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Biden marks D-Day

President praises vets: 'We will not bow down, we will never forget'

D-DAY AT 80

BRADLEY LATHAM/Stars and Stripes

President Joe Biden shakes hands with World War II veteran Calvin Shiner during the D-Day 80th Anniversary commemoration at Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, France, on Thursday. Shiner was awarded the Legion of Honor by French President Emmanuel Macron.

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

COLLEVILLE-SUR-MER, France — President Joe Biden praised American and allied troops at a ceremony in Normandy on Thursday to mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day, drawing parallels between the struggles against tyranny during World War II and Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine.

Speaking before a crowd at Normandy American Cemetery that included WWII veterans, dignitaries and celebrities, Biden vowed that the United States would not walk away from Ukraine.

"To surrender to bullies, to bow down to dictators is simply unthinkable," Biden said. "Were we to do that, it means we would forget what happened here at these hallowed beaches.

"Make no mistake, we will not bow down, we will not forget."

The anniversary of the D-Day invasion comes as even the youngest veterans of that day are approaching their 100th birthday, making today's event an opportunity to pass the living memory of WWII on to younger generations.

Dozens of veterans were welcomed with fanfare and applause at the cemetery, whose roughly 9,400 white grave markers in the shape of crosses and Stars of David stretch for acres on a bluff overlooking Omaha Beach.

Three C-130 aircraft flew overhead as Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron led the

SEE BIDEN ON PAGE 8

Houthis unveil 'Palestine' missile similar to Iran's hypersonic weapon

BY JON GAMBRELL
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Yemen's Houthi rebels have unveiled a new, solid-fuel missile in their arsenal that resembles aspects of one earlier displayed by Iran that Tehran described as flying at hypersonic speeds.

The rebels fired its new "Palestine" missile, complete with a warhead painted like a Palestinian keffiyeh checkered scarf, at the southern Gulf of Aqaba port of Eilat in Israel on Monday. The attack set off air raid sirens but caused no reported damage or injuries.

Footage released by the Houthis late Wednesday showed the Palestine being raised on what appeared to be a mobile launcher and rising quickly into the air with plumes of white smoke coming from its engine. White smoke is common with solid-fuel missiles.

Solid-fuel missiles can be set up and fired faster than those containing liquid fuel. That's a key concern for the Houthis as their missile launch sites have been repeatedly targeted by U.S. and allied forces in recent months over the rebels' attacks on shipping through the Red Sea corridor. One such strike hit the Houthis even before they were able to launch their missile.

For their part, the Houthis described the Palestine as a "locally made" missile. However, the Houthis are not known to possess the ability to manufacture compli-

SEE MISSILE ON PAGE 4

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Germany	$3.925	$4.468	$4.826	$4.135
Change in price	-6.1 cents	-5.3 cents	-6.2 cents	-3.2 cents
Netherlands	..	$4.720	$4.992	$4.753
Change in price	..	-0.2 cents	No change	+3.1 cents
U.K.	..	$4.468	$4.826	$4.135
Change in price	..	-5.3 cents	-6.2 cents	-3.2 cents
Azores	..	..	$4.676	..
Change in price	..	..	-6.2 cents	..
Turkey	..	..	$4.492	$4.534*
Change in price	..	..	-6.2 cents	-18.7 cents

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective June 7. The change in price is from May 31.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Japan	..	$4.469	..	$3.779
Change in price	..	-6.0 cents	..	-3.0 cents
Okinawa	$3.569	..	..	$3.779
Change in price	-6.0 cents	..	..	-3.0 cents
South Korea	$3.599	..	$4.499	$3.809
Change in price	-6.0 cents	..	-6.0 cents	-3.0 cents
Guam	$3.629**	$4.169	$4.529	..
Change in price	-6.0 cents	-5.0 cents	-6.0 cents	..

***DieselEFD **Midgrade**
Pacific price for the week of June 7-13

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (June 7)	$1.06
British pound (June 7)	$1.25
Japanese yen (June 7)	152.00
South Korean won (June 7)	1335.00

Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769
Britain (Pound)	1.2785
Canada (Dollar)	1.3685
China (Yuan)	7.2475
Denmark (Krone)	6.8525
Egypt (Pound)	47.5330
Euro	0.9186
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8098
Hungary (Forint)	358.62
Israel (Shekel)	3.7333
Japan (Yen)	156.15
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3064
Norway (Krone)	10.5938
Philippines (Peso)	58.63
Poland (Zloty)	3.94
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7505
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3471
South Korea (Won)	1367.05
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8915
Thailand (Baht)	36.49
Turkey (NewLira)	32.2341

(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	8.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00
Federal funds market rate	5.33
3-month bill	5.39
30-year bond	4.44

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

FRIDAY IN EUROPE

SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

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

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MILITARY

Detained US soldier goes on trial in Russia

Army staff sergeant accused of stealing from, threatening to kill his girlfriend

BY LUCY PAPACHRISTOU
Reuters

VLADIVOSTOK, Russia — A U.S. soldier, stationed in South Korea but detained in Russia on suspicion of stealing from his girlfriend and threatening to kill her, went on trial on Thursday, the state news agency RIA reported.

Gordon Black was detained on May 2 in Vladivostok in Russia's far east on suspicion of stealing from his Russian girlfriend. Citing local prosecutors, Russian independent media reported he had also subsequently been charged with threatening to kill her.

Black, a U.S. Army staff sergeant posted at Camp Humphreys outside Seoul, pleaded guilty to theft in May, RIA reported at the time, citing interior ministry officials.

As his trial in Vladivostok began, Black said he understood the charges against him and agreed to testify.

When the judge asked him if he admitted guilt, RIA quoted Black as saying he would enter a plea later.

The interior ministry said Black had met the Russian woman in South Korea and later traveled to Vladivostok to be with her.

The Pentagon said he had broken Army rules by traveling to Russia without authorization, having passed through China.

TATIANA MEEL/Reuters

U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Gordon Black, who was detained in Russia on May 2 on suspicion of stealing from a woman he was in a relationship with, is escorted during a hearing in Vladivostok, Russia, on Thursday.

The United States warns its citizens against travel to Russia, citing reasons including "the potential for harassment and the singling out of U.S. citizens for detention by Russian government security officials." Russia has said Black's case has no political element.

Black's wife, Megan Black, with whom he is finalizing a divorce, and his mother, Melody Jones, told Reuters last month that he and the Russian woman had a tempestuous and sometimes violent relationship.

Testifying in court on Thursday, Black's girlfriend said he had frequent outbursts of aggression and had had run-ins with Russian police prior to his detention, the TASS state news agency reported.

Prosecutors said the couple had quarreled and the American had subsequently "forcibly grabbed the girl by the neck, which she perceived as a real threat to her life."

Black is then alleged to have stolen $110 from her purse and fled their shared apartment, according to media reports. He was later arrested at a local hotel, where he had purchased plane tickets and intended to fly back to the U.S.

Megan Black said she and their daughter had no idea he was in Russia and had been expecting him back in Texas as his tour in South Korea had just ended.

She said she got a message from her husband on May 2, the day Russian authorities say they arrested him, "telling me that he wasn't coming home." She said they were already finalizing their divorce at the time and that she had not heard from him since.

Russia is holding a number of Americans in its jails, including corporate security executive Paul Whelan and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich. The U.S. government has designated both men as wrongfully detained and has been trying to negotiate for their release.

Others detained include Travis Leake, a musician who had been living in Russia for years and was arrested last year on drug-related charges; Marc Fogel, a teacher in Moscow, who was sentenced to 14 years in prison, also on drug charges; and dual nationals Alsu Kurmasheva and Ksenia Khavana.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

House panel advances $833 billion defense funding bill

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A House panel advanced a $833 billion defense funding bill on Wednesday that provides a steep pay raise for junior enlisted troops while also cutting back funding for Ukraine and Pentagon programs popular with Democrats.

The House Appropriations Committee's defense subpanel approved the legislation in a voice vote over the objections of some Democrats who said they could not support riders in the bill targeting culture war issues.

The provisions ban funding for diversity and inclusion efforts, prohibit funding for gender-affirming health care and prevent the Defense Department from subsidizing travel costs for service members who want to access abortion and other reproductive health care in another state.

Rep. Ken Calvert of California, the Republican chairman of the subcommittee, said the bill seeks to refocus the military on strengthening its capabilities rather than initiatives and programs that are "wasteful, inefficient or do not contribute directly to our national security."

Calvert

"This bill supports the true difference makers and our best national security assets — our men and women in uniform and their families — with a pay raise, including one specifically for our junior enlisted service members," he said.

The legislation meets the White House's request for a 4.5% pay raise for all troops while also paying for a 15% pay increase for junior enlisted service members on top of that. The House Armed Services Committee proposed and signed off last month on the additional pay hikes, which will cost $2.5 billion.

Democrats said the bill advanced Wednesday included some of their priorities but also contained attacks on women and the LGBTQ+ community that they believe will sow division instead of supporting morale and unity among service members.

They pilloried Republicans for inserting the same controversial policy provisions that made last year's defense funding bill a failure with Democrats. The measures were removed from the final bill following negotiations with the Democrat-led Senate.

"These policy riders do not belong in appropriations bills and, like last year, we will defeat them," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee. "But it is disappointing that we are going through this charade again, just months after Republicans and Democrats voted for the 2024 appropriations bills."

Rep. Betty McCollum of Minnesota, the top Democrat on the defense subpanel, said she could not vote for legislation that cuts $612 million from the Pentagon's climate change initiatives and continues to "treat climate change as if it is not happening and is not a national security threat."

She said she was also concerned by plans to cut funding for the military's civilian workforce by $916 million and predicted plans to curtail abortion access and obstruct diversity efforts would weaken military recruitment.

"Just as we are seeing an improvement of recruiting numbers in the Army, provisions like these will discourage recruitment from across America's diverse population, which is our strength as a nation," McCollum said.

