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& PACIFIC
WEEKEND
EDITION

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VIRUS OUTBREAK



JAE C. HONG/AP

Nurse Natasha Garcia administers a dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to Magaly Esparza in a mobile clinic set up in the parking lot of a shopping center in Orange, Calif., on April 29. Some experts are projecting COVID's toll on the U.S. will fall sharply by the end of July.

A road map to recovery

CDC says coronavirus could be under control this summer in US if people get vaccinated and maintain precautions

BY JOEL ACHENBACH AND LENA H. SUN
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Coronavirus infections could be driven to low levels and the pandemic at least temporarily throttled in the United States by July if the vast majority of people get vaccinated and continue with precautions against viral transmission, according to a report released Wednesday by the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention. The report comes as administration officials and leaders in many states are sounding more confident that the country can return to a degree of normalcy relatively soon. President Joe Biden on Tuesday announced a new vaccination goal, saying he wants 70% of adults to have

SEE ROAD MAP ON PAGE 9

Army CID will cede oversight to civilian in major reform

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — The Army will split control of its criminal investigative agency from a general officer to a civilian director and add more civilian agents to its workforce in a major restructuring ignited by an independent committee that found the agency was failing to prevent and investigate crimes and support victims.

Maj. Gen. Donna Martin, Army provost marshal general and commander of Army Criminal Investigation Command, known commonly as CID, announced the restructuring Thursday, more than five months after the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee found the CID detachment at Fort Hood, Texas, "was unstable, under-experienced, over-assigned and under-resourced leading to inefficiencies that had an adverse impact on investigations, especially complex cases involving sex crimes and soldier deaths."

With four main points of adjustment, Martin said the restructuring will "address many seams and gaps, and it will also address those findings from the Fort Hood independent review."

"We did extensive research, calculations and staff work to develop more comprehensive courses of action to present the Army senior leaders," she said.

Specifically, CID will split oversight of criminal investigations with a civilian director, add more civilian agents and support staff,

SEE CID ON PAGE 6

RELATED

Spc. Vanessa Guillen's harasser was a known toxic leader, report shows
Page 6



82nd Airborne paratroopers get fully vaccinated before taking part in Baltic jump
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BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Germany	+\$3.165	\$3.578	\$3.832	\$3.417	Azores	..	..	\$3.732	..
Change in price	+1.8cents	+2.0cents	+2.1cents	+1.8cents	Change in price	..	..	+2.1cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.100	\$4.401	\$4.031	Belgium	..	\$3.058	\$3.332	\$3.081
Change in price	..	-0.6cents	-0.6cents	-0.6cents	Change in price	..	No change	No change	No change
U.K.	..	\$3.477	\$3.731	\$3.316	Turkey	..	..	\$3.617	\$4.026*
Change in price	..	+2.0cents	+2.1cents	+1.8cents	Change in price	..	..	+2.1cents	No change

PACIFIC GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Japan	..	\$3.619	..	\$3.209	South Korea	\$2.969	..	\$3.639	\$3.219
Change in price	..	+2.0cents	..	+2.0cents	Change in price	+2.0cents	..	+2.0cents	+2.0cents
Okinawa	\$2.959	..	..	\$3.209	Guam	\$2.969	\$3.379	\$3.629	..
Change in price	+2.0cents	..	..	+2.0cents	Change in price	+2.0cents	+2.0cents	+2.0cents	..
*DieselEFD **Midgrade For the week of May 7-13									

EXCHANGE RATES		
Military rates		
Euro costs (May 7)	\$1.18	
Dollar buys (May 7)	0.8086	
British pound (May 7)	\$1.36	
Japanese yen (May 7)	106.00	
South Korean won (May 7)	1096.00	
Commercial rates		
Bahrain(Dinar)	.3770	
Britain (Pound)	1.3895	
Canada (Dollar)	1.2209	
China(Yuan)	6.4669	
Denmark (Krone)	6.1646	
Egypt (Pound)	15.6707	
Euro	.8290	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7684	
Hungary (Forint)	297.00	
Israel (Shekel)	3.2549	
Japan (Yen)	109.20	
Kuwait(Dinar)	.3014	
Norway (Krone)	8.3381	
Philippines (Peso)	47.94	
Poland (Zloty)	3.80	
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7304	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3340	
South Korea (Won)		1122.33
Switzerland (Franc)		.9085
Thailand (Baht)		31.25
Turkey (NewLira)		8.3132
(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		3.25
Interest Rates Discount rate		0.75
Federal funds market rate		0.06
3-month bill		0.02
30-year bond		2.26

WEATHER OUTLOOK



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STARS AND STRIPES

RELOCATION GUIDE

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MILITARY

Army to offer bonuses in recruiting drive

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

ATLANTA—The Army, in an attempt to bolster recruiting as the coronavirus pandemic stretches into a second year, will offer extra bonuses starting next week to individuals who commit to serve in 11 high-demand jobs, service officials said Wednesday.

The five-week recruiting drive, dubbed Army National Hiring Days, is the service's second annual attempt to steer potential recruits toward the Army with a mostly virtual effort to boost enlistment numbers, which have dipped during the pandemic. The Army will hold the event from May 10 through June 14, when it hopes to generate interest in the service for some 60,000 potential recruits, said Brig. Gen. Pa-

trick Michaelis, the deputy commanding general of U.S. Army Recruiting Command.

"We are in a pretty challenging recruiting environment right now," Michaelis told reporters Wednesday. "We've got a very challenging mission, and we have to adapt to the [pandemic] environment, to be able to bring young men and women ... into our Army to serve our nation."

In its first Army National Hiring Days drive during the summer, service officials sought to commit 10,000 new recruits to the Army in three days. This year, the Army is aiming to provide its recruiters new enticements, largely in an effort to populate the service's 11 high-demand fields, which require more soldiers due to shortages or expan-

sions of those fields as the service modernizes.

The Army will offer an extra \$2,000 bonus to qualified individuals who begin the enlistment application process during the five-week drive, commit to an active-duty enlistment in one of those priority jobs, and ship to initial entry training by Sept. 30, according to the service. That bonus is in addition to existing bonuses that range from \$9,000 to \$40,000 for recruits who commit to serve in those specialties, Michaelis said.

The high-priority jobs are infantry, special forces, fire-control specialists, multiple launch rocket system crew members, air and missile defense crew members, human intelligence collectors, signals intelligence voice interceptors, psycho-

logical operations specialists, explosive ordnance disposal specialists, parachute riggers, and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear specialists.

While the campaign will be primarily online and driven by a social media blitz from officials across the entire Army, this year's National Hiring Days will also include some in-person recruiting efforts. For example, the Army will send recruiters to the Miami Air and Sea Show in Florida on May 29 and 30, said Col. Rich McNorton, a spokesman for Army Training and Doctrine Command.

"As conditions start to get better across the country, we want to start integrating in and start to attend more [in-person] physical events," Michaelis said. "Face-to-face is an

amazing way to be able to connect to the target market."

Michaelis and other Army officials said Wednesday that they expect to meet their recruiting goal but declined to provide specific numbers of new recruits that they aim to bring into the service. The general said the goal likely would be similar to last year when the Army brought in roughly 60,000 recruits, meeting its quota that was lowered mid-year amid higher-than-anticipated retention of already serving soldiers.

"Right now, we're sitting pretty good," Michaelis said. "We are dead-in-line to make our [goal] this year."

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Navy offers some sailors an early out to reduce overmanned rates

By DANIEL BETANCOURT
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy is offering as many as three years' early separation to sailors in some "overmanned" rates and career fields before the end of fiscal year 2021, according to a Navy administrative message released Tuesday.

The service exceeded its retention goals in FY 2020 and announced a select list of ratings would qualify for early separation, according to NAVADMIN messages in December and January. The list includes boatswain's mate, culinary specialist and hospital corpsman.

"While we have grown over the years, some enlisted ratings have become overmanned, creating imbalances in the Fleet," the chief of Navy personnel, Vice Adm. John Nowell, wrote in December's message.

Early separation comes with some conditions, namely the return of unearned bonus money and no separation pay, according to Tuesday's message.

Sailors in fields that are less than 95% manned or in nuclear fields are not eligible for early separation, according to Ja-



ALISON HUMMEL/U.S. Navy

Sailors prepare to man the rails of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz in San Diego in February.

nuary's message. Sailors subject to selective reenlistment bonuses, obligated service for school training or in the Selective Training and Reenlistment Program are also not eligible.

Applications for early separation will be considered on a first come, first serve basis until quotas are met, according to Tuesday's message. The deadline is Sept. 30.

All applicants for early separation must come forward on a voluntary basis through submitted requests into the Enlisted Early Transition Program, which gets updated regularly to show opportunities to those seeking it.

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Pacific Fleet's new leader takes up post

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Adm. Samuel J. Paparo, a naval aviator who most recently commanded U.S. 5th Fleet and Naval Forces Central Command in Bahrain, took the helm of U.S. Pacific Fleet during a ceremony Wednesday at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

He replaces Adm. John Aquilino, who assumed leadership of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command on Friday.

Paparo is a graduate of the Navy Fighter Weapons School and has flown the F-14 Tomcat, F-15 Eagle and F/A-18 Hornet fighter jets, among others, the Navy said in a news release.

Among his operational command tours at sea were Strike Fighter Squadron 195 at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan; command of Carrier Air Wing 7, which was embarked in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Strike Group; and command of Carrier Strike Group 10, according to his official biography.

As head of 5th Fleet, Paparo kept naval watch on Iran dur-

ing a period of heightened tension over its nuclear program.

From Hawaii, Paparo's attention will turn to China, what Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin at his Senate confirmation hearing in January called the "pacing threat" to U.S. interests in the region.

Paparo said in the news release that he looked forward to leading a Navy fleet with an area of responsibility spanning 100 million square miles and 14 time zones, an expanse over which about 60% of the world's trade passes.

"The U.S. remains committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific that can only be achieved by the teamwork of like-minded partners, all working with a common commitment to upholding international law and the rules-based, international order," he said.

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Paparo

Austin to attend Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore to reassure allies

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will attend the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore next month to "make clear how much we are prioritizing the Indo-Pacific theater," chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters Wednesday.

The Shangri-La Dialogue is an Asian security summit, organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank in London. It brings together heads of states, top military leaders and defense ministers from across the globe "to engage in vital defense diplomacy," according to the think tank's website.

Scheduled for June 4 and June 5, the summit will be Austin's first trip to Southeast Asia, though he visited Japan, South Korea and India in his first trip overseas in March. He is expected to deliver a speech on "advancing the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy," according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies website.

This year's Shangri-La Dialogue will be the first since 2019. The summit was cancelled last year because of the coronavirus pandemic. Though the pandemic continues, Austin will travel to the summit rather than attend virtually.

Attending in-person will allow Austin to show the U.S. commit-

ment to the Indo-Pacific region, Kirby said. The Defense Department has called the Indo-Pacific a "priority theater" as tensions climb with China over its claims in the South China Sea, among other issues.

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MILITARY

US says China's Africa outreach poses threat

By **LOLITA C. BALDOR**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The top U.S. general for Africa is warning that a growing threat from China may come not just from the waters of the Pacific but from the Atlantic as well.

U.S. Gen. Stephen Townsend, in an interview with The Associated Press, said Beijing is looking to establish a large navy port capable of hosting submarines or aircraft carriers on Africa's western coast. Townsend said China has approached countries stretching from Mauritania to south of Namibia, intent on establishing a naval facility. If realized, that prospect would enable China to base warships in its expanding Navy in the Atlantic as well as Pacific oceans.

"They're looking for a place where they can rearm and repair warships. That becomes militarily useful in conflict," said Townsend, who heads U.S. Africa Command. "They're a long way toward establishing that in Djibouti. Now they're casting their gaze to the Atlantic coast and wanting to get such a base there."

Townsend's warnings come as the Pentagon shifts its focus from the counterterrorism wars of the last two decades to the Indo-Pacific region and threats from great power adversaries like China and

Russia. The Biden administration views China's rapidly expanding economic influence and military might as America's primary long-term security challenge.

U.S. military commanders around the globe, including several who may lose troops and resources to bolster growth in the Pacific, caution that China's growing assertiveness isn't simply happening in Asia. And they argue that Beijing is aggressively asserting economic influence over countries in Africa, South America and the Middle East, and is pursuing bases and footholds there.

"The Chinese are outmaneuvering the U.S. in select countries in Africa," said Townsend. "Port projects, economic endeavors, infrastructure and their agreements and contracts will lead to greater access in the future. They are hedging their bets and making big bets on Africa."

China's first overseas naval base was built years ago in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa and it is steadily increasing its capacity. Townsend said as many as 2,000 military personnel are at the base, including hundreds of Marines who handle security there.

"They have arms and munitions for sure. They have armored combat vehicles. We think they will soon be basing helicopters there to



Lu Xin/Chinese defense ministry

The Chinese destroyer Haikou sails into the port of Djibouti in 2017 for a visit.

potentially include attack helicopters," said Townsend.

For some time, many have thought that China was working to establish a Navy base in Tanzania, a country on Africa's eastern coast, that has had a strong, long-standing military relationship with Beijing. But Townsend said it appears there's been no decision on that yet.

He said that while China has been trying hard to get a base in Tanzania, it's not the location he's most concerned about.

"It's on the Indian Ocean side," he said. "I want it to be in Tanzania instead of on the Atlantic coast. The Atlantic coast concerns me greatly," he said, pointing to the relatively shorter distance from Africa's west coast to the U.S. In nautical miles, a base on Africa's northern Atlantic coast could be substantially closer to the U.S. than military facilities in China are to America's western coast.

More specifically, other U.S. officials say the Chinese have been eyeing locations for a port in the Gulf of Guinea.

The Defense Department's 2020 report on China's military power, said China has likely considered adding military facilities to support its naval, air and ground forces in Angola, among other locations. And it noted that a large amount of oil and liquefied natural gas imported from Africa and the Middle East, make those regions a high priority for China over the next 15 years.

Henry Tugendhat, a senior policy analyst with the United States Institute of Peace, said China has a lot of economic interests on Africa's west coast, including fishing and oil. China also has helped finance and build a large commercial port in Cameroon.

He said that any effort by Beijing to get a naval port on the Atlantic coast would be an expansion of

China's military presence. But the desire for ocean access, he said, may be primarily for economic gain, rather than military capabilities.

Townsend and other regional military commanders laid out their concerns about China during recent congressional hearings. He, along with Adm. Craig Faller, head of U.S. Southern Command, and Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, are battling to retain their military forces, aircraft and surveillance assets as the Pentagon continues to review the shift to great power competition.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is conducting a global posture review to determine if America's military might is positioned where it needs to be, and in the right numbers, around the world to best maintain global dominance. That review is expected to be finished in late summer.

Blinken reaffirms support for Ukraine amid Russia tensions

By **YURAS KARMANAU**
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with top Ukrainian officials in Kyiv Thursday and reaffirmed Washington's support for the country in the wake of heightened tensions with Russia, fueled by its recent troop buildup near the borders with Ukraine.

The top American diplomat met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and reiterated the U.S.'s commitment to Ukraine's "sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence," while also underscoring the importance of Ukraine's efforts to tackle widespread corruption and carry out reforms.

"Ukraine is facing two challenges: aggression from outside, coming from Russia, and in effect aggression from within, coming from corruption, oligarchs and



EFREM LUKATSKY, POOL/AP

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, right, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pose after their talks in Kyiv Thursday.

others who are putting their interests ahead of those of the Ukrainian people," Blinken told a news conference after his meeting with

Zelenskyy.

By visiting so early in his tenure, before any trip to Russia, Blinken signaled that Ukraine is a

high foreign-policy priority for President Joe Biden's administration.

His visit was highly anticipated in Ukraine, with hopes for increased military aid and strong support for NATO membership being voiced on the frontlines of the battle against Russia-backed separatists in the east and in the halls of government in Kyiv.

Ukraine has seen an increase in hostilities in the east in recent months. Ukraine's military says 34 of its soldiers have been killed by rebel attacks this year, a significant upswing from the quiet months of the latter part of 2020. Russia, which claims its soldiers are not on the ground in eastern Ukraine, fueled the tensions further this year by massing troops and conducting large-scale military exercises near the border with Ukraine.

Zelenskyy has made it clear that

he wants significant action — "a clear signal about the European and Euro-Atlantic prospect," as he said on Twitter on Monday, referring to Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO and the European Union. "Postponing these issues for 'later,' 'some day,' '(in) 10 years' has to end."

Blinken reiterated Washington's commitment to Ukraine's "independence, to its sovereignty, to its territorial integrity" at the news conference Thursday.

He said that Ukraine's "Euro-Atlantic aspirations" were discussed during his meeting with Zelenskyy and that the U.S. was "actively looking" at strengthening its security assistance to Ukraine, but didn't offer any details.

Zelenskyy also said that the military support and the financial support from the U.S. "is increasing," but didn't elaborate.

MILITARY

Former crewman campaigns to stop cutter sale

By ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

A Coast Guard cutter with a historic tie to 9/11 may be headed to Indonesia, but a former crew member wants it preserved as a memorial to the terrorist attacks in New York City.

The cutter Adak, built in 1989, led the evacuation of 500,000 people from Lower Manhattan following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, according to the Coast Guard. The ship and its crew received the Secretary of Transportation Outstanding Unit Award for the rescue.

The cutter is homeported in New Jersey, but is now serving with U.S. Central Command in Bahrain.

The U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency notified Congress on April 2 that it intended to sell the Adak and another Island-class patrol boat, the cutter Aquidneck, to Indonesia under the Excess Defense Articles program, according to the State Department. The Defense Department sells or transfers older equipment to allies and partners through the program.

A translated April 30 report by CNN Indonesia, however, suggested the sale was in jeopardy.

“I’m not interested in used vessels,” Vice Adm. Aan Kurnia, head of the Indonesia Maritime Security Agency, known as Bakamla, was quoted as saying in the report. “I prefer to build my own ships in Indonesia.”

Bakamla is also known as the Indonesian Coast Guard, according to its website. It did not respond to email inquiries on Thursday. The U.S. Coast Guard referred questions about the potential sale to the State Department, which would not give an on-the-record response.

The nonprofit USCGC Adak Historical Society in Tampa, Fla., is trying to bring the Adak back to America to serve as a 9/11 memorial museum if the sale falls through, according to a news release Tuesday from James Judge, the organization founder and a former Adak crew member.

A Change.org petition supporting the USCGC Adak Historical Society had garnered more than 10,000 signatures as of Thursday.

Rep. Lee Zeldin, R-N.Y., wrote

to the State Department asking to halt the sale, according to Judge’s release.

“The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Adak played a critical role in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks,” Judge quoted Zeldin as saying. “As we approach the 20th anniversary of one of America’s darkest days, the Adak serves as a reminder of American courage, sacrifice and resilience in the days and years following this attack on our freedom and way of life. Selling this significant historic symbol to a foreign nation would be incredibly shortsighted.”

As it seeks to strengthen friendly ties in the Western Pacific, the United States has provided Vietnam, Sri Lanka and the Philip-



U.S. Coast Guard

The Coast Guard cutter Adak, which led the evacuation of 500,000 people from Lower Manhattan following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

pires with Hamilton-class cutters to patrol their maritime territory. The ships respond to calls for help, combat piracy, smuggling and illegal fishing, and respond to incursions by ships of other countries.

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Marines in Europe, Africa get new boss

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A two-star general took command Thursday of Marines in Africa and Europe, where the service has expanded its mission in recent years with a heavy focus on security in the Arctic region.

Maj. Gen. Tracy W. King, who previously served as director of expeditionary warfare in the office of the chief of naval operations, will lead Marines from his headquarters near Stuttgart.

“The commandant of the Marine Corps has clearly articulated a vision of how our service will confront the security challenges of the 21st century,” King said in a statement. “In close partnership with the Navy, we will work to implement that vision here, making us a more lethal and dynamic force, better able to support our allies and partners in this theater.”

King replaces Maj. Gen. Michael Langley, who arrived in Germany in November to command Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa.

Langley will return to his previous post as deputy commander of Fleet Marine Force Atlantic in Norfolk, Va., a position that the Corps has used in the past to fill other command vacancies as the need arises.

Langley filled in after the previ-



King

ous commander, Maj. Gen. Stephen Neary, was relieved in October in connection with allegations he used a racial slur in front of Marines.

Langley, who was the first Black general to command the Marine mission in Europe and Africa, said he was “humbled by the tremendous impact we’ve made in support of our allies and partners.”

“Regardless of the challenge, I have witnessed our Marines consistently rise to the occasion and represent our command with distinction,” Langley said in a statement.

A key mission for King will be moving forward with training in Norway. In April, the United States and Norway signed a revised defense cooperation agreement that will allow the U.S. to build facilities at three airfields and one naval base in the country.

Over the last four years, the Marine Corps also has expanded troop rotations to Norway, allowing Marines to gain cold weather experience in the Arctic, a region where the Russian military has stepped up its operations.

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MILITARY

Report: Guillen harasser was known toxic leader

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — The sexual harassment that Spc. Vanessa Guillen faced before her death last year from a noncommissioned officer at Fort Hood wasn't an isolated incident.

There had been four other complaints filed against her platoon sergeant for his mistreatment of subordinates, yet leaders continued to move him and keep him in charge of soldiers, according to an Army report released last week.

The sergeant, whose name was redacted in the public release of the report, was known to yell, belittle and threaten soldiers with counseling, delayed promotion or denial of leave, while playing favorites and speaking Spanish in the workplace, which isolated those who didn't understand the language, according to the report.

Though the redacted report does not include his position in Guillen's unit, he was identified as her platoon sergeant by Gen. Michael Garrett, the commander of Army Forces Command who initiated the internal administrative investigation, known as a 15-6.

The platoon sergeant and 20 other leaders have faced disciplin-

ary action in the wake of the investigation and another report by the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee that was released in December. It is unclear where and in what position the sergeant serves now, but he has been notified of an intent to relieve him from leadership, according to a military official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Punishment for some of the other leaders at Fort Hood came because they continued to place this NCO in positions of leadership, which showed poor judgment, the military official said.

The report described how a toxic leader in one platoon created an "intimidating, hostile environment," and those able to stop the harassment failed to do so. Guillen's platoon exemplified on a small scale how soldiers' erosion of trust occurred at Fort Hood, which was found by the independent and internal Army investigations.

The Army investigation, announced in September and under the direction of Gen. John Murray, the commander of Army Futures Command, looked into every echelon of Guillen's leadership between April 22 and July 1 to



ROSE L. THAYER/Stars and Stripes

A memorial to honor Spc. Vanessa Guillen remains one year later in the parking lot of a tattoo shop in Killeen, Texas.

learn what her leaders knew and when they knew it. The investigation also looked into allegations from the Guillen family that she had faced sexual harassment during the 15 months that she spent at Fort Hood.

Guillen disappeared during the workday on April 22, 2020. After more than two months, investigators found her body buried along a river miles from the central Texas Army base. Spc. Aaron Robinson, a fellow soldier in the regiment, is believed to have killed her with a hammer in an arms room that he

supervised. When confronted by local law enforcement July 1 in nearby Killeen, Robinson shot himself dead.

In Murray's investigation, he found two instances of sexual harassment against Guillen from the same man, her platoon sergeant. She informally reported the harassment on two occasions. But in both instances, her supervisor failed to report the harassment, and other leaders failed to take appropriate action, according to the report.

The investigation also uncovered that the platoon sergeant didn't just harass Guillen, he was known among soldiers and other leaders in the unit as a "counter-productive leader." It led to "low trust [and] very low morale" in the maintenance platoon and soldiers lost focus on their assigned tasks, according to the report.

"[His] unchecked behavior directly impacted the performance of multiple soldiers and readiness functions," Murray wrote in the report. "Likewise, the failure to act by the chain of command cemented the severely diminished lack of trust in leadership."

When it came to Guillen, the sergeant would bypass her squad

leader to call her directly, often just to make certain that she was still around, according to the report. He often spoke to Guillen in Spanish, and she told someone, whose name was redacted in the report, that he once said inappropriate things during a unit urinalysis.

The sergeant was the subject of two formal inspector general complaints that were investigated and the allegations confirmed, as well as an informal inspector general complaint and an equal opportunity complaint, according to the report.

Leaders held a sensing session and counseled the sergeant after the two formal complaints in August 2019.

Afterward, the sergeant was moved on Feb. 15, 2020, from one platoon to another position that was redacted from the report, though his leaders were aware of complaints on his "leadership style." Another person, whose name is redacted from the report, agreed they would watch and see if anything changed with the sergeant.

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CID: Army hoping to turn over sex assault cases quicker after reforms

FROM PAGE 1

create a new commissioned officer tract of criminal investigators and staff its security missions for senior leaders with military police instead of CID agents.

"Because military people tend to transition, every two to three years, when we add our civilian capacity on top of our military special agents, we believe that what we will see is an enhanced partnership with our local and regional law enforcement partners. We believe that will help us help not only in Criminal Investigation Command, but it will help our commanders on our installations understand crime as it relates to what happens on the installation, and what happens off the installation," Martin said.

Created after the disappearance and death last year of Fort Hood Spc. Vanessa Guillen, the Fort Hood review committee released a report in December that offered 70 recommendations, with 11 focused on improving CID through its staffing, crime-suppression efforts and deepening their investigations into drug crimes and soldier deaths.

The inefficiencies stemmed from staffing protocols and other policies and procedures that transcend Fort Hood, according to the report.

Following the release of the re-

port, Martin said she conducted an administrative investigation into the actions of personnel at the Fort Hood detachment and, as a result, fired the battalion operations officer because he "failed to conduct his duties as required in providing oversight of the investigation."

In the new structure, the duties and responsibilities now assigned to one general officer serving simultaneously as the Army's provost marshal general and the CID commander will split. The Army will hire a civilian director with criminal investigative experience to lead the restructured CID with a general remaining the provost marshal.

To maintain and ensure independence of Army criminal investigations, the civilian director will initially report to the undersecretary of the Army, the service said. The provost marshal general will continue to report to the Army chief of staff and the Army secretary.

CID will increase the ratio of civilian criminal investigators to military special agents to improve investigative experience and grow effective partnerships with local and regional law enforcement agencies — something the review committee found to be lacking. More administrative and support staff will be added to detachments and hiring has already

begun, Martin said.

The Army will create a new commissioned officer tract for criminal investigations, similar to the Air Force and Navy, to oversee the new support staff in each detachment. A captain, who is also a credentialed, badge-carrying agent, will command the detachments, Martin said.

The Army will implement this redesign in phases, beginning at Fort Hood, Fort Bragg, N.C., and Fort Carson, Colo. They were chosen "due to the large population and a mixture of units that are assigned there," Martin said.

"We don't know where that percentage [of civilian agents] will end up, but we're going to learn from these first three installations that we're going to implement," she said.

Without providing a specific amount on the increased cost for these additional personnel, Martin said CID has "programmed our budget in order to support this enhancement of command growth."

"We have some very baseline numbers, on what it costs to bring on a civilian with the equipment with the training, all of that analysis has brought us to dollar figure. Now where this will all end up, I don't know. It will depend on, again, those lessons learned from those three installations, and where we go in the future," she

said. "We have made a preliminary estimate of what it will cost through the next five years, but of course that's not solid, it's not locked in."

Army CID manages all Defense Department crime lab needs and the restructuring will also increase capacity and hire more scientists to process evidence, Martin said.

"Our estimation is that you will see a shorter turnaround of these in the investigations," she said. "Specifically [with] sexual-assault cases, we believe with this added resource of civilian personnel, and with our scientists in our lab, that we will turn around sex assault cases sooner."

Investigative timelines vary at each base and the Fort Hood committee found that when it came to investigating sex crimes, Fort Bragg had the longest average of 316 days between opening a case and referring it to a commander. Fort Hood had the next longest average of 215 days and Fort Carson averaged 185 days, according to the committee's report.

The new resources should also help CID with deepening its investigations into both drug crimes and soldier deaths, as was recommended by the Fort Hood committee.

"We've always investigated drug crimes. The majority of our drug-crime investigations come

through urinalysis, so this is an extension of our policy. We now ask our agents to go for the source. So we're trying to find through this increased investigative activity where their drugs are coming from, and how they're impacting our soldiers and our installations," she said.

Better collaborations with local civilian law enforcement near the base will help improve investigations when a soldier dies by suicide off base. Agents will get more involved to better inform families about the case and provide additional assistance to them.

"In our death investigations and in the executive summaries that are sent to our Army senior leaders, we also have a behavioral health assessment that is done in every death and especially every suicide case, because we do want to understand why these events are occurring," Martin said.

Most of these changes will take time, Martin said, but she is confident it "will make this an even better organization."

"We are doing this reorganization while we're still balancing the daily challenges of conducting felony criminal investigations. So crime doesn't stop, and you have to consider so many complex issues," she said.

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MILITARY

Airmen have a blast analyzing snow, C-4 in Alaska

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

Frosty's made of it, kids play in it and Christmas carolers sing about it. And now we know bomb blasts can be hushed with it.

That's what a team of innovative airmen in Alaska confirmed recently during a four-day experiment into how effective snow is at dampening dangerous shockwaves from ordnance blasts. Ordnance teams normally use sand or water barriers for that job.

The tests revealed that charges surrounded by bags filled with snow significantly reduced pressure waves emanating from the blast.

That knowledge may provide an option to commanders looking for the best blast protection for their people and installations once snow barriers become available, said Air Force Master Sgt. Chance Rupp, an explosive ordnance disposal flight chief at Eielson Air Force Base. His idea kindled the experiment.

Rupp said he envisions development of a snow reference scale: "With this much charge, use this much snow."

Shrapnel and other projectiles are an obvious and visual danger from a detonation, but shockwaves from an explosion, known as overpressure, can also wreak havoc on bodies, buildings and equipment.

"Basically, anything that is full of air inside your body is going to be at risk of rupturing or having damage when you're exposed to overpressures — ears, lungs," Rupp said during a phone interview on April 26 with Stars and Stripes.

"Glass is also a pretty big weakness because when broken, it becomes a hazard itself," he said.

Blast mitigation of this type is typically done using bags filled with sand or containers holding water, but the Arctic cold makes their use a challenge during many months of the year, Rupp said.

"Whenever we're trying to mitigate a blast, it takes a significant amount of material around that explosive device to achieve a desired effect," he said. "When it comes to using sand or sandbags or soil, it's difficult here because the ground is frozen. You have to use mechanized equipment (to dig



DANIELLE SUKHLALL/U.S. Air Force

Airmen attach the metal plates of a bikini gauge used in testing snow barriers to mitigate shockwaves from detonations at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, in March.



DANIELLE SUKHLALL/U.S. Air Force

An explosive charge detonates during an experiment to see if snow-filled bags can dampen shockwaves from such blasts.

it up), and even if you use that, you're probably going to get big chunks of ice that you have to break down."

And with temperatures often well below zero, water freezes quickly.

Rupp said he and fellow EOD specialists had "kicked around"

the idea of somehow using snow as blast mitigation.

"One of the things we try to do up here at Eielson is figure out the best way to adapt our techniques and tactics to winters up here," he said. "There are a lot of things that fit the mold for the lower 48, the lower latitudes, but it's different

up here in the wintertime."

In its Arctic strategy released last summer, the Air Force called the development of cold-weather materials "foundational to future operations."

During a monthly demolition qualification event in the winter, however, Rupp and a few others conducted an impromptu test of the concept.

They buried about 10 feet of detonation cord under a foot of snow and, in another location, laid the same length on the surface.

The difference in sound was significant, and Rupp wrote an experimental design paper soon after for a class he was enrolled in.

Rupp submitted the concept to Iceman Spark, a loose collaboration of airmen at Eielson who foster innovations from within the ranks to support the 354th Fighter Wing.

Iceman Spark's director of innovation, Tech. Sgt. Nicholas Cavanaugh, sent it on to Force Warrior Operations in the Materials and Manufacturing Directorate at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. The scientists

and engineers at the directorate test and field all types of material for the Air Force.

High-tech instruments exist for measuring blast overpressure, but the extreme cold made it impractical to use them for the rest, said 1st Lt. Tyler Despard, who is assigned to the directorate and oversaw the proof-of-concept testing in Alaska in March.

Instead, they used a simple and inexpensive device called a "bikini gauge," which consists of two aluminum plates with matching holes of various sizes, he said. A thin sheet of aluminum foil is squeezed between them.

Larger exposures of foil tear most easily, while smaller foil holes rip with increasingly stronger overpressure.

