALT LAKE CITY — A blaze that started in a restaurant kitchen injured three firefighters and scorched century-old buildings in Salt Lake City's nightlife hub, officials said Tuesday.

Firefighters were dispatched to a cooking fire at the London Belle Supper Club on Monday night and found smoke and flames in the kitchen area, Salt Lake City Fire Chief Karl Lieb said at a news conference. The intense heat created a challenging environment, and because it was unsafe to keep firefighters inside or on the roof, where they normally start their attack, he said they fought the fire with aerial devices.

One of the injured firefighters had a broken ankle; another was suffering from smoke inhalation, dehydration and nausea; and the third was injured by falling debris, Lieb said. All were doing OK Tuesday morning.

Officials estimate about $5 million in losses through the five affected buildings, Lieb said. The investigation of the fire could take weeks.

35 Union Pacific train cars derail, no injuries

TX GORDON — Thirty-five cars of a Union Pacific train derailed Tuesday afternoon near a small Texas town, officials said.

No injuries were reported and no evacuations have been ordered following the afternoon derailment, Union Pacific spokeswoman Robynn Tysver said.

The emergency services district said the derailment was being treated as a hazardous material situation. But it was not immediately known what the derailed train cars were carrying.

From wire reports

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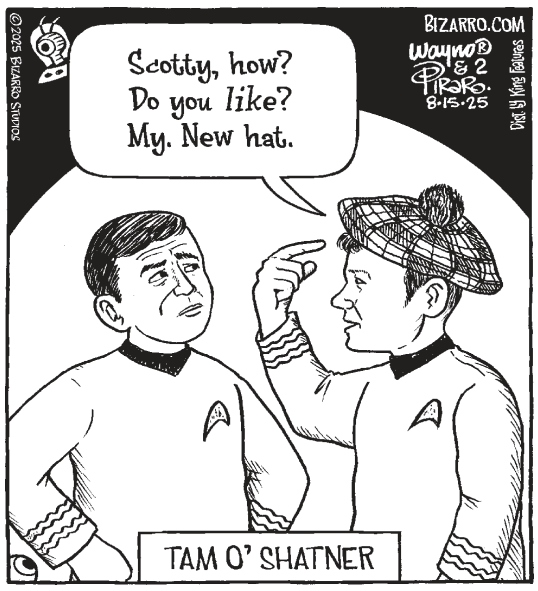
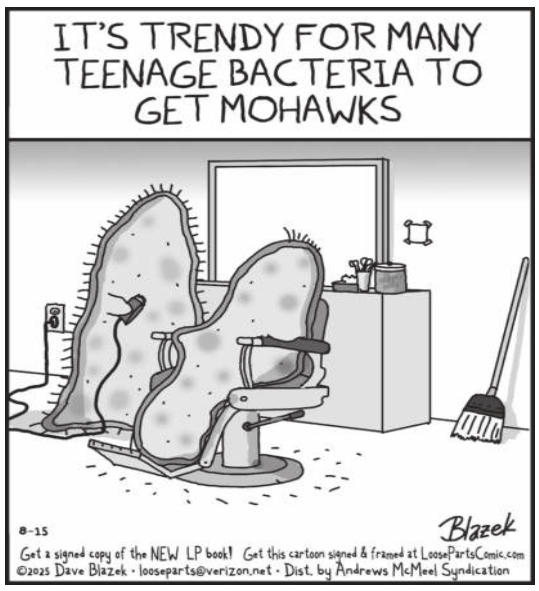
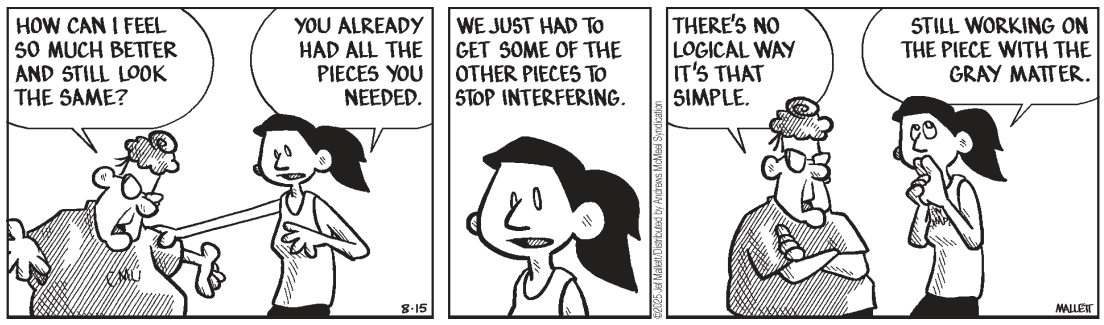


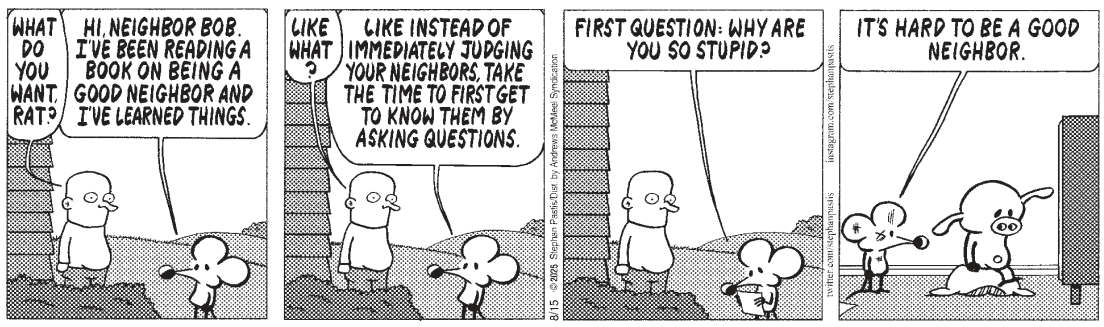
Loose Parts



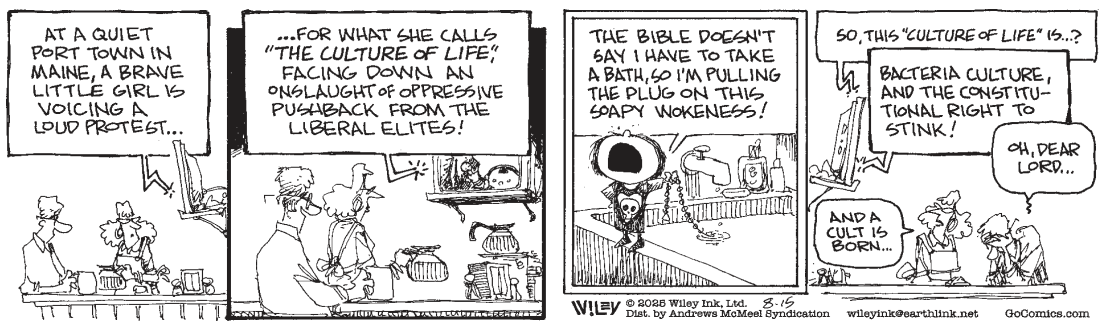
Frazz



Pearls Before Swine

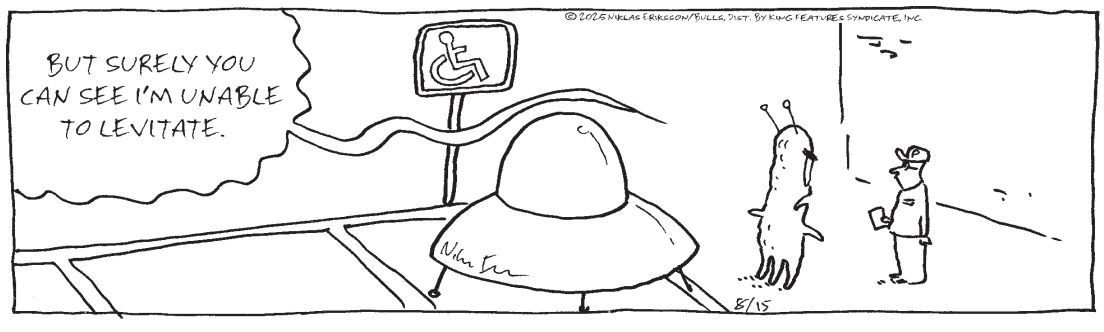


Non Sequitur

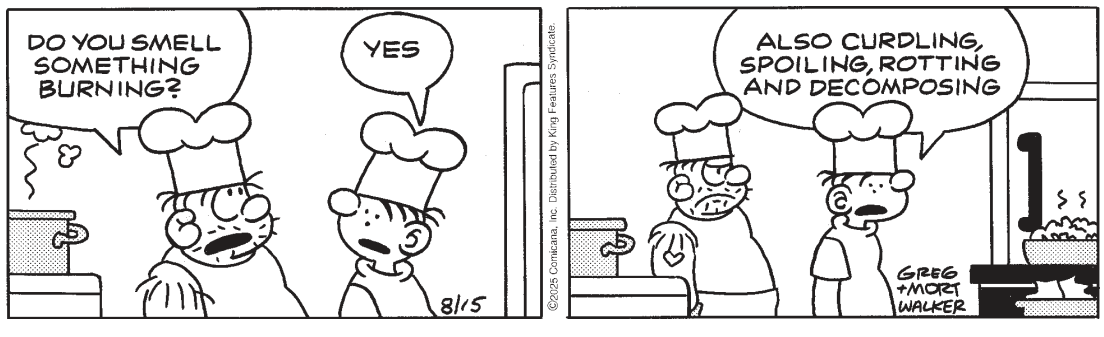


Wumo

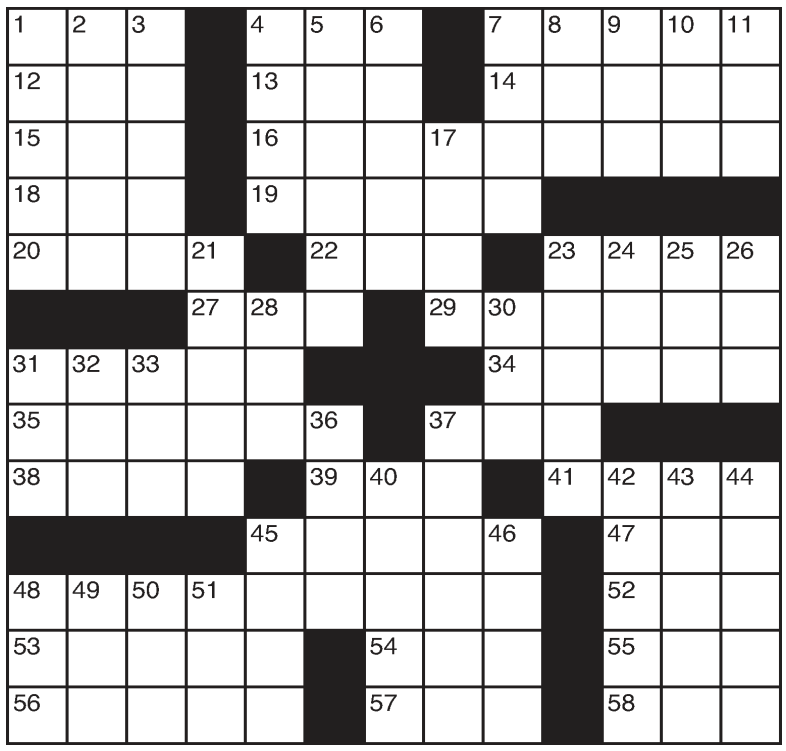
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Big-screen buys
4 Past
7 Flat floaters
12 Perfume label word
13 Soak (up)
14 Maestro Seiji —
15 Spinning abbr.
16 Tucked-in blouse part
18 Religious sch.
19 Bar mixer
20 Dutch export
22 Convened
23 Ache
27 Before
29 Marsh birds
31 Energizer mascot
34 Major artery
35 Obliterates
37 Sit-up targets
38 Writer Quindlen
39 Luau dish
41 Squeezes (out)
45 More mature
47 Low digit
48 Grimm story
52 Nabokov novel
53 Big foil maker
54 Business letters
55 Allow
56 Synthetic fabric
57 Lawn material
58 Billboards