Democrats also took issue with the bill's omission of the White House's $300 million request for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, a program that provides training and weapons procurement for Ukraine and has been funded since fiscal 2015.

"Why, after this Congress has repeatedly demonstrated broad bipartisan support for Ukraine in its fight against Russian tyranny, are we considering a bill that fails to fund the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, rewarding Russia?" DeLauro asked.

Republicans have grown increasingly resistant to arming Ukraine against Russia's invasion, with the majority of House Republicans voting against $60 billion in military aid for Ukraine in April.

Rep. Tom Cole of Oklahoma, the Republican chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, said the spending legislation approved Wednesday strengthens America's defense and the military's readiness for renewed threats around the globe, particularly competition with China.

"By focusing resources on the core duty of the Pentagon, the mission to deliver a combat-ready military that can prevent war and protect our great nation is met," he said.

MILITARY

Report calls for revamped NATO structure

Reactivation of US 7th Army in Germany and relocations are among the proposals

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The U.S. 7th Army should be reactivated in Germany and the Navy's European headquarters in Naples should be relocated to the United Kingdom as part of a revamped NATO structure, according to a new Atlantic Council report.

"As presently constituted, the NATO Command Structure is not fit for purpose in a post-2022 NATO," the Washington-based think tank said in the report, which was released Wednesday.

Since Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, NATO has already gone through numerous changes to its command structure. Among the additions are a headquarters in Ulm, Germany, focused on ensuring that military forces and gear can quickly be mobilized around the Continent in a crisis.

Gen. Christopher Cavoli, NATO's top military commander and head of U.S. European Command, also has overhauled his headquarters based out of Mons, Belgium. Those moves have involved modified NATO command-and-control arrangements for the purpose of carrying out new regional defense plans.

Even so, more measures would be advisable, the Atlantic Council report argues, saying it's time to consider improvements "both to deter and, if necessary, to contain and defeat a dangerous adversary."

The analysis calls for a series of changes in how the alliance does business, including moving a NATO strategic headquarters situated in Norfolk, Va., to either Washington or Paris.

Doing so would give the Virginia-based command, which is focused on military modernization but said by some experts to have "second class" status, more political clout in the NATO bureaucracy, the report said.

Another move would have Joint Force Command Brunssum shift from the Netherlands to Poland, where a four-star Polish general would take charge.

The move lines up with Poland's emergence as a major land power in Europe and would focus efforts more sharply on the threat Russia poses to NATO's eastern flank, wrote report author Richard Hooker, a senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security.

"The growing capabilities of Poland, the importance of geographic proximity, and the reality of large-scale combat operations just across its border with Ukraine strongly suggest that JFC Brunssum should be replaced with a 'JFC East,' possibly located at Szczecin near the German-Polish border," the report said.

In related moves, bringing back to life U.S. Army Europe and Africa's 7th Army, created during World War II and disbanded in 2010, would help bolster a NATO Land Command in Turkey that's not quite up to the job, the report said.

"Reporting (from former commanders) suggests that, while LANDCOM can effectively monitor and flag readiness and interoperability shortfalls, its ability to field a fully staffed and trained battlestaff as an effective land component command for (Supreme Allied Command Europe) remains a work in progress," the report said.

A solution would be to reactivate 7th Army as an operational field army headquarters that would function like U.S. Central Command's 3rd Army. The 7th Army would be able to command two or more NATO corps, the report said.

Likewise, America should consider sending U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa from Naples to the U.K. to London, which it once maintained a headquarters. The alliance would be better positioned to deal with the challenges posed by Russia in the north, where the bulk of Moscow's naval forces are positioned, the report said.

In a revised NATO structure, Joint Force Command Naples would then be redesignated as "JFC South" under the command of an Italian four-star admiral.

U.S. Embassy Bratislava

U.S. Army Gen. Christopher Cavoli, NATO's top military commander and head of U.S. European Command, speaks with allied troops during a visit to Slovakia in March. The U.S. should revive 7th Army in Europe and NATO should make changes to its command structure, a new Atlantic Council report said.

Missile: Houthis repeatedly armed by Iran despite a UN arms embargo

FROM PAGE 1

cated missile and guidance systems locally in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, which been gripped by war since the rebels seized the capital, Sanaa, nearly a decade ago.

The Houthis have, however, been repeatedly armed by Iran during the war despite a United Nations arms embargo. While Iran claims it doesn't arm the Houthis, ships seized by the U.S. and its allies have found Iranian weaponry, missile fuel and components on board.

Iranian media reported the launch of the Palestine and described it as locally manufactured, citing the Houthis. However, design elements on the missile resemble other missiles developed by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. That includes one called the Fattah, or "Conqueror" in Farsi.

Iran unveiled the missile last year and claimed it could reach Mach 15 — or 15 times the speed of sound. It also described the missile's range as up to 870 miles. That's a little short of Eilat from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, but missile can be reconfigured to boost their range.

In March, Russia's state-run RIA Novosti news agency quoted an anonymous source claiming the Houthis had a hypersonic missile.

"While we cannot say for sure what exact version the 'Palestine' corresponds to, we can say with high certainty that it is an advanced and precision-guided (Guard)-developed solid propellant missile provided by Iran," wrote Fabian Hinz, a missile expert and research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the similarity between the Palestine and its missiles.

Hypersonic weapons, which fly at speeds higher than Mach 5, could pose crucial challenges to missile defense systems because of their speed and maneuverability.

Ballistic missiles fly on a trajectory in which anti-missile systems like the U.S.-made Patriot can anticipate their path and intercept them. The more irregular the missile's flight path, such as a hypersonic missile with the ability to change directions, the more difficult it becomes to intercept.

China is believed to be pursuing the weapons, as is America. Russia claims it has already used them.

It remains unclear how well the Palestine maneuvers and at what speed it travels.

Maui council opposes US Space Force telescope plan

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Local officials on the Hawaiian island of Maui on Wednesday voted to oppose a U.S. military proposal to build new telescopes on the summit of Haleakala volcano, the latest observatory project to meet objection in the islands.

The U.S. Space Force and Air Force want to build a new facility on the top of Haleakala, Maui's highest peak, to track objects in space.

The Maui County Council voted 9-0 to pass a resolution opposing the project. The measure said Haleakala's summit was a sacred place used for religious ceremony, prayer and connecting to ancestors.

"Haleakala is more than just a mountain; the summit is considered wao akua, or 'realm of the gods,' and continues to be a place of deep spirituality for Native Hawaiians to engage in some of these traditional practices," the resolution said.

It said that the Space Force hasn't finished cleaning up a 700-gallon diesel fuel spill at the site of one its existing Haleakala telescopes.

The spill occurred last year when a pump that supplies fuel to a backup generator failed to shut off during a lightning storm.

The proposed new facility is called AMOS STAR, which is an acronym for Air Force Maui Optical and Supercomputing Site Small Telescope Advanced Research. It would feature six telescopes enclosed in ground-mounted domes and one rooftop-mounted domed telescope.

The county's resolution urged the military to heed community calls to cease their development efforts. It urged the National Park Service, Federal Aviation Administration and the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources to deny the project permits.

MILITARY

Court orders review of woman's suit of rape on ship as worker's comp

By Rose L. Thayer
Stars and Stripes

A federal judge on Tuesday halted a lawsuit from a civilian engineer who claims she was raped aboard a Navy ship so the Labor Department can determine whether the incident should be treated as a work-related injury.

Elsie Dominguez filed the lawsuit against the U.S. government in November, claiming the captain of the ship within the Navy's Military Sealift Command raped her in December 2021.

The suit also claims the Navy's inadequate security allowed for the assault, and the service failed to care for and protect her when she reported the attack the next morning using the proper reporting procedures.

A 2014 graduate of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Dominguez is a career mariner who worked aboard the USNS Carson City, an expeditionary fast transport vessel, as the first assistant engineer, according to court documents.

During a stop in Brindisi, Italy, Dominguez left the ship and said she felt overly intoxicated after one beer and one shot of liquor. She returned to the ship and passed out in her room, where she claims the captain used a master key code to enter her room during the night and assault her while she was unconscious.

The Justice Department has argued Dominguez's time working on the ship fell within a temporary travel status, and anything that occurred in that time while on her employer's premises, even when off duty, is covered by the Federal Employees' Compensation Act, or FECA, according to court documents.

The Labor Department manages claims under FECA, the federal law that pays medical expenses and compensation benefits to workers for injuries obtained while performing their duties.

Dominguez's legal team has argued this was her permanent duty station because she had no other work site, and her time aboard the ship was indefinite.

Judge Edward Kiel of the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey, where the lawsuit was filed, determined there was a substantial question about the matter and the Labor Department should weigh in, according to court documents.

The case will stop until that happens, and each side is required to submit status reports every three months, said Christine Dunn, an attorney for Dominguez.

"It's very frustrating because even in their own papers, the government says being sexually assaulted should never be part of a mariner's job," Dunn said Wednesday. "But yet, that's essentially what they have to conclude to find that it's worker's compensation."

If the Labor Department determines FECA does not apply to Dominguez, the lawsuit will continue through the courts, Dunn said.

The Naval Criminal Investigative Service has an ongoing investigation into the allegations, according to court documents.

Top aide to leave after Austin health debacle

By Dan Lamothe
The Washington Post

The chief of staff to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will step down, the Pentagon said Wednesday, months after she drew criticism for not informing the White House and Congress of Austin's emergency hospitalization last winter.

Kelly Magsamen will depart at the end of June, Austin said in a statement expressing gratitude for her service over 3½ years. She has served beside him since the beginning of his tenure, a turbulent period that included the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Israel's war in Gaza.

Austin called her "the chief architect of every initiative I have launched." His statement did not indicate why Magsamen, who was traveling with Austin in France on Wednesday, was leaving. Attempts to reach her were not successful.

