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WEEKEND EDITION



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Same powerhouses, big money continue to reign in new era
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STARS AND STRIPES®

stripes.com

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YORK SPACE SYSTEMS/AP

A York Space Systems satellite carries an advanced communications payload in July. Communications satellites have already fallen prey to hacking by Russian agents.

Space: The new battlefield

In 21st-century war, satellites and orbiting weapons play critical role

BY DAVID KLEPPER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As Russia held its Victory Day parade this year, hackers backing the Kremlin hijacked an orbiting satellite that provides television service to Ukraine.

Instead of normal programming, Ukrainian viewers saw parade footage beamed in from Moscow: waves of tanks, soldiers and weaponry. The message was meant to intimidate and was an illustration that 21st-century war is waged not just on land, sea and air but also in cyberspace and the reaches of outer space.

Disabling a satellite could deal a devastating blow without one bullet, and it can be done by targeting the satellite's security software or disrupting its ability to send or receive signals from Earth.

"If you can impede a satellite's ability to communicate, you can cause a significant disruption," said Tom Pace, CEO of NetRise, a cybersecurity firm focused on protecting supply chains.

"Think about GPS," said Pace, who served in the Marines before working on cyber issues at the Department of Energy. "Imagine if a population lost that and the confusion it would cause."

Satellites are short-term challenge

More than 12,000 operating satellites now orbit the planet, playing a critical role not just in broadcast communications but also in military operations, navigation systems like GPS, intelligence gathering and economic supply chains. They are also key to early launch-detection efforts, which can warn of approaching missiles.

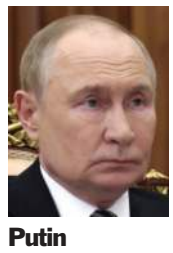
SEE SPACE ON PAGE 7

Trump's limits clear as Moscow resists plan

BY CAT ZAKRZEWSKI, CATHERINE BELTON AND MICHAEL BIRNBAUM
The Washington Post

Just days after the White House celebrated splashy summits with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine as foreign policy victories, the Kremlin has signaled that its position has barely budged, prompting foreign policy experts to suggest that Washington's insistence it had made progress was a sign of wishful thinking.

Since the summits, President Donald Trump repeatedly has touted security guarantees for Ukraine that, he said, could include France and other European countries providing "boots on the ground" in Ukraine. And the White House said Russian President Vladimir Putin had agreed to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.



Putin

Russian officials on Wednesday spoke against both of those ideas.

"The brainless Gallic rooster can't let go of the idea of sending troops to 'Ukraine,'" former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev wrote on X, in an apparent reference to French President Emmanuel Macron. "It's been explicitly stated: NO NATO troops as peacekeepers. Russia won't accept such a 'security guarantee.' But the hoarse, pathetic bird continues to crow to prove it's king of the coop."

Also on Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov struck a blow at another major part of Trump's peace effort,

SEE LIMITS ON PAGE 8

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Germany	$3.555	$4.124	$4.479	$4.143
Change in price	-07 cents	+1.0 cents	+1.1 cents	-4.1 cents
Netherlands	..	$4.818	$5.400	$5.074
Change in price	..	-6.0 cents	-6.2 cents	-13.1 cents
U.K.	..	$4.136	$4.491	$4.155
Change in price	..	+1.0 cents	+1.1 cents	-4.1 cents
Azores	..	..	$4.337	..
Change in price	..	..	+1.1 cents	..
Turkey	..	..	$4.129	$3.793*
Change in price	..	..	+1.1 cents	-4.1 cents

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Aug. 22. The change in price is from Aug. 15.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Japan	..	$2.792	..	$2.658
Change in price	..	-1.6 cents	..	+1.1 cents
Okinawa		..	..	$3.104
Change in price		..	..	+1.1 cents
South Korea	$3.209	..	$4.139	$3.799
Change in price	No change	..	+1.0 cents	-4.0 cents
Guam	$3.239**	$3.809	$4.169	..
Change in price	+1.0 cents	+1.0 cents	+2.0 cents	..

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
Pacific prices for the week of Aug. 22-28

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates

Euro costs (Aug. 22)	0.84
British pound (Aug. 22)	$1.28
Japanese yen (Aug. 22)	143.00
South Korean won (Aug. 22)	1,362.00

Commercial rates

Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3744
Britain (Pound)	1.3424
Canada (Dollar)	1.3900
China (Yuan)	7.1757
Denmark (Krone)	6.4231
Egypt (Pound)	48.4171
Euro	0.8605
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8135
Hungary (Forint)	340.78
Israel (Shekel)	3.4165
Japan (Yen)	147.82
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3052
Norway (Krone)	10.1878
Philippines (Peso)	57.14
Poland (Zloty)	3.66
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7483
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2881
South Korea (Won)	1,401.04
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8075
Thailand (Baht)	32.63
Turkey (NewLira)	40.9381

(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

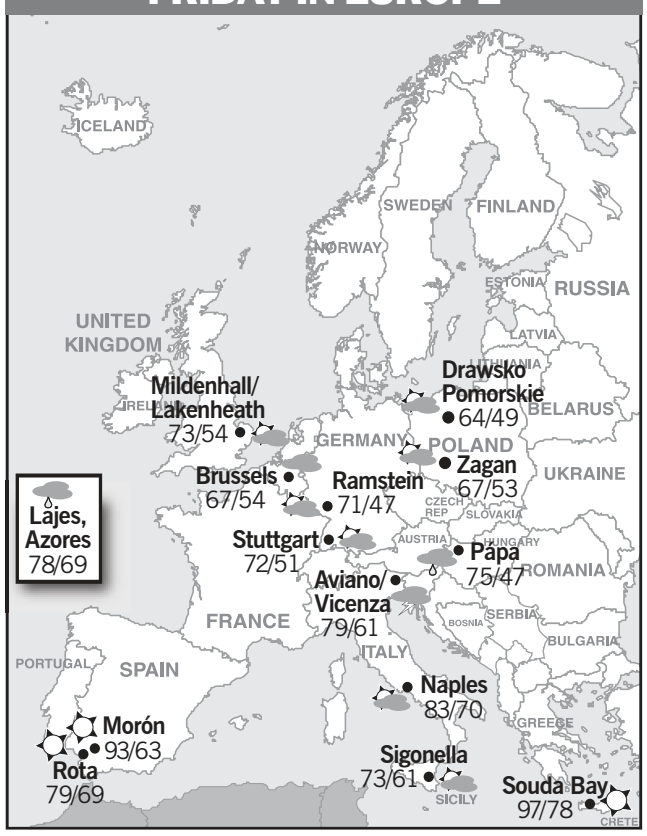
Prime rate	7.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.33
Federal funds market rate	4.38
3-month bill	4.22
30-year bond	4.90

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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STARS AND STRIPES®

A message from our publisher:

News organizations operate in a complicated information environment. As media outlets have become more partisan, sometimes publishing content that is not balanced, the voice of the local community is lost. These are challenges that we seek to overcome while sustaining the vital role Stars and Stripes serves for the military community. Below are the core journalistic values that guide our publishing. I believe these values are what keep Stars and Stripes a trusted and valued news source for our readers.

Stars and Stripes Core Values

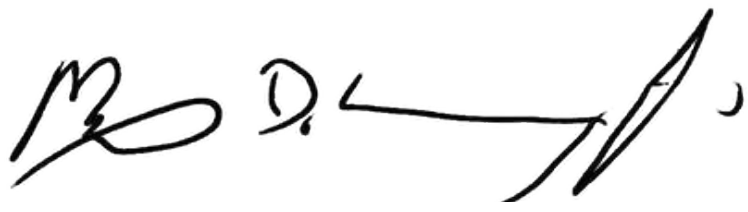
Credibility is the greatest asset of any news medium, and impartiality is its greatest source of credibility. ***Impartiality*** means reporting and editing the news honestly, fairly, and objectively without personal opinion or bias. Journalism's core mission is ***truth-telling***, which requires accurately reporting facts and context.

Nothing is more sacred to us than the readers' trust in us. A journalist's role is not to determine what they believe to be the truth and reveal only that to their readers. They must report all verifiable facts as completely and impartially as possible, so that readers can, based on their own knowledge and experience, determine what they believe to be true.

A news organization must not just cover the news but *uncover* it. It must follow the story wherever it leads, without allowing preconceived ideas to filter the search for facts or replace the discipline of verification. We are accountable for our work and publish corrections promptly.

When a news organization delivers both news and opinions, its impartiality and credibility can be questioned. To minimize this, a clear distinction must be made between the two. Stars and Stripes maintains a strict separation between news and opinion. We do not write opinion pieces. Instead, we publish a ***balanced*** selection of external viewpoints.

These principles are not mere slogans. They are commitments that guide every aspect of our work. Any breach of these standards undermines the credibility of our organization, our profession, and each of us as individuals.



Max D. Lederer Jr.
Publisher, Stars and Stripes

MILITARY

2 injured in fire aboard USS New Orleans

By Brian Mcelhiney and Keishi Koja
Stars and Stripes

WHITE BEACH NAVAL FACILITY, Okinawa — U.S. sailors extinguished a blaze aboard the USS New Orleans, an amphibious transport dock ship anchored off Okinawa's southeastern coast, early Thursday after a 12-hour battle alongside Japanese sailors and the country's coast guard.

Sailors aboard the New Orleans finally put out the fire at 4 a.m. with assistance from the crew of its sister dock ship USS San Diego moored at White Beach.

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, Japan coast guard and Navy commands across Okinawa also helped fight the fire, U.S. 7th Fleet said in an unsigned statement issued around 6 a.m.

Two sailors were treated for minor injuries aboard the ship, the fleet said.

The fire started in the forward area of the 684-foot-long vessel, a coast guard spokesman said Wednesday. The cause is under investigation, the fleet said.

Seventh Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Tommy Groves declined in an email Thursday to answer further questions, saying he had no additional information.

The ship may be carrying munitions, and the fire "has caused great anxiety" to Okinawa, Gov. Denny Tamaki said Thursday during his regular morning news conference, a prefecture spokesman said by phone.

"One wrong move could have led to a major disaster involving the local residents, which is extremely regrettable," the governor said, according to the spokesman.



Japan coast guard

A Japan Self-Defense Force vessel and two tugboats shoot water at the USS New Orleans near White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa.

Two tugboats with the Maritime Self-Defense Force and two commercial tugboats did most of the firefighting on the Japanese side, a coast guard spokeswoman said Thursday.

The Navy on Okinawa provided logistics and communications through its emergency operations center.

The Harbor Boat Unit at White Beach helped take personnel to the tugboats and the New Orleans, spokeswoman Candice Barber wrote in an email Thursday.

The coast guard vessel Ishigaki briefly stepped in after one of the tugboats experienced mechanical issues at 10:40 p.m. but stood down after another tugboat arrived about an hour later, according to coast guard news releases.

Another undisclosed Japanese navy vessel responded to the fire after Camp Foster called for assistance at 5 p.m. Wednesday, but it left the scene sometime after 5:55 p.m. when the request was withdrawn, the coast guard spokeswoman said.

The call was reinstated at 7:28 p.m.

Three coast guard vessels — the Ishigaki, the Shimagumo and the Awagumo — were surveilling the area as of 9:30 a.m. Thursday.

No oil spills from the New Orleans have been reported, the spokeswoman said.

The New Orleans' crew will remain aboard the vessel, with additional services and berthing available aboard the San Diego or at White Beach, the fleet said.

The Navy on Okinawa has established a command post at White Beach and has partnered with the American Red Cross to provide lodging, meals, transportation, medical and religious services to sailors on board, Barber said. No medical support had been requested as of 1 p.m., she added.

Amphibious transport dock ships take Marines and their equipment, including air-cushioned landing craft, amphibious assault vehicles, helicopters or MV-22B Ospreys, to support expeditionary warfare missions.

Air Force PCS pause is limited

By Janiqua Robinson
Stars and Stripes

Only airmen who have not yet received orders for new duty stations in the continental United States are affected by a temporary pause on permanent change of station moves, according to the Air Force.

The service made "temporary adjustments" for moves scheduled between Oct. 1 and Dec. 31 for those without orders, an Air Force spokeswoman at the Pentagon — a captain who refused to attach her name to her comments — said by email Friday.

The pause stems from the Air Force "proactively managing its budget to ensure responsible stewardship of resources," according to her email. "As part of this effort, we are carefully reviewing the timing of personnel actions to continue operating within our allocated budget," she wrote.

Airmen with pending assignments in November and December under Assignment Availability Code 50 are also affected, the spokeswoman said. Code 50 applies to controlled tours, such as instructor positions, that end with mandatory reassignment.



Stephanie Henry/U.S. Air Force

A military mover packs a service member's belongings at Scott Air Force Base, Ill., July 17.

Exceptions may be requested, the spokeswoman said. "Those impacted should contact their local Military Personnel Flight with questions," she wrote.

Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force David Flosi said Thursday that some airmen's reporting deadlines were extended because of budget limits.

"I just got word, though, that back in the States we had a problem with the PCS budget and unfortunately many of our airmen just got notified of an extension in the PCS cycle," Flosi said.

Airmen moving to or from duty stations outside the continental U.S. who already have orders, along with those scheduled to depart by Sept. 30, are not affected, the Air Force said. Neither are humanitarian or formal training moves, Space Force Guardians or Air Reserve component members.

Pausing moves before orders are issued allows the service to "align the obligation of these PCS funds with mission requirements, budget realities, and overall fiscal year execution," the Air Force spokeswoman wrote.

Four soldiers charged with sexual assault in barracks

By Gary Warner
Stars and Stripes

Four soldiers have been charged with sexually assaulting the same victim in a barracks at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., the Army said Wednesday.

Private 2nd Class Deron J. Gordon, Cpl. Pedro Angel Ruiz, Spc. Jadon Bosarge and Pfc. Kallon Curiel are being prosecuted by the Army's Office of Special Trial Counsel, based at Fort Belvoir, Va., said Michelle McCaskill, communications director for the special trial counsel.

They also face a charge of conspiracy to commit the sexual assault.

The special trial counsel handles most sex crimes involving Army personnel, as well as charges of murder and kidnapping.

McCaskill said the soldiers are accused of assaulting the victim on Oct. 27, 2024.

The special trial counsel did not release information on the gender, age or military status of the victim. It also did not release information on the ages and specific units of the soldiers accused of the sexual assault.

"All four cases are in various stages of the legal process," McCaskill said.

Gordon faces a general court-martial on 12 counts of rape, two counts of sexual misconduct and one count each of conspiracy and obstruction of justice.

Gordon's case docket posted on the website of the Army Judge Advocate General shows he pleaded guilty Aug. 5 during a preliminary hearing.

Gordon also waived his right to a trial by jury and requested to have his case decided by a judge alone. No judge has been assigned to the case, according to the docket record. His arraignment and trial are scheduled for Sept. 3.

Ruiz faces a general court-martial for sexual assault, conspiracy and obstruction of justice. He is scheduled for a preliminary hearing at Lewis-McChord on Sept. 26, with a trial scheduled to begin Nov. 3.

No military case docket has been posted yet by the Judge Advocate General for Bosarge or Curiel.

McCaskill said additional information, if available, would be released by her office later this week.

PACIFIC

Health care program for civilians extended

Family members still excluded from Pentagon's program connecting people to services in Japan

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Defense Department has extended a pilot program to help its civilian employees in Japan find health care, but their family members are still not permitted to take advantage of its services.

The program, which connects civilians with Japanese health care providers and issues payment guarantees, begins its second phase Sept. 30 and continues until Sept. 29, 2026, according to an Aug. 8 memorandum obtained by Stars and Stripes.

The first phase began Jan. 1 with a $4.2 million budget and was originally scheduled to conclude Sept. 29.

The memorandum, signed by Anthony Tata, undersecretary of defense personnel and readiness, identified two "gaps" in the program's services: interpreter services and coverage for DOD civilian dependents.

The program already offers written translation services and a bilingual customer service call center, but will add interpreter services for medical appointments, "subject to their availability," according to Tata's memo and an email Tuesday from Pete Graves, spokesman for the Military Health System.

Assistance for dependents is left for further study during the second phase, according to the memo.

The Japan Civilian Medical Advocacy group, a grassroots organization established to help DOD civilians navigate Japan's often complex health care system, said it was "encouraged to see this valuable medical resource extended for civilians in Japan," according to a statement provided Wednesday by group member Alexandra Cummings.

"However, we are disappointed that the service does not extend to dependents and civilian employees continue to be asked to put their families at risk," the group said.

The group also identified a "critical gap" in accessible emergency care for all Americans in Japan, a topic Tata's memo does not address.

"Because this program often takes days or longer to provide services, it does not address the urgent risks our community faces in emergencies," the group said in the statement.

Graves said the program's first year was intended to establish a structure and explore its benefits.

The second year, he said, will "monitor participant feedback and utilization rates to determine if the contract will expand to include dependents of DoD Civilians."

Japan is home to approximately 14,600 U.S. civilians and contractors, many of whom have reported significant barriers to health care in Japan, according to an April 3 report from the Government Accountability Office.

Between Jan. 1 and June 30, the program accommodated 1,142 civilian health care cases, according to a graph attached to Tata's memo. Navy civilians used the program most frequently at 409 cases, followed by 311 cases from the Department of Defense Education Activity.

Other users included civilians with the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, Defense Commissary Agency and more, including two cases from DHA itself.

Access to health care became a concern for DOD civilians in Japan in December 2022, when DHA limited civilians to space-available appointments only at military health care facilities and encouraged them instead to seek care from local providers, most of which do not accept foreign health insurance.

NORAD tracks Russia surveillance plane near US air space

BY JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes



JAPAN AIR SELF-DEFENSE FORCE

A Russian Ilyushin IL-20M surveillance plane, similar to the one seen Wednesday flying through the Alaska Air Defense Identification Zone, flies near Japan on Feb. 12.

A Russian military surveillance plane flew through the Alaska Air Defense Identification Zone on Wednesday but posed no threat to U.S. security, according to North American Aerospace Defense Command.

A lone Ilyushin IL-20 Coot flew through the international zone and did not enter either Canadian or U.S. air space, according to a command news release Wednesday. The IL-20 is a four-engine turboprop used to gather electronic intelligence, according to combataircraft.com

Canadian Armed Forces Capt. Rebecca Garand, a NORAD spokeswoman, could not immediately provide further information about the flight Wednesday.

"This Russian activity in the Alaskan ADIZ occurs regularly and is not seen as a threat," the release said.

NORAD sent two F-16s and one KC-135 air refueler to identify and monitor the Russian aircraft.

On Tuesday, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force scrambled fighters to intercept two Russian Tu-95 Bear bombers and two fighters over the Sea of Japan, according to the Japan Joint Staff.

The Russians flew from the mainland, then turned northeast to skirt Japanese territorial airspace off the coast of Sado Island, Niigata prefecture, a news release said. The Russians' flight lasted from morning to afternoon.

"We will continue to monitor Russian military movements in the airspace surrounding Japan with great interest and will take all possible measures to ensure vigilance and surveillance," a Joint Staff spokesman said Thursday. Some Japanese government officials speak to the press only on condition of anonymity.

An air defense identification zone, or ADIZ, begins where sovereign airspace ends 12 nautical miles from the coastline.

While not universally recognized, the identification zone serves as a buffer area where aircraft are expected to identify themselves for national security purposes.

Russian aircraft most recently flew through the Alaskan zone in July. Two Russian Tu-95 Bear bombers and two Russian Su-35 Flanker fighters flew for three hours through the zone, which covers millions of square miles, including large portions of the Arctic Ocean, the Bering Sea and the northern Pacific.

In April, two Tu-95 bombers, one Tu-142 F/J reconnaissance and anti-submarine plane, one A-50 Mainstay early warning plane, and two Su-35 Flanker fighters flew through the identification zone for about 2 ½ hours over the Bering Sea.

On Sept. 23, a Russian Su-35 fighter made a close pass of an American interceptor, which drew a rebuke as unsafe and unprofessional from the head of NORAD at the time.

Stars and Stripes reporters Alex Wilson and Hana Kusumoto contributed to this report.

Lightning strike kills 2 Japanese soldiers during training

BY HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

Two Japanese soldiers died this week of lightning strikes during training in western Japan, a spokesman said Thursday.

Sgt. Kento Tanitsu, 25, and Sgt. Ayu Kubota, 21, of the Western Army Tank Unit, were found in cardiac arrest at 12:06 a.m. Monday at the Japanese army's Hijyudai Maneuver Area in Oita prefecture, the Ground Self-Defense Force spokesman said by phone.

Both were confirmed dead at 1:14 a.m. Monday; an autopsy determined they died from electrocution by lightning, he said.

"The death of our troops during training is extremely regrettable and we take this very seriously," said tank unit commander Col. Motohiko Nakamura, according to the spokesman.

"I would like to once again express our heartfelt condolences to the family of the deceased," Nakamura said.

The army will take all possible measures to prevent a recurrence, he said.

The two soldiers were playing the enemy role in infiltration training, the spokesman said. Their radio communication cut off with their last communication around 2 p.m. Sunday, he said.

The Self-Defense Force began searching after they were unable to contact them by 10 p.m. Sunday, the spokesman said.

The area was under a lightning advisory at the time of the exercise, the spokesman said.

The Japan Meteorological Agency issued an advisory in Oita prefecture from early morning until around 9 p.m. Sunday, Kyodo News reported Thursday.

The army created a committee Sunday to investigate the incident, the spokesman said.

Some Japanese government officials are required to speak to the press on condition of anonymity.

MILITARY

Army OKs new facility in Iowa to make more artillery shells

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Army has greenlit a new facility to support production of in-demand artillery shells, after stockpiles shrank following shipments to Ukraine and Israel.

MSM Group North America Inc. was awarded a $635 million contract on Aug. 15 to design and build the Future Artillery Complex at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant, the Army said Wednesday.

The facility is slated for completion in August 2029. It will rely on robotics and technology to load, assemble and pack 155 mm munitions, an Army statement said.

The award is part of the service's effort to modernize and expand production of the shells, which are used in platforms like the M777 Howitzer and the M109 Paladin.

In July, Army spokesman Steve Warren said the service is turning out 40,000 shells per month, according to a Defense Department statement cited by National Defense Magazine.

The Army had aimed to have 100,000 shells per month in production by October. The goal has since been pushed back to mid-2026, Warren told reporters in July.

The U.S. has sent more than 3 million 155 mm shells to support Ukraine since Russia's 2022 invasion, the State Department said in a statement in March.

It has also delivered tens of thousands of shells to Israel since its 2023 conflict with Hamas began.

The Army supplies ammunition for all U.S. military services and numerous allies, the Wednesday statement said.

An Army statement in February called the 155 mm shell the "backbone of U.S. and allied field artillery." It features a high-fragmentation steel body and about 24 pounds of explosive material.



MARKUS RAUCHENBERGER/U.S. Army

Pfc. Chad Averill carries a 155 mm artillery round ahead of a May exercise at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany. The Army this month awarded a $635 million contract for an artillery complex at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant to make 155 mm rounds.



SAR PAW/U.S. Army

M795 High Explosive Projectile 155 mm rounds are shown ready to be fired during the exercise.

In 2023, the service began awarding contracts and requesting funds to expand capacity to 100,000 shells per month, the February statement said. It also expanded facilities in Pennsylvania and completed a new factory in Texas last year.

The Army awarded a $435 million contract in November to build a TNT production facility in Kentucky, a statement said at the time.

MSM is based in St. Petersburg, Fla., and was the sole bidder, the award states.

GOP lawmakers push for passage of ACCESS Act

BY LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Republican chairmen of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees said they will push for passage of legislation to expand veterans' access to private medical care outside the Department of Veterans Affairs when Congress reconvenes next month.

The Veterans' Assuring Critical Care Expansions to Support Servicemembers Act — also known as the ACCESS Act — would enable patients for the first time to schedule their own appointments through online portals, track their referrals for private community-based care and manage appeals when non-VA care is denied.

Supporters of the bill have said the changes will speed up the VA's process for determining whether veterans can see private doctors in their communities in lieu of extended wait times or traveling a long distance to obtain the same care at a VA hospital or clinic.

The ACCESS Act is sponsored by Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill., chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. Final votes are pending in the House and Senate after the bill advanced from veterans' affairs committees in both chambers at the end of July.

"Community care is VA care. This bill would not privatize VA," Bost said in response to criticism from some Democratic lawmakers that strengthening coverage for veterans' private medical services will erode demand and services within the VA care network.

VA spending on private care has doubled in five years — from $17.6 billion in 2021 to $34 billion slated for 2026, according to VA figures.

The ACCESS Act would require the VA to inform veterans of their option for private care from clinicians registered with the VA system. Veterans are entitled to seek private medical care when the same treatment is not readily available close to home.

"Veterans repeatedly tell us, 'I heard about community care months after trying to get an appointment.' Or worse, 'I never knew.' The stories go on. Veterans are either delayed care or left without care," Bost said.

The legislation also requires the VA to provide clear explanations if referrals — or pre-approvals — from a VA doctor are denied. Without pre-authorization, VA will not approve or pay for the non-VA community care. Exceptions are made for urgent care and emergency situations, the VA said.

Under the ACCESS Act, a three-year pilot program also would be established for granting veterans direct access to outpatient mental health and substance abuse treatments through private health care clinics. The legislation would allow veterans to bypass the VA's pre-approval process.

"No veteran — especially one facing cancer, addiction, chronic pain or a mental health condition — should have to wait weeks or months for the care they need or have to fight to receive the community care referrals they are entitled to by law," Moran said when he introduced the legislation in January.

Pilot rescued after Navy F/A-18 Super Hornet crash in Atlantic

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

A Navy pilot based at Naval Air Station Oceana was rescued from the Atlantic Ocean off Virginia's coast Wednesday after ejecting from an F/A-18E Super Hornet, according to a service statement.

The pilot from Strike Fighter Squadron 83 ejected just before 10 a.m. and was rescued about an hour and 20 minutes later, said Lt. Jackie Parashar, a spokeswoman for Naval Air Force Atlantic. The pilot was transported to a local hospital "for further medical evaluation," though the pilot's condition was not disclosed.

Parashar said the fighter jet remained in the ocean late Wednesday afternoon.

It was not clear what led the pilot to eject during the "routine training flight." Authorities were beginning an investigation into the incident, Parashar said.

Strike Fighter Squadron 83, known as the Rampagers, flies F/A-18Es out of NAS Oceana and deploys aboard aircraft carriers. It last deployed in late 2023 for nine months aboard the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower. During that deployment, its pilots flew more than 1,000 combat flight hours in the Red Sea against Iran-backed Houthi militants in Yemen who were attacking commercial and military vessels, according to the Navy.

374th Airlift Wing reports airman's death in Japanese resort town

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — An airman with the 374th Airlift Wing was found dead Wednesday in Shimoda, a resort town about 2½ hours south of this airlift hub in western Tokyo.

The wing announced the death on its official Facebook page Thursday afternoon. It provided no other information.

The airman was not identified pending 24 hours after notification of next-of-kin, which has already occurred, according to the wing.

"Today is a difficult day for Team Yokota," said wing commander Col. Richard McElhaney in the post. "Thank you to our installation law enforcement officials and local community partners within the Shimoda Police Service for their assistance.

"Those affected are on the front of our minds, and our base support agencies are standing by to support members of the community suffering from this loss," he said.

Shimoda, on the tip of the Izu Peninsula facing the Pacific Ocean, is known for its hot springs, busy port and long, sandy beaches.

MILITARY

Space Force OKs some career-specific patches

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Guardians with certain jobs may proudly display their area of expertise on their uniform, despite a move by the Air Force earlier this year to do away with duty identifier patches.

The Space Force in an updated dress and appearance policy issued last week authorized 11 badges for personnel directly involved "in mission execution," such as "EW" for electromagnetic warfare and "NAVWAR" for navigation warfare.

The other mission areas, according to the policy, are theater electromagnetic warfare, orbital warfare, cyberspace warfare, satellite communications, missile warning and tracking, space-based sensing and targeting, satellite control and space lift and range control, according to the policy.

Staff and other support roles are not authorized to wear the mission-identifying patches, the new guidelines state.

The Air Force had more than 130 approved career-field patches, all of which were banned starting in February to promote unity, service leaders said at the time.

Airmen are still permitted to wear tabs signifying special duties, qualifications or training, such as honor guard or air adviser under the new policy.

The Space Force's 114-page policy, published Aug. 15, consolidates all uniform and grooming rules into a single document, the service said in a statement this week.

The guidance "provides clear standards that support our warfighting objectives and culture" for just under 10,000 guardians, Katharine Kelley, deputy chief of space operations for personnel, said in a statement Monday.

The mission tabs must be a textile. They are to be worn above the organizational unit patch and below the Commander's Badge Insignia, the policy says.

Besides this authorization, which was first reported by Air and Space Forces Magazine, the Space Force standards closely align with those of the Air Force.

In some grooming categories, however, guardians appear to have a little more leeway.

The Air Force in February changed policy on fingernail adornment, going from 60 permissible nail polish colors to just three approved styles, "clear or French or American Manicure," according to guidelines.



EUGENE CRIST/U.S. Air Force

The Space Force has authorized 11 job-related patches, like the Air Force one shown here, for wear on guardians' Operational Camouflage Pattern uniforms.

The Space Force says female guardians "may wear nail polish in a single, muted color that does not compromise the uniform's appearance," with the exception of gold, silver, black or fluorescent colors.

Also authorized are white-tip French manicures, American manicures and natural ombre styles, the updated Space Force policy says.

Beards for men are banned without a medical waiver or religious accommodation, similar to the Air Force.

Still in the works is an official Space Force service dress uniform. The service has said it expects to roll out the uniform in early 2026, after several years of testing.

Space: US, Russia, China racing to put nuclear plants on moon

FROM PAGE 1

That makes them a significant national security vulnerability and a prime target for anyone looking to undermine an adversary's economy or military readiness — or deliver a psychological blow like the hackers supporting Russia did when they hijacked television signals to Ukraine.

Hackers typically look for the weakest link in the software or hardware that supports a satellite or controls its communications with Earth. The actual orbiting device may be secure, but if it's running on outdated software, it can be easily exploited.

As Russian forces invaded Ukraine in 2022, someone targeted Viasat, the U.S.-based satellite company used by Ukraine's government and military. The hack, which Kyiv blamed on Moscow, used malware to infect tens of thousands of modems, creating an outage affecting wide swaths of Europe.

National security officials say Russia is developing a nuclear, space-based weapon designed to take out virtually every satellite in low-Earth orbit at once.

The weapon would combine a physical attack that would ripple outward, destroying more satellites, while the nuclear component is used to fry their electronics.

U.S. officials declassified information about the weapon after Rep. Mike Turner, R-Ohio, issued a public warning about the technology. Turner has pushed for the Department of Defense to provide a classified briefing to lawmakers on the weapon, which, if deployed, would violate an international treaty prohibiting weapons of mass destruction in space.

Turner said such a weapon could render low-Earth orbit unusable for satellites for as long as a year.



AP

X-37B Orbital Test Vehicle-7, the U.S. Space Force's dynamic unmanned spaceplane, successfully deorbited and landed at Vandenberg Space Force Base, Calif., March 7.

If it were used, the effects would be devastating: potentially leaving the U.S. and its allies vulnerable to economic upheaval and even a nuclear attack.

Russia and China also would lose satellites, though they are believed to be less reliant on the same kinds of satellites as the U.S.

Turner compared the weapon, which is not yet ready for deployment, to Sputnik, the Russian satellite that launched the space age in 1957.

"If this anti-satellite nuclear weapon would be put in space, it would be the end of the space age," Turner said. "It should never be permitted to go into outer space. This is the Cuban Missile Crisis in space."

Mining moon and beyond

Valuable minerals and other materials found on the moon and in asteroids could lead to future conflicts as nations look to exploit new technologies and energy sources.

Acting NASA Administrator Sean Duffy announced plans this month to send a small nuclear reactor to the moon, saying it's important the U.S. does so before China or Russia.

"We're in a race to the moon, in a race with China to the moon," Duffy said. "To have a base on the moon, we need energy and some of the key locations on the moon. ... We want to get there first and claim that for America."

The moon is rich in a material known as helium 3, which scientists believe could be used in nuclear fusion to generate huge amounts of energy. While that technology is decades away, control over the moon in the intervening years could determine which countries emerge as superpowers, according to Joseph Rooke, a London-based cybersecurity expert who has worked in the U.K. defense industry and is now director of risk insights at the firm Recorded Future.

The end of the Cold War temporarily halted a lot of investments in space, but competition is likely to increase as the promise of mining the moon becomes a reality.

"This isn't sci-fi. It's quickly becoming a reality," Rooke said. "If you dominate Earth's energy needs, that's game over."

China and Russia have announced plans for their own nuclear plants on the moon in the coming years, while the U.S. is planning missions to the moon and Mars. Artificial intelligence is likely to speed up the competition, as is the demand for the energy that AI requires.

Messages left with Russia's Embassy in Washington were not returned.

Despite its steps into outer space, China opposes any extraterrestrial arms race, according to Liu Pengyu, a spokesperson for China's Embassy in Washington. He said it is the U.S. that is threatening to militarize the final frontier.

"It has kept expanding military strength in space, created space military alliances and attempted to turn space into a war zone," Liu said. "China urges the U.S. to stop spreading irresponsible rhetoric, stop expanding military build-up in space and make due contribution to upholding the lasting peace and security in space."

US security in space

Nations are scrambling to create their own rocket and space programs to exploit commercial prospects and ensure they aren't dependent on foreign satellites. It's an expensive and difficult proposition, as demonstrated last week when the first Australian-made rocket crashed after 14 seconds of flight.

The U.S. Space Force was created in 2019 to protect American interests in space and to defend U.S. satellites from attacks from adversaries.

The space service is far smaller than the more well-established services like the Army, Navy or Air Force, but it's growing.

The U.S. military operates an unmanned space shuttle used to conduct classified military missions and research. The craft, known as the X-37B, recently returned to Earth after more than a year in orbit.

The Space Force called access to space a vital national security interest.

"Space is a warfighting domain, and it is the Space Force's job to contest and control its environment to achieve national security objectives," it said in the statement.

American dominance in space has been largely unquestioned for decades following the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union. But the new threats and competition posed by Russia and China show the need for an aggressive response, U.S. officials say.

The hope, Turner said, is that the U.S. can take steps to ensure Russia and China can't get the upper hand, and the frightening potential of space weapons is not realized.

"You have to pay attention to these things so they don't happen," Turner said.

Limits: Peacekeeping forces still nonstarter for Putin

FROM PAGE 1

downplaying expectations for a swift bilateral meeting with the Ukrainian president, and further blocking the prospects for any deal on security guarantees for Ukraine. He said Russia would only agree to the measures if it had an effective veto over future efforts to defend Kyiv.

The statements laid bare the limits of Trump's attempts to leverage his personal relationship with Putin to bring an end to the bloodiest European war since World War II. The disconnect has exacerbated concerns that the president and his top advisers have failed to grasp central elements of Putin's positions in Ukraine, which remain largely unchanged since he launched a full-scale invasion into the country more than three years ago.

"There is a straight line between the demands made in Alaska and what Russian negotiators put on the table in Istanbul in April 2022," said Andrew S. Weiss, the James Family Chair and vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, referencing the failed peace talks. "The Kremlin's positions have not fundamentally changed."

Russia's conditions to end its war would essentially subvert Ukraine's sovereignty, neuter its military and seize territory in eastern Ukraine that it has not captured in battle. Moscow wants to also permanently bar Ukraine from NATO and other international groupings and prevent it from hosting foreign troops — terms that would force Ukraine into a close, unwanted economic and political partnership with Russia.

The Trump administration's assessment of Moscow's readiness to make concessions alarmed foreign policy analysts, who are concerned that the president's advisers, who have not been dealing with the Kremlin during most of the war, have not understood major elements of what Putin was insisting on.

Trump has rejected the government's traditional national security agencies, instead relying on a small circle of advisers with limited foreign policy experience. He deputized much of the negotiations to a longtime friend, Steve Witkoff, who largely worked in real estate development before the president's decision to name him envoy to the Middle East and Russia.