DOWN

1 To the point
2 Smoked an e-cig
3 — cum laude
4 Admin. aide
5 "You Can't — Again"
6 Express a view
7 Campus mil. group
8 HIV-treating drug
9 JFK regulator
10 Prefix with night
11 Erie Canal mule
17 Ceremony
21 High-IQ group
23 Plain writing
24 — Lingus
25 Hairy Addams cousin
26 Intelligence org.
28 Bagel variety
30 Prattle
31 Actress Arthur
32 Coffee vessel
33 A Bobbsey twin
36 Skewer
37 Danny of "Moonstruck"
40 October birthstones
42 Eucalyptus eater
43 Finished
44 Plane assignments
45 Pitcher Nolan
46 Shipping dept. stamp
48 Distant
49 Carte lead-in
50 Glacial
51 Kanga's kid

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

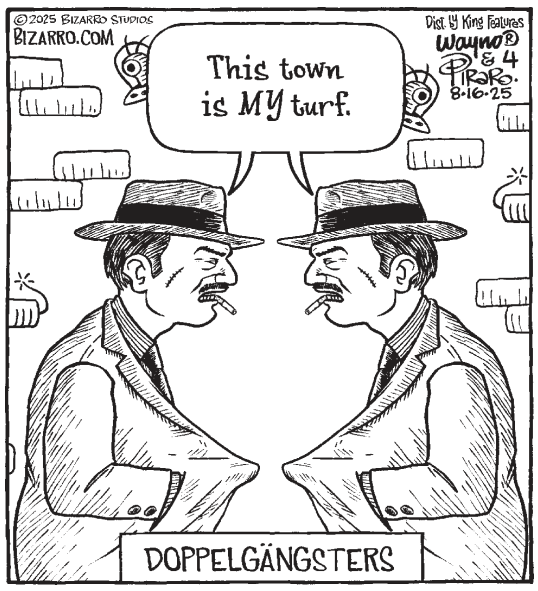
8-15 CRYPTOQUIP

AKHNOGK EB NZK YAKNPYKETX HKAOEV NZPN MPX IWEMW BEA ONX AKPGGQ BETG EVEA: NQAPWWEXPTATX AKKIX.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WOULD YOU ASSUME THAT COWS, SHEEP AND PIGS GET THEIR PRESCRIPTIONS FILLED AT THE FARMACY?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: E equals O

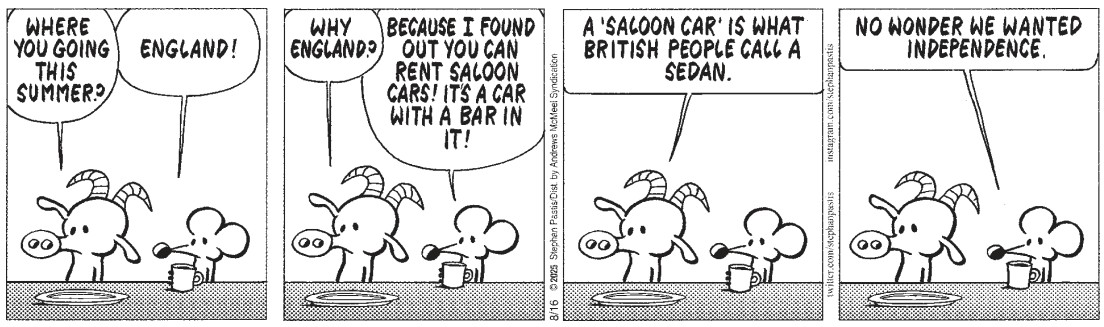
Bizarro



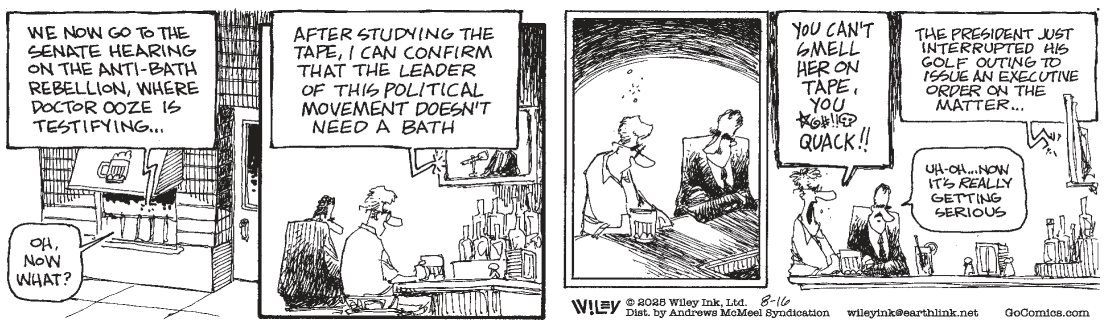
Loose Parts

Frazz

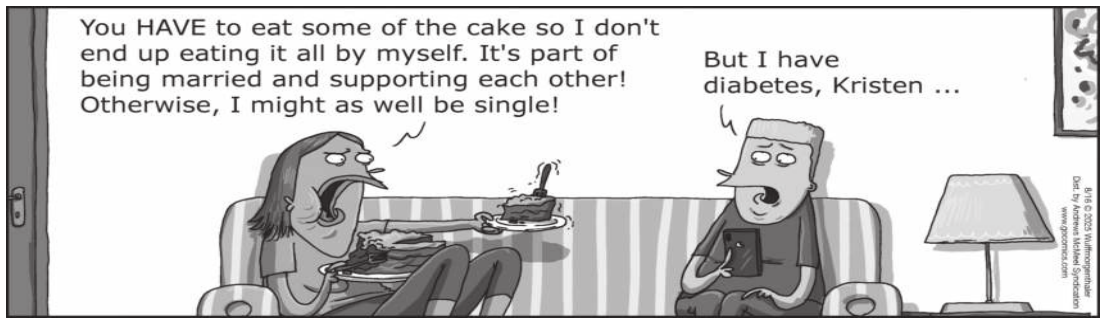
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur

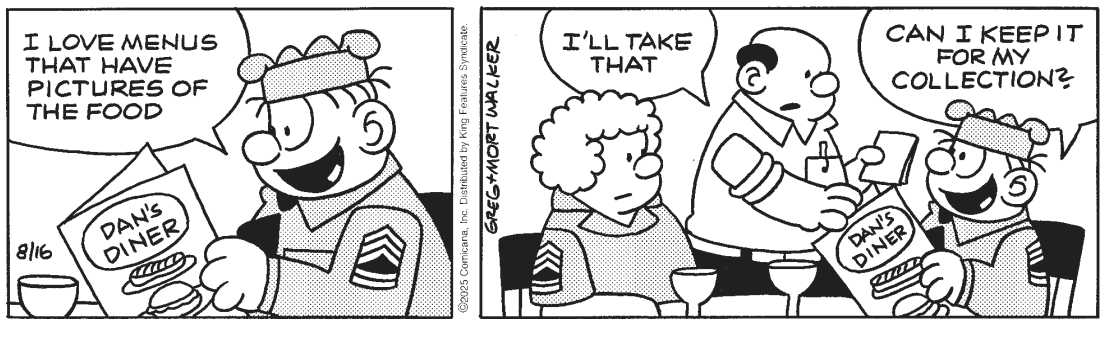


Wumo

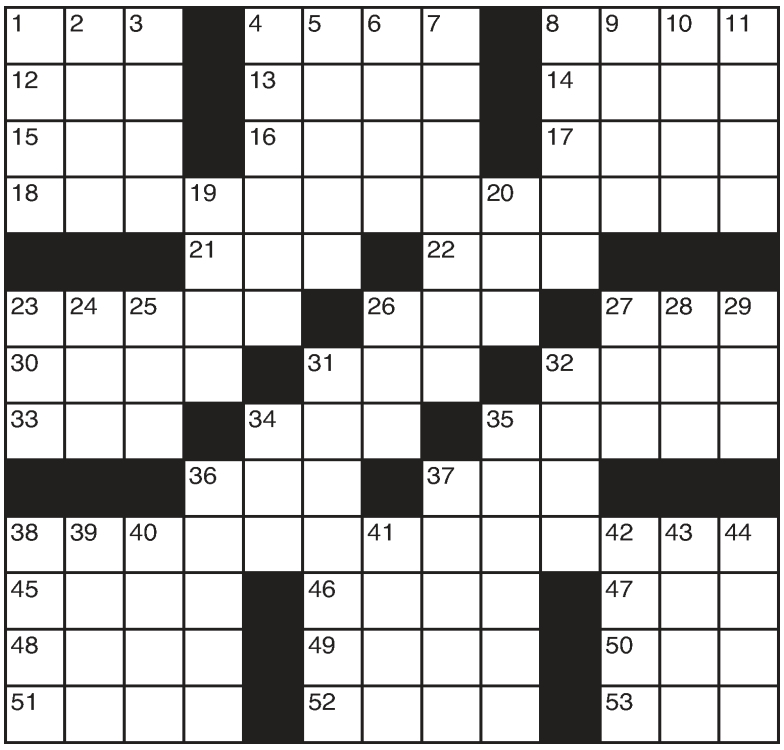


Carpe Diem

Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Nonclerical
4 Dance move
8 Jubilation
12 Before
13 Tree with cones
14 "Listen!"
15 Carte lead-in
16 Hideaway
17 Theater award
18 Quarterback's throws
21 Red — beet
22 Tipsy
23 Draconian
26 Marry
27 Watch chain
30 "Oops!"
31 Cowboy moniker
32 "Suits" actress Torres
33 Apprehend
34 Nondairy milk variety
35 Hive head
36 Candy-heart word
37 Bit of wit
38 Dojo offerings
45 Showy flower
46 Castle
47 Verse by Pablo Neruda
48 Half quart
49 Zilch
50 Dugout item
51 Fifth Avenue store
52 Requests
53 Early hrs.

DOWN

1 Piece of lettuce
2 Guthrie of folk
3 Twelve months
4 Bellyflop aftermath
5 Royal crown
6 Author Bagnold
7 Puzzle
8 Specter
9 Chemists' rooms
10 Buffalo's lake
11 Squeezes (out)
19 Cleanse
20 Succor
23 Attila, notably
24 "Caught ya!"
25 Filch
26 Drenched
27 "A pox upon thee!"
28 "A Chorus Line" song
29 Prohibit
31 Small Greek restaurant
32 Weaponry
34 Ump's yell
35 Seismic events
36 Endures
37 Drop heavily
38 — Bay (Manhattan area)
39 La Scala solo
40 Hockey venue
41 Dove calls
42 Japanese noodles
43 Wax-coated cheese
44 Gels

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

8-16 CRYPTOQUIP

WQ VAZGHCJWI VQ E LRWTI AGHG IECCGM MVAZ QHVT QEYJGH YV CVZ, AVSRM YJEY LG EWHCJWI JGWHCJWI?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: REPTILE OF THE CRETACEOUS PERIOD THAT WAS KNOWN FOR ITS REALLY FOUL ODOR: TYRANNOSAURUS REEKS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: J equals H

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Max D. Lederer Jr., Publisher
Laura Law, Chief Operating Officer
Lt. Col. Daniel "DQ" Quinlan, Europe commander
John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
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John Albaugh, Pacific chief of staff

EDITORIAL

Sean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation
moores.sean@stripes.com
Ann Pinson, Digital Managing Editor
pinson.ann@stripes.com

BUREAU STAFF

Europe/Mideast

Erik Slavin, Europe & Mideast Bureau Chief
slavin.erik@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9350; DSN (314)583.9350

Pacific

Aaron Kidd, Pacific Bureau Chief
kidd.aaron@stripes.com
+81.42.552.2511 ext. 88380; DSN (315)227.7380

Washington

Joseph Cacchioli, Washington Bureau Chief
cacchioli.joseph@stripes.com
(+1)(202)886-0033

Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News
bowers.brian@stripes.com

CIRCULATION

Mideast

David Schultz, District Manager
schultz.david@stripes.com
xsscirculation@stripes.com
+49(0)152.5672.5036; DSN (314)583-9111

Europe

Carlo Aquino, Circulation Manager
aquino.carlo@stripes.com
memberservices@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9136; DSN (314)583.9136

Pacific

Mari Mori, customerhelp@stripes.com
+81-3 6385.3171; DSN (315)227.7333

CONTACT US

Washington

tel: (+1)202.886.0003
633 3rd St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001-3050

Reader letters

letters@stripes.com

Additional contacts

stripes.com/contactus

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OPINION

The CDC shooting and the dangers of misinformation

By Lisa Jarvis
Bloomberg Opinion

The horrifying attack on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Atlanta headquarters felt like the grimly predictable result of years of pandemic-related misinformation and disinformation — much of it propagated by the very people now leading U.S. health agencies.