Magsamen will be replaced on an acting basis by Caroline Zier, who had been Austin's deputy chief of staff, said a senior defense official, speaking on the condition of anonymity ahead of the move becoming official.

Magsamen

Magsamen, who rarely spoke publicly on Austin's behalf, became mired in the political controversy that arose after it was revealed that he had been treated for prostate cancer in December and hospitalized in critical condition for days in January without President Joe Biden being made aware.

At the time, the Pentagon said not even Magsamen had been told about Austin's cancer diagnosis and surgery. But it later acknowledged that when she and a handful of other top officials did learn that there were complications and that he had been hospitalized in critical condition, they waited to make the appropriate notifications.

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MILITARY

Putin warns of reciprocal moves on long-range arms

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia — President Vladimir Putin warned Wednesday that Russia could provide long-range weapons to others to strike Western targets in response to NATO allies allowing Ukraine to use their arms to attack Russian territory.

Putin also reaffirmed Moscow's readiness to use nuclear weapons if it sees a threat to its sovereignty.

The recent actions by the West will further undermine international security and could lead to "very serious problems," he said, taking questions from international journalists — something that has become extremely rare since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine.

"That would mark their direct involvement in the war against the Russian Federation, and we reserve the right to act the same way," Putin added.

The United States and Germany recently authorized Ukraine to hit some targets on Russian soil with the long-range weapons they are supplying to Kyiv.

On Wednesday, a Western official and a U.S. senator said Ukraine has used U.S. weapons to strike inside Russia under newly approved guidance from President Joe Biden that allows American arms to be used for the limited purpose of defending Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. The official was not authorized to comment publicly on the sensitive matter and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Putin claimed that using some Western-supplied weapons involves military personnel of those countries controlling the missiles and selecting targets, and therefore he said Moscow could take "asymmetrical" steps elsewhere in the world. The U.S. military said it does not control the missiles it provides to Ukraine or the targets.

"If they consider it possible to deliver such weapons to the combat zone to launch strikes on our territory and create problems for us, why don't we have the right to supply weapons of the same type to some regions of the world where they can be used to launch strikes on sensitive facilities of the countries that do it to Russia?" he said.

"We will think about it," he told the journalists on the sidelines of the annual St. Petersburg International Economic Forum.

Asked whether Russia could resort to using nuclear arms, Putin said the conditions for utilizing that arsenal are clearly spelled out in Moscow's security doctrine.

"For some reason, they believe in the West that Russia will never use it," he said.

Even Russia's battlefield nuclear weapons are much more powerful than what the U.S. used against Japan in World War II, Putin said.

Speaking to senior news leaders of international news agencies, including The Associated Press, for more than three hours, Putin also said nothing will change in terms of Russia-U.S. relations regardless of the outcome of the American presidential election in November.

The Russian leader faced questions on various topics, although the more than two years of fighting in Ukraine dominated the session.

Putin claimed the West had opportunities to end the fighting in Ukraine but did not act on them, citing a letter he once supposedly wrote to Biden that said hostilities could end in two or three months if Washington stopped supplying Kyiv with weapons.

Asked about Russian military losses, Putin said that no country would reveal that information during hostilities but claimed without providing details that Ukraine's casualties are five times greater than Russia's.

VALENTINA PEVTSOVA/AP

Russian President Vladimir Putin

He also said Ukraine has more than 1,300 Russian troops in captivity, while more than 6,400 Ukrainian soldiers are being held in Russia.

The claims could not be independently verified.

Asked by AP about the case of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, Putin said the U.S. is "taking energetic steps" to secure his release. Gershkovich was jailed over a year ago while on a reporting trip and charged with espionage.

Putin has used the St. Petersburg forum as a showcase for touting Russia's development and seeking investors. The meeting with journalists took place in Gazprom's new global headquarters, a needle-shaped 81-story skyscraper overlooking the Gulf of Finland.

US: Russia deploying assets in Caribbean

Miami Herald

WASHINGTON — Russia is preparing to deploy aircraft and combat naval vessels to the Caribbean to conduct military exercises in the coming weeks, its first exercises in the Western Hemisphere involving both air and sea activity in five years, a senior administration official told McClatchy and the Miami Herald.

The Biden administration is not expressing concern over the deployment, with the official stating it poses "no direct threat to the United States." But the administration believes Moscow intends to use the exercises as a "messaging tactic" after President Joe Biden gave Ukraine permission last week to fire U.S.-made weapons across its border into Russia to defend its territory.

The official said the administration expects Moscow will "conduct heightened naval and air activity near the United States" that will likely include port calls by combat naval vessels in Cuba, and possibly Venezuela — two longstanding Russian allies that have seen occasional visits from Russian naval assets in the past two decades. The exercises may also include "aircraft deployments" and flights in the region, the official said.

Administration officials suspect that Cuba approved the Russian port call "at least in part" over an incident last year in which a U.S. nuclear submarine docked at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, angering the Cubans, a second U.S. official said.

Russia has sailed ships into the Western Hemisphere every year from 2013 to 2020, and has sent flights through the region that have violated the airspace of U.S. allies. But the anticipated activity would be the first coordinated air and sea exercise of its kind since 2019, during the Trump administration, the official noted.

"We expect that, as is predictable, the Russians will amp up the information space with this, both to make a point and to unsettle us," the official said. "We're not particularly concerned. It's something that they've done before."

Moscow did not inform the Biden administration of the maneuvers. Biden administration officials notified members of Congress of the Russian deployments earlier on Wednesday.

The U.S. Navy is tracking the Russian movements closely, the official added, and will adopt "whatever the necessary posture is to track and to monitor" their activity as the exercises unfold.

US, allies see China recruiting Western military trainers

Reuters

WASHINGTON — The U.S. and other "Five Eyes" countries on Wednesday warned that China has been circumventing measures aimed at halting its recruitment of current and former Western military pilots and other personnel to train the Chinese military.

"Western recruits who train the PLA (Peoples Liberation Army) may increase the risk of future conflict by reducing our deterrence capabilities," said a public bulletin issued by the U.S., British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand intelligence services.

The notice is the latest warning by the English-speaking "Five Eyes" intelligence-sharing alliance about rising concerns with Chinese government-directed espionage, cyber hacking and intellectual property theft as Beijing's growing might has roiled relations with Washington and its allies.

China's embassy in Washington did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

The PLA is using private companies in South Africa and China to hire former fighter pilots, flight engineers and air operations center personnel from Western countries to train its Air Force and Navy aviators, the services said in the notice.

JIN DANHUA, XINHUA/AP

China is reportedly using private companies in South Africa and China to hire former fighter pilots and related personnel to gain insight into Western air tactics and procedures.

"The PLA wants the skills and expertise of these individuals to make its own military air operations more capable while gaining insight into Western air tactics, techniques, and procedures," the notice said.

It said the efforts represented a "persistent, adaptive threat," with the insight gleaned by the PLA a threat to "U.S. and allied security."

In one high-profile case, former U.S. Marine pilot Daniel Duggan is fighting extradition from Australia on U.S. charges of training Chinese military pilots through a South African flight school in how to land on aircraft carriers.

Duggan, a naturalized Australian citizen, faces U.S. charges including money laundering and breaking arms control law. He denies the allegations.

One official from the U.S. National Counterintelligence and Security Center, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the governments issued the warning at this time because China "has been adapting" to countermeasures aimed at thwarting recruitment.

Western pilots have been lured into training Chinese pilots by "tons of money" and opportunities "to fly really exotic" Chinese aircraft, said a U.S. official familiar with the matter.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, added that the Chinese military had recruited at least five former pilots from New Zealand and some 30 from Britain, as well as former pilots from Germany and other countries.

The U.S. Commerce Department last year sanctioned more than a dozen companies in China, Kenya, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, the U.K, and the United Arab Emirates for their roles in recruiting Western military talent for PLA aviation training.

The U.S. official said the Test Flying Academy of South Africa is "one of the biggest companies" that has been hiring Western former military pilots to train Chinese pilots and has continued doing so despite U.S. sanctions.

PACIFIC

Outgoing Guam chief to stay and lead new squad

By Alex Wilson
Stars and Stripes

Leadership of Guam's three major military bases, along with other installations in the region, changed hands Thursday as the former commander prepares to assume a new role next week.

Rear Adm. Brent DeVore relieved Rear Adm. Greg Huffman as commander of Joint Region Marianas during ceremony at Naval Base Guam. The command is responsible for all military installations in the U.S. territory — primarily Andersen Air Force Base, Naval Base Guam and Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz — along with the surrounding Northern Mariana Islands.

Huffman, who led the command since June 2023, won't be leaving the island. He'll head up an entirely new command — Joint Task Force Micronesia — set to begin operations June 14.

The task force will represent the senior military officer in the region and be responsible for operational defense. Huffman, in his new role, will also serve as a direct representative to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and provide military support for civilian and humanitarian assistance projects, according to task force spokesman Cmdr. Joseph Hontz.

The new command, headquartered alongside Joint Region Marianas at the Nimitz Hill Annex in Asan, Guam, has about 30 personnel but plans to grow to about 40, Hontz told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday.

The task force represents a "strong commitment" from the Department of Defense to work closer with regional partners and build "operational capability and flexibility," Huffman said at Thursday's ceremony, which was livestreamed on Joint Region Marianas' Facebook page.

"With these capabilities, we will ultimately drive towards deterrence," he said. "Adversaries will see the work that we are doing and the posture we're setting throughout the region and think, 'Not today — today is not the day to risk conflict.'"

The Defense Department's presence on Guam has grown steadily over the past decade with the establishment of new training areas, commands and other facilities both on the island and on nearby Saipan and Tinian.

Camp Blaz activated in 2020, becoming the first new Marine Corps installation since 1952. In May 2023, the Missile Defense Agency introduced a proposal for a comprehensive, 360-degree missile defense system that can counter ballistic, cruise and hypersonic weapons.