Trump has deployed Witkoff in negotiations in complex conflicts without a large staff, said James Rubin, former adviser to Biden Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

"He has never done this before," Rubin said. "He clearly has Trump's confidence, but the president himself has shown amateurishness by thinking he could end this war in 24 hours, by thinking that Putin's personal relationship with him matters at all. And now Witkoff is suffering potentially the same mistake or worse."



DANYLO ANTONIUK/AP

Ukrainian servicemen of the 44th artillery brigade fire a 2s22 Bohdana self-propelled howitzer toward Russian positions at the frontline in the Zaporizhzhia region, Ukraine, on Wednesday.

Trump expects a bilateral meeting will occur despite the Kremlin's public resistance, and he and his team remain in communication with Russian and Ukrainian officials, a White House official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to describe private deliberations.

"More self-proclaimed 'experts' in the room' doesn't mean better foreign policy," the official said. "Steve Witkoff has had more conversations with Putin than any of the so-called experts with the past administration."

European allies of Ukraine said earlier this month that they were confused about Witkoff's reports of what Putin had told him when they met on Aug. 6. The Americans interpreted Putin's suggestion that he would halt Russian attacks on two regions of southern Ukraine as an offer to withdraw, according to people briefed on the talks, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe private conversations. The Kremlin later clarified that it was ready to halt fighting in those regions but was still demanding that Kyiv relinquish the Donbas area of eastern Ukraine without offering anything in return, according to people briefed on the negotiations.

Kremlin officials, too, have been concerned that Witkoff at times has failed to accurately represent Moscow's position when he relayed it back to Trump, said Thomas Graham, a distinguished fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

The administration focused on territorial issues in their proposals to Moscow, at times failing to address the concerns about NATO and the demilitarization of Ukraine that Russia also views as central to the war.

The idea that territorial concessions could bring peace in Ukraine is "a dangerous illusion," said Boris Bondarev, a former senior Russian diplomat who resigned over Putin's Ukraine invasion, in a post on X.

"Some still imagine that, in exchange for land, the Kremlin might accept security guarantees for Ukraine, tolerate the presence of peacekeepers or even acquiesce to the continued arming of Kyiv," he wrote. "This is fantasy. It will not happen."

Trump and his advisers appear unfazed by the Kremlin backlash to its positions. Witkoff described Trump as a legendary dealmaker and said he "has an uncanny ability to bend people to his sensible way of thinking."

After the Alaska summit, Witkoff told CNN that Putin agreed that the United States could offer Ukraine a security guarantee resembling NATO's collective defense mandate as part of an eventual deal to end the war. Russian officials have now roundly denounced that idea.

"Witkoff clearly misunderstood what the Russians were offering in Alaska in terms of security guarantees" said Eric Ciaramella, former Ukraine adviser in the first Trump term and now an analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Witkoff has further confused everyone by saying that the guarantee would be modeled after NATO's Article 5, yet without an American pledge to intervene in defense of Ukraine. Well, that's the essence of Article 5, so what are we even talking about?"

Trump remains optimistic about the possibility of peace in Ukraine, and he called Witkoff "a wonderful person that everybody likes" and "a good dealmaker" during an interview Tuesday with conservative talk radio star Mark Levin.

"He understands the president's perspective and is able to effectively articulate that to foreign leaders," a White House official said.

Trump's selection of Witkoff reflects his style of prioritizing personalities over policy details in diplomatic negotiations.

"It's probably instinct more than process," Trump said when Levin asked him if there was a method to his negotiations with Ukraine and Russia. "I have instincts you know, and I've lived with my instincts." The president than began a non sequitur on his decision to run for president.

Trump has emphasized his personal relationship with Putin, suggesting on Monday in a conversation with Macron caught on microphone that he believed Putin wants to make a deal with him. This relational approach to diplomacy is a pattern for Trump that dates back to his first term.

"In his first term, he'd say, 'Isn't it a good thing I'm friends with Putin?' As if that solves the problem. And I think he wants to be a good friend with Putin again," said John Bolton, who was Trump's national security adviser before breaking with him. "That's why Putin wants the opportunity to tell him that they are still good friends."

Following the meeting with European leaders on Monday, Trump announced that the next step would be a meeting between Putin and Zelenskyy. A White House official on Tuesday said that Putin had confirmed to the White House that he was willing to meet with the Ukrainian president. But such a meeting would probably be untenable for the Kremlin at this stage, analysts say.

Throughout the war, the Kremlin has ruled out Putin meeting with Zelenskyy until certain conditions were met — a formulation that analysts say means he would meet only when Zelenskyy was ready to capitulate to Russia's terms. Putin has also derided Zelenskyy's legal legitimacy, saying that he could not sign a peace deal because it would not be valid.

"Putin will not meet Zelensky under the current circumstances," wrote Tatiana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center on X on Tuesday. "He has repeatedly stated that such a meeting would only be possible if there were well-prepared grounds, which in practice means Zelensky's acceptance of Russia's terms for ending the war. This, she wrote, meant that "another disappointment for Trump is therefore inevitable."

In the month before the Alaska summit, Trump appeared to be growing cold toward Putin as the Russian president continued to rain bombs down on Ukraine, despite assurances he made over the phone to the U.S. president. Trump set a 50-day deadline for Russia to agree to a ceasefire or face "very severe" new economic consequences — later reducing it to 10 days.

Days before the deadline expired, Putin invited Witkoff to Moscow and offered a proposal, seen by the White House as sufficient grounds to set up last week's Alaska summit meeting. There, Putin succeeded in convincing Trump that an immediate ceasefire to allow for complex peace negotiations was not required, allowing Russia to continue its attacks on Ukraine, without the risk of new U.S. sanctions.

The move alarmed European leaders, who raced to Washington on Monday to back up Zelenskyy during a meeting at the White House. After the meeting, they appeared satisfied by Trump's openness to security guarantees. If Putin does not accept the terms, that could make the Kremlin the obstacle to Trump's peace deal, insulating Ukraine from having to choose between untenable concessions of territory and inviting Trump's ire.

Just because Russia, Ukraine and the United States appear to be far apart, it does not mean the negotiations have failed, Graham continued. A serious negotiation could extend beyond the end of the year, despite Trump's push for a speedy conclusion to the war, Graham said.

NATION

California acting fast on congressional map

Associated Press

The national redistricting battle entered its next phase Thursday as California Democrats were scheduled to pass a new congressional map that creates five winnable seats for their party, a direct counter to the Texas House's approval of a new map to create more conservative-leaning seats in that state.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom has engineered the high-risk strategy in response to President Donald Trump's own brinkmanship. Trump pushed Texas Republicans to reopen the legislative maps that they passed in 2021 to squeeze out up to five new GOP seats to help the party stave off a midterm defeat.

Unlike in Texas, where passage by the Republican-controlled state Senate and signature by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott are now all that's needed to make the maps official, California faces a more uncertain route.

Democrats must use their legislative supermajority to pass the map by a two-third margin. Then they must schedule a special election in November for voters to approve the map that Newsom must sign by Friday to meet ballot deadlines.



Newsom

The added complexity is because California has a voter-approved independent commission that Newsom himself backed before Trump's latest redistricting maneuver. Only the state's voters can override the map that commission approved in 2021.

But Newsom said extraordinary steps are required to counter Texas and other Republican-led states that Trump is pushing to revise maps.

"This is a new Democratic Party, this is a new day, this is new energy out there all across this country," Newsom said Wednesday on a call with reporters. "And we're going to fight fire with fire."

Texas Democratic lawmakers, vastly outnumbered in that state's legislature, delayed approval of the new map by 15 days by fleeing Texas earlier this month in protest. They were assigned round-the-clock police monitoring upon their return to ensure they attended Wednesday's session.

That session ended with an 88-52 party-line vote approving the map after more than eight hours of debate. Democrats have also vowed to challenge the new Texas map in court and complained that Republicans made the political power move before passing legislation responding to deadly floods that swept the state last month.

In a sign of Democrats' stiffening redistricting resolve, former President Barack Obama on Tuesday night backed Newsom's bid to redraw the California map, saying it was a necessary step to stave off the GOP's Texas move.

"I think that approach is a smart, measured approach," Obama said during a fundraiser for the Democratic Party's main redistricting arm.

The incumbent president's party usually loses congressional seats in the midterm election, and the GOP currently controls the House of Representatives by a mere three votes.

Trump is going beyond Texas in his push to remake the map. He's pushed Republican leaders in conservative states like Indiana and Missouri to also try to create new Republican seats. Ohio Republicans were already revising their map before Texas moved. Democrats, meanwhile, are mulling reopening Maryland and New York's maps as well.

However, more Democratic-run states have commission systems like California's or other redistricting limits than Republican ones do, leaving the GOP with a freer hand to swiftly redraw maps. New York, for example, can't draw new maps until 2028 and even then only with voter approval.

Texas Republicans openly said they were acting in their party's interest. State Rep. Todd Hunter, who wrote the legislation formally creating the new map, noted that the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed politicians to redraw districts for nakedly partisan purposes.

There was little that outnumbered Democrats could do other than fume and threaten a lawsuit to block the map. Because the Supreme Court has blessed purely partisan gerrymandering, the only way opponents can stop the new Texas map would be by arguing it violates the Voting Rights Act requirement to keep minority communities together so they can select representatives of their choice.

House Republicans' frustration at the Democrats' flight and ability to delay the vote was palpable during the Wednesday vote.

House Speaker Dustin Burrows announced as debate started that doors to the chamber were locked and any member leaving was required to have a permission slip. The doors were only unlocked after final passage more than eight hours later.

Republicans issued civil arrest warrants to bring the Democrats back after they left the state Aug. 3, and Abbott asked the state Supreme Court to oust several Democrats from office. The lawmakers also face a fine of $500 for every day they were absent.

Trump to join DC patrol as feds deploy checkpoints

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump planned to join a Thursday evening patrol in the nation's capital as federal authorities deployed checkpoints around the city.

"I'm going to be going out tonight with the police and with the military," the Republican president told Todd Starnes, a conservative commentator.

Trump's presence during his controversial crackdown, which has lasted for two weeks, would be the latest show of force from the White House. Hundreds of federal agents and National Guard soldiers have surged into Washington this month, leaving some residents on edge and creating tense confrontations in the streets.

Vice President JD Vance and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on Wednesday visited some of the troops at Union Station, showing their support while protestors chanted "free D.C."

Although the city has historically struggled with crime, statistics show the problem was declining before Trump declared there was a crisis that required his intervention.

Immigration enforcement has been a core part of the crackdown, rattling people in some of the city's neighborhoods. A daycare was partially closed on Thursday when staff became afraid to go to work because they heard about federal agents nearby. An administrator asked parents to keep their children at home if possible.



AL DRAGO/AP

White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Vice President JD Vance, greet members of the National Guard at Union Station in Washington, Wednesday.

Other day cares have stopped taking kids on daily walks because of fears about encountering law enforcement.

Since Aug. 7, when Trump began surging federal agents into the city, there have been 630 arrests, including 251 people who are in the country illegally, according to the White House. Trump has been ratcheting up the pressure since then, seizing control of the D.C. police department on Aug. 11 and deploying more National Guard troops, mostly from Republican-led states.

Soldiers have been largely stationed in downtown areas, such as monuments on the National Mall and transit stations.

However, federal agents are operating more widely through the city. D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser acknowledged the proliferation of traffic checkpoints on Thursday.

"The surge of federal officers is allowing for different types of deployments, more frequent types of deployments, like checkpoints," Bowser said.

The Supreme Court has upheld the use of law enforcement and government checkpoints for specific purposes, such as for policing the border and for identifying suspected drunk drivers.

But there are restrictions on that authority, especially when it comes to general crime control. Jeffrey Bellin, a former prosecutor in Washington and professor at Vanderbilt Law School who specializes in criminal law and procedures, said the Constitution doesn't allow "the government to be constantly checking us and stopping to see if we're up to any criminal activity."

He said checkpoints for a legally justifiable purpose — like checking for drivers' licenses and registrations — cannot be used as "subterfuge" or a pretext for stops that would otherwise not be allowed. And though the court has affirmed the use of checkpoints at the border, and even some distance away from it, to ask drivers about immigration status, Bellin said it was unlikely the authority would extend to Washington.

Anthony Michael Kreis, a professor at Georgia State College of Law, said the seemingly "arbitrary" and intrusive nature of the checkpoints in the capital could leave residents feeling aggrieved.

"Some of the things could be entirely constitutional and fine, but at the same time, the way that things are unfolding, people are suspicious — and I think for good reason," he said.

There are few places in the country that have been unaffected by Trump's deportation drive, but his push into D.C. is shaping into something more sustained, similar to what has unfolded in the Los Angeles area since early June.

In Los Angeles, immigration officers — working with the Border Patrol and other federal agencies — have been a near-daily presence at Home Depots, car washes and other highly visible locations.

In a demonstration of how enforcement has affected routines, the bishop of San Bernardino, Calif., formally excused parishioners of their weekly obligation to attend Mass after immigration agents detained people on two parish properties.

NATION

Gabbard to slash intel workforce

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Office of the Director of National Intelligence will dramatically reduce its workforce and cut its budget by more than $700 million annually, the Trump administration announced Wednesday.

The move amounts to a major downsizing of the office responsible for coordinating the work of 18 intelligence agencies, including on counterterrorism and counterintelligence, as President Donald Trump has tangled with assessments from the intelligence community.

His administration also this week has revoked the security clearances of dozens of former and current officials, while last month declassifying documents meant to call into question long-settled judgments about Russian interference in the 2016 election.

"Over the last 20 years, ODNI has become bloated and inefficient, and the intelligence community is rife with abuse of power, unauthorized leaks of classified intelligence, and politicized weaponization of intelligence," Tulsi Gabbard, the director of national intelligence, said in a statement announcing a more than 40% workforce reduction.

She added: "Ending the weaponization of intelligence and holding bad actors accountable are essential to begin to earn the American people's trust which has long been eroded."

Among the changes are to the Foreign Malign Influence Center, which is meant to track influence operations from abroad and threats to elections. Officials said it has become "redundant" and that its core functions would be integrated into other parts of the government.

The reorganization is part of a broader administration effort to rethink how it tracks foreign threats to American elections, a topic that has become politically loaded given Trump's long-running resistance to the intelligence community's assessment that Russia interfered on his behalf in the 2016 election.

In February, for instance, Attorney General Pam Bondi disbanded an FBI task force focused on investigating foreign influence operations, including those that target U.S. elections.

The Trump administration also has made sweeping cuts at the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which oversees the nation's critical infrastructure, including election systems.

And the State Department in April said it shut down its office that sought to deal with misinformation and disinformation that Russia, China and Iran have been accused of spreading.

State Department employee fired over talking points on Israel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The State Department has fired a press officer who was responsible for drafting Trump administration talking points about policy toward Israel and Gaza after complaints from the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem.

Officials said Shahed Ghoreishi, a contractor working for the Bureau of Near East Affairs, was terminated following two incidents last week in which his loyalty to Trump administration policies was called into question.

Ghoreishi, who is Iranian American, also was targeted Wednesday by right-wing personality Laura Loomer, who accused him of not being fully supportive of the administration's policies in the Middle East.

According to Ghoreishi and two current U.S. officials, Ghoreishi drew the ire of a senior official at the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem and then top aides to Secretary of State Marco Rubio for drafting a response to a query from The Associated Press last week. The question related to discussions between Israel and South Sudan about relocation of Palestinians from Gaza to South Sudan.

The draft response included a line that said the U.S. does not support the forced relocation of Gazans, something that President Donald Trump and his special envoy Steve Witkoff have said repeatedly.

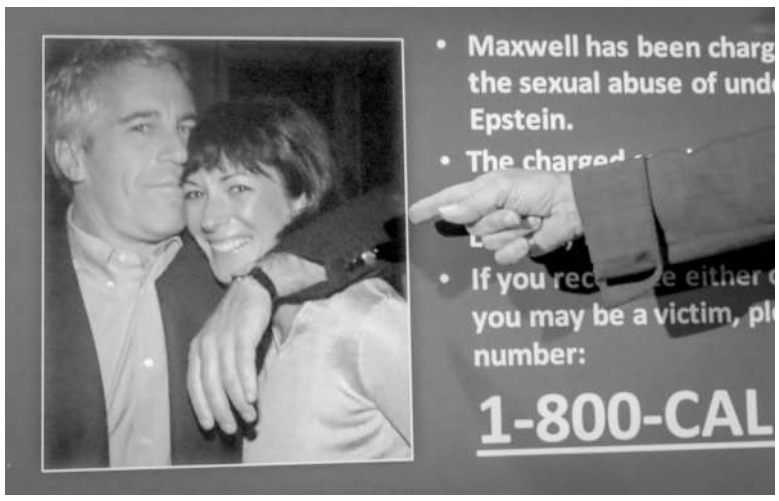
However, according to Ghoreishi and the officials, that line was rejected by the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem, leading to questions about policy back in Washington.

Ghoreishi also said he questioned a statement from the embassy that referred to the West Bank as "Judea and Samaria," the Biblical name for the Palestinian territory that some right-wing Israeli officials prefer. Mike Huckabee, U.S. ambassador to Israel, also has repeatedly backed referring to the West Bank by Judea and Samaria.

The ouster shows the lengths that the Trump administration has gone to ensure what it sees as loyalty to the president and his goals, including a foreign policy approach that has offered overwhelming support for Israel in the war against Hamas. The administration this week also revoked security clearances for 37 current and former national security officials, including many who had signed a 2019 letter critical of Trump that was recently highlighted by Loomer.

"Despite a close working relationship with many of my dedicated and hardworking colleagues, I was targeted following two events last week when I attracted the ire of the 7th floor and senior officials in Embassy Jerusalem: stating we are against forced displacement of Palestinians in Gaza as President Trump and special envoy Witkoff have both previously claimed and cutting a reference to Judea and Samaria," Ghoreishi said, referring to the floor where top leaders have offices.

"Both of these had been consistently approved at the senior level in the past, so it begs the question why I was suddenly targeted without a direct explanation and whether our Israel-Palestine policy is about to get even worse — including an unwillingness to take any stand against ethnic cleansing. The future looks bleak," he said.



JOHN MINCHILLO/AP

Audrey Strauss, acting U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, points to a photo of Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, during a news conference in New York in 2020.

Judge refuses to unseal grand jury transcripts

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A federal judge on Wednesday rejected the Trump administration's request to unseal grand jury transcripts from Jeffrey Epstein's sex trafficking case, joining two other judges who declined to release similar records from investigations into the late financier's sexual abuse.

Judge Richard Berman, who presided over the 2019 case, ruled a week after another Manhattan federal judge turned down the government's request to release transcripts from the grand jury that indicted Epstein's longtime confidante Ghislaine Maxwell.

Barring reversal on appeal, Berman's decision appears to foreclose the possibility of federal courts releasing Epstein-related grand jury testimony. A federal judge in Florida declined to release grand jury documents from an investigation there in 2005 and 2007, though some material from a state case against Epstein was made public last year.

The rulings were a resounding repudiation of the Justice Department's effort to unlock the records, a move the administration undertook amid a fierce backlash over its refusal to release documents in its possession.

Berman and the judge in Maxwell's case, Paul A. Engelmayer, made clear in their rulings that the grand jury transcripts contain none of the answers likely to satisfy public interest in the case.

President Donald Trump had called for the release of transcripts amid rumors and criticism about his long-ago involvement with Epstein. Trump promised to release files related to Epstein, but he was met with criticism when the small number of records released by his Justice Department lacked new revelations.

Each of the judges who declined to release transcripts cited longstanding grand jury secrecy rules and concluded that the government did not meet the exceptions under federal law that could justify making them public.

600 CDC employees to get termination notices

NEW YORK — At least 600 employees of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are receiving permanent termination notices in the wake of a recent court decision that protected some CDC employees from layoffs.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on Wednesday did not offer details on the layoffs and referred an AP reporter to a March statement that said restructuring and downsizing were intended to make health agencies more responsive and efficient.

Official says she won't be 'bullied' into resigning

WASHINGTON — Federal Reserve governor Lisa Cook late Wednesday said she wouldn't leave her post after Trump on social media called on her to resign over an accusation from one his officials that she committed mortgage fraud.

Bill Pulte, the head of the agency that regulates mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and a Trump appointee, alleged on the X social media platform early Wednesday that Cook had claimed two primary residences in 2021 to get better mortgage terms. Mortgage rates are often higher on second homes or those purchased to rent.

Trump followed up Pulte's accusation by calling on Cook to resign, in an effort by the administration to exert control over one of the few remaining independent agencies in Washington.

If Cook is forced off the Fed's governing board, it would provide Trump an opportunity to appoint a loyalist. Trump has said he would only appoint officials who would support cutting rates.

Court ends temporary protections for some

SAN FRANCISCO — A federal appeals court on Wednesday sided with the Trump administration and halted for now a lower court's order that had kept in place temporary protections for 60,000 migrants from Central America and Nepal.

This means that the Republican administration can move toward removing an estimated 7,000 people from Nepal whose Temporary Protected Status designations expired Aug. 5. The TPS designations and legal status of 51,000 Hondurans and 3,000 Nicaraguans are set to expire Sept. 8, at which point they will become eligible for removal.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco granted the emergency stay pending as the lead plaintiff alleges that the administration acted unlawfully.

From The Associated Press

NATION

Hurricane Erin stirs up strong winds and waves

Associated Press

RODANTHE, N.C. — Hurricane Erin battered North Carolina's Outer Banks with strong winds and waves that flooded part of the main highway and surged under beachfront homes as the monster storm slowly began to move away from the East Coast on Thursday.

Forecasters predict the storm will gradually weaken over the next few days while turning farther out to sea.

Tropical storm conditions were in effect over parts of the Outer Banks and the coast of Virginia, the National Hurricane Center in Miami said. In Bermuda, residents and tourists were told to stay out of the water with rough seas expected through Friday.

There was flooding along part of the North Carolina and mid-Atlantic coasts, the center said Thursday morning. Authorities warned that the largest swells would continue to whip up life-threatening rip currents from the Carolinas to New England.

As Erin's outer bands brushed the Outer Banks, waves broke through dunes on Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands and swamped the main route connecting the barrier islands. Parts of Highway 12 remained closed Thursday, and Ocracoke's connection to its ferry terminal was cut off.

Beaches were closed to swimming Thursday in New York City, but that didn't stop more than a dozen surfers from taking on the waves at Rockaway Beach in Queens. Other spots in New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware also were temporarily off-limits. Widespread, moderate coastal flooding was forecast for low-lying areas of Long Island and parts of New York City.



ALLEN G. BREED/AP

Maggie Ford takes a photo of a teetering stilt house being pummeled by waves from Hurricane Erin in Rodanthe, N.C., on Wednesday.

Off Massachusetts, Nantucket Island could see waves of more than 10 feet this week.

Bob Oravec, a National Weather Service forecaster, said that even if someone thinks they know how to handle a rip current, it's not safe.

Coastal flooding and erosion was a big worry in many beachfront communities. In North Carolina, waves were estimated as high as 18 feet Thursday morning, according to local weather reports.

Dozens of beach homes already worn down from chronic erosion and protective dunes were at risk, said David Hallac, superintendent of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Appeals court throws out massive civil fraud penalty against Trump

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A New York appeals court on Thursday threw out President Donald Trump's massive civil fraud penalty while upholding a judge's finding that he exaggerated his wealth for decades. The ruling spares Trump from a potential half-billion-dollar fine but bans him and his two eldest sons from serving in corporate leadership for a few years.

The decision came seven months after the Republican returned to the White House. A panel of five judges in New York's mid-level Appellate Division said the verdict, which stood to cost Trump more than $515 million and rock his real estate empire, was "excessive."

After finding Trump engaged in fraud by flagrantly padding financial statements that went to lenders and insurers, Judge Arthur Engoron ordered him last year to pay $355 million in penalties. With interest, the sum has topped $515 million.

The total — combined with penalties levied on some other Trump Organization executives, including Trump's sons Eric and Donald Jr. — now exceeds $527 million, with interest.

"While the injunctive relief ordered by the court is well crafted to curb defendants' business culture, the court's disgorgement order, which directs that defendants pay nearly half a billion dollars to the State of New York, is an excessive fine that violates the Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution," Judges Dianne T. Renwick and Peter H. Moulton wrote in one of several opinions shaping the appeals court's ruling.

Engoron's other punishments, upheld by the appeals court, have been on pause during Trump's appeal, and he was able to hold off collection of the money by posting a $175 million bond.

The court, which split on the merits of the lawsuit and Engoron's fraud finding, dismissed the penalty in its entirety while also leaving a pathway for an appeal to the state's highest court, the Court of Appeals. Trump and his co-defendants, the judges wrote, can seek to extend the pause on any punishments taking effect.

The panel was sharply divided, issuing 323 pages of concurring and dissenting opinions with no majority. Rather, some judges endorsed parts of their colleagues' findings while denouncing others, enabling the court to rule.

Employee protests lead to 18 arrests at Microsoft

Associated Press

Police officers arrested 18 people at worker-led protests at Microsoft headquarters Wednesday as the tech company promises an "urgent" review of the Israeli military's use of its technology during the ongoing war in Gaza.

Two consecutive days of protest at the Microsoft campus in Redmond, Wash., called for the tech giant to immediately cut its business ties with Israel.

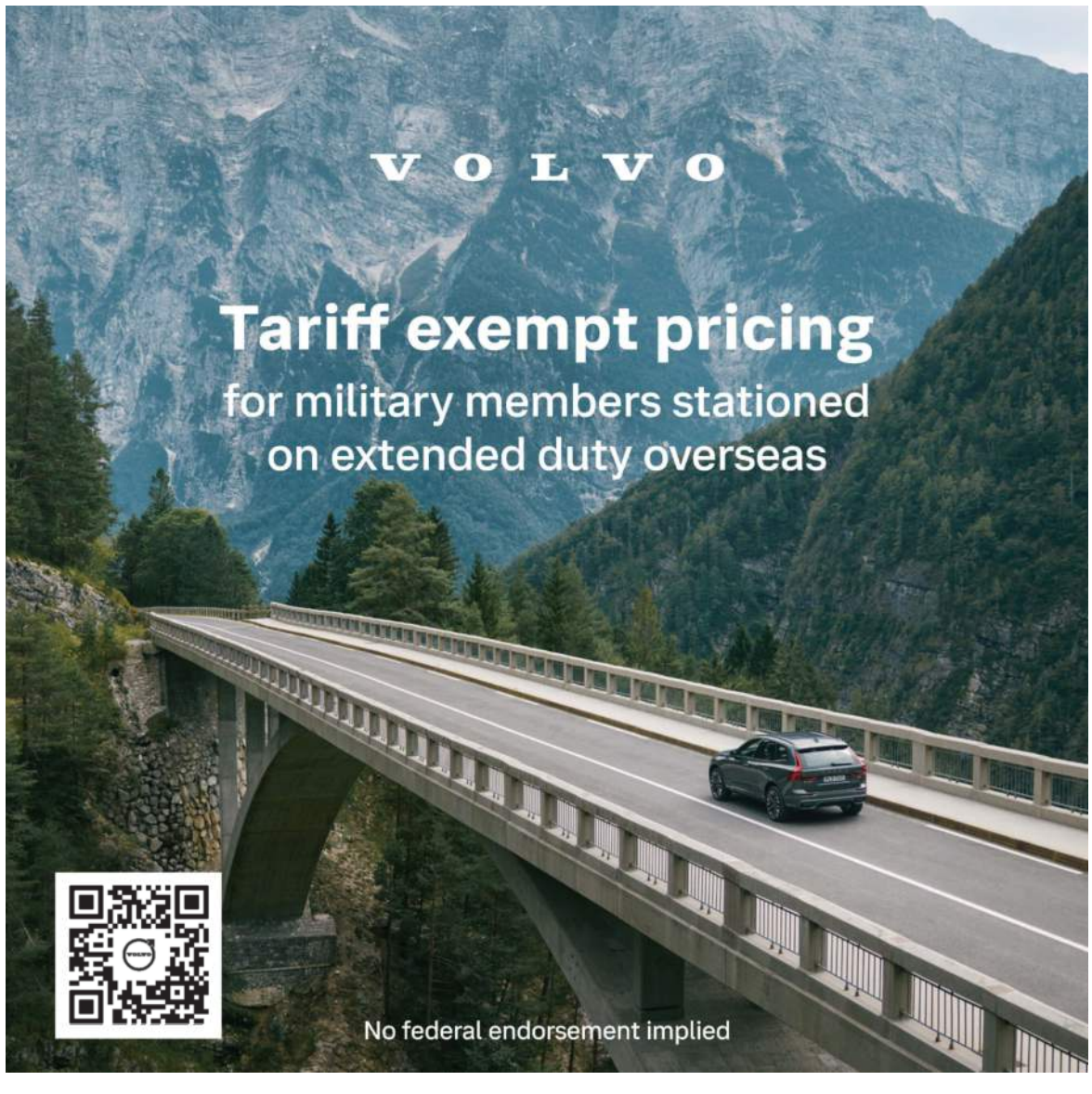
But unlike Tuesday, when about 35 protesters occupying a plaza between office buildings left after Microsoft asked them to leave, the protesters on Wednesday "resisted and became aggressive" after the company told police they were trespassing, according to the Redmond Police Department.

The protesters also splattered red paint resembling the color of blood over a landmark sign that bears the company logo and spells Microsoft in big gray letters.

"We said, 'Please leave or you will be arrested,' and they chose not to leave so they were detained," said police spokesperson Jill Green.

Microsoft late last week said it was tapping a law firm to investigate allegations reported by British newspaper The Guardian that the Israeli Defense Forces used Microsoft's Azure cloud computing platform to store phone call data obtained through the mass surveillance of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

"Microsoft's standard terms of service prohibit this type of usage," the company said Friday, adding that the report raises "precise allegations that merit a full and urgent review."



WORLD

Ukranian suspect in Nord Stream pipeline blasts arrested in Italy

Associated Press

BERLIN — A Ukrainian citizen man suspected to be one of the coordinators of the undersea explosions in 2022 that damaged the Nord Stream gas pipelines between Russia and Germany has been arrested, German prosecutors said Thursday.

The suspect, identified only as Serhii K. in line with German privacy rules, was arrested overnight by officers from a police station in Misano Adriatrico, near the Italian city of Rimini, federal prosecutors said.

Explosions on Sept. 26, 2022, damaged the pipelines, which were built to carry Russian natural gas to Germany under the Baltic Sea. The damage added to tensions over the war in Ukraine as European countries moved to wean themselves off Russian energy sources, following the Kremlin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Investigators have been largely tightlipped on their investigation, but said two years ago they found traces of undersea explosives in samples taken from a yacht that was searched as part of the probe.

In a statement Thursday, prosecutors said Serhii K. was one of a group of people who placed explosives on the pipelines and is believed to have been one of the coordinators. They said he is suspected of causing explosions, anti-constitutional sabotage and the destruction of structures. He was arrested on a European arrest warrant that was issued on Monday.

The suspect and others used a yacht that set off from the German port of Rostock, which had been hired from a German company using forged IDs and with the help of intermediaries, prosecutors said.

They didn't give any information on the other people aboard the yacht or say anything about who else might have been involved in coordinating the suspected sabotage, or about a possible motive.

German Justice Minister Stefanie Hubig praised what she called "a very impressive investigative success." She said in a statement that the explosions must be cleared up, "so it is good that we are making progress."

The explosions ruptured the Nord Stream 1 pipeline, which was Russia's main natural gas supply route to Germany until Moscow cut off supplies at the end of August 2022.

They also damaged the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which never entered service because Germany suspended its certification process shortly before Russia invaded Ukraine in February of that year.

Uganda agrees to take deported migrants provided they don't have criminal records

Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda — Uganda has agreed to a deal with the United States to take deported migrants on condition that the deportees should not have criminal records and not be unaccompanied minors, officials said Thursday.

The Ugandan foreign affairs ministry in a statement said the "two parties are working out the detailed modalities on how the agreement shall be implemented."

Uganda also expressed a preference that those brought into the country should be of African nationalities.

It was not clear if the agreement had been signed but the ministry statement said it had been "concluded."

International Relations Minister Henry Okello Oryem told The Associated Press that while Uganda is known globally for its benevolent refugee policy, there are limits.

And he questioned why the country would take people rejected by their own countries.

"We are talking about cartels: people who are unwanted in their own countries. How can we integrate them into local communities in Uganda?" he asked.



MASOUD NAZARI MEHRABI, IRANIAN ARMY/AP

A missile is fired from a vessel during an Iranian navy drill in the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean.

Iran launches first military drill since war with Israel

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran launched its first military exercise since the end of its 12-day war with Israel, state television reported Thursday, with navy vessels launching missiles at targets at sea in the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean.

While such drills are routine in the Islamic Republic, the "Sustainable Power 1404" exercise comes as authorities in Iran are trying to project strength in the wake of a war that saw Israel destroy air defense systems and bomb are variety of sites.

The state TV report said the frigate IRIS Sabalan and a smaller vessel, the IRIS Ganaveh, launched Nasir and Qadir cruise missiles at targets in the sea, striking them. Coastal batteries also opened fire as part of the exercise.

Iran's navy, estimated to have some 18,000 personnel, apparently avoided any major attack during the June war.

The navy, based out of the port city of Bandar Abbas, patrols the Gulf of Oman, the Indian Ocean and the Caspian Sea, and broadly leaves the Persian Gulf and its narrow mouth, the Strait of Hormuz, to Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

The Guard's naval forces are known for seizures of Western vessels during the breakdown of Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, as well as closely shadowing passing U.S. Navy vessels coming into the region.

Since the end of the war, Iran has increasingly insisted that it is ready to counter any future Israeli attack.

Defense Minister Brig. Gen. Aziz Nasirzadeh said that the country has equipped its forces with new missile, in remarks reported Wednesday by the state-run IRNA news agency.

STARS AND STRIPES
SERVICE DIRECTORY
The Daily Guide to Navigating The Military Business Market

Transportation 944

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WEEKEND



Qualley shines as a private eye

Movies, Pages 16-18

Baring her soul

Icelandic Chinese artist Laufey explores a wide range of styles and emotions on her third album, 'A Matter of Time'

Music, Pages 28-29

REBECCA CABAGE, INVISION/AP

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Color me curious

Why are smartphone manufacturers trotting out an array of ever-changing hues and eye-catching designs?

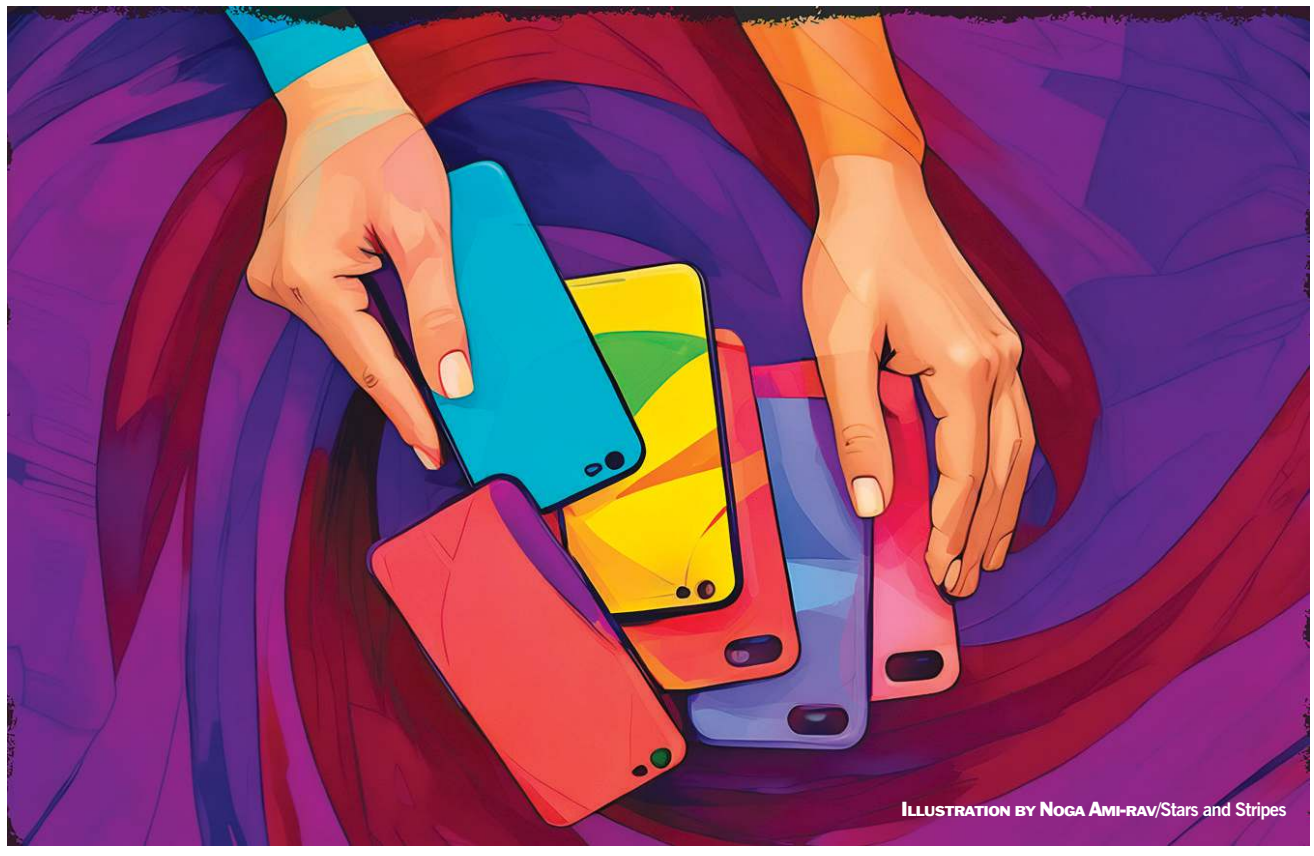


ILLUSTRATION BY NOGA AMI-RAV/Stars and Stripes

BY SHIRA OVIDE
The Washington Post

There are two kinds of people in the world

There are people who debate whether to get the Titanium Jadegreen or Titanium Silverblue Samsung phone or who trade hot rumors of an orange iPhone coming soon.

