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Trump may bring end to unit's days in Bavaria

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — President-elect Donald Trump's imminent return to the Oval Office is reviving concerns about a Vilseck-based Army brigade's future in Germany.

The 2nd Cavalry Regiment was among the 12,000 troops designated for withdrawal under an eleventh-hour plan from Trump's first administration that President Joe Biden scrapped before it could be enacted.

Army leaders have called the regiment the "go-to brigade for quick response" within U.S. European Command, and its role on the Continent has been magnified by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The regiment also leads NATO's multinational battle group in Poland.

Trump hasn't said anything publicly about moving troops out of Germany since winning the November election. However, he has called on allies to spend a lot more on defense.

In a Dec. 8 interview with NBC News, Trump said the U.S. would "absolutely" remain in NATO if its members "pay their bills." During his first term, Trump hounded allies that fell well short of a defense spending benchmark of 2% of gross domestic product, which was to be reached by 2024.

Twenty-three of the alliance's 32 members now meet that goal, including Germany. But recently appointed NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has acknowledged that the 2% level is no longer enough.

And Vice President-elect JD Vance in November singled out Germany for needing to contribute

SEE BAVARIA ON PAGE 4



GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

Matthias Hauswirth of New Orleans prays near where a vehicle drove into a crowd on New Orleans' Canal and Bourbon streets Wednesday.

ISIS ties seen in New Orleans

Driver who killed 14 people during New Year's was US Army veteran

By ERIC TUCKER,
JIM MUSTIAN,
KEVIN MCGILL
AND JACK BROOK
Associated Press

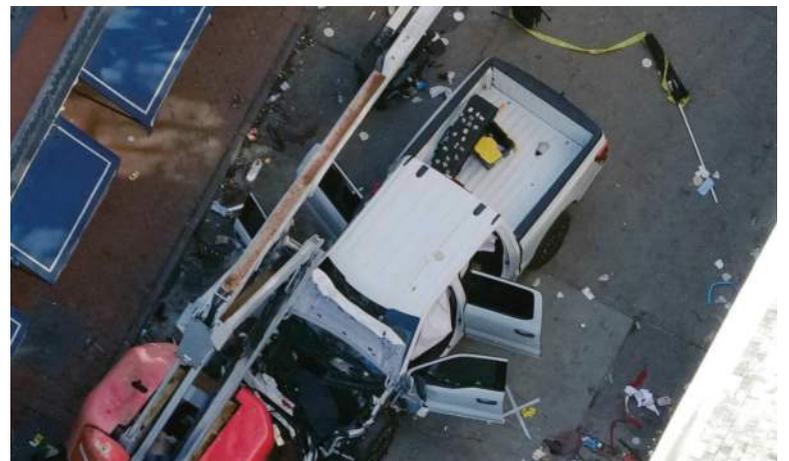
NEW ORLEANS — The U.S. Army veteran who drove a pickup truck into a crowd of New Year's revelers acted alone, the FBI said Thursday, reversing its position from a day earlier that he likely worked with others in carrying out the deadly attack, which officials say was an act of terrorism in-

■ Man who died in Cybertruck blast was a Green Beret **Page 10**

spired by the Islamic State.

The FBI also revealed that the driver, Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a U.S. citizen from Texas, posted five videos on his Facebook ac-

SEE ISIS ON PAGE 9



GERALD HERBERT/AP

A black flag with white lettering lies on the ground rolled up behind a pickup truck that a man drove into a crowd on Bourbon Street.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	Azores	Change in price	Turkey	Change in price
Germany	\$3.415	\$3.963	\$4.316	\$3.912	..	..	\$4.171	..
Change in price	-1.8 cents	-1.0 cents	-0.8 cents	+2.7 cents	..	..	-0.8 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.365	\$4.882	\$4.655	..	..	\$3.987	\$4.307*
Change in price	..	-5.0 cents	-5.2 cents	-5.5 cents	..	..	-0.8 cents	-3.9 cents
U.K.	..	\$3.963	\$4.316	\$3.912	..	..	..	..
Change in price	..	-1.0 cents	-0.8 cents	+2.7 cents	..	..	..	..

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Jan. 3. The change in price is from Dec. 27.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	South Korea	Change in price	Guam	Change in price
Japan	..	\$3.959	..	\$3.549	\$3.089	..	\$3.989	\$3.589
Change in price	..	-1.0 cents	..	+2.0 cents	-2.0 cents	..	-1.0 cents	+3.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.369	..	..	\$3.549	\$3.119**	\$3.669	\$4.019	..
Change in price	No change	..	..	+2.0 cents	-2.0 cents	-1.0 cents	-1.0 cents	..

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
Pacific prices for the week of Jan. 3-9

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Jan. 3)	0.95	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
British pound (Jan. 3)	\$1.21	Britain (Pound)	1.2399
Japanese yen (Jan. 3)	154.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.4431
South Korean won (Jan. 3)	1429.00	China (Yuan)	7.2995
		Denmark (Krone)	7.2392
		Egypt (Pound)	50.7679
		Euro	0.9705
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7765
		Hungary (Forint)	401.53
		Israel (Shekel)	3.6493
		Japan (Yen)	157.06
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3085
		Norway (Krone)	11.3602
		Philippines (Peso)	57.94
		Poland (Zloty)	4.15
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7557
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3660
		South Korea (Won)	1470.59

Switzerland (Franc) 0.9095
Thailand (Baht) 34.29
Turkey (NewLira) 35.3089

(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

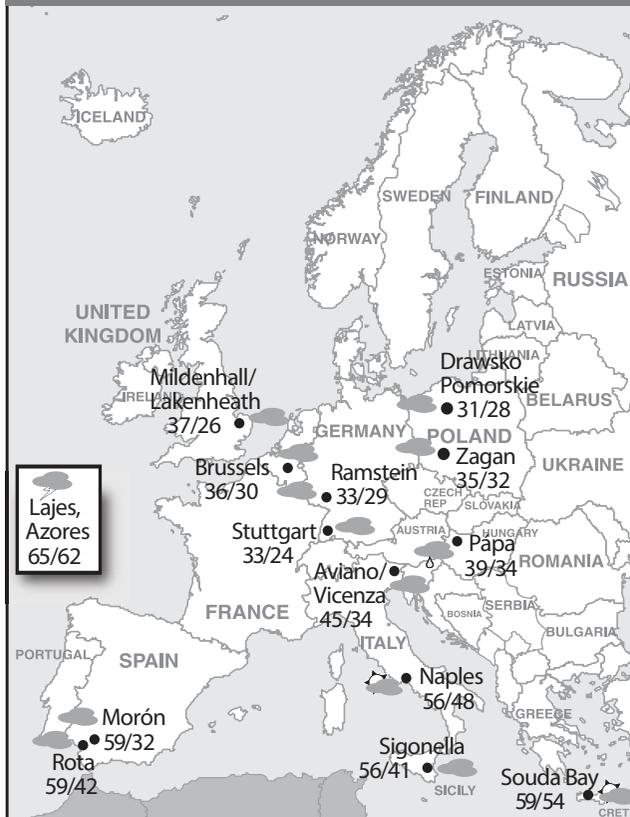
Prime rate	7.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	4.50
Federal funds market rate	4.33
3-month bill	4.34
30-year bond	4.79

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

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MILITARY

New special trial counsels take over cases

By GARY WARNER

Stars and Stripes

Military commanders will lose their authority to overturn court-martial findings in the most serious sexual harassment cases as of Jan. 1, the Pentagon said Tuesday.

Under a plan approved by Congress, certain sexual harassment cases under the Uniform Code of Military Justice — the military's set of laws — will be investigated and prosecuted by the new Offices of Special Trial Counsel in each service branch.

The Defense Department issued a statement Tuesday confirming the special trial counsels of the Army, Air Force, Navy and the Marine Corps will take over Article 134 sexual harassment cases.

Article 134 is the military's "general article" covering "all disorders and neglects to the prejudice of good order and discipline in the

armed forces, all conduct of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces, and crimes and offenses not capital, of which persons subject to this chapter may be guilty, shall be taken cognizance of by a general, special, or summary court-martial," according to the U.S. Manual of Courts-Martial.

Article 134 has several subsections dealing with specific violations, including disloyal statements, fraternization, underage drinking, abusing animals, adultery and gambling with subordinates.

Sexual harassment violations under Article 134 are defined as knowingly making sexual advances, demands or requests for sexual favors. The advances must also have been unwelcomed, and a reasonable person would believe submission or rejection to the advances would have an effect on the tar-

geted person's job, pay, career, benefits or entitlements. It is also defined as severe, repetitive or pervasive, creating a hostile environment and being to the prejudice of good order and discipline, and a discredit on the armed forces.

The maximum penalty for each count of sexual harassment is a dishonorable discharge for enlisted personnel or dismissal from service for officers, total forfeiture of pay and allowances, and confinement for up to two years.

Congress has acted to remove commanders from exercising discretionary authority on prosecution and punishment for 14 "covered offenses" of the UCMJ, including nearly all sex crimes, kidnapping, manslaughter and murder.

Some lawmakers said they pushed for reforms after receiving

several reports of "command influence" in which charges were not brought against senior officers or findings were overturned following courts-martial.

The special trial counsels were established in late December 2023 and began taking cases immediately.

In past cases, officers were sometimes allowed to accept retirement, with a reduction in rank, with an honorable discharge in lieu of dismissal, the military's equivalent of a dishonorable discharge for officers.

Lawmakers who supported removing commanders from the decision-making process said they hoped it would create a more professional prosecution and punishment of offenders.

The addition of sexual harassment cases to the slate of crimes handled by special trial counsels

was delayed until 2025 to allow the new offices more time to develop reporting methods and standards.

Before Jan. 1, decisions to charge service members with sexual harassment under Article 134 were made by unit commanders. The commanders also reviewed the outcome of cases that went to court-martial and had the unilateral power to vacate sentences or overturn verdicts with which they disagreed.

The new rules mean appeals of courts-martial handled by the special trial counsels can only be reviewed and altered by the secretaries of the service branches.

Conviction for sexual harassment under Article 134 is considered a felony, which could limit the guilty person's ability to get a job, vote, and buy firearms, among other civilian penalties, once the person has left military service.

Army is testing drone that gives big-picture view of the battlefield

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

The Army has a surveillance drone prototype that when fielded will give brigade commanders a clearer picture of the battlefield terrain where soldiers are maneuvering, the service said this month.

The unmanned aircraft was delivered to the Army after two years of development and testing. A training phase is expected to be completed by the end of January.

The Army then will evaluate production proposals for its Future Tactical Uncrewed Aircraft Systems, with awards anticipated by the end of 2025, the service said in a Dec. 20 statement.

The program "will provide brigade combat teams with an organic capability for reconnaissance and surveillance operations, enabling them to collect, develop,

and report actionable intelligence," the Army statement said.

The system could be fielded as soon as 2026.

Incorporating an array of drones into combat formations has been a focal point for the Army in recent years as it looks for ways to give its ground forces an advantage on modern battlefields.

While sophisticated drones have been part of the U.S. military's arsenal for decades, the Russia-Ukraine war has highlighted how relatively simple unmanned systems can be put to effective use by junior soldiers in small units.

At Army training centers, soldiers have been busy working with both hand-held drones and more advanced systems.

For example, U.S. troops training in Romania in November were



U.S. Army

The Army has taken delivery of the Textron Systems MK 4.8 HQ Aerosonde drone prototype.

the first to try out a pair of drone systems designed for infantry and scout platoons on dismounted patrols. Those drones give ground troops a better view of the immediate area.

The prototype delivered to the Army in December is focused on

the bigger picture, enabling commanders to "maintain dominance during multi-domain operations," the Army said.

The system is known as the MK 4.8 HQ Aerosonde and was developed by Textron Systems. It has a variety of features sought by the

Army, including vertical take-off and landing capabilities.

The Textron Systems prototype is competing with a similar model developed by Griffon Aerospace, with the Army set to make a final decision on which model it wants in 2025.

Air Force expands retention bonuses for 89 high demand career fields

By MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force expanded retention bonuses this month for 89 career fields in high demand from cyber systems operations to bomb technicians.

Though the list was not made readily available by the service, it appeared on a Facebook group last week called "Air Force amn/nco/snco."

"The list is authentic and accurate and was effective Dec. 16. We

use the selective retention bonus to help retain talent that is in high demand," Air Force spokeswoman Rose Riley said in a statement.

The military celebrated meeting recruiting goals in 2024 but attracting young Americans has been a long-running issue for the services. The Army, Navy and Air Force made changes after not meeting recruiting goals in 2023. Each military service employed various types of strategies, programs and enticements to over-

come recruiting woes in recent years that were exacerbated by several issues including in-person recruiting restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic, a low unemployment rate and stiff competition from the private sector.

The Air Force fell short of its recruitment goals by 10% in 2023. Relaxed tattoo rules and increased bonuses are among the methods used to help the Air Force reach its recruiting mission goals in 2024, service officials have said.

The service also recently ex-

panded medical waivers to cover asthma, food allergies and hearing loss in a bid to bring more recruits into the fold.

The memo detailing the career fields states the funds can range from \$180,000 to \$360,000 during an airman's career. The selective retention bonuses are used to keep highly skilled airmen in job fields that might have low staffing, low reenlistment or high exit rates.

Some of the various roles include working dog handlers, bomb technicians, flight attendants, pa-

raleals and airborne cryptologic language analysts.

Though the list has 89 jobs, some older jobs might not be included. For any careers that might have been removed from the list, airmen have until Feb. 15 to get another contract "before it is reduced [or] terminated" by Feb. 16, according to the document.

The Air Force's budget for fiscal 2025 is \$188.1 billion, with \$1.1 billion slated for bonuses and retention programs for 118,000 positions.

EUROPE

3 charged in Germany in pro-Russian plot

BY MATTHEW BURKE

Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — Three men have been charged with spying on U.S. military bases for Russia and plotting attacks on American personnel in retaliation for Western support of Ukraine, German prosecutors said.

The men, identified only as dual German-Russian nationals Dieter S., Alexander J. and Alex D., were charged Dec. 9 in the Munich Higher Regional Court with suspicion of working for a foreign intelligence agency, according to a statement Monday from the German federal prosecutor's office.

Dieter S., who prosecutors say was the plot's ringleader, was also charged with acting as a sabotage agent, conspiracy to cause an explosion and arson, declaring his willingness to interfere with rail traffic and endangering security by taking pictures of military installations.

The case first made headlines in April after Dieter S. and Alexan-



U.S. Army

U.S. M1A1 Abrams tanks arrive at Grafenwoehr, Germany, in 2023 to be used to train Ukrainian soldiers. Three German-Russian dual nationals were charged this month with spying on the U.S. Army training area in Grafenwoehr for the Kremlin.

der J. were arrested in Bayreuth, about 20 miles northwest of Tower Barracks in Grafenwoehr, the prosecutor's office said at the

time. Police raided the men's homes and workplaces.

The pair surveilled U.S. military facilities, including the Army

training area in Grafenwoehr, with the intention of disrupting NATO logistical support to Ukraine in its ongoing war with Russia, German news magazine *Der Spiegel* reported in April. Ukrainian forces receive combined-arms and weapons training there.

German law enforcement officials typically withhold the full identity of suspects due to the country's strict privacy laws.

Dieter S. became acquainted with a Russian intelligence agent while battling Ukrainian forces starting in 2014 as a member of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, the prosecutor's office statement said.

Donetsk is a province in eastern Ukraine that has been the scene of heavy fighting since the 2014 Russian invasion, which served as a precursor to the ongoing full-scale war that the Kremlin launched in February 2022.

Dieter S. was charged Oct. 18 with suspicion of membership in a foreign terrorist organization, the

Donetsk People's Republic, the statement said.

The group is reported to have used violence against civilians and was often involved in "intensive confrontations," according to German authorities.

In October 2023, Dieter S. began exchanging information with the agent about possible sabotage in Germany and scouted potential targets, prosecutors allege.

He passed on images of military transports and goods to his Russian handler, said he was willing to carry out bomb and arson attacks against military and industrial sites, and promised to attack railway lines used to move military equipment, authorities said.

Alexander J. and Alex D. began helping in March, the statement said. Prosecutors did not specify what that help entailed. Of the three, Alex D. is the only one who remains at large.

Stars and Stripes reporter Marcus Kloeckner contributed to this report.

Bavaria: Residents fear loss of US troops in region

FROM PAGE 1

more to military matters.

The question with no immediate answer is whether Trump would revive his first-term plan to move U.S. troops if Germany, which is constitutionally prevented from most deficit spending, doesn't pay more for defense.

The uncertainty has been a source of anxiety for residents who live around the U.S. Army's sprawling training ranges in northern Bavaria, said Nils Gruender, a federal lawmaker representing Amberg and a member of the pro-business Free Democratic Party.

A pullout of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment would be a "catastrophe for the entire region," Gruender said in a statement.

The bases in Bavaria are surrounded primarily by small towns and forests. The American troops here represent a major economic force, Vilseck Mayor Hans-Martin Schertl said, noting that the soldiers based at the Grafenwoehr Training Area pump \$739 million into the economy annually.

While there are groups with pro-Russian views and small leftist political parties that shun most defense spending, more domestic investment in the military is popular among many in the area, whether out of self-interest or conviction in the aftermath of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Harald Rippl, a businessman in neighboring Weiden who rents homes and apartments to American military personnel, said Ger-

many should contribute its fair share.

The possibility that Trump might reintroduce a withdrawal plan during his second term is worrisome in Vilseck and surrounding towns, he said.

"If you go to restaurants, if you see (Americans) at the Christmas markets, if you have American tenants ... (the impact of losing them) will be huge," Rippl said.

Vilseck hosts Rose Barracks, the regiment's home, which is connected by a series of secure roads to Tower Barracks and the grounds at Grafenwoehr, the Army's largest and most advanced permanent training area in Europe.

In recent years, the U.S. has ramped up operations in Poland, which Trump praised during his first term for its willingness to spend on the military. Poland is expected to lead NATO at 4.7% of GDP spending on defense in 2025, according to budget projections released in October.

However, the U.S. would be hard-pressed to quickly replicate the facilities and infrastructure it already has in Bavaria, whether in Poland or in other central and Eastern European countries.

Another possibility is having fewer U.S. troops in Europe altogether. Some analysts nominated for key roles in the Trump administration have argued that America's concerns on the Continent are detracting from the higher priority of deterring China.



MARKUS RAUCHENBERGER/U.S. Army

Army Capt. Raza Muhammad, assigned to Field Artillery Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, pulls the lanyard to fire a M777 howitzer during a live fire exercise at the 7th Army Training Command's Grafenwoehr Training Area in Germany in October.

Jakub Janda, director of the European Values Center for Security Policy in Prague, said that although reducing the American military presence in Europe wouldn't kill NATO's deterrence capabilities, they would be significantly diminished.

"It would be a very bad signal if we want to negotiate with Russia from a position of strength," Janda said. "Withdrawing U.S. troops from Europe in any way would be obviously not very smart during this situation."

Russian President Vladimir Pu-

tin would likely see a withdrawal as a lack of commitment to European security and try to exploit the move, like when he annexed Crimea in 2014, Janda said.

Such a move also could harm American bargaining power during negotiations to end the Ukraine war, he added.

American personnel number about 33,000 in Germany and 90,000 in Europe, EUCOM spokesman Charles Prichard said in November.

Those figures have fluctuated in recent years as U.S.-based units

rotate through the country. But moving permanently based service members in Germany elsewhere — whether within Europe, to the U.S. or another continent — would send a far stronger signal to allies and adversaries alike.

"It's pretty much a game of numbers," Janda said. "How many and what kind of troops would various allies and the U.S. have ready in close proximity of a potential conflict?"

Stars and Stripes reporter Marcus Kloeckner contributed to this report.

PACIFIC

Carl Vinson makes year-end stop in Malaysia

By BRIAN McELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

The USS Carl Vinson pulled into Port Klang over the weekend, marking a Navy aircraft carrier's second visit to Malaysia in as many months after a 12-year pause, according to the Navy.

The carrier and its strike group, which includes the guided-missile cruiser USS Princeton and guided-missile destroyers USS Sterett and USS William P. Lawrence, arrived at the port near Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, just after

sunrise Sunday, according to a Navy news release that day.

A spokeswoman for the carrier declined Tuesday to say how long the Carl Vinson would remain in port, but it may welcome the new year there.

Navy port calls vary in length, but a four-day stay by an aircraft carrier is common.

The USS Abraham Lincoln made a four-day port call Nov. 23 at Port Klang, the first U.S. carrier to stop there since 2012. The same carrier also stayed four days at

Guam in August.

During their stay, sailors with the Carl Vinson strike group will volunteer with animal shelters and the Pure Life Society, a home for orphans and underprivileged children, carrier spokeswoman Lt. Cmdr. Devin Arneson told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday. A carrier strike group may include approximately 7,500 sailors and Marines.

The two carrier visits to Malaysia this year mark the 10th anniversary of a comprehensive part-

nership with the U.S. that began in April 2014, according to the release.

The Carl Vinson's visit is meant to "reinforce the importance" of that partnership, Arneson said.

The Abraham Lincoln was the first U.S. carrier to visit Malaysia since the arrest of Leonard Glenn Francis — also known as "Fat Leonard" — who orchestrated a decade-long scheme to bribe U.S. Navy officials.

The Department of Justice said Francis swindled the Navy out of

more than \$30 million. Port Klang was among Francis' "pearl ports," named for their profitability in the scheme.

Francis, the former head of Glenn Defense Marine Asia, pleaded guilty in 2015 to bribery, conspiracy to commit bribery and conspiracy to defraud the United States. He was sentenced in November to 15 years in prison for paying off more than 30 Navy officials with cash, prostitutes and luxury travel to secure lucrative contracts.

Navy corpsman who treated Pearl Harbor victims dies at 103

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Harry Chandler, a Navy corpsman who witnessed the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941 from a hillside hospital before rushing to take part in a watery rescue mission, died Monday in Palm Beach County, Fla. He was 103.

Chandler's death leaves only 14 veterans of the attack known to be alive, according to a tally maintained by Kathleen Farley, president of the California chapter of Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors.

His death comes less than a week after that of Warren "Red" Upton, who died on Christmas in California at age 105.

"It is with profound sadness that we announce Harry Chandler, after a swift downturn over the past several days, passed peacefully at 5:08 pm ET," Chandler's family said in a statement published Monday by WPTV-5 in West Palm Beach. "We are gutted by this loss of our Pappy but comforted by the fact few have lived on Earth as fully and long as he did and now he is with many who passed before him."

From the time Chandler was a child, raised in Massachusetts in part during the hardscrabble years of the Great Depression, he wanted to be a sailor.



Chandler

For years, he begged his parents for a sailor suit, and they eventually gave in. "It was a bit too small, but it felt so good, so good," Chandler said during a video interview in Hawaii with Pacific Historic Parks on Dec. 8, 2023, a day after he attended the 82nd commemoration of the Japanese surprise attack at the Pearl Harbor National Memorial.

"I don't know why, but I was always sort of interested in the Navy," he said. "There was just something about the Navy. I didn't know too much about it, but I wanted to be a sailor in the Navy."

Chandler skipped graduating from high school and instead joined the Navy during his senior year.

On Dec. 7, 1941, he learned more

than any book could teach.

"I grew up very quickly, very quickly, that one day," Chandler said. "I thought I was a big shot being in the Navy, but I wasn't a man. I was still a kid. That day turned me into a man."

Chandler arrived in Hawaii in September 1941 and was assigned to Mobile Hospital No. 2, a complex of metal huts perched on the hillside of Aiea Heights overlooking Pearl Harbor.

On the morning of Dec. 7, he was preparing to raise the hospital's flag when he heard the roar of airplanes, he recalled in the interview.

He assumed they were American planes arriving from the mainland.

"I saw them swooping," he said. "I thought they must be practicing. Then I saw the bombs dropping."

Within minutes, Chandler said he saw the fiery explosion of the USS Arizona as it was hit by bomber torpedoes.

"It was scary, but they put us in trucks to take us down to the harbor to do what we could do to help those poor guys," he said.



PACIFIC HISTORIC PARKS

Harry Chandler talks about his experiences during the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on Dec. 8, 2023.

They pulled the wounded from the water and transferred them to hospital beds.

The sight of so many corpses and so many men in agony profoundly affected the young hospital corpsman, and thoughts of it 82 years later brought Chandler to

tears numerous times during the interview.

"The funny part of it was, you got so busy you weren't scared at all. It was after that it got scary: Holy smokes — only it wasn't 'holy smokes' we said — I could have been killed."

Okinawa motorcyclist dies after collision with Marine's car

By BRIAN McELHINEY
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A Japanese motorcyclist was killed early New Year's Day in a two-vehicle collision involving a U.S. Marine, according to Japanese police.

The 22-year-old Marine from Camp Foster was northbound on Route 58 in a sedan when he collided with a motorcycle at 5:21 a.m. Wednesday in the Gusukuma district of Urasoe city, an Okinawa Prefectural Police spokesman said. He declined to identify the Marine, who was not arrested.

The motorcyclist, Koji Moriya-

ma, 56, of Urasoe, was declared dead at 6:16 a.m. at a hospital in southern Okinawa, the spokesman said.

The Marine was not under the influence of alcohol at the time, a spokesman at the Urasoe Police Station said Thursday.

The Marine was not injured in the collision and cooperated with police at the scene, according to an email Thursday from Wes Hayes, a spokesman for Marine Corps Installations Pacific.

Personnel from the base Provost Marshal's Office also responded to the scene and are working cooperatively with prefectural police on the investigation, he said.

"Marine Corps Installations Pacific expresses their deep condolences to the family of the individual who lost their life in this tragic accident," Hayes said.

The collision occurred just after Moriyama shifted from the third to the second lane of the four-lane highway, the prefectural police spokesman said.

A passerby reported the incident minutes later, saying that Moriyama was "bleeding from his head," the spokesman said.

The incident is under investigation, the spokesman said.

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



BRIAN McELHINEY/Stars and Stripes

A Subaru sedan and a motorcycle involved in a fatal collision Wednesday at the Urasoe Police Station, Okinawa, on Thursday.

MILITARY

Marines to unify senior NCO leadership courses

BY LYDIA GORDON

Stars and Stripes

Marine Corps staff sergeants and gunnery sergeants will begin attending the same leadership school for promotion to the next rank under a pilot program that will merge their respective schools.

The creation of a single program to teach leadership skills, tactics classes and other aspects of their roles is intended to lessen the time those Marines spend away from their units.

The program consolidating the Career and Advanced schools will begin in the spring, a Marine Corps administrative message said.

While the change is being referred to as a pilot program, it ap-

pears likely to become permanent. The administrative message issued last month stated that the existing format offering separate resident schools will sunset in February 2025, while distance learning programs will be available until June 2025.

The new senior noncommissioned officer leadership school will be offered in two formats, online and in person. The online version will last 15 weeks, and prerequisites will be updated.

The distance course will be run through the Fort Worth, Texas, region beginning in March 2025 and be offered to Marines who can't attend in person.

The course sites are at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va.; Camp Lejeune, N.C.; Camp Pendleton,

Calif.; and Camp Smedley D. Butler on Okinawa. For the resident version, instruction will begin in April and is shortened to seven weeks.

Staff sergeants and gunnery sergeants who have already completed current requirements are exempt from attending the new program, according to the statement.

A third option is a two-week format available for Marines of those two ranks who are individual ready reservists or get mobilized as individual augmentees.

"Through the (school), our SNCOs are equipped with the tools to not only lead more effectively but to mentor and guide their Marines through the complexities of today's operational en-



RYAN PULLIAM/U.S. Marine Corps

Marines at Recruiting Station Houston graduate from their Advanced School Seminar in June. A new senior noncommissioned leadership school pilot program will merge career and advanced schools for staff sergeants and gunnery sergeants, streamlining their training time, according to the service.

vironment," Sgt. Maj. Stephen Griffin of the Training and Education Command said in the Dec. 23 statement.

The change was intended to balance the needs for education and

occupational training, Griffin said.

Timelines for classes beginning in the 2026 academic year starting in July have not yet been announced.

Pre-enrollment opens for Red Hill water-crisis registry

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The University of Hawaii announced Monday it had begun pre-enrollment in its Red Hill Registry, which is intended to provide support and resources for those impacted by the Navy's 2021 jet fuel spill on Oahu.

Those wishing to pre-enroll will be asked to provide contact information, activities as related to the fuel spill, current location and main concerns they wish the registry to address, the university said in a news release Monday.

Enrollment is open to anyone affected by the spill regardless of a connection with the military.

A form to pre-enroll is at www.RedHillRegistry.org. Full enrollment is expected to begin this summer.

The registry, operated by the university's Office of Strategic Health Initiatives project, is being funded by a five-year, \$27.2-million federal grant from the National Center for Disaster Medicine and Public Health at the Uniformed Services University of the



MAR'QUEON A.D. TRAMBLE/U.S. Navy

A Navy contractor tests a water sample as part of real-time monitoring at the Navy's Red Hill well in Aiea, Hawaii, in 2022.

Health Sciences.

The registry will also track and study the health status of participants over time in order gain greater understanding of long-term effects from jet-fuel exposure.

A spill in November 2021 from the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility, located a few miles from

Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, contaminated one of three wells used by the Navy for its water distribution system for military communities on and near the joint base.

Thousands of residents were temporarily relocated during the following months as the Navy sealed off the system from the

contamination and flushed the pipes.

Many residents, however, consumed and bathed in the tainted water in the wake of the contamination. Some complained of rashes, headaches, nausea, dizziness and vomiting.

Hundreds have joined a lawsuit in federal court seeking compensation. The trial for the first 17 "bellwether" plaintiffs in the civil suit Feindt vs. United States took place in May in Hawaii. U.S. District Court Judge Leslie Kobayashi has not yet issued a decision.

That case, however, underscored the need for better understanding of the long-term effects of human exposure to jet fuel.

During pretrial motions, Kobayashi disallowed expert testimony about long-term illnesses caused by jet-fuel, saying that only animal studies had been conducted.

"Animal studies, standing alone, do not demonstrate that a specific Plaintiff's exposure to jet fuel caused that specific Plaintiff's injuries," Kobayashi wrote

in an April 9 order.

Human studies on the effects of jet-fuel exposure are feasible and necessary, according to a report prepared by the University of Hawaii earlier this year under a requirement by the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal 2024.

"Exposure to jet fuel through the drinking water to the general population is unprecedented and little is known about the potential health effects, particularly in vulnerable populations such as children and pregnant women," the report states. It was presented Sept. 23 to the Committees on Armed Services of the House and Senate.

Existing studies are too few and too limited in scope to generalize findings, the report states.

"Given the infrastructure that is in development by the Registry, numerous epidemiological studies, including those that are broad in scope or very specific, are indeed feasible following a questionnaire-based or modeling-based exposure assessment," the report states.

US forces strike Houthi weapons and command hubs in Yemen

BY LAURA KOTE

Stars and Stripes

American forces in the Middle East struck multiple Houthi targets in Yemen's capital city of Sanaa and along its coast this week, U.S. Central Command said Tuesday.

The strikes, conducted Monday and Tuesday by U.S. Navy

ships and aircraft, targeted a command hub and weapons production facility as well as a bunker housing missiles and drones, CENTCOM said in a statement on X.com.

Navy and Air Force aircraft also destroyed a coastal radar site, seven cruise missiles and one-way attack drones over the Red

Sea, according to the statement.

The strikes mark the third and fourth actions U.S. forces have taken against the Houthis in the last month.

There were no injuries or damage to U.S. personnel or equipment during the strikes, which are part of the ongoing efforts to degrade the Iran-

backed rebel group as it attacks Israel and continues to target commercial and military ships.

Houthi leaders have made multiple recent claims, without evidence, of successful attacks against U.S. targets. On Tuesday, the group said it had targeted the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman.

Earlier this month, a U.S. Navy jet was shot down over the Red Sea in an apparent "friendly fire" accident by the guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg, which is part of the Truman Carrier Strike Group. The two flight officers were able to eject safely and an investigation into the strike is ongoing.

MILITARY

Court: Military's 9/11 plea deals can proceed

US seeks continuance after rebuke of Austin's action

By DAN LAMOTHE
The Washington Post

The U.S. government's controversial plea deals with three men accused of orchestrating the 9/11 terrorist attacks may proceed, a Defense Department appeals court has ruled, after the Biden administration sought to thwart an agreement that would spare the lives of those who have admitted guilt in the deadliest crime perpetrated on American soil.

The unanimous decision, released Monday night by the U.S. Court of Military Commission Review, is a rebuke of Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who intervened in the cases in August after the agreements were approved by a judge he had appointed to oversee the cases against Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the attacks' alleged mastermind, and Mohammed's suspected accomplices. At the time, Austin said he believed that the families of those killed on Sept. 11, 2001, and as a result of the ensuing wars deserved to see the men stand trial.

The appeals court ruled that while Austin had authority to restrict the judge, Susan K. Escallier, from entering into future pretrial agreements on behalf of the U.S. government, he could not rescind them after the fact. Mohammed and other defendants have already acknowledged their guilt, undermining any other proceeding against them, the appeals court found.

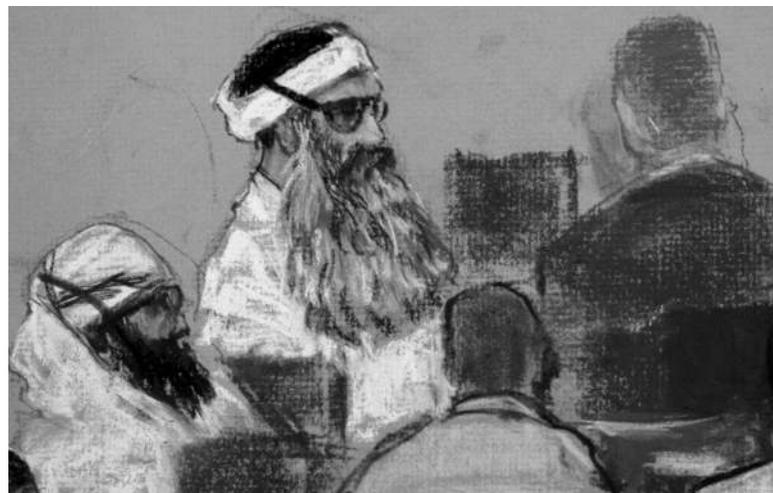
A senior defense official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, said the Defense Department, in conjunction with the Justice Department, is reviewing the ruling and considering options. The U.S. government on Tuesday filed a motion with the military commission requesting a continuance of the guilty pleas until Jan. 27 to provide U.S. officials "the opportunity to determine whether to pursue relief" in the case, the senior defense official said. A motions hearing in Mohammed's case was to begin Jan. 6.

The appeals court's ruling upholds an earlier determination by Air Force Col. Matthew McCall,

a military commission judge who found in November that the plea deals are valid and that allowing Austin to rescind them afterward would grant him an "absolute veto over any discretionary act" reached by the officer he had appointed to oversee the cases. The Pentagon appealed that ruling within days, setting the stage for the appeals court to act.

In the plea deals, Mohammed and two other defendants — Walid bin Attash and Mustafa al-Hawsawi — would receive life in prison for admitting to killing nearly 3,000 people in an al-Qaida plot that turned hijacked passenger jets into weapons. Two planes were flown into the World Trade Center in New York City, with another hitting the Pentagon outside Washington. A fourth jetliner crashed in a Pennsylvania field after passengers fought with the hijackers.

The three defendants remain among the most prominent of some two dozen inmates at a detention facility on the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. President Joe



JANET HAMLIN/AP

This December 2008 courtroom drawing shows Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, center, and co-defendant Walid bin Attash, left, attending a pre-trial session at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba.

Biden said early in his administration that he intended to close the prison, but his administration has struggled to complete negotiations with other nations to transfer inmates back to their home countries.