Huffman

The buildup is tied to Guam's proximity to China, North Korea and the contested South China Sea, which has led to the U.S. military calling the island the "tip of the spear" in the Indo-Pacific. The Defense Department particularly sees China, which claims nearly the entirety of the South China Sea and aspires to annex Taiwan, as its pacing challenge.

"The threat from China continues to grow every day," said Vice Adm. Scott Gray, head of Navy Installations Command, at Thursday's ceremony. "Any major conflict today has the potential to impact our population and the people of Guam like we haven't seen in many years."

The job of Joint Region Marianas and Joint Task Force Micronesia is to keep Guam and the U.S. safe and "present a posture that will make any foe seek to think twice before they mess with the United States," he added.

DeVore, formerly a chief of staff for U.S. Pacific Fleet's Naval Surface Forces, brings to Joint Region Marianas ample experience both in surface warfare and naval administration. He commanded the guided-missile destroyer USS Stethem, the amphibious transport dock USS New York and Patrol Coast Crew Foxtrot while attached to the patrol ships USS Typhoon and USS Hurricane.

He also served as an executive assistant for a director at U.S. Joint Forces Command and as a deputy for the director of surface warfare at the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, according to his Navy biography. He holds a bachelor's in chemistry education from Purdue University, a master's from Georgetown University and a master's from the Marine Corps Command and Staff College.

DeVore, noting that he'll be working alongside Huffman, promised "two for the price of one," during the ceremony.

"Double the energy, double the enthusiasm, double the commitment," he said.

US plans up to 20 missile tests for Guam defense system over 10 years

By Wyatt Olson
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military plans to conduct up to two live-fire missile defense tests each year over the next decade from Guam as it develops an integrated defense system for the strategically important island.

The Missile Defense Agency released a 378-page environmental assessment Saturday laying out its plan to track and destroy target missiles in cooperation with the Air Force, Army, Navy and Coast Guard. The tests would begin sometime in the last three months of this year.

The assessment concluded "no significant direct, indirect, or cumulative environmental impacts" would occur from the testing.

The agency is soliciting public comment on the assessment through July 2.

"A missile defense system provides a layered defense consisting of various land-, sea-, and air-based weapons; sensor and communications systems; and command and control platforms that are used to defeat incoming ballistic, cruise, and hypersonic missiles in all phases of flight," the assessment states.

Indo-Pacific Command sees completion of the Guam Missile Defense System as a top priority for the region.

The U.S. territory is home to Andersen Air Force Base, Naval Base Guam and Camp Blaz, a massive Marine Corps base still under construction.

The island would serve as a crucial hub in the event of a conflict with China because it is the westernmost American territory and closest to the South China Sea, a flashpoint in the region.

The assessment was greeted warily by the Pacific Center for Island Security, a Guam-based group that describes itself as "an action-oriented research institute that aims to anchor this island and islander perspective."

"In view of the coming plans for Guam that are not of our making or choosing, it is imperative that an all-Guam approach be launched to protect the essential value of our island and our future," the center's chairman, Robert Underwood, said in a statement Monday.

"As billions of dollars are flowing for military projects, the community in Guam is not being planned for," he said. "Today, the military has not planned for enough housing for their own troops and contractors that they plan to bring to Guam."

The two annual flight tests or tracking exercises would be conducted from Andersen or from a U.S. Navy ship afloat in the Western Pacific, the assessment states.

"A flight test represents a target missile flight, an interceptor missile flight, an intercept of a target missile, or a test of sensors independent of missile flight," the assessment states. "For a single flight test, multiple interceptors and targets may be utilized."

A tracking exercise uses sensors to scan and trace a target, but an interceptor is not typically used.

The first test later this year would involve launching an interceptor called Standard Missile-3 using the Aegis Weapon System from Andersen against a medium-range ballistic missile, the assessment states.

That target would be air-launched from a C-17 Globemaster at an altitude greater than 20,000 feet and at least 800 nautical miles east of Guam over the Pacific Ocean.

The first-stage booster from the interceptor would separate and land in a remote area of Andersen, the assessment states.

Debris from the intercepted target "would fall to the surface of the ocean greater than 88 nautical miles from Guam and sink to the ocean floor," the assessment said.

Future flight tests and tracking exercises would use the interceptors from the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, and Patriot systems.

The tests would eventually include the not-yet-fielded Indirect Fire Protection Capability, or IFPC — a mobile, ground-based system used to defeat cruise missiles, drones, rockets and mortars.

The tests will validate the military's capability of integrating multiple sensors and interceptors that will become the "backbone" of the Guam Missile Defense System, the assessment states.

The assessment is available at www.mda.mil/system/GuamFT/ea.html. Comments can be emailed to info@GFT-EA.com or mailed to ManTech International Corp., Attention: Guam Flight Test EA Project Support, PMB 403, 1270 N. Marine Corps Dr., Suite 101, Tamuning, Guam 96913-4331.

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D-DAY AT 80

Biden: Leaders focus on aggression

FROM PAGE 1

veterans onto the ceremony grounds.

After a short speech, Macron awarded the Legion of Honor, the highest national decoration in France, to 11 of the veterans.

"You came here because the free world needed each and every one of you, and you answered the call," Macron said.

Actor Tom Hanks and director Steven Spielberg were also among the spectators who arrived at the cemetery early Thursday morning.

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, who spoke to the crowd, said it was important to defend the principles that the Allied forces fought for eight decades ago.

"At this hinge of history, we must stand firm against aggression and tyranny," Austin said.

Addressing the veterans, he added: "You saved the world, and we must only defend it … our gratitude must never fade, our memories must never dim, and our resolve must never fail."

Members of the 529th Military Police Company, Honor Guard, performed a 21-gun salute with small cannons pointed toward Omaha Beach.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, the head of U.S. Africa Command, Gen. Michael Langley, one of many top military officials in attendance, lauded the veterans who turned the tide of the war.

"That had a common purpose, to come and achieve the planned mission in the face of danger," Langley said. "We remember that today generations later, the sacrifices they made."

A larger international ceremony at nearby Omaha Beach, where many Americans lost their lives on D-Day as they stormed the shore in the face of heavy fire, followed the cemetery memorial.

American, Canadian and British troops also landed at beaches code-named Utah, Gold, Juno and Sword.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was embraced by Macron as dignitaries arrived at the international remembrance Thursday afternoon.

King Charles III and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak were scheduled to honor British troops at Sword, and Prince William and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will participate in a ceremony for Canadian troops who landed at Juno.

About 14,000 Canadians were among the 150,000 Allied troops who landed or parachuted into Normandy in 1944.

"Far from home they stormed these very sand dunes behind me, shoulder to shoulder with thousands of British troops," William said.

Hundreds of smaller memorials and commemoration events have been held throughout Normandy in the run-up to the anniversary.

PHOTOS BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

Spectators at Normandy American Cemetery watch Thursday as World War II veterans arrive at a ceremony to mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

Members of the 529th Military Police Company (Honor Guard) wait to participate in a ceremony at the Normandy American Cemetery.

People look on as World War II veterans are escorted into a ceremony at Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, France, on Thursday.

Actor Tom Hanks and American soldiers stand at an engraved map of the D-Day landing beaches at Normandy American Cemetery.

NATION

Tornado hits Michigan quickly, kills toddler

Separate twister injures 5 in Md. as multiple regions are affected

Associated Press

LIVONIA, Mich. — Tornado-spawning storms tearing across the eastern U.S. killed a toddler in a Detroit suburb and injured five in Maryland on Wednesday and left another eight people hurt in Ohio early Thursday.

A suspected tornado ripped away a gas station canopy and heavily damaged a restaurant and a discount store early Thursday in the eastern Ohio village of Frazeysburg. Eight people suffered minor injuries, mostly from flying debris, said Jeff Jadwin, the emergency management director in Muskingum County.

The storm's path followed the village's main street, leaving a trail of uprooted trees and damaged homes from one end to the other, he said. He estimated that at least 100 homes were hit, several of which were destroyed. The village of 1,500 people is about 50 miles east of Columbus.

Officials in Livonia, Mich., said the tornado tore through several neighborhoods on Wednesday afternoon and developed so quickly that there was no advance notice from the National Weather Service or others that would have normally led to the activation of warning sirens.

The storm uprooted a massive tree that fell on one family's house and came through the roof, landing on a bed where a woman and her 2-year-old were sleeping, officials said in a post on the city's website. Crews worked for nearly an hour to remove the roof and parts of the tree and then lift the tree to get the victims out.

The toddler was pronounced dead at the scene, officials said. The mother was transported to a local hospital in critical condition.

A 2-week-old sibling who was in a crib in a separate room was not injured but taken to a hospital for evaluation, Livonia Fire Department Chief Robert Jennison told WDIV-TV.

"This is a terrible tragedy for our community," Mayor Maureen Miller Brosnan said in the statement. "Our hearts are broken, too, and we send our deepest sympathies."

The weather service in Detroit confirmed on the social platform X that an EF1 tornado with a peak wind speed of 95 mph moved through Livonia. The agency said the twister traveled a path spanning over 5 miles, uprooting trees and damaging some homes.

A representative from the weather service called it a spin-up storm that didn't show up on their radars in enough time to issue a warning, according to city officials.

By late morning Thursday, 14,000 customers lacked power in southeastern Michigan, DTE Energy said.

It has been a grim spring for tornadoes in the U.S., where severe weather killed at least 24 people during the Memorial Day holiday weekend alone. April had the second-highest number of tornadoes on record in the country.

Tornado warnings were issued for parts of several other states on Wednesday night, including Ohio, New Jersey and Delaware. In New Hampshire's Seacoast area, storms took down trees and caused power outages.

In Maryland, emergency workers responded to reports that people were trapped inside structures that collapsed after a tornado hit Wednesday night. In Gaithersburg, there were reports of three collapsed structures with people trapped inside, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service spokesperson Pete Piringer said. The most significant damage occurred when a large tree fell on a house, injuring five people who were taken to hospitals, including one with traumatic injuries, he said. No serious injuries were reported at the other structures.