And there are those of us who are lazily uninterested in the color of our smartphones. I had to pop my phone out of its case to remind myself that it's black — sorry, Stormy Black, as the manufacturer dubbed it.

For years, your color choices in computing were beige or beige — as in, the boring boxy beige personal computer. Now the same industry is trotting out smartphones in an unimaginable array of ever-changing colors and other eye-catching design elements.

Motorola on Aug. 5 announced a Razr smartphone "adorned with crystals by Swarovski." Samsung brags that almost half of the earliest buyers of a $2,000 smartphone opted for the Blue Shadow color. When Apple came out with a yellow iPhone in 2023, it was a hot search term on Google and hundreds of news articles mentioned it.

With smartphone store shelves looking like Willy Wonka's fever dreams, it raises a question: Are these dazzling colors motivated by an industry desperate to sell you stuff — or by your desire, even if you can't admit it, for a pop of personality in your smartphone?

What's the most popular color?

I assumed black would be the runaway winner, but I didn't find much hard evidence.

The research firm IDC, which tracks minutiae about smartphone sales, said it didn't have formal data about the most commonly purchased colors. Smartphone manufacturers wouldn't cough up sales numbers by color.

Nabila Popal, an IDC senior research director, did venture to say that black — sorry, Black Titanium — was a favorite color for iPhone 16 Pro models. Popal thinks that buyers assume black is broadly accepted and their device will be easy to resell later.

For phone protective cases, the pollster YouGov found last year that black crushed all other color contenders.

YouGov says it doesn't have polling on the popularity of colors for smartphone devices, but available data does suggest that we don't care much about their color.

When Americans are asked about important features in picking a smartphone, by far the most common response is battery life, cited by three-quarters of respondents, according to YouGov. Only about 23% of people cite "device design/appearance" as an important feature.

If it's not important to most of us, why are manufacturers pitching you vegan leather finishes, Pantone-inspired Mocha Mousse hues, or iPhone colors that pop up midyear to juice sales?

It could be that mired in a yearslong sales slump, smartphone companies are trying to excite you with new colors.

Most smartphone companies didn't answer my questions about this. But a spokesman for Google Pixel phones said the company's research shows that "offering unique and thoughtful color choices is a significant factor for many customers." A "significant portion" of Pixel phone customers gravitate to a colorful device over a "classic, neutral" tone, he said.

Are we lying to ourselves?

It might be that we're liars, and we care more about the color and style of our smartphones than we're willing to tell pollsters such as YouGov or admit to ourselves.

I say that I don't care about smartphone colors, but I also remember carefully selecting a green iPhone a few years ago.

Marcie Cooperman, a color theory specialist at the New School's Parsons School of Design, said that a phone color serves a similar purpose to the color you pick for your bedroom walls or your shirt.

"We like some colors, love others and hate some more," she said. "We use some colors to express who we are."

Cooperman knows that others may be oblivious to color and design. "I just wouldn't marry one of those people (smiley face)," she said by email.

Jane Boddy, creative director of the Pantone Color Institute, described the feelings spurred by various phone colors. Soft greens and lilacs may feel calming. Bold berry colors express joy and energy. Earthy tones and matte metal finishes can make devices feel grounded and rooted in emotion, she said.

You can turn up your nose at people who care about this stuff, but technology history shows the power of color in our imaginations and device sales.

Starting in the late 1990s, Apple helped revive the company's fortunes with semitranslucent iMac computers in peppy colors.

Apple also made its white iPod headphones an iconic visual feature and status symbol, and later did the same with its bold iPod colors.

On the flip side of cool, Microsoft's Zune portable music player, released in 2006, seemed doomed when it came in a dark brown color that people compared to dog doo.

After my conversations, I was convinced that even people like me who consider smartphones to be utilitarian tools really do have color preferences. If we're going to stare at this dumb slab of circuits all day, it doesn't hurt to pick a color we like.

But Michael Ernst, a brand and product designer who proudly owns a black smartphone, tossed in the wrinkle of protective phone cases and phone wallet covers. (About 85% of us own a smartphone with a case, YouGov told my colleague Andrew Van Dam.)

Those accessories often hide the expressive smartphone color that you might have thought so hard about. Ernst said that makes smartphone colors like the choice of underwear hues.

"While personal to us, our rose gold skivvies get covered up," he said. "Dropping new, vibrant colors may be just a marketing ploy."



OXS/TNS

The OXS S5 Soundbar has a built-in subwoofer and Dolby Atmos 3.1.2 technology.

OXS S5 gives you theater-quality sound at home

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

For anyone who is not familiar with a soundbar, you need to be. There is no comparison between the sound a TV emits from its built-in speakers and how the same TV sounds with the OXS S5 - Dolby Atmos 3.1.2ch TV Soundbar ($249.99, but there is a $50 off coupon). The OXS S5 can make or break the enjoyment of a media room or even a single-TV setup.

The OXS S5 is filled with features, including a built-in subwoofer that enhances the overall audio experience by adding depth — it can bring movie theater sound to your home. Soundbars fall into the category of "you don't need them, until you try one." Then you are hooked.

There are a variety of user-friendly connection options including Bluetooth and HDMI eARC. The connection method determines how it can be mounted or placed in an entertainment center.

The all-in-one AC-powered OXS S5 has a 230 watt peak output. There are six drivers integrated into the bar. The Dolby Atmos 3.1.2. technology delivers clear and crisp audio at any volume.

I had the S5 set up and running right out of the box with the default settings. It can be customized for your personal preferences with equalizer mode choices of standard, movie, music, night and voice. You can also adjust the treble and bass.

Online: oxsaudio.com/products/oxs-s5-dolby-atmos-3-1-2ch-tv-soundbar

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

REVIEW



MindsEye, directed by ousted Grand Theft Auto producer Leslie Benzies, is littered with visual glitches like characters in the midst of building themselves during camera cuts.

IO Interactive

MindsEye the worst game of the year

Benzies' Build a Rocket Boy debut the latest disasterpiece in an expanded graveyard of failed, trend-chasing projects

BY GENE PARK
The Washington Post

MindsEye is more than an embarrassment of the video games medium; it is actively hostile toward the audience's desire for entertainment. It shames you for playing it, but the onus of guilt belongs to all involved with it. It deserves every bit of its scornful reputation as not just the worst game of 2025 but among the worst games in history.

Released in June, MindsEye is the debut game by Build a Rocket Boy, a studio founded by Leslie Benzies, the former Rockstar executive who helped produce the landmark Grand Theft Auto series and who was unceremoniously ousted from the company. Embarrassing exit notwithstanding, it's no surprise that someone with Benzies' curriculum vitae was able to secure funding from investors and good faith from IO Interactive for the Danish video game firm's first published game. Whatever his contributions were to one of the most profitable entertainment brands in history, the rank awfulness of his directorial debut calls into question his entire work history.

Benzies clearly has ownership over the project, and made himself the face of its marketing. There's a 54-second YouTube video on the MindsEye channel titled "Quality Assurance with Leslie Benzies." Spend one hour with this game and you'll wonder whether those 54 seconds were the entire quality assurance process. Prominent and frequent visual glitches, including melted faces of characters reconstructing during camera cuts, fuel this nightmarish game that is barely holding together.

MindsEye was originally meant as a branch of a larger concept called Everywhere, envisioned as a platform like Roblox or Fortnite for user-generated games but with hyperreal visuals and gritty environments instead of cartoony aesthetics. In this case, MindsEye is the terrible consequence of trend-chasing, unimaginative video game executives who wrongly believe the formula for success means "Fortnite, but with a twist." It's the latest disasterpiece in an expanded graveyard of failed projects, like last year's ill-fated launch of Sony PlayStation's Concord, an attempt at "live service" online gaming that so few bought and played, the company made the unprecedented move of recalling it after only two weeks in retail.

Everywhere may yet launch, but in Benzies' scramble to produce anything in the years since his exit as Grand Theft Auto producer, MindsEye was cobbled together using its tools — which are the same ones as those used by Fortnite creator Epic Games. So what's even the point? Why not just use Fortnite? MindsEye provides no answers. But it's important to highlight its failure as a cautionary tale of unchecked executive ego and imprudent, shortsighted investment.

The studio is now promising patches to fix the game for the handful still playing it, an unhealthy habit in the digital media era of releasing terrible products for hype only to apologize later. More than Concord, this game deserves no shelf life. Even that tragic game displayed competence lacking in MindsEye.

Our hero, Jacob Diaz, a military veteran who lost his memories during service thanks to the MindsEye implant installed in his brain, is voiced by Alex Hernandez. His performance is fine enough for its weak script, and he is one of the few involved in this project whose integrity is not in question thanks to his taking the rare step of criticizing his employer for releasing such a broken project. Diaz moves to the fictional Las Vegas-like city Redrock to work for the Elon Musk-like billionaire whose company created Neural ... I mean, MindsEye.

The game looks similar to a Grand Theft Auto game, complete with open-world city environments, gunplay and fast cars. But it's simply a nonstop narrative across 30 missions that barely understands the fundamentals of video game design. The game's antagonism of the player is Kafkaesque. I don't mean this in a thematic sense; rather it feels like enduring the psychological torments placed on Josef K., the protagonist of Franz Kafka's 1925 book "The Trial."

In MindsEye, if you walk too slow, you fail. If you drive too fast, you fail. If you walk a few feet away from the goal, game over. And the most egregious example: Mission success can also mean failure. The game offers little to no information on what constitutes a goal, and it can barely mark the difference between player success or failure. Everything you do is wrong in a game where everything it does is wrong.

Sometimes the game will fail you for failing to make time during a mission with no timer. When a timer exists and counts down to zero, the game will start counting in negative time. It's as if the game is going out of its way to communicate to you just how much of your short life it has wasted.

You're assigned to bring a truck to a building, and when this boring task is fulfilled, you're greeted with a failure screen. It is a truly maddening and defective experience not seen even in history's first video games, built in the 1970s. Playing MindsEye is like driving a sports car in 2025 that handles worse than a Flintmobile.

A game as primitive as the first Super Mario Bros. in 1985 understood the principles of thoughtful placement of enemies and items. Place a mushroom enemy here to encourage the player to jump over it, or place a turtle there to discourage moving too fast through a level.

MindsEye offers no evidence that its developers understand this fundamental design principle, haphazardly placing soldiers and evil robots all over its admittedly nice-looking reconstruction of Las Vegas. These enemies have broken intelligence, barely acknowledging the player's existence as they run around shooting guns all over creation like headless chickens.

Besides the well-designed city, I can praise the game's driving controls. While the physics of the cars are floaty, handling turns and weaving through traffic at high speeds both work well. Of course, the game destroys any potential of fun by limiting your car options to your sports car that breaks apart like a wet napkin and your employer's tiny, goofy security cars. There's a terrible stealth sequence that, of course, creates instant failure states due to nonexistent stealth mechanics. Boring fetch-and-kill missions begin and end with driving back and forth across the city as the game plays no music, only jabbering from the cast.

At 15 hours, MindsEye is the longest short game I've ever played. You are rewarded with the worst cliff-hanger ending in games — even ChatGPT would have served this story better — and a mystifying free-roam mode in which you explore the vacant city as a new character in a tiny white car that resembles a child's Little Tikes Cozy Coupe. You are not able to switch characters, change his clothes or car, or do anything. You find there is no other interaction in the city. Enemies barely acknowledge your existence.

So why should anyone acknowledge the existence of MindsEye? Far from its asking price of $60, it's not even worth being paid to play it. From its developers to its investors and publisher down to the poor gamers suckered into buying it, MindsEye is a grand theft of everyone's time and money.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

REVIEW

Qualley shines in fun neo-noir

By Lindsey Bahr
Associated Press

The skies are blue, the sun unrelenting and the body count escalating in the Bakersfield, Calif., of "Honey Don't!," where Margaret Qualley's private investigator tries to get a handle on the nefarious goings-on in her city with a small-town feel.

It's the second film in Ethan Coen and Tricia Cooke's so-called "lesbian B-movie trilogy," and while this shaggy caper might not add up to anything significant — perhaps part of the "B-movie" point — it is fun and immensely watchable. That's thanks in large part to Qualley's turn as the smoothly confident Honey O'Donahue, kind of a Philip Marlowe, or maybe Veronica Mars, in cherry-red lipstick, high heels and silks (inspired choices for the sweltering setting by costume designer Peggy Schnitzer).

Honey is meant to be strikingly "other" in this very downtrodden Bakersfield of eccentrics, dropouts and lost souls, where missing teeth seem to be more prevalent than pedicures. It's a carnival of very memorable, very Coen-esque misfits, like a grumpy bartender played by Don Swayze and Charlie Day's clueless police officer Marty Metakawitch. Marty is not the only man in town who has trouble accepting that Honey will never be interested in him. You could play a drinking game with how many times she has to tell hapless men, "I like girls."

Not only is queer literacy low, but many in town seem to have come under the influence of a church leader played by Chris Evans, the Rev. Drew Devlin, whose high-wattage smile and proclivity for flirting have made him a local celebrity. Evans, who seems to be having fun in a weirder role, plays the Rev. Drew as a charismatic creep, an ego-driven and possibly sex-addicted influencer who is also peddling drugs and arranging hits around town. He too has a boss, or bosses, known only as "the French," which is amusingly underexplained. And he's often completely, or nearly, naked and involved in some cringey, experimental acts with his naive followers.

Not unlike the new "The Naked Gun," this saga begins with a suspicious vehicular death. The deceased was an almost-client of Honey's, which sets her off poking around and looking for answers. Most of her cases are of the cheating spouse type, and this is just more interesting. Meanwhile, others start dropping dead too. Some of these deaths feel spiritually, comedically similar to the Mark Pellegrino sequence in "Mullholland Drive" (not the only Lynchian nod). And all signs are pointing back to the church, though Honey gets a bit distracted with a new fling in Aubrey Plaza's lustful cop MG Falcone and some family drama with her wayward niece Corinne (Talia Ryder).

"Honey Don't!" might play more like a pilot episode of a television series than a contained film, but it is a step up from Coen and Cooke's previous effort, "Drive Away Dolls," which felt constructed of comedic parts whose shelf life expired 20 years ago. This script, written by Coen and Cooke, is probably just as vintage, technically speaking, but it feels more timeless. With a stable of memorable side characters, including Josh Pafchek as the reverend's assistant and Jacnier as a skittish new drug dealer named Hector, "Honey Don't!" is gory, unapologetically sexual, quippy and dark. It also clocks in at under 90 minutes — they knew just when to get out.

As Ethan Coen finds his groove as a solo director, "Honey Don't!" might not be "The Big Lebowski" or "Raising Arizona," but it is a swing in the right direction. At this rate, if we get the pleasure of seeing a third film, it might just be a classic.

"Honey Don't!" is rated R for some strong violence, language, graphic nudity and strong sexual content. Running time: 88 minutes. Now playing at select on-base theaters



FOCUS FEATURES/AP

Margaret Qualley stars as smoothly confident private investigator Honey O'Donahue in "Honey Don't!," the second film in Ethan Coen and Tricia Cooke's so-called "lesbian B-movie trilogy."

Explore Margaret Qualley's best roles on her way to the A-list

By Katie Walsh
Tribune News Service

In "Honey Don't!," in theaters this weekend, Margaret Qualley makes her second star turn in the Ethan Coen/Tricia Cooke "lesbian B-movie trilogy," following last year's "Drive-Away Dolls," and proves she makes a pretty good private eye in the vein of Philip Marlowe, following the lineage that goes from Humphrey Bogart to Elliott Gould.

Qualley has had a banner couple of years, especially with last year's body-horror phenomenon, "The Substance," for which she earned a Golden Globe nomination for her performance as Sue, the younger, hotter version that crawls out of Elisabeth Sparkle's back and makes her life hell. "The Substance," directed by Coralie Fargeat and co-starring Demi Moore in a ferocious turn as an aging actress, is streaming on Mubi or available for rent.



FOCUS FEATURES/AP

Margaret Qualley, left, played a lesbian lothario in last year's "Drive-Away Dolls." Also shown: Geraldine Viswanathan.

The film cemented Qualley's A-list status, though she's been putting in the work for years. The daughter (and doppelgänger) of actress Andie MacDowell, Qualley has always sought out interesting directors and challenging roles, and the risk-taking has paid off. Here are a few of her best performances and some underrated gems to get to know her career better.

■ There's her first Cooke/Coen collab, "Drive-Away Dolls" (2024), sapphic crime comedy in which Qualley demonstrates her best Southern twang as a lesbian lothario who ends up with a rental car that has a high-value package in the trunk, becoming inadvertently involved in a senatorial sex scandal. Stream it on Peacock or rent.

■ In 2023, she joined the Yorgos Lanthimos/Emma Stone company of stars with his Oscar-winning fractured fairy-tale "Poor Things," and though her role was small, it translated into a larger role in the follow-up "Kinds of Kindness," a strange triptych about identity, sex, bodies and meat. Stream "Kinds of Kindness" on Hulu or rent "Poor Things" on all digital platforms.

■ In another daring choice, Qualley starred as a particular kind of dominatrix in 2022's "Sanctuary," opposite Christopher Abbott as her client. Written by Micah Bloomberg and directed by Zachary Wigon, this stylish exploration of intimate power dynamics is available on Hulu or for rent.

■ Qualley earned two Emmy nominations, one for her turn in the Netflix series "Maid" (2021) with her mother MacDowell playing her mom, and for the Broadway biopic series "Fosse/Verdon" (2019) starring Sam Rockwell as Bob Fosse and Michelle Williams as dancer Gwen Verdon. Qualley co-starred as dancer Ann Reinking who was involved with Fosse and starred in his autobiographical film "All That Jazz." Stream "Fosse/Verdon" on Hulu.

■ In 2019, she also delivered a memorable turn in Quentin Tarantino's "Once Upon a Time… In Hollywood," as a comely young Manson girl who enchants Brad Pitt's stuntman Cliff Booth and brings him to Spahn Ranch. Rent it on all digital platforms.

■ And in 2018 and 2017, she delivered two performances in little-seen indies that made her an actor to watch. Tim Sutton's gritty "Donnybrook" (2018) stars Jamie Bell as Earl, a fighter preparing for an underground bare-knuckle boxing match, with Qualley turning in a raw performance as Delia, the sister of Earl's meth-dealing nemesis (Frank Grillo). In a far different film, Maggie Betts' "Novitiate" (2017), she plays a novice nun learning to cope with the strict structure of life in the convent. Stream "Donnybrook" on Kanopy or rent it elsewhere, and rent "Novitiate" on all streaming platforms.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Colorful mess

Sydney Sweeney-led 'Americana' an oddball 'Fargo' wannabe with inconsistent rhythms

BY TY BURR
The Washington Post

The crowded western crime noir "Americana" has had a curious journey to your local theater.

Filmed in early 2022 and premiered at the SXSW festival in 2023, it's getting a theatrical release on the heels of a headline-grabbing controversy surrounding one of its actors, Sydney Sweeney, and a jeans ad that some accuse of being white supremacist propaganda, which others say is an overreaction (which still others say is an overreaction to the reaction). Accordingly, Sweeney, who has made a name for herself on TV's "White Lotus" and "Euphoria," is front and center in the movie's publicity materials, even if she's one of many characters here and not the most important one. And even if, it has to be said, she gives the weakest performance in the movie.

Written and directed by Tony Tost, a successful TV writer-producer ("Poker Face," "Damnation") making his big-screen debut, "Americana" is a sun-parched "Fargo" wannabe with a side helping of Tarantino. The plot features a motley assortment of colorful characters chasing after a valuable Native American artifact, a high body count and a screenplay that wrings every bit of wryness from the dialogue until it's just about wrung out.

But "Americana" also makes time to give the sly character actor Paul Walter Hauser ("Richard Jewell," "The Naked Gun") something close to a lead role, and for that we must be thankful. Hauser plays Lefty Ledbetter — the joke is that he's right-handed — a woebegone cowpoke with a tendency to propose to women on the third date. Sweeney plays Penny Jo, a stuttering diner waitress in their small South Dakota town who gets wind of a deal going down and persuades Lefty to join with her in getting a piece of the action.

The deal involves a priceless Native American "ghost shirt," and the web of extra-colorful folks trying to cash in on it includes a local bigwig named Roy Lee Dean (Simon Rex of "Red Rocket"), a nasty hired killer named Dillon (Eric Dane) and his slightly more ethical accomplice (Joe Adler), the hired killer's girlfriend Mandy (pop singer Halsey), Mandy's young son, Calvin (Gavin Maddox Bergman) — the kid insists he's the reincarnation of Sitting Bull, and maybe he is — and a pair of loose-limbed Native American activists, Ghost Eye (Zahn McClarnon) and Hank (Derek Hinkey).

There are double-crosses and flashbacks, digressive "Pulp Fiction"-style monologues and a casual attitude toward people getting killed that feels more like a pose than a commitment. On the plus side, the audience is reminded of how lethal a bow and arrow can be, and "Americana" picks up in the home stretch, as all the characters converge on a desert compound run by a survivalist patriarch (Christopher Kriesa) and his tradwives.

By then, Halsey's Mandy has emerged as the first of the cast's equals, and she gives good gumption in a satisfyingly violent settling of scores.

The performances in general are professional, which has the effect of making Sweeney look like the worst of equals. She never makes Penny Jo's stammer believable as more than an actorly affectation — it's not clear why the character has a stutter in the first place — and her limp line-readings make it difficult to accept that this hash-slinging sweetie pie would suddenly decide to go criminal.

"Deep thinking's overrated," says one character in "Americana," and that's true enough when it comes to crime movies and westerns. On a scene-by-scene basis, the film's entertaining enough (it's certainly nicely shot by Nigel Bluck), but the rhythms are consistently off. Tost can't match the oddball inspiration of his influences, and the results simply feel forced.

"Americana" is rated R for violence, language and some sexual references. Running time: 107 minutes. Now playing at select on-base theaters.



Lionsgate

Sydney Sweeney plays a stuttering diner waitress who becomes a criminal in "Americana."

Chinese animated film 'Ne Zha II' deserves its accolades

BY QINA LIU
The Seattle Times

Move over, Superman: A new superhero movie will be overtaking U.S. box offices this weekend.

"Ne Zha II" is already the highest-grossing animated film of all time since its Lunar New Year release in China, earning more than $2 billion globally; the Chinese film, releasing in U.S. theaters this week with a new English dub, scored the highest Rotten Tomatoes audience rating for an animated film in the past decade. Not bad for a "raccoon-eyed," "pug-nosed" cartoon of a misfit boy, based on ancient Chinese mythology and the 16th-century novel "Investiture of the Gods."

Written and directed by Jiaozi, the plot-heavy sequel follows the events of the 2019 film "Ne Zha," which depicts the trickster hero's origin story. Ne Zha (voiced by Crystal Lee in the new English dub) is the third son of Chentang Pass' monster-hunting military generals: Li Jing (Vincent Rodriguez III) and Lady Yin (Michelle Yeoh). His parents earned the favor of the gods and Ne Zha's body was supposed to be infused with the godly and good powers of a Spirit Pearl; however, through a sinister mishap and power struggle, Ne Zha's human body was born with demonic attributes and was cursed to be struck by lightning and to die after three years. Ao Bing (Aleks Le), a dragon prince who becomes Ne Zha's only friend, inherited attributes of the Spirit Pearl. "Ne Zha," which is streaming on Peacock and YouTube TV and worth watching before its sequel, concludes with Ne Zha defying his fate and prophecy: Ne Zha doesn't die on his third birthday. Ne Zha and Ao Bing are struck by lightning, but their spirits live on even though their physical bodies dissolve.



A24/AP

Lady Yin, left, and Ne Zha in "Ne Zha 2."

As "Ne Zha II" begins, the immortal Taiyi (Rick Zieff), assigned by the gods to be Ne Zha's shifu (the Chinese word for teacher or master), attempts to restore Ne Zha and Ao Bing's spirits into physical forms again. But an ill-timed interruption means the two have to temporarily share a body as Ne Zha goes on a quest to become an immortal in order to save his hometown and best friend.

Ne Zha's epic story rivals the Marvel franchise in scale and spectacle (be sure to stay after the credits), spanning heaven, earth and sea. Tricolored dragon fire. Slow-motion martial arts fights. An underwater prison break. A jaguar cub with large bulbous kitten eyes. Breathtaking photorealistic animation of crashing waves and waterfalls underneath sprawling pagodas and palaces and empires. The animation is stunning and worth watching on IMAX. Over the span of two hours and 23 minutes that fly by, "Ne Zha II" touches upon war, sacrifice, genocide, prejudice, revenge, lots of light shows and tests: Can you stomach watching someone eat boogers and try to consume regurgitated vomit? Or questions like, do immortals have to pee? (We never find out.) There are a few cannibalism and fart jokes, too.

If you can stomach the potty humor, you're rewarded with "Ne Zha II's" emotional core: moving stories about family. The father who would go to war and storm heaven itself in order to save his son. The mother who will sacrifice her body and life so she can give her son a hug. The dad who will trade his life to undo a curse so his son has more than three years to live. The mom who won't let her son leave on a hero's journey without packing him a bag of snacks for the road.

"Ne Zha II" is a film that will heal your inner child. It's a film that shows you a parent's unconditional love even if yours don't say the words often enough, and that if you can't be who you are, you can change your world. "Ne Zha II" deserves all the attention and accolades: It's an empowering film that makes you believe that you, too, can change your fate.

"Ne Zha II" is unrated. Running time: 143 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

What happens when a fan gets too close?



MATT LICARI, INVISION/AP

From left, director Alex Russell and stars Archie Madekewe and Théodore Pellerin pose for a portrait to promote "Lurker" on Aug. 18 in New York.

'Beef' co-executive producer Alex Russell's directorial debut 'Lurker' explores the dark side of celebrity

BY LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

Fandom is a funny thing in the age of social media. Spend enough time scrolling and it's easy to feel like you really know a celebrity, and all their friends. The new film "Lurker," a Sundance breakout now in stateside theaters, explores the question of what might happen if a certain type of fan got a foot in the door, and what they might do to stay there.

Archie Madekwe's Oliver hardly knows what's coming when he walks into a trendy Los Angeles clothing shop. A rising music star, Oliver seems already accustomed to a certain amount of attention wherever he goes, with asks for selfies and autographs just part of the deal. So of course he's taken aback when one of the employees, Théodore Pellerin's Matthew, doesn't seem to know or care who he is. Oliver doesn't see that it's an act and is soon asking this stranger to come around and hang with his entourage.

"At the beginning Matthew thinks Oliver has this god-given place of celebrity and success," Pellerin said. "He quickly understands that he will have to give things to serve a certain purpose in Oliver's world and his ego. But also that they're not dissimilar. They're both playing by a certain rule book that is written by Oliver. If the power becomes Matthew's, he can also write the rules."

A hot script and a first-time filmmaker

The film is the directorial debut of Alex Russell, whose own star is rising. He wrote "Forks," widely considered one of the best episodes of "The Bear," and won an Emmy for co-executive producing the Netflix series "Beef." His script for "Lurker," which he wrote sort of as a challenge for himself during COVID-19 lockdowns, immediately became a hot commodity. Madekwe remembers being bummed when he didn't hear back after he put himself on tape to play the hanger-on.

A few years later, Madekwe's agent called and said Russell wanted to meet him. Not for Matthew, but for Oliver.

"I had to completely rethink the film and the structure and the what it was about," Madekwe said. "But it was most daunting to imagine myself needing to go and meet Alex and convince him that I could play somebody like this cool character."

He needn't have been so worried. Unbeknownst to Madekwe, Russell had been doing some stealth behind-the-scenes work. After someone recommended his name, Russell saw Madekwe in a coffee shop one day and just watched him for 20 minutes. His conclusion: This is Oliver.

A charmed production of young creatives

Russell was cognizant of the limitations he was faced with as a first-time director making an independent film, where things like casting and hiring are often rushed.

"My goal was to get what I felt like were underrated actors," Russell said. "People who could come in and really hit it out of the park. Then people would look at this movie and be like wow, they really took a step up here. That's kind of where you can punch above your weight if you're making your first movie and don't have a huge budget."

> **"It's an incredibly important film for now. The relationship that we have with people that we don't know? I think that conversation is really interesting and exciting."**
>
> **Archie Madekwe**
> Oliver in "Lurker"

It wasn't just his leads either, but the full ensemble including Sunny Suljic, Havana Rose Liu, Zack Fox and Daniel Zolghadri — faces you might recognize, but names you might not yet know. Putting it together was hard work, with strict limits on budget and time, but Russell said the experience of "Lurker" was charmed nonetheless.

"It's only because I got so lucky with decisions I made early on with casting and hiring," he said. "So much of it is like I'm just a kid with a screenplay and everyone else has to be really good at their job."

When it came to directing the actors, he had a simple litmus test: Do I believe it?

"You're watching the monitor and, like, do I buy that? Because everyone else is going to have to," he said. "I just think my cast was very good. I didn't have to force any performance."

Often times, Russell's friends in the music world would come around set, giving the off-camera times a bit of a meta quality.

"It didn't feel a little like the movie sometimes, like just a group of young creatives," Pellerin said. "There was a real LA film and music scene that was very present. That was helpful for me — it was like the fun aspect of the movie, not the hardcore humiliation."

Many involved describe the process as uniquely collaborative. Madekwe also stepped up as a producer, which wasn't just a vanity title. He was actually involved in many major creative decisions, including recommending Suljic, who he'd just worked with on a music video, and finding locations and some of the music for the film, including a song called "Love and Obsession," written by Rex Orange County.

An obsessive thriller for the parasocial age

"It's an incredibly important film for now," Madekwe said. "The relationship that we have with people that we don't know? I think that conversation is really interesting and exciting. But most importantly, I think it's really exciting to be at the beginning of Alex Russell's career and to invest into a filmmaker that I think is gonna be making incredible films for a very long time."

The film shares some DNA with what Russell calls "obsessive thrillers" like "Whiplash" and "Black Swan." In "Lurker," he wondered "what if the drumming was social climbing."

The shifting power dynamics between Matthew and Oliver aren't just relevant to celebrities and hangers-on. It could apply to any group of friends.

As Russell explained: "You get a text from your new shiny friend and a text from your old friend: Who do you text back first?"

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Emigration museums remember goodbyes

Every year, millions of Americans visit Ellis Island, where their ancestors may have arrived from "the old country." But Europe has many excellent "Ellis Islands in reverse" — museums at the places where millions said goodbye to the land of their birth.

Few things are more poignant than a person willing to sacrifice everything in pursuit of a better life. That's the story of many hard-scrabble Europeans heading off to dreamed-of opportunities in far-off America. Others, who faced persecution or even starvation, really had no choice — it was leave or die. Museums in Ireland, Belgium, Germany and Sweden tell some of these compelling stories.

My favorite among them might be Dublin's, called Epic: The Irish Emigration Museum. With so much anxiety surrounding immigration in the U.S. today, I found it thought-provoking to learn how many Americans were just as worried about Irish immigrants 160 years ago.

I had never fully appreciated the Irish diaspora until that visit. The Irish Emigration Museum, as entertaining as it is educational, celebrates how this little island has had an oversized impact on the world (an estimated 70 million people worldwide claim Irish heritage).

Docked nearby is a floating exhibit aboard the Jeanie Johnston Tall Ship, a replica of a real ship that made 16 eight-week transatlantic crossings, safely carrying about 200 per voyage to their new lives after the Great Potato Famine of the 1840s.

The Belgian port city of Antwerp is home to the Red Star Line Museum, another cutting-edge place to learn about the plight of European emigrants. In late-19th-century Europe, the Industrial Revolution and a tremendous population boom led to political instability and economic difficulties. During the great migration between 1873 and 1935, the Red Star shipping line brought some two million emigrants from Antwerp to New York City.



Rick Steves

Antwerp was the exit point for people from all over Europe — especially Germany and areas to its east. Jews fleeing pogroms in Tsarist Russia and later Nazi persecution in Germany — among them Irving Berlin, Golda Meir and Albert Einstein — accounted for at least a quarter of the Red Star Line's passengers taken across the Atlantic. The 10-day steamer journey transported cargo, luxury travelers and "steerage-class" peasants alike.

The Red Star Line Museum fills the hall that processed many who passed through Antwerp on their way to a new life. Displays profile immigrants throughout history— from the first humans who left Africa in 40,000 BC to migrant workers of today.



RICK STEVES/Rick Steves' Europe

In Dublin, the Jeanie Johnston Tall Ship re-creates the harsh conditions on a famine ship, where entire families often shared one 6-foot-square berth.

In Hamburg, the engaging BallinStadt Emigration Museum tells the story of those from Germany and beyond who went first to Hamburg, by train or even on foot, before boarding a ship to cross the ocean. Creative themed exhibits, featuring big, colorful re-creations of living conditions, give a look at the origins of the five million German emigrants who passed through here, the reasons they chose to leave (from poverty to persecution), their experiences on the transatlantic ships, and their challenges forging a new life.

And the House of Emigrants in Växjö, in southern Sweden, is a fascinating stop for anyone with immigrant ancestors. The inspiring "Dream of America" exhibit captures the experiences of the 1.3 million Swedes who sought a better life in the American promised land in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Economic woes (and, much like in Ireland, a potato famine) wracked Sweden from the 1850s to the 1920s. Roughly 20 percent of the men and 15 percent of the women who were born in Sweden during the last half of the 19th century left. Personal letters from emigrants to family back in Sweden give a poignant perspective on what it was like to adapt to a new culture.

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

Playing games at these events not just for those still young

Playtime is a wonderful thing, and it's not just youth who enjoy time spent in fantasy worlds and distant realms. Here are a few upcoming events centered around both digital and analog games, fantasy worlds and other means of escape from the everyday.

Cologne, Germany: Billed as one of world's most important events for the games industry, Gamescom is a both a trade fair and an event at which the general public can discover the latest computer, console and online games. Through Sunday, visitors can look forward to trying out firsthand the latest games put out by some of the biggest names in the industry, discovering the offerings of indie developers, esports tournaments, a cosplay village and more. The Gamescom City Festival, a parallel event running Saturday and Sunday between the Rudolfplatz and the Friesingplatz, brings the spirit of Gamescom to the city streets with a mix of concerts, food trucks and an exhibit of a Formula 1 race car built true to size out of Lego bricks. Gamescom takes place at the Koelnmesse fairgrounds. A single-day ticket on Sunday goes for 30.50 euros; an evening ticket for entry after 4 p.m. on Saturday goes for 12.50 euros. (Note: day tickets for Aug. 31 are sold out.) Online: gamescom.global/en



Karen Bradbury

Schluderns/Sluderno, Italy: The Suedtiroler Ritterspiele, or South Tyrolean Knight Games, transports the land surrounding the Coira Castle several centuries back in time. From Friday to Sunday, this town nestled among the stunning scenery of the Venosta Valley is transformed by the presence of knights, damsels, merchants, fortune tellers, craftspeople and others in splendid costume. Visitors can watch knight's tournaments, birds of prey demos, shop a medieval market or visit the knight's camp. Other program highlights include horse shows, a 1499 battle reenactment and a historical parade scheduled for 11 a.m. Sunday. Single-day entry tickets go for 23 euros for adults, 16 euros for youth ages 7-15 and 9 euros for children ages 3-6; multi-day passes are also available. Online: ritterspiele.it



iStock

Gamescom 2025 will take place in Cologne, Germany, through Sunday.