It's no surprise, then, that instead of offering a concrete plan to protect staff and rebuild public trust, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. seized the tragedy as another opportunity to double down on his dangerous rhetoric.

On Aug. 8, CDC workers huddled together in offices as a gunman — struggling with his mental health and angry about COVID vaccines — fired nearly 500 rounds, with about 200 striking buildings on the agency's campus, police said Tuesday. DeKalb County police officer David Rose was killed while responding to the attack, and the shooter took his own life.

Over the weekend, Kennedy offered condolences for the slain officer, and in an email to CDC staff obtained by The Washington Post, he praised the importance of their work: "From public health labs to data systems to community programs, your efforts matter," he wrote. By Monday, however, he was on television using the platform to denigrate yet again and undermine those efforts.

President Donald Trump, meanwhile, has said nothing publicly about this assault on a major federal institution.

According to neighbors, the gunman believed the COVID vaccine was responsible for his health problems. And police confirmed on Tuesday that he left behind writing that "expressed the shooter's discontent" with the shots. But when a reporter from Scripps News asked Kennedy about HHS' plans — in light of the shooting — to counter vaccine misinformation, he turned the spotlight back on health agencies themselves. He accused the government of overreach and lying during the pandemic, claiming that this, not conspiracy theories or falsehoods, was the actual reason people had lost faith in the mRNA vaccines and health leadership.

"We have to ask, 'Why are people not believing the public health agencies?' And the answer I think is pretty elementary: that the public health agencies have not been honest," he said.

In the same interview, Kennedy defended his recent decision to abandon investment in mRNA vaccines — a move decried by scientists and doctors as leaving the U.S. dangerously vulnerable to current and future threats — with what amounted to another swipe at the CDC. "We were told during COVID, 'Trust the experts,' but 'trust the experts' is not a feature of either science or democracy. It's a feature of totalitarianism and of religion."

It's true that in the early stages of the pandemic, public health leaders kept their message simple: get vaccinated for yourself and for the greater good. Over time, that lack of nuance created, for some, a troubling disconnect when their lived experience didn't align with the threat level they were told justified sweeping pandemic-era policies. Yet the danger was real — the U.S. experienced daunting waves of deaths and hospitalizations — as was the efficacy of the vaccine, which saved millions of lives.

But that's a communication problem, not an expertise problem. Kennedy, meanwhile, conveniently neglects to mention that he and nearly everyone he chose for leadership roles at HHS were responsible for the erosion of trust. The current hostility toward the CDC is a direct result of his constant drumbeat of falsehoods about the COVID shot, which he has called the "most dangerous vaccine ever made," and the agency itself, which he once likened to a Nazi death camp.

He continues to spread misinformation about the safety of the vaccine and the body of data to support it. Now, he's using his position and the mistrust he fueled among some Americans to justify the dismantling of our public health protections — whether through abandoning mRNA research, dismissing the CDC's expert vaccine panel, or unilaterally changing recommendations on shots.

Even before the shooting, the CDC was under siege from Kennedy's program and staffing cuts, and challenges to its expertise. Now, many employees feel abandoned by this administration — traumatized, even.

In her first all-staff meeting on Tuesday, newly confirmed CDC Director Susan Monarez offered little beyond platitudes. "We know that misinformation can be dangerous not only to health, but to those that trust us and those we want to trust, and we need to rebuild that trust together," Monarez said, according to Bloomberg News. "That trust is what binds us in moments like this."

But it's hard to know where to go from here — at least with Kennedy leading HHS. CDC scientists have stood on the front lines against public health threats; now they increasingly find themselves targets. Unfortunately, no one in this administration seems willing — or able — to defend them, and that puts us at risk.

Lisa Jarvis is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering biotech, health care and the pharmaceutical industry. Previously, she was executive editor of Chemical & Engineering News. This column reflects the personal views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

Big Pharma's ads won't make America healthy again

By Alex Ward
InsideSources.com

As a dad, I'm used to interruptions — from kids bursting in during a quiet moment or to those "battery is low" smoke alarm warnings. Nothing grates quite like those slick pharmaceutical ads blaring across the TV, promising quick fixes while whispering side effects in fine print.

That's why I'm excited by recent proposals from Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and the Department of Health and Human Services to fight misleading ads by forcing more side-effects transparency and ending tax breaks for pharmaceutical advertising.

A recent Washington Post editorial suggests that advertisements nudge American patients to spot undiagnosed issues and consult their doctor. Does the pharmaceutical industry think the American people are so clueless that we need a commercial to know when we're feeling off?

Ads don't encourage thoughtful conversations with primary care physicians — they push viewers toward medication-only solutions and prod us to demand specific drugs, skewing conversations away from lifestyle choices toward pharmaceutical fixes.

It's more troubling when kids catch these ads, absorbing the idea that every problem has a pill. The United States and New Zealand are the only countries that allow this direct-to-consumer advertising, and that should raise red flags. Why has the entire world caught onto the dangers of this advertising, but the land of the free refuses to nip it in the bud? These ads are not about empowerment; they're meant to condition us, especially young minds, to see medication as the default.

Worse, these ads aren't about transparency; they're about sales. Companies push brand-name blockbuster drugs to increase profits and then write off their advertising costs, sometimes to the tune of $1.5 billion. And let's not pretend the ads are informative. If they were, why would Big Pharma quickly rattle off the most dangerous side effects at the end of the ad (and in small fine print)? After all, side effects often cause more misery than the ailments they treat, trapping people in a cycle of new prescriptions to fix problems the first ones created.

Kennedy and his HHS team deserve applause for putting patients over profits, fighting for greater transparency related to side effects, and ending advertising tax breaks for pharmaceutical companies. Regardless of who's leading these efforts, the MAHA movement has exposed Big Pharma's reluctance to be fully transparent and revealed its priority: keeping us hooked, not healthy.

Real health doesn't come from a pill bottle but rather from how we live. The Post's claim that ads keep us healthier ignores the power of natural choices. While science, including the National Institutes of Health, agrees that lifestyle choices are the deciding factor for one's health, it doesn't take a peer-reviewed journal to realize the benefits of healthy living.

Recently, my wife and I went kayaking for 90 minutes on a lake. For a $20 rental, we enjoyed the benefits of exercise, fresh air, vitamin D, and a mental reset that lasted days. At home, our kids love our budget-friendly steam sauna and cold plunge setup — especially after a day at summer camp. Unlike the false scenes of euphoria and joy depicted in predatory pharma ads, my kids come out laughing, with spirits lifted and zero side effects.

I'm not saying prescriptions are never needed. Diabetics need insulin, and someone in crisis might benefit from temporary anxiety medication. That's not the reality we live in. Instead, prescription drug use is as much an epidemic as chronic illness. Twenty percent of children are on one or more prescription drugs. The typical American citizen is on at least four prescription drugs. An American male born in 2019 will spend 48% of his life taking prescription drugs, while a female will spend 60% of her time doing the same.

As a parent, these statistics terrify me. They should worry you, too. The goal should be long-term wellness through lifestyle, not lifelong dependency on drugs.

We deserve better than manipulative ads that drown out our instincts. Proposals to limit these ads are a step toward protecting us, especially the kids, from Big Pharma's grip. Let's focus on the most effective prescription for a healthier America: moving our bodies, eating well and connecting as families.

Alex Ward is a high school economics teacher and a father.

SCOREBOARD/LITTLE LEAGUE WORLD SERIES

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League

BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Sent RHP Houston Roth outright to Norfolk (IL).
BOSTON RED SOX — Sent RHP Nick Burdi outright to Worcester (IL).
CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Reinstated LHP Martin Perez from the 60-day IL. Optioned LHP Cam Booser to Charlotte (IL). Designated LHP Jared Shuster for assignment.
DETROIT TIGERS — Optioned RHP Codi Heuer to Toledo (IL). Reinstated RHP Sawyer Gipson-Long from the 15-day IL.
HOUSTON ASTROS — Selected the contract of RHP Jordan Weems from Sugar Land (PCL). Optioned LHP Colton Gordon to Sugar Land.
LOS ANGELES ANGELS — Sent 2B Scott Kingery outright to Salt Lake (PCL).
TEXAS RANGERS — Reinstated CF Evan Carter from the 10-day IL. Placed RF Adolis Garcia on the 10-day IL.
TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Sent RHP Alek Manoah to Buffalo (IL) on a rehab assignment to Buffalo (IL).

National League

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS — Recalled RHP Casey Kelly from Reno (PCL). Placed RHP Anthony DeScalfani on the 15-day IL. Released RHP Kendall Graveman.
ATLANTA BRAVES — Agreed to terms with RHP Anderson Pilar on a minor league contract.
CHICAGO CUBS — Released 3B Jon Berti.
CINCINNATI REDS — Reinstated RHP Hunter Greene from the 15-day IL. Optioned RHP Sam Benschoter to Louisville (IL).
COLORADO ROCKIES — Sent C Austin Nola outright to Albuquerque (PCL).
NEW YORK METS — Reinstated RHP Paul Blackburn from the 15-day IL. Optioned RHP Justin Hagenman to Syracuse (IL).
PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Placed OF Oneil Cruz on the 7-day concussion IL. Recalled OF Ronny Simon from Indianapolis (IL).
SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Signed free agent RHP JT Brubaker to a minor league contract.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

BALTIMORE RAVENS — Waived RB Marcus Major.
BUFFALO BILLS — Signed RB James Cook to a four-year contract extension.
CHICAGO BEARS — Placed DB Major Burns on injured reserve.
CLEVELAND BROWNS — Released WR Luke Floriea from injured reserve.
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Claimed WR Kawaan Baker off waivers from Las Vegas. Placed DB Isaiah Dunn and RB Jalen White on injured reserve.
HOUSTON TEXANS — Signed TE Tre' McKitty to a contract. Placed TE Dalton Keene on injured reserve.
JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Placed DB Zech McPhearson on injured reserve. Released DB Levi Wallace from injured reserve. Signed DB Keni-H Lovely to a contract.
MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Signed OLB Cam Gill and LB Max Tooley to contracts. Placed C Zeke Correll on injured reserve.
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Placed RB Deneric Prince on injured reserve.
NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Placed WR Bub Means on injured reserve. Signed G Mike Panasiuk to a contract. Placed TE Mason Pline on injured reserve.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Placed DR Bradlee Anae on injured reserve. Signed WR Malik Turner.
TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS — Placed QB Michael Pratt on the physically unable to perform list.
TENNESSEE TITANS — Claimed LB Brian Asamoah II off waivers from Minnesota. Waived LB Otis Reese IV.

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

COLORADO RAPIDS — Sign D Lucas Herrington to a four-year contract.
PORTLAND TIMBERS — Signed F Kristoffer Velde to a contract.

National Women's Soccer League

DENVER SUMMIT FC — Signed F Ally Watt to a contract.