"We got incredibly lucky in Montgomery County, with two different tornadoes coming during the peak of rush hour, evening rush hour, and people home, having dinner in their homes," Earl Stoddard, director of the Montgomery County Office of Emergency Management & Homeland Security, said at a briefing on Thursday morning. "We were just very fortunate that the damage in Montgomery County was not substantially worse."

There were nine different areas with possible tornadic damage in Maryland that crews will survey, looking at whether there was one tornado that skipped along or different tornadoes, according to Kevin Rodriguez, lead meteorologist at the weather service office in Sterling, Va.

In Portsmouth, N.H., fires at two homes on opposite ends of the city were believed to have been started by lightning strikes that happened within 15 minutes of each other, Fire Chief William McQuillen said. Both homes were damaged and one was considered uninhabitable. No injuries were reported.

MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON, THE WASHINGTON POST/AP

Injured tornado victims are moved to the front yard of a neighbor's home in Gaithersburg, Md., before being taken to a hospital Wednesday. Several people were hurt when a large tree collapsed on a house.

Widow of Beau Biden testifies she got rid of Hunter's gun

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — The widow of Hunter Biden's brother told jurors in his federal gun trial Thursday about the moment she found the revolver in his truck, describing how she put it into a leather pouch, stuffed it into a shopping bag and tossed it in a trash can outside a market near her home.

"I panicked, and I wanted to get rid of them," she testified about finding the gun and ammunition in October 2018. "I didn't want him to hurt himself, and I didn't want my kids to find it and hurt themselves."

The purchase of the Colt revolver by Hunter Biden — and Hallie Biden's frenzied disposal of it — are the fulcrum of the case against him. Federal prosecutors say President Joe Biden's son was in the throes of a heavy crack addiction when he bought the gun. He's been charged with three felonies: lying to a federally licensed gun dealer, making a false claim on the application by saying he was not a drug user and illegally having the gun for 11 days.

MATT SLOCUM/AP

Hunter Biden, left, arrives to federal court with his wife, Melissa Cohen Biden, on Thursday, in Wilmington, Del.

Hunter Biden, who has pleaded not guilty, has said the Justice Department is bending to political pressure from Republicans and that he's being unfairly targeted.

Hallie, who had a brief romantic relationship with Hunter after Beau Biden died, said she considered hiding the gun but thought her kids might find it, so she decided to throw it away.

"I realize it was a stupid idea now, but I was panicking," she said.

Hunter Biden watched expressionless from the courtroom during her testimony. She told jurors that she found crack at her home and saw him using it. She was with him occasionally when he saw dealers. Prosecutor Leo Wise asked Hallie about a 2018 trip to California, where she visited Hunter at the Roosevelt Hotel, and asked her whether she was also using drugs.

"Yes, I was," she said.

"And who introduced you to it?"

"Hunter did," Hallie said as Hunter rested his face on his hand and looked down.

"It was a terrible experience that I went through, and I'm embarrassed and ashamed, and I regret that period of my life," she added.

Hallie testified she stopped using drugs in August 2018, but that Hunter continued smoking crack.

Much of the prosecution's case has been dedicated to highlighting the seriousness of his crack addiction and showcasing to jurors bare-chested moments with ex-girlfriends, infidelity and crack pipes — judgment lapses they believe prove he was actively using when he checked "no" on the form. Prosecutors argue that the evidence is necessary to show his state of mind when he bought the gun.

After Hallie Biden threw the gun in the trash can at Janssen's Market, he noticed it missing and asked her whether she had taken it.

"Are you insane?" he texted. He told her to go back to the market to look for it.

Surveillance footage played for jurors showed her digging around in the trash can for the gun, but it wasn't there. She asked store officials if someone had taken out the trash.

Hallie said Hunter told her to file a police report because the gun was registered in his name. She called the police while she was still at the store.

The Democratic president's son arrived at court Thursday with a copy of his memoir, "Beautiful Things," tucked under his arm. The book, written after he got sober in 2021, figures heavily into prosecutors' case: They've played audio excerpts for jurors in which he details his descent into drugs and alcohol following the death of his brother in 2015 from cancer.

Defense attorney Abbe Lowell has said Hunter Biden's state of mind was different when he wrote the book than when he purchased the gun, when he didn't believe he had an addiction. And he's suggested Hunter Biden might have felt he had a drinking problem at the time, but not a drug problem. Alcohol abuse doesn't preclude a gun purchase.

NATION

Appeals court halts Trump's Georgia case

BY KATE BRUMBACK
Associated Press

ATLANTA — An appeals court has halted the Georgia election interference case against former President Donald Trump and others while it reviews the lower court judge's ruling allowing Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis to remain on the case.

The Georgia Court of Appeals' order on Wednesday prevents Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee from moving forward with pretrial motions as he had planned while the appeal is pending. While it was already unlikely that the case would go to trial before the November general election, this makes that even more certain.

The appeals court on Monday docketed the appeals filed by Trump and eight others and said that "if oral argument is requested and granted" it is tentatively scheduled for Oct. 4. The court will then have until mid-March to rule, and the losing side will be able to appeal to the Georgia Supreme Court.

A spokesperson for Willis declined to comment on the appeals court ruling.

ALEX SLITZ/AP

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis looks on during a hearing on the Georgia election interference case in March in Atlanta.

A Fulton County grand jury in August indicted Trump and 18 others, accusing them of participating in a sprawling scheme to illegally try to overturn the 2020 presidential election in Georgia. Four defendants have pleaded guilty after reaching deals with prosecutors, but Trump and the others have pleaded not guilty. It is one of four criminal cases against Trump.

Trump and eight other defendants had tried to get Willis and her office removed from the case, arguing that a romantic relationship she had with special prosecutor Nathan Wade created a conflict of interest. McAfee in March found that no conflict of interest existed that should force Willis off the case, but he granted a request from Trump and the other defendants to seek an appeal of his ruling from the state Court of Appeals.

McAfee wrote that "an odor of mendacity remains." He said "reasonable questions" over whether Willis and Wade had testified truthfully about the timing of their relationship "further underpin the finding of an appearance of impropriety and the need to make proportional efforts to cure it." He said Willis could remain on the case only if Wade left, and the special prosecutor submitted his resignation hours later.

The allegations that Willis had improperly benefited from her romance with Wade resulted in a tumultuous couple of months in the case as intimate details of Willis and Wade's personal lives were aired in court in mid-February.

Steve Sadow, Trump's lead attorney in Georgia, said the Court of Appeals was right to halt proceedings while it hears the appeal "which argues the case should be dismissed and Fulton County DA Willis should be disqualified for her misconduct."

Two Trump allies are appointed to House Intelligence Committee

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Mike Johnson on Wednesday appointed two far-right Republicans to the powerful House Intelligence Committee, positioning two close allies of Donald Trump who worked to overturn the 2020 presidential election on a panel that receives sensitive classified briefings and oversees the work of America's spy agencies.

The appointments of GOP Reps. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania and Ronny Jackson of Texas to the House Intelligence Committee were announced on the House floor Wednesday. Johnson, a hardline conservative from Louisiana who has aligned himself with Trump, was replacing spots on the committee that opened up after the resignations of Republican Reps. Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin and Chris Stewart of Utah.

Committee spots have typically been given to lawmakers with backgrounds in national security and who have gained respect across the aisle. But the replacements with two close Trump allies comes as Johnson has signaled his willingness to use the full force of the House to aid Trump's bid to reclaim the Oval Office. It also hands the hard-right faction of the House two coveted spots on a committee that handles the nation's secrets and holds tremendous influence over the direction of foreign policy.

Johnson

Trump has long displayed adversarial and flippant views of the U.S. intelligence community, flouted safeguards over classified information and directly berated law enforcement agencies like the FBI. The former president faces 37 felony counts for improperly storing in his Florida estate sensitive documents on nuclear capabilities, repeatedly enlisting aides and lawyers to help him hide records demanded by investigators and cavalierly showing off a Pentagon "plan of attack" and classified map.

Perry, who formerly chaired the ultraconservative House Freedom Caucus, was ordered by a federal judge last year to turn over more than 1,600 texts and emails to FBI agents investigating efforts to keep Trump in office after his 2020 election loss and illegally block the transfer of power to Democrat Joe Biden.

Perry's personal cellphone was also seized by federal authorities who have explored his role in helping install an acting attorney general who would be receptive to Trump's false claims of election fraud.

Perry and other conservatives have also pushed Congress to curtail a key U.S. government surveillance tool. They want to restrict the FBI's ability to use the program to search for Americans' data.

Jackson, who was elected to the House in 2020, was formerly a top White House physician under former presidents Barack Obama and Trump. Known for his over-the-top pronouncements about Trump's health, Jackson was nominated by Trump to be the secretary of Veterans Affairs.

He withdrew his nomination amid allegations of professional misconduct. An internal investigation at the Department of Defense later concluded that Jackson made "sexual and denigrating" comments about a female subordinate, violated the policy on drinking alcohol on a presidential trip and took prescription-strength sleeping medication that prompted worries from his colleagues about his ability to provide proper medical care.

Jackson has denied those allegations and described them as politically motivated.

YouTube toughens policy on gun videos and youth

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — YouTube is changing its policies about firearm videos in an effort to keep potentially dangerous content from reaching underage users.

The video sharing platform owned by Google said Wednesday it will prohibit any videos demonstrating how to remove firearm safety devices. In addition, videos showing homemade guns, automatic weapons and certain firearm accessories like silencers will be restricted to users 18 and older.

The changes take effect June 18 and come after gun safety advocates have repeatedly called on the platform to do more to ensure gun videos aren't making their way to the site's youngest users, potentially traumatizing children or sending them down dark paths of extremism and violence.

Katie Paul, director of the Tech Transparency Project, said the change was welcome news and a step in the right direction. But she questioned why the platform took so long to issue a new policy, and said her group will look to see how effectively YouTube enforces its new rule.