Brussels, Belgium: The Brussels Games Festival is sure to appeal to fans of board games, from the old classics to brand-new creations. More than 40 publishers and distributors will be on hand to show off their wares, while a marketplace offers deals on used games or the chance to sell one's own games. The BGF runs Aug. 29-31 at The EGG, Rue Barastraat 175, 1070 Brussels. Adult entry costs 6 euros when tickets are purchased in advance or 7 euros at the gate. Online: brusselsgamesfestival.be/en

San Marino: Fans of comics, cosplay and steampunk will flock to this tiny landlocked republic within Italy for three days of escape as the San Marino Comics event returns to the scene. From Aug. 29-31, the old town itself makes a picture-perfect backdrop for concerts and DJ sets, karaoke, cosplay competitions, walking acts, a horror plaza and more. This year's edition, themed "Whisper," examines the world of Grimm's fairy tales. Entry is free. Online: sanmarinocomics.com

Milan, Italy: The Milano Fiere del Fumetto, or Comics and Games Fair, is set to transform the Malpensa fairground into an alternate universe Sept. 13-14. Visitors can shop for comics, trading cards, action figures and fan merchandise, try out the latest video games, play laser tag, enjoy K-pop, cosplay competitions and other forms of entertainment, meet artists and creators or try their land at building with LEGO bricks. Single-day entry tickets go for 12 euros on either day. The Comics and Games Fair comes to Vicenza Nov. 15-16. Online: fieredelfumetto.it

Arcen, Netherlands: Stunning castle gardens set the scene for the autumn edition of the fantasy fair Elfia from Sept. 20-21. Visitors can enjoy concerts and stage shows, shop market stalls, search for like-minded souls in various fandoms or learn new skills at a workshop. While costume parades take place both days, Sunday's event gives those who've created their own original garb the chance to shine. Those wishing to take part in either parade must sign up in advance. Tickets for entry on Saturday cost 51.30 euros for adults and 34.30 euros for ages 3-11; entry on the Sunday is slightly less expensive. Castle Arcen is located at Lingsforterweg 26, 5944 BE. Online: elfia.com/en

Verona, Italy: For more than 20 years, the festival known as Tocatì has been reviving ancient games culture from all corners of our planet. From Sept. 19-21, visitors to the fair city can once again discover traditional games, this time from the Maori of New Zealand, the guests of honor at Tocatì 2025. In addition to trying various games and activities, visitors can enjoy folk music, dancing, concerts or indulging in regional fare. The festival unfolds in Verona's atmospheric old town, and entry is free. Online: tocati.it/en

WEEKEND: TRAVEL



AP photos

The Bayeux tapestry chronicling the Norman conquest of England is currently in Bayeux, Normandy, France. It will go to London's British Museum next year for a limited exhibition.

A new mission for the Bayeux tapestry

Its journey to London for temporary exhibition symbolizes warming relations between U.K. and France after Brexit

By Nicolas Garriga and John Leicester
Associated Press

For centuries, the storytelling masterpiece has been a source of wonder and fascination. In vivid and gruesome detail, the 70-meter (230-foot) embroidered cloth recounts how a fierce duke from France conquered England in 1066, reshaping British and European history.

The Bayeux Tapestry, with its scenes of sword-wielding knights in ferocious combat and King Harold of England's famous death, pierced by an arrow to an eye, has since the 11th century served as a sobering parable of military might, vengeance, betrayal and the complexity of Anglo-French relations, long seeped with blood and rivalry but also affection and cooperation.

Now, the medieval forerunner of today's comic strips, commissioned as propaganda for the Normandy duke William known as "the Conqueror" after he took the English throne from Harold, is being readied for a new narrative mission.

A homecoming for the tapestry

Next year, the fragile artistic and historic treasure will be gingerly transported from its museum in Bayeux, Normandy, to star in a blockbuster exhibition in London's British Museum, from September 2026 to July 2027.

Its first U.K. outing in almost 1,000 years will testify to the warming latest chapter in ties across the English Channel that chilled with the U.K.'s acrimonious departure from the European Union in 2020. The loan was announced in July when French President Emmanuel Macron became the first EU head of state to pay a state visit to the U.K. since Brexit.

Bayeux Museum curator Antoine Verney says the cross-Channel trip will be a homecoming of sorts for the tapestry, because historians widely believe that it was embroidered in England, using woolen threads on linen canvas, and because William's victory at the Battle of Hastings was such a major juncture in English history, seared into the U.K.'s collective consciousness.



A close-up of a scene in the Bayeux tapestry.

"For the British, the date — the only date — that all of them know is 1066," Verney said in an interview with The Associated Press.

A trip not without risks

Moving an artwork so unwieldy — made from nine pieces of linen fabric stitched together and showing 626 characters, 37 buildings, 41 ships and 202 horses and mules in a total of 58 scenes — is further complicated by its great age and the wear-and-tear of time.

"There is always a risk. The goal is for those risks to be as carefully calculated as possible," Verney said.

Believed to have been commissioned by Bishop Odo, William the Conqueror's half-brother, to decorate a new cathedral in Bayeux in 1077, the treasure is thought to have remained there, mostly stored in a wooden chest and almost unknown, for seven centuries, surviving the French Revolution, fires and other perils.

Since then, only twice is the embroidery known to have been exhibited outside of the Normandy city: Napoleon Bonaparte had it shown off in Paris' Louvre Museum from late 1803 to early 1804. During World War II, it was displayed again in the Louvre in late 1944, after Allied forces that had landed in Normandy on D-Day, June 6th of that year, had fought onward to Paris and liberated it.

The work, seen by more than 15 million visitors in its Bayeux museum since 1983, "has the unique characteristic of being both monumental and very fragile," Verney said. "The textile fibers are 900 years old. So they have naturally degraded simply due to age. But at the same time, this is a work that has already traveled extensively and been handled a great deal."

A renovated museum

During the treasure's stay in the U.K., its museum in Bayeux will be getting a major face-lift costing tens of millions of euros. The doors will close to visitors from Sept. 1 this year, with reopening planned for October 2027, when the embroidery will be rehoused in a new building, encased on an inclined 70-meter-long table that Verney said will totally transform the viewing experience.

How, exactly, the treasure will be transported to the U.K. isn't yet clear.

"The studies required to allow its transfer to London and its exhibition at the British Museum are not finished, are under discussion, and are being carried out between the two governments," Verney said.

But he expressed confidence that it will be in safe hands.

"How can one imagine, in my view, that the British Museum would risk damaging, through the exhibition, this work that is a major element of a shared heritage?" he asked. "I don't believe that the British could take risks that would endanger this major element of art history and of world heritage."

What's the best budget airline in Europe?

A Washington Post writer tries three different ones

By Natalie B. Compton
The Washington Post

Nothing puts the size of Europe into perspective for an American like traveling around the continent by plane (even if we'd rather get around by train). What do you mean you can fly over nine countries in a couple of hours? Take one of Europe's many budget airlines, and it might even cost you less than a cab to the airport.

European budget airlines abound: Vueling, Iberojet, AeroItalia, and we all know nothing beats a Jet2 holiday. Their fares are shockingly low, rivaling the likes of Spirit's best deals to Florida — a feat made possible by starting with super-low base fares and charging for every possible add-on, from bringing a carry-on bag to sitting next to your travel companion.

Are they worth the dirt cheap prices? Is a flight that costs less than a parking ticket bound to be miserable? On a recent trip to Europe, I tried three of the most popular ultrabudget options: Wizz Air, EasyJet and Ryanair, to find out:



Photos by Natalie Compton/The Washington Post

The legroom in my EasyJet economy seat was fine, providing an entire hand's length between my knees (I'm 5-foot-4) and the seat back. I got lucky with a random upgrade to an emergency row with even more space to spare.

EasyJet

British carrier EasyJet operates in more than 160 airports in 38 countries. After navigating the complex website that made buying a ticket feel like solving a riddle, I booked a one-way from London Gatwick to Berlin for $113. It was costlier than many comparable EasyJet flights, but it was the best option for the day I needed to fly. The fare did not include any luggage. I'd read on the website that all passengers can bring one small underseat cabin bag free, so I rolled the dice on how strict that policy could be.

I could check in online, and I got through the airport without issue. But at the gate with my duffel bag and a purse, my prospects didn't look good. Each passenger's bag was examined before entering the waiting area, and I watched other travelers argue with gate agents over charges for their carry-ons being too large. I was hit with a $65 fee for exceeding my allotment.

The legroom in economy was decent, an entire hand's length between my knees (I'm 5-foot-4) and the seat back — better than my recent Norse experience — but I got lucky with a random upgrade to an emergency row with even more space to spare.

Pros: Clean and professional.

Cons: Overly complicated website.



Ryanair's thin seats are par for the course in European budget flights. Ryanair also puts a lot of pressure on customers to pay for their seat selection.

Ryanair

With hands-down the most cutthroat social media account in the corporate world, Ryanair takes cheap flights to another level — like a Dublin-to-Frankfurt, round-trip (sans baggage) ticket for September for $43. It's also the largest budget airline in Europe, with more than 3,600 flights daily to 37 countries.

My one-way basic fare from Barcelona to Lisbon was $78, which only included a personal item that must be small enough to fit under a seat. I decided to upgrade to a package including another cabin bag and priority boarding for $27. Ryanair warns that passengers will be charged about $100 at the gate for bringing an extra cabin bag or having one that won't fit in the bag sizer (about 15 x 7 x 9 inches) — and if you have a connecting flight, you'll have to pay that for each leg.



My husband and I were lucky to be assigned seats together on our Wizz Air trip, which is not guaranteed without paying for the pairing.

In the days before my flight, I got emails warning that if I didn't check in online more than two hours before my flight, I'd be hit with a $72 "airport check-in fee." There was also a lot of pressure to pay for my seat selection (starting around $10). I was flying with my husband, and the emails told me I had a high chance for a seat away from my travel companion. Lo and behold, I was assigned an aisle seat in the back of the plane while my husband had an aisle seat toward the front.

Pros: The largest fleet with the most options.

Cons: The hard press to pay for seat selection.

Wizz Air

Wizz Air may have the worst name in aviation, but haters get real quiet once they see the Hungarian airline's prices. If you're planning on flying around Europe regularly, you could also join one of Wizz's discount clubs for further discounted fares. Fans say the membership fees pay for themselves after a couple of trips.

I found a July one-way basic ticket from Tiranë, Albania, to Barcelona for $71 and later added a carry-on bag for $38. My husband, who was traveling with me, got by without paying for extra luggage even though his backpack slightly exceeded the roughly 7 x 11 x 15-inch cabin bag allotment. If they had flagged him, the fee would have been $78 at the airport.

My husband and I were seated together, despite not paying extra for a seat assignment. We would have been able to sit together even without that courtesy: After boarding, we learned the flight was not full, and the flight attendants allowed passengers to rearrange throughout the plane — a friendly touch.

Pros: Extremely cheap.

Cons: Terrible name.

The takeaways

Ultimately, all of these airlines felt like the same product with a different paint job. They all furnish their planes with wafer-thin seats, among the thinnest non-reclining seats I have ever seen. But the legroom is also more generous than the price would suggest. I've felt more cramped on legacy airlines in the United States and ultrabudget carriers in Asia.

Some advice works across the board: Be prepared to pay extra for luggage, seat assignments and in-flight refreshments. Be prepared for long lines at the airport if you need to check luggage — lines so long, I'd avoid checking a bag at all costs.

Booking with any one of them felt like trying to get through a booby-trapped obstacle course. One stray click of the cursor and you could end up paying an extra fee for a service you didn't want or need. But you should pay for your luggage online early versus waiting to add it on at the airport for a better rate.

If you're meticulous when you book and you follow their rules (sticking to the luggage size you purchased, checking in when required), you really can fly for cheap.



PHOTOS BY MATT WAGNER/Stars and Stripes

The entrance to Fort Schoenenbourg, part of the World War II-era Maginot Line, sits deep in a forest near the town of Hunspach, France. The fort is about 45 miles south of the U.S. bases in Kaiserslautern, Germany.

No folly in visiting this fort

Schoenenbourg stretch of Maginot Line in France a must-see for WWII buffs

BY MATT WAGNER
Stars and Stripes

Perhaps unfairly, the chain of French World War II fortifications known as the Maginot Line has become a symbol of folly.

The line itself was well-built and formidable. The error lay in not anticipating German plans to bypass it.

The only folly to be found on a recent visit to the 1.8-mile Fort Schoenenbourg stretch of the line was my suggestion that we didn't need the stroller for my friend's toddler.

The fort is about 45 miles south of the U.S. bases in Kaiserslautern, just across the German-French border near the town of Hunspach. It was once a part of the defensive network championed in the 1920s by France's minister of war, André Maginot.

At the entrance, a sign warned of a 132-step descent to reach the fort's main facilities, roughly 90 feet underground, which is why I thought carrying the stroller made little sense.

But just past the gate, we found an elevator. Thus, the three adults had to carry the little guy through the labyrinth. I did my best to shoulder extra turns as penance.

Other than that mistake, the Fort Schoenenbourg experience was well worth the trip. I was unexpectedly impressed by the underground fortress, given the unflattering portrayal of Maginot's namesake I remember from school.

The Maginot Line was supposed to force the Nazis to invade through the Netherlands and select parts of Belgium, giving French and Allied forces time to rally.

Ultimately, the plan failed because German forces attacked the lightly defended Ardennes forest, which the Allies had thought were impassable for large forces. The maneuver encircled the British and French in the north.

Seeing Fort Schoenenbourg, I can understand why the German high command avoided the Maginot Line. The place still seems impenetrable.

Despite facing some of the heaviest German bombardment, the fort wasn't breached. It surrendered at the request of the French high command on July 1, 1940, nine days after France itself had capitulated.



The command center at the Maginot Line museum is furnished to look as it did at the beginning of World War II. Maps and other signs adorn the walls.

Had the Germans tried to enter, the casualties would have been enormous. The six bunkers and two entrance blocks were heavily fortified, and walking down the corridors 85 years later, I could see how attackers would have been sitting ducks.

The fort also housed some unheard-of amenities for the time. It had its own electric plant with ventilators, maintenance equipment and a railway to move ammunition and supplies. Of the 620 men stationed there, at least 70 were highly skilled in electromechanical engineering.

With numerous personal touches throughout the facility, it felt less spartan than I'd imagined. Murals adorning many of the walls included depictions of Mickey Mouse and Josephine Baker, the American-born French entertainer whose exploits as a spy during World War II have been celebrated in both countries.

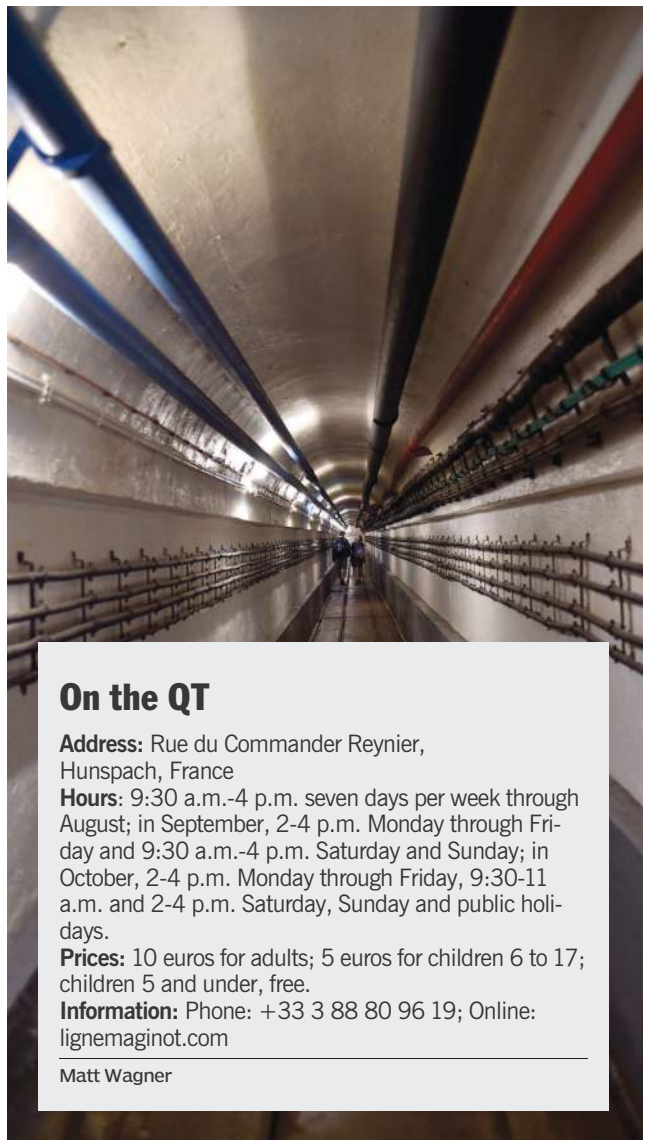
Early on, I saw a little alcove with a painting and a cross that acted as a prayer area. And to give a more World War II-era vibe, French big band music from the 1930s and '40s played from speakers.

You could see the effect World War I had on those involved. Chemical warfare was still on everybody's minds, so the designers created areas for soldiers to wash off residue quickly.

The temperature is a consistent 53.6 degrees Fahrenheit, so warmer clothes are suggested. Comfortable walking shoes are a must.

Overall, it was an enlightening experience and a must-see for any World War II buff. Expect to spend multiple hours there because this isn't a place you can blitz through. And if any kids are tagging along, don't err like I did. Fort Schoenenbourg is stroller-friendly.

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@MWagsStripes



On the QT

Address: Rue du Commander Reynier, Hunspach, France
Hours: 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. seven days per week through August; in September, 2-4 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; in October, 2-4 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9:30-11 a.m. and 2-4 p.m. Saturday, Sunday and public holidays.
Prices: 10 euros for adults; 5 euros for children 6 to 17; children 5 and under, free.
Information: Phone: +33 3 88 80 96 19; Online: lignemaginot.com

Matt Wagner

The Maginot Line museum at Fort Schoenenbourg has about 1.8 miles of tunnels and rooms.



The kitchen at Fort Schoenenbourg was fully electric. It was tasked with feeding the 600-plus men stationed there. The fort also had an infirmary and its own electric plant with ventilators, maintenance equipment and a railway to move ammunition and supplies.



Plenty of paintings adorn the walls of the fort including depictions of Mickey Mouse and spy Josephine Baker.

Delivering comfort food with style

German fare, hospitality at Schlemmerwerk im Kipperhof in Otterbach will keep you coming back for more

BY CHRISSY YATES
Stars and Stripes

After almost two years in Kaiserslautern, I still haven't adapted to German food. And on top of that, my favorite item at local festivals — flammlachs, or flame-grilled salmon — is actually of Finnish origin.

My efforts to try more German dishes have led me to say yes when someone suggests trying a new restaurant.

Back in January, the Ladies of the KMC Facebook group booked Schlemmerwerk im Kipperhof in Otterbach for a monthly dinner meetup. I recently returned with a colleague to try the summer menu.

The restaurant's name translates to "Gourmet Works in the Kipperhof," referring to the half-timbered Baroque house — the oldest restored building in town — that was converted into a previous restaurant in 1991.

Schlemmerwerk serves a mix of traditional and modern takes on German cuisine that includes burgers, steaks cooked on a heated stone and homestyle dishes.

Our host for the January visit, a native Texan, recommended the steak. I ordered a small Argentine filet, cooked medium and served on a hot stone. I added grilled shrimp in garlic confit on the side.

I could've eaten three more sides of the shrimp and my steak was cooked just how I like it. It was a hearty meal for a chilly evening.

The hospitality was equally impressive. The weak cell signal at our table in the cellar made it tough to use translation apps, but the servers were quick to help and provide recommendations.

At the end of the meal, one of the owners, Jennifer Schilling, came down to thank us for trying the newly opened restaurant.

The return visit came on a Sunday evening. We were seated across from the kitchen entrance and watched as burger after mouthwatering burger came out, buns piled high with toppings. But my assignment was to try something German.

Unfortunately, the restaurant was out of my first two picks: grass-fed beef braised in Irish beer from the summer seasonal menu and Grandma Else's beef roulade from the "Like Grandma's" menu.

The waiter suggested the seasonal lemon pasta with salmon. Y'all, I tried.

I enjoyed the creamy citrus sauce on my pasta and the salmon was cooked nicely to medium.



MATT WAGNER/Stars and Stripes

One of the specialties at Schlemmerwerk im Kipperhof in Otterbach, Germany, is the Kipperhof-Pfaennle, a pork cutlet from Rheinland-Pfalz lathered in a mushroom cream sauce with homemade spaetzle.



MATT WAGNER/Stars and Stripes

The tapas appetizer, from left: chicken skewers in teriyaki sauce; falafel in a sweet-and-sour sauce; salmon tartare; fried chicken with yogurt sauce and fried shrimp in a mango sauce.

The dish was such a large serving that I had half of it packed up to go after eating all the fish.

I also ordered the tapas in hopes of getting a German cuisine sampler. It had chicken skewers in teriyaki sauce, falafel in a sweet-and-sour sauce, salmon tartare, fried chicken strips and fried shrimp in a mango sauce.

Not really German, but quite tasty. My favorite was the crispy shrimp, dipped in the tangy, sweet sauce. My co-worker preferred the chicken strips, paired with an herby yogurt sauce.

For his main course, my colleague had one of the Schlemmerwerk specialties, the Kipperhof-Pfaennle. It's straw pig from the Rheinland-Pfalz region, lathered in a mushroom cream sauce with homemade spaetzle.

It was "creamy, yet light, while the mushrooms and pork were heavier. The mushrooms were meaty and much better than I expected," my colleague said. "You could tell they didn't just pick up whatever mushroom was cheapest and got one(s) with some taste."

I sampled a bit of his dish and



CHRISSY YATES/Stars and Stripes

The seasonal special of pasta al limone with salmon at Schlemmerwerk im Kipperhof.

the rich, brown mushroom gravy was seasoned well, while the spaetzle was firm and slightly chewy.

My colleague said it's a common dish in the region, but one difference was the chunkier pieces of mushroom, which we both liked.

I would love to have had the gravy over some long-grain rice, though that's closer to a smothered pork chop dish — something my Southern grandma would make.

The dessert menu changes often enough that it's written on a blackboard. When I mentioned my tree nut allergy, the server helped out. The restaurant can accommodate most food allergies and restrictions with advance notice.

My favorite dessert was the panna cotta with strawberry sauce. It was creamy and the sauce was sweet. I found the cherry crumble pie to be tasty but not sweet enough for my American palate, and I wanted more of the filling as well.

The raspberry cheesecake also wasn't very sweet, but that meant the tangy taste of the berries really came through and made it my second-favorite.

One small but thoughtful touch: Each table has a cube you can press to call the waitstaff. In a region where it can sometimes be hard to get your server's attention, that feature stands out. Combined with the quality food and service, it's a big reason why I'll be returning.

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MATT WAGNER/Stars and Stripes

Schlemmerwerk im Kipperhof in Otterbach offers steaks, burgers and classics reminiscent of Sunday dinner at grandma's, according to the menu. The name translates to "Gourmet Works in the Kipperhof."

AFTER HOURS GERMANY

Schlemmerwerk im Kipperhof

Address: Hauptstrasse 12, Otterbach, Germany
Hours: Sunday, noon-10 p.m.; Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 12-2:30 p.m. for lunch; dinner hours are Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, 5-11 p.m. Closed on Tuesdays.
Prices: Main dishes range from 15 to 30 euros. Steaks from 25 to 45 euros.
Information: Online: schlemmerwerk-im-kipperhof.eatbu.com/?lang=en#

Chrissy Yates

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY MARC CASTANEDA/Stars and Stripes

Known internationally as the mind behind the manga series "Iron Atom," called "Astro Boy" in the United States, Osamu Tezuka's influence stretches past the pages of his comics.

'God of manga' takes center stage

Tokyo Fuji Art Museum exhibit examines life, work of Astro Boy creator

BY MARC CASTANEDA
Stars and Stripes

An exhibit at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum in Hachioji, a western Tokyo suburb not far from Yokota Air Base, revives the first manga and anime many Americans ever experienced.

The creator of Astro Boy and Kimba the White Lion is revered in Japan as the "god of manga" whose creations represent some of the first popular expressions of the art anywhere.

The special exhibit, Osamu Tezuka: Upon Wings of Dreams, running through Sept. 15, is a deep dive into Tezuka's life and work. Known internationally as the mind behind the manga series "Iron Atom," in Japan, called "Astro Boy" in the United States, Tezuka's influence stretches far beyond the pages of his comics.

"Astro Boy," based on the story of a boy robot, was the first anime series broadcast outside Japan. It aired for 104 episodes on NBC between 1963 and 1965.

"Kimba the White Lion," another Tezuka creation and based on a "brave and optimistic" lion cub, first aired for 52 episodes on NBC between 1966 and 1967.

The special exhibit features more than 200 pieces of Tezuka's work, from rough sketches to detailed illustrations. I felt as if I'd stepped inside the mind of the masterful animator and creator of such well-known characters as Black Jack, Princess Knight and Phoenix.

The further I moved through the gallery, the more I began to grasp the depth of his creative genius.

A certain three-piece storyboard of the jet-booted robot boy duking it out with a mechanical kaiju, or beast, piqued my interest. The first animation cel depicted a gaping crater, pebbles breaking loose from the impact, and the small silhouette of the protagonist struggling as his opponent pinned him to the wall.

The remaining two showed the monster defeated as Astro Boy towered over him. The trio told a full story through minimal yet powerful linework.

Most of Tezuka's displayed pieces all share unmatched attention to detail. His concepts from 1971 and 1978 showed meticulous color work that reminded me of another animation pioneer, Walt Disney. The two met during the 1964 World's Fair in New York, where Disney suggested a collaboration to create something like Astro Boy, though it bore no fruit.

Still, Tezuka's imagination inspired many prominent artists to come. Hayao Miyazaki of "Spirited Away"; Katsuhiro Otomo, creator of "Akira"; Naoko Takeuchi of "Sailor Moon"; and, perhaps the biggest one, Akira Toriyama of the "Dragon Ball" series, all cite Tezuka as a major inspiration.

Toward the end of the exhibit, a mockup re-creates Tezuka's work desk. Colored pencils, drafts and his signature black beret are displayed here.

Overall, the trip was inspirational. This exhibit isn't just nostalgia for anime fans, though. It's a rare chance to understand how one man redefined a medium, influenced generations of creators and left a mark on global pop culture.

Whether you grew up watching Astro Boy or just know his silhouette in passing, visiting this exhibition is like stepping into the blueprint of modern Japanese storytelling.

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Above and below: Osamu Tezuka: Upon Wings of Dreams features more than 200 pieces of the "Astro Boy" creator's work, from rough sketches to detailed illustrations.



On the QT

Directions: About a 20-minute drive from Yokota Air Base and less than an hour from Camp Zama. 492-1 Yano-machi, Hachioji, Tokyo 192-0016.
Times: Open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday; exhibit closes Sept. 15
Costs: Admission is 1,500 yen.
Food: An onsite restaurant offers a menu that changes with the seasons.
Information: Phone: 0426-91-4511, Online: fujibi.or.jp/en

Marc Castaneda

Suitable for a sumo wrestler

Burger King Japan's 5-patty, 1,876-calorie Baby Body Burger fit for a giant appetite

BY JUAN KING
Stars and Stripes

During a recent stop at Burger King near Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo, I noticed a new, but puzzling option. A Baby Body Burger?

At first glance, I wasn't sure I read it correctly, but there it was, a five-patty creation with a peculiar name made in collaboration with the Japan Sumo Association.

How Burger King Japan came up with the name Baby Body is left unexplained, but the sandwich is not for a weak appetite or faint heart. Its 1,876 calories meet nearly all your recommended daily needs.

It debuted July 11, a couple of days before the Nagoya Grand Sumo Tournament began July 13. The tournament concluded July 27.

This "yokozuna-class," or sumo grand champion burger, consists of Burger King's signature all-beef patties, four slices each of cheese and bacon, tomatoes, lettuce, pickles with ketchup, mayonnaise and a rich and tangy "special aurora sauce."

The sandwich alone costs 2,590 yen, or about $18. The meal set comes with small fries and a medium drink for 2,890 yen. I went with the combo for the full experience.

Online reviews were mostly impressed with the size of this creation, although one Reddit user called it the "meal of misfortune."

A food reviewer for the Guardian newspaper weighed in with: "The denseness and thickness of the five industrial patties, unfortunately, overwhelm the cheddar and sauces beyond the edges."

Other than that, he appeared to relish the towering assignment.

Along with the burger, you get a unique 6-inch black, circular Baby Body Burger sticker with Japan Sumo Association written in kanji, and bearing the braided belt insignia of the yokozuna, the highest rank of sumo wrestler. The set is available until supplies last.

Did I beat the challenge? I could have downed it all but chose instead to savor it and save a quarter of it for lunch the following day.

Challenge yourself with this oddly named burger at a Burger King Japan location near you before it's gone.

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AFTER HOURS JAPAN

BK Baby Body Burger

Location: Burger King restaurants throughout Japan.
Hours: Vary by location; promotion is available while supplies last.
Prices: The sandwich alone costs 2,590 yen, or about $18. A meal set with small fries and a medium drink is 2,890 yen.
Dress: Casual
Information: burgerking.co.jp

Juan King



PHOTOS BY JUAN KING/Stars and Stripes

Burger King Japan created the five-patty Baby Body Burger in collaboration with the Japan Sumo Association. It consists of Burger King's signature all-beef patties, four slices each of cheese and bacon, tomatoes, lettuce, pickles with ketchup, mayonnaise and a rich and tangy "special aurora sauce."

Tuna melt quesadillas an unexpected twist on a diner classic

BY ELLIE KRIEGER
The Washington Post

Cheese and fish can be a controversial combination. I can see my friend's Italian grandmother shaking her head at me just for considering it. But there's proof that the two can team up deliciously: the tuna melt. Tuna salad served on an open-faced sandwich blanketed in melted cheese is a diner staple for a reason.

This quesadilla is a spin on that winning formula, and one that has seen me through many hectic weeknights with a hungry family and hardly any time or energy to cook. To make it, start by flaking a couple of cans of tuna. Then — to use diner-speak — "run it through the garden" by adding fresh vegetables chopped celery, grated carrot, onion and cilantro. Stir in a squeeze of lime juice and some shredded cheese, and the filling is ready. I like to use pepper jack for a kick of heat, but Monterey jack or cheddar work well, too. I keep the amount of cheese on the modest side, but feel free to add more if you want it super cheesy. Pile the tuna mixture onto whole-grain tortillas, top that with a handful of baby spinach leaves, fold the loaded tortillas into half-moons, and cook them until the cheese is melted, and the tortillas are crisp and browned.

Served with sliced avocado, a dollop of yogurt or sour cream, and salsa, these quesadillas are a healthfully-balanced tuna-melt-inspired dish that's a game changer when you need a family-friendly meal in little time.



TOM MCCORKLE/For The Washington Post

Tuna Melt Quesadillas take little time or energy to make.

Tuna Melt Quesadillas

Total time: 20 minutes
Servings: 2-4 (makes 4 quesadillas)

Ingredients

Two (5-ounce) cans tuna packed in water, preferably no-salt-added, drained
½ cup (1 ½ ounces) shredded Monterey jack or pepper jack cheese
1 stalk celery, finely diced (¼ cup)
1 small carrot, scrubbed and coarsely grated (¼ cup)
¼ cup finely diced red onion
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice (from 1 lime)
Four (8-inch) whole-wheat flour tortillas
2 cups (2 ounces) coarsely chopped fresh baby spinach
2 teaspoons olive oil, divided
Flesh of 1 ripe avocado, sliced
½ cup jarred salsa (optional)
⅓ cup plain Greek yogurt or sour cream (any fat level; optional)
Lime wedges, for serving
Hot sauce, for serving (optional)

Directions

In a medium bowl, toss together the tuna, cheese, onion, celery, carrot, cilantro and lime juice until well combined.

Lay the tortillas on a work surface and mound one-quarter of the tuna mixture (about ½ cup) onto half of each tortilla. Pile ½ cup of the spinach on top of each. Fold the other half of each tortilla over the filling to create a half-moon shape.

In a 10- to 12-inch nonstick or cast-iron skillet over medium heat, heat 1 teaspoon of the oil. Place 2 quesadillas in the skillet, and press on them with a spatula to weigh them down. Cook until the quesadillas are golden brown on both sides and the cheese is melted, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer to a cutting board and repeat with the remaining 2 quesadillas.

Cut the warm quesadillas into wedges, and serve alongside the avocado, salsa, yogurt, lime wedges and hot sauce, if desired.

Turning back time

In a digital age, old-fashioned watchmaking schools – including a new one from Rolex – are in demand



MYUNG J. CHUN, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

A green Rolex Submariner dive watch.



ROBERT GAUTHIER, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

Spencer Torok, 25, a watchmaker at J.N. Shapiro Watches in Torrance, Calif., graduated from the now defunct Lititz Watch Technicum in Pennsylvania three years ago. Only four full-time, independent watchmaking schools remain in the U.S.



MYUNG J. CHUN, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

The Rolex GMT-Master II.

BY DANIEL MILLER
Los Angeles Times

Ever since watches began bringing order to the ephemeral passage of time, they also started doing something else: breaking.

Own one long enough and something will probably go wrong. It'll run slow. Or fast. Or stop altogether.

Decades ago, watch repair shops across the country were staffed with technicians who could service almost any mechanical timepiece when its intricate innards — tiny gears, wheels and springs — failed. But when the U.S. watchmaking industry declined in the mid-20th century, the number of craftspeople who could fix or fabricate timepieces began dwindling too.

There were 1,880 U.S. watch and clock repairers in 2023, down from 2,430 just three years earlier, according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

That 23% decline, on top of previous losses, has led some in this niche industry to label the situation a workforce crisis. It comes amid renewed interest in mechanical timepieces and a modest rebirth of the American watchmaking industry — despite the omnipresence of cellphones and their effortless timekeeping. Rolex, the Swiss behemoth, alone makes more than 1 million watches a year.

Who will be able to service all of them as they age? Or make the new ones being dreamed up?

A dearth of new watchmaking schools — where students learn about repairs, fabrication or both — is central to the problem. After the closure of several programs in recent decades, only four full-time, independent watchmaking schools remain in the U.S.

One watch company, Torrance, Calif.-based J.N. Shapiro Watches — maker of the $70,000 Resurgence model — is among the handful of U.S.-based firms that has struggled to hire watchmakers.

Rolex has a solution on the repair side.

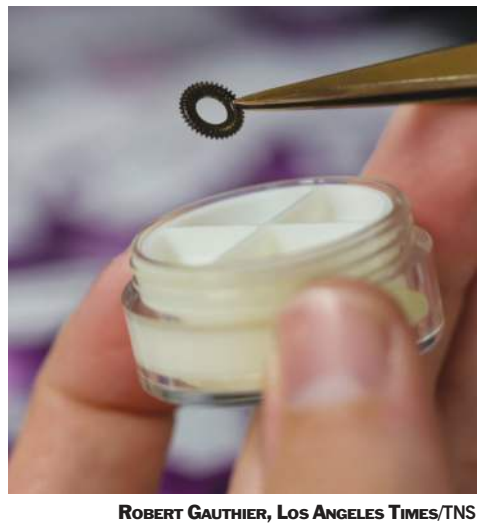
In September, the Geneva-based company debuted a new watchmaking school at the Rolex Watch Training Center in Dallas. The program's 18-month curriculum is focused on training students to service watches made by the brand. The last six months of schooling include an immersion component in which students repair Rolex timekeepers under the supervision of instructors.