For the testing, charges of C-4 explosives were placed in an open range and enclosed with up to 18 snow-filled bags.

"We would set off similar charges with and without mitigation," he said.

In comparing the tears to the aluminum foil between the two, "we saw a dramatic reduction in the damage done to those gauges," Despard said.

The findings of the experiment have been turned over to the Naval Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technology Division, the entity charged with creating and updating EOD standards across the Defense Department.

"They are working through the process of looking at our data, determining if any additional testing or design work is needed," Despard said. "Our hope is that will become standard Arctic operating procedure."

As director of Iceman Spark, Cavanaugh sees the larger context for the innovation.

"One of the big things out of this is that we're trying to find new ways to operate in this newest contested domain, that being the Arctic environment," Cavanaugh said.

"[This] is the kind of stuff we're trying to get after in order to ensure that we're more effective and actually upholding the Arctic strategy," he said.

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MILITARY

US joins EU to help get troops through Europe even faster

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The United States this week joined a European Union effort focused on clearing bureaucratic obstacles that stand in the way of moving military forces more quickly across the Continent's borders.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed an EU decision Thursday that gives three non-EU countries — the U.S., Canada and Norway — a seat at the table on military mobility policies in Europe. “Non-EU allies play an essential role in protecting and defending Europe,” Stoltenberg said ahead of talks with EU defense officials Thursday.

Mobility and the bureaucratic impediments facing it has been a focus among allies for several years. Problems with moving large numbers of troops and equipment emerged as the U.S. and other NATO members intensified the scale of maneuvers up and down NATO's eastern flank in the aftermath of Russia's 2014 intervention in Ukraine.

Some U.S. officials have called for a military “Schengen Zone” in Europe, which would allow U.S. and other national contingents to move freely toward missions in places such as the Baltics and Poland.

The EU's Schengen Agreement provides for free movement of civilians and goods across most of the Continent. But it does not apply to the armed forces, and different national rules on military convoys and inspections have caused movement delays in the past. NATO has been seeking a more streamlined approach that will enable forces to move faster and on shorter notice during a crisis.

In 2019, NATO launched a mission based in Ulm, Germany, focused exclusively on ensuring the speedy flow of military hardware around Europe. This week, NATO forces are testing their progress with a series of exercises dubbed Steadfast Defender.

The drill “demonstrates the importance of moving NATO troops quickly throughout Europe, and that is also the reason why military mobility is so important,” Stoltenberg said.

Military reports 8 new cases in Japan, S. Korea

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — U.S. military commands in Japan and South on Thursday reported eight new coronavirus infections going back to mid-April.

Meanwhile, Tokyo announced another 591 infections, continuing a trend of declining case numbers, according to public broadcaster NHK. The number of people stricken severely by COVID-19, however, rose to 72 on Wednesday, the first time that number has exceeded 70 since February.

Osaka prefecture, Japan's second-largest metropolitan area and coping with its worst phase of the pandemic, reported 747 new coronavirus cases and 28 deaths Thursday, according to NHK.

Speaking on American Forces Network Radio on Wednesday, the commander of Naval Air Facility Atsugi in Kanagawa prefecture southeast of Tokyo said inoculations are responsible for the low or non-existent number of new COVID-19 patients on his installation.

“We combat this thing by getting the vaccine,” Capt. Manning Montagnet said. “And we've got it. We've got it for any and all SOFA members, and it works.”

SOFA refers to the status of forces agreement that governs rights and responsibilities of U.S. military personnel, Defense Department civilian employees and their families in Japan.

Kadena Air Base on Okinawa had three people test positive for the coronavirus, according to a base Facebook post Thursday.

Five people affiliated with U.S. Forces Korea tested positive for COVID-19 after arriving on the peninsula between April 18 and Saturday, according to a USFK news release.

South Korea reported 574 new COVID-19 patients Wednesday, 211 in Seoul and 142 in Gyeonggi prefecture, where Humphreys and Osan are located, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency.

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ALEXANDER BURNETT/U.S. Army

An 82nd Airborne Division paratrooper gets tested for COVID-19 at Fort Bragg, N.C., on Monday.

82nd Airborne paratroopers fully vaccinated before Baltic jump

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Before hundreds of 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers stand up, hook up and shuffle to the door for an airborne jump over Estonia, they sat down, rolled up their sleeves and got the coronavirus vaccination.

Two battalion-sized task forces of the division's 3rd Brigade Combat Team are scheduled to parachute into the Baltic country Thursday night for Swift Response 2021, part of the U.S. Army-led Defender Europe-21 exercises running through June. They've all had two doses of the Pfizer vaccine and are being tested for the virus before departure.

“The last thing we need to do is to send someone overseas that is not vaccinated,” said Maj. Gen. Christopher Donahue, the division's commanding general.

This week's event is the first “really big” exercise for the division since the pandemic began, spokesman Lt. Col. Mike Burns said last week.

Many of the Defender-Europe exercises last year were canceled or cut short because of the virus.

A division headquarters will command and control three separate airborne operations, all scheduled in somewhat rapid succession. Overnight Sunday, U.S. soldiers of the Italy-based 173rd Airborne Brigade will jump into Bulgaria, followed by a jump

“The last thing we need to do is send someone overseas that is not vaccinated.”

Maj. Gen. Christopher Donahue
82nd Airborne Division commanding general

Monday into Romania, led by Poland's 6th Airborne Brigade.

Half of the 82nd Airborne contingent is staged in Lithuania and will meet up in the air with the other half, which is flying 11 hours from Fort Bragg on “direct delivery,” Burns said. If the weather doesn't cooperate, they'll divert and board helicopters to conduct an air assault instead.

The exercise represents a unique and “very complex maneuver of forces” for the division — America's quick response force — said Maj. Ben Barnard, who spent the past year planning the drill.

The pandemic has added to the complexity, but “I think we've mitigated it fairly well,” said Donahue, who said that momentum is building as vaccination continues to spread throughout the division. “This is a good example of how you can train as we work

through this pandemic.” The 3rd Brigade had faced criticism in February after an apparent soldier sent an anonymous letter to the media complaining about lax coronavirus countermeasures for soldiers who traveled by bus to Fort Polk, La., for a three-week exercise at the Joint Readiness Training Center. Though they tested negative and were offered the vaccine before departure, several soldiers tested positive on arrival at the training center.

Ahead of Swift Response, the brigade's participants and a company of British paratroopers accompanying them were training in “bubbles” as an added countermeasure, said Dr. Jonathan Peterson, a lieutenant colonel and the division surgeon.

“We're going to be on the same flights, military flights, we're going to be housed in the same areas,” he said.

Estonia and Romania have seen spikes in infection rates in recent months similar to upticks seen around Fort Bragg earlier this year, he said, but the spikes in those countries are trending downward.

“Our best defense is the Pfizer vaccine,” Peterson said. “We're doing the best we've got right now.”

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VIRUS OUTBREAK

US unemployment claims fall to under 500K

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans seeking unemployment aid fell last week to 498,000, the lowest point since the viral pandemic struck 14 months ago and a sign of the job market's growing strength as businesses reopen and consumers step up spending.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department showed that applications declined 92,000 from a revised 590,000 a week earlier. The number of weekly jobless claims — a rough measure of the pace of layoffs — has declined significantly from a peak of 900,000 in January as employers have

ramped up hiring.

At the same time, the pace of applications is still well above the roughly 230,000 level that prevailed before the viral outbreak tore through the economy in March of last year.

As vaccinations have been more widely administered, restrictions on businesses have gradually lifted and consumers have become more willing to travel, shop and dine out, stronger spending has boosted hiring, slowed layoffs and accelerated growth. The economy grew last quarter at a vigorous 6.4% annual rate, with expectations that the current quarter will be even better.

In March, employers added nearly 1 million jobs, the most since August. Roughly the same number is expected to be reported Friday when the government issues the jobs report for April. Even so, the economy will still be more than 7 million jobs short of its pre-pandemic level.

The government's report Thursday showed that about 16.2 million people were continuing to collect unemployment benefits in the week that ended April 17, down from 16.6 million in the previous week. That's a sign that some former recipients have found jobs.

As economic growth has accelerated, sales of vehicles and newly

built homes have soared, manufacturing output has risen and Americans on average have increased their savings and wealth. In part, this is because of \$1,400 stimulus checks that were distributed to most adults and in part because many affluent households have built up savings while working from home and have benefited from a surging stock market.

The economy, though, is restarting so quickly that it's creating supply bottlenecks and parts shortages. Many companies, especially restaurants, can't find enough applicants to fill available jobs. Others are raising pay to attract more applicants.

Shortages of raw materials and parts have swollen prices for lumber, copper and semiconductor chips, which are critical to the housing and auto industries, among other sectors. Those higher costs, along with wage pressures, have elevated fears that inflation could accelerate.

Analysts have forecast that when the monthly jobs report is released Friday, it will show that the economy added 975,000 jobs in April, according to data provider FactSet, and that the unemployment rate fell from 6% to 5.8%. That would show that more Americans are looking for work and more employers are hiring them.

Road map: Experts caution that the number of new infections remains high

FROM PAGE 1

had at least one dose by July 4.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said Wednesday that the modeling results give Americans a road map out of the pandemic — so long as they continue to get vaccinated and maintain mitigation strategies until a “critical mass of people” get the shots.

“The results remind us that we have the path out of this, and models, once projecting really grim news, now offer reasons to be quite hopeful for what the summer may bring,” she said.

The CDC report is not a prediction or forecast. It is a set of four scenarios based on modeling of the pandemic, using different assumptions about vaccination rates, vaccine efficacy and precautions against transmission.

Each scenario shows an epidemic curve in which the national increase in cases that began in early March hits a peak and plummets in late spring, leading to a significantly improved viral landscape this summer. In the less optimistic scenarios, hospitalization numbers will vary significantly from state to state.

Under the most optimistic scenario, deaths linked to COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, could drop into the low 100s per week in August and into the “tens” per week in September, according to Justin Lessler, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and one of the paper's senior authors. More than 4,000 people a week are dying of the disease, and about 578,000 people in the U.S. have died of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic.

That model includes an assumption that 90% of those eligible for vaccine would get a shot, which Lessler acknowledged “may be on the optimistic side given rates of vaccine refusal in some areas.”

Infectious-disease experts cau-



JAE HONG/AP

Guests walk down Main Street USA at Disneyland in Anaheim, Calif., last week. The iconic theme park that was closed under the state's strict virus rules swung open its gates last Friday and some visitors came in cheering and screaming with happiness.

tion that the number of new infections remains high. Variants of the virus could emerge with mutations that allow the pathogen to evade vaccines. Immunization hesitancy among large chunks of the population is another concern. High rates of vaccination seen in early April have come down in the past several weeks.

And the long-term picture remains cloudy because of all the unknowns about this virus, which continues to circulate freely around the planet and is driving catastrophic outbreaks in Brazil, Colombia, India and other countries. Some epidemiologists say that even if the coronavirus is sup-

pressed to low levels this summer in the U.S., it will rebound in the fall.

There are limitations to the modeling. Although the researchers factored in the highly transmissible coronavirus variant B.1.1.7 now dominant in the U.S., it did not contemplate what would happen if an even more problematic variant — for example, one that could evade vaccine-induced immunity — were to spread.

The models used data through March 27. The report did not capture the high rate of vaccinations in April, when more than 90 million doses went into arms, according to Washington Post vaccine

tracking data. Instead, the report considered 60 million to be a high vaccination rate in April. The high rate of vaccinations so far has made the most optimistic scenario more likely, Lessler noted.

Attempts to model the trajectory of the pandemic have had a rocky history going back to spring 2020. Some models predicted steep declines in infections that did not materialize. The virus has repeatedly surprised infectious-disease experts and has shown a pattern of resurgence when people let down their guards.

Officials said people and communities need to maintain some efforts, such as wearing masks, to limit viral transmission. But the new report suggests that vaccination is the key to improvement.

“Vaccines matter most. That's the one that's really going to drive the numbers down the most,” said Katriona Shea, a professor of biology at Penn State and one of the senior authors of the report.

“It's absolutely possible to get a full rebound,” she said. “But if we can get enough vaccine uptake and high enough compliance with [precautions], it is possible to bring it down.”

How low the numbers get depends on vaccinations and “non-pharmaceutical interventions,” which include wearing masks and social distancing. The report makes clear the American public will play the key role in determining the speed with which the threat of contagion is eased and whether the coronavirus will have the opportunity to surge anew.

Infection numbers have been dropping nationally since mid-April, and hospitalizations and deaths are also coming down, although more slowly. With more than half of U.S. adults having received at least one dose of vaccine, and with millions more having recovered from an infection, immunity to the coronavirus is increasingly widespread and impeding

spread of the virus.

Working against that: the relaxation of public precautions and the rapid increase in social interactions as people emerge from relative isolation and resume, to some degree, their pre-pandemic lives. This is happening even as the virus is causing close to 50,000 new infections a day.

The new models show “a potentially bumpy path between now and the early to midsummer,” Lessler said. But he added that all six of the modeling teams that contributed to the CDC report envision a summer in which case numbers are low and outbreaks under control.

William Hanage, an epidemiologist at Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said the report shows that increases in illness are possible in coming months and could produce “hospitalizations worth taking seriously,” even if deaths are limited by high vaccination rates among the elderly.

“In some ways this is just more of what we knew: more vaccines good, less vaccines bad,” he said. Adding other measures to stanch viral spread remains critical, he said.

The pandemic will not be over even if the numbers drop to low levels this summer. A significant number of people have said they will not receive the vaccine. The number of “susceptibles” will remain in the tens of millions. The coronavirus will still find ways to circulate.

Walensky said Tuesday during a “fireside chat” webinar that she expects the current infection numbers to continue their decline. She also warned against complacency, noting that there are many unknowns, including the mutated virus variants circulating across the globe.

“If we're not humble at this point, we have a problem,” she said.

VIRUS OUTBREAK

US backs waiving protections for vaccines

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration on Wednesday joined calls for more sharing of the technology behind COVID-19 vaccines to help speed the end of the pandemic, a shift that puts the U.S. alongside many in the developing world who want rich countries to do more to get doses to the needy.

U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai announced the government’s position, amid World Trade Organization talks about a possible temporary waiver of its protections that would allow more manufacturers to produce the life-saving vaccines.

“The Administration believes strongly in intellectual property protections, but in service of ending this pandemic, supports the waiver of those protections for COVID-19 vaccines,” Tai said in a statement.

She cautioned that it would take time to reach the required global “consensus” to waive the protections under WTO rules, and U.S. officials said it would not have an immediate effect on the global supply of COVID-19 shots.

In a tweet, the director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, John N. Nkengasong, said the Africa CDC

welcomed the waiver and called the decision “leadership in action.”

He added: “History will remember this decision as a great act of humanity!”

Tai’s announcement came hours after WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala spoke to a closed-door meeting of ambassadors from developing and developed countries that have been wrangling over the issue, but agree on the need for wider access to COVID-19 treatments.

The WTO’s General Council took up the issue of a temporary waiver for intellectual property

protections on COVID-19 vaccines and other tools, which South Africa and India first proposed in October. The idea has gained support among some progressive lawmakers in the West.

More than 100 countries have come out in support of the proposal, and a group of 110 members of Congress — all fellow Democrats of Biden — sent him a letter last month that called on him to support the waiver.

Opponents — especially from industry — say a waiver would be no panacea. They insist that production of coronavirus vaccines is complex and can’t be ramped up

by easing intellectual property. They also say lifting protections could hurt future innovation.

Stephen Ubl, president and CEO of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, said the U.S. decision “will sow confusion between public and private partners, further weaken already strained supply chains and foster the proliferation of counterfeit vaccines.”

Pfizer declined to comment on Biden’s announcement, as did Johnson & Johnson, which developed a one-dose vaccine. Moderna and AstraZeneca didn’t respond to requests for comment.

Biden hits schools goal even as many students still learning remotely

Associated Press

President Joe Biden has met his goal of having most elementary and middle schools open for full, in-person learning in his first 100 days, according to new survey data, but the share of students choosing to return has continued to lag far behind.

The survey, conducted in March by the Education Department and released Thursday, found that 54% of public schools below high school were offering full-time classroom learning to any student who wanted it. It marks steady progress since January, when the figure was 46%.

But even with that milestone achieved, most students continued to learn at least partly away from school. Almost 4 in 10 students continued to take all their classes remotely, the survey found, and another 2 in 10 were split between classroom and remote learning.

The disparity reflects a trend that has alarmed education officials at all levels: Even when schools reopen, many families have opted to keep students at home for remote learning. It has been most pronounced among Black, Hispanic and Asian American students, most of whom spent no time in a classroom in March, the survey found.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona applauded the nation’s progress but also drew attention to racial disparities, saying schools must do more to reach all students.

“While we’ve made important progress, I will not be satisfied until 100% of schools are safely open for full time in-person learning for all students,” Cardona said in a statement. “The department will continue to work with students, families, educators, states and districts, to ensure our education system serves all students, not just some.”

Among students of all races, there was a modest shift toward classroom learning in March, but gains were largest among whites. Just more than half of white students were learning entirely in-person, compared to about a third of Black and Hispanic students. Only 15% of Asian Americans were learning entirely in the classroom.

Progress has been equally uneven based on geography, the survey found. Half of all students in the South and Midwest were learning entirely in-person in March, compared to less than 20% in the West and Northeast. Still, the Northeast saw the largest gains, with Connecticut doubling its share of fourth grade students learning fully in-person, from 17% to 35%.



MAHESH KUMAR A./AP

An Indian health worker checks the body temperature of a woman in Hyderabad, India, on Thursday.

India hits another grim virus record as oxygen demand jumps

Associated Press

NEW DELHI — Infections in India hit another grim daily record on Thursday as demand for medical oxygen jumped sevenfold and the government denied reports that it was slow in distributing life-saving supplies from abroad.

The number of new confirmed cases breached 400,000 for the second time since the devastating surge began last month. The 412,262 new cases pushed India’s

official tally to more than 21 million. The Health Ministry also reported 3,980 deaths in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 230,168. Experts believe both figures are an undercount.

Eleven COVID-19 patients died when pressure in an oxygen line dropped suddenly in a government medical college hospital in Chengalpet in southern India on Wednesday night, possibly because of a faulty valve, The Times of India newspaper reported.

Hospital authorities said they repaired the pipeline last week, but the consumption of oxygen had doubled since then, the newspaper said.

Demand for hospital oxygen has increased sevenfold since last month, a government official said, as India scrambles to set up large oxygen plants and transport oxygen. India created a sea bridge on Tuesday to ferry oxygen tankers from Bahrain and Kuwait in the Persian Gulf, officials said.

Federal judge strikes down CDC’s national moratorium on evictions

Associated Press

BOSTON — A federal judge ruled Wednesday that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention exceeded its authority when it imposed a federal eviction moratorium.

The Justice Department said it

would appeal the ruling from the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., meaning there won’t likely be any immediate impact on the ban, which in March was extended through the end of June.

Opponents of the moratorium, including the National Association

of Realtors, welcomed the decision and said the solution was rental assistance, not a ban on evictions.

“This prevents two crises — one for tenants, and one for mom-and-pop housing providers who do not have a reprieve from their bills,”

the president of the realtors association, Charlie Oppler, said in a statement. “With rental assistance secured, the economy strengthening, and unemployment rates falling, there is no need to continue a blanket, nationwide eviction ban.”

The Alabama and Georgia asso-

ciations of realtors were among the plaintiffs in the case.

The eviction ban, put in place last year, provides protection for renters out of concern that having families lose their homes and share crowded conditions would further spread the virus.



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WEEKEND

■ Grisham writes about
a different kind of court
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MAN OF ACTION

Michael B. Jordan stars as a Navy SEAL
out to avenge his wife in ‘Without Remorse,’
but in real life he just wants to serve humanity

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AMAZON/AP

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Up for the challenge

Startups look to 3D printing to solve housing shortage

By **TERENCE CHEA**
Associated Press

A new generation of startups wants to disrupt the way houses are built by automating production with industrial 3D printers.

3D printing, also known as additive manufacturing, uses machines to deposit thin layers of plastic, metal, concrete and other materials atop one another, eventually producing three-dimensional objects from the bottom up. In recent years, 3D printers have mostly been used to create small quantities of specialized items such as car parts or prosthetic limbs, allowing consumers or businesses to produce just what they need using the machines at home or work.

Now a small number of startups around the world are applying 3D printing to home construction, arguing that it's faster, cheaper and more sustainable than traditional construction. They say these technologies could help address severe housing shortages that have led to soaring home prices, overcrowding, evictions and homelessness across the U.S.

But 3D home construction is still in the early stage of development. Most startups in this field are developing new technologies and not building homes yet. And two of the highest profile and best-financed companies — Mighty Buildings and ICON — have delivered fewer than 100 houses between them.

To move beyond a niche market, construction firms will need to significantly ramp up production and persuade home buyers, developers and regulators that 3D printed houses are safe, durable and pleasing to the eye. They'll also need to train workers to operate the machines and install the homes.

"To the extent that 3D printing can offer a faster, cheaper way to build even single family housing units or small units, it can address a portion of the problem," said Michelle Boyd, who directs the Housing Lab at the University of California, Berkeley's Turner Center for Housing Innovation. But the sheer magnitude of the housing shortage demands many types of solutions, from loosening zoning restrictions to building more high-rise apartment buildings, she said.

Proponents note that printing houses rather than nailing them together could save huge quantities of scrap wood, metal and other discarded construction materials that are dumped into landfills every year.

Backers say 3D printing reduces the need for human labor at a time when home builders are struggling to find enough skilled workers to meet housing demand. Many construction workers left the trades after the housing-fueled financial crisis more than a decade ago, and fewer young people are entering the field.

Jason Ballard, CEO and co-founder of a 3D printing construction startup called ICON, said its 3D printing system can do the work of 10 to 20 workers in five or six differ-



REGAN MORTON, ICON/AP

A 3D home created by ICON in Austin, Texas. A new generation of startups wants to disrupt the way houses are built by automating production with industrial 3D printers.



TERRY CHEA/AP

Mighty Buildings production manager Yonah Naftaly shows a machine that fills 3D-printed wall panels with insulating foam March 17 in Oakland, Calif.

ent trades. And unlike humans, the machines can work up to 24 hours a day, saving developers time and money.

"With 3D printing, we're able to print exactly what we need," said Sam Ruben, the company's co-founder and chief sustainability officer at Mighty Buildings. The process can eliminate nearly all construction waste, he said, which can add up to savings of two to three tons of carbon per housing unit.

In Mighty Buildings' factory warehouse in Oakland, Calif., a 3D printer deposits thin layers of a stone-like material that quickly hardens under ultraviolet light and resists fire and water. Wall panels are printed one layer at a time and then filled with an insulating foam. Robotic arms finish the surfaces into various designs.

The printer can produce the entire exterior shell of a studio home or individual wall panels that can be easily assembled with simple tools, the company said. Mighty Buildings is now producing 350-square-foot backyard studios, known in the industry as "accessory dwelling units," that can be used as extra bedrooms, playrooms, gyms or home offices.

So far the company has delivered six units and has another 30 under contract, starting at \$115,000 each, which doesn't include the cost of installation and site work. Two units can be combined to make a 700-square-foot dwelling. The company's home construction costs are about 40 percent lower than that of traditional homes in California, Ruben said.

Most of the modules are assembled in the factory, transported by truck to the owner's property, then put into place using a crane. The unit size is limited by the dimensions of



MIGHTY BUILDINGS/AP

Most of the modules built by Mighty Buildings are assembled in a factory, transported by truck to the owner's property, then put into place using a crane.

the truck bed and the clearance heights of tunnels and overpasses.

Backed by more than \$70 million in venture capital, Mighty Buildings is planning to build more factories with a goal of producing 1,000 housing units next year. It's also creating software that allows developers to custom design printed buildings. Ultimately, the company plans to produce townhouses and multistory apartment buildings, Ruben said.

Austin, Texas-based ICON has used 3D printing technology to produce low-cost housing. It's printed homes for the chronically homeless in Austin as well as poor families in Nacajuca, Mexico. Instead of producing homes in factories, it brings its Vulcan printer to work on-site, squeezing out long tubes of concrete layer by layer that dry quickly to form the walls of a house.

"The factory comes to you, imprints the house right where it intends to be. We chose that method to eliminate a lot of the shipping costs and then also to give ourselves a lot of design freedom," said Jason Ballard, ICON's CEO and co-founder.

Its current technology can reduce construction costs by up to 30 percent and build a house twice as fast as traditional methods because the 3D printer does nearly all the work, Ballard said.

"The benefits that automation and digitization had brought to so many other industries with regard to speed and affordability were completely missing from the construction industry," Ballard said. 3D printing, he said, "was like the most powerful automation of all the automations we could discover."

GADGETS

High-quality sound from bookshelf speakers

By **GREGG ELLMAN**
Tribune News Service

Audioengine's HD4 Powered Bluetooth aptX HD system is a great-looking pair of Bluetooth speakers that are easy to set up and sound even better.

One of my favorite parts about reviewing products is getting them up and running without having to read instructions or quick-start guides. If I succeed quickly, this scores points with me. In the case of the \$449 Audioengine HD4 Bluetooth bookshelf speakers, I had my Jimmy Buffet playlist blasting in less than five minutes.

I've delayed testing these speakers for way too long, but with "Margaritaville" playing at high volume levels, I can say that they were worth the wait. I am talking about zero distortion with the volume cranked up using the speakers' volume control.

The setup time included opening the box, taking the speakers out of nice cloth bags, locating the power cord and installing the speaker cable. While I was plugging in the 7-foot speaker wire to the main speaker, I noticed a connection for a Bluetooth antenna. Audioengine included one in the box. Once everything was connected, and the backside power switch flipped, Audioengine HD4 appeared in my iPhone 12 Pro Bluetooth preferences.

The product offers a variety of connection methods. Among them are cables for direct connection that include 3.5 mm stereo mini-jack, micro-USB and RCA L/R. The latest Bluetooth 5 is used for simple and robust wireless. There are even output options with RCA variable line-out and 3.5 mm mini-jack headphone out.

I used the speakers with connected devices, streaming music, movie night and even listening to a live baseball broadcast. All methods produced great sound, with perfect clarity at any volume. The three setups were in different environments and the Audioengine HD4 Powered Bluetooth speaker system was great.

Each speaker is 9-by-5.5-by-6.5 inches, and since these are bookshelf speakers, the looks count. These have a pleasing walnut finish, and are constructed with real wood veneer. Audioengine has built the speaker cabinets with thick high-resin MDF walls with extensive internal bracing.

Online: audioengineusa.com; \$449

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Service commitment

By SONAIYA KELLEY
Los Angeles Times

In promotion of his latest film, “Tom Clancy’s Without Remorse,” streaming now on Amazon Prime Video, Michael B. Jordan surprised volunteers and store associates at a Ladera Heights, Calif., Amazon Fresh one recent morning.

The grocery chain partnered with the nonprofit Village for Vets, an organization that provides meals, emergency grants and other kinds of support and services to homeless and at-risk veterans in and around Los Angeles. The nonprofit has provided nearly \$250,000 in emergency financial assistance and delivered nearly 6,000 meals a month to veterans in need. With Amazon’s support, Village for Vets was able to meet its monthly goal of delivering 1,000 boxes of food across the city.

“This has been a challenging year,” said Marcie Polier Swartz, the founder and CEO of Village for Vets. “We hope this partnership brings awareness to the growing needs of the veteran community and inspires others to give back.”

“We definitely have to pay [closer] attention and do a better job of [understanding] what the process is like for veterans when they come home,” said Jordan, whose father was a Marine, in advance of the event. “They train, get molded [by the military] and give all of themselves to be of service. And when they get back, we have to do a better job of making sure they’re welcomed back and getting the things they need to assimilate back into civilian society.”

The event was organized to help deliver care packages of food and household items from local Amazon Fresh grocery stores to more than 600 LA-based veterans across 24 housing projects, with deliveries made by the veteran-owned Amazon Delivery Service Partners.

For Jordan, whose father volunteered at a food bank for years, the desire to be of service was instilled in him from a young age. “I just want to connect with the community as much as possible,” he said. “Making movies is a blessing; it’s a gift. So to be able to give back when I can and really make that connection and shorten the gap [is meaningful].”

The unique opportunity to tie his film’s release to a worthy cause likely wouldn’t have happened at all if “Without Remorse” had continued on its original trajectory as a theatrical release from Paramount Pictures, initially scheduled to open last September. When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down theaters, Amazon stepped up to acquire the film. Jordan’s production company, Outlier Society, subsequently signed a first-look film deal with the digital powerhouse in February.

In “Without Remorse,” Jordan plays John Clark, a Navy SEAL out to avenge his wife’s murder. Though he didn’t read the book the film is based on, Jordan says he’s a huge fan of the late Clancy’s adapted works and has long been interested in making the jump from leading man to action star.

“I grew up playing [Tom Clancy’s] ‘Rainbow Six’ video game,” he said. “And I spent hours playing [Clancy’s] ‘Ghost Recon’ and always envisioned myself in an action movie like this. As a kid, those were the movies that I watched and loved. So when I had an opportunity to step into the Clancy universe and take on this character with a fresh, modern take, I jumped at it.”

To prepare for the role, he spent time talking to veterans about the mental health difficulties they’ve experienced. “It’s heavy and intense to hear what they’ve seen and lived through on a daily basis

His latest film,
‘Without Remorse,’
is all about payback,
but actor/producer
Michael B. Jordan
just wants
to give back

out there,” he said. “It haunts them, but there’s also a sense of pride and honor. There’s a code and a love they have for what they do that is unmatched. Being able to talk to some of them and hear a little bit of what they go through, I have nothing but respect for them. It’s truly incredible.”

He also dissected action sequences with his dad, spent weeks in Utah and Mexico undergoing tactical and weapons training and sought the counsel of Marine veteran Buck Doyle, who has served in Iraq and Afghanistan and “been in his share of tough situations.”

“All the things you see me do in the movie are things I had to actually work through and train for,” said Jordan. “I had the best guys from their fields really put the time in to help me get comfortable and prepared.”

Although a huge action spectacle like this was clearly designed for the big screen, Jordan says he’s just grateful the film is able to be seen after a year of uncertainty. “I feel extremely fortunate and blessed that we found a home at Amazon,” he said. “We finished shooting this movie right before everything that went down with the pandemic and for a minute we didn’t know whether the movie was going to come out. We had to make real-time decisions about this movie.”

“I think this last year a lot of things have evolved in our industry [regarding] what a traditional movie release looks like,” he added. “Now that vaccines are rolling out and people are getting back to whatever the ‘new norm’ is going to be, hopefully there’s going to be a balance between movie theaters and streaming. I’m really interested and curious to see where things go.”

A sequel to “Without Remorse,” tentatively titled “Rainbow Six,” is in development, but it’s unclear when production might start. Up next, the actor will step behind the camera to direct his first feature, 2022’s “Creed III.”

In preparation, he’s been reaching out to “everybody,” he says, drawing on the relationships he’s made since he became a professional actor at the age of 12 — the start of a career that has ranged from TV’s “The Wire” and “Friday Night Lights” to Ryan Coogler’s award-winning drama “Fruitvale Station” and blockbuster “Black Panther.”

As for the next steps on his career journey, Jordan says he hopes to continue to act while adding other skills to his résumé. “I have ideas and I loosely think about things I want to do in the future,” he said. “I definitely want to continue to be a leading man; hopefully that’s something that’s here to stay. And I want to add other things to the list during my time on this planet. I think being able to do other things that

I’m interested in is important for growth. And I’m looking forward to whatever God has in store for me.”

Michael B. Jordan, whose father was a Marine and a longtime food bank volunteer, looks for opportunities to connect with the community.

CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP



WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Even in death, life goes on

‘Things Heard & Seen’ is a campy and at-times obvious marital thriller with a philosophical twist

BY JOCELYN NOVECK
Associated Press

Hollywood thrillers in which sophisticated, attractive city folk move to creaky old country homes and experience scary things are a dime a dozen. Less common is when those Hollywood thrillers are based on the theology of 18th-century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg.

But here we are — a Swedenborgian thriller — and thus it’s not a bad idea to read up a bit on the man, by which we mean to Google him, before diving into “Things Heard & Seen,” a well-cast and often entertaining but campy and sometimes obvious thriller starring Amanda Seyfried and James Norton.

What you’ll learn is that Swedenborg believed (among other things) that death was just a continuation of life — and that people lived on, in the spiritual world, past the expiration of their physical body. For the film’s purposes, we’ll boil it down for you: Ghosts!

In fact the film, based on the novel “All Things Cease to Appear” by Elizabeth Brundage, begins with a Swedenborg quote: “Things that are in heaven are more real than things that are in the world.” So, even if you’ve skipped your theology homework (tsk tsk), this should alert you to a spectral influence in the story — maybe even a seance or two.

We begin in the winter of 1980, when a perturbed-looking George Claire (Norton) drives up a snowy road to his isolated

home. Immediately, it’s obvious something terrible has happened.

Flash back to the spring before, in a Manhattan apartment. George and wife Catherine (Seyfried) are celebrating the fourth birthday of their daughter, Franny. George — handsome and chiseled, with the kind of tousled hair that looks breezy but you know he works on it — has an announcement to make: Not only has he completed his Ph.D in art history, but he’s found a teaching job upstate. “Oh, at Bard?” asks a (snobby) friend. No, he replies, at a place called Saginaw.

Nobody is impressed, but Catherine, despite having no desire to leave her coveted job as an art restorer, feels the need to support her husband. For one thing, she tells a friend, they need the money — his wealthy parents have finally cut him off. The friend warns Catherine she’s giving up a lot to go live in a place filled with “rich horsey weekenders and full-time rednecks.”

But move they do, to beautiful Hudson Valley (writer-directors Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini draw out both the charm and the isolation of the place) and their chosen town, which is ominously called ... Chosen. (Certain things are unabashedly telegraphed in this film. Then again, sometimes they’re red herrings. Maybe?)

The house George has found, on an old dairy farm, is huge and creaky and needs work, but Catherine launches into the job. Soon, however, it becomes clear the family is not entirely alone. As happens in haunt-



ANNA KOORIS/AP
Amanda Seyfried stars as Catherine Claire in the campy thriller “Things Heard & Seen.”

ed house movies, there are strange noises and strange voices and dodgy electricity. There are also historical hints sprinkled through the home, suggesting past trauma.

Catherine is much more attuned to these than George, who’s spending most of his time trying to curry favor with colleagues in his art history department, including the chairman, Floyd DeBeers, who has a fascination not only with Swedenborg but his influence on prominent landscape painter George Inness (DeBeers is played by a deliciously formal F. Murray Abraham.)

Catherine also develops an affection for two brothers, Eddy and Cole, who live next door and offer to do odd jobs. As we

suspect early on, there’s more to these brothers and their connection to the home than meets the eye.

What’s most interesting, though, is not all the sometimes ridiculous plot twists and hints of dark motives and impending doom. It’s the relationship between Catherine and George, who may not know each other as well as they thought.

It all comes hurtling toward a strenuous conclusion, and you can bet those aforementioned ghosts get their moment, too. But that’s not necessarily a bad thing. If you want to know why, you may want to ask Emanuel Swedenborg.

“Things Heard & Seen” is unrated. Running time: 119 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

Michael B. Jordan is out for revenge in ‘Without Remorse’

BY LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

In the new Tom Clancy adaptation, “Without Remorse,” Michael B. Jordan is a Navy SEAL about to trade military life for private security when his pregnant wife (Lauren London) is executed in their Washington, D.C., home. It’s part of a calculated ambush: The assassins are picking off the men in his unit because of a mishap in Aleppo where the Americans attacked the Russian military instead of Syrians. They were following orders without knowing the full story, and soon the Russians are in the U.S. retaliating. Jordan’s John Kelly was the target, but he happened to be on the couch using noise-canceling headphones and not the bed when the assassins broke in.

It’s somewhat frustrating that movies like this tend to be so similar that it almost ensures zero emotional investment in the inciting incident whatsoever. The dead, pregnant wife is a launching-off point, and the screenplay (written by Taylor Sheridan and Will Staples) doesn’t do us (or them) any favors. Never has there been a more generic couple than the Kellys. One of the precious few scenes with them together has them reminiscing about what appears to be a prom photo that’s framed in their dining room. Soon enough, she’s dead, and John and the movie can really get started.

I suppose it’s just as well, since no one is coming to “Without Remorse” for a story about a couple. It just feels like a wasted opportunity to show Jordan in full expectant father mode instead of just fast-forwarding through loaded signifiers to get to a motive.



NADJA KLIER, AMAZON/AP
Jamie Bell plays CIA agent Robert Ritter, left, and Michael B. Jordan is John Kelly, an ex-Navy SEAL out for vengeance, in “Tom Clancy’s Without Remorse.”

The good news is that “Without Remorse” is pretty great when it comes to the action, and there is a lot of it. Director Stefano Sollima, who directed the “Sicario” sequel (which Sheridan also wrote), keeps the engines moving forward and the set pieces dynamic and distinct from the start. And although John Kelly might not be the most layered guy on the page, it’s impossible to take your eyes off him — the power of movie star charisma? He’s best when he’s playing opposite Jodie Turner-Smith, playing Lt. Cmdr. Karen Greer. She is steely and intimi-

dating without being cliché and makes you want a spinoff about how she got her position.

Clancy’s novel was published in 1993 and it’s a story that has been bouncing around Hollywood almost as long as it’s been on shelves with everyone from Keanu Reeves to Tom Hardy circling the project at various points in the past two decades. But besides the names used, the book and the film seem to have almost nothing else in common. Instead of setting it during the Vietnam War, Sollima and the writers have made it modern with escalating tensions between Russian and the U.S. Jamie Bell co-stars as Robert Ritter, a suspect CIA officer who was the reason for the Aleppo snafu. Guy Pearce adds some gravitas as the Secretary of Defense. With its glossy pedigree, it will be no surprise to anyone that this was originally intended as a Paramount theatrical release before the pandemic.

Although it has a few twists and turns that you might not see coming, “Without Remorse” is also in some ways exactly what you expect it’ll be. It doesn’t exactly have anything revelatory to say about global diplomacy or the American military and it takes itself very, very seriously, which makes it a little disarming to see Brett Gelman show up at a key moment. It’s also setting up at least one sequel. Jordan will likely be reprising John Kelly (by the end, he’s John Clark) in “Rainbow Six.” Maybe by then the filmmakers will allow themselves to have some fun with his character. Even so, he’s just the shot in the arm that the Clancy-verse needed.

“Without Remorse” is rated R for violence. Running time: 109 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Cross-country connections

Animated ‘Mitchells vs. Machines’ weighs pros, cons of technological advancement during a college dropoff family road trip

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

Easily the most heartfelt movie about family life that also includes a robot apocalypse and a pug often mistaken for a loaf of bread, “The Mitchells vs. the Machines” is an antic, irreverent animated delight that somehow doesn’t sacrifice depth even as it hurtles forward at breakneck comic speed.

Director Mike Rianda’s film, produced by Phil Lord and Chris Miller, shares much of the DNA of Lord and Miller’s other cartoon adventures (“The Lego Movie,” “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse”) in its ability to remake movie clichés with mad-cap irreverence, youthful zeal and a contemporariness that often eludes less freewheeling films.

“The Mitchells vs. the Machines,” now streaming on Netflix (after originally being set for theatrical release from Sony Pictures), manages to spin through a sincere father-daughter relationship, our technology addictions, Instagram jealousy and general feelings of inadequacy while breezing through an

end-of-the-world plot accidentally initiated by a reckless tech CEO. Oh, there are maniacal Furbys, too.

But for all its fast-paced zaniness, “The Mitchells vs. the Machines,” scripted by Rianda and his writing partner Jeff Rowe (also co-director), is basically a good old-fashioned family road trip movie, and the Mitchells slide in somewhere between the Griswolds and a more accident-prone Incredibles. They’re neither a hopeless clan nor a perfect one (usually the only two options in family movies), but a flawed, loving family.

Rick Mitchell (Danny McBride) is a devoted but distracted dad who, when faced with more complicated emotional issues, happily retreats to home improvement and woodworking. He and wife Linda (Maya Rudolph) have a daughter heading to college, Katie (Abbi Jacobson), a younger dinosaur-crazed boy named Aaron (Michael Rianda) and a dog named Monchi — a four-legged running gag. They all have their own interests but share a common smartphone addiction. So when Rick suggests a dinner with “10 seconds of



NETFLIX/AP

In “The Mitchells vs. The Machines,” the smartphone-addicted Mitchell family takes a road trip to drop daughter Katie off at college and along the way must save society from a phone-turned diabolical overlord.

unobstructed family eye contact,” it’s torture for everyone.

When Katie is about to leave for college, her relationship with her father has reached a low point. Katie, an insanely creative budding filmmaker, can’t ever get him to pay attention to her creations. In a last-ditch stab at bringing them closer, Rick cancels her flight and the family drives across the country instead. Part of what’s great about “The Mitchells vs. the Machines” is that, even though it’s a big-budget computer-generated animation, it pulses with a hand-drawn, DIY spirit. Along the way, Katie is filming and her work frequently bleeds into the movie itself, redecorating the frame and sometimes taking it over. “The Mitchells vs. the Machines” is

simultaneously an ode to the creative possibilities at our fingertips and a warning to the dangers of digital dependence.

The latter is especially true once a newly launched phone turns diabolical overlord and scoops up the world’s population with little more than promises of free Wi-Fi. The Mitchells, by luck and pluck, are the only ones to go undetected, a success owed less to their intelligence than their imperfections.

The engulfing dystopia makes for a dramatic and metaphorical backdrop for the Mitchells to work through their issues. What, after all, is more apocalyptic for a father than a daughter leaving home for college?

Rianda’s film drags some in the big finale as the Mitchells go

to battle in Silicon Valley. The mom, and Rudolph, are a little wasted. But the father-daughter relationship is primary here, and it’s really wonderfully done. I think what “The Mitchells vs. the Machines” does so well is show how things evolve between parents and children with time. It’s a bond that’s permanent in so many ways, but a relationship forever fluctuating with the pushes and pulls of growing up. The filmmakers are always cutting to old home movies and other memories of Rick and Katie in various stages through the years. In “The Mitchells vs. the Machines,” family life is a brilliant, ever-changing collage.

“The Mitchells vs. the Machines” is rated PG for action and some language. Running time: 114 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

‘Street Gang’ a love letter to the creation of Sesame Street

BY ADAM GRAHAM
The Detroit News

It’s a show for children that didn’t talk down to its audience, and taught them important lessons on race, tolerance and matters of life and death, while also teaching them their ABCs and how to count.

“Street Gang: How We Got to Sesame Street” is an enlightening look at the genesis of “Sesame Street” through the eyes of its creative team, who had a visionary idea to make a television show that would love people rather than market to them. The result speaks for itself, and is still an institution more than 50 years after it hit the airwaves.

Marilyn Agrelo directs this unabashed love letter to “Sesame Street” and its inhabitants, based on the 2008 book by Michael Davis. Through interviews both new and archival, “Sesame Street’s” founders explain how the show was started, the coming together of the talent involved and the magic that has made the show endure for generations.

For those who grew up watching the show and took it at face value, it may come

as a surprise how much was going on beneath the surface. Producers explain how the show was specifically targeted to reach inner-city youth, and how the set was modeled after a Harlem street corner. The racially integrated cast was a subliminal message in racial equality. And the real-life death of Will Lee, who played Mr. Hooper on the show, presented a challenge to producers: how best to address the loss to the audience? They wound up doing it through Big Bird, who processed the news like a child would, but the straightforwardness with which the show handled the issue was something of a breakthrough for children’s television programming.

“Street Gang” is a warm and often fascinating look at a group of bold visionaries who focused their talents on teaching — and entertaining — the youth. It would take a real Oscar the Grouch to deny its appeal, but then “Sesame Street” taught us that grouches are okay, too.

“Street Gang: How We Got to Sesame Street” is rated PG for some thematic elements, language and smoking. Running time: 107 minutes. Now playing in select theaters.



CHILDREN’S TELEVISION WORKS, COURTESY OF GETTY IMAGES/TNS

A publicity still of the Sesame Street Muppets taken to promote their record album, “Sesame Country,” is shown above July 1, 1981.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS



FOCUS FEATURES/AP photos

Amir El-Masry stars in “Limbo,” a film about refugees waiting on a remote Scottish island for residency.

Migrants in ‘Limbo’

Tale of Syrian refugees a hopeful drama about not letting one’s past be a burden

By MICHAEL O’SULLIVAN
The Washington Post

A sensitive Syrian musician seeking asylum after fleeing his country’s civil war winds up on a small, windswept Scottish island in the Hebrides in “Limbo,” writer-director Ben Sharrock’s sensitive, bitter-sweet and, despite a moment of tragedy, ultimately hopeful migrant drama. It’s tempting — and not entirely inaccurate — to call this oddly moving little film a comedy-drama, but if so, it’s a dark one at that.

Despite a gently funny opening in which a classroom of some 20-odd immigrants are schooled in matters of assimilation, including an anachronistic lesson on ballroom dancing (courtesy of the wry actors Kenneth Collard and Sidse Babett Knudsen), every other joke, if that’s even the right word, is tinged with sorrow. One minute, one of the refugees is cracking wise about the weak cellphone signal on the island: It was better, he quips, “in the middle of the Mediterranean.” And the next moment, an English lesson on the proper use of the imperfect tense includes such examples as “I used to have a beautiful house — before it was blown up by coalition forces.”

As the film’s protagonist Omar, Amir El-Masry has the perfect deadpan face to match the film’s tone. One running bit involves a theory, espoused by Omar’s Afghan friend and fellow asylum seeker Farhad (Vikash Bhai), that the eyes are the window to the soul. Farhad keeps covering his mouth and asking Omar to guess whether he’s smiling or not. Except

you never can really tell: Happy or not, Farhad’s eyes reflect the horrors he’s running away from, even when he’s grinning from ear to ear. In his case, it’s not war that drove him from his home, but a pain more private and deeply personal.

There are lots of reasons to become a refugee, “Limbo” suggests. One asylum seeker scoffs, matter-of-factly, at a group of what he dismisses as “economic migrants,” who are being rounded up by police, as if they were on a lower rung of the refugee pecking order.

Speaking of pecking, Farhad adopts a stolen chicken as a pet, which he names Freddie after Queen’s Freddie Mercury, his hero. It’s somewhat silly, and sounds an off note in what is otherwise a deft mix of pathos and absurdity, one that Sharrock balances with the skill of a virtuoso.

The plot of “Limbo” is straightforward: Omar, a gifted musician, carries his oud — a guitar-like stringed instrument adorned with designs that depict the garden of his house back in Syria — around with him in a case everywhere he goes, like it’s a coffin for his soul, as Farhad puts it. At the start of the film, a cast on Omar’s hand prevents him from playing. But even after the cast has been removed, and an open-mic night at the local community center beckons, Omar seems too broken, spiritually, to play. The film is interspersed with homesick phone calls from Omar to his mother about this and that: the recipe for a favorite family dish, and Omar’s brother, who has stayed behind to fight in the war.

This is not a typical tale of the immigrant experience. A Sikh store clerk (San-



(From left) Amir El-Masry, Ola Orebiyi, Kwabena Ansah and Vikash Bhai star in “Limbo.” The story is based on writer/director Ben Sharrock’s own experience of studying and living in Arab countries and visiting refugee camps.

jeev Kohli), who presides over the shelves of the town’s only grocery — where Omar goes looking for sumac, only to find little besides ketchup and mustard — has been in the country long enough to have a lovely Scottish burr, but there’s a long list of banned ethnic slurs taped to the wall, all of which, it is implied, he has heard before. No one finds love and happiness here (or not quite, anyway).

But there is a sense of a beginning in this story, a sense of possibility that acknowledges that one can continue to carry one’s past, without it becoming a coffin. If you tend it right, it can become the soil from which something beautiful, and entirely new, springs.

“Limbo” is rated R for strong language and some mature thematic elements. Running time: 104 minutes. Now playing in select theaters.

Grohl documentary ‘What Drives Us’ a breezy commentary about inspiration

By ADAM GRAHAM
The Detroit News

One of the first voices heard in “What Drives Us,” Dave Grohl’s documentary about bands getting their starts by hitting the road in vans, is Lars Ulrich’s. The Metallica drummer matter-of-factly explains to Grohl that he never toured in a van. So, maybe not the best person to opine on the subject?

But Lars is a massive rock star, just like Grohl. And “What Drives Us” is largely about the incredibly affable Grohl, who has become something of the keeper of the flame for rock ‘n’ roll and rock ‘n’ roll culture, shooting the breeze with other rock stars. Off-topic? Eh, does it really matter anyway?

That breeziness — or carelessness, depending on your perspective — sums up “What Drives Us.” Grohl wants to talk to his peers about touring in vans, kind of, but he also wants to talk about inspiration, playing to live crowds, making it big and looking back fondly on the days when bandmates cramped into a small van and went town to town playing for crowds of 30 people or less. The good ol’ days.

We see Grohl reacquire the actual van he first toured North America inside on the Foo Fighters’ maiden voyage. Then we see him talk to a bunch of big-time rock stars — Flea, Steven Tyler, Ben Harper, St. Vincent, AC/DC’s Brian Johnson, Ringo Starr, to name a few — about their early touring days, and then chats up a pair of young bands currently getting their start. Does Grohl drive from interview to interview in his newly rescued van? Nah, that’s a little high concept, and might have made too much sense.

Instead, “What Drives Us” is loose and informal, and in the end there’s not a whole lot to it. In “Sound City,” Grohl buckled down and told the story of the famous Los Angeles recording studio of the same name; in the HBO series “Sonic Highways,” he told the stories of eight American cities that inspired him musically. “What Drives Us” lacks the focus of either of those projects and comes off like a carefree nostalgia ploy, warm but amorphous. For Grohl, it’s just a joy ride.

“What Drives Us” is unrated. Running time: 88 minutes. Available on Amazon Prime’s Coda Collection channel.



In this screengrab from YouTube, Dave Grohl expounds on the joys of touring in vans in the film “What Drives Us.”

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



PHOTOS BY TRIPWIRE INTERACTIVE/TNS

Players have to protect the siege towers and move them into position so they can scale the walls in Chivalry II.

Return to the ultimate medieval battlefield

Chivalry II is a multiplayer first-person slasher with great swordplay, Monty Python humor

By GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

Chivalry has never been huge on my radar. It's a game that I faintly know about, but I never investigated. It showed up on Steam pages and a few mentions on Twitter, but not being a fan of medieval warfare, I scrolled past it intent on examining more familiar and higher-profile games.

To be frank, it was beyond my comfort zone, but when I had a chance to play the Chivalry II beta that featured 64-player combat, fireworks went off. The experience was surprisingly fun. The swordplay had depth and the scrums were chaotic, but felt true to world. It made me feel like an extra in "Braveheart." How did I miss this for so long?

"When we look back at Chivalry and why it succeeded, it hit the right balance with the right sword mechanics and the Monty Python humor," said Steve Piggott, president at Torn Banner Studios. "It's a game with swords where you can scream your head off."

The original game came out in 2012, and the developers wanted to get back to it when they had enough time to create a "true sequel." Piggott said they used the "Game of Thrones" scene of Jon Snow in the Battle of Bastards as a touchstone, and they wanted to address the shortcomings of the first project.

A compelling premise

For the uninitiated, think of Chivalry II as a Battlefield game, but instead of pistols and rifles, players fight with swords, spears and axes. The developers said it blends the first-person shooter and fighting game genre, and that's true.

Players can get by with mashing buttons for a few encounters, but experts stand out in a skirmish. They know how to block, parry and riposte. They can overhead



One of the highlights of Chivalry II is the interactive environments, like the Tournament Grounds. It also has crossplay, allowing players across all platforms to play together.

slash an opponent and lean into a swing so that they can strike before an opponent tries to counterattack.

The combat relies on reading an opponent and quickly reacting. Before an enemy can strike, players can kick him to interrupt an attack and thrust a sword forward to do damage.

Masters can hold their own against several opponents, but similar to a real-life scrum, they can't hold off an enemy indefinitely. Players can't guard forever because their stamina goes down, and when facing enemies in front, it leaves open the possibility of an attack from behind.

Chivalry II has a Bushido Blade vibe in that an opportunistic attack can kill instantly. It can also at the very least chop off a limb. Yes, in Chivalry II, players can fight with a missing arm and call it a flesh wound. If they're desperate, they can even throw their main weapon, but that would leave players nearly defenseless with just

their. That turns out to be a real player who is chosen based on performance.

In battle, Chivalry II lets players use almost anything as a weapon. Players can attack each other with brooms or barrels. They can even pick up weapons that end up on the ground during combat. In some places, players can even come across giant ballistas that spear foes for an instant kill.

A more detailed environment

One of the highlights of Chivalry II is the interactive environments. That showed up at Tournament Grounds. I ran across a jousting dummy that swings around and knocks players down if they aren't careful. In the Siege of Rudhelm, players can use a trap door that instantly kills friend or foe if they're standing on it.

With eight maps at launch, players will have plenty of content to explore and test out initially. So far, Torn Banner has developed Team Objective, Free-For-All and Team Deathmatch.

The third option is what we encountered in Waldenglade, the third map we saw. It's a mostly flat area with a few hills. The battles came in waves as players just ran at each other with no place to hide. The best position to have is on the hills, which have the advantage of the high ground.

Although the prospect of a first-person melee game sounds intimidating, it worked surprisingly well and was easy enough to pick after the tutorial. Of course, it will take longer to gain expertise, but in the meantime, getting practical experience in the fire of battle is a quick way to gain competency with the controls and concepts. Players can get a start on the learning process when Chivalry II releases June 8. The game also features crossplay so that players on different consoles can jump into a match together.

Platforms: PlayStation 5, PlayStation 4, Xbox Series S/X and Xbox One

Online: chivalry2.com

Maps have distinct rule sets

I played through three maps and two rule sets in the Chivalry II demo. The first was The Siege of Rudhelm, an objective-based map where one team defends a castle and heir while the opposing teams battle to assassinate the leader. On one side, it's the Mason Order trying to attack the keep while the Agatha Knights play defense. The battle starts with the Mason Order trying to bring siege towers to the wall so the red team can bypass the walls.

The objective-based mission takes players from defending outside the castle walls to battling over the gatehouse. The objective takes into account how many teammates occupy key points. If one team occupies the key point for a long time, they capture it and move ahead. In one of the maps, as a defender, we kept losing and falling back. We went from the gatehouse to the tents to finally several squares until the team had to protect the

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

The Laz know how to party in Turkey

Here's a reminder of the fun that awaits us in Europe at the other end of this crisis.

I'm in northeastern Turkey, the world's top hazelnut-producing region and home of the Laz people. It's located along the Black Sea coast, where it rains 320 days a year. Yet I'm enjoying an enthusiastic welcome; the locals ambush visitors with unforgettable warmth and a wide-eyed curiosity.

My tour group, which includes 22 American travelers and a Turkish co-guide, has been invited to spend an evening and a night with a Laz family — actually the families of three brothers, who all live in one large three-story house provided to them by their elderly parents. We are the first Americans that the 16 people who live there have ever seen in the flesh. They ask us to make ourselves comfortable. Adding our shoes to the pile by the door creates a thought-provoking commotion of high-tech American travel gear mixing it up with woven village footwear. Overlapping carpets are warm under our feet, making the place cozy.

We are treated to a feast. As American visitors, we're elevated to a kind of royal status. Only the older men eat with us as women serve and teens peek curiously from just outside the doors.



Rick Steves

Meanwhile, the little kids frolic freely, as if we were from just next door. The bread is fresh from the oven and hearty. The meat is dark and abundant — as if serving it is showing off wealth. And the salad puts me in that awkward space of not wanting to disappoint my hosts while not wanting to upset my stomach. As we praise the stuffed peppers, members of our group — in anticipation of tummy troubles later — discreetly pass Pep-to-Bismol tablets around under the table.

We enjoy some conversation as our meal digests. Having an interpreter helps with communication here, but it's not required. Somehow, communication happens. Many younger Turks speak English and many older Turks,



DOMINIC ARIZONA BONUCCELLI/Rick Steves' Europe

Don't be afraid to join a dance in Turkey: Just snap your fingers and shake your shoulders.

having worked in Germany, speak German. Especially in small towns, their curiosity and eagerness to connect makes the language barrier fun to hurdle. If Turkish sounds tough, remember, it's the same in reverse. Certain sounds, like our "th," are tricky.

After dinner, we pay our respects to the frail, bedridden grandma, looking like a veiled angel in white. She and her family know she will soon succumb to her cancer. But for now, she is overjoyed to see such a happy evening filling her family's home.

When we wonder about the

wisdom of having an extended family under one roof, one of the sons says, "If a day goes by when we don't see each other, we are very sad." The three brothers married three sisters from a single family so that they would share the same in-laws — and assure harmony in the family. They also assure us that entertaining our group of 22 is no problem. If we weren't here, they'd invite just as many of their neighbors in for dinner.

No Turkish gathering is complete without dancing. Anyone who can snap fingers and swing a Hula-Hoop can be comfortable

on the living-room dance floor of new Turkish friends. Two aunts, deaf and mute from meningitis, bring the house down, with their shoulders fluttering like butterflies. We dance and talk with four generations until after midnight.

By venturing beyond our cultural expectations and comfort zones, we can realize that our world is filled with joy, with love, with good people, and — in the case of this trip — warm Turkish Laz-pitality.

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. You can email Rick at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

Advance planning critical for successful travel in 2021

Anyone who tries to predict what European travel will look like in the summer of 2021 is destined to fail. As ever-changing regulations and speculation about vaccination passports keep us all guessing, one thing seems certain: at most museums, cultural sites and attractions, it will be anything but business as usual, and gone are the days when you could just show up at the gate and procure a ticket on the spot.

New changes likely to stick include the ability to track and trace visitors, as well as to cap their numbers. With this in mind, many entities have already upgraded their websites to sell personalized entry tickets for specific time slots. Such measures are bound to put timely planners at a distinct advantage during the peak travel months of July and August.

Whatever your European travel intentions are this summer, checking the provider's ticketing policies and planning ahead might prove judicious. Here are a handful of places representing a variety of interests that are already offering would-be travelers the chance to secure their place in line.

Buckingham Palace: For the first time ever, paying visitors will be able to enjoy the beauty of the palace gardens on independent, self-guided tours this spring and summer. The 39 acres of Queen Elizabeth II's official London residence feature rare and beautiful greenery, more than 1,000 trees and a lake with its own ecosystem. Visitors are welcome to pack a hamper and enjoy a picnic on the lawn within sight of the palace; food and drink also will be available for purchase at stands set up in the park. Guided tours of the palace and its sumptuous state rooms are offered between May and September, and a combination ticket allows visitors to experience both. A dated ticket for entry to the grounds goes for 16.50 pounds (about \$23). Online: rct.uk/visit/buckingham-palace



Karen Bradbury



iStock

The beautiful Bramante's Staircase is one of the famous sites within Vatican City's museums.

Disneyland Paris: The park remains closed, and a reopening date has yet to be announced. Ticket sales at the park entrance are currently suspended. Two types of entry tickets are currently on sale on the Disneyland Paris website: dated and undated. Prices for one-day, dated tickets to one of the Disney Parks (Disneyland Park or Walt Disney Studios Park) start at \$64.26 and allow for entry on most weekdays in May-June and September-December. Tickets for weekends and dates in July and August are available at higher prices. Visitors can cancel without fees up to three days before their scheduled arrival date. Dated tickets valid for a time when the park remains closed are automatically canceled one week beforehand and subject to a full refund. One-day, undated tickets are \$116.81 and remain valid for one year. Visitation dates must be booked online in advance. Undated tickets can be used as soon as one day after purchase and are non-refundable. Online: tinyurl.com/2awdmhjc

Europa-Park: Germany's most popular amusement park remains shuttered; when it reopens, it will limit daily visitor numbers and allow entry only by means of date-specific tickets, available exclusively online. Should the regulations in place at the time mean the park is forced to remain closed (or has to shut down once again) on the date of your visit, the website allows you to reschedule. An app by the name of VirtualLine allows guests to book their place in line for the park's most popular rides. Online: europapark.de/en/theme-park/tickets-offers

Vatican Museums: As of this writing, the Vatican Museums and Gardens were expected to reopen to the public May 3. Entry to the Vatican Museums and Sistine Chapel is possible only with the purchase of a date-specific ticket, and visitor names must be provided at the time of booking. Even though the name does not appear on the reservation voucher, visitor ID will be checked by personnel upon entry. No refunds on tickets will be provided, although changing dates or modifying visitor names is allowed. Online: www.museivaticani.va

Wilhelma: Stuttgart, Germany's famous zoo and botanical garden reopened on April 28. Tickets for fixed admission time slots must be booked online in advance. All visitors over age 6 must present a negative Corona test result taken within the previous 24 hours. Results from the rapid tests are acceptable, but only those administered by official sources, i.e., no self-testing onsite is possible. Those vaccinated can alternately present a certificate. An official photo document such as a passport or driver's license must be presented to verify ID; for children under 16, a birth certificate or insurance card will suffice. Adults must wear medical-grade masks on site at all times, whereas everyday masks are sufficient for children ages 6 to 14. Visitor numbers are capped at 4,000. As parts of the park remain closed, winter admission rates apply: 15 euros adults, 5.50 euros for children and free for those under 6. Online: tinyurl.com/36fmu652

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



Verna Park in Ruesselsheim, Germany, on the banks of the Main River, is a nice place to spend a sunny afternoon. Established in the mid-1800s by Baroness Wilhelmine von Verna, it was sold to the city in 1911 and has since been a public park.

A tranquil bit of green space

Verna Park is a surprising find in industrial Ruesselsheim

BY MICHAEL ABRAMS
Stars and Stripes

For a city known more for its bustling industry than its tranquility, it was surprising to find that Ruesselsheim has a lot of green to enjoy.

Despite living nearby for a long time, I didn't really know much about this central German town except that it's home to the sprawling Opel car factory.

But while looking for a relatively corona-safe place to go on a sunny spring afternoon, I wondered if there was anything else to see there.

Ruesselsheim is on the Main River, so I thought a stroll along its banks might be nice. Checking a map, I discovered a green square abutting the river's floodplains called Verna Park.

It's named after its mid-19th century founder, Baroness Wilhelmine von Verna. Also known as the Stadtpark or city park, it's really not that big at about 14 acres, but it is pleasant.

The English garden-style landscaping is surrounded by an old stone wall and includes a pond, a music pavilion, a circular colonnade topping a small hill and even faux castle ruins.

We decided to just meander



People enjoy a sunny spring day at Verna Park in Ruesselsheim, Germany. In the background is Eremitage, also called the Alten Muehle, or Old Mill. Not really a mill, Baroness Wilhelmine von Verna, who founded the park, used the building as a retreat.

the crisscrossing paths and enjoy the sunshine, fresh air and the sounds of birds singing.

Soon, instead of birdsong, the sounds of squealing children filled the air. We rounded a corner and came across a playground between the park's monopteros and the music pavilion. Though small and without swings, it's still a nice place to let the wee ones work off some energy.

Supposedly the baroness had

the colonnade, called a monopteros, built in honor of her dead husband. Concerts at the pavilion are on hold due to the coronavirus.

The Eremitage — also called the Alten Muehle, or Old Mill — is a small, half-timbered, two-story building. Not really a mill, the baroness used the top floor as a retreat with a view across the park. The bottom floor housed the turbine and pumps that once powered the garden's fountains.

Across from the Eremitage is a cool precision sundial. Looking a bit like a bent quarter moon, you read the time at the left edge of the shadow thrown by the bend. Either it, or my cellphone clock, was two minutes off.

We stopped at the pond, its fountain not working, unfortunately, to watch turtles sun themselves on the rocks.

The tall, shell limestone-clad obelisk is one of the oldest things in the park, dating back to the mid-1800s.

There are around 500 trees growing here, and some of the more exotic are identified by little plaques. Among them are trees from the U.S. and an evergreen from Morocco's Atlas Mountains.

The fake castle ruins, with its two towers connected by a bridge, are tucked into a corner of the park. Unfortunately, entrance isn't permitted.

A passage in the wall and under the levee leads out to the Main and its floodplain. You can walk atop the levee for a view of the river.

We strolled down to the river's edge and watched the boats go by. Not far from here, it flows into the Rhine.

Nearby are the Opelvillen, two

On the QT

Directions: Enter Ludwig-Doerfler-Allee 4, 65428 Ruesselsheim am Main in your map app. It is about 12 miles from Wiesbaden and 60 miles from Kaiserslautern.

Times: Open daily during daylight hours

Cost: Entrance is free. Parking on the street is 50 cents for each 30 minutes up to 3 hours. The APOCA Parkhaus an der Festung at Taunusstrasse 5, costs 70 cents per hour or 5 euros for the day.

Michael Abrams



A child checks out the shell limestone-clad obelisk at Verna Park. It is one of the oldest things in the park that was established in the mid-1800s.



A modern precision sundial at Verna Park in Ruesselsheim, Germany. You read the time at the left edge of the shadow.



The towers of the faux castle ruins at Verna Park.

manor homes that are now an art and cultural center, and the Festung, a 600-year-old fortress that houses the City and Industry Museum.

They are worth visiting, but we'll save those for another day.

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WEEKEND: FOOD & TRAVEL

Raising the bar

Termeh Persian Restaurant elevates delivery offerings in Kaiserslautern

By Erik Slavin
Stars and Stripes

Turned to Termeh Persian Restaurant mostly out of delivery food-induced desperation.

The expanding number of restaurants delivering in Kaiserslautern as a result of the pandemic hasn't done much for variety. With some exceptions, this is still mostly a pizza, pasta and burger town if you want dinner to arrive at your door. The Greek food I ordered one week-end to break up the monotony could have just as easily been substituted for a salt lick and a side of raw onions.

This set the bar pretty low for Termeh. To make sure my positive first impressions weren't just a reaction to the absence of heartburn, I've ordered from them four more times.

Termeh turns out to be one of the best options in the area.

Persian food shouldn't be too much of a culinary stretch for the uninitiated American. Ask someone of Iranian ancestry what's popular, and they'll probably answer something like "rice and meat." It's a deceptively simple answer because of the complexity behind so many of the dishes.

Rice is as central to the food and culture as it is to Japan, though the grains are very different from the sticky East Asian varieties. Persian steamed rice, or chelo, is long-grained and goes through something akin to ritual washing when prepared right. It's often topped with yellow saffron, which Termeh does extravagantly.

The meat comes mainly as



Termeh Persian Restaurant

Location: Kaiserstrasse 10, Kaiserslautern, 67657, about a mile from the Pulaski Barracks gate.
Hours: Tuesday — Saturday, 12 p.m. to 10 p.m.; Sunday, 12 p.m. to 9 p.m.; pandemic hours may vary.
Dress: Casual
English menu: Yes
Prices: Appetizers and sides, 4-6 euros; main courses, 11 to 18 euros.
Information: termehfood.com; email info@termehfood.com; Phone: 0631-9841-0119; also available at lieferando.de.

Erik Slavin

kebabs and braised stews at Termeh. The mixed kebab plate's chicken breast has a citrusy tang to it, while the minced lamb that comes with it tends toward garlic, onion and blended spices. The grilled pepper on the side starts relatively mild at the bottom, then works its way up north of habanero heat when you start reaching the seeds. I recommend ordering a side of mast khiar, plain yogurt mixed with cucumbers, to cool things down and to use for dipping.

As for the stews, the fried chicken in pomegranate sauce with crushed walnuts is a fun change of pace, but it was too much sweetness for me as a main course. It's a good few spoonfuls if you're eating family style,



PHOTOS BY ERIK SLAVIN/Stars and Stripes

The chicken and minced lamb kebab plate from Termeh Persian Restaurant in Kaiserslautern, Germany. Diner alert: the pepper on the side brings a lot of heat when you reach the seeds.



The smoky eggplant with saffron basmati rice from Termeh Persian Restaurant in Kaiserslautern, Germany. The Persian restaurant has become one of the better delivery options in the city.

which Persian food seems made for. Termeh's appetizers, including its sambosa, beg for sharing. The fried pockets of potato and herbs will seem familiar to lovers of Indian samosas, while remaining just different enough for variety's sake.

The best appetizer, which also comes as a meal, is the grilled and smoked eggplant. It's blended with eggs and braised tomatoes, accompanied with flatbread and a spicy red sauce that I keep on hand for several days as a hot sauce substitute. I drizzled a little on some of our next-day leftover kebabs, which imparted their flavors on the rice as well. It beat next-day pizza handily.

Termeh had dinner for four ready in about 30 minutes for takeout and also delivered across town in less than an hour. While the food held up pretty well in transport, I'm eager to try it out in person at the restaurant, located on Einsiedlerhof's main drag where an Italian restaurant once operated. Delivery is great, but good Persian food deserves a big restaurant table, a group of friends and lots of time to enjoy.

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DOMENICO STINELLIS/AP

Visitors tour the ancient Colosseum April 26 in Rome. Italy's culture minister Dario Franceschini announced a plan to build and install a retractable, high-tech, lightweight stage inside the Colosseum that will allow visitors a central viewpoint from within the ancient structure.

New central stage will restore grand view of Roman Colosseum

Associated Press

A project to build a high-tech, lightweight stage inside the Roman Colosseum will allow visitors a central viewpoint from within the ancient structure "to see the majesty of the monument," Italy's culture minister said Sunday.

Dario Franceschini announced an 18.5 million euro (\$22 million) contract to build and install the retractable structure that will restore the traditional "arena," or stage for combat for gladiatorial shows in ancient Rome.

The stage was original to the first-century amphitheater and existed until the 1800s when it was removed for archaeological digs on the subterranean levels of the ancient structure, Franceschini said.

The project should be completed by 2023. The mobile system will be able to quickly cover or un-

cover the underground structures below, to both protect them from rain or allow them to be aired out. The project is reversible, meaning it can be removed if plans for the Colosseum change in the future.

The new stage will allow visitors to stand in the center and view the Colosseum's vaulted walls as they would have been seen by gladiators in ancient Rome. It also will permit the staging of cultural events that are respectful of the Colosseum as a symbol of Italy, Franceschini said.

The Colosseum reopened to the public April 26 after a 41-day closure because of rolling pandemic restrictions. Officials have set up a one-way itinerary as part of safety measures, and visitors are limited to 1,260 a day, compared with as many as 25,000 a day in 2019, pre-pandemic.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Bridging the culture gap

American couple wants to introduce bagels to Rome

BY ERICA FIRPO

Special to The Washington Post

Bagels are certainly not the first thing you think of when you visit Rome.

They're also not the second or third, or even the last. No, bagels are for a long weekend in New York City, paired with lox and cream cheese. Maybe with a coffee in a paper cup.

Here in Rome, we're sipping cappuccino and nibbling cornetti. But one couple is hoping to change this, and it is one of the best feel-good stories to come out of Italy's lockdowns.

Introducing Linda Martinez and Steve Brenner, an American husband-wife team who have lived in Rome for more than 20 years and run the Beehive, an eco-friendly hostel near the city's central Termini train station. Over the years, Beehive guests loved hanging out in the kitchen where Steve created vegan dishes. Bagels would make the occasional appearance.

Like many in the hospitality industry, the Beehive was decimated by the coronavirus pandemic. After hosting just a trickle of guests last summer, Martinez and Brenner needed to do something to supplement their income and lift their spirits. Enter Beehive Bagels.

"Basically, we were here, lying in one of the bedrooms, just all day doing absolutely nothing, depressed. And we were doing a lot more cooking at home," Brenner said.

For Brenner, that meant making everything from homemade pasta and tortillas to pancakes and bagels, sharing their cooking adventures on Instagram. For fun, Martinez suggested offering up Brenner's bagels to order. "Yeah, sure, you know, go for it," he casually responded.

Go for it, they did. In October, Martinez shared a photo of the bagels on their Instagram, and the requests came in hot. The Beehive's tiny kitchen was overflowing with bagels and bread. The couple realized they would either have to turn away orders or scale up.

Brenner met up with friend and pizza-maker Emanuele Piga, whose takeout pizza shop, Mr. Crunch, was suffering the same ennui of slower business during lockdown. It took just one bite of a toasted, buttered plain bagel for a partnership to begin. Piga joined the team, offering his dough-making expertise along with his kitchen and ovens.

Beehive Bagels offers a typical deli menu: plain, sesame, poppy, everything, onion, cinnamon raisin and pumpernickel bagels, as well as artisanal deli-style pickles (big and briny, which are not typical in Italy) and sourdough bread. All the bagels are vegan, and ingredients are locally sourced and organic.

Brenner, who grew up in Orange, Conn., has always been obsessive in his research, which he carries into the kitchen. Along with perusing hundreds of recipes and taking copious notes, he relies on taste memory as he works through several incarnations before committing to what he feels is good enough for his customers. Case in point: his onion and pumpernickel bagels.

"I hadn't had a pumpernickel bagel for 30 years, you know? And I was like, 'OK, what's in pumpernickel? What was it like when I was a kid,'" which led him on a hunt to find the perfect caraway and rye ratio.

Trial and error was key for the onion bagel as well, a tricky creation that often results in a dry onion-flaked plain impostor. Steve reviewed and tested scores of recipes, but none tasted right.

"I felt like [onion] was inside ... but nowhere online



PHOTOS BY FEDERICA VALABREGA/The Washington Post

Four of Beehive's bagel varieties, clockwise from upper left: poppy, sesame seed, onion and pumpernickel. The freshly made bagels also come in everything, cinnamon raisin and plain flavors.



Steve Brenner and Linda Martinez bag bagels recently in the kitchen of Mr. Crunch, the Rome pizza shop where they bake the bagels fresh every day.

could I find anybody who did it that way," he said. Finally, Brenner mixed up a dough with onions from Tropea, Italy, baked it, and the scent immediately pulled him back to his childhood deli.

Making bagels is a family affair. Steve and Emanuele get up at 5 a.m. to make bagels. Brenner and Martinez's three daughters — 15, 18 and 20 — are often the taste testers, critiquing every detail. Martinez handles all the public relations, orders and local deliveries, and the middle daughter, Paloma, has designed a pamphlet that shows customers how to store, freeze and defrost the goods.

From starting at baking just a few dozen a day to making at least 300 five days a week, Beehive Bagels now delivers all over Italy and has even starting filling orders as far as Switzerland.

Their clients are not exclusively expats, although the majority tend to be. But bagels are not native to Italians for breakfast — they typically eat a pastry and a cappuccino.



Martinez and Brenner stand in front of their hostel, the Beehive. The couple hopes to bridge a culture gap and make bagels a part of Italian breakfast.

The couple wants to bring bagels into the breakfast fold in Italy, and they are playing around with the idea of launching an experience where people can gift bagels to Italian friends who may have never tried one.

Martinez's dream: A "bagel pen-pal system."

"We'll match them, a bagel pal, like a little cultural bridge ... a bagel bridge," she says. "Italy has contributed so much to U.S. food culture; we would love to give back."

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



Tree Cross Adventure near Naval Air Facility Atsugi boasts a nearly 50-foot platform, the highest in Japan and equivalent to a five-story building.

Tree Cross Adventure is a family-friendly zip lining adventure with obstacle courses that let you swing through the trees and take in breathtaking views near Atsugi, Japan. There is also a separate children's area.

Unleash your inner Tarzan

Thrill-seekers can fly through the treetops near Naval Air Facility Atsugi

By DANIEL BETANCOURT
Stars and Stripes

My journey began with a 1½-hour-long drive from Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, through beautiful, scenic roads to a wild, treetop zip lining adventure I will not soon forget.

Tree Cross Adventure welcomed me with amazing hospitality. The course has six stops in your journey to the final goal. Making you go through obstacles before you zip line to the next course adds a whole new layer of fun.

Course No. 3 boasts a nearly 50-foot platform, the highest in Japan and equivalent to a five-story building.

Course No. 5 features “Big Tarzan,” a steep drop and a swing across the course into a safety net. Flying through the air this way is such a thrill, and performing Tarzan’s signature shout is encouraged.

The final course is a 173-meter-long zip line taking you more than 25 mph over a valley about 100 feet deep. The view is simply breathtaking.

Safety is of great concern to the staff. The preparation and safety briefs are done in groups. Every harness is checked stitch by stitch, and the first course is intended as a warm-up that will ease you into the rest of the adventure.

Two parking lots provide space for 55 vehicles free of charge. The restroom area is outside the entrance, so make sure to stop before heading toward reception and

On the QT

Directions: About a 30-minute drive from Naval Air Facility Atsugi. Address: 2758 Nanasawa, Atsugi-shi, Kanagawa 243-0121.

Times: Open 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on weekends.

Costs: 3,600 yen for adults and 2,600 yen for ages 9-17. The Kids Adventure is 700 yen for children under 8 and a parent or guardian.

Tips: Dress casual, with long sleeves, gloves and sneakers.

Information: Online: treecross-advtr.storeinfo.jp; English reservation number is 080-4635-8446

Daniel Betancourt

beginning the journey.

An adventure course for children 4 to 9 years old is also available for 700 yen if an adult supervises. It has four locations with 35 obstacles and trampolines included.

Admission for adults is 3,600 yen, or about \$33. Admission for children in primary grades and ages 3 to 17 years old is 2,600 yen. A season pass is also available for 10,000 yen for a year of unlimited visits.

It is best to show up in comfortable sneakers and clothing you won’t mind getting dirty, but rentals are provided if you arrive unprepared. Jackets, pants and sneakers are 400 yen apiece or a whole set for 1,000 yen.

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Zip lines allow thrill-seekers to fly high above the ground at Tree Cross Adventure near Atsugi, Japan.



Wear comfortable sneakers and clothing you won’t mind getting dirty when visiting Tree Cross Adventure.



Memories with STARS AND STRIPES Pacific

Share your Memories with Stars and Stripes Pacific!

Your photos/stories will appear on the Stars and Stripes Pacific 75th Anniversary Website, 75.stripes.com.



WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Tasty eye candy

Tokyo Maca Presso delights with colorful sweet and savory macarons

BY ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

A baked goods and coffee shop in Kawagoe, Japan, offers colorful Korean-style macarons in both sweet and savory varieties.

Tokyo Maca Presso, a port-manteau of “macaron” and “espresso,” serves large, stuffed macarons and colorful, blended smoothies and coffee drinks that are as much eye candy as they are confections.

Maca Presso has a store in Shinjuku and just opened its Kawagoe location this year. The Kawagoe shop is on the pedestrian street known as Crea Mall.

The main appeal of Maca Presso is its Korean macrons called tunkaron. They are larger than the traditional French version and contain a much thicker layer of buttercream and include additional fillings such as fruits and jam.

Maca Presso also offers savory macaron flavor options such as cheddar cheese and corn chowder.

I went to the Kawagoe location in April and tried a few classic and original flavors.

The cheddar cheese macaron tasted like a highly elevated version of Cheez Whiz on saltine crackers. It wasn’t bad, and I was glad I satisfied my curiosity and tried it, but it was my least favorite of the bunch.

I also sampled the milk flavor because of its eye-catching rosy pink color. Its flavor was reminiscent of the milk at the bottom



**AFTER
HOURS
JAPAN**

of sugary fruit cereals. I had never seen a dessert that flavor before. The berry and tangerine flavors were also delicious and had a small bit of jam filling in them.

I asked the shop owner to include his favorite flavors in my batch of treats, and he recommended the Biscoff gingerbread cookie and the sweet potato. The latter was my favorite flavor of all the macarons I tried.

Other flavors at Maca Presso include Oreo, matcha and grape.

The shop also serves “macaccinos,” blended coffee drinks topped with whipped cream, marshmallows, candies and miniature macarons.

Maca Presso has trendy café vibes and is a good snacking destination to visit as a family or group of friends so each person can get a couple of flavors, since the shop has so many and rotates their menu.

If you want to sample a variety of flavors but know you polish them off in one sitting, fret not. Maca Presso includes takeout boxes upon request. I recommend making sure the packaging is airtight and refrigerating them soon, before the outer, cookie-like shell goes stale or gets too crispy.

earl.eric@stripes.com
Twitter: @ThisEarlGirl



Tokyo Maca Presso

Location: 6-19 Wakitamachi, Kawagoe-shi, Japan. Google Plus Code: WF5M+W3 Kawagoe, Saitama

Hours: Open daily, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Prices: Macarons are 380 yen, or \$3.50, each, and macaccinos are 840 yen, or \$8, each. Coffee and specialty blended drinks cost \$5-\$8.

Dress: Casual

Directions: A 5-minute walk from Kawagoe Station on the main shopping pedestrian strip, across from Style Monster.

Information: 049-238-4000

Erica Earl



Tokyo Maca Presso serves large stuffed macarons and colorful blended smoothies and coffee drinks that are as beautiful as they are tasty.

Left: A “Macaccino,” a blended coffee drink topped with whipped cream and miniature macarons.

PHOTOS BY ERICA EARL/Stars and Stripes



Macaron flavors from Tokyo Maca Presso include oreo, tangerine and berry. There are also savory options such as cheddar cheese.

STARS AND STRIPES

Month of the Military Child

Let's celebrate by reading their stories!

Check out all the stories at militarychild.stripes.com

Read My Story

WEEKEND: FOOD



Japan News-Yomiuri

R.J. Cafe's Ecopresso edible cups are shown above and come in two flavors, cookie dough and gluten-free. The Osaka cafe is among a number of other companies and manufacturers in Japan that have jumped on the eco-friendly trend.

Use your cup and plate and eat them too

Japanese companies, manufacturers are producing edible tableware to support the environment by reducing waste

By NAOTO HASHIMOTO
Japan News

While disposable tableware is everywhere around us — chopsticks, spoons, straws, cups, plates and so on — edible tableware pieces have been growing in number of late.

Wouldn't it be nice if such items became the norm? Amid this eco-friendly trend, several manufacturers of these products explained why they decided to produce them.

R.J. Cafe in Osaka serves edible cups in two types: one made of cookie dough and the other gluten-free.

In 2012, Machiko Hayashi and her husband started the espresso-specialist cafe, which is operated by 10sense Co. — a company where Hayashi is the president.

At first, the cafe struggled financially because many customers were not familiar with the rich aroma and taste of the espresso served at the cafe. They would make complaints such as, "It's bitter" or "The serving size is too small."

One day, the cafe took part in an environment-themed event, at which reusable tableware was used. But Hayashi became concerned because the organizers were using a lot of water and detergent to clean the tableware.

Then she hit on the idea of pouring espresso into a cookie cup — the reverse of the popular way of eating sweets with espresso, which is dipping it into the beverage. She used pudding molds to create

cups made of cookie dough, coating the inside with sugar to make it more durable. The cups were named Ecopresso and went on sale in 2016. They became popular after customers began posting photos of them on social media.

The edible cups were initially all hand-made, but the company won a government subsidy and developed a machine to make them. The cups are sold to cafes in many places as well as to individual customers. They have even been used at events organized by global brands such as Mercedes-Benz and Armani.

Currently, Hayashi is planning to develop a user-friendly machine to bake the cookie cups so even children can make them at home.

"I want to spread the cups more widely so that it will become a matter of course to think about SDGs [sustainable development goals] and being eco-friendly," she said.

Kimura Alumi Foil Co. in Osaka manufactures small cups for separating food in bento boxes. Some of the company's best-selling products in recent years have been edible cups made of nori (dried seaweed), oboro-kombu (thinly shaven dried kelp) and soybeans. They represent the unique products offered by the company, whose motto reads, "We've got to do something different from others."

The company was established in 1930 by the grandfather of the current president, Yuichi Kimura, who assumed the post in 1987.

The company used to make cups out of aluminum foil. But as microwaves and convenience stores became more and more common, aluminum liners could no longer be used for bento boxes sold at convenience stores as they are often heated in a microwave. After some trial and error, the company eventually started manufacturing cups made of plastic films.

In the meantime, society was becoming increasingly eco-friendly, which urged Kimura to think, "Wouldn't it be great if the cups are edible and won't become a waste?" The first food the company used to make edible cups was nori. The company started selling the seaweed-based cups in 2008 after setting up a fitting environment for food production.

As the coronavirus pandemic continues, demand for bento cups has increased because more and more people have started to use them at sushi parties at home, for example. The company is also researching the production of water-resistant edible cups that can be used for convenience store bento boxes. Another project in the works is making sheets out of unused food and turning them into cups.

Marushige Seika, a company in Hekinan, Japan, produces wafers for "monaka ice cream," an ice-cream-filled version of the traditional Japanese sweet monaka. In 2011, the company started selling e-trays, edible trays made with potato starch and other ingredients.

According to Katsuhiko Sakakibara, the company's senior executive, he saw a

huge number of disposable trays discarded at a gourmet event he attended more than 10 years ago. That's when he came up with the idea of e-trays.

"The product must be solid enough to function as tableware. But it can't be too hard, because it is also food. Balancing those two factors was difficult," Sakakibara said.

The company also gave the edible trays various flavors so people can be eco-friendly while enjoying a nice variety of options. The e-trays come in flavors such as shrimp cracker, onion, sweet potato and grilled corn.

Marushige Seika also produces edible chopsticks and "pacoons," edible spoons made from ingredients like pumpkin and okara (soy bean pulp).

Major beverage company Asahi Breweries, Ltd. in Sumida Ward, Tokyo, has collaborated with Marushige Seika to produce edible cups called "Mogu Kap-pu." They come in three sizes and have been available for purchase online since March. According to the company, it is an introduction to a new food lifestyle — moving from disposables to edibles.

Another company that has taken the eco-friendly, edible route is Bourbon Corp. in Kashiwazaki, Niigata Prefecture. It developed a tubular topping cookie called "Corone Cookie," which can also be used as a straw. The edible straw was launched for business use last year. Currently, the company is considering commercializing the product for consumers.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Courtroom smarts, center-court passion

Grisham discusses his new college hoops novel, 'Sooley,' as well as his writing process

By JOHN FEINSTEIN
The Washington Post

John Grisham's new book, "Sooley," is his 36th novel — and his 45th book in all — but it's his first about basketball.

The novel, which came out April 27, tells the story of Samuel Sooleymon, a South Sudanese teen who comes to the United States to play college ball and hopes to make it to the NBA so he can help the family he left behind. The book is not a thriller, but it shows Grisham's passion for a sport he's loved since his days playing on his high school team in Mississippi.

In a phone interview, Grisham, a season ticket-holder for the Virginia men's and North Carolina women's basketball teams, was happy to gush about the Cavaliers' 2019 national championship but reluctant to talk about the previous year, when the team became the first — and only — No. 1 seed to lose to a No. 16 seed in NCAA tournament history. He was, however, happy to discuss other matters: "Sooley," why he loves basketball and more.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

The Washington Post: Where did the idea for "Sooley" come from?

Grisham: Last March, when there was no NCAA tournament because of the pandemic, it was like a kick in the gut. I knew I wanted to write a basketball book. I needed to write one to make up for missing the tournament. I wanted to have it out for March Madness this year, but it took me longer than I expected. My other sports books have been about 50,000 words. It took me closer to 100,000 to tell this story.

How did you come up with the plot?

There were three things involved. I read a magazine story about a team that came over here from South Sudan to play in a summer showcase tournament a few years back. They were from a war-torn country with horrors happening every day, but



Michael Lionstar

they became the darlings of the tournament with their skill and charisma. They played with so much joy in spite of where they'd come from.

Second was Mamadi Diakite, a kid from Africa who became a very good player at Virginia after not playing much at all when he first got there. And third was Len Bias. He could have been another Michael

Jordan, but died so tragically in 1986.

When you write legal thrillers, you have expertise on the subject because you were a trial lawyer. Did you feel you had that sort of expertise on basketball?

No. I'm a fan and I see a lot of games, but I'm not an expert. So, I leaned on people like [Virginia coach] Tony Bennett, [former Virginia star] Barry Parkhill and

some of the guys who played recently at Virginia. I called people I knew who know basketball.

What was your thinking using North Carolina Central as a key part of the story?

Well, it had to be a small school, given that Sooley wasn't considered much of a prospect at first. But I also liked the idea that Central is the "other" school in Durham ... In my family, we don't like Duke at all.

When you're creating a plot, do you start writing and figure out where you're going as you get deeper into the book? Or do you know your ending right from the start?

I never write the first sentence of a book until I know the last sentence. I made the mistake of not doing that with "A Time to Kill," and I got halfway through and was completely lost. I learned that lesson the hard way. Now, I finish an outline before I start writing. Sometimes, I get halfway through the outline and realize I'm lost and start over. But at least I haven't written half a book already.

You have been remarkably prolific since "A Time to Kill." How do you turn out books so quickly?

I think I'm very disciplined. I'm up and writing by 7 a.m. five mornings a week. I work four or five hours and write at least 1,000 words most days. I have a process. I start a new legal thriller every year on Jan. 1 with the goal of writing about 100,000 words to produce a first draft by July 1. Sometimes, like with "Sooley," I work on a different schedule, but I'm still writing every morning. Then, in the afternoons, I'm free to relax, maybe play golf.

Do you ever sit back and wonder at your success?

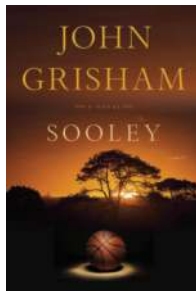
All the time. I started writing because I was looking for a way to make some extra money. I was a small-town lawyer in Mississippi not making a lot of money. But I never thought for a second that "The Firm" would have the success it had or become the huge moneymaking movie that it became. I've often said I haven't worked a real 40-hour workweek in more than 30 years. I love working on the books I write. It's never felt like a job.

'Sooley' features Grisham's trademark short chapters, rapid-fire prose

By ROB MERRILL
Associated Press

When you've written 35 novels and are working on a streak of 43 consecutive No. 1 New York Times bestsellers, you can write about whatever you want. That's probably the simplest way to explain why John Grisham's latest is a basketball story and doesn't feature a single courtroom scene.

It's not the first sports book for Grisham, of course, but it's the first set in the big-time world of college hoops. Samuel Sooleymon, nicknamed Sooley, is a 17-year-old playing on dirt courts in his native South Sudan when we first meet him. Growing like a



stars, showcasing his skills for college coaches.

The joy of a Grisham novel is turning the pages as the plot propels you forward, so I'll avoid revealing too much. Suffice it to say "Sooley" follows the familiar Grisham playbook — short chapters, plenty of foreshadowing and

weed and with an infectious passion for the game, soon he's in Orlando playing on a team of traveling Sudanese all-

a rapid-fire prose that's easy to read and hard to put down.

Grisham seems to enjoy moonlighting as a sportswriter. There are entire paragraphs that read like AP game recaps: "Central ripped off a 14-0 run and led by 15 at the half ... Sooley grabbed 11 rebounds, for his first double-double ... Sooley, still coming off the bench but playing 29 minutes, scored 31 and blocked four shots."

He relishes putting words in the mouth of Sooley's fictional coach, who tells his team before their first-ever NCAA tournament game: "Men, we don't deserve respect. Yet. Respect is out there on the floor, just waiting for

us to go get it." If they can get the casting right, it'll make an action-packed sports movie.

Harder to re-create in a film adaptation will be the secondary plot of the novel, which focuses on the family Sooley leaves behind in Sudan. When a rebel group burns their village, they join millions of fellow refugees fleeing the country, eventually finding food and shelter in a Ugandan camp. They're never far from Sooley's mind as his basketball career takes flight in America. The juxtaposition of his fame and celebrity with his family's plight back home is the heart of the story.

When Sooley's college team,

North Carolina Central, qualifies for March Madness, Grisham has a little fun with his fiction and history, writing, "Never in the tournament's storied history had a No. 16 beaten a No. 1." The novel is set in 2016, two years prior to Grisham's favorite team, No. 1-ranked Virginia, losing to No. 16-ranked University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

It's not spoiling too much to say that Sooley's team makes history in Grisham's world and their dream season continues. The pages turn even more quickly after that, building to a climax that won't leave readers doubting whether this is a John Grisham novel.

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Southern comfort

Grammy-winning artist Travis Tritt returns, discovers his influence on a younger generation of artists

By MELISSA RUGGIERI
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

A mid framed gold records and concert posters celebrating a Ray Charles tribute show at the Grand Ole Opry in 2006 and the 2014 opening of the Earl Scruggs Center in Shelby, N.C., there hangs a drawing of Charles. A fan had created the artwork, and it looms as a spiritual music guide in this cozy studio room otherwise filled with racks of acoustic and electric guitars, including a customized Dale Earnhardt Gibson.

"Ray has more to do with what comes out of my mouth when I sing than anybody, probably. He influenced me so much."

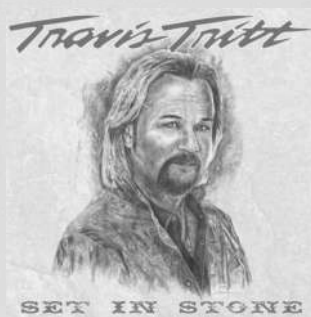
Travis Tritt is looking at the depiction of Charles with a crinkle-eyed smile as he relays his everlasting awe of the Georgia soul titan, and in that fleeting moment, the nearly 32-year history of Tritt crystallizes.

A member of the vaunted class of 1989 — which includes Garth Brooks, Alan Jackson and Clint Black and is widely recognized as the year that turbocharged the popularity of mainstream country music — Tritt and his amalgamation of country, Southern rock, blues and soul is still vital.

From his first top 10 country hit in 1989 — "Country Club" — through a spate of No. 1s including "Anymore," "Can I Trust You With My Heart,"

"Foolish Pride" and "Best of Intentions" and dozens of other fan favorites, Tritt has been a defining voice in country music. His No. 2 hit from 1991, "Here's a Quarter (Call Someone Who Cares)," remains a signature as well as an apt kiss-off.

On May 7, Tritt releases "Set in Stone." Tritt co-wrote eight of the 11 songs, and all feature musical muscularity and plainspoken lyrics that will appeal to old-timers ("Smoke in a Bar," "They Don't Make 'Em Like That No More"), fresh-faced fans ("Stand Your Ground") and those



"Set in Stone," Travis Tritt's first studio album since 2007, was produced by the always-in-demand Dave Cobb, who grew up hearing Tritt's blend of country, soul and Southern rock on the radio.



SEE SOUTHERN ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

Southern: Tritt returning to attract new fans, serve longtime audience

FROM PAGE 28

who appreciate the loyalty that the Marietta, Ga.-born Tritt professes to his roots (“Southern Man,” “Way Down in Georgia”).

For his first new studio album since 2007’s “The Storm,” Tritt teamed with super-producer — and fellow Georgia native — Dave Cobb for the first time, an arrangement suggested by Tritt’s manager, Mike “Cheez” Brown. Cobb had produced an album for The Dirty Heads, whom Brown also manages, and the timing fit after Brown encouraged Tritt to consider recording new music.

“He got me to thinking that you’re at a point in your career that you don’t have anything to prove, but have the opportunity to draw in new people and feed your audience who has been with you a long, long time by just providing content,” Tritt said.

The news of Tritt, 58, signing a recording contract with Big Noise Label Group arrived the week in March 2020 that the coronavirus was deemed a pandemic. Imminent plans to record in Nashville were shuffled to Castle Recording Studios in nearby Franklin, Tenn., last April, where Tritt recorded several albums throughout his three-decade career.

Cobb, who has produced work for artists ranging from Chris Stapleton to Lady Gaga to Brandi Carlile, quickly agreed to work with the music veteran.

“I didn’t listen to a lot of country music growing up. Whatever we heard was the most commercial at the time, and Travis was one of those artists I connected with because he had so much more to his sound — the rock ’n’ roll, the Ray Charles soul. I connected with it. It was like the (Rolling) Stones and Southern rock, and it hit everything on the head,” Cobb said recently from Nashville. “I didn’t want to reinvent anything, but to make the best Travis Tritt record we could make, and I think we pulled that off. I wanted to capture the essence of what he is — real, proper Southern music.”

Cobb suggested that Tritt collaborate with other writers, including Cobb’s cousin, Brent, a noted country-folk singer-songwriter who recently released his fourth album, “Keep ’Em on They Toes.”

Brent Cobb came to Tritt’s studio room to work, and birthed what became the title track, as well as the song, “Ain’t Who I Was.” Tritt also worked with longtime Zac Brown partner Wyatt Durrette, Ashley Monroe and Channing Wilson, among others, on the album.

“The cool thing I discovered writing with them all — who are a good bit younger than me — is they all were telling me how much they were influenced by my music in one way or another,” Tritt recalled. “Brent said, ‘I can’t tell you how many times I rode around as a teenager listening to your music and coming to see you play live and what an inspiration that was to me.’ He said, ‘I started thinking about your legacy, and in my view, your legacy is already

“I didn’t want to reinvent anything, but to make the best Travis Tritt record we could make, and I think we pulled that off. I wanted to capture the essence of what he is — real, proper Southern music.”

Dave Cobb
Prodcer of Tritt’s “Set in Stone”

Thoughts from Tritt

About the songs on “Set in Stone”: “The last thing I would want is to hype people on a new album and then for some reason to do something different than I’ve always done. It’s been pretty consistent, and the last thing you want anyone to do is listen to a new album and go, ‘Really? What is this? This is not you. We know who you are, and this is not you.’ So, I think that when people hear this album, (those) who are already fans of mine will recognize all those same influences mixed in together and they’re going to relate to a lot of the songs. It all goes back to my favorite quote in music, which came from Dan Fogelberg: I write music to move me honestly and objectively because I know that if I can honestly move myself, I can move other people.”

About the role of country radio: “I’m at a point in my career to try to chase after radio just doesn’t make sense. If I can be so bold to say it: it really doesn’t play the part it used to play. When I started my career, radio was the gatekeepers for everything. They’re no longer that. The thing that everybody is looking at now is your streaming numbers ... I’m gonna take the same approach to this album that I’ve always had, and that is if radio plays it, great; I consider that to be gravy. But if they don’t play it, that doesn’t bother me, either.”

About the more you play, the more you learn: “Before I got signed, I was a human jukebox and playing everything from everybody. For whatever reason, if I did a Hank (Williams) Jr. cover or Waylon (Jennings) or Willie (Nelson); people accepted that from me. I tried doing George Strait songs and for whatever reason, my audience never would accept George Strait from me. That was extremely helpful. That made me realize right away, I need to gravitate more in this direction. It helps define you as an artist ... I always tell (young musicians); every time you get an opportunity to entertain in front of an audience, you should do it. My oldest son (Tristan) has done it the right way. He’s been out there hustling with his band (Pale Moon Creek). They are playing clubs all over the place. They’re trying to establish a following and a reputation based on playing music in front of people. They’ve done some really cool gigs and some really small, terrible ones. For all of the bad experiences I had from those early days, I would never take them away.”

set in stone; you don’t have anything to prove to anybody.’ First of all, it was a huge compliment, but I also thought it was a great idea (for a song). He said, you can apply it to anybody who works with their hands for a living, has a little bit of age on them. He had part of the first verse and chorus written and I said, ‘Man, we’ve got to finish that.’”

Tritt is back on the road and will share his new material on dates throughout the summer and into fall, though he likely won’t hit his standard 130-ish annual concerts.

Norah Jones

‘Til We Meet Again (Blue Note)

Norah Jones has dipped into many genres during her career. She’s played electric guitar in Puss N Boots, done an Everly Brothers tribute album with Green Day’s Billie Joe Armstrong (2013’s “Foreverly”), and sung with the Foo Fighters, Outkast, Belle and Sebastian, Willie Nelson and many others (compiled on 2019’s “... Featuring Norah Jones”).

On “‘Til We Meet Again,” her first live album, Jones focuses on the jazz-pop sweet spot that made her famous. It’s a lovely, comforting album that favors thoughtful ballads like “After the Fall” and her debut hit, “Don’t Know Why.”

Recorded on tours between 2017 and 2019, it showcases Jones’ impressive talents as a singer and piano player. Her voice is intimate and slightly husky, with occasional hints of her Texas drawl. She’s leading small bands, often just a bass player and a drummer, which allows her to stretch out her piano playing. She shines on soul jazz numbers such as “Those Sweet Words” and “Flipside,” which call to mind ’60s great Les McCann.

Ten of the 14 songs come from either her first two albums or the singles she released between 2016’s “Day Break” and 2020’s “Pick Me Off the Floor.” The one surprise is a cover of Soundgarden’s “Black Hole Sun,” recorded shortly after Chris Cornell’s death. Jones, alone at the piano, turns the grunge classic into a seven-minute elegy; it’s a captivating transformation.

— Steve Klinge
The Philadelphia Inquirer



Sharon Van Etten

epic Ten (Rough Trade)

In 2010, Sharon Van Etten was finding her way as a solo artist, working as an intern for Brooklyn’s Ba Da Bing records and recording “Epic.” Working with A-list Philly musicians such as Dave Hartley of the War On Drugs, Brian Christinzio of BC Camplight and Meg Baird of Espers, she used her fulsome voice to fill up songs of open-hearted possibility and thwarted romance.

Now, “Epic” feels like a classic. Van Etten — whose recent triumphs include 2019’s “Remind Me Tomorrow” — is celebrating its 10th anniversary. The original set has been reissued, and the package includes a second volume that features Van Etten’s admirers covering her songs. It’s an impressive list, starting with Big Red Machine (recent Taylor Swift collaborators Aaron Dessner and Justin Vernon of Bon Iver) who dive into the strummy “A Crime.” Also here are Lucinda Williams, Fiona Apple and the British post-punk band IDLES.

It’s a model mini-tribute, with contributors paying homage while delivering distinct versions. Standouts include Williams’ drawing out “Save Yourself” into an accusatory blues, and Courtney Barnett and Vagabon turning up the volume on “Don’t Do It” as a ragged Neil Young-style jam.

— Dan DeLuca
The Philadelphia Inquirer



Steve Cropper

Fire It Up (Provogue Records)

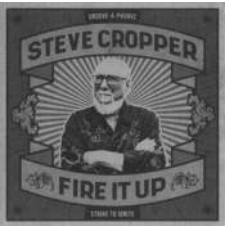
Perhaps no guitarist has carved out more great grooves than Memphis soul man Steve Cropper, and his new album is all about the beat.

The songs on “Fire It Up” mix it up in finding different ways to fill the dance floor, from the toe-tapper “One Good Turn” and hip-shaker “I’m Not Havin’ It” to the foot-stomper “Far Away,” finger-snapper “Heartbreak Street” and palate-cleanser “Bush Hog.”

Cropper has made his career in a supporting role, and even on his own album, he’s a team player. His rhythm guitar work serves as a master class in elegant simplicity, with overdubs allowing Cropper to work his magic in multiple parts. He plays only brief, occasional solos that will keep shoulders swaying.

Lead singer Roger C. Reale’s husky tenor is a good fit for the material, most of which he helped Cropper write. Longtime Cropper collaborator Jon Tiven also co-wrote and co-produced, and the Rascals’ Felix Cavaliere is among the guest artists. The set was recorded in Nashville but is rooted in Memphis, echoes of Cropper’s glorious 1960s work with the Stax label evident in every greasy, delicious riff.

— Steven Wine
Associated Press



WEEKEND: MUSIC

Not your typical boy band

Produce Pandas, China’s plus-sized music group, seeks to break the mold

Associated Press

Gathered in a practice room, five generously proportioned young men in baggy black sweaters are patting their bellies and wagging their arms. Bearded with double chins, they shout “Hoo-Ha!” in time to upbeat African drums.

The choreography is for the new song “Good Belly,” by Produce Pandas. DING, Cass, Husky, Otter and Mr. 17 weigh an average of 220 pounds and proudly call themselves “the first plus-sized boy band in China.”

That’s a radical departure from the industry standard seen in South Korean super groups such as BTS, whose lanky young members are sometimes referred to in China as “little fresh meat.”

Yet it seems to be working for Produce Pandas, who rose to fame after making it about halfway through “Youth with You,” an idol talent competition hosted by iQiyi, one of the largest video platforms in China.

On the show, mentors and audience voters pick nine finalists, either individuals or group members, to come together to form a new band.

“The five of us may not have the standard look and shape of a boy band, but we hope to use the term ‘plus-sized band’ to break the aesthetic stereotypes,” Cass said in an interview.

The five, two of whom formerly sang in bars, are also unusual for their relatively advanced ages in an industry that worships youth and stamina. Most of their fellow contestants on “Youth with You” began South Korean-style training while in their teens.

While Produce Pandas excited audiences and sparked discussion about how a pop idol should look, some taunting also appeared online.

Users of China’s Weibo microblog seized on the Chinese word for panda, a homonym of which appears in the Chinese name for the Japanese horror movie “Ring,” suggesting that watching them dance was similarly frightening.

Mr. 17, the band’s main dancer, was the



PHOTOS BY MARK SCHIEFELBEIN/AP

Members of the Chinese music group Produce Pandas, from left — DING, Husky, Otter, Cass and Mr. 17 — strike a pose April 15 in Beijing while practicing choreography. The Produce Pandas proudly call themselves “the first plus-sized boy band in China.” That’s a radical departure from the industry standard set by Korean super groups with lanky young members such as BTS.

oldest contestant in the competition at age 31. He had been discovered on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, where he posted clips of himself dancing in pajamas or while holding a bowl of rice.

He nicknamed himself “17” after his favorite age. The former petroleum company worker said he doesn’t feel old, but admits that after rehearsals, “I felt my energy was emptied.”

The five were solicited from more than 300 hopefuls by Beijing-based DMDF Entertainment, which wanted to build a band that would be rotund and approachable as well as inspiring.

Husky, who worked in IT, thought he would fit in perfectly because he has been chubby since primary school and has failed repeatedly to lose weight.

“I often work out one day then take a rest for the next three days, so the result is clear that I gained some weight instead,” he said. The point is “stay in shape (and) not to lose weight, but to lose fat.”

Echoing Husky, Cass said the upside to being on such a team is that they don’t need to abstain when it comes to food: “We don’t mind eating like a horse. I feel sorry for the ‘little fresh meat’ bands whose members must follow a diet to stay slim. I feel great whenever they look on enviously as we dig in!”

Team leader DING quit plus-sized modeling when he heard about auditioning for an “XXL” boy band, saying, “I feel this is probably the closest I can get to being on a magazine cover.”



A member of the Chinese music group Produce Pandas holds a sheet of lyrics with hand-drawn doodles while practicing vocals during rehearsals in Beijing on April 15.

The five are working on a new album. Songs include “Pursue Your Dreams.”

“Saddle up on the horse and pursue your dreams / Don’t idle your time away,” the lyrics go.

Vocalist Otter, who has idolized the South Korean boy band Super Junior since he was 7, never thought he could be

in a band that lives and performs together, and more importantly, encourages ordinary folk.

“I hope people will feel encouraged when watching our performance,” he said. They can think, “If Produce Pandas can make a breakthrough and perform on a bigger stage, then why can’t I?”

“The five of us may not have the standard look and shape of a boy band, but we hope to use the term ‘plus-sized band’ to break the aesthetic stereotypes.”

Cass
Produce Pandas

WEEKEND: TELEVISION



Ed Helms (Nathan Rutherford), Dana L. Wilson (Mayor Deirdre) and Jana Schmieding (Reagan Wells) appear in a scene from “Rutherford Falls.”

Peacock

Thinking outside history’s box

‘Rutherford Falls’ comedy series upends sad, monolithic narratives about Native Americans, their traumas

By VALENTINA VALENTINI
Special to The Washington Post

Native Americans’ stories in Hollywood are, more often than not, depicted as sad and monolithic. And while the stories of historical trauma inflicted upon our nation’s first inhabitants serve a purpose, it seems a sea change may be afoot.

“Rutherford Falls,” a half-hour series for NBC’s Peacock streaming service, is one of a few Native narratives coming down the television pipeline that tells a different story about America’s Indigenous peoples.

The comedy follows two best friends — Nathan Rutherford (Ed Helms) and Reagan Wells (Jana Schmieding) — who both have a loyalty and love for their heritage, but whose histories come head-to-head when a statue of Nathan’s ancestor, their town’s founder, needs to be removed.

The minds behind “Rutherford Falls” — co-creator Mike Schur (“The Office,” “Parks and Recreation”), showrunner and co-creator Sierra Teller Ornelas (“Brooklyn Nine-Nine,” “Superstore”) and lead and co-creator Helms — wanted to take Native Americans out of the box in which they’re so often put.

“We very intentionally wanted to tell a story that had Native joy,” Ornelas says. “Diversity of Native perspectives was the big thing (in our writer’s room).”

Ornelas, who originally linked up with Schur on “Brooklyn Nine-Nine” and developed a pilot for Helms in 2017, is a seasoned TV writer and producer who was perfectly positioned to take the reins of “Rutherford Falls.” For a room of 10 writers, Ornelas staffed five Natives, including herself (she has a Latin-Navajo background) and Schmieding (who is a mem-

ber of the Cheyenne River Lakota Sioux tribe).

Decisions about the show — from the beadwork to the artwork to wardrobe to choosing Red Lobster as a hangout spot — came directly from the writers’ lives. Creating “authenticity” — a word that’s problematic in its own right — was effectively baked in.

The staff “had very different views on certain issues, and not just Native issues,” Ornelas says. “It was so great to have those conversations (both in the room and) on the show. I have a lot of Native friends who have made films that depict trauma in really incredible ways (that are) moving and wonderful. I think that is what people assume they want to see from us, (but) I feel very reticent to present my trauma because there’s so much of my life that has been joyous.”

Adds Schur: “I wanted us to do a show where there’s a scene where three Native people are hanging out and they’re not talking about being Native, because that’s what actual, legitimate representation is;

it’s the normal, boring, everyday stuff.”

It was the same mundane stuff that Schmieding was wading through in late 2019, just before she was hired as a writer on the show. At 38, she was still trying to transition out of public education and into full-time stand-up comedy and TV writing. Tired of the Hollywood hustle, she promised herself that if she didn’t get staffed by spring of 2020, she was going to move back in with her parents.

“All of my writing samples featured a Native female lead,” says Schmieding, whose parents and grandparents taught her that representation mattered, especially in the small Oregon town where they were one of only a few Native families. “I don’t want to say that there was no interest in my samples, but I was worried that there was no market for Native roles. I was betting on my own identity, and it wasn’t working out until it was. Until Sierra.”

Schmieding — who grew up loving to perform, went to the University of Oregon for theater arts and did the rounds on the New York City stand-up and sketch circuit

— had no intention of acting on “Rutherford Falls.” Without a trace of self-pity, she explains that she just didn’t think that what she had going on was “marketable,” motioning to her body.

But Schur is known for casting his writers, probably a holdover from his days on “Saturday Night Live,” where the line between behind the scenes and on screen is often nebulous. Writer Paul Lieberstein famously ended up as Toby on “The Office,” and Schur himself played the fan-favorite Mose.

As the entire team worked to bring this first-of-its-kind story to the small screen, Schmieding was able to focus her efforts not only behind the scenes, but on visibility in front of the camera, too. And while the story is built around the issues that come from a statue that needs to be moved from the center of town, she’s quick to remind that — much like the real-world protests over historical monuments — that is simply the inciting incident.

“It becomes much more personal than whether or not we should take down a statue,” Schmieding says. “What we’re really seeing is how historical narratives manifest between a friendship, which is something that I experience all the time as a Native person. In what ways has my life been in service to or supporting other people’s narratives about their life? And because people don’t have that deep level of literacy about Native history, we often get trapped being in support of other people’s dreams and visions. We don’t have that autonomy, that sovereignty, to go to bat for our history and when we do, it doesn’t get mainstream attention.”

“I wanted us to do a show where there’s a scene where three Native people are hanging out and they’re not talking about being Native, because that’s what actual, legitimate representation is; it’s the normal, boring, everyday stuff.”

Mike Schur

“Rutherford Falls” co-creator

“Rutherford Falls” (10 episodes) is available for streaming on Peacock.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

BY HILARY POTKEWITZ

Special to The Washington Post

Michael Gilbert did not let his 9-year-old son, Caleb, join a basketball league last fall, even though some programs had started modified practice.

“He really wanted to play, but my wife and I were nervous. Everything was inside a gym. It just didn’t seem safe,” said Gilbert, a law professor in Charlottesville, Va.

After some soul-searching, the family found an activity that felt less risky: skateboarding.

To Gilbert’s surprise, skateboarding ticked all the COVID-safety boxes that basketball could not.

“It’s outdoors, in a nice big skate park, and there’s a natural distance that people want to keep from each other,” he said.

As for injury risk — skateboarding’s perennial hot-button issue — the Gilberts were less concerned, he said. They outfitted Caleb and his 13-year-old brother, Graham, with boards, helmets and lessons and called it a day.

“It’s the pandemic trade-off,” says Gilbert, 43. “I don’t want them to get COVID, but I also don’t want them to go insane. They have nothing else to do. This is exercise and gets them out of the house.”

With most kids’ team sports suspended or restricted because of concerns about COVID, parents have been reassessing which activities feel safe and which seem risky. It’s led to some unorthodox trade-offs, as people turn away from traditional team sports and start looking at alternative sports in a new light.

Skateboard sales jumped 75% last year compared with that of 2019, according to ActionWatch, a research firm that tracks specialty skate/surf retailers. Mountain biking, another parental-anxiety trigger, also soared during the pandemic, with mountain bike sales increasing by 75% in 2020, according to market research firm the NPD Group.

Meanwhile traditional team sports faltered: Baseball and softball equipment sales dropped 17%, and soccer and football equipment fell more than 10%, according to Matt Powell, NPD’s senior industry analyst.

“Parents have only so much attention to give to risks, and it’s possible that the pandemic has absorbed all of that thinking,” says Matthias Doepke, an economics professor at Northwestern University who researches parental decision-making. “COVID is a bigger and much more tangible risk, so we’ve become more relaxed about other smaller risks.”

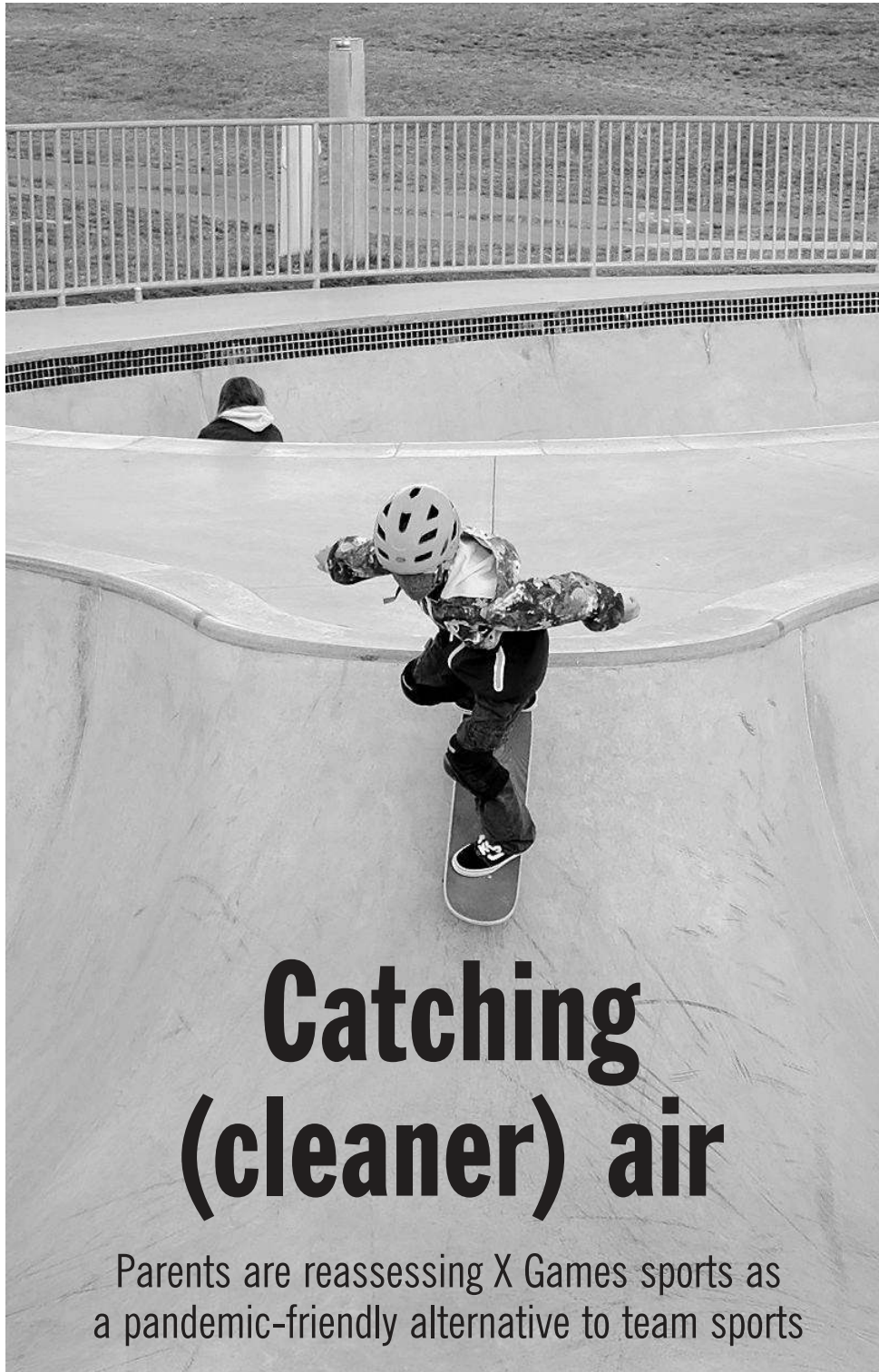
Hordes of new skateboarders and cyclists may be a bright spot in the decadeslong trend of declining physical activity rates among kids. Some wonder whether the shift will become part of a broader trend away from highly structured team sports and toward more free-range forms of physical activity.

“I’ve seen a lot of skeptical parents come around,” says Matt Moffett, manager of the Charlottesville Skate Park. A former professional skateboarder, Moffett gives private and group lessons.

The pandemic brought a flood of new kids to the skate park, including the Gilbert boys, and demand for lessons more than doubled, he says. Based on his conversations with parents, “all these new faces were kids that normally do Little League, soccer or football,” he says.

By September, Moffett was teaching about 25 lessons per month. He took a hiatus in January and February but has been fully booked since resuming lessons in March.

About 40% of his students are female: “We have 4-year-old girls in unicorn helmets



Catching (cleaner) air

Parents are reassessing X Games sports as a pandemic-friendly alternative to team sports

Michael Gilbert

Caleb Gilbert, 9, wanted to play basketball last fall, but his parents weren’t comfortable with the COVID risk. Skateboarding felt safer, said dad Michael Gilbert: “It’s outdoors, in a nice big skate park, and there’s a natural distance that people want to keep.”

riding next to fully tattooed guys,” he says, “and everyone tries to mentor each other.”

The collective easing of anxiety around skateboarding may be more in line with statistical realities, according to national data from the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Responding to growing parental concern about X Games sports, the agency in 2002 published a study comparing youth skateboarding injury rates with those of other sports.

The findings showed that skateboarding was, statistically speaking, much safer than basketball: Skateboarders had an injury rate of 8.9 per 1,000 participants, while basketball players’ injury rate was 21.2 per 1,000 players. (Nevertheless, the American Academy of Pediatrics that year recommended against skateboards for children under 10 unless closely supervised by an adult, citing injury risk.)

“When you’re trying to convince parents, statistics are important, but they’re not enough,” says Mariana Brussoni, an associate professor of pediatrics at the University of British Columbia who specializes in injury research and prevention. For example, cars are one of the leading causes of death for

children, she says, “yet parents think they’re keeping their kids safe by putting them in a car and driving them somewhere, rather than letting them bike.”

Parents’ focus on competitive team sports overlooks the importance of free play in cognitive development, Brussoni says.

Unstructured physical activities — including skateboarding, bike riding and general outdoor play — allow kids to explore and develop skills in problem-solving and goal-setting, she says.

Organized team sports, on the other hand, tend to be adult-led and highly supervised, with goals set by others, she says. “When someone is telling you what to do and how to do it, you’re not practicing using that part of your brain.”

Anna Inabinet’s 8-year-old daughter, Kilby, was a competitive swimmer until Chicago pools closed because of COVID.

When Kilby asked for a skateboard, Inabinet, 43, was surprised and a little nervous: “It just seemed so outside her comfort zone,” she says.

It has since become a favorite activity. Kilby rides at the Grant Skate Park several times a week.

“We’ve been six times since Monday,” Inabinet said on a recent Thursday.

Though some pools have reopened for competition, Inabinet says she isn’t sure when Kilby will be returning to swim team.

“I’ve seen videos: They’re indoors, without masks. It looks pretty crowded, and you know the kids are breathing hard,” she says. “Personally, swimming feels too dangerous. I’m much more comfortable with her skateboarding.”

This kind of break from team sports can be a chance for kids to explore creative and independent forms of play, Brussoni says. “As kids build up their skills over time, it also builds parents’ confidence in what their kids are capable of.”

Carley Truyens saw this firsthand. She introduced her kids Eli, 7, and Ashby, 4, to a local mountain-biking group last summer as a COVID-friendly alternative to team sports.

Truyens originally thought Ashby might be too young to keep up on the weekly rides, but she’s watched her daughter’s confidence grow each week in the woods near their home in North Bethesda, Md.

“Now she has a little crew of 5- and 6-year-old friends who ride bikes,” says Truyens, 38.

Truyens figured the evening rides, with the Montgomery County chapter of Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiasts organization, would stop once daylight saving time ended in November.

“I’d never thought about mountain biking at night,” she said, never mind with children. But the group rode through the winter, weather permitting, so she and Ashby learned to gear up with headlamps, bike lights and reflective clothing.

“She’s disappointed now that rides aren’t in the dark anymore,” Truyens says.

Katie Fates has a pretty strong caution meter, she says. The 44-year-old mother of four from Boxford, Mass., didn’t let her son Jack play football until high school, for example, because of concerns about head injuries.

When he started mountain biking last year at 17, she figured it would be a good father-son activity — especially because his lacrosse and football seasons were canceled. Jack and his dad, Matt, 47, built a ramp. Then another. They got better and more aggressive.

As his biking skills improved, Jack designed increasingly elaborate features for the backyard obstacle course, including multiple drops and jumps.

“The engineer in his brain really came out; it was cool to watch,” Fates says.

Now, they charge downhill courses, and “one of them usually comes home a little bloody,” Fates says. All of that is fine. What makes her nervous is high school lacrosse season, which started in April.

“I’m so much more comfortable with him biking than going back to team practice,” Fates says. Because Jack’s rides either start from the house or from the car with his dad, she feels they still have some control.

“You’re not relying on other people’s sensibilities like you are with a team,” she says. Knowing the kinds of bad decisions teens can make, “it’s nice to take that out of the equation.”

As the pandemic wears on, Mike Gilbert is finding his attitudes toward risk relaxing even further: One day in March, the boys came home exhausted, carrying bags of junk. They had been treasure hunting along the train tracks in their neighborhood — without permission, Gilbert adds.

“I remember thinking, ‘If this weren’t a pandemic, would I be freaking out right now?’ he recalls. “As it was, all I said was, ‘You were outside for an hour? Great!’”

WEEKEND: FAMILY



HEATHER KRUG/AP

Heather Krug, right, and her mother, Brenda, pose for a photo at The Getty Villa in Los Angeles in 2016. The two are reuniting for Mother's Day this year as vaccinations have made families feel more comfortable gathering.

Reuniting on Mother's Day

Vaccinated adults are excited to finally be able to visit, celebrate their moms

BY LEANNE ITALIE

Associated Press

When Leland Stein heads to his 93-year-old mother's senior living facility for Mother's Day, he'll have flowers in hand, a bottle of bubbly and a year's worth of hugs.

"I miss Leland's visits very much," said Sondra Green, a retired Vassar College drama professor who counts Meryl Streep among her former students. "I'm just very grateful for his presence."

Many moms, grandmothers and their offspring around the U.S. will be equally thrilled. They were forced to hold off on the physical joys of Mother's Day last year amid pandemic fears and restrictions. This time around, vaccinations and abiding by post-shot waiting periods have brought more security and comfort to bring on the hugs and kisses for sweet in-person — and indoor — reunions.

Of course, not everyone will feel that joy. There are those mourning for mothers lost to COVID-19, and others who are refraining from socializing in person until they, too, can get vaccinated.

During the pandemic, the 64-year-old Stein and his elegant mom have met just once, about six months ago outside of her Brookdale Senior Living location in downtown Manhattan. He couldn't keep away, particularly since Green lost her husband just months before the pandemic took hold, but it was a long trip from his home in Arlington, Mass., for a brief visit on the lawn.

Green's three other sons live in the West, too far to make a Mother's Day trip.

Stein, too, has been feeling the separation and the sting of isolation. At the start of the pandemic in mid-March 2020, the performance space he manages, the Regent Theatre in Arlington, was shut down as the world headed into emergency mode.

"It was Friday the 13th," he recalled. "We had a sold-out show at the theater and the rug was pulled out from under us. I had just lost a relationship, so I lost my relationship, my community, my family. That was a lot to deal with and I have to say, having my mom still around was very helpful. My mom was cool, calm and collected."

Raising four boys, Green joked, "you have to stay calm."

Heather Krug, 49, in Los Angeles hasn't seen her extrovert of a mother, Brenda Krug, in a year and a half. Brenda, too, lives in a senior living community, on the other side of the country in the Long Island hamlet of Woodbury, N.Y.

"She's been pretty much without family throughout this," said Krug, who has a sister in the Boston area. "I knew as soon as I was able to get the vaccine I would feel

more comfortable about flying but also that I wouldn't be bringing COVID to her or anybody in her community. It's been pretty tough."

The two will mark Mother's Day and the 81-year-old Brenda's June birthday at the same time. And, a bonus, Heather will meet Brenda's boyfriend for the first time after Heather's dad died a couple years ago.

"They met during COVID, which is a good thing because it's kept her spirits up. It's the first person she's dated since my father passed," Heather said. "I'm sure she has a list of things she needs me to do. One is get her on Zoom because that's been an issue, but she's handling everything much better than me."

Heather's sister managed a two-hour rendezvous with their mom over the summer for a restaurant meal outdoors, but she has also kept her distance to be safe. A high school friend of Heather's on Long Island assisted Brenda, who still works as an interior designer, when she came down with COVID-19 in the chaotic early days of the pandemic.

Brenda, who is also missing her recently departed dog, was excited for her up-close Mother's Day.

"I only saw my girls and grandchildren on FaceTime. It's not the same, you know," she said. "We're definitely a hugging kind of family."

Maricela Waugh, a 30-something relationship consultant in Los Angeles known professionally as Spicy Mari, has a huge Mother's Day surprise for her mom, Marta. Marta, who has been on the job in San Diego as an essential worker for FedEx throughout the pandemic, has wanted a grandchild for years.

She's about to get her wish. Waugh is pregnant.

"She's going to be flabbergasted," said Waugh, the oldest of three siblings and the first to be expanding her family.

"It's the ultimate gift," Waugh said. "We're extremely close. I tell my mother everything and it's been really hard because I don't really know what to do. I've been asking her a lot of hypothetical questions like, 'When did you start getting stretch marks?'"

The two haven't seen each other since April 2020, when they got together for a quick meal out.

"We've done a few FaceTimes and only from the chest up as this baby bump has grown. But she's been like, oh you must be gaining the quarantine 15," Waugh said.

Mari, who has chosen not to get vaccinated during her pregnancy, is planning a brunch outdoors at a Malibu restaurant with mom and other vaccinated loved ones to announce her son's upcoming arrival.

"I've missed everyone so I'm super excited to bring everyone together for Mother's Day," she said.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Motherhood no picnic, but worth it after all

After eight hours of labor, a sort of delirium set in. My conscious brain was no longer in control. I fell into a sleep-like stupor between contractions, as if my body insisted on resting up for what was ahead. When each contraction began, I regained minimal consciousness, just enough to grip the hospital bed rail and attempt to breathe through the pain.

I refused pain meds, not out of bravery, but of fear. It was the mid-'90s in Monterey, Calif., where the "crunchy" nurses who taught our prenatal classes said that natural childbirth decreased my chances of having a C-section. (During my third pregnancy, I decided those nurses were as nutty as their banana muffins, because epidurals are magical.)

A few hours later, my body had taken complete control, and ordered me to push. In my delirium, I thought birth was imminent, but it took three more hours before the last excruciating push produced our 9-pound baby boy, a severe perennial tear, ruptured vessels turning my eyes' whites blood red, and a lifetime of parental responsibilities.

Mine is not a unique story. Childbirth has happened more than 100 billion times since homo sapiens first walked the Earth 50,000 years ago. Anyone who's been to a baby shower knows how the storytelling gets started. "When I was in labor," sparks the conversation, and before you've had a chance to finish your cake, you've heard about Karen's 22-hour labor, Bonnie's mucus plug and Janelle's episiotomy.

These awful childbirth stories beg the question, "Why?"

A few days after the birth of my son, my extended family came to our Fort Ord house to see the baby. "What?" I said to my brother, who was staring at me with a grimaced face.

After a few minutes of thought, he pondered, "Men talk about how much weight they can lift or whatever, but I've never known any man who would volunteer to do something physical that he knew could cause him to burst all the blood vessels in his eyes or tear his own flesh."

He was right — the fact that women voluntarily subject their bodies to the physical pain and bodily injuries of childbirth is mind-boggling. So why do we do it?

Despite all the horror stories about labor, childbirth, postpartum depression, stretch marks, sleepless nights, diaper blow-outs, tantrums, infuriating defiance, back-talking teenagers, college bills and other negatives of parenting, motherhood is, without a doubt, a winning value proposition.

Mothers may enjoy telling dramatic labor and delivery stories, but they often leave out the most important part: the moment they held their babies for the first time.

Twenty-six years later, I can still feel him, smell him, see him, like it was yesterday.

After that final push, my eyes followed him from the hands of the doctor to the nurse and to my chest. I didn't feel any pain, only the warm softness of my baby's skin on mine, the sweet smell of him and a gush of primal emotion that could only be described as human love.

That night in the hospital, after baths, eyedrops and Apgar tests were complete, I didn't sleep. Despite my exhaustion, I lay awake in my room's dim light, with my nose and lips pressed gently on my baby boy's petal-soft head, feeling his warm body snuggled into mine, looking down at his perfectly formed eyelashes, pink lips, fingers and toes, listening intently to his contented newborn squeaks.

Despite my physical condition, that moment, along with the post-birth hours after my daughters were born, was the best I've ever felt. Each instance bonded me inextricably to my children and my role as their mother. Women are instilled with a powerful natural tendency that transcends pain, inconvenience and self-preservation, and makes women's role in society supremely important — the instinct to nurture and grow other living beings.

Happy Mother's Day to all the women who've known the bliss of nurturing those you love.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com, and in Lisa's book, *The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com*. Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

Jeremy Newton, of Austin, Texas, is a software engineer who makes mobile games. Titles he has worked on include Crosswords With Friends, Zynga Poker, Dragon Academy and many others. He has been a puzzle enthusiast since he was a child, when a grandmother got him hooked on Jumble. As a crossword constructor, Jeremy says he likes “wacky themes” (as a glance at today’s grid might suggest). This is Jeremy’s 14th Sunday and 21st Times puzzle overall. — W.S.

50 Float component

20. All the dead ____.

123 Recess for prayer

13 Bone to pick

62. Out of practice

75 Photog's setting

87 Consider with

workers

116 "Ver-r-ry
i-t-e-r-r-ry!"

A black and white cartoon by Davis. A boy with spiky hair and a wide-eyed, shouting expression is shown from the chest up. He is holding a stick or branch in his right hand. A large speech bubble coming from him contains the text: "I'M NOT A BULLY! I'M A MOTIVATOR." To the right of the boy, a bird is shown in flight, moving away from him. The background is plain white. The artist's signature "DAVIS" is in the bottom right corner.

“Gunston Street” is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

[illegible]

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FACES



BETH DUBBER/AP

Andrew Garfield, from left, Maya Hawke and Nat Wolff star in “Mainstream,” a film by Gia Coppola.

How internet stars are made

Gia Coppola dissects ‘Mainstream’ culture in new film

By LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

Gia Coppola was feeling out of touch with popular culture when she stumbled upon the ending of Elia Kazan’s 1957 satire “A Face in the Crowd” several years ago. The story of a folksy truth-teller who rises to dangerous levels of fame and influence on television seemed oddly prescient (and this was before it became “trendy” again after the 2016 presidential election). The image of Andy Griffith laughing maniacally stayed with her.

At the same time, she was watching the rise of internet stars from afar and wondering where art fits in a world where everyone wants to watch others play video games and unbox toys.

“I’ve always sort of felt a little bit like an alien or something. Just what I like is very different, I think, than what most people like,” Coppola, 34, said. “I think now because of the internet, it’s even more in your face of what gets gratification.”

It was the genesis of her sophomore feature, “Mainstream,” in which a struggling young artist (Maya Hawke) inadvertently creates a monster when her videos of an antiestablishment loner (Andrew Garfield) go viral. The film, which premiered at the Venice Film Festival, is in theaters and on demand Friday.

But even with a surname like Coppola, a well-reviewed debut film under her belt and a timely topic, it wasn’t an easy or straightforward path to getting “Mainstream” made. Her 2013 film, “Palo Alto,” was an evocative look at the lives of suburban teens that had

more than a few people throwing out favorable comparisons to her aunt, Sofia Coppola. But this, she knew, was decidedly weirder.

Things started to fall into place after she met Garfield through Greta Seacat, an acting coach they both work with. Coppola doesn’t want to act. “Nothing terrifies me more,” she said. It’s just a means to a deeper understanding of actors.

And in Garfield, she found not just an actor she’s always admired but a kindred spirit and a collaborator who would introduce her to a co-writer, Tom Stuart, as well as agree to star in and produce the film. They spent a lot of time up at what he calls “Camp Coppola” in Napa workshoping the concepts that would end up on screen, like when Hawke’s character Frankie vomits animated emojis into a sink.

“We became fast friends and felt a sweet kind of creative connection and shared a similar kind of childish humor,” Garfield said. “She’s such a gentle soul.”

Not only would he get to help a friend realize her creative vision, he’d also get to play and experiment a bit himself with that scariest of all concepts: Unlikability.

“There’s a fear of being liked by an audience and a pressure to create characters that have a likability,” Garfield said.

His character, Link, is a kind of street corner philosopher/exhibitionist, which let him access some “Off-putting and grotesque and darker parts of ourselves.”

It also provided an opportunity to go off the rails with a crazy character who

at one point runs down Hollywood Boulevard (mostly) naked.

“I did one take and she was like, ‘Are you OK? That was one of my favorite moments of my life. I can’t believe that you did that for me.’ And I’m sitting there going, let’s (expletive) do it again!” Garfield said. “How often does one get a chance to run around Hollywood Boulevard with their butt cheeks hanging out and not get arrested?”

The guerrilla-style stunt, he said, was like, “Thieving the reality of the people who happened to be on the block that time and feeling like you’re creating something that was totally alive.”

Much of the film is set in and around the ugly-beautiful stretches of that famed street, near where Coppola was raised and now chooses to live as an adult.

“I just have a deep love for it and what it represents to people on the outside and how it’s so unglamorous but there’s so many amazing characters,” Coppola said. “It feels like a metaphor for Los Angeles in a way.”

It was a quick shoot, only 19 days, and a family affair. She used American Zoetrope, the studio her grandfather Francis Ford Coppola founded in 1969. Her mother, Jacqui Getty, did the costumes. Her cousin Jason Schwartzman co-stars. And her uncle Roman Coppola’s tote bag company even makes a cameo.

Garfield described the Coppolas as a “soulful artistic hub.”

“It’s a very generous family,” he said. “And it’s very, very cool to be included in that world for a period of time.”

‘Conan,’ other popular shows nearing the end

From wire reports

Conan O’Brien is turning off the lights at TBS.

The late-night funnyman will wrap his eponymous show, “Conan,” on June 24 after 11 years, the network announced Monday.

The final run of episodes will include special guests before culminating in a one-hour special and retrospective of the show.

“I’m very proud of what we’ve accomplished here,” he said on the show Monday night. “And so what I’d like is I’d like these last couple of weeks to be a fond look back at all the absurd madness that my team and I have concocted.”



O'Brien

O’Brien, 58, a former writer for “Saturday Night Live” and “The Simpsons,” took over “Late Night” for David Letterman in January 1993 and stuck around until February 2009, when he left for a brief hosting gig on “The Tonight Show.” After a hiatus, O’Brien took his show on the road for the cross-country “The Legally Prohibited from Being Funny on Television Tour” from March to June 2010.

“Conan” debuted on Nov. 8, 2010, and has been on the air ever since, making O’Brien the longest serving active late-night talk show host in the U.S. after Letterman’s retirement in 2015.

In the coming weeks, many other series will also air their grand finales and/or launch final seasons.

Here are some other notable outgoing shows:

“**Shrill**” — The Aidy Bryant-led comedy series, based on Lindy West’s 2016 book “Shrill: Notes from a Loud Woman,” drops its third and final eight-episode season this week. (streams May 7 on Hulu)

“**Mom**” — Time for a big group hug. The warm-hearted sitcom that boldly told stories about recovery from alcoholism and addiction — and brought Allison Janney two Emmy Awards — closes the curtain on its acclaimed eight-year run. (May 14, AFN-Prime)

“**Last Man Standing**” — The Tim Allen family sitcom that found new life on Fox after being canceled by ABC goes out for good this time. The Baxters will call it a wrap with an hourlong finale. (airs Fridays on AFN-Pulse)

“**NCIS: New Orleans**” — The crime drama will go out with a wedding as Pride (Scott Bakula) and Rita (Chelsea Field) tie the knot. And, of course, there will be one more case to crack. But don’t go thinking the “NCIS” franchise is waning. CBS has already ordered another spin-off set in Hawaii. (May 31, AFN-Prime)

“**The Bold Type**” — The glossy fashion-magazine drama returns this month for its fifth and final season. The show’s swan song will consist of six episodes. They’ll find Jane, Kat and Sutton “on the brink of defining who they really are and how best to leave their mark on the world.” (May 26 stateside, Freeform)

“**The Kominsky Method**” — Alan Arkin left the Golden Globe-winning comedy last year, and Season 3 will begin with the news that his character, Norman Newlander, has died. That means Sandy (Michael Douglas) will now have to navigate his golden years without his best pal by his side. (streams May 28 on Netflix)

“**Bless the Harts**” — The animated comedy about a Southern family and featuring the voice talents of Kristen Wiig, Maya Rudolph and Kumail Nanjiani has been canceled after only two seasons. Its run is expected to end June 20. (airs Mondays on AFN-Spectrum)

“**Van Helsing**” — The vampire drama will end with its 13-episode fifth season, which launched on April 16. The season finds Vanessa (Kelly Overton), Violet (Keeya King) and Jack (Nicole Munoz) “risking everything to finally bring an end to the Dark One once and for all.” (airs Saturdays and Sundays on AFN-Spectrum)

“**Keeping Up with the Kardashians**” — The juicy reality series that brought us into the rich-and-famous lives of the Kardashians will come to an end after 14 years and 20 seasons. The farewell tour began on March 18 and though a finale date has yet to be announced, expect it to air in mid-June. (airs Wednesdays and Fridays on AFN-Pulse)

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WORLD

Ex-TV presenter killed after Taliban threats

By RAHIM FAIEZ
Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Gunmen killed a former Afghan TV presenter on Thursday as he was traveling in the southern city of Kandahar, a provincial official said, adding to fears for press freedom in the war-wrecked country. Nimat Rawan was shot at noon, provincial spokesman Baheer Ahmadi said, by two assailants who escaped with his cellphone. Security

officials have told several other journalists in the area that extremists are targeting them as well, he added.

The killing heightens worries over the fate of Afghan journalists as U.S. troops pull out. Many fear violence will spike and reprisals will be taken out against those who worked with foreign forces.

Rawan was a former presenter for the well-known local channel Tolonews. He had been working in

the Finance Ministry's media office, media watchdog Nia said in a statement.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but it comes a day after the Taliban issued a threat to Afghan journalists it considered too close to U.S.-backed security agencies.

In a statement, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid warned Afghan journalists against giving "one-sided news in support of Af-

ghanistan's intelligence," or otherwise "face the consequences."

Afghanistan is considered one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a journalist. Since 2006, as many as 76 journalists have been killed in Afghanistan, according to UNESCO.

Last year alone at least 15 were killed, and earlier this year, three women employed by media outlets were killed in eastern Afghanistan. Islamic State has claimed

responsibility for some of the killings, including that of the three women. The majority of the targeted journalists have been women.

The government blames a resurgent Taliban — who now control or hold sway over half the country — for many of the targeted killings. The insurgents, meanwhile, claim the Afghan intelligence service is carrying out these attacks so as to blame the Taliban.



ABDELJALIL BOUNHAR/AP

A Moroccan nurse takes care of one of the nine babies protected in an incubator at the maternity ward of the private clinic of Ain Borja in Casablanca, Morocco, on Wednesday. Halima Cisse, 25, gave birth to the babies Tuesday in Morocco after being sent there for special care, Mali's top health official announced.

Malian mom is first to give birth to 9 babies at once

Associated Press

BAMAKO, Mali — A Malian woman has given birth to nine babies at once — after expecting seven, according to Mali's Minister of Health and the Moroccan clinic where the nonuplets were born.

It appeared to be the first time on record that a woman had given birth to nine surviving babies at once.

The five girls and four boys, and their mother, "are all doing well," Mali's health minister said in a statement.

The mother, 25-year-old Halima Cisse, gave birth to the babies by cesarean section on Tuesday in Morocco after being sent there for special care, Mali's top health official announced.

Associated Press reporters saw some of the babies wiggling their hands and feet inside incubators Wednesday in the private Ain Borja clinic in Casablanca. Medical staff checked their status regularly in the neonatal ward wallpapered with cartoon characters.

Cisse had been expecting seven babies. Malian doctors, under government orders, sent her to Morocco for the births because hospitals in Mali, one of the world's poorest countries, are ill-equipped to provide adequate care for this exceptional multiple pregnancy.

The Casablanca clinic's director Youssef Alaoui told Moroccan state TV that they had been contacted by Malian doctors about the case a month and a half ago. They were not expecting nine babies, he said.

Cisse gave birth prematurely at 30 weeks and is now in stable condition after heavy bleeding for which she was given a blood transfusion, he said.

The cesarean was ordered after Cisse had "birth pains," Alaoui, the clinic director, said. The babies weigh between 1.1 and 2.2 pounds.

The Guinness Book of World Records said in an email to The AP that its current record for most living births at once is eight, and that it is verifying the Morocco birth.

The current holder of the Guinness record is American Nadya Suleman, who gave birth to eight premature but otherwise healthy children in 2009.

Alaoui, the clinic director, told The AP that as far as he was aware Cisse had not used fertility treatments. The Malian health ministry did not provide any other information about the pregnancy or births.

Yacoub Khalaf, a professor of reproductive medicine at King's College London, said that such births would be extraordinarily unlikely without fertility treatment, and noted the dangers involved. The mother "was at severe risk of losing her uterus or losing her life," he said. The babies "could suffer physical and mental handicaps. The risk of cerebral palsy is astronomically higher."

He urged more awareness worldwide about monitoring fertility treatments and about the risks and costs of having so many premature babies at one time.

Rome jury convicts 2 Americans in slaying of police officer in '19

Associated Press

ROME—A jury in Italy convicted two American friends in the 2019 slaying in Rome of a police officer in a tragic unraveling of a small-time drug deal gone bad, sentencing them to the maximum life in prison.

More than 12 hours after deliberations began, the jury of two judges and six civilians delivered verdicts and sentences Wednesday night that set off a collective gasp in the courtroom: Finnegan Lee Elder, 21, and Gabriel Natale-Hjorth, 20, former schoolmates from the San Francisco area, were each found guilty of murder and four other counts and received Italy's stiffest punishment, life imprisonment.

Each had been charged with homicide, attempted extortion, assault, resisting a public official and carrying an attack-style knife without just cause. Presiding Judge Marina Finiti announced the jury found them guilty of all the charges in the trial indictment.

Prosecutors alleged Elder stabbed Vice Brigadier Mario Cerciello Rega 11 times with a knife that he brought with him on his trip to Europe and that Natale-Hjorth helped him hide the knife in their hotel room. Under Italian law, an ac-

complice in an alleged murder can also be charged with murder without materially doing the slaying.

The July 26, 2019, killing of the officer in the storied Carabinieri paramilitary police corps shocked Italy. Cerciello Rega, 35, was mourned as a national hero. Cerciello Rega had recently returned from a honeymoon when he was assigned along with partner, officer Andrea Varriale, to follow up on a reported extortion attempt. They went in plainclothes and, for reasons never clear in court testimony, didn't bring their service pistols on the mission.

Prosecutors contend the young Americans concocted a plot involving a stolen bag and cellphone after their failed attempt to buy cocaine with \$96 in Rome's Trastevere nightlife district. Natale-Hjorth and Elder testified they had paid for the cocaine but didn't receive it.

During the trial, the Americans told the court they thought that Cerciello Rega and Varriale were thugs who had showed up, and not the go-between, for the appointment. Varriale, who suffered a back injury in a scuffle with Natale-Hjorth while his partner was grappling with Elder, testified that the officers did identify themselves as Carabinieri.



GREGORIO BORGIA/AP

Finnegan Lee Elder and his co-defendant Gabriel Natale-Hjorth, right, listen as the verdict is read, in their trial for the slaying of an Italian plainclothes police officer in a drug sting gone awry in Rome in 2019, in Rome, on Wednesday. The two American friends were convicted.



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OPINION

Preparing for a much bigger theater of war

DEFENSE SECRETARY LLOYD AUSTIN
Special to The Washington Post

The cornerstone of America’s defense is deterrence, ensuring that our adversaries understand the folly of outright conflict. “Only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt,” said President John F. Kennedy in 1961, “can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed.”

Sixty years later, we are still the best in this business. But being the best today isn’t a guarantee of being the best tomorrow — not in an age when technology is changing the character of warfare itself, and not at a time when our potential adversaries are very deliberately working to blunt our edge.

Galloping advances in technology mean important changes in the work we do to keep the United States secure not just through air, land and sea but also space and cyberspace.

To ensure that the costs and risks of aggression remain out of line with any conceivable benefit, we’ll use existing capabilities, build new ones, and use all of them in new and networked ways — hand in hand with our allies and partners.

We cannot predict the future. What we need is the right mix of technology, operational concepts and capabilities — all woven together in a networked way that is so credible, flexible and formidable that it will give any adversary pause. We need to create

advantages for ourselves and dilemmas for them.

Under what I call “integrated deterrence,” the U.S. military isn’t meant to stand apart, but to buttress U.S. diplomacy and advance a foreign policy that employs all instruments of our national power. As President Joe Biden has made clear, diplomacy must come first, and the use of force must be a very last resort.

Integrated deterrence means using some of our current capabilities differently. It means developing new operational concepts for things we already have. And it means investing in quantum computing and artificial intelligence, which will help us make decisions with more speed and rigor.

We are already investing in the huge opportunities of edge computing, the framework that lets us process data as it is being collected, absorb it and share it instantaneously — enabling us to find not just one needle in one haystack but 10 needles in 10 haystacks, and share those locations with various forces and partners. This gives us real-world, real-time advantages — and can let us fully grasp situations moving at the speed of war.

Yet deterrence today doesn’t rely on any particular platform or service or skill set. It relies on the networks we build across the whole of our military.

In space, for example, integrated deter-

rence would mean ensuring that capabilities such as our satellite-based Global Positioning System can continue even if adversaries attack it with missiles, cyber tools or space-based weapons. It might also mean employing cyber effects in one location to respond to a maritime security incident hundreds of miles away.

Any adversary thinking about pressing for advantage in one domain must know that we can respond not just in that arena but in many others as well. The power to deter rests on our ability to respond to aggression in the time and manner of our choosing.

This won’t be easy. The nature of warfare is changing; it spans an unprecedented theater that stretches from the heavens to cyberspace and far into the oceans’ depths. That demands new thinking and new action inside the Defense Department. We must redouble our efforts to work together — with allies and partners, across commands, across services and across our fiefdoms and stovepipes.

It is always easier to stamp out a small ember than to put out a raging fire. We must think harder and more creatively about preventing the future fight. And if we can’t prevent it, we need to be ready to win it, and to win it decisively.

This essay is adapted from Austin’s April 30 speech at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii.

Ruling means Facebook just lost its greatest power

MOLLY ROBERTS
The Washington Post

Facebook wanted you to know that its decision about Donald Trump’s future was not really Facebook’s decision, but the Facebook Oversight Board’s decision. The Facebook Oversight Board wants you to know that Facebook’s decision is indeed Facebook’s decision after all.

Got that? You would be forgiven if you had some questions here. For starters, what even is this “Oversight Board”? The board isn’t Facebook, but it is by, for and of Facebook: a commission of outside experts in freedom of expression, misinformation and more, funded by a \$130 million trust of the firm’s creation, to which consumers may appeal content moderation.

On Wednesday, this commission answered Facebook’s query of whether it should reinstate the former president on the platform . . . by refusing to answer. The company, proclaimed the panelists, was right to suspend the president after the riot at the U.S. Capitol. But now, it must decide for itself whether that suspension will stand.

The Oversight Board’s purpose was always to reduce Facebook’s power, yet skeptics have always asked whether it also reduces Facebook’s responsibility. This week, the body declined to do either.

Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg hyped the Oversight Board concept a few years ago as a salve for concerns about a private company’s unaccountable control over the public conversation, though at the time, he called it the “Supreme Court.” And why not? Internet law professor Kate Klonick described social media sites in the Harvard Law Review as the “new governors.” They operate as micro-countries and meta-countries all at once, creating their own laws

The fate of Trump is right back where it is always was: in Zuckerberg’s lap.

and enforcement mechanisms that dictate the way of life within their walled-off sites, but also apply everywhere and to everyone.

All that was missing was a judiciary. So Facebook did what computer geeks do best: It built one, dabbling this time in constitutional theory instead of if-statements and user networks.

Now ask a constitutional theorist: What is a judiciary supposed to do? This particular body can decide whether Facebook’s rules were properly enforced. What it says goes regarding, say, an opposition group disciplined for criticizing a repressive regime. Or a white supremacist let off for spewing racist invective. Or a former president exiled for an undetermined period of time for inciting armed insurrection. Yet the board can’t decide anything about the integrity of the laws themselves, or those mysterious algorithms that undergird the whole game; instead, it may only advise.

Ever since Marbury took on Madison all those years ago, this country hasn’t thought much of a Supreme Court that can’t invalidate laws. So you might have expected the chorus of scoffs to start when the Oversight Board declined even to settle the enforcement question, at least as far as the exiled erstwhile leader’s long-term fate goes. Its members kicked the question back to Facebook to answer, on the grounds that the initial determination applied “a vague, standardless penalty” that was impossible to interpret. A legal scholar might call this remanding the case. A layman might call it

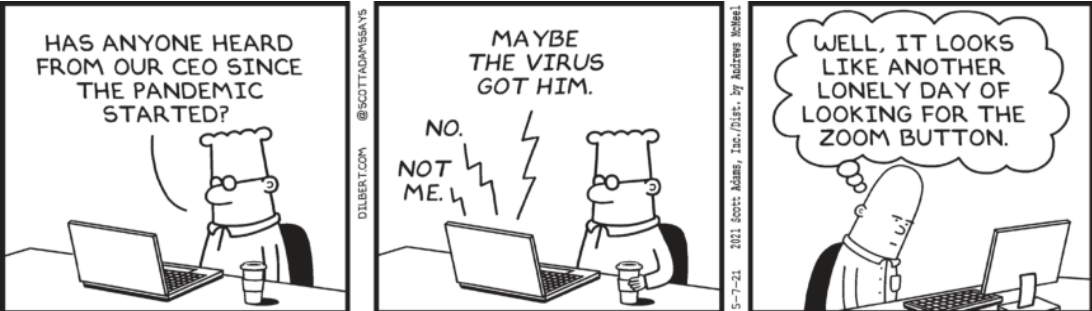
punting. But the Oversight Board claims it is punting only because Facebook itself punted. The commission has in essence adopted the favorite argument of its most strident naysayers: The outcome of today’s blockbuster case was all the same to Facebook, because there was money to be made and money to be lost on either side of it — and enemies, too. Better to blame it on someone else. Say the board had confirmed Facebook’s decision in full. The company would have been able to use the board as cover for attacks from conservatives who accuse Zuckerberg of throwing down his lightning bolt from on high. Same goes for if the board had told Facebook it was utterly wrong. Facebook would have been able to dodge liberals’ ire for going easy on a democracy-destroying con man. “We did do the right thing,” Facebook might protest, “but these other guys wouldn’t let us!” The Oversight Board, in that event, hardly would have enhanced this elusive “accountability” the company claims to quest after. Determined not to become merely a fig leaf for Facebook to obscure its sins, the commission opted instead to be a hair shirt. Well, all right. But where does that leave us? Most helpfully, the Oversight Board has demanded that Facebook craft clearer standards and impose them in a clearer manner. Still, the fate of Trump is right back where it is always was: in Zuckerberg’s lap. That means that, while the board has returned to Facebook the responsibility it sought to shirk, it has returned along with it the power that chafes at critics the world over. Or perhaps we should look at it another way. Facebook has been deprived of the greatest power of all: to choose not to choose.

Molly Roberts writes about technology and society for The Washington Post’s Opinions section.

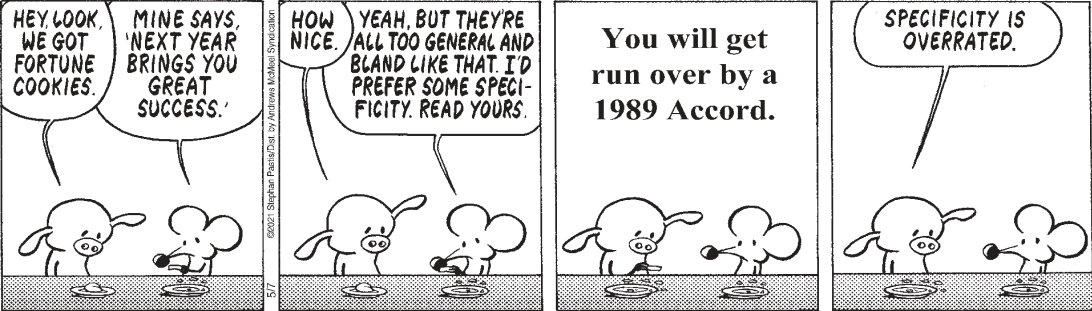
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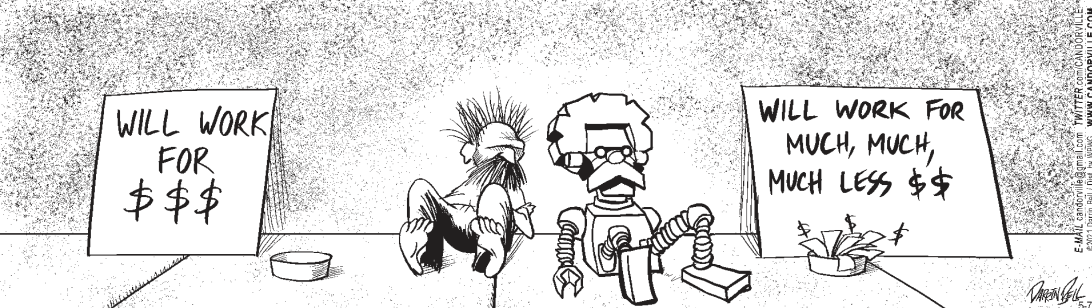
Pearls Before Swine



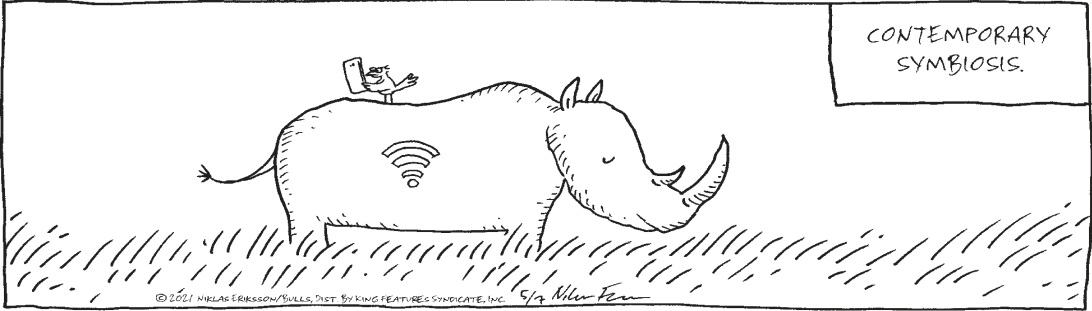
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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- ACROSS
- 56 Clean air org.
- 57 France's longest river
- 21 Auction signal
- 22 Flamenco cheer
- 24 HBO rival
- 26 Operatic barber
- 28 Andrew — Webber
- 30 Fun and games
- 32 "Seven —" (1954 Kurosawa film)
- 33 Historic period
- 34 Kibosh
- 36 Mal de mer
- 38 Type of beam
- 39 Reflection
- 40 CNN News anchor Don —
- 42 Dickens work
- 45 Use scissors
- 46 Vegas game
- 48 Shock partner
- 50 TiVo precursor
- 51 Summer on the Seine
- DOWN
- 1 Hostel
- 2 Eastern path
- 3 Tennis champ Pete
- 4 1401, in Roman numerals
- 5 Tools for duels
- 6 Supermodel Bündchen
- 7 Some HDTVs
- 8 Sleep acronym
- 9 Yo-Yo Ma's instrument
- 10 "... — and hungry look"
- 11 Overbearing
- 17 Cookout spots
- 19 West Pointer
- 6 Fido's warning
- 9 Urban carrier
- 12 Civil rts. org. since 1909
- 13 "Rocks"
- 14 "Evil Woman" band
- 15 — plume
- 16 Sales rep's freebies
- 18 Jigsaw puzzle parts
- 20 "Sad to say ..."
- 21 Neither mate
- 23 Pitcher Maglie
- 24 Unemotional
- 25 Norwegian saint
- 27 Indian city
- 29 Yen
- 31 Untie
- 35 "I — kick from champagne ..."
- 37 Mumbai dress
- 38 Pale purple
- 41 Writer Rand
- 43 Upper limit
- 44 From the U.S.
- 45 Number puzzle
- 47 Residents of Apia
- 49 Enthusiasm
- 52 Conceit
- 53 Golfer Michelle
- 54 Put into law
- 55 Stimp's pal

Answer to Previous Puzzle

B	A	T	H		M	A	C		C	F	O	S
A	L	G	A		E	P	A		A	L	B	S
A	V	I	V		D	O	S		R	A	I	N
S	A	F	A	R	I			H	E	I	S	T
				N	E				D	O	H	
P	A	P	A		V	A	C	U	M	E	D	
A	S	U			A	M	O			O	V	A
M	E	D	U	L	L	A	S		O	B	E	Y
				D	N	A			T	I	L	
I	C	I	E	S	T			U	S	E	F	U
D	O	N	A			R	U	M		A	L	L
L	O	G	S			I	S	E		R	E	A
E	T	S	Y			G	O	D		Y	E	N

5-7 CRYPTOQUIP

XLMS VGRLS ALNGHSVMH SNZZ

QGRLSH HMW XLZB AMHOMQQW

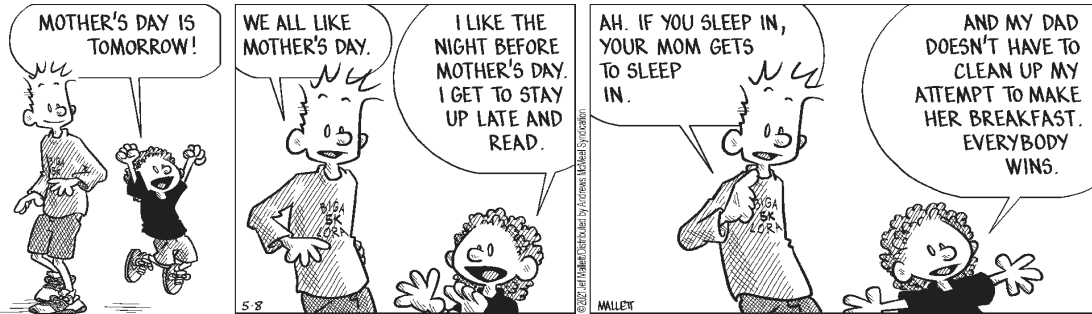
RNZZSGBR TBZ MBTSLZN?

“LTX’H GS RQTXGBR?”

Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: NAME FOR AN ODD ESTABLISHMENT THAT’S A COMBO OF A PIZZA SHOP AND HAIR SALON: LITTLE SCISSORS.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: X equals W

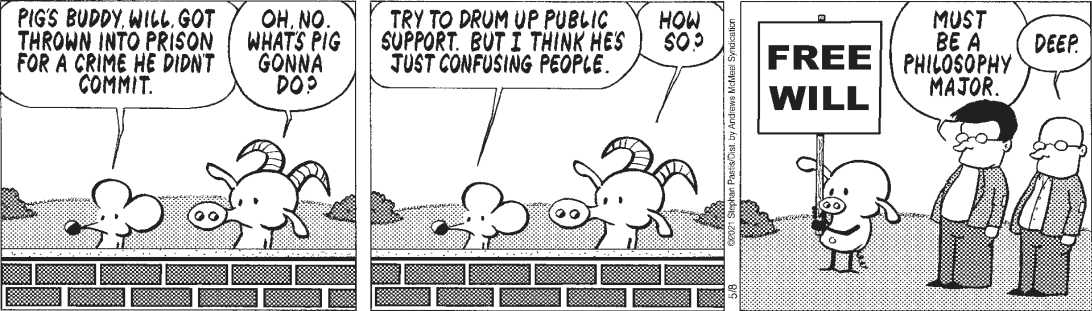
Frazz



Dilbert



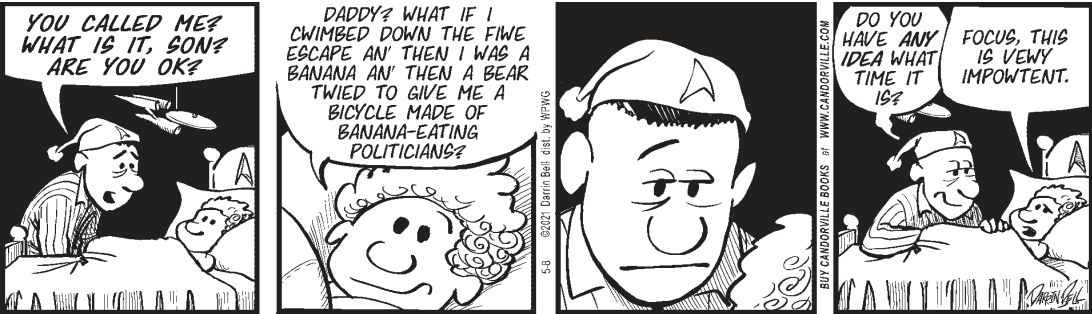
Pearls Before Swine



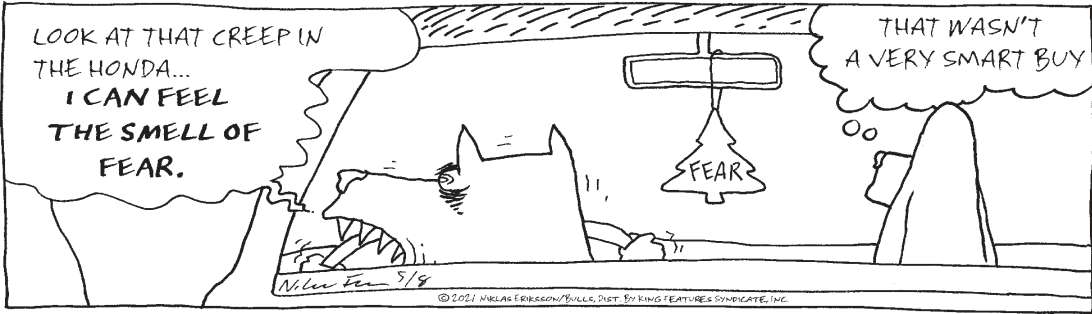
Non Sequitur



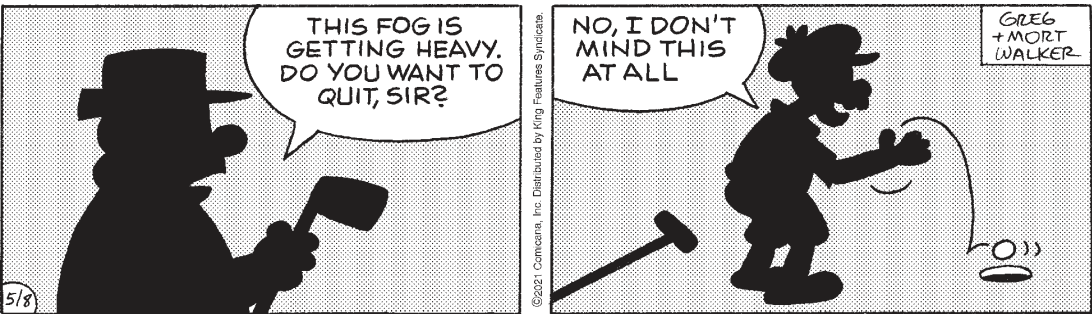
Candorville



Carpe Diem



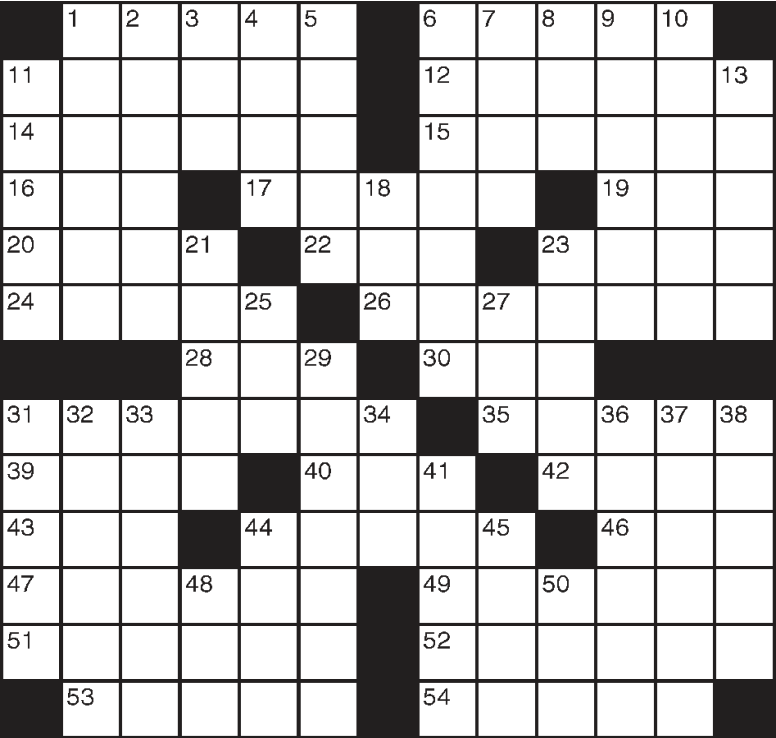
Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



- ACROSS
- 1 Greedy person's demand
- 6 Vice —
- 11 Artillery soldier
- 12 Niche
- 14 Kidman of "The Hours"
- 15 London's river
- 16 "People of Earth" actress Gasteyer
- 17 652, in letters
- 19 Gallery display
- 20 Tear
- 22 Tic- — -toe
- 23 Differently
- 24 Performs high-tech surgery
- 26 Trick-or-treaters' booty
- 28 Rug cleaner, briefly
- 30 Eggy quaff
- 31 Louisiana bird
- 35 Floating ice masses
- 39 And others (Lat.)
- 40 "Unh-unh"
- 42 Antitoxins
- 43 Performance
- 44 Asian capital
- 46 Sylvester, for one
- 47 Mince
- 49 Strange thing
- 51 Pooh's mopey pal
- 52 More profound
- 53 De-ices, in a way
- 54 Rescues
- DOWN
- 1 Old British coin
- 2 Machu Picchu residents
- 3 6 on a phone
- 4 Blend
- 5 Upright
- 6 Papal residence
- 7 K thru 12
- 8 — Victor
- 9 Mogadishu resident
- 10 Reluctant
- 11 Make twisty
- 13 — Park, Colorado
- 18 Fond du —
- 21 Evil one
- 23 Rims
- 25 Pouch
- 27 San Francisco's — Hill
- 29 Cocktail hour appetizers
- 31 Quiet partner?
- 32 Carves in stone
- 33 Janet Jackson's sister
- 34 Indian bread
- 36 Cookbook entry
- 37 Vent covers
- 38 Nymph pursuer
- 41 Car engine covers
- 44 In pain
- 45 Notion
- 48 D.C. figure
- 50 "Lion" actor Patel

Answer to Previous Puzzle



5-8 CRYPTOQUIP

SHUU-ORTSR DTBHQYMR SLT

STGON TR ELH NYQH MN M

NKGXGYNYRAUZ ATTQ XHGNTRMU

EGMYRHG: AZB DMGGHZ.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT MIGHT CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTS SAY WHEN CASUALLY GREETING ONE ANOTHER? "HOW'S IT GLOWING?"

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals L

SCOREBOARD/NFL

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

NCAA FCS Playoffs
Semifinals Saturday, May 8 South Dakota St. (7-1) vs. Delaware (7-0) James Madison (7-0) vs. Sam Houston (8-0)
Championship Sunday, May 16 At Frisco, Texas Semifinal winners

PRO SOCCER

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE							
	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA	
New England	2	0	1	7	5	3	
NYCFC	2	1	0	6	8	2	
Orlando City	1	0	2	5	4	1	
Montreal	1	0	2	5	6	4	
Atlanta	1	1	1	4	4	3	
Inter Miami CF	1	1	1	4	4	4	
New York	1	2	0	3	5	5	
D.C. United	1	2	0	3	3	6	
Nashville	0	0	3	3	4	4	
Columbus	0	0	2	2	0	0	
Toronto FC	0	1	1	1	4	6	
Philadelphia	0	2	1	1	1	4	
Chicago	0	2	1	1	3	7	
Cincinnati	0	2	1	1	2	10	

WESTERN CONFERENCE							
	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA	
Seattle	2	0	1	7	8	1	
San Jose	2	1	0	6	8	4	
Real Salt Lake	2	0	0	6	5	2	
Austin	2	1	0	6	4	3	
LA Galaxy	2	1	0	6	6	7	
LAFC	1	0	2	5	4	2	
FC Dallas	1	1	1	4	5	4	
Houston	1	1	1	4	4	4	
Vancouver	1	1	1	4	3	3	
Sporting KC	1	1	1	4	4	5	
Colorado	1	1	1	4	2	3	
Portland	1	2	0	3	3	6	
Minnesota	0	3	0	0	1	7	

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Friday's game
San Jose at Real Salt Lake
Saturday's games
Philadelphia at Chicago
Toronto FC at New York
D.C. United at Columbus
New England at Nashville
Montreal at Vancouver
Houston at FC Dallas
New York City FC at Orlando City
Los Angeles FC at LA Galaxy
Minnesota at Colorado

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL Major League Baseball American League
HOUSTON ASTROS — Reassigned RHP Enoli Paredes from rehab assignment to Corpus Christi (Double-A South).
KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Selected the contract of RHP Eddie Butler from Southern Maryland (Atlantic League).
LOS ANGELES ANGELS — Activated RHP Mike Mayers from IL. Recalled Of Juan Lagares and OF Taylor Ward from Salt Lake City (Triple-A West). Placed INF Anthony Rendon on IL. Optioned RHP James Hoyt to Salt Lake City (Triple-A West). Designated RHP Ben Rowen for assignment.
MINNESOTA TWINS — Recalled LHP Lewis Thorpe from St. Paul (Triple-A Midwest). Activated INF Miguel Sano from the 10-day IL. Placed OF/1B Alex Kirilloff on the 10-day IL retroactive to May 4.
NEW YORK YANKEES — Placed INF Rougned Odor on the 10-day IL. Recalled RHP Albert Breu from Scranton/Wilkes Barre (Triple-A Northeast).
OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Optioned Skye Bolt to Las Vegas (Triple-A West).
SEATTLE MARINERS — Recalled RHP Wyatt Mills from Tacoma (Triple-A West). Placed RHP Keynan Middleton on the 10-day IL.
TAMPA BAY RAYS — Activated RHP Pete Fairbanks from the 10-day IL. Placed RHP Diego Castillo on the 10-day IL retroactive to May 4.
TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Placed OF George Springer on the 10-day IL. Activated C Reese McGuire and OF Jonathan Davis to active roster. Transferred RHP Julian Merryweather to the 60-day IL.Optioned C Riley Adams to Buffalo (Triple-A East)
National League
ATLANTA BRAVES — Activated LHP Max Fried from the 10-day IL. Optioned LHP Sean Newcomb and RHP Chris Martin to Gwinnett (Triple-A Southeast).
CHICAGO CUBS — Optioned RHP Kohl Stewart to Iowa (Triple-A East).
CINCINNATI REDS — Optioned RHP Jose De Leon to Louisville (Triple-A Midwest). Recalled LHP Cionel Perez from Louisville (Triple-A Midwest).
COLORADO ROCKIES — Recalled RHP Jose Mujica from Albuquerque (Triple-A East). Optioned OF Sam Hilliard and RHP Ryan Castellani to Albuquerque (Triple-A

TENNIS

L'Open 35 De Saint-Malo
Wednesday At Tennis Club J.A Saint-Malo Saint-Malo, France Purse: Euro 92,742 Surface: Red clay Women's Singles Round of 16
Anna-Karolina Schmiedlova, Slovakia, def. Kateryna Kozlova, Ukraine, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4.
Viktorija Golubic (5), Switzerland, def. Greet Minnen, Belgium, 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (2).
Harmony Tan, France, def. Arantxa Rus (6), Netherlands, 6-4, 6-2.
Aliona Bolsova Zadoinov, Spain, def. Oceane Dodin, France, 5-7, 7-5, 7-5.
Jasmine Paolini, Italy, def. Nina Stojanovic (7), Serbia, 4-6, 6-2, 6-1.
Women's Doubles Round of 16
Aliaksandra Sasnovich, Belarus, and Clara Tauson, Denmark, def. Lidziya Marozava, Belarus, and Cristina-Andreea Mitu (4), Romania, 2-6, 6-4, 10-6.
Arantxa Rus, Netherlands, and Xiyu Wang, China, def. Amandine Hesse and Harmony Tan, France, 6-3, 6-3.
Quarterfinals
Hayley Carter, United States, and Luisa Stefani (1), Brazil, def. Vivian Heisen, Germany, and Cornelia Lister, Sweden, 6-2, 6-4.
Elixane Lechemia, France, and Julia Wachaczyk, Germany, def. Yana Sizikova and Anna Kalinskaya (3), Russia, 7-5, 2-6, 10-8.
Sabrina Santamaria and Kaitlyn Christian (2), United States, def. Alla Kudryavtseva, Russia, and Oksana Kalashnikova, Georgia, 6-3, 6-3.

Madrid Open
Wednesday At Caja Magica Madrid Purse: Euro 2,614,465 Surface: Red clay Men's Singles Round of 32
Cristian Garin (16), Chile, def. Dominik Koepfer, Germany, 6-3, 6-4.
Aslan Karatsev, Russia, def. Diego Schwartzman (7), Argentina, 2-6, 6-4, 6-1.
Daniil Medvedev (2), Russia, def. Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, Spain, 4-6, 6-4, 6-2.
Alexander Zverev (5), Germany, def. Kei Nishikori, Japan, 6-3, 6-2.

GOLF

PGA Tour FedEx Cup leaders			
Through May 2	Points	Money	
1. Justin Thomas	1,607	\$5,666,666	
2. Bryson DeChambeau	1,577	\$5,443,091	
3. Viktor Hovland	1,430	\$4,079,255	
4. Cameron Smith	1,381	\$4,258,720	
5. Xander Schauffele	1,369	\$4,266,444	
6. Stewart Cink	1,348	\$3,217,215	
7. Patrick Cantlay	1,313	\$3,532,353	

DEALS

NEW YORK JETS — Claimed WR Matt Cole off waivers from San Francisco. Signed S Jamien Sherwood.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Claimed LB Nate Evans off waivers from Jacksonville.
TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS — Signed S Raven Greene and LB Joseph Jones. Hired Thaddeus Lewis and A.Q. Shipley to the team's coaching staff. Re-Signed QB Blaine Gabbert to a one-year contract.
TENNESSEE TITANS — Signed RB Brian Hill.
HOCKEY National Hockey League
NHL — Named Jared M. Maples executive vice president, chief security officer. Announced the retirement of Dennis Cunningham, executive vice president of security. National Hockey League's department of safety has suspended Philadelphia D Shayne Gostisbehere two games for boarding Pittsburgh D Mark Friedman on May 4.
ANAHEIM DUCKS — Recalled RW David Backes from minor league taxi squad.
ARIZONA COYOTES — Signed G Karel Vejmelka to a one-year contract.
COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS — Recalled G Matiss Kivlenieks from minor league taxi squad.
OTTAWA SENATORS — Recalled RW Parker Kelly and D Jonathan Aspirot from Belleville (AHL). Recalled D Olle Alsing and Vitaly Abramov from minor league taxi squad.
NEW JERSEY DEVILS — Reassigned G Evan Cormier and LW A.J. Greer to Binghamton (AHL). Recalled LW Nolan Foote from Binghamton (AHL). Signed G Nico Daws to a three-year, entry-level contract.
SAN JOSE SHARKS — Recalled C Alexander Chmelevski and Ds Nicolas Meloch and Jacob Middleton from San Jose (AHL). Recalled C Kyle Topping from Orlando (ECHL). Recalled C Alexander True and Alexander Barabanov from minor league taxi squad.
ST. LOUIS BLUES — Recalled C Dakota Joshua from Utica (AHL).
WASHINGTON CAPITALS — Recalled LW Daniel Carr from minor league taxi squad.
SOCCER Major League Soccer
LOS ANGELES FC — Loaned Fs Bryce Duke, Alvaro Quezada, Danny Musovski, Raheem Edwards and Cal Jennings, G Tomas Romero, and D Tony Leone to Las Vegas (USL Championship).

Daniel Evans, Britain, def. John Millman, Australia, 6-7 (5), 6-2, 6-3.
Federico Delbonis, Argentina, def. Albert Ramos-Vinolas, Spain, 7-6 (5), 6-3.
Rafael Nadal (1), Spain, def. Carlos Alcaraz, Spain, 6-1, 6-2.

Alexei Popyrin, Australia, def. Jannik Sinner (14), Italy, 7-6 (5), 6-2.
John Isner, United States, def. Roberto Bautista Agut (9), Spain, 6-4, 6-7 (4), 7-6 (6).

Women's Singles
Quarterfinals
Paula Badosa, Spain, def. Belinda Bencic (8), Switzerland, 6-4, 7-5.
Ashleigh Barty (1), Australia, def. Petra Kvitova (9), Czech Republic, 6-1, 3-6, 6-3.
Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, Russia, def. Karolina Muchova, Czech Republic, 7-6 (4), 7-6 (2).
Aryna Sabalenka (5), Belarus, def. Elise Mertens (13), Belgium, 6-1, 4-0, ret.

Men's Doubles
Round of 32
Nicolas Mahut and Pierre-Hugues Herbert (6), France, def. Fabrice Martin and Jeremy Chardy, France, 6-3, 6-3.

Cristian Garin, Chile, and Alexander Bublik, Kazakhstan, def. Rajeev Ram, United States, and Joe Salisbury (5), Britain, 7-6 (5), 7-5.

Raven Klaasen, South Africa, and Ben McLachlan, Japan, def. Oliver Marach, Austria, and Taylor Fritz, United States, 6-2, 6-3.

Round of 16
Marcel Granollers, Spain, and Horacio Zeballos (3), Argentina, def. Karen Khachanov and Andrey Rublev, Russia, 6-3, 6-2.

Lukasz Kubot, Poland, and Wesley Koolhof (7), Netherlands, def. Marcelo Demoliner, Brazil, and Daniil Medvedev, Russia, 7-5, 6-7 (4), 10-3.

Tim Puetz and Alexander Zverev, Germany, def. Jean-Julien Rojer, Netherlands, and Marcelo Melo, Brazil, 6-4, 6-4.

Rohan Bopanna, India, and Denis Shapovalov, Canada, def. Robert Farah and Juan Sebastian Cabal (1), Colombia, 6-3, 6-4.

Women's Doubles
Quarterfinals
Barbora Krejickova and Katerina Sinikova (2), Czech Republic, def. Zhang Shuai and Xu Yifan (7), China, 6-1, 6-0.
Belinda Bencic and Jil Teichmann, Switzerland, def. Petra Martic, Croatia, and Shelby Rogers, United States, 6-3, 7-6 (3).
Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, Russia, and Jelena Ostapenko, Latvia, def. Vera Zvonareva and Elena Vesnina, Russia, 7-6 (2), 6-3.

AUTO RACING

Goodyear 400 lineup
NASCAR Cup Series After Saturday qualifying; race Sunday At Darlington Raceway Darlington, S.C. Lap length: 1.37 miles (Car number in parentheses)
1. (2) Brad Keselowski, Ford, .000 mph.
2. (4) Kevin Harvick, Ford, .000.
3. (18) Kyle Busch, Toyota, .000.
4. (19) Martin Truex Jr, Toyota, .000.
5. (24) William Byron, Chevrolet, .000.
6. (9) Chase Elliott, Chevrolet, .000.
7. (11) Denny Hamlin, Toyota, .000.
8. (21) Matt DiBenedetto, Ford, .000.
9. (3) Austin Dillon, Chevrolet, .000.
10. (8) Tyler Reddick, Chevrolet, .000.
11. (17) Chris Buescher, Ford, .000.
12. (22) Joey Logano, Ford, .000.
13. (34) Michael McDowell, Ford, .000.
14. (5) Kyle Larson, Chevrolet, .000.
15. (99) Daniel Suarez, Chevrolet, .000.
16. (12) Ryan Blaney, Ford, .000.
17. (1) Kurt Busch, Chevrolet, .000.
18. (42) Ross Chastain, Chevrolet, .000.
19. (48) Alex Bowman, Chevrolet, .000.
20. (6) Ryan Newman, Ford, .000.
21. (20) Christopher Bell, Toyota, .000.
22. (14) Chase Briscoe, Ford, .000.
23. (23) Bubba Wallace, Toyota, .000.
24. (41) Cole Custer, Ford, .000.
25. (38) Anthony Alfredo, Ford, .000.
26. (43) Erik Jones, Chevrolet, .000.
27. (10) Aric Almirola, Ford, .000.
28. (47) Ricky Stenhouse, Chevrolet, .000.
29. (37) Ryan Preece, Chevrolet, .000.
30. (7) Corey Lajoie, Chevrolet, .000.
31. (77) Justin Haley, Chevrolet, .000.
32. (78) BJ McLeod, Ford, .000.
33. (51) Cody Ware, Chevrolet, .000.
34. (53) JJ Yeley, Chevrolet, .000.
35. (00) Quin Houff, Chevrolet, .000.
36. (15) James Davison, Chevrolet, .000.
37. (52) Josh Billicki, Ford, .000.

Steakhouse Elite 200 lineup
NASCAR Xfinity Series After Friday qualifying; race Saturday At Darlington Raceway Darlington, S.C. Lap length: 1.37 miles (Car number in parentheses)
1. (16) AJ Allmendinger, Chevrolet, .000 mph.
2. (22) Austin Cindric, Ford, .000.
3. (10) Jeb Burton, Chevrolet, .000.
4. (11) Justin Haley, Chevrolet, .000.
5. (9) Noah Gragson, Chevrolet, .000.
6. (98) Riley Herbst, Ford, .000.
7. (18) Daniel Hemric, Toyota, .000.
8. (20) Harrison Burton, Toyota, .000.
9. (68) Brandon Brown, Chevrolet, .000.
10. (2) Myatt Snider, Chevrolet, .000.
11. (39) Ryan Sieg, Ford, .000.
12. (51) Jeremy Clements, Chevrolet, .000.
13. (02) Brett Moffitt, Chevrolet, .000.
14. (44) Tommy Joe Martins, Chevrolet, .000.
15. (66) Timmy Hill, Ford, .000.
16. (7) Justin Allgaier, Chevrolet, .000.
17. (61) David Starr, Toyota, .000.
18. (48) Jade Buford, Chevrolet, .000.
19. (4) Landon Cassill, Chevrolet, .000.
20. (1) Michael Annett, Chevrolet, .000.
21. (92) Josh Williams, Chevrolet, .000.
22. (19) Brandon Jones, Toyota, .000.
23. (36) Alex Labbe, Chevrolet, .000.
24. (8) Josh Berry, Chevrolet, .000.
25. (15) Colby Howard, Chevrolet, .000.
26. (47) Kyle Weatherman, Chevrolet, .000.
27. (26) Brandon Godvic, Toyota, .000.
28. (0) Jeffrey Earnhardt, Chevrolet, .000.
29. (54) Ty Gibbs, Toyota, .000.
30. (07) Joe Graf Jr, Chevrolet, .000.
31. (78) Jesse Little, Toyota, .000.
32. (5) Matt Mills, Chevrolet, .000.
33. (99) Ryan Ellis, Toyota, .000.
34. (6) Ryan Vargas, Chevrolet, .000.
36. (23) Tanner Berryhill, Chevrolet, .000.
37. (52) Garry Gaulding, Chevrolet, .000.
38. (90) BJ McLeod, Chevrolet, .000.
39. (74) Bayley Currey, Chevrolet, .000.
40. (13) Matt Jaskol, Ford, .000.

LiftKits4Less.com 200 lineup
NASCAR Gander Outdoors Truck Series After Thursday qualifying; race Friday At Darlington Raceway Darlington, S.C. Lap length: 1.37 miles (Car number in parentheses)
1. (4) John Nemechek, Toyota, .000 mph.
2. (16) Austin Hill, Toyota, .000.
3. (21) Zane Smith, Chevrolet, .000.
4. (99) Ben Rhodes, Toyota, .000.
5. (38) Todd Gilliland, Ford, .000.
6. (13) Johnny Sauter, Toyota, .000.
7. (52) Stewart Friesen, Toyota, .000.
8. (18) Chandler Smith, Toyota, .000.
9. (88) Matt Crafton, Toyota, .000.
10. (1) Hailey Deegan, Ford, .000.
11. (15) Tanner Gray, Ford, .000.
12. (22) Austin Wayne Self, Chevrolet, .000.
13. (51) Corey Heim, Toyota, .000.
14. (42) Carson Hocevar, Chevrolet, .000.
15. (2) Sheldon Creed, Chevrolet, .000.
16. (26) Tyler Ankrum, Chevrolet, .000.
17. (98) Grant Enfinger, Toyota, .000.
18. (40) Ryan Truex, Chevrolet, .000.
19. (24) Ryan Reed, Chevrolet, .000.
20. (19) Derek Kraus, Toyota, .000.
21. (25) Timothy Peters, Chevrolet, .000.
22. (45) Erik Darnell, Chevrolet, .000.
23. (34) Akinori Ogata, Toyota, .000.
24. (23) Chase Purdy, Chevrolet, .000.
25. (9) Codie Rohrbaugh, Chevrolet, .000.
26. (56) Timmy Hill, Chevrolet, .000.
27. (30) Danny Bohn, Toyota, .000.
28. (11) Spencer Davis, Toyota, .000.
29. (04) Cory Roper, Ford, .000.
30. (02) Kris Wright, Chevrolet, .000.
31. (3) Jordan Anderson, Chevrolet, .000.
32. (41) Dawson Cram, Chevrolet, .000.
33. (12) Tate Fogleman, Chevrolet, .000.
34. (20) Spencer Boyd, Chevrolet, .000.
35. (17) David Gilliland, Ford, .000.
36. (75) Parker Kligerman, Chevrolet, .000.
37. (10) Jennifer Jo Cobb, Chevrolet, .000.
38. (44) Bayley Currey, Chevrolet, .000.
39. (33) BJ McLeod, Chevrolet, .000.
40. (6) Norm Benning, Chevrolet, .000.

NFL warns of off-site injuries

By ARNIE STAPLETON
Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — The NFL is reminding teams following Ja’Wuan James’ potentially season-ending Achilles injury that they’re not obligated to pay salaries of players who get hurt away from team facilities.

The memo sent to all 32 teams Wednesday and obtained by The Associated Press was spurred by James’ injury he sustained while working out at a private gym away from Broncos headquarters on Tuesday.



The league encouraged teams to “remind players of the significant injury-related protection provided if they choose to work out at the club facility and the risks they undertake in choosing to train in non-NFL locations.”

Players are protected against lost wages if they sustain an injury at a team’s facility. They don’t have the same protection if they’re injured working out anywhere else.

Players from 20 teams, including the Broncos, are boycotting voluntary offseason workouts at team facilities over COVID-19 concerns.

The NFL said in the memo that several teams had raised the issue of compensation after James, the Broncos’ starting right tackle, got hurt.

The league said the Broncos are off the hook for James’ \$10 million salary for 2021, which would have been fully guaranteed had he gotten hurt while working out at the team’s facilities.

“Injuries sustained while a player is working out ‘on his own’ in a location other than an NFL facility are considered ‘Non-Football Injuries’ and are outside the scope of a typical skill, injury and cap guarantee,” the memo said.

“Such injuries are also not covered by the protections found in paragraph 9 of the NFL Player Contract, meaning that clubs have no contractual obligation to provide salary continuation during the year in which the injury was sustained.”

“By contrast,” the memo added, “injuries sustained by a player while working out at a club facility or as specifically authorized by his club are considered ‘Football-Related Injuries.’ Under our agreement with the NFL Players Association, players that sustain ‘Football Related Injuries’ are entitled to significant protections.”

NFL



ROGER STEINMAN/AP

Notre Dame quarterback Ian Book was selected by New Orleans in the fourth round of the NFL Draft.

Lower-round quarterbacks face long odds to make it

By JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

The five teams that took quarterbacks in the first round of the NFL Draft head into the offseason program full of optimism that they have found the franchise cornerstone that will lead to great success for the next decade.

History indicates that at least a couple of those teams will be looking for new answers sooner than they hoped with the hit rate on successful first-round quarterbacks being no better than a coin toss, something the New York Jets know all too well after taking Zach Wilson second overall just three years after making Sam Darnold the third overall pick.

The chances that the five teams that selected quarterbacks after round one found a keeper is considerably smaller based on the recent track records of those picks.

The days of first-round snubs going on to superstar careers such as Tom Brady, Brett Favre, Drew Brees, or becoming solid long-term starters such as Matt Hasselbeck, Trent Green and Mark Brunell are a thing of the past.

Since a stretch in 2011-12 when Russell Wilson, Andy Dalton, Kirk Cousins and Colin Kaepernick fashioned successful careers after being passed over in round one, only a rare few have made it since.

Of the 70 quarterbacks taken after round 1 from 2013-20, including 26 who went in rounds two through four, only Dak Prescott, Derek Carr and Jimmy Garoppolo have become successful starters.

The jury is still out on a few others such as Jalen Hurts, picked in the second round last year by Philadelphia, and 2019 second-rounder Drew Lock in Denver, but that history doesn't bode well for this year's class.

Five quarterbacks were drafted after the first round this year, matching the fewest taken after round one in the common draft era that started in 1967. As more teams elevate quarterbacks up their draft boards to take them in the first round, the quality in the later rounds has dropped.

There was speculation that a record-tying six quarterbacks could go in the first round this year with Trevor Lawrence, Wilson, Trey Lance, Justin Fields and Mac Jones near locks. The next to go off



MARTA LAVANDIER/AP

Texas A&M quarterback Kellen Mond went to the Minnesota Vikings in the third round.

the board ended up being Florida's Kyle Trask, who went to Tampa Bay with the final pick of the second round.

Texas A&M's Kellen Mond and Stanford's Davis Mills then went to Minnesota and Houston respectively with back-to-back picks early in the third round, Notre Dame's Ian Book went to New Orleans in the fourth and Indianapolis took Sam Ehlinger out of Texas in the sixth round.

With the possible exception of Mills, who could be rushed into play depending on the status of Deshaun Watson with the Texans, the other young quarterbacks are behind entrenched veterans and will be given time to develop.

Trask, who started 22 games in college, will get to watch the 43-year-old Brady and learn from coach Bruce Arians and offensive coordinator Byron Leftwich. Assistants Clyde Christensen and Tom Moore, who have helped develop several young passers in their decades in the league, also will provide a big help.

Mond has much more college experience than Trask with 44 starts at Texas A&M, but will have time in Minnesota to learn behind Kirk Cousins, who is under contract for two more seasons.

AP pro football writer Dave Campbell and AP sports writers Fred Goodell, Kristie Rieken and Brett Martel contributed to this report.

Seahawks' Metcalf faces elite sprinters

By PAT GRAHAM
Associated Press

The newest sprinter in the game is tall just like world-record holder Usain Bolt and has quite an explosive burst — off the line of scrimmage, anyway.

DK Metcalf will soon see just how quick he is from a different line, the starting line.

The speedy Seattle Seahawks receiver is scheduled to trade his football cleats for track spikes Sunday as he ventures into a new, faster lane for a 100-meter competition at the USA Track and Field Golden Games in Walnut, Calif.

He will put his feet to the test against Olympic-caliber sprinters. It's a decision that definitely caught the attention of the track world, where athletes have for years been challenged by anyone, in any sport, who just happens to be fast.

This may be their chance to show, once and for all, that track speed is far different from football fast.

"There's not a sprinter in the world who will let this guy think he can run with them. They will destroy him," said track agent and former 110-meter hurdler Renaldo Nehemiah, who also played three seasons with the San Francisco 49ers. "It's a noble gesture but an exercise in futility. It really is. No offense to DK, I'm a fan of his."

"I applaud him for wanting to find out — and find out he will."

The 6-foot-4 Metcalf — an inch shorter than the retired Bolt — is quick. Metcalf ran 4.33 in the 40-yard dash at the NFL combine prior to the 2019 NFL Draft.

But what really got people buzzing about Metcalf's blazing speed was when he chased down Arizona defensive back Budda Baker from behind after an interception to prevent what seemed to be a sure touchdown last season. Metcalf made up nearly 10 yards on Baker and reached a top speed of

22.64 mph in pads and cleats. He ran 108.8 yards on the play to tackle Baker short of the end zone.

"That was one of the best football plays I've ever seen," Seahawks coach Pete Carroll said after the game.

Impressive, indeed.

"But if you put a world-class track athlete in the same spot, he would be 10 meters in front of Baker and waiting for Baker," Nehemiah said. "People just don't understand world-class speed."

The speed of a sprinter is more linear, with mechanics and transitions focused on being as straight as possible. The speed of a football player tends to be more horizontal, and centered around quick five- to 10-yard bursts.

"I hope he doesn't think he's getting out here with some average Joes," said 2016 Olympian Mike Rodgers, who will be one of the favorites in Sunday's 100-meter race, where the top runners in round one advance to the final. "It's a pride thing for track athletes. We've been hearing about this for so long. So giving him a proper introduction to track is going to be everything to everybody in the track world."

For decades, track standouts have been challenged by the speediest athletes in other sports. Like Hall of Fame receiver Terrell Owens trying to set up a friendly competition with 2004 100-meter Olympic gold medalist Justin Gatlin, who's still in elite form at 39 and among the favorites to make the team for the Tokyo Games.

It simply comes with the territory. Everyone wants to see how they measure up in a race.

Metcalf recently tipped his hand — or feet — by walking by in a video posted on social media and dropping a pair of spikes on the track. He's listed in the field Sunday.

AP sports writer Tim Booth contributed to this report.



STEPHEN BRASHEAR/AP

Seattle Seahawks wide receiver DK Metcalf will compete in the 100 meters this weekend at the USA Track and Field Golden Games.

NHL

AROUND THE NHL

McDavid targeting playoffs, not points

Associated Press

Connor McDavid is within reach of a milestone that could go down in hockey history.

McDavid needs seven points in Edmonton's final five games to reach 100 in 56 games during this pandemic-shortened NHL season. Getting there would be an achievement remembered alongside Wayne Gretzky's 50 goals in 39 games, but the Oilers captain is far more worried about the 16 victories needed to win the Stanley Cup than the chase for 100 points.

"It's a number," McDavid said. "If I get there, great. If not, it's not the end of the world, either. The most important thing is our team is gearing up for the playoffs and making sure we're firing on all cylinders in Game 1."

McDavid is eager to shift focus to the postseason, a place the world's best hockey player has really only been once in six pro seasons. Edmonton fizzled out in the expanded, 24-team bubble playoffs last year, and that only fired up McDavid more to get into the round of 16 and beyond.

Houser's moment

Goaltender Michael Houser is six years removed from being an American Hockey League regular, and his last start came March 7, 2020, with Cincinnati of the ECHL. That only made Houser's 34-save victory in his NHL debut Monday night for Buffalo all the more of an accomplishment, and he followed that up with a 45-save win Tuesday.

"I was really excited to play behind six NHL defensemen," Houser said. "Any time you're in the (ECHL), it seems like it's quite a jump to get there. ... But they always tell you to stay ready."

Race for home ice

A handful of teams are still in the running for the Presidents' Trophy and home-ice advantage throughout the playoffs. Carolina is firmly in the driver's seat after back-to-back victories, especially after Vegas blew a 5-3 lead and lost at Minnesota on Monday night.

Florida, Tampa Bay, Colorado, Toronto, Washington and Minnesota are also in contention near the end of a season with no crossover play out of division. Who's the best team? No one really knows.

AP freelance writer Joe Yerdon in Buffalo, N.Y., contributed to this report.



BRUCE BENNETT/AP

Washington Capitals right winger T.J. Oshie is surrounded by the New York Rangers defense. Oshie had a hat trick in the Capitals' 4-2 win Wednesday in New York.

Capitals take out depleted Rangers in fight-filled game

New York fires team president, GM a day after they criticized the league for not suspending Washington's Wilson

BY ALLEN KREDA
Associated Press

NEW YORK — T.J. Oshie had a hat trick, Vitek Vanecek made 19 saves and the Washington Capitals beat the depleted New York Rangers 4-2 in a fight-filled game Wednesday night.

Oshie beat Alexandar Georgiev 12 seconds into the middle period with a shot from the right circle with Rangers forward Pavel Buchnevich in the penalty box.

Oshie scored again at 8:26 of the second — again with Buchnevich penalized for a high-sticking major — his 20th goal of the season.

Oshie, whose father died this week, completed his hat trick with an empty net goal at 18:20 of the third.

"We are trying to be there for him and take care of him and he ends up taking care of us," Nic Dowd said of Oshie, who was surrounded in a giant group hug from teammates at the Capitals bench.

Dowd also scored for Washington at 14:48 of the second with assists to defenseman John Carlson and Dmitri Orlov, his second of the game.

Rangers rookie Alexis Lafreniere ruined Vanecek's shutout bid at 1:15 of the third period with his 11th goal of the season. Fellow rookie forward Morgan Barron scored his first NHL goal at 18:44 to complete the scoring.

Vanecek, the 25-year-old rookie from the Czech Republic, improved to 20-9-4 this season. Vanecek was elevated into a key role for the Capitals when former Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist signed with Washington but couldn't play because of a heart condition requiring surgery.

Georgiev made 31 saves.

Washington moved into a first-place tie with idle Pittsburgh in the East Division. The Capitals have three games left while the Penguins have two.

"I thought our guys really hung together and stuck together, did what we needed to do and got to the two



SETH WENIG/AP

John Davidson, left, president of the New York Rangers, and Rangers general manager Jeff Gorton, right, were fired by the team on Wednesday.

points and heading home," coach Peter Laviolette said. "I think the way we just stuck up for each other and played for each other the entire night, I thought we did a good job just staying disciplined as well."

The dismal loss — the Rangers' fourth straight — came in their home finale and on the same day the organization stunningly fired President John Davidson and General Manager Jeff Gorton. The team said former Ranger Chris Drury would take over both jobs.

A day earlier, the team ripped the league for fining but not suspending Washington's Tom Wilson for his role in a scrum Monday night that injured Rangers star Artemi Panarin. A team statement called the decision a dereliction of duty and that George Parros was "unfit" to remain in his job as the NHL's head of player safety.

The incident obviously had an effect on the Rangers' game against the Capitals on Wednesday night, which was the first in NHL history to feature six fights in the first five minutes.

"It's obviously a crazy day. You add in the anxiety or anticipation all day from our group, and then waking up from a pregame nap with the whole set of news," Rangers forward Ryan Strome said. "It's never easy, I think, in pro sports. It's a tough business."

Scoreboard

East Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
x-Washington	53	34	14	5	73	185	157	
x-Pittsburgh	54	35	16	3	73	187	152	
x-Boston	52	31	14	7	69	156	127	
x-N.Y. Islanders	53	31	16	6	68	148	122	
N.Y. Rangers	54	26	22	6	58	172	149	
Philadelphia	53	23	23	7	53	154	195	
New Jersey	53	18	28	7	43	140	184	
Buffalo	54	15	32	7	37	134	190	

Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
x-Carolina	53	36	10	7	79	177	126	
x-Tampa Bay	53	36	14	3	75	178	133	
x-Florida	54	35	14	5	75	180	152	
Nashville	54	29	23	2	60	148	153	
Dallas	53	21	18	14	56	146	144	
Chicago	53	22	25	6	50	151	178	
Columbus	54	17	25	12	46	130	178	
Detroit	54	18	27	9	45	118	164	

West Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
x-Vegas	52	37	13	2	76	176	118	
x-Colorado	51	34	13	4	72	178	127	
x-Minnesota	52	33	14	5	71	170	143	
St. Louis	51	24	19	8	56	152	158	
Arizona	54	22	26	6	50	143	170	
Los Angeles	51	21	24	6	48	137	151	
San Jose	53	21	26	6	48	145	183	
Anaheim	54	17	30	7	41	120	171	

North Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
x-Toronto	52	33	13	6	72	174	136	
x-Edmonton	51	32	17	2	66	167	135	
Winnipeg	52	28	21	3	59	158	145	
Montreal	52	24	19	9	57	149	152	
Calgary	51	22	26	3	47	132	148	
Ottawa	53	21	27	5	47	148	179	
Vancouver	47	19	25	3	41	123	156	

x-clinched playoff berth

Tuesday's games

Carolina 6, Chicago 3
Buffalo 4, N.Y. Islanders 3, SO
Pittsburgh 7, Philadelphia 3
Edmonton 4, Vancouver 1
New Jersey 4, Boston 3, OT

Wednesday's games

Columbus 4, Nashville 2
Tampa Bay 6, Dallas 2
Ottawa 5, Montreal 1
Washington 4, N.Y. Rangers 2
Anaheim 3, St. Louis 2, SO
Vegas 3, Minnesota 2, OT
Winnipeg 4, Calgary 0
San Jose 3, Colorado 2
Los Angeles 4, Arizona 2

Thursday's games

Buffalo at Pittsburgh
Chicago at Carolina
Montreal at Toronto
N.Y. Rangers at Boston
New Jersey at N.Y. Islanders
Vancouver at Edmonton

Friday's games

Dallas at Tampa Bay
Detroit at Columbus
Philadelphia at Washington
Anaheim at Minnesota
Colorado at Los Angeles
St. Louis at Vegas
Arizona at San Jose

Saturday's games

Buffalo at Pittsburgh
N.Y. Rangers at Boston
Detroit at Columbus
Montreal at Toronto
New Jersey at N.Y. Islanders
Ottawa at Winnipeg
Philadelphia at Washington
Tampa Bay at Florida
Anaheim at Minnesota
Carolina at Nashville
Colorado at Los Angeles
St. Louis at Vegas
Vancouver at Edmonton
Arizona at San Jose

Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday				
	GP	G	A	PTS
Connor McDavid, EDM	51	31	62	93
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	51	26	49	75
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	46	20	45	65
Patrick Kane, CHI	53	15	49	64
Mitchell Marner, TOR	52	18	46	64
Brad Marchand, BOS	50	27	36	63
Auston Matthews, TOR	48	39	24	63
Sidney Crosby, PIT	53	23	37	60
Jonathan Huberdeau, FLA	54	19	40	59
Mark Stone, LV	50	21	38	59
Mikko Rantanen, COL	46	29	30	59
Artemi Panarin, NYR	42	17	41	58
Sebastian Aho, CAR	53	24	33	57
Jake Guentzel, PIT	54	23	33	56

MLB

Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	18	13	.581	—
New York	16	14	.533	1½
Tampa Bay	17	15	.531	1½
Toronto	15	14	.517	2
Baltimore	15	16	.484	3
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	16	13	.552	—
Cleveland	16	13	.552	—
Kansas City	16	13	.552	—
Minnesota	11	18	.379	5
Detroit	9	22	.290	8
National League				
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oakland	19	13	.594	—
Seattle	17	15	.531	2
Houston	15	15	.500	3
Texas	15	17	.469	4
Los Angeles	13	16	.448	4½
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	16	15	.516	—
New York	12	13	.480	1
Atlanta	14	16	.467	1½
Washington	12	14	.462	1½
Miami	13	16	.448	2
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
St. Louis	18	13	.581	—
Milwaukee	17	14	.548	1
Chicago	15	16	.484	3
Cincinnati	14	15	.483	3
Pittsburgh	13	17	.433	4½
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
San Francisco	18	13	.581	—
San Diego	18	14	.563	½
Los Angeles	17	15	.531	1½
Arizona	15	15	.500	2½
Colorado	12	19	.387	6
Wednesday's games				
Cincinnati 1, Chicago White Sox 0, 10 innings				
Baltimore 6, Seattle 0				
N.Y. Yankees 6, Houston 3				
Texas 3, Minnesota 1				
Detroit 6, Boston 5, 10 innings				
Cleveland 5, Kansas City 4				
Toronto 9, Oakland 4				
Tampa Bay 3, L.A. Angels 1				
Colorado 6, San Francisco 5				
St. Louis 4, N.Y. Mets 1, 7 innings, 1st game				
Miami 8, Arizona 0				
Atlanta 5, Washington 3				
Philadelphia 5, Milwaukee 4				
N.Y. Mets 7, St. Louis 2, 7 innings, 2nd game				
San Diego 4, Pittsburgh 2				
Chicago Cubs 6, L.A. Dodgers 5, 11 innings				
Thursday's games				
Houston at N.Y. Yankees				
Detroit at Boston				
Texas at Minnesota				
Cleveland at Kansas City				
Toronto at Oakland				
Tampa Bay at L.A. Angels				
Milwaukee at Philadelphia				
N.Y. Mets at St. Louis				
Atlanta at Washington				
Arizona at Miami				
Friday's games				
Boston (Rodríguez 4-0) at Baltimore (Harvey 3-1)				
Washington (Corbin 1-3) at N.Y. Yankees (Taillon 1-2)				
Cincinnati (Miley 3-2) at Cleveland (Plesac 2-3)				
Minnesota (Shoemaker 1-3) at Detroit (Skubal 0-4)				
Seattle (Flexen 2-1) at Texas (Foltynewicz 1-3)				
Chicago White Sox (Rodón 4-0) at Kansas City (Keller 2-3)				
Toronto (Stripling 0-1) at Houston (Urquidy 2-2)				
L.A. Dodgers (Urias 4-0) at L.A. Angels (TBD)				
Tampa Bay (Hill 1-1) at Oakland (Manea 3-1)				
Pittsburgh (Cahill 1-3) at Chicago Cubs (Davies 1-2)				
Arizona (Gallen 1-1) at N.Y. Mets (TBD)				
Milwaukee (Burnes 2-2) at Miami (Rogers 3-2)				
Philadelphia (Eflin 1-1) at Atlanta (Morton 2-1)				
Colorado (Gomber 2-3) at St. Louis (Flaherty 5-0)				
L.A. Dodgers (Urias 4-0) at L.A. Angels (TBD)				
San Diego (Snell 1-0) at San Francisco (DeSclafani 2-1)				

Orioles' Means throws no-hitter

It's the third this season, but first by a single Orioles pitcher since '69

By TIM BOOTH
Associated Press

SEATTLE—The clubhouse celebration that awaited John Means was more than 50 years in the making for the Baltimore Orioles and more like a playoff berth being clinched rather than a Wednesday win in May.

Only a wild pitch in the dirt kept the Orioles from celebrating perfection. That's how dominant Means was in throwing the major leagues' third no-hitter of the season in Baltimore's 6-0 win over the Seattle Mariners on Wednesday.

A franchise still in the midst of a rebuild with little to celebrate in recent seasons was happy to put the spotlight on its tall lefty who overmatched the Mariners with an array of unhittable fastballs, breaking pitches and a terrific changeup.

No, it wasn't perfection. But it was about as close as it comes.

"I never really thought I'd be here. I'd always write MLB player when I was a kid on the sheet when asked what you wanted to do when you're older, but I never thought it was a reality," Means said. "And now that it is, and now I'm able to throw this, it's crazy and I don't even know how to describe it."

This wasn't a fluke performance — Means has been one of the best pitchers in the American League to start this season. This was domination.

Means (4-0) struck out 12 and walked none. Seattle's only base-runner was Sam Haggerty after he raced to first after swinging at a curveball in the dirt for strike three with one out in the third inning. The 1-2 pitch bounced away from catcher Pedro Severino and ended up being the only blemish that separated Means from a perfect game.

Haggerty wasn't on base long, getting thrown out attempting to steal second.

It was Means' first complete game in 44 career big league starts, and he said he couldn't care less that it wasn't a perfect game.

Means pitched the first non-perfect no-hitter in which the opposing team did not reach on a walk, hit by pitch or error, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Means threw 79 strikes among 113 pitches, including first-pitch strikes to 26 of 27 batters. When Seattle did make contact against the 28-year-old left-hander, it was weak and there were no threats to fall in for a hit.

Means lowered his ERA to 1.37 and became the first individual Orioles pitcher to toss a no-hitter



PHOTOS BY TED S. WARREN/AP

Above: Baltimore Orioles pitcher John Means, right, hugs catcher Pedro Severino after Means threw a no-hitter in the team's 6-0 win Wednesday at Seattle. Only a wild pitch in the dirt kept Means from a perfect game. **Below:** Means improved to 4-0 with the 12-strikeout win.



since Jim Palmer against Oakland on Aug. 13, 1969. It was the 10th no-hitter in franchise history, including six as Baltimore after four as the St. Louis Browns.

"It's such a crazy feeling. It's such a whirlwind of an experience. I don't think I've been able to process it yet," Means said. "But to be in the same breath as Palmer, I don't think that it gets much better than that."

In a season in which batters are on track to hit a record-low .234, Means joined a no-hit club that includes San Diego right-hander Joe Musgrove at Texas on April 9 and Chicago White Sox left-hander Carlos Rodón against Cleveland on April 14.

In addition, Arizona left-hander Madison Bumgarner pitched a

seven-inning no-hitter against Atlanta on April 25, but that is not recognized as an official no-hitter by Major League Baseball because the game did not go at least nine innings, shortened under pandemic rules in effect for a second straight season.

It's the first time since 1969 there have been three complete game no-hitters this early in the season.

"Really can't put into words what the last three outs, seeing how the teammates embraced him," Baltimore manager Brandon Hyde said. "Our clubhouse after the game, it was like we clinched a playoff spot."

The closest Seattle came to a hit through six innings was J.P. Crawford's short fly ball in the sixth that center fielder Cedric Mullins

caught with a slide. Kyle Lewis provided a threat with a drive leading off the eighth that Austin Hays caught on the left-field warning track.

Means got a popout from Dylan Moore, struck out Haggerty swinging and induced a soft liner from Crawford to end it, setting off a wild celebration with his teammates on the mound and a standing ovation from the crowd.

"He was good. He was really good," Seattle's Kyle Seager said. "He was in control. I don't think we had hardly any balls that were close to being hits."

Baltimore's previous no-hitter came on July 13, 1991, when Bob Milacki, Mike Flanagan, Mark Williamson and Gregg Olson combined for a 2-0 victory at Oakland. The Orioles had not had an individual pitcher throw a no-hitter since Hall of Famer Jim Palmer, also against the A's, on Aug. 13, 1969.

Means had never pitched beyond seven innings in a big league start.

"When I started the (ninth) I got a little bit of the Jell-O legs, just a little bit, started to kind of feel a little wobbly," Means said. "But once I did get that first pitch, I was able to lock in again."

D.J. Stewart and Ramón Urias had third-inning RBI singles against Yusei Kikuchi. Pat Valaika hit a solo homer off Kikuchi (1-2) in the sixth, and Trey Mancini connected for a three-run shot against Aaron Fletcher in the eighth. It was Mancini's sixth homer in a season that marked his return from colon cancer surgery.

OLYMPICS

Anti-Games petition gains momentum in Japan

BY YURI KAGEYAMA
AND STEPHEN WADE
Associated Press

TOKYO — An online petition calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be canceled has gained tens of thousands of signatures since being launched in Japan only days ago.

The rollout of the petition comes with Tokyo, Osaka and several other areas under a state of emergency with coronavirus infections rising — particularly new variants. The state of emergency is to expire on May 11, but some reports in Japan say it is likely to be extended.

The postponed Olympics are to open in just under three months on July 23.

The petition is addressed to International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach, who has tentative plans to visit Japan later this month. He is expected to meet the Olympic torch relay on May 17 in Hiroshima, and perhaps also travel to Tokyo, where small anti-Olympic protests are being planned.

Although 70-80% of Japanese citizens in polls say they want the



HIRO KOMAE / AP

A “No Olympics” banner is placed by protesters in Tokyo during a March 25 demonstration against the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. An online petition calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be canceled has gained ten of thousands of signatures.

Olympics canceled or postponed, there is no indication this will happen. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Tokyo organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto, and Bach have repeatedly said the games will go on as scheduled.

Organizers and the IOC unveiled so-called Playbooks last week, explaining rules for athletes and others to show how the Olympics can be held in the middle of a pandemic. Several test events have been conducted in the last few days, and organizers have reported few

problems.

The Olympic torch relay has been crisscrossing Japan for a month. Organizers say that eight people working on the relay have tested positive for the virus.

The Tokyo Olympics have become a face-saving exercise for Japan, which has officially spent \$15.4 billion to prepare them. For the IOC, the Tokyo Olympics are critical since 73% of its income comes from selling television rights.

Organizers say the Olympics will be “safe and secure,” though his has been challenged by local medical specialists, and in an editorial last month in the British Medical Journal. It said mass events like the Olympics are “neither safe nor secure.”

Organizers say they will need 10,000 health workers to support the Olympics. They have also requested 500 additional nurses — a nurses’ federation balked at the request — and 200 sports medicine specialists.

The petition was organized by Kenji Utsunomiya, a lawyer who has run several times for Tokyo

governor. It registered about 50,000 signatures in the first 24 hours after being launched.

“Government policies are being set with the Olympics in mind, and measures to curb the coronavirus pandemic are being neglected,” Utsunomiya told The Associated Press. “Hospital are stretched thin, and some people are dying at home.”

The headline in English over the petition reads: “Cancel the Tokyo Olympics to protect our lives.”

The petition suggests the Olympics cannot be held safely and says the games have drained finances away for other needs such as the rollout of a COVID-19 vaccine. Only 2% of the Japanese public have been vaccinated. Japan has attributed 10,500 deaths to the virus, good by global standards but not as good as many Asian neighbors.

“In order to host the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in July, we must devote a large number of medical professionals, valuable resources such as medical facilities and medical equipment, and various other resources,” the petition says.

Stripes

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The Daily Guide to Navigating the European Business Market

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944

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NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference					
Atlantic Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
x-Philadelphia	45	21	.682	—	
x-Brooklyn	43	23	.652	2	
New York	37	29	.561	8	
Boston	35	31	.530	10	
Toronto	27	39	.409	18	
Southeast Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Atlanta	37	30	.552	—	
Miami	35	31	.530	1½	
Charlotte	32	33	.492	4	
Washington	30	36	.455	6½	
Orlando	21	45	.318	15½	
Central Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
x-Milwaukee	42	24	.636	—	
Indiana	30	35	.462	11½	
Chicago	26	39	.400	15½	
Cleveland	21	45	.318	21	
Detroit	19	47	.288	23	
Western Conference					
Southwest Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Dallas	37	28	.569	—	
Memphis	33	32	.508	4	
San Antonio	31	34	.477	6	
New Orleans	30	36	.455	7½	
Houston	16	50	.242	21½	
Northwest Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
x-Utah	48	18	.727	—	
x-Denver	44	22	.667	4	
Portland	37	29	.561	11	
Oklahoma City	21	45	.318	27	
Minnesota	20	46	.303	28	
Pacific Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
x-Phoenix	47	19	.712	—	
x-L.A. Clippers	44	22	.667	3	
L.A. Lakers	37	28	.569	9½	
Golden State	33	33	.500	14	
Sacramento	29	37	.439	18	
Wednesday's games					
Boston 132, Orlando 96					
Portland 141, Cleveland 105					
Atlanta 135, Phoenix 103					
Philadelphia 135, Houston 115					
Sacramento 104, Indiana 93					
Memphis 139, Minnesota 135					
Milwaukee 135, Washington 134					
Utah 126, San Antonio 94					
Denver 113, New York 97					
Thursday's games					
Chicago at Charlotte					
Brooklyn at Dallas					
Washington at Toronto					
Atlanta at Indiana					
Memphis at Detroit					
L.A. Lakers at L.A. Clippers					
Oklahoma City at Golden State					
Friday's games					
New Orleans at Philadelphia					
Boston at Chicago					
Houston at Milwaukee					
Minnesota at Miami					
Orlando at Charlotte					
Cleveland at Dallas					
Denver at Utah					
L.A. Lakers at Portland					
New York at Phoenix					
San Antonio at Sacramento					
Saturday's games					
Detroit at Philadelphia					
Washington at Indiana					
Memphis at Toronto					
Brooklyn at Denver					
Houston at Utah					
Oklahoma City at Golden State					
San Antonio at Portland					
Sunday's games					
Miami at Boston					
New York at L.A. Clippers					
Dallas at Cleveland					
Minnesota at Orlando					
New Orleans at Charlotte					
Chicago at Detroit					
Oklahoma City at Sacramento					
Phoenix at L.A. Lakers					
Leaders					
Scoring					
	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Curry, GS	58	599	324	1829	31.5
Beal, WAS	57	632	388	1775	31.1
Rebounds					
	G	OFF	DEF	TOT	AVG
Capela, ATL	59	280	567	847	14.4
Gobert, UTA	65	216	652	868	13.4
Assists					
	G	AST	AVG		
Westbrook, WAS	59	668	11.3		
Young, ATL	58	550	9.5		

Bucks hold off Westbrook, Wizards

By STEVE MEGARGEE
Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Playing for the second straight night, the Milwaukee Bucks hung tough after Giannis Antetokounmpo fouled out in a 135-134 victory over the surging Washington Wizards.

Jrue Holiday scored 29 points Wednesday night to help the Bucks win their fourth straight while withstanding a 42-point performance from Bradley Beal and a triple-double from Russell Westbrook.

“It took a little bit of everybody to find a way to win this game,” Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said.

Westbrook had 29 points, 17 assists and 12 rebounds for his 179th career triple-double, but the Wizards still lost for just the fourth time in their last 17 games. He’s just two shy of Oscar Robertson, whose 181 career triple-doubles are the highest recorded total in NBA history.

The Bucks led 127-124 when Antetokounmpo picked up his sixth foul with 1:54 left. They played the entire game without two-time All-Star Khris Middleton, who was out with a sore left knee after playing one night earlier in a 124-118 victory over Brooklyn.

They still found a way to win. “It’s big for us,” said Donte DiVincenzo, who had 19 points. “I think it’s a big thing for us to come together and know we can pull it out in different ways.”

Pat Connaughton had 16 points and made a pair of three-pointers in the final 90 seconds to answer Wizards baskets. Bryn Forbes added 14 and put the Bucks ahead for good by sinking a tiebreaking three-pointer with 2:23 remaining.

Washington trailed by just two points with just over 30 seconds



The Bucks’ Giannis Antetokounmpo drives to the basket against the Washington Wizards’ Anthony Gill and Russell Westbrook during the second half of Wednesday’s game in Milwaukee.

left when Holiday and Connaughton each blocked shot attempts by Daniel Gafford from under the basket. Gafford believed he was fouled.

“I should have really just passed up the ball at the end,” Gafford said. “Russ was right beside me. That would have been the smart play instead of trying to go up with that last layup attempt. It really just cost us the game, to be honest.”

Brook Lopez delivered a put-back dunk that gave Milwaukee a four-point lead with 6.8 seconds left.

But the Wizards still nearly pulled it off.

Beal hit a three-pointer that cut Milwaukee’s lead to 135-134 with 5.3 seconds remaining. Westbrook got a steal in the final second, but Garrison Mathews’ desperation shot from over 50 feet away didn’t connect.

“We’re putting ourselves in positions to win,” Beal said. “We’re getting better with executing and closing out down the stretch, but obviously we can be better.”

Tip-ins

Wizards: Westbrook has a league-leading 33 triple-doubles this season, including five in his last six games. The only time Westbrook missed out on a triple-

double during this six-game stretch came Saturday when he had 42 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists in a 125-124 loss to Dallas. ... Rui Hachimura didn’t play due to an illness unrelated to COVID-19. Anthony Gill replaced him and made his third start of the season. ... Washington’s 43 free-throw attempts were the most by a Bucks opponent this season. ... Chandler Hutchinson left with a bruised left knee after playing three minutes.

Bucks: P.J. Tucker replaced Middleton in the lineup and made his first start since the Bucks acquired him from Houston on March 19.

Sour: Play-in means more teams, more fans, and more revenue

FROM PAGE 48

said whoever came up with the tournament “needs to be fired,” offering that opinion Sunday night after the Los Angeles Lakers lost to Toronto in a game that moved the defending champions closer to possibly falling into the play-in round.

It should be noted that the Raptors played that game with desperation — almost like they want to get into the play-in round, or something. If Toronto is going to the playoffs, the play-in is the only realistic path toward getting there. And other teams are embracing it as well, because of the second-chance opportunity it provides.

For the league, the teams that get to play host to these games and the television partners, the six extra games will mean more revenue gets generated. (Spoiler alert: That’s good for everyone.) For the teams involved, it will be more games immediately after a jammed season and, for some, a short offseason. They may say that’s unfair, especially if they lose these games.

Here’s a way to avoid that unfairness: don’t

finish seventh, eighth, ninth or 10th.

The 12 teams with top-six seeds in the Eastern and Western Conferences will get basically a week off before the playoffs start. They won’t complain about that. The 10 teams that miss everything, they won’t complain, either, since they’ll be too busy packing for vacation. And the four teams that earn playoff spots from the play-in games, they’ll be sending the league thank-you notes.

The four teams that go to the play-in and get eliminated, they’ll probably blast the format instead of putting the blame for missing the playoffs where it belongs — on themselves.

If traditionalists don’t like change because, well, they just don’t like change, that’s understandable. But just imagine some of the possibilities that might await two weeks from now: Stephen Curry and Golden State against Gregg Popovich and San Antonio in an elimination game, the Boston Celtics and Miami Heat — East finalists last year — facing off in a one-game showdown, or Damian Lillard in another high-drama moment that he’s embraced plenty of times already in his career.

There isn’t much not to like about the prospects of any of those happenings.

James has some problems now, and they don’t include the play-in tournament or his take that the person who came up with the idea should be fired. His sprained right ankle clearly hasn’t healed. He’s not in rhythm after missing basically a third of the season with the ankle, didn’t look right in his two appearances since coming back, the Lakers have been awful without him and they’re now in some serious trouble. They do not, in any way, look like a championship team at this point.

They might wind up needing the play-in. Nobody saw that coming, especially after a championship last fall, especially after James was very high — if not atop — the MVP conversation for much of the first half of the season.

James doesn’t like the idea of the play-in tournament now. His stance would probably change if it winds up being the mechanism that gets the Lakers back to the playoffs.

Whether he likes it or not, embrace the play-in idea. It’s here. It’s almost certainly here to stay.

SPORTS

Means to an end

O's lefty tosses first no-hitter by single
Baltimore pitcher since '69 » Page 45



COMMENTARY

Sour grapes

NBA play-in losers may complain, but for winners and fans, tourney offers plenty of reasons to cheer

By TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

There will be three types of people in the NBA two weeks from now. Group 1 is those who won't be in the play-in tournament. Group 2 is those who will use it to get to the playoffs. Group 3 is those who will make the tournament and see their seasons end there.

Group 1 won't care.
Group 2 will love it.
Group 3 will hate it.

The play-in tournament, which starts May 18, is just two weeks away. Fans are going to embrace it and the ratings will be big, since the games will all absolutely matter and that's what everybody wants. The games will have an NCAA Tournament feel, win-or-else, Game 7-type stuff. All six games will either send a team to the playoffs, or send a team home, or both.

There's a lot to like about all of that.

There also will be naysayers, the level of volume of their complaints when it's all said and done to be determined based on what transpires. There's a chance that a No. 7 or No. 8 team — a team that would have ordinarily gone to the playoffs — will get bumped. There's also a chance that someone will get hurt, as if 73 or 74 games is somehow that much more physically demanding than 72 games.

For now, those who need something to complain about will complain about the play-in games because they're low-hanging fruit, easy to pounce upon. LeBron James

SEE SOUR ON PAGE 47

Lakers forward LeBron James said whoever came up with the play-in tournament "needs to be fired," on Sunday after a loss to the Raptors moved the defending champs closer to falling into the play-in round.

AP photo



QB's drafted in late rounds face long odds » NFL, Page 43