PRO FOOTBALL

NFL preseason

Friday's games

Tennessee at Atlanta, **AFN-Sports, 1 a.m. Saturday CET, 8 a.m. Saturday JKT**
Kansas City at Seattle, **AFN-Sports, 4 a.m. Saturday CET, 11 a.m. Saturday JKT**

Saturday's games

Carolina at Houston
Cleveland at Philadelphia, **AFN-Sports, 7 p.m. Saturday CET, 2 a.m. Sunday JKT**
Green Bay at Indianapolis
Miami at Detroit
New England at Minnesota
San Francisco at Las Vegas, **AFN-Sports, 10 p.m. Saturday CET, 5 a.m. Sunday JKT**
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's games

Jacksonville at New Orleans, **AFN-Atlantic, 2 a.m. Monday CET, 9 a.m. Monday JKT**
Buffalo at Chicago

Monday's game

Cincinnati at Washington

TENNIS

Cincinnati Open

Wednesday
At Lindner Family Tennis Center
Cincinnati
Purse: $9,193,540
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Seedings in parentheses
Men's Singles
Round of 32

Ben Shelton (5), United States, def. Roberto Bautista Agut, Spain, 7-6 (3), 6-3

Men's Singles
Round of 16

Holger Rune (7), Denmark, def. Frances Tiafoe (10), United States, 6-4, 3-1, ret.
Jannik Sinner (1), Italy, def. Adrian Mannarino, France, 6-4, 7-6 (4)
Felix Auger-Aliassime (23), Canada, def. Benjamin Bonzi, France, 6-4, 6-3
Terence Atmane, France, def. Taylor Fritz (4), United States, 3-6, 7-5, 6-3
Carlos Alcaraz (2), Spain, def. Luca Nardi, Italy, 6-1, 6-4
Andrey Rublev (9), Russia, def. Francisco Comesana, Argentina, 6-2, 6-3
Alexander Zverev (3), Germany, def. Karen Khachanov (14), Russia, 7-5, 3-0, ret.

Women's Singles
Round of 32

Veronika Kudermetova, Russia, def. Clara Tauson (16), Denmark, 3-6, 7-6 (4), 6-4

Women's Singles
Round of 16

Iga Swiatek (3), Poland, def. Sorana Cirstea, Romania, 6-4, 6-3
Aryna Sabalenka (1), Belarus, def. Jessica Bouzas Maneiro, Spain, 6-1, 7-5
Elena Rybakina (9), Kazakhstan, def. Madison Keys (6), United States, 6-7 (3), 6-4, 6-2
Anna Kalinskaya (28), Russia, def. Ekaterina Alexandrova (12), Russia, 3-6, 7-6 (5), 6-1

Men's Doubles
Round of 16

Rajeev Ram, United States, and Nikola Mektic, Croatia, def. Kevin Krawietz and Tim Putz (4), Germany, 7-6 (3), 7-5
Lloyd Glasspool and Julian Cash (2), Britain, def. Matthew Ebden and Jordan Thompson, Australia, 7-5, 5-7, 10-8
Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori (6), Italy, def. Robert Cash and James Tracy, United States, 6-3, 7-6 (8)
Evan King and Christian Harrison (7), United States, def. Romain Arneodo, Monaco, and Robert Galloway, United States, 7-6 (3), 3-6, 10-7

Women's Doubles
Round of 16

Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini (1), Italy, def. Magda Linette, Poland, and Clara Tauson, Denmark, walkover
Lyudmyla Kichenok, Ukraine, and Ellen Perez (6), Australia, def. Jessica Pegula and Hailey Baptiste, United States, 6-4, 7-5
Barbora Krejcikova, Czechia, and Jelena Ostapenko, Latvia, def. Veronika Kudermetova, Russia, and Elise Mertens (4), Belgium, 6-3, 1-6, 10-5

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA

Eastern Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	21	11	.656	—
New York	21	12	.636	½
Indiana	18	15	.545	3½
Washington	14	18	.438	7
Chicago	8	24	.250	13
Connecticut	6	26	.188	15

Western Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Minnesota	27	5	.844	—
Phoenix	19	12	.613	7½
Las Vegas	19	14	.576	8½
Golden State	17	15	.531	10
Seattle	16	17	.485	11½
Los Angeles	15	17	.469	12
Dallas	9	24	.273	18½

x-clinched playoff spot

Tuesday's games

Dallas 81, Indiana 80
New York 105, Los Angeles 97

Wednesday's games

Connecticut 71, Chicago 62
Golden State 88, Washington 83
Las Vegas 83, New York 77
Atlanta 85, Seattle 75

Thursday's games

No games scheduled.

Friday's games

Golden State at Chicago
Los Angeles at Dallas
Washington at Indiana
Las Vegas at Phoenix
Seattle at Atlanta

Saturday's game

New York at Minnesota

Sunday's games

Indiana at Connecticut
Los Angeles at Washington
Dallas at Las Vegas
Phoenix at Seattle
Atlanta at Golden State

PRO SOCCER

MLS

Western Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
San Diego FC	15	7	4	49	50	32
Vancouver	13	6	6	45	43	28
Minn. United	12	6	8	44	43	30
Seattle	11	6	8	41	43	35
LAFC	10	6	7	37	41	30
Portland	10	8	7	37	33	34
Austin FC	9	8	7	34	23	28
Colorado	9	11	6	33	33	40
San Jose	8	10	8	32	49	45
Real Salt Lake	9	12	4	31	27	32
FC Dallas	7	11	7	28	37	45
Houston	7	11	7	28	32	41
Sporting KC	6	13	6	24	36	47
St Louis City	5	14	6	21	27	41
LA Galaxy	3	15	7	16	28	52

Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Philadelphia	15	5	6	51	44	25
Cincinnati	15	7	4	49	39	32
Nashville	14	7	5	47	43	29
Orlando City	12	6	8	44	50	34
Columbus	12	5	8	44	41	36
Inter Miami CF	12	5	6	42	50	38
Charlotte FC	13	11	2	41	44	39
NYC FC	11	8	5	38	34	29
Chicago	10	9	6	36	47	42
New York	10	10	6	36	41	37
New England	7	11	7	28	33	35
Toronto FC	5	13	7	22	26	33
Atlanta	4	11	10	22	30	46
CF Montréal	4	15	7	19	24	47
D.C. United	4	15	7	19	22	51

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

Saturday's games

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

Sunday's games

Nashville at New York City FC
San Diego FC at San Jose
Houston at Vancouver

Saturday, Aug. 23

New York City FC at Cincinnati
New England at Columbus
Miami at D.C. United
Austin FC at CF Montréal
Chicago at Philadelphia
Los Angeles FC at FC Dallas
San Jose at Houston
Orlando City at Nashville
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
St Louis City at Vancouver
Colorado at LA Galaxy
Portland at San Diego FC

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Kansas City	13	2	0	39	32	10
Orlando	8	4	3	27	22	12
Washington	8	4	3	27	23	20
San Diego	7	3	5	26	26	17
Portland	7	4	4	25	24	16
Seattle	7	5	3	24	21	17
Louisville	6	6	3	21	20	25
Gotham FC	5	5	5	20	19	14
North Carolina	5	6	4	19	19	22
Bay FC	4	6	5	17	17	20
Angel City	4	7	4	16	21	27
Houston	4	8	3	15	17	25
Chicago	1	9	5	8	12	29
Utah Royals FC	1	11	3	6	12	31

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

Friday's games

Louisville at Washington
Angel City at Utah Royals FC

Saturday's games

Orlando at Kansas City
Portland at North Carolina
San Diego at Bay FC

Sunday's game

Houston at Gotham FC

Monday's game

Chicago at Seattle

Thursday, August 21

Orlando at Angel City

Friday, August 22

North Carolina at Chicago

Saturday, August 23

Washington at Bay FC
Utah Royals FC at Gotham FC
Kansas City at Portland

CALEB CRAIG/AP

Venezuela's team participates in the opening ceremony at the Little League World Series on Wednesday in South Williamsport, Pa.

Venezuela at home once it gets on field

BY AMANDA VOGT
Associated Press

SOUTH WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. — Hitting with the bases loaded at the Little League World Series, Samuel Castillo found the gap between left and center field. Two runs scored and Venezuela's lead over Puerto Rico grew to 3-0.

Above the team dugout, spectators in a fan section that barely filled three rows raised one of the few Venezuelan flags in Volunteer Stadium.

It took a lot for Venezuela to get here, but on Wednesday, its team made the playing baseball part of the journey look easy. Cardenales Little League from Barquisimeto went on to shut out Puerto Rico 5-0.

Cardenales won all five of its regional tournament games, outscoring opponents 46-6 to become the Latin America representative to the LLWS. But in the wake of President Donald Trump's travel bans and restrictions affecting 19 countries, the team needed a special exemption from the U.S. State Department and a sign-off from Secretary of State Marco Rubio after visas were initially denied.

Venezuela's senior team, with players who are up to 16 years old, was supposed to compete in Easley, S.C., last month but was unable to get the exemption and was denied entry to the United States.

"They were working their way through applying for the exemption," Little League President and CEO Patrick Wilson said in a news conference before Wednesday's game. "We ran out of time, just candidly."

Wilson said there were close to 10 days for Venezuela's Williamsport team to get approved, which was "more lead time" than the senior team. They were notified of the approval last Thursday.

This isn't the first time visa snarls have been an issue at the tournament. In 2011, Uganda's visa applications were denied and Saudi Arabia, the regional runner-up, played instead.

"We'll do our best to have conversations with the great folks at the State Department that help us out in an effort to, whether we have to adjust lead times or whatever we can do, to ensure that all teams can participate and enjoy the Little League experience, whether that's at the Little League level, junior, senior, softball, whatever it takes," Wilson said.

Venezuelan players traveled to the U.S. without their families — parents couldn't get visas — but the coaches of last year's team that made it to the international final were among the few fans from back home sitting proudly in the stands above the dugout. Euclides and Ender Rivero only had to renew their visas which, they explained through an interpreter, was a much easier process.

Maria Lewis sat just a few seats away from the Riveros holding one of the country's flags and wearing the Latin America team shirt. She's Venezuelan and lives only an hour away from Williamsport.

"I've been praying for them to come," Lewis said. "I'm very pleased that (their visas were) granted, because these are 12-year-olds that deserve to play their game."

She comes to Volunteer Stadium every year when a team from Venezuela plays.

"I'm just here like a team mom, honorary team mom, so that they can feel supported, that they have people behind them," Lewis said.

Manager Luis Bermudez said the team has been keeping in touch with those 2,204 miles away in Barquisimeto through their smartphones, and he's grateful to the fans Venezuela did have in the stands.

On Friday, Venezuela will play Canada.

MLB

Ohtani can't keep Angels from sweep

2-way star shines, but Dodgers' skid at 4

BY GREG BEACHAM
Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Shohei Ohtani racked up seven strikeouts and pitched into the fifth inning. He tripled, scored and reached base twice at the plate.

The two-way superstar still couldn't stop his team from falling deeper into a losing streak in Anaheim. Sound familiar?

Angels fans know this melancholy story all too well — and now Dodgers fans have experienced it, too.

Ohtani stepped back in time in more ways than one when he returned to the Angel Stadium mound Wednesday night for the first time since he switched teams in Los Angeles' crosstown rivalry.

For six seasons, the three-time MVP couldn't make the Angels into winners with his unprecedented talents. This summer, his defending champion Dodgers are in an increasingly ugly slump — and Ohtani couldn't save them Wednesday, neither on the hill nor at the plate.

Ohtani tripled and scored the Dodgers' first run, and he eventually left his longest start of the season with a 5-4 lead. The Angels still rallied for a 6-5 victory, sweeping the six-game Freeway Series and sending the Dodgers to their fourth consecutive loss overall.

The Dodgers also fell a game behind the Padres in the NL West standings with streaking San Diego on Friday night. The Dodgers led the division by nine games on July 3, and they've gone 12-21 since.

"Obviously, it doesn't feel good to fall into second place and to lose a lot of these games," Ohtani said through his interpreter. "We're doing everything in our power, having meetings, doing everything that we can to try to right the ship. We just have to do a better job."

Ohtani pitched 4⅓ innings of five-hit, four-run ball against the Angels. He gave up up a homer to Taylor Ward and a two-run double to Zach Neto, but he also fanned Mike Trout twice, getting his friend and fellow MVP the second time with his fastest pitch of the night — a 101 mph fastball in the fourth. But the Angels got three straight hits to chase him, capped by Neto's double.

"I just couldn't finish off hitters in the fifth," Ohtani said. "They did a good job putting balls in play, and that's what happens. Next time I've got to do a better job."