Upon graduation, participants can work for a Rolex-affiliated jeweler or for the company itself. Most of the school's first class, which graduates next February, have already secured jobs, a Rolex spokesperson said. They can expect annual salaries starting in the range of $75,000 to $85,000, depending on location.



ROBERT GAUTHIER, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

Torok inspects the inner workings of an Insurgence series watch on July 24.



ROBERT GAUTHIER, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

Torok inspects a watch gear on July 24.

The school is free. The company spokesperson said in a statement that the Dallas program, which welcomes just 27 students per class, represents the company's "commitment at a larger scale to meet the industry demand."

Rolex's focus on training watchmakers to work solely on its timepieces differentiates its program from independent schools, which typically teach students how to work on all sorts of watches, turning out graduates with expertise in subjects including micromechanics and repairs.

"I think we need a balance of technicians and then more full-service watchmakers," said Tony Traina, who publishes Unpolished Watches, an industry newsletter. "The way in which the profession is evolving right now — it seems like we're headed in that direction. There are the Shapiros of the world, along with the Rolexes of the world. I think we'll reach an equilibrium."

Rolex opened a more traditional watchmaking school in the U.S. in 2001 — the Lititz Watch Technicum in Pennsylvania, but closed it after its final class graduated this summer. The Rolex school in Dallas is in high demand, with 400 applicants for its inaugural class and 560 more for the second one starting in September.

Among the applicants, the spokesperson said, were Texans who'd initially been surprised that fixing watches could be "a viable career with an established educational track."

The average student age among the first two classes is 28; some have been admitted straight out of high school and others have a college degree. Students have backgrounds in areas such as engineering and accounting, and have had careers as musicians, teachers and communications professionals.

As head of an independent watch company, Joshua Shapiro said it was extremely difficult to find the six watchmakers who now work for him in Torrance.

"It took a lot of networking," said Shapiro, who added that his team was assembled over several years, and that three of his watchmakers came from the Lititz school.

One of those watchmakers is Spencer Torok, 25, who graduated from Lititz three years ago. After high school, the Hilliard, Ohio, native attended Ohio Dominican University, where he took accounting classes. But Torok realized during the COVID-19 pandemic that he wanted to make a change. He'd long been interested in watches, he said, and enrolled at Lititz.

Torok said that the schooling only stoked his passion — and that he would never have gotten hired by Shapiro if not for the education he received at Lititz.

"No way," he said with a laugh. "It takes a lot of resources to train someone."

Some American watch companies have had to go abroad to make hires.

Cameron Weiss, whose eponymous watch company was founded in LA in 2013 and later moved to Nashville, said he had to turn to Switzerland to recruit a watchmaker.

"I'd been looking for someone with that skill level for the last 12 years," Weiss said.

In July, Weiss traveled again to Switzerland to scout for workers. He hopes the Rolex program in Dallas will help invigorate watch education in the U.S.

One of the last remaining full-service watchmaking schools in America is at Paris Junior College in Texas. Program coordinator Garrin Fraze, 24, graduated from it in 2019. He was enticed back last year by a former instructor, who asked him to take over.

"Because we are independent, we have a little bit of openness in the curriculum," said Fraze, who also serves as head instructor of the program.

Like the Rolex school in Dallas, the Paris program is small, accommodating about 20 students. But Fraze hopes to expand it — he knows how strong demand is for watchmakers, including those who can repair Rolexes.

After his graduation from the Paris program, he got a job as the in-house watchmaker of a Fort Worth jeweler.

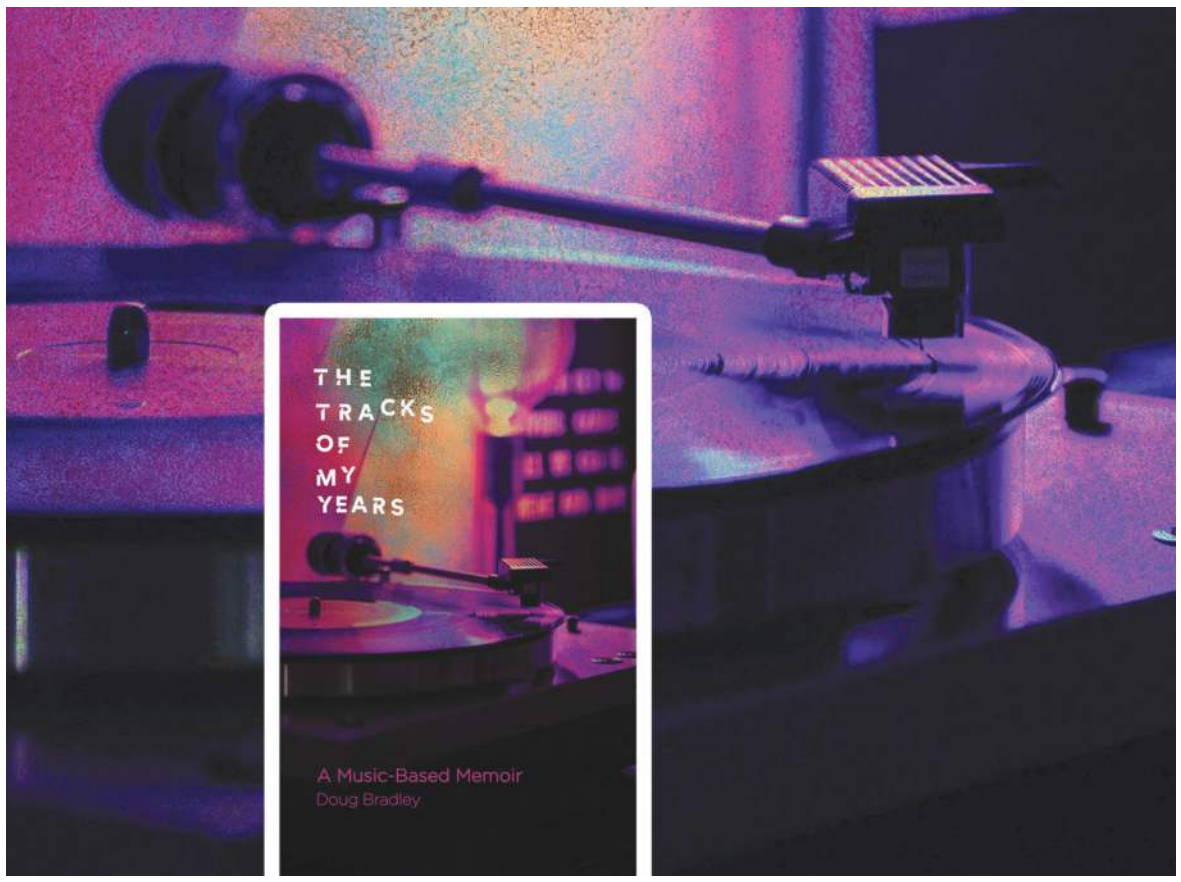
It was an authorized Rolex dealer.

REVIEW

The soundtrack that shaped him

Vietnam veteran Doug Bradley's memoir 'The Tracks of My Years' an engrossing meditation on music and memory

By Sean Moores
Stars and Stripes



Legacy Book Press

In "The Tracks of My Years: A Music-Based Memoir," author, educator and Vietnam veteran Doug Bradley tells the story of a life lived with, and in, music.

Even casual music fans know that songs evoke powerful memories.

Wilco's "The Late Greats" takes me back to my daughter's birth. That track, from "A Ghost is Born," might not make you think of staring into the most beautiful blue eyes you've ever seen, but surely there are songs that elicit specific times in your life.

Eric Church sings about this phenomenon on his 2012 No. 1 country hit "Springsteen," a song about young love framed by the recollection of seeing The Boss in concert:

When I think about you
I think about 17
I think about my old Jeep
I think about the stars in the sky
Funny how a melody sounds like a memory
July Saturday night
… Springsteen

Doug Bradley's book "The Tracks of My Years" is brimming with music and memories. Memories of playing basketball with the Miracles … of sharing a joint with Grace Slick ... of holding Dionne Warwick's hand when he told her that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated. And that was just Bradley's college years.

Bradley, this year's recipient of the Vietnam Veterans of America's Excellence in Arts Award, has written extensively about music. He co-authored with University of Wisconsin professor Craig Werner 2015's "We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War," which was followed by his own "Who'll Stop the Rain: Respect, Remembrance, and Reconciliation in Post-Vietnam America" in 2019.

His latest, subtitled "A Music-Based Memoir," is a crate-digger's delight: a deep dive into the soundtrack of his life, the songs that brought him comfort, camaraderie and even bitter irony. (You should also listen to his companion Spotify playlist.) The engrossing narrative flies by like a favorite album on a road trip. It's a virtuosic performance, on par with Cream drummer Ginger Baker's "Toad" solo mentioned in the book.

Music was a life-defining force for Bradley, who was born into the first rock 'n' roll generation. He unflinchingly writes chapters of his life, their titles taken from songs that factored into them. He is the hero in some dramas, the heel in others. The stories and lyrical references flow seamlessly, like singles stacked on a record changer.

"Our music broadcast our independence, anointed our individuality," he writes. "Music on the radio, from records spinning on the tiny RCA 45-RPM record player I shared with [my older brother], music constantly in my head, in the hallways, everywhere. Connecting me to my body, my feet, to every other kid walking down the halls of Thomas Jefferson High School."

Songs shaped him well before he roamed the halls of his Pittsburgh-area high school. They played in his childhood home, the source of many happy times but also a salve applied to the psychological wounds wrought by financial woes and the resultant steely silences between his parents. Generational conflict between his father and older brother, and fights over the volume knob, played out in time with the music. But the variety of songs at home set Bradley on the path to becoming an aficionado. His WWII veteran father loved big-band music. His older brother sang doo-wop. Bradley first took a shine to gritty soul before growing alongside all the offshoots of rock 'n' roll.

It is when he writes about high school, though, that Bradley begins to really show his skill as a memoirist. He does this most effectively in the retelling of his teenage dramas, along with their internal and external soundtracks. He enters high school a confident young man and budding basketball star, but angst and ostracization erode his self-esteem. He experiences first love and its heartbreaking flipside (what would rock 'n' roll be without either?), with a tune to match every ensuing emotion. He would have made a great music supervisor for movies and TV.

On cue, high school also provides Bradley with a much-needed mentor, who becomes a main character in his story. The teacher opens the creative writing student's eyes to more music (such as the Beatles and Bob Dylan), and a greater appreciation of it. This tutelage, however, is tempered by an unsettling ambiguity about the teacher's intent that recurs throughout the book, coloring the quest for harmony with dissonant tones. Bradley often wonders aloud to his anonymous audience if something more sinister was at play. He's still searching for meaning as the final notes of the text fade into the coda.

His social status improved considerably at Bethany College, where he had the encounters — and more like them — with the Miracles (and their leader, Smokey Robinson), Slick and Warwick. Bradley, as the elected social chair, was responsible for booking bands at the tiny West Virginia school, and this accounts for some of the most entertaining anecdotes in the book. He recounts the shows in expressive detail, and who wouldn't remember vividly a peck on the cheek from Slick in her "Surrealistic Pillow" prime?

The good times didn't last. Bradley drew a low draft number in December 1969 and soon joined other members of the rock 'n' roll generation in the first rock 'n' roll war. Next stop was Vietnam. As he stepped off the plane in-country, Bradley's senses were assaulted by the oppressive heat and a foul smell. Somehow there was comfort, too.

"It was the sound of music. Rock and roll. Our music," he writes. "A cassette deck was cranked up somewhere on the tarmac, blasting Smokey's 'The Tears of a Clown.' Took me back to Bethany and pick-up basketball and better times."

Bradley's writing confirms what the Vietnam movies tried to tell us: Music was everywhere. Only his soundtrack is more diverse than in most of those films. As an Army journalist at Long Binh Post in 1971-72, Bradley's tour of duty wasn't always the stuff of "Platoon." But those chapters contain plenty of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll amid the quagmire in Southeast Asia. And, as Bradley recounts, tragedy still touched the soldiers stationed in the rear, aka "the air-conditioned jungle." A final musical moment, including a song overlooked by too many of the movies, provides a bittersweet recollection of heading back to the world:

"Suddenly, the plane was lifting off the shimmering Tan Son Nhut tarmac, and we departing GIs burst into a chorus of 'We Gotta Get Out of This Place'!" Bradley writes. "Everyone smiled as if the weight of the world had been lifted from their shoulders. Little did we know we'd be carrying the weight of that godforsaken war the rest of our lives."

Bradley shouldered the weight, and his anger, while finding his way stateside. A master's degree in English and an opportunity to help other vets readjust ultimately gave him purpose, as did true love. He worked for more than three decades in communications at the University of Wisconsin, where he had a most fortuitous introduction to Werner, with whom he taught the popular course "The U.S. in Vietnam: Music, Media, and Mayhem" for nearly a decade. His evolution continued as an advocate, an educator, a father and a grandfather. Life cycled so far forward that Bradley eventually found himself as the elder combatant in generational skirmishes with his own son. Music made peace.

Another full-circle moment comes in the book's closing, when Bradley puts his remaining high school demons in the past while serving as the DJ at his 50th reunion.

"So many moments. So many songs. So many times. From 'World on a String' to 'Chain Gang,' 'Kansas City' to 'Wild Horses'," he writes. "Philly, Ohio, Pittsburgh, Vietnam, Pullman (Wash.), and Madison (Wis.). Music. Yesterday. Today. I smiled, fulfilled, at least for the moment at peace. I was where I was always meant to be, past and present, playing the music that mattered."

Readers need not be Boomers or Vietnam veterans to enjoy "The Tracks of My Years," although they both surely will find much to like about it. Bradley offers an invitation across the nation. Music lovers would be wise to accept.

Q&A

Making music from the heart

Icelandic singer-songwriter Laufey's new album, 'A Matter of Time,' explores anger, love and more

BY KARENA PHAN
Associated Press

Long before the Icelandic Chinese artist Laufey became recognized the world over for her neoclassical jazz-meets-pop music, she was a student, answering a familiar yearbook prompt: "Where do you see yourself in 10 years?"

Her answer: Move to the U.S., sign a record deal and win a Grammy. The 26-year-old has done all three.

"I must have been so confident to write that because I remember that being a very far-sought kind of thing," the musician born Laufey Lín Jónsdóttir told The Associated Press.

Those aren't her only accomplishments: She's collaborated with Barbra Streisand and shared the stage with Hozier, Noah Kahan and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. An unexpected nonconformist to the rules of contemporary pop, Laufey's third album, "A Matter of Time," released Aug. 22, pulls inspiration from country and Icelandic folk music as well as classical and bossa nova sounds.



"A Matter of Time" pulls inspiration from country, Icelandic folk, classical and bossa nova music.

"My ultimate goal is to introduce young audiences to jazz music, to classical music, to encourage them to learn instruments and explore their own sound," Laufey said.

In a recent interview, Laufey discussed her new album, embracing anger on the record, working with her twin sister and more. Responses are edited for clarity and brevity.

Associated Press: What's the story behind the title "A Matter of Time"?

Laufey: I knew I wanted the album to have time as a central theme. I was just so fascinated by how it's kind of like this one thing that humans have no control over, and sometimes we want to speed up and sometimes we want to slow down, but ultimately it's out of our control. And there's something romantic about that to me.

Now it's taken on a little bit of a different meaning in that it's basically me baring my soul to the world and baring my soul to a lover. And it's kind of like, "a matter of time until you find out everything about me."

The end of "Sabotage" felt very jarring, which is unexpected. Are you embracing anger on this album?

For sure. I think I was never allowed to embrace anger. I was a very good kid growing up. I was very polite and very quiet. I used this as a way to show that you can be angry, and rather, to show also that you can be both a softspoken person while still harboring anger.

I think the understanding of women and characters has so much been like one or the other. She's like this; she's a mad woman; she's a soft, sweet woman. Like, we're all everything.

How do you compare this album to your past projects?

This is just the most free I've been. I wasn't following any type of compass in that I wasn't trying to create something as education. I was more so just making music from the heart. I just approached with a whole lot more confidence, even though the album's all about anxiety and learning about oneself and insecurity and delusion. And it's tapping into emotions that I maybe wouldn't have dared to tap into before. It is the most confident I've been, because I don't think I'd have the confidence to put out the music in this album before.

Your twin sister Junia is credited on the album. What's it like working with her?

It's so special. We do everything together. Like, she does everything, pretty much, — other than the music, the literal music making — she has her hands in.

All the merch, that's all her. The album covers, all the creative, like, music videos, everything — she's such a part of the project. And then she literally plays violin on some of the songs. I know so many artists who talk about how it can be quite lonely, but I've never really been alone. Like, I've always done it in tandem with my sister.

You've spoken about the importance of Asian role models. I think you've become one yourself.

I grew up in a very, very different, like, homogenous Icelandic community. I didn't see people who looked like me every single day. I saw my mom, that was it. And I guess I saw my identical twin sister, who looked exactly like me. But it's so powerful, seeing someone who looks like you, that you can look up to.

I already see more representation, but there's still such a long way to go. I'm still a half-white Asian woman, you know? And I don't want young Asian women to look up and see all of the stars in front of them be half-white either, because what kind of message is that sending? So, I don't know. Anything I can do to lift up voices, create those communities and empower young Asian artists to do their thing, that's, like, at the center of my philosophy.



REBECCA CABAGE, INVISION/AP

Laufey, 26, has won a Grammy and worked with big-name collaborators but she still has career goals — such as scoring a film and doing a theme song to a James Bond movie.

You've done all the things you said you wanted to do in your yearbook. What's next?

I'd love to score a film or do, like, a theme song to a film, preferably a James Bond theme song, because that's, like, my dream. But it's so hard to say because I've ticked off all those simple things off — many are big, but the tick-able ones. I hope I'm still making music and I still hope that I love it.

WEEKEND: MUSIC

‘We were true punk’

Netflix documentary clears up the story behind Devo’s ‘Whip It’ and the band’s misunderstood legacy

By Mark Kennedy
Associated Press

You know the band Devo, right? The guys with the funny red plastic hats and jumpsuits? The New Wave musicians behind the silly “Whip It” video? They had that odd, spiky ’80s vibe? Well, it turns out you may not know as much as you think.

The new Netflix documentary “Devo,” now streaming, is an eye-opening examination of an Ohio-born art-rock band that argues they were perhaps the most misunderstood band on the face of the planet.

“We were trivialized and pigeonholed,” co-founder Gerald Casale tells The Associated Press. “This documentary allows us to talk about what we were thinking and what we are motivated by to create what we created.”

Directed by Chris Smith, “Devo” uses archival footage and interviews to trace the band’s beginnings, rise and fall, with cameos from fans like David Bowie, Iggy Pop and Neil Young.



Netflix

Mark Mothersbaugh cracks a whip in the video for “Whip It,” which became a hit just as their label was getting ready to drop them. Part of Devo’s strength was the band’s visual component.



Netflix

“I always tried to be optimistic that devolution was something that was going to be corrected and that our message would be not necessary at this point, but unfortunately it’s more real than ever.”
Devo’s Mark Mothersbaugh

Art against regression

Devo introduced themselves to the world in 1977 by making a frenetic version of the Rolling Stones’ “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction,” which earned them a crucial slot on “Saturday Night Live.” On stages, they would wriggle like worms or dress like the guys from “Ghostbusters.”

They released their Brian Eno-produced debut, “Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!,” in 1978 and reached platinum status with 1980’s “Freedom of Choice,” which featured “Whip It,” a hit just as their label was getting ready to drop them.

But behind the odd neck braces and knee pads were powerful art and literary ideas about where the country was going. They named themselves after the idea that modern society was entering a process of “devolution.”

“We were seeing a world that was the antithesis of the idealized, promised future ginned up in the ’50s and ’60s,” Casale says in the movie. “What we saw was regression.”

The nucleus of the band was formed from tragedy: Casale and Mark Mothersbaugh met at Kent State University, where they lived through the 1970 killing of four unarmed anti-war student protesters by the National Guard.

That tragedy forged in the pair an antiestablishment, anti-capitalist protest, mixing lofty art history with pop culture. They admired Dadaism and Andy Warhol. The factories of Akron inspired their gray overalls and clear plastic face masks — portraying cogs in a machine like in the art movie “Metropolis.”

“We had a meta-approach,” Casale tells the AP. “It was a multimedia, big idea approach. Music was an element, a layer, a dimension, but it was connected to this big worldview.”

‘Whip It’ video

Part of Devo’s strength was its visual component and their videos were drenched with political commentary. The upbeat “Beautiful World” featured footage of police violence, the KKK and bombings, while “Freedom of Choice” warned against the dangers of conformity.

The song “Whip It” was written after reading Thomas Pynchon’s 760-page postmodern sci-fi tome “Gravity’s Rainbow.” The video — featuring cowboys drinking beer, dangerous gunplay and assault — was actually mocking President Ronald Reagan and his macho brand of conservatism.

Members of Devo — which then also included Mark’s brother, Bob; Gerald’s brother, Bob; and Alan Myers — performed on TV and chatted with talk show hosts like David Letterman, but their satire never seemed never to break through.



Evan Agostini, Invision/AP

From left: Bob Mothersbaugh, Mark Mothersbaugh, Josh Hager and Gerald Casale, of Devo, attend the “SNL50: The Homecoming Concert” on Feb. 14 in New York. Devo got an early break on “SNL.”

“Nobody wanted to hear us talking about the duality of human nature and the dangers of groupthink and the atrophication of people being able to think logically and think critically,” Casale says. “It was like, ‘That’s a bummer. Just tell us about drugs and sex.’”

A counterculture legacy

Rock has always needed bands like Devo, a corrective to the corporate machine. You can see an echo of Devo when M.I.A. raised her middle finger during the Super Bowl halftime show in 2012. The members of Devo cite such bands as Rage Against the Machine and System of a Down as keeping the flame alive.

“The only thing you can hope is that it will create an awareness and get rid of complacency, but it doesn’t seem to have done that in the past,” Mothersbaugh says.

“I always tried to be optimistic that devolution was something that was going to be corrected and that our message would be not necessary at this point, but unfortunately it’s more real than ever.”

After Devo, Casale directed music videos and commercials, while Mothersbaugh scored movies and TV shows such as “Pee-Wee’s Playhouse,” “The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou,” “Rugrats” and “Hello Tomorrow!”

There are signs of optimism when members of Devo play live now. Mothersbaugh says he sees a lot of young people, who have used their smartphones to bypass media gatekeepers.

“We see a lot of people that look like us, with gray hair out there in the audience. But there’s also, there’s also a lot of kids, which is kind of surprising to me, but I think it’s only because they have this thing in their hand that they sometimes use to their advantage.”

Devo are set to hit the road later this year in a co-headlining tour with the B-52’s. The Cosmic De-Evolution Tour will kick off Sept. 24 in Toronto and wraps Nov. 2 in Houston.

You may think of Devo as New Wave or early electronica or synth-pop. but they see themselves differently: “We were true punk, meaning we questioned illegitimate authority and we stayed in our own lane and did our thing, remaining true to our vision,” Casale says. “That’s punk.”

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

British streamer turns to US stars

Acorn TV strategy seen by AMC Networks as a ticket to accelerating subscriber growth

BY STEPHEN BATTAGLIO
Los Angeles Times

Thirty years ago, the coming-of-age romantic comedy "Clueless" opened in movie theaters and went on to become an enduring American pop culture touchstone.

"I'm thrilled that people love it and continue to love it," the film's star, Alicia Silverstone, said in a recent conversation in New York. "Young people. Old people. It's really gone on and on, and obviously that's lovely."

AMC Networks is counting on Silverstone's multigenerational appeal to help boost the New York-based media company's streaming service Acorn TV, which specializes in British dramas and other programs from overseas.

Silverstone is the lead in the new Acorn original series "Irish Blood," which premiered Monday. She plays hard-bitten Los Angeles divorce lawyer Fiona Sharpe, who heads to Ireland to resolve a mystery involving the father who abandoned her as a child.

AMC has also signed the imperishable Brooke Shields to star in another Acorn project titled "You're Killing Me." She portrays a mystery novelist who teams with a young wannabe writer and influencer to investigate murders in a small New England town. The series starts shooting this summer and is set to premiere in 2026.

Why put two iconic American actresses on a streaming platform with a well-defined niche of providing viewers with international locations and accents that at times require closed-captioning even when the language is English?

Even the small players in streaming have to get bigger.

AMC does not have the deep pockets to compete with Netflix, Prime Video and Disney+.

The company has blazed its own digital path by serving dedicated audiences who will pay for an additional streaming service that caters to their passions, such as Shudder for horror fans and HIDIVE for anime lovers.

The company's suite of streaming services has around 10.4 million customers. Even with that modest figure, AMC Networks' streaming revenue has steadily grown to the point where it will soon surpass what the company earns from its traditional TV channels such as AMC, BBC America, Sundance TV and WE, which continue to see subscriber declines.



SZYMON LAZEWSKI/TNS

Alicia Silverstone is shown in the new Acorn TV original series "Irish Blood." AMC Networks, which owns Acorn, is counting on Silverstone's multigenerational appeal to help boost the streaming service.

AMC has found that the strong fan bases for its niche services are willing to absorb price increases and are less likely to cancel. The company has managed to keep its streaming platforms priced at less than $10 a month.

Now AMC Networks is looking to accelerate its subscriber growth and Acorn — the most popular and profitable of its standalone offerings — is seen as the platform best suited to the task.

"It's a service we really believe in," said Courtney Thomasma, executive vice president for streaming and content strategy at AMC Networks. "Over the last year, we've been really focused on looking for ways to continue to raise awareness of the brand and invite new viewers in who we know would also love it. We're doing that with a focus on investing in the brand and inviting bigger talent that's more familiar to North American audiences."

Many fans of Acorn — which started out as a direct marketer of British TV series on home video and was acquired by AMC in 2018 — are what Thomasma calls "armchair travelers" who want to take in a French vineyard or the cobblestone streets of Chelsea. But AMC believes aligning Acorn more closely to the mystery genre will widen its appeal.



CJ RIVERA, INVISION/AP

A monthlong promotional campaign under the banner of Murder Mystery May — which featured a number of season premieres — drove Acorn TV subscription sign-ups to a four-year high. The 20 million hours watched during the month was the best ever for the service, according to AMC.

"This is the first time I've ever had this much creative control as an executive producer. I feel lucky that they entrusted me to do what we're doing."

Brooke Shields
Executive producer and star of "You're Killing Me"

The emphasis on mystery provides Acorn the latitude to cast Silverstone and Shields. One way AMC attracts star talent is the opportunity to put their own creative stamp on their programs. "They become as invested in the success of the projects as we are," Thomasma said.

Silverstone came on to "Irish Blood" as executive producer and became involved in the development of the series. She was involved in the hiring of key positions in the production and worked with the writers. She's happy with the result.

"I thought it was quirky and also an emotionally deep drama," Silverstone said. "There's a lot for me to do."

Shields and writer Robin Bernheim pitched the generation gap tandem at the center of "You're Killing Me" to AMC and the actor remains deeply involved in the process as shooting begins.

"This is the first time I've ever had this much creative control as an executive producer," Shields said in an interview. "I feel lucky that they entrusted me to do what we're doing."

Acorn teams with production partners around the world and generates revenue from selling some of its series for second runs on international broadcasters and PBS.

AMC spends in the range of $1 million per episode for its cost-efficient series, which are heavy on dialogue and largely car-chase free. The audience is older — they are avid readers who are likely to subscribe to newspapers, watch cable news and PBS and enjoy solving puzzles.

And although Acorn is hoping to attract more younger subscribers, the service won't be losing its British accent.

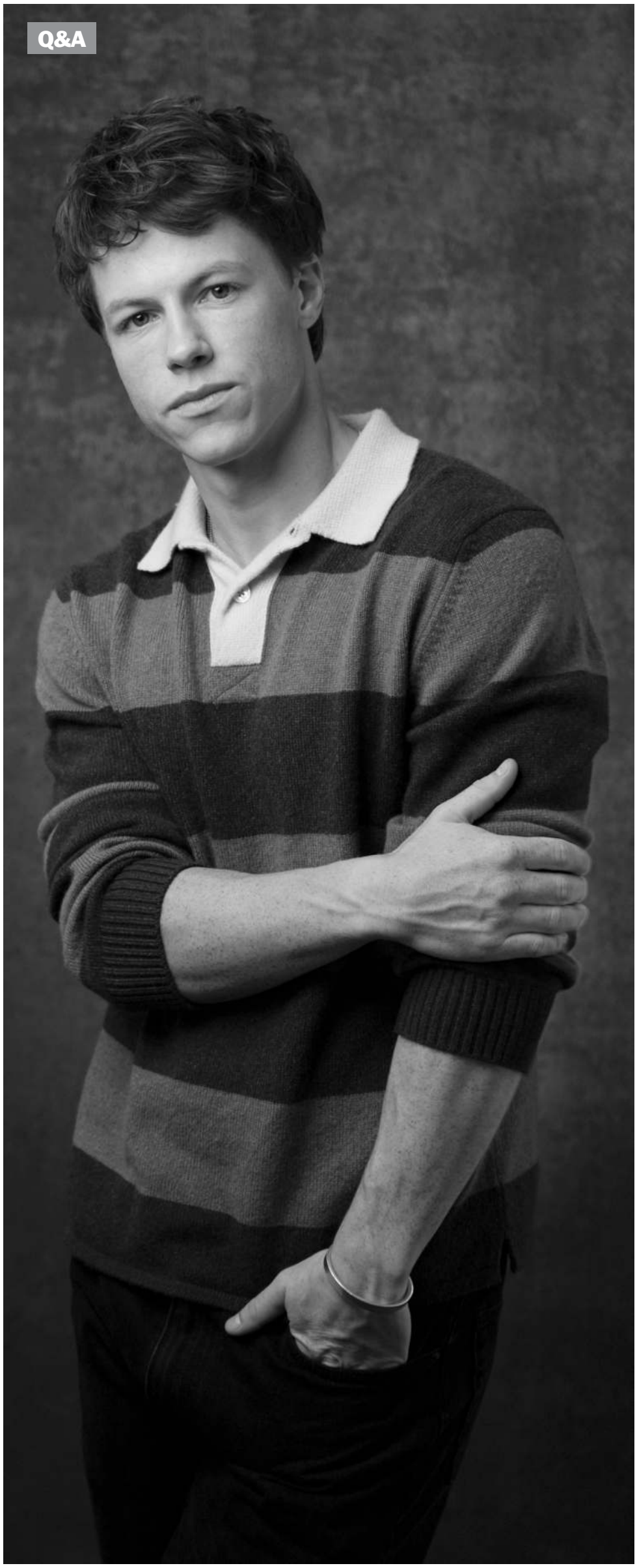
Acorn recently launched "Art Detectives" with Stephen Moyer, who also is an executive producer. The series, about a Heritage Crime Unit that solves murders connected to art and antiques, had the strongest premiere in the streamer's history.

Later this year, it will offer a new six-episode series starring Matthew Lewis, known for his Neville Longbottom role in the Harry Potter films. Based on the series of Canon Clements mystery novels by the Rev. Richard Coles, "Murder Before Evensong" is a co-production with British broadcaster Channel 5.

"We pride ourselves on being a boutique neighborhood store, the kind that you walk in, you know the owner [and] the owner knows you," Thomasma said. "We have deep connection to our audience."

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Q&A



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

British actor Milo Callaghan poses for a portrait to promote the new USA Network series "The Rainmaker" on Aug. 14 in Los Angeles. It is based on a 1995 John Grisham novel.

Learning legalese

'The Rainmaker' star Callaghan discusses how he prepped to play a lawyer on the Grisham adaptation

BY ALICIA RANCILIO
Associated Press

Since 2021, the USA Network has stacked its lineup with reality shows and sports, entirely forgoing original, scripted programming. Fans of "Suits," "White Collar" and "Monk" were left with only memories of those shows' case-of-the-week storytelling. But last week, the network returned to scripted TV with the legal thriller "The Rainmaker."

If the title sounds familiar, it's because it's based on the 1995 novel by John Grisham, which was first adapted into the 1997 Matt Damon-starring film directed by Francis Ford Coppola. In this "Rainmaker," British actor Milo Callaghan plays Rudy Baylor. It's the first leading role for Callaghan, who had previously played recurring characters in shows like HBO's "Dune: Prophecy" and Starz's "The Spanish Princess."

Baylor is fresh out of law school and about to start working at the largest law firm in the state, run by Leo F. Drummond (John Slattery). On his first day, Baylor gets fired after challenging Drummond in a meeting. Desperate for work, he takes a job at a small ambulance-chasing firm that works out of a former taco joint. His boss is Jocelyn "Bruiser" Stone (Lana Parrilla, in a gender swap from the film where Mickey Rourke had the role). She's smart, confident and not afraid to use her sex appeal to get what she wants. Rudy's first big case pits him against the big, fancy law firm that let him go — and his girlfriend who still works there.

Callaghan told The Associated Press about learning legalese while doing a Memphis accent and familiarizing himself with the source material. Answers are edited for clarity and brevity:

Associated Press: Did you watch "The Rainmaker" film?

Callaghan: I watched it when I got cast. Matt Damon is somebody that every young actor would look up to. I wanted to be aware of the work that he did. I mean, it was a Coppola movie as well, so I was excited to see it. And then I gave it maybe like 20 minutes' thought and focused on the script because it is different and I think we have 10 hours of television to explore this character. We go on a windier road than the movie.

Did you read the novel as well and did that help to find your version of Rudy?

Yes. It's a slow-paced thriller, really, but fantastic. And there's this chunk, it must be about 100 pages, of him just preparing for this case for months and months and months. So I never wanted it to feel like it was off-the-hand genius. It felt like this is a situation that has to be honored to a certain extent. Like, you can be a fantastic lawyer, but you don't get there without grinding and grafting. We had great scenes where we were working late into the night.

Did learning your lines to play a lawyer also have you working late?

You prep a court scene, and it's eight pages, and it is a deposition. And you know it and you've worked on it and you're ready to go to sleep, and it's quarter to midnight, and you have an email saying, "We've rewritten this scene and we're shooting it at 8 a.m." And you're like, "Not only am I relearning all this, but I have to go back through the dialect to make sure that this is airtight." It was definitely an extra component that I probably lost a bit of sleep over.



USA NETWORK/TNS

Callaghan stars as brand-new lawyer Rudy Baylor in "The Rainmaker."

You're also British and Rudy Baylor is from Tennessee. How did you lose your accent and master a Southern one?

Consistent work with a great dialogue coach. I remember I got there on my first day and I was running lines with P.J. Byrne, who plays Deck, and he's kind of looking at me funny. He's like, "Why are you talking like that?" I was like, "What do you mean? Because we start filming in three days." I was pronouncing everything phonetically because that was the way I learned. I had to really work on paring it back into a place that felt so natural. For a movie, you might get away with it, but for 10 hours of television, it just has to be light, it has to be quick, it has to be at your fingertips.