"Firearms are the number one cause of death for children and teens in America," said Paul, whose group has long sought stronger age controls on online gun videos. "As always with YouTube, the real proof of change is whether the company enforces the policies it has on the books. Until YouTube takes real action to prevent videos about guns and gun violence from reaching minors, its policies remain empty words."

Last year, researchers at Paul's group created YouTube accounts that mimicked the behavior of 9-year-old American boys with a stated interest in video games. The researchers found that YouTube's recommendations system forwarded these accounts graphic videos of school shootings, tactical gun training videos and how-to instructions on making firearms fully automatic.

One video featured an elementary school-age girl wielding a handgun; another showed a shooter using a .50 caliber gun to fire on a dummy head filled with lifelike blood and brains. Many of the videos violated YouTube's own policies against violent or gory content.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg last month called on YouTube to stop the proliferation of firearm-related videos to young users, and told the company it was failing to enforce its own policies. On Wednesday, Bragg said he applauded the company's new policy.

NATION

Boeing's Starliner springs more leaks

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Boeing's space capsule developed more leaks during its first test flight with astronauts as it closed in on the International Space Station on Thursday.

The Starliner capsule already had one small helium leak when it rocketed into orbit Wednesday. Boeing and NASA managers were confident they could manage the propulsion system despite the problem and that more leaks were unlikely. But just hours into the flight, two more leaks cropped up. There was no immediate word on the size of these new leaks.

The leaks pose no safety issues for NASA test pilots Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams or the mission, Boeing spokesman Jim May said.

Mission managers pressed ahead for a midday docking with the space station while continuing to monitor the issue.

May said the capsule holds plenty of helium reserves to make up for what's lost. The propulsion system will be disabled once the capsule is docked at the space station since the thrusters will not be needed then, he said.

Helium is used to pressurize the fuel lines of Starliner's thrusters, which are essential for maneuvering. Before liftoff, engineers devised a plan to work around any additional leaks in the system. A faulty rubber seal, no bigger than a shirt button, is believed responsible for the original leak.

After the space shuttles retired, NASA hired Boeing and SpaceX to ferry astronauts to and from the space station. SpaceX's taxi service began in 2020. Boeing was supposed to start around the same time, but was held up for years by safety concerns and other troubles.

Boeing plans to keep Starliner at the space station for at least eight days before guiding it to a landing in the western U.S.

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators arrested at Stanford University

Associated Press

STANFORD, Calif. — Police arrested 13 people at Stanford University after pro-Palestinian demonstrators occupied the school president and provost's offices early Wednesday, causing what officials described as "extensive" vandalism inside and outside the building.

The takeover began around dawn on the last day of spring classes at the university in California's Silicon Valley, and ended three hours later. Some protesters barricaded themselves inside the building while others linked arms outside, The Stanford Daily reported. The group chanted "Palestine will be free, we will free Palestine."

Demonstrators cheered in support of those being arrested as the detainees were escorted out of the building and loaded into law enforcement vehicles.

The student newspaper said one of its reporters was among those detained.

Protest camps have sprung up on university campuses across the U.S. and in Europe as students demand their universities stop doing business with Israel or companies that support its war efforts.

Organizers seek to amplify calls to end Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza, which they describe as a genocide against the Palestinians. The top United Nations court has concluded there is a "plausible risk of genocide" in Gaza — a charge Israel strongly denies.

Stanford students who participated in Wednesday's protest would be immediately suspended, and any seniors would not be allowed to graduate, university President Richard Saller and Provost Jenny Martinez said in a joint statement.

They said the university also removed a student encampment of Palestinian supporters on Wednesday, which had been set up on campus on April 25, citing public safety concerns and violations of school policies.

Prosecutors : Man charged in NY serial killings had crime 'blueprint'

Associated Press

RIVERHEAD, N.Y. — The New York architect previously accused of killing four women and leaving their corpses scattered along a coastal highway was charged Thursday in the deaths of two more after prosecutors said they gathered new DNA evidence and found a computer document he had used to "blueprint" his crimes.

Rex Heuermann, 60, appeared before a judge on the eastern end of Long Island to face charges that he killed Jessica Taylor and Sandra Costilla, two young women who were long suspected of being the victims of men preying on sex workers.

Taylor disappeared in 2003. Costilla was killed in 1993. The new charges came just days after police finished extensive searches of Heuermann's Massapequa Park home and a wooded area on Long Island tied to the investigation of a string of deaths known as the Gilgo Beach serial killings.

In a court filing, prosecutors said they were able to use new forensic testing methods to match hairs found on or near the vicinity of both victims to a DNA profile that is a likely match to Heuermann. Additionally, prosecutors say they discovered a "planning document" on the hard drive found in his basement used to "methodically blueprint" his killings.

The document includes Heuermann's concerns about leaving behind forensic evidence, guidance for cleaning and washing bodies, and notes on how to improve "next time," according to the bail application.

Heuermann pleaded not guilty at the court hearing and was ordered held without bail.

Heuermann

Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney planned to hold a news conference following the court hearing.

The charges involving Costilla, who was killed 30 years ago, indicate that prosecutors believe Heuermann was killing victims for much longer than previously thought. Prosecutors say one entry in the planning documents suggested he was involved in the death of another woman, Valerie Mack, who was found dismembered in the same vicinity as Taylor. Heuermann has not been charged in the death of Mack, who disappeared in 2000.

Since late 2010, police have been investigating the deaths of at least 10 people — mostly female sex workers — whose remains were discovered along an isolated highway not far from Gilgo Beach on Long Island's south shore.

The victims had disappeared over a span of at least 14 years. Vexed police officers made only halting progress in identifying possible suspects. Investigators long said it was likely that not all of the deaths were the work of the same killer. Some of the victims disappeared in the mid-1990s. Investigators concluded that an 11th person who disappeared in 2010 from the barrier island community of Oak Beach had accidentally drowned.

Heuermann, who lived across a bay from where the bodies were found, was arrested last July. Prosecutors said a new investigative task force used mobile phone location data and DNA samples to link the architect to some of the victims. He was charged with killing four of the women: Megan Waterman, Melissa Barthelemy, Amber Lynn Costello and Maureen Brainard-Barnes.

Investigators who had searched Heuermann's home extensively and dug up his yard last summer returned to the house again last month and spent nearly a week searching it again. They focused their efforts mostly in the basement, according to a lawyer for Heuermann's wife.

Heuermann, who has been in custody since his arrest, has pleaded not guilty.

MIDEAST

JEHAD ALSHRAFI/AP

Palestinians look at the aftermath of the Israeli strike on a United Nations-run school that killed dozens of people in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, on Thursday. The Israeli military said that Hamas militants were operating from within the school.

Israel strikes school in Gaza it says was being used by Hamas

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — An Israeli strike early Thursday on a school sheltering displaced Palestinians in central Gaza killed more than 30 people, including 23 women and children, according to local health officials. The Israeli military said that Hamas militants were operating from within the school.

It was the latest instance of mass casualties among Palestinians trying to find refuge as Israel expands its offensive. A day earlier, the military announced a new ground and air assault in central Gaza, pursuing Hamas militants it says have regrouped there. Troops repeatedly have swept back into parts of the Gaza Strip they have previously invaded, underscoring the resilience of the militant group despite Israel's nearly eight-month onslaught.

Witnesses and hospital officials said the predawn strike hit the al-Sardi School, run by the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees known by the acronym UNRWA. The school was filled with Palestinians who had fled Israeli operations and bombardment in northern Gaza, they said.

Ayman Rashed, a man displaced from Gaza City who was sheltering at the school, said the missiles hit classrooms on the second and third floor where families were sheltering. He said he helped carry out five dead, including an old man and two children, one with his head shattered open. "It was dark, with no electricity, and we struggled to get out the victims," Rashed said.

Casualties from the school strike arrived at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in nearby Deir al-Balah, which had already been overwhelmed by a stream of constant ambulances since the central Gaza incursion began 24 hours earlier, said Omar al-Derawi, a photographer working for the hospital.

Hospital records and an Associated Press reporter at the hospital recorded at least 33 dead from the strike, including 14 children and nine women. Another strike on a house overnight killed six people, according to the records. Both strikes occurred in Nuseirat, one of several built-up refugee camps in Gaza dating to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes.

Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA commissioner-general, said in a post on X that 6,000 people were sheltering in the school when it was hit without prior warning. He said UNRWA was unable to verify claims that armed groups were inside.

An Israeli military spokesman, Lt. Col. Peter Lerner, said that the army wasn't aware of any civilian casualties in the strike. He said that intelligence indicated that militants had used the school compound to orchestrate some of the Oct. 7 attacks on Israel and that at least 20 militants there were using it currently as a "staging realm" to launch attacks on Israeli soldiers. The military said it took steps before the strike "to reduce the risk of harming uninvolved civilians ... including conducting aerial surveillance, and additional intelligence information."

Spain asks to join UN court case targeting Israel

Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain — Spain became on Thursday the first European country to ask a United Nations court for permission to join South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza.

South Africa filed its case with the International Court of Justice late last year. It alleged that Israel was breaching the genocide convention in its military assault that has laid waste to large swaths of Gaza.

The court has ordered Israel to immediately halt its military offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah but stopped short of ordering a cease-fire for the enclave. Israel has not complied and shows no sign of doing so.

"There should be no doubt that Spain will remain on the right side of history," Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said after his foreign minister made the announcement.

Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua, Libya and the Palestinians are waiting for the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands, to grant approval to their requests to join the case.

Israel denies it is committing genocide in its military operation to crush Hamas triggered by its deadly Oct. 7 attacks in southern Israel.

Hamas killed 1,200 people and took 250 more hostage in the surprise attacks. Israel's air and land attacks have since killed 36,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between combatants and civilians.