Late Monday, the Pentagon announced that Ridah Bin Saleh al-Yazidi had been repatriated to Tunisia, leaving 26 inmates in Guantanamo. Of those, 14 are eligible for

transfer, defense officials said.

It's unclear what President-elect Donald Trump may do with Guantanamo and its inmates when he takes office in January. During his first administration, Trump forbid the facility's closure and blocked efforts that former President Barack Obama had underway to repatriate several inmates, suggesting that doing so was soft on terrorism.

US: N. Korean troops in Russia deemed 'expendable' by their leaders

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korean troops deployed to Russia's western border with Ukraine are conducting "human wave tactics" on the battlefield, leading to more than 1,000 casualties within their ranks last week, a White House spokesman said recently.

North Korean troops supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine are conducting ground assaults in the Kursk region against Ukrainian forces that have led to "heavy casualties," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said last Friday during a news conference in Washington.

"It is clear that Russian and North Korean military leaders are treating these troops as expendable and ordering them on hopeless assaults against Ukrainian defenses," he said. "These North Korean soldiers appear to be highly indoctrinated, pushing attacks even when it is clear that those attacks are futile."

The White House had received reports that North Korean troops were killing themselves, instead of surrendering, Kirby said, "likely out of fear of reprisal against their families in North Korea in the event that they're captured."

North Korean troops have suffered "many losses" and Moscow and Pyongyang "have no interest in the survival of these Koreans at all," Ukrainian President Volody-



Korean Central News Agency

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, center, observes troops firing their rifles at an undisclosed military base in North Korea, on March 6. North Korean troops deployed to Russia's western border with Ukraine are conducting "human wave tactics" on the battlefield, leading to more than 1,000 casualties within their ranks last week, a White House spokesman said recently.

myr Zelenskyy said in a video address last Friday.

"Everything is arranged in a way that makes it impossible for us to capture the Koreans as prisoners," Zelenskyy said. Those who were captured were "seriously wounded and could not be resuscitated," he said.

Militaries and intelligence agencies in Ukraine, the United

States and South Korea have estimated around 10,000-12,000 North Korean troops have deployed to Russia since October.

Since 2022, Pyongyang has shipped artillery shells and ballistic missiles to Russia in its fight against Ukraine, according to South Korea's military. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin in

June pledged mutual military aid if either of their countries were at war.

President Joe Biden on Monday announced the U.S. would send nearly \$2.5 billion in security assistance to Ukraine. This package includes medium-range surface-to-air missiles, artillery shells, small arms, grenades, communications equipment and clothing,

according to a Defense Department news release that day.

"At my direction, the United States will continue to work relentlessly to strengthen Ukraine's position in this war over the remainder of my time in office," Biden said in a White House statement Monday.

The security package is in addition to the \$3.5 billion sent Monday to Ukraine by the Treasury Department, State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development. The funds are meant to directly support Ukraine's budget, including the salaries of government employees, teachers and health care workers.

"Ukraine's success is in America's core national interest," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a department news release Monday. "Stopping Russia's illegal invasion will help uphold a global democratic, rules-based, order that advances American security and economic interests, and it will send an unmistakable message to autocrats and would-be aggressors around the world that they will face unshakeable resolve."

Congress has approved over \$180 billion in funds and military assistance to Ukraine since Russia's invasion in 2022, according to a September report from the U.S. Ukraine Oversight Interagency Working Group, a group of 24 federal agencies tasked with overseeing assistance to Kyiv.

VETERANS

Natural outcome: 'Just put me in a pine box'

Survey finds more vets interested in green burial option offered at 3 national cemeteries

By **LINDA F. HERSEY**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Christopher, a Marine Corps veteran who survived a truck explosion while serving in Afghanistan, said the near-death experience caused him to consider his own mortality and how he wants his burial to be handled.

The 35-year-old Colorado resident, who declined to provide his last name, said he has done advance planning and conveyed his desire to have a natural burial, also known as a green burial, that does not burden loved ones with thousands of dollars in funeral bills.

In contrast to the pomp and circumstance of traditional military funerals, a growing number of veterans say they prefer a simple, low-cost burial that forgoes the luxury of lined caskets and marble urns for a natural interment with minimal impact to the environment, according to a recent survey of veterans by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Based on survey feedback, the VA recently opened green burial sections at three national cemeteries that limit markers and landscaping, forgo chemicals and embalming fluids, and use caskets, shrouds and urns from natural materials that degrade over time.

The green burials are offered at Pikes Peak National Cemetery in Colorado Springs, Colo.; the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona in Phoenix; and Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, which is north of Tampa.

The VA survey showed respondents ages 40 and under had the greatest interest in natural burials and overwhelmingly supported green alternatives.

"Just put me in a pine box where my body can decompose and return to nature," said Christopher, a former sergeant who served between 2007 and 2016 in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Interest by veterans and their families in green burials parallels a national trend among Americans seeking alternatives to formal funerals with costly grave sites, underground vaults and a standardized burial process that does not allow for individual expression, according to Ann Hoffner, who publishes "Green Burial Naturally," a state-by-state guide to natural burials.

The number of cemeteries offering green burials has grown from 42 in 2016 to more than 300 in 2024, Hoffner said.

Hoffner first learned about green burials through her own experience seeking an alternative to a conventional funeral for her 94-year-old father, a World War II veteran who died in 2016.

Edward A. Hoffner was an Army lieutenant who participated in the



Ann Hoffner

Mourners stand before the gravesite of Edward Hoffner, a World War II veteran who died in 2016. His daughter, Ann Hoffner, chose a green burial for her father that used only biodegradable materials. Hoffner was buried at Steelmantown Cemetery, a natural burial preserve in New Jersey.



ERIC KAYNE/Stars and Stripes

Jane Pennington holds a photo of her deceased husband, World War II veteran Ken Pennington, who was buried using green burial methods.

liberation of France, his daughter said.

Hoffner published an essay about her father's natural burial at a wooded sanctuary, comparing it to a cousin's traditional funeral "in a painted casket in a concrete vault under an Astroturf temporary covering" at a memorial park.

An American flag was draped over her father's body, which was wrapped in a shroud of natural material. Mourners placed his body in a wooden wagon that was wheeled to his grave at Steelmantown Cemetery, a woodland burial preserve in New Jersey.

An honor guard played taps and fired a three-volley salute as a final farewell after the body was lowered into the ground.

"The wild blueberries had been pulled back to admit his body and would be replanted," Ann Hoffner wrote. "It was an extraordinary realization that he had joined an ecosystem. It would recycle the nutrients in his flesh and bones and weave them into life."

While the Hoffner family holds a deed to his burial plot, there are no grave markers or head stones.

national cemetery.

The National Cemetery Administration will accept cremated and intact remains for green burials at the three cemeteries participating in the pilot program.

According to the National Funeral Directors Association, nearly 70% of Americans surveyed expressed interest in learning about green burials as a funeral option because of the lower costs and benefits for the environment.

Congress in 2022 authorized the VA to establish green burial sections in national cemeteries.

Under the National Cemeteries Preservation and Protection Act, a veteran's remains interred in a green burial section must be prepared without chemicals and using caskets and urns that will naturally degrade in the environment.

The idea behind green burials is to allow the body to recycle in the natural environment with little disturbance to the surroundings, according to the Green Burial Council.

"When it comes to green burials, I like to say there are many shades of green. For some families, green burial means no chemical preservation of the body, a casket made of natural material, and no vault or grave liner if the cemetery allows," said Lily Buerkle, director of funerals for the historic Congressional Cemetery in Washington, where 1,700 veterans are interred.

The private, nonprofit cemetery is unique among burial grounds in Washington for providing both natural burials and conventional funerals.

At green burials, families "tend to want to be active participants in their loved one's funerals," Buerkle said. "They want to put their grief to action — whether that is helping to bathe and shroud their person, or hand-shovel earth at the cemetery,

or lead their own heartfelt ceremonies without clergy. They want to be a vital part of it," she said.

Buerkle, who is a licensed mortician in D.C., Maryland and Virginia, said she appreciates that the National Cemetery Association is giving veterans and their families the option of green burials at some of its cemeteries.

"This is a giant leap forward to allow veterans' families access to greener burial options," Buerkle said. "I love knowing that our veterans are beginning to have these choices."

Jane Pennington, 98, of Maryland, said she sought a more eco-friendly alternative to cremation, which dumps toxins into the air, when she began making funeral arrangements for her late husband, an Army and Air Force veteran who served in 1945 and 1946.

"Crematoriums are usually located in disadvantaged areas in the city, so my husband and I had decided while he was alive that we would start looking for an alternative," Pennington recalled.

Kenneth Pennington, 96, died in 2023. The former Air Force corporal had served in an Army specialized training corps while studying to be an engineer in college. He joined the Air Force after graduation and was assigned to a military installation in Dayton, Ohio.

After her husband's death, Jane Pennington said she found Serenity Ridge, a new cemetery in Maryland where burial vaults and embalming chemicals are not permitted. A trail network leads to wooded burial sites.

"By offering a recreational green space with walking trails, families are invited to embrace the space itself, and the cemetery enjoys a dual purpose," said Ed Bixby, founder of the Global Green Burial Alliance, which promotes eco-friendly funeral options.

There are more than 18 million U.S. military veterans. Many of the veterans are at an advanced age, which means a higher number of deaths are expected each year.

Christopher, the Marine Corps veteran in Colorado, said he has thought about that statistic when considering a natural burial for his funeral someday.

"America basically has been at war every 10 years. In my view, we don't have the space it will take at veterans' cemeteries to put people in \$8,000 caskets and concrete vaults in the ground," he said. "The amount of land that these cemeteries take up is ridiculous."

"I see natural burials as another way for veterans like myself to give back to our country and community. Guys I served with did not enlist for the recognition," he said. "We were just doing our job."

NATION

Struggles preceded Texas vet's truck attack

The Dallas Morning News

Investigators are probing why a Texas Army veteran who bragged about his Beaumont roots and militant work ethic went from working in real estate to praising ISIS just before he launched a deadly attack in New Orleans.

The 42-year-old man was identified as the driver of a truck that plowed into a crowd celebrating the new year at New Orleans' French Quarter.

The rampage ended when Shamsud-Din Jabbar exited the rented Ford pickup and was fatally shot by officers in a shootout with police. The attack left at least 15 people dead and more than 30 injured, including two police officers hurt in the gunfight.

President Joe Biden said Jabbar posted videos on social media "mere hours" before the early morning attack "indicating that he was inspired by ISIS." An Islamic State flag was discovered in the pickup.

"The situation is very fluid," Bi-

den said during a news conference in Camp David, Md. He cautioned that "no one should jump to conclusions" and described the FBI-led investigation as being in a "preliminary stage."

The investigation at least extends into Louisiana and Texas,



Jabbar

where law enforcement from the FBI's Houston office descended upon a location possibly linked to Jabbar in the northern part of the city. An FBI SWAT team, crisis negotiators and counterterrorism investigators were among those deployed to the area.

Court records and a now-removed YouTube video reviewed by *The Dallas Morning News* paint a picture of a man who struggled after his military service ended, including with mounting financial struggles, a contentious divorce and a failing real estate

venture in the years leading up to the attack.

Jabbar served in the U.S. Army as a human resource specialist and an information technology specialist from March 2007 until January 2015, including during deployment to Afghanistan from February 2009 to January 2010, an Army spokesperson said.

Jabbar later served in the Army Reserve as an IT specialist from January 2015 until July 2020. He held the rank of staff sergeant at the end of service, the Army spokesperson said.

A man with a similar name — Shamsud-jin Jabaar — was identified as a Georgia State senior and U.S. Army vet attending Georgia State University in Atlanta in 2015, according to an article from that time in the school's student paper, *The Signal*.

In the article, Jabaar said he paid for his tuition through the GI bill and complained of the difficulties of obtaining tuition due to the complex bureaucracy of the De-

partment of Veteran Affairs.

Address records showed Jabbar previously lived in Georgia. He earned a bachelor of business administration degree in computer information systems in 2017 from Georgia State University, officials confirmed to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

Wednesday's attack was just hours before thousands of football fans were expected to attend the Sugar Bowl game featuring the University of Georgia and Notre Dame, which was delayed after the tragedy.

A search of criminal court records in Texas turns up little on Jabbar. He was charged with misdemeanor theft and driving with an invalid license in 2002 and 2005, respectively.

In a video published to YouTube in 2020 that has since been taken down, Jabbar pitched himself as a competent real estate agent. He said he was born and raised in Beaumont.

Drawing on his military experi-

ence, he touted his service in the U.S. Army, which he said showed him the importance of "great service" and attention to detail.

"I feel like what really sets me apart from other agents is my ability to be able to one: be a fierce negotiator," Jabbar said in the video.

But by July 2021, Jabbar filed for divorce from his wife in Fort Bend County. The couple had one child together, according to court filings.

Jabbar's ex-wife could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Jabbar, whose attorney withdrew early in the proceeding, represented himself in the divorce. In an August 2022 filing, he noted that he worked at a consulting firm and made about \$120,000 a year.

But Jabbar faced financial problems, including the risk of foreclosure, he wrote in the filings. In a January 2022 email to his ex-wife's attorney, he said he could not afford his house payment.

ISIS: Driver killed by police officers

FROM PAGE 1

count in the hours before the attack in which he aligned himself with ISIS and told viewers that he had joined the militant group before last summer.

"This was an act of terrorism. It was premeditated and an evil act," said Christopher Raia, the deputy assistant director of the FBI's counterterrorism division.

The attack killed 14 people, including an 18-year-old woman who had ambitions of becoming a nurse. Authorities initially put the death toll at 15, which included Jabbar, who was fatally shot in a firefight with police.

Officials had said Wednesday that they were seeking additional potential suspects in the attack, which occurred when Jabbar steered around a police blockade and plowed into a crowd.

But Raia said the current assessment is that he acted alone, without any conspirators.

Authorities recovered a black flag of the Islamic State in the truck, and President Joe Biden said he was told by the FBI that Jabbar, a U.S. citizen from Texas, had posted videos to social media hours before the carnage that showed he was motivated by the militant group and expressed a desire to kill.

He was shot to death by police, and the FBI said Wednesday that it believed he did not act alone. Investigators found guns and what appeared to be an improvised explosive device in the vehicle, along with other explosive devices elsewhere in the French Quarter.

Officials fanned out to serve search warrants and spent hours at a Houston-area home thought to be connected to the investigation. But as of Thursday morning, no additional arrests were known to have been made, and it was unclear if the FBI was still actively looking for more suspects.

The rampage turned festive Bourbon Street into a macabre scene of maimed victims, bloodied bodies and pedestrians fleeing for safety inside nightclubs and restaurants. In addition to the dead, dozens of people were hurt.

Zion Parsons, 18, of Gulfport, Miss., said he saw the truck "barreling through, throwing people like in a movie scene, throwing people into the air."

"Bodies, bodies all up and down the street, everybody screaming and hollering," said Parsons, whose friend Nikyra Dedeaux was among the dead.

But by Thursday, a still-reeling city was inching back toward normal operations. Authorities finished processing the scene early in the morning, removing the last of the bodies, and Bourbon Street was set to reopen at some point later in the day, according to an official familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity to *The Associated Press*.

The Sugar Bowl college football game between Notre Dame and Georgia, initially set for Wednesday night and postponed by a day in the interest of national security, was still on for Thursday. And the city planned to host the Super Bowl next month.

Federal officials were investigating Jabbar's potential associations with any terror organizations as they hunted for additional clues in what's believed to be the deadliest ISIS-inspired assault on U.S. soil in years.

Local officials, meanwhile, faced more questions about security protocols in the city leading up to the attack, the latest example of a vehicle being used as a weapon to carry out mass violence.

Jabbar drove a rented pickup truck onto a sidewalk, going around a police car that was positioned to block vehicular traffic, authorities said. A barrier system meant to prevent vehicle attacks was being repaired in preparation for the Super Bowl.

Jabbar was killed by police after he exited the truck and opened fire on responding officers, New Orleans Police Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick said. Three officers returned fire. Two were shot and are in stable condition.

The driver "defeated" safety measures in place to protect pedestrians and was "hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did," Kirkpatrick said.

"This is not just an act of terrorism. This is evil," she added.

A photo circulated among law enforcement officials showed a bearded Jabbar wearing camouflage next to the truck after he was killed. The intelligence bulletin obtained by the AP said he was wearing a ballistic vest and helmet. The flag of Islamic State was on the truck's trailer hitch, the FBI said.

"For those people who don't be-



BUTCH DILL/AP

Security and bomb sniffing dogs check vehicles as they enter the Superdome parking garage ahead of the Sugar Bowl NCAA College Football Playoff game on Thursday in New Orleans.

lieve in objective evil, all you have to do is look at what happened in our city early this morning," U.S. Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., said. "If this doesn't trigger the gag reflex of every American, every fair-minded American, I'll be very surprised."

Jabbar joined the Army in 2007, serving on active duty in human resources and information technology and deploying to Afghanistan from 2009 to 2010, the service said. He transferred to the Army Reserve in 2015 and left in 2020 with the rank of staff sergeant.

Hours after the attack, several coroner's office vans were parked on the corner of Bourbon and Canal streets, cordoned off by police tape with crowds of dazed tourists standing around, some trying to navigate their luggage through the labyrinth of blockades.

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry urged people to avoid the area,

which remained an active crime scene.

"We looked out our front door and saw caution tape and dead silence, and it's eerie," said Tessa Cundiff, an Indiana native who moved to the French Quarter a few years ago. "This is not what we fell in love with, it's sad."

Biden, speaking from the presidential retreat at Camp David, addressed the victims and the people of New Orleans: "I want you to know I grieve with you. Our nation grieves with you as you mourn and as you heal."

FBI officials have repeatedly warned about an elevated international terrorism threat due to the Israel-Hamas war. In the last year, the agency has disrupted other potential attacks, including in October when it arrested an Afghan man in Oklahoma for an alleged Election Day plot targeting large crowds.

NATION

Cybertruck explodes outside a Trump hotel

Suspect a soldier in Green Berets

Staff and wire reports

LAS VEGAS — Firework mortars and camp fuel canisters were found stuffed into the back of the Tesla Cybertruck that exploded outside President-elect Donald Trump's Las Vegas hotel early Wednesday, killing a suspect inside the vehicle and sparking an intense investigation into possible terrorism.

Las Vegas Metropolitan Police and Clark County Fire Department officials said that a person died inside the futuristic-looking pickup truck and seven people nearby suffered minor injuries.

The U.S. Army identified the dead man as Matthew Alan Livelsberger.

He was a master sergeant assigned to the Army's 10th Special Forces Group, an official said Thursday on condition of anonymity. The group, which has a battalion based out of Stuttgart, is the Army's primary special operations unit in Germany and carries out missions across Europe.

Livelsberger enlisted in the Army in 2006 and served on active duty until 2011.

He then had stints in the National Guard and Army Reserve before returning to active duty in December 2012 as a special oper-



SAM MORRIS, LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL/AP

Clark County Fire Department crews work outside Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas after a fire and explosion of a Tesla Cybertruck in the valet area on Wednesday.

ations soldier, the Army said.

During his Army career, Livelsberger deployed twice to Afghanistan and served in Ukraine, Tajikistan, Georgia and Congo, the Army said. He was awarded two Bronze Stars including one with a valor device for courage under fire, a combat infantry badge and an Army Commendation Medal with valor.

Livelsberger was on leave from his assignment in Germany when he died, officials said.

U.S. Army Special Operations

Command "is in full cooperation with federal and state law enforcement agencies, but as a matter of policy, will not comment on ongoing investigations," the Army statement said.

Video of the aftermath of Wednesday's blast showed a tumble of charred fireworks mortars, canisters and other explosive devices crowded into the back of the pickup. The truck bed walls were still intact because the blast shot straight up rather than to the sides.

The FBI said Thursday in a post on X that it was "conducting law enforcement activity" at a home in Colorado Springs, Colo., related to Wednesday's explosion but provided no other details.

The incident happened on the same day that Army veteran Shamsud-Din Bahar Jabbar drove into a crowd in New Orleans' French Quarter, killing at least 15 people before being shot to death by police.

Both Livelsberger and Jabbar spent time at Fort Liberty in North

Carolina, which was previously known as Fort Bragg.

However, an official who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity said there was no overlap in their assignments at the base.

Chris Raia, FBI deputy assistant director, said Thursday that officials have found "no definitive link" between the New Orleans attack and the truck explosion in Las Vegas.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk said Wednesday afternoon on X that "we have now confirmed that the explosion was caused by very large fireworks and/or a bomb carried in the bed of the rented Cybertruck and is unrelated to the vehicle itself."

"All vehicle telemetry was positive at the time of the explosion," Musk wrote.

In Las Vegas, witness Ana Bruce, visiting from Brazil, said she heard three explosions.

"The first one where we saw the fire, the second one, I guess, was the battery or something like that, and the third was the big one that smoked the entire area and was the moment when everyone was told to evacuate and stay away," Bruce said.

Her travel companion, Alcides Antunes, showed video he took of flames lapping the sides of the silver-colored vehicle.

Stars and Stripes staff reporter John Vandiver contributed to this report.

Chinese-backed hacker breaches the US Treasury

Bloomberg News

The U.S. Treasury Department was hacked by a Chinese state-sponsored actor through a third-party software service provider, according to a letter the agency sent to Congress on Monday.

Treasury described the intrusion as a "major cybersecurity incident," since it was attributed to a state-sponsored actor, according to the letter, which was reviewed by Bloomberg News.

Treasury was notified on Dec. 8 by a third-party software provider, BeyondTrust Inc., that a hacker had gained access "to a key used by the vendor to secure a cloud-based service used to remotely provide technical support for Treasury Departmental Offices (DO) end users," according to the letter.

The department is being assisted by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, the FBI, the intelligence community and third-party forensic investigators.

Based on available information, advanced hackers tied to China were behind the incident, according to the letter.

The Chinese embassy in Washington opposes U.S. "smear attacks against China without any factual basis," it said in an emailed statement. "The U.S. needs to stop using cybersecurity to smear and slander China, and stop spreading all kinds of disinformation



MICHAEL A. MCCOY/For The Washington Post

The Treasury Department says some of its workstations were breached by a China-sponsored hacker.

about the so-called Chinese hacking threat," it said.

BeyondTrust, which sells managed access software and other cybersecurity products, holds contracts with the federal government worth more than \$4 million, according to government data compiled by Bloomberg. In addition to Treasury, the data shows, BeyondTrust does business with the Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Justice, along with other agencies.

A BeyondTrust spokesperson said Monday night that a limited number of customers were involved, had been notified and were being offered support. The spokesperson added that law enforcement had been contacted and the company was supporting the investigation.

FBI found 150 homemade bombs at home in Virginia

Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. — Federal agents found one of the largest stockpiles of homemade explosives they have ever seized when they arrested a Virginia man on a firearms charge last month, according to a court filing by federal prosecutors.

Investigators seized more than 150 pipe bombs and other homemade devices when they searched the home of Brad Spafford northwest of Norfolk in December, the prosecutors said in a motion filed Monday. The prosecutors wrote that this is believed to be "the largest seizure by number of finished explosive devices in FBI history."

Most of the bombs were found in a detached garage at the home in Isle of Wight County, along with tools and bomb-making materials including fuses and pieces of plastic pipe, according to court documents. The prosecutors also wrote: "Several additional apparent pipe bombs were found in a backpack in the home's bedroom, completely unsecured," in the home he shares with his wife and

two young children.

Spafford, 36, was charged with possession of a firearm in violation of the National Firearms Act. Law enforcement officers allege he owned an unregistered short barrel rifle. Prosecutors said that he faces "numerous additional potential charges" related to the explosives.

Defense attorneys argued in a motion Tuesday that authorities haven't produced evidence that he was planning violence, also noting that he has no criminal record. Further, they question whether the explosive devices were usable because "professionally trained explosive technicians had to rig the devices to explode them."

The investigation began in 2023 when an informant told authorities that Spafford was stockpiling weapons and ammunition, according to court documents. The informant, a friend, told authorities Spafford had disfigured his hand in 2021 while working on homemade explosives. Prosecutors said he only has two fingers on his right hand.

NATION

Fatal fireworks explosion leaves ruin in Honolulu

Associated Press

Emergency crews arrived to a chaotic and gruesome scene in a Honolulu neighborhood after a large New Year's firework tipped over after being lit and ignited a fiery, shrapnel-studded blast that killed three people and injured more than 20 others, several of them critically.

Two women died at the scene and a third woman died at a hospital, authorities said Wednesday as they implored people to abandon their New Year's tradition of setting off fireworks across the city. Officials promised tougher penalties for illegal fireworks.

Hawaii Gov. Josh Green graphically described the deaths in a news conference Wednesday to emphasize the potential danger of fireworks. "We're talking about the worst possible, war-zone injuries that took their lives."

Some of the more than 20 people taken to hospitals with severe burns and shrapnel wounds included children, said officials who had not yet publicly identified any victims including those

killed.

Police were investigating whether charges for the person who lit the firework near midnight were warranted, Honolulu Police Chief Arthur Logan said.

The blast happened at a three-story home with a bottom-level carport. Piles of debris including bundles of blackened firework mortars could be seen in front of the house in Wednesday's daylight.

The explosion broke windows across the street. It happened when a lit bundle of aerial, mortar-style fireworks called a "cake" tipped over or fell off a table and fired sideways into crates containing additional fireworks, which then exploded.

The cake's rounds could be separated but had been lit as a bundle of 50, part of what officials said was tens of thousands of dollars' worth of fireworks at the home.

Ambulance crews arrived but had to triage — separate and treat victims with the worst injuries first — several houses away be-



MARCO GARCIA/AP

Debris is piled outside the site of a deadly New Year's Eve fireworks explosion in Honolulu.

cause of parked cars and crowds on the streets, Honolulu Emergency Services Department Director Dr. Jim Ireland said.

Some people nearby continued setting off fireworks even as blast victims were being taken to hospitals, officials said.

The neighborhood is near Honolulu's international airport and a joint U.S. Air Force and Navy base and a little more than 2 miles east of the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial, which honors sailors who died in the attack on Pearl Harbor that drew the U.S. into World War II.

"I've been in EMS over 30 years and this is probably one of the worst calls I've ever been on as far as the immense tragedy and amount of patients and severity of the injuries," Ireland said in an earlier news conference.

A fourth person was killed in a different fireworks explosion elsewhere on Oahu, officials said. At least four other serious injuries occurred in unrelated fireworks accidents overnight.

Social media posts overnight showed fireworks being set off across wide areas of Honolulu even though sparklers, fountains

and aerial fireworks are illegal and a permit is required to set off firecrackers, according to the Honolulu Fire Department.

"We're angry, frustrated and deeply saddened at this unnecessary loss of life and suffering. It's a tragic way to start the new year," Mayor Rick Blangiardi said. "No one should have to endure such pain due to a reckless and illegal activity."

Green said he was looking into whether new penalties including a felony charge for possessing large fireworks are needed to curtail fireworks in Hawaii.

Biden to give 2nd highest civilian award to leaders of Jan. 6 panel

BY COLLEEN LONG
Associated Press

President Joe Biden is bestowing the second highest civilian medal on Liz Cheney and Bennie Thompson, leaders of the congressional investigation into the Capitol riot who Donald Trump has said should be jailed for their roles in the inquiry.

Biden will award the Presidential Citizens Medal to 20 people in a ceremony Thursday at the White House, including Americans who fought for marriage equality, a pioneer in treating wounded soldiers, and two of the president's longtime friends, former Sens. Ted Kaufman, D-Del., and Chris Dodd, D-Conn.

"President Biden believes these Americans are bonded by their common decency and commitment to serving others," the White House said in a statement. "The country is better because of their dedication and sacrifice."

Biden last year honored people who were involved in defending the Capitol from a mob of angry Trump supporters on Jan. 6, 2021,

or who helped safeguard the will of American voters during the 2020 presidential election, when Trump tried and failed to overturn the results.



Cheney

Cheney, a former Wyoming congresswoman, and Thompson, a Mississippi Democrat, led the House committee that investigated the insurrection. The committee's final report asserted that Trump criminally engaged in a "multi-part conspiracy" to overturn the lawful results of the election he lost to Biden and failed to act to stop his supporters from attacking the Capitol. Thompson wrote that Trump "lit that fire."

Cheney later said she would vote for Democrat Kamala Harris and campaigned with the Democratic nominee, raising Trump's ire. Biden has been considering whether to offer preemptive pardons to Cheney and others Trump has targeted.

Trump, who won the 2024 election and will take office Jan. 20, still refuses to back away from his lies about the 2020 presidential race and has said he would pardon the rioters once he is back in the White House.

During an interview with NBC's "Meet the Press," the president-elect said that "Cheney did something that's inexcusable, along with Thompson and the people on the un-select committee of political thugs and, you know, creeps," claiming without evidence they "deleted and destroyed" testimony they collected.

10 injured in shooting outside NYC nightclub

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Ten people were wounded in a shooting outside a New York City nightclub while they were waiting to get into a private event, police said.

About 15 people were standing outside Amazura nightclub at 11:15 p.m. Wednesday in Jamaica, Queens, when four men on foot approached the group of 16 to 20-year-olds.

Three or four men opened fire on the group, New York Police Department Chief of Patrol Philip Rivera said during an early Thursday news conference.

About 30 shots were fired before the gunmen fled on foot. They were then seen getting into a sedan with out-of-state plates.

There is "zero tolerance for these senseless shootings," Rivera said.

Six females and four males were taken to hospitals with non-life-threatening injuries, he said.

A massive police presence and several ambulances could be seen outside Amazura in footage posted on social media.

The motive was not immediately known but Rivera said: "This is not terrorism."



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WORLD

Impeached S. Korean president defiant with detention possible

By KIM TONG-HYUNG
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, in a message to conservative supporters rallying outside his Seoul residence, vowed to “fight to the end” against “anti-state forces,” while his legal team warned Thursday that police officers attempting to detain him could face arrest by his presidential security service or even civilians.

Yoon’s latest statement of defiance came as the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials prepared to execute a detention warrant against him that was issued by a Seoul court on Tuesday and is valid for one week. The warrant was issued after Yoon evaded multiple requests to appear for questioning and blocked searches of his office, hindering an investigation into

whether his hourslong martial law imposition on Dec. 3 amounted to rebellion.

Oh Dong-woon, the anti-corruption agency’s chief prosecutor, has indicated that police forces might be deployed if Yoon’s security service resists the detention attempt, which could occur as early as Thursday. But it remains unclear whether Yoon can be compelled to submit to questioning.

Yoon’s legal team issued a statement on Thursday warning that any attempt by the anti-corruption agency to use police units for his detention would exceed their legal authority. The lawyers said police officers could face arrest by either the “presidential security service or any citizens” if they try to detain Yoon. They didn’t elaborate further on the claim.

South Korean law permits anyone to make an arrest to stop an active crime, and critics ac-

cused Yoon of inciting his supporters to obstruct attempts to detain him.

In a message to supporters gathered outside his residence Wednesday evening, Yoon said he would continue to fight against anti-state forces “violating our sovereignty” and putting the nation in “danger.” He applauded his supporters for their efforts to protect “liberal democracy and constitutional order” and said he was watching their protests on live YouTube broadcasts, according to a photo of the message shared by Yoon’s lawyers.

Yoon Kap-keun, the president’s lawyer, filed a challenge with the Seoul Western District Court on Thursday to block both the detention warrant for Yoon Suk Yeol and a related search warrant for his residence. The lawyer argued that both warrants violate criminal laws and the constitution.



AHN YOUNG-JOON/AP

Supporters of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol lie down on the ground as Yoon faces potential arrest, near the presidential residence in Seoul, South Korea, on Thursday.

The liberal opposition Democratic Party, which drove the legislative vote that impeached Yoon Suk Yeol on Dec. 14 over his imposition of martial law, accused the president of trying to mobilize his supporters to block his detention and called for law enforcement authorities to execute the warrant immediately.

Braving subfreezing temperatures, thousands of Yoon’s sup-

porters rallied for hours near his residence on Thursday amid a heavy police presence, waving South Korean and American flags while chanting, “Nullify the impeachment!” and “We will protect President Yoon Suk Yeol!” Officers removed some protesters who laid down on a road leading to the entrance of Yoon’s residence, but there were no immediate reports of major clashes.

Montenegro mourns after gunman kills at least 12 people then himself

Associated Press

CETINJE, Montenegro — Shock and dismay prevailed in Montenegro on Thursday after a gunman fatally shot 12 people, including two children, in a western town before killing himself.

At least four others were wounded in the shooting rampage in Cetinje on Wednesday that followed a bar brawl, officials said. This was the second such incident in the town in the past three years.

The shooter, identified as 45-year-old Aco Martinovic, killed the owner of the bar, the bar owner’s children and his own family members, officials have said.

The attacker, who first fled after the rampage, was later located and surrounded by police. He died after shooting himself in the head, Interior Minister Danilo Saranovic said.

Residents of Cetinje were stunned and grief-stricken. Vanja

Popovic, whose relatives are among the victims, said that “we are all in shock.”

“How can I feel after this?” Popovic said. “No one expected it. You can’t even ask anyone anything.”

Police had dispatched a special unit to search for the attacker in the town, which is located about 18 miles northwest of Podgorica, the capital. All roads in and out of the city were blocked for hours as police swarmed the streets.

Saranovic said that the shooter had died while being taken to a hospital in the capital and succumbed from the “severity of his injuries.”

Officials have said that the attacker was at the bar throughout the day with other guests when the brawl erupted. He then went home, brought back a weapon and opened fire at around 5:30 p.m.

Prosecutor Andrijana Nastic said Thursday that the attacker went to six locations during the

shooting rampage, including the last one, where he shot himself.

Prime Minister Milojko Spajic said that the government may try to impose a total ban on weapons “because we must ask ourselves after this who should be allowed to have guns in Montenegro.”

The small Adriatic Sea nation, which has a population of around 620,000 people, is known for its gun culture and many people traditionally have weapons.

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WEEKEND



Netflix projects celebrate Avicii's life
Music, Pages 28-29



"Unstoppable"

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"The Fire Inside"

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"Day of the Fight"

FALLING FORWARD FILMS/AP

Worth the fight

A trio of new sports dramas bring something new to the genre

Movies, Pages 15-17

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

A novel way to tell time

Author Clock displays literary quotes for each hour, minute

By CHRISTOPHER BORRELLI
Chicago Tribune

The Author Clock, which was created in Chicago several years ago by a local engineer and finally arrived in stores this holiday season, has been forcing me to pause now and then, whenever I look up to see the time. Knowing the time used to be fast for me. But the Author Clock slows one's relationship to time. I don't know yet how I feel about it as a daily timepiece, but I can say for sure that it is not a clock to take for granted. Even the coolest Swatch or vintage Mickey Mouse, after some admiring, gets taken for granted.

Not so with this.

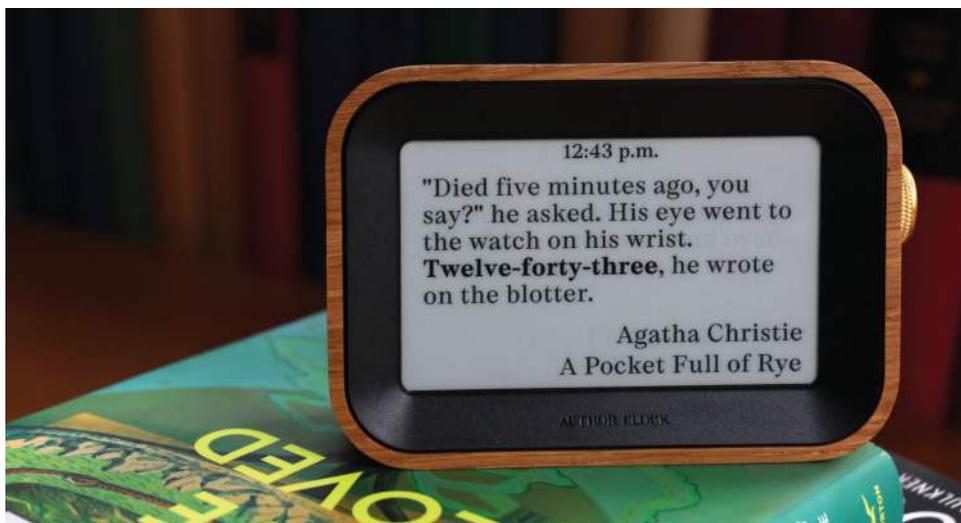
The Author Clock is small and rectangular and housed inside a wooden frame. Its clock face is Kindle gray, and instead of a traditional number-based digital read-out or circular timepiece, it shows a quotation from a book containing the exact time of day. The other day, for instance, at exactly 11:32 a.m., the Author Clock informed me that, in James Joyce's infamously rambling "Finnegans Wake," there is a character named Marcus Lyons who poetically remembers: "Flemish armada, all scattered, and all officially drowned, there and then, on a lovely morning, after the universal flood, at about eleven thirty-two."

At 11:35 a.m., it read, courtesy of a passage from the Robert Harris thriller "Munich": "The Prime Minister's plane came to a stop at Oberwiesfeld airport, at 11:35 a.m."

At precisely noon, Dr. Seuss himself informed me: "And by noon, poor old Horton, more dead than alive, had picked, searched and piled up, nine thousand and five."

For the practical person, the bold-faced time will be what matters in each passage on the Author Clock, which pairs every minute of the day with thousands of quotations that reference every minute of the day. Its creators, engineer Jose Cardona, designer Luke Gray and editor Yasmin Sara Gruss, partly dug up and partly crowdsourced 13,193 book passages that refer to specific minutes, then arranged them digitally into the 1,440 minutes that make up 24 hours. Author Clock comes loaded with those 13,000-odd lines; Wi-Fi updates add more. Because there are so many more than 1,410 quotations, it also rarely gives the same passage at the same time two days in a row.

So now, when I sit at my desk, time is no longer a relentless progress of numbers but a string of random experiences —



STACEY WESCOTT, CHICAGO TRIBUNE/TNS

An Agatha Christie quote from her book "A Pocket Full of Rye" mentioning the time of 12:43 is shown on an Author Clock. This quote, like hundreds of others from various authors, pops up on the Author Clock at the exact time the quote references.

which, I suppose, is what we often hope to take away from time. One day, at 4:15 p.m., my Author Clock read: "The sun had begun to sink in the west, and the shadow of an oak branch has crept across my knees. My watch said it was 4:15." That's from Haruki Murakami's "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle." At 12:45 a.m.: "It is twelve forty-five. Time for my dwindling medication," as Deborah Levy wrote in "Hot Milk." At 10:38 a.m., Charles Dickens even noted the way in which we take for granted ordinary clock design: "'It'll be done to a turn,' said the landlord, looking up to the clock — and the very clock had a colour in its fat white face, and looked a clock for jolly Sandboys to consult — 'it'll be done to a turn at twenty-two minutes before eleven.'"

This thing is so strange and paradigm shifting, I had to know more.

The concept came to Cardona when he worked as a product-design consultant in the West Loop. He made samples at mHUB on West Fulton Street, a local testing ground for prototype development and magnet for venture capitalists. Cardona adds that the idea for a literary clock wasn't his alone, then he winds through a history of inspiration:

First, there was the artist Christian Marclay's remarkable 2010 installation "The Clock," a 24-hour-long film constructed out of thousands of scenes edited together from thousands of movies, arranged so that when you watch "The Clock" at, say, 2:30 p.m., it's 2:30 p.m. in the movie clip on screen. Marclay's work made such a splash (it won the Golden Lion at the 2011 Venice Biennale), it inspired the book staff at London's Guardian newspaper to attempt something similar using literary passages.

That led to a tech designer in the Hague, using the Guardian's quotations, assembling a literary clock on a hacked e-reader. He posted instructions online for creating your own clock — which led to a Danish coder creating a literary-clock website (literature-clock.jenevoldsen.com). About this time, Cardona, who had recently graduated college with an engineering degree, was looking for a product to make:

"I was an avid reader, I heard about the clocks, I knew someone would absolutely make it as a product. That was six, seven years ago. I'd occasionally check to see if anyone made it yet."

When no one did, Cardona jumped in. Gray, who has worked on many household products as a designer (for Ikea, among

others), came up with the minimalistic look; Gruss, a freelance editor who taught literature courses at Brooklyn College, began evaluating every quotation.

To fund its development costs, Cardona turned to Kickstarter and Indiegogo. He sought to raise a relatively modest \$20,000; he ended up netting more than \$2 million.

He's since left Chicago and moved back to his native Puerto Rico. About four years later, the Author Clock is now sold in museum shops and book stores; it's also being offered through AuthorClock.Com. Cardona said he's sold about 20,000 so far: "We can't make them fast enough." The desk size is \$199; a larger hangable one is \$349.

Both do the same thing. That is, one minute at a time, they offer a kind of history of literature — or rather, a history of how authors have used timepieces as a literary device.

"Initially we wondered if authors even mention time often enough to serve a clock like this," Cardona said. "Turns out, they do. But it wasn't always the case. People didn't live so minute-by-minute until relatively recently."

Reliable, consistent timepieces emerged in the late 19th centuries, and wristwatches didn't take off with the public until about a century ago. The oldest quotes in the Author Clock date to "The Canterbury Tales" in the 14th century, but the majority come from the past 100 years of fiction: "We particularly noticed an uptick in writers using time as detective characters got popular in the 1920s."

What I've noticed about the Author Clock is how we use time to memorialize an instant — to recognize the flat tick of the everyday. Or we need to note the urgency to beat time: Harry Potter racing to his train at 10:45 a.m., Jack Reacher retrieving his assault rifle at precisely 11:34 a.m., Dean Moriarty in "On the Road" promising to return by 3:14 p.m.

Cardona and Co., buoyed by the success of the Author Clock, are already working on a home weather station that uses literary quotations about the weather to provide a local forecast. Weather is often an author's proxy for establishing an emotional state, he said.

Time, however practical, is more elastic. The Author Clock illustrates how it means something different to everyone. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us — as Gandalf tells Frodo. He says this "after a late breakfast," Tolkien writes.

But he doesn't mention the exact time.

ROCKSTER GO 2 speaker rugged for adventures in great outdoors

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

It takes some research to shop for a Bluetooth speaker. Whatever you think is the best available now can change by the day as this is one of the most crowded electronic gadget categories.

Sound and size are critical features, along with battery life, waterproof rating and cost. The Bluetooth version is critical as it affects the range and whether it supports pairing with more than one speaker to get full stereo sound. Even built-in microphones can be important if you want to use the speaker for hands-free calls, karaoke or accessing voice assistants like Alexa or Google Assistant.

The Fender x Teufel ROCKSTER GO 2 is a medium-sized Bluetooth speaker with great sound and great looks. It measures 2.4 by 8.3 by 4.3 inches and weighs 1.6 pounds. The company's website accurately describes it as rugged and waterproof with a long-lasting battery and enormous stereo sound that can stand up to whatever outdoor adventures you throw its way.

The ROCKSTER GO 2 is built with a rugged black rubberized case and lightweight aluminum. It has great sound coming from under the front-side grill, where two wide-band drivers in stereo arrangement, along with a passive radiator, produce some ultradeep bass.

The rubber casing helps protect the speaker from accidental drops, and its IPX67 dust and waterproof rating gives it more versatility. You can take it for a swim for up to 30 minutes in 3 feet of water. Bluetooth 5.3 allows wireless pairing, so if you purchase a pair of ROCKSTER GO 2 speakers, you can get true stereo sound.

Teufel testing shows it playing for up to 28 hours of battery life (in Eco Mode at medium volume) before a USB-C charge is needed (cable included). A flexible carrying strap is also included and works well for carrying the speaker or attaching it to whatever you choose. Top-side buttons control volume and music selections. Power, Bluetooth pairing and LEDs that display the battery status are on the back.

Online: us.teufelaudio.com/fender-x-teufel-rockster-go-2; on sale for \$89.99 (regular price is \$129.99)



TEUFELAUDIO/TNS

The Fender x Teufel ROCKSTER GO 2 Bluetooth speaker has a rubber casing and IPX67 dust and waterproof rating.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

New films punch above their weight

Each of the 3 sports dramas unique aside from inclusion of inspirational coach cliché

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

The sports movie, like any genre, can easily fall victim to overly familiar story beats. An underdog challenger. A big match. You know how it goes.

But a trio of new movies brings some original moves, and a few curveballs, to a genre where tried-and-true formula often reigns supreme.

Each, curiously enough, is a directorial debut by an industry veteran. And each features, among other fine performances, one of the great standbys of the sports film and the abiding refuge of great character actors: the inspirational coach.

'Day of the Fight'

Jack Huston's "Day of the Fight," currently playing in theaters stateside, stars Michael Pitt as down-and-out middle-weight boxer "Irish" Mike Flannigan. He is, like some battered boxers before him, seeking redemption. Flannigan's once-promising career was long ago derailed by a fatal drunk driving accident. But on this day, he's preparing for an unlikely opportunity: an undercard bout at Madison Square Garden.

"Day of the Fight" is loosely based on the 1951 Stanley Kubrick documentary short of the same name, and it's likewise in black and white. Huston, the "Boardwalk Empire" actor and grandson to director John Huston, has mulled the movie since watching his "Boardwalk" co-star Pitt, the sometimes troubled but always talented actor.

"I had in my head this image of Michael Pitt punching a sandbag when we were on the set of 'Boardwalk,'" Huston says. "I think his life in a strange way mimics that of a boxer — sometimes the ups, sometimes the downs. Specifically where he is in his life right now, he has the essence of that boxer mentality. He can take a punch but, guess what, he keeps standing up."

"Day of the Fight" culminates in the Madison Square Garden match, but the movie is largely about the preamble to the fight. The movie follows Flannigan on a series of poignant errands.

"I wanted to make a film where you didn't necessarily need the boxing match," Huston says. "The boxing match became icing."

The film instead evolves as an elegiac character study of a man, pummeled by life, trying to put things in order.

"Me and Michael used to speak about how you can walk into any boxing gyms and you'd find multiple stories just like Irish Mike's," Huston says. "These guys go through it. I think that's probably why their world is so fascinating to us."



FALLING FORWARD FILMS/AP

Michael Pitt as Mike Flannigan and Ron Perlman as his coach in "Day of the Fight."



AMAZON MGM STUDIOS/AP

Don Cheadle is the coach of NCAA wrestler Anthony Robles in "Unstoppable."



AMAZON MGM STUDIOS/AP

Ryan Destiny plays Olympian gold medalist Claressa Shields and Brian Tyree Henry is her coach, Jason Crutchfield, in "The Fire Inside."

Cornerman: Ron Perlman. Though "Day of the Fight" is graced by several father figures (Joe Pesci, Steve Buscemi), Perlman is the one that really stands out. He has all the gravitas and crustiness you'd ever want in a boxing coach.

'Unstoppable'

Oscar-winning editor William Goldenberg directs this based-on-a-true-story drama about the life of NCAA champion wrestler Anthony Robles, played by Jhar-

rel Jerome. The film, which arrives Jan. 16 on Prime Video, chronicles Robles' constant hardships, not the least of which is that he was born without his right leg.

While "Unstoppable" does steer toward the moment of ultimate triumph for Robles, it also carefully and naturally dramatizes his long road to the championship. It's less about Robles' overcoming one challenge than it is about his perseverance through constant adversity. Jennifer Lopez co-stars as his mother, with Bobby Cannavale as an abusive stepfather.

"At a certain point, it's a movie about an athlete who wins, so there's going to be certain tropes that are unavoidable. And I didn't want to avoid them," Goldenberg says. "I just wanted to try to do them in an organic, real-feeling way. Shooting handheld was the idea that we're with him along the journey, so you feel like you were facing the challenges he faces."

"Unstoppable" is unique for another reason. While Jerome, the charismatic up-and-coming actor of "Moonlight," bulked up for the role and devoted himself to shadowing Robles, he couldn't do everything that Robles could. For the wrestling scenes, Robles was Jerome's body double.

"I signed onto the movie and then I was like: How am I going to do the wrestling?" Goldenberg says. "I watched so many hours of him wrestling. I thought, there's no way I can do this without him doubling himself. He moves in a way that I just thought no one could ever master."

Cornerman: "Unstoppable" is the rare sports drama to give you not just one excellent coach, but two. Because it spans Robles' wrestling career in high school and college, we first get Michael Peña as his most devoted supporter, and, later, Don Cheadle as his initially more skeptical coach in college.

'The Fire Inside'

"The Fire Inside," directed by decorated cinematographer Rachel Morrison ("Fruitvale Station," "Mudbound"), is also about a real champion, the Olympic gold medal winner Claressa Shields (played by Ryan Destiny).

The first half of "The Fire Inside," now in theaters, is somewhat conventional, albeit crafted with a keen sense of texture and the local flavor of Flint, Mich., where Shields was from. It charts her rise as a female boxer leading up to the 2012 Olympics.

Once she's won gold, the film, scripted by "Moonlight" director Barry Jenkins, then turns into something else, something more interesting. Shields' glory is short-lived. No Wheaties box covers come for her. A tough Black woman in a bloody sport who makes no apologies for her interest in knocking out her opponent, is unappealing to marketers. "The Fire Inside" asks questions less about who wins and more about who gets to be deemed "an American hero."

Cornerman: Brian Tyree Henry plays Shields' devoted cornerman Jason Crutchfield for the duration, from her first jabs in the gym to her post-Olympics struggles. Henry, a tender and soulful actor in everything, is more of a co-star than a supporting player. Of all the coaches in these three films, he's the one you'd most want cheering you on.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

A fight to make it to the big screen

'The Fire Inside,' about boxer 'T-Rex,' had to overcome many obstacles like a COVID lockdown, casting and studio changes

BY ADAM GRAHAM

The Detroit News

When Claressa Shields first talked to Ryan Destiny, she immediately sized her up. Shields, the Flint, Mich., boxer known as "T-Rex" and boxing's GWOAT — that's short for Greatest Woman of All Time — wanted to know if Destiny, who hails from Detroit, was tough enough to play her in the big-screen story of her life.

"I'm like, 'Hey, you're playing me; good to meet you,' and she's like, 'Yeah, I'm so excited.' And I'm like, 'You ever been in a fight before?'" says Shields, recalling her first phone call with the actress. "When she said 'No,' I was like, 'A pushing war?' She's like, 'no, nothing.' And I'm looking at the phone like, huh? I knew she was a great actress, but this was something completely different. So I told myself she got the role for a reason; I'm going to trust it. That's all I can do, is just trust it."

"And she has to know that if I don't like it, I'm probably gonna snatch her up."

Thankfully, Destiny passed Shields' test with flying colors, and punches. Destiny plays the two-time gold-medal winner in "The Fire Inside," the story of Shields' rise from meager beginnings in Flint to Olympic glory, which opened Christmas Day in theaters stateside.

Shields' approval wasn't the only obstacle the movie faced during its long journey toward theaters. Filming originally commenced in March 2020, just days before the COVID-19 pandemic halted all Hollywood production. During lockdown, the film was bounced from Universal Stu-

dios' slate and put into turnaround, and Ice Cube, who was set to play Shields' coach, Jason Crutchfield, exited the project.

But like a fighter mounting a triumphant comeback, the film eventually landed at Amazon MGM Studios and resumed production, with Oscar nominee Brian Tyree Henry ("Causeway") in the trainer role. "The Fire Inside" premiered in September at the Toronto International Film Festival to solid reviews — it currently carries a 95% "fresh" rating on movie review aggregation site Rotten Tomatoes.

"Everything was perfect," says Shields, joining Destiny and the film's director, Rachel Morrison, for an interview in early November.

"I've watched the movie six times now, maybe seven, and I cry the same way every time. It's one of those things where it's like, when you see it, you get up and you're like, 'I'm about to go win some s—. I'm about to go tell my boss I quit; I'm about to leave my day job,'" she says. "It's one of those pick-me-ups, and I think everyone in the world needs that. And I feel like I'm the perfect person, I'm the perfect story, to give that."

Flint Strong

"The Fire Inside" is not the first time Shields' story has been told on film; the multiple world title holder was also the subject of 2015's "T-Rex: Her

Fight for Gold." That documentary inspired Universal Pictures to acquire the rights to Shields' story for a big-screen drama, with a script by "Moonlight" Oscar winner Barry Jenkins.

In 2019, Morrison — the first woman to be nominated for an Academy Award for cinematography for her work on 2017's "Mudbound" — was hired to direct the film, and Destiny, the 29-year-old singer and actress who starred on Fox's music business drama "Star" for three seasons from 2016 to 2019, won the role of the boxer. It's her biggest movie role to date.

"It's crazy because it wasn't like they were searching for someone from Michigan; that's just how it happened," says Destiny, a West Bloomfield High School graduate (she was Ryan Irons then; Destiny is her middle name) who didn't know much about Shields' story until she saw the film's script.

"I think it was meant to be that way," Destiny says. "It was very aligned and really special to me. I feel like a lot of my journey, personally, always tends to come back home in some way, and I love when it does. And I think it's such an honor to be able to have those parallels."

Filming on "The Fire Inside," which once carried the title "Flint Strong," started on March 12, 2020, in Flint and was shut down just a few days later when COVID-19 hit. But some of that initial footage survived the final cut of the movie, and shows Shields (played as a youngster by

Jazmin Headley) jogging on the streets of Flint. (When filming resumed in summer 2022, it was chiefly shot in Hamilton, Ontario, which doubles for Michigan and other locations.)

Shields trusted the filmmakers to tell her story and stayed away from the production during shooting.

"When I met with Rachel and I talked to her, she was very excited about it, and I was just like, 'OK, go ahead,'" says Shields, 29, who won Olympic gold in 2012 in London and 2016 in Rio de Janeiro. "I'm a boxer. I'm going to do my job. Rachel's a director, Barry Jenkins is a writer, Ryan Destiny is an actress; I'm not getting into none of that."

"I'm not going to cross those lines because that's like if Rachel was going to show me how to box. You can't show me how to box," Shields says. "I've been doing this for a long, long time, and it's my business. It's my job. I actually live this, and I don't want to step on nobody's toes and try to mess her up or mess Ryan up. I feel like if everybody would do their job it would turn out great, and it did."

Shields and Destiny didn't meet in person until after the movie was finished shooting, at the actress' birthday party in Los Angeles in January 2024.

"It was crazy because she saw the film right before that, and I was like, 'if she doesn't like this, it's going to be really awkward,'" Destiny says. "So I'm really glad she liked it."

From left, boxer Claressa Shields, star Ryan Destiny and director Rachel Morrison attend a Nov. 10 community screening of "The Fire Inside" in Flint, Mich.

SCOTT LEGATO, GETTY IMAGES/TNS



WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS



AMAZON MGM STUDIOS/AP photos

Jharrel Jerome plays Anthony Robles, a champion wrestler born with only one leg, in “Unstoppable.” At one point in the film, Jerome, as Robles, jokes that he chose wrestling because it was the only sport where the other guy couldn’t run away from him.

‘Unstoppable’ resolve

Drama about champion wrestler Robles inspirational, although formulaic

BY LINDSEY BAHR

Associated Press

Anthony Robles’ story seems almost tailor-made for a Hollywood film. Born with only one leg, his right, he overcame the prejudices of those around him and his own physical limitations to become a champion wrestler.

Though coaches at the top wrestling programs couldn’t see his potential, he was undeterred, coasting on his own determination and his mother Judy’s (Jennifer Lopez) unwavering belief in him.

The film version is aptly titled “Unstoppable,” and it got a limited theatrical release before it streams on Prime Video on Jan. 16. Directed by William Goldberg, the Oscar-winning editor of “Argo” making his feature directorial debut, “Unstoppable” has all the makings of a rousing sports drama that’s sure to have audiences cheering in theaters or on their couches.

You’d have to be a certain kind of grinch not to get swept up in the hurdles and triumphs, especially with such a compelling lead performance from Jharrel Jerome. And yet for a story about a guy who shattered expectations, the film itself is rather conventional.

Eschewing the temptation to tell his story from birth, “Unstoppable’s” arc begins at the end of high school. He chose long ago to not rely on a prosthetic and is comfortable in his body. His sport is wrestling, which he’ll joke later that he chose because



Jennifer Lopez plays Robles’ mom, Judy, above, in the film. Bobby Cannavale plays Robles’ toxic father, Rick.

it was the only one where the other guy couldn’t run away from him.

Though he’s winning at the high school level, the exciting college programs, like Iowa, are not interested in taking a chance on him. His best offer is a full ride at Drexel in Philadelphia, which everyone agrees is better than walking on at one of the better-known schools. But complications on the home front force his hand and soon enough he’s walking on at Arizona State University, trying to prove himself to a coach, Sean Charles (Don Cheadle), who had already advised him to go elsewhere.

Mom as eldest son’s biggest cheerleader isn’t new, but Judy has a lot going on. She had Anthony at age 16 and, when we meet up with the family, is married and has four young children with Rick (Bobby Cannavale), a toxic husband and father who goes long on the virtues of making the right choices and being a man and providing for his family (which, spoiler, he doesn’t). It’s a

very one-note role for Cannavale, just a shorthand villain who’s always just around the corner ready to ruin things, whether it’s dinner or Anthony’s plans to move across the country.

Regardless of how much this is true, “Unstoppable” relies too heavily on the clichés of a working-class domestic drama and Rick’s vileness, which perhaps is a little insulting to Judy’s experience. This is a woman who managed to achieve incredible things (revealed at the end) despite being a single mother to five. While Lopez is magnetic as always, it’s hard not to wonder what this character might have looked like if one of the three credited screenwriters had been a woman. Judy does get her own arc and demonstrates her agency in a mic drop kind of scene, but it seems like a rather small moment to concentrate on once you’ve learned what she went on to accomplish.

The film is really best when it’s about the sport, the impossible training including a run up a rocky hill that Anthony does on his crutches, the matches and Anthony’s relationships with his coaches who become de facto father figures for him. Michael Peña, as his high school coach, is particularly impactful in his limited scenes, and Cheadle is always a joy. But it’s ultimately Jerome’s show, and a good one at that. Let’s hope it’s the first of many leading film roles for him.

“Unstoppable” is rated PG-13 for some strong language and thematic material. Running time: 116 minutes. Now playing in select theaters and streaming Jan. 16 on Prime Video.

‘The Fire Inside’ focuses on boxer’s post-Olympic journey and struggles

BY LINDSEY BAHR

Associated Press

“The Fire Inside,” about boxer Claressa “T-Rex” Shields, is not your standard inspirational sports drama, even if it feels like it for the first half of the movie.

There’s the hopeless dream, the difficult home life, the blighted community, the devoted coach, the training montages, the setbacks and, against all odds, the win. We’ve seen this kind of story before, you might think, and you’d be right. But then the movie pulls the rug out from under you: The victory is not the end. “The Fire Inside,” directed by Rachel Morrison and written by Barry Jenkins, is as much about what happens after the win. It’s not always pretty or inspirational, but it is truthful, and important.

Sports dramas can be just as cliché as fairy tales, with the gold medal and beautiful wedding presented as a happy ending. We buy into it time and time again for obvious reasons, but the idea of a happy ending at all, or even an ending, is almost exclusively for the audience. We walk away content that someone has found true love or achieved that impossible goal after all that work. For the subject, however, it’s a different proposition; life, and all its mundanities, disappointments and hardships, continues after all. And in the world of sports, that high moment often comes so young that it might be easy to look at the rest of the journey as a disappointing comedown.

Shields, played by Ryan Destiny in the film, was only 17 when she went to the 2012 London Olympics. Everything was stacked against her, including the statistics: No American woman had ever won an Olympic gold medal in the sport before. Her opponents had years on her. She was still navigating high school in Flint, Mich., and things on the home front were volatile and lacking. Food was sometimes scarce, as was consistent parental care. Her mother (Olunike Adeliyi) even kicks her out of the home at one point. But Claressa has a savior on her side in the form of her coach, Jason Crutchfield, played by Brian Tyree Henry, whose calming presence signals to her and the audience that she’s in good hands.

Coach Crutchfield is the one who gives an 11-year-old Claressa a shot in the first place and sticks with her through everything. And she can be a lot to handle, especially post-Olympics when reality comes crashing down. She might have a little more money and the



AMAZON MGM STUDIOS/AP

For many Olympic athletes like Claressa Shields (Ryan Destiny) in “The Fire Inside,” the glory is short-lived. The film shows the uglier sides of her journey.

pride of her hometown behind her, but the sponsors are not calling. The male athletes in that 2012 class seem to have skyrocketed to wealth, while she’s thinking about pawning her medal to afford groceries and diapers for her sister’s baby. And she’s not handling it well, or at least how people think a young woman should handle such inequalities. That titular fire inside is in danger of fizzling out before she’s even reached 20, and she’s wondering what it was all for in the first place.

This is the truth of so many Olympic athletes, and professionals as well, that no one really wants to talk about. That glory is guaranteed to be short-lived, probably without a multimillion-dollar deal, and then you just have to figure out what to do with the rest of your life. There are only so many commentator jobs out there.

Morrison is a celebrated cinematographer known for “Black Panther,” “Fruitvale Station” and “Mudbound,” making her feature debut as a director. And it’s a promising one, full of beautiful shots, unexpected choices and rousing fights inside the ring, anchored by a thoughtful, engaging script and compelling lead performances. “The Fire Inside” isn’t afraid to show the uglier sides of this journey, even if it makes Claressa “unlikable” for a moment.

It would have been easy to focus just on Claressa’s achievements, which are ongoing with a fight scheduled in Flint on Feb. 2 for the undisputed heavyweight title against top-ranked contender Danielle Perkins. But it is infinitely more rewarding and authentic to show the in-between instead: Surviving that is the real test, after all.

“The Fire Inside” is rated PG-13 for brief suggestive material, thematic elements and some strong language. Running time: 109 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Q&A

Time, fame speeding up for actor Ben Schwartz

The star of 'Sonic the Hedgehog 3' talks about Final Fantasy, co-stars and the lost art of the \$10 million to \$25 million comedy

BY GENE PARK
The Washington Post

The animated movie “Sonic the Hedgehog 3” opened recently in theaters, and it’s a meaty, muscular action film with a darker edge, introducing the vengeful Shadow, voiced by Keanu Reeves. It’s also a three-peat for director Jeff Fowler who, along with writers Pat Casey and Josh Miller, navigated the challenge of turning a Saturday morning cartoon of a video game into a blockbuster film franchise.

Another common thread: the boyish, high-register voice of Ben Schwartz as the titular hero. The Bronx-born performer and Upright Citizens Brigade alum was baptized in the fires of early internet comedy. Now 43, the “Parks and Recreation” alum is working alongside Reeves, Jim Carrey and Idris Elba starring as a hedgehog who runs really fast. Last month, the Washington Post’s Gene Park sat down with Schwartz to reflect on his career so far.

The Washington Post: I think “Sonic 3” was a bit darker and more action-packed this time. What did you think about that when you read the script?

Schwartz: I loved it. I knew that we were introducing Shadow, and if you play the video games and you played Sonic Adventure, you know what Shadow’s backstory is. Because we’ve always been faithful and true to the fans, the idea is that we have to play that out, but we have to do it in the best way we can with love and to make fans happy. And I remember [thinking], God, if we can get Keanu Reeves, this would be crazy!

I loved it because it kind of makes it that some of the audience is growing up and maturing with our movies, and we could hit themes that are a bit darker, but also at the same time always having the light and joy that Sonic brings.

We’re both 43 years old. ... “Sonic 3” reminded me of the classic comedies that we grew up with. I’m just wondering about your take on how film and comedy has evolved, because it’s very different now.

Man, listen, I could talk to you about this forever. I’m someone who writes films for studios and writes TV shows for networks, and I also act and improvise. I am so sad that the \$10 million to \$25 million comedy doesn’t exist anymore. I grew up on Steve Martin movies, Jim Carrey movies, Eddie Murphy movies. The idea that we don’t really have those anymore and they don’t really come out in theaters, it breaks my heart. I’m hoping that as things start shifting and it seems people are really in the mood to laugh right now, I’m hoping that we start to get to make these. I just sold one with me and Sam Rockwell attached. ...

I’m trying to set some stuff up in places to do those things exactly [like] you said, those movies I fell in love with as a kid. Even like a “Three Amigos,” you know what I mean? Just a goofy, fun mo-

vie that’s not very expensive to make with the funniest people in front of a screen, give them a really funny script and see what happens.

One thing I find fascinating about you is how you are fascinated by the people you work with. You’ve worked with Jim Carrey, Idris Elba and Keanu freaking Reeves. Is that something you reflect on — how these people are now in your orbit?

I used to be really bad at enjoying the moment. I would always be thinking about my next thing with my next movie. The first “Sonic” movie was the first time when I allowed myself to just enjoy the moment and look around.

We had a premiere in the United Kingdom a few days ago, and it was the biggest premiere I’ve ever been a part of. I look down the line and it was Jim Carrey, who was my idol as a kid; Idris, who’s part of one of the top five television shows ever made; Keanu, who shaped my childhood and is one of the best actors of all time. ... It wasn’t until I got home afterward where I looked at pictures and I texted Jeff, “Thank you for believing in me. We’ve grown into this huge thing.”

I really try to take it in because I’m very aware how rare it is to have movies even come in cinemas anymore, and to have them be hits? It’s crazy how people care, and we found a beautiful audience. So I’m getting better at enjoying it.

Last question. I saw you’re a Final Fantasy fan. Is there a character you’d like to play?

It’d be hard not to say Cloud [the hero of Final Fantasy VII]. I’d love to play one of the old-school black mages with the little hat and just the blue gown. Or the gentleman — oh I guess I couldn’t do a Louisiana accent — who throws cards, what’s his name?

Setzer!

Yes! Setzer. An airship would be very fun. That would make me very excited.



Ben Schwartz, shown at a Dec. 16 film premiere in Los Angeles, voices Sonic in “Sonic The Hedgehog 3.”

RICHARD SHOTWELL, INVISION/AP

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Western Norway steep and deep

The term “rugged” is putting it mildly when it comes to 80% of Norway. Historically, it was a challenge to live here. That’s why Vikings ventured south and so many emigrants left for America.

But I find excuses to return to Norway regularly. Three of my grandparents grew up there, and it can be a fun part of travel to feel a kinship with people from the land of your ancestors. In this intensely scenic corner of Europe, the challenges presented by nature have met the tough and creative spirit of the Norwegian people. The result: a fascinating land well worth exploring.

I head for western Norway to experience the best of the nation’s natural beauty. Northern Europe’s highest mountains are here — in the region of Jotunheimen, which means “giant’s country.” This lofty national park feels like the top of the world. You can imagine the Norse spirits of Thor and Odin inhabiting these misty peaks.

The country’s famously steep

mountains and deep fjords were shaped by the glaciers that covered Scandinavia 10,000 years ago. The distance from seabed to mountaintop around here is nearly 2 vertical miles.



Rick Steves

At the glacier called Nigardsbreen, the scale is enormous. Cruising on a boat across a pristine lake to the glacier,

I felt dwarfed by blue cliffs of ancient ice. Adventurous travelers can lash on crampons and follow a guide on a trek over the ice and snow. While there are more demanding Nigardsbreen routes, I like to join a family hike — just an hour, but enough to bring me face to face with the glacier’s majesty.

To get deep into the heart of the fjords, sightseers ride traditional ferries or excursion boats. The stunning scenery has everyone on deck, cameras clicking.

From the heart of the Sognefjord a handy express boat quick-



Rick Steves

In Bergen, Norway, old wooden warehouses line the historic Hanseatic wharf of Bryggen.

ly gets travelers to Bergen, the biggest city in the west of Norway. Just one sheltering island away from the open sea, Bergen has long been a safe port of call.

The urban heart of colorful Bergen has a thriving personality all its own. After a week in this expensive country, I’m comfortable with the notion that, here, beer is wine (\$10 a glass). Busy with business travelers and popular with tourists, Bergen’s hotels spike up and down with the demand. (It pays to check hotel websites for deals.)

Back in the 13th century, Bergen was Norway’s capital, but the

city has few visible hints of its historical importance. For most of its past, Norway was extremely humble. As the wealthier parts of Europe were building grand churches and castles of stone, Norway built with wood, and little survives from centuries past. Bergen has burned down and been rebuilt several times.

In the touristy wharf area, called Bryggen, creaky wooden warehouses lean across cobbled alleys. This was the historic trading center. A medieval boomtown, Bergen was a member of the mighty Hanseatic League, an alliance of seafaring merchants.

The Hanseatic Museum, on the edge of the wharf, helps bring to life the salty economy that made Bergen prosper. It was all about the fish. Today, the bustling fish market at the harbor has a seafood circus of eateries.

In the last century, Bergen was a launching point for countless adventurers headed to the New World. Today’s residents of the New World now head to Norway to discover a prosperous, contented and beautiful country.

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Epiphany keeps events, excitement rolling across Continent

Christmas has come and gone, but celebrations related to Christ’s birth aren’t over just yet. In many parts of Europe, Epiphany, or Three Kings Day, is cause for excitement, particularly among children, who will be hoping for presents arriving by special means of delivery.

Italy: The religious feast of the Epiphany on Jan. 6 is a public holiday and the day of a folkloric tradition that fills children with wonder and delight. According to one version of the legend, as the Three Wise Men were making their way toward Bethlehem, they encountered an old



Karen Bradbury

woman, whom they invited to accompany them on their journey to the site of Jesus’ birth. As she was too busy with her household, she refused to come along, but soon regretted having turned down the opportunity. As she searched in vain for the baby of whom the Wise Men had spoken, she gave away the presents she’d prepared to other children instead. Throughout Italy, children leave out stockings on the night of Jan. 5, in hopes that La Befana, traveling upon her broom, will reward them with toys and treats. A number of other activities are held to mark the day.

In Rome, Piazza Navona serves as one of the central gathering points on Jan. 6. Here, on the last day of the Christmas market that bears her name, families and friends will gather for one last round of seasonal treats and holiday cheer, and Befana herself will make an appearance. Also on the day, “Viva La Befana” sees a historical parade begin at 10 a.m. along the Via della Conciliazione. Musicians, majorettes, flag-wavers and other figures clad in historical costume are accompanied by horses and animals associated with the nativity scene. The spectacle concludes in St. Peter’s Square, where Pope Francis presides over the midday Angelus benediction. After the Angelus, the three Magi present their symbolic gifts to the pope. Online: tinyurl.com/59zv9ayh



iStock

In Barcelona, the Magi arrive at port aboard a ship as part of Spain’s Three Kings Day festivities.

Venice celebrates La Befana on its waterfront. On the morning of Jan. 6, members of the city’s oldest rowing club, the Bucintoro, don witches’ costumes before taking part in a regatta. The waterborne procession of participants arrives at the Rialto Bridge, from which dangles a gigantic stocking, at 10:30 a.m., and the races get underway shortly thereafter. Online: tinyurl.com/24v77cns

One Italian town is as closely associated with La Befana as the North Pole is with Santa Claus. Urbania, in the northern Marche region in the province of Pesaro-Urbino, is the site of a celebration for all ages. The thousands of stockings hung about town create the perfect backdrop for dancing witches and a pair of particularly acrobatic ones displaying their high-wire skills from the bell tower. Street theater and stands serving regional fare complete the festive atmosphere of “Befana World.” Festivities take place Jan. 3-6. Adult entry costs 6 euros; children under 10 are free. Online: festadellabefana.com

Until recently, Verona had celebrated Jan. 6 with a ceremony known as “rogo della vecia,” or burning of the old woman, which involved setting alight an effigy. The revamped celebration still sees the procession of the Magi, albeit without the live animals of yore, as well as fire and magic shows, circus acts, a singalong concert and projections on the Palazzo Barbieri. Festivities kick off at 4 p.m. Online: tinyurl.com/4uny7xup

Spain: Three Kings Day is marked in cities and towns across Spain with parades held on Jan. 5. Processions known as “cabalgatas,” or cavalcades, mark the arrival of the Three Kings, who instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh, pass out trinkets or candy to children. Places with notable parades include the city of Alcoy, in Alicante, believed to be the country’s oldest of its ilk. More than 1,000 marchers, from musicians to dancers to torch bearers, take part. In Barcelona, the Three Kings generally arrive in Port Vell by boat in the late afternoon. Madrid’s parade is made up of some 2,000 participants and traditionally concludes with fireworks in front of the Palacio de Cibeles. Seville’s procession is known for its fantastic floats as well as its duration, beginning at 4:30 p.m. and concluding around 10 p.m. Online: tinyurl.com/bkcfdtzn

Germany: For more than 50 years, it’s been tradition in Garmisch-Partenkirchen to mark Three Kings Day with the holding of “Hornschlittenrennen,” downhill racing on an old-fashioned style of wooden sledge. The sleds, built specifically for the races, are similar to those traditionally used in the Alps to bring down hay and firewood. The brave racers compete in teams of four and achieve speeds of up to 100 km. Spills are commonplace, but the threat of injury doesn’t seem to discourage competitors. Only a lack of snow on the track would put the brakes to this event slated to take place near the Olympic Ski Stadium on Jan. 6 at 12:30 p.m. The spectator fees are 10 euros for adults, 5 euros for ages 13-18 and free for 12 and under. Online: hornschlitten.de

WEEKEND: TRAVEL



PHOTOS BY ALESSANDRO PENSO/For The Washington Post

One of the jubilee projects is a walkway from the papal fortress of Castel Sant'Angelo to St. Peter's Square. By eliminating cars from Piazza Pia, the \$82 million redevelopment will allow a free flow of pedestrians from the papal fortress to the Via della Conciliazione leading to the square.

A double-edged sword

Jubilee a mixed blessing for Rome, which is getting a face-lift and massive economic boost, but has become a giant construction zone

BY ANTHONY FAIOLA
AND STEFANO PITRELLI
The Washington Post

Romans are gesticulating in overdrive and griping in snarled traffic as the Eternal City overhauls piazzas, fountains, bridges and tunnels. Even more are ranting about surging rents and greedy landlords poised to cash in on a coming tsunami of tourists.

On Christmas Eve, Pope Francis symbolically opened the sealed Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica from his wheelchair, inaugurating a jubilee year that is expected to draw a whopping 32 million visitors to Rome — 10 million more than this year's record high.

Jubilees are a Catholic Church tradition dating to 1300. They are considered a time for reconciliation and renewal. Catholics

who visit designated sacred sites and engage in redemptive activities can obtain a jubilee indulgence — a sort of spiritual deep cleaning and megapardon for earthly sins.

For many Romans, though, this jubilee feels like a mixed blessing. It is set to give a massive boost to the tourism industry, a pillar of the Roman economy. It has also helped motivate Rome's biggest face-lift since the 1960 Olympic Games. With \$5 billion worth of projects funded by the national government, the city is transforming in ways that will outlast the pilgrims.

But the coming jubilee has left Romans living amid a giant construction site, and has once again highlighted the double-edged sword of tourism.

The Spanish Steps are already overcrowded. Officials have been

talking about how to limit the number of visitors at the Trevi Fountain. What happens when millions more people pour in?

From his office overlooking the Roman Forum, a gathering place for centuries, Mayor Roberto Gualtieri said that he understands the grumbling about the jubilee but that it is an unavoidable fact of Roman life every 25 years.

"It's not like 'Oh, the mayor, the bloody mayor, decided to have a jubilee.' We cannot say 'No, we don't want it,'" he said. Romans "of course are not happy, because it's inconvenient. But they are also happy ... they know we are transforming the city."

No project is more dramatic than the elimination of cars from Piazza Pia. The \$82 million redevelopment will allow a free flow of pedestrians from the papal



Jubilee construction is underway in the Borgo Pio neighborhood near Vatican City. The jubilee year was inaugurated by Pope Francis on Christmas Eve when he symbolically opened the sealed Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica.

fortress of Castel Sant'Angelo to the Via della Conciliazione leading to St. Peter's Square. In a city of archaeological treasures, excavation work unearthed the ancient portico and remains of Emperor Caligula's garden.

To the chagrin of some Romans and the delight of others, the jubilee arrives as a city of ancient glory is having a modern moment. TikTok revealed how

often men think about the ancient Roman Empire. Ridley Scott recently fetishized Rome, again, with his "Gladiator" sequel. Even Emily in Paris ditched the City of Lights for the Seven Hills by the Tiber.

In 2025, she will be joined by millions of Catholics from around the world. They will begin to

SEE JUBILEE ON PAGE 21

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Jubilee: The Holy Year also vexing for renters, homeless

FROM PAGE 20

arrive amid a trademark dose of Roman chaos and controversy. Up-in-arms activists are hacking Airbnb drop boxes off apartment entranceways. In a Holy Year meant to honor the less fortunate, activists have also criticized the clearing of a migrant camp at the city's main train station.

"Now with the jubilee, they want the dust under the bed," said Gianluca Puricelli, who works with Binario 95, a group aiding the homeless near Termini station and other parts of Rome. "I don't like this. Look, I'm Christian ... but when I see big chains of gold or [religious robes] worth thousands and thousands of euros, I don't know."

The denizens of Rome are bemoaning the Disneyfication of their city — epitomized by the plan for aspiring gladiators to go mano a mano for the first time in 2,000 years in mock Colosseum fights sponsored by Airbnb.

Even the reverent Vatican is inaugurating an Epcot-like experience, in partnership with Microsoft. Buzzing drones mapped St. Peter's Basilica, capturing 400,000 images. Artificial intelligence then processed the data into a big-screen 3D adventure that tracks the church's evolution from swampland to architectural masterpiece, allowing visitors to glimpse minute details — including spider nests inside the basilica's soaring dome.

Asked what message he had for jubilee-weary Romans, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the Vatican's point man on the jubilee, appealed for patience, reminding residents why many of Rome's glories were built.

"The Sistine Chapel was built for a jubilee," Fisichella said. "If you go anywhere in Rome, you will see many things have been realized for the coming of a jubilee."

Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, the cleric in charge of St. Peter's, said separately: "This jubilee is a chance, not only for financial gain, but also for fraternity."

For the Holy See, the jubilee should indeed amount to a windfall. The Vatican could begin to plug a gaping budget deficit through museum revenue, donations, purchased papal blessings and pilgrimage stays in monasteries, convents and Catholic hostels.

"A [full] year of charity and fundraising events — that's money rolling in," said Giovanni Di Bartolomeo, an economist at Sapienza University of Rome.

Italy largely picks up the bill. But it should recoup its jubilee investment through tourist spending on hotels, restaurants, shopping and entertainment, said Michele Costabile, a marketing professor at Luiss University who has studied the topic. Pilgrims tend to have shallower pockets, but such vast visitor numbers are still projected to inject more than \$10 billion into the local economy.

At least one jubilee event — a proposed "Gay Day" — has sparked controversy. At the request of a Florence-based group, the Vatican added a special pilgrimage for LGBTQ+ Catholics and their families to the official 2025 calendar. After the event was made public last month, however, it was quickly removed. Fisichella said not enough details had been provided by the group about its plans.

Soon after, the same event reappeared in the same Sept. 6 slot. A person familiar with the back and forth between organizers and the Vatican said the event seemed to have been taken down after articles in Catholic media created internal pressure. It was restored after further details were provided and Vatican "higher ups" offered support.

"The pope's [inclusive message] and 'who am I to judge' work is helping change things around in the church as an institution, regardless of the resistance it meets," said the person, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to comment on internal discussions.

In late October, the Vatican introduced a mascot for the holy year — Luce, a blue-haired, manga-inspired young pilgrim "meant to reflect pop culture." Italian outlets had a field day, and traditionalist blogs were incensed, upon learning that the work of the same designer — Simone Legno — had previously appeared on sex toys and apparel celebrating gay pride.

But the biggest complaints have been about the construction and the crowds. Alessandro Gassmann, a director and actor, said he pulled the mayor aside during the Christmas tree lighting at the Spanish Steps.



PHOTOS BY ALESSANDRO PENSO/For The Washington Post

A woman combs her hair near the migrant camp tents at Rome's Termini train station on Dec. 11. Officials have been trying to clear the tents away from the station ahead of the jubilee, a move being criticized by activists since the Holy Year is meant to honor the less fortunate.

"I relayed to him what I've been hearing from people. ... They're quite [angry]. The traffic, the hundreds of ongoing construction sites."

As for the coming influx of visitors, he said, "We're all very concerned."

Some projects were wrapping up just in time for the jubilee's start. For instance, after three months of grousing by tourists on social media about the Trevi Fountain being outfitted with an almost comically small pool for coin tosses as it underwent repairs, the refurbished landmark reopened Dec. 22.

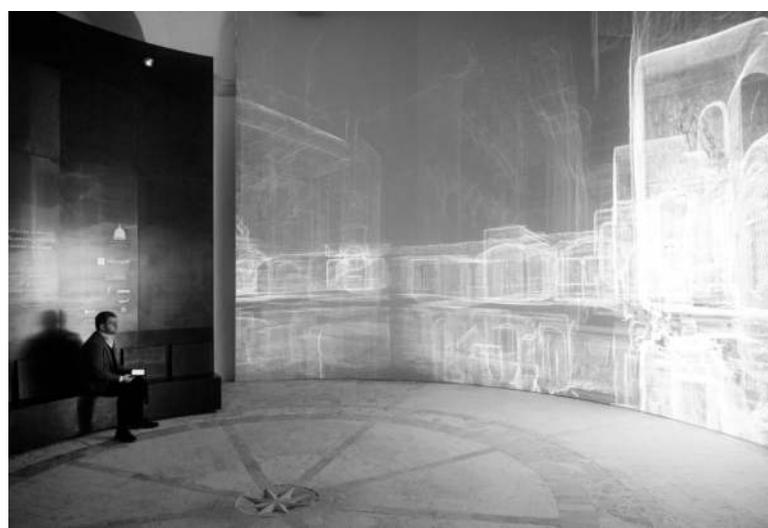
Authorities knew for years that the jubilee was coming — so why, critics ask, did the city not postpone nonessential projects until after it was over?

The mayor said talk of projects being behind schedule is overblown. Some jubilee projects, he said, are converging with others as a result of pandemic-related delays. Patience, he said, will be rewarded with a radical transformation that will forever change one of the world's most iconic metropolises.

"This will be a different city," he said.

Despite the griping, Romans have a reputation for being among the most welcoming hosts in Europe, in part because so many jobs in the historic center depend on tourism.

"Thank God they're coming!" said David Sermoneta, 62, a store owner and head of the Piazza di Spagna business association — in



In partnership with Microsoft, St. Peter's Basilica has also been digitized. Drones buzzed through, capturing 400,000 images. Artificial intelligence then processed the data into a big-screen 3D adventure that tracks the church's evolution.

a part of Rome lined with shops selling luxury goods.

"Sure, you'll get pilgrims. But you'll also get the very rich ones, too," he said.

For average Romans, nothing has been more vexing than the worsening of a housing crunch — one so bad that the pope has ordered local parishes to shelter Roman families left homeless from jubilee-year rent hikes.

Rents in Rome have rocketed in recent years, coinciding with a surge in short-term rentals. There are now about 30,000 short-term listings in the Rome market, up 26% since 2021, according to real estate site immobiliare.it.

Jubilee demand, experts say, is worsening that problem — with

rents per square foot increasing in October by 10% compared with those of the same month last year. Robert Viviani, a graduate student living in Rome's Pigneto district, east of the Colosseum, felt that firsthand when his landlord abruptly informed him that he would not renew his lease.

"He was up-front about the reason why — Airbnb," Viviani said as he joined a group of protesters covering short-rental lockboxes with stickers reading, "Your Airbnb is our eviction."

"The jubilee was coming, and a company offered him a lot more money to use the apartment for short-term rentals," Viviani said. "I asked him how much, and he said it was so high that he was too ashamed to tell me."

"The Sistine Chapel was built for a jubilee. If you go anywhere in Rome, you will see many things have been realized for the coming of a jubilee."

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the Vatican's point man on the jubilee speaking to jubilee-weary Romans

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

A hole different kind of mini golf

Schwartzlichthelden in Mainz, Germany, sheds black light on a classic pastime

BY BRADLEY LATHAM
Stars and Stripes

With the temperatures dropping, I had been looking for an indoor activity near Wiesbaden, Germany, that my teenage son and I could enjoy as his birthday approached.

We found what we were looking for at Schwartzlichthelden Minigolf outside Mainz's old town. The place's name means "black light heroes," hinting at the twist we would get from our first German miniature golf experience.

The place is easy to miss. As we drove up on a recent Sunday evening, my son and I realized we had driven by several times in the past year without realizing what it is.

Since we arrived about 10 minutes before our scheduled tee time, we ordered drinks to tide us over. Once we were ready, the desk attendant handed us our scorecard, two pairs of 3D glasses and — much to my confusion — only one ball and club.

I was also a bit puzzled because the "scorecard" was just a blank piece of paper on a clipboard.

She explained the course rules, clarifying that a group shares the ball and putter, playing the hole in turn with a six-stroke limit per person, per hole. She added that the scorecard would make sense when we got on the course.

We donned our glasses and stepped into a neon landscape. As I looked down at the scorecard, the chart illuminated under the black light.

The walls were painted with city landscapes, superheroes and mutant monsters. The subject matter was a bit kitschy, with my son describing it as an "uncanny mashup of generic-brand Marvel and DC characters." I thought the graffiti-style artwork was well done and on theme.

I'd presumed that the use of only one ball and putter per group would cause congestion on the 18-hole course, but thankfully the other groups playing ahead of us were also mostly pairs, with one group of four being the exception.

I could see, though, how traffic might pile up on the course if players get behind a larger group or one with younger kids.

Schwartzlichthelden Minigolf

Address: Holzstrasse 24, Mainz, Germany

Hours: Monday through Thursday, 2-10 p.m.; Friday, 2 p.m.-midnight; Saturday, 10 a.m.-midnight; Sunday, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.

Prices: Adults, 13 euros; students, 12 euros; kids up to age 5, free; drinks range from 2.50 euros to 5 euros.

Information: +49 61314929275, info@schwarzlichthelden.de, www.schwarzlichthelden.de/schwarzlicht-minigolf-mainz

Bradley Latham

There were a couple of short downtimes for us during the first few holes, but those pauses allowed us to examine the artwork and 3D effects that surrounded us.

The lights and paint created entertaining illusions that played with my depth perception. Although the holes were small and appeared simple in design, they were deceptively challenging.

By the third hole, I was questioning my senses, as the paint and visual effects created false corners and barricades on the course.

More than once, I used my putter to tap on some barriers and obstacles to help me determine whether they were real or illusion. The 3D glasses added an extra layer of difficulty as well.

The hard, smooth floor was quite a contrast from the artificial turf or carpeting at most mini-golf courses I've played. It made for some faster speed on putts that took a few strokes to adjust to.

My son said that while he had fun, it was the most difficult course he could remember playing, and I'm inclined to agree with him. I don't think we were alone feeling that way, either, as I heard a few exasperated shouts of the German word for "impossible" ring out.

The current course record is an impressive 25 strokes. Neither of us was anywhere close to that score.

While I fared a bit better than my son, I took the maximum score on three of the holes and managed two strokes on only one hole. The prized hole-in-one eluded us both on this outing, which involved a little over an hour of playing time.

Schwartzlichthelden isn't a



PHOTOS BY BRADLEY LATHAM/Stars and Stripes

The sixth hole at Schwartzlichthelden Minigolf in Mainz, Germany, requires players to hit the ball through a small window on a ramp. Many of the course's 18 holes appear simple in design but are deceptively challenging. The place's name alludes to its black lights and murals.



Schwartzlichthelden Minigolf scorecards initially appear blank, but under black light, they become visible. Each person is has a six-stroke limit per hole.

place I would likely visit more than a couple of times a year, but it is entertaining and makes for a fun date night or occasional family outing.

We made online reservations in advance. The website was easy to navigate despite being in German. Although customers don't have to make a reservation, that's the best way to guarantee a play time.

As far as price, it is a bit more than what I would consider great value. That said, the 2-euro discount coupons we received for a future visit might entice me to return in search of a better score.

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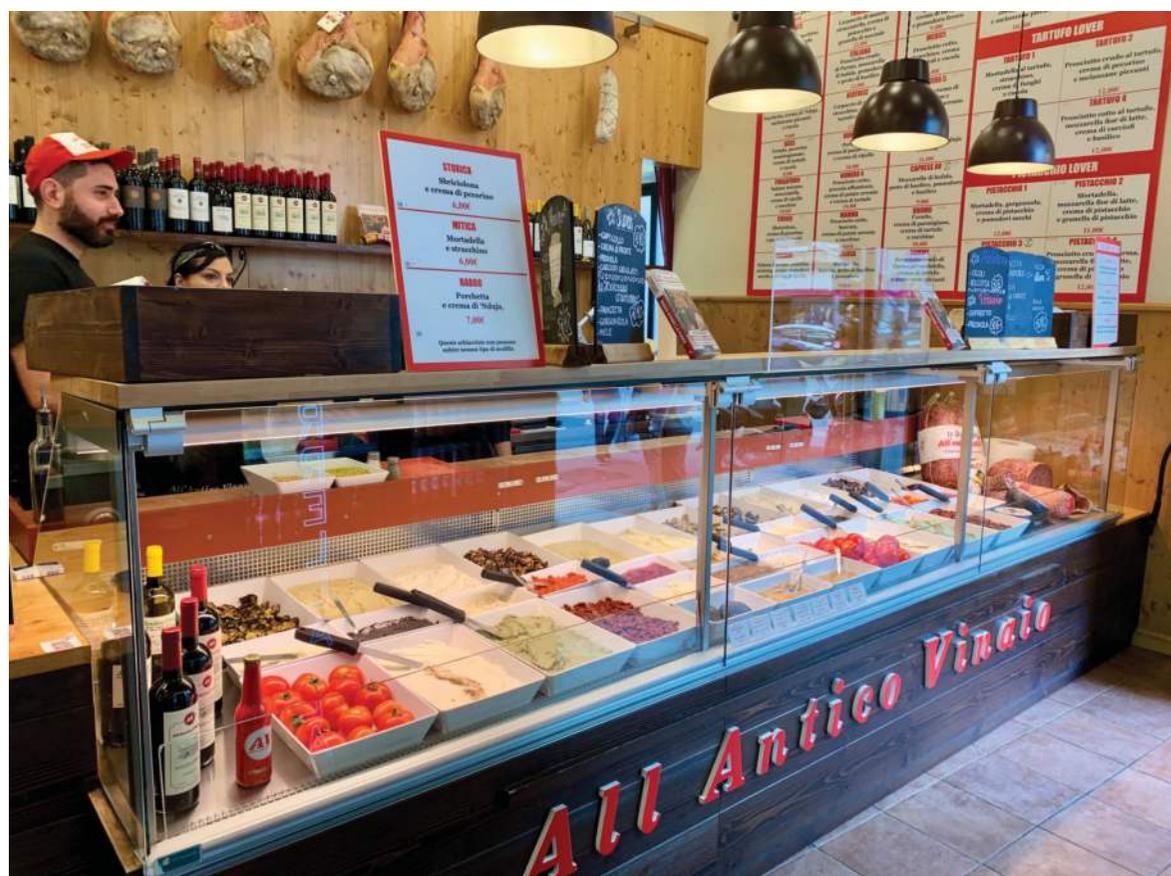


The neon spray-painted murals at Schwartzlichthelden Minigolf in Mainz depict battles between superheroes and monsters.



The 3D glasses combined with paint and lighting effects at Schwartzlichthelden Minigolf in Mainz create illusions of false boundaries and obstacles on many holes of the course.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

The order counter at All'antico Vinaio panini shop in Naples, Italy, displays a variety of condiments, including pistachio, roasted potato and truffle creams, and other toppings available for sandwiches.



The Naples location of All'antico Vinaio is in the Centro Storico neighborhood, not far from the University of Naples Federico II. The Florence, Italy-based panini maker has other locations worldwide, including in New York and Dubai.



Panini makers quickly assemble a variety of sandwiches available at All'antico Vinaio in Naples, wrapping them up for easy on-the-go noshing; you can also eat them in an adjacent dining room.

The cure for boring lunch

Panini chain All'antico Vinaio has varied menu, helpful staff in Naples

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

One of the best ways to get a taste of Naples can be found in a visit to a local salumeria.

The neighborhood delicatessen stock prosciutto, ham and Italy's much better answer to American bologna — mortadella — among other cured meats.

You can also find a vast selection of local cheeses, including fresh buffalo mozzarella, burrata and provolone.

And while it's usually not displayed on a menu, if you ask, a salumeria owner will make you a panini, or sandwich, on local bread from meats and cheese freshly cut as you wait.

It's a culinary experience that should top any foodie's to-do list. Sadly, the options are limited for vegetarians and vegans.

That fact and a yen for a panini other than the tomato, mozzarella and basil version typically offered at salumerias led me to All'antico Vinaio.

The Florence, Italy-based panini maker with worldwide locations, including in New York and Dubai, offers a variety of sandwiches on tasty focaccia, including three specifically tailored for those who don't eat meat, and another for vegans.

On a recent, early Sunday afternoon, a friend and I visited the shop's location in Naples' Centro Storico neighborhood, not far from the University of Naples



Shown above, the Paradise with mortadella, pistachio cream, stracciatella cheese and chopped pistachios and the vegetarian No. 3 with roasted spicy eggplant, smoked provola cheese and roasted potato cream but no customary truffle cream.

Frederico II. Reminiscent of chain sandwich makers in the U.S., its counter displays an array of condiments and toppings available for panini.

But that's where the similarity ends. You won't find mayonnaise, mustard or vinegar and oil here. There also isn't any shredded iceberg lettuce or pickled jalapeño peppers.

Instead, a case displays pistachio, onion, roasted potato, truffle and other creams used to complement the meat and cheese. Roasted eggplant and zucchini, along with arugula, sun-dried tomatoes and a spicy pork sausage spread also are among the offerings.

Diners choose their sandwich

from a large menu featured on an adjacent wall that also is available by QR code.

Offerings range from classics, such as the San Marco with ham, Gorgonzola, truffle cream and fresh tomato to seasonal offerings like The Tasty with rolled pancetta, taleggio cheese and pumpkin cream.

There even are American favorites such as a pastrami sandwich and a smoked turkey, mozzarella, tomato and avocado version called the Venice Beach.

Vegans can opt for focaccia with hummus, sun-dried tomatoes, zucchini and eggplant.

Prices range from eight to 14 euros, but the paninis are large and could easily feed two people

with smaller appetites.

On our visit, my meat-eating companion settled on one of All'antico Vinaio's more popular paninis, the Paradise with mortadella, pistachio cream, stracciatella cheese and chopped pistachios.

Originating from Bologna, Italy, mortadella is made of ground pork, spices and pistachios. It also includes pork chunks. Depending on the region, the recipe will vary. For example, myrtle berries, cloves or other ingredients can be added to mortadella, which has a smooth texture.

My friend's sandwich came generously loaded with meat expertly garnished with the pistachio cream and stracciatella, a creamy version of mozzarella that has been torn as part of the stretching process.

The combination along with a crispy but not hard, lightly salted focaccia created "the perfect mouthful in every bite," she said.

I chose the vegetarian No. 3, roasted spicy eggplant, smoked provola cheese, roasted potato cream and truffle cream.

I'm not a fan of truffles and asked the panini maker to leave it off, which he did with no hesitation.

In fact, diners can individual-



All'antico Vinaio

Address: Corso Umberto I, 28, Naples
Hours: Open daily from 10 a.m.-10 p.m.

Prices: 8-14 euros for panini; 2-5 euros for water, soft drinks, beer and wine; 18 euros for red or white wine by the bottle

Information: allanticovinaio.com

Alison Bath

ize their sandwich, adding toppings or condiments for a little as 50 cents to 3 euros extra.

The sandwich came stuffed with eggplant with just the right amount of heat and nicely accented by the smoked provola and potato cream.

I'm embarrassed to say I ate every bit, and wondered what vegetarian offering I would try next time.

All'antico Vinaio doesn't offer the cultural experience of a visit to an Italian deli, but its imaginative menu and quick, accommodating service make it worth a visit.

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WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Tips to keep teens happy on vacation

Include your older kids in planning, consider traveling with friends and sometimes simply leave them alone

BY HOLLY JOHNSON
TravelPulse

You planned the perfect vacation for your entire family, and your teenagers were more than happy to put their lives on hold to come along. But now that you're a few days into your trip, they're acting uninterested and staring at their phones for hours on end.

That last part is bad enough on its own, but their whole attitude is just killing the family vibe.

This is just the reality of traveling with teens, at least for a few hours here and there. I have certainly dealt with teen attitudes while traveling with my two girls, who are ages 13 and 15. They're pretty good most of the time, but we've definitely had unsavory moments during our travels with them to more than 40 countries over the past 10 years.

Fortunately, there are some moves to make that help keep hormones and bad teen attitudes at bay on vacation. Here are some of the tips I use to keep my teens happy as we travel around the world.



DREAMSTIME/TNS

Teenagers may be much happier on vacation when they get some "wins" throughout the trip.

Resist the urge to overplan

It's easy to avoid planning too much when you're visiting an all-inclusive resort or renting a beach villa, whereas you may be tempted to plan a bunch of activities if you're opting for a sightseeing trip somewhere new.

With my teenagers, I have found they're fairly eager to do one big "activity" every day, whether it's a hike through the mountains or a guided tour of a popular museum. However, they get crabby when we try to see or do too much in a single day and they don't get any downtime.

With that in mind, I try to plan one big family event each day for each trip we take to a sightseeing destination. I fill the rest of the time with activities for myself and my husband only, and I leave plenty of free time on the agenda each day.

Leave them alone

This brings me to my next tip — leaving them alone. My husband and I tend to let our kids stay in our vacation rental alone for at least a few hours per day, whether it's during the evening while we dine or during the day while we sightsee or get some fresh air.

Giving kids some alone time (and screen time) gives them space to disengage and relax while preserving the rest of their mental energy for family time. Of course, you need to be comfortable leaving your teens alone for several hours at a time for this tip to work, and we all know this is perfectly fine for some teenagers and not others.

Lean into teenage interests

We also let our kids get involved in the planning process, usually by asking what they want to do in destinations we're planning to visit. When we travel to Europe, for example, we ask them about art they want to see, museums they want to explore or historical sites they may have learned about in school that should be on our radar.

When we take a warm-weather trip, like visiting an all-inclusive resort or going on a cruise, we ask about the excursions they want to do and try to get them excited about the journey and destinations they're visiting.

Say 'yes' every day

I have also found that teenagers are much happier on vacation when they get

some "wins" under their belt throughout the trip. For us, that happens when we (their parents) say "yes" to a few things they want every day, whether it's a stop for gelato, a new shirt or a pair of earrings from a local store.

We don't say "yes" to everything since that would derail our family travel budget in a hurry. However, saying "yes" here and there keeps them happy for longer periods, and that lets my husband and I enjoy the trip for that much longer.

Do something they love

Also consider planning a trip around something your kids love, whether it's a sporting event, a concert or a show. In our family, for example, we have traveled for concerts to see artists like Noah Kahan and The Lumineers (my teenager's favorites).

We also planned an entire trip around a Harry Styles concert in New York City once, then used the opportunity to see Broadway shows and check off some other sightseeing boxes while we were there. When we were in Italy for fall break this year, we surprised the kids with a day of riding coasters at one of the country's biggest theme parks, Gardaland.

Also in this vein, my kids just love cruises to the Caribbean where everyone gets off and on the ship in the same place (unlike in Europe and other destinations where there are multiple points for embarkation).

Having the same people on the ship for the entire cruise makes it so much easier for them to make friends during the trip, and they love going to the onboard teen clubs and forging connections with other kids.

Travel with friends

Finally, consider the prospect of planning a trip with family or friends. This can work especially well if you book a trip with another family that has adults and teenagers of their own, as long as everyone gets along.

We have done this several times in the past, both for all-inclusive resort trips and cruises and both times we traveled with other families where we were friends with the parents and the kids got along. It's always nice to give your teens some built-in friends to hang out with on vacation provided you know another family with a similar travel style and travel budget to work with.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY LUIS GARCIA/Stars and Stripes

La Casa Del Mexicano's chompi con queso is a fajita-style dish of mushrooms, bell peppers and cheese.



Mexican restaurant La Casa Del Mexicano is located in the Songtan entertainment district of Pyeongtaek, near Osan Air Base.



Quesabirrias are quesadilla-style tacos filled with tender birria meat and melted cheese and served with birria broth dip.

Variety, authenticity at Mexican eatery

La Casa Del Mexicano near Osan Air Base combines familiar flavors, unique offerings and cozy ambiance

BY LUIS GARCIA
Stars and Stripes

La Casa Del Mexicano, nestled in the Songtan entertainment district near Osan Air Base, is as close to a Mexican eatery transplanted to South Korea as you can get.

The interior is warm and inviting, with a mix of traditional Mexican décor and an American influence. It's a comfortable spot for a meal, whether you're a local or stationed nearby.

Like its counterparts in America, this Mexican restaurant offers a wide variety of dishes, from quesadillas, burritos and tacos to more elaborate dishes like various styles of fajitas, tostadas, mole and much more.

For the main course, I tried the chompi con queso, a fajita-style dish served sizzling on a

cast-iron plate. The dish combines mushrooms, bell peppers and cheese, creating a harmonious mix of textures and flavors. It was accompanied by rice, beans and flour tortillas on the side. The tortillas made it easy to craft your own tacos, adding a personal touch to the meal. The price came to 22,000 won, or about \$15.

Another standout on the menu is a recent addition, quesabirrias, a dish that's gained massive popularity in the U.S. These quesadilla-style tacos, filled with tender birria meat and melted cheese, are served with four portions and accompanied by a flavorful birria broth dip.

It's a satisfying and hearty option for those craving indulgence, although a little pricey at 22,000 won, or about \$15. Still, it's a great option among the wide selection of dishes.

The selection of drinks at La Casa Del Mexicano is impressive. From Mexican beers and tequilas to Korea's favorite soju, there's something for every preference.

If you're opting for nonalcoholic options, the restaurant offers the usual sodas alongside Mexican Jarritos sodas and traditional drinks like Jamaica and horchata. These beverages pair wonderfully with the bold flavors on the menu.

In short, La Casa Del Mexicano is a great place to indulge in Mexican-inspired comfort food with a familiar American twist. Its mix of familiar favorites and unique offerings, combined with a cozy ambiance, makes it a solid choice for anyone craving a taste of Mexico near Osan.

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La Casa Del Mexicano

Directions: 18 Shopping-ro, Pyeongtaek-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea, a five-minute walk down the Songtan Entertainment District from Osan Air Base's walk-in gate.

Hours: Open daily, 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m.
Prices: Entrees range from 8,000 to 25,000 won, or \$5.50 to \$17; drinks range from 5,000 to 22,000 won.

Dress: Casual
Contact: Phone: 031-668-8259

Luis Garcia

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WEEKEND: FOOD



PHOTOS BY CLAY WILLIAMS/For The Washington Post

Bitter & Esters, the last home brew supply shop in New York City, had been open since 2011. It closed in October a few weeks after holding its final home brew swap, “a love letter” to the customers who “gave the love back.”

A bitter finish?

As home brew supply shops shutter around the country, hobbyists worry about the future of the activity and the loss of a creative community

BY COURTNEY ISEMAN
The Washington Post

On the first Thursday in October, the only home brew supply shop in New York City held its final home brew swap. John LaPolla, who owned Bitter & Esters with business partner Douglas Ampert since 2011, said the event was “a love letter to our customers, and they gave the love back. It was just a giant mix of appreciation and sadness.”

Ten days later, at 5:59 p.m. on the shop’s last day of operation, one of those loyal customers made the final purchase.

“People were coming in [during the final days] saying goodbye to me while I was still working,” LaPolla said. “They’d say, ‘how do you feel?’ And I’d say, ‘I don’t know, I’m still finishing it.’ Now, I feel untethered ... which is OK; it’s another chapter in life.” LaPolla said he plans to move out of the city, but first, he would attend a meeting of a local home brew club that met regularly at Bitter & Esters, Brewminaries, for some closure.

The story of Bitter & Esters — the loss of both a home brewing supplier and the community gathering place it provided — isn’t unique. Over the last few years, home brew stores have shuttered across the country, and while the exact number is difficult to pinpoint, there’s anecdotal evidence in the announcements. Among the 2024 casualties: Atlantic Brew Supply in Raleigh, N.C.; Vermont Homebrew Supply in Winooski, Vt.; and Salt City Brew Supply in Salt Lake City. In late November, My Local Home-Brew Shop in Falls Church, Va., became the latest, just three months shy of its 20th anniversary.

Around 540 home brew shops appear on the American Homebrewers Association’s directory, though many survive because they’re also hardware stores, or sell beer and wine. The business closures reflect a steep decline in home brewing interest in the United States. The AHA’s own membership is down. It had about 45,000 members between 2016 and 2019; in a 2023 year-end

annual survey, it counted only 30,000. After consecutive years of underwhelming attendance at Homebrew Con, the biggest national home brewing event held by the AHA, this year’s convention was rolled into the Great American Beer Festival while the AHA decides how to proceed.

Local home brewing groups are also downsizing. In Southern California, SoCal Cervceros club president Marvin Gomez says membership has dropped by 50 members to 52 over the past three years. Brooklyn’s Brewminaries club still counts 130 active members, but that’s also down from its peak, says president Kari Vaughn.

Where have the home brewers gone? What does their absence say about craft beer at large, which is facing its own struggles with interest and sales? And what does a possible future for home brewing and the community aspect that has long been central to its appeal look like?

SEE BREW ON PAGE 27



A collage of staff, customers and friends at Bitter & Esters.

WEEKEND: FOOD

Brew: Some enthusiasts hopeful, citing past resurgences among factors

FROM PAGE 26

“Home brewing clubs provide an important social outlet,” Vaughn said. “You make friends; you learn alongside each other. There’s a great satisfaction that comes with DIY, especially when it’s something you can then share with people.”

Chris Anderson, owner of Maryland Homebrew supply shop in Columbia, says the people are what have kept her in the home brewing world as opposed to commercialized craft beer: “I was offered different jobs in the beer industry when I was working at [Maryland Homebrew], before I bought it, but I loved this community so much I didn’t want to leave it.”

The drop-off in home brewing and community spaces for it may feel sudden to longtime enthusiasts. For more than three decades, home brewing thrived as a hobby. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter legalized the activity, which had been banned since Prohibition. The following year, Charlie Papazian founded the American Homebrewers Association. Home brewing competitions, clubs and shops proliferated as Americans learned to make beers that weren’t available on the light lager-dominated market. Several of those hobbyists went pro, opening the first contemporary craft breweries, including Ken Grossman with Sierra Nevada Brewing Company and Jim Koch with Samuel Adams.

Home brewing continued as a farm team for the burgeoning craft beer industry. After a 2013 law change in New York enabled taprooms to exist, frequent hobby home brewers and Bitter & Esters regulars opened their own breweries in New York: Finback Brewery in 2014, Strong Rope Brewery in 2015 and KCBC in 2016. Gomez says SoCal Cerveceros members launched California breweries Hermosa Brewing, Feathered Serpent, Brewjeria and Norwalk Brew House, among others.

Co-founder of KCBC Tony Bellis was an integral member of the Bitter & Esters community, as he went from customer to staffer. The shop opened right as he was staying home with his newborn son and was home brewing often, while also planning a career transition into beer.

“I was that home brewer walking in, ‘I want to open a brewery,’” Bellis said. “John and Doug were probably like, ‘Oh, sure.’” But soon, he landed his first brewing job at the now defunct Greenpoint Beer Works, and LaPolla and Ampert asked if he would teach a home brewing 101 class at the shop.

“That place is really pivotal in my starting a business,” Bellis said of Bitter & Esters. He also came to meet Bobby Rolandi, working retail at the shop, who has been KCBC’s head brewer since the brewery opened.

Bellis sees Bitter & Esters as a driver of growth and diversity in home brewing and craft beer. Not only did staff and customers end up going pro, but the shop was fertile ground for inclusive home brew clubs like Brewminaries, which grew out of the customer base.

“Suddenly there were younger people home brewing, and more women in the home brewing scene,” he said. “That ended up trickling down into the professional brewing world.”

By the mid-2010s, the Brewers Association counted more than 4,000 breweries across the country, and some in the industry began to worry that craft beer’s ubiquity could threaten hobby home brewing. Anderson says while it wasn’t as significant as the current decline, she saw an early drop in home brewing activity around 2015 to 2016 compared to what she calls a heyday in 2012.

“What changed the structure of [home brewing] ... was access,” said Mike McGarvey, a co-founder of Washington’s 3 Stars Brewing — the brewery had a home brew shop that closed in 2020, and the entire business shuttered in 2022. “There were a handful of breweries that were well thought of but you couldn’t get to ... then suddenly, people had options wherever they were.”

Despite the dip, home brewing carried on.

“I was asked back then if I thought breweries would hurt my business,” LaPolla said. “I thought, ‘Do restaurants hurt grocery stores?’ If you’re into something, you want to make it.”

This rang true for plenty of home brewers, and the activity surged in the early months of the pandemic with people stuck at home. Taprooms were closed indefinitely



CLAY WILLIAMS/For The Washington Post

Some of the supplies used in home brewing: A hydrometer is used to measure the sugar content of the wort before and after fermentation. The flasks are used to make a yeast starter, which gives the brewer healthy yeast and more of it.

“I don’t think after a 9,000-year run, beer is suddenly going to fall out of favor with people, or that Americans will decide they don’t like beer that tastes like anything and just want to drink macro [brewery offerings].”

Brett Taylor

co-founder of Brooklyn’s Wild East Brewing

and people were seeking busy-making activities to fill the time — alongside sourdough starters and jigsaw puzzles. Per the Associated Press, one of the best known home brewing suppliers, Northern Brewer, reported a 40 to 50% spike in sales in the first month of the pandemic. But as restrictions lifted, many of those would-be brewers abandoned their projects just as new knitters forgot their sweater attempts.

LaPolla believes postlockdowns, people wanted to get outside of their homes and back to enjoying food and drinks in restaurants and breweries. Now, even if their amount of discretionary spending is similar, people allocate those funds elsewhere. Some home brewers say they are experiencing sticker shock when shopping for ingredients and deciding it’s just not worth the investment. Vaughn says liquid yeast has gotten “crazy expensive,” and Kendall Alvarez Eskew, owner of Jersey City home brew shop The Thirsty Quaker, says he’s noticed some suppliers have stopped selling supplies in sizes accessible to home brewers. Sanitizing solutions no longer come in four or 16 ounces; Five Star’s Defoamer once came in two-ounce packages, and now Eskew can order it only by the gallon.

Longtime home brew enthusiasts might also just be aging out. Award-winning home brewer Annie Johnson refers to the large percentage of home brewers over the age of 50 when she lists factors for the decline, such as “health reasons, boredom, getting serious for retirement ... the physical nature of home brewing — even though

[some things] are automated now, it’s still quite physical with a lot of lifting.” A 2018 AHA study found 38% of members were from Generation X, compared to 30% millennials and 28% boomers.

It’s a generational dynamic affecting craft beer itself: Many of the old guard fans now consume less alcohol for health and lifestyle reasons. Research shows Gen Z isn’t backfilling the gap — instead, they’re chasing flavors across categories such as ready-to-drink cocktails and functional, nonalcoholic beverages. There’s optimism about craft beer, however. Alcoholic beverage preferences tend to be cyclic, a pattern behind amaro’s recent resurgence, for example. Brewers like Brett Taylor, co-founder of Brooklyn’s Wild East Brewing, point to the first craft beer industry crash, in the 1990s, during which many of the first-generation breweries folded — but plenty survived, and craft beer grew bigger than ever.

“I don’t think after a 9,000-year run, beer is suddenly going to fall out of favor with people, or that Americans will decide they don’t like beer that tastes like anything and just want to drink macro [brewery offerings],” Taylor said.

But how much does craft beer’s future hinge on home brewing’s vitality? If people aren’t home brewing, who are tomorrow’s professional brewers? They might be brewers taking different pathways. Because of the brewery boom, there are more entry-level jobs that let hopeful brewers get a foot in the door. Several universities also offer an educational springboard into brewing, McGarvey notes, pointing to the Beer Brewer Professional Certificate program at Virginia Tech and the University of Richmond.

Still, home brewing remains a viable tool for anyone interested in going pro. McGarvey says craft beer’s popularity made trade professions desirable and, even as strictly a hobby, LaPolla reasons that people often return to an interest in making things by hand, whether that’s home brewing or knitting. One such hands-on hobby is bringing a younger generation into home brew shops right now: LaPolla, Alvarez Eskew and Anderson have had customers stocking up on supplies for mead. The fermented honey and water-based beverage with ancient roots is more accessible for beginners than beer and has been lauded for its sustainability — instructional videos have been trending on TikTok.

“You don’t have to do as much cooking [to make mead], and it takes up less room,” Anderson said. She’s been bringing in other supplies, too, in response to customer interest in cheese, yogurt and sourdough starters. Alvarez Eskew also stocks ingredients for making kombucha and shrubs. At a recent Brewminaries event in Brooklyn, Vaughn says members made nonalcoholic beers, ciders and hop waters, and executive director of the AHA Julia Herz has been using her home brewing equipment to make cherry soda, among other beverages.

Advanced brewing technology may also be a boon for home brewing as new at-home systems can reduce initial knowledge barriers for first-time brewers. Pinter, for example, is a tabletop setup; users simply add yeast to wort and wait for fermentation. U.S. CEO of the British company Paul Benner believes the streamlined system is more welcoming.

“[Home brewing] is an expensive hobby to get into right away,” he said. “It takes up a lot of space, a lot of time, a lot of commitment. The beer quality may not be great right away for new brewers, and I think people get burned out quickly.” Pinter guarantees consistent results, which Benner — a longtime home brewer himself — hopes gets more new home brewers into the fold, even if they then move onto traditional setups.

Some shuttered shops have moved their operations online, including Minnesota-based Northern Brewer, More Beer and Craft A Brew. But while user-friendly at-home kits and online retail options may appeal to Gen Z, these won’t replace what many consider to be home brewing’s greatest benefit.

“Online, the community space is lost,” Bellis said. “Bitter & Esters was a space for home brewers to get together, do bottle shares, swap ideas — that’s going to be a big miss. Because what home brewing is all about is sharing the thing you make with other people, getting their feedback and seeing their enjoyment.”

WEEKEND: MUSIC



NETFLIX/AP

Avicii is shown in the documentary “Avicii — I’m Tim,” now streaming on Netflix. The groundbreaking Swedish DJ, whose name was Tim Bergling, died in 2018. Filmmaker Henrik Burman, who began the project before the pandemic, allows Avicii himself to tell his story through the use of archival and never-before-published interviews.

Spinning a sensitive tale

Q&A: Avicii documentary director on celebrating the late DJ without exploiting his death

BY MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

Avicii, the groundbreaking Swedish DJ-producer, died six years ago at 28. Two new movies on Netflix aim to celebrate his life.

His suicide was a tragedy that reverberated around the world — much like his music, which brought unexpected genres and collaborators into his melodic EDM through forward-thinking, chart-topping hits like “Wake Me Up!” and “Hey Brother.”

A short concert film captured at what became his final performance, “Avicii — My Last Show,” and a full-length documentary, “Avicii — I’m Tim,” premiered Tuesday on Netflix. They work to celebrate the artist born Tim Bergling, capturing his early life, the songs that made him an idiosyncratic talent, his insatiable curiosity and hunger for reinvention, and the people he left behind.

Miraculously, Avicii himself narrates a lot of the film — pulled from archival interviews and some never before published.

Capturing Avicii’s life and career was no easy feat, director Henrik Burman told The Associated Press. The project took half a decade, beginning before the pandemic and not long after the DJ’s death. Burman’s interviews were long and many. “To know people around Tim,” he says, was the only way “to know Tim.”

Burman discussed Avicii’s life, career and legacy with the AP. This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

The Associated Press: How did you approach this project?

Burman: I would say from the beginning, the first thing I knew I wanted to do was find my story ... the story that I wanted to tell about Tim. But the most important (aspect) was time. I wanted this to be a project with no time

limits ... I wanted it to be a slow process. And I wanted to have a lot of time for research. And the people close to Tim, I didn’t want to force them into anything. I didn’t want to push it. I wanted them to see and learn what I wanted to tell, you know, my story and my vision.

The structure is compelling; it really focuses on Avicii’s life and his biggest songs that shifted genre — you avoid casting his career as “it was the 2010s and EDM was massive.” There’s a lot of research.

I had access to a lot of material ... I was looking for clues all the time ... I’ve watched so, so many hours of, you know, interviews with Tim just to see, “OK, he says this again. And it was like the eighth time that year. OK. That should be important.” ... It was kind of a puzzle and yeah, it was huge research work.

Sometimes, in the material that

I had ... he was like, “If there’s a documentary, ever, about me, this should be in it.” ... There’s a story in the film, in the beginning, from where he is a kid. He tells a story to the interviewer. And he says, “When I was a kid, I wasn’t like a really nice person. For a few years, I was kind of bullying people. And I was around 6 or 7. And after a while I realized that people didn’t like me, so after a summer, I was thinking about this, and I decided, ‘I need to change ... and see what happens.’ And then people liked me again.” And when he told that story, he was like, “That’s a really important story. That’s a story that needs to be in a documentary, if it’s ever a documentary about me, because that says so much about me as a person.”

I was trying to find clues and

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WEEKEND: MUSIC

Spinning: Director took care with tone

FROM PAGE 28

stories and listen and ... early on, I was quite sure that I wanted to tell the story from Miami Ultra (Music Festival) and what happened there. That was kind of a key moment for me, and that was a huge key moment for Tim. But when I realized that this ... needs to be the center of my story, at the midpoint for my story, I realized that I had something to hold on to.

The childhood story reflects his interest in creative transformation, too. How do you aim to capture his spirit and not center his death?

That is hard. I have from the beginning ... tried to explain my vision for this film ... But I reached out to a lot of friends, and of course his family, and I got their blessing.

When I got this kind of group of people that said yes to being in the film, I could start to ask more questions and have deeper conversations. But again, we needed time ... I wanted to work gently; that was very important.

And you have footage of Tim in the womb! It is very different than what could've very easily been an exploitative version of the film.

I wanted to make an intimate and personal story and not speculate ... to find the right tone, you need time. And since we started work ... one, one-and-a-half years after Tim passed, I just knew that we needed time. And, of course, people around Tim needed a lot of time.

What is Avicii's legacy?

You can answer that question in so many ways. But if you're talking about the music, and the music that he produced and wrote, he was so much ahead of his time, I would say. And you can hear the legacy of Avicii in the music today. You can hear it in the production in new music and hits from today. If you listen to the music — go back and listen to the music now that he released like 10 years ago, it sounds so fresh, modern, and I would say timeless.

What do you hope viewers take away from this film?

Someone said to me that the film is so much about Tim, but at the same time, it's so kind of universal. And I thought that was beautiful because life is not simple. There are no easy answers. And everything is complex and multilayered. So, that's what I aim to contribute to Tim's story. And I also really hope that even the most hardcore fans get a new, fresh perspective of Tim as a person and Avicii as an artist.



ROB GRABOWSKI, INVISION/AP

Rats, clowns and the Stones

Chris Robinson, left, and Rich Robinson of The Black Crowes perform on Oct. 25 at Hard Rock Casino in Rockford, Ill. Their newest album, "Happiness Bastards," is nominated for best rock album, the band's second career Grammy nomination.

Black Crowes enjoying Grammys love decades after first nomination

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

The first time Chris and Rich Robinson were at the Grammy Awards, it was 1991. The New York Giants had won the Super Bowl, and the U.S. was in the midst of the Gulf War.

The siblings behind the band The Black Crowes had just released their debut album "Shake Your Money Maker" and were nominees for best new artist. They didn't have high hopes. Sure enough, Mariah Carey would take the crown.

"I don't remember ever, like, getting too worked up about it," singer-songwriter Chris Robinson recalls. "Of course, Mariah Carey is going to get that. Are they going to give it to these dirtbag kids from Atlanta who just came to the party really to get thrown out?"

Fast forward more than three decades and the Black Crowes have been invited back to the party, earning their second career Grammy nod this year for best rock album alongside the Rolling Stones.

"Literally just to be nominated is an amazing thing. And to be nominated next to the Rolling Stones makes it even better," says Rich Robinson, the songwriter and guitarist.

Beside the Stones

The Black Crowes' "Happiness Bastards" is up for best rock album against "Romance" by Fontaines D.C., "Saviors" by Green Day, "TANGK" by IDLES, "Dark Matter" from Pearl Jam, "Hackney Diamonds" by the Stones and "No Name" from Jack White.

"To be in a place where it's all clicking and it all feels right, that's the real special feeling," says Chris Robinson. "I think it rein-

forces our commitment and where we're going."

"Happiness Bastards" is a 10-track romping tour of rock, from the Southern boogie of "Rats and Clowns" to the stuttering stomp of "Cross Your Fingers" and the airy cool of "Wilted Rose." There's blues harmonica, some glam rock, '70s harmonies and fun AC/DC-like riffs.

The band last released a studio album in 2009, and the volatile Robinson brothers needed a decade apart before they regrouped in 2019. In 2022, they released an EP with covers of David Bowie, the Rolling Stones, the Temptations, T. Rex, Little Feat and Rod Stewart. Now they're in the same Grammy category as the Stones.

Critics have welcomed the brothers back, with Paste magazine calling the new album "a respectable collection of bluesy rockers that showcase the brothers' strengths" and Rolling Stone describing it as "fun, energetic and unmistakably not-crusty."

Some cynics thought the reunion was simply a cash grab, an attempt to monetize fans of the band yearning for the '90s and a good-time rock concert. The strong album and Grammy love refutes that argument.

"Well, we did it and we've been successful. And all these years later we wrote these new songs and, boom, here we are," says Chris Robinson. "The validation of that is really unique to us."

Inside the writing process

The way they come up with a song hadn't changed over the years. During the pandemic, Rich started sending a flood of ideas to his brother to see what clicked with him.

Chris wrote the lyrics for "Rats and Clowns" in 20 minutes after Rich — inspired by AC/DC — sent him a killer riff. "Rich just handed me a hanging curveball. 'I can hit this,' you know what I mean?" says Chris. "I have to emphasize how much fun we're having in this band."

One difference this time was the addition of an outside producer. The Robinson brothers had produced all The Black Crowes albums after their second and wanted a new element.

That happened with producer Jay Joyce, who has worked with artists like Cage the Elephant, Lainey Wilson and Eric Church. Joyce pushed them and was able to negotiate the sibling rivalry, what some call the U.S. equivalent to Oasis.

"Our story connects with people because if you have siblings, you understand the dynamic of that — how amazing it is and how difficult it can be," says Chris Robinson.

His brother agrees: "We've had our ups and downs, we've had our trials and tribulations, and we kind of came out stronger in the end. Chris and I's relationship is in the best place it's been probably in our lives."

The brothers hint about that on the album's last song — "Kindred Friends" — which strikes a loving, wistful note. "Kindred friend, where have you been? / Guess it's been a while / Through thick and thin / Many times again / Always makes me smile."

The Robinsons say the song is partly about them but could be a toast to an old lover and is also for their fans after all these years.

"There's a sweetness to it," says Rich Robinson. "I sent it to Chris and what he sang on it was really moving. It's a great way to end that record, you know?"

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

Adorable, but actually important

Many dogs need added protection of winter clothing in cold weather to ensure their safety

By SYDNEY PAGE
The Washington Post

It's 30 degrees in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Mara Peverini is getting ready to head out the door. She bundles up in a sweater, a puffer jacket, boots and a scarf.

Then she does the same for her dog.

"She can spend an hour outside in the snow, as long as she's dressed properly," Peverini, 31, said of her 10-year-old Chihuahua, Layla. "But the moment I underdress her, we walk five feet and she refuses to keep going."

"We alternate with the colors and styles," Peverini said.

Winter outerwear has become increasingly popular for pets. Clothing brands for humans have started selling doggy lines, and pet parents are wearing matching parkas with their pooches.

While it's adorable, and sometimes hilarious, for canines to wear winter clothes, it's actually important for many dogs to keep them safe in cold weather, experts say.

"There are several factors that go into whether a dog needs winter protection," said Nancy Kay, a veterinarian and author of "Speaking for Spot."

Key factors include climate, breed, age, size, health and hair coat.

"Any of the arctic breeds — Siberian huskies, malamutes, Samoyeds — those are dogs that were bred for snow, and so they really don't need protection," Kay said. "If you picture the opposite end, like a whippet, with skinny legs and a light hair coat, those dogs definitely need protection."

When humans domesticated wolves about 40,000 years ago, they did not need people to wrap them in parkas to keep them warm. But over the centuries, as they evolved into various breeds of dogs that live inside, many have lost their natural thick fur that protects them from the elements.

"Dogs have changed," said Kay, adding that breeds that are vulnerable to the cold have become more popular in recent years.

If a dog is going outside to relieve themselves, they don't need protective gear, Kay said, but it's important to protect them if they're spending stretches of time in the cold.

"A common misconception is that dogs have hair coats and that they're never going to be bothered by the cold," Kay said. "That's not true at all."

A rule of thumb, she said, is that larger breeds are generally less likely to need winter clothing, but smaller breeds have a harder time regulating their body temperature and should wear warm layers and booties, especially if they live in places where temperatures dip below freezing.

Age and health are also considerations.

"A dog that's more fragile because of age or illness, that, too, is a reason to put a coat on," Kay said. "Know your animal and know your environment."

Even in relatively mild climates, dogs can get too cold. Signs to look out for if



Mara Peverini

Mara Peverini and Layla playing in the snow. Peverini says that Layla, a 10-year-old Chihuahua, won't stay outside when it is cold unless she is dressed in winter clothing. Experts say that such protection is essential for many breeds.

your dog is chilly include apprehension about going for a walk.

"Shivering is a good indicator," Kay said.

Lori Bierbrier, senior medical director of community medicine at the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, said dogs are vulnerable to hypothermia if they're too exposed to cold weather.

"If it is too cold for you, it's too cold for

your pet," she said.

In the world of pet winter gear, though, experts say the boundaries between fashion and function have somewhat blurred — the global pet-clothing market size was valued at \$5.56 billion last year.

Before dressing their dog, owners should consider: "Are you putting it on for the dog's sake or your sake?" Kay said. "I think some people do it as more of a fashion statement than anything else."

Han Xia, who lives in Hoboken, N.J., with her 3-year-old miniature dachshund, Kiki, said her pup has three winter coats, as well as dozens of sweaters.

"If it's cold outside, she doesn't want to go out without clothes," said Xia, 32.

When Xia got Kiki a few years ago and took her outside on a winter walk, "she was shaking uncontrollably, and we realized she's really cold."

Although the winter gear keeps Kiki warm, Xia said she enjoys leaning into the fashion and fun of it.

"If I'm going to buy clothes for Kiki anyway, I might as well get cute ones," she said.

Devon Boone, 34, also delights in dressing his 4-year-old Doberman pinscher, Cru.

"It's fun to see him dress up in different sweaters and be festive," Boone said.

While the weather is mostly mild in San Diego, where they live, Cru still wears sweaters. For a trip to Yosemite two years ago, Boone bought Cru a puffer jacket and boots.

Alisha Bobczynski recently bought Ocean, her 1-year-old American bully-American Staffordshire terrier mix, a pearly pink winter coat from the trendy retailer Aritzia to match her own jacket.

"I think I get more satisfaction out of buying clothes for her than I do buying clothes for myself," said Bobczynski, who lives in Calgary, Alberta, where winters are frigid. The average temperature in January is a low of 12 degrees and a high of 30.

Bobczynski, 33, said she is certain her pup prefers to wear a coat on cold days, because if she goes out without one, "she'll turn around and drag me back home."

Like many dogs, Ocean is not a fan of boots — which keep paws warm in cold weather and prevent salt and harsh chemicals from irritating them.

When it comes to selecting winter protection for dogs, fit is an important factor.

"A jacket that doesn't fit properly may be uncomfortable and may cause irritation to the dog's skin," said Bierbrier, adding that winter coats should always be waterproof. "Make sure the winter gear does not limit their movement, sight or ability to breathe or bark."

Training is helpful, too.

"The training component is one of the important pieces that often gets overlooked," said Sassafras Patterdale, a dog trainer in Portland, Ore.

Patterdale — author of "Tricks in the City" — recommends introducing dogs to winter gear slowly before they need to wear it and letting them explore it. Offer treats, too.

"Repeat that over several training sessions ... [and] very slowly start to increase the time that your dog is wearing the winter gear," Patterdale advised.

Above all, owners should — to the best of their ability — try to tune in to what their dog is comfortable with.

"Dogs don't speak human, but they do speak to us," Kay said. "We just have to pay attention."

WEEKEND: BOOKS

RACING
GENRE

Formula One is booming, and so are romance novels about the sport

BY GREGORY LEPORATI

Special to *The Washington Post*

In 2019, Lauren Asher began watching the first season of the Netflix docuseries “Drive to Survive.” The show — which chronicles the globe-trotting, glamorous world of Formula One racing, filled with luxury-brand sponsors, teammate drama and European car manufacturers — captivated her in a way she was not expecting.

By the time she reached the final episode, she jotted down a late-night note on her iPhone with a quick idea for a novel: “A romance between a driver’s sister and his rival teammate would be fun,” she wrote.

“I could see it so clearly,” Asher said during a recent Zoom interview. “That idea was what really sparked my interest in writing about F1.”

About a year later, Asher self-published her first novel, “Throttled.” “I just wanted to try and have fun with it, a passion project,” Asher said. “And if people didn’t like it, I wouldn’t do it again.”

As it turned out, people did, especially on TikTok, where praise can turn little-known books into bestsellers. This year, with Formula One booming in popularity in the United States, a traditional publisher picked up the paperback rights to widen its distribution.

Sports romance novels have gained considerable traction in recent years, with hockey famously emerging as the most popular subgenre. But few sports, in general, are rising as rapidly as Formula One, which just wrapped up an exciting 2024 season that featured three races in the United States: in Austin,

Texas; Miami; and Las Vegas.

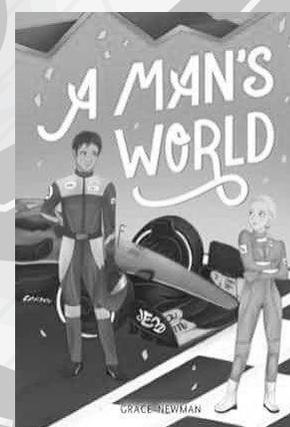
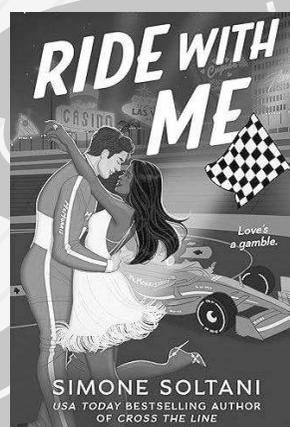
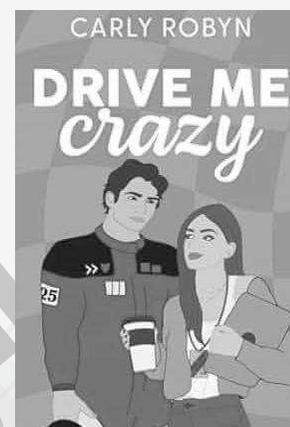
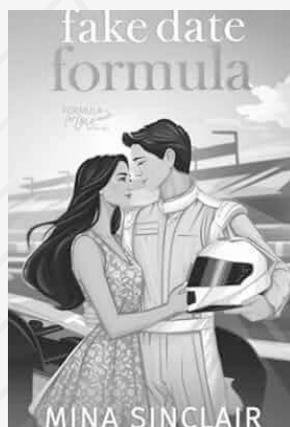
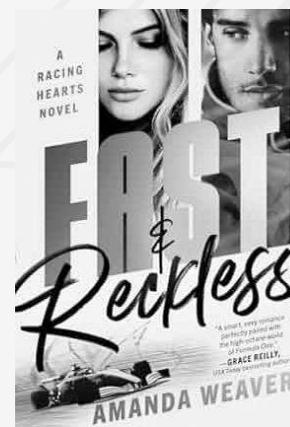
The sport’s ascent is partly thanks to a huge influx of female fans. According to a study conducted by Formula One in 2022, approximately 40 percent of its fans are women, up from 8 percent in 2017.

This is probably due, in part, to the sport’s recent mainstream crossover: Big-time actors and musicians are flocking to races, and drivers such as Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc have become fashion and cultural icons in their own right. They also just so happen to be strapping, wealthy young men.

“Good-looking guys, that sure doesn’t hurt,” laughed Amanda Weaver, the author of “Fast & Reckless,” another recent Formula One romance novel. Weaver has been a casual fan of Formula One for more than a decade (in fact, her husband co-hosts a podcast about it) and has noticed a seismic shift in female interest in the sport in recent years. A number of dedicated Formula One websites, podcasts and communities have popped up online and on social media catering specifically to women. There are insider podcasts and popular Instagram accounts, some celebrating Formula One fashion and others dedicated entirely to the WAGs (“wives and girlfriends”) of the drivers.

“As the sport gets this explosion, there can be a lot of gatekeeping,” Weaver said. “But it’s important to remember that you can love Formula One in lots of ways. Some people are into the tech, into the drivers, into the strategy.”

Romance novels, she added, are a logical extension of this. Weaver’s book — which she describes as an “ill-advised



romance between a driver and a team principal’s daughter” — had been in the works for some time, “bouncing around my hard drive for a while,” she said, but it took the sport’s ascent to finally help it see the light of day.

Formula One certainly provides plenty of fodder for romance novelists, with the sport dripping in wealth and danger, behind-the-scenes politicking, and exotic race locations such as Monaco and Abu Dhabi.

“Sexy global destinations week to week make it such a perfect setting,” said Simone Soltani, the author of “Cross the Line,” a Formula One romance novel that published in the summer. “You can have your characters go on dates in Singapore, then the next time they’re in Japan. It’s nice to be able to have that diversity.”

Soltani, a longtime fan of the sport, planned to independently publish her novel last year, but a traditional publisher approached her and picked up the rights to distribute the book.

“More women are into it now — these are fans who love the sport for the sport itself, too, but also have other interests, which might be reading and romance,” she said. “Knowing there was a new audience there was really encouraging for me as I wrote it.”

In fact, according to K-lytics, an intelligence service that provides analytics on the publishing industry, Formula One

has emerged this year as the sixth-most-written-about subgenre in sports romance literature.

“It had not yet appeared on this list,” said Jane Friedman, a publishing industry analyst. “So Formula One went from not-on-the-radar to sixth — it certainly appears to be a new, trending trope.”

Self-published novels and fan fiction about Formula One are also on the rise. The website Wattpad, which allows users to upload their fan fiction stories and books, now has more than 10,000 search results for “Formula 1 Romance” and could further hint at the subgenre’s room for growth.

“In my opinion, the traditional market tends to follow self-published when it comes to romance,” Friedman said, adding that all signs indicate that sports romance, in general, shows no signs of slowing down.

“That latest K-lytics report says that right now, supply is not outpacing demand,” she continued. “There’s a lot of hunger in the market for this.”

That’s music to the ears of authors like Weaver, who is hopeful that the Formula One romance boom is just getting started.

“I feel like we’re on the very front edge of this,” she said. “A lot of authors watched Formula One during the pandemic, and their books are just now coming to market. We’re just beginning to see a big flood.”

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS



Are you cooking with chemicals?

Authors of study that detected toxins in black plastic products recognize they overstated risks but still advise tossing them

By **KAREN GARCIA**
Los Angeles Times

A recent study that recommended black plastic products be immediately thrown away included a math error that significantly overstated the risk of contamination with toxic chemicals, but its authors are standing by their conclusions and warn against using such products.

In the study, which was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Chemosphere*, experts from the nonprofit Toxic-Free Future said they detected flame retardants and other toxic chemicals in 85% of 203 items made of black plastic including kitchen utensils, takeout containers, children's toys and hair accessories.

The study initially said the potential exposure to chemicals found in one of the kitchen utensils approached the minimum levels the Environmental Protection Agency deemed a health risk.

But in an update to the study, the authors say they made an error in their calculations and the real levels were "an order of magnitude lower" than the EPA's thresholds. The error was discovered by Joe Schwarcz, director of McGill University's Office for Science and Society in Canada.

In a blog post, Schwarcz explained that the Toxin-Free Future scientists miscalculated the lower end of what the EPA considered a health risk through a multiplication error. Instead of humans being potentially exposed to a dose of toxic chemicals in black plastic utensils near the minimum level that the EPA deems a health risk, it's actually about one-tenth of that.

Though Schwarcz said the risks outlined in the study aren't enough for him to want to discard black plastic kitchen items, if he had them, he agreed with the authors that flame retardants shouldn't be in these products in the first place.

"The math error does not impact the study's findings, conclusions or recommendations," said Megan Liu, a co-author of the study who is the science and policy manager for Toxic-Free Future.

She added that any traces of flame retardants or toxic chemicals in cooking utensils should be concerning for the public.

Flame retardants are getting into commonly used items because the black-colored products are being made from recycled electronic waste, such as discarded television sets and computers, that frequently contain the additives. When they're heated, the flame retardants and other toxic chemicals can migrate out.

If you're wondering whether your old black plastic spoons or other utensils are a part of this group, Liu shared some more guidance:

How do I know a product is harmful?

It's nearly impossible to know whether a black plastic product is contaminated. That's because the products that include recycled e-waste don't disclose a detailed list of all ingredients and contaminants in them.

Liu said it's also unclear how many types of flame retardants are in these black plastic products.

Some of the products that researchers tested in this recent study "had up to nine different harmful chemicals and harmful flame retardants in them," she said.

How can I find out if black food trays are made with recycled contaminated plastic?

Anytime you're looking for the type of recycled plastic a product is made of, you're going to look for a number within the chasing arrows (that form a triangle) logo.

Recycling symbols are numbered 1 to 7, and we commonly associate the numbers with what we can toss in our blue recycling bins. The 1 through 7 numbers stand for,

respectively, polyethylene terephthalate, high-density polyethylene, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), low-density polyethylene, polypropylene, polystyrene or Styrofoam and miscellaneous plastics (including polycarbonate, polylactide, acrylic, acrylonitrile butadiene, styrene, fiberglass and nylon).

The study found higher levels of toxic flame retardants in polystyrene plastic, which is labeled with the number 6, Liu said.

When did recycled e-waste begin contaminating black plastic products?

There isn't a definitive timeline of when recycled electronic waste started to be incorporated into black plastic products specifically, but e-waste started to get recycled in the early 2000s, Liu said.

The way computers, cellphones, stereos, printers and copiers were being disposed of previously was to simply add them to a landfill without reusing salvageable parts.

But as the National Conference of State Legislatures notes, electronics production required a significant amount of resources that could be recovered through recycling.

Recovering resources such as metals, plastics and glass through recycling used a fraction of the energy needed to mine new materials.

However, the study pointed out that flame retardants and other chemical contaminants have been detected in and near e-waste recycling facilities, in indoor air and dust, in Canada, China, Spain and the U.S.

It also noted contamination in soil samples surrounding e-waste recycling sites in China and Vietnam.

What are safer alternatives?

The safest nontoxic material options for kitchen utensils are wood and stainless steel.

WEEKEND: FAMILY



Fresh approach to finances

Financial experts' tips include paying down debt, knowing your 'why'

BY CORA LEWIS AND ADRIANA MORGA
Associated Press

With the end of 2024 around the corner, you might be reflecting on financial goals for 2025.

Whether you're saving to move out of your parents' house or pay off student loan debt, financial resolutions can help you stay motivated, said Courtney Alev, consumer advocate for Credit Karma.

"Entering a new year doesn't erase all our financial challenges from the prior year," Alev said. "But it can really help to bring a fresh-start mentality to how you're managing your finances."

If you're planning to make financial resolutions for the new year, experts recommend that you start by evaluating the state of your finances in 2024. Then, set specific goals and make sure they're attainable for your lifestyle.

Here are some tips from experts:

Change your relationship with money

Think about how you currently deal with finances — what's good, what's bad, and what can improve.

"Let this be the year you change your relationship with money," said Ashley Lapato, personal finance educator for YNAB, a budgeting app.

If you feel like money is a chore, that there's shame surrounding the topic of money, or like you were born being "bad at money," it's time to change that mentality, Lapato said.

To adjust your approach, Lapato recommends viewing money goals as an opportunity to imagine your desired lifestyle in the future. She recommends asking questions like, "What do my 30s look like? What do my 40s look like?" and using money as a means to get there.

Liz Young Thomas, head of SoFi Investment Strategy, added that it's key you forgive yourself for past mistakes in order to move on with motivation.

Know your 'why'

When setting your financial resolutions for 2025, it's important to establish the "why" of each, said Matt Watson, CEO of Origin, a financial tracking app.

"If you can attach the financial goal to a bigger life goal, it's much more motivating and more likely you'll continue on that path," Watson said.

Whether you're saving to buy a house, pay off credit card debt or take a summer vacation, being clear about the goal can keep you motivated. Watson also

recommends using a tool to help you keep track of your finances, such as an app, spreadsheet or website.

Budget, budget, budget

"After three years of inflation, your pay increases are likely still playing catch-up to your monthly expenses, leaving you wondering where all the money is going," said Greg McBride, chief financial analyst at Bankrate. "Make that monthly budget for 2025 and resolve to track your spending against it throughout the year."

McBride said that you may need to make adjustments during the year as certain expenses increase, which would require cutting back in other areas.

"Calibrate your spending with your income, and any month you spend less than budgeted, transfer the difference into your savings account," he said.

Pay down outstanding debt

"Interest rates aren't likely to come down very fast, so you're still going to have to put in the hard work of paying down debt, especially high-cost credit card debt, and do so with urgency," McBride said.

Start by taking stock of how much debt you have now relative to the beginning of the year. Hopefully you've made steady progress on paying it down, but, if you've gone in the other direction, McBride encourages making a game plan. That includes looking into 0% balance transfer offers.

Take control of credit card interest rate

"You have more power over credit card interest rates than you think you do," said Matt Schulz, chief credit analyst at LendingTree. "Wielding that power is one of the best moves you can make in 2025."

A 0% balance transfer credit card is "a good weapon" in the fight against high card APRs, or annual percentage rates, he said. A low-interest personal loan is an option as well.

You may simply be able to pick up the phone and ask for a lower interest rate. LendingTree found that a majority of people who did that in 2024 were successful, and the average reduction was more than 6 points.

Automate savings where possible

Automated changes, like increasing workplace 401(k) plan contributions, setting up direct deposits from paychecks into dedicated savings accounts, and arranging for monthly transfers into an IRA and/or college savings accounts add up, McBride said.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



A bit of self-compassion increases odds of success

As I dunked a two-week-old Christmas cookie into my coffee on the first day of 2025, my stomach still gurgled with the contents of the overindulgent dinner we'd eaten on New Year's Eve. Despite the long list of resolutions I'd made, I'd already broken three of them, and it was only noon.

"Wake up early," I'd told myself. "Exercise each morning. Do intermittent fasting." Only hours into the New Year, and I already felt like a failure.

I'd been repeating this dysfunctional pattern every year. Beginning in October, when Halloween festivities lured me into "treating myself" to an entire bag of miniature Almond Joys (full disclosure: I'd buy them knowing kids often turn their noses up at coconut, leaving them all for me). I'd give in to too many pumpkin pie martinis and cinnamon spiked ciders. A bit of self-indulgence would throw my schedule off track, and before I knew it, I'd skipped Boot Camp class and slept in again.

November, with its Sunday football chili-cheese Frito boats, complicated family logistics and Thanksgiving splurges, would drag me further into holiday excess.

December presented me with an entire month's worth of excuses for lowering my health, financial and behavioral standards: Obligatory events to attend, marathon shopping trips to endure, sticks of butter to soften, cards to send, cookie platters to consume, cheese balls to chomp, eggnog to guzzle, puzzle pieces to find, expensive cuts of beef to buy, advent calendars to fill, mail carriers to reward, garbage workers to tip, teachers to treat, bosses to butter up, stockings to stuff, holiday dinners to host, Christmas trees to water and presents to wrap.

By the end of the calendar year, I'd fallen off of the Polar Express into a deep, dark abyss, eventually reaching my lowest level of personal disgust.

Ready — no, begging — to get back on track, I'd then draft a list of New Year's resolutions that seemed realistic in the moment given my desperation, but was so overly ambitious, I was bound to fail. It covered everything from dramatic weight loss and extreme physical fitness, to sleep regulation, buying behavior, procrastination, wrinkle management, stress levels, thinking patterns, attitude tendencies and relationship goals.

And when failure inevitably happened, as it had every year, I'd wallow in shame and remorse wondering how much farther I'd go before my belief in my own ability to change hit its rock bottom.

As I sat in my kitchen on New Year's Day, I realized that for years, maybe decades, I'd repeated this maladaptive annual cycle as if failure, guilt and self-loathing were my holiday traditions themselves. "What should I do to break the cycle?" I wondered.

If I am to ever succeed at self-improvement, I knew I needed a different approach. One that was more realistic, encouraging and forgiving.

Rather than demanding that I make sudden, drastic changes in specific areas of my life as I had done for years, I needed to encourage myself to simply ... do better.

Whatever form my betterment would take, be it significant or small, I needed to recognize that step toward self-improvement. I would be aware that slipups would happen along the way. I would give myself the grace to be human. I would stop being my own judge, jury and executioner. I would discourage guilt and encourage progress in any form. I would be my own cheerleader, using pep talks that would inspire me to take pride in accomplishments big and small.

Besides, I'd always dreamt of being a cheerleader.

"Blech, this cookie is stale," I muttered, and threw the remainder into the kitchen trash. "Nice job," my inner voice praised, and the corner of my mouth turned up into a proud half-smile. "See? You've got this."

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

GO WITH THE FLOW

BY ADRIAN JOHNSON / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

Adrian Johnson, from Laramie, Wyo., is currently a substitute teacher in Knox County, Tenn., where he is affectionately known as "Mr. A. J." He sold his first crossword to The Times three years ago when he was 21. This is his ninth puzzle for the paper — and the seventh one that is unthemed (his favorite type of crossword to make). Puzzles like this are built on the interlock of long, colorful answers throughout the grid. Many, like 1-, 27- and 91-Across, are making their Times debut.

ACROSS

- 1 Reality show about the perils of crabbing in the Bering Sea
- 15 Apple cores, for short?
- 19 Fast lane
- 21 "____ No Sunshine" (1971 Bill Withers hit)
- 22 "God forbid!"
- 24 "O Rei do Futebol," to Brazilians
- 25 Sporty car roof options
- 26 Subsequently occur
- 27 Bioré product
- 29 Sitters on the farm
- 30 Sheets of floating ice
- 31 Shanghai or Shenzhen
- 32 Grp. that's a year above 41-Across
- 33 Vaquero's ties
- 34 1/48 of a cup: Abbr.
- 37 Wipe out at one's desk, say
- 38 Cut down
- 39 Rentals at a bowling alley
- 41 Grp. that's a year below 32-Across
- 42 Solidify, as a jiggly dessert
- 43 Rhyming toys with colored pegs
- 46 Online initialism of excitement

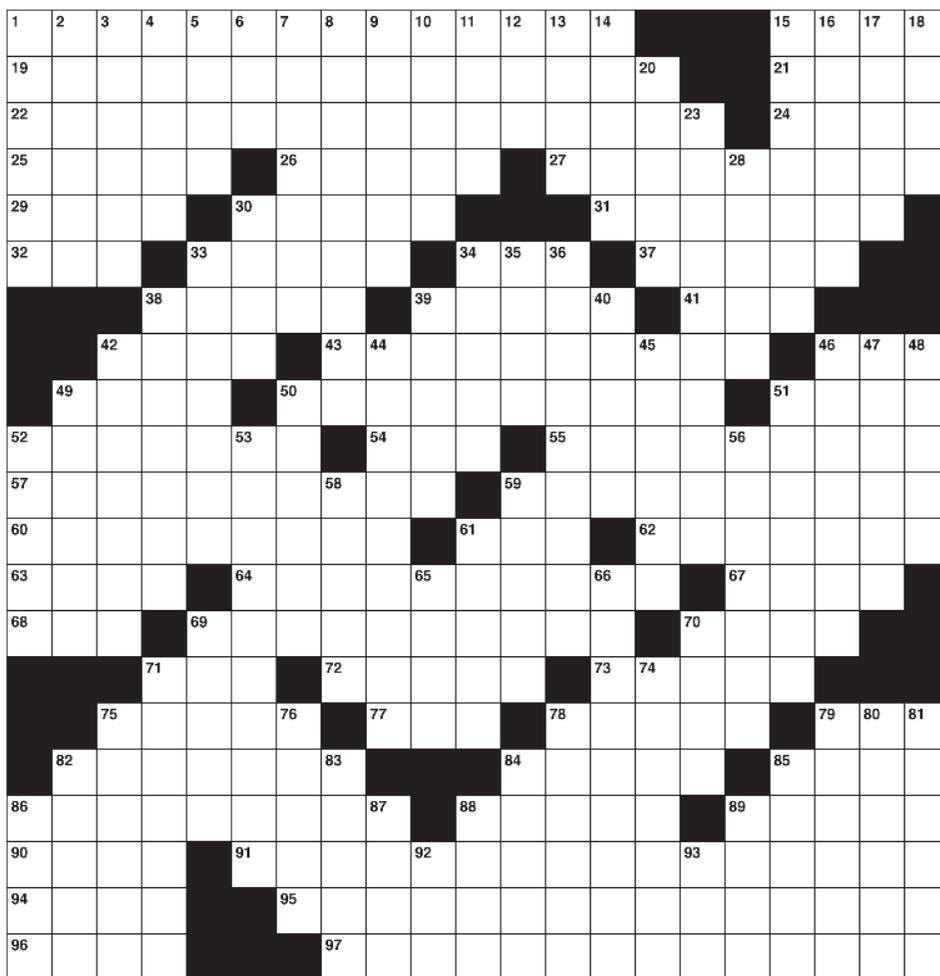
- 49 Rhyme for "soul" in "Frosty the Snowman"
- 50 One catching bugs
- 51 Jungle warning
- 52 Amusement park attraction that often ends in a splash
- 54 Doo-wop's ____ Na Na
- 55 Frozen yogurt chain with a fruity name
- 57 Pretends all is well
- 59 Part of many an anniversary celebration
- 60 Wrap sheets?
- 61 Many a Christmas tree
- 62 Part of a jail cell
- 63 New Mexico's ____ Pueblo
- 64 Godsend
- 67 Souvenir from an international vacation, maybe
- 68 Latin "is"
- 69 Travel-size makeup bag
- 70 Multitude
- 71 Space station from 1986 to 2001
- 72 Some volunteer babysitters
- 73 Way to be brushed or pulled
- 75 Medicare section that covers ambulance services
- 77 Windows might be found on these
- 78 ____ pan
- 79 Cry during an argument between siblings

- 82 Neighbor of Latvia
- 84 Stopping points for runners
- 85 Public squares
- 86 Court staffers
- 88 Brought to tears, say
- 89 Object of knightly quests
- 90 Eight, in Italian
- 91 Only African nation where Spanish is an official language
- 94 Author Silverstein
- 95 Second-place finish?
- 96 One of four for F.D.R.
- 97 They're usually written in December

- 16 Second-smallest U.S. state capital by population, after Montpelier
- 17 Like new matches
- 18 Out of ____
- 20 What a waltzer counts to
- 23 Emotion picture?
- 28 Trades jobs
- 30 Any of the meats in a turducken, e.g.
- 33 Cocktail made from peach nectar and Prosecco
- 34 Letter before iota
- 35 Drink brand with lizards in its logo
- 36 Sweats
- 38 Members of a publishing dynasty
- 39 "60 Minutes" journalist Lesley
- 40 Protest that goes nowhere?
- 42 Relaxed gait
- 44 "We're being framed!"
- 45 Sport with a chair umpire
- 46 Briefly
- 47 Textile with roots in the Scottish Highlands
- 48 More sardonic
- 49 Ski lodge beverages
- 50 Most populous city in the European Union
- 51 Prominent feature of Rudolph

DOWN

- 1 Shipwreck's resting place, with "the"
- 2 English city in the county of Devon
- 3 Garments with strings
- 4 Makes like a melting icicle
- 5 You shouldn't settle for it
- 6 "Well, kinda"
- 7 One-named singer of 2008's "American Boy"
- 8 Hybrid dog breed with curly hair
- 9 Master's musts
- 10 Whale constellation
- 11 Feel sore
- 12 It's a bout done!
- 13 Despot's undoing
- 14 Annual science fiction awards
- 15 Tradition at the end of a graduation ceremony



- 52 Drink made with steamed milk
- 53 Chain store that sells many of its items for \$1.25, curiously
- 56 Dudes abide by it
- 58 Party game in which participants try to identify a secret assassin
- 59 Demanding sorts
- 61 Bits of trivia

- 65 Align, as audio to video
- 66 Foldable parts of some cars
- 69 Widely shared, say
- 70 Hula swayers
- 71 ____ X
- 74 Small plant germ
- 75 Alloy containing tin
- 76 Head-to-toe Islamic garment

- 78 Expensive appetizer
- 79 Jazz standard with the lyric "I'm so tired of paying my dues"
- 80 Get acclimated
- 81 Spanish city where Picasso was born
- 82 Cats do it with their tongues
- 83 Día de los Muertos prop

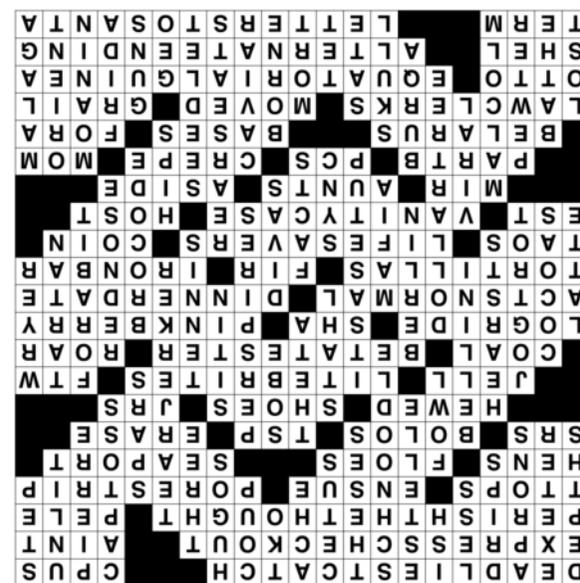
- 84 Transported, as by water
- 85 Surrealist Kahlo
- 86 Without a clue
- 87 Fully fill
- 88 French for "death"
- 89 Revs, as an engine
- 92 Holiday in which bánh chung cakes are eaten
- 93 Prefix with -graphic

GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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FACES

Full-length adventure, familiar foe

Stop-motion duo Wallace & Gromit, penguin villain Feathers McGraw return with 'Vengeance Most Fowl'

By LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

The cheese-loving English inventor Wallace and his loyal dog Gromit have been stars since the beginning.

In the 35 years since Nick Park introduced the world to his stop-motion creations and their eccentric, unapologetically British existence, they've won Oscars, appeared in commercials, video games, animated series and even the occasional bit of (unofficial) protest art. Feature films, however, have been few and far between. Part of the reason is the difficulty: Even a 30-minute short can take upward of two years. Besides, why mess with a formula that's produced only classics?

After working on the pair's first feature, "Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit," which was released in 2005 and won an Oscar, and "Early Man" (2018), Park even doubted that he'd dabble in the form again. But sometimes inspiration requires a little more breathing room: That's how the second "Wallace & Gromit" feature film, "Vengeance Most Fowl," came to be. It debuts on Netflix worldwide, except in the U.K., on Friday.

The seed of an idea

Gnomes have always been part of Wallace and Gromit's world. After "The Curse of the Were-Rabbit," Park started kicking around an idea about a smart gnome, Norbot, built to help Gromit in the garden.

"There was something a bit missing," Park said. "We tinkered around with the story on and off for years, and it seemed to be lacking the more sinister element that's often in 'Wallace & Gromit.' Why do the gnomes go wrong? Who was the motivated villain?"

Five years ago, the solution came to them: Feathers McGraw, the conniving penguin with a penchant for heists and simple disguises, who turned their lives to chaos in "The Wrong Trousers."

"He was the answer to everything," Park said. "The story got bigger and more exciting. Suddenly it became a feature-length film."

The problem with Feathers McGraw

Over the years, Park and his co-director Merlin Crossingham often heard fan requests to bring Feathers back.

"We'd been very noncommittal about it because characters haven't in the past come back," Crossingham said. "But when we did drop a little teaser trailer, we were completely bowled over by the response."

Feathers McGraw was by far the most difficult puppet to animate, direct and light — this in a movie that has chase sequences, special effects and an army of evil gnomes. The simplicity of his design, and the fact that he doesn't speak, gave animators no room to hide. In fact, among the world-



NETFLIX/AP photos

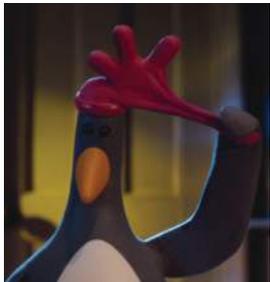
Gromit, left, and Wallace, right, introduce their robot gnome, Norbot, in "Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl."

class team at Aardman, Park said only five animators volunteered to work on Feathers.

"All the filmmaking tricks have to come together very well to make Feathers have that screen presence that we needed from him," Crossingham said.

Keeping the Britishisms alive

Part of the charm of the "Wallace & Gromit" films is their unabashed Britishness, which the filmmakers have had to fight (politely) to preserve as their audience has become more and more global.



Fan-favorite villain Feathers McGraw resurfaces in the latest "Wallace & Gromit" adventure.

"A lot of the stuff in the films is inspired by stuff we grew up with, the design of things, little products," Park said.

He was particularly happy to include a "high-speed" barge chase on the canals and a joke about police at the Yorkshire border — melding uniquely British references with big Hollywood movie tropes.

"I think all of it is a sort of a lovely homage to Britishness

and not in a patriotic way, just kind of laughing at ourselves culturally," Crossingham said.

Stop-motion animation in a CGI world

The starting point for all scenes was always the traditional: In camera, stop-motion animation like they've been using since 1989. It is, Crossingham said, fundamentally vital to the films to see the thumbprints on the characters and know that they're handmade.

There have always been limitations, and the option to use

'Vengeance Most Fowl' by the numbers

- 5: Years it took to make "Vengeance Most Fowl"
- 10: Norbot puppets (with 20 interchangeable heads)
- 11: Feathers McGraw puppets
- 20: Years since the last "Wallace & Gromit" feature film
- 22.5: Hours of Wallace dialogue recorded by Ben Whitehead (who took over after Peter Sallis' death in 2017)
- 32: Animators
- 127: Seconds of animation produced each week
- 200+: Crew members
- 600: Eyes made for all characters in the film
- 750: Norbot hands created

Associated Press

more digital assistance, but it's only been in recent years that computer graphics have caught up enough to blend in. Effects like fog and steam are possible in stop-motion, but, they explained, they never look quite right.

"The main thing we required was that if we were going to use a digital technique, could we force it to look right for our film rather than it just being bolted on and feeling like an accessory that was a bit of an unwelcome guest," Crossingham said.

The tension between embracing technological innovation like artificial intelligence and preserving the old ways that still work was not just an off-camera concept. It's at the heart of the film too, as Wallace's well-intentioned invention turns against him (and wreaks havoc on the town).

"It's a bit meta," Crossingham said. "I think there's something that resonates with audiences with stop-motion that they can tell it's handcrafted, they can tell that's the human touch."

Justin Baldoni files \$250M libel lawsuit against New York Times

From wire reports

Justin Baldoni, the director and co-star of "It Ends with Us," is suing the New York Times for libel for a story it published in December about allegations made by his co-star, Blake Lively, that Baldoni sexually harassed her and hired a crisis PR firm to coordinate a smear campaign against her.

Baldoni's lawsuit, filed Tuesday in Los Angeles Superior Court, which seeks upward of \$250 million in damages, alleges that the Times "relied almost entirely on Lively's unverified and self-serving narrative, lifting it nearly verbatim while disregarding an abundance of evidence that con-

tradicted her claims and exposed her true motives."

It also accused the outlet of not providing enough time to Baldoni and his team to respond to Lively's allegations ahead of the Dec. 21 story's publication, alleging that they received roughly 14 hours to provide comment, only for the Times to publish nearly two hours earlier than promised.

The New York Times, in an emailed statement, stood firm on its reportage.

Lively had months earlier faced widespread backlash from domestic violence survivors for her lighthearted promotion of "It Ends with Us," a film adaptation of Col-

leen Hoover's best-selling novel about a woman who tries to end the cycle of abuse in her family.

Baldoni has pushed back on Lively's claims that he sexually harassed her by shooting scenes without an intimacy coordinator present; making sexual comments; and entering her trailer uninvited while she was undressed.

"It Ends with Us" ended up becoming a box office hit, making around \$350 million in theaters worldwide after it was released in August. But domestic violence survivors said the movie's drama and promotional efforts eclipsed the film's message.

Jolie, Pitt settle divorce

Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt have reached a divorce settlement, ending one of the longest and most contentious divorces in Hollywood history but not every legal issue between the two.

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Scott J. Nord approved the agreement Tuesday. The filing says Jolie, 49, and Pitt, 61, give up the right to any future spousal financial support, but gives no other details.

Jolie and Pitt were among Hollywood's most prominent pairings for 12 years, two of them as a married couple. The Oscar winners have six children together.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Fire damages hotel made famous by The Doors

CA LOS ANGELES — The former Morrison Hotel, made famous by The Doors and their 1970 album of the same name, was significantly damaged by a fire that erupted in downtown Los Angeles.

The four-story building, which has been vacant more than a decade, burned for nearly two hours before more than 100 firefighters brought the flames under control, according to the Los Angeles Fire Department.

The Morrison Hotel was featured on the cover of The Doors' fifth album. Celebrated music photographer Henry Diltz made the image in 1969 and said years later that it took a little trickery to pull it off.

A hotel clerk told the band they weren't allowed to take photos inside, but when the clerk stepped away, the group ran into the lobby and Diltz quickly got the photo looking through the window, with legendary frontman Jim Morrison in the middle.

The building in recent years had been used as a training site for firefighters.

Officer's traffic stop assault charge dismissed

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — Oklahoma's Republican attorney general dismissed a felony assault charge against a police officer who slammed a 71-year-old man to the ground, breaking his neck, during an argument over a traffic ticket.

Gentner Drummond announced that he had intervened in the case and dismissed the aggravated assault and battery charge against Oklahoma City Police Sgt. Joseph Gibson, 28.

Oklahoma County District Attorney Vicki Behenna charged Gibson last month after body-worn camera video released by police showed Gibson throwing Lich Vu to the ground after Vu touched Gibson during the argument following a non-injury traffic accident Oct. 27.

"As attorney general, I will not permit Oklahoma police officers to face criminal prosecution for conduct adhering to their training," Drummond said in a statement. "While the outcome of this incident is unquestionably devastating for Mr. Vu and his family, I do not believe the officer exhibited criminal intent."

Prosecutors said Vu suffered a brain bleed and a broken neck and eye socket.

Tugboat, tanker collide in Mississippi River

LA LULING — The crew of a tugboat was quickly rescued when their vessel sank into the Mississippi River following a collision with a tanker ship in Louisiana.

St. Charles Parish Sheriff Greg



KRISTOPHER RADDE, THE BRATTLEBORO (Vt.) REFORMER/AP

Anew twist on 2025

Performers from the New England Center of Circus Arts in Brattleboro, Vt., put on a show for families at Last Night Brattleboro on Tuesday.

Champagne said his office received a report of the collision between the ship and tugboat near the Hale Boggs Memorial Bridge in Luling, La., on Sunday night.

"Preliminary reports are that all crew members from the tug have been rescued," Champagne said in a Facebook post around 10 p.m. Sunday.

The sheriff's office said the tanker was traveling upriver when it struck the tugboat and caused the smaller vessel to sink, WWL-TV reported.

Plane crew, passenger injured during turbulence

WA SEATTLE — Four Alaska Airlines crew members were hospitalized after severe turbulence struck their Boeing 737 MAX on a recent flight from Seattle to Phoenix.

One passenger aboard Alaska Airlines Flight 700 was also injured during the midafternoon incident, but was treated at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport and not hospitalized, Alaska Airlines said.

The airline isn't providing details about the severity of the crew members' injuries or their hospitalization status "to protect their privacy," according to Alaska Airlines.

The Federal Aviation Administration is investigating the incident, which involved a Boeing 737 MAX 9, according to the agency's website. The plane landed safely

following a report by the flight crew of a "medical emergency following severe turbulence," the FAA said.

OK for top chess player to compete in jeans

NY NEW YORK — Top-ranked chess player Magnus Carlsen headed back to the World Blitz Championship on Monday after its governing body agreed to loosen a dress code that got him fined and denied a late-round game in another tournament for refusing to change out of jeans.

Lamenting the contretemps, International Chess Federation President Arkady Dvorkovich said in a statement Sunday that he'd let World Blitz Championship tournament officials consider allowing "appropriate jeans" with a jacket, and other "elegant minor deviations" from the dress code.

He said Carlsen's stand — which culminated in his quitting the tournament — highlighted a need for more discussion "to ensure that our rules and their application reflect the evolving nature of chess as a global and accessible sport."

Feds: Bengali kidnappers tortured recent victim

NY NEW YORK — A Queens kidnapping ring that targeted fellow members of the Bengali community tortured one victim for spreading gossip about the ringleader's wife, new

court documents reveal.

Supermarket owner Abu Chowdhury, 35, and his wife, Iffat Lubna, 24 — already accused in a pair of brutal kidnappings — were hit with new charges earlier in December alleging a third abduction.

The newly revealed victim was held against his will and beaten for four days during which the couple sliced open his palms and threatened to pour chili powder in the wounds, according to prosecutors.

Even after the kidnapping ended the victim had no choice but to keep living with his attackers for weeks because they refused to give up his passport and belongings and he had nowhere else to stay, the feds say.

Another Dem switches to GOP in Florida House

FL TALLAHASSEE — A second Democrat re-elected to the Florida House of Representatives this year has joined the Republican Party, further increasing the GOP's supermajority in the chamber.

State Rep. Hillary Cassel, an attorney from Dania Beach, announced that she had changed her party affiliation from Democrat to Republican, saying that she no longer shares the values of the current Democratic Party and that she believes it will be easier to deliver on her promises by joining the majority party.

"This decision was not made lightly but comes from a deep

sense of responsibility to my constituents and my commitment to the values that guide my service," Cassel said in a statement. "I will be joining the Republican Conference of the Florida House of Representatives because I believe in their vision for a better, more prosperous Florida."

Cassel's announcement comes less than a month after State Rep. Susan Valdés, a former school board member who was reelected as a Democrat in November, switched her party affiliation to Republican. Valdés said she was "tired of being the party of protesting."

State reports rare fatal human case of rabies

KY LEXINGTON — A northern Kentucky resident has died of rabies, the state Department for Public Health announced.

Officials did not release the person's name or disclose whether the victim was a man or woman.

Health officials had not yet been able to pinpoint how the person contracted the disease but said it may have happened during travel outside the U.S.

The person was treated in both Kentucky and Ohio, so health authorities in both states are working with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to investigate the case.

From wire services

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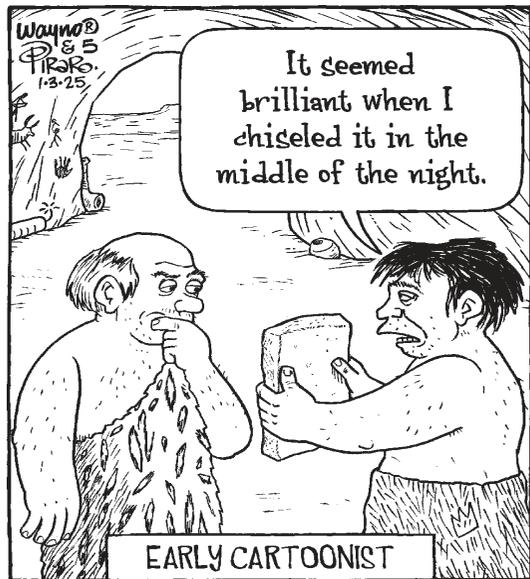


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Bizarro

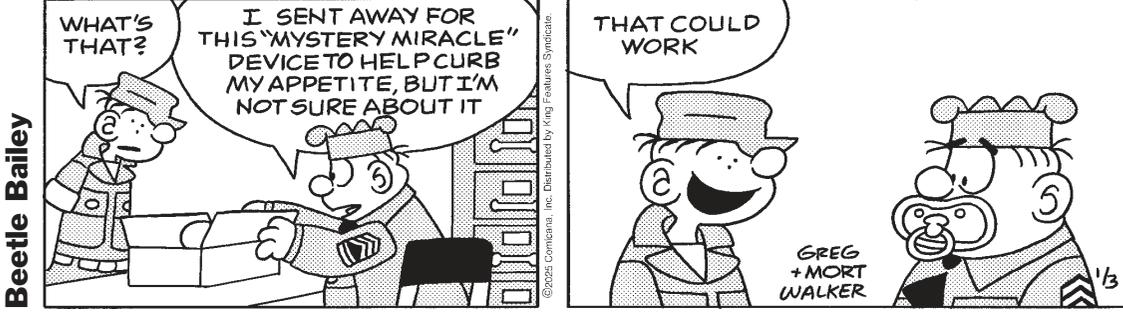
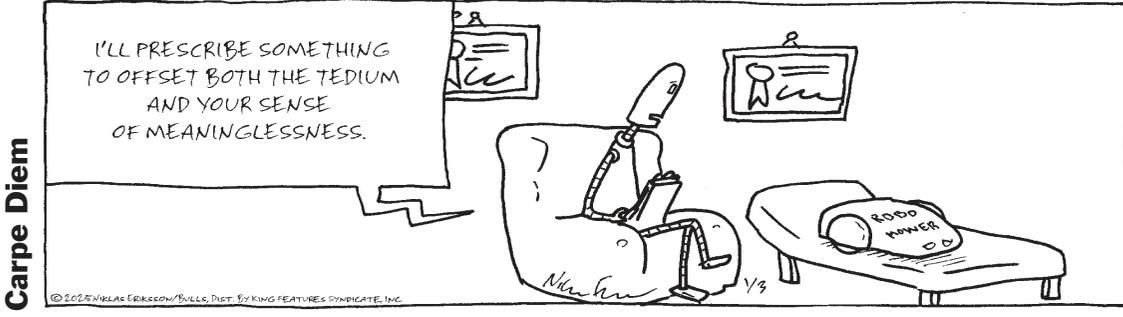
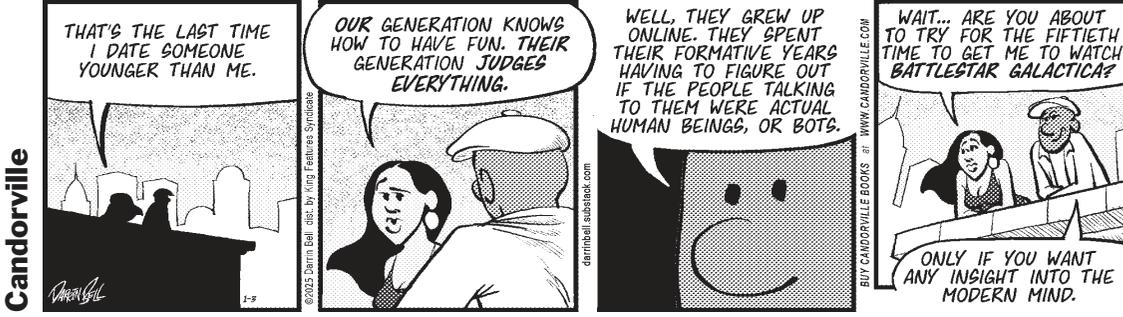
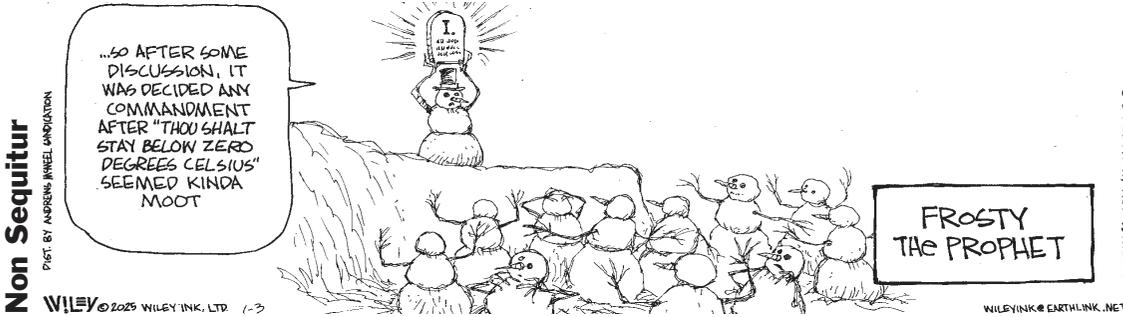
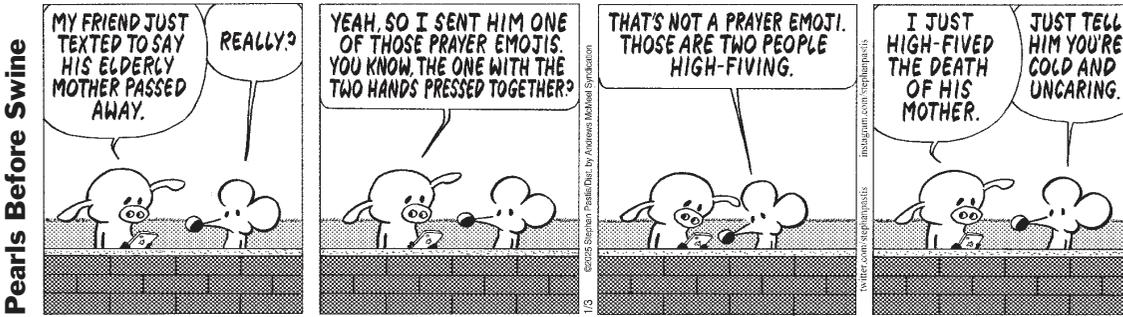


Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6		7	8	9	10	11
12				13				14				
15				16				17				
18				19								
20			21		22				23	24	25	26
			27	28				29	30			
31	32	33						34				
35					36			37				
38					39	40			41	42	43	44
					45				46		47	
48	49	50	51								52	
53								54			55	
56								57			58	



- ACROSS**
- 1 Lawyers' gp.
 - 4 Radiator sound
 - 7 Explosion
 - 12 Bottom line
 - 13 Ref
 - 14 — Ababa
 - 15 Hindu honorific
 - 16 Obstruction
 - 18 Work unit
 - 19 Incursion
 - 20 Frog's relative
 - 22 — Aviv
 - 23 Chumps
 - 27 Fan's shout
 - 29 Owing money
 - 31 Choir member
 - 34 Like anchovies
 - 35 Hour follower
 - 37 Dog's foot
 - 38 Yuletide tune
 - 39 GPS suggestion
 - 41 Lounge about
 - 45 Toe woes
 - 47 Nev. neighbor
 - 48 "Psycho" director Alfred
 - 52 Chemical suffix
 - 53 Petrify
 - 54 "QB —" (Uris novel)
 - 55 Cacophony
 - 56 "One L" author Scott
 - 57 Right angle
 - 58 Mermaid's home
- DOWN**
- 1 Plus
 - 2 Small pack animal
 - 3 Spanish girlfriend
 - 4 Ride the waves
 - 5 Suave
 - 6 Memoir by Prince Harry
 - 7 Infant instrument
 - 8 "Bad" cholesterol
 - 9 Commotion
 - 10 Bracketed word
 - 11 Chiding sound
 - 17 Painter Salvador
 - 21 Slobber
 - 23 Shoulder wrap brand
 - 24 "You've got mail" co.
 - 25 Agt.'s cut
 - 26 Cloud setting
 - 28 Rainbow
 - 30 Code-breaking gp.
 - 31 Great weight
 - 32 Green prefix
 - 33 Mets' div.
 - 36 Ray of McDonald's
 - 37 Writing instrument
 - 40 Treasure stash
 - 42 Lab liquids
 - 43 "The Fraud" author — Smith
 - 44 Justice Kagan
 - 45 Enjoy gum
 - 46 Power tool brand
 - 48 FDR follower
 - 49 Post-op area
 - 50 Sailor
 - 51 — -Magnon

Answer to Previous Puzzle

A	R	F		L	A	M	A		L	E	N	A		
T	I	O		A	V	O	N		I	R	A	S		
F	O	O	D	B	A	N	K		P	I	N	S		
				D	O	E		A	L	A	S	K	A	N
S	U	B	T	L	E			E	L	Y				
A	L	L		S	E	A		E	N	S	U	E		
M	N	O	P		L	I	D		C	O	G	S		
E	A	G	E	R		L	E	I		U	L	T		
					L	E	D		S	C	A	L	I	A
T	R	A	I	L	E	R		E	L	F				
R	O	T	C		B	I	R	D	F	O	O	D		
E	T	T	A		T	O	N	I		O	U	I		
F	I	N	N		S	T	A	N		D	R	S		

1-3 CRYPTOQUIP

VPAETG GELF WELWMSLHLF P
 FTR NQE'G PIETX XE IM
 BSMGGMB HL P AELC'G SEIM:
 "NM NHKK VSEWC RET."
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT DID THE TWO GOOD-NATURED NUTS ALWAYS SAY TO EACH OTHER UPON PARTING WAYS? "CASHEW LATER!"
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: F equals G

Bizarro

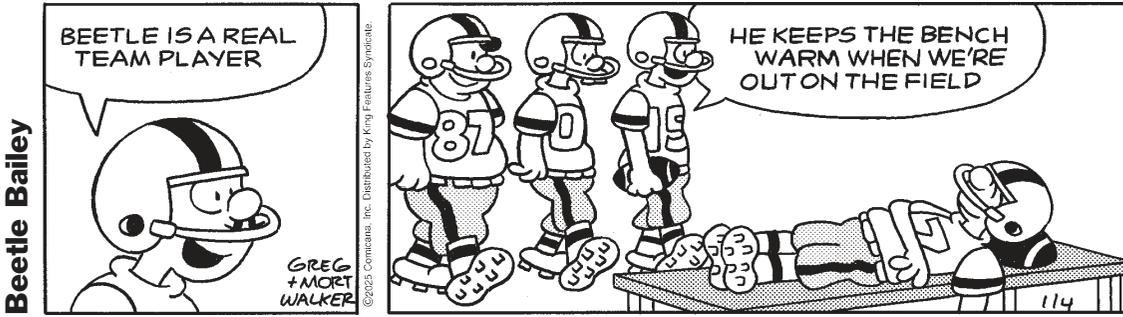
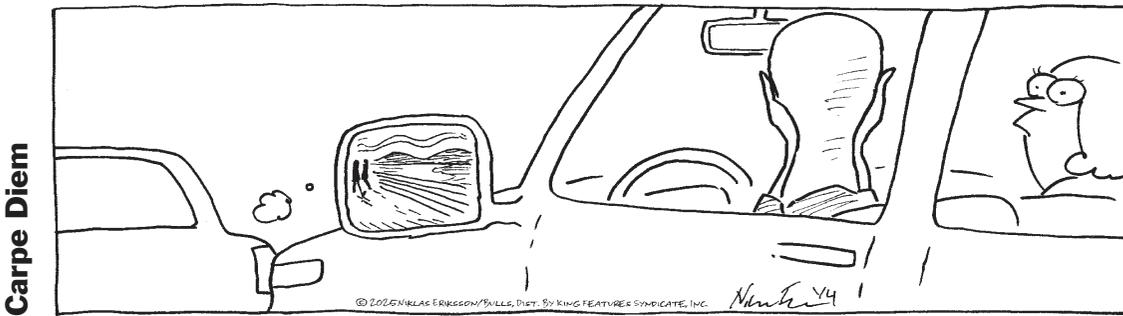


Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15				16					17			
18			19					20				
			21			22						
23	24	25			26				27	28	29	
30					31				32			
33				34				35				
			36			37						
38	39	40				41			42	43	44	
45					46				47			
48					49				50			
51					52				53			



ACROSS

- 1 Golfer Ernie
- 4 Gullet
- 8 Engine noise
- 12 Horror star Chaney
- 13 Costa —
- 14 Inter —
- 15 Past
- 16 Novelist Jennifer
- 17 Pealed
- 18 Fresh starts
- 21 Boom times
- 22 Small batteries
- 23 Humorist Dave
- 26 Flow out
- 27 Depot vehicle
- 30 "Iliad" setting
- 31 Shade
- 32 Spring honorees
- 33 — Salvador
- 34 Supporting
- 35 Rolled-up sandwiches

- 52 Checks out
- 53 Tel. number add-on

- 24 Notre Dame coach
- 25 Harry Potter pal
- 26 Where Ger. is
- 27 Large snake
- 28 Ref
- 29 Radiator sound
- 31 "That's wonderful!"
- 32 Hosp. scans
- 34 Charge
- 35 Places for bracelets
- 36 Relinquish
- 37 Pigs
- 38 Per person
- 39 Roman emperor
- 40 Family
- 41 Tea carrier
- 42 Rx amount
- 43 Cameo stone
- 44 Humorist Sahl

DOWN

- 1 Flair
- 2 Theater section
- 3 Winter fall
- 4 Eerie
- 5 Bobby who lost to Billie Jean King
- 6 Smoothie berry
- 7 Hopeful
- 8 Seine city
- 9 — Bator
- 10 Saturn feature
- 11 Cleaning cloths
- 19 Conceal, in a way
- 20 Arrest
- 23 "Dynamite" band

Answer to Previous Puzzle

A	B	A	S	S	S	B	L	A	S	T	
S	U	M	U	M	P	A	D	D	I	S	
S	R	I	R	O	A	D	B	L	O	C	K
E	R	G	F	O	R	A	Y				
T	O	A	D	T	E	L	S	A	P	S	
			R	A	H	I	N	H	O	C	K
T	E	N	O	R		S	A	L	T	Y	
O	C	L	O	C	K	P	A	W			
N	O	E	L	R	T	E	L	A	Z	E	
			C	O	R	N	S	C	A	L	
H	I	T	C	H	C	O	C	K	I	D	E
S	C	A	R	E	V	I	I	D	I	N	
T	U	R	O	W	E	L	L	S	E	A	

1-4

CRYPTOQUIP

N RPEEXRI SQYS GQIU Y CYJI
 JNXU XK SNDIK BPO NR OXKU,
 TXP CNDQS BYJJ QNC Y
 EXPUBNUD OYOT OXT.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: FAMOUS SONG CONCERNING A GUY WHO'S ABOUT TO BE DRESSED IN A MONK'S ROBE: "WE WILL FROCK YOU."

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: O equals B

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Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Pacific commander

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Jacqueline Smith

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Lady Liberty has a message for America

BY THEODORE R. JOHNSON

Special to The Washington Post

When I was in middle school, my class visited the Statue of Liberty. Our first stop was the museum, filled with old photographs of ships packed with immigrants sailing into New York Harbor. Some of the kids looked our age ... and one of them looked just like me.

In truth, this experience was a role-play scenario from a choose-your-own-adventure book, a popular genre among preadolescents decades ago. The stories turn the reader into the main character, who makes plot-altering decisions every few pages. In this one, as I stared at my doppelgänger, the museum began to shake, knocking me down. Suddenly, the floor was a wooden deck; I had been transported onto the boat in the picture — as an immigrant and an orphan. Then, decision time: “If you go below deck to meet some of the other immigrants, turn to Page 40. If you go to the front of the ship to meet the passengers who are traveling first-class, turn to Page 10.”

Your fate is in your hands. By presenting conflicting options wrapped in entertaining scenes, these books require young readers to prioritize their values and face the consequences of their decisions. Readers are also encouraged to consider matters from another person's perspective — an important practice for democratic societies.

Those skills would be useful now. Policy questions about immigration place the destinies of others in our hands. Today, efforts to deport undocumented people must reckon with “dreamers,” those brought illegally to the United States as children and knowing no other home. Proposals to end birthright citizenship — the Constitution's most color-blind provision — would strip away someone's rights simply because of who their parents

were. Better policy ideas can result from walking a mile in other people's shoes. In crafting immigration policy, “what would a dreamer do?” is not a bad place to start.

That impulse doesn't always come naturally, but perhaps it should for Americans. The Statue of Liberty is a declaration that the story of the country is a story of immigration. Around the turn of the 20th century, much of the nation's rapid population growth was because of the more than 12 million people who sailed past the lady and her torch, alongside other newcomers who debarked in places like San Francisco, New Orleans, Philadelphia and Boston. Every surge of immigrants has reshaped the nation. They've included those escaping persecution as well as those just searching for a place to make a living. Hoping to be welcomed — and maybe even accepted.

This defining decision in the book — meet the people like me or visit first class — offers a choice between social belonging and economic opportunity. Immigrants still cite these as principal motivations for coming to the United States. But they also report encountering racism and nativism after arrival, like those before them. Anti-Irish and anti-German backlash in the 1840s led to riots and rebellions, stirred conspiracy theories, and produced measures to limit citizenship and restrict voting. In the wake of World War I, xenophobia fueled the Red Scare and a heyday of the Ku Klux Klan. Nationality quotas were instituted that discriminated against racial and ethnic minorities. It's a familiar turn of events. Today's Hispanic and Asian immigrants endure hate crimes, disinformation campaigns, and threats of deportation and revoked citizenship.

What would you do in their shoes?

The book hints at the high stakes: Choices made by the reader can lead to adoption by a wealthy family or to beatings by a slumlord.

One series of decisions led to becoming a famous doctor, another to a life of crime. “Remember,” the book warned, “whatever you do decides your fate in America!”

But sometimes, no matter what you do, America will decide your fate. Immigration was a top issue in the recent presidential election, and that can make for strange bedfellows. Policies of mass deportation and to redefine the citizenship clause of the 14th Amendment are ideas rooted in the same intolerance that once limited naturalization to “any alien being a free white person,” banned Asians, and targeted Jewish, Catholic and Muslim hopefuls. Yet many Hispanic and Asian Americans — the people at the heart of the today's wave — voted for stricter policies rather than more welcoming ones, evidence of Americans' mixed attitudes toward immigration.

Politicians of all stripes have professed that success is available in the United States to anyone who works hard and plays by the rules. But the path to citizenship is a bureaucratic nightmare, a slow and broken process that mostly hinges on family relationships or long-time employment. Meanwhile, many are left without options, having no choice but to live in the shadows — their destinies hinging on the whims of politics.

Another game book was published at the same time: “The Miss Liberty Caper,” written for grade school readers. Both were released to mark the statue's centennial in 1986 and teach the meaning of the iconic landmark. In the second volume, a schoolgirl must decide whether to climb toward the torch, designed as a lighthouse for freedom and liberty, or head down to the departing ferries. America is in her shoes, and the choice is up to us.

Theodore R. Johnson, a contributing columnist for The Washington Post and retired naval officer, writes on issues of race, democracy and American identity. He's the author of the book “If We Are Brave.”

The language of both sides in the Israel-Hamas war

BY AMIR SOMMER

Los Angeles Times

The language people use to talk about the Israel-Hamas war has power: It can contribute to misunderstanding and alienation, but it can also bring about appreciation for concepts that can seem impossible during this kind of conflict, such as peace.

I was born to a Palestinian Arab father and an Israeli Jewish mother — a union that might sound romantic at first. In reality, my parents were the Romeo and Juliet of falafel stands. They couldn't marry; interfaith marriages are illegal in Israel, and their type of romance is taboo in the Palestinian territories. As one of the few children born of such unions, I've felt like an outsider my entire life.

On weekends, my family usually visited Palestinian families in Nazareth or accompanied Israeli friends to a kibbutz. Wherever we went, my parents coached us to adjust our identities to fit in. Among Palestinians, speaking too much Hebrew or making too many references to popular Israeli books or music was often frowned upon. With Israeli friends, I learned it was better to refrain from speaking Arabic and to downplay connections to religions other than Judaism.

We were like water, always reflecting the people in front of us and hiding what was underneath.

I studied to become a writer and my early poetry was preoccupied with my search for

belonging. I wrote first in Hebrew and then in Arabic. For years, I wrote for Israeli audiences; later, I switched my focus to Arab audiences. Yet I felt incomplete either way, as if I had to sacrifice part of myself to reach anyone. Now I write in English, which strikes me as more neutral.

During the Israel-Hamas war, I've noticed the words that people on both sides of the conflict use and avoid, and what those choices say about their sense of identity and belonging. Some of my Israeli friends, even those who consider themselves left-wing, say things like “There's no such thing as Palestinians; that place never existed,” a sentiment that echoes that of some Israeli leaders. Similarly, some Palestinian leaders deny Israel's existence, and some of my Palestinian friends insist that my mother isn't an Israeli, just a Jew.

What people don't say is just as relevant. Many Israelis shy away from terms such as “apartheid” and “genocide,” as if using the words could be a first step toward acknowledging injustices. And many Palestinians avoid words such as “conflict” and “war” because they believe that Israel is responsible for the hostilities taking place. Some Palestinians also eschew the term “terrorism,” viewing Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack as legitimate resistance to occupation.

Semantic differences can be signaled in nonverbal ways too, especially on social media. The watermelon emoji, for example, with colors like the Palestinian flag's, is used to

signal support for Gaza, while the yellow ribbon emoji is used to indicate support for Israel.

I've learned to use both groups' terms for something at the same time whenever possible to preserve my hybrid identity and maintain neutrality. For example, when I speak of the holy city, I call it “Jerusalem-Al-Quds,” embracing both its Israeli and Palestinian names. I use the terms “Nakba” and “establishment of Israel” in the same sentence. This is my way of respecting both narratives.

I also draw on terminology from both sides in my writing, recognizing that the weaponization of language traps people in denial. It causes them to mistake the light of empathy for darkness, much as in Plato's allegory of the cave, and overlook the possibility of coexistence. I see trying to liberate words from their cages as part of my job.

Because if we can't communicate about our pain and suffering, it's no surprise that we see peace as a form of weakness or surrender.

For many Palestinians, the two-state solution is an empty American promise, and therefore permission for Israeli occupation. For many Israelis, a two-state solution is a precursor to another Oct. 7 massacre. I can't blame any of them for their fears and traumas. But I hope to be one of the many people who help them understand the word “peace” as a positive and a possibility.

Amir Sommer is an award-winning poet and author who divides his time between Berlin and California.

SCOREBOARD

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

AP Men's Top 25

The top 25 teams in The Associated Press' college basketball poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, and total points based on 25 points for a first-place vote through one point for a 25th-place vote and previous ranking.

	Record	Pts	Prv
1. Tennessee (41)	12-0	1504	1
2. Auburn (20)	11-1	1481	2
3. Iowa St.	10-1	1392	3
4. Duke	10-2	1321	4
5. Alabama	11-2	1238	5
6. Florida	13-0	1202	6
7. Kansas	9-2	1084	7
8. Marquette	11-2	1037	8
9. Oregon	12-1	979	9
10. Kentucky	10-2	958	10
11. UConn	10-3	904	11
12. Oklahoma	13-0	863	12
13. Texas A&M	11-2	812	13
14. Houston	8-3	626	15
15. UCLA	11-2	571	22
16. Cincinnati	10-1	551	17
17. Mississippi St.	11-1	483	19
18. Michigan St.	10-2	473	18
19. Gonzaga	9-4	383	14
20. Purdue	9-4	281	21
21. Memphis	10-3	213	-
22. Illinois	9-3	193	24
23. Arkansas	10-2	174	23
24. Mississippi	11-2	165	16
25. Baylor	8-3	139	25

Others receiving votes: Maryland 133, Drake 100, St. John's 98, Dayton 90, Michigan 65, Utah St. 59, Georgia 48, Pittsburgh 35, West Virginia 30, San Diego St. 28, Ohio St. 19, Missouri 19, North Carolina 19, Arizona St. 13, Indiana 11, Texas Tech 8, Clemson 8, Wisconsin 7, Penn St. 5, St. Bonaventure 2, Nebraska 1.

USA Today Men's Top 25

The USA Today Sports Top 25 men's basketball poll, with team's records through Sunday in parentheses, total points based on 25 for first place through one point for 25th, ranking in last week's poll and first-place votes received.

	Pts	Prev	1st
1 Tennessee (12-0)	764	1	20
2 Auburn (11-1)	747	2	11
3 Iowa State (10-1)	707	3	0
4 Duke (10-2)	664	4	0
5 Florida (13-0)	651	5	0
6 Alabama (11-2)	626	6	0
7 Kansas (9-2)	552	7	0
8 Marquette (11-2)	539	8	0
9 Oregon (12-1)	491	9	0
10 Oklahoma (13-0)	437	11	0
11 Kentucky (10-2)	428	10	0
12 Texas A&M (11-2)	424	13	0
13 Connecticut (10-3)	416	14	0
14 Houston (8-3)	386	12	0
15 Michigan St. (10-2)	270	18	0
16 Mississippi St. (11-1)	267	19	0
17 Cincinnati (10-1)	259	17	0
18 UCLA (11-2)	255	21	0
19 Gonzaga (9-4)	170	15	0
20 Illinois (9-3)	129	22	0
21 Baylor (8-3)	113	23	0
22 Purdue (9-4)	108	25	0
23 Mississippi (11-2)	92	16	0
24 Maryland (11-2)	90	NR	0
25 Memphis (10-3)	87	NR	0

Dropped out: No. 20 San Diego State (8-3); No. 24 St. John's (11-2).

Others receiving votes: St. John's (11-2) 70; Arkansas (10-2) 58; Drake (12-0) 53; Michigan (10-3) 49; Utah State (12-1) 42; Georgia (12-1) 36; San Diego State (8-3) 30; Dayton (10-3) 19; Texas Tech (9-2) 12; Pittsburgh (10-2) 10; Clemson (10-3) 9; West Virginia (9-2) 8; Missouri (10-2) 6; North Carolina (8-5) 1.

Men's Top 25 schedule

Friday's games

No. 8 Marquette (12-2) vs. Creighton (9-5)
No. 18 Michigan St. (11-2) at Ohio St. (9-4)

Saturday's games

No. 1 Tennessee (13-0) vs. No. 23 Arkansas (11-2)
No. 2 Auburn (12-1) vs. Missouri (11-2)
No. 3 Iowa St. (11-1) vs. No. 25 Baylor (9-3)
No. 4 Duke (11-2) at SMU (11-2)
No. 5 Alabama (11-2) vs. No. 12 Oklahoma (13-0)
No. 6 Florida (13-0) at No. 10 Kentucky (11-2)
No. 13 Texas A&M (11-2) vs. Texas (11-2)
No. 14 Houston (9-3) vs. BYU (10-2)
No. 15 UCLA (11-2) at Nebraska (11-2)
No. 16 Cincinnati (10-2) vs. Arizona (7-5)
No. 17 Mississippi St. (12-1) vs. South Carolina (10-3)
No. 19 Gonzaga (10-4) at Loyola Marymount (8-6)
No. 24 Mississippi (11-2) vs. Georgia (12-1)

Sunday's games

No. 7 Kansas (9-3) at UCF (10-2)

No. 9 Oregon (12-1) vs. Maryland (11-2)
No. 11 UConn (10-3) vs. Providence (7-7)
No. 20 Purdue (9-4) vs. Northwestern (10-3)
No. 21 Memphis (10-3) vs. North Texas (10-3)
No. 22 Illinois (9-3) at Washington (9-4)

AP Women's Top 25

The top 25 teams in The Associated Press' women's college basketball poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, and total points based on 25 points for a first-place vote through one point for a 25th-place vote and previous ranking.

	Record	Pts	Prv
1. UCLA (30)	13-0	798	1
2. South Carolina (1)	12-1	763	2
3. Notre Dame (1)	11-2	727	3
4. Southern Cal	12-1	693	4
5. Texas	13-1	642	5
6. LSU	15-0	628	6
7. UConn	11-2	613	7
8. Maryland	12-0	609	8
9. Oklahoma	12-1	534	9
10. Ohio St.	13-0	504	10
11. TCU	13-1	475	11
12. Kansas St	13-1	452	12
13. Georgia Tech	14-0	400	13
14. Duke	10-3	357	14
15. Tennessee	12-0	340	15
16. Kentucky	11-1	321	16
17. North Carolina	13-2	303	17
18. West Virginia	10-2	233	18
19. Alabama	13-1	207	20
20. California	13-1	186	21
21. Michigan St.	11-2	148	19
22. NC State	10-3	137	22
23. Iowa	11-2	116	24
24. Michigan	10-3	82	23
25. Mississippi	8-3	48	25

Others receiving votes: Vanderbilt 26, Utah 24, Illinois 11, Oklahoma St. 7, Baylor 5, Nebraska 4, Mississippi St. 3, Harvard 3, Portland 1.

USA Today Women's Top 25

The USA Today Sports Top 25 women's basketball poll, with team's records through Monday in parentheses, total points based on 25 for first place through one point for 25th, ranking in last week's poll and first-place votes received.

	Pts	Prev	1st
1 UCLA (13-0)	775	1	31
2 South Carolina (12-1)	741	2	0
3 Notre Dame (11-2)	678	4	0
4 LSU (15-0)	677	3	0
5 USC (12-1)	659	5	0
6 Texas (13-1)	621	6	0
7 Maryland (12-0)	572	8	0
8 Connecticut (11-2)	559	7	0
9 Ohio State (13-0)	526	9	0
10 Oklahoma (12-1)	498	10	0
11 Kansas State (13-1)	461	11	0
12 TCU (13-1)	431	12	0
13 Tennessee (12-0)	384	13	0
14 Georgia Tech (14-0)	355	16	0
15 Duke (10-3)	344	14	0
16 Kentucky (11-1)	319	15	0
17 North Carolina (13-2)	284	17	0
18 West Virginia (10-2)	229	18	0
19 NC State (10-3)	181	20	0
20 Alabama (13-1)	178	21	0
21 Michigan St. (11-2)	161	19	0
22 Iowa (11-2)	118	22	0
23 California (13-1)	95	24	0
24 Baylor (11-2)	87	23	0
25 Mississippi (9-3)	27	NR	0

Dropped out: No. 25 Michigan (10-3).

Others receiving votes: Mississippi State (13-1) 25; Utah (10-2) 23; Vanderbilt (13-1) 23; Michigan (10-3) 15; Illinois (11-2) 13; Florida State (11-2) 11; George Mason (11-1) 4; Nebraska (10-3) 1.

Women's Top 25 schedule

Saturday's games

No. 1 UCLA (13-0) at Indiana (10-3)
No. 11 TCU (13-1) vs. Cincinnati (8-3)
No. 12 Kansas St. (13-1) vs. Texas Tech (12-2)
No. 18 West Virginia (10-2) vs. BYU (9-3)

Sunday's games

No. 2 South Carolina (12-1) at Mississippi St. (13-1)
No. 3 Notre Dame (11-2) at No. 17 North Carolina (13-2)
No. 4 Southern Cal (12-1) at Rutgers (8-5)
No. 5 Texas (13-1) vs. Arkansas (7-8)
No. 6 LSU (15-0) vs. Auburn (9-4)
No. 7 UConn (11-2) at Villanova (7-6)
No. 8 Maryland (12-0) at No. 23 Iowa (11-2)
No. 9 Oklahoma (12-1) at No. 15 Tennessee (12-0)
No. 10 Ohio St. (13-0) vs. Northwestern (7-7)
No. 14 Duke (10-3) vs. Pittsburgh (8-7)
No. 16 Kentucky (11-1) at Vanderbilt (13-1)
No. 19 Alabama (13-1) vs. Missouri (11-4)
No. 20 California (13-1) at SMU (8-5)
No. 22 NC State (10-3) vs. Boston College (10-5)
No. 25 Mississippi (9-3) at Texas A&M (7-5)

PRO HOCKEY

NHL

Eastern Conference Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	38	23	13	2	48	118	106
Florida	38	23	13	2	48	131	119
Boston	39	20	15	4	44	102	118
Tampa Bay	34	20	12	2	42	134	97
Ottawa	36	19	15	2	40	110	103
Montreal	37	17	17	3	37	113	127
Detroit	37	15	18	4	34	98	120
Buffalo	38	14	20	4	32	116	128

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	37	25	10	2	52	135	96
New Jersey	41	24	14	3	51	132	104
Carolina	37	22	13	2	46	128	106
Pittsburgh	39	17	17	5	39	120	145
Columbus	38	16	16	6	38	127	136
Philadelphia	38	17	17	4	38	119	136
N.Y. Islanders	38	14	17	7	35	102	122
N.Y. Rangers	36	16	19	1	33	101	113

Western Conference Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	39	27	11	1	55	142	96
Minnesota	38	23	11	4	50	113	104
Colorado	38	23	15	0	46	130	123
Dallas	36	22	13	1	45	116	91
St. Louis	39	18	17	4	40	106	117
Utah	37	16	15	6	38	106	112
Nashville	38	11	20	7	29	91	122
Chicago	38	12	24	2	26	96	129

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	37	25	9	3	53	131	102
Los Angeles	37	22	10	5	49	116	95
Edmonton	37	22	12	3	47	121	105
Calgary	37	18	12	7	43	101	111
Vancouver	36	17	11	8	42	112	115
Seattle	38	17	19	2	36	111	119
Anaheim	36	15	17	4	34	91	111
San Jose	40	11	23	6	28	105	146

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

Monday's games

Florida 5, N.Y. Rangers 3
Winnipeg 3, Nashville 0
Seattle 5, Utah 2

Tuesday's games

Washington 3, Boston 1
Toronto 3, N.Y. Islanders 1
Montreal 3, Vegas 2
St. Louis 6, Chicago 2
Colorado 5, Winnipeg 2
Dallas 4, Buffalo 2
Detroit 4, Pittsburgh 2
Philadelphia 4, San Jose 0
Anaheim 3, New Jersey 2
Minnesota 5, Nashville 3
Columbus 4, Carolina 3, SO
Edmonton 4, Utah 1
Calgary 3, Vancouver 1

Wednesday's game

Los Angeles 3, New Jersey 0

Thursday's games

Boston at N.Y. Rangers
Carolina at Florida
Detroit at Columbus
Minnesota at Washington
Toronto at N.Y. Islanders
Anaheim at Winnipeg
Ottawa at Dallas
Buffalo at Colorado
Utah at Calgary
Philadelphia at Vegas
Vancouver at Seattle
Tampa Bay at San Jose

Friday's games

Pittsburgh at Florida
Montreal at Chicago
Ottawa at St. Louis
Anaheim at Edmonton
Nashville at Vancouver

Saturday's games

N.Y. Rangers at Washington
Detroit at Winnipeg
New Jersey at San Jose
Boston at Toronto
Minnesota at Carolina
Montreal at Colorado
St. Louis at Columbus
Utah at Dallas
Tampa Bay at Los Angeles
Buffalo at Vegas
Edmonton at Seattle
Nashville at Calgary

Sunday's games

N.Y. Rangers at Chicago
N.Y. Islanders at Boston
Pittsburgh at Carolina
Philadelphia at Toronto
Tampa Bay at Anaheim

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

FCS playoffs

Championship Monday, Jan. 6

Montana St. vs. North Dakota St.

NCAA Division III playoffs

Championship Sunday, Jan. 5

North Central (Ill.) vs. Mount Union

College Football Playoff

First Round Dec. 20

No. 7 Notre Dame 27, No. 10 Indiana 17

Dec. 21

No. 6 Penn St. 38, No. 11 SMU 10
No. 5 Texas 38, No. 12 Clemson 24
No. 8 Ohio St. 42, No. 9 Tennessee 17

Quarterfinals Dec. 31

Fiesta Bowl

Penn St. 31, Boise St. 14

Jan. 1 Rose Bowl

Ohio St. 41, Oregon 21

Peach Bowl

Texas 39, Arizona St. 31, 20T

Jan. 2 Sugar Bowl

Notre Dame vs. No. 2 Georgia

Semifinals Jan. 9

Orange Bowl

Penn St. vs. Notre Dame-Georgia winner

Jan. 10 Cotton Bowl

Texas vs. Ohio St.

National Championship Jan. 20

Atlanta

Semifinal winners

Bowl glance

Dec. 14 Celebration Bowl

Jackson St. 28, South Carolina St. 7

NBA/COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Bahamian Hield brings energy, joy to Warriors

By JANIE MCCAULEY
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Buddy Hield hollers through the locker room at Stephen Curry with some good-natured banter or cracks jokes at practice and on the team plane, by all accounts leaving everyone in hysterics.

From the moment Hield joined the Golden State Warriors last summer, he exhibited a tireless training regimen, too — one that has impressed Curry.

“He probably puts more hours in the gym than I think I’ve ever seen anybody,” Curry said.

The two-time NBA MVP is enjoying the high-energy personality, team-first dedication along with his new Warriors backcourt mate’s love for his craft.

From Freeport in the Bahamas to the Bay Area, the 32-year-old Hield takes great pride in representing his island nation on the big NBA stage.

“It’s special,” Hield said. “It’s not by chance. I’ve put the work in, for sure. I’m just blessed and honored to be in this position.”

Hield is averaging 12.6 points and shooting nearly 43% from the field with the Warriors, but he also is making his presence felt off the court.

When Hield arrives anywhere with the Warriors, he offers his hellos with that signature smile and instantly lifts the spirits of his new team. It’s the kind of joy and focus coach Steve Kerr has long insisted defines the Warriors franchise.

“There is nothing even-keel about him, he is all extreme happy, joy, talking all the time, and you love that energy because he loves the game,” Curry said. “... He does bring joy to the locker room, to the plane. No matter where we’re at, you’re going to hear him and he lifts everybody up because he’s got a great sense of humor and he’s been around the block. The funniest part is you just can’t get him to shut up. So you appreciate everything he brings.”

His teammates call him Buddy Love, Buddy Fresh and Buddy Buckets — the nickname Buddy has been with the shooting guard since just after his birth, as Hield’s formal first name is Chavano.

Hield became the 17th player in NBA history to reach 2,000 3-pointers, and he sparks the offense with the way he runs the floor.

“I’ve just got to keep moving and hopefully I’m able to catch some of the greats,” Hield said. “I probably won’t be able to catch Steph, but I hope to catch some of the greats and hopefully I can crack



TONY AVELAR/AP

Warriors guard Buddy Hield has brought a sense of humor and tireless work ethic with him to Golden State as well as great pride in representing his island nation of the Bahamas on the big NBA stage.

“The funniest part is you just can’t get him to shut up. So you appreciate everything he brings.”

Steph Curry
Warriors guard

top-10, maybe top-five.”

That would be just fine with Kerr.

“We’re at our best when we’re playing fast and with a lot of pace, and that’s what Buddy does really well,” Kerr said. “He runs the floor in transition probably better than anybody on our team.”

The Warriors (16-16) have been struggling lately, losing three of their last 10.

But you won’t hear complaints from Hield, who has enjoyed an impressive run — from shooting as a youngster on a makeshift hoop that he and his brother Chevez constructed from a milk crate to helping lead Oklahoma to a Final Four in college and now as a journeyman in his ninth NBA season with a fifth different team.

“Where I came from in the Bahamas, I couldn’t write a better script than this, just being down there, shooting on an outside court, building my own court right

from a crate. To have 2,000 3s, I know the young kids back home and the people that helped me get to this point will really appreciate that.

“So I’m just blessed to be in this situation.”

Hield landed with Golden State following Klay Thompson’s departure to Dallas, and it’s something Bahamas teammate Thompson called “very special.”

“I’m just happy they replaced me with another Bahamian,” he said.

And Thompson certainly realizes what Hield means to the Bahamas and helping build basketball back home.

“Are you kidding me? He’s a legend, especially around Freeport. Buddy gives young men and women hope all over the nation,” Thompson said. “Especially his commitment to the national team, it’s amazing. It’s really cool.”

Hield’s shooting has been inconsistent, but the Warriors are seeing everything he brings on and off the court. And that doesn’t waver whether he’s hitting shots or missing them, or starting or coming off the bench.

“He lifts this team every day when he comes in smiling,” guard Gary Payton II said. “I know that smile travels all the way back to the Bahamas and those kids have the same smile when he’s on the court. ... How he plays and what he does, it’s kind of like a Steph effect over there in the islands. They’re shouting Buddy. We know what he means to this team and what he means to the Bahamas.”

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	24	9	.727	—
New York	24	10	.706	½
Philadelphia	13	18	.419	10
Brooklyn	12	21	.364	12
Toronto	8	26	.235	16½

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	20	15	.571	—
Miami	17	14	.548	1
Atlanta	18	16	.529	1½
Charlotte	7	25	.219	11½
Washington	6	25	.194	12

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	29	4	.879	—
Milwaukee	17	14	.548	11
Indiana	16	18	.471	13½
Detroit	15	18	.455	14
Chicago	15	19	.441	14½

Western Conference Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	23	11	.676	—
Houston	22	11	.667	½
Dallas	20	14	.588	3
San Antonio	17	16	.515	5½
New Orleans	5	29	.147	18

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	27	5	.844	—
Denver	19	13	.594	8
Minnesota	17	15	.531	10
Portland	11	21	.344	16
Utah	7	25	.219	20

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Clippers	19	14	.576	—
L.A. Lakers	18	14	.563	½
Golden State	16	16	.500	2½
Phoenix	15	17	.469	3½
Sacramento	15	19	.441	4½

Tuesday’s games

Boston 125, Toronto 71
Milwaukee 120, Indiana 112
San Antonio 122, L.A. Clippers 86
Oklahoma City 113, Minnesota 105
Cleveland 122, L.A. Lakers 110
Memphis 117, Phoenix 112

Wednesday’s games

Washington 125, Chicago 107
Detroit 105, Orlando 96
New York 119, Utah 103
Miami 119, New Orleans 108
Toronto 130, Brooklyn 113
Houston 110, Dallas 99
Denver 139, Atlanta 120
Sacramento 113, Philadelphia 107

Thursday’s games

Boston at Minnesota
Indiana at Miami
Brooklyn at Milwaukee
L.A. Clippers at Oklahoma City
Philadelphia at Golden State
Portland at L.A. Lakers

Friday’s games

Charlotte at Detroit
Orlando at Toronto
Boston at Houston
New York at Oklahoma City
Washington at New Orleans
Cleveland at Dallas
San Antonio at Denver
Memphis at Sacramento
Atlanta at L.A. Lakers

Saturday’s games

Philadelphia at Brooklyn
Minnesota at Detroit
Phoenix at Indiana
Denver at San Antonio
New York at Chicago
Portland at Milwaukee
Utah at Miami
Memphis at Golden State
Atlanta at L.A. Clippers

Sunday’s games

Boston at Oklahoma City
Charlotte at Cleveland
New Orleans at Washington
Utah at Orlando
L.A. Lakers at Houston
Sacramento at Golden State

Monday’s games

Portland at Detroit
Phoenix at Philadelphia
Indiana at Brooklyn
Orlando at N.Y. Knicks
Milwaukee at Toronto
San Antonio at Chicago
Dallas at Memphis
L.A. Clippers at Minnesota
Miami at Sacramento

Penn St. bottles up Jeanty

By JOHN MARSHALL
Associated Press

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Penn State defenders clogged every hole, stretched out every outside run, closed with ferocity.

Everywhere that Ashton Jeanty turned, he ran into Nittany Lions. The Heisman Trophy runner-up still went over 100 yards, but he sure had to work for it.

Drew Allar threw three touchdown passes and No. 5 Penn State bottled up Jeanty for a 31-14 win over No. 8 Boise State in the Fiesta Bowl on Tuesday night, earning a spot in the College Football Playoff semifinals.

“We knew who we were going against. We knew we had to have hats to the ball every single play because every play he could break one,” said Penn State safety Zakee Wheatley, who had an interception and recovered a fumble. “We did that the whole game.”

The Nittany Lions (13-2, CFP No. 6 seed) opened their first CFP berth with a blowout win over SMU and appeared headed toward the latest lopsided victory in the new 12-team format by jumping out to a 14-0 lead against Boise State.

But the Broncos (12-2, CFP No. 3 seed) have relished the role of underdog and they had an answer.

Boise State galloped back from the early deficit, trimming the margin to 17-14 early in the third quarter, momentum seemingly on its side.

And then Penn State turned the tide for good.

Allar threw his second touchdown pass of the night to John Mackey Award winner Tyler Warren, and Nick Singleton burst up the middle for a 58-yard TD run, sending the Nittany Lions to the Jan. 9 Orange Bowl against No. 2 Georgia or No. 3 Notre Dame.

“We played a complete game,” Penn State coach James Franklin said. “Our offense, defense and special teams, we played complementary football, did some special things.”



RICK SCUTERI/AP

Boise State’s Ashton Jeanty tries to find room to run against Penn State in the Fiesta Bowl.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Ohio St. routs Oregon to advance to semis

BY GREG BEACHAM
Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. — Second chances don't come around often in life, Ohio State coach Ryan Day told his players in a team meeting before the Rose Bowl.

After a season in which they fell short at too many key moments, the Buckeyes all knew they had one of those second chances when they stepped onto this famous turf for another shot at the top-ranked, unbeaten Oregon Ducks.

Ohio State seized it with a vengeance.

Jeremiah Smith caught two of Will Howard's three long touchdown passes during a sensational 34-point first half, and the No. 6 Buckeyes roared into the College Football Playoff semifinals with a 41-21 victory in the 111th Rose Bowl on Wednesday night.

"You can see the potential of where we're at, when we play in all three phases the way we did," Day said.

Howard passed for 319 yards, Emeka Egbuka also caught a long TD pass and TreVeyon Henderson made a 66-yard touchdown run in a redemptive Rose Bowl for the Buckeyes (12-2, CFP No. 8 seed), who lost a 32-31 heartbreaker to the Ducks in Eugene in October. Ohio State then lost to archrival Michigan in humiliating fashion to conclude a regular season in which its performances didn't always measure up to its formidable talent.

The inaugural 12-team College



KYUSUNG GONG/AP

Ohio State quarterback Will Howard celebrates a touchdown against Oregon during the first half in the CFP quarterfinals in the Rose Bowl.

Football Playoff created a way for the Buckeyes to erase their mistakes — and from the opening minute in Pasadena, they took out every frustration on the outclassed Ducks.

"I think nobody has gone through more scrutiny than probably the team here," Egbuka said. "Five weeks ago, you know, people on the scene getting death threats, our head coach getting cussed out, people saying he should never come to Ohio again, all that type of stuff. And I'm sure by the end of (tonight), when you

scroll Twitter, Instagram, everyone's going to be singing our praises. We just know what to say true to in our building."

Facing the tournament's No. 1 seed, the Buckeyes scored on six of their first seven drives — with four scoring plays longer than 40 yards — to take a 34-0 lead late in the second quarter on the nation's only remaining unbeaten team.

Henderson's second TD run late in the third essentially put it away for Ohio State, which is headed to the Cotton Bowl on Jan. 10 to face No. 4 Texas for a berth in

the national title game.

"I'm proud of the resilience of these guys," Day said. "Still got a lot of football ahead of us."

Smith, the Buckeyes' standout freshman playmaker, had a remarkable bowl debut with seven receptions for a season-high 187 yards — including five catches for 161 yards in the first half alone, hauling in scoring passes of 45 and 43 yards. Egbuka compared Smith favorably to Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who had a record 347-yard, three-touchdown Rose Bowl performance three years ago.

"I would say legendary," Egbuka said. "I was able to witness Jaxon's game in the Rose Bowl and the pure dominant performance that that was, but even though (Smith's) stats might not reflect the exact same thing that Jaxon has, I don't think it was too far off in terms of dominance. He's a very special talent, and I'm so excited to keep watching him grow."

Dillon Gabriel passed for 299 yards and hit Traeshon Holden for two touchdowns for the Ducks (13-1, CFP No. 1 seed), whose dreams of their first national title were flattened on the famed Rose Bowl turf. Oregon's 14-game winning streak also ended.

"We really didn't have the ability to stop them, and we didn't have the ability to get something going for us on offense," Oregon coach Dan Lanning said. "We haven't faced a lot of moments like this all year. (Ohio State) is an unbelievable team."

Eleven days after routing Tennessee to open the Playoff, Ohio State dominated the Ducks. Along with the Buckeyes' offensive fireworks, the Ohio State defense that couldn't sack Gabriel in the teams' first meeting dropped the Heisman Trophy finalist eight times in the rematch.

The Big Ten champion Ducks failed to create any of the big plays that carried them to victory last time. Oregon also played without receiver Evan Stewart, who caught seven passes for 149 yards in the first meeting, but was ruled out of the Rose Bowl with a back injury.

"They brought the fight, and we got hit in the mouth," Oregon receiver Tez Johnson said. "They won the game from the first snap."

Ohio State needed just three plays and 49 seconds to strike first. Howard threw a short play-action screen pass to Smith, who motored through Oregon's secondary for a 45-yard score.

On the Buckeyes' third drive, Howard feathered an exceptional long pass over three Ducks to the sprinting Egbuka for a 42-yard TD. Howard finished the first quarter with a career-best 212 yards passing, surpassing his 160 yards against Tennessee.

Early in the second quarter, Smith got so open near the Ducks' goal line that he had two seconds to settle under Howard's long throw like an outfielder with a fly ball, scoring a 42-yard TD untouched.

Texas dodges upset with 20T win

BY PAUL NEWBERRY
Associated Press

ATLANTA — With Arizona State one play away from pulling off a comeback for the ages in the College Football Playoff, Quinn Ewers delivered a throw to Matthew Golden that saved the season for Texas.

Then it was left to Andrew Mukuba to finish off Cam Skattebo and the gritty Sun Devils.

If the Longhorns go on to win the national championship, they'll long remember how they kept their hopes alive in this Peach Bowl quarterfinal classic.

Ewers passed 28 yards to Golden for a touchdown on fourth-and-13 to force a second overtime, and Mukuba's interception clinched a 39-31 victory after Texas squandered a 16-point lead in the fourth quarter and missed two field goal attempts that could've won it in regulation.

"The one thing that I know about our group is when our backs are against the wall and when our best is needed, our best shows up time and time again," coach Steve Sarkisian said. "The resiliency that these guys showed today was something that as a coach makes you really proud."

Skattebo put No. 10 Arizona State ahead for the first time all day with a 3-yard touchdown run to start overtime against No. 4 Texas, the capper on a brilliant perfor-

mance that wasn't quite enough to knock off the Longhorns.

The Sun Devils — two-touchdown underdogs, according to BetMGM Sportsbook — had the game in their grasp before Ewers spotted Golden breaking free behind two defenders to haul in the tying score.

"That's just a testament to how mature this team is and just taking advantage of every single opportunity that we have," Ewers said.

After moving to the opposite end of Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Ewers threw a 25-yard touchdown pass to Gunnar Helm on the very next play, followed by a 2-point conversion pass to Golden.

The Longhorns (13-2) finally put Arizona State (11-3) away when Mukuba picked off Sam Leavitt's pass at the 3 to end the game.

"We gave everything we had," Skattebo said. "We never stopped."

After a bunch of lopsided results through the first five games of the expanded 12-team playoff, the format finally produced the sort of thriller that supporters envisioned.

It sends Texas back to its home state for a Cotton Bowl semifinal against No. 6 Ohio State, which routed No. 1 Oregon 41-21 in the Rose Bowl.

Despite being dominated on the stat sheet most of the game, the Longhorns had a seemingly comfortable 24-8 lead after scor-

ing two early touchdowns and getting a 5-yard scoring run from Ewers with just over 10 minutes remaining.

Skattebo and the Sun Devils were just getting warmed up.

The running back who calls himself the best in the nation, Skattebo backed up his bravado by displaying every facet of his all-around game.

First, he took a pitch on fourth-and-2 and heaved a 42-yard touchdown pass to Malik McClain that gave the Sun Devils a chance when they made the 2-point conversion.

Then, Skattebo broke loose down the sideline and hauled in a 62-yard throw from Leavitt — getting his helmet ripped off at the end of the play, which seemed like the only way to bring him down.

That set up a 2-yard touchdown run by the bowling ball of a back, and it was only appropriate that Skattebo also powered in for the 2-point conversion that tied the game at 24 with 5 minutes remaining.

Texas had two chances to win in regulation, but Bert Auburn was wide right on a 48-yard field goal attempt and clanked one off the left upright from 38 yards away as time expired.

"We weren't at our best and it felt like an NCAA March Madness basketball game with the swings of emotions and things," Sarkisian said. "I'm just proud of these guys



BRYNN ANDERSON/AP

Texas wide receiver Matthew Golden catches a two-point conversion against Arizona State in the second overtime.

because not every game is going to be pretty and not every game is just going to go exactly how you want it to go."

In the final minute of the third quarter, Texas led 17-8 even though Arizona State had a commanding 303-128 lead in total yards and had held the ball nearly three times longer than the Longhorns, 32:49 to 11:30.

Arizona State finished with 510 yards to 375 for the Longhorns.

NFL

Nabers has been bright spot amid dismal season

Receiver needs 4 receptions to break Giants' single-season mark

By TOM CANAVAN
Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — While the New York Giants season has been a major disappointment, wide receiver Malik Nabers has lived up to all the hype.

The No. 6 overall pick in the draft has delivered again and again and he enters the season finale against the Philadelphia Eagles (13-3) four catches shy of breaking Steve Smith's single-season franchise record of 107 receptions set in 2009.

That team finished 8-8. The Giants (3-13) have struggled mightily this season and that's what makes his achievement so remarkable. Playing on one of the NFL's worst offenses, the LSU product has been the team's constant on offense.

In snapping a franchise-record 10-game losing streak last week in a 45-33 win against the Colts, Nabers did something he has not done in his first 14 games — he missed two games with a concussion. He turned short passes in touchdowns, scoring on catches-and-run of 31 and 59 yards. He finished with seven catches for 171 yards and the two touchdowns.

Nabers said the big plays were a combination of things. He felt good, he caught the ball early and could adjust to approaching defenders, some who took bad angles in trying to tackle him and he got good blocks with tackle Evan Neal having a key one on the first touchdown.

"I took some time out to look at my old film, had a talk with my old coach, stuff like that," Nabers said of

his big game. "I actually looked back before that game. I was looking at my YAC (yards after catch) in college and I was like, 'What was I missing?' And it was like, I wasn't really scared. I was just out there when I got the ball, I was just running."

Pro Football Focus credited Nabers with 103 yards after the catch, eclipsing his previous season high of 83 in the second week of the season.

That's the way he played during his final year in college when he had 89 catches for 1,569 yards and 14 touchdowns.

Nabers didn't want to compare college to the NFL. "There's older guys in this league," he said. "They got families to feed. So, they're playing their hearts out. But I wouldn't say it was any harder or any easier. I had a lot of great mentors on my back, on my side and in my ear, pushing me to be who they know I can be. I expected everything that I did this year. I expected more. But the things that I've done so far, I'm not surprised that I did it."

While he has dealt with a number of aches and pains this season, Nabers said he has been diligent about keeping his body healthy with cold plunges, hyperbaric chamber treatment, massages and anything else that will help.

For his final game, Nabers just wants to win.

"Every game that we play, we're always hungry," said Nabers. "No game are you more hungry for this game. Every game you're going in with the same mentality, to win the game. Never expect to lose, always win the game."



SETH WENIG/AP

New York Giants WR Malik Nabers had seven catches for 171 yards and two TD in a 45-33 victory over the Indianapolis Colts last Sunday.

Short: Barkley is only 9th NFL running back to rush for 2,000 yards

FROM PAGE 48

The Eagles (13-3) clinched the NFC East and the No. 2 seed in the conference, leaving little to play for against the Giants.

That included NFL records.

Coach Nick Sirianni made the final call — after a pair of conversations with Barkley, players, coaches, general manager Howie Roseman — to give Barkley the week off and not risk potential injury to perhaps their most valuable player and only the ninth running back in NFL history to top 2,000 yards rushing in a season.

"May never get another opportunity like that again," Barkley said. "So, I'm down. But at the end of the day, I don't care for putting the team at risk. He's the head coach for a reason. He makes those decisions."

Barkley should have plenty of company among the starting lineup sitting out Sunday before the Eagles host either Washington or Green Bay in an NFC wild-card playoff game.

Sirianni said he was set to rest the bulk of the starters — notably quarterback Jalen Hurts, who sat out Sunday's rout of Dallas with the lingering effects of a concussion — to get them rested and healthy ahead of what the fran-



MATT SLOCUM/AP

Saquon Barkley wanted to chase the season rushing record in the regular-season finale, but agreed to do what was best for the Eagles.

chise hopes will be a deep run to the Super Bowl.

"I'm just happy I didn't have to make that decision," Barkley said. "Nick made it pretty easy on me and I'm truly at peace with it."

The Eagles had their bye week in Week 5, and returned from a 2-2 start to win 10 straight games and seize control of the division. But 12 straight games — where Barkley added to his NFL-high 345 carries — also played a role in Sirianni giving the Barkley and the starters one week off before the Eagles

open the playoffs.

With no guarantee of a Super Bowl, much less even one playoff win, some Eagles struck a melancholy tone inside the locker room that Barkley's run had been grounded.

"Everybody would like to have the record," offensive tackle Lane Johnson said. "We'd also like to have the player for a playoff game, and win a playoff game with him."

After he ran for 167 yards in Sunday's win against Dallas, Barkley said he wanted the record,

but he would do what was best for the Eagles, even if that meant sitting out the last game of the regular season.

"On Sunday, I probably didn't care too much for it," Barkley said. "When I slept on it, it was like, it was an opportunity to implement my name in football history."

Barkley can't catch Dickerson, but he bulldozed past LeSean McCoy, Brian Westbrook and Wilbert Montgomery for the best season by a running back in Eagles history.

He set the Eagles record for yards rushing in a season and set a season franchise record for scrimmage yards (2,283). McCoy set the mark of 2,146 yards in 2013.

The yards, wins and records never seemed to stop coming for Barkley and the Eagles.

Barkley ran for 147 yards against New Orleans in Week 3. He had 176 yards in a win in their first meeting against the Giants. Barkley ran for touchdowns of 70 and 72 yards against the Los Angeles Rams and finished the game with a career-high 255 rushing yards on 26 carries and two rushing TDs in November.

Hurts was still in the NFL's concussion protocol on Wednesday

and could not practice or play until he was cleared.

Kenny Pickett started for the Eagles last week and ran and threw for a touchdown before he left with injured ribs. Tanner McKee, the third-string QB, threw a pair of touchdown passes as he put the finishing touches on a rout of the Cowboys.

The Eagles only held a walk-through Wednesday and Pickett was estimated on the injury report to have missed practice — meaning McKee is in line to start Sunday.

Barkley is set to wonder, what if?

The decision also ends that hand-wringing that Barkley would have set the record in an extra 17th game that Dickerson did not have in 1984.

In 1984, Dickerson topped 100 yards rushing 12 times to break O.J. Simpson's 1973 record with Buffalo of 2,003 yards rushing in a single season.

Simpson set his record in 14 games before the NFL expanded to 16 in 1978. The NFL moved to 17 games in 2021.

"I didn't sign here to break Eric Dickerson's record," Barkley said. "I came here to win a Super Bowl."

NFL

Scoreboard

American Conference						
East						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Buffalo	13	3	0	.813	509	345
Miami	8	8	0	.500	325	332
e-N.Y. Jets	4	12	0	.250	306	384
e-New England	3	13	0	.188	266	401
South						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Houston	9	7	0	.563	349	358
e-Indianapolis	7	9	0	.438	351	404
e-Jacksonville	4	12	0	.250	297	409
e-Tennessee	3	13	0	.188	297	437
North						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-Baltimore	11	5	0	.688	483	351
x-Pittsburgh	10	6	0	.625	363	328
Cincinnati	8	8	0	.500	453	417
e-Cleveland	3	13	0	.188	248	400
West						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
*-Kansas City	15	1	0	.938	385	288
x-L.A. Chargers	10	6	0	.625	368	281
Denver	9	7	0	.563	387	311
e-Las Vegas	4	12	0	.250	289	400
National Conference						
East						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-Philadelphia	13	3	0	.813	443	290
x-Washington	11	5	0	.688	462	372
e-Dallas	7	9	0	.438	331	445
e-N.Y. Giants	3	13	0	.188	260	395
South						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	9	7	0	.563	475	366
Atlanta	8	8	0	.500	351	379
e-New Orleans	5	11	0	.313	319	371
e-Carolina	4	12	0	.250	297	496
North						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
x-Detroit	14	2	0	.875	533	333
x-Minnesota	14	2	0	.875	423	301
x-Green Bay	11	5	0	.688	438	314
e-Chicago	4	12	0	.250	286	348
West						
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-L.A. Rams	10	6	0	.625	342	356
e-Seattle	9	7	0	.563	345	343
e-Arizona	7	9	0	.438	353	355
e-San Francisco	6	10	0	.375	365	389

e-Eliminated from playoffs
 x-clinched playoff spot
 y-clinched division
 *-clinched home-field advantage

Saturday's games

Cleveland at Baltimore
 Cincinnati at Pittsburgh

Sunday's games

Buffalo at New England
 Carolina at Atlanta
 Chicago at Green Bay
 Houston at Tennessee
 Jacksonville at Indianapolis
 N.Y. Giants at Philadelphia
 New Orleans at Tampa Bay
 Washington at Dallas
 Kansas City at Denver
 L.A. Chargers at Las Vegas
 Miami at N.Y. Jets
 San Francisco at Arizona
 Seattle at L.A. Rams
 Minnesota at Detroit

Playoffs

Wild Card weekend

Jan. 11-13

Divisional round

Jan. 18-20

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

14-win team will be a wild card

By **JOSH DUBOW**
Associated Press

There's never quite been a division like this season's NFC North and there has never been a wild-card team like whoever loses the division title showdown between Detroit and Minnesota.

Led by the Lions and Vikings, both 14-2, the NFC North is set to be the winningest division since the NFL realigned to eight divisions of four teams each in 2002, with 43 wins for the four division teams with two head-to-head games remaining.

The only other divisions to combine for 43 wins since 2002 were the AFC North last season and NFC East in 2022. The NFC North will top that barring two Week 18 ties when Detroit hosts Minnesota and Green Bay (11-5) hosts Chicago (4-12).

The NFC North teams combined to go 33-11 in non-division games, with the .750 win percentage tied for the second best ever behind the .775 for the 1984 AFC West.

The Week 18 showdown between the Lions and Vikings will feature the first matchup in the regular season between teams with at least 14 wins. There have been only five postseason games between teams that won at least 14 regular-season games, with Kansas City beating Philadelphia in Super Bowl 57, New England beating Pittsburgh in the 2004 AFC title game, Denver beating Atlanta in Super Bowl 33, Atlanta beating Minnesota in the 1998 NFC title game and San Francisco beating Miami in Super Bowl 19.

The loser of the game in Detroit on Sunday night will drop all the way to the No. 5 seed as a wild-card team and have to open the playoffs on the road against a team that with at least four more losses.

There has never been a wild-card team with at least 14 wins, with the previous high coming in 1999 when Tennessee went 13-3 and lost the AFC Central to Jacksonville. The Jaguars lost two games in the regular season that year — both to the Titans — and also dropped the AFC title game to



BRUCE KLUCKHOHN/AP

Vikings quarterback Sam Darnold, right, congratulates Cam Akers on a touchdown against Green Bay last week. Minnesota is tied with Detroit for the best record in the NFC heading into this week's game.

Tennessee.

If Detroit has to hit the road to start the playoffs, the Lions at least have comfort in the fact that they went 8-0 away from home this season. They were the 10th team to go 8-0 or better on the road, with three of the previous nine winning the championship: New England in 2016 and San Francisco in 1984 and 1989.

Only two of those teams had to play a road game in the playoffs, with the 2014 Cowboys losing a divisional round game at Green Bay and the 1934 Bears losing the NFL title game to the New York Giants at the Polo Grounds. The Chiefs also lost the Super Bowl to Tampa Bay in the 2020 season in the Buccaneers' home stadium in what was officially designated as a neutral-site game.

Greener pastures

When Baker Mayfield and Sam Darnold were teammates for Carolina in 2022, they combined to throw 13 TD passes for a seven-win team that fired coach Matt Rhule early that season.

The two former first-round picks from the 2018 draft are having far more success this season. Mayfield has thrown 39 touch-

down passes in his second season in Tampa Bay and has the Bucs in position to win the NFC South with one more victory. Darnold has thrown 35 TD passes for the Vikings.

Turnaround coach

Jim Harbaugh's turnaround skills had another success story in his first year coaching the Los Angeles Chargers.

Harbaugh clinched a playoff spot when Los Angeles beat New England 40-7 on Saturday after going 5-12 last season. This is the second time Harbaugh has taken over a team with a losing record and gone to the playoffs in his first season, having San Francisco go from 6-10 in 2010 before he arrived to 13-3 in 2011.

Harbaugh is the first coach in the Super Bowl era to take over two teams that had losing records the year before he arrived and take them to the playoffs in his first season.

Harbaugh also had an immediate impact in college, helping Stanford improve by three wins in his first season in 2007 and Michigan improve by five wins in 2015.

Harbaugh has gone to the postseason in four out of five seasons as an NFL coach, a rate exceeded only by four coaches with at least four seasons in the Super Bowl era: Nick Sirianni (4 for 4), Sean McDermott (7 for 8), Tony Dungy (11 for 13) and Matt LaFleur (5 for 6).



New Orleans Saints (5-11) at Tampa Bay Buccaneers (9-7)
 AFN-Sports
 7 p.m. Sunday CET
 3 a.m. Monday JKT



Los Angeles Chargers (10-6) at Las Vegas Raiders (4-12)
 AFN-Atlantic
 10:25 p.m. Sunday CET
 6:25 a.m. Monday JKT



Minnesota Vikings (14-2) at Detroit Lions (14-2)
 AFN-Sports
 2 a.m. Monday CET
 10 a.m. Monday JKT

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NFL

Broncos eyeing playoffs, not personnel

With first postseason berth since 2015 season on line, Denver insists it doesn't care who sits out for Chiefs

BY ARNIE STAPLETON
Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — The Denver Broncos aren't necessarily breathing any easier knowing they won't have to face Patrick Mahomes and several other Kansas City Chiefs starters on Sunday with a playoff berth on the line.

Chiefs coach Andy Reid announced his decision to rest Mahomes on Wednesday, but declined to say who else might spend the day with the three-time Super Bowl MVP on the sideline in Denver with Kansas City having already secured the AFC's top seed.

There's a good chance, though, that superstar defensive tackle Chris Jones (strained calf) will sit this one out. And the same could go for running back Isiah Pacheco (bruised ribs), right tackle Jawaan Taylor (sore knee) and veteran tight end Travis Kelce, who similarly skipped last year's Week 18 game, among others.

"We have to play the game to win, that's all that matters," Broncos wide receiver Courtland Sutton said. "We don't care about none of the other stuff. Whoever has on shoulder pads and is wearing red, white and yellow, we have to beat them boys."

"We don't care who shows up and plays," Sutton continued. "We don't care who sits. We don't care who doesn't play, who does play. We don't care about any of that. The Denver Broncos have to show up Sunday and win the game."

If they do, the Broncos (9-7) will



JEFF DEAN/AP

Denver Broncos wide receiver Courtland Sutton makes a touchdown catch in front of Cincinnati Bengals cornerback Josh Newton on Dec. 28 in Cincinnati. The Broncos lost 30-24 in overtime.

clinch a playoff berth for the first time since winning Super Bowl 50 in Peyton Manning's final game on Feb. 7, 2016.

The franchise has churned through half a dozen coaches and more than a dozen starting quarterbacks since hoisting the team's third Lombardi Trophy nearly nine years ago.

The Chiefs (15-1) won three games in an 11-day stretch culminating with a 29-10 win at Pitts-

burgh on Christmas Day that secured the conference's first-round bye as they seek a three-peat as Super Bowl champions. Reid is using the finale as a chance to rest some of his starters, who will have more than a three-week break by the time they return to the field for an AFC divisional-round game on either Jan. 18 or 19.

"You know, a credit to Kansas City, Andy and his team," Broncos coach Sean Payton said. "When

you go 15-1, then you're afforded those decisions and I've been in that position where your team might need a break here or there. They've earned that and that's part of the deal. For us, it's about understanding what we're seeing scheme-wise and being ready to play our best game."

The Broncos blew chances to wrap up a playoff berth with road losses to the Los Angeles Chargers and Cincinnati Bengals the last



Kansas City Chiefs (15-1)
at Denver Broncos (9-7)

AFN-Sports
10:25 p.m. Sunday CET
6:25 a.m. Monday JKT

two weeks. But they're embracing the moment as they control their own destiny with a win-and-in game at home Sunday.

"You could say that it would have been nice to be able to go into this game and have your position locked in," Sutton said, "but in terms of a storybook thing that you couldn't really write up any better, I think this is the best opportunity that we could have to go in and solidify why we deserve to be in the dance."

The Broncos could back into the playoffs even if they lose or tie Sunday if Cincinnati loses to Pittsburgh on Saturday and the Miami Dolphins lose to the New York Jets on Sunday. They're not relying on anybody else punching their playoff ticket, though.

"We gotta win the game, simple," Sutton said. "There's nothing that goes into it. We gotta win the game. People say it's never black and white — it's black and white. We gotta win the game. And that's as simple as it gets."

Commanders have plenty of motivation to beat Cowboys

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

ASHBURN, Va. — In the Washington Commanders' first meeting after clinching a playoff spot, coach Dan Quinn told his players they still had some unfinished business left to accomplish in their regular-season finale with the chance of being the NFC's sixth seed.

They are in the field, but winning Sunday at Dallas would ensure a wild-card round game at Tampa Bay, if it wins the NFC South, or the NFC West Division champion Los Angeles Rams. A loss or tie — unless Green Bay loses to Chicago — would send them to NFC East-winning Philadelphia instead, so expect the full complement of starters on the field.

"We're going to go after it as hard as we can," Quinn said. "The seeding portion of this is really important. ... We recognize having the 6 seed and going into the playoffs with that is a good thing, and so we're going to fight like hell to keep that."



VERA NIEUWENHUIS/AP

Running back Austin Ekeler, who suffered a concussion in a loss to the Cowboys on Nov. 24, could be back when Washington plays at Dallas on Sunday.

The Commanders moved ahead of the Packers, who lost Sunday at Minnesota, by beating Atlanta in overtime. The Rams would be the third seed if they beat Seattle or the Buccaneers lose to New Orleans.

"We want to stay in the spot we're in, so we still got a lot to play for," safety Quan Martin said after practice Wednesday.

Quinn recalled four weeks ago being 7-5 and just wanting to make the playoffs. After winning four in a row to improve to 11-5, the focus has shifted to the most advantageous path possible.

"That's a big emphasis this week," right guard Sam Cosmi said, adding there's also some other motivation after losing to Dallas at home on Nov. 24. "Obviously they got us here, and we're going to try to return the favor and do it at their house. We didn't forget that. It's still a divisional game, and it's still the Cowboys, so we're going to bring it to 'em."

The Commanders could have Austin Ekeler back after the running back was concussed on a kickoff return late in that game. They opened Ekeler's practice window Wednesday, and the 29-year-old is eligible to come off injured reserve this weekend after missing the past four games.

"We're really pumped to have him back out on the field," Quinn said. "He's had great workouts, all the speed and everything, but just

to have him back on the field today was really cool. There was a spring in his step, for sure, and we'll go through the whole process."

Washington is rolling thanks to rookie quarterback Jayden Daniels running all over opponents while also picking them apart by throwing the ball. But in the past three games, running backs Brian Robinson, Chris Rodriguez and Jeremy McNichols have averaged just 2.14 yards a carry.

Ekeler's seemingly imminent return adds a pass-catching threat and a change-of-pace option.

As for the sixth seed, Daniels is "not necessarily" thinking about it, but his focus is still on the Cowboys.

"You want to win every game," said Daniels, who has never played a game in the place colloquially called "Jerry World," AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. "It means something to us to go out there and — not just for the seeding — but go out there and end the regular season off right

with a win."

Six-time All-Pro linebacker Bobby Wagner, who helped Seattle win the Super Bowl a little more than a decade ago when Quinn was defensive coordinator, considers it important to go into the playoffs on a high note. The Seahawks won their final regular-season game in that 2013 season.

"We have a game in front of us, and that's the only game that matters," Wagner said. "We don't know where we're going to be. We don't know where we're going to be at next year. All we have is this week. The message is kind of just focus on where you're at and be where you're at."

That message has filtered down from the coaching staff and veteran leaders to the rest of the locker room.

"We know them, they know us and we just want to try to still have our best output at the back end of the season," Robinson said. "Finish strong, we have stuff to play for and we just want to keep that chip on our shoulder."

NFL



DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP

Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson could become only the seventh player to win three or more NFL MVP awards, but Buffalo Bills quarterback Josh Allen is the betting favorite this season.

Jackson slight underdog to enter elite 3-MVP club

BY NOAH TRISTER
Associated Press

OWINGS MILLS, Md. — John Harbaugh wasn't going to wade into the debate over whether Lamar Jackson should win a third NFL MVP award this season.

Instead, he stuck to the obvious. "He's my MVP. He'll always be my MVP — I promise you that," the Baltimore coach said. "Yes, as far as I'm concerned, he's our MVP, he's our guy."

Local media agreed, honoring Jackson with the team MVP in voting announced Tuesday — a suspense-free tally if there ever was one. The bigger question is whether Jackson can win yet another NFL MVP when balloting for that AP award takes place. If so, he would join pretty impressive company.

Only six players have won that honor three times: Peyton Manning (five), Aaron Rodgers (four), Tom Brady, Brett Favre, Johnny Unitas and Jim Brown. Players with exactly two MVPs include Jackson, Patrick Mahomes, Kurt Warner, Steve Young and Joe Montana.

As of Tuesday, Buffalo quarterback Josh Allen (-300) was the MVP favorite this season, according to BetMGM, with Jackson (+225) as the only particularly close challenger. If Allen wins, he'd be the league's first first-time



**Cleveland Browns (3-13)
at Baltimore Ravens (11-5)**
AFN-Sports
10:30 p.m. Saturday CET
6:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

MVP since Jackson in 2019.

Jackson said last week it's hard to avoid the MVP talk since he's often tagged into it online.

"If it does happen, it happens. That'd be dope — three times," Jackson said. "That's never been my goal, though. Even the first or second one, it's never been my goal. I always want to finish with the championship, but I've been falling short."

This weekend the Ravens have bigger concerns. They're heavily favored against Cleveland, and a win Saturday would wrap up the AFC North title and a home playoff game for Baltimore.

Jackson's individual accomplishments will be tracked closely as well. He enters the game with a passer rating of 121.6. The league record for a season is 122.5 by Rodgers in 2011, the first time he was MVP.

Jackson might not win it this time around, despite leading Allen in touchdown passes, yards passing and yards rushing, and throwing fewer interceptions. Last season, Allen bested Jackson in yards passing and touchdowns (both passing and rushing), but Jackson won MVP after leading Baltimore to the league's best regular-season record.

This season it's Allen and the Bills (13-3) who will finish ahead of the Ravens (11-5) in postseason seeding. Buffalo lost big to Baltimore head-to-head in September, but Allen led the Bills to signature victories over Kansas City and Detroit — teams that could both end up as No. 1 seeds in their conferences.

It's no surprise where Jackson's center, Tyler Linderbaum, stands on the matter.

"You see him every day, the things he's able to do, and carrying it over to the game. He's a special player," Linderbaum said. "He's extremely fun to play with, just the things he's able to do. There's no one more deserving of that award than Lamar Jackson."

As much as this debate consumes NFL talk right now, by the time the award is presented a few days before the Super Bowl, either Jackson or Allen — or perhaps both — will have fallen short of that goal again.

Steelers defense looks to regain lost swagger

BY WILL GRAVES
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Looking back, DeShon Elliott thinks he maybe shouldn't have made his frustrations about the direction the Pittsburgh Steelers defense is heading so public.

Then again, the veteran safety knows the candor he showed in the aftermath of a 29-10 loss to Kansas City on Christmas Day — when he vented about communication issues in the secondary that shouldn't be popping up in late December for a unit that considers itself among the best in the NFL — also makes him who he is. "It was out of emotion," Elliott said Wednesday. "I love ball. Everyone knows that I love these guys. But we just have to get back to the drawing board."

And do it quickly. The swagger the Steelers (10-6) and the NFL's highest-paid defense exuded for the first three-plus months of the season has vanished during the three-game losing streak they take into the regular-season finale against Cincinnati (8-8), replaced by the kinds of mistakes that have cost them the inside track to the AFC North title.

Shortly after Patrick Mahomes picked them apart while throwing for 320 yards and three scores, several players — including Elliott and outside linebacker Alex Highsmith — groused about a variety of issues.

It's telling of the current mood in the locker room that after star outside linebacker T.J. Watt was selected as the team's Most Valuable Player for a record fifth time on Wednesday afternoon, he spent most of his brief session with reporters fielding questions about how things have gotten so sideways so quickly.

Asked about the defense's level of angst, Watt shrugged.

"I think we're all professionals, we're all grown adults here," he said. "We know that it's all about channeling energy in the right way."

If Pittsburgh wants to avoid another quick playoff exit, it doesn't really have a choice. The Steelers are giving up more than 400 yards per game during their current skid against the kinds of teams — Philadelphia, Baltimore and Kansas City — that similar to Pittsburgh, carry the desire to play deep into January and beyond.

The Eagles, Ravens and Chiefs are surging to the finish. The Steelers are not. And while the offense has hit a rough patch — it hasn't helped that wide receiver George Pickens missed three weeks with a hamstring injury and was kept relatively under wraps by Kansas City in his return.

Pittsburgh's best chance at being a legitimate threat when the



**Cincinnati Bengals (8-8)
at Pittsburgh Steelers (10-6)**
AFN-Sports
2:05 a.m. Sunday CET
10:05 a.m. JKT

playoffs begin relies heavily on a star-studded unit that creates turnovers and chaos.

At the moment there's little of either to go around.

While the Steelers are tied with Minnesota and Buffalo for the most takeaways in the league (31), they're also minus-2 in turnover ratio during a December swoon that has done little to offer proof they're ready to compete with the league's elite.

And while Watt remains one of the best in coming off the edge, his 11½ sacks are also on pace for the fewest in a non-injury-abbreviated season since his rookie year in 2017, endemic of a unit that's going to finish with its fewest sacks in a decade.

There are many factors at play, from the outsized attention Watt receives to Highsmith missing six games with groin and ankle problems to opposing offenses emphasizing quick passes designed to negate Pittsburgh's pass rush.

Yet the Steelers were getting by just fine until one of the most daunting stretches any team in the league faced this season, 11 days against three division champions that exposed Pittsburgh's weaknesses for the whole league to see.

The nature of the losses — each by two TDs or more, the worst such stretch by the Steelers since the 1980s — created the ingredients of an imperfect storm that happened to blow in with cameras and tape recorders rolling.

"You prepare to win, and when you don't win, things can get frustrating, but we'll be all right," Elliott said.

"We all love each other. It's like when you argue with your brother. Eventually, you'll hash it out and get on the same page."

Trying to regain its confidence against the Bengals — winners of four straight behind quarterback Joe Burrow — is a tough ask. The Steelers have put themselves in a position where they desperately need to come up with an answer.

To that end, the players requested an additional walkthrough on Wednesday, unusual for this time of the season.

Then again, they're in an unusual situation — a playoff team that doesn't look like one at the moment — and they know it.

SPORTS



Buckeyes roll to CFP semis

Rematch with Oregon a rout; Texas, Penn State also advance » Pages 42-43



NFL

Stopped short

Eagles will rest RB Barkley in season finale, ending pursuit of Dickerson's rushing record

BY DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

2,005

PHILADELPHIA — Saquon Barkley had a heart-to-heart talk with his dad that was more coated in heartbreak than hope over the Philadelphia Eagles running back's pursuit of the NFL single-season rushing record.

Barkley's stirring chase of Eric Dickerson was over — he will sit out the Eagles final regular-season game Sunday, denying the running back his chance at breaking the mark.

The news came with a tough call with his dad, Alibay.

"He definitely wanted me to play," Barkley said Wednesday at his locker. "Selfishly for him, you've got to think about it ... our last name would have been attached to that. I see it from that side, too. At the end of the day, the most important thing is winning football games. He's the one that raised me to kind of be all about the team, too. He can have his little selfish moment, but he'll get over it."

Rushing yards for Eagles running back Saquon Barkley this season. The team plans to rest him Sunday, which will leave him 101 yards short of breaking Eric Dickerson's league record of 2,105 set in 1984 with the Los Angeles Rams.

Associated Press

Barkley insisted he recovered from the sting, too.

So will an offensive line that pushed for the star back to set the record, and even fans who wanted to say they were there Sunday at the Linc against the New York Giants and witness a little slice of NFL history.

Barkley will finish the season with 2,005 yards rushing, just 101 yards shy of breaking Dickerson's record of 2,105 yards set with the Los Angeles Rams in 1984.

SEE SHORT ON PAGE 44

Saquon Barkley ran for 167 yards last Sunday in the Philadelphia Eagles' 41-7 victory over the Dallas Cowboys on Dec. 29 to get within striking distance of Eric Dickerson's single-season rushing record.

MATT SLOCUM/AP

Bahamian Hield giving Warriors joyful boost » NBA, Page 42