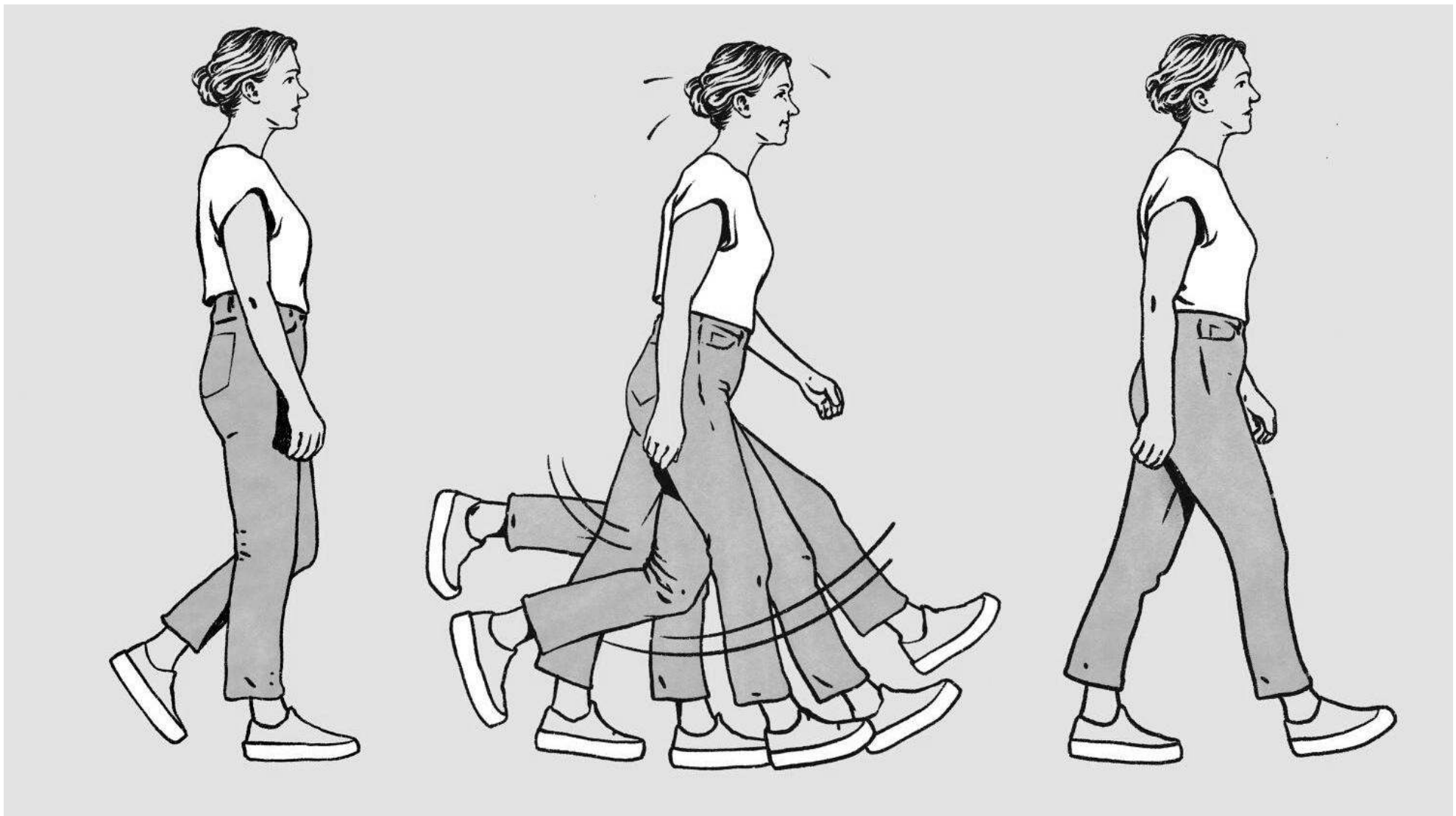
Was there a word that gave you trouble?

"North City Hospital." It was the hardest thing. I was like, 'Why did you call it this?" I got all this legalese down and then "North City Hospital" would shoot me in the foot every time.

There are also differences between U.K. and American law. Did you study U.S. law?

I went through major trials, like the whole O.J. Simpson murder trial and the Gwyneth Paltrow trial. And also obscure trials. I studied attorneys and their patterns of speech and the way they address the court. We don't really have the same kind of pop star element to the legal system of like, "That's the guy who represented this person and that person." Studying that is fascinating.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS



JIM COOKE, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

"Japanese walking" is the latest viral fitness trend on TikTok and has people wondering whether this short-interval workout can improve health more efficiently than a regular stroll.

Far East fitness trend

'Japanese walking' promises big health gains in 30 minutes, but experts are skeptical

BY ASPEN ANDERSON
Los Angeles Times

It promises the benefits of a 10,000-step walk in just 30 minutes. No gym membership required. Just a pair of shoes and a willingness to alternate between brisk and slow-paced walking in three-minute bursts.

Dubbed "Japanese walking," the latest viral fitness trend is all over TikTok and has people wondering whether this short-interval workout can improve health more efficiently than a traditional stroll.

The trend has spread across social media and beyond, with bloggers, online articles and major media outlets all jumping in on the walking routine.

The protocol traces back to a 2007 Japanese study that tested the effects of high-intensity interval walking on middle-aged and older adults. But the recent buzz started with a video from Australian content creator and fitness coach Eugene Teo that surpassed 10 million views on TikTok and 17 million views on YouTube. Known to his over 426,000 TikTok followers and 1.22 million YouTube followers as "Coach Eugene," Teo rebranded the science-backed routine into an accessible, algorithm-friendly idea: "Japanese walking."

"People don't like fitness jargon," Teo, 33, said in a recent interview with the Los Angeles Times. "They don't like scientific terms ... and if I want to impact millions globally ... I like to make fitness advice and scientific jargon a lot more accessible."

In his video explainer, Teo describes the method: Walk fast for three minutes, slow down for three minutes and repeat the cycle five times.

According to the small study of 186 women and 60 men, participants who followed this routine four or more days a week saw greater improvements in blood pressure, leg strength and aerobic capacity than those in the moderate-intensity continuous walking group.

"It's that cardio work that a lot of people are missing," Teo said.

Teo, a longtime coach and nutritionist, didn't invent the protocol, but he did help it reach millions. He said his viral video resonated with people overwhelmed by the pressure to hit 10,000 steps a day — a goal he himself often finds out of reach.

"A lot of people have this all-or-nothing approach where they think, 'Oh, I can't hit 10,000 steps. I've failed,'" he said. "It's about just changing the stigma people have and that all-or-nothing mentality ... of what fitness should be about."

"There's something to the idea that small amounts of vigorous activity are really beneficial."

David Raichlen
professor of biological sciences and anthropology at USC

He emphasizes effort over perfection: Walk fast enough to get out of breath, but not so fast that you can't finish the three-minute interval. The recovery periods are as slow as needed to reset.

But is the science behind the trend as strong as the messaging?

Dr. Helga Van Herle, a cardiologist with Keck Medicine of USC, noted flaws in the original study's design — namely, that only the high-intensity walking group was monitored with accelerometers, not the moderate intensity group, a bias that could have skewed results.

"This creates a major bias in the monitoring and compliance and could potentially skew the results in favor of the high-intensity training group," she said in an email, pointing to the Hawthorne effect, a phenomenon in which people alter their behavior because they know they're being watched.

Dr. Parveen Garg, also with Keck Medicine, said he doesn't see intense interval walking as a standout recommendation among physicians. The study, he said, was small and meant to be thought-provoking and encourage further research, not to support sweeping conclusions.

He supports any activity that gets people moving but cautions against overhyping Japanese walking benefits or ease.

"It's kind of onerous," he said, explaining that remembering to switch gears every three minutes and navigating technology isn't easy for everyone.

He said it's possible to get similar benefits by walking continuously at a vigorous pace for a shorter time. But there isn't enough evidence to confirm that.

Experts agree that vigorous activity, even in short spurts, is beneficial.

David Raichlen, professor of biological sciences and anthropology at USC, said short intervals of increased effort — even just walking briskly for a few minutes — can yield meaningful health effects.

"There's something to the idea that small amounts of vigorous activity are really beneficial," Raichlen said.

Yasuyuki Suzuki, a cardiac imaging specialist from Tokyo, is aware of the trend and the associated study. He said while there is some new interest in the topic, it is not trending in Japan the way it appears to be in other parts of the world.

The simplicity and catchy name may be why it took off.

"Pretty much anybody in Los Angeles can go outside and walk around," said Sarah T. Roberts, a UCLA associate professor and internet culture expert.

WEEKEND: FAMILY



ILLUSTRATION BY NOGA AMI-RAV/Stars and Stripes

No shame for metal mouths

Old-school braces are making a comeback among Gen. Z hipsters, adults

BY ABBY ELLIN
Special to The Washington Post

Ask Laura Kissinger to smile, and she'll do so happily. Broadly. Widely. Proudly displaying the metal brackets adorning her incisors, molars and canines.

"I'm not embarrassed!" said Kissinger, 47, a bartender in Sierra Vista, Ariz. "People come up to me on the street and they're like, 'I love your braces!' I smile way more now."

Kissinger's metamorphosis into a bold brace face began two years ago, when she visited Brian Decker, an orthodontist with three offices in the Tucson area. Decker gave her options for fixing the spaces between her teeth: Ceramic or clear brackets, or a transparent aligner such as Invisalign?

Kissinger wasn't interested. The former were too expensive and could stain easily. As for the latter, Kissinger didn't trust herself not to accidentally toss the plastic trays into the garbage.

What she really wanted — what she'd always wanted, ever since she was a kid unable to afford orthodonture — were the old-fashioned "electric can openers" sported by Marcia Brady in a particularly painful episode of the "Brady Bunch," Drew Barrymore (aka Josie Grossie) in "Never Been Kissed" and America Ferrera in "Ugly Betty."

"They're so endearing looking," Kissinger said. "I don't want them to come off."

Orthodontists across the country are noticing a rise in interest in the uncool oral train tracks of yore among Generation Z hipsters and adults who have no qualms about broadcasting their perceived imperfections. On the contrary, enthusiasts say, they show that the wearers care about their appearance and can afford to invest in themselves.

"When my practice started, kids and adults didn't want braces," said Decker, who has been receiving requests for metal braces over the past five years. "Now, little girls beg us for them. It's more of a fashion symbol. Many middle-aged females like having braces now, as it adds a sort of youthful or innocent look. I can think of a couple of patients who were begging me not to take them off, and I'm like, 'You're done; it's been three years!'"

Richard Schechtman, an orthodontist in Santa Maria, Calif., has seen an uptick in the number of his patients in their 20s and 30s opt for metal braces.

"I started noticing this a year ago but thought it was just a few of my patients," he says.

Out of curiosity, he put a query in a Facebook group he belonged to with orthodontists nationwide. They all reported seeing a similar trend among their patients.

"Braces were associated with the stereotypical shame of appearance, but it's much different today," he said.

Happy wearers credit the trend to influencers and models such as Abbey Clancy, Charlie James and Kitty Hayes, whose metal smile graced the cover of Carine Roitfeld's CR Fashion Book in 2015. More recently, rapper and singer Lil Uzi Vert broadcast his braces, along with his orthodontist, Cassandra Pinkerous, on Instagram.

"No shade to Invisalign, but it's kind of boring to me," said Francis Alvarez, a dental assistant in Brooklyn. Alvarez, 24, had a bad overbite, spaces between his teeth and a lower jaw that jutted out farther than the upper. He appreciated Lil Uzi Vert's "using braces as a form of expression and individuality," and chose them for himself, decorating them with colored rubber bands — green for St. Patrick's Day, rainbow colors for Pride.

"I get that Invisalign is for individuals who are shy about showing others that they are working on themselves, but I'm not timid." he said. "I'm bold, loud and proud about my own journey of improvement and individuality."

For Alvarez and others, metal braces are both a status symbol — they are often not covered by insurance, and can range in price from $3,000 to $10,000 — and a desirable accessory. While serving an orthodontic purpose, they allow wearers to express their individuality with colorful rubber bands or "ties," crystals or jewels. ("I have no issues with them doing that as long as they run it by us first — like bring them into the office so we can make sure it's not in the wrong spot," Decker says of adding embellishments to braces.)

The proliferation of fake or fashion braces that can be purchased online attests to the appeal of the real thing. But fakes can be dangerous. A May 2024 report from the American Association of Orthodontists notes that the devices can cause infections, poisoning, choking, oral cuts, tooth damage or misalignment.

Decker speculates that many people are becoming more aware of the downsides of aligners, especially the necessity of wearing them 22 hours a day.

"Most people know somebody who has gone through it and it took forever, or they didn't get the results they wanted," he said. "We have more control and precision to move teeth with braces than with plastic, even when patient compliance is perfect, which it rarely is."

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



The giant drama of summer storms

My hydrangeas act out summer's story, as their bleaching pastel blooms wilt sadly in the beating August heat. I shut myself inside, windows and doors closed tight to keep out the relentless humidity. Shutters are down, darkening my rooms. Curtains are closed to nature's drama.

Electric bills be damned. I turn the clunky old window air conditioner in my dining room up to its highest setting, and use a box fan to direct the cooler air into my kitchen. Living in a house built in the 1800s is charming nine months of the year, when we can pretend to be Victorian aristocrats cozying up around our fireplace and drinking hot toddies. But for the three warmest months, we mar our gorgeous old home with unsightly air conditioners, spoiling the house's classic coastal New England vibe.

It's been hot and abnormally dry for weeks in the Northeast. No measurable precipitation yet this month, and none predicted in the 10-day forecast. Our lawn, once a luscious emerald-green blanket, is now patchy with tufts that have turned a sickly flaxen hue, highlighting the stubborn weeds that survive in contrasting shades of olive.

Somehow, even without a drop of rain in weeks, humidity is constant, thickening the air, dampening my upper lip and unmentionable areas and turning my hair into a ball of frizz. I feel wasteful being indoors, missing out on these fleeting summer days, but it's just too damned hot and muggy to stay out there for more than a quick trip to the mailbox.

I find myself wishing for rain. Not only to satisfy the theatrical hydrangeas and the parched grass but also for the refreshing break that rain brings during hot summers like this. I close my eyes and envision a mid-August thunderstorm.

The first signs appear in the low clouds that gather on the horizon. Usually, their formations are dark, thick and featureless, but today, fluffy marshmallows grow towering and ominous, heralding more than just rain. I walk out onto our porch to watch the developing spectacle.

As the clouds expand and come closer, the muggy, stagnant air abruptly shifts as if it's being inhaled by a giant in the sky. I am suddenly aware of the scent of earth. The needy soil gives off its distinct musty fragrance like pheromones to attract the coming storm.

I hear a rumble in the distance as the giant takes another step towards me. He still seems so far away. I'm not afraid, but rather excited to see him approaching. There's a flash in my peripheral vision. The fine hairs on my arms lift off my skin — a cool breeze rolls out like a red carpet making way for the superstar's arrival.

The air is now crisp, electric, as flashes and rumbles close in like paparazzi. I feel a drop, then another, before a "CRACK!" splits the sky, sending me back indoors to watch from my window.

The giant has arrived. His thunderous entrance is not gracious or polite, but he brings gifts for everyone. A deluge of rain pours down over the hard earth, softening soil and soaking roots, feeding thirsty flora and fauna and cooling searing sidewalks, streets, asphalt and chrome.

With rain pelting the windows and thunder rumbling over the house, I don't feel wasteful being indoors anymore, because seeking shelter is justified during a thunderstorm.

The giant departs as quickly as he arrived, and as his cloak of clouds trails off with him, the sun appears again. For once, I am glad to see her. I walk out onto the porch again, and along with the hydrangeas, I turn my face upward in appreciation. The actors in this neighborhood play are the same, but the story has changed dramatically.

I see steam rising from the street. I smell the wet grass. I hear birds chirping excitedly. Rested and refreshed, my world is alive again.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

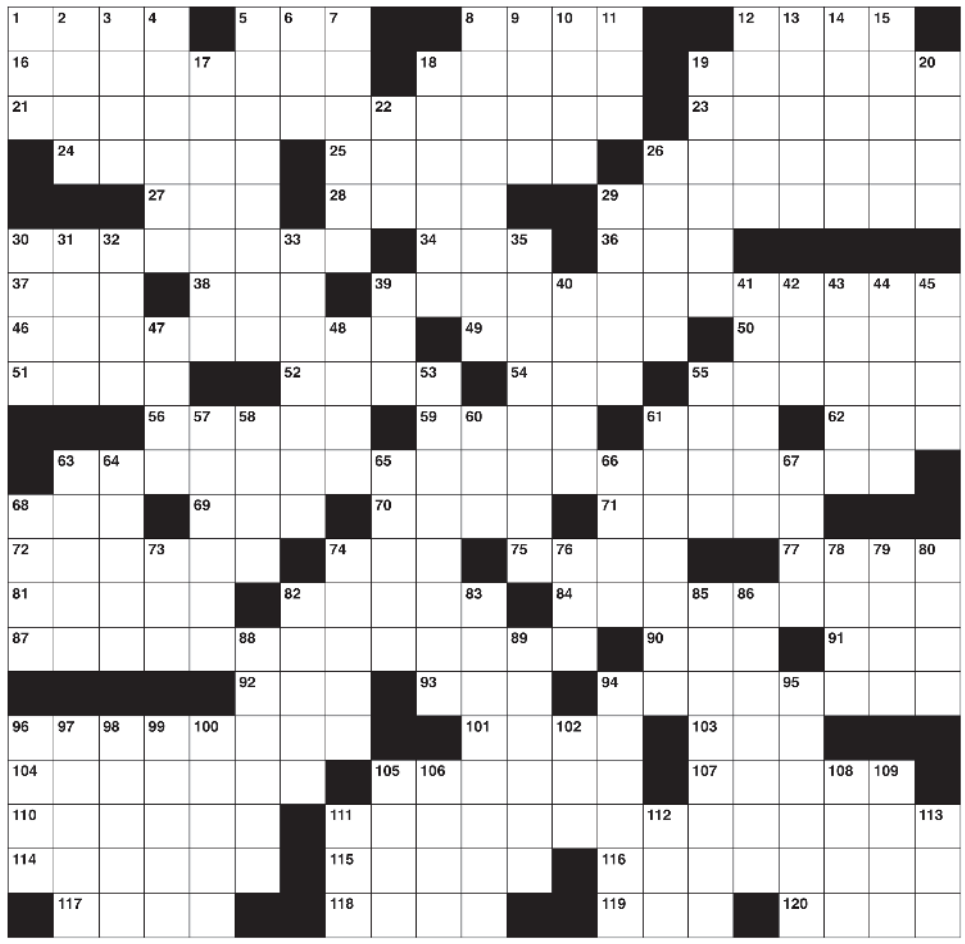
WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

PASSING GLANCES

BY ADAM WAGNER AND CHANDI DEITMER / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Adam Wagner, of Oakland, Calif., is a creative lead at Patreon, a monetization platform for content creators. Chandi Deitmer, of Cambridge, Mass., writes puzzles for Elevate Labs, a brain-training app. They met through an online crossword constructor forum. Adam writes, "We're both used to being the person in a collaboration who pitches the wild, way-too-ambitious ideas and then relies on the other to talk us back down to earth." — W.S.



ACROSS

1 Helpful site for a D.I.Y.'er
5 Thurman of film
8 Need for a transfer of power?
12 Make easier to swallow
16 Basis for a write-off, perhaps
18 Mann who wrote songs for 1999's "Magnolia"
19 First name in country
21 … something big and rocky with a Space Force base in it
23 "So weird …"
24 New York City's ____ Place
25 Norse mythology's equivalent of Olympus
26 Really tipsy
27 Be possessive?
28 Auctioneer's cry
29 … something pointy grown by Pinocchio
30 Teeming
34 "This is the first truth that ____ thine own tongue was guilty of": "All's Well That Ends Well"
36 Mimic
37 Rep who's not a Rep.
38 Music genre associated with the tellum, or reverse mullet
39 … something conical in a chemistry lab
46 … something round and metallic with kanji written on it
49 Homes for hogs
50 Run-down
51 Figure (out)
52 Disney snow queen
54 Approves
55 Many a hangout in Boystown, Chicago
56 Tolerate
59 Corner piece
61 Common remote batteries
62 In the style of
63 Children's game phrase that should start the italicized clues … or a hint to eight squares in this puzzle
68 [Not another word!]
69 Location marker on a map app
70 Novelist James
71 Mega-store?
72 Alfred E. ____, mascot of Mad magazine
74 Long-running drama with the protagonist Olivia Benson, for short
75 Per ____
77 Nowhere close
81 Hall's music partner
82 Certain water hazard
84 … something yellow and happy in a text message
87 … something soft and melty in a black tub
90 Place with moving exhibits
91 Locale for a Snapple fact
92 G.I. grub
93 ____ Hammarskjöld, only posthumous winner of a Nobel Peace Prize
94 Outdoor event with costumes
96 … something feathery sipping on nectar
101 Final four event
103 Store that sells protein powder
104 Single facial feature
105 One of the Jacksons
107 Onionlike vegetables
110 New home for a "fresh prince" in a 1990s sitcom
111 … something long and painted on a highway
114 Down in the dumps
115 Pungent
116 Crispy tortilla-based dishes
117 Funerary shroud
118 Excellent, in 1990s slang
119 Elect (to)
120 Herb paired with brown butter in sauces

DOWN

1 … and so on
2 One of the text reaction buttons on an iPhone
3 Showy daisies
4 Deliberate and unprovoked
5 A password might be provided with one
6 First letter of "menorah," in Hebrew
7 "Let's raise our glasses!"
8 Fortresses
9 Poet Khayyám
10 Las Vegas's Harry ____ International Airport
11 Thieves' place
12 Wedge placed next to a wheel to prevent it from moving
13 Iowan, by another name
14 Sherlock's younger sister on TV
15 Like the Río de la Plata vis-à-vis the Amazon
17 Noted N.S.A. whistle-blower
18 One going fishing
19 You might get one in a row
20 Contributes
22 Source of some base humor, for short?
26 Fast-food chain founded in New Orleans
29 Some noblewomen
30 Happy, dopey, sneezy, sleepy, grumpy and bashful: Abbr.
31 ____ idéal
32 Ones making "Out!" cries
33 Advanced cautiously, front end first
35 Upgraded with new machinery
39 Several characters in nonfiction?
40 Republican politico Haley
41 Brendan of "The Mummy"
42 Ballad
43 Held in check
44 Tired
45 Newswoman Phillips
47 "Please rush!"
48 Hole for a shoelace
53 Archer's protection
55 Fund-raising fete
57 Way around
58 "Take that, loser!"
60 Spanish interjection
61 Smash to smithereens
63 "Word has it ..."
64 Sleep, informally
65 Topsy-turviness
66 That group
67 Cheese typically wrapped in paraffin
68 Sort who won't heed the advice "Don't look down"?
73 What abuts une côte
74 Diaphanous
76 Can you believe it?
78 An ellipse has two of these
79 Slightly open
80 Ready to eat
82 Turn (in)
83 At all, with "the"
85 Out of touch for decades, say
86 Shakespearean potion ingredient
88 Vacillator's confession
89 Timeless
94 Venice's ____ Bridge
95 Express Amtrak options
96 Transportation centers
97 Slightly outdo
98 Brand of wafer
99 Scrutinize
100 Animated daughter of King Triton
102 "Ridiculous!"
105 Bit of blue on a map of Scotland
106 Otherworldly glow
108 Radiohead's first #1 album (2000)
109 Holdup
111 Greeting with the hands
112 ____-eared
113 Jargon suffix

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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NATION

Winged ferry tested for transportation use

By Matt O'Brien
Associated Press

NORTH KINGSTOWN, R.I. — The winged passenger ferry gliding over the surface of Narragansett Bay could be a new method of coastal transportation or a new kind of warship.

Its maker, Regent Craft, is betting on both.

Twelve quietly buzzing propellers line the 65-foot wingspan of Paladin, a sleek ship with an airplane's nose. It looks nothing like the sailboats and fishing trawlers it speeds past through New England's largest estuary.

"We had this vision five years ago for a seaglider — something that is as fast as an aircraft and as easy to drive as a boat," said CEO Billy Thalheimer, jubilant after an hours-long test run of the new vessel.

On a cloudy August morning, Thalheimer sat in the Paladin's cockpit and, for the first time, took control of his company's prototype craft to test its hydrofoils. The electric-powered watercraft has three modes — float, foil and fly.

From the dock, it sets off like any motorized boat. Farther away from land, it rises up on hydrofoils — the same kind used by sailing ships that compete in America's Cup. The foils enable it to travel more than 50 miles per hour — and about a person's height — above the bay.

What makes this vessel so unusual is that it's designed to soar about 30 feet above the water at up to 180 miles per hour — a feat that hasn't quite happened yet, with the first trial flights off Rhode Island's seacoast planned for the end of summer or early fall.

If successful, the Paladin will coast on a cushion of air over Rhode Island Sound, lifting with the same "ground effect" that pelicans, cormorants and other birds use to conserve energy as they swiftly glide over the sea. It could zoom to New York City — which takes at least three hours by train and longer on traffic-clogged freeways — in just an hour.

As it works to prove its seaworthiness to the U.S. Coast Guard and other regulators around the world, Regent is already lining up future customers for commercial ferry routes around Florida, Hawaii, Japan and the Persian Gulf.



PHOTOS BY CHARLES KRUPA/AP

Billy Thalheimer, CEO and Co-Founder of REGENT, left, and Mike Klinker, CTO and Co-Founder of REGENT, walk on a dock after piloting the Viceroy Seaglider, a winged passenger ferry, following a test run (pictured below) on Narragansett Bay on Aug. 6 in North Kingstown, R.I.



Regent is also working with the U.S. Marines to repurpose the same vessels for island-hopping troops in the Pacific. Those vessels would likely trade electric battery power for jet fuel to cover longer journeys.

With backing from influential investors including Peter Thiel and Mark Cuban, Thalheimer says he's trying to use new technology to revive the "comfort and refined nature" of 1930s-era flying boats that were popular in aviation's golden age before they were eclipsed by commercial airlines.

This time, Thalheimer added, they're safer, quieter and emission-free.

"I thought they made travel easier in a way that made total sense to me," Cuban said by email this week. "It's hard to travel around water for short distances. It's expensive and a hassle. Regent can solve this problem and make that travel fun, easy and efficient."

Co-founders and friends Thalheimer, a skilled sailor, and chief technology officer Mike Klinker, who grew up lobster fishing, met while both were freshmen at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and later worked together at Boeing. They started Regent in 2020.

They've already tested and flown a smaller model. But the much bigger, 12-passenger Paladin — prototype of a product line called Viceroy — began foil testing this summer after years of engineering research and development. A manufacturing facility is under construction nearby, with the vessels set to carry passengers by 2027.

The International Maritime Organization classifies "wing-in-ground-effect" vehicles such as Regent's as ships, not aircraft. But a database of civilian ships kept by the London-based organization lists only six around the world, all of them built before it issued new safety guidance on such craft in 2018 following revisions sought by China, France and Russia.

The IMO says it treats them as marine vessels because they operate in the vicinity of other watercraft and must use the same rules for avoiding collisions. The Coast Guard takes a similar approach.

"You drive it like a boat," Thalheimer said. "If there's any traffic on the harbor, you'll see it on the screen. If you see a boat, you'd go around it. We're never flying over boats or anything like that."

One of the biggest technical challenges in Regent's design is the shift from foiling to flying. Hydrofoils are fast for a seafaring vessel, but far slower than the speeds needed to lift a conventional airplane from a runway.

That's where air blown by the 12 propellers comes in, effectively tricking the wing into generating high lift at low speeds.

All of this has worked perfectly on the computer simulations at Regent's headquarters in North Kingstown, R.I.. The next step is testing it over the water.

For decades, the only warship known to mimic such a ground-effect design was the Soviet Union's hulking ekranoplan, which was built to fly under radar detection but never widely used. Recently, however, social media images of an apparent Chinese military ekranoplan have caught the attention of naval experts amid increasingly tense international disputes in the South China Sea.

Regent has capitalized on those concerns, pitching its gliders to the U.S. government as a new method for carrying troops and cargo across island chains in the Indo-Pacific region.

While the U.S. military has shown increasing interest, questions remain about their detectability, as well as their stability in various sea states and wind conditions, and their "cost at scale beyond a few prototypes and maintainability," said retired U.S. Navy Capt. Paul S. Schmitt, an associate research professor at the Naval War College, across the bay in Newport, R.I.

Scientists get a rare peek inside of an exploding star

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Scientists for the first time have spotted the insides of a dying star as it exploded, offering a rare peek into stellar evolution.

Stars can live for millions to trillions of years until they run out of fuel. The most massive ones go out with a bang in an explosion called a supernova.

Using telescopes that peer deep into space, researchers have observed many such explosions. The cosmic outbursts tend to jumble up a dying star's layers, making it hard for scientists to observe the inner structure.

But that wasn't the case for the new discovery, a supernova called 2021yfj located in our Milky Way galaxy.

The collapsing star's outermost layers of hydrogen and helium had peeled away long ago, which wasn't surprising. But the star's dense, innermost layers of silicon and sulfur had also shed during the explosion.

"We have never observed a star that was stripped to this amount," said Northwestern University's Steve Schulze, who was part of the discovery team that published the research Wednesday in the journal Nature.

The finding lends evidence to ideas scientists have about how large stars look near the end of their lives, organized into layers with lighter elements on the outside and heavier ones close to the core.

"Because so many of the layers had been stripped off this star, this basically confirmed what those layers were," said Anya Nugent, who studies supernovas at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. She was not involved with the new research.

It's not yet clear how this star got so whittled down — whether its layers were flung off violently in the final stages of its life or yanked away by a twin star. Future research may yield clues, though scientists acknowledged such an event may be tough to capture again.



ADAM MAKARENKO/AP

This illustration provided by W.M. Keck Observatory depicts the insides of an exploding star.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

DC unemployment rate again highest in country

DC WASHINGTON — The seasonably adjusted unemployment rate in Washington, D.C., was the highest in the nation for the third straight month, according to new data released Tuesday by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

D.C.'s jobless rate reached 6% in July, a reflection of the mass layoffs of federal workers, ushered in by President Donald Trump's Department of Government Efficiency, earlier this year. An overall decline in international tourism — which is a main driver of D.C.'s income — is also expected to have an impact on the unemployment rate in the District.

Neighboring states also saw an uptick in unemployment rates in July — with Maryland at 3.4% (up from 3.3%) and Virginia at 3.6% (up from 3.5%), according to the state-by-state jobless figures.

In July, the Supreme Court cleared the way for Trump administration plans to downsize the federal workforce further, despite warnings that critical government services will be lost and hundreds of thousands of federal employees will be out of their jobs.

Reporter: Mayor's ex-aide gave her a cash-filled bag

NY NEW YORK — A longtime adviser to New York City Mayor Eric Adams who resigned from his administration while under FBI scrutiny gave a reporter a potato chip bag filled with cash Wednesday following a campaign event, a gift her lawyer later insisted wasn't an attempted bribe.

The local news site The City reported the episode hours after one of its reporters said Winnie Greco had pressed a bag of potato chips into her hands containing a red envelope with a $100 bill and several $20 bills. The reporter, Katie Honan, had scrutinized Greco's conduct in the past as a major fundraiser for Adams in the Chinese American community.

Greco's attorney, Steven Brill, said the situation was being "blown out of proportion."

"This was not a bag of cash," Brill wrote in an email. "In the Chinese culture, money is often given to others in a gesture of friendship and gratitude. And that's all that was done here. Winnie's intention was born purely out of kindness."

Settlement mandates education up to age 22

MT HELENA — A federal district court approved a settlement dictating that Montana students with individualized education programs are eligible for public education up to the age of 22.

In the Aug. 13 settlement between Disability Rights Montana and the state, the Montana Office of Public Instruction must offer students with disabilities access to public education past the age of 18.

A 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals case in Hawaii from 2013 established a parallel precedent. Most states maintain a similar policy.

Montana federal Judge Dana Christensen approved the settlement, which mandates that the Montana Office of Public Instruction offer re-enrollment to students with individualized education plans who graduated without a diploma in the spring of 2025.

Carrying some weapons now won't bring charges

DC WASHINGTON — Federal prosecutors in the nation's capital will no longer bring felony charges against people for possessing rifles or shotguns in the District of Columbia, according to a new policy adopted by the leader of the nation's largest U.S. attorney's office.

That office will continue to pursue charges when someone is accused of using a shotgun or rifle in a violent crime or has a criminal record that makes it illegal to have a firearm.

Local authorities in Washington can prosecute people for illegally possessing unregistered rifles and shotguns.

U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro said in a statement that the change is based on guidance from the Justice Department and the Office of Solicitor General and conforms with two Supreme Court decisions on gun rights.

Judge: Court's map violates Voting Rights Act

MS JACKSON — A federal judge has ordered Mississippi to redraw its Supreme Court electoral map, after finding the map dilutes the power of Black voters.

U.S. District Judge Sharion Aycock ruled the map, which was enacted in 1987, violates the Voting Rights Act and cannot be used in future elections.

The Mississippi branch of the American Civil Liberties Union helped litigate the lawsuit, arguing the map cut Mississippi's Delta region — a historically Black area — in half.

The lawsuit, which was filed on April 25, 2022, argued the map diminished the Black vote in the Central District.

Prosecutor under review after warning amid arrest

RI NEWPORT — A Rhode Island prosecutor is under review after police body camera footage recorded her warning officers "you're gonna regret this" while she was being arrested.

Devon Flanagan, a special assistant attorney general, was arrested outside a restaurant by Newport police Aug. 14 for trespassing, according to law enforcement.

Body camera footage provided by the police department shows Flanagan asking an officer multiple times to turn off his body camera and then repeatedly saying "I'm an AG."

Eventually, Flanagan is put in a patrol vehicle and says, "Buddy, you're gonna regret this. You're gonna regret it."

Shrimp recalled over potential contamination

DC WASHINGTON — Walmart has recalled frozen, raw shrimp sold in 13 states because federal health officials say it could have potential radioactive contamination.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration asked Walmart to pull three lots of Great Value brand frozen shrimp from stores after federal officials detected Cesium-137, a radioactive isotope, in shipping containers and a sample of breaded shrimp imported from Indonesia.

The products could pose a "potential health concern" for people exposed to low levels of Cesium-137 over time, FDA officials said.

"If you have recently purchased raw frozen shrimp from Walmart that matches this description, throw it away," FDA officials said in a statement.

The risk from the recalled shrimp is "quite low," said Donald Schaffner, a food safety expert at Rutgers University.

Near-term chances of volcano eruption 'low'

AK ANCHORAGE — Officials lowered the alert level for a volcano near Alaska's largest city to normal Wednesday, which they said indicates that Mount Spurr is "quiet" months after showing signs of activity that raised the possibility of an eruption.

Over the past few months, signs of unrest at the 11,070-foot volcano near Anchorage have gradually decreased, according to the Alaska Volcano Observatory, which added that no ground deformation has been detected since March. The observatory characterized the near-term chances of an eruption as "extremely low."

It said small earthquakes continued to occur more frequently than before a period of unrest began in early 2024, and that volcanic gases were still being released. But the center said this is normal for volcanoes where magma has moved upward but has not erupted.

From wire reports



MATT ROURKE/AP

Centenarians' babies

Staff members pose for photographs with 16 critically endangered western Santa Cruz tortoise hatchlings during their debut at the Philadelphia Zoo on Wednesday. The pampered turtles were born in a series of hatches this year to Mommy and Abrazzo, a couple that is estimated to both be about 100 years old.

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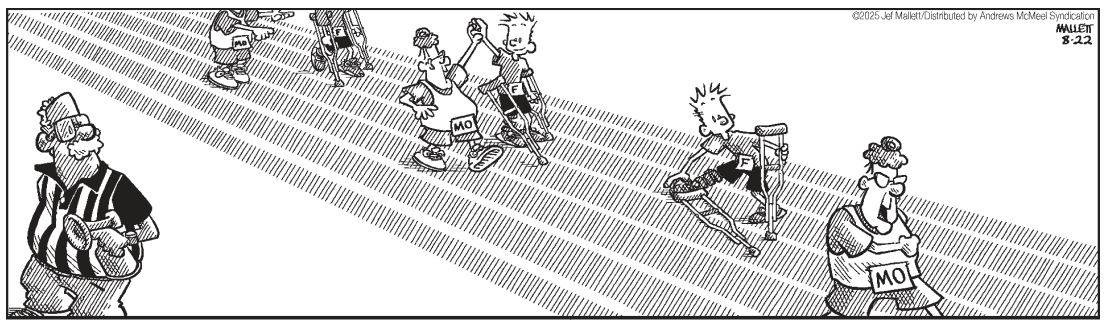
Bizarro



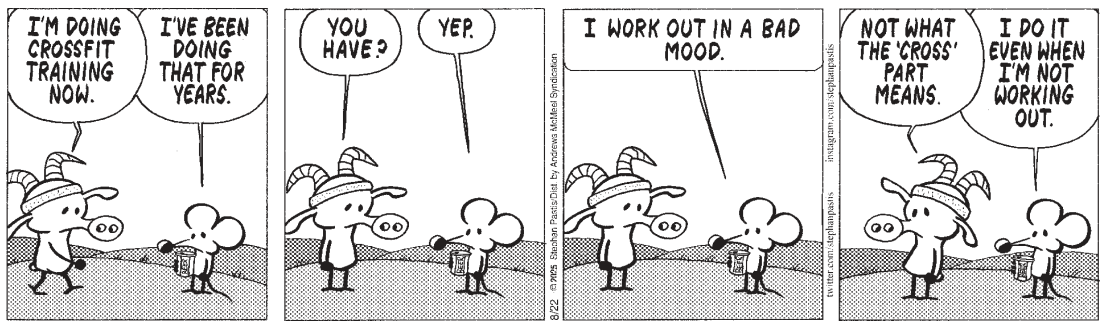
Loose Parts



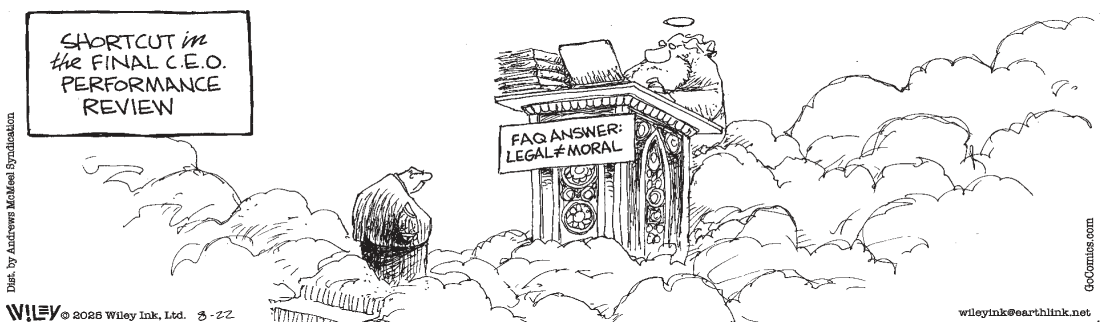
Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Wumo



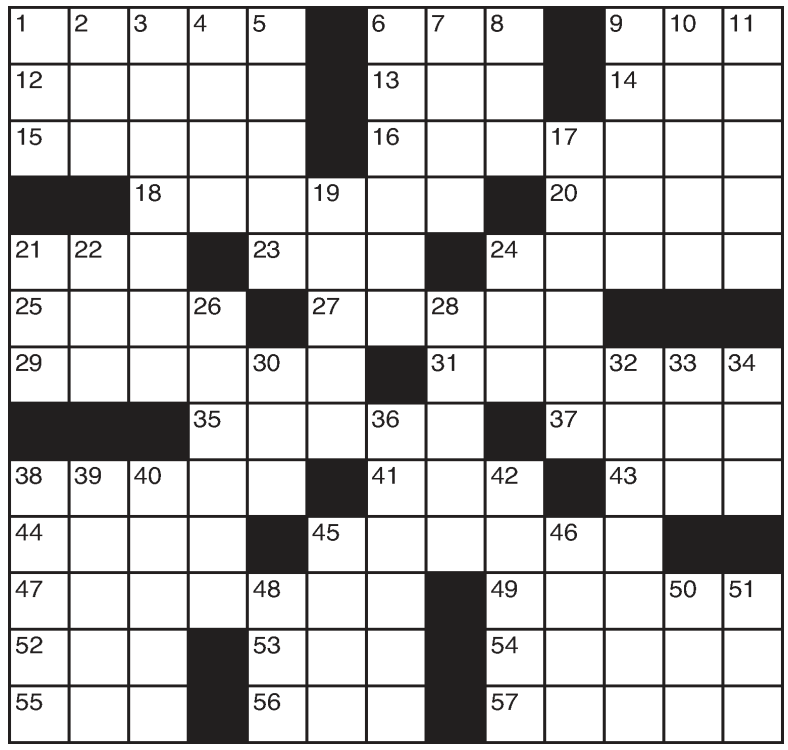
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Rage
6 Knee protector
9 Rx overseer
12 Eucalyptus muncher
13 Super serve
14 Sound of wonderment
15 World record?
16 "Downton Abbey" family name
18 Amount consumed
20 Employ
21 Oft-torn knee part, for short
23 Blackbird
24 Ties up, as a boat
25 Not single-sex
27 Preamble
29 Cleans with a broom
31 Fish-eating hawk
35 Direct, as a car
37 Harboring a grudge
38 "As You Like It" role
41 Canonized Fr. woman
43 Stitch
44 Couturier Cassini
45 Sports venues
47 "Anne of Green Gables" setting
49 Politico Stevenson
52 Go astray
53 Performance
54 Dewy
55 Mao — -tung
56 "Adios!"
57 Nodded off

DOWN

1 Wanted poster abbr.
2 Part of NIMBY
3 Biblical sea
4 Flair
5 Bob Marley fan, often
6 Cram
7 Farmland unit
8 Narc's org.
9 Book's page number
10 "Cloud Cuckoo Land" author Anthony
11 "But of course!"
17 Cries of excitement
19 Ouzo flavor
21 Condo coolers
22 Farm female
24 "— Miniver"
26 Blueprint
28 Mexican sandwich
30 Bake sale org.
32 — Hale ("Twilight" vampire)
33 Before
34 Evergreen tree
36 Will subject
38 Seaboard
39 "The King" of Graceland
40 Sierra —
42 Dutch treats?
45 Cabinet dept. head
46 Object of worship
48 Science room
50 Nile biter
51 Addams cousin

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

8-22

CRYPTOQUIP

GPKG UKHOK OFSQH'G QUSHO ZFHSA YIARHL HFH-MWIMRKN RGSZQ. RG FHNA LSGQ GPS YSKW HSMSQQRGRSQ.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHICH GENRE OF SONGS DO YOU SUPPOSE A GROUP OF REALLY YOUNG DOGS WOULD PERFORM? PUP MUSIC.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: H equals N

Bizarro



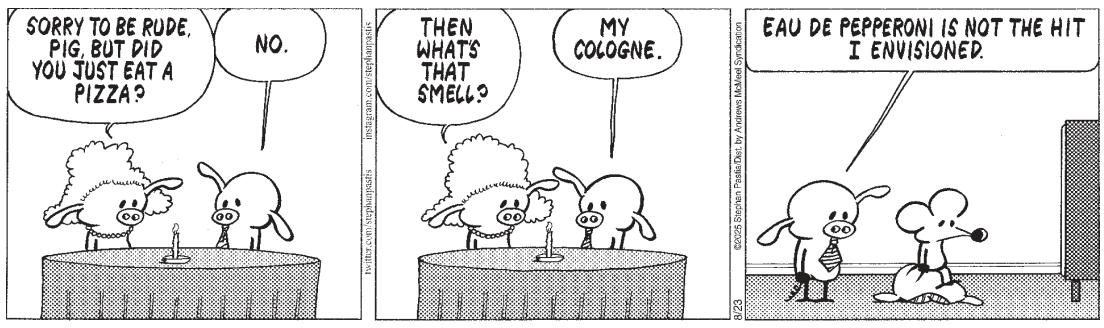
Loose Parts



Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Wumo



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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

ACROSS

1 After-school groups
6 Lin and Angelou
11 Playground fixture
12 Reps
14 Actress Anderson
15 Music for seven
16 Buckeyes' sch.
17 Bridge call
19 Before
20 Laura of "Big Little Lies"
22 Away from NNW
23 Melody
24 '50s Ford
26 ABBA's music
28 Zee preceder
30 Hogwash
31 French bacteriologist
35 Deep gorge
39 Big fusses
40 Gun the engine
42 "Ex's & Oh's" singer King
43 Crater part
44 Speedy
46 N.J. neighbor
47 Some potatoes
49 In layers
51 Deli meat
52 Fesses up
53 First half of an LP
54 Lake birds

DOWN

1 Stopped
2 Madagascar primates
3 Work with
4 Indonesian island
5 Trades
6 Spa employee
7 Ice and Bronze
8 "You betcha!"
9 Pay to play
10 Buffet-table heater
11 Fine china brand
13 Pricey
18 Enzyme suffix
21 Salamanders
23 "Joy — World"
25 Caustic cleaner
27 Sinbad's bird
29 Turkey is part of it
31 Hilton heiress
32 Nike rival
33 Mogadishu resident
34 Gym unit
36 Apollo 11 astronaut
37 Icy downpours
38 Pinochle ploys
41 Imperative
44 The Eternal City
45 Queen of Carthage
48 Owned
50 Comic Philips

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

8-23

CRYPTOQUIP

HEQI SYSY YDLWGL XQYI'G STB BTL QMFWLYAKQ YIS XVCRQS YDTVIS, HEYL SWS WL QMFKYWC? "YDR, YDR!"

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THAT PANDA DOESN'T SPEND MONEY BUYING NON-CRUCIAL ITEMS. IT ONLY GETS THE BEAR NECESSITIES.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals D

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OPINION

People are starting to talk like ChatGPT

By Adam Aleksic
Special to The Washington Post

If you use ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini or another artificial-intelligence-powered chatbot, you're probably operating under the assumption that you're both speaking the same language. You input English, it outputs English. Simple, right? Except that's a misconception: You've actually been speaking different languages.

Rather than processing text like a human, the chatbot turns your prompt into an embedding — a group of numbers represented in a "vector space," kind of like coordinates on a map. But just as a map is a flattened representation of its territory, this embedding is a flattened representation of language; some amount of human variation and context is necessarily lost.

Next, the chatbot formulates a reply, making a word-by-word prediction based on how it was trained to answer past inputs. This prediction draws on biased training data (the specific texts it learns from) and biased reinforcement learning (the feedback it receives). Ultimately, what looks like English to you is really a simulacrum of actual human speech.

The unnerving thing is that now, with hundreds of millions of people regularly engaging with chatbots, English-speaking humans are starting to talk like the inhuman communicator on the other side.

For example, ChatGPT uses the word "delve" at higher rates than people generally use when writing or speaking English. As Florida State University researchers Tom S. Juzek and Zina B. Ward have found, this likely results from small biases and errors in the human feedback process compounding over time. Employees of AI companies checking over large language model (LLM) outputs are often low-wage workers from countries such as Nigeria and Kenya, where "delve" is used at higher rates than in American or British English.

Slight lexical overrepresentations may thus have been reinforced into the model — sometimes even more frequently than in the workers' own usage. Because of the job's time pressures and stressful conditions, the checkers might have missed the "delve" frequency while clicking through sample texts, leading to further amplification. (Some other examples are "intricate," "commendable" and "meticulous.")

Now this overuse is bleeding into global culture. In the two years since ChatGPT launched in late 2022, the appearance of "delve" in academic publishing saw a tenfold increase as researchers began turning to AI for help with their papers. As scientists and writers have grown more aware of this phenomenon, they've taken steps to "sound less like AI." I actually used to enjoy using the word "delve"; now I try to avoid it.

But most people likely don't know about the chatbot biases toward certain words. Users assume that ChatGPT is talking in "normal" English, because that's the implication of the tool's user interface. They also assume that regular, everyday texts they encounter are normal English, even when they might have been AI-generated as well. Over time, it gets easier and easier to confuse the representation with reality.

Indeed, a study reported in Scientific American last month found that people have started saying "delve" more in spontaneous, spoken conversations. This isn't AI's doing anymore; we've started internalizing its biases and repeating them by ourselves. I say "we" because even those in the anti-"delve" faction aren't exempt. We might avoid using the most well-known ChatGPT giveaways, but so many words are appearing with unnatural frequency that we can't possibly avoid them all. Are we also supposed to stop using the chatbot-overused "inquiry"? Or "surpass"? There's too much to keep track of.

Our susceptibility to unwittingly adopting LLM vocabulary will likely only increase as the circle of AI text, human text we don't know is AI, and actual human speech spins faster and faster. In psycholinguistics, it's generally understood that the frequency of a word's representation affects its availability in people's mental lexicon — the "dictionary" of possible options to draw from in spoken conversation. Essentially, the more we see a word represented, the more intuitive it feels to use it ourselves.

It's normal for our mental language mappings to evolve, but now we're in a feedback loop where our "maps" are converging with the chatbots' "maps." Both differ from the actual landscape — the unfathomable variation in how humans speak — but the confusion is making it harder to evaluate what's real human language and what's artificially generated. As this distinction becomes harder to discern, we'll keep blurring the lines of reality, cyclically using that blur to construct our new realities. And as AI models continue to be trained on both their own output and the AI-influenced human writing they ingest, the pervasiveness of LLM-speak will only intensify.

Linguistically, there's nothing wrong with this. The word "delve" isn't any worse for your brain than its synonyms. But language is a harbinger of greater social shifts. There are many other, far more insidious misrepresentations that are also coded into LLMs. Racial biases, gender biases and political biases — all of these are likely trained into the models much like linguistic biases, but these are harder to definitively measure.

We need to remember that these aren't neutral tools: They hold the power to subtly reshape our thinking.

Adam Aleksic is the author of "Algospeak: How Social Media Is Transforming the Future of Language."

Russia, Ukraine summits show Trump can push for peace

By Mikhail Alexseev
Los Angeles Times

By hosting an unprecedented short-notice summit with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and key European leaders on Monday, President Donald Trump significantly raised the prospects for ending Russia's three-and-a-half-year-long war against Ukraine.

The vibe at the opening was affable and positive. The participants genuinely looked determined to work out compromises that only a few weeks ago appeared illusory. It was a good sign for long-term Euro-Atlantic security cooperation in the face of challenges that, in Trump's words, we have not faced since World War II. Toward the end, Trump's call to Moscow brought a follow-up U.S.-Ukraine-Russia summit within reach.

But the rising expectations also reveal formidable obstacles on the path to peace. As the world's leaders were heading to Washington, Russian leader Vladimir Putin's forces unleashed 182 infantry assaults, 152 massive glide bombs, more than 5,100 artillery rounds and 5,000 kamikaze drones on Ukraine's defenses and 140 long-range drones and four Iskander ballistic missiles on Ukraine's cities.

The Monday summit also revealed that Putin's ostensible concession at the Alaska summit to agree to international security guarantees for Ukraine is a poisoned chalice. On the surface, it seemed like a breakthrough toward compromise. The White House summit participants jumped on it and put the guarantees at the center of discussions.

And yet there has been no agreement, and the world has more questions than answers. How could the Ukrainian armed forces be strengthened to deter Russia? Who would pay? How could Russia be prevented from rebuilding its Black Sea Fleet and blocking Ukrainian grain exports? What troop deployments would be needed? Who would put boots on the ground in Ukraine? What kind of guarantees should match what kind of territorial concessions?

Disingenuously, in exchange for this poisoned chalice of a concession, Putin demanded that Ukraine cede not only lands currently under Russia's illegal military occupation but also a large piece of the Donetsk province still under Kyiv's control. That area is home to 300,000 people and is a defense stronghold. Controlling it would give Russia a springboard to deeper attacks targeting big cities and threatening to bring Ukraine to its knees.

Putin's offer also threatens to tear apart Ukraine's society. In my tracking poll with Ukraine's Academy of Sciences Institute of Sociology completed in early August, close to half of 567 respondents want Ukraine to reassert control over all of its internationally recognized territories, including the Crimean Peninsula illegally annexed in 2014. Only 20% would be content with freezing the conflict along the current front lines.

Getting Ukrainian society right is important for Trump's peace effort to succeed. Misjudging Ukrainians now would most likely result in a rejection of peace proposals and possibly a political crisis there, inviting more aggression from Moscow while empowering more dogged resistance to the invasion, with a long, bloody war grinding on.

Thankfully, Trump has the capacity to keep the peace process on track. First, he can amplify two critically important messages he articulated at the Monday summit: U.S. willingness to back up Ukraine's security guarantees and to continue to sell weapons to Ukraine if no peace deal is reached. Second, he can use his superb skills at strategic ambiguity and pivot back to threats of leveraging our submarine power and of imposing secondary sanctions on countries trading with Russia. Third, he can drop a hint he'd back up the Senate's bipartisan Supporting Ukraine Act of 2025, which would provide military assistance to Ukraine over two years from confiscated Russian assets, the U.S.-Ukraine minerals deal proceeds and investment in America's military modernization.

The Monday summit makes the urgency of these and similar moves glaringly clear.

Mikhail Alexseev, a professor of international relations at San Diego State University, is the author of "Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence, and Global Struggle" and principal investigator of the multiyear "War, Democracy and Society" survey in Ukraine.

SCOREBOARD/MLB

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League

BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Sent SS Jorge Mateo to Norfolk (IL) on a rehab assignment.
BOSTON RED SOX — Optioned RHP Isaiah Campbell to Worcester (IL).
CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Placed RHP Elvis Peguero on the 15-day IL. Recalled RHP Wikelman Gonzalez from Charlotte (IL).
CLEVELAND GUARDIANS — Designated RHP Carlos Hernández for assignment. Selected the contract of LHP Parker Messick from Columbus (IL).
DETROIT TIGERS — Sent RHP José Urquidy to Toledo (IL) on a rehab assignment.
HOUSTON ASTROS — Sent RHP Jordan Weems outright to Sugar Land (PCL).
LOS ANGELES ANGELS — Placed RHP Jose Soriano on the paternity list. Recalled RHP Chase Silseth from Salt Lake (PCL).
NEW YORK YANKEES — Recalled RHP Allan Winans from Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (IL).
TEXAS RANGERS — Placed RHP Cole Winn on the 15-day IL. Recalled LHP Jacob Latz from Round Rock (PCL).
TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Optioned RHP Braydon Fisher to Buffalo (IL).

National League

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS — Recalled RHP Bryce Jarvis from Reno (PCL). Optioned RHP Andrew Hoffmann to Reno.
CHICAGO CUBS — Sent RHP Eli Morgan to South Bend (ML) on a rehab assignment.
CINCINNATI REDS — Placed C Tyler Stephenson on the 10-day IL, retroactive to August 17. Selected the contract of C Will Banfield from Louisville (IL).
LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Optioned RHP Alexis Díaz to Oklahoma City (PCL). Recalled RHP Paul Gervase from Oklahoma City. Sent 1B Enrique Hernandez on a rehab assignment to Oklahoma City.
MIAMI MARLINS — Sent 3B Connor Norby to Jacksonville (IL) on a rehab assignment.
MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Recalled RHP Carlos Rodriguez from Nashville (IL). Optioned RHP Tobias Myers to Nashville. Optioned RHP Chad Patrick to Nashville.
PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Recalled RHP Johan Oviedo from Indianapolis (IL). Optioned LHP Evan Sisk to Indianapolis. Optioned RHP Chase Shugart to Indianapolis.
SAN DIEGO PADRES — Optioned RHP Ron Marinaccio to El Paso (PCL). Recalled LHP JP Sears from El Paso.

BASKETBALL
Women's National Basketball Association

PHOENIX MERCURY — Released G Kiana Williams, then signed her to a rest-of-season contract.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS — Signed OL Dohnovan West to a contract. Released WR Kelly Akharaiyi.
BUFFALO BILLS — Signed CB Zy Alexander, OL Elijah Young and OL Rush Reimer to contracts. Released K Caden Davis. Waived/injured RB Jarveon Howard. Reverted DB Te'Cory Couch and WR Kaden Prather to injured reserve.
CHICAGO BEARS — Signed QB Tyson Bagent to a two-year contract. extension. Signed RB Royce Freeman to a contract. Placed RB Deion Hankins on injured reserve.
DENVER BRONCOS — Signed DT Michael Dwumfour to a contract. Waived ILB J.B. Brown.
HOUSTON TEXANS — Signed LS Blake Ferguson to a contract. Released TE Tre' McKitty. Reverted WR Xavier Johnson from to injured reserve.
JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Waived/injured WR Joshua Cephus.
LOS ANGELES RAMS — Signed DB Mike McAllister and OL John Leglue to contracts. Reverted WR Mike Williams to injured reserve.
MIAMI DOLPHINS — Activated TE Darren Waller from the PUP list.
NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Acquired WR Devaughn Vele from Denver in exchange for 2026 fourth round draft pick.
NEW YORK JETS — Acquired DT Jowon Briggs and a 2026 seventh-round draft pick from the Cleveland Browns in exchange for a 2026 sixth-round draft pick. Acquired DT Harrison Phillips and a 2027 seventh-round draft pick from the Minnesota Vikings in exchange for a 2026 sixth-round draft pick and a 2027 sixth-round draft pick.
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Signed LB Chance Campbell to a contract. Released WR Giles Jackson.
PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Reverted LB Gareth Warren to injured reserve. Waived LB Devin Harper from injured reserve with an injury settlement.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Signed OL Michael Dunn and WR Malik Knowles to one-year contracts. Released DL Demone Harris. Waived/injured RB Corey Kiner. Suspended WR DeMarcus Robinson three games to start the season.
TENNESSEE TITANS — Activated CB L'Jarius Sneed from the PUP list.
WASHINGTON COMMANDERS — Released CB Kevon Seymour from injured reserve with an injury settlement. Waived/injured G Julian Good-Jones.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

COLORADO AVALANCHE — Signed F Victor Olofsson to a one-year contract.
NASHVILLE PREDATORS — Signed F Brady Martin to a three-year, entry level contract.

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

HOUSTON DASH — Loaned D Zoe Matthews to Dux Logroño (Spain Liga F) through June 30, 2026.
NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION — Acquired F Dor Turgeman from Maccabi Tel Aviv (Israeli Premier League) through the 2028 MLS season, with a club option for 2029.
SAN DIEGO FC — Acquired D Leo Duru from Blackburn Rovers F.C. (EFL) on loan through June 2026, with a permanent purchase option.

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA

Eastern Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	22	13	.629	—
New York	22	13	.629	—
Indiana	19	16	.543	3
Washington	16	19	.457	6
Chicago	8	26	.235	13½
Connecticut	7	27	.206	14½

Western Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Minnesota	28	6	.824	—
Phoenix	21	13	.618	7
Las Vegas	22	14	.611	7
Golden State	18	17	.514	10½
Seattle	18	18	.500	11
Los Angeles	17	18	.486	11½
Dallas	9	27	.250	20

x-clinched playoff spot

Tuesday's games

New York 85, Minnesota 75
Connecticut 80, Washington 69
Seattle 94, Chicago 88
Phoenix 98, Golden State 91
Las Vegas 74, Atlanta 72

Wednesday's game

Los Angeles 81, Dallas 80

Thursday's games

Chicago at New York
Washington at Connecticut
Minnesota at Atlanta
Phoenix at Las Vegas

Friday's games

Minnesota at Indiana
Seattle at Dallas
Golden State at Phoenix

Saturday's games

New York at Atlanta
Las Vegas at Washington
Connecticut at Chicago

Sunday's games

Seattle at Washington
Golden State at Dallas
Indiana at Minnesota

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Schedule

Saturday, Aug. 23
SOUTH

Incarnate Word (0-0) at Nicholls (0-0)
Mercer (0-0) vs. UC Davis (0-0) at Montgomery, Ala.
Sam Houston St. (0-0) at W. Kentucky (0-0)
Southern U. (0-0) vs. NC Central (0-0) at Atlanta

MIDWEST

Kansas St. (0-0) vs. Iowa St. (0-0)
Fresno St. (0-0) at Kansas (0-0)

FAR WEST

Idaho St. (0-0) at UNLV (0-0)
Tarleton St. (0-0) at Portland St. (0-0)
Stanford (0-0) at Hawaii (0-0)

Thursday, Aug. 28
EAST

Ohio (0-0) at Rutgers (0-0)
Delaware St. (0-0) at Delaware (0-0)

SOUTH

Boise St. (0-0) at South Florida (0-0)
St. Francis (Pa.) (0-0) at Louisiana-Monroe (0-0)
Jacksonville St. (0-0) at UCF (0-0)
Towson (0-0) at Norfolk St. (0-0)
East Carolina (0-0) at NC State (0-0)
West Georgia (0-0) at Samford (0-0)
Elon (0-0) at Duke (0-0)
Alcorn St. (0-0) at Northwestern St. (0-0)
Alabama St. (0-0) at UAB (0-0)

MIDWEST

McKendree (0-0) at Indiana St. (0-0)
Lafayette (0-0) at Bowling Green (0-0)
Mercyhurst (0-0) at Youngstown St. (0-0)
Dayton (0-0) at E. Illinois (0-0)
Wyoming (0-0) at Akron (0-0)
Lindenwood (Mo.) (0-0) at St. Thomas (Minn.) (0-0)
Upper Iowa (0-0) at Drake (0-0)
Cent. Arkansas (0-0) at Missouri (0-0)
Buffalo (0-0) at Minnesota (0-0)
Cincinnati (0-0) vs. Nebraska (0-0) at Kansas City, Mo.
Miami (Ohio) (0-0) at Wisconsin (0-0)

SOUTHWEST

Arkansas Baptist (0-0) at Houston Christian (0-0)
UT Martin (0-0) at Oklahoma St. (0-0)
Stephen F. Austin (0-0) at Houston (0-0)

FAR WEST

Stony Brook (0-0) at San Diego St. (0-0)

PRO SOCCER

MLS

Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Cincinnati	16	7	4	52	42	34
Philadelphia	15	6	6	51	44	26
Nashville	14	8	5	47	44	31
Orlando City	13	6	8	47	53	35
Inter Miami CF	13	5	6	45	53	39
Columbus	12	5	9	45	42	37
Charlotte FC	14	11	2	44	45	39
NYC FC	12	8	5	41	36	30
Chicago	11	9	6	39	50	44
New York	11	10	6	39	42	37
New England	7	12	7	28	33	37
Toronto FC	5	13	8	23	27	34
Atlanta	4	12	10	22	31	49
CF Montréal	4	15	8	20	25	48
D.C. United	4	15	8	20	23	52

Western Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
San Diego FC	16	7	4	52	52	33
Minn. United	13	6	8	47	44	30
Vancouver	13	6	7	46	44	29
Seattle	11	7	8	41	43	36
LA FC	11	6	7	40	43	30
Portland	10	9	7	37	35	37
Colorado	10	11	6	36	36	41
Austin FC	9	8	8	35	24	29
San Jose	8	11	8	32	50	47
Real Salt Lake	9	13	4	31	27	33
FC Dallas	7	11	8	29	38	46
Houston	7	11	8	29	33	42
Sporting KC	6	14	6	24	37	50
St Louis City	5	15	6	21	29	44
LA Galaxy	3	16	7	16	29	55

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

Saturday's games

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

Sunday's games

Toronto FC at Atlanta
New York at Charlotte FC
Sporting Kansas City at Seattle

Saturday, Aug. 30

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

Sunday, Aug. 31

San Diego FC at Los Angeles FC

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Kansas City	13	2	1	40	32	10
San Diego	8	3	5	29	28	18
Orlando	8	4	4	28	22	12
Washington	8	4	4	28	25	22
Portland	7	4	5	26	25	17
Seattle	7	5	4	25	24	20
Louisville	6	6	4	22	22	27
Gotham FC	5	6	5	20	20	16
North Carolina	5	6	5	20	20	23
Houston	5	8	3	18	19	26
Bay FC	4	7	5	17	18	22
Angel City	4	7	5	17	21	27
Chicago	1	9	6	9	15	32
Utah Royals FC	1	11	4	7	12	31

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

Thursday's game

Orlando at Angel City

Friday's game

North Carolina at Chicago

Saturday's games

Washington at Bay FC
Utah Royals FC at Gotham FC
Kansas City at Portland

Sunday's games

Seattle at Houston
Louisville at San Diego

Friday, Aug. 29

Houston at Louisville
Gotham FC at Orlando
San Diego at Seattle
Utah Royals FC at Portland

MLB scoreboard

American League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Toronto	74	54	.578	—
New York	69	57	.548	4
Boston	68	59	.535	5½
Tampa Bay	61	66	.480	12½
Baltimore	59	67	.468	14

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	76	53	.589	—
Kansas City	65	62	.512	10
Cleveland	64	62	.508	10½
Minnesota	58	68	.460	16½
Chicago	45	82	.354	30

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	69	58	.543	—
Seattle	68	60	.531	1½
Texas	63	65	.492	6½
Los Angeles	61	66	.480	8
Athletics	58	70	.453	11½

National League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	74	53	.583	—
New York	67	59	.532	6½
Miami	60	67	.472	14
Atlanta	58	69	.457	16
Washington	51	75	.405	22½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	79	48	.622	—
Chicago	73	54	.575	6
Cincinnati	67	61	.523	12½
St. Louis	63	65	.492	16½
Pittsburgh	54	74	.422	25½

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	72	55	.567	—
San Diego	71	56	.559	1
Arizona	62	66	.484	10½
San Francisco	61	66	.480	11
Colorado	37	90	.291	35

Wednesday's games

Pittsburgh 2, Toronto 1
Philadelphia 11, Seattle 2
Detroit 7, Houston 2
Arizona 3, Cleveland 2, 10 innings
Miami 6, St. Louis 2
Washington 5, N.Y. Mets 4
Atlanta 1, Chicago White Sox 0
N.Y. Yankees 6, Tampa Bay 4, 10 innings
Texas 6, Kansas City 3
Athletics 4, Minnesota 2, 10 innings
Chicago Cubs 4, Milwaukee 3
Colorado 8, L.A. Dodgers 3
L.A. Angels 2, Cincinnati 1
San Diego 8, San Francisco 1

Thursday's games

Athletics at Minnesota
Texas at Kansas City
Milwaukee at Chicago Cubs
L.A. Dodgers at Colorado
N.Y. Mets at Washington
San Francisco at San Diego
Boston at N.Y. Yankees
Houston at Baltimore
St. Louis at Tampa Bay

Friday's games

Colorado (Senzatela 4-14) at Pittsburgh (Ashcraft 3-2)
Washington (Cavalli 1-0) at Philadelphia (Walker 4-6)
Boston (Bello 9-6) at N.Y. Yankees (Fried 13-5)
Houston (McCullers 2-4) at Baltimore (Povich 2-6)
Kansas City (Bergert 1-1) at Detroit (Mize 12-4)
Toronto (Bieber 0-0) at Miami (Quantrill 4-10)
N.Y. Mets (McLean 1-0) at Atlanta (Wentz 4-3)
St. Louis (Mikolas 6-9) at Tampa Bay (Houser 6-4)
Minnesota (Matthews 3-4) at Chicago White Sox (Civale 3-8)
Cleveland (Cecconi 5-6) at Texas (Eovaldi 11-3)
San Francisco (Webb 11-9) at Milwaukee (Quintana 10-4)
Chicago Cubs (TBD) at L.A. Angels (Anderson 2-8)
Cincinnati (Littell 9-8) at Arizona (Nelson 6-3)
L.A. Dodgers (Snell 3-1) at San Diego (Darvish 2-3)
Athletics (Morales 1-0) at Seattle (Woo 10-7)

Saturday's games

Boston at N.Y. Yankees
Toronto at Miami
Washington at Philadelphia
Kansas City at Detroit
Colorado at Pittsburgh
Cleveland at Texas
Houston at Baltimore
Minnesota at Chicago White Sox
San Francisco at Milwaukee
N.Y. Mets at Atlanta
Cincinnati at Arizona
L.A. Dodgers at San Diego
Chicago Cubs at L.A. Angels
Athletics at Seattle



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Los Angeles Dodgers head athletic trainer Thomas Albert checks on starting pitcher Shohei Ohtani after he took a line drive off his leg in the fourth inning against the Colorado Rockies on Wednesday in Denver.

Ohtani hit by comebacker, leaves game

BY CRAIG MEYER
Associated Press

DENVER — Los Angeles Dodgers two-way star Shohei Ohtani had a forgettable outing in his first career pitching start against the Colorado Rockies at Coors Field.

Ohtani left Wednesday's game after giving up five earned runs and nine hits in four innings and getting hit in the leg by a comeback line drive. With runners at second and third and one out in the fourth inning, Ohtani got hit by a 93-mph line drive off the bat of Colorado's Orlando Arcia on his right leg that caused him to limp and grimace in pain.

The liner struck the reigning National League MVP and ricocheted toward the first base line. Ohtani gave chase and grabbed the ball on the line, spun to make a throw, but had no play as a runner scored. After a mound visit from manager Dave Roberts and team medical personnel, Ohtani stayed in the game and got the last two outs of the inning, with Los Angeles trailing 5-0 at the time. Roberts said after the game that the line drive hit Ohtani on the thigh and managed to avoid his knee and any on-bone contact.

"I was just really relieved that it was the thigh, because it hit him flush," Roberts said. "When I saw the ball mark on his thigh, I was very relieved, relative to the situation."

Through a translator, Ohtani said he had recently been hit in the same spot on his leg by a pitch.

"I'm glad it didn't hit the knee," Ohtani said through a translator. "I think we avoided the worst-case scenario. So, I'm going to focus on the treatment."

BOXING/RUGBY

Sex testing to be required for next month's worlds

By Greg Beacham
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The governing body for Olympic-style boxing will require sex testing for all fighters wishing to compete in the women's division at its world championships next month.

World Boxing already had announced its plan to require competitors to undergo a polymerase chain reaction test or an equivalent genetic screening test to determine their sex at birth. The rules will be implemented ahead of the World Boxing Championships in Liverpool, England, in early September, the organization announced Wednesday.

The tests identify the presence or absence of Y chromosome genetic material as the indicator of biological sex.

"World Boxing respects the dignity of all individuals and is keen to ensure it is as inclusive as possible," World Boxing president Boris Van Der Vorst said.

"Yet in a combat sport like boxing, we have a duty of care to deliver safety and competitiveness fairness, which are the key principles that have guided the development and creation of this policy."

Paris Olympic champion Imane Khelif of Algeria declined to enter a World Boxing tournament in the Netherlands in June, shortly after the governing body initially announced its plans to introduce sex testing.

Van Der Vorst later apologized for specifically naming Khelif, who initially planned to fight in the tournament, while outlining World Boxing's future testing plans.

Khelif and fellow gold medalist Lin Yu-ting from Taiwan excelled in Paris under a harsh spotlight of widespread scrutiny and misconception about their sex. The 26-year-old Khelif repeatedly has said she was born a woman, and she has competed at all levels of women's amateur boxing for nearly a decade.

Chromosome testing was common in Olympic sports during the 20th century but was largely abandoned in the 1990s because of numerous ambiguities that couldn't be easily resolved by the tests, collectively known as differences in sex development. Many sports switched to hormone testing to determine sex eligibility, but those tests require governing bodies to make difficult decisions on the eligibility of women with naturally high testosterone levels.

World Boxing said athletes with DSD in which male androgenization occurs will be eligible to compete only in the men's category.

But the governing body also said it would offer extensive additional analysis and evaluation for athletes with Y chromosome genetic material who wish to compete in the women's categories, including genetic screening, hormonal profiles, anatomical examination and further evaluation of endocrine profiles by medical specialists. An appeals process also is available.

National federations are responsible for conducting the tests and submitting the results, World Boxing said.

Earlier this year, World Athletics — the governing body for track and field — became the first Olympic sport to reintroduce chromosome testing, requiring athletes who compete in the women's events to submit to the test once in their careers. World Athletics has set a deadline of Sept. 1 for athletes to submit to the gene tests ahead of the world championships.

The last two Olympic boxing tournaments were run by a task force from the International Olympic Committee under previous rules of sex eligibility.



Ariana Cubillos/AP

Algeria's Imane Khelif, right, fights China's Yang Liu in their women's 66kg finals match at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris.



Anthony Upton/AP

Ilona Maher reponds to the crowd after a match with the Bristol Bears. Maheri sleading the US team in the Women's World Cup starting Friday, hoping the event can showcase rugby to an American audience.

Maher wants to hook US on rugby with World Cup

Associated Press

SUNDERLAND, England — Ilona Maher's mission at the Women's Rugby World Cup is about more than just winning games.

Heading into the United States' tournament opener on Friday, the world's most followed rugby player on social media wants to get more eyeballs on the sport as it ramps up attempts to crack the market in America.

"Not many people know that there's a Women's Rugby World Cup going on, so we try to get as many people as we can to spread that knowledge," Maher said ahead of the match against host England in the World Cup curtain-raiser in Sunderland.

"We want the fans in America to see us play here because we've got a World Cup there in eight years and we need to start building for that."

Rugby authorities see America as a vital new market for the sport. The United States will stage the men's Rugby World Cup in 2031 and the women's tournament in 2033.

The presence of Maher is key to attracting attention on rugby in the U.S., given she has 5.2 million followers on Instagram and 3.6 million on TikTok — platforms on which she promotes body positivity.

The 29-year-old Vermont native believes she and her teammates are "changing the game on and off the field a lot."

"This is a time where women's rugby is in a state where it could grow massively," she said, "and I do believe this team is at the forefront with how we present ourselves and people's perception of us."

Maher certainly stands out, having been named as the best breakthrough athlete at the ESPYs last month.

She used that opportunity to urge a theater full of fellow American sports glitterati to try and catch the Women's Rugby World Cup.

"You're not going to understand it the first time you watch it," Maher said. "You're not going to understand the second time either, but just keep watching."

What she was promising any perseverer was a rousing show — with Americans in it! — in an era-defining World Cup that has set records even before it kicks off.

Rugby fans anticipating the 10th and best Women's World Cup yet have gobbled up tickets at a stunning rate. Faraway New Zealand hosted the last tournament in 2022 and sold a record 150,000 tickets.

This year more than 375,000 tickets — 80% of the total — have gone, and the Sept. 27 final is sold out, guaranteeing the largest crowd ever for a one-day women's rugby event.

In an interview with the BBC ahead of the World Cup, she said she has been approached by the WWE — joking that her ring name would be "Maher-vellous" if she ever became a wrestler — and that she'd love to get into acting.

First, though, she wants to deliver at the World Cup, starting with a match against England, the tournament favorite.

A star in rugby sevens, in which she won a bronze medal with the U.S. team at the Paris Olympics last year, Maher also had a three-month stint at English club Bristol in the 15 players-a-team format at the start of 2025.

"I think it's so cool," Maher said, "that we're up here, so far away from maybe where rugby union is big, and yet we're getting 40,000 people out to a game."

The Americans also will play Australia and Samoa in Pool A at the World Cup.

US OPEN/NFL

Sinner, Alcaraz still ruling over men's tennis

By Howard Fendrich
Associated Press

NEW YORK — OK, sure, maybe it wouldn't be rational to say there's no point in actually holding the full U.S. Open and instead just fast-forwarding to the inevitable matchup for the men's championship between Jannik Sinner — assuming he's healthy — and Carlos Alcaraz on Sept. 7.

Seems reasonable, though.

"We know," Novak Djokovic acknowledged, "they're the dominant force right now."

When singles action begins Sunday at Flushing Meadows, a change from the usual Monday start, there are cases to be made for various players to make their way to the women's final. The top three in the rankings — No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka, No. 2 Iga Swiatek and No. 3 Coco Gauff — have won the past three U.S. Open titles, for example. Other past major champions such as Naomi Osaka or Elena Rybakina have performed well lately; maybe a new face will emerge.

When it comes to the men, however, there really is just one name that matters in this post-Big Three era, and that name is "Sincaraz," the silly, made-up, "Fedal"-style mashup of the guys who are ranked No. 1 (Sinner) and No. 2 (Alcaraz) and have claimed seven Grand Slam trophies in a row and nine of the last 12.

Djokovic took the other three in that span.

There is nothing quite like it in the women's game at the moment. The past five Slams were won by five players: Swiatek (Wimbledon in July), Gauff (French Open in June), Madison Keys (Australian Open in January), Sabalenka (last year's U.S. Open) and Barbora Krejcikova (last year's Wimbledon).



THIBAULT CAMUS/AP

Italy's Jannik Sinner, left, and Spain's Carlos Alcaraz have combined to win the last seven Grand Slam titles.

"Sinner and Alcaraz," said Marcos Giron, an American who has been ranked 37th and faced both, "are bringing a ridiculous level, week in and week out."

Look at the ATP rankings, which either could lead after the U.S. Open. Look at the titles. Look at the past two Grand Slam finals, with Alcaraz erasing a two-set deficit and saving three championship points to win the French Open in June, before Sinner won in four sets at Wimbledon in July. Look at the most recent Masters 1000 tournament, the Cincinnati Open, where Sinner didn't drop a set en route to Monday's final but quit because he was feeling ill, ceding the trophy to Alcaraz.

That ended Sinner's 26-match winning streak on hard courts; Alcaraz was responsible for the previous defeat, too. Alcaraz collected his tour-leading sixth trophy this season and has won 39 of his most recent 41 contests.

Since Sinner returned in May from a three-month doping ban, Cincinnati was the fourth event both entered — and they met to decide the title in all four.

They hit the ball as hard as anyone. Sinner's returns rival Djokovic's for best in the game. Alcaraz's drop shots are unrivaled. The athleticism displayed by both is remarkable. Alcaraz might be the fastest guy around. Sinner's long limbs reach everything.

What sets them apart from others?

"Their confidence. Their ball-striking. Their movement is basically perfect," said Sam Querrey, a former player who made it to Wimbledon's semifinals and the U.S. Open's quarterfinals. "It seems like they hit the ball with just a little extra force when they need to."

It leaves other elite players such as Ben Shelton, the 22-year-old American who is ranked No. 6, so-close-yet-so-far at majors.

Shelton's 2025 Grand Slam resume includes losses to Sinner at the Australian Open, to Alcaraz at the French Open and to Sinner at Wimbledon.

"Frustrating," Shelton said. "Two very different players and challenges."

The sample size is, admittedly, small, but these two are producing the sort of riveting points and thrill-a-minute matches that Roger Federer vs. Rafael Nadal, or Nadal vs. Djokovic, used to.

"The rivalry is real. It's there," said Darren Cahill, one of Sinner's two coaches. "And hopefully it's going to be there and real for the next 10 or 12 years."

Not sure? Head to YouTube and check out Alcaraz vs. Sinner, whether at Roland-Garros this year or at the U.S. Open in 2022 or pretty much any of their 14 showdowns (Alcaraz leads 9-5).

"You have to earn every point, every game. He makes you suffer (from) the first point of the match until the last ball," said Alcaraz, a 22-year-old from Spain. "It's really tough to find holes in his game."

Sinner's take?

"We try," the 24-year-old from Italy said of their matchups, "to push ourselves to the limits."

Garrett avoids ticket questions, focuses on Browns defense

By Joe Reedy
Associated Press

BEREA, Ohio — Myles Garrett was expected to become a more vocal leader for the Cleveland Browns after signing a four-year contract extension worth $204.8 million in March.

However, Garrett was quiet in his first comments since picking up his eighth speeding ticket since being drafted by the Browns in 2017.

"I'd honestly rather talk about football and this team than anything I'm doing off field other than the back to school event that I did the other day," Garrett said on Wednesday.

Garrett was asked a couple of other times about being cited for driving a Ferrari 100 mph on a suburban Cleveland interstate on Aug. 9. It got contentious when the All-Pro defensive end was asked what kind of leadership it showed to be pulled over for speeding shortly after the Browns came back from a road game.



SUE OGROCKI/AP

The Cleveland Browns signed defensive end Myles Garrett to a four-year, $204.8 million contract extension in March.

"I've answered it two different times. I'm going to need you to ask a different question so I can focus on this team and not, you know, this headline you're trying to get out of these questions you're asking," Garrett said.

In 2022, Garrett flipped his Porsche when he veered off a rural road near his home following practice. He suffered a sprained shoulder, strained biceps, cuts and bruises in the wreck and was cited for failure to control his vehicle and unsafe speed. He missed one game because of the accident.

When it comes to on-field matters, Garrett said he has noticed he has more leeway and a platform to lead during this training camp. That has included conversations with the coaching staff about the flow of the day's practices and what is being accomplished.

Garrett also noted the changes have been more self driven instead of coming from coaches or ownership.

"I've heard that from multiple accounts with some players and coaches about the bit of a style change I've had of this year and being a bit more minute with the attention I give and the details that I bring, making sure the guys are bringing that same detail to the game and everybody being on the same page," he said.

"It's going to go as far as I want it to go and we're only strong as the weakest link. I feel like I've got to continue to improve and find a way to elevate my teammates, not just myself."

Coach Kevin Stefanski said Garrett's leadership is another step in his growth as a player.

"He's seen a lot in his career. He's been with a bunch of different teammates and learned from those teammates. So I think he's just a player that's continuing to evolve and certainly his leadership's been a big part of who we are around here," Stefanski said. "So he's somebody that I rely on, his teammates rely on and that's something that he embraces."

Despite Cleveland going 3-14 last season, Garrett had 14 sacks and finished third in AP Defensive Player of the Year voting. He also became the first player to have four straight seasons with at least 14 sacks since they became an official statistic in 1982.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Don't expect status quo in Sun Belt

By Maura Carey
Associated Press

The Sun Belt has created a bit of a reputation for chaos. The days of single-team dominance have been replaced by fast risers, rapid turnover, unpredictable outcomes and fierce competition.

Defending champion Marshall lost coach Charles Huff and a significant portion of the roster to conference foe Southern Miss. The West Division has its own intrigue with Louisiana-Lafayette and Texas State splitting opinion on which will be on top this season.

JMU was the clear favorite in the Sun Belt preseason coaches poll, earning a league-high 11 first-place votes.

JMU the consensus favorite

James Madison is in its fourth year in the conference and the Football Bowl Subdivision and has 28 wins to show for it, a steady performance that followed a run near the top of the FCS.

The Dukes finished 9-4 overall and third in the East Division with a 4-4 conference record in coach Bob Chesney's first year at the helm. Quarterback Alonza Barnett III completed 60% of his passes for 2,598 yards, 26 touchdowns and four interceptions while rushing for 442 yards and seven TDs. A leg injury cut Barnett's season short, sidelining the sophomore from the Boca Raton Bowl.

JMU brought in other options at signal-caller, including Matt Sluka, who played for Chesney at Holy Cross and left UNLV over a contract dispute. Georgia Southern was picked to finish second in the East.

None of the Sun Belt Conference teams made the AP Top 25 preseason poll, but the Dukes (9) and Louisiana-Lafayette (1) got votes — and both are the coaches' picks to reach the title game.

Thundering Herd has moved south

Under Huff, Marshall went 10-3 last season, including 7-1 in play, and beat the Ragin' Cajuns 31-3 in the league title game. Huff left for Southern Miss soon after and the Herd had to pull out of the Independence Bowl because more than 30 players jumped into the transfer portal, pushing the team below the necessary roster minimum.



Julio Cortez/AP

JMU coach Bob Chesney led the Dukes to their first bowl game in his first season. They are the favorite among league coaches to win the Sun Belt title.

Several of those players followed Huff, including quarterback Braylon Braxton, the preseason Sun Belt offensive player of the year. Braxton completed 124 of 206 passes for 1,624 yards, 19 touchdowns and two interceptions while tacking on 610 rushing yards and four rushing touchdowns in 2024 — all career highs.

Redshirt sophomore return specialist Ian Foster and redshirt senior defensive back Josh Moten also followed Huff and were 2025 preseason all-Sun Belt selections.

Wild West Division

Louisiana-Lafayette and Texas State each got six votes from league coaches to win the division.

The Ragin' Cajuns followed their loss to Marshall in the Sun Belt title game with a 34-3 loss to TCU in the New Mexico Bowl, but it was still the best season offensively since the departure of coach Billy Napier. Significant turnover looms over its offense, losing quarterbacks Ben Wooldridge and Chandler Fields.

The Bobcats' offense faces similar changes, bringing in a new quarterback and offensive coordinator Landon Keopple. Of the five quarterbacks on the roster, redshirt freshman Brad Jackson is the sole returner. Texas State acquired several transfer quarterbacks from strong programs: Keldric Luster from SMU, Holden Geriner from Auburn and Nate Yarnell from Pitt. The Bobcats also welcomed freshman Gavin Parkhurst.

Favored MAC teams boast big-name QBs

By Michael Marot
Associated Press

Quarterback Dequan Finn is returning to a very different Mid-American Conference than the one he left when he transferred to Baylor last year.

His biggest challenge now comes from quarterback Parker Navarro, who led Ohio to the 2024 league crown. Finn's backup at Toledo, Tucker Gleason, is now the incumbent starter for the preseason favorite. And Finn, the 2023 MAC player of the year, is back to prove he's still the best of the bunch, this time at Miami (Ohio).



George

Naturally, the league's three best quarterbacks also happen to be running the top three teams as each vies for a championship ring.

"When I got in the portal, that was just like a second chance for me, a second opportunity to showcase my skills," Finn said during last month league media day in Detroit. "And having a second chance to be on the football field doing what I love the most."

It didn't take Finn long to find out how fleeting success can be. He lost the starting job after two games and opted to leave.

But with so many proven winners at quarterback around the league and his starter leaving, Miami coach Chuck Martin waited for Finn to make his decision.

Can he help the RedHawks outduel Navarro, the star in Ohio's 38-3 rout of rival Miami in December's title game, Gleason or anyone else? Perhaps.

"I don't know if he was looking to come back to the MAC or even to Miami, I don't think that was the plan," Martin said. "You're losing your starter, we had a wide open door for somebody to come in and take the job. It worked out good for him and worked out good for us."

Other top QBs in the league include Akron's Ben Finley and Bowling Green's Drew Pyne, who played previously at Notre Dame, Arizona State and Missouri.

Each knows the journey will be challenging.

"It would be a display of dominance," Navarro said when asked what it would mean if Ohio won consecutive crowns after snapping a nearly six-decade title drought. "But we know there's a target on us, and we're excited about it."

Hello and goodbye

In a college football era where change has become the norm, the MAC had been the most stable conference in the FBS.

It couldn't stay that way forever. The league has expanded to 13 teams this season thanks to the return of UMass, an independent the past nine seasons after playing in the league from 2012-15.

This season also marks the final year of Northern Illinois' second MAC stint. The Huskies are headed to the Mountain West next year.

New face

The 13-team MAC has five new coaches this season.

The headliner is easy: Bowling Green coach Eddie George, the 1995 Heisman Trophy winner.

"It was going to take something special (to leave Tennessee State) and this is something special," George said. "This team's been knocking at the door the last three years, a game here or there and they're playing for a championship. And then a chance to come back to Ohio? Oh yeah."

Top C-USA teams counting on transfer QBs to contend

By Teresa M. Walker
Associated Press

Liberty finds itself in a familiar position favored to win the Conference USA title with added motivation of bouncing back from a disappointing 2024.

Coach Jamey Chadwell and his Flames were favored a year ago only to miss the title game. They also finished on a two-game skid capped by a loss in the Bahamas Bowl.

"Maybe a bad taste in the mouth about how we finished thinking that we could've had a better season than we had last year, and I think the guys returning knew that and they knew why we didn't and they're focused on making sure we don't beat ourselves moving forward," Chadwell said.

Liberty had a game canceled by Hurricane Helene in September, then stumbled to a 5-3 mark in league play and 8-4 overall. It was a big drop from 2023 when the Flames went undefeated in winning the C-USA championship and a berth in the Fiesta Bowl in Chadwell's first season.



Vasha Hunt/AP

Dual threat quarterback Ethan Vasko transferred to Liberty to take the place of Kaidon Salter, who left for Colorado.

Now Chadwell is managing the transfer portal that saw quarterback Kaidon Salter go to Colorado. Ethan Vasko is among 13 portal additions, and the quarterback threw for 2,110 yards and 14 touchdowns last season at Coastal Carolina. Vasko also ran for 447 yards and five more scores.

Chadwell said the challenge now in C-USA is knowing which teams got "plucked" through the portal and who's actually back. He sees his fellow coaches having to build teams each season rather than programs.

"We lost a bunch of guys just like everybody else, but I do think we have a good nucleus," Chadwell said. "I think we have a chance to have a really, really good year if we can stay together and stay connected."

Liberty will also be relying on Vaughn Blue and JuJu Gray to keep an offense clicking after ranking fourth nationally last season with 250.7 yards rushing per game.

Western Kentucky also is a heavy favorite after the Hilltoppers lost in the title game last December. Defending C-USA champ Jacksonville State will try to defend its league title with a first-year head coach.

Transfer portal help

Western Kentucky went back to the portal for a quarterback with Maverick McIvor transferring from Abilene Christian. McIvor threw for 3,847 yards and 30 touchdowns with seven interceptions. McIvor should be comfortable with offensive coordinator Rick Bowie, brought along for the same job.

Other portal additions include running back George Hart III and a pair of wide receivers in K.D. Hutchinson and Noah Meyers.

Newcomer coach

Jacksonville State has Charles Kelly in his first season as a first-time head coach replacing Rich Rodriguez, who went to West Virginia.

Kelly was hired away from Auburn where he had been co-defensive coordinator. The Gamecocks hope to ease Kelly's transition with the addition of running back Cam Cook, who transferred from TCU after scoring nine TDs in 2024.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Boise State heavy favorite in Mountain West

BY MARK ANDERSON
Associated Press

Change is coming to the Mountain West, but this season will feel like so many others.

No. 25 Boise State was picked to win the conference.

For the 15th year in a row.

Broncos coach Spencer Danielson pointed out that didn't equate to a conference title every time, but Boise State is the two-time defending champion. The program lost Heisman Trophy runner-up Ashton Jeanty and still received 35 of 39 first-place votes from the media.

"That's just the culture that we have," said left tackle Kage Casey, a potential first-round pick in next year's NFL draft. "Everyone in the conference knows that we're putting in the work to be the best, and that's what we're going to show game by game, day by day."

Boise State and four other schools — Colorado State, Fresno State, San Diego State and Utah State — will be playing their final season in the Mountain West. Those five will depart for the Pac-12 Conference in what has been a contentious divorce that saw UNLV turn down overtures from the Pac-12 to remain in the Mountain West.

The Rebels made the championship game the past two seasons before falling short against Boise State, and they were picked to finish second again this year. With first-year coach Dan Mullen, who previously coached Florida and Mississippi State, there is great optimism at UNLV of taking the next step and perhaps qualifying for the College Football Playoff.



RICK SCUTERI/AP

Quarterback Maddux Madsen returns as Boise State's starter, and he could help make up for the loss of Ashton Jeanty.

Junior safety Jake Pope was recruited by Mullen coming out of high school in 2022, but chose Alabama over the Gators. He transferred to Georgia two years later and then to UNLV.

"A really, really great players' coach," Pope said.

"He's always down to listen to what we have, positive and negative."

Moving on from Jeanty

Jeanty had a season for the ages last year, leading the nation with 2,601 yards and 29 touchdowns rushing. He fell just 27 yards short of Barry Sanders' NCAA record.

It might take a committee to come close to making up such production.

Malik Sherrod is a sixth-year transfer from Fresno State who also had his season ended prematurely by injury, but in 2023 he rushed for 966 yards and nine TDs.

Whether the Broncos can make up the difference remains to be seen.

But quarterback Maddux Madsen is back for his second season as the starter to help with the load. He threw for more than 3,000 yards with 23 touchdowns last year.

Taking the next step

Boise State appeared in the playoff last season for the first time. The Broncos, who received a first-round bye, were demolished by Penn State 31-14 in the quarterfinals.

"We went to the playoffs, but we lost," Casey said. "That's the thing that I always think about. We were the fourth team to go to the Fiesta Bowl; we were the first Boise State team to fall short. That is deep in our hearts and deep in our thoughts, that we are not going to let that be our legacy. We want to build off of something no Boise State team has ever done. We want to go on a run."

SEC West at UNLV?

Mullen isn't the only one who gives UNLV a Southeastern Conference feel as he replaces Barry Odom, who parlayed back-to-back Mountain West title game appearances into the Purdue job.

In addition to Pope, other new Rebels include cornerbacks Denver Harris (previously LSU and Texas A&M) and Laterrance Welch (LSU).

Spartans on the rise

San Jose State, like UNLV, for many years was at or near the bottom of the league until recently.

The Spartans posted four seven-win seasons in the past five years under two coaches. Brent Brennan built the program before leaving for Arizona after the 2023 season. Ken Niumatalolo — who went 109-83 in 16 years at Navy — took over and guided San Jose State to a 7-6 record last season.

San Jose State was picked third.

"I think we're way more mature," Niumatalolo said. "I felt a little chaotic at this time last year implementing our culture, implementing what we do. I feel like that stuff's already in place."

Tulane, Navy primed to challenge for American supremacy

BY BRETT MARTEL
Associated Press

With aggressive moves in the transfer portal, second-year Tulane coach Jon Sumrall appears to have revamped his roster well enough to make the Green Wave an American Conference favorite again — although Navy, Army, UTSA, Memphis or South Florida could have something to say about that.

Tulane went through an offseason of roster upheaval and uncertainty after appearing in its third straight league title game in 2024.

With 52% of Tulane's roster comprised of players who never previously wore a Green Wave uniform, Sumrall concedes that his team entered August camp with "a lot of uncertainty" about which transfers or recruits might emerge as prominent players.

"None of them were guaranteed a starting anything," Sumrall said, referring to a transfer class that included ex-Appalachian State defensive tackle Santana Hopper, edge rusher Mo Westmorland from UTEP and running back Maurice Turner from Louisville.

Tulane's roster losses after last season included starting quarterback Darian Mensah transferring to Duke and star running back Makhi Hughes leaving for Oregon.

Sumrall responded by bringing in four transfer QBs, including Jake Retzlaff, who won 11 games as a starter for BYU last season. Running back Arnold Barnes, a promising backup to Hughes last season, will compete for carries with Turner.

Tulane has just five returning starters on offense and defense combined, but all received preseason all-conference recognition from various college football publications.

Navy momentum

Navy was blown out 35-0 at home by Tulane last season. That, however, was more of an anomaly for the Midshipmen, whose 10-3 record included a victory over American Conference champion Army in the Army-Navy game, followed by a comeback victory over Oklahoma in the Armed Forces Bowl.

Crucially, Navy again will feature dual-threat QB Blake Horvath, who led an offense that averaged 31.3 points per game in its first season under offensive coordinator Drew Cronic — who, too, has returned.

"I don't think there's a better fit in the country for me than this system and our offense," Horvath said.

Navy also returns a top defender in nose tackle Landon Robinson, who says the spike in preseason hype the Midshipmen are getting has led them to adopt the motto: "Don't choke on the sugar."



DANIEL KUCIN JR./AP

Navy quarterback Blake Horvath led an offense that averaged 31.3 points per game. The Mids expect to contend for a league title.

Newberry sounds gratified by his players' determination not to rest on recent success.

"I've got a good feeling about this team, outside of the returning production, just who we are, the chemistry." he said.

Brown is back

South Florida's high hopes for 2024 took a hit when QB Byrum Brown went down in Week 5 (against Tulane) with a foot injury.

Brown returns healthy this season behind an experienced offensive line and again has one of his favorite downfield targets back in receiver Keshaun Singleton.

Roadrunner resurgence

Following the departure of UTSA all-time passer Frank Harris at the end of the 2023 campaign, the Roadrunners wasted little time returning to relevance. Harris' successor, Owen McCown, passed for 3,424 yards and 25 touchdowns last season to help UTSA post a fifth-straight winning season. That's raised hopes of a sixth straight in 2025.

The academies

Having two service academies among the league favorites gives the American more of an old-school feel than some other conferences.

Army and Navy players tend to stay put before moving on to military careers, rather than having agents shop them around to see what other schools are willing to pay for their skills.

As Navy's Newberry put it, "We're a unicorn. We still truly are a developmental program."

Hot seat

Trent Dilfer, a former Super Bowl-winning coach with the Baltimore Ravens, has found it tougher to contend for titles as coach at UAB. He's gone 7-17 in his first two seasons in Birmingham, putting him under mounting pressure to win with a team that has just three returning starters this season.

"I've made a lot of mistakes; I only want to make them once," Dilfer said.

Same: Programs will need to continue adapting to NCAA changes

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gible for the playoff to share millions with their athletes, said these times remind him of the early 1990s, when the NFL introduced unrestricted free agency and the salary cap.

"It's a big change," Kessler said. "But I think the system will adapt and the better-managed athletic departments will do well, as they always do. And athletic departments that are poorly managed won't do so well, and probably didn't do so well in the old system, either."

Heisman, title watches

Pay or no pay, one thing hasn't changed in college football or any sport: Great players win games.

It's no big surprise, then, to see Texas at the top of almost everyone's watch list. Leading the Longhorns is none other than Arch Manning, the sophomore quarterback with the reported $6 million-plus NIL deal, and the latest burgeoning star in a family that has produced lots of them, from Archie to Peyton to Eli.

"For Arch, he grew up in this era of seeing high-level football," Texas coach Steve Sarkisian said. "He's watched Super Bowls. He's watched gold jackets getting put on. He's been to playoff games. He's been recruited at the highest level as the No. 1 player in the country."

Though it doesn't always work out, there are plenty of schools where a player with hopes of winning the Heisman Trophy also will have a legitimate chance to win the CFP.



ERIC GAY/AP

Texas quarterback Arch Manning, center, goes through drills during practice in Austin on July 30.

Besides Manning, other favorites include receiver Jeremiah Smith, whose success with defending champion Ohio State figures to depend a lot on whether the Buckeyes' next quarterback, Julian Sayin, who is also in the Heisman mix, is as good as advertised.

Clemson QB Cade Klubnik is among the favorites, as are the Tigers for a repeat title in the ACC.

Quarterback Drew Allar is in his fourth season at Penn State, where the Nittany Lions are expected to face Ohio State for the Big Ten title (They play Nov. 1, and coach James Franklin is 1-10 against the Buckeyes).

Meanwhile, LSU appears to be only a secondary threat to Texas as Georgia and Alabama are in the SEC, but Garrett Nussmeier is in that Heisman mix and can stay there with a good performance against Klubnik and Clemson on Aug. 30.

Turning hype into wins

Nobody has defined this new era of NIL as much as Colorado coach Deion Sanders.

Sanders brought his unapologetic swagger to a program that had been in the dumps for decades. He made the Buffaloes relevant, producing TV ratings, celebrity sightings, a Heisman winner in Travis Hunter and maybe the most talked-about player in the sport in his own son, Shedeur, whose tumble to the fifth round of the NFL draft said as much about his talent as the football-loving public's reaction to a new era in which players hold more power.

Winning? That was another thing. Deion Sanders is 13-12 over his two seasons, and now that Hunter and Shedeur are gone, the only big expectations for CU are coming from Boulder.

"The next phase is we're going to win differently, but we're going to win," Sanders said.

Another celebrity coach, Bill Belichick, will start answering the question of whether fans and wins will follow him to North Carolina, a school where the excitement often doesn't ramp up until basketball season.

The 73-year-old coach said he was building an NFL-style program — meaning everything he does, from nutrition to training to, yes, contracts, will look more like the pros. It was the sort of notion that used to be spoken softly but can now be used as a selling point.

"Everything we do here is predicated on building a pro team," said Carolina's new general manager, Mike Lombardi, who worked with Belichick in the pros. "We consider ourselves the 33rd (NFL) team because everybody who's involved with our program has had some form or aspect in pro football."

Over in Lubbock, Texas, the Texas Tech athletic program has never been afraid to swing big.

The program that gave us swashbuckling coach Mike Leach and Super Bowl quarterback Patrick Mahomes is being bankrolled by the billionaire head of its board of regents, Cody Campbell, who now has the school's football field named after him.

The Red Raiders have made a series of high-profile and expensive player signings — some for high schoolers who haven't arrived yet — and is estimated to be spending more on NIL than any program in the country besides Texas.

"I know there's a lot of expectations on this team," said coach Joey McGuire, who is coming off an 8-5 season. "We look at it as opportunities."

Seeking even footing

The new world of revenue sharing and an expanded playoff does give more reason for hope across the country.

When searching for blueprints of how that can work, most long-suffering programs will look to Indiana.

The Hoosiers were an also-ran for decades, with one Rose Bowl appearance ever and one winning record in a non-COVID-19 season since 1995. Then coach Curt Cignetti arrived, brought 54 new players from the transfer portal and turned Indiana into a winner overnight.

It was a remarkable turnaround that ran counter to the realities seen in these stats:

- There are 70 teams that make up the Power Four conferences, plus Pac-12 leftovers Oregon State and Washington State.
- Since 2000, 36 of those teams have captured a total of 137 outright or shared league titles that have been won between the five largest conferences.
- Of those 137 titles, 92 (67%) have been captured by 10 programs that have won five or more. The other 26 have combined to win 45.
- That leaves 34 programs (48.5%) which haven't won any. In the NFL over the same period, only 10 teams (31%) have failed to reach the Super Bowl.

Those numbers reflect how hard it is to break through in big-time college football, but also the size of the glass ceiling that could be shattered in this new era of college sports.

"I think the rev-share world definitely has a chance to bring things to a more balanced circumstance," said Purdue athletic director Mike Bobinksi, whose football program has a new coach, Barry Odom, after going 1-11 last season. "Will there always be some programs that operate in a little bit of a different reality? Of course. But we're not concerned about that, nor are we crying in our beer about that. We've just got to find a way."



DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP

With their celebrity statuses drawing more attention to their programs, head coaches Deion Sanders, left, and Bill Belichick of Colorado and North Carolina, respectively, will look to ensure that hype turns into wins.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW



BRYNN ANDERSON/AP

Arizona State players take the field before a College Football Playoff quarterfinals game against Texas on Jan. 1 in Atlanta. The Sun Devils won the Big 12 title in their first season as a member of the conference.

No. 11 Arizona State seeking more after Big 12 title debut

BY STEPHEN HAWKINS
Associated Press

Arizona State was a big surprise debuting in the Big 12 with a conference championship and making the College Football Playoff after being picked to finish at the bottom of the 16-team league.

Kenny Dillingham, the 35-year-old coach now in his third season at his alma mater, bluntly told his Sun Devils they really didn't do anything special last year.

"The reality is there's been a lot of teams in college football who have done what we've done, who have won one year and then come back to reality," Dillingham said. "What would be special would be to continue to build off of that. The real challenge was how do we not become what normal teams in our situation do, which is fall back to where we've always been."

After a CFP quarterfinal loss in double overtime to now preseason No. 1 Texas, No. 11 Arizona State is the highest-ranked team from the unpredictable Big 12, even after the departure of do-everything running back Cam Skattebo to the NFL. They return quarterback Sam Leavitt (2,855 yards, 24 TDs passing), the preseason Big 12 offensive player of the year, and receiver Jordyn Tyson (75 catches, 1,101 yards, 10 TDs) is healthy after missing the end of the last season with a collarbone injury.

The last time the Sun Devils were higher in the preseason Associated Press Top 25 was No. 8 in 1998, what turned into a 5-6 season.

The Big 12's other ranked teams are No. 17 Kansas State and league runner-up No. 22 Iowa State, who open against each other with a conference game in Ireland on Saturday, along with No. 23 Texas Tech.

No. 17 Kansas State
vs. No. 22 Iowa State
Dublin, Ireland
AFN-Sports
6 p.m. Saturday CET
1 a.m. Sunday JKT

Stanford (0-0)
at Hawaii (0-0)
AFN-Sports
1:30 a.m. Sunday CET
8:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

All return quality starting quarterbacks.

The Red Raiders transformed their program with big money through the transfer portal and made the preseason poll for the first time since 2008, six years before three-time Super Bowl champion quarterback Patrick Mahomes played a game for Texas Tech.

Contenders pass, rush

Baylor redshirt sophomore Bryson Washington (1,028 yards, 12 TDs) is the only of the Big 12's eight 1,000-yard rushers back from last season. The Bears, who won their last six regular-season games, also return quarterback Sawyer Robertson (3,335 yards, 27 TDs).

Leading passer Shedeur Sanders (4,134 yards, 37 TDs) went in the NFL draft after two seasons at Colorado, but the next eight top QBs were all coming back, including Iowa State's Rocco Becht, Texas Tech's Behren Morton and Kansas State's Avery Johnson. The only change was Jake Retzlaff unexpectedly leaving BYU this spring after a since-dismissed civil sexual assault lawsuit.

Three seasons after making the national title game, TCU has Josh Hoover (3,949 yards, 27 TDs) after a 9-4 season capped by four consecutive wins.

Old coaches feel heat

Only Iowa's Kirk Ferentz in his 27th season has been with his FBS team longer than Oklahoma State's Mike Gundy and Utah's Kyle Whittingham. The Big 12's stalwarts are coming off huge disappointments in their 20th seasons.

The Utes were the presumptive favorite last year to be the team to make its Big 12 debut with a title, but had their first losing season (5-7, 2-7 Big 12) since 2013. Two-time Pac-12 champion quarterback Cam Rising had to "medically retire", but dual-threat QB Devon Dampier followed new offensive coordinator Jason Beck from New Mexico.

The Cowboys were 3-9 and didn't win a conference game, their first losing season since Gundy's 4-7 debut in 2005. And there is still plenty of uncertainty with two new coordinators and a lot of transfers.

"The changes in how we go about rebuilding, whether it's financially or roster management, have been challenging but also intriguing," Gundy said. "It's different than it's ever been before."

Schedule strength to play bigger role in CFP selections

BY ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

The College Football Playoff selection committee announced Wednesday that it will place more emphasis on strength of schedule this year when determining which teams make the 12-team field.

The committee said in a statement that the schedule strength metric has been adjusted to apply greater weight to games against strong opponents. An additional metric, record strength, has been added to go beyond a team's schedule strength to assess how a team performed against that schedule.

"This metric rewards teams defeating high-quality opponents while minimizing the penalty for losing to such a team," the committee said. "Conversely, these changes will provide minimal reward for defeating a lower-quality opponent while imposing a greater penalty for losing to such a team."

The adjustment to the evaluation process comes after some in the Southeastern Conference complained about last season's inclusion of — at the time of selections — an 11-2 SMU of the Atlantic Coast Conference over a 9-3 Alabama or even a 9-3 South Carolina or 9-3 Mississippi.

The Mustangs' losses were to an unranked BYU and a ranked Clemson in the ACC championship game. The Crimson Tide had bad losses against Vanderbilt and Oklahoma, both .500 at the time, but also had wins over a second-ranked Georgia, No. 21 Missouri and No. 14 LSU.

Prompted by concerns about how teams that don't play in conference championship games are judged, the committee reviewed the movement of idle teams from the second-to-last ranking to final ranking. The selection committee reaffirmed that movement in the final week should be evidence-based, and did not recommend creating a formal policy prohibiting such movement.

The committee also updated its policy on recusal of selection committee members.

A member will be fully recused from the evaluation of a team if they receive direct compensation from the school in question or has an immediate family member who is a football player, football staff member or senior administrator at the school. A fully recused member is not allowed to participate in any deliberations or vote concerning that school.

A member will be partially recused if they have a secondary relationship with the school in question, such as an immediate family member employed by the institution but outside of the football program or senior administration. A partially recused member may remain present and participate in discussions related to the team in question, but is not allowed to participate in votes involving the team.

The selection committee will release its five weekly Top 25 rankings Nov. 4. The final rankings and playoff field will be announced Dec. 7.



BRYNN ANDERSON/AP

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day celebrates with the trophy after the Buckeyes' win over Notre Dame in the College Football Playoff national championship game Jan. 20 in Atlanta.

SPORTS



More eyes

Maher hoping World Cup will increase Americans' interest in rugby ›› Page 42



COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Same old same old

Regular powerhouses, big money continue to reign in new revenue sharing era

By Eddie Pells
Associated Press

Headline after headline during the offseason spoke to the same reality for college football: Millions of dollars are headed directly into the pockets of players and only programs that can nimbly recalibrate and replenish their resources will succeed.

Now, with preseason camps winding down and opening kickoffs approaching, a different reality hits: The more things change, the more they stay the same.

The preseason AP Top 25 for 2025 could have just as easily come from 1975. The first official season of revenue sharing between schools and their players in the new name, image and likeness era of college sports is sorting programs into familiar categories.

The first includes college football's biggest brands, which are dominating the list of favorites once again: No. 1 Texas, No. 2 Penn State, No. 3 Ohio State and No. 4 Clemson.

Second are teams that have been talked about over the past few decades that are using money and celebrity coaches to elbow their way into the conversation: Colorado, North Carolina and No. 23 Texas Tech.

And then there are those who see the second year of the 12-team playoff and a different playing field created by revenue sharing and think they might be able to fashion a turnaround not unlike No. 20 Indiana's worst to (almost) first resurgence last year: Pick a name, any name, but a good starting point might be UCLA (now with star QB Nico Iamaleava) or Virginia (which, like Indiana last year, avoids pretty much every top team on its conference schedule).

Jeffrey Kessler, the attorney who helped broker the massive legal settlement that compelled virtually all schools eli-

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Clemson's Cade Klubnik was named the top quarterback in the nation, making the AP preseason All-American first team.

Jacob Kupferman/AP

'Sincaraz' still dominates going into US Open ›› Page 43