"We take the decision because of the ongoing military operation in Gaza," Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said in Madrid. "We want peace to return to Gaza and the Middle East, and for that to happen we must all support the court."

Once admitted to the case, Spain would be able to make written submissions and speak at public hearings.

Spain's request is the latest move by Sánchez's left-wing coalition to support peacemaking efforts in Gaza.

Spain, Ireland and Norway formally recognized a Palestinian state on May 28 in a coordinated effort by the three Western European nations. Slovenia, a European Union member along with Spain and Ireland, followed suit and recognized the Palestinian state this week.

Over 140 countries have recognized a Palestinian state — more than two-thirds of the U.N. — but none of the major Western powers, including the United States, has done so.

While Sánchez has condemned the attacks by Hamas and joined demands for the return of the remaining Israeli hostages, he has not shied away from the diplomatic backlash from Israel. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said that by recognizing a Palestinian state, Sánchez's government was "being complicit in inciting genocide against Jews and war crimes."

Sánchez's backing of the Palestinians is generally supported in Spain, where some university students have followed their American counterparts in protesting on campuses. Spaniards will vote in elections for the European Parliament elections on Sunday.

Last year, the International Court of Justice allowed 32 countries, including Spain, to join Ukraine's case alleging that Russia breached the genocide convention by falsely accusing Ukraine of committing genocide in its eastern Luhansk and Donetsk regions, and using that as a pretext for the invasion.

Preliminary hearings have been held in the genocide case against Israel, but the court is expected to take years to reach a final decision.

Soldier injured on Gaza pier mission now at Army hospital in Texas

BY MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A U.S. soldier injured while helping move aid to the temporary pier off the coast of Gaza has been taken to Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas and remains in critical condition, the Pentagon said Wednesday.

The soldier and his family were transported Tuesday by military aircraft from Israel to San Antonio where the hospital is located. The injury happened on a ship that was not docked at the pier. Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said she did not have further information Wednesday.

The soldier was one of three U.S. service members injured working on the pier mission. Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, deputy commander of U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East, said last month that the service members suffered minor, noncombat-related injuries, but one was taken to an Israeli hospital for an undisclosed issue. CENTCOM later revealed one service member was in critical condition.

Singh also said Wednesday that the Pentagon hopes to re-anchor the floating pier later this week and expects humanitarian aid to "flow pretty immediately."

The Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore, or JLOTS, pier is meant to provide another way to deliver needed aid into Gaza. The World Health Organization has warned some 2.3 million Gaza inhabitants face extreme hunger as Israel continues its war against Hamas militants who launched a surprise assault in October from the enclave.

The pier became operational on May 17, but the Pentagon announced less than two weeks later it would be removed to undergo repairs after suffering damage from rough seas and bad weather.

The suspended use of the pier comes after more than 1,000 metric tons of aid had been delivered.

Singh said the Pentagon has also reassessed the cost of the pier, which was originally estimated to be approximately $320 million. Lower-than-expected costs for contracted trucks, drivers and commercial vessels, and the United Kingdom's contribution of a birthing vessel for soldiers and sailors have lowered the U.S. price tag by about $90 million.

The latest cost assessment includes repair and rebuilding of the pier.

WEEKEND

‘Erased’ gives WWII heroes their due

Television, Page 31

Bummer summer

A pandemic hangover, strikes and streaming from home are just a few of the reasons the box office is off to a bad start

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ILLUSTRATION BY NOGA AMI-RAV/Stars and Stripes

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WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Fueling, creating fandom

How Netflix is using its mobile games to build and retain its reality-TV audience

BY WENDY LEE
Los Angeles Times

Reality show contestants are fiercely protective of how they look on screen. For Chloe Veitch, one of the breakout stars of Netflix's risque dating series "Too Hot to Handle," that kind of intense image control now includes her appearance as a digital character in the company's mobile video games.

Her digital avatar is prominently featured in a series of Netflix games based on the streaming giant's reality programs, including "Too Hot to Handle," in which scantily clad contestants must form romantic connections while being penalized for getting frisky. Her animated persona appears as a "love guru" guiding players through the gaming experience.

"The game version of me is almost identical," Veitch said in an interview, noting that the game designers painstakingly copied her multiple tattoos. "Obviously it doesn't get spots (pimples), it doesn't have hormone imbalances, so I'm quite jealous, to be honest with you."

The reality-show-inspired games are part of Netflix's growing library of mobile-only interactive offerings, which are available to the streaming service's subscribers.

The company's gaming service has about 100 titles, including 13 that are based on Netflix original programs. The streamer hopes that by providing these ad-free games for users, it will increase the amount of time people spend with the service. It's also looking to use its gaming operation to promote its programming and prevent subscriber "churn," or cancellations.

Late last month, Netflix announced four new additions to its gaming roster: Netflix Stories: Perfect Match, Netflix Stories: Selling Sunset, Too Hot to Handle 3 and The Ultimatum: Choices, all based on the company's reality programs. The games will launch in tandem with new seasons of the shows.

The idea is that by offering games on smartphones, Netflix can keep viewers engaged even between seasons of such popular shows as "Too Hot to Handle," "Selling Sunset" and "Love is Blind," increasing the likelihood that they'll tune in again.

"It is that amplification effect that if you love the show or you love the game, there is another iteration for you to immerse yourself in, to enjoy that world," said Brandon Riegg, Netflix's vice president of nonfiction series.

In the games, players get to design their own characters and take part in choose-your-own adventure-style stories. The outcomes can be as racy as those of a romance novel. With the Too Hot to Handle games, for example, players must choose whether to stay chaste with the other animated contestants or break the rules by making out or having sex in a suite.

Netflix has not released numbers to gauge the performance of its games business. But third-party data suggest reality-show-based games have performed well for Netflix. Too Hot to Handle: Love is a Game, released in 2022, had an estimated 5.9 million installs, ranking it as the fourth most popular Netflix mobile game since November 2021, according to data firm Appfigures.

"These will be great hooks to draw in new users but also can be a great incentive to prevent losing users," said Randy Nelson, head of insights at Appfigures. "It keeps them in that Netflix world longer, and they're exposed to more Netflix content. In the long run, this will be a pretty big positive for Netflix."

Netflix began acquiring game studios in 2021 as it expanded into the popular entertainment medium. The company has released titles based on its original programs, as well as offerings from the studios it acquired. It also licenses from other firms to make games based on franchises such as Grand Theft Auto. Since inception, Netflix games have achieved 119 million downloads, Appfigures estimates.

Netflix declined to comment on third-party download figures. In a January earnings presentation, Netflix co-Chief Executive Greg Peters said the company had "tripled game engagement over the last year." Netflix games remain a small part of the company's overall business, which has 270 million subscribers globally.

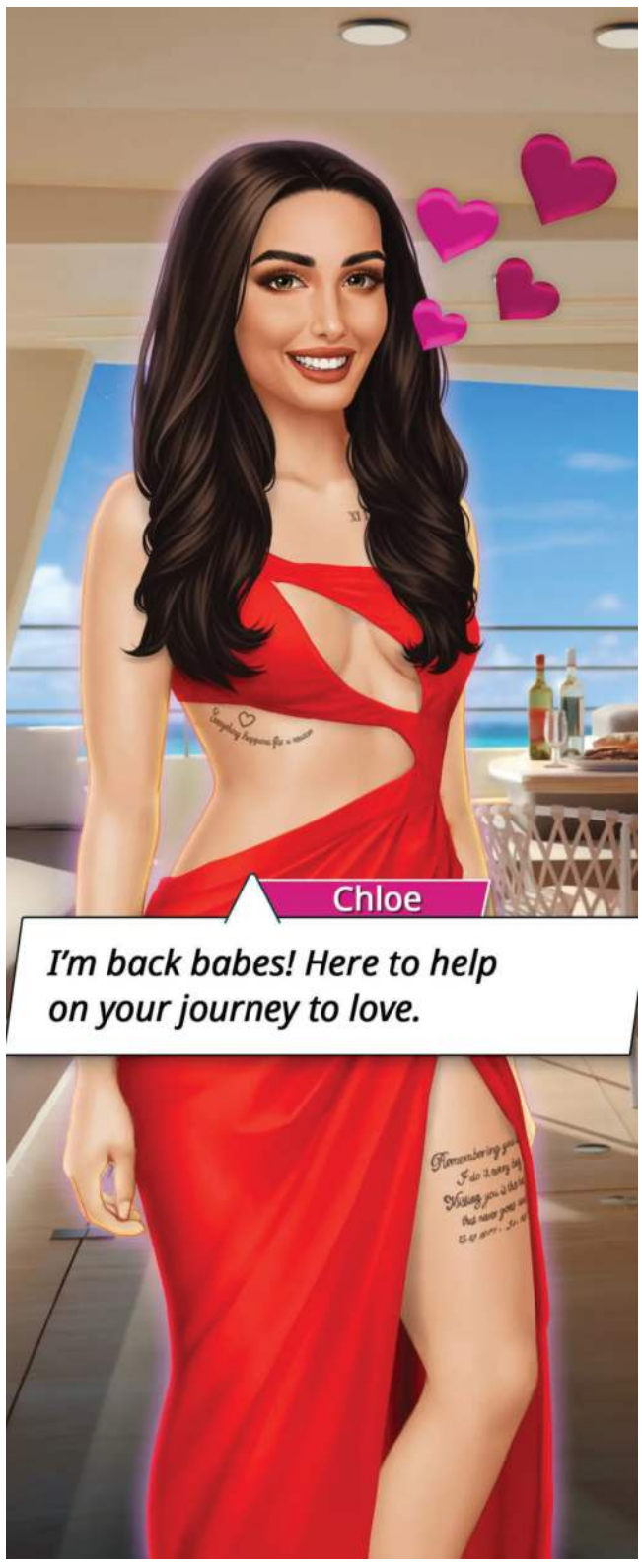
Subscribers have spent hours playing the reality-show-based games, Netflix executives told The Los Angeles Times. As with the shows themselves, the games tend to attract a female audience.