The Dodgers' beleaguered bullpen again failed while missing five high-leverage arms on the injured list, but their expensive lineup also didn't score after the fourth inning.

MARK J. TERRILL/AP

Dodgers starting pitcher Shohei Ohtani wipes his face after the third inning against the Angels on Wednesday in Anaheim, Calif. Ohtani tripled and scored and struck out seven in the loss.

Logan O'Hoppe delivered a bases-loaded, two-run single in the eighth, and longtime Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen coolly pitched the ninth. Ohtani struck out in his final two at-bats.

"Doesn't feel good to lose close games," Ohtani said. "It's tough mentally, but we have an off day tomorrow, so the plan is to regroup, refresh and get ready for the weekend."

Ohtani is still beloved in Anaheim by fans who mostly couldn't blame him for leaving a team that could never assemble a winning lineup around him and Trout during six consecutive losing seasons.

All fans were locked in on the main event in this showdown.

After Trout and Ohtani acknowledged each other with slight nods and smirks, Ohtani finished his 1-2-3 first inning by throwing five straight fastballs to Trout before striking him out looking with a sweeper. Ohtani was even meaner to Trout in their second meeting, starting him out with a 73 mph curve before eventually fanning him with that blazing fastball in the low outside corner.

Outside of Trout, Ohtani saw plenty of familiar faces Wednesday: Seven of the nine hitters in the Angels' starting lineup played with him in Anaheim.

Ward blasted a 97-mph fastball from Ohtani to right for his 29th homer, just the second allowed by Ohtani this season.

Padres take NL West lead ahead of series in LA

BY STEVE KRONER
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — At the outset of play on July 4, the San Diego Padres were coming off a 2-4 trip through Cincinnati and Philadelphia and trailed the Los Angeles Dodgers by nine games in the National League West.

On Friday night, the Padres open a three-game series at Los Angeles with San Diego atop the division.

The Padres completed a three-game sweep of the host San Francisco Giants on Wednesday with an 11-1 romp that extended their winning streak to five games. The Padres (69-52) also have won five straight series and are 23-12.

"We've played a lot of really good baseball," Padres manager Mike Shildt said. "Pitching's been good, defense, baserunning. I've been really pleased the last week or so about the offense dictating the game."

San Diego took control Wednesday with a seven-run second inning. Fernando Tatis Jr. contributed a two-run single.

"We're going out there confident every single day, playing good baseball, clean baseball — and that's what we're capable of doing," said Tatis, who had two hits, two walks and drove in three runs.

GODOFREDO A. VÁSQUEZ/AP

The San Diego Padres' Ramón Laureano, right, celebrates with Ryan O'Hearn after hitting a two-run homer during the fifth inning against the Giants on Wednesday in San Francisco.

The Padres and Dodgers have met in the NL Division Series three times in the past five seasons. Considering that history, Tatis said it's hard to overstate the importance of this weekend's series, even if it is only mid-August.

"It's huge. That's what we're playing for," Tatis said. "It's in our hands, how much we want it."

Barely more than a month ago, the Padres weren't particularly concerned with the division race.

"We played some bad baseball around that time, so we weren't really looking up at that point," third baseman Manny Machado said. "We were just trying to get back in the win column."

The Padres revamped their roster at the trade deadline, adding — most notably — outfielder Ramón Laureano and All-Star designated hitter Ryan O'Hearn from the Orioles, catcher Freddy Fermin from the Royals, left-hander Nestor Cortes from the Brewers and reliever Mason Miller from the Athletics.

"Every player that has come in has contributed in a really big (way). They're a really big part of this team," Tatis said.

Laureano went 3 for 4 with a two-run homer Wednesday. He has gone 15 for 45 (.333) with San Diego. Fermin is 11 for 31 (.355) with the Padres. And this weekend, the Padres take on their Southern California rivals with first place in the NL West at stake.

"Clearly, it's a series people are going to be paying attention to," Shildt said, "and we're just going to play good, clean, fundamental Padre baseball."

Scoreboard

American League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Toronto	70	51	.579	—
Boston	66	56	.541	4½
New York	64	57	.529	6
Tampa Bay	59	63	.484	11½
Baltimore	54	66	.450	15½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	70	52	.574	—
Cleveland	62	57	.521	6½
Kansas City	60	61	.496	9½
Minnesota	57	63	.475	12
Chicago	44	77	.364	25½

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	68	53	.562	—
Seattle	67	54	.554	1
Texas	61	61	.500	7½
Los Angeles	59	62	.488	9
Athletics	54	69	.439	15

National League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	69	51	.575	—
New York	64	56	.533	5
Miami	58	62	.483	11
Atlanta	52	68	.433	17
Washington	48	72	.400	21

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	76	44	.633	—
Chicago	68	51	.571	7½
Cincinnati	64	58	.525	13
St. Louis	61	61	.500	16
Pittsburgh	51	71	.418	26

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
San Diego	69	52	.570	—
Los Angeles	68	53	.562	1
Arizona	59	62	.488	10
San Francisco	59	62	.488	10
Colorado	32	88	.267	36½

Wednesday's games

Detroit 1, Chicago White Sox 0
Washington 8, Kansas City 7
Arizona 6, Texas 4
Baltimore 4, Seattle 3
Miami 13, Cleveland 4
Houston 4, Boston 1
Chicago Cubs 4, Toronto 1
Minnesota 4, N.Y. Yankees 1
Tampa Bay 8, Athletics 2
Colorado 6, St. Louis 5
Milwaukee 12, Pittsburgh 5
San Diego 11, San Francisco 1
Cincinnati 8, Philadelphia 0
Atlanta 11, N.Y. Mets 6
L.A. Angels 6, L.A. Dodgers 5

Thursday's games

Seattle at Baltimore
Chicago Cubs at Toronto
Miami at Cleveland
Philadelphia at Washington
Atlanta at N.Y. Mets
Detroit at Minnesota
Arizona at Colorado

Friday's games

Pittsburgh (TBD) at Chicago Cubs (Rea 9-5)
Milwaukee (TBD) at Cincinnati (Martinez 10-9)
Philadelphia (Wheeler 10-5) at Washington (Gore 5-12)
Texas (deGrom 10-5) at Toronto (Bassitt 11-6)
Atlanta (Fedde 4-12) at Cleveland (Cantillo 3-2)
Miami (Alcantara 6-11) at Boston (Giolito 8-2)
Seattle (Castillo 8-6) at N.Y. Mets (Manaea 1-1)
Baltimore (Young 0-6) at Houston (Valdez 11-5)
Chicago White Sox (Civale 3-7) at Kansas City (Cameron 6-5)
Detroit (Morton 7-10) at Minnesota (Ureña 0-0)
N.Y. Yankees (Gil 0-1) at St. Louis (Pallante 6-9)
Arizona (Pfaadt 12-7) at Colorado (Gordon 2-5)
L.A. Angels (Kikuchi 6-7) at Athletics (Perkins 1-2)
San Diego (King 4-2) at L.A. Dodgers (Kershaw 6-2)
Tampa Bay (Boyle 1-2) at San Francisco (Roupp 7-6)

Saturday's games

Pittsburgh at Chicago Cubs
Texas at Toronto
Philadelphia at Washington
Miami at Boston
Seattle at N.Y. Mets
Milwaukee at Cincinnati
Atlanta at Cleveland
Baltimore at Houston
Chicago White Sox at Kansas City
Detroit at Minnesota
N.Y. Yankees at St. Louis
Arizona at Colorado
Tampa Bay at San Francisco
San Diego at L.A. Dodgers
L.A. Angels at Athletics

MLB/NFL

GARETT FISBECK/AP

Nolan McLean was selected by the New York Mets out of Oklahoma State in the third round of the 2023 MLB Draft. McLean is set to make his major league debut Saturday as a starting pitcher.

Mets promote top prospect McLean to boost rotation

BY JERRY BEACH
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Pitching prospect Nolan McLean will make his major league debut Saturday for the New York Mets, who are hoping the right-hander can provide a boost to a struggling rotation.

McLean, 24, went 8-5 with a 2.45 ERA in 21 games, including 18 starts, between Double-A Binghamton and Triple-A Syracuse. He struck out 127 batters in 113⅔ innings with a five-pitch arsenal that includes a mid-to-high 90s fastball as well as a sweeper that's been clocked in the mid-80s.

"We feel good with him going out there and giving us a chance to win baseball games at the big league level," Mets manager Carlos Mendoza said. "Credit to him that he put himself in this position."

Mendoza and swingman Paul Blackburn, who was recalled from Triple-A Syracuse on Wednesday to replace Justin Hagenman on the roster, both said they were impressed by McLean's mound maturity.

"I was there in Jacksonville (for) his first start at Triple-A and his demeanor and his presence out there — really looked like he knew kind of what he wanted to do, what he was trying to do, how he was trying to set up guys," Blackburn said. "I think that just kind of says a lot about somebody."

McLean, who played for Oklahoma State, is the first member of New York's 2023 draft class to reach the majors. He is taking the rotation spot of Frankie Montas, who was sent to the bullpen Tuesday after going 3-2 with a 6.38 ERA in his first eight games, including seven starts.

The Mets rotation ranks sixth in the majors with a 3.70 ERA, though their 591 innings are the fourth-fewest. David Peterson, the scheduled starter Wednesday night against the Atlanta Braves, is the only New York starter to pitch at least six innings in a start since June 7.

McLean, who last pitched for Syracuse on Sunday, has thrown at least six innings in nine starts this season. He reached at least 90 pitches seven times, most recently on Aug. 5.

"Every time you're able to call up a prospect, whether it's a position player or a pitcher, the expectations here is to help us win baseball games," Mendoza said.

MLB leaders

AMERICAN LEAGUE

BATTING — Judge, New York, .333; Peña, Houston, .318; Aranda, Tampa Bay, .316; Ja.Wilson, Athletics, .312; M.Garcia, Kansas City, .302; V.Guerrero, Toronto, .299; Bichette, Toronto, .296; Kirk, Toronto, .294; J.Ramírez, Cleveland, .294

RUNS — Judge, New York, 94; V.Guerrero, Toronto, 80; Ju.Rodríguez, Seattle, 79; Raleigh, Seattle, 78; J.Ramírez, Cleveland, 76; Rooker, Athletics, 76; Witt, Kansas City, 75; Neto, Los Angeles, 72; Arozarena, Seattle, 70; Buxton, Minnesota, 70; Caminero, Tampa Bay, 70

RBI — Raleigh, Seattle, 98; Ward, Los Angeles, 90; Judge, New York, 88; Greene, Detroit, 87; Caminero, Tampa Bay, 84; Pasquantino, Kansas City, 80; Bichette, Toronto, 78; Story, Boston, 75; Adell, Los Angeles, 72; Soderstrom, Athletics, 71

HITS — Bichette, Toronto, 148; V.Guerrero, Toronto, 135; Witt, Kansas City, 135; Judge, New York, 134; M.Garcia, Kansas City, 133; Rooker, Athletics, 130; J.Ramírez, Cleveland, 129; Y.Díaz, Tampa Bay, 128; Ju.Rodríguez, Seattle, 128; Altuve, Houston, 127

DOUBLES — Witt, Kansas City, 37; Bichette, Toronto, 35; Ja.Duran, Boston, 31; M.Garcia, Kansas City, 31; V.Guerrero, Toronto, 29; Henderson, Baltimore, 28; Perez, Kansas City, 28; Rooker, Athletics, 28

TRIPLES — Ja.Duran, Boston, 12; McKinstry, Detroit, 8; Bellinger, New York, 5; M.Garcia, Kansas City, 5; Buxton, Minnesota, 4; Henderson, Baltimore, 4; Isbel, Kansas City, 4; W.Pérez, Detroit, 4; Ju.Rodríguez, Seattle, 4; Volpe, New York, 4; Witt, Kansas City, 4

HOME RUNS — Raleigh, Seattle, 45; Judge, New York, 38; Caminero, Tampa Bay, 34; Ward, Los Angeles, 29; Greene, Detroit, 27; Torkelson, Detroit, 26; Adell, Los Angeles, 25; J.Ramírez, Cleveland, 25

STOLEN BASES — Caballero, New York, 35; J.Ramírez, Cleveland, 33; Simpson, Tampa Bay, 33; Robert, Chicago, 31; Witt, Kansas City, 30; Arozarena, Seattle, 23; Ju.Rodríguez, Seattle, 23; M.Garcia, Kansas City, 22; Neto, Los Angeles, 21; Story, Boston, 20

PITCHING — Crochet, Boston, 13-5; Fried, New York, 12-5; Ryan, Minnesota, 12-5; Rodón, New York, 12-7; Skubal, Detroit, 11-3; Mize, Detroit, 11-4; Valdez, Houston, 11-5; Bassitt, Toronto, 11-6; Eovaldi, Texas, 10-3; H.Brown, Houston, 10-5; deGrom, Texas, 10-5; Rasmussen, Tampa Bay, 10-5

ERA — Skubal, Detroit, 2.35; H.Brown, Houston, 2.46; Crochet, Boston, 2.48; Ryan, Minnesota, 2.72; deGrom, Texas, 2.86; Fried, New York, 2.94; Valdez, Houston, 2.97; Woo, Seattle, 3.08; Luis.Castillo, Seattle, 3.19; Rodón, New York, 3.25

STRIKEOUTS — Crochet, Boston, 188; Skubal, Detroit, 187; H.Brown, Houston, 164; Rodón, New York, 164; Flaherty, Detroit, 153; Ryan, Minnesota, 153; Kikuchi, Los Angeles, 146; Valdez, Houston, 145; Woo, Seattle, 145; deGrom, Texas, 143

NATIONAL LEAGUE

BATTING — Edwards, Miami, .305; F.Freeman, Los Angeles, .300; K.Marte, Arizona, .297; Frelick, Milwaukee, .296; Machado, San Diego, .296; Naylor, Seattle, .292; Hoerner, Chicago, .291; Arraez, San Diego, .289

RUNS — Ohtani, Los Angeles, 115; J.Soto, New York, 85; E.De La Cruz, Cincinnati, 84; Tatis, San Diego, 84; Schwarber, Philadelphia, 81; Carroll, Arizona, 78; Lindor, New York, 78; Tucker, Chicago, 77

RBI — Alonso, New York, 98; Schwarber, Philadelphia, 97; E.Suárez, Seattle, 87; Suzuki, Chicago, 85; Yelich, Milwaukee, 81; Perdomo, Arizona, 79; Ohtani, Los Angeles, 79; Wood, Washington, 78; Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 78

HITS — Machado, San Diego, 138; T.Turner, Philadelphia, 137; Arraez, San Diego, 136; Ohtani, Los Angeles, 132; E.De La Cruz, Cincinnati, 130; Edwards, Miami, 130; Hoerner, Chicago, 127; Perdomo, Arizona, 126

DOUBLES — Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 31; Alonso, New York, 30; Machado, San Diego, 30; Olson, Atlanta, 30; Chourio, Milwaukee, 29; Willson.Contreras, St. Louis, 29; F.Freeman, Los Angeles, 29; Bogaerts, San Diego, 27; Harper, Philadelphia, 27; J.Lee, San Francisco, 27

TRIPLES — Carroll, Arizona, 14; J.Lee, San Francisco, 10; Ohtani, Los Angeles, 8; Harris, Atlanta, 6; Moniak, Colorado, 6; Abrams, Washington, 5; J.Beck, Colorado, 5; 12 tied at 4

HOME RUNS — Ohtani, Los Angeles, 43; Schwarber, Philadelphia, 42; E.Suárez, Seattle, 36; J.Soto, New York, 29; Alonso, New York, 28; Suzuki, Chicago, 27; Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 27

STOLEN BASES — On.Cruz, Pittsburgh, 34; E.De La Cruz, Cincinnati, 31; V.Scott, St. Louis, 31; Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 30; Abrams, Washington, 26; T.Turner, Philadelphia, 26; Tatis, San Diego, 24; Tucker, Chicago, 24

PITCHING — F.Peralta, Milwaukee, 14-5; Pivetta, San Diego, 12-4; Pfaadt, Arizona, 12-7; Priester, Milwaukee, 11-2; C.Sánchez, Philadelphia, 11-4; Boyd, Chicago, 11-5; Gray, St. Louis, 11-5; Luzardo, Philadelphia, 11-5

ERA — Skenes, Pittsburgh, 2.13; Abbott, Cincinnati, 2.42; C.Sánchez, Philadelphia, 2.45; Boyd, Chicago, 2.46; Wheeler, Philadelphia, 2.68; Yamamoto, Los Angeles, 2.84; Pivetta, San Diego, 2.87; F.Peralta, Milwaukee, 2.90; Ray, San Francisco, 2.98; Lodolo, Cincinnati, 3.05

STRIKEOUTS — Wheeler, Philadelphia, 189; Cease, San Diego, 169; Webb, San Francisco, 168; Skenes, Pittsburgh, 166; Gore, Washington, 158; C.Sánchez, Philadelphia, 157; Ray, San Francisco, 152; Luzardo, Philadelphia, 151; Gray, St. Louis, 148; F.Peralta, Milwaukee, 148

Patriots-Vikings joint practice spurs reunions

BY DAVE CAMPBELL
Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — Soon after Mike Vrabel was hired as head coach of the New England Patriots earlier this year, his counterpart with the Minnesota Vikings, Kevin O'Connell, called with a invitation.

Joint practice, our place. Just like we did it before.

Two years after Vrabel brought the Tennessee Titans to Minnesota for some valuable training camp work against another team, he took New England this week for two days of drills against the Vikings in advance of their preseason game.

"There's a reason why the Patriots are here: It starts with their head football coach and their organization itself," said O'Connell, who's starting his fourth year in Minnesota. "I've got so much respect for Vrabes and our relationship over the years."

O'Connell was a rookie backup quarterback with New England in 2008, the last of eight seasons Vrabel played outside linebacker for them. Vrabel, a 14-year NFL veteran, coached the Titans for six seasons and spent 2024 as a consultant for the Cleveland Browns.

Asked about his impression of O'Connell as a player, Vrabel was ready with a quip before the teams took the field Wednesday afternoon.

"He wasn't as good as Tom Brady," he said, with a deadpan expression.

Vrabel and O'Connell were far from the only connections between the two teams. Vikings defensive coordinator Brian Flores spent 15 years with the Patriots organization in various roles. Stefon Diggs is the highest-profile New England player who was previously with Minnesota, but that list also includes backup quarterback Joshua Dobbs and center Garrett Bradbury.

Bradbury, like his former head coach O'Connell, mentioned the word "relationships" when assessing his return to a facility where he trained for six seasons after being drafted in the first round in 2019 out of North Carolina State.

"On one hand, it feels like I never left. On the other hand, I've got another jersey on and some new teammates," Bradbury said. "A lot of people here mean a lot to me and helped me the last six years, so it's good to see everyone again."

Bradbury was released with one season left on his contract, part of the Vikings' push to revamp the interior of the offensive line after they were overwhelmed in the wild card round loss to the Los Angeles Rams that left O'Connell's playoff record at 0-2. He didn't want to leave, but he's found invigoration in his new surroundings.

"I think it should be mandatory that everyone play for at least two organizations because you get to re-prove yourself, reinvent yourself," Bradbury said, recounting advice he received from a former player after he was let go. "You get to meet a lot of people, make awesome friends and see different ways of doing things."

NFL coaches have grown to much prefer the controlled setting of joint practices over exhibition games during which to test their players against different opponents. When the Patriots hosted the Washington Commanders last week, a couple of fights occurred — and Vrabel even jumped into one scrum to try to break it up before emerging with a bloodied nose.

New England and Minnesota had no such trouble, perhaps a sign of the respect between the two organizations. Because he felt the energy level was lacking, Patriots wide receiver Mack Hollins said later, the eighth-year journeyman decided to punt the ball into the bleachers after a long touchdown pass from Drake Maye.

Maye had plenty of pressure in full-team drills that likely would've resulted in sacks during games, but with no tackling allowed he was able to let several deep passes rip down the field that hit their intended targets. Former Vikings wide receiver Diggs caught one of them at the sideline with Pro Bowl cornerback Byron Murphy Jr. in coverage.

ABBIE PARR/AP

New England Patriots wide receiver Stefon Diggs (8) catches a pass against Minnesota Vikings cornerback Byron Murphy Jr. Both ran drills during a joint training camp session Wednesday in Eagan, Minn.

NFL

Bengals RB serves as offensive focal point

BY CHARLIE GOLDSMITH
Associated Press

CINCINNATI — After being one of the league's top running backs in the second half of last season, the Cincinnati Bengals are looking for Chase Brown to be an even bigger focal point this season.

"I believe Chase Brown is a top-10 back in the league," offensive coordinator Dan Pitcher said. "Certainly you don't want to burn the guy out. You also want to make sure your most explosive players are on the field and ready to touch the ball as many times as possible."

Between Week 9 through Week 17 last season, Brown ranked fifth in the league in yards from scrimmage and third in touches. He missed the season finale at Pittsburgh because of an ankle injury.

At this point last year, Brown was the team's backup running back behind Zack Moss.

Then, as Brown improved his ability as a pass catcher out of the backfield, he started earning more snaps. He took advantage of the opportunity and ran with it, finishing the season with 1,350 scrimmage yards (990 yards rushing, 360 receiving yards).

This year, Brown said he feels stronger, more confident as a rusher and even more dependable as a pass catcher. He had 54 receptions last season after only 14 as a rookie in 2023.

MATT ROURKE/AP

Cincinnati Bengals running back Chase Brown runs past Eagles linebacker Smael Mondon Jr. during the first half of a preseason game Aug. 7 in Philadelphia.

"Sometimes, I think about the stretch I've had and the improvements that I've made," Brown said. "I try to just stay in the moment. As cliche as it sounds. As much as I am thinking ahead sometimes, I'm really trying to just stay in the moment and focus on what plays I can make right now. The improvements I can make at practice. Learning opportunities I can take away and learn from right now so when Week 1 comes, we're full speed."

Brown followed up what's been a strong training camp with a strong performance in last Thursday's preseason opener against the Philadelphia Eagles.

He ran the ball five times for 26 yards, and caught three passes for 25 yards over the course of his two series with the first-team offense. The Bengals scored on their first two possessions with Joe Burrow and the first unit on the field, but ended up losing 34-27.

Cincinnati's second preseason game is Monday night at Washington.

"With the speed and the way he's able to use it coming out of the backfield, I don't think he really gets credit for the way he actually runs the ball," said Bengals safety Geno Stone, who faced Brown in 2023 when Stone was in Baltimore. "He's a guy who can run the ball between the tackles or outside of the tackles. He has really good balance. When he hits the hole and gets through, he's gone."

Cincinnati is redesigning their run scheme this year around Brown's strengths. Heading into 2025, the Bengals coaching staff had a series of meetings to determine how they wanted the run game to evolve.

"At the end of the conversation, it wasn't about what we think looks good on the board," running backs coach Justin Hill said. "(It was) what is Chase good at? How can we showcase his tools in the run game and in the pass game? Where we have in the run game right now is pretty true to who we think Chase is and what he can be."

Taylor, Lazard hurt as injuries pile up for Jets

BY DENNIS WASZAK JR.
Associated Press

FLORHAM PARK, N.J. — New York Jets backup quarterback Tyrod Taylor will be sidelined through the preseason after recent knee surgery, but the team expects he should be ready for the regular-season opener.

Coach Aaron Glenn announced Tuesday after the Jets' joint practice with the Giants that Taylor had "a minor scope" on the knee that has sidelined him the last week of training camp.

"He's still going through his protocols, as far as his rehab," Glenn said. "So we'll see exactly where he is in the next couple of weeks. I don't think he'll be playing in preseason, but hopefully he'll be ready for Week 1."

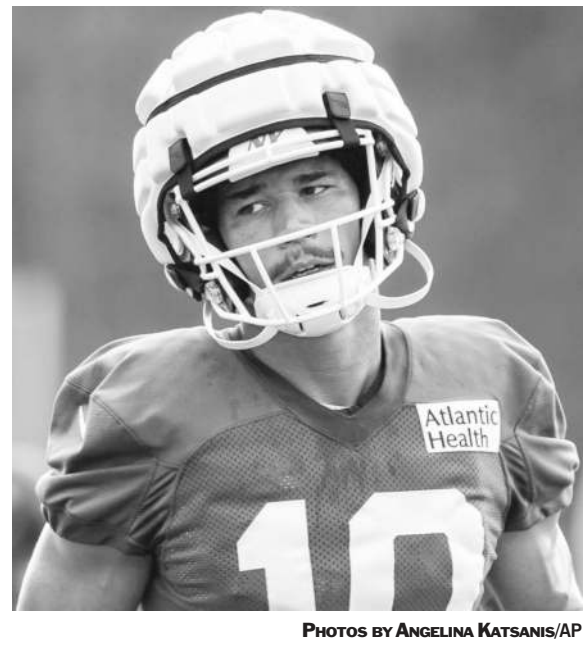
Justin Fields is the Jets' starting quarterback and has bounced back from a dislocated toe on his right foot early in training camp.

Taylor, a 36-year-old veteran in his second season with New York, will serve as Fields' backup as long as he's healthy.

The Jets' quarterbacks room is a bit banged up now. Rookie Brady Cook, an undrafted free agent from Missouri, has an ankle injury after his right foot was stepped on during practice with the Giants. He left the field after practice riding in the passenger seat of a cart, but Glenn downplayed the injury.

"I think he'll be just fine," Glenn said.

Adrian Martinez, in his second year with the Jets, is the only other healthy quarterback on the roster.



PHOTOS BY ANGELINA KATSANIS/AP

New York Jets quarterback Tyrod Taylor, left, and wide receiver Allen Lazard run drills during practice at the team's training camp July 26 in Florham Park, N.J. Both are now recovering from injuries.

New York will also be without wide receiver Allen Lazard for at least two weeks after he injured his right shoulder during the Jets' 30-10 preseason victory at Green Bay last Saturday night.

"So we will see where his situation is going into Week 1," Glenn said.

Lazard is competing for the No. 2 wide receiver spot behind Garrett Wilson, but had been mostly quiet for much of camp before the injury. His roster spot was thought by some to be in jeopardy, especially with veterans Josh Reynolds, Tyler Johnson and Xavier Gipson on the team and youngsters such as Arian Smith, Brandon Smith, Jamaal Pritchett and Quentin Skinner flashing at times during practices.

Taylor time

Rookie tight end Mason Taylor returned to practice just over a week after suffering a high ankle sprain that was expected to sideline him a few weeks.

Taylor, a second-round pick out of LSU and the son of Pro Football Hall of Famer Jason Taylor, participated in individual, positional and team drills during the session with the Giants. He also made a terrific catch, diving for a ball along the left sideline on a throw from Martinez in drills.

"I think it was outstanding the way that he was able to reach and maneuver his feet to stay in bounds on that play," Glenn said. "But the things I expect from him in the passing game, it's nothing new for that player. The thing is, he's got to make sure that he comes along at the right pace so we don't re-injure that ankle again.

"But he's a fighter and he wants to be out there. We're going to do everything we can to protect him the right way, but also let him go out there and get his work in. So I thought he had a hell of a day."

Johnson's return

Edge rusher Jermaine Johnson is being eased back to the field Tuesday after being activated from the active/physically unable to perform list Sunday.

Johnson tore his right Achilles tendon in Week 2 last season, but is in position to play in this season's opening game. He didn't participate in team drills Tuesday.

"I feel great," a smiling Johnson said. "I feel ready to go, but I trust them. I like to say that they're backing the Ferrari off the truck a little cautiously right now. I understand it, but I'm ready to go."

Working their way back

Pro Bowl defensive tackle Quinnen Williams (calf) was back in uniform after missing some time, but didn't participate in team drills as he recovers from his injury. He spent some time with the trainers during practice.

Defensive lineman Byron Cowart (ankle) was also among those sidelined, as were cornerback Azareye'h Thomas (shoulder) and running back Isaiah Davis (ankle).

Left guard John Simpson returned to practice after missing over a week with a back issue.

NFL

RICK SCUTERI/AP

Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes (15) leads his team onto the field before a preseason game against the Cardinals on Aug. 9 in Glendale, Ariz.

Competitiveness continues fueling Mahomes in big way

BY DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. — Maxx Crosby kept running into star athletes over the summer, from NBA great Kevin Garnett to former NFL wide receiver Steve Smith Sr., and the instant connection they shared made Las Vegas' star pass rusher think about another athlete he keeps coming across a couple of times a year.

Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes.

The reason was simple: "He's the ultimate competitor," Crosby said.

"Like, I've had the honor to meet some of the greatest players, greatest people, greatest dudes across all different types of walk of life," Crosby explained, "and I could say this: Like, when you meet somebody else that's an ultimate competitor, and that is all what you're about, I don't even have to say nothing. It's just, you click right away."

Crosby and Mahomes are not exactly best of buds, but there is a healthy dose of respect between two of the fiercest rivals in the AFC West. Crosby has sacked Mahomes six times in 12 career games, yet Kansas City has won eight of the last nine matchups.

Mahomes is 12-2 against the Raiders overall, throwing 33 touchdown passes and only five interceptions.

"So I got the ultimate respect for Pat. I've said it a million times," Crosby said. "I look at myself as the ultimate competitor. I look at myself as the best in the world. I know he thinks he's the best in the world. And I've said it myself. So he brings the best out of me. I know I bring the best out of him. So definitely looking forward to those wars."

Mahomes isn't exactly sure where his competitive nature comes from, though dad is a safe place start. Pat Mahomes Sr. managed to hang around for 11 years in the big leagues, and his son spent a lot of those years hanging out in the clubhouse.

It's what drives Mahomes all offseason, when his personal trainer, Bobby Stroupe, is putting him through yet another brutal workout. It's what pushes him in practice, the boiling ones at training camp and the frigid ones late in the season. And it's what allows him to push through the pain of bumps and bruises on gameday, when other QBs might call it quits.

It's what has allowed Mahomes to continually rally his team, leading them to five Super Bowls and three championships.

"Yeah, that burn to win is at the highest level of probably any player in the NFL," Chiefs offensive coordinator Matt Nagy said. "He's built different that way, and I think when you have that, it goes on to these players on the team — offense, defense, special teams — and us as coaches. You want to make sure you are doing everything possible."

So many games in the NFL come down to the wire, Nagy said, and the sheer will to win sometimes makes the difference.

"When you have him on your side, you know he's going to give you a great chance," Nagy said. "When we lost that Super Bowl (in February), it was the very next day and he was ready to go, and we just know that it's a great, high standard that we all have."

Mahomes has readily admitted that the 40-22 loss to the Eagles in New Orleans was one of the worst performances of his career, and that the Philadelphia defense had a lot to do with it. He threw two interceptions and was sacked six times.

Still, the numbers that Mahomes — who turns 30 next month — has compiled through his first eight seasons are staggering.

His career passer rating of 102.1 is second only to Aaron Rodgers, while Mahomes' average of 288.9 yards passing per game is the best of anyone to play the quarterback position. But perhaps most importantly, he has led KC to seven of its nine consecutive AFC West titles, and then reached the conference title game in each of those seven seasons.

"I think you always have to get better," Mahomes said. "That's something that people lose track of when you have success. Obviously we didn't win that last game, but we had a lot of success last year. And I think sometimes people want to be stagnant, and they want to go out there and just do it over again. But you see with the rest of the AFC West, the rest of the AFC and the NFL, everybody is getting better. So we have to get better."

Small: Robinson learning plenty from RB coach Pitre

FROM PAGE 48

its out of the skills that don't turn heads, such as his footwork when he releases out of the backfield to go out on a pass route or where he places his hands on defenders when pass blocking.

"Can we do the little things consistently?" Pitre said. "Can we continue to focus on the details that are going to allow us to be great down in and down out?"

Robinson's eagerness to master those small fundamentals speaks volumes about where he is headed. His care over becoming better at hand placement in pass protection signals how high he wants to reach as a running back. If he wants to improve at that, how much more must he want to excel when he actually has the ball? He's like a naturally gifted student who has an A grade in the class but still wants the extra credit.

That drive can mean only good things for himself and Atlanta as it tries to end its seven-year playoff drought and establish itself as a legitimate championship contender.

Improving upon Robinson's established standard is difficult, Pitre said, but "that's not anything that I'm putting on him. That's something that he wants, and that's the part that makes it fun coaching a guy like him."

They make a good pair. Pitre is a teacher at heart. He began his career intending to be a high school coach and teacher, earning a master's degree in special education. But his excellence as a coach kept moving him up the ladder. You can hear his understanding of pedagogy in the way he talks about pacing lessons, not to overload his players, and making sure that they master the first skill before going on to the second.

"You're just slowly building the scaffolding and building that thing so slowly you can pull off a little bit and say, 'OK, here — now you go because you're ready to go do it,' if that makes sense," Pitre said.

And in Robinson, Pitre has a student who is eager and skilled at absorbing the material. Normally, it's an athlete's versatility on the field that earns him or her a description as a "Swiss Army knife." But that is how Pitre described Robinson's learning aptitude.

Robinson can take in Pitre's instruction on the practice field as well as he can by watching a video of another running back flashing a certain attribute or skill that Pitre wants him to develop.

"Well, now then, we carry it on the field," Pitre said. "Then from the field, he watches himself when we go back in the classroom, and it's just a methodical process. So he hears it, he sees it, he does it, he sees it. It's that constant, repetitive, over and over and over again process."

Greatness isn't always a juke that puts a linebacker on the ground or outsprinting a safety to the pylon for a touchdown. It can be caring enough to perfect a pass-blocking technique.

Perhaps in a couple of months, it will provide Michael Penix Jr. an extra tenth of a second to complete a routine second-down pass in the middle of the first quarter. It might go unnoticed, but it could contribute to a stack of modest gains that ultimately accumulate into a win. The challenge for Robinson, Pitre said, is to focus "on those little things that can be our slight edge."

Those little things won't make Robinson's highlight reel. But as he pursues greatness, they could help the Falcons finally win.

DANNY KARNIK/AP

From left, Falcons running backs coach Michael Pitre, running back Bijan Robinson and Detroit Lions running backs coach Tashard Choice pose for a photo after a preseason game Aug. 8 in Atlanta.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

AP picks its best from 100 years

Associated Press

Ohio State and Pittsburgh each placed three players on The Associated Press All-Time All-America team announced Thursday as part of the news organization's celebration of the 100th anniversary of the storied honor for the top players in college football.

Since 1925, nearly 2,000 men have been named AP first-team All-Americans, one of the most prestigious honors in the sport.

The Big Ten led all conferences with seven selections, two more than the Southeastern Conference.

Of the 25 players on the first team, five won the Heisman Trophy and 21 are in the College Football Hall of Fame, two are nominated for induction in 2026 and two are not eligible because they are not yet 10 years removed from their college careers.

A panel of 12 AP sports writers who cover college football selected the all-time team. It won't be, and shouldn't be, considered definitive. There have been far more great players over the last century than spots available.

For a player to qualify, he must have been an AP first-team All-American at least once. His professional career, if any, was not to be considered.

Many fans might say Anthony Munoz and Ray Guy, among others, are glaring omissions. Neither qualified for consideration.

Munoz, who played at Southern California from 1976-79, is considered one of the greatest offensive linemen of all time, college or pro. He's in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Alas, he was never a first-team AP All-American.

Guy, who played at Southern Mississippi from 1970-72, remains the only punter selected in the first round of an NFL draft. But punters were not included on AP All-America teams until 1981.

Also, a member of the all-time team could only be listed on the side of the ball where he was named first-team All-America. All-purpose players could come from any position.

STEPHEN MORTON/AP

Florida quarterback Tim Tebow won the Heisman and made the AP All-America team as a sophomore in 2007. He was voted to the All-Time All-America team as the first-team QB.

Voters were cautioned against recency bias, but it is notable that only three of the first-team selections played before 1970.

Of the 12 players who were three-time All-Americans, only four made the two all-time teams picked by AP.

Florida's Tim Tebow edged Texas' Vince Young (2005) for all-time first-team quarterback. Tebow won the Heisman and made the AP All-America team as a sophomore in 2007, his first year as the starter.

He led the Gators to their second national championship in three years in 2008 and narrowly missed a chance at another when the 2009 team started 13-0 but lost to Alabama in the SEC championship game. He remains the SEC career leader in rushing touchdowns and touchdowns responsible for.

MARK HALL/AP

Ohio State tackle Orlando Pace was named first team of the AP All-Time All-America team.

AP All-Time All-America team

FIRST TEAM
OFFENSE

Wide receivers — Randy Moss, Marshall, 1997; Larry Fitzgerald, Pittsburgh, 2003
Tackles — Orlando Pace, Ohio State, 1995-96; Bill Fralic, Pittsburgh, 1982-83-84
Guards — John Hannah, Alabama, 1972; Jim Parker, Ohio State, 1956
Center — Chuck Bednarik, Penn, 1947-48
Tight end — Brock Bowers, Georgia, 2023
QB — Tim Tebow, Florida, 2007
Running backs — Barry Sanders, Oklahoma State, 1988; Herschel Walker, Georgia, 1980-81-82
Kicker — Sebastian Janikowski, Florida State, 1998-99
All-purpose — Johnny Rodgers, Nebraska, 1972

DEFENSE

Defensive ends — Hugh Green, Pittsburgh, 1978-79-80; Randy White, Maryland, 1974
Defensive tackles — Ndamukong Suh, Nebraska, 2009; Bronko Nagurski, Minnesota, 1929
Linebackers — Dick Butkus, Illinois, 1964; Derrick Thomas, Alabama, 1988; Chris Spielman, Ohio State, 1986-87
Cornerbacks — Charles Woodson, Michigan, 1996-97; Deion Sanders, Florida State, 1987-88
Safeties — Ronnie Lott, Southern California, 1980; Ed Reed, Miami, 2000-01
Punter — Tory Taylor, Iowa, 2023

SECOND TEAM
OFFENSE

Wide receivers — DeVonta Smith, Alabama, 2020; Desmond Howard, Michigan, 1991
Tackles — Jonathan Ogden, UCLA, 1995; Bryant McKinnie, Miami, 2001
Guards — Brad Budde, Southern California, 1979; John Smith, Notre Dame, 1927
Center — Dave Rimington, Nebraska, 1981-82
Tight end — Keith Jackson, Oklahoma, 1986-87
QB — Vince Young, Texas, 2005
Running backs — Archie Griffin, Ohio State, 1974-75; Tony Dorsett, Pittsburgh, 1976
Kicker — Martin Gramatica, Kansas State, 1997
All-purpose — Tim Brown, Notre Dame, 1986-87

DEFENSE

Defensive ends — Bubba Smith, Michigan State, 1966; Bruce Smith, Virginia Tech, 1984
Defensive tackles — LeeRoy Selmon, Oklahoma, 1975; Warren Sapp, Miami, 1994
Linebackers — Jerry Robinson, UCLA, 1976-77-78; Brian Bosworth, Oklahoma, 1985-86; Lawrence Taylor, North Carolina, 1980
Cornerbacks — Champ Bailey, Georgia, 1998; Tyrann Mathieu, LSU, 2011
Safeties — Bennie Blades, Miami, 1986-87; Al Brosky, Illinois, 1951
Punter — Reggie Roby, Iowa, 1981
Voters: AP sports writers Cliff Brunt, Maura Carey, Schuyler Dixon, Josh Dubow, Stephen Hawkins, Larry Lage, Mark Long, Michael Marot, Steve Megargee, Eric Olson, Eddie Pells, Noah Trister

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Toll-free:	0800-CARSHIP (Germany only)		+1-800-264-8167 (US only)
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COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Several players manage to shine on shabby teams

By Steve Megargee
Associated Press

Isaac Smith knows what drew him to Mississippi State and why he has remained there.

"There's no distractions in Starkville," the junior safety told reporters during Southeastern Conference media days. "Small town. Real pretty community. The people are awesome. I fell in love with it and I'm still in love with it and will forever always be in love with it."

Smith's 127 tackles last season led the Southeastern Conference and tied him for seventh place among all Football Bowl Subdivision players, production that hasn't translated to team success. Mississippi State has gone 7-17 overall and 1-15 in SEC competition during Smith's two seasons.

Smith believes the Bulldogs have what it takes to turn things around. He considers the program a blue-collar one that values hard work.

"I love the fact that's Mississippi State's been all about that, just working hard and going to prove something that maybe people don't think you can do," Smith said.

Mississippi State's chances of being more competitive this season depend on whether Smith can help upgrade a defense that allowed 34.1 points per game last season. Texas Tech, Oklahoma State and Purdue were the only Power Four teams to give up more points per game.

"We lacked execution the whole season really — missed tackles, missed assignments," Smith said. "Quite frankly, that's why we lost a lot of games. I think we were last at about everything."

Demond Claiborne, Wake Forest: Claiborne rushed for 1,049 yards and 11 touchdowns last year for a Demon Deacons team that finished 4-8 for a second straight season. He rushed for at least 113 yards against North Carolina A&T, NC State, Stanford and Cal. He also had 23 catches for 254 yards and two more scores. The ACC preseason media poll forecasts Wake Forest to finish 16th out of 17 teams, ahead of only Stanford.

Scottre Humphrey, New Mexico: After helping Montana State reach the Football Championship Subdivision title game last year, Humphrey makes the move to the FBS ranks while trying to help the Lobos produce their first winning season since 2016. Humphrey rushed for 1,386 yards last year, which include 140 yards and the winning touchdown in Montana State's 35-31 victory over New Mexico. The Lobos' 5-7 record last year was their best since a 9-4 finish in 2016.

James Pugh/AP

Mississippi State safety Isaac Smith (2) and linebacker JP Purvis celebrate after a play against Toledo during the first half in Starkville, Miss., on Sept. 14, 2024.

Devin Mockobee, Purdue: The small-town, home-stater started with the Boilermakers as a walk-on but earned a scholarship by helping Purdue win the 2022 Big Ten West Division crown. The Boilermakers have struggled since — going 4-8 in 2023 and 1-11 in 2024 — but Mockobee has remained productive. His 2,466 yards rushing rank him seventh on Purdue's all-time list. He's aiming to become the fourth 3,000-yard rusher in school history. A big season could enable him to threaten Mike Alstott's school record of 3,635 career yards rushing

Josh Moten, Southern Miss.: Moten transferred to the Golden Eagles after intercepting five passes for Marshall last season to tie for fourth place among all Bowl Subdivision players. Southern Mississippi went 1-11 last year and has won more than three games just once over the past five seasons. He intercepted a pass in four of his final five games last season.

Caleb Tiernan, Northwestern: The Wildcats went 4-8 in 2024 for their third losing season in the last four years, but they have a quality left tackle in Tiernan. He has started 30 games over the last three seasons. Pro Football Focus gave him an 88.9 pass block grade last season, ranking him sixth among all tackles. He allowed just one sack over Northwestern's final six games last year.

Cade Uluave, California: After being named the Pac-12's freshman defensive player of the year by the league's coaches in 2023, Uluave collected 71 tackles while playing nine games for the Golden Bears last season. He made at least eight stops in six different games, including a 15-tackle performance against Miami. California went 5-7 last year for its fifth straight losing season, and it's picked to finish 15th in the ACC this year.

Officials to crack down on players faking injuries

By Eric Olson
Associated Press

Officials will be cracking down on college football players who feign injuries, the number of overtime timeouts will be reduced and referees will use different verbiage when announcing the results of video reviews.

Those are among the changes for the 2025 season, the National Football Foundation announced Wednesday in its annual summary of rules changes.

Combating the practice of players faking injuries to stop the game clock was an offseason priority for the NCAA Football Rules Committee.

Beginning this season, if a player on the field presents as injured after the ball is spotted for the next play, that player's team will be charged a timeout. If the team does not have timeouts remaining, a 5-yard delay-of-game penalty will be assessed.

The player must also remain out of the game for at least one down, even if that team is granted a timeout, and may not return until receiving the approval of a medical professional.

Artie Walker Jr./AP

South Carolina head coach Shane Beamer reacts after his offensive momentum is slowed down by another Mississippi injury during the second half Oct. 5, 2024, in Columbia, S.C.

Feigning injuries, sometimes at the coach's instruction, has concerned the rules committee in recent years. It's a tactic defenses use to slow down tempo offenses or as a way for an offense to avoid a delay-of-game penalty or get an extra timeout.

In overtime, each team will continue to be allowed one timeout in both the first and second extra periods. After the first two overtime periods, each team will be allowed only one timeout for the remainder of the game. Previously, a team was allowed one timeout in each overtime period regardless of how many were required to decide a winner.

After video reviews, if the ruling on the field is not overturned, referees will announce that the call is "upheld." Previously the referee would say the call is "confirmed" if video showed the call was correct or "stands" if there was no evidence to overturn the ruling. If the call is changed, the referee will describe the reason.

Some other changes:

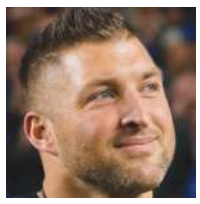
■ On kick returns, if any player on the receiving team holds out his arms to make a "T" signal during the kick, the team gives up its right to make a return and the play will be whistled dead.

■ Any defensive player within 1 yard of the line of scrimmage (stationary or not) may not make quick and abrupt or exaggerated actions that simulate action at the snap in an obvious attempt to make the offense commit a penalty. The offense will be held to the same standard as any pre-snap movement that simulates action at the snap is a foul on the offense for a false start.

■ The defense may not have more than 11 players on the field when the ball is snapped. The infraction is treated as a live-ball foul and is a 5-yard penalty. If this occurs after the two-minute timeout in either half, the offense will have the option to reset the game clock back to the time displayed at the snap.

■ All forms of gun violence are not permitted and simulating the firing of a weapon is an automatic unsportsmanlike foul. This year, if a player simulates the act of brandishing a weapon, it is considered an unsportsmanlike act.

SPORTS



Century in the making

AP releases All-Time All-America team to mark 100 years ›› College football, Page 46

NFL

MIKE STEWART/AP

The Atlanta Falcons' Bijan Robinson has emerged as an elite running back after just two seasons, but is still looking to improve by focusing on the smaller details of his game.

Sweating the small stuff

Falcons star running back Robinson gets mundane to achieve greatness

BY KEN SUGIURA
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

FLOWERY BRANCH, Ga. — As Bijan Robinson starts his third season in the NFL, his position coach said what any Atlanta Falcons fan should want to hear about the star running back.

Not only does Robinson care about improving, but he is willing to dive into the mundane process of getting better at the small details that few people notice. As running backs coach Michael Pitre put it, Robinson has an open mind and an open heart to being coached and a desire to keep improving.

"And that's where he's at right now, is that he wants all the information that he can get," Pitre said Tuesday after Atlanta's first of two joint practices with the Tennessee Titans.

Any Falcons fan knows Robinson in the broad strokes — the jaw-dropping highlights and staggering numbers that he has amassed in his first three years in the NFL testify to his gathering greatness.

The No. 8 pick of the 2023 draft has emerged as an elite player in the NFL, a running back with speed, elusiveness, vision, power and a keen sense of how to play the position. Last year, he finished third in the league in rushing yards (1,456), fourth in all-purpose yards (1,866) and tied for seventh in touchdowns (15). He led the NFL in missed tackles forced (117). It earned him his first Pro Bowl berth.

In an NFL Network video touting Robinson as the No. 62 player in the league in its top 100, 2025 rushing king Saquon Barkley called him "definitely the next great one, him and (Detroit's Jahmyr Gibbs). There's nobody who's able to cut like Bijan in the NFL."

But what Pitre laid out as Robinson's next step was making hab-

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Padres overtake Dodgers for NL West lead ›› MLB, Page 42

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