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JOHN SORENSEN/U.S. Navy

Midshipman candidates perform warm-ups during a physical training session at Recruit Training Command, Naval Station Great Lakes in Great Lakes, Ill., in 2021. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has asked the base for access to help with its operations.

ICE eyes Great Lakes use

Noem seeks access of Chicago-area Navy base for 'strike team'

BY DAN LAMOTHE
The Washington Post

The Trump administration wants to use a Navy base north of Chicago as a launchpad for federal law enforcement activity against undocumented immigration, defense officials said Tuesday, as the White House contemplates also deploying thousands of U.S. troops to the nation's third-largest city amid rising tension with the Illinois governor.

Officials at Naval Station Great Lakes on Wednesday acknowledged having received a

request from the Department of Homeland Security that seeks "limited support" for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, whose aggressive tactics under the current administration have drawn outrage from opponents of President Donald Trump. The base, a hub for recruit training, would provide "facilities, infrastructure, and other logistical needs" if the request is granted, defense officials said in a statement.

No decisions to approve access have been made, officials said. That responsibility lies

with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who since taking office in January has eagerly pledged the Pentagon's full cooperation as DHS and its agents search for, detain and remove undocumented immigrants. He has approved the use of other military bases to build detention facilities for people in DHS custody.

The White House is determined to ramp up ICE operations, with deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller pressing for 3,000 arrests per day.

SEE USE ON PAGE 7

Mystery clouds firm at center of Texas camp

BY MICHAEL BIESECKER
AND JOSHUA GOODMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — When President Donald Trump's administration last month awarded a contract worth up to \$1.2 billion to build and operate what it says will become the nation's largest immigration detention complex, it didn't turn to a large government contractor or even a firm that specializes in private prisons.

Instead, it handed the project on a military base to Acquisition Logistics LLC, a small business that has no listed experience running a correction facility and had never won a federal contract worth more than \$16 million. The company also lacks a functioning website and lists as its address a modest home in suburban Virginia owned by a 77-year-old retired Navy flight officer.

The mystery over the award only deepened last week as the new facility began to accept its first detainees. The Pentagon has refused to release the contract or explain why it selected Acquisition Logis-

SEE MYSTERY ON PAGE 8



PLANET LABS/AP

Construction of a new immigrant detention center at Fort Bliss, a U.S. Army base outside El Paso, Texas, on Aug. 7.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel				
Germany	\$3.577	\$4.142	\$4.497	\$4.138	Azores	..	..	\$4.355
Change in price	+2.2 cents	+1.8 cents	+1.8 cents	-0.5 cents	Change in price	..	..	+1.8 cents
Netherlands	..	\$4.895	\$5.476	\$5.115	Turkey	..	..	\$4.147 \$3.788*
Change in price	..	+7.7 cents	+7.6 cents	+4.1 cents	Change in price	..	..	+1.8 cents -0.5 cents
U.K.	..	\$4.154	\$4.509	\$4.150	Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Aug. 29. The change in price is from Aug. 22.			
Change in price	..	+1.8 cents	+1.8 cents	-0.5 cents				

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel				
Japan	..	\$4.129	..	\$3.769	South Korea	\$3.239	..	\$4.159 \$3.799
Change in price	..	+2.0 cents	..	No change	Change in price	+3.0 cents	..	+2.0 cents No change
Okinawa	\$3.269	..	..	\$3.769	Guam	\$3.259**	\$3.829	\$4.179
Change in price	No change	..	..	No change	Change in price	+2.0 cents	+2.0 cents	+1.0 cents

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
Pacific prices for the week of Aug. 29 - Sept. 4

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Aug. 29)	0.83	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3744
British pound (Aug. 29)	\$1.32	Britain (Pound)	1.3504
Japanese yen (Aug. 29)	144.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.3767
South Korean won (Aug. 29)	1,354.00	China (Yuan)	7.1530
		Denmark (Krone)	6.3960
		Egypt (Pound)	48.4700
		Euro	0.8568
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7945
		Hungary (Forint)	340.14
		Israel (Shekel)	3.3289
		Japan (Yen)	147.08
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3050
		Norway (Krone)	10.0760
		Philippines (Peso)	56.99
		Poland (Zloty)	3.65
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7476
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.2832
		South Korea (Won)	1,385.23

Switzerland (Franc) 0.8015
Thailand (Baht) 32.30
Turkey (NewLira) 41.0408

(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	4.18
30-year bond	4.92

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

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MILITARY

Out of sight, pinpoint strike

Israel-made, Apache-fired missiles destroy targets in Baltic Sea test

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

USTKA, Poland — With the Baltic Sea as their backdrop, American and Polish troops fired a new long-range missile from Apache helicopters in a first-of-its-kind European demonstration aimed squarely at deterring Russia.

Soldiers from U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade on Wednesday launched two Spike Non-Line of Sight missiles from AH-64E Apache helicopters at the Polish Air Force Training Center in Ustka.

The Israeli-made missiles traveled 16 miles out to sea to destroy a pair of floating targets in pinpoint strikes that were broadcast for brass from both nations.

Apache pilots can fire the weapon without seeing their target — even from behind mountains — and without exposing themselves to the enemy, said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Michael Weisskopf, the brigade standardization officer.

Produced by the Haifa-based Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, the Spike missile can destroy armor, air defense artillery, naval flotillas and even troop formations up to 30 miles away, or about four times the distance of

the current Hellfire missile, said Weisskopf, who is also an Apache pilot.

The demonstration in Ustka came as Russia gears up for its major Zapad military exercise with Belarus.

"This shows the Russians, 'Hey, we watch what you're doing, and we're here to deter any future aggression,'" V Corps commander Lt. Gen. Charles Costanza said prior to the exercise.

The missile launches were part of the third Polish Apache Initiative, a series of semiannual summits and exercises where U.S. Army aviators share their knowledge of tactics and maintenance, as well as train with Polish air force members.

Col. Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, chief of combat aviation for the helicopter branch of the Polish military, called the event very important for the development of the Polish air force. He credited V Corps with helping the Poles build a "new strength."

Last year Poland purchased 96 Apaches, which will begin arriving in 2028. Warsaw has also been procuring upgrades to its existing tanks, jets and artillery systems. It is unclear if or when the Polish air force will obtain its own Spike NLOS missiles.



MATTHEW M. BURKE/Stars and Stripes

An Army AH-64E Apache helicopter from the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade fires a Spike Non-Line of Sight missile during a Wednesday demonstration at the Polish Air Force Training Center in Ustka, Poland. It was the first time the Israeli-made missile had been fired in Europe.



MATTHEW M. BURKE/Stars and Stripes

The missile can be guided to its target from afar using a controller.

The missiles can lock on before or after being fired and can be guided into a target using a camera, screen and what looks like a gaming controller.

Guests at Wednesday's launches watched on a giant screen for several minutes as the munition traveled to the targets, which



GRANT HOCKLEY/U.S. Army

Soldiers load a Spike Non-Line of Sight missile onto an AH-64E Apache helicopter during a test run Tuesday.

were white boxes marked with X's.

The pilots simulated their GPS systems being jammed by an adversary, which forced them to rely on the missile's internal navigation and then manual control.

Applause erupted as the feeds showed the missiles heading for

the center of the X's, followed by static. Weisskopf called the missile a "game-changer."

"It gives U.S. Army aviation and Apaches the capability to defeat and have overmatch on (air defense artillery) systems that we did not previously have that overmatch on with," he said.

US intercepts another Russian surveillance flight near Alaska

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

American aircraft intercepted a Russian surveillance flight Tuesday off the coast of Alaska for the fifth time in the past week, defense officials said Wednesday.

An Ilyushin IL-20 surveillance aircraft flew into the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone, according to the North American Aerospace Defense Command, the joint U.S.-Canadian air defense operation based at Peterson Space Force Base in Colorado.

National borders extend 12 miles from land under international law. The ADIZ is an additional buffer zone of up to 150 miles into international airspace created by the U.S. and Canada in which visual identification of all aircraft is required.

NORAD responded by scrambling two F-16 Fighting Falcon fighters, one E-3 Sentry surveil-

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

NORAD

lance plane, and one KC-135 Stratotanker refueling tanker to make visual contact with the Russian IL-20, a type given the NATO nickname "COOT."

"The IL-20 flew inside the ADIZ for approximately two hours and 20 minutes — the closest point of approach to the U.S. mainland was 26 nautical miles north of Shemya Island," said Canadian Armed Forces Capt. Rebecca Garand, a NORAD spokeswoman in Colorado.

Shemya Island is one of the far western Aleutian Islands, about 1,500 miles from Anchorage.

Though 2,300 miles from the nearest major Russian city, Vladivostok, the island is only a few hundred miles from northern islands that are part of Russia.

NORAD said the Russian military aircraft remained in international airspace and did not enter the sovereign airspace of the United States or Canada.

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

NORAD has logged incursions into the zone on Aug. 20, 21, 24 and

26.

The Alaskan zone stretches from the west end of the Aleutian Islands chain, across the Alaska and Canadian mainland, where it joins with the Canadian zone, which extends to St. Lawrence Island in the east.

The flurry of Russian flights into Alaska zone began five days after a meeting between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska to discuss ending the war in Ukraine.

Russia and China have increased their military activity in the Arctic region in recent years as climate change has opened up far northern waterways to military and commercial shipping. Russia and China operated a joint flotilla through the 51-mile-wide Bering Strait that separates eastern Russia and Alaska.

Other recent Russian flights near Alaska were tracked on July 22, July 24, April 14, Feb. 18 and 19.

American and Canadian aircraft were also sent to monitor Russian aircraft over the Arctic on Jan. 30, though NORAD did not specify whether they entered the Alaska zone.

NORAD recorded 12 flights into the zone by Russian planes during 2024.

"Since Russia resumed long-range aviation activities in 2007, the number of incursions fluctuates annually, but we have seen as many as 15 in one year to as low as zero," Garand said.

The U.S. and Canada use satellites, radar, and patrolling aircraft to monitor incursions, she said.

The IL-20 is a Soviet-era electronic intelligence and reconnaissance turboprop aircraft, developed from the IL-18 turboprop airliner that first flew in March 1968.

MILITARY

Second B-21 expected to fly by year's end

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The second of the Air Force's newest long-range stealth bombers is expected to take flight by the end of the year, a top general said this week.

Another B-21 Raider likely will be in the air soon, Lt. Gen. Andrew Gebara said Wednesday during an online discussion hosted by the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, a think tank based in Washington, D.C.

The service flew its first B-21 in November 2023. The aircraft is in its final test flights.

But Gebara cautioned that the Air Force wasn't going to give the aircraft's developer, Northrop Grumman, "an artificial date that they have to make."

"That's really been the secret sauce to the B-21 right now, is no undue pressures," said Gebara,



JUAN FEMATH/U.S. Air Force

A B-21 Raider conducts flight testing at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., in September.

deputy chief of staff for strategic deterrence and nuclear integration. "Let them do what they're doing, and they'll get us the world's best aircraft here very soon."

Realizing that goal is eased by \$4.5 billion in additional funding for the program under the recently passed reconciliation bill, helping the Air Force and Northrop Grumman build the aircraft to

scale, he said.

The domestic policy bill gave the Pentagon \$150 billion on top of its annual budget and was signed into law by President Donald Trump on July 4.

Last month, Northrop Grumman said it was in talks with the Air Force "regarding the potential for an accelerated production ramp on the program," according to a transcript of a July 22 earn-

ings call with investors.

The Air Force is expected to buy about 100 of the bombers, which can fly intercontinentally and drop conventional and thermonuclear weapons, at a cost of nearly \$700 million each. The service's 2026 budget calls for \$10.3 billion to fund the B-21.

The sixth-generation aircraft is the result of a program aimed at producing a more technologically advanced strategic bomber to eventually replace the aging B-52 Stratofortress and the B-1.

The B-21 is the Pentagon's second stealth bomber in history after the B-2 Spirit, which entered service in the late 1990s.

On a separate topic during the Mitchell Institute event, Gebara declined to comment on recent reports that the U.S. had moved nuclear weapons to the U.K. But later, he said the B61-12 nuclear

gravity bomb is "fully deployed throughout Europe."

"NATO is a nuclear alliance," Gebara said. "The United States is a huge part of that nuclear deterrence. We provide that extended deterrence in the form of these weapons at certain locations around Europe."

In July, open-source intelligence analysts said an Air Force C-17A Globemaster III aircraft appeared to have delivered nuclear weapons to RAF Lakenheath.

That report followed one in January 2024 by the BBC identifying a Defense Department contract announcement for the U.S. air base related to an "upcoming nuclear mission."

Nuclear bombs were removed from Lakenheath in 2008. Since then, no nuclear weapons have been deployed to the U.K. in more than 15 years, the BBC reported.

All NATO members projected to reach 2% spending target

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — NATO released data on Thursday showing that all its 32 members are projected to finally meet a long-standing goal of spending 2% of their overall economic output on defense this year, while only three meet a new goal set at 3.5% of GDP agreed in June.

A push for higher defense spending is one result of Russia's war in Ukraine, which has created profound security concerns across Europe.

It is also a reaction to pressure from President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly accused European allies of not investing enough in their own security. Trump has warned Europeans that Washington might not defend those who fail to meet commitments.

All 32 alliance members are expected to reach the 2% goal this year for the first time, marking a significant change since 2023, when just 10 allies met that benchmark, the NATO report said.

Alliance members agreed at summit in June to hike defense spending from 2% to 3.5% and to require a further commitment of 1.5% of GDP for spending on other measures, such as upgrading roads, bridges, ports and airfields so armies can better deploy and establishing measures to counter cyber and hybrid attacks and preparing societies for future conflict.

Germany was the sole country excluded from the NATO report's 2025 GDP count, but it already

reached the 2% target in 2024. Germany finalized its 2025 budget late after the collapse of its previous government and an election in February.

The country's Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil said in June that German defense spending will hit 2.4% of GDP in 2025 and 3.5% by 2029.

Speaking on Thursday in Wurzburg, Germany, where he was attending a political conference, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte praised Germany's accelerating militarization.

"By 2029 Germany will spend over 150 billion euros (\$175 billion) on its defense. That is more than doubling what you spent in 2021, that's almost four times of what you spent in 2018," Rutte said. "And that means that you really take the lead in Europe, and we need that in Europe. You are the second biggest economy in NATO, the biggest economy in Europe."

Countries with the highest expenditures are Eastern European nations with bitter memories of past rule by Moscow. Poland's spending this year is projected to reach 4.5% of GDP, while Lithuania's will be 4% and Latvia on 3.7%.

Many European countries, including Spain and Belgium, face major economic challenges and Trump's global tariff war could make it even harder for America's allies to reach those new defense spending targets.



ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES/AP

Allied ships sail near the Philippine Navy BRP Jose Rizal during Exercise ALON 2025 on Wednesday.

Australia, Canada, Philippines stage air defense drills off shoal

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Australia, Canada and the Philippines deployed three warships and aircraft Wednesday for drills against simulated aerial threats off a disputed South China Sea shoal where Chinese forces have used risky maneuvers to try to drive away Manila's aircraft and ships.

The Philippine military said the naval drills east of the Scarborough Shoal were concluded safely, and it did not mention any encounter with Chinese coast guard, navy and suspected militia ships which have been closely guarding the uninhabited fishing atoll off the northwestern Philippines for years.

Chinese officials did not immediately issue any comment on the naval drills but they have repeatedly warned that they would defend the shoal and outlying waters, which they claim as Beijing's territory, at all cost.

China and the Philippines claim Scarborough and other is-

lands, islets and reefs in the South China Sea. Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also lay overlapping claims in the busy waterway, a key global trade route.

The United States has no claims but has questioned China's claim to virtually the entire sea passage, including to Scarborough. Two U.S. warships sailed off the shoal this month to promote freedom of navigation and were shadowed by a Chinese navy ship.

Sailing from a western Philippine province, the Royal Australian Navy's guided-missile destroyer HMAS Brisbane, Canadian navy frigate HMCS Ville de Quebec and a Philippine navy guided-missile frigate BRP Jose Rizal conducted exercises east of the shoal, including the "air defense exercise that honed the participants' capability to counter simulated aerial threats through coordinated defensive maneuvers," the Philippine military said in a brief statement.

Video footage and photographs

issued by the Philippine military show at least three fighter jets soaring in the sky during the drills while two combat helicopters separately flew near the Philippine navy frigate.

"This engagement reaffirms the Armed Forces of the Philippines' commitment to advancing defense cooperation with like-minded nations," it said.

The drills were among the final activities of the largest military exercises Australia has staged with the Philippines that involved more than 3,600 military personnel for 15 days of live-fire and battle maneuvers that would end on Friday.

One of Asia's most sensitive flashpoints, the Scarborough Shoal has been closely guarded by China's forces, which suffered a setback on Aug. 11 when a Chinese navy ship accidentally collided with a Chinese coast guard ship while trying to block a Philippine coast guard vessel near the shoal.

PACIFIC



GURO FIRE STATION

These M26 grenades were found within a rice cooker inside a dumpster at Wooshin High School in Seoul, South Korea, on Saturday.

South Korean army disposes of leftover wartime grenades

By DAVID CHOI
AND YOOJIN LEE
Stars and Stripes

Three hand grenades discovered at a high school in South Korea's capital and on a hill inside the city prompted two separate emergency responses by the South Korean army within a week, according to spokesmen from local fire stations.

A janitor at Wooshin High School, in the Guro District of western Seoul, found a pair of Korean War-era M26 grenades Saturday within a rice cooker inside a dumpster, a spokesman for the Guro Fire Station said Thursday.

Army explosive ordnance disposal technicians retrieved the grenades about 90 minutes later, the spokesman said.

Police determined that a faculty member found the grenades on the campus July 29 and kept them in the rice cooker believing they were not a threat, the spokesman said.

An M26 grenade weighs a pound, about a third of it in explosives, and detonates within 4 to 5 seconds after being triggered, according to a U.S. Army technical manual dated June 1966.

The South Korean army did not

immediately respond to a request for comment. South Korean government officials speak to the media on the customary condition of anonymity.

Following the incident, the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education held an emergency meeting Monday to review safety protocols at its schools, according to a news release from the office.

"We take this case seriously, and we will prioritize students' right to learn and their safety," office superintendent Jeong Geun-sik said in the release. "We will do our utmost to preemptively eliminate danger in schools and provide a safe educational environment."

In a separate incident Wednesday 15 miles east of the school, a passerby found an unspecified grenade near Daemo Mountain, a 960-foot hill in the Gangnam District with scenic views of the capital city, according to a Gangnam Fire Station spokesman.

The person placed the grenade on a pile of stones before calling the police, said the spokesman Thursday. Military explosive technicians retrieved the grenade and no injuries were reported, he said.

Marines extend Reaper deployment at Okinawa

By BRIAN McELHINEY
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps plans to keep a group of MQ-9A Reaper drones on Okinawa indefinitely beyond their original yearlong deployment, according to Japan's Ministry of Defense.

Fewer than six of the unmanned aerial vehicles arrived at Kadena Air Base on Aug. 13, 2024. They belong to Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 3, Marine Aircraft Group 24, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

The Reapers were scheduled to stay one year while conducting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance activities around the Nansei region, a spokeswoman with the prefecture's Military Base Affairs Division said at the time.

The extended stay continues an increased presence of U.S. unmanned aerial vehicles that began with Air Force Reapers in 2023 and was boosted by Navy Tritons in April. Two Tritons also operated from Kadena between May and October 2024.

The Okinawa Defense Bureau, an arm of the ministry, announced the continuing Reaper presence on its website Wednesday, citing the "increased severity of the security environment surrounding Japan."

"Japan and the U.S. confirmed the need to further deepen their cooperation in [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] activities during the '2+2' meeting held in July last year," the release said. The 2+2 meeting was a Tokyo summit by former Secretary of State Antony Blinken, former Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Japan's defense and foreign affairs ministers at the time.

First Marine Aircraft Wing spokesman 2nd Lt. B.K. Rhodes confirmed the drones are still at Kadena but declined to confirm an extended deployment or disclose the exact number of aircraft.

"This rotational deployment



KEISHI KOJA/Stars and Stripes

A Marine Corps MQ-9A Reaper assigned to Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 3 parks in a hangar on Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, on March 21.

supports training in the region," he said. "Operating from Japan provides VMU-3 with realistic domain awareness training that will increase proficiency to help provide critical support to Marines, the Joint Force, and our Japanese Allies in support of the defense of Japan."

The Nansei island chain — also known as the Ryukyu Islands — stretches from Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, to Taiwan.

China in recent years has been conducting more drone flights around Taiwan and near Japanese airspace. In June, its military carried out Pacific drills involving both of its aircraft carriers — the Shandong and Liaoning — for the first time.

Defense bureau officials explained the extended deployment to the prefecture during a meeting in Okinawa's capital city, Naha, on Wednesday, a Military Base Affairs Division spokesman said by phone that day. Fewer than 20 personnel will remain deployed with the aircraft, he said.

"We told the bureau that the deadline was about one year, so we asked them to adhere to it," the spokesman said. "We asked them to clarify how long the aircraft will be deployed."

The Air Force and the Navy have also deployed drones to Kadena in recent years.

Air Force Reapers with the 319th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron have flown intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions over Japan's southern island chain from Kadena since 2023.

An unspecified number of Navy MQ-4C Tritons deployed to Kadena in April from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, 7th Fleet spokeswoman Lt. Cmdr. Jamie Moroney said. The aircraft, assigned to Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19 at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla., came with about 50 supporting personnel.

Tritons are primarily intelligence-gathering, reconnaissance and surveillance vehicles.

They can fly for more than 24 hours at altitudes above 50,000 feet with a range of 7,400 miles, according to their maker, Northrop Grumman.

The Marines and Air Force employ the Reaper for the same mission; the Air Force highlights its ability to carry up to eight air-to-ground Hellfire missiles, according to official websites for each service.

The Tritons' mission on Okinawa is "a long-planned temporary deployment in support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations and is not in response to any provocation or action," Moroney said.

USS New Orleans steams back to Sasebo after onboard fire

By BRIAN McELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

WHITE BEACH NAVAL FACILITY, Okinawa — The USS New Orleans left Okinawa on Thursday for its homeport in Japan more than a week after U.S. and Japanese sailors and Japan's coast guard extinguished a fire that burned for 12 hours aboard the ship.

The amphibious transport dock ship left White Beach at about 10 a.m. It was bound for Sasebo Naval Base on Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, "for further assessment and repairs," U.S. 7th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Matthew Comer said Thursday.

The New Orleans was not far from the Okinawa shore when a

fire broke out in its forward area at 4 p.m. Aug. 20. Sailors extinguished it early the next morning with help from the crew of its sister ship, the USS San Diego, moored at White Beach, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the coast guard.

The New Orleans docked at White Beach at 3:40 p.m. Aug. 22 under its own power, Task Force

76 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. John Mike said by email Monday. Damage assessors inspected the ship in port, according to an Aug. 22 fleet news release.

Several sailors were treated for minor injuries and have returned to duty, according to the release. Mike and Comer declined to provide an exact number of injured sailors.

The fleet reported Aug. 21 that two sailors were treated on board for minor injuries.

"The cause of the fire remains under investigation," Comer said.

Amphibious transport dock ships carry Marines, equipment and aircraft, such as helicopters and MV-22B Ospreys, to support expeditionary warfare missions.

MILITARY

2nd Cavalry wins Best Squad for 4th straight year

By LYDIA GORDON
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR TRAINING AREA, Germany — A storied cavalry regiment based in Vilseck will once again represent U.S. Army Europe and Africa at the Army's Best Squad Competition, as it kept its streak alive as the only winner of a theater-wide contest.

The 2nd Cavalry regiment scored its fourth win in a row in the eight-day competition, which ended Thursday. It brought together 10 of the toughest five-soldier squads from across Europe and Africa-based units for a grueling test of endurance, skill and teamwork at the Army's largest overseas training area in Germany.

The winning squad was made up of Staff Sgt. Seth Peaton, Sgt. James Tranchina, Spc. Devin Schallert, Spc. Reynoso Ruiz and Pfc. Samuel Vittitow.

The regiment's sniper section leader, Peaton stepped into the role held last year by Staff Sgt. Jordan Behr, inheriting both his billet within the unit and the mantle of best squad leader.

And Vittitow earned individual recognition as the competition's best soldier, a remarkable achievement given that he's been in the service for only six months.

"I'm hoping to see how other units fare against ours," he said. "I'm not going to underestimate them. I know these guys are going to be the best of the best, but so are we."

Since its inception four years ago, the USAREUR competition has been adapted with each iteration to best reflect situations would face on the battlefield.

"As we see different effects and different tactics used by the Russian forces against Ukraine and different things that are impacting the United States' efforts in Europe, of course we take those into consideration and try to work those different variables into our training scenarios," V Corps' operations Sgt. Maj. David Huntington said Monday.

While squads receive general guidance on which skills to train for, the exact challenges remain unknown until the competition be-



PHOTOS BY LYDIA GORDON/Stars and Stripes

Army Staff Sgt. William Ansong, right, helps Sgt. Matthew Whitley, both with 2nd Theater Signal Brigade, put on a gas mask during a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials event at the U.S. Army Europe and Africa Best Squad Competition at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, on Monday.



Army Sgt. Joshua Botti of the 2nd Theater Signal Brigade prepares his gear for an event.



A team from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment placed first in the U.S. Army Europe and Africa's Best Squad Competition on Thursday.



Soldiers carry a casualty dummy into a CH-47 Chinook during a medical event.

gins, Huntington said.

This year's version featured three phases, with teams tested in events to include the Army Fitness Test, live-fire ranges, day and night land navigation, endurance rucks, troop-leading procedures, situational training exercises, and written exams.

For the five 2nd Cavalry Regiment members vying for the title of best squad in Europe this time around, the bar had already been

set high.

Last year's USAREUR team took third place in the Army's overall competition. Their successors will get their chance on the big stage in October, when Fort Bragg, N.C., will host the test to determine the service's best squad.

The legacy of winning is giving

them confidence for the challenge ahead.

"I think competition breeds good soldiers," Peaton said. "We aren't actively in a war zone at this moment ... so I think that competitions like these will improve our warfighting capabilities and our lethality."

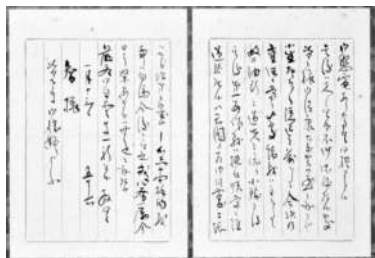
WWII exhibit reveals letters from architect of Pearl Harbor attack

By KEISHI KOJA
AND BRIAN McELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

Two letters written by the head of Japan's imperial navy during World War II are being exhibited for the first time at a museum in northeastern Japan.

The letters from Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto to his brother-in-law Toshi Mitsuhashi are on public display as part of a World War II exhibit at the Fukushima Museum in Fukushima prefecture about 180 miles northeast of Tokyo.

The Our War Experience exhibit commemorates the 80th anniversary of the war's end in the Pacific and showcases military mail and photographs sent by soldiers to their families in the prefecture,



Fukushima Museum (private collection)

Two letters written by Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto, who led the Pearl Harbor attack, are on display at Fukushima Museum through Sept. 15.

along with uniforms and other artifacts. It runs through Sept. 15.

Yamamoto, born in Niigata on April 4, 1884, served as command-in-chief of Japan's combined

fleet from 1939 until his death in 1943.

He led the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, which killed more than 2,400 U.S. service members and civilians, damaged multiple ships and destroyed 188 U.S. military planes. The attack led the U.S. to declare war on Japan the next day and enter World War II.

Yamamoto was killed when a U.S. Army Air Forces Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighter shot down the Mitsubishi G4M bomber he was traveling in over Papua New Guinea on April 18, 1943.

The museum received the letters from a descendant of Yamamoto's wife, Reiko Mitsuhashi, in July just before the exhibit opened, museum curator Ayumi

Watanabe said Thursday. Toshi was her younger brother.

Yamamoto "was a key figure during the Pacific war and was on the front lines," Watanabe said. "These letters offer a glimpse into his private life and personal interactions with his family. This is a valuable resource that reveals how he viewed the attack on Pearl Harbor."

The first letter, dated Jan. 13, 1942, was sent from the warship Nagato. Yamamoto did not wish to start a war with the U.S. but was nevertheless put in charge of Japan's combined fleet, according to explanatory material emailed to Stars and Stripes on Wednesday along with the letters.

"As a military man close to re-

tirement, I am engaged in an important mission," the letter reads. "The attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii succeeded due to American carelessness and negligence, and the first phase of the subsequent operation [in the Nanpou region including the Philippines, Malaysia and Guam] is also progressing smoothly. However, the real battle is yet to come."

The second letter, dated April 1942, was sent from the warship Yamato in response to an unknown previous letter from Toshi. In his response, Yamamoto expressed gratitude for Toshi's visit to his ancestors' grave in Wakamatsu city and wrote about his own desire to visit the grave after the war.

MILITARY

NTSB says B-52 bomber nearly hit 2 planes

Incident after flyover at North Dakota State Fair last month also included small Piper

By **JOSH FUNK**
Associated Press

Shortly after an airliner made an aggressive maneuver to avoid colliding with a B-52 last month over North Dakota, the bomber nearly collided with a small private plane as it flew past the Minot airport, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

Investigators released their preliminary report Wednesday on the July 19 incident that happened after the bomber completed a flyover at the North Dakota State Fair in Minot. The close call with Delta Flight 3788 is well known because of a video a passenger shot of the pilot's announcement after making an abrupt turn to avoid the bomber. But the fact that the B-52 subsequently came within one-third of a mile of a small Piper airplane hadn't been previously reported.

The SkyWest pilot told his passengers that day that he was surprised to see the bomber looming to the right, and the U.S. Air Force also said that air traffic controllers never warned the B-52 crew about the nearby airliner. Officials said at the time that the flyover had been cleared with the FAA and the private controllers who oversee the Minot airport ahead of time.

These close calls were just the latest incidents to raise questions about aviation safety in the wake of January's midair collision over Washington, D.C., that killed 67 people.

The NTSB report doesn't identi-



NORTH DAKOTA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE/AP

A B-52 bomber performs a flyover at the North Dakota State Fair in Minot. Shortly after an airliner made a maneuver to avoid colliding with a B-52 last month over North Dakota, the bomber nearly collided with a small private plane, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

fy the cause of the incidents, but the transcript of the conversation between the three planes, the air traffic controller on duty in Minot and a regional FAA controller at a radar center in Rapid City, S.D., show several confusing commands were issued by the tower that day. Investigators won't release their final report on the cause until sometime next year.

With the B-52 and Delta planes converging on the airport from dif-

ferent directions, the controller told the Delta plane that was carrying 80 people to fly in a circle to the right until the pilot told the controller he didn't want to do that because the bomber was off to his right, so he broke off his approach.

"Sorry about the aggressive maneuver. It caught me by surprise," the pilot can be heard saying on the video a passenger posted on social media. "This is not normal at all. I don't know why they didn't give us

a heads up."

At one point, the controller intended to give the Delta plane directions but mistakenly called out the bomber's call sign and had to cancel that order.

Less than a minute after the B-52 crossed the path of the airliner, it nearly struck the small plane that was also circling while the bomber flew past the airport on its way back to Minot Air Force Base where 26 of the bombers are based.

Aviation safety consultant Jeff Guzzetti, who used to investigate plane crashes for both the NTSB and FAA, said the controller didn't give the commands for the Delta and Piper planes to circle soon enough for them to stay a safe distance away from the bomber.

The transcript shows the local controller calling the regional FAA controller to get permission every time before he issued a command to the planes. Guzzetti said it is not clear whether taking that extra step to consult with the other controller delayed the commands or whether the Minot controller simply didn't anticipate how close the planes would come.

"It all just kind of came together at the same time very quickly, and this controller was not on top of it," Guzzetti said.

The Minot airport typically handles between 18 and 24 flights a day. But at this moment, three planes were all arriving at the same time.

After the close calls, all the planes landed safely.

These North Dakota close calls put the spotlight on small airports like Minot that are run without their own radar systems, but it is not clear whether that contract tower program that includes 265 airport towers nationwide had anything to do with the incident. There was one controller staffing the tower in Minot at the time of incident, and a controller at a regional radar center in Rapid City was helping direct planes in the area.

Use: Experts question legal limits of what Trump can approve

FROM PAGE 1

The polarizing strategy has strained DHS, prompted public outcry and set off numerous legal battles.

Asked about its plans for the Navy base in Illinois, DHS tied the discussion to Trump's call for safer cities, though the vast majority of those targeted for removal have no history of violent crime. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said in an interview with NewsNation this week that DHS will have an "ICE strike team" in Chicago soon.

"Across the country, DHS law enforcement are arresting and removing the worst of worst including gang members, murderers, pedophiles, and rapists that have terrorized American communities," the agency said in a statement.

Spokespeople for Hegseth referred questions to DHS.

The request for use of Naval Station Great Lakes was reported

earlier by the Chicago Sun-Times, which cited an email the base's commanding officer, Navy Capt. Stephen Yargosz, sent to staff. Yargosz said in the message that DHS authorities would be at the Navy base from Sept. 2 to 30, with a "potential to also support National Guard units."

The Washington Post reported Saturday that military officials have for many weeks been devising plans to send U.S. troops to Chicago, likely coordinated with expanded ICE operations there. A range of options exist, with one likely plan calling for a few thousand members of the National Guard to deploy, officials familiar with the matter said.

The deployment of active-duty troops has also been considered, officials said.

The backlash from state and local officials has been fierce. Democratic Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker has said that while Chicago has some challenges, there are no cir-

cumstances that warrant the deployment of military force there.

Pritzker told reporters Wednesday that no one from the White House or elsewhere in the federal government had contacted him about the matter.

"They don't seem to want to communicate at all. And that's odd because it sounds like what they're trying to do is march right over local police," Pritzker said of the Trump administration. "You know, we used to hear that the president of the United States supported local police. We support local police. But now it appears that he wants to ignore them all together and just do whatever he has a whim about on that day."

Pritzker and Trump have traded jabs in recent days, with Trump saying he wants the governor to approve a military deployment. But the president suggested, too, that he may send the military even if Pritzker does not endorse the move. Trump, speaking Tuesday,

claimed he has "the right to do anything that I want to do."

"I'm the president of the United States," he said. "If I think our country is in danger — and it is in danger in these cities — I can do it."

Pritzker quickly responded on social media: "No, Donald. You can't do whatever you want."

Experts on constitutional law questioned the legal limits of what Trump can approve, while acknowledging that he may pursue another domestic military deployment anyway and let the courts sort it out later.

Elizabeth Goitein, senior director of the Brennan Center's Liberty and National Security Program, said that for Trump to deploy the Illinois National Guard in Chicago without Pritzker's consent, he could rely on the same legal authority laid out in Title 10 of U.S. code to send troops to Los Angeles earlier this year.

In that case, the administration

cited a section of law that says that U.S. troops are allowed to deploy within the United States with a limited role when "there is a rebellion or a danger of a rebellion against the authority of the Government" or when the president is unable to "execute the laws of the United States." Administration officials cited a handful of protesters throwing concrete at ICE agents as the legal basis for the deployment.

Whether the administration met the legal bar for the deployment in California remains contested, with a trial held earlier this month in U.S. District Court and no ruling issued yet by Judge Charles Breyer.

But even if that deployment is deemed to have been lawful, the situation in Chicago is separate and there is no indication of a rebellion there, Goitein said. Violent street crime also cannot be used as a legal basis to send in U.S. troops, she said.

MILITARY

Vet accused of false injury, death claims

BY LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — An Army veteran from Maine accused of faking his own death after falsely claiming he was wheelchair bound to collect \$245,000 in veterans benefits was arrested by the U.S. Marshals Service.

Gregory P. Heimann Jr., 51, was detained at an Amtrak train station in Missouri on charges related to falsely representing service-connected knee and back injuries to the Department of Veterans Affairs to qualify for monthly disability checks and other benefits, according to marshals.

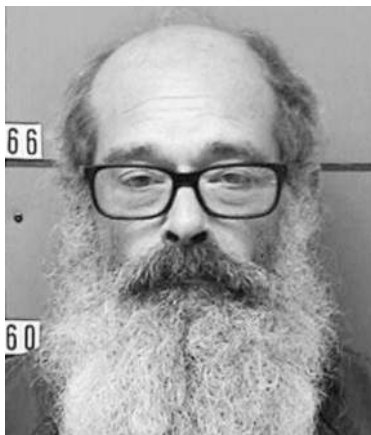
A federal judge in Missouri last week ordered Heimann to be transported back to his home state where he will face criminal charges for “materially making false, fictitious and fraudulent statements” to the VA to receive

monthly disability checks and other benefits, according to court documents.

Heimann had dropped out of sight and managed to evade authorities for more than a year, after federal marshals obtained a warrant for his arrest in April 2024, according to documents filed in U.S. District Court in Maine.

Agents from the VA Office of Inspector General said they had obtained multiple photos and video of Heimann walking and moving without the use of a wheelchair or assistance, according to an affidavit filed in support of his arrest.

But on April 19, 2024, Heimann disappeared after taking a canoe with his belongings to a river near the Canadian border, according to court documents. Heimann could not be found, and authorities at first believed he had drowned.



Army veteran Gregory Heimann

“More than 15 game wardens, dozens of civilians, aircraft, watercraft, and all-terrain vehicles from the Maine Game Warden Service responded to the call and began a search that lasted several days, all in an attempt to find Heimann or recover his body,” the

Marshals Service said.

But further investigation revealed Heimann was not deceased, and his disappearance was ruled suspicious, marshals said. Authorities said Heimann had faked his own drowning to avoid arrest shortly after authorities questioned him, according to court documents.

Heimann had claimed to the VA since 2005 that he suffered serious injuries that stemmed from a 1995 accident while based in Hawaii. He had served in the Army from 1993 to 1997. He then served in the Army National Guard from 1997 to 2005.

Heimann claimed to the VA that he first injured his back and legs in 1995 and reinjured them while on active duty that caused permanent damage.

He said the injuries worsened, caused chronic pain and severely

limited his ability to walk after leaving military service. He was collecting \$5,000 in monthly disability checks and other forms of VA assistance, according to the affidavit.

But Heimann abruptly disappeared less than a month after agents confronted him with photos showing instances of him walking and engaging in physical activities with no help or visible impairment. Investigators first discovered a Facebook account under Heimann’s name that included photos of him standing without assistance and posting messages about plans to go elk hunting with friends.

They later found surveillance video of Heimann shopping at a hardware store, pushing a full grocery cart at a Walmart and dragging a chicken coop across his yard, according to the affidavit.

Mystery: Bidding was opened up to small businesses only

FROM PAGE 1

tics over a dozen other bidders to build the massive tent camp at Fort Bliss in west Texas. At least one competitor has filed a complaint.

The secretive — and brisk — contracting process is emblematic, experts said, of the government’s broader rush to fulfill the Republican president’s pledge to arrest and deport an estimated 10 million migrants living in the U.S. without permanent legal status. As part of that push, the government is turning increasingly to the military to handle tasks that had traditionally been left to civilian agencies.

A member of Congress who recently toured the camp said she was concerned that such a small and inexperienced firm had been entrusted to build and run a facility expected to house up to 5,000 migrants.

“It’s far too easy for standards to slip,” said Rep. Veronica Escobar, a Democrat whose district includes Fort Bliss. “Private facilities far too frequently operate with a profit margin in mind as opposed to a governmental facility.”

Attorney Joshua Schnell, who specializes in federal contracting law, said he was troubled that the Trump administration has provided so little information about the facility.

“The lack of transparency about this contract leads to legitimate questions about why the Army would award such a large contract to a company without a website or any other publicly available information demonstrating its ability to perform such a complicated project,” he said.



ALAN SUDERMAN/AP

This home in Richmond, Va., is listed as the headquarters of Acquisition Logistics LLC, a small business that won a contract to build an immigrant detention facility in Texas.

Ken A. Wagner, the president and CEO of Acquisition Logistics, did not respond to phone messages or emails. No one answered the door at his three-bedroom house listed as his company’s headquarters. Virginia records list Wagner as an owner of the business, though it’s unclear whether he might have partners.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth approved using Fort Bliss for the new detention center, and the administration has hopes to build more at other bases. A spokesperson for the Army declined to discuss its deal with Acquisition Logistics or reveal details about the camp’s construction, citing the litigation over the company’s qualifications.

Department of Homeland Security spokeswoman, Tricia McLaughlin, issued a statement that said “under President Trump’s leadership, we are working at turbo speed on cost-effective and innovative ways to deliver on the American people’s mandate for mass deportations of criminal illegal aliens.”

She said the Fort Bliss facility “will offer everything a traditional ICE detention facility offers, in-

cluding access to legal representation and a law library, access to visitation, recreational space, medical treatment space and nutritionally balanced meals.” DHS oversees the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Named Camp East Montana for the closest road, the facility is being built in the sand and scrub Chihuahuan Desert, where summertime temperatures can exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit and heat-related deaths are common. The 60-acre site is near the U.S.-Mexico border and the El Paso International Airport, a key hub for deportation flights.

The camp has drawn comparisons to “Alligator Alcatraz,” a \$245 million tent complex erected to hold ICE detainees in the Florida Everglades. That facility has been the subject of complaints about unsanitary conditions and lawsuits. A federal judge recently ordered that facility to be shut down.

The vast majority of the roughly 57,000 migrants detained by ICE are housed at private prisons operated by companies like Florida’s Geo Group and Tennessee-based CoreCivic. As those facilities fill

up, ICE is also exploring temporary options at military bases in California, New York and Utah.

At Fort Bliss, construction began within days of the Army issuing the contract on July 18. Site work began months earlier, before Congress had passed Trump’s big tax and spending cuts bill, which includes a record \$45 billion for immigration enforcement. The Defense Department announcement specified only that the Army was financing the initial \$232 million for the first 1,000 beds at the complex.

Three white tents, each about 810 feet long, have been erected, according to satellite imagery. A half dozen smaller buildings surround them.

A June 9 solicitation notice for the Fort Bliss project specified the contractor will be responsible for building and operating the detention center, including providing security and medical care. The document also requires strict secrecy, ordering the contractor inform ICE to respond to any calls from members of Congress or the news media.

The bidding was open only to small firms such as Acquisition Logistics, which receives preferential status because it’s classified as a veteran and Hispanic-owned small disadvantaged business.

Though Trump’s administration has fought to ban diversity, equity and inclusion programs, federal contracting rules include set-asides for small businesses owned by women or minorities. For a firm to compete for such contracts, at least 51% of it must be owned by people belonging to a federally designated disadvan-

tagged racial or ethnic group.

One of the losing bidders, Gemini Tech Services, filed a protest challenging the award and the Army’s rushed construction timeline with the U.S. Government Accountability Office, Congress’ independent oversight arm that resolves such disputes.

Gemini alleges Acquisition Logistics lacks the experience, staffing and resources to perform the work, according to a person familiar with the complaint who wasn’t authorized to discuss the matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity. Acquisition Logistics’ past jobs include repairing small boats for the Air Force, providing information technology support to the Defense Department and building temporary offices to aid with immigration enforcement, federal records show.

A ruling by the GAO on whether to sustain, dismiss or require corrective action is not expected before November. A legal appeal is also pending with a U.S. federal court in Washington.

Schnell, the contracting lawyer, said Acquisitions Logistics may be working with a larger company. Geo Group Inc. and CoreCivic Corp., the nation’s biggest for-profit prison operators, have expressed interest in contracting with the Pentagon to house migrants.

In an earnings call this month, Geo Group CEO George Zoley said his company had teamed up with an established Pentagon contractor. Zoley didn’t name the company.

A spokesperson for CoreCivic said it wasn’t partnering with Acquisition Logistics or Gemini.

NATION



REBECCA BLACKWELL/AP

Work progresses on a new migrant detention facility dubbed “Alligator Alcatraz,” at Dade-Collier Training and Transition facility in the Florida Everglades, on July 4, in Ochopee. A judge has ordered the facility closed by late October.

Judge: ‘Alligator Alcatraz’ closure can proceed amid request for stay

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — The immigration detention center in the Florida Everglades dubbed “Alligator Alcatraz” must keep moving toward shutting down operations by late October, a judge has ruled, even as the state and federal governments fight that decision.

U.S. District Judge Kathleen Williams late Wednesday denied those requests to pause her order to wind down operations at the facility, which has been plagued by reports of unsanitary conditions and detainees being cut off from the legal system.

The facility was already being emptied of detainees, according to an email exchange shared with The Associated Press on Wednesday. In a message sent to South Florida Rabbi Mario Rojzman on Aug. 22 related to providing chaplaincy services at the facility, Florida Division of Emergency Management Executive Director Kevin Guthrie said “we are probably going to be down to 0 individuals within a few days,” implying there would soon be no need for the services.

The detention center was quickly built two months ago at a lightly

used, single-runway training airport in the Everglades. State officials signed more than \$245 million in contracts for building and operating the facility, which officially opened July 1.

President Donald Trump toured the facility last month and suggested it could be a model for future lock-ups nationwide as his administration races to expand the infrastructure needed to increase deportations.

Attorneys for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said in their request for a stay that Williams’ order last week, if carried out, would disrupt the federal government’s ability to enforce immigration laws. But the judge in Wednesday night’s order noted that the detainee population already was dwindling at the facility, and that the federal government’s “immigration enforcement goals will not be thwarted by a pause in operations.”

Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis’ administration is preparing to open a second immigration detention facility dubbed “Deportation Depot” at a state prison in north Florida.

Williams said in last week’s order

that she expected the population of “Alligator Alcatraz” to decline within 60 days through the transferring of the detainees to other facilities, and once that happened, fencing, lighting and generators should be removed. She wrote the state and federal defendants can’t bring anyone other than those who are already being detained at the facility onto the property.

Environmental groups and the Miccosukee Tribe had argued in their lawsuit that further construction and operations should be stopped until federal and state officials complied with federal environmental laws.

A second lawsuit also was filed by civil rights groups last month against the state and federal governments over practices at the Everglades facility, claiming detainees were denied access to the legal system.

Civil rights groups last Friday filed a third lawsuit over practices at the facility in federal court in Fort Myers, asking for a restraining order and a temporary injunction that would bar Florida agencies and their contractors from holding detainees at “Alligator Alcatraz.”

CDC director fired as other agency leaders resign

By MIKE STOBBE
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The director of the nation’s top public health agency has been fired after less than one month in the job, and several top agency leaders have resigned.

Susan Monarez isn’t “aligned with” President Donald Trump’s agenda and refused to resign, so the White House terminated her, spokesman Kush Desai said Wednesday night.

Her lawyers said she was targeted for standing up for science.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services had announced her departure in a brief social media post late Wednesday afternoon. Her lawyers responded with a statement saying Monarez had neither resigned nor been told she was fired.

“When CDC Director Susan Monarez refused to rubber-stamp unscientific, reckless directives and fire dedicated health experts, she chose protecting the public over serving a political agenda. For that, she has been targeted,” attorneys Mark Zaid and Abbe David Lowell wrote in a statement.

“This is not about one official. It is about the systematic dismantling of public health institutions, the silencing of experts, and the dangerous politicization of science. The attack on Dr. Monarez is a warning to every American: our evidence-based systems are being undermined from within,” they said.

Her departure coincided with the resignations this week of at least four top CDC officials. The list includes Dr. Debra Houry, the agency’s deputy director; Dr. Daniel Jernigan, head of the agency’s National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases; Dr.

Demetre Daskalakis, head of its National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases; and Dr. Jennifer Layden, director of the Office of Public Health Data, Surveillance, and Technology.

In an email seen by The Associated Press, Houry lamented the crippling effects on the agency from planned budget cuts, reorganization and firings.

“I am committed to protecting the public’s health, but the ongoing changes prevent me from continuing in my job as a leader of the agency,” she wrote.

She also noted the rise of misinformation about vaccines during the current Trump administration, and alluded to new limits on CDC communications.

“For the good of the nation and the world, the science at CDC should never be censored or subject to political pauses or interpretations,” she wrote.

Daskalakis worked closely with the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. remade the committee by firing everyone and replacing them with a group that included several vaccine skeptics.

In his resignation letter, Daskalakis lamented that the changes put “people of dubious intent and more dubious scientific rigor in charge of recommending vaccine policy.” He described Monarez, 50, as “hamstrung and sidelined by an authoritarian leader.” He added: “Their desire to please a political base will result in death and disability of vulnerable children and adults.”

He also wrote: “I am unable to serve in an environment that treats CDC as a tool to generate policies and materials that do not reflect scientific reality.”

FDA OKs updated COVID shots with limits for some kids, adults

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. regulators approved updated COVID-19 shots Wednesday but limited their use for many Americans — and removed one of the two vaccines available for young children.

The new shots from Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax are approved for all seniors. But the Food and Drug Administration narrowed their use for younger adults and children to those with at least one high-risk health condition, such as asthma or obesity. That presents

new barriers to access for millions of Americans who would have to prove their risk — and millions more who may want to get vaccinated and suddenly no longer qualify.

Additionally, Pfizer’s vaccine will no longer be available for any child under 5, because the FDA said it was revoking the shot’s emergency authorization for that age group.

Parents will still be able to seek out shots from Moderna, the other maker of mRNA vaccines, which

has full FDA approval for children as young as 6 months. But the company’s Spikevax vaccine is only approved for children with at least one serious health problem.

The revamped vaccines target a newer version of the continuously evolving virus and are set to begin shipping soon. But it could be days or weeks before many Americans know if they’ll be able to get one.

The new restrictions — previewed by FDA officials in May — are a break from the previous U.S.

policy, which recommended an annual COVID-19 shot for all Americans 6 months and up.

The approach reflects heightened skepticism about the ongoing risks of COVID-19 and the need for yearly booster shots from Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and FDA Commissioner Marty Makary, both outspoken critics of wide-scale vaccinations.

“The American people demanded science, safety, and common sense. This framework delivers all three,” Kennedy wrote on

social media.

Novavax’s shot is only open to people 12 or older, not younger children, and carries the same risk-based restrictions that are now in place for Moderna and Pfizer. It’s the nation’s only traditional, protein-based COVID-19 vaccine.

The new limits “can’t help but create barriers to vaccinations” and cause confusion for patients, doctors and pharmacists, said Dr. William Schaffner, a Vanderbilt University vaccines expert.

NATION

Shooting suspect an ex-member of church, school

Associated Press

RICHFIELD, Minn. — The shooter who killed two Catholic school students and wounded more than a dozen children sitting in the pews of a Minneapolis church once attended the school and had been a member of the church, the city's police chief said.

Authorities were pouring over videos, writings and movements of the shooter but remained uncertain what motivated Robin Westman to open fire through stained-glass windows as children celebrated Mass on the first week of classes at the Annunciation Catholic School.

"Everything we've seen so far is a classic pathway to an active shooter," Minneapolis police chief Brian O'Hara said on NBC's "TODAY" show Thursday, adding police have seen nothing "specific to trigger the amount of hate that occurred yesterday."

Investigators have recovered hundreds of pieces of evidence from the church and three residences, and are seeking warrants to search devices, the chief said. They have found more writings from the suspect, but no additional firearms.

Westman, 23, who was armed

with a rifle, shotgun and pistol, died by suicide, he said.

Two children, ages 8 and 10, died in the shooting while 14 other kids and three parishioners in their 80s were wounded and most were expected to survive, O'Hara said. One child was in critical condition Thursday while 11 other victims remained in hospitals.

Westman, whose mother worked for the parish before retiring in 2021, left behind videos and several pages of writing describing a litany of grievances. In one he said: "I know this is wrong, but I can't seem to stop myself."

On a YouTube channel, videos that police say may have been posted by the shooter show weapons and ammunition, and list the names of mass shooters. What appears to be a suicide note to family contains a confession of long-held plans to carry out a shooting and talk of being deeply depressed.

Hours after the shooting, hundreds of people including Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and clergy members, attended a vigil.

Speaking to a crowd crammed shoulder-to-shoulder — with hundreds more outside — Archbishop Bernard Hebda described the students trying to shield their class-



ABBIE PARR/AP

Mementos were placed as a memorial at Annunciation Catholic Church after Wednesday's school shooting in Minneapolis.

mates as the gunfire erupted.

"In the midst of that, there was courage, there was bravery, but most especially there was love," he said.

Rev. Dennis Zehren, who was inside the church with the nearly 200 children, said the responsorial psalm — which spoke of light in the darkness — had almost ended when he heard someone yell, "Down down, everybody down," and gunshots rang out.

O'Hara said someone inside the church barricaded some of the side doors with a wooden plank and that authorities found a smoke bomb at the scene.

Fifth-grader Weston Halsne said he ducked for the pews, covering his head, shielded by a friend who was on top of him. His friend was hit, he said.

"I was super scared for him, but I think now he's OK," he said.

The police chief said the wounded children range from 6 to 15.

FBI Director Kash Patel said on X the shooting is being treated as an act of domestic terrorism and a hate crime targeting Catholics.

On a YouTube channel titled Robin W, police said at least two videos were posted before the channel was taken down Wednesday. In one, the person filming the video points to two windows in what appears to be a drawing of the church, then stabs it with a long knife.

The videos also show weapons and ammunition, scrawled with "kill Donald Trump" and "Where is your God?" along with the names of past mass shooters.

Federal officials referred to Westman as transgender. In 2020, a judge approved a petition, signed by Westman's mother, asking for a name change from Robert to Robin, saying the petitioner "identifies as a female and wants her name to reflect that identification."

Economy up 3.3% in second quarter

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy rebounded this spring from a first-quarter downturn caused by fallout from President Donald Trump's trade wars.

In an upgrade from its first estimate, the Commerce Department said Thursday that U.S. gross domestic product — the nation's output of goods and services — expanded at a 3.3% annual pace from April through June after shrinking 0.5% in the first three months of 2025. The department had initially estimated second-quarter growth at 3%.

The first-quarter GDP drop, the first retreat of the U.S. economy in three years, was mainly caused by a surge in imports — which are subtracted from GDP — as businesses scrambled to bring in foreign goods ahead of Trump's tariffs. That trend reversed as expected in the second quarter: Imports fell at a 29.8% pace, boosting April-June growth by more than 5 percentage points.

The Commerce Department reported that consumer spending and private investment were a bit stronger in the second quarter than it had first estimated.

Consumer spending, which accounts for about 70% of GDP, grew at a 1.6% annual pace, lackluster but better than 0.5% in the first quarter and the 1.4% the government initially estimated for the second.

Even with an upward revision, private investment dropped at a 13.8% annual pace from April through June. That would be the biggest drop since the second quarter of 2020 at the height of the coronavirus pandemic. A reduction in private inventories cut almost 3.3 percentage points off second-quarter GDP growth.

Spending and investment by the federal government fell at a 4.7% annual clip on top of a 4.6% drop in the first quarter.

A category within the GDP data that measures the economy's underlying strength came in stronger than first reported, growing 1.9% from April-June, same as in the first quarter. This category includes consumer spending and private investment but excludes volatile items like exports, inventories and government spending.

Since returning to the White House, Trump has overturned decades of U.S. policy that had favored freer trade. He's slapped double-digit taxes on imports from almost every country on Earth and targeted specific products for tariffs, too, including steel, aluminum and autos.

Police: Amish woman threw son, 4, into lake

Associated Press

An Amish woman who told authorities she was testing her faith when she threw her 4-year-old son into an Ohio lake was charged Wednesday with two counts of aggravated murder in the boy's death.

Authorities said Ruth R. Miller, 40, of Millersburg, Ohio, told investigators she believed she was acting at the direction of God when she allegedly killed her son Vincen at Atwood Lake early Saturday.

The lead investigator with the Tuscarawas County Sheriff's Office, Capt. Adam Fisher, said Wednesday that Ruth Miller repeatedly said in interviews with police that she threw the boy off the dock and into the water to give him to God.

"It did not appear that the gravity of the situation had sunk in," Fisher said.

The woman's husband, Marcus J. Miller, 45, had apparently drowned while attempting to swim to an offshore sandbank hours earlier in another test of faith, Sheriff Orvis Campbell said Monday.



TUSCARAWAS COUNTY, OHIO, SHERIFF'S OFFICE/AP

A dive team floats over the spot on Atwood Lake in Ohio where they recovered the body of Marcus Miller on Sunday, a day after Miller's wife allegedly killed their 4-year-old son by throwing him into the lake.

Their other children, a 15-year-old girl and twin 18-year-old boys, survived water-based trials of their belief, Campbell said.

The family had gone to Atwood Lake in a recreational vehicle as a getaway, arriving Friday, Ruth Miller's birthday.

Online court records indicate Ruth Miller was also charged with domestic violence and child endangerment regarding the older children. Authorities said Ruth Miller

was receiving treatment at a secure mental health facility.

Family members and the Millers' church said in a statement that the deaths "do not reflect our teachings or beliefs but are instead a result of a mental illness."

Campbell said Ruth Miller told investigators she believed she could walk on water but when she tried doing so off the end of the dock, she fell into the water.

Authorities were called Saturday

morning for a report of a golf cart having gone into the lake. Campbell said Ruth Miller had driven it at a high speed into a stone wall on the shore with the three older children on board. The cart ended up submerged but visible, and her children stood on it before getting out of the water.

When a rescuer tried to get Ruth Miller out of the water, she told them to "just pray for her," Campbell said.

Park rangers heard "concerning type statements" from Ruth Miller, the sheriff said: "There was a pretty immediate statement made that she had given her son to the Lord." Authorities soon realized her husband and 4-year-old son were missing.

"She began to express more that she had thrown the child in the water to give that child to God," Campbell said.

Around 6 p.m. Saturday, a diver found Vincen on the lake bed not far from the dock. Sunday morning, divers found Marcus Miller's body 53 yards from the dock.

NATION

Bill would let military retirees, some vets still contribute to TSP

BY LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Service members retiring from the military will for the first time be allowed to keep contributing to their military-sponsored retirement accounts — known as Thrift Savings Plans — under legislation introduced by Rep. Jen Kiggans, R-Va., a former Navy pilot.

The Financial Opportunities for Retirees and Warriors Advancing Retirement Development — or FORWARD Act — also would let veterans who are 100% disabled send a portion of their monthly benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs to Thrift Savings Plans that they opened during military service, according to the bill.

Under the law now, veterans can keep their Thrift Savings Plans, also known as TSP accounts, after they leave the military. But they cannot continue putting aside a portion of their income into the retirement account.

TSP accounts are funds that offer “a variety of investment options, from a short-term U.S. Treasury security to index funds made of domestic and international stocks,” according to a federal government website on the savings plan.

The bill enables qualifying veter-

ans to continue making contributions to their Thrift Savings Plans using their monthly retirement pension or from their disability payments. Service members are eligible for retirement and military pensions after 20 years of military service.

“For our 20-year retirees and veterans with a 100% disability rating, it’s only fair that they can keep contributing to the Thrift Savings Plan they’ve spent years building,” said Kiggans, a member of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee. “They shouldn’t be forced to start over in a new system when they’ve already invested in one that works for them.”

Congress originally established Thrift Savings Plans in 1986 to help federal employees save for retirement. Thrift Savings Plans are known as “defined contribution plans,” meaning individuals invest a portion of their earnings during their working years with their investment accumulating over time.

In 2001, lawmakers passed legislation that also allowed service members to participate in Thrift Savings Plans as a retirement tool.

“But right now federal law cuts off TSP [Thrift Savings Plan] contributions as soon as someone leaves the military, which creates a



A bill led by Rep. Jen Kiggans, R-Va., a former Navy pilot, would enable military retirees and veterans with 100% disability to continue making contributions to their Thrift Savings Plans.

frustrating gap for veterans who want to continue growing their retirement savings using the plan they know and trust,” said Kiggans, 54, a former Navy pilot who joined the military in 1993 and served for 10 years.

“I understand the challenges our service members face during the transition to civilian life,” said Kiggans, who also is married to a retired Navy fighter pilot. They have a son who is training to be a pilot.

Government contributions to a Thrift Savings Plan are similar to a 401(k) with automatic and matching contributions. But the bill would not authorize a matching contribution from the military.

A hearing has not been scheduled for the bill, which would require a rule change by the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board in coordination with the Defense Department and VA, according to Kiggans’ office.

Fed official sues over Trump administration attempt to fire her

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook has sued the Trump administration in an effort to overturn the president’s attempt to fire her, launching an unprecedented legal battle that could significantly reshape the Fed’s long-standing political independence.

The lawsuit seeks an emergency injunction to block her firing and “confirm her status” as a member of the Fed’s governing board.

“The President’s effort to terminate a Senate-confirmed Federal Reserve Board member is a broadside attack on the century-old independence of the Federal Reserve System,” Cook’s lawyer, Abbe David Lowell, wrote in a court filing.

The case could become a turning point for the 112-year-old Federal Reserve, which was designed by Congress to be insulated from day-to-day political influence. Economists prefer independent central banks because they can more easily take unpopular measures, such as lifting interest rates to combat inflation, than elected officials can.

The case was assigned to Judge Jia Cobb, an appointee of former President Joe Biden. A hearing was scheduled for Friday.

Many economists worry that if the Fed falls under the control of the White House, it will keep its key interest rate lower than justified by economic fundamentals to satisfy President Donald Trump’s demands for cheaper borrowing. That could allow inflation to rise more quickly and could also push up longer-term interest rates, such as those on mortgages and car loans. Investors may demand a higher yield to own bonds to offset greater inflation in the future, pushing up borrowing costs throughout the economy.

“If Cook wins, she stays in place and we achieve some semblance of stability,” said Peter Conti-Brown, a professor of financial regulation at the University of Pennsylvania in a Substack post. “If she loses ... that’s the end of Fed independence as it has been constructed and reconstructed over 112 years.”

No president has sought to fire a Fed governor before until Trump posted a letter on media late Monday saying that Cook was fired.

Banks urged to monitor for suspect Chinese transactions

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Treasury Department wants U.S. financial institutions to monitor for suspected Chinese money laundering networks handling funds that are used to fuel the flood of fentanyl across American communities.

An advisory Thursday to banks, brokers and others highlights how such operations are working with Mexican drug cartels.

The Trump administration is calling on banks to flag certain customers who may fit a profile of people who could launder money for cartels. That could include Chinese nationals such as students, retirees and housewives with unexplained wealth, and those who refuse to provide information about the source of their money.

The Treasury contends that many of these people unknowingly work with cartels to bypass Chinese currency controls that restrict the renminbi exchange rate through a system limiting the annual foreign currency conversion for individuals, which is about \$50,000.

It is not uncommon for Chinese individuals to evade such restrictions by turning to underground

banks where their money is converted into foreign currencies, often U.S. dollars.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington had no immediate comment Thursday.

Also Thursday, the department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, known as FinCen, released a report about how Chinese money laundering networks are expanding their ties beyond drug cartels. Financial institutions are increasingly filing suspicious activity reports on human trafficking and adult senior day care centers in New York that have become a vehicle for money laundering, according to the report.

FinCen analyzed more than 137,000 Bank Secrecy Act reports from January 2020 to December 2024 that accounted for approximately \$312 billion in total suspicious activity.

Last year, law enforcement officials uncovered a complex partnership between Mexico’s Sinaloa Cartel and Chinese underground banking groups in the United States that laundered \$50 million from the sale of fentanyl, cocaine and other drugs, federal prosecutors said.

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WORLD

Russian strikes hit Ukrainian capital

BY HANNA ARHIROVA AND SAMYA KULLAB
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia launched a major air attack early Thursday on Kyiv that included a rare strike on the city center, killing at least 18 people, wounding dozens and damaging European Union diplomatic offices, authorities said.

The bombardment of drones and missiles was the first major Russian attack on Kyiv in weeks as U.S.-led peace efforts to end the three-year war struggled to gain traction. Britain said the attack sabotaged peace efforts, while top EU diplomat Kaja Kallas summoned Russia's EU envoy to Brussels over the strikes that damaged EU offices.

Two of Ukraine's top envoys were set to meet Friday with the Trump administration regarding mediation. The Kremlin said Russia remained interested in continuing peace talks despite Thursday's air attack, which was one of the biggest since the war began.

Among the dead were four children between 2 and 17, said Tymur Tkachenko, the head of Kyiv's city administration. The numbers are expected to rise.

The attack was one of the few



DANYLO ANTONIUK/AP

A young woman sits in the street after her home was damaged Thursday in Russia's drone and missile attack in central Kyiv, Ukraine.

times Russian drones and missiles have penetrated the heart of Kyiv since the start of the full-scale invasion.

Ukraine's air force said Russia launched 598 strike drones and decoys and 31 missiles of different types across the country early Thursday, most of them striking targets in Kyiv.

At least 33 locations across all 10 of the city's districts were directly hit or damaged by debris, Tkachenko said. Thousands of windows shattered as nearly 100 buildings were damaged, including a shopping mall in the city center.

European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen said two strikes landed 20 seconds apart about 164 feet from the EU Mission to Ukraine building in Kyiv. She said no staff were injured in the strike.

"No diplomatic mission should

ever be a target. In response, we are summoning the Russian envoy in Brussels," Kallas said Thursday in a post on X.

The British Council, which promotes cultural relations and educational opportunities, also said its Kyiv office had been "severely damaged" in the attack and was closed to visitors until further notice.

The organization posted a photo showing the building with its windows and entrance smashed open and surrounded by glass and debris. A guard was injured and is "shaken but stable," council chief executive Scott McDonald posted on X.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said it carried out a strike against military air bases and companies "within Ukraine's military-industrial complex" using long-range weapons, including Kinzhal missiles.

Rwanda says 7 deportees arrived from US in August

Associated Press

KIGALI, Rwanda — Seven migrants were transferred from the United States to Rwanda in August under a deportation agreement with the U.S., authorities in the East African country said Thursday.

Rwanda said earlier in August it would accept up to 250 deportees from the U.S.

Yolande Makolo, a spokeswoman for the Rwandan government, said in a statement that the "first group of seven vetted migrants arrived in Rwanda in mid-August."

Rwanda is one of four African countries that have reached deportation agreements with Washington. The others are Uganda, Eswatini and South Sudan.

No information was provided about the identities of the deportees sent to Rwanda this month.

They have been "accommodated by an international organization" with visits by the International Organization for Migration, as well as representatives of Rwandan social services, Makolo said.

"Three of the individuals have expressed a desire to return to their home countries, while four wish to stay and build lives in Rwanda," Makolo said.

In addition to accommodation, those approved for settlement in Rwanda will receive workforce training and health care, she said.

The Trump administration has come under scrutiny for the African countries it has entered into secretive deals with to take deportees. It sent eight men from South Sudan, Cuba, Laos, Mexico, Myanmar and Vietnam to South Sudan in early July after a U.S. Supreme Court ruling cleared the way for their deportations.

The U.S. also deported five men who are citizens of Vietnam, Jamaica, Cuba, Yemen and Laos to the southern African kingdom of Eswatini, where the government said they will be held in solitary confinement in prison for an undetermined period of time.

Uganda has also agreed to a deal with the U.S. to take deported migrants as long as they don't have criminal records and are not unaccompanied minors..



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WEEKEND



Madden NFL 26 returns to Nintendo
Video games, Page 18



Going with the flow

Rapper A\$AP Rocky, actor Denzel Washington hold their own on each other's turf in Spike Lee's heist thriller 'Highest 2 Lowest'

Movies, Pages 15-16

A\$AP Rocky, left, and Denzel Washington star in "Highest 2 Lowest."

DREW CURIAN, INVISION/AP

WEEKEND: TECHNOLOGY

Is AI the answer to taking better photos?

Google Pixel 10 phones use the tech to enhance zoomed-in images, teach composition and edit by text or voice

BY CHRIS VELAZCO
The Washington Post

I'm no great photographer, but I still get lots of questions about how to frame a photo just right. Google's new Pixel 10 phones can help with that too.

For years, Google's Pixels have been also-rans in the U.S. smartphone market, where Apple and Samsung continue to dominate. But those who do buy them have been loud in their praise of their cameras, which this year got a potent boost from artificial intelligence. Though maybe not how you'd expect.

Earlier Pixel models were more than happy to tweak your images for you. Now, Google is trying to use AI to make you better at capturing and editing those images yourself.

The new photography features built into the Pixel 10 (\$799+), 10 Pro (\$999+) and 10 Pro XL (\$1,199+), which launched Thursday, are part of Google's big push to put more smarts in smartphones by tapping its AI technology. Your photos might well look better after using them. We'll put them to a proper test soon enough — for now, here's how Google's more collaborative take on AI-supported photography works.

Maximum zoom

Google's new phones look as sleek as ever but pack the AI equivalent of an enormous telephoto lens. With a lot of help from AI you can zoom in on a scene by 30x on the company's entry-level Pixel 10, and up to 100x on its slab-like Pro models.

As with any phone, when you zoom in beyond a certain point, these Pixel phones mostly see a blurry mess. But Google then cleans it up using an on-device AI model to "recover" texture and detail based on that model's training and what's still visible in the original image.

In the end, though, these phones are just painting in details calculated to be a good fit. Put another way, you're getting AI's interpretation of the world — not necessarily what's really there.

For photos of buildings and landmarks, this might not be so bad: AI has gotten pretty good at replicating regular lines and geometry and if you're not trying to preserve perfect architectural detail, you may well be happy with the result.

But consider this humble can of seltzer we photographed from the far end of a spacious demo room.

The top photo is what the camera's sensor "sees." Not much of anything. The bottom photo is what Google's AI guessed should be there. The results show the limits of the fake-it-to-photograph-it approach. The branding is mostly right, but the company's algorithms appear to have little idea of what to do with the finer surrounding details.

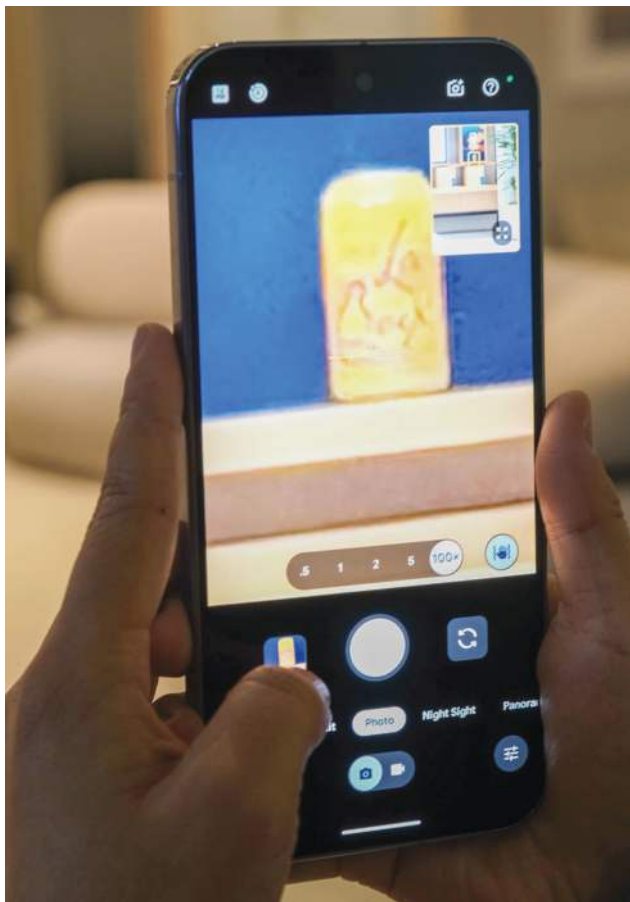
Features like this aren't completely new. Samsung's Ultra-branded smartphones have had a 100x "Space Zoom" feature for years and have previously drawn criticism for producing images that were at least a little out of step with reality.

I've also long wondered about the potential for these enhanced-zoom smartphone cameras to become helpful tools for creeps. Snapping photos of people covertly is a lot easier to do when you're using a phone instead of a camera with a massive lens.

Google has attempted to fix this: The camera on Pixel 10 phones largely refuses to enhance people appearing in those hyperzoomed photos.

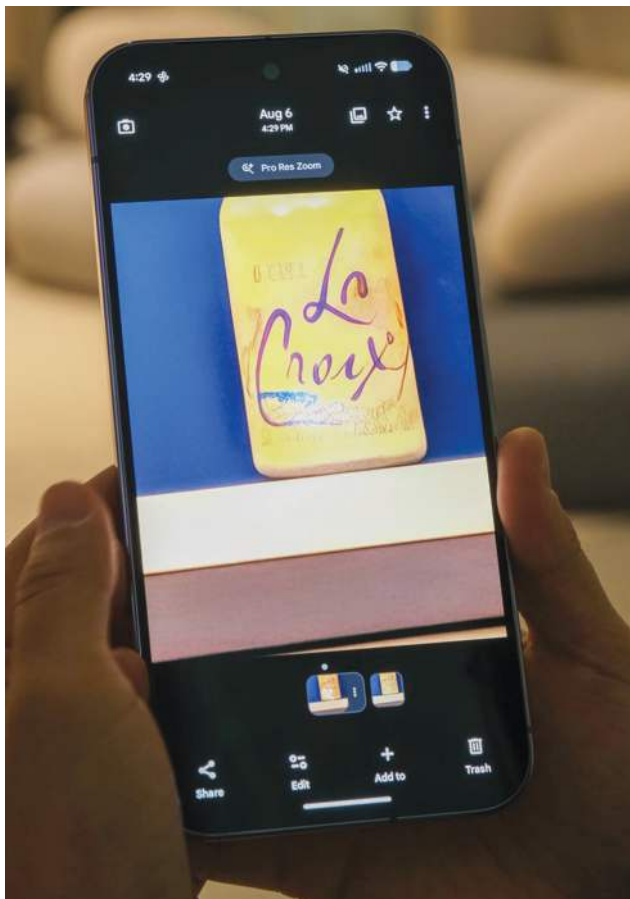
In photos where, say, a landmark or city street is the clear focal point, Google's AI model will sharpen and enhance everything but the humans milling around. And if you zoom in 100x onto a person's face, the phones simply refuse to help.

When I urged a Google employee to take a close-up of



PHOTOS BY CHRIS VELAZCO/The Washington Post

What the Pixel 10 Pro's camera sees, top, compared to an artificially enhanced version, bottom. The results show the limits of the fake-it-to-photograph-it approach. The branding on this can of seltzer is mostly right, but Google's algorithms appear to have little idea of what to do with the finer surrounding details.



my mug from across the room, the phone instead spat out a detailed image of, uh, just my hand. I can get behind the idea of fewer AI-distorted faces on the internet, though I'm sure lots of people wouldn't want other extremities sneakily photographed at a distance either.

This feature deserves some rigorous testing. I just wish the Pixel phone had explained why it happened as I was using the feature.

A better 'Best Take'

My colleague Geoffrey A. Fowler once called Google's Best Take "a nifty superpower for the family photographer" for the way it stitches together faces from different photos into a single cheery composite with nary a closed eyelid or squinched nose.

He's got a point: The results can be pretty and pleasant compared with the originals, where subjects could be blinking or burping or looking away, even though these composite images depict a moment that technically may have never occurred.

Google is tweaking that approach with its latest Pixels, making them more faithful to reality. The new phones will still cobble together a smiley amalgam if needed. But if they can see you appear to be taking a group shot, they'll analyze up to 150 images after you snap the photo — a process that can take a few seconds — in search of that magical moment when everyone looks just right.

If that moment never occurs? That's when the phone will cobble together a composite. (Pro tip: If these not-quite-true-to-life images give you the creeps, you can turn this feature off entirely.)

AI photo coaching

Google's new phones also debut an AI photography feature that kicks in long before you press the shutter button. With the tap of the screen, you can launch a "Camera Coach" tool that scans what the camera can see to give advice on how to frame an image.

Once that momentary scan is complete, the Pixel will offer suggestions like "full-length portrait" or "urban oasis detail," previewing what the final image could look like.

Tap your favorite suggestion, and the real hand-holding starts: On-screen prompts will steer you to select specific photo modes, walk around your subject and move the phone to cut unwanted objects from the frame.

I haven't been thrilled by the coaching I've seen so far, but I could see the feature genuinely helping some amateurs.

But my advice for folks seriously interested in taking better photos is that they should spend a little time getting to know their camera of choice — even if it is a phone — and poring over images they find personally arresting to understand why.

That said, I'm almost certainly going to make my parents use Camera Coach all the time.

Edit with words, not sliders

Editing photos is as much an art form as taking good ones in the first place, but getting started can feel daunting. Open up those menus and you'll soon be staring at sliders and toggles with names you've never heard of.

If you'd rather not swim through all those settings, the new Pixel phones come with a new version of the Google Photos app that will let you just type or speak the edits you want to make. You don't need to know any technical lingo, either.

The tool can field multipart requests like "remove the glare and brighten the photo" as well as dead-simple ones like "make the photo look better."

In early demos, I've used the feature to make very specific changes, like cropping images vertically for social media and swapping out existing backdrops for AI-generated views of starry space. Thankfully, it's a little harder now to pass off images edited with AI as fully genuine. Google's new phones are the first with so-called "content credentials" built in, so edited images will contain hidden data explaining exactly how they've been tweaked.

Some of these AI photography features may leave you feeling kind of icky, especially since Google is still happy to take some liberties with objective reality. But Google, a company that once unilaterally decided our photos should look like Caravaggio paintings, could have gone a lot further.

It's been a pleasant surprise that the company appears to realize that maybe the best way to use AI in photography is to keep it from making too many decisions for us.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Freestyle faceoff

Rapper A\$AP Rocky, venerable actor Denzel Washington go toe to toe on each other's turf in 'Highest to Lowest'

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

A\$AP Rocky had no idea Denzel Washington was going to throw Nas at him.

Midway through Spike Lee's "Highest 2 Lowest," a New York riff on Akira Kurosawa's "High and Low," wealthy music executive David King (Washington) has cornered aspiring rapper Yung Felon (Rocky) after he tries to kidnap King's son. They meet in a music studio. A rap battle ensues.

While the scene was scripted, much of what Washington freestyled — mixing in lines from Nas, Tupac, DMX and others — startled his professional rapper co-star.

"I'm like: How does this man know who Moneybagg Yo is?" Rocky says, sitting alongside Washington.

"And I'm 70," Washington says with a grin.

"Highest 2 Lowest," which was released in stateside theaters this month and streams on Apple TV+ on Sept. 5, is a heist thriller that hits hardest when Washington and Rocky are going at it. Washington, one of the mightiest of living actors, is, of course, an imposing presence. Even though Rocky might usually have the upper hand in the studio, he's just beginning to prove himself as an actor.

"Denzel is such a powerful force. Not a derogatory term, but he's a beast," Lee said. "Rocky is from Harlem, uptown. So I knew that he's not going to punk out. He's going to stand there, feet planted to the ground, as a heavyweight fight, blow to blow to blow. If you got somebody who don't got it, Denzel is going to slaughter them. SLAUGHTER."

But in "Highest 2 Lowest," Rocky proves that he can go toe-to-toe with a titan like Washington. In the annals of movie faceoffs between the veteran and the up-and-comer, the scene is a riveting showdown. Not that Rocky is claiming victory.

"I had to go with the flow with him," Rocky says.

"You've got to realize this guy's a pro. He's a wordsmith for real. It's not a joke. So when he went, I caught his drift. But I lost a rap battle to this man. And I'm a professional f—— rapper."

With that Washington roars and slams the table. "But I'm using other people's material," he adds. "And I've been practicing."

"It doesn't matter," Rocky replies. "I lost, man. It's unfortunate that that's my profession in real life."

Washington's rapping skills

But as he showed in a recent interview, Washington's envy for his co-star's day job is more than for show. Washington's hip-hop affection runs deep. Asked how he approached the big scene with Rocky, Washington takes out his phone and begins playing Nas' "N.Y. State of Mind" and raps along: "I keep some E&J, sittin' bent up in the stairway."

"All right, would you ever in a million years expect *the* Denzel Washington to be able to recite classic quotes and lines from hip-hop?" Rocky exclaims.

But Washington was just getting started. He grandly spat a verse of DMX ("Lucky that you breathing, but you dead from the waist down"), a few bars of Outkast ("Yes, we done come along way like them slim-ass cigarettes") and cackled joyfully at a line from Samara Cyn and Smino's "Brand New Teeth": "Spent my rent money on these brand-new teeth."



DREW GURIAN, INVISION/AP

A\$AP Rocky, left, and Denzel Washington promote their film "Highest 2 Lowest" on Aug. 10 in New York. The Spike-Lee directed film is a New York riff on Akira Kurosawa's "High and Low."

"For me on the outside looking in, it was like this guy was method acting," Rocky says. "He was just being himself. He should have been a rapper."

Washington shakes his head. "No, I play one on TV."

Yet Washington has as much facility with Wizkid as he does Shakespeare or August Wilson. Pushed to explain his mentality going into the scene, Washington still demurs.

"I can't, man. I don't have one," he says. "I just flow. I can't tell you what I'm going to do, because I don't know. I never know how it's going to go. I don't plan. But I have been practicing for a long time, and nobody knew! I never had the platform."

'I'm still on top'

In "Highest 2 Lowest," Lee — in his fifth film with Washington — surveys a changing entertainment indus-

try. Washington's once supreme music executive is losing his grip on what sells — and what sells matters less than how many followers someone has. The movie weaves in some of Lee's other obsessions — the New York Yankees; New York, itself — but it casts the moral questions of Kurosawa's classic against a media landscape where authenticity can be hard to find.

Asked if he identified with his character's quandary, Washington pauses to consider the question.

"If I had an ego, I'd say no, because I'm still on top," Washington says. "And I'm getting better."

Rocky, though, sees some of himself in Yung Felon. It's a moniker Rocky, himself, suggested replace the scripted name, MC Microphone Checka. Rocky, whose real name is Rakim Mayers, shot "Highest 2 Lowest" in the run-up

SEE BATTLE ON PAGE 16

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Battle: Music industry backdrop in film rings true**FROM PAGE 15**

to his recent trial over a 2021 incident in which Rocky was accused of firing a gun at Terrell Ephon, a former friend and collaborator known as A\$AP Relli. Rocky was found not guilty in February on two felony counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm.

The verdict gave Rocky a new lease on life just as his film career might be taking off. He also co-stars in the upcoming "If I Had Legs I'd Kick You," a hit at Sundance. Meanwhile, he's preparing his long-awaited fourth album, "Don't Be Dumb."



Denzel Washington plays wealthy music executive David King in "Highest 2 Lowest."

'The new rappers'

For Rocky, the music industry backdrop of "Highest 2 Lowest" rings true. Music sales, he notes, are way down. Artificial intelligence is taking over.

"They've got to figure out how to regulate it," Rocky says. "People in music are already doing it. Not to put nobody on the spot, there are people with No. 1 records and it's not even them. It's not even their voice on the track."

"This is a smart kid here," Washington says.

But Washington is resistant. "People trying to sound like me don't sound like me, to me," he says, doubting AI's potential. He peppers Rocky with questions. Rocky, 36, already sounds like an old-timer.

"The kids, they don't want to be rappers anymore," Rocky says. "They don't want to be ballers. They want to be streamers. It's basically another word for 'YouTuber.' They all want to be YouTubers, I promise you."

Washington: "How will they make money doing that?"

Rocky: "They make all the money now."

Washington: "From what? What do they do? Without the

talent, without the thing to go see..."

Rocky: "What's the substance? That's what I'm saying is the big question. The performers are obsolete. Nobody's watching. Nobody cares. They'd rather watch an 18-year-old with millions of viewers open up a bag of chips and tell you how good it is. These guys are the new rappers."

But for now, at least in "Highest 2 Lowest," Rocky and Washington are still the performers. They're the rappers, even the two-time Oscar winner. Rocky, who grew up watching Washington in "Malcolm X," can hardly believe it.

"He gives you that confidence he walks around with," Rocky says. "A lot of times, people tell me that I embody this self-confidence — I see it all in him. Just him embracing me, them embracing me, it was so chill. I waited my whole life for this."

"Me too!" bellows Washington, with a laugh. "And that's the truth! I've been a closet rapper for 40 years. Finally I get the chance."



A\$AP Rocky plays aspiring rapper Yung Felon in "Highest 2 Lowest." His character tries to kidnap King's son.



A24/AP

Music executive David King (Denzel Washington) is faced with a moral dilemma in "Highest 2 Lowest": save a kidnapped kid or his flagging empire.

Quintessential Spike Lee

'Highest 2 Lowest' not director's best, but has his DNA in every frame

By LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

Spike Lee's "Highest 2 Lowest" takes some time to find its groove. But once it does, when the film leaves the high-rises and puts its feet on the New York pavement, it really sings.

A reimagining of Akira Kurosawa's 1963 crime thriller "High and Low," Lee brings the story to a modern-day New York where a music mogul, played by Denzel Washington, is faced with a moral dilemma: save a kidnapped kid or his flagging empire. Both will cost nearly everything he has.

We toss around the term "auteur" pretty casually these days. It's become almost a shorthand for any filmmaker with an ounce of style. But "Highest 2 Lowest" is a film that has Lee's DNA in every frame — a symphonic blend of his influences and passions: cinema, New York City, sports, Black stories, great needle drops and, of course, Washington. It's easy enough to just go along for the ride, trusting that it will end up somewhere worthwhile, even when the green screen is a little off, the score a little distracting or the dialogue a little unnatural.

But it will require some audience patience nonetheless. In its first half, "Highest 2 Lowest" plays a bit like a melodrama crossed with a sitcom, where the beats are stilted and the dialogue feels like dialogue. There's an awkward artificiality to the whole thing, which is likely more metaphor than accident, but it's also not the most engaging stretch.

Washington's character David King is a music executive and founder of a record label whose biggest days are behind him. You wouldn't necessarily know it to look at his palatial apartment with its panoramic views of the Brooklyn Bridge and the Manhattan skyline, but the money isn't exactly coming in like it used to. The realities of the music business, social media and the attention economy have muddled the plot. The guy who once had the "best ears in the business" can't seem to get a handle on what works anymore. He has the chance to cash out and sell the business, but against the wishes of everyone around him, decides he wants to take back ownership of the thing he created.

When his wife Pam (Ifenesh Hadera, either miscast or terribly underwritten) says she's going to pledge half a million dollars to an arts organization, he asks her to hold off. "But we've always

supported young Black artists," she replies, though you suspect part of the worry is about keeping up appearances. Things come into focus quickly, however, when David learns that his son Trey (Aubrey Joseph) has been kidnapped. The ransom is \$17.5 million.

There is a twist, which perhaps shouldn't be spoiled, but it soon becomes less obvious to the Kings whether they should pay up. It's an interesting conundrum, and a potent one for these greedy times, but also difficult to empathize with on a certain level. This is a guy with a lot of assets to his name and the ability to get his hands on \$17.5 million. For the audience, the choice will seem obvious. It's never quite clear what his life will look like if that money disappears, but the bottom doesn't seem like a possibility.

But this is all just a lead-up to the more exciting and compelling cat-and-mouse portion of the film, where the kidnapper, an aspiring, down-on-his-luck rapper named Yung Felon (played by a magnetic A\$AP Rocky) is finally introduced. His showdown with King is fun, tense and even includes a rap battle. A\$AP Rocky more than holds his own with Washington.

In a world in which King listened to as many new artists as he did when he was starting out, their stories might have been different. Yung Felon might have been discovered, instead of just being one of the aggrieved talents languishing in obscurity and plotting violent revenge.

There is a lot going on in Alan Fox's script for "Highest 2 Lowest," which attempts to present a realistic picture of New York and all its contradictions, from the billionaire boardrooms to the Puerto Rican festivals in the Bronx to the lively Yankees fans on the subway. Jeffrey Wright, who also gets some great scenes with Washington, plays King's friend and driver, Paul. He too is looking for his son Kyle (real-life son Elijah Wright) but gets far less respect and attention from the cops. The inequalities and prejudices run deep, and at a certain point David and Paul set off on their own to solve the case, vigilantes in a Rolls-Royce. "Highest 2 Lowest" may not reach the heights of some of Lee's best films, but it's the kind of film that makes you hope Lee and Washington have more to make together.

"Highest 2 Lowest" is rated R for language throughout and brief drug use. Running time: 133 minutes. Starts streaming Sept. 5 on Apple TV+.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Marital hatefest is hard to watch

Cumberbatch, Colman at war in 'The Roses'

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

The film "The Roses" begins in a marriage therapist's office, where Theo Rose has something interesting to say about his longtime wife, Ivy: "I would rather live with her than a wolf." That's especially interesting because the question the therapist posed was: What are 10 things you love about each other?

After a few minutes of blistering barbs back and forth — Ivy suggests that one good thing about her husband is "he has arms" — the therapist is appalled and resigned. "I see so much resentment, I don't think you have the capacity to fix your problems," she tells them.

There are dark marriage comedies, and then there's "The Roses," an escalating hatefest that, by the time a loaded gun comes out, all the fun has been sucked out. It's hard tonally to go from microaggressions to the burning of someone's prized books to attempted murder and stay a comedy.

That was the trap that sunk the Danny DeVito-directed 1989 version "The War of the Roses," and it's the same quicksand that makes the Jay Roach-directed

"The Roses" so unpleasant. Seeing a marriage implode with such ferocity, with both participants hoping to extract maximum hurt, is like having "Marriage Story" on MDMA.

Benedict Cumberbatch and Olivia Colman naturally bring a certain dry Britishness to roles originally portrayed by Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner. They are witty and arch, sarcastic and passive-aggressive. You believe their love, but you also believe they can hate each other.

He is a prickly, high-flying architect — adding artistic flourishes like cascading balconies — and she is a stalled chef — weirdly able to make both elaborate, sculptural desserts and down-home seafood — who are raising their two teenagers when the action gets going. His career hits a horrific roadblock and hers takes flight when she opens the restaurant We've Got Crabs!

Switching roles, Cumberbatch's Theo now becomes the laundry-folding, kids' lunch maker — "I could build children instead of houses," he says — while Colman's Ivy jets off to cook with David Chang while her Champagne flute is being topped up.

Screenwriter Tony McNamara



SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES/AP

Benedict Cumberbatch, left, and Olivia Colman are a couple with an imploding marriage in "The Roses."

plops these bickering twosomes in the affluent California enclave of Mendocino, a place of ample negronis and Audis. He surrounds them with a motley group, including a couple, Andy Samberg and Kate McKinnon, dealing with their own marriage inertia.

Samberg has perhaps the most sad line when he says of his wife: "When we were younger, I knew what she was going to say before she said it. Now I don't know what she's said after she's said it."

For her part, McKinnon does her bug-eyed, off-kilter, hypersexual thing — a tiresome character that she seems to do exclu-

sively now after it reached its apex in "Barbie."

Theo takes charge of the kids — including daily wind sprints and Charles Bukowski quotes — while Ivy misses key home moments, like her daughter's first period. Resentments build and their friends notice "sporadic, dizzying waves of hatred." Neither want to apologize or budge. One has a "bottomless pit of need" and the other has "caustic narcissism." Deepfake videos posted to harm his client list lead to him hacking into her restaurant vendors to screw up supplies. Then the shooting begins.

The problem with "The Roses" — 1989 or 2025 — is it doesn't

know what it wants to say about marriage. Maybe that fervent love eventually curdles and we should just find the moments of joy that remain? That only someone who loves you can hurt you so exquisitely? That we should never let small resentments metastasize or change roles mid-marriage? That we should never, ever get back together?

Perhaps it's that we constantly try to tap into the deep well of love that started it all. One terrific line Ivy says to Theo sums it up: "You stopped. You're not supposed to stop."

"The Roses" is rated R for language throughout, sexual content and drug content. Running time: 105 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

'Caught Stealing' stars Austin Butler in a crime caper in '90s NYC

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

Darren Aronofsky has already made several indelibly New York movies. But lovable as was the subterranean monochrome paranoia of "Pi" and charming as we all consider the pupil-dilating tragedy of his bleak Brighton Beach-set "Requiem for a Dream," Aronofsky's latest, "Caught Stealing," is easily the director's most affectionate portrait of his hometown.

That, too, may be a funny way to describe a movie where bodies get brutalized, corpses accumulate and even the cat comes away with a limp. But "Caught Stealing," a terrific caper starring Austin Butler as a Lower East Side man inadvertently drawn into a nightmarish crime world, is a period movie. It's set in 1998. And no amount of blood can detract from the overwhelming endearment Aronofsky has for '90s New York.

Butler plays Hank Thompson: a former baseball player who can't play anymore; a bartender who soon enough can't drink anymore; and a devoted San Francisco Giants fan surrounded by Mets fans. As his not-quite-girlfriend Yvonne (Zoë Kravitz) says, he's "a good country boy" who calls his mom in California every day.

Hank is far from the first regular guy to be ensnared in underground crime syndicates, but there are a number of things that distinguish "Caught Stealing." First, his troubles stem, like they do for so many New Yorkers, from his neighbor. Russ (Matt Smith), the mohawked Brit punk who lives next door, rushes out to fly to London, and he leaves Hank his cat to take care of.



SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT/AP

Matt Smith, left, and Austin Butler play neighbors of interest to the Russian mob in "Caught Stealing."

Soon, though, a pair of Russian gang skinheads (Yuri Kolokolnikov, Nikita Kukushkin) are banging on Russ' door and quickly after, pummeling Hank, too. Their beating of Hank is unexpectedly brutal, and the first sign that "Caught Stealing" is going for something a little different. When Hank wakes up in the hospital, he's down a kidney and told he can't drink alcohol ever again.

For Hank, it's not his first blush with alcohol-connected fatality. In flashbacks that replay as Hank's nightmares, we see him as a hotshot high-school baseball player, soon to be drafted into the pros. While drinking and driving, he

careens off the road to avoid a cow, driving straight into a pole. His buddy is dead, and Hank's knee won't ever be the same.

Meanwhile, the Russian mob interest continues to spiral, drawing in a police detective (Regina King, always good), the skinheads' boss, Colorado (Bad Bunny), and a pair of Orthodox Jewish brothers (Liev Schreiber and Vincent D'Onofrio). The question that keeps coming up is whether Hank can hack it in this world. Is he a killer? He doesn't think so, even though he has killed. As King's detective says, "I thought maybe you played real ball."

For Butler, the role flashes his talent better than "Elvis" ever did. Aronofsky captures the sweet kid in him, with a hint of something deeper and darker.

"Caught Stealing," based on Charlie Huston's 2004 novel, is a ride through '90s nostalgia. The looming Twin Towers are a regular reminder that this was a long time ago, indeed, with moments that include the now-bygone concerns of cellphone minutes running low.

Late summer is always an odd time for movies, but especially this year. We've somehow had not one but two excellent New York films, both rich in baseball fandom, in "Caught Stealing" and Spike Lee's "Highest 2 Lowest." Hollywood seemingly has little idea what to do with genre movies from auteur filmmakers that aren't obvious awards fodder. These might not be home runs, but their directors most definitely stretch them for extra bases.

"Caught Stealing" is rated R for strong violent content, pervasive language, some sexuality/nudity and brief drug use. Running time: 107 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



Electronic Arts photos

The graphics in Madden NFL 26 are as impressive as ever on more powerful consoles, but the game still runs decently on the Nintendo Switch 2. Player movement has been updated to reflect the explosive athleticism only the NFL can deliver. Physics-based interactions now include catch tackles, stiff-arms and trucks for improved collision control.

Madden makes solid return to Nintendo

NFL 26 for the Switch 2 essentially same package as on other consoles, but portable mode tends to be glitchy

BY GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

It's been more than a decade since Electronic Arts released a football game on a Nintendo console, and the absence has been noticeable for a company with one of the biggest fandoms. The last Madden entry was on the Wii U and featured now-retired Calvin Johnson on the cover. EA entirely skipped the Switch generation.

That changes with Madden NFL 26 making its way to the Nintendo Switch 2. Because it's more powerful, the console can run the demanding code that EA Orlando has crafted over the years to make its football games more realistic.

The animation systems are more complex and they rely on in-game physics to make every tackle and collision feel more visceral. Internet integration is tighter so that rosters are constantly updated and online play is deeper. The graphics look so realistic that casual fans can't tell the difference between the game and a broadcast at first glance. Nintendo has missed out on a lot of improvements since 2012.

Content on par with other consoles'

With Madden NFL 26 on the Switch 2, fans can enjoy the complete experience. It's essentially the same package as the PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X versions. Gamers will start off with Madden Ultimate Team and they can navigate to the other staples such as Franchise, Superstar and online modes. They're all polished and



In Franchise mode played on simulation, gamers take on the role of the football coach and can customize their staff, scouting department and weekly game plans. Coach DNA delivers on the real-life tendencies and styles of each NFL head coach.

robust after years of tinkering.

The modes feature enough depth to sate the most rabid football fan. The Franchise mode played on simulation lets gamers take on the role of the football coach, and they can customize their staff, scouting department and weekly game plans. The developers emphasized Madden NFL 26's new wear and tear system that shows how constant pounding diminishes athletes' abilities over the season.

That forces gamers to better manage their teams over the season. While that adds more layers to gameplay, it also means that an in-game weekly matchup can take an entire night to complete. However, the developers added flexibility to streamline that depth, so that gamers can have fun at their own pace.

Customizable depth

Gamers can simplify the Simulation Mode so that they handle just the team on game days or they can dabble with scouting at the end of the season. Those looking for more action-oriented gameplay can play arcade-style. There's even a competitive mode for players into esports.

That same customization applies to the Superstar mode, in which gamers take a rookie through his draft combine and career and have to manage relationships and superstardom. They can automate some of the other sections of the NFL lifestyle and just focus on game day performances.

How it plays on Switch 2

For newcomers, there's an in-depth tutorial called Training Camp that first introduces the basics in a transparent manner and later injects more complex ideas. Veterans will also find it worthwhile because it introduces some gameplay tweaks and improvements such as the ability to reach for a first down or improved controls for a back shoulder throw.

The Switch 2 version boasts these improvements, but the game's performance on the system is good, not great. Visually, Madden NFL 26 on the Nintendo console is a step below the PlayStation 5 version. The developers managed to keep the realistic detail on helmets and other surfaces, but the frame rate suffers, especially when playing in portable mode. The game runs better when docked or at least connected to a power source such as an external battery.

In addition, the load times are longer, which becomes aggravating when switching modes or retrying a failed exercise. The game also has a lot of glitches and bugs. In the build I played, sometimes the offense would come out to play as the defense or I would automatically run up to spike the ball after a play was over.

The biggest benefit of the Switch 2 version compared to its counterparts is that the system is portable, so gamers can bring Madden NFL 26 wherever they go. It's a serviceable version of the famed football series. It will make Nintendo fans who haven't played an entry in ages happy, but for veterans, the year-over-year improvements feel minor and not worth it if they picked up past entries.

Platforms: Nintendo Switch 2, PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X and Series S, PC

Online: ea.com/games/madden-nfl/madden-nfl-26

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Cultural treats in the Basque Country

The land of the Basque people, split between Spain and France, is a “nation without a state” — left off the map when they drew Europe’s national borders. The Basque Country is often left out of travel itineraries too, and that’s also a mistake. With sunny beaches, great modern architecture, tasty tapas and feisty, free-spirited people, this region is filled with cultural treats.

Much unites the Spanish and French Basque regions: They share a striking Atlantic coastline, with the Pyrenees Mountains soaring high above the Atlantic. They have the same flag, similar folk music and dance and a common language, Euskara, spoken by about a half million people. Both, after some struggles, have been integrated into their respective nations, but still enjoy significant autonomy.

Wherever you go, your Basque sightseeing should be a fun blend of urban, rural, cultural and culinary activities. Devote at least a day to each country.

In Spain, San Sebastián is the heart of the tourist’s Basque Country, with its sparkling, picturesque beach framed by looming green mountains and a charming old town. Bilbao is

worth a look for its landmark Guggenheim art museum (designed by Frank Gehry) and its atmospheric old town.

Compared with their Spanish cousins, the French Basques seem French first and Basque second. My favorite home base here is the central, comfy and manageable resort town of Saint-Jean-de-Luz. It’s a stone’s throw to half-timbered Bayonne (with its “big-city” bustle and good Basque museum) and the snazzy beach town of Biarritz.

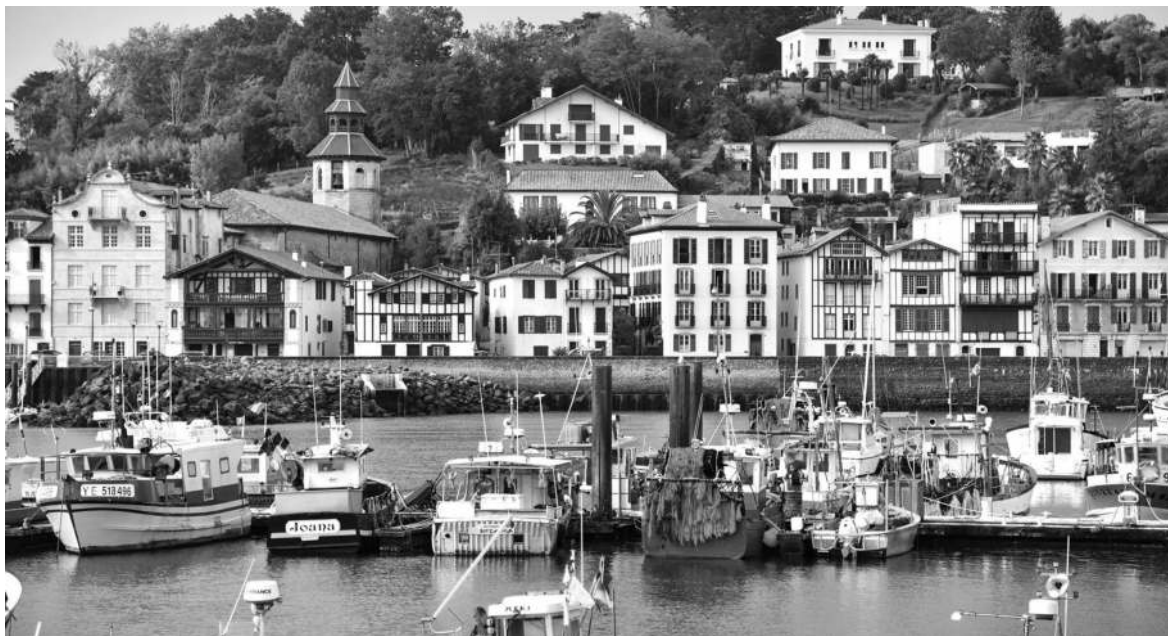


Rick Steves

On both sides of the border, traditional village settings reflect the colors of the Basque flag: Deep-red and green shutters adorn bright white chalet-style homes scattered across the lush, rolling foothills of the Pyrenees.

If you know where to look, Basque customs are strong and lively ... perhaps nowhere more so than in one of their favorite sports, jai alai, where players use long wicker baskets to whip a ball — smaller and harder than a baseball — off walls at more than 150 miles per hour.

Mixing influences from the



CAMERON HEWITT/Rick Steves' Europe

The resort town of Saint-Jean-de-Luz makes a welcoming home base in the French Basque Country.

mountains, sea, Spain and France, Basque food is reason enough to visit the region. The local cuisine — dominated by seafood, tomatoes and red peppers — offers some spicy dishes, unusual in most of Europe.

On the Spanish side, hopping from bar to bar sampling pintxos (tapas) is a highlight of any trip. Local brews include sidra (hard apple cider) and txakoli, a light,

sparkling white wine that’s often theatrically poured from high above the glass for aeration. You’ll want to sample the famous pil-pil, made from emulsifying the skin of bacalao (dried, salted cod) into a mayonnaise-like substance with chili and garlic.

Piment d’Espelette gives many Basque foods their distinctive flavor. Look for the pepper in the terrific Basque dish axoa (a veal

or lamb stew on mashed potatoes). Don’t leave the area without trying ttoro, a seafood stew that is the Basque Country’s answer to bouillabaisse or cioppino. For dessert, check out gâteau Basque, a tart filled with pastry cream or cherries from Bayonne.

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Harleys, museums, music and wine: Go exploring this weekend

With Labor Day falling on Sept. 1 this year, many of those working in accordance with the U.S. federal holiday calendar find themselves blessed with a long weekend ahead of them. To make the most of this welcome time off, consider some of these activities:

Harleys in Prague: Those nostalgic for a slice of that back-home feeling can make way to the Czech capital, where Prague Harley Days are set to bring a healthy dose of Americana to the city’s Exhibition Grounds. On Friday and Saturday, Harley owners and those with a heart for the iconic brand will find motorcycles and autos on display, rock concerts, a barbecue pit, a custom bike show, adrenaline zone, market, beer garden and more. Harley riders will navigate the neighborhoods of Prague



Karen Bradbury

as a group in an event slated to begin Saturday at 10:30 a.m. Advance online tickets for both days of the festival go for 777 Czech Koruna (about \$37) for male visitors. Female visitors can enjoy free entry to this year’s edition of the festivities. Online: pragueharleydays.cz/en

Star spotting in Venice: The Lido di Venezia is the place to be for those hoping for a glimpse of famous faces, as the 82nd edition of the Venice International Film Festival continues its 11-day run through Sept. 6. The Mostra Internazionale d’Arte Cinematografica, the world’s oldest film festival, is known for holding screenings in historical venues and for the party atmosphere it brings to the island just a hop from Venice proper. Tickets to showings of several films daily are available to the public. Films competing in the festival this year include Guillermo del Toro’s “Frankenstein” and Benny Safdie’s “The Smashing Machine.” Other things to do include exploring the festival’s outdoor spaces including gardens with seating, food and beverage areas and a waterfront terrace restaurant. Online: labiennale.org/en/cinema/2025



iStock

The Herbstfest Rosenheim in Germany opens Saturday and runs through Sept. 14, a perfect warm-up for the country’s much bigger Oktoberfest.

Culture and museum visits in Frankfurt: Germany’s financial capital displays a more relaxed and multicultural side as the Museumsuferfest, or Museum Embankment Festival, unfolds along the banks of the Main River Friday through Sunday. Visitors can pop in to see the collections and special exhibitions of some two dozen museums, enjoy concerts, dancing and other live performances across several stages, sample global cuisines or shop the arts and crafts market. The event will conclude with a display of fireworks high above the river scheduled for 10 p.m. Aug. 31. The purchase of a button at a cost of 7 euros provides holders with free admission to all participating museums. Online: tinyurl.com/mr3v35y4

Music festival in Munich: Superbloom features dozens of international artists playing in the city’s Olympic Park. At the time of this writing, there were still tickets available to the event slated for Saturday and Sunday. Artists

playing on Saturday include Post Malone, Raye, Nelly Furtado, Alligatoah and Jelly Roll. Sunday’s lineup includes Hozier, Shawn Mendes, Bebe Rexha and others. Festival experiences include workshops, installations, acrobatic displays and numerous chill-out zones. A weekend ticket goes for 219 euros. Online: superbloom.de/en

Wine fest in Stuttgart, Germany: The Stuttgarter Weindorf, or Stuttgart Wine Village, brings coziness and conviviality to some of the city’s prettiest corners. Through Sept. 6, wine lovers can sample Trollinger, Lemberger, Spätburgunder and other varieties typical to the region in the market square, Schillerplatz and along Kirchstrasse. The wines are sure to pair well with the Swabian cuisine on offer. Sunday’s program offers handicrafts, face painting, cooking lessons and other activities geared toward younger visitors. Online: stuttgarter-weindorf.de

Volksfest in Rosenheim, Germany: The Herbstfest Rosenheim, or Rosenheim Autumn Festival, could make a great prelude or alternative to Munich’s massive Oktoberfest. While Rosenheim’s volksfest is nowhere near the size of the event in Bavaria’s capital, it still attracts more than a million visitors over the course of its 16-day run at the Loreto meadow. The festival opens Saturday in spectacular style at 11 a.m. with a procession of marchers in traditional costume. Once the barrel has been ceremoniously tapped, visitors can enjoy the food, drink and ambiance of the festival’s two large tents, eat from food stalls or try the carnival attractions. The festival runs daily through Sept. 14. Online: herbstfest-rosenheim.de

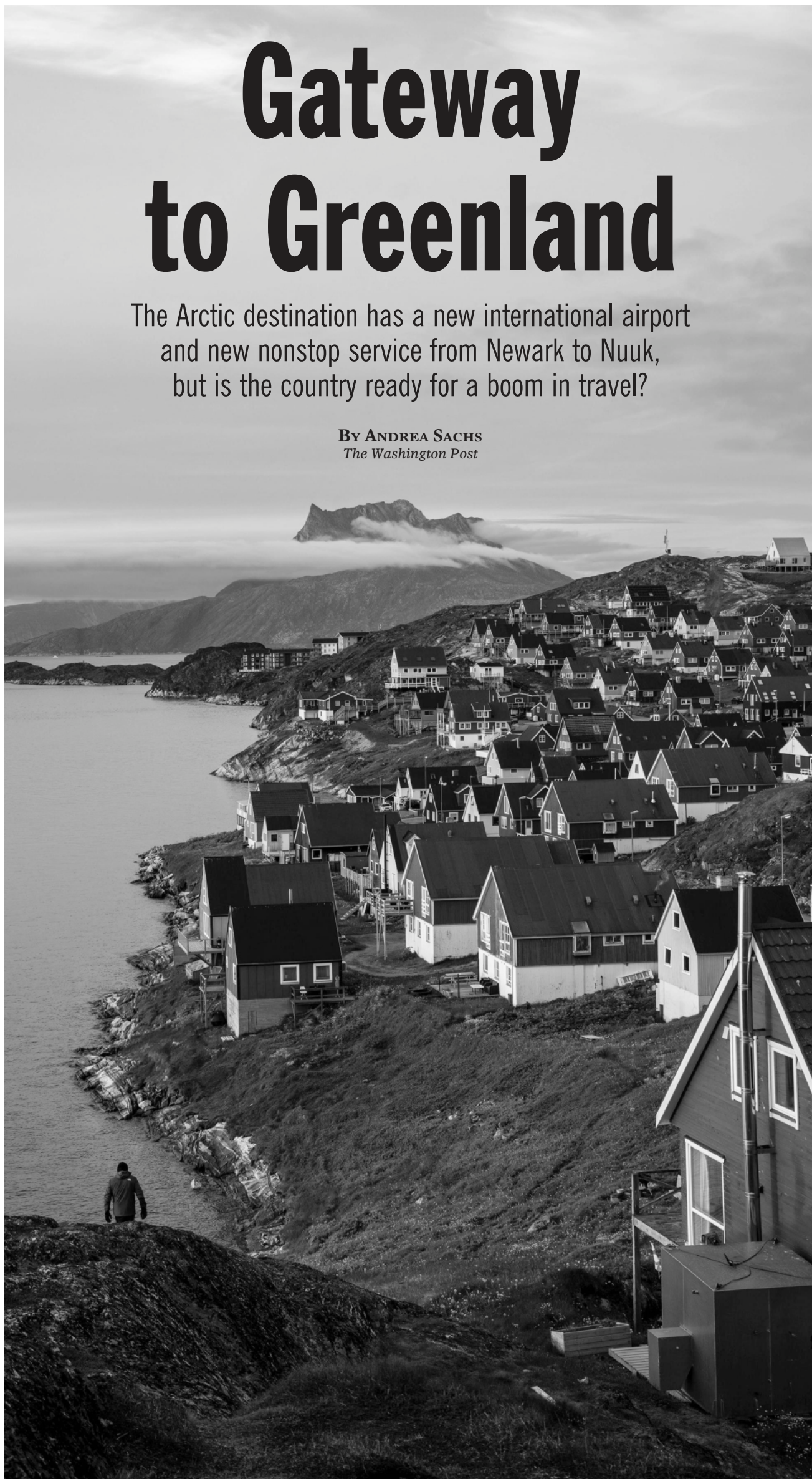
Rosenheim isn’t the only German city in full volksfest mode over the last August weekend. Other cities celebrating through the weekend include Augsburg, where the Augsburg Herbsftplärer continues through Sept. 7; Erding, at which the Herbstfest Erding runs through Sept. 7; Regensburg, site of the Regensburger Herbsftdult through Sept. 14 and Worms, where the Backfischfest unfolds Saturday-Sept. 7.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Gateway to Greenland

The Arctic destination has a new international airport and new nonstop service from Newark to Nuuk, but is the country ready for a boom in travel?

BY ANDREA SACHS
The Washington Post



LASSE KYED/For The Washington Post

Denmark founded Greenland's capital Nuuk in 1728. Greenland is still a territory of Denmark, but it is mostly autonomous. According to a Visit Greenland report, the country welcomed an estimated 149,000 international visitors last year, including 54,000 arrivals by air. (The others arrived via cruise ships.)

A dark SUV pulled into a shopping center illuminated by the midnight sun. Tour operators René and Ulrikke Andersen jumped out of the vehicle and approached a pair of tourists with an offer. Two people had signed up for that evening's whale-watching cruise, but the guides needed to fill a few more seats. Were we interested in going?

Yes, we answered, but we are those two guests. The Andersens sped off on their quest to rustle up more bodies.

Though more than 160 tourists had just landed on United's new flight from Newark airport, Malik Marine Tours struggled to corral more participants. Close to cast-off time, the tour company canceled the excursion.

Greenland is new to this scale and style of tourism, and it showed. Interest in the country is spiking, for political and recreational reasons, putting pressure on the its budding tourist infrastructure.

Visitors are coming, whether Greenland is ready or not.

Before United's June 14 maiden journey, travelers from the United States would have to fly to Copenhagen or Reykjavik before recrossing the Atlantic to the Arctic island. Two airports — Kangerlussuaq and Narsarsuaq, both former U.S. military bases built during World War II — could accept international visitors arriving on large jets.

In November, Greenland opened a third jet-friendly international airport. Nuuk, the capital about 1,850 miles northeast of Newark, took over from Kangerlussuaq as the gateway to Greenland. Two more international airports are slated for 2026, with new facilities in Ilulissat and Qaqortoq.

"New York to Nuuk has been a dream for many years," said Tanny Por, head of international relations at Visit Greenland, the official tourism office. "It's exciting to see Greenland being more connected to the world because that means locals are more connected as well."

United has company on the tarmac. Scandinavian Airlines, Icelandair and Air Greenland recently launched flights from Europe to Nuuk. The big planes are so novel that residents will sometimes park on the road overlooking the runway, binoculars in hand.

"Some people are still quite excited to see it land," said Elise Bruun, founder of Travel by Heart, a travel agency in Nuuk.

While many European destinations are wrestling with overtourism, Greenland is trying to expand its industry — responsibly, sustainably, thoughtfully. A 10-year plan released this year by Visit Greenland includes extending the tourism season beyond the peak months, spreading tourism to communities beyond Nuuk and Ilulissat and doubling the number of tourists by 2035.

According to a Visit Greenland report, the country welcomed an estimated 149,000 international visitors last year, including 54,000 arrivals by air. (The others sailed in on cruise ships.) United said demand has been strong for its seasonal Nuuk flights, which end for the year on Sept. 24. The carrier plans to return next summer.

With the increase in air service and seat capacity, Jacob Nitter Sørensen, CEO of Air Greenland, anticipates many more visitors this year. But the rise will be gradual.

"It's going to be a building block system for years," Nitter Sørensen said. "Growth is not going to explode, and we are not going end up in a situation like Iceland, where suddenly the whole country is just overwhelmed with hordes of tourists."

In recent years, Greenland has piqued the interest of some people more concerned with foreign policy than polar events. During both of his terms, President Donald Trump has pitched the idea of annexing Denmark's autonomous territory. On a March visit, Vice President JD Vance criticized Denmark's stewardship of the island and implied that the country should become independent.

This summer, a movement of a different nature is taking place.

"We are seeing so many tourists," Bruun said. "It's coming so fast."

Nuuk, the new hot spot

At Newark airport this summer, the travelers bound for Nuuk stood out. For one, they were dressed in winter gear — fleece jackets, hiking pants, insulated boots — despite the East Coast heat. They were also giddy.

SEE GREENLAND ON PAGE 21

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Greenland: Weather, limited lodging don't make for 'easy tourism'**FROM PAGE 20**

"Welcome to Greenland," the pilot said over the intercom as the plane bumped down on the brand-new runway. "First time in my career I've said that."

In the customs line, a knot of United interns jabbered about their plans to stay up all night and catch the flight back to Newark the following morning. Other visitors brandished meticulously crafted itineraries.

Scott Kane, a former instructor with the National Outdoor Leadership School in Wyoming, said Greenland is not "easy tourism, whether it's the short season or the challenging weather conditions. Or maybe it's the mosquitoes." (The bugs are notorious for their overzealousness.)

For his first trip there, Kane and his party of three were going to spend 22 days on the west coast. They scheduled a day in Nuuk to buy last-minute supplies before flying north to Kangerlussuaq, the starting point of the Arctic Circle Trail, a 100-mile trek from the portal to the world's second-largest ice cap to the Arctic Ocean.

"The United flight made the logistics so much easier," Kane said of the direct flight to the country's largest city, where they could stock up on provisions without depleting the grocery shelves of smaller communities.

Because ice covers about 80% of Greenland, the country does not have an equivalent of Ring Road in Iceland or the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway in Alaska. In fact, Greenland doesn't have a national roadway or railway system at all. You can drive locally but not between most towns or regions.

"Our roadways are in the sky and sea," Por said. "Fjords, mountains and the Arctic climate stand in the way of a drive system."

For domestic travel, residents and visitors rely on planes or helicopters; private boats, which outnumber cars; or the passenger ferry, which stops at a dozen ports along the west coast. Snowmobiles and dog sleds are pulled out of the garage for shorter routes.

Visitors with limited time or budgets will stick close to Nuuk, a newly minted tourist spot.

"We're not used to having tourists in Nuuk every day," Nitter Sørensen said. "Now suddenly it's full of activity, and that's due to the airport."

Searching for whales, settling for waterfalls

Soon after the biweekly United flight departed for Newark, chatter about an impending storm in Nuuk started to mount.

"I'm quite excited to see what will happen tomorrow," Bruun said.

With eight months of wintry weather, Greenlanders are a hardy (and hearty) bunch, accustomed to inclement weather and unruffled by disruptions. They often respond to unpredictable events with a "maybe."

"In Greenland, we do this," Bruun said, shrugging her shoulders, tilting her head and flashing an impish smile. "We just don't know, so you can't do anything but sit down and relax."

In the face of uncertainty, I boarded a whale-watching cruise with Malik Marine Tours for that afternoon. With temper-



PHOTOS BY LASSE KYED/For The Washington Post

The Eternity fjord near Maniitsoq in western Greenland. You can drive locally in Greenland but not between most towns or regions so for domestic travel, people rely on planes or helicopters; private boats, which outnumber cars; or a passenger ferry.



Lodging is relatively sparse in Greenland, where a flight cancellation can send travelers scrambling for accommodations.

atures expected to drop to the 30s and winds exceeding 40 miles an hour, it could be my only opportunity to see Greenland's other summer visitors.

The Andersens' little Finnish vessel bucked like a bronco in the choppy seas. We stopped to gaze at an iceberg before hightailing it to the site where, hours earlier, another outfitter had spotted humpback whales.

Fog engulfed us, erasing the landscape. Ulrikke and his son Malik Andersen, the captain, revised the plan. We were going to visit a puffin colony instead. The water was too rough, so they returned to the whale pursuit, searching closer to Nuuk's coastline. We couldn't see anything but grayness, so they ditched marine animals entirely. Malik steered the vessel toward the sound of rushing water and parked under a glacier waterfall.

Ulrikke fished out a small iceberg and broke it into cocktail-size pieces. He poured whiskey over the ice and we drank to the storm, no longer a maybe.



A Greenlandic sled dog named Sisimiut. For shorter routes, snowmobiles and dog sleds are pulled out of the garage.

A storm and a seamstress

The wind and rain battered down much of Nuuk. The airport halted all incoming and outgoing flights, domestic and international. Tour operators nixed outdoor excursions. With gusts that felt like a pair of strong hands, even walking was precarious.

Nuuk has enough indoor attractions to occupy at least one blustery day. In the Colonial Harbor, the Nuuk Local Museum covers centuries of history, from the founding of Nuuk in 1728 to last year, when the airport was "in full swing."

In the same museum complex, Kittat, a costume workshop, teaches visitors about the construction and design of elaborate Inuit attire, which traditionally incorporates crocheted lace, beadwork, embroidered animal skin and seal fur. A collar alone can take 64 hours of sewing.

The cultural center limits guests to 10 minutes, a rule our group unintentionally flouted. Halfway through our hourlong

visit, one of the seamstresses packed up the fabric samples and rolled the suitcase next door. She returned to her workstation and resumed sewing, occasionally frowning in our direction.

"We can only work Tuesdays and Thursdays without interruption from tourists," said Sara Marie Berthelsen, a tailor and seamstress who repairs costumes and creates pieces for rent. "It would be good if we could employ a tour guide."

Scrambling for a hotel room

Visitors with canceled flights didn't have a free day.

If they were flying on Air Greenland, they had to return to the airport to consult with the airline agents about a new reservation. For many domestic travelers, such as the Kane family, a one-day delay turned into two.

"Greenland is not the place for people on tight schedules, who will be unhappy in poor weather or are in search of comfort and ease," said Kane, whose group also missed a return flight to Newark because of delays in Ilulissat. (His post-trip review: "Can't wait to return.")

Though the early July storm was "an act of God" — code for "not the airline's problem" — Air Greenland, per a long-standing policy, provided stranded passengers with vouchers for accommodations, food and cab fare. The staff also searches for lodging, not the easiest task with so few options. According to a Visit Greenland report from late 2024, there are 586 hotel beds, 357 hotel apartment beds and 96 hostel beds in and around Nuuk. One international flight can carry upward of 300 people.

"This an increasing problem because many tourists take up the hotel rooms," Nitter Sørensen said. "In times of disruptions, it gets more and more difficult for our staff to secure rooms."

The city has approved the construction of four new hotels, including two by the airport. Nitter Sørensen said he has not seen any cranes or heard any blasts by the airport.

"I don't think they will be ready for the peak season of next year," he said, "but definitely for 2027."

With a freeze on all flights the day of the storm, everyone could stay where they were. However, the airport reopened the following morning, requiring the unexpected guests to hand over their keys for new arrivals.

Nitter Sørensen said the airline can arrange emergency lodging in these instances, setting up beds in the cafeteria of a ski lodge, an indoor playground or a conference center in Nuuk. During the early July tempest, 15 visitors on a fly-fishing vacation crashed on mattresses inside the airport. Nitter Sørensen described the venue as a "torture chamber" because an automated announcement repeatedly reminded passengers to not leave their luggage unattended. Despite the annoying lullaby, Nitter Sørensen said the travelers were pleased with their accommodations.

"They were really happy because the alternative was not very nice," Nitter Sørensen said. "They would just have to wander around."

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Museumsdorf: Portal into past

Bavarian Forest site preserves historic homes, contains largest folklore collection in the region

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

On a quiet Monday in the Bavarian Forest, I wandered through a deserted village, where the air smelled old as time and the straw beds still seemed to wait for their long-gone inhabitants.

The Museumsdorf Bayerischer Wald, near the southeastern city of Passau, features over 150 historic buildings set up like a farming village dating from the 17th to 19th centuries.

Among its charms are scores of artifacts, farm equipment, vehicles and on busier days, reenactors. It seems like there's a Jesus statue for every blade of grass nestled deep in the rolling hills and spruce-beech woodland.

I made the two-hour drive from Tower Barracks in Grafenwoehr on a Monday in August. The name translates to Bavarian Forest Museum Village, and the site did not disappoint.

I had hoped to take my wife and kids, but the start of school snuck up on us. Instead, I went ahead to scout, to see if it was worth a return trip as a family.

It is open five days a week in season and offers a reenactor-free version with fewer open buildings on Mondays and Tuesdays, providing both a vibrant touristy vibe on busy days and an almost eerie quiet on the others.

I followed the roads winding around the 61-acre site. A faraway village turned out to be part of the property as well. I stopped at dozens of houses, from single-ridge buildings to residential stables and four-sided farmsteads, along the way.

Since it was an off day, some were closed, but I got to enter the majority of them. The old straw beds in tiny bedrooms, hand-made wooden furniture, period dress, artisanal ceramics and wooden shoes intrigued me, as I pictured myself living there.

Placards outside the buildings told where the home had been moved from, who had lived there and sometimes had photographs of former inhabitants. It was like stepping into the past.

The museum was started by travel agent and hotelier Georg Höttl in 1974, according to its website. After opening a hotel across the street, he purchased and saved the mill, which was slated for demolition.

On the QT

Address: Am Dreiburgensee, Tittling, Germany

Hours: For the Museum Village, Wednesday to Sunday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. via the ticket office and Monday and Tuesday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. via the turnstile. Visitors can walk through from November to Easter, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. via the turnstile. For Gasthaus Mühlhiasl, Wednesday to Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; closed from November to Easter.

Costs: 7 euros for adults, 5 euros for students, the disabled and individuals in groups of over 16; children under 6 accompanied by parents, free. Turnstile entry is 2 euros, payable only in coins of 1 or 2 euros.

Information: Online: www.museumsdorf.com/de/startseite

Matthew M. Burke

Saddened by the disappearance of historic Bavarian homes, he opened the museum and began procuring buildings and artifacts. Today, the museum is home to thousands of period items and the largest folklore collection in the region.

In another area of the site, I saw an old brewery that teaches visitors about Bavarian beer traditions. Nearby were blacksmith and cobbler workshops, family homes of varied sizes, gardens and barns.

The highlight of that area was a Danube farmer's house from 1864. The home looked untouched, down to its peeling paint and numbers carved into the facade. A photograph of the Zillner family, taken before the U.S. got involved in World War II but after the German invasion of Poland, made the past feel strikingly close.

The Gasthaus Mühlhiasl, located near the entrance, serves hearty Bavarian fare and beer. On warm weekends, the terrace fills up with guests taking a break from the exhibits.

I enjoyed exploring the village in solitude, but I cannot wait to bring my family to see the other version, complete with arts and crafts, reenactors, livestock, exhibits and more open buildings.

Museumsdorf Bayerischer Wald is a must-visit for anyone seeking to truly understand Bavaria's people and culture. Just make sure you have a translator app and a fully charged phone if you're not a German speaker.

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PHOTOS BY MATTHEW M. BURKE/Stars and Stripes

The Museumsdorf Bayerischer Wald, or Bavarian Forest Museum Village, is a living museum in Tittling, Germany. It features over 150 historic buildings set up like a farming village from hundreds of years ago.



The age-old art of brewing is the subject of one of the many exhibits visitors will find at Museumsdorf Bayerischer Wald, which preserves assorted aspects of Bavarian culture.



A traditional farmer's bedroom displayed at Museumsdorf Bayerischer Wald portrays rural Bavarian life between the 17th and 19th centuries. Among other exhibits is a farmhouse parlor.



Bavaria's history as a bastion of the Catholic faith in Germany is evident in nearly every one of the more than 150 buildings.



An old form of punishment called a schandmaske, or shame mask, is on display at Museumsdorf Bayerischer Wald.



The museum has an extensive collection of antique ceramics from Lower Bavaria. Pottery was an important feature in nearly every Bavarian household in the 17th to 19th centuries.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY BRADLEY LATHAM/Stars and Stripes

The Palm House, built in 1901, is home to the Café at Orangerie Aukamm in Wiesbaden, Germany, and provides guests a light, open-air feel with its tall timber framing and large windows.

Green getaway

Wiesbaden's historic Café at Orangerie Aukamm a family-friendly spot to grab a bakery treat, as well as flowers, organic produce and plants

BY BRADLEY LATHAM
Stars and Stripes

With three kids under 5, my wife and I rarely escape the trenches of toddler warfare. But Wiesbaden's Bierstadt district has a few family-friendly cafés that provide a bit of respite.

One of our favorite spots is the Aukamm Orangerie about a 15-minute walk from the military housing area of the same name.

The path to the Orangerie is easy to miss because the sign is tucked away on the right side of Emil-Pfeiffer-Weg. We happened upon it by chance last year when walking downtown to visit a festival. The complex is also easily accessible by car and has plenty of parking.

The café and nursery sit on a historic site dating back to the early 1900s. The grounds once served as the municipal spa gardens of the city of Wiesbaden.

The Palm House, built in 1901, is the focal point of the six-acre facility and houses the café and event center.

The English country house-styled building with its tall timber framing and expansive windows provides a light, open-air feel inside, although there's also plenty of shaded outdoor seating.

We felt at ease in the relaxed environment despite being the



Plum cake is among the varied offerings from regional bakeries available at the café.

only guests with a toddler and infant.

The café has a standard menu offering a rotating variety of cakes delivered daily from regional bakeries and an assortment of fair-trade, organic coffee and espresso drinks.

My wife ordered a cappuccino and a slice of plum cake. She said her drink was a typical cappuccino but well-made and pleasant nonetheless, while her cake was moist and fruity without being overly sweet — a traditional, well-executed “Kaffee und Kuchen” staple.

I opted for a waffle with mango sauce and the Amazonas cocktail from the alcohol-free menu.

The drink was sweet with a slight herbal twist and gave me a tropical vibe with its blend of pineapple, orange and passion



Waffles with mango sauce are one of a few treats made in-house at the café.

fruit juices, and the greenery bordering our table.

A splash of rum or tequila would've set it off nicely, but I kept it spirit-free considering it was early afternoon on a Monday.

My treat took a bit longer to reach the table, but the warm, buttery scent of a freshly prepared waffle filled the air as I waited a bit impatiently.

The presentation wasn't remarkable, but the taste and pillowy texture more than made up for it.

Our first round left my wife and me wanting more, so we indulged with two slices of the vegan apple streusel cake.

While streusel is usually prepared with a heap of butter, neither of us would've guessed the cake was vegan by taste alone. It



The Orangerie Aukamm sells a variety of organic, sustainably grown produce and plants. Many of the offerings are grown on site in a greenhouse complex.



Orangerie Aukamm visitors can wander the wildflower field and pick an arrangement to take home for a small fee.



The vegan apple streusel cake, shown here with added whipped cream, rivals its traditional butter-laden counterpart.

didn't stay vegan, though. We added a dollop of fresh whipped cream.

The ice cream selection is modest with about six different flavors, but the classic scoops of vanilla and mango sorbet hit the mark for my 2-year-old and his ever-discerning palate.

Operating as a subsidiary of the nonprofit association for disabled assistance in Wiesbaden and the Rheingau-Taunus district, the café and greenhouses are primarily staffed by workers with disabilities.

The only thing nicer than the staff and environment was the price.

Two drinks, a couple scoops of ice cream and four sweet treats



Café at Orangerie Aukamm

Address: Weinreb 23, 65191 Wiesbaden

Hours: Monday-Friday 12 p.m.-6 p.m. from April to October

Prices: baked goods 3-5 euros; coffee 3-4 euros; drinks 3-7 euros.

Information: Phone: +49 (0)611 23874968;

Online: orangerie-aukamm.de

Bradley Latham

came in at just over 30 euros.

The Orangerie also sells a variety of organic produce and plants, many of which are grown in the greenhouse complex.

On our way out, I took a stroll through the flower field where patrons can pick their own flowers for a small fee deposited in a cash box at the entrance.

The tranquil complex provides a nice afternoon getaway in Aukamm's backyard that will remain a regular go-to for my family.

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WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Kangaroos rule this tourist town

Southeastern Australian hamlet of Halls Gap also has cockatoos, emus and a hike with a great view

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

If you're Down Under and want to see kangaroos hopping about in the wild, Halls Gap, a small tourist town surrounded by Grampians National Park, in the southern Australia state of Victoria, is worth a visit.

Reasonably large kangaroos seem to go where they want in this community of 500 human residents. The docile beasts are preoccupied with feeding on vegetation and happily graze in front of hotels, shops and restaurants.

Hold out your hand and they sniff about for some free food.

Nearby pastures are filled with the gentle creatures and a few others, including emus and sheep. There are also plenty of cockatoos in the trees.

It's a more wholesome scene than some of the other parts of Australia, where the most common sort of kangaroo you'll see is roadkill.

Once you've feasted your eyes on marsupials, you might consider a hike up to the Pinnacle Lookout — an impressive rock feature jutting from a stony peak above Halls Gap.

You can climb from the valley floor or drive halfway and start walking.

From a roadside parking lot, it's about a 90-minute scramble up a rocky trail to reach the summit.

In mid-winter it was cold enough for a sweater. In summer, hot temperatures are dangerous in Australia, so make sure to take extra water.

Some of the rock formations on the climb are otherworldly.

There's a section that passes through a tunnel-like structure before a steep climb to reach the top where hikers get an impressive view of surrounding mountains.

The rocky ledge overlooking Halls Gap has no guardrails, other than on the lookout itself, so watch your footing.

When you step back from the edge it's easy to get disoriented and take the wrong trail down, so make sure you go back the way that you came up.

Post hike, there are several restaurants and coffee shops as well as a bakery at Halls Gap, where you can replenish your energy.

If you want to tell the kangaroos about your day, they'll be hopping around nearby.



PHOTOS BY SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

A kangaroo considers its next move July 25 in Halls Gap, Australia. Grazing 'roos wander freely among the 500 or so townspeople.



The view from Pinnacle Lookout above Halls Gap, Australia, on July 25. The ledge has no guardrails.



Halls Gap is a great starting point for hikes at Grampians National Park in the state of Victoria.

If you go

Directions: Halls Gap can be reached via the Western Highway and Grampians Road. The drive will take more than three hours from Melbourne and more than five hours from Adelaide.

Times: You'll be able to spot kangaroos around the town 24/7.

Costs: Hiking is free.

Food: The Halls Gap Bakery is open daily, 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Information: tinyurl.com/mvd99pze

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY MARC CASTANEDA/Stars and Stripes

Pork skewers, minced shrimp fritters and a Thai-style omelet are just a few of the most popular appetizers at Thai Erawan near Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

Award-winning flavors

Thai Erawan maintains Michelin star-worthy dining in Yokosuka

BY MARC CASTANEDA
Stars and Stripes

In a city better known for ramen counters, sushi-go-rounds and izakayas, Yokosuka, Japan, quietly made history in 2015 when an unassuming Thai restaurant earned a coveted Michelin star.

Thai Erawan is a hidden gem that's been serving authentic cuisine since 2001. The couple that owns the place are from the small town of Phitsanulok, Thailand.

I first ate here in 2017, and the flavors have been remarkably consistent. I've tried almost everything on the menu, including the green curry (1,300 yen, or about \$8.80) that earned the restaurant its Michelin star.

The dining room is cozy, with room for no more than 30 people, bathed in warm lighting and filled with wooden Thai décor. On busy nights, the space buzzes with a mix of Japanese locals and American military families.

The food isn't just spicy, though it comes with a certain level of heat. Each dish has layers of flavor and texture.

On my most recent visit, my party started with our usual go-to order of spicy mango salad, pork barbecue and pad thai.

The salad packs a kick, perfectly balanced by tart mango. The barbecue skewers blended sweet and savory, with just the right char. The noodles came



Thai Erawan

Location: 238-0007 Kanagawa, Yokosuka, Wakamatsucho, 1 Chome-2 3F

Hours: Opening times are complicated, so check the website for details.

Prices: Course menus are available. Lunch dishes start at around \$9.

Dress: Casual

Directions: A short walk from Yokosuka-Chuo Station near Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

Information: Phone: 050-5484-2653; Online: gc55400.gorp.jp

Marc Castaneda

with generous shrimp and chicken, topped with a dash of fish sauce and chili flakes for extra bite.

We did not order the green curry this time as I overestimated my appetite. We finished with a complimentary dessert from the owner — two small bowls of mochi, banana and tapioca in warm coconut milk.

Michelin stars are awarded for exceptional cooking, and most recipients are concentrated in Tokyo or other major food capitals. Thai Erawan's recognition in 2015 was unusual due to its location, but only a few restaurants have earned the accolade.



Thai Erawan received a coveted Michelin star for its green curry in 2015.



Shock your taste buds with Thai Erawan's spicy mango salad.

And while the star isn't listed in the most recent guides, the flavors and attention to detail that won the award remain. Nearly a decade after its Michelin nod, Thai Erawan continues to deliver a pleasant, filling and flavorful experience. It has stood the test of time in Yokosuka's ever-changing dining scene.

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Celebrate end of summer with corn and potato salad

BY KATIE WORKMAN
Associated Press

We are almost face-to-face with Labor Day, but there's still a sliver of summer left. And we should not waste these last days telling each other how quickly the season has flown by.

Let's spend the rest of summer and early fall eating all of the ripe, rainbow-hued produce that is spilling over at the farmer's markets and (if we're lucky) in our gardens. Tomatoes, eggplants, zucchini, herbs, string beans and — to some folks' minds — the pick of the season: fresh sweet corn.

Do you have an avid corn lover in your world? The kind of person who will eat three ears of corn without blinking? A friend who will call you up in the fall, sounding panicked, to share the news that the corn stand has closed and the season is over?

I have several such people in my life. And I made this potato salad for them.

This corn and potato salad is at once comfortingly creamy and bracingly bright. Tender chunks of potato mingle with sweet corn (at other times of year, you can

think about using frozen or canned corn, but not just yet), crispy bacon and a tangy lemon-buttermilk dressing. It's the kind of crowd-pleasing summer side dish that works for cookouts, backyard gatherings and that Labor Day party menu.

You can prep this salad ahead and serve it at room temperature. If you love corn, add as much as you like. You could even make it into a corn salad punctuated with potatoes if you're so inclined.

If you are a regular potato-salad maker, you know that potatoes can absorb dressing pretty significantly. This might seem like quite a bit of dressing at first, but the salad will thicken up on standing. And if you refrigerate it, it will thicken up even more.

If you are thinking of bringing this corn and potato salad to a picnic or other potluck event, remember to pack the extra crumbled bacon in a separate baggie or container and sprinkle it on at the end to preserve the crunchiness. But if you don't remember? Eh. You brought potato salad ... you're awesome.

Double or triple this recipe at will.

Corn and Potato Salad

Serves 6

Ingredients

1½ pounds Yukon Gold or waxy potatoes, peeled
Kosher or coarse salt to taste
2 cups fresh corn kernels
½ onion, finely minced
⅓ cup plain Greek yogurt
⅓ cup buttermilk
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
½ teaspoon finely grated lemon zest

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
Freshly ground pepper to taste
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves

½ cup crumbled cooked bacon

Directions

Cut the potatoes into ½-inch dice. Bring a medium pot of salted water to a boil over high heat, add the potatoes, partially

cover the pot and simmer for about 10 minutes until the potatoes are almost fork-tender. Add the corn and simmer for another 2 minutes, until the potatoes are tender and the corn kernels crisp and just cooked through. Drain the potatoes and the corn; let them cool for about 10 minutes in the colander.

Meanwhile, in a small bowl, mix together the onion, yogurt, buttermilk, lemon juice, lemon zest, mustard, and salt and pepper.

Place the warm potatoes and corn, basil and half the bacon in a large bowl. Pour the dressing over it and toss to mix well. Turn into a serving bowl and top with the remainder of the crumbled bacon.



CHEYENNE COHEN/AP

Corn and potato salad makes a fitting dish for Labor Day Weekend.

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

Viral hit spreading Black Cowboy joy

‘Boots on the Ground’ spawns wildly popular line dance

BY GARY GERARD HAMILTON
Associated Press

When Tre Little two-stepped in his cowboy boots at the BET Awards pre-show this summer, he was overcome with joy and gratitude.

“I used to watch this on TV every year, and I’m now performing,” said the 22-year-old Atlanta-area resident. “I started crying ... tears of joy.”

He joined Southern soul singer 803Fresh to perform the rapper’s viral hit, “Boots on the Ground.” Released in December, the trail ride-inspired song and accompanying line dance have become an anticipated moment at African American gatherings like family reunions, weddings, graduations, parties and cookouts.

The “Boots on the Ground” dance, which includes the rhythmic clacking of folding hand fans as the South Carolinian belts “Where them fans at?,” was created by Little during a work lunch break. After hearing a snippet on TikTok, he played around with a routine and posted it, without much thought.

“I usually get my little six views from my family ... I took a nap and when I woke up, it was at 100K,” said Little, who is now in demand nationwide teaching line dance classes and hosting events. He has even been approached to create new dances. “It’s bringing people together to do a dance and share laughter.”

Beyoncé incorporated the dance into her record-breaking “Cowboy Carter” tour, and former first lady Michelle Obama and Shaquille O’Neal have publicly participated. Popular line dances are not a new phenomenon, but several factors made this song, which hit No. 1 on both Billboard’s adult R&B airplay and R&B digital song sales charts, spread at an unprecedented pace.

“With the new energy toward country music and trail ride music and African Americans’ presence in it, I think that opened up America’s eyes to what we’ve been doing down in Louisiana and Texas and Mississippi and Alabama for years,” said recording artist Bryson “Cupid” Bernard, known as the Line Dance King and creator of the popular “Cupid Shuffle” (2007) song and choreography.

“Their eyes have been opened to line dancing and the unity that it brings,” he said.

New take on old tradition

Line dancing features individuals gathered to perform synchronized, repetitive dance moves, generally in lines, and is popular for both socializing and exercise. A major appeal is that there is no age limit or skill requirement, and dances can be learned in real time.

There is no consensus on the origins of line dancing. Some historians trace it to African celebratory tribal dances, which

extended to enslaved Black Americans who sang or moved in unison during field work. Other scholars trace it to European immigrants who brought traditional folk dances from their native lands. The country western style is performed to country tunes, while soul line dancing is backed by R&B, soul and hip-hop.

Along with the “Cupid Shuffle,” routines to DJ Casper’s “Cha Cha Slide” (2000) and V.I.C.’s “Wobble” (2008) are canonized in soul line dancing, as well as the most recognized 1972 song, “Electric Boogie (The Electric Slide)” by Marcia Griffiths. But “Boots on the Ground” has introduced trail ride line dancing to many Americans outside of the Southeast.

Trail rides are socialized horseback processions traveling to a designated location. In Black Southern culture, it is a party atmosphere with food and dancing, including niche music genres like zydeco and Southern soul, which blends R&B, blues, gospel and country.

“People didn’t really know about it. ... When something is trending, it makes everybody get on the bandwagon,” said 28-year-old Jakayla Preston, who goes by the handle @_itsjakaylaa on TikTok. A professional dancer, the Houstonian began teaching line dance classes this year after persistent requests from her followers, which intensified following the “Boots on the Ground” boom. Leading classes across the country, she discovered attendance was about more than foot-taps and turns.

“I have people who are struggling and battling with a lot of things ... they’ll even sometimes cry and thank me for hosting the class there, or just giving them the experience to be able come and express,” she said. “It’s a feeling that’s indescribable.”

Beyoncé effect

“Beyoncé probably had a lot to do with that, as far as her ‘Cowboy Carter’ album,” said Preston, referring to the attention on trail ride line dancing.

The Grammy’s reigning album of the year sparked conversations about African American contributions to country music and Black cowboy culture, with “Cowboy Carter” tourgoers frequently dressing the part. The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, one of the city’s marquee events, broke its attendance record this year, and while there were several factors, many first-timers and social media users said they visited Queen Bey’s hometown to experience what she sang about.

“I never seen — ever — that many people that was out there line dancing,” said Preston, who grew up attending the rodeo. “It’s an amazing sight to see.”

Sharlene Sinegal-DeCuir, chair of African American and Diaspora Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans, said Beyoncé’s impact extends beyond music.



MICHAEL DWYER/AP

Levis Martin, left, and his brother Daniel dance with fans during a Juneteenth celebration in Portsmouth, N.H., on June 19.



AP photos

Southern soul singer 803Fresh, left, has seen his “Boots on the Ground” song take off as a popular line dance. Recording artist Bryson “Cupid” Bernard, right, who created 2007’s “Cupid Shuffle,” can attest to the power of a communal experience. He says he will be releasing an album in September that will be the first all-line-dance album.

“Country western music: the sound, the banjo, the violin, all those things are African instruments,” said Sinegal-DeCuir, who grew up in Lafayette, La., line dancing and listening to zydeco. “She’s bringing it to the world to let the world know, no, we’re not just getting into country — we are country.”

Political line (dance) in the sand

Sinegal-DeCuir believes the political climate may have indirectly contributed to the success of “Boots on the Ground” and interest in line dancing. She notes about 9 in 10 Black women voted against President Donald Trump, whose policies are disproportionately affecting Black Americans, including eliminating DEI programs, federal agency mass layoffs and cuts to SNAP benefits, Medicare and Medicaid.

“We know how to survive these things because we lean on family, we lean on

community, and this joy,” said Sinegal-DeCuir. “The world is burning down, and we’re sitting here learning a new line dance because we’re tired of the political atmosphere ... it’s a form of resistance.”

Cupid remembers a pivotal moment during the social justice movement, sparked by the 2020 killing of George Floyd, a Black man who was murdered by a Minneapolis police officer. He saw a video of a tense exchange between protesters and law enforcement at a rally, and “Cupid Shuffle” began playing to ease tensions.

“I realized the importance of it, as far as connecting two people that don’t even see eye to eye,” said the “Flex” artist, who is readying a new album next month that he says will be the first all-line-dance album. “If you had to pick three songs that could bring people on two opposite sides of the fence together for a moment, then line dancing is definitely those types of songs.”

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Where reader becomes detective

The twist in these mystery novels: You get to solve the crime

By KAREN MACPHERSON
The Washington Post

The first book I ever read by myself as child was a mystery, and since then, I have read a mountain of them. Despite my passion for mysteries, however, I'm still terrible at guessing "whodunit."

It's not that I'm totally clueless at spotting red herrings, although I'll admit I was the kid who always had to check the answers at the back of the classic "Encyclopedia Brown" mysteries. It's just that I'd much rather focus on the characters and the story, so solving the puzzle and identifying the murderer before the big reveal just doesn't grab me as much.

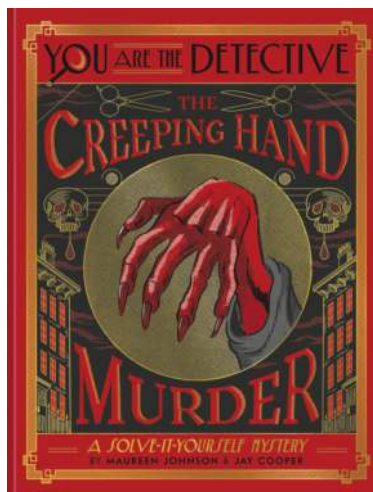
Yet the puzzle aspect of mysteries is beloved by many readers, as evidenced by a recent mini-trend of "solve-it-yourself" mysteries being published for adults. Intrigued, I set out to read five of them and write about my experience. (Spoiler alert: It was a highly entertaining experiment, but my ability to guess the culprit sadly remains negligible).

I began with "A Most Puzzling Murder" by Bianca Marais. Set on desolate Eerie Island, the novel blends fantasy and mystery. The protagonist is Destiny Whip, a former child puzzle-solving prodigy who travels to Scruffmore Castle in search of information about her birth parents and instead finds herself in the midst of a deadly Scruffmore family power battle. To keep the murder count down, Whip — and the reader — must solve a series of puzzles. In a fascinating twist, readers can get clues by sending an email to an address provided by the author. Even so, I solved

few of the puzzles, but — mercifully for me — Marais channels "Encyclopedia Brown" and provides the answers in the back of the book.

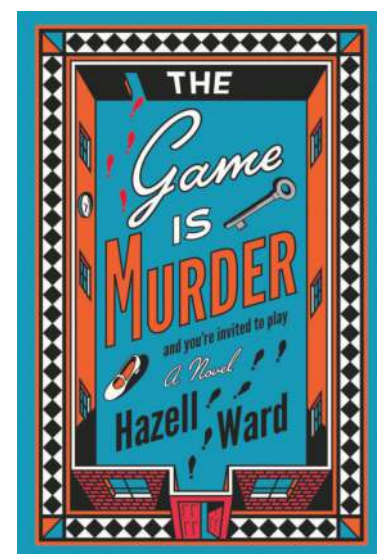
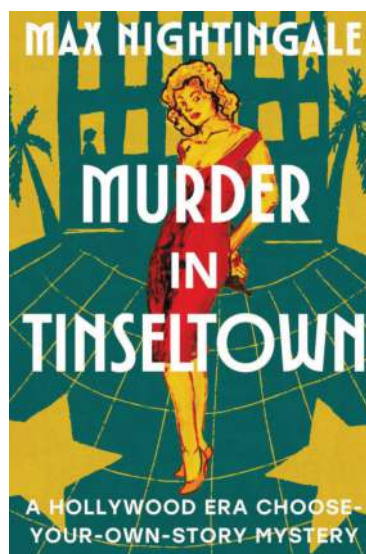
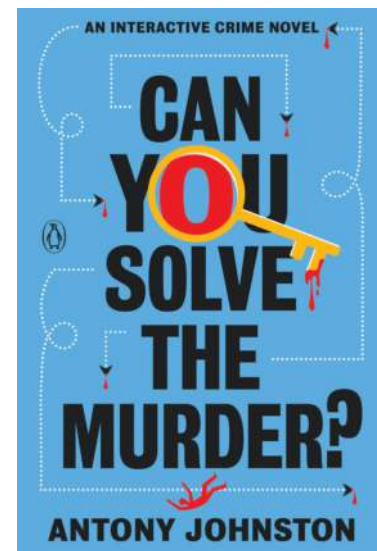
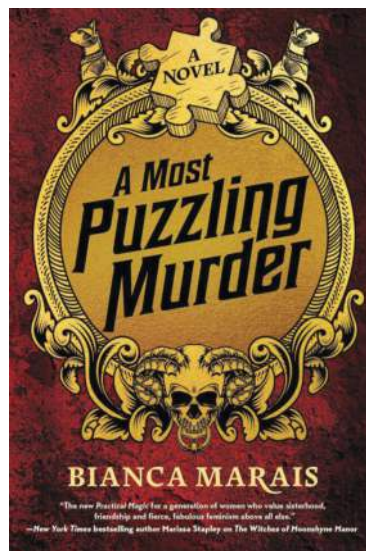
My next book, "Can You Solve the Murder?" by Antony Johnston, is billed as "an interactive crime novel." As the reader, I was required to don the persona of an English police detective and actually create the story by deciding what evidence to gather, what clues to follow and which suspect to accuse of murdering a local businessman at a wellness retreat. The book is divided into 200 short, numbered sections: Readers start with the first section, then — depending on the choices they make — move through the book in a non-chronological order, jotting down a series of numbers and letters designed to help identify the murderer. It's an incredibly inventive concept, and I quite enjoyed playing detective, although it took me two tries to guess the killer.

Author Hazell Ward then took me on a wild ride in her debut, "The Game Is Murder." The book is based on a 50-year-old real — and unsolved — murder case in which a nanny named Sally Gardner was killed, and the main suspect, her aristocratic boss, Lord John Verreman, disappeared before facing trial. Readers can take on the role of "The Great Detective" at an exclusive murder mystery dinner party hosted by David Verreman, who wants you to decide if his father is really guilty after hearing evidence laid out by the other guests. While this is the main thread of the book, it's only one layer of the dizzying story



presented by Ward in this tour-de-force meta mystery. There are puzzles for the reader to solve, frequent authorial intrusions, dozens of sly, knowledgeable references to detective fiction classics and unexpected twists galore. I'll freely admit I was baffled much of the time, and the last-minute reveal of the murderer was a total surprise, but Ward's book is so captivating that I eagerly kept turning the pages.

Things got even more challenging for me with "Murder in Tinseltown" by Max Nightingale, which is set in the glitzy world of late-1950s Hollywood. This time, I was thrust into the role of a Los Angeles homicide detective working to solve the mystery of who brutally murdered young movie star Blanche Aikerman in her luxury hotel suite. Similar to Johnston's "Can You Solve the Murder?," I jumped around in the book, depending on my choices and decisions. More often than not, I guessed wrong and was either killed, demoted or forced to start at the beginning again



(and again). While I'm admittedly not the ideal reader for this type of mystery, I did find it the most frustrating of all the "solve-it-yourself" books I read.

Fortunately, my final book offered the perfect antidote. "You Are the Detective: The Creeping Hand Murder" by Maureen Johnson and Jay Cooper is packaged as a police file on a particularly tricky locked-room murder. Six suspects were present in

the room when a seventh person died, but it seems none of the six could be the killer. The police are stumped and have asked a famous detective — the reader — to comb through the file and determine the murderer. The book is a blast to read, filled with drawings of crime scene photos and interviews with the suspects. At the end, there's a gift for clueless readers like me: an envelope containing the killer's confession.

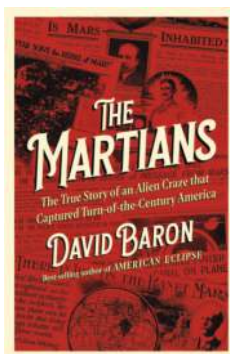
'The Martians' spins a clever tale about a real early-1900s craze

By DOUGLASS K. DANIEL
Associated Press

Talk about fake news: In 1907, a New York Times banner headline declared, "There Is Life On the Planet Mars." Upping the ante the next year, the stodgy Wall Street Journal claimed "proof" of "conscious, intelligent human life" on our red neighbor.

A decadeslong cultural phenomenon is revisited in "The Martians: The True Story of an Alien Craze That Captured Turn-of-the-Century America" by science writer David Baron. He explores how a society on the cusp of reality-piercing scientific advances — global radio communications, X-rays, Einstein's Theory of Special Relativity among them — bought into what now seems downright silly.

The idea of life on other planets had



been orbiting the public imagination ever since the realization that the Earth wasn't alone in the solar system. As Baron explains, advances in telescopes provided breakthrough views of an alien landscape that led to unbridled theorizing in extraterrestrial life, even civilization, all sparked by an innocent mis-

translation. While several astronomers in the late 19th century had observed the large patches of different colors and shades on our closest heavenly neighbor, Italian Giovan-

ni Schiaparelli published them on a map. Projecting Earth-like characteristics, he connected Mars' larger, darker areas thought to be oceans, with thin, linear features he labeled "canali," Italian for "channels." Misreported in English as artificial waterways, "CANALS ON THE PLANET MARS" headlined The Times of London in 1882.

From there, Baron tells a compelling story in which mankind's greatest power, compelling storytelling, unleashes a tenacious scientific observation that drives premature speculation, and a thin veneer of logic spawns runaway flights of fancy.

No one was more spellbound than Percival Lowell, who, armed with a Gilded Age fortune, dedicated his life and resources to study of the nearby planet.

Lowell did more than anyone to gather

what he claimed was visible evidence of engineering on Mars. Though an amateur scientist, he wrote well-received books and delivered sold-out lectures, broadening the acceptance of the canal theory and the possibilities it opened. Most reputable astronomers refused to speculate on the dark markings, and the scientific community eventually rallied to convince the public that the rectilinear structures he championed were merely optical illusions.

In "The Martians," author Baron judges Lowell gently by focusing on the many researchers and writers his works inspired. A later Mars enthusiast, author Ray Bradbury, claimed, "There's hardly a scientist or an astronaut I've met who wasn't beholden to some romantic before him who led him to doing something in life."

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Q&A

Perspectives on passion

Mariah the Scientist's latest, 'Hearts Sold Separately,' mixes love potions, pensive emotions

By GARY GERARD HAMILTON
Associated Press

If you were surprised when Mariah the Scientist's "Burning Blue" hit No. 1 on Billboard's rhythmic airplay chart, you weren't alone.

"It's shocking. It's almost like impostor syndrome, feeling, 'I have a No. 1 song on the radio? This is crazy,'" said the 27-year-old with a bright smile. "It makes me feel like somebody — multiple people — like my music, I guess. It's flattering."

Reaching No. 25 on the Billboard 200 and named by Rihanna as her go-to karaoke song, "Burning Blue" has created high anticipation for Mariah's new album, "Hearts Sold Separately." Available now, it's the fourth album from the R&B singer-songwriter who's crafted huge records like "From a Woman" and "Spread Thin," which has more than 190 million Spotify plays.

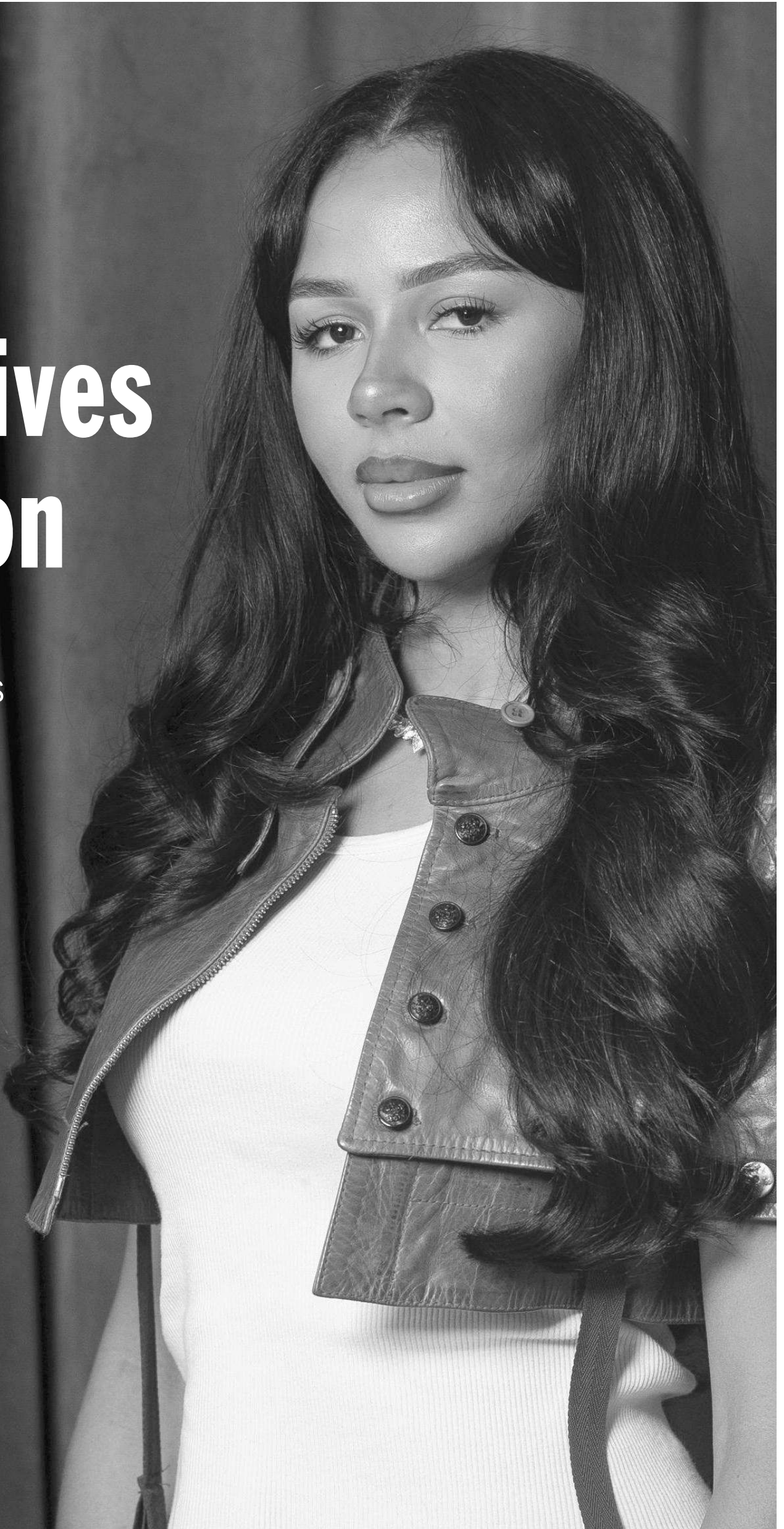
Following 2023's "To Be Eaten Alive," the 10-track project, with Kali Uchis as the sole feature and new age '80s R&B synth sonics, pensively explores love and relationships, themes synonymous with the former St. John's University scholarship student. Her stage name was first a nickname earned when studying biology before dropping out her junior year to pursue music.

While she's attracted dedicated fans with her alternative R&B sounds and unapologetic vulnerability, she's also the girlfriend of rapper Young Thug. The Grammy winner was indicted in a sprawling Georgia gang and racketeering case in 2022. He pleaded guilty in October 2024 to gang, drug and gun charges. He also entered a no contest plea to other charges. He was sentenced to time served and 15 years of probation.

SEE PERSPECTIVES ON PAGE 29

Mariah the Scientist is receiving lots of attention for her music and for her relationship with rapper Young Thug.

GARY GERARD HAMILTON/AP



WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

CMAT

Euro-Country (AWAL)

Seven years ago, Irish singer CMAT (born Ciara Mary-Alice Thompson) received life-changing advice from a fellow rising pop star. Charli xcx urged her to dump her boyfriend and take making

music seriously. It turns out that Charli knows best. "Euro-Country," CMAT's third studio album, is her strongest yet, an emotive collection of energetic, cheeky pop songs.

On her previous albums, like 2023's BRIT Award nominated "Crazymad, for Me," CMAT mined relationships for big-hearted and humor-filled songs pulling from country-pop rhythms and retro '70s grooves. On "Euro-Country," she's sharpened her tools, becoming both more personal and political in the process.

CMAT opens the title track by singing in Irish. The song, atop swelling synths, traces periods of economic decline and depression in Ireland. "I never understood what this way of living could do to me / All the mooching 'round shops, and the lack of identity," she opines about the change in culture.

The song reflects the rest of the album: "Euro-Country" is a mix of catchy pop with depth. These are danceable songs written from the frustrated, introspective viewpoint of someone stuck watching daytime dramas in their hometown (the moody "Coronation Street"), or as a sharp meditation on the loss of a close friend ("Lord, Let That Tesla Crash," which inspired the album). There's also grief for girlhood ("Iceberg") or for body shaming (the upbeat "Take a Sexy Picture of Me," which inspired a TikTok dance craze), or, of course, for her country (the title track).

In an album with many enjoyable moments, a highlight is the uptempo alt-rock swagger of "Jamie Oliver's Petrol Station." Lyrically, the song tackles everyday life in Ireland by using Oliver, one of the U.K.'s most ubiquitous celebrity chefs, as a symbol for disillusionment with capitalism. Ambitious, but it works: "It's the fear of not getting the dole and the joy of then chopping it up with the card that you draw it on," she sings. "Coming through town and then seeing the type of the people you missed who'd have died back in Dublin."

The song also highlights CMAT's talent for funny pop culture lyrical references. "OK, don't be a (expletive) / The man's got kids," she sings, referencing Oliver. "And they wouldn't like this."

In the hypercompetitive musical climate of 2025, it is hard to stand apart from the crowd. But on "Euro-Country," CMAT has furthered her individual vision and style. Now it's up to the rest of the world to get on board.

— Connie Panzariello
Associated Press



Jon Batiste

Big Money (Interscope)

On "Big Money," Super Bowl-sized singer Jon Batiste opts for a surprisingly intimate sound.

The just over 32-minute, nine-song set, released Aug. 22, is not nearly as loud as the New Orleans jazzman's eye-popping wardrobe. The stripped-down, mostly acoustic arrangements create a chill vibe. Simplicity somehow only intensifies the songs' swing and sway.

Batiste pairs lyrics about devotion, values, angels and ecology with music that mixes folk and funk, gospel and the blues. The range is such that Batiste even plays a little fiddle and mandolin, but he shines brightest on two songs featuring his solo piano.

The first is a wonderful duet with Randy Newman, another piano man with New Orleans roots, who in recent years has been slowed by health issues and kept a low profile. They cover Doc Pomus' "Lonely Avenue," and Newman's legendarily froggy tenor provides a comical contrast to Batiste's vocal sheen. "I could die, I could die, I could die," Newman sings. "It sounds like I'm dying."

Also stellar is "Maybe," a ballad filled with thick chords and questions about the big picture. "Or maybe we should all just take a collective pause," Batiste sings, before launching into a keyboard exploration worthy of Jelly Roll Morton.

The bouncy "Lean on My Love" draws from Prince, Sly Stone and the Spinners as Batiste sings in unison with Andra Day. The equally buoyant title cut rhymes "money" and "dummy" in a strummy sing-along that includes backing vocals by the Womack Sisters, granddaughters of soul singer Sam Cooke.

"Pinnacle" chooses a similar tempo to kick up Delta dust around a delightful word salad. "Hop scotch / Double Dutchie jumping rope / Twistin' it and ya wobble it / And let it go," he sings on one verse.

Batiste's gospel influences are most evident on the closing reggae tune "Angels" and the ballad "Do It All Again," a love song that could be interpreted as secular or spiritual.

"When I'm happy, it's your shine," Batiste sings. As always, he makes joy sound genuine.

— Steven Wine
Associated Press



Conan Gray

Wishbone (Republic)

Rejection serves as inspiration for angst and contemplation on Conan Gray's wistful fourth album, "Wishbone." It is a return to form for Gray with 12 diaristic tracks that oscillate between bold heart-break anthems and moments of tender reflection.

Discovered on YouTube in the early 2010s, Gray's narrative pop earned him a place among the tastemakers of Gen Z music. He collaborated closely with producer Dan Nigro (known for his work with Olivia Rodrigo and Chappell Roan) on his first two albums. The 26-year-old's most recent, 2024's "Found Heaven," was a departure from Nigro and the affective melancholy of his previous singer-songwriter releases. Swedish super-producer Max Martin produced many of that project's well-received '80s-inspired tracks, which saw an adaptable Gray convey big emotions through sound, rather than story.

Nigro returns as the executive producer of "Wishbone." Their reunion finds Gray comfortable but candid, as recurring characters, settings and symbols help him recount relationships atop a sonic landscape informed by his past releases.

Introduced with a trumpet's call, "Romeo" details a destabilizing heartbreak. "I took the blade into my ribs," Gray sings, taking inspiration from Shakespeare's tragedy. His voice is pitched down to an almost robotic effect on the bridge: "Where art thou? I'm all alone now," he sings. Unlike the teens pushed to violent ends in the Bard's play, Gray and his 21st century Romeo meet their demise through more relatable means: egos, emotional manipulation and miscommunication. "Guess I was just your experiment!" Gray screams at the song's midpoint, his voice cracking.

Romeo returns in "My World," which opens with a preppy drum beat. Elsewhere, "Connell" approaches the self-inflicted pain of a breakup: "You remind me of how good it feels to hurt," Gray coos over strings and electric guitar, an unguarded voice replacing the angsty, spoken word cadence of "Romeo."

Many of Gray's lyrical stories are relatable, but some of the stickiest tracks focus on his inner thoughts. The acoustic guitar and piano that start "Nauseous" is drowned out by Gray's layered vocals as it takes on his fear of love and the childhood trauma that informs it. "Caramel," with an earworm chorus set to electric guitar, describes the memories he can't shake after a breakup.

"Everything comes back around, I still feel like the class clown," he lolls. While Gray struggles with his place, the way he deftly tackles those feelings in song proves he's among the star pupils of his class.

— Elise Ryan
Associated Press



Perspectives: Mariah doesn't feel pressure to replicate success

FROM PAGE 28

Mariah did not know Young Thug during the time of the accused crimes.

"There's just so many different facets to love. I feel like it's so romanticized, which is cute — I wish it was that great every single day, but that's not the case. Most days it is great, but it is really the collective journey," said Mariah. "Everybody has their own individual growing and evolution and journey, and then it's a totally separate thing where you're doing it together. Most people will grow apart, so, it's like an active effort to grow with somebody."

Mariah spoke with The Associated Press about creating another No. 1 hit, love and facing persistent relationship criticism. Answers have been edited for brevity and clarity.

Associated Press: How does it feel to be one of the bright stars of R&B?

Mariah: I feel like it's paying off ... I do

feel justified in some areas now.

Just people appreciating the art I make, not on just an acknowledgment level, but actually digesting it and appreciating it. ... It's really not necessarily about the accolades, but I feel like accolades are indicative of the exposure and being perceived in a flattering way.

Would you describe your career as a slow burn?

I think that a lot of people, as children, want to do certain things like, oh, they do want to be an actress or they do want to be a singer. And I feel like I didn't necessarily have that ambition.

I felt a little reluctant at first ... maybe almost a little shameful. Like, I just tried something — I just created something and



Mariah the Scientist says that she is used to public scrutiny of her relationship with Young Thug, but that she doesn't want it to affect her decisions.

then people took to it.

After scoring a No. 1 song, is there pressure to replicate that success?

The fact that "Burning Blue" has done what it has done ... makes me feel like I can surpass what I have done. But I don't wanna put some large list of expectations on what I'm doing because I didn't expect to have anything that I have. So, really, I'm just appreciative.

How did you come up with the album title?

Without a heart, the functionality of a person or of relationships, friendships, marriages, even jobs ... the passion aspect, I feel like if it's not there, you're not operating to your fullest potential.

I feel like some people really do feel like you can buy love. So, I just wanted to be

open to interpretation. I want people to take multiple different perspectives and argue over them on the internet because that's what they have been doing with the majority of stuff I put out. And it's really interesting because it brings new perspectives to my own dashboard.

You have a relationship with Young Thug that's heavily criticized. How have you dealt with it?

Even the fact that I do talk about him, they get mad about it ... at this point, I'm used to people scrutinizing my relationship. It's almost like I expect them to do that.

I also don't want it to have such a heavy impact on my opinion on him or us to the point where it makes me not want to do it. I just want to be able to actively decide on my own if it's something that I want to do or not. Or, if it is something that's serving me or not serving me. And I think it's definitely been a process.

WEEKEND: TELEVISION



Prime Video

Daniel Dae Kim plays a former U.S. intelligence operative in South Korea whose past catches up with him in “Butterfly” on Prime Video.

Not yet a romantic lead

Kim discusses his newest project ‘Butterfly,’ a Korea-U.S. co-production

BY JUWON PARK
Associated Press

After three decades in Hollywood, Daniel Dae Kim has done spy thrillers, sci-fi epics and medical dramas. But there’s one role that’s eluded the Korean American actor: romantic leading man.

“I’m still waiting to play a romantic lead after all these years,” Kim says with a laugh.

His latest project, “Butterfly,” which features a star-studded cast including top Korean actors Kim Tae-hee and Park Hae-soo (“Squid Game”), follows a former U.S. intelligence operative in South Korea whose past catches up with him. It premiered on Amazon Prime in the U.S. and elsewhere earlier this month, and made its Korean debut last week.

In a recent interview with The Associated Press in Seoul, South Korea, Kim revealed one of his biggest regrets, reflected on cultural lessons from the Korea-U.S. co-production and opened up about what it’s really like being the bridge between two cultures while pursuing his mission to tell stories “that haven’t been told yet.” The interview has been edited for clarity and brevity:

Associated Press: You served as both star and executive producer on “Butterfly.” How do those roles differ for you?

Kim: As an EP, I’m a job creator. I am a person responsible for a lot of people, and I will fight so much harder for others than I often fight for myself. When I feel like one of the cast, or one of the crew, or one of the writers is not being taken care of, I’m not afraid to talk to anybody and have a hard conversation.

How did cultural differences between Korean and American crews translate into the production?

Every day, there was something that needed to be translated literally through language but also working styles. In Korea, because it’s a more Confucian society, the hierarchy of departments is very clear. We had to learn to talk to the head of the department who would then talk to the staff, as opposed to if you have an issue with one of the staff, you go directly to the staff. This kind

of thing was new to the Americans.

You’ve talked about choices and regrets in your work. Have you experienced that personally?

I think in 2007 I got a DUI when I was working on “Lost,” and I regret that night every day of my life. At the time, I felt so much shame, so much guilt, so much regret. I felt terrible to my parents, because that’s not the way I think they wanted me to be raised. I think with the right perspective, these things, these mistakes that you made can actually be helpful for your life because they can guide you in certain ways.

Are you worried about backlashes against diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives potentially taking place in Hollywood?

We’re already seeing it. If you look at what happened with Paramount and CBS News, we’re seeing a chilling effect on free speech and journalism and DEI. “DEI” is a bad word these days, but to me, DEI’s not a fad. The idea of inclusion is not something that’s a political trend. It’s my life. It’s what I’ve lived every decade I’ve been in this business.

Do you ever get tired of being that bridge between cultures?

I’m human, so everyone feels on certain days like, “Oh, this is too tough,” or on another day, “I can’t wait to do this.” But one of the reasons I think I act and produce is because I feel like there are a lot of stories to be told that haven’t been told yet, and one of those stories is a Korean American story.

The criticism you faced on “Lost” for your Korean pronunciation seems particularly harsh, looking back. How has Korea’s acceptance of Korean Americans evolved?

I got so much criticism when I did “Lost” that I had to learn how to not take it so personally because it hurt a lot at the time. When I came to Korea when I was 18, cab drivers would give me such a hard time because I couldn’t speak fluent Korean. And they were like, “You’re Korean, your face is Korean, why don’t you speak Korean?” They had never thought about an immigrant experience from another country. But now Korea is so used to



AHN YOUNG-JOON/AP

Kim speaks during an interview at the Associated Press bureau in Seoul, South Korea, Aug. 19.

that kind of thing that people are much more understanding.

How intentional have you been in choosing roles to expand beyond audience expectations?

I have a lot of sympathy for actors who take stereotypical roles when they’re starting out because you need some way to break into the business. It’s much easier once you’re more successful and more established because you have more financial stability. It’s something that, if you’re not a person of color, or someone who’s a minority in the United States, you don’t have to think about. You don’t think about what this role means for the rest of a nation or an ethnicity. You just do what you’re drawn to, and that’s very liberating. I am lucky enough now where I can also make those same choices. But I don’t ever escape the fact that whatever I do will be watched and seen by so many people and judged through their own lens and filters.

After all these years, what role do you still hope to play?

I’m still waiting to play a romantic lead after all these years. I’ve never gotten the opportunity and it’s one of those interesting things because I look the way I do as an Asian American, and Asian men were never considered handsome or sexy. That’s changing now, though. I’m friends with Jimmy O. Yang and, a few years ago, he got to play a romantic lead in a rom-com. And I said to Jimmy, like, “Who would have thought you, Jimmy, would have been the one to be the romantic lead?” But I was so happy for him because it meant that the way we were looking at Asian men was different.

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

No longer Foxy Knoxy

How Monica Lewinsky, Amanda Knox teamed up to reclaim Knox's story for Hulu's new series, 'The Twisted Tale'

By ALICIA RANCILIO
Associated Press

Monica Lewinsky is keenly aware of what it feels like when your name is no longer your own and becomes attached to a character conjured by others. An affair that she had with President Clinton nearly 30 years ago as a White House intern made her an international headline.

So, when Lewinsky read that Amanda Knox, another woman whose image precedes her, wanted to adapt her memoir for the screen, she felt she was in a unique position to help.

Knox was in a study abroad program in Italy in 2007 when one of her housemates, Meredith Kercher, was killed. She and her then-boyfriend Raffaele Sollecito quickly became the prime suspects. The story was a tabloid sensation and Knox was branded Foxy Knoxy. After a lengthy trial, she and Sollecito were convicted of Kercher's murder and sentenced to more than 20 years in prison; they were later acquitted and exonerated.

Knox has already told her story in two memoirs and it's been dramatized by others. There was a Lifetime movie about the case and she believes the 2021 movie "Stillwater" starring Matt Damon was unfairly familiar.

"I have a story to tell because I have a mission, and my mission is to help people appreciate what really is going on when justice goes awry," Knox said about why she entrusted Lewinsky to help tell her story through "The Twisted Tale of Amanda Knox."

"This woman, who has gone through her own version of hell where the world had diminished her to a punch line inspired me to feel like maybe there was a path forward in my life," Knox said.

The limited series is now streaming on Hulu. Grace Van Patten ("Tell Me Lies") stars and both Knox and Lewinsky are among its executive producers.

Shared but different trauma

Lewinsky was not always in a place to help others reclaim their narrative because her own was too much to bear.

She remembers vaguely hearing about Knox's case but didn't have the energy to give it attention. "I was allergic to cases like this," Lewinsky said. "I had just come out of graduate school at the end of 2006. And 2007 was a very challenging year for me."

She believed graduate school would lead to a new beginning and desired to "have a new identity and go get a job like a normal person." She said the realization that wasn't going to happen "was a pretty devastating moment."

In 2014, Lewinsky wrote a personal essay for Vanity Fair and became one of its contributors. She went on to produce a documentary and give a TED Talk called "The Price of Shame," addressing cyberbullying and public shaming. Educating others provided Lewinsky with a purpose she had been looking for.

"With most everything I do, it feels really important to me that it moves a conversation forward somehow," Lewinsky said. She now hosts a podcast called "Reclaiming with Monica Lewinsky."

By the time they officially began working on "Twisted Tale," Lewinsky was in protective mode. The 52-year-old Lewinsky, 14 years older than Knox, wanted to shield her from painful moments. She recalled being particularly worried that Knox would be traumatized by reading the



DISNEY/AP

Grace Van Patten, right, in a scene from "The Twisted Tale of Amanda Knox," a Hulu series based on the true story of Knox (played by Van Patten), who was falsely accused of murdering a housemate while studying abroad in Italy.



Knox

Lewinsky

Instead, Knox was OK, and Lewinsky learned they're "triggered by different things."

She laughs about it now: "Amanda's a lot more agreeable than me."

The interrogation was key

Knox said a part of her story that she wanted to make sure the TV series got right was the interrogation scene. She still describes it as "the worst experience of my life and a really defining moment in how this whole case went off the rails.

"I was interrogated for 53 hours over five days. We don't see that on screen," she said. Now an advocate for criminal justice reform, Knox hopes viewers are moved by the condensed version and recognize "the emotional truth and the psychological truth of that scenario."

Knox said she was coerced into signing a confession that she did not understand because of the language barrier. She was not fluent in Italian and did not have a lawyer with her at the time. In that document, Knox wrongly accused a local bar owner of the murder, and she still has a slander conviction because of it. Knox's lawyers recently filed paperwork to appeal that decision.

She believes interrogations should have more transparency "because what happens behind closed doors results in coerced confessions from innocent people to this day. I really wanted to shed a light on that."

No villains in Knox's version

Knox has returned to Italy three times since her release from prison. One of those times was to meet with the prosecutor of her case after years of correspondence. Showrunner-creator K.J. Steinberg said she had to condense more than 400 pages of their writing back-and-forth for their reunion scene. That meeting ultimately became the framework for the series.

"The scope of this story isn't, 'Here's the bad thing that happened to Amanda, the end.' The scope of the story is Amanda's going back to Italy, and to appreciate why she made that choice, we need to go back and revisit everything that leads up to it," Knox said.

first script.

"It's someone else's interpretation. There's dramatic license," explained Lewinsky, who said she can still "have sensitivities" to reading something written about her.

Viewers will also see the perspectives of others, including Sollecito, a prison chaplain and confidante and Knox's mother. It also shows how the investigators and prosecutor reached the conclusion at the time that Knox and Sollecito were guilty.

"We did not want mustache-twirling villains," Knox said. "We wanted the audience to come away from the story thinking, 'I can relate to every single person in this perfect storm.' That, to me, was so, so important because I did not want to do the harm that had been done to me in the past."

"It's showing all of these people who are going through the same situation and all truly believing they were doing the right thing," Van Patten added.

Knox isn't presented as perfect in the series. "I wasn't interested in doing a hagiography of Amanda Knox, nor was Amanda," Steinberg said.

Knox's harsh return to life after prison

Knox had a hard time adjusting to so-called "real life" after she was acquitted and returned home to the United States. This is shown in "Twisted Tale."

"I couldn't interact like a normal person with other people," Knox said. "I went back to school and there were students who were taking pictures of me in class and posting them to social media with really unkind commentary." She said the stigma has become "a huge, like, life-defining problem for me to solve."

"People don't think about the adjustments she had to go through to reinsert herself into normal life, which is still not normal," Van Patten said.

Knox said she's learned that there are positives and negatives to her unique situation:

"There are exonerated friends of mine who have been able to move on with a life and be around people who don't know about the worst experience of their life. That's kind of a blessing and a curse. You don't have to explain yourself all the time, but it's a curse because then this thing that was so defining of who you are as a person is something that you maybe feel like you don't know if you should share. In my case, I never had that choice."

Knox is now a married mother of two and grateful that her life did not turn out the way that she feared it would while in prison, particularly that she would never have children.

"I was 22 years old when I was given a 26-year prison sentence. I could do the math," she said. "So every single day when I am with my children, I am reminded that this might not have happened. I don't care if I'm exhausted and I'm overwhelmed; this is what life is all about."

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

Nitrous abuse leaking into mainstream

Despite dangers, demand is rising for recreationally used laughing gas near concerts

By JOHN WENZEL
The Denver Post

Every party needs balloons. These just happen to be filled with laughing gas. “We don’t do it that often. It’s funny for about 30 seconds,” said a concertgoer outside Red Rocks Amphitheatre, who was preparing to inhale nitrous oxide from a balloon before The String Cheese Incident played there in mid-July. She requested anonymity for fear of job reprisal. “There’s not really that much thought to it. It’s a stupid drug. The dumbest out of them all.”

Perched in the bed of a silver pickup with friends in Lower South Lot 1, the 20-something woman pinched the end of the pastel blue balloon as she brought it to her lips, then inhaled until the balloon went limp. A minute or so of euphoric wooziness followed, and her voice briefly dropped in pitch due to the density of the gas.

Elsewhere in the parking lot, vendors — nitrous tanks poking out of their trunks — were selling balloons in different sizes, at \$10 to \$30 a pop. (Vendors approached by The Denver Post at Red Rocks weren’t interested in commenting.)

Nitrous oxide powers whip cream canisters and sedates patients in dentists’ offices, but huffing it for fun can lead to addiction, injury and death. Still, the practice is becoming more common, not just in parks and concerts but in widely imitated viral videos.

A wave of colorfully branded new nitrous products has alarmed medical professionals who see it as a public health problem that’s hard to track, treat and warn against — even as most users consider it to be harmless fun.

Balloons and canisters, known as whippets, have been a common sight for decades in concert-venue parking lots, particularly in Colorado’s thriving jam-band scene at Phish, Dead and Company, Wide-spread Panic and others’ shows. It’s cheekily known as “hippie crack” because of its association with those bands, and people can buy nitrous from vendors at the unofficial marketplace of drugs, jewelry and merchandise that often accompanies these shows.

The gas is perfectly legal to buy (for those over 18) when used for medical or culinary purposes, though not for recreational use. Nevertheless, it is widely available in head shops and online.

But when used incorrectly — and not, for example, under the supervision of a dentist — inhaling nitrous “can lead to asphyxiation and, if deprived of too much oxygen, life-threatening seizures or even death,” said Shireen Banerji, director of Rocky Mountain Poison & Drug Safety.

In addition to the potential for brain damage, recreational users can get frostbite of the mouth and soft palate, according to a New England Journal of Medicine study that documented a severe injury involving the mouth and throat. It’s a con-



ANDY CROSS, THE DENVER POST/TNS

A man inhales nitrous oxide from a large balloon in a parking lot at Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre before The String Cheese Incident concert in Morrison, Colo., on July 19.

dition sometimes referred to as “lung freeze.”

Despite the risks, nitrous abuse appears to be growing — and trendy. Between 2019 and 2023, the U.S. saw an alarming 110% increase in deaths due to hypoxia (or oxygen deprivation to the brain) stemming from nitrous oxide abuse, according to researchers. Nitrous-related emergency room visits grew by 32% over five years, said the Drug Abuse Warning Network. The data did not include the number of visits or people affected.

Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health published in 2024 showed that 13 million people have tried nitrous for recreational purposes in their lifetimes, as compared with 224.3 million people ages 12 and older who have tried alcohol.

Notably, 2.9 million Americans 12 and older used inhalants in the past year, according to the survey. That covers nitrous oxide, but also poppers, household solvents and aerosols. The survey found that roughly 564,000 people aged 12 to 17 also used inhalants within the last year.

Social media seems to be glorifying it, and posts about nitrous have racked up tens of millions of views, while the companies that sell it — such as Galaxy Gas, ExoticWhip and Monster Gas — are offering newly candy-colored branding, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which renewed warnings of nitrous abuse and addiction this year.

The result is a resurgence that has tarnished nitrous’ longtime reputation among users as a cheap, easy high — and one that has leaked out of concert parking lots and into the mainstream.

In comparison to the rise of nitrous, the use of electronic cigarettes and vaping devices among middle and high school students declined between 2023 and 2024 by 5.9% — or about 1.63 million students, according to the FDA — from a high of 7.7% (or 2.13 million). Researchers credited public awareness campaigns for that, and have expressed support for new ones that target teenage nitrous abuse.

‘Way worse than weed’

Back at concert venues, the spike in abuse is having a corrosive effect on the jam-band scene, said Khalil Simon, leader of the Denver street-music group Brothers of Brass, which often plays in parking lots before concerts.

“When you have 20 tanks going off all around you, it’s one of the few things that can cut through a nine-piece brass band with horns and drums,” said Simon, the band’s tuba player, who largely quit playing Phish shows due to the “out of control” takeover of nitrous vendors.

“You’re also trying to play for tips and everyone’s spending all the cash in their pockets on these balloons,” he said.

Simon posted on Facebook last year that Brothers of Brass were done with Phish, despite eight years of well-received shows outside its concerts. The group began following Phish around the country in 2016 and busking in the ad-hoc markets that popped up before shows.

In some cases, his band would collect thousands of dollars in tips in a couple of hours. Over the past two years, however, nitrous vendors have muscled out nearly every other aspect of that scene, he said.

“This is one of those cases where drug dealers win,” Simon said. “They’re being persistent for years and years and multiplying, and cops don’t do anything.”

“I know Colorado’s drug-friendly, but I didn’t know it would blow up like this. Kids are losing their brain cells now that it’s been rebranded,” he said. “It’s way worse than weed or anything like that. It straight up makes you dumb.”

“There is also the issue of long-term effects,” Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Safety’s Banerji said. “Chronic use can result in anemias and effects to the brain, blood, spinal cord and nervous system. It’s not harmless. But people still don’t think of it in terms of chronic toxicity.”

Most users dismissed side effects and medical concerns when asked about nitrous outside Red Rocks. Some were planning on bringing drugs such as psilocybin mushrooms and cannabis inside with them for the show, but leaving the “dumb fun” of whippets in the parking lot.

“We do it for the ‘whomp whomp,’” said a woman holding a translucent balloon that had been filled by a golden-colored tank in her trunk. She and her friends, who described the experience as blissfully disconnected, declined to give their names due to professional concerns. Among them was a government employee, a scientist and a business owner, they said.

“Our perspective is that there’s no safe way to use it recreationally,” Banerji said. “At the very least, you should have your friends around you, so they can help if something happens.”

Easy to get

The latest FDA warnings on nitrous were prompted by “an increase in reports of adverse events after inhalation ...” according to a June update from the agency. That means increased risks of vitamin B12-deficiency and “related neurological and hematological effects associated with heavy use,” said the National Institutes of Health. Researchers from the Centers for Disease Control, the University of Mississippi, Michigan’s Wayne State University and others have also expressed concern this year about the rise they’ve documented in nitrous addiction and attributed deaths.

On Reddit, however, users casually discuss buying 35 to 50 lb. tanks of food-grade nitrous before concerts from Phish and Billy Strings, whether from wholesalers, or local head shops like Purple Haze and online retailers such as Amazon, eBay and Walmart.

Nitrous-product sales have gone up in recent months at Myxed Up Creations, said Kyle Manibusan, assistant manager at a Denver-area head shop location. He doesn’t question why people buy nitrous products there, but he does like to give “some knowledge and responsibility” before they purchase it, he said.

“This product can be used for many different things, including food services,” he said. “But you’re an adult and you know what you’re using it for.”

Even as sales have risen, Manibusan said he’s been concerned by the sight of spent chargers strewn across nearby playgrounds and parks. His shop only sells to customers 21 and up, and he said he believes kids shouldn’t go anywhere near it.

WEEKEND: FAMILY



PHOTOS BY MYUNG J. CHUN/TNS

Rebecca Zeitlin's concern for her 5-year-old son Will entering kindergarten (pictured below Aug. 16) is what she will pack for his lunch and how much. She wants to pack enough to last through his snack break and lunch.

Packing for a picky kid

Limited, consistent options fare best

BY KATE SEQUEIRA
Los Angeles Times

For Rebecca Zeitlin, packing her 5-year-old son's school lunch is always full of surprises. Offer him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich at home, and he won't touch it. But pack it in his lunch with fruits, vegetables and a small treat, and he'll dive in.

He will "chow down" on applesauce at preschool parties. But if she served him applesauce at home, "he'd look at me like I was crazy," Zeitlin said.

Like many parents, Zeitlin has been thinking about school lunch ahead of her son's first day of kindergarten. Lunchtime will be different than it was at his small private preschool, where teachers could more closely monitor whether he was eating.

She plans to start off with some of her usual go-tos. Perhaps she'll pack him chicken nuggets or pasta alongside strawberries, oranges or watermelon.

"I think it's going to be real interesting to see what next month is going to be like," Zeitlin said. "I've got my plans for now, but when reality hits, his lunches might look different."

For parents of children 5 and under, navigating school lunch can be challenging. Colorful videos fill TikTok and Instagram showing off creatively shaped sandwiches and neatly cut vegetables laid in bento box-like containers. Lunch box styles can make a difference, influencers advise, as they share school-friendly recipes.

It's easy for parents to worry that they got it wrong when a child returns home with uneaten food, said Anet Piridzhanyan, a clinical dietitian at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. Here are tips to make school lunches a success.

What should be in a toddler's lunch box?

It's important to remember that the start of the school year is exciting, but can also be overwhelming for a young child, said Lori Russell, a registered dietitian and nutritionist at the Mayo Clinic. It may not be that they don't like their food — they may simply be distracted. Either way, lean into familiarity to encourage them. And don't offer too many options.

"We have this tendency to overdo it," Russell said. "If parents want to fill that lunch box with everything that that kid might possibly consume that you have in the house, that's stressful."

Kids should have one main item in their lunch box



and two or three snacks, which could include carrot sticks or an apple and perhaps a small treat such as a piece of chocolate, she said. Piridzhanyan agreed, recommending that parents rotate through the five food groups throughout the week, packing different fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins and dairy.

Consistency is key. If a parent plans to offer something new in their child's lunch box, they should pair it with a food item they know their child likes, she added.

"They've only been around for two to five years, so it's not like us where, when we see food, we're like, 'Oh yeah, I know what that is,'" Piridzhanyan said.

What's the best type of lunch box?

It's important for parents to make sure that the food they pack is accessible and that they have the utensils and napkins that they need, the dietitians said. Parents should practice opening containers with their child and make sure the lunch box isn't too heavy.

Bento box-style lunch boxes with compartmentalized containers have been popularized on social media. "It's just kind of convenient," Zeitlin said. "Everything's in one place."

Russell, who has a 4-year-old, said that when a child likes their lunch box or container it can encourage them to eat.

It helps to know how the teacher or child-care provider stores the food, Piridzhanyan added. Sometimes kids will have access to a refrigerator, other times the food may be left out in the sun, so it helps to be able to plan accordingly by adding an ice pack or a thermos to help keep food safe and appetizing, she said.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



I love Lucy, especially her enviable twin bed

"You remind me of Lucille Ball," a military friend once said, chuckling after I told a funny story. The iconic 1960s television character with a fiery ginger updo looked nothing like me, but we share the same exaggerated facial expressions. As a fan of all things throwback, I took the comparison as a generous compliment.

A lifelong class clown, I related to Lucy's humorous antics. However, Lucy had something I coveted but couldn't have. She slept in a twin bed.

This scene detail seems insignificant, but Lucy was always so darned bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, while I groped through my days in a perpetually drowsy fog. Despite her ditzzy disposition, she knew better than to snuggle up to snoring Desi. When it was time to get her forty winks, Lucy snoozed soundly, all the way across the room.

I, on the other hand, lay each night right beside my husband, Francis, praying that I might squeeze in five meager hours of shuteye over the racket of his rattling airways.

During our first decade of marriage, bedtime was tolerable. Francis' snore fluctuated from relatively mere mild wheezing to mattress-vibrating rumbling.

Some evenings, Francis' slackened sinuses projected nothing more than a steady nose whistle punctuated by soft snorts, and I was able to sleep using a strategic combination of earplugs, elbowing and whispering, "Honey, turn on your side!" But other nights, his snoring was relentless, turning my mornings into a scene from "Dawn of the Dead."

Furthermore, when Francis partook in scotch and cigars with our base neighbors around our fire pit, his snoring was so loud that I'd grab my pillows and retreat to the couch.

During the second decade of marriage, Francis' snoring got worse. Researching online, I read a Finnish study concluding that women suffering from chronic sleep deprivation have significantly impaired ability to maintain peak cognitive performance. I found articles with headlines such as "For snoring spouses, separate beds may save marriage," "More couples getting 'sleep divorces,'" and "When happily ever after means separate beds." I wondered if twin beds might be good for our relationship.

However, I couldn't realistically suggest twin beds to Francis. On mornings when I'd resorted to the couch, he'd tsk at me as if I'd betrayed him. He never believed his snoring was bad, and thought I was being ridiculous.

It wasn't until Francis retired from the Navy, and we went on a family getaway to Vermont, that I was vindicated.

We reserved an open cabin room with a cozy fireplace where we slept with our three children. At breakfast the morning after our first night, our groggy youngest, Lilly, shared snippets of an overnight video she took on her phone.

The time-stamped footage showed teenaged Lilly illuminated under her covers, thumbing captions, "12:42 AM I can't sleep cuz Dad's snoring!" "2:26 AM Mom tried to make him stop, but nothing works!" "3:10 AM [Lilly weeping]."

In the background, we heard shockingly loud grinding coming from deep within Francis' respiratory tract, as if a meaty drill bit gnashed against his larynx, or a jackhammer battered his sinuses with each thundering inhale.

"That's not me, is it?" Francis asked incredulously.

A few months later, Francis was diagnosed with sleep apnea and outfitted with a CPAP machine. Arguably, snoozing in twin beds is more romantic than sleeping with a partner who has surgical tubing extending from his nostrils. But after decades of applying copious amounts of concealer to the bags under my eyes, I was relieved that I could finally sleep through the night.

Looking back, I'm glad we solved our problem without resorting to twin beds like Lucy. It may have taken us 20 years, but love is definitely worth losing a little sleep over.

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

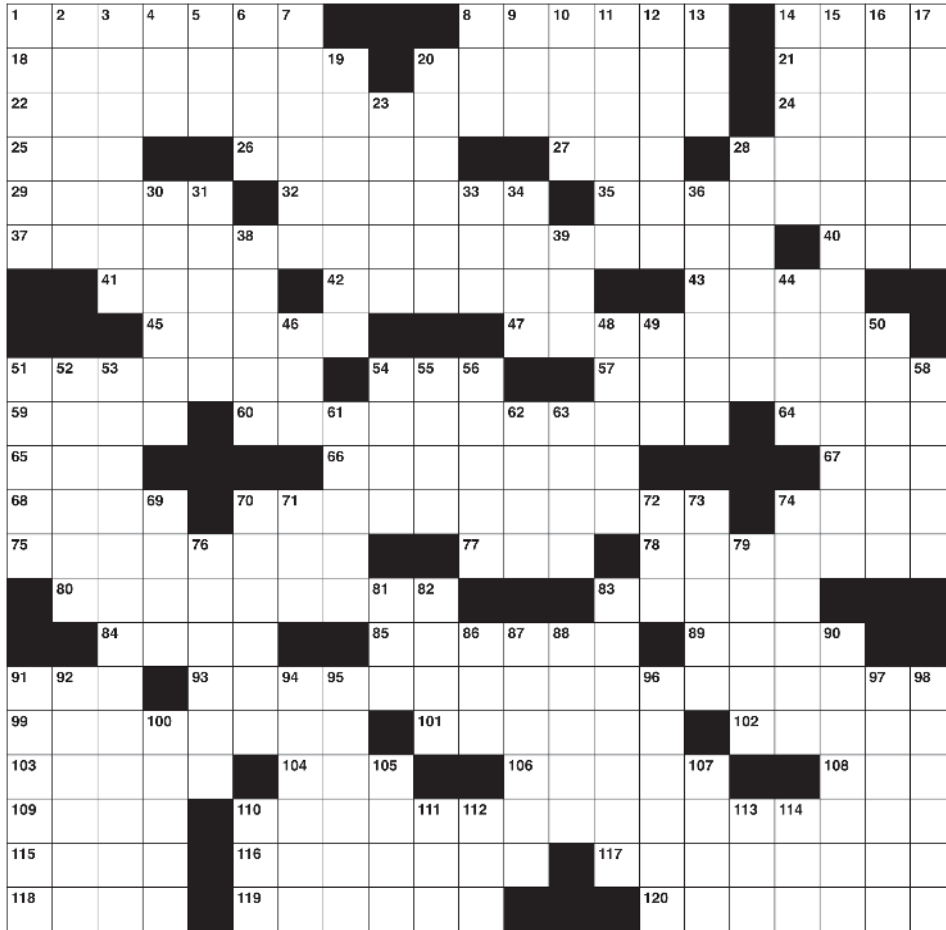
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

IXNAY THAT!

BY AMSAY EZERSKY / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Sam Ezersky, of Buffalo, is a digital puzzles editor for The Times. He has been creating crosswords for the paper since he was 17. His favorite ones to solve are "tough-as-nails themeless Saturdays." When he's constructing, Sam works hard to include answers with "interesting letters and fun cluing potential" over tired fill loaded with E's, R's, S's and T's. — W.S.

- ACROSS**
- 1 Sign off on
 - 8 Feel the pain
 - 14 One of music's Three B's
 - 18 They're paving the way
 - 20 Island with ferries to Ibiza
 - 21 Tangent line?
 - 22 One of the better morning beverages?
 - 24 Zoom background option
 - 25 Hrs. for Augusta in August
 - 26 "___ Q" (1968 hit)
 - 27 Styling substance
 - 28 "C'mon, the car door's open!"
 - 29 Avoid ___ (GPS option)
 - 32 Slice of the economy
 - 35 First non-English-language film to win Best Picture
 - 37 Just one inning left after this?
 - 40 Annual gala locale, with "the"
 - 41 Meat sauce in Italian cooking
 - 42 Go-getter sorts
 - 43 Trifling
 - 45 View from the Quai d'Orsay
 - 47 Character with a Jamaican accent in Disney's "The Little Mermaid"
 - 51 How a mountain road may rise or fall
 - 54 Threads, e.g.
 - 57 Query of worry
 - 59 Units on a multimeter
 - 60 Seasoning preference when eating Maryland blue crab?
 - 64 Berry plant related to a hawthorn
 - 65 The lion in summer?
 - 66 "So here's my question . . ."
 - 67 Humorous ending with hater
 - 68 Sephora competitor
 - 70 Two-pound tomahawk steak, for instance?
 - 74 Underwater respirator
 - 75 Home on the internet, perhaps
 - 77 Prescriptions, for short
 - 78 Arouses
 - 80 Slimy scheme for profit
 - 83 Listing that might include an explanation of benefits
 - 84 Anchors provide this
 - 85 Casual shoe
 - 89 New Jersey?
 - 91 A.C.C. school
 - 93 "Do I *really* wanna start an online bidding war? Hmm . . .?"
 - 99 Czech brew
 - 101 Move (over)
 - 102 Michael of R.E.M.
 - 103 The government, at times
 - 104 What Pomeranians do
 - 106 The (middle) sound of "silence"
 - 108 "___ but a scratch"
 - 109 Creature in Magic: The Gathering
 - 110 Give an extra perk to a cigarette smoker?
 - 115 Finish filming
 - 116 ___ Attucks, Revolutionary War casualty who posthumously became an abolitionist symbol
 - 117 Cherish
 - 118 No side
 - 119 Become gooey over, as cheese atop a hot burger
 - 120 They're usually found to the left of Q's
 - 13 Hindi for "reign"
 - 14 Sweethearts
 - 15 One of the best coffee beverages ever?
 - 16 Top execs, collectively
 - 17 Charlotte N.B.A. player
 - 19 Montreal newspaper continuously published since 1778, with "The"
 - 20 Get-together
 - 23 French city from which a soup gets its name
 - 28 Merriment, in one spelling
 - 30 Doesn't own, say
 - 31 Largest college fraternity in the U.S., familiarly
 - 33 No U.S. area code starts with this
 - 34 Nutrition figs.
 - 36 Minnesota county whose seat is St. Paul
 - 38 Artfulness
 - 39 Suffix with journal
 - 44 Some natural borders en México
 - 46 Greek goddess of the night
 - 48 Emperor who founded the Mughal Empire
 - 49 Palindromic constellation
 - 50 Noggin
 - 51 Latin for "only"
 - 52 What fugitives are on
 - 53 What might confirm the worst for an athlete's injury?
 - 54 Many a Bahraini
 - 55 Old El ___ (Tex-Mex brand)
 - 56 Game with an annual World Series since 1970
 - 58 Collapses, with "over"
 - 61 Smartphone clock function
 - 62 A bobcat is one, technically
 - 63 . . .
 - 69 Actress Bancroft
 - 70 Many-time N.B.A. All-Star Tatum
 - 71 Boot out of Australia?
 - 72 Creature with flat, transparent larvae called "leptocephali"
 - 73 ___ change
 - 74 Vodka-and-lime cocktail
 - 76 Metal material used for dishware before porcelain became popular
 - 79 Ta-tas
 - 81 In the style of
 - 82 School bathroom sign
 - 83 Spin a yarn, perhaps?
 - 86 Progressive initials in the U.S. Congress
 - 87 Puts icing on
 - 88 Methuselah's father
 - 90 Paramount+ docuseries with real-life crime stories
 - 91 Like Manhattan in the 80s and 90s?
 - 92 Cialis alternative
 - 94 Long-eared pal of Pooh
 - 95 Country whose name Americans spell with a "z"
 - 96 Szymic
 - 97 Abode that's abuzz
 - 98 "Ah, that's right!"
 - 100 Trickles
 - 105 Wicketless attention-getter
 - 107 Traveling in waves, say
 - 110 Vintage film channel
 - 111 Milestone for a start-up, for short
 - 112 Sister figure
 - 113 Pre-___ (exercise program in advance of surgery)
 - 114 Vowelless rebuke



GUNSTON STREET



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

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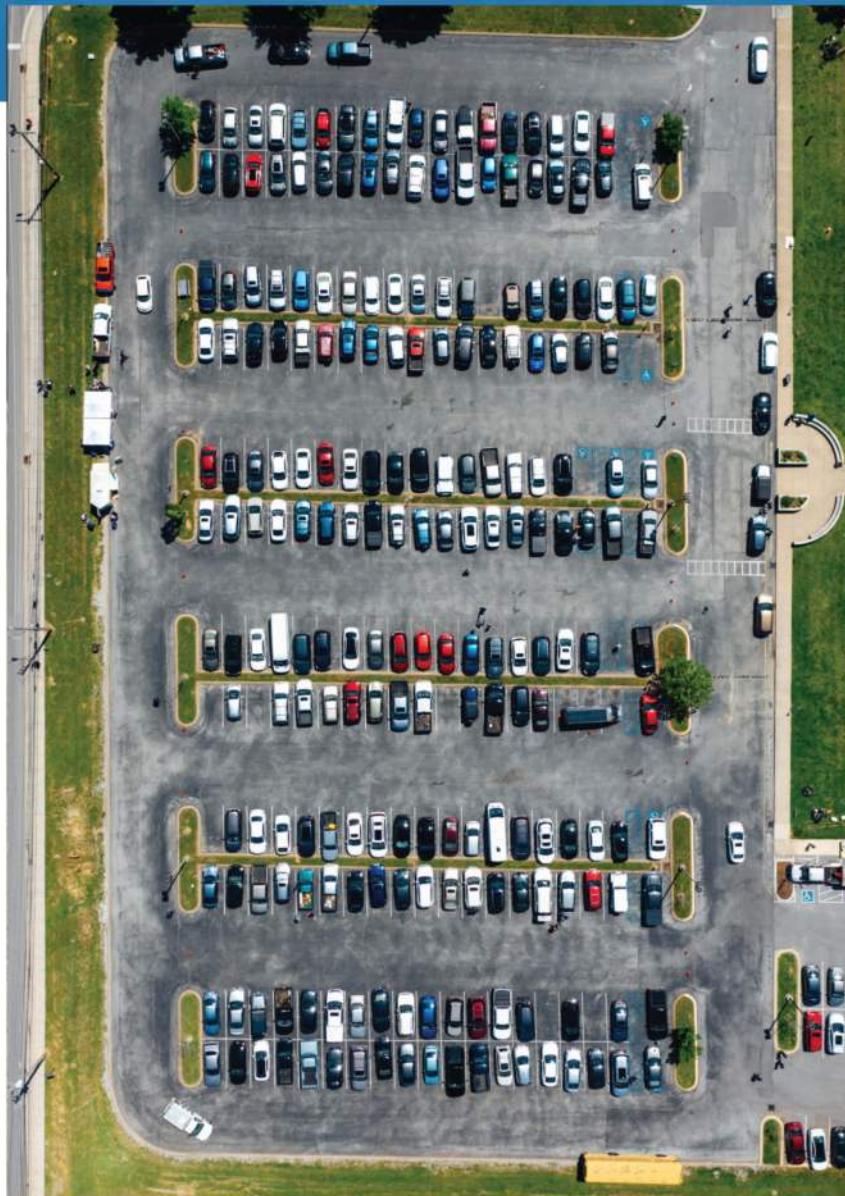
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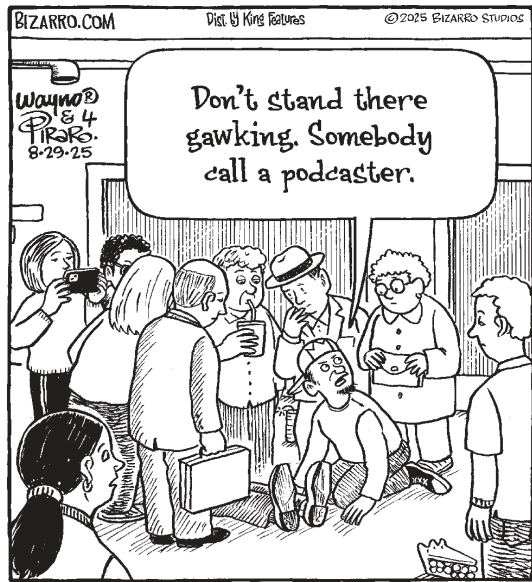
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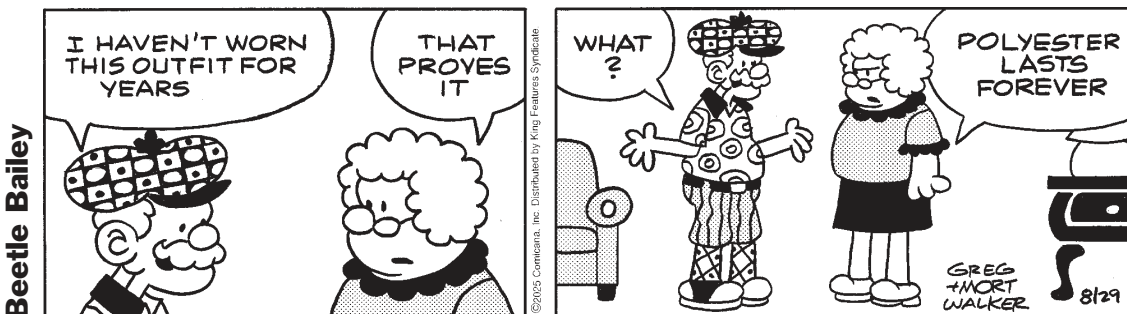
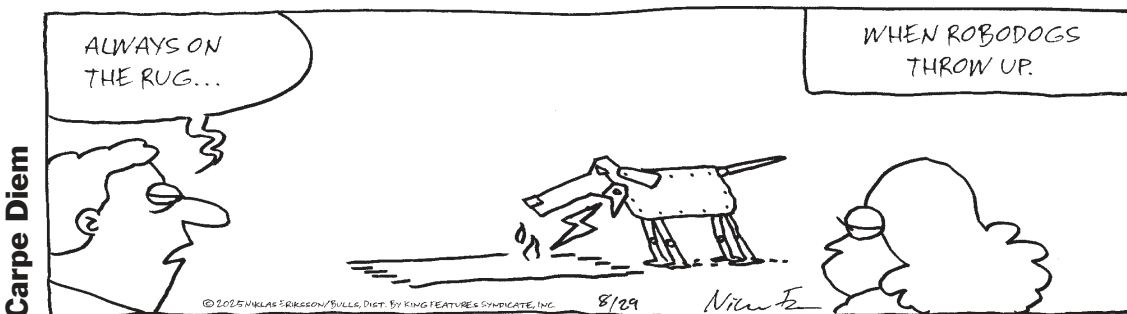
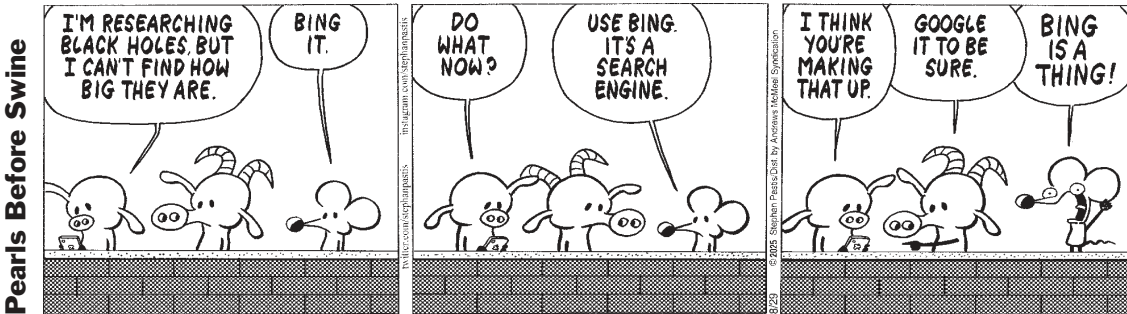
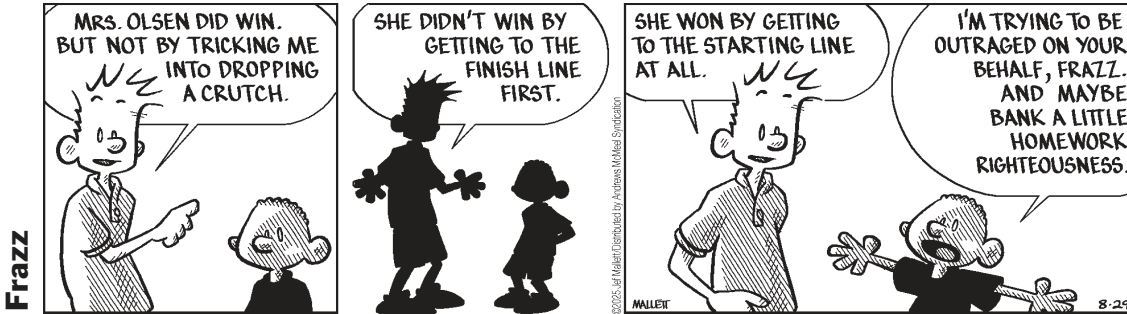
WHERE HEROES SHOP:
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SHOPMYEXCHANGE.COM/VETS



Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15			16						17			
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45	46	47				48	49					
50						51				52		
53						54				55		

- ACROSS**
- 1 Race segment
 - 4 Grand tale
 - 8 Sidewalk eatery
 - 12 Swiss peak
 - 13 Not pizzicato
 - 14 Filches
 - 15 Tropical fruit
 - 17 Yale students
 - 18 Stop
 - 19 Water-testing digit
 - 21 Scot's refusal
 - 22 Morticia or Gomez
 - 26 Stopwatch button
 - 29 Cover
 - 30 Avril follower
 - 31 Chopping tools
 - 32 Many millennia
 - 33 Shade
 - 34 Actress Farrow
 - 35 520, in old Rome
 - 36 Musical sounds
 - 37 Meryl of "The Post"
 - 39 Trim the grass
 - 40 Night school subj.
 - 41 Sports venues
 - 45 Tavern order
 - 48 JFK Terminal transport
 - 50 Hotel chain
 - 51 Concerning
 - 52 Hand-held organizer
 - 53 Brownish purple
- DOWN**
- 1 "Dragnet" org.
 - 2 Model Macpherson
 - 3 Transcript stats
 - 4 Bothers
 - 5 Chatter
 - 6 Here (Fr.)
 - 7 Hold
 - 8 Belief
 - 9 "You've got mail" ISP
 - 10 J. Edgar's org.
 - 11 "Heir" extension?
 - 16 Dressed to the —
 - 20 Quirky
 - 23 Whitaker's Oscar-winning role
 - 24 Long hair
 - 25 Poses
 - 26 Runs (into)
 - 27 Way out
 - 28 Blacken
 - 29 Bagel topper
 - 32 Clarify
 - 33 "Silver Ladders" composer
 - Joan
 - 35 — Moines
 - 36 Rich cakes
 - 38 Haunting
 - 39 Tie the knot
 - 42 Valley in Cali-ornia
 - 43 Helps
 - 44 Ginger cookie
 - 45 Conk on the head
 - 46 Big bird of Australia
 - 47 SASE, e.g.
 - 49 Pig-poke link

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

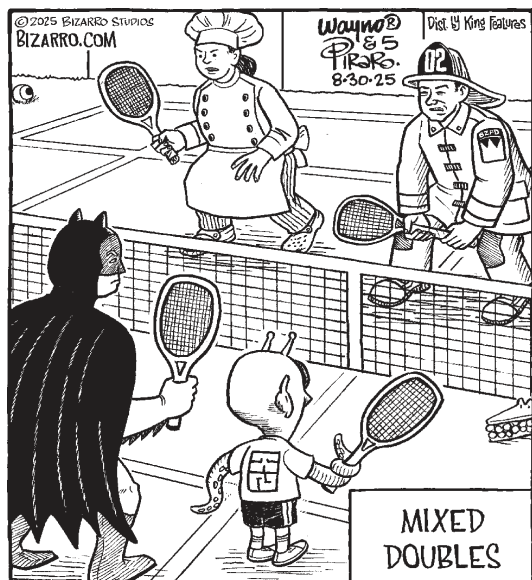
8-29 CRYPTOQUIP

CKS AR SRM FMOORFH WQDAF
 ZHTHD ODHONDH ERD IKQZBF
 QZ NATNZJH? WHJNMFH IKHS
 ODHEHD IR CQZB QI.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: BOTH OF THOSE UNTRAINED SCOTTIE DOGS ARE FRIGHTENING, BUT THAT ONE IS THE SCARIER TERRIER.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: O equals P

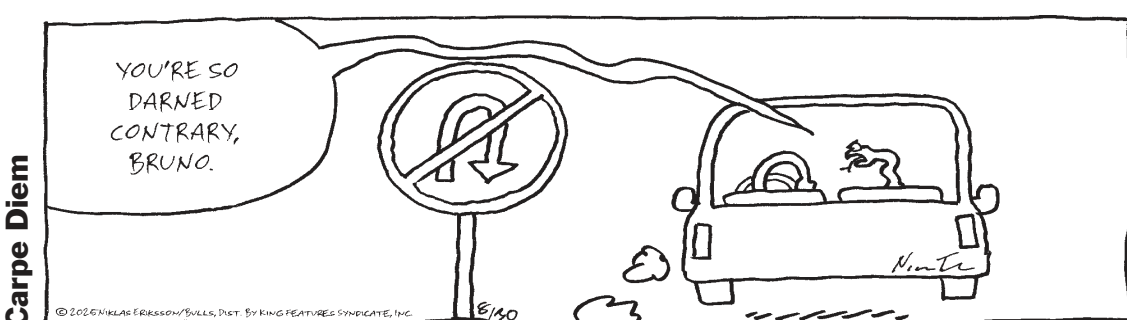
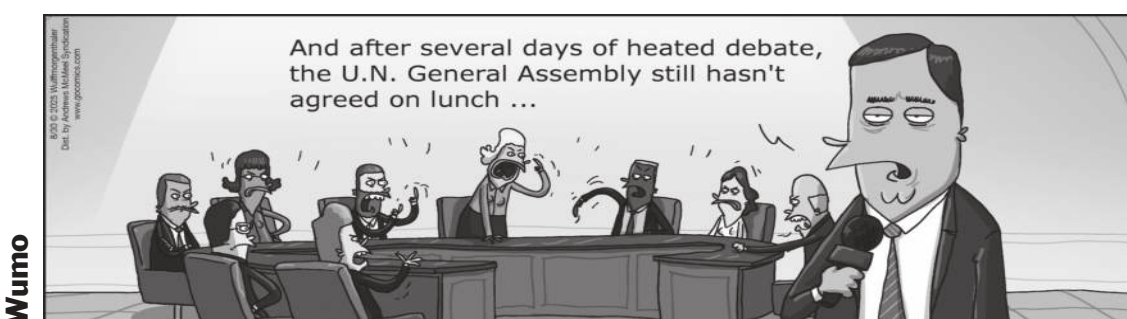
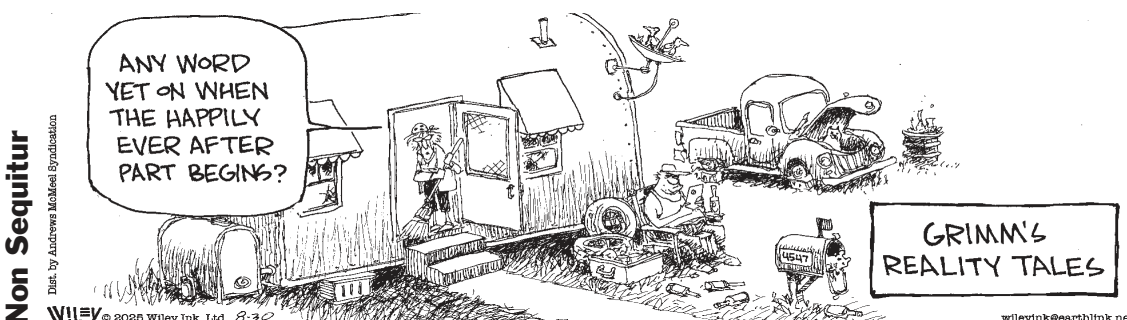
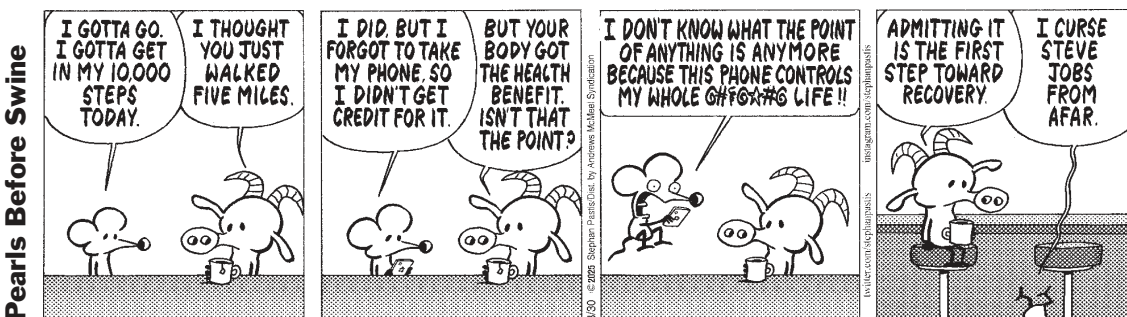
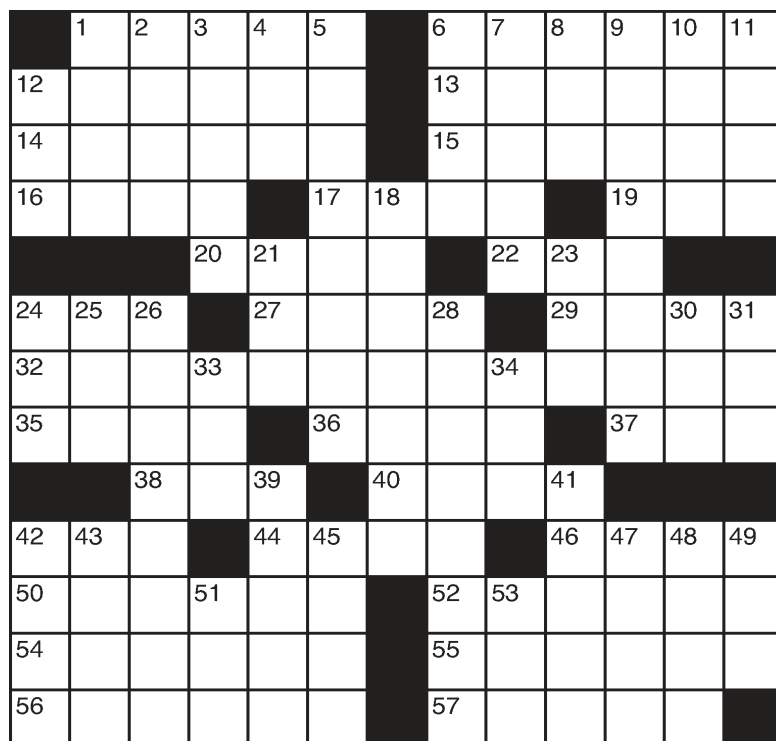
Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



- ACROSS**
- 1 Russian ballet company
 - 6 Degraded
 - 12 Italian sandwich
 - 13 Bagel choice
 - 14 Without markup
 - 15 "I'm all ears ..."
 - 16 Deli array
 - 17 Slightly
 - 19 Author Fleming
 - 20 Wrestling style
 - 22 Abel, to Eve
 - 24 Chances, for short
 - 27 Itsy-bitsy
 - 29 Opposite of "fer"
 - 32 Investor and philanthropist born on 8/30/1930
 - 35 Actress Falco
 - 36 Aviator's milestone
 - 37 Fan's shout
 - 38 — -di-dah
 - 40 Adjoining
 - 42 Docs' bloc
 - 44 Sunrise direction
 - 46 "Casablanca" role
 - 50 Foreign correspondent?
 - 52 Truly
 - 54 Harley riders
- DOWN**
- 1 Winslet of "Titanic"
 - 2 Bygone Peruvian
 - 3 Mob scenes
 - 4 Switch settings
 - 5 C and D, for two
 - 6 Spumante source
 - 7 Borscht base
 - 8 Visual communication syst.
 - 9 Caulfield's creator
 - 10 Tennis star Raducanu
 - 11 TV chef Paula
 - 12 Nonstick spray
 - 18 Chocolate treats
 - 21 Salt Lake athlete
 - 23 Klutz
 - 24 Have bills
 - 25 Small tablet
 - 26 Colombo's land
 - 28 Christmas season
 - 30 "Give — rest!"
 - 31 Ultimate
 - 33 Actor Stephen
 - 34 Sly one
 - 39 Core
 - 41 Kind of wave
 - 42 SFPD alerts
 - 43 Chow —
 - 45 To boot
 - 47 News story intro
 - 48 Beheld
 - 49 USN bigwig
 - 51 Zing
 - 53 Zilch

Answer to Previous Puzzle



8-30

CRYPTOQUIP

EY X QETJT KY YKOEXLT EV
 HTNQKZXZEOW NEVVEGL YZKN
 EHV HZTT, NELDH HDXH PT X
 OTXY KY XPVTGJT?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE BIRDS NEVER PREPARE FOR THINGS IN ADVANCE? BECAUSE THEY PREFER TO WING IT.
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Y equals F

STARS AND STRIPES.

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GOP won't let hypocrisy get in the way of tyranny

BY JONAH GOLDBERG

Tribune Content Agency

Even before America became a country, Americans already had a habit of freaking out about even minor violations of abstract principles.

"In other countries, the people... judge of an ill principle in government only by an actual grievance," observed Edmund Burke, the great British statesman and philosopher, in 1775. But in America, "they anticipate the evil, and judge of the pressure of the grievance by the badness of the principle. They augur misgovernment at a distance; and snuff the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze."

America's obsession with slippery slopes used to frustrate me. I support gun rights, but bans on machine guns or bump stocks do not overly trouble me. I'm a passionate defender of parental rights, but child abuse is intolerable. I think political speech is inviolate, but obscenity laws are fine by me.

The response to such nuance was often, "If the government can do this, what's to stop it from doing (insert something much, much, worse)."

My answer was usually "us" — i.e. Americans. Voters, politicians, intellectuals et al. can make distinctions based on context, reason and culture that still respect a principle. The trick, however, requires respecting the principle, even when inconvenient.

In the last month, President Donald Trump has sent troops — now armed — into the District of Columbia ostensibly to combat an ill-defined crime "emergency." Because of D.C.'s special constitutional status, he has the authority to do so. But he's already talking about taking the show on the road to Chicago,

Baltimore and New York, all cities that just happen to be run by Democrats.

The D.C. gambit — following an earlier scheme in Los Angeles — is partly intended to force Democrats to talk about crime (which they are very bad at). But it also seems intended to normalize using the Army on American soil, at the whim of the president, an idea that is directly contrary to the law and the constitutional order.

The Trump administration has acquired a 10% stake of Intel and wants more such "deals." It raided the home of a prominent critic, John Bolton, without much explanation. Annoyed by commentary from former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, the president threatened to reopen a criminal investigation in which Christie was already cleared of wrongdoing. Trump fired the head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics for releasing data he did not like, and fired the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency allegedly for a preliminary finding that contradicted his claims of military success (this on the heels of earlier Pentagon purges).

Trump successfully ordered a pliant Texas Republican governor and legislature — elected officials who do not answer to the federal government — to redraw state maps to produce more Republican friendly districts. He has declared he will lead an effort to dictate how elections are conducted — a function he has no legal or constitutional authority over — on the grounds that the states are merely "agents" of the federal government.

Since taking office, Trump has lawlessly defied Congress' explicit instruction to force the sale or termination of the Chinese spyware social media app TikTok. Last week, the White House opened a TikTok account.

Democrats have raised alarms about this hardly exhaustive list. They are obviously correct about the GOP's staggering hypocrisy. If a Democratic president did any of these things, Republican outrage would be biblical.

But the issue is bigger than that.

For my entire adult life, when conservatives raised concerns about the government intruding on constitutional rules and norms, Democrats (and the media) almost invariably responded with contemptuous eye-rolling and mockery. This is one of the reasons the new right no longer cares much about those rules and norms. They've convinced themselves that the left only cares about such things when they constrain Republicans.

Contempt breeds more contempt. Norms for thee, unrestrained power for me is a sure-fire way to destroy all norms.

I'm not saying that what Trump is doing isn't worse than what Democrats did — or wanted to do but failed. But in our politics, the ratchet effect always leads to ever greater violations, in part because each side wildly exaggerates the other's transgressions.

Point out that Trump is weaponizing the justice system or profiting off government, the reply is "they did it first." There's some truth there. But when Democrats did such things, Republicans shrieked that it was wrong. Now one team's wrongness is justification for even more wrongness.

Partisanship is not new. But partisans used to respect the rules as a way to ensure they were followed when their team was out of power. That's what has been lost: the idea that the rules should apply to your team, too.

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

Today's many college students are studying too little

BY GEORGE F. WILL

The Washington Post

Autumn, season of mists and mellow fruitfulness (Keats), is also when too many young Americans head to college, where too many of them will study too little under the undemanding supervision of faculty who teach too little. Colleges illustrate the seepage of rigor from American life.

Since 1990, college enrollment has increased by 6 million students (29%). Reasons for this include government tuition subsidies and "college for everyone" rhetoric. And "degree inflation": irrational requirements for job applicants.

Preston Cooper, then of the Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity, reported in 2023 that applicants for a \$35,600-per-year job driving an Oscar Mayer Wienermobile (a 27-foot-long motorized hot dog) had to have a bachelor's degree. In 2000, only 16% of prime-age workers earning \$35,000 (in today's dollars) had such degrees; by 2022, 24% did. In 1990, 9% of secretaries and administrative professionals had bachelor's degrees; today, 33% do, and a higher proportion of job listings require applicants to have one. This "paper ceiling" is especially egregious in state and local governments, where 63% of those earning between \$40,000 and \$60,000 have bachelor's degrees or higher. Only 28% of such earners in the private sector do.

A recent report from the Burning Glass Institute and the Strada Education Foundation says 52% of recent college graduates are underemployed: in jobs not using their college

learning. Meanwhile there are 750,000 industrial jobs unfilled.

Frederick M. Hess and Greg Fournier of the American Enterprise Institute document that "students spend far less time studying" than formerly. In 1961, the average full-time student at a four-year college studied 24 hours a week; today it's 14 hours. A 2016 analysis based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that "the average full-time college student spent only 2.76 hours a day on all education-related activities" (classes, out-of-class studying), a total of 19.3 hours per week.

The 2011 book "Academically Adrift" reported that first-year students spend 6.3 hours a week doing assigned reading, part of a total of 14.3 hours preparing for classes, a decline of about 50% from a few decades earlier. Today, Hess and Fournier say, faculty tend to think the figure is just 4.9 hours preparing for classes. This, although only 40% of students hold jobs, down from 79% in the mid-1990s.

Many students consider writing a 750-word essay "long." Although 64% of students say they devote "a lot" of effort to schoolwork, only 6% report spending more than 20 hours per week studying and doing homework. In 2024, 74% of first-year students reported no reading assignment longer than 11 pages and no writing assignment longer than five pages. And 51% of seniors said they had written nothing longer than 11 pages in their final year.

But as effort declines, grades rise. Hess and Fournier say, "At institutions like Harvard and Yale, the mean GPA is 3.7 or higher, and 80 percent of grades are at least an A-minus."

Economist Arnold Kling says that despite

the limited "natural demand" for college education ("students who are excited by academic subjects"), graduate schools continue to churn out more Ph.D.s (almost 60,000 in 2022) than the growth of undergraduate enrollment justifies. So, artificial student demand must be stimulated. Kling says "colleges adapt by offering dumbed-down courses and grade inflation."

And by teachers teaching less. Hess and Richard B. Keck, also of AEI, say light teaching loads have become badges of professional status — and require schools to rely on teaching by graduate students or part-time adjunct instructors. Tenured or tenure-track professors teach less and less. Most are on nine-month contracts requiring them to teach 13 weeks in each semester, or 26 weeks of the approximately 40 covered by the contracts — often about 15 hours a week each semester. Instead of teaching, teachers chase grants or participate in "publication inflation," filling the more than 24,000 "scholarly journals." This dilutes the quality of what is published — 215,000 articles from 2015 to 2019 — most of them ignored.

The College Board, administrators of the SAT, says college applicants taking the test will no longer need to demonstrate comprehension of 500- to 750-word reading passages. Instead, the passages will be of 25 to 150 words, suited to the attention spans of young minds formed by browsing social media. The board says the ability to comprehend passages of "extended length" (the length of this column, not "Middlemarch") is not "an essential prerequisite for college." What worse can be said about higher education today?

SCOREBOARD

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL Major League Baseball American League

ATHLETICS — Placed RHP Joey Estes on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 25. Recalled LHP Brady Basso from Las Vegas (PCL).

BALTIMORE ORIOLAS — Selected the contract of 3B Emmanuel Rivera from Norfolk (IL). Designated SS Vimaël Machin for assignment. Transferred RHP Brandon Young from the 15-day IL to the 60-day IL. Optioned RHP Yaramil Hiraldo to Norfolk. Selected the contract of RHP Roansy Contreras from Norfolk.

CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Placed OF Luis Robert Jr. on the 10-day IL. Recalled OF Will Robertson from Charlotte (IL).

DETROIT TIGERS — Sent OF Parker Meadows to Toledo (IL) on a rehab assignment. **HOUSTON ASTROS** — Placed C Victor Caratini on the 7-day concussion IL. Recalled C César Salazar from Sugar Land (PCL).

KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Agreed to terms with RHP Geoff Hartlieb on a minor league contract.

LOS ANGELES ANGELS — Sent OF Chris Taylor to Salt Lake (IL) on a rehab assignment. Recalled RHP Jack Kochanowicz from Salt Lake (PCL). Optioned RHP Sam Bachman to Salt Lake.

MINNESOTA TWINS — Reinstated RHP Simeon Woods Richardson from his rehab assignment and reinstated him from the 15-day IL. Optioned RHP Pierson Ohl to St. Paul (IL).

SEATTLE MARINERS — Recalled RHP Emerson Hancock from Tacoma (PCL). Optioned LHP Sauryn Lao to Tacoma.

TAMPA BAY RAYS — Sent OF Jonny DeLuca to Durham (IL) on a rehab assignment.

TEXAS RANGERS — Placed RHP Nathan Eovaldi on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 24. Recalled RHP Caleb Boushley from Round Rock (PCL). Agreed to terms with INF/OF Dylan Moore on a minor league contract.

National League

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS — Selected the contract of RHP Taylor Rashi from Reno (PCL). Optioned RHP Juan Morillo from Reno. Designated INF Tristin English for assignment.

CINCINNATI REDS — Placed RHP Graham Ashcraft on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 25. Reinstated LHP Nick Lodolo from the 15-day IL.

MIAMI MARLINS — Selected the contract of RHP Seth Martinez from Jacksonville (IL). Recalled RHP Freddy Tarnok from Jacksonville. Placed RHP Janson Junk on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 24. Optioned LHP Josh Simpson to Jacksonville.

MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Transferred RHP Logan Henderson from the 15-day IL, to the 60-day IL. Placed RHP Trevor Megill on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 25. Agreed to terms with RHP Erick Fedde on a major league contract.

NEW YORK METS — Sent CF Jose Siri and LF Jesse Winker to St. Lucie (FSL) on a rehab assignment. Sent OF Francisco Alvarez to Syracuse (IL) on a rehab assignment. Recalled RHP Kevin Herget from Syracuse.

SAN DIEGO PADRES — Agreed to terms with C Christopher Sargent on a minor league contract.

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS — Placed LHP John King on the 15-day IL, retroactive to August 26. Recalled RHP Andre Granillo from Memphis (IL).

BASKETBALL Women's National Basketball Association

GOLDEN STATE VALKYRIES — Signed G Bree Hall to a seven-day contract.

FOOTBALL National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS — Signed WRs Andre Baccellia, Simi Fehoko and Tejhaun Palmer, LB Elliott Brown, OL Jeremiah Byers, Jake Curham, Sincere Haynesworth and Nick Leverett, TE Josiah Deguara and DL Anthony Goodlow and Elijah Simmons to the practice squad.

ATLANTA FALCONS — Acquired OF Michael Jerrell from Seattle in exchange for a 2027 seventh-round draft pick. Placed RT Kaleb McGary on injured reserve. Signed K Lenny Krieg, WRs Chris Blair, Dylan Drummond and Nick Nash, CBS Cobee Bryant and C.J. Henderson, OL Joshua Gray and Brandon Parker, S Ronnie Harrison, EDGE

Khalid Kareem, TE Joshua Simon, QB Easton Stick, DL Kentavious Street and RB Carlos Washington Jr. to the practice squad.

BALTIMORE RAVENS — Signed S Kyle Hamilton to a four-year contract extension. Signed QB Tyler Huntley, WRs Anthony Miller and Keith Kirkwood, CBs Marquise Robinson and Thomas Graham Jr., RB D'Ernest Johnson, S Keondre Jackson, FB Lucas Scott, LBs Chandler Martin, Kaimon Rucker and Malik Hamm, DL Brent Urban and C.J. Okoye, C Nick Samac, G Jared Penning, T Gerard Lichtenhan and TE Zaire Mitchell-Paden to the practice squad.

BUFFALO BILLS — Signed QB Shane Buechele, RB Frank Gore Jr., WRs Stephen Gonnell and Kristian Wilkerson, TE Keleki Latu, OL Travis Clayton, Dan Feeney and Kendrick Green, DL Zion Logue and Jordan Phillips, LBs Jimmy Ciarlo and Keonta Jenkins, CBs Daequan Hardy and Dane Jackson and SS Jordan Poyer and Sam Franklin to the practice squad.

CAROLINA PANTHERS — Claimed CB Damarri Mathis off waivers from Denver and WR Dalevon Campbell from the Los Angeles Chargers. Waived DT Jaden Crumedy. Signed LBs Krys Barnes and Mapalo Mwansa, CBs Shemar Bartholomew and Mike Reid, OL Boogie Basham, DE Jared Harrison-Hunte, OL Jarrett Kingston and Brandon Walton, OT Mike Tarquin, DT Sam Roberts, TE Bryce Pierre, WR Ja'seem Reed and S Trevian Thomas to the practice squad.

CHICAGO BEARS — Signed WRs Maurice Alexander, Miles Boykin and JP Richardson, RB Brittain Brown, TE Stephen Carlson, DL Xavier Carlton, Jonathan Ford, Tanoah Kpassagnon and Jamree Kromah, LB Power Echols, LS Luke Elkin, DBs Tre Flowers and Mekhi Garner and OL Jordan McFadden and Ricky Stromberg to the practice squad. Claimed LB D'Marco Jackson from New Orleans and LB Jaylon Jones from Arizona. Released DS Scott Daly and WR Devin Duvernay.

CINCINNATI BENGALS — Signed HBs Gary Brightwell and Kendall Milton, OTs Devin Cochran and Andrew Coker, CBs Jalen Davis and Bralyn Lux, LBs Joe Giles-Harris and Maema Njongmeta, G James Kirkland, C Seth McLaughlin, WRs Jordan Moore and Isaiah Williams and DE Isaiah Thomas and QB Brett Rypien to the practice squad.

CLEVELAND BROWNS — Claimed DB Jarrick Bernard-Converse from the New York Jets and RB Raheim Sanders from the Los Angeles Chargers. Waived TE Brenden Bates and CB Dom Jones. Signed TE Sal Cannella, WR Kaden Davis, Ss Christopher Edmonds, CB LaMareon James, DTs Ralph Holley and Sam Kamara, RBs Ahmani Marshall and Trayveon Williams and DE Julian Okwara to the practice squad.

DALLAS COWBOYS — Claimed DB Trikweze Bridges off waivers from the Los Angeles Chargers and DB Reddy Steward from Minnesota. Waived CBs Andrew Booth and Zion Childress. Signed WRs Jalen Brooks, Traeshon Holden and Jalen Cropper, DT Earnest Brown IV, OL Saahdiq Charles, OT Geron Christian, Ss Alijah Clark, RB Malik Davis, TEs Rivaldo Fairweather and Princeton Fant, QB Will Grier, CBs Robert Rochell and Kemon Hall and LBs Justin Barron and Buddy Johnson to the practice squad. Placed CB Caelen Carson and RB Phil Mahaf on injured reserve. Signed OT Hakeem Adeniji and CB C.J. Goodwin to the active roster.

DENVER BRONCOS — Signed ILBs Jordan Turner, Garret Wallow and Levell Bailey, WRs Michael Bandy and A.T. Perry, QB Sam Ehlinger, TE Caleb Lohner, C Joe Michalski, NT Jordan Miller, CBs Reese Taylor, Jaden Robinson and Quinton Newsome, FB Adam Prentice, DB Keidron Smith, G Calvin Throckmorton and S Delarion Turner-Yell to the practice squad.

DETROIT LIONS — Claimed DT Tyler Lacy off waivers from Jacksonville and Tyrus Wheat from Dallas. Signed DL Myles Adams and Keith Cooper, WRs Ronnie Bell, Tom Kennedy and Jackson Meeks, OLs Trystan Colon, Mason Miller, Michael Niese and Dan Skipper, LB Anthony Pittman, RB Jacob Saylors, S Loren Strickland, TE Zach Horton and EDGE Isaac Ukwu to the practice squad.

GREEN BAY PACKERS — Signed LB Nick Niemann to a contract. Released CB Micah Robinson. Signed RB Israel Abanikanda, DL Deshaun Alexander, James Ester and Arnon Mosby, DBs Johnathan Baldwin and Jaylin Simpson, T Brant Banks, WRs Mecole Hardman, Isaiah Neyor and Will Sheppard, LBs Jamon Johnson and Kristian Welch and K Mark McNamee to the practice squad.

HOUSTON TEXANS — Signed TE Harrison

Bryant, DE Solomon Byrd, C Eli Cox, LBs K.C. Ossai and Jackson Woodard, DB Myles Bryant, DTs Junior Tafuna and Hagai Nduhuisi, OLs Jaylon Thomas and Trent Brown, FB Jakob Johnson, TE Luke Lachey and WR Jared Wayne to the practice squad.

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS — Claimed LB Chad Muma off waivers from Jacksonville. Signed LBs Austin Ajiake, DE Durrell Nchami, CB Chris Lammons, WRs Tyler Kahmann and Coleman Owen, RBs Ulysses Bentley IV and Khalil Herbert, T Marcellus Johnson, OL G Josh Sills, C Mose Vavao, DT Josh Tupou and TEs Maximilian Mang and Sean McKeon, S Trey Washington to the practice squad.

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Acquired WR Tim Patrick from Detroit in exchange for a 2026 sixth-round draft pick. Signed WRs Chandler Brayboy and Dorian Singer, OL Jerome Carvin, Ricky Lee and Sal Wormley, LB Branson Combs, QB Seth Henigan, TE Patrick Herbert and Quintin Morris, RB Ja'Quinden Jackson, CB Keni-H Lovely, DBs Jabbar Muhammad and Cam'Ron Silmon-Craig and DL Keivie Rose to the practice squad.

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS — Signed LB Cole Christiansen, Ss Mike Edwards, CBs Kevin Knowles and Melvin Smith, WRs Jimmy Holiday and Hal Presley, DTs Coziah Izzard and Marlon Tuipulotu, RB Carson Steele, TE Robert Tonyan and Tre Watson, QB Chris Oladokun and T Chukwuebuka Godrick, G C.J. Hanson to the practice squad.

LAS VEGAS RAIDERS — Signed WRs Alex Bachman, Shedrick Jackson and Justin Shorter, RB Chris Collier, QBs Cam Miller, TE Albert Okwuegbunam Jr. and Carter Rynyon, OL Laki Tasi, Antonio Mafi and T Dalton Wagner, DT Treven Ma'ae, DE Jahfari Harvey, LBs Matt Jones, CB Greedy Vance and Ss Terrell Edmunds, Trey Taylor and JT Woods to the practice squad. Waived OT Thayer Munford.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Signed G Karsen Barnhart, DL Te'rah Edwards, CBs Harrison Hand and Myles Purchase, WRs Ja'Quae Jackson and Jalen Reagor, S Tony Jefferson, LB Emamy Johnson, C Josh Kaltenberger, LS Rick Lovato, RBs Nyheim Miller-Hines and Kimani Vidal, OLB Garmon Randolph, T David Sharpe, G Branson Taylor, QB DJ Uiagalelei and TE Thomas Yassmin to the practice squad.

LOS ANGELES RAMS — Signed OL A.J. Arcuri, Wyatt Bowles and Dylan McMahon, WRs Tru Edwards and Brennan Presley, CBs A.J. Green and Cam Lampkin, DTs Jack Heflin and Bill Norton, LBs Jamil Muhamamad and Elias Neal, RBs Ronnie Rivers and Cody Schrader, Ss Tanner Ingle and Nate Valcarcel to the practice squad.

MIAMI DOLPHINS — Signed CB Rasul Douglas and T Kendall Lamm to contracts. Placed CB Cam Smith on the NFL list. Waived CBs Isaiah Johnson, BJ Adams and Ethan Robinson, WRs Andrew Armstrong, Erik Ezukanma, AJ Henning and Theo Wease Jr., OL Mason Brooks, Braeden Daniels, Jalen McKenzie, Josh Priebe and Addison West, T Ryan Hayes, DTs Alex Huntley and Ben Stille, LBs Dequan Jackson, Mohamed Kamara, Derrick McLendon, Grayson Murphy and Channing Tindall, SS Jordan Colbert, Patrick McMorris and John Saunders Jr., TE Hayden Rucci and RB Aaron Shampkin. Waived/injured T Bayron Matos and LB Eugene Asante. Claimed DB Julius Brents off waivers from Indianapolis. Placed OL Liam Eichenberg on the PUP list and C Andrew Meyer and K Jason Sanders on injured reserve.

MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Traded a 2026 fifth-round draft pick and a 2027 fourth-round pick to Carolina in exchange for WR Adam Thielen, a conditional 2026 seventh-round pick and a 2027 fifth-round pick. Signed WRs Tim Jones, Jeshua Jones, Lucky Jackson and Dontae Fleming, CBS Zemaiah Vaughn and Fabian Moreau, TEs Nick Vannett and Bryson Nesbit, RB Zazavian Valladay, OLB Gabriel Murphy, Gs Vershon Lee and Henry Byrd, DLs Jonathan Harris and Taki Taimani and OL Max Pircher to the practice squad.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Claimed QB Tommy DeVito off waivers from the New York Giants and DB Charles Woods from the Los Angeles Rams. Released WRs Javon Baker and Kendrick Bourne. Signed CBS Miles Battle and Brandon Crossley, Gs Mehki Butler and Jack Conley, TE S.C. Dippre and Gee Scott Jr., RB Terrell Jennings, WRs John Jiles and Jeremiah Webb, DE Truman Jones, C Alec Lindstrom, DB Kobe Minor, DTs David Olajiga and Jahveare Ritzie and LBs Cam Riley and Brady Swain to the practice squad.

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Claimed WR Trey Palmer off waivers from Tampa Bay

and G Xavier Truss from Denver. Released WR Cedrick Wilson and TE Jack Stoll. Signed WRs Kevin Austin Jr. and Cedrick Wilson Jr., CBs Dalys Beaman and Jayden Price, Ss Terrell Burgess and Elliott Davison, QBs Hunter Dekkers and Jake Haener, DEs Fadi Diggs and Jonah Williams, T Easton Kilty, LBs Nephi Sewell, K Charlie Smyth and TEs Jack Stoll and Treyton Welch to the practice squad.

NEW YORK GIANTS — Claimed DB Beau Brade from Baltimore and CB Rico Payton from New Orleans. Signed DL Elijah Chatman, Elijah Garcia and Jordan Riley, OLBs Trace Ford and Tomon Fox, WRs Lil'Jordan Humphrey and Ihmir Smith-Marsette, C Bryan Hudson, G Jake Kubas, RB Dante Miller, CB Dee Williams, S Raheem Layne and K Jude McAtamney to the practice squad.

NEW YORK JETS — Claimed TE Jelani Woods off waivers from Indianapolis, LB Cam Jones and T Esa Pole from Kansas City. Waived WR Tyler Johnson, LB Zaire Barnes and G Marquis Hayes. Signed Ss Dean Clark and Jordan Clark, QB Brady Cook, WRs Tyler Johnson, Jamaal Pritchett, Quentin Skinner and Brandon Smith, Gs Kohl Levas and Leander Wiegand, K Harrison Mevius, DT Payton Page, LBs Jackson Sirmion and Boog Smith and DL Eric Watts to the practice squad.

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Waived G Trevor Keegan. Claimed OL Willie Lampkin off waivers from the Los Angeles Rams. Signed LBs Chance Campbell, OLBs Patrick Johnson and Antwaun Powell-Ryland, WRs Elijah Cooks and Terrace Marshall, G Kenyon Green, T Hollin Pierce, QBs Kyle McCord, CBs Brandon Johnson, Parry Nickerson and Eli Ricks, TEs E.J. Jenkins and Cameron Latu and S Andre Sam to the practice squad.

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Claimed DT Jordan Jefferson off waivers from Jacksonville. Signed CBs Eli Apple, WRs Junior Bergen, Robbie Chosen and Malik Turner, DL William Bradley-King, Trevis Gipson and Sebastian Valdez, DB Derrick Canteen, LBs Jalen Graham and Curtis Robinson, OL Drake Nugent and Nick Zakelj and TE Brayden Willis to the practice squad. Re-signed P Thomas Morstead to a contract. Placed WR Jacob Cowing on injured reserve.

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Claimed DB Deion Kendrick off waivers from the Los Angeles Rams. Released CB Shaquill Griffin. Signed DTs Quinton Bohanna, Anthony Campbell and J.R. Singleton, DE Jalen Gaines, CB Shemar Jean-Charles, Ts Amari Kight, G Sataoa Laumea, C Federico Maranges, RBs Damien Martinez, Anthony Tyus III and Jacardia Wright, LBs Patrick O'Connell and Jamie Sheriff, NT Brandon Pili, Ss Jerrick Reed II and WRs Tyrone Broden and Ricky White III to the practice squad.

TAMPA BAY BUCCANERS — Signed LB Nick Jackson, OLs Michael Jordan, Luke Haggard, Ben Scott, Lorenz Metz and Tyler McLellan, WRs Garrett Greene and Dennis Houston, CB Bryce Hall, DLs C.J. Brewer, Nash Huttmacher, Jayson Jones and Adam Gotsis, TE Tanner Taula and QB Connor Bazelak to the practice squad.

TENNESSEE TITANS — Signed DT Shy Tuttle to a contract. Released C Corey Levin. Waived DT Timmy Horne, LB Curtis Jacobs, CB Gabe Judy-Lally and OL John Ojukwu. Claimed CBS Jalyn Armour-Davis and Samuel Womack III, LB Dorian Mausi and DL C.J. Ravenell off waivers. Signed WRs Mason Kinsey, Xavier Restrepo and James Proche II, QB Trevor Siemian, OL Andrew Ruppich, DTs Isaiah Raikes and Cam Horsley, DEs Ali Gaye and Carlos Watkins, RBs Jordan Mims and Jermar Jefferson, DBs Kendall Brooks and Amani Oruwariye and TE Thomas Odukoya to the practice squad.

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS — Signed DTs Ricky Barber and Sheldon Day, WRs Ja'Corey Brooks, Jacoby Jones and Chris Moore, TE Lawrence Cager, C Michael Deiter, G Timothy McKay, DEs Jalyn Holmes and T.J. Maguranyanga, CBS Antonio Hamilton Sr. and Carlin Vigers, QB Sam Hartman and S Rob McDaniel to the practice squad.

SOCCER Major League Soccer

LOS ANGELES FC — Announced the retirement of D Maxime Chanot.

SAN ANTONIO FC — Signed F Kyle Linhares to a contract.

National Women's Soccer League

WASHINGTON SPIRIT — Traded F Mackenna Morris to Racing Louisville FC in exchange for \$115k in allocation funds.

PRO SOCCER

MLS

Western Conference						
	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
San Diego FC	16	7	5	53	52	33
Minn. United	14	6	8	50	47	31
Vancouver	14	6	7	49	47	31
Seattle	12	7	8	44	48	38
LAFC	11	6	8	41	44	31
Portland	10	9	8	38	35	37
Colorado	10	12	6	36	36	44
San Jose	9	11	8	35	52	48
Austin FC	9	9	8	35	26	32
Real Salt Lake	9	14	4	31	28	36
FC Dallas	7	11	9	30	39	47
Houston	7	12	8	29	34	44
Sporting KC	6	15	6	24	39	55
St Louis City	5	16	6	21	31	47
LA Galaxy	4	16	7	19	32	55
Eastern Conference						
	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Philadelphia	16	6	6	54	48	26
Cincinnati	16	8	4	52	42	35
Nashville	15	8	5	50	49	32
Charlotte FC	15	11	2	47	46	39
Orlando City	13	7	8	47	54	40
Inter Miami CF	13	5	7	46	54	40
Columbus	12	6	9	45	43	39
NYC FC	13	8	5	44	37	30
New York	11	11	6	39	42	38
Chicago	11	10	6	39	50	48
New England	8	12	7	31	35	38
Toronto FC	5	13	9	24	27	34
CF Montréal	5	15	8	23	28	50
Atlanta	4	12	11	23	31	49
D.C. United	4	15	9	21	24	53

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

Saturday's games

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 FC
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's game

San Diego FC at Los Angeles FC

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Kansas City	14	2	1	43	34	10
Washington	9	4	4	31	28	24
San Diego	8	4	5	29	28	19
Orlando	8	5	4	28	22	13
Portland	7	5	5	26	25	19
Seattle	7	5	5	26	25	21
Louisville	7	6	4	25	23	27
Gotham FC	5	6	6	21	20	16
North Carolina	5	6	6	21	23	26
Angel City	5	7	5	20	22	27
Houston	5	8	4	19	20	27
Bay FC	4	8	5	17	20	25
Chicago	1	9	7	10	18	35
Utah Royals FC	1	11	5	8	12	31

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

Friday's games

Houston at Louisville
Gotham FC at Orlando
San Diego at Seattle
Utah Royals FC at Portland

Saturday's game

North Carolina at Kansas City
Sunday's game
Chicago at Washington

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA

Eastern Conference				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	24	14	.632	—
New York	23	15	.605	1
Indiana	20	18	.526	4
Washington	16	22	.421	8
Connecticut	10	28	.263	14
Chicago	9	28	.243	14½
Western Conference				
	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Minnesota	30	7	.811	—
x-Las Vegas	26	14	.650	5½
Phoenix	23	14	.622	7
Golden State	19	18	.514	11
Seattle	20	19	.513	11
Los Angeles	17	19	.472	12½
Dallas	9	30	.231	22

x-clinched playoff spot

Tuesday's games

Indiana 95, Seattle 75
Phoenix 92, Los Angeles 84

Wednesday's games

Las Vegas 81, Atlanta 75
Connecticut 101, Dallas 95

Thursday's games

Washington at New York
Seattle at Minnesota
Chicago at Phoenix

Friday's games

Dallas at Atlanta
Indiana at Los Angeles

Saturday's games

Minnesota at Connecticut
Washington at Golden State
Chicago at Seattle
New York at Phoenix

Sunday's games

Washington at Los Angeles
Indiana at Golden State

TENNIS

US Open

Wednesday
At USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center
New York
Purse: \$31,620,000
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Seeding in parentheses
Men's Singles
Second Round

Jiri Lehecka (20), Czechia, def. Tomas Martin Etcheverry, Argentina, 3-6, 6-0, 6-2, 6-4.

Novak Djokovic (7), Serbia, def. Zachary Svajda, United States, 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-3, 6-1.
Tomas Machac (21), Czechia, def. Joao Fonseca, Brazil, 7-6 (4), 6-2, 6-3.

Jerome Kym, Switzerland, def. Brandon Nakashima (30), United States, 4-6, 7-6 (2), 7-5, 3-6, 7-6 (8).

Raphael Collignon, Belgium, def. Casper Ruud (12), Norway, 6-4, 3-6, 3-6, 6-4, 7-5.
Taylor Fritz (4), United States, def. Lloyd Harris, South Africa, 4-6, 7-6 (3), 6-2, 6-4.

US OPEN/AUTO RACING

Djokovic advances again despite more lingering struggles

By HOWARD FENDRICH
Associated Press

NEW YORK — For the second contest in a row at this U.S. Open, Novak Djokovic appeared a bit sluggish, a bit off, for a stretch. This time, he even dropped the opening set. And then, as always at Flushing Meadows, the 24-time Grand Slam champion progressed to the third round.

Djokovic improved to 36-0 across the first and second rounds in New York, a place he's won four championships, by coming back to beat 145th-ranked American qualifier Zachary Svajda 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-3, 6-1 at Arthur Ashe Stadium on Wednesday.

"I really tried to soak it in and enjoy the moment, especially when I won the first set," said Svajda, a 22-year-old from San Diego. "It kind of shocked me. I was like, 'Wow!'"

Asked on court afterward how he felt in his first competition since losing to eventual champion Jannik Sinner in the Wimbledon semifinals on July 11 while hindered by a groin injury, Djokovic replied: "Not that great, to be honest."

Svajda noticed.

"He was missing a little bit," said Svajda, who got cramps in his legs and arms as the match wore on. "He was getting a little frustrated."

At his news conference later, the 38-year-old Djokovic spoke a little more about his mood.

"It's not a motivation thing. It's just like me a bit frustrated with my game, and then I kind of go through stuff internally that — you don't want to know the details what I'm going through and telling myself," he explained after getting to the third round at a major for the 75th time, breaking a tie with Roger Federer for the most such appearances by a man.

"I'm just trying to be locked in. Just trying to solve the riddle once

I'm on the court," Djokovic continued. "It's not like I'm not finding joy on the court competing. I enjoy competing, but I don't enjoy not playing well. That's why I put extra pressure on myself and my team to be better the next day, the next match."

That will come against Cam Norrie, a British left-hander who reached the semifinals at Wimbledon in 2022 and is 0-6 against Djokovic.

Norrie got past Francisco Comesana of Argentina 7-6 (5), 6-3, 6-7 (0), 7-6 (4) in four hours, and now it's his turn to face the task that Svajda did Wednesday against Djokovic.

"He does everything so well, which is incredible," Svajda said. "I was talking to my team and coaches before, trying to figure it out. It's Novak Djokovic, so there's not a big weakness."

Elsewhere, Taylor Townsend and Jelena Ostapenko got into a face-to-face argument on the Court 11 sideline right after Townsend won their second-round match 7-5, 6-1. Townsend, an American who is ranked No. 1 in doubles, said Ostapenko, a Latvian who won the 2017 French Open, told her she has "no class" and "no education."

No. 5 seed Jack Draper, a semifinalist in 2024, withdrew because of a lingering injury to his left arm. Other winners included defending champion Aryna Sabalenka, both of last year's runners-up — Jessica Pegula and Taylor Fritz — along with Carlos Alcaraz, Ben Shelton, Frances Tiafoe, 2021 champion Emma Raducanu and Emma Navarro. No. 12 Casper Ruud, whose 0-3 record in Grand Slam finals includes a loss to Alcaraz at Flushing Meadows in 2022, was eliminated 6-4, 3-6, 3-6, 6-4, 7-5 by Raphael Collignon of Belgium. The 107th-ranked Collignon had never won a match at a major or played a five-setter until this tournament.



KIRSTY WIGGLESWORTH/AP

Novak Djokovic, of Serbia, pretends to play the violin after defeating Zachary Svajda, of the United States, during the second round of the U.S. Open on Wednesday in New York.



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Ryan Blaney, center, celebrates in Victory Lane after winning a NASCAR Cup Series race at Daytona International Speedway on Saturday in Daytona Beach, Fla.

NASCAR's playoffs set with no clear favorite

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Nobody cheered Ryan Blaney louder to win NASCAR's regular-season finale than Alex Bowman, who vowed to buy Blaney 7 million beers for the Daytona victory that saved Bowman's spot in the playoffs.

Bowman had wrecked out at Daytona very early Saturday night and had to watch on television as Blaney won a four-wide race across the finish line to stop a gaggle of long-shot drivers from snagging Bowman's spot in the 16-driver field.

His relief was a contrast to the frustration shown by Tyler Reddick, last year's regular-season champion, who limped into the playoffs this year. Like Bowman, he also wrecked early, but his points total was better, so once Bowman was out of the race, Reddick was locked in.

But his 23XI team heads into the playoffs in a slump, a year after making it all the way to NASCAR's championship-deciding season finale, and Reddick hasn't had the consistency it will take to race again for the Cup title. Who has?

Well, no single team has emerged as the favorite as NASCAR heads to Darlington Raceway for Sunday's playoff opener. Kyle Larson is the top seed, just ahead of regular-season champion William Byron.

Lurking right behind the Hen-

drick Motorsports teammates is Denny Hamlin, one of only two drivers with a Cup Series-high four wins this season. There are two first-time playoff participants in the field, including rookie Shane van Gisbergen, who dominated street and road courses to match Hamlin with four wins.

Front of the pack

Larson is the top seed but hasn't won a race since early May, before he ran the Indianapolis 500, when his Kansas victory gave him three wins in seven races.

It's been up and down since, but Larson starts the playoffs coming off back-to-back sixth-place finishes.

Byron has two wins, including the Daytona 500, and hasn't ranked lower than second the entire season. He is trying to make it to the championship race for a fourth consecutive year.

Hamlin does have four wins but is coming off a bad night in Daytona: His car was damaged in an early crash and he finished 25th, dropping from third to sixth in the season standings — which cost him five playoff points, the equivalent of a victory.

Hamlin has never won a Cup title and hasn't even made it to the championship four since 2021. He'll try to get there this year at the same time as 23XI Racing, the team he co-owns with Michael Jordan, fights NASCAR in federal court over antitrust claims. The two sides were due in court Thurs-

day, four days before the playoff opener.

Blaney's victory at Daytona boosted him to fourth in the playoff seedings and gave him the momentum to potentially be considered the favorite. Team Penske gets hot this time of year and has won three consecutive championships with Blaney's title in 2023 sandwiched between a pair of Joey Logano triumphs.

Logano is seeded a distant 12th, but as NASCAR's only active three-time champion, he can't be counted out.

In the middle

Christopher Bell is the fifth seed and his three wins are tied with Larson, but he won three straight after the season-opening Daytona 500 and hasn't been to victory lane since March 9 at Phoenix.

Van Gisbergen is seeded sixth for his playoff debut based on four victories, all on street or road courses. If he can make it out of the first round, the New Zealander could be a spoiler — the hybrid road course/oval Roval at Charlotte Motor Speedway is in the second round and a win there would vault van Gisbergen into the final eight.

Chase Elliott is the seventh seed, but the 2020 champion needs to start winning. His victory at home track Atlanta is his lone win this season and only one of two victories since 2022 — the last time he made it to the championship four.

MLB

Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Toronto	78	56	.582	—
Boston	74	60	.552	4
New York	73	60	.549	4½
Tampa Bay	64	69	.481	13½
Baltimore	60	73	.451	17½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	78	57	.578	—
Kansas City	69	65	.515	8½
Cleveland	66	66	.500	10½
Minnesota	60	73	.451	17
Chicago	48	85	.361	29
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	73	60	.549	—
Seattle	72	62	.537	1½
Texas	68	67	.504	6
Athletics	63	72	.467	11
Los Angeles	62	71	.466	11
National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	76	57	.571	—
New York	72	61	.541	4
Miami	62	71	.466	14
Atlanta	61	72	.459	15
Washington	53	80	.398	23
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	83	51	.619	—
Chicago	76	57	.571	6½
Cincinnati	68	66	.507	15
St. Louis	65	69	.485	18
Pittsburgh	59	75	.440	24
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	77	57	.575	—
San Diego	75	59	.560	2
San Francisco	65	68	.489	11½
Arizona	65	69	.485	12
Colorado	38	95	.286	38½

Wednesday's games

Cleveland 4, Tampa Bay 3, 10 innings
 N.Y. Yankees 11, Washington 2
 Seattle 4, San Diego 3
 Boston 3, Baltimore 2
 Toronto 9, Minnesota 8
 Kansas City 12, Chicago White Sox 1
 Houston 4, Colorado 0
 Texas 20, L.A. Angels 3
 Athletics 7, Detroit 0
 Atlanta 12, Miami 1
 N.Y. Mets 6, Philadelphia 0
 Pittsburgh 2, St. Louis 1
 Arizona 3, Milwaukee 2
 L.A. Dodgers 5, Cincinnati 1
 San Francisco 12, Chicago Cubs 3

Thursday's games

Boston at Baltimore
 Colorado at Houston
 Arizona at Milwaukee
 Pittsburgh at St. Louis
 Chicago Cubs at San Francisco
 Atlanta at Philadelphia
 Miami at N.Y. Mets
 N.Y. Yankees at Chicago White Sox

Friday's games

St. Louis (Liberatore 6-11) at Cincinnati (Littell 9-8)
 Atlanta (Elder 5-9) at Philadelphia (Suárez 10-6)
 Tampa Bay (Houser 7-4) at Washington (Parker 7-14)
 Milwaukee (Peralta 15-5) at Toronto (Bieber 1-0)
 Pittsburgh (Burrows 1-4) at Boston (May 7-10)
 Seattle (Kirby 8-6) at Cleveland (Allen 7-10)
 Miami (Pérez 6-3) at N.Y. Mets (Tong 0-0)
 N.Y. Yankees (Rodón 14-7) at Chicago White Sox (Gómez 3-1)
 Detroit (Paddock 5-11) at Kansas City (Lugo 8-6)
 L.A. Angels (Anderson 2-8) at Houston (McCullers 2-4)
 San Diego (Cortes 2-2) at Minnesota (Matthews 3-4)
 Chicago Cubs (Horton 8-4) at Colorado (Márquez 3-11)
 Texas (Leiter 8-7) at Athletics (Springs 10-8)
 Arizona (Gallen 9-13) at L.A. Dodgers (Snell 3-2)
 Baltimore (Kremer 9-9) at San Francisco (TBD)

Saturday's games

Milwaukee at Toronto
 Tampa Bay at Washington
 Pittsburgh at Boston
 Miami at N.Y. Mets
 Atlanta at Philadelphia
 St. Louis at Cincinnati
 L.A. Angels at Houston
 N.Y. Yankees at Chicago White Sox
 San Diego at Minnesota
 Baltimore at San Francisco
 Detroit at Kansas City
 Seattle at Cleveland
 Chicago Cubs at Colorado
 Arizona at L.A. Dodgers
 Texas at Athletics



PAMELA SMITH/AP

Mets catcher Hayden Senger congratulates pitcher Nolan McLean on the way to the dugout during the eighth inning against the Philadelphia Phillies on Wednesday in New York.

McLean boost Mets, wins first major league starts

By JERRY BEACH
 Associated Press

NEW YORK — Three games into his major league career, Nolan McLean has already accomplished something Tom Seaver, Dwight Gooden, Jacob deGrom or anyone else wearing a New York Mets uniform could not.

McLean became the first Mets pitcher to win his first three MLB starts, tossing eight marvelous innings Wednesday night in a 6-0 victory over the Philadelphia Phillies that completed a three-game sweep.

“He’s a stud, man,” New York infielder Mark Vientos said with a grin. “It’s so fun to be a part of what he does on day-to-day basis.”

Facing the Phillies, who entered Wednesday with the second-best batting average in the majors, the 24-year-old right-hander allowed four hits and walked none with six strikeouts. He threw 95 pitches — just 55 through the first six innings.

“Top to bottom, they’re stacked with hitters,” McLean said. “So I definitely knew I had to bring some good stuff tonight.”

Showing off an arsenal that includes a sharp-breaking curveball in the high 70s, a sweeper and a fastball clocked in the mid-90s,

McLean retired 15 straight batters following Alec Bohm’s second-inning single and faced the minimum into the seventh.

“All I can say is wow,” Mets manager Carlos Mendoza said. “It’s just everything about the kid — not only what we’re seeing on the mound, just the way he carries himself. He’s got electric stuff, but he’s got pitchability. He knows what he’s doing on the mound. He knows how to manipulate the baseball. He knows what hitters are trying to do. He’s not afraid to use all his pitches.”

Philadelphia mounted its lone threat in the eighth, when Bohm and Max Kepler opened the inning with singles.

McLean preserved the shutout by retiring Nick Castellanos and Bryson Stott on medium-depth flyouts and inducing Harrison Bader to hit a squibber back toward the mound.

“I felt like he had good stuff,” Phillies slugger Kyle Schwarber said. “He moves the ball around really good and he was filling up the zone. I felt like he made some pitches when he needed to make some pitches.”

McLean pounded his right fist into his glove as the Citi Field crowd of 41,893 roared.

“He doesn’t shy away from big moments,” Vientos said. “Three starts — it’s been big moments and good teams and he’s done his thing.”

New York has gone 8-3 since McLean was called up from the minors to pull within four games of the NL East-leading Phillies. McLean, who went seven innings in a 12-7 win at Atlanta last Friday, and All-Star lefty David Peterson are the only Mets starters to last at least seven innings since June 2.

“We’ve been missing that type of performance pretty much the whole year,” Mendoza said.

McLean lowered his ERA to 0.89 — also the lowest in team history for a rookie in his first three starts. Seaver, a 300-game winner and Hall of Famer, held the mark previously with a 1.19 ERA over his first three starts in 1967.

McLean’s 21 strikeouts are tied with teammate Kodai Senga for the third-most in franchise annals through three career starts, behind only Matt Harvey (2012).

“I’ve always been a believer in my stuff. I’m a confident guy,” McLean said. “Obviously, the hitters here are the best in the world and I know that. But I also know I have good stuff. And if I go out there and execute, I can get a lot of guys out as well.”

Leaders

AMERICAN LEAGUE

BATTING — Judge, New York, .323; Ja.Wilson, Athletics, .311; Bichette, Toronto, .307; Peña, Houston, .307; Springer, Toronto, .303; Kirk, Toronto, .299; Witt, Kansas City, .298; M.Garcia, Kansas City, .297; V.Guerrero, Toronto, .292.

RUNS — Judge, New York, 104; Raleigh, Seattle, 87; Ju.Rodriguez, Seattle, 86; Witt, Kansas City, 86; Rooker, Athletics, 85; V.Guerrero, Toronto, 83; J.Ramirez, Cleveland, 81; Springer, Toronto, 81; Arozarena, Seattle, 79; Caminero, Tampa Bay, 79.

RBI — Raleigh, Seattle, 107; Greene, Detroit, 99; Judge, New York, 95; Ward, Los Angeles, 94; Caminero, Tampa Bay, 94; Pasquantino, Kansas City, 94; Bichette, Toronto, 86; Story, Boston, 83; Adell, Los Angeles, 82; Bellinger, New York, 79.

HITS — Bichette, Toronto, 169; Witt, Kansas City, 155; M.Garcia, Kansas City, 146; Judge, New York, 144; Ju.Rodriguez, Seattle, 144; Y.Diaz, Tampa Bay, 142; V.Guerrero, Toronto, 140; Rooker, Athletics, 140; J.Ramirez, Cleveland, 137; Kwan, Cleveland, 136.

DOUBLES — Witt, Kansas City, 41; Bichette, Toronto, 40; Ja.Duran, Boston, 34; M.Garcia, Kansas City, 32; Perez, Kansas City, 32; Rooker, Athletics, 32.

TRIPLES — Ja.Duran, Boston, 12; McKinstry, Detroit, 10; Bellinger, New York, 5; M.Garcia, Kansas City, 5; Henderson, Baltimore, 5; Buxton, Minnesota, 4; Carpenter, Detroit, 4; Isbel, Kansas City, 4; W.Pérez, Detroit, 4; Ju.Rodriguez, Seattle, 4; Volpe, New York, 4; Witt, Kansas City, 4.

HOME RUNS — Raleigh, Seattle, 50; Judge, New York, 41; Caminero, Tampa Bay, 39; Greene, Detroit, 32; Adell, Los Angeles, 30; Ward, Los Angeles, 30; Langeliers, Athletics, 29; Torkelson, Detroit, 28; Pasquantino, Kansas City, 28; Kurtz, Athletics, 27; Buxton, Minnesota, 27.

STOLEN BASES — Caballero, New York, 41; Simpson, Tampa Bay, 38; J.Ramirez, Cleveland, 36; Witt, Kansas City, 34; Robert, Chicago, 33; Arozarena, Seattle, 24; Neto, Los Angeles, 24; Ju.Rodriguez, Seattle, 24.

PITCHING — Crochet, Boston, 14-5; Fried, New York, 14-5; Rodón, New York, 14-7; Mize, Detroit, 12-4; Woo, Seattle, 12-7; Valdez, Houston, 12-7; Ryan, Minnesota, 12-7; Eovaldi, Texas, 11-3; Skubal, Detroit, 11-4.

ERA — Skubal, Detroit, 2.28; H.Brown, Houston, 2.37; Crochet, Boston, 2.38; deGrom, Texas, 2.79; Woo, Seattle, 2.95; Bello, Boston, 2.99; Fried, New York, 3.06.

STRIKEOUTS — Skubal, Detroit, 212; Crochet, Boston, 207; H.Brown, Houston, 177; Rodón, New York, 172; Ryan, Minnesota, 166; Woo, Seattle, 166; Flaherty, Detroit, 165; Valdez, Houston, 158.

NATIONAL LEAGUE

BATTING — F.Freeman, Los Angeles, .302; Frellick, Milwaukee, .297; T.Turner, Philadelphia, .297; W.Smith, Los Angeles, .295; Perdomo, Arizona, .293; Hoerner, Chicago, .290; K.Marte, Arizona, .290; Burleson, St. Louis, .288; Edwards, Miami, .288; Machado, San Diego, .288; Stowers, Miami, .288.

RUNS — Ohtani, Los Angeles, 123; J.Soto, New York, 96; Tatis, San Diego, 92; E.De La Cruz, Cincinnati, 90; Lindor, New York, 90; Schwarber, Philadelphia, 90; T.Turner, Philadelphia, 90; Carroll, Arizona, 88.

RBI — Schwarber, Philadelphia, 110; Alonso, New York, 106; Yellich, Milwaukee, 90; E.Suárez, Arizona, 143; Perdomo, Arizona, 87; Suzuki, Chicago, 87; Ohtani, Los Angeles, 85; Wood, Washington, 83; Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 82; L.Gurriel, Arizona, 80.

HITS — T.Turner, Philadelphia, 163; Machado, San Diego, 149; Arraez, San Diego, 147; Perdomo, Arizona, 143; E.De La Cruz, Cincinnati, 142; Lindor, New York, 142; Ohtani, Los Angeles, 141; Hoerner, Chicago, 140; Edwards, Miami, 137; Turang, Milwaukee, 137.

DOUBLES — Olson, Atlanta, 35; Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 34; F.Freeman, Los Angeles, 34; B.Reynolds, Pittsburgh, 34; Alonso, New York, 33; Machado, San Diego, 32; Wood, Washington, 31; Wills-Contreras, St. Louis, 30; J.Lee, San Francisco, 30.

TRIPLES — Carroll, Arizona, 16; J.Lee, San Francisco, 10; Ohtani, Los Angeles, 8; Harris, Atlanta, 6; Moniak, Colorado, 6; T.Turner, Philadelphia, 6; Abrams, Washington, 5; J.Beck, Colorado, 5; E.De La Cruz, Cincinnati, 5; Edwards, Miami, 5; Hays, Cincinnati, 5.

HOME RUNS — Schwarber, Philadelphia, 45; Ohtani, Los Angeles, 45; E.Suárez, Arizona (Seattle), 36; J.Soto, New York, 32; Alonso, New York, 29; Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 28; Carroll, Arizona, 27; Suzuki, Chicago, 27.

STOLEN BASES — On.Cruz, Pittsburgh, 34; E.De La Cruz, Cincinnati, 32; T.Turner, Philadelphia, 32; Crow-Armstrong, Chicago, 31; V.Scott, St. Louis, 31; Tatis, San Diego, 27; Abrams, Washington, 26; Tucker, Chicago, 25; Lindor, New York, 24.

PITCHING — F.Peralta, Milwaukee, 15-5; Pivetta, San Diego, 13-4; Luzardo, Philadelphia, 12-6; Boyd, Chicago, 12-7; Gray, St. Louis, 12-7; Pfaadt, Arizona, 12-8; Webb, San Francisco, 12-9; Priester, Milwaukee, 11-2; C.Sánchez, Philadelphia, 11-5; C.Holmes, New York, 11-6.

ERA — Skenes, Pittsburgh, 2.07; Abbott, Cincinnati, 2.62; C.Sánchez, Philadelphia, 2.66; F.Peralta, Milwaukee, 2.68; Wheeler, Philadelphia, 2.71; Boyd, Chicago, 2.82; Pivetta, San Diego, 2.82; Yamamoto, Los Angeles, 2.90; Ray, San Francisco, 2.93; Webb, San Francisco, 3.13.

STRIKEOUTS — Wheeler, Philadelphia, 195; Cease, San Diego, 183; Skenes, Pittsburgh, 181; Webb, San Francisco, 180; Luzardo, Philadelphia, 175; Gore, Washington, 173; C.Sánchez, Philadelphia, 173; Gray, St. Louis, 168.

NFL

Chiefs WR Rice suspended for 1st 6 games of season

By DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Kansas City Chiefs wide receiver Rashee Rice has been suspended six games for violating the NFL's personal conduct policy, keeping him out of a series of high-profile games starting with next week's season opener against the Los Angeles Chargers in Brazil.

Rice pleaded guilty about six weeks ago to two third-degree felony charges of collision involving serious bodily injury and racing on a highway causing bodily injury. As part of his plea agreement from the March 2024 crash on a Dallas highway, prosecutors said, Rice also received a sentence of five years of deferred probation and 30 days in jail as a condition of his probation.

The NFL handed down its suspension, which Rice will not appeal, after its own internal investigation. It voids a Sept. 30 hearing before former federal Judge Sue L. Robinson that was scheduled for the NFL's headquarters in New York.

Along with missing the Chargers game, Rice will miss a Super Bowl rematch with the Philadelphia Eagles on Sept. 14 at Arrowhead Stadium; a Sunday night trip to New York to face the Giants; a high-profile matchup with Lamar Jackson and the Baltimore Ravens on Sept. 28; a game against the Jacksonville Jaguars the following Monday night; and a Sunday night showdown with the Detroit Lions.

Rice will be eligible to return to the field when Kansas City faces the AFC West rival Las Vegas Raiders on Oct. 19.

The Chiefs did not make Rice nor coach Andy Reid available Wednesday. Rice was also not at their final practice before Sunday, when Kansas City will go into its game-week schedule to prepare for the Friday night matchup with Los Angeles.

"We're just going to go out there, trust what the coaches put on our plates, whatever game plan we have regardless of who is in there," tight end Noah Gray said Wednesday. "I'm extremely confident in all the guys."

Rice's status has been in limbo ever since he was driving a Lamborghini Urus SUV at 119 mph on the North Central Expressway, made "multiple aggressive maneuvers around traffic" and struck other vehicles, prosecutors said. After the crash, Rice did not check on the welfare of those in the other vehicles but instead fled on foot.

Rice said in a statement issued by his attorney that he's had "a lot of sleepless nights thinking about the damages my actions caused, and I will continue working within my means to make sure that everyone impacted will be made whole."

The Dallas County District Attorney's Office said the 25-year-old Rice will have some flexibility in when he must serve his jail time. He was also required to pay the victims for their out-of-pocket

medical expenses, which totaled about \$115,000.

"I've completely changed. You have to learn from things like that," Rice said during a brief media availability in training camp. "All I can focus on is what I can control right now and that's me doing what I do."

After a breakout rookie season, Rice was on his way to a memorable follow-up last fall, catching 24 passes for 288 yards and two touchdowns in his first three games. But in Week 4, after Patrick Mahomes had thrown an interception, the QB accidentally dived into Rice's leg as they were trying to make a tackle, tearing the lateral collateral ligament in his knee.

Rice wound up missing the rest of the season, including a loss to Philadelphia in the Super Bowl.

He spent the offseason rehabbing his knee and was ready to participate in the Chiefs' offseason program. But under terms of the suspension, Rice will now be barred from the practice facility until the middle of next month.

Kansas City undoubtedly believed a suspension was coming. It kept eight wide receivers Tuesday, when NFL roster cuts were due. That group includes rookie Jalen Royals, who has been dealing with an injury and might not be available for the opener, and Marquise Brown, who missed most of last season with a shoulder injury.

Now the Chiefs will be relying on Brown and second-year pro Xavier Worthy alongside tight end



REED HOFFMANN/AP

Chiefs wide receiver Rashee Rice stretches during warmups before a game against the Chicago Bears on Aug. 22 in Kansas City, Mo.

Travis Kelce in their passing game. The other wide receivers on the initial roster are veteran JuJu Smith-Schuster, return specialist

Nikko Remigio, preseason stand-out Tyquan Thornton and Jason Brownlee, who spent part of last season with the Jets.

Colts GM: QB Richardson still playing part in team's future

By MICHAEL MAROT
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Indianapolis Colts general manager Chris Ballard still believes Anthony Richardson will be part of the franchise's long-term future.

In fact, he still considers Richardson a potential franchise quarterback.

Eight days after coach Shane Steichen announced that Daniel Jones had won the starting job for Indianapolis' Sept. 7 season opener against the Miami Dolphins, Ballard insisted he thinks Richardson remains capable of realizing the potential the Colts saw when they selected him No. 4 overall in the 2023 draft.

"We knew it was going to take time. We knew it was going to be a little bit of a roller coaster, absolutely," Ballard said Wednesday. "Sometimes you've got to take a swing. So we took a swing and I'm not ready to say that we missed. I



MICHAEL CONROY/AP

Indianapolis Colts quarterback and 2023 fourth overall draft pick Anthony Richardson was passed over for the starting position.

don't think we have yet. I think Anthony still has a bright future."

But Richardson, for the first time in his pro career, is not entering the season as a starting QB.

The former Florida star's first two seasons in Indy have been defined by injuries and inaccuracy.

Richardson's 8-7 record reflects his penchant for getting hurt. He's missed 19 games — 17 because of injuries, two because of a brief benching last season after taking himself out of a game because he needed a breather. And some of the games he started, he couldn't finish because of injuries.

It's been equally challenging for Richardson on the field. He's thrown more interceptions (13) than touchdown passes (11), and last season his completion percentage of 47.7% was the worst of any regular starter in the league.

Those numbers prompted the Colts to give Jones, the No. 6 overall pick in the 2019 draft, a one-year contract and a chance to challenge Richardson.

"One thing I think that gets overshadowed is Daniel won the job, OK?" Ballard said. "Does that

mean we're down on Anthony? Daniel has had a good run here. He reminds me a lot of Alex Smith, who we had in Kansas City and who I thought was just the ultimate professional. I feel that's kind of the same thing with Daniel."

Jones has also had his share of struggles.

Since cashing in on the only playoff trip of his six-year career with a \$160 million contract from the New York Giants, he's thrown 13 interceptions and 10 TD passes in 16 starts. Last November, he requested and was granted his release by New York, then signed with the Minnesota Vikings, where he did not take a snap.

But he outplayed Richardson in training camp and throughout the preseason.

Ballard said he has spoken with Richardson's agent multiple times in recent weeks, adding that he has not fielded any trade offers and has no intention of dealing the strong-

armed 23-year-old.

"I know it's easy to say, 'He's done,'" Ballard said. "I don't agree. I think overcoming challenges and obstacles along the way are good for anybody. I do. I'm proud of Anthony and where he's at, how far he's come. He's come miles. It's tough on any young quarterback in the league, but for him to keep taking the growth steps he has and to work so hard and not get the goal he set for himself and now continuing to do that, I think there's some real value in that."

The question is whether that will be enough for Indianapolis to exercise its fifth-year option on Richardson in 2026 before he begins his fourth year in the league.

"I think it's sure in him, I do," Ballard said when asked if he considered Richardson a franchise quarterback. "I think it's in him. Whether that happens or not, we'll see, but I do think that's in him."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Opening week spotlight clearly on QBs

By MAURA CAREY
Associated Press

Week 1 of the college football season boasts a loaded schedule with top-10 matchups and revenge games, and the spotlight falls squarely on the quarterbacks. Not everyone can run the table, so expect a shakeup in the next AP Top 25 on Tuesday.

Several top programs are breaking in new QBs, from the Arch Manning takeover at Texas to Julian Sayin filling the shoes of national championship-winner Will Howard at Ohio State. Just like Manning-Sayin, Heisman Trophy hopefuls Garrett Nussmeier and Cade Klubnik will also go head-to-head, while Notre Dame and Miami debut new starters with a vast difference in experience.

The theme is common across six can't-miss Week 1 games: How the QBs perform could set the tone for the playoff hunt as early as this weekend:

No. 1 Texas at No. 3 Ohio State

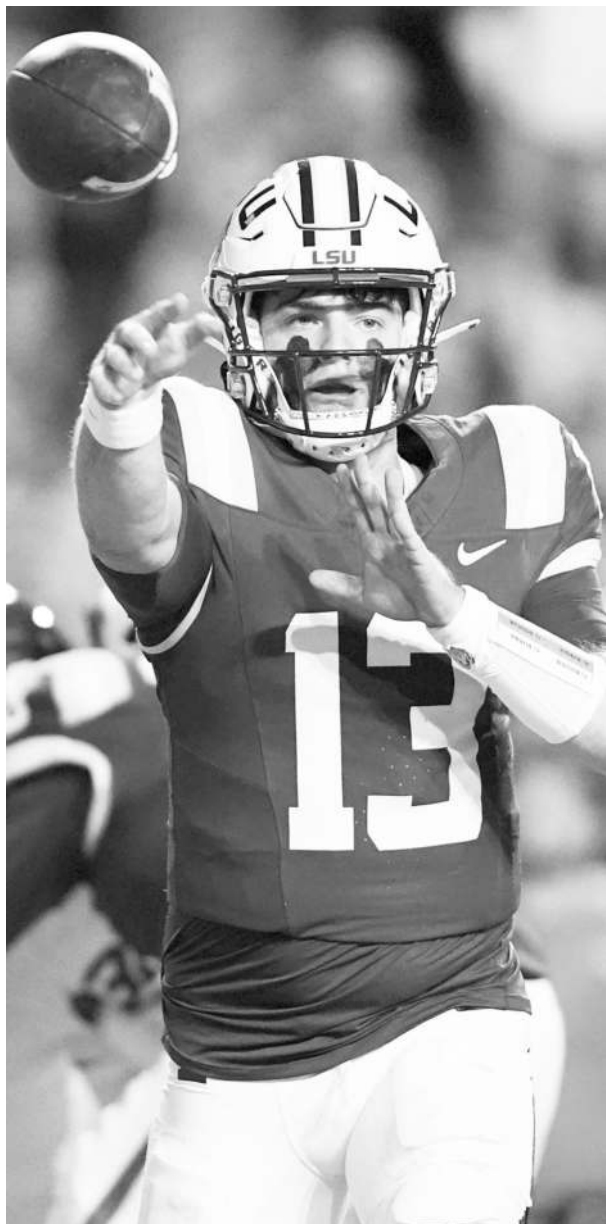
One of the most talked-about Week 1 matchups in years, Texas travels to Columbus to take on the reigning national champs. The two teams met in a College Football Playoff semifinal, where Ohio State won 28-14. Less than a year later, the two rosters look quite different, starting at signal-caller.

Manning makes his long-awaited debut as official QB1 for the Longhorns while the Buckeyes turn to Sayin, who transferred from Alabama and sat behind Howard last year. Sayin's job is simple but could be daunting for an inexperienced QB: feed Jeremiah Smith, the sophomore receiver considered a Heisman candidate.

No. 9 LSU at No. 4 Clemson

Tiger vs. Tiger, Death Valley vs. Death Valley. QBs Nussmeier and Klubnik should each have high-powered offenses in this one.

LSU is 3-1 in the series and the last meeting came in January 2019 when it ended Clemson's 29-game winning streak with a 42-25 victory for the national championship.



GERALD HERBERT, LEFT, AND JACOB KUPFERMAN/AP

Quarterbacks Garrett Nussmeier, of LSU, left and Cade Klubnik, of Clemson, would like to get the season started on a personal path to the Heisman Trophy and their teams' path toward a CFP national title.

Five years later, the teams meet again, with two Heisman favorites eager to get a title run started with a big win.

No. 6 Notre Dame at No. 10 Miami

Georgia transfer quarterback Carson Beck will make his debut for the Hurricanes, and the Fighting Irish have picked CJ Carr to start following Riley Leonard's departure for the pros.

Carr played all of four snaps in 2024 and is tasked with taking on a top-10 opponent on the road. Carr

will lean on Jeremiyah Love, one of the top backs in the game and the Irish have seven starters back on defense.

No. 8 Alabama at Florida State

The Crimson Tide have something to prove after falling short of the CFP during coach Kalen DeBoer's inaugural season. Will Florida State be able to slow down a highly motivated Alabama team?

The Seminoles received eight votes in the preseason poll but are coming off a 2-10 season.

The Seminoles hope senior transfer quarterback Tommy Castellanos can jumpstart the rebuild. Returner Ty Simpson will fill Jalen Milroe's shoes for a Crimson Tide team with higher expectations and little margin for error.

Virginia Tech at No. 13 South Carolina

It's a somewhat sentimental season opener for South Carolina coach Shane Beamer facing Virginia Tech, where his father, Frank, was the winningest coach in Ho-

Top 25 schedule

Thursday's game

No. 25 Boise St. at S. Florida

Friday's game

No. 12 Illinois vs. W. Illinois

Saturday's games

- No. 1 Texas at No. 3 Ohio St.
- No. 2 Penn St. vs. Nevada
- No. 4 Clemson vs. No. 9 LSU
- No. 5 Georgia vs. Marshall
- No. 7 Oregon vs. Montana St.
- No. 8 Alabama at Florida St.
- No. 11 Arizona St. vs. N. Arizona
- No. 14 Michigan vs. New Mexico
- No. 15 Florida vs. LIU Brooklyn
- No. 16 SMU vs. East Texas A&M
- No. 17 Kansas St. vs. North Dakota)
- No. 18 Oklahoma vs. Illinois St.
- No. 19 Texas A&M (0-0) vs. UTSA
- No. 20 Indiana vs. Old Dominion
- No. 21 Mississippi vs. Georgia St.
- No. 22 Iowa St. vs. South Dakota
- No. 23 Texas Tech vs. Ark.-Pine Bluff
- No. 24 Tennessee vs. Syracuse at Atlanta

Sunday's games

- No. 6 Notre Dame at No. 10 Miami
- No. 13 South Carolina vs. Virginia Tech at Atlanta

kies' history. The teams meet at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

Expectations are high for the Gamecocks and quarterback LaNorris Sellers after winning six straight to end the season. The Gamecocks welcome back nine starters — five on the offensive side of the ball, and four defensively, including Dylan Stewart, expected to have a breakout year.

It's an opportunity for South Carolina to get a win under its belt before a challenging SEC schedule commences. Virginia Tech has a chance to make a statement after a 6-7 finish last year, including 0-5 in one-possession games last year with two overtime road losses.

Syracuse at No. 24 Tennessee

A whole bunch of orange in this one. No. 24 Tennessee's quarterback room was a hot topic of conversation this offseason with Nico Iamaleava unexpectedly departing for UCLA. The Volunteers landed Joey Aguilar in return, ironically coming from UCLA.

The dual-threat veteran will lead an offense against a Syracuse defense that struggled against the run and pass last fall.

Syracuse is tasked with replacing key offensive playmakers in quarterback Kyle McCord and running back LeQuint Allen Jr. Notre Dame transfer Steve Angeli has big shoes to fill at QB.

Top 25 on AFN

 	 	 	 	 
<p>Syracuse at No. 24 Tennessee AFN-Sports2 6 p.m. Saturday CET 1 a.m. Sunday JKT</p>	<p>Marshall at No. 5 Georgia AFN-Sports2 9:30 p.m. Saturday CET 4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT</p>	<p>No. 8 Alabama at Florida State AFN-Sports 9:30 p.m. Saturday CET 4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT</p>	<p>No. 9 LSU at No. 4 Clemson AFN-Sports 1:30 a.m. Sunday CET 8:30 a.m. Sunday JKT</p>	<p>No. 6 Notre Dame at No. 10 Miami AFN-Sports 1:30 a.m. Monday CET 8:30 a.m. Monday JKT</p>

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Rematch: Texas will need to find new ways to keep Smith silenced

FROM PAGE 48

horns cornerback Malik Muhammad said Monday. "He's the guy everyone is looking at in college football. I'm sure he's overly motivated, especially coming out of that game last year."



No. 1 Texas
at No. 3 Ohio State
AFN-Sports
6 p.m. Saturday CET
1 a.m. Sunday JKT

Reloading secondary

Smith had 76 receptions for 1,315 yards and 15 touchdowns last season, with all three marks Ohio State freshman records. Yet Texas smothered him with cornerback Jahdae Barron, last season's Thorpe Award winner, and safety Andrew Mukuba. Both of them are now in the NFL.

But while the Longhorns have some holes to fill in the secondary, it's hardly a rebuild. It's more like a reload.

Texas senior safety Michael Taaffe, like Smith a preseason All-American, and Muhammad will anchor a unit that has plenty of experience. Some analysts have rated the position group among the best in the country.

The Longhorns also add the return of Duane Akina as safeties coach and passing game defensive coordinator. Akina spent 13 seasons at Texas from 2001-2013 when he coached two Thorpe Award winners (Michael Huff in 2005 and Aaron Ross in 2006) and two more finalists. He spent the past two seasons at Arizona.

Physical mismatch

In a straight physical matchup, Smith towers over most defensive backs at 6-foot-3, 223 pounds. Muhammad is 6-0, 181. Taaffe is 6-0, 189.

Smith also had the speed to lead the nation last year with six catches longer than 50 yards.

"What he does on the football field, it doesn't seem like a real

human's doing that ... It's going to be really fun going against him because he's a freak of nature," Taaffe said. "The best thing about him is going up and getting the football. You can put three DBs on him, but if you get it up in the air, he's going to go get it."

Texas made sure Smith was always covered by multiple defenders on almost every play last season. But that also opened the field for the rest of the Buckeyes. Carnell Tate had seven catches for 89 yards against the Longhorns in the playoff.

The same scenario could play out Saturday as Akina and Texas defensive coordinator Pete Kwiatkowski draw up a game plan to neutralize Smith again.

"Ideally you've got multiple people with eyes on him and guarding him, but you still have to play great team defense," Longhorns coach Steve Sarkisian said. "And you've gotta cover the two other wideouts they have or two other really good players, too."

But Smith is Ohio State's ultimate playmaker.

"I do think, at the end of the day, (Smith) is where your attention needs to be," Sarkisian said. "You better know where No. 4 is at all times."



JULIO CORTEZ/AP

Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian is looking to get revenge on Ohio State after the Buckeyes beat the Longhorns in the Cotton Bowl.



GARETH PATTERSON/AP

Texas quarterback Arch Manning, right, spent the past two seasons as a backup for Quinn Ewers, but is now set to take over as the starter for the top-ranked Longhorns.

Arch Manning finally takes reins as Texas' starting QB

BY JIM VERTUNO

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Arch Manning has waited for this moment.

So have Texas fans. College football fans have too, to see what the hype is all about.

No more waiting. Manning leads No. 1 Texas against No. 3 Ohio State on Saturday in a season-opening matchup that will lift the lid off a pair of national title contenders, and two of the early favorites for the Heisman Trophy in Manning and Buckeyes wide receiver Jeremiah Smith.

Manning was one of the most coveted recruits when he signed with the Longhorns out of Isadore Newman High School in New Orleans. He certainly had the biggest name, but it was the big body, strong arm and fast feet that every program wanted.

And after two years behind Quinn Ewers, with some spot duty and two career starts when Ewers was injured, Manning finally takes over Texas as the undisputed leader of a team chasing a national title.

"I'm excited," Manning said. "This is what I've been waiting for. I spent two years not playing, so might as well go have fun, right?"

All the Mannings

The Manning name has been big in football since the 1960s when Arch's grandfather Archie was dazzling Ole Miss fans in college and the New Orleans Saints in the NFL. Uncles Peyton and Eli combined to win four Super Bowls.

That left Arch with a legacy that would have been tough for any player to shoulder. And it would have been easy to fall into its trapings. Unlike the Manning quarterbacks before him, Arch lives in a world of constant social media attention.

Good or bad, it could be overwhelming. Like his freshman year, when he lost his student ID and it was quickly posted online.

But Manning seems to cruise through the attention on campus and far beyond with an aw-shucks attitude and soft smile under a head of curly brown hair. He also knows anything he says can instantly make a headline.

"Arch is a great kid. I just feel like he's normal. And that's what I love about him. He's not some guy who feels like he's untouchable, he's better than everybody else. He doesn't do life like that," Texas coach Steve Sarkisian said this week.

Making money

The humility in public and the locker room hasn't stopped Manning from cashing in. He arrived in college just in time for the new era of college athletes being paid for endorsements, and analysts have said there's no more valuable player on the market.

Manning has endorsements with giant brand names, including Red Bull, Uber, Vuori and Panini to name a few. He announced a new one Wednesday with Warby Parker, the eyewear company. Manning has worn glasses since

age 3 and the company said its first commercial in the partnership will debut during the game Saturday.

Manning also lives in an era of constant transfers. It would have been easy for him to chase a chance to start last season, but stayed put.

Texas was where he wanted to be. Even if that meant waiting it out.

"I want to be the quarterback at the University of Texas. Sometimes it's worth the wait," he said. "I'm ready to play."

Time to prove it

A new starter, Manning is not exactly a mystery on the field. He started two games last season when Ewers was hurt and was used in spot duty in several other key moments.

He even earned Texas' first SEC victory against Mississippi State, and finished the season with 939 yards passing with nine touchdowns.

New Ohio State defensive coordinator Matt Patricia, who came to the Buckeyes this past offseason after two decades in the NFL, is dialed in on Manning.

"I'm worried about what his uncles are telling him right now. That's probably the biggest thing for me," Patricia said. "He's big, strong and really athletic. ... We know it's a huge challenge for us. He's got, you know, his uncles and his dad and his grandfather. They pretty much groomed him as a quarterback his entire life."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Some late-season matchups critical for CFP

By MAURA CAREY
Associated Press

The 2025 college football season kicks off with fireworks, featuring eye-catching Week 1 showdowns like No. 1 Texas vs. No. 3 Ohio State, No. 9 LSU vs. No. 4 Clemson and No. 10 Miami vs. No. 6 Notre Dame. Despite the excitement of preseason powerhouses and Heisman Trophy contenders going head-to-head, early stumbles in September rarely end post-season dreams, certainly not in the new 12-team playoff era of college football. The real pressure hits as the season progresses and playoff standings are on the line.

Here are six high-stakes matchups that you won't want to miss (using preseason AP Top 25 rankings):

LSU at Alabama (Nov. 8): After falling short of the inaugural 12-team College Football Playoff, pressure is building for LSU's Brian Kelly and Alabama's Kalen DeBoer. Both historically successful programs are not far removed from recent title victories, with LSU in 2020 and Alabama the following year.

Both are coming off matching 9-4 seasons, each with a 5-3 conference record in the rugged SEC. Alabama should be favored in every game ahead of this one except for a late September visit to No. 5 Georgia. If LSU can knock off Clemson, the Tigers should be favored in all their games too ahead of this tilt.

Last fall, a two-interception game from Garrett Nussmeier hurt the Tigers, who struggled to stop Jalen Milroe and Co. Now Nussmeier is considered a Heisman contender and he will get a chance for a marquee conference road win over the Tide and DeBoer, who wants to distance himself from last year's 9-4 debut season.

Texas and Georgia, the two highest-ranked SEC teams in the AP Top 25 preseason poll, square off in Athens less than a month before the league title game, which is where they last met (a 22-19 Bulldogs win in December).

Texas has a new quarterback in charge in Arch Manning; he briefly entered both games against Georgia in 2024, completing 3 of 6 passes for 19 yards after a slow start by Quinn Ewers and a 20-point deficit in Week 8.

Both teams have a lot of football to navigate before this one but it could be a dandy — and a precursor to another meeting or even two before the season ends?

Penn State at Ohio State (Nov. 1): Penn State earned the No. 2 seed in the Top 25, surpassing the reigning national champions, Ohio State, who came in at No. 3. The Big Ten rivals meet on Nov. 1 in Columbus in a matchup likely to carry



BARRY REEGER/AP

Penn State quarterback Drew Allar runs up field against Ohio State last season in State College, Pa. The teams meet again on Nov. 1 in Columbus and both could enter the game undefeated. A good showing here might impress the CFP committee before its first rankings.

league title game and playoff implications.

Drew Allar, a two-headed rushing attack and a stout defense should have the Nittany Lions favored in every game before this one, with all due respect to No. 7 Oregon (Sept. 27).

Same for the Buckeyes, who are a 2.5-point favorite over the higher-ranked Longhorns in the opener. Ohio State is 24-8 against Penn State and has won eight in a row. Coach James Franklin's sole victory against the Buckeyes was in 2016 during his second year at the helm.

This year, the playoff format shifts to straight seeding, meaning the top four teams will be rewarded with a bye. A good showing here might impress the CFP committee before its first rankings of the season, too.

SMU at Clemson (Oct. 18): Expectations are high for Clemson, which is loaded. After LSU, the Tigers could be on cruise control when SMU comes calling for a game that matches two CFP teams from a year ago (both lost in the first round).

Clemson quarterback Cade Klubnik, a Heisman favorite, had a standout outing against the Mustangs in 2024, throwing for 262 yards and four touchdowns. Receiver Bryant Wesco Jr. had a career-high eight receptions, 143 yards and two TDs. The two are ex-



ERIC GAY/AP

Texas QB Arch Manning passes during practice in Austin, Texas, July 30. Texas is currently ranked No. 1 for the season.

pected to pick up where they left off. SMU QB Kevin Jennings is back amid some question marks elsewhere, but the schedule isn't daunting ahead of the trip to Clemson.

Arizona State at Iowa State (Nov. 1): The Sun Devils went 11-3 and grabbed an automatic bid to the College Football Playoff last season, thanks in part to a dominant 45-19 Big 12 championship game victory against ... Iowa State.

The Cyclones have some challenging games ahead of this one but wins there set this up nicely for a chance to impress the CFP committee.

Power Four conference champions still earn a spot in the 12-team bracket, but they won't have the luxury of a first-round bye unless they're ranked in the top four. The Sun Devils could be in the running either way, but every win counts for both teams in pursuit of

a playoff berth.

USC at Notre Dame (Oct. 18): After consecutive underwhelming seasons, USC coach Lincoln Riley could use a major road win, and is there a bigger statement to make than against a storied rival?

Notre Dame has beaten the Trojans seven times in the last eight meetings, including the last two in which the Fighting Irish averaged 48.5 points. USC last won a game in Notre Dame Stadium in 2011.

The Irish have national title hopes. The Trojans have hopes that Riley is finding the right formula to turn things around in what could be one of the last games in this longstanding series. The contract for a rivalry that dates to 1926 expires after their game in 2026.

Honorable Mention: No. 8 Alabama at No. 5 Georgia (Sept. 27), a chance for 'Bama to improve to 10-1 against the Bulldogs since 2008 or for Kirby Smart to cut into his 1-6 record as a head coach against the Crimson Tide ... No. 3 Ohio State at No. 14 Michigan (Nov. 29), a matchup of the last two national champions in a series that has seen the Wolverines win four straight ... No. 25 Boise State at No. 6 Notre Dame (Oct. 4), a rare shot for a top Group of Five team to put up a marquee midseason win on the road ... No. 3 Ohio State at No. 12 Illinois (Oct. 11), a chance for Bret Bielema's Illini to show if last year's 10-win season was a fluke.

SPORTS



Good first impression
Mets get boost from McLean just 3 starts into career » **MLB, Page 43**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW



MICHAEL THOMAS, LEFT, AND BRYNN ANDERSON/AP

Texas linebacker Anthony Hill Jr., left, and Ohio State wide receiver Jeremiah Smith are among the returning stars for the Longhorns and Buckeyes, respectively.

Revenge in the rematch

Texas, Ohio State WR Smith both have something to prove in opener

BY JIM VERTUNO
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Ohio State's Jeremiah Smith is the most feared wide receiver in college football.

For most teams, anyway. When the No. 3 Buckeyes meet No. 1 Texas on Saturday, Smith will face the one team that shut him

down last season.

The Longhorns held Smith to just one catch for 3 yards in a College Football Playoff semifinal. Ohio State still won the game 28-14 and went on to win the national title as Smith scored a touchdown and set up the game-clinching field goal in the final minutes with a 56-yard catch.

Smith is ready for the rematch against Texas and looking for some personal redemption.

"I'm definitely hyped about this one, especially with how things went last year, people saying things about me, about that game I had last year," Smith said during Buckeyes training camp. "I'm definitely

hungry for this one, for sure."

The Longhorns wouldn't expect him to be any other way. Smith is among the early Heisman Trophy contenders along with Texas quarterback Arch Manning.

"He has all the hype right now," Long-

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Chiefs' Rice suspended for initial six games » NFL, Page 44