In some cases, players first discover the games and then later watch the reality series they are based on. In other cases, fans of the show pick up the games.

"Games can fuel fandom, but they can also create it," said Sarah Springwater, director of story for Netflix Stories, the library of interactive fiction games based on the company's programs.

The stories in games like Too Hot to Handle 3 and The Ultimatum: Choices branch out depending on the decisions players make. Those games have more than 15 possible endings. That gives players room to explore and stay engaged for longer, said Leanne Loombe, who leads external game development for Netflix.

"The thing with games is that they definitely allow you to engage over the longer period of time, and that's the opportunity that we see," Loombe said.



Netflix

Chloe Veitch, one of the stars of Netflix's risque dating series "Too Hot to Handle," appears as an animated persona in the mobile game version of the show, guiding players through the gaming experience.

Dr Well's new AF7001 leg massager targets entire leg from thigh to foot

DR WELL/TNS

Among its myriad benefits, the AF7001 6-Chamber Air Compression Leg Massager can help relieve muscle fatigue and enhance circulation.

BY GREGG ELMAN
Tribune News Service

Dr Well has launched the new AF7001 6-Chamber Air Compression Leg Massager.

It is designed to provide myriad benefits, from relieving muscle fatigue to enhancing blood circulation and metabolism. The AF7001 is engineered with cutting-edge air compression technology and precision targeting to supply relief to every part of the leg, including the upper thigh, lower thigh, knee, calf, ankle and foot.

According to Dr Well, the AF7001 employs the dynamic air pressure to rhythmically expand and contract leg muscles, mimicking the deep kneading action of a professional massage. This 360-degree intense compression swiftly alleviates muscle tension and fatigue, making it an indispensable companion for athletes, outdoor enthusiasts and anyone seeking relief from the strains of daily life.

With its six powerful air chambers that evenly inflate for consistency and 10 levels of massage intensity, users can customize it based on their needs and preferences to achieve optimal relaxation and recovery. This can be as simple as wanting to recover from a workout or improve circulation. The self-care AF7001 is simple to use in the comfort of your home or work.

The AF7001 also has three auto modes, an adjustable timer and 100% manual control of air cells. The auto timer has settings for 10, 20 and 30 minutes.

The highly portable device (8.3-by-8.3-by-20.5 inches, 4.4 pounds) was designed with functionality and style. It has a cuff container for easy storage post-massage and a premium leather handle, making it easy to travel with and use anywhere.

Dr Well is a leading total health care company based in South Korea. They have 120 items across five categories and specialize in developing, manufacturing and distributing a wide array of massage devices. They are committed to superior quality and exceptional service.

Online: drwellgo.com; $299

WEEKEND: MOVIES

The summer the movies died

Last year's strikes, COVID-19 and streaming among the reasons why the box office is off to a bad start this season

BY ADAM GRAHAM
The Detroit News

The sky is falling at the summer box office, and it's not even officially summer yet.

Hollywood's bummer summer started at the top of May when "The Fall Guy," the highly touted action comedy starring Ryan Gosling and Emily Blunt, opened to a soft $27.7 million, well below projections. That kicked off a month of disappointing returns, which was capped late last month when "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga" and "The Garfield Movie" combined for the worst Memorial Day box-office frame since "Casper" opened in theaters in 1995, when Christina Ricci was still only 15 years old.

Things weren't any better last weekend, with the new releases led by the dismal Diane Keaton comedy "Summer Camp." And it looks like "Bad Boys: Ride or Die" (opening Friday) and "Inside Out 2" (set to open June 14) will have a lot of heavy lifting to do before Gru and Deadpool arrive and try to straighten things out in July.

The question everyone in the movie industry wants to know the answer to is, "what happened?" There is no one answer, there are a combination of factors, and there's no quick fix. And things might get worse before they get better, if they ever get as good as they once were again.

Yes, there will be hits again, and "Deadpool & Wolverine," due out July 26, is as close to a sure thing as there is this summer. It's the only Marvel movie opening this year, and while Marvel has had its follies over the past few years, "Deadpool" is a proven entity and the circumstances of Ryan Reynolds' character reteaming with Hugh Jackman's Wolverine should combine to make it a massive hit. Probably.

But sure things just aren't so sure anymore, and that's the lesson Hollywood is learning, one painful weekend at a time.

So what happened? Here are a few things that occurred over the past few years that made this the summer Hollywood would rather forget:

■ The strike: Ah, remember the dual strikes last year? Hollywood's writers and actors strikes, which lasted five months and four months, respectively, slowed down Hollywood's production pipeline and impacted the summer slate of offerings. That's partially why it's a weak summer to begin with, and why unproven entities such as a TV show reboot ("The Fall Guy") and a "Mad Max" prequel were asked to shoulder the weight of the May box office.

Warner Bros. Pictures

Anya Taylor-Joy stars in "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga," which, with "The Garfield Movie," combined for the worst Memorial Day box-office frame since "Casper" opened in theaters in 1995.

Universal Pictures

Ryan Gosling takes a leap in the highly touted "The Fall Guy," an action comedy about stunt performers, which opened to a soft $27.7 million, well below projections.

■ Streaming: If you didn't see "The Fall Guy" in theaters, you can watch it at home. Right now. There used to be a monthslong wait between when a movie opened in theaters and when it was available to watch at home, but that window has been shortened to, in many situations, 17 days.

So if you want to see a movie but would rather watch it at home, you're incentivized to just wait a few weeks and bam, you can pop your own popcorn and enjoy from the comfort of your couch. Theatrical purists will always go to the theater, but some people just want to watch a movie, and they can now do so from home more easily than ever.

■ Other entertainment options: Movies are far from the only game in town: There are the streaming services we all subscribe to way too many of and pay way too much money for, there are video games, there are TV shows to binge, there is social media and there are the phones that we cannot, no matter how hard we try, put down or look away from. Movies require two hours of unbroken attention, which didn't used to be a lot to ask, but we live in an accelerated world, and our attention spans have been fragmented into bits by constantly refreshing our screens for the latest TikTok video. We've become scrolling zombies, and there's no scrolling at the movies.

■ The pandemic: The closure of movie theaters during the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated trends that were already happening in Hollywood and in the culture that were driving people away from the movies, and the pandemic got people awfully used to staying at home. "Top Gun: Maverick" brought people back in waves in 2022, as did "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" last summer, but now people are used to the idea of coming out to one mega-event movie (or double feature, in the case of "Barbenheimer") a year.

■ The theatrical experience: Phones haven't ruined the theatrical experience, but they definitely haven't made it any better. And when the person next to you or a few rows ahead of you whips out their phone to check their texts, it draws your attention away from the screen. (That's how light works when you're in the dark. It's science.) Someone talking loudly, sound bleeding over from the screen next door, projection mishaps, 20 minutes of trailers, on-screen advertisements and more are all other factors that have taken away from the theatrical moviegoing experience. When you're weighing it against staying home and sitting on the couch, the living room often wins.

■ The movies themselves: Maybe people just didn't want to see "The Fall Guy," or "Furiosa," or John Krasinski's "IF." A lot of movies are released every week and it's tough to keep up with them all, even for people whose job it is to keep up with them all. There's no off-season at the movies. So outside of the mega-event movies, and with so many other entities competing for people's attention, only a few movies are going to be able to break through. And a gas-guzzling trip through the Australian wasteland ("Furiosa") or a winking ode to the hard work of Hollywood stuntpeople ("The Fall Guy") might not be everyone's cup of tea. And frankly, they shouldn't have to be.

So what happens now?

The movies and movie culture aren't going to go away. But they will have to adapt to the new reality. That could mean fewer movies or smaller budgets, which wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing for creatives and for storytellers. It could mean less visionary blockbusters the scope and scale of "Furiosa" — all those trucks and explosions don't come cheap — but it could clear the way for more grounded projects less reliant on special effects and more in touch with the human experience. Hollywood will find a way, it always has. It just has to weather this current storm first.

Going against the current

Ridley put in laps to portray Olympian Ederle, 1st woman to swim across English Channel

BY THOMAS FLOYD
The Washington Post

Daisy Ridley, the star of "Young Woman and the Sea," had three months to prepare for her role as Gertrude Ederle, the first woman to swim across the English Channel. She began the training buoyed by pluck. But within seconds of hopping in the water, the "Star Wars" actor found herself weighed down by doubt.

Ridley

"I got halfway down a 20-meter pool and stood up and actually thought, 'I can't do this. I don't know what I've done. I shouldn't have agreed to it,'" Ridley said during a recent video chat from Los Angeles. "I was really fully learning a new skill."

Ridley promptly plunged into an arduous training schedule, swimming three to four times a week for several months under the guidance of Siobhan-Marie O'Connor, a two-time Olympian for Britain.

After Ridley flew to Bulgaria for the start of filming in April 2022, she embarked on a rigorous two-week regimen to round out her preparation. Once production began, she complemented her days of swimming on set with practice sessions during evenings and weekends. Along the way, O'Connor helped hone Ridley's technique through fingertip drag drills, no-kick and kick-only laps and myriad other exercises.

When it came time to shoot the scenes from Ederle's milestone moment — a 21-mile swim from France to England on Aug. 6, 1926 — Ridley had progressed enough that director Joachim Rønning said he barely called upon the movie's stunt swimmers over a week-plus of filming in the Black Sea.

"I just ended up wanting to use Daisy as much as possible," Rønning said. "The way she swam it, nobody could really beat it. So even for wide shots when there's no way to see that it's Daisy, I just ended up using Daisy all the time — and thank God she was up for it."

Nearly two years after wrapping production, "Young Woman and the Sea" is hitting theaters Friday. Adapted by screenwriter Jeff Nathanson from Glenn Stout's 2009 book of the same name, the Disney-produced drama shines a light on Ederle, the New York native who won two individual bronze medals and was part of the gold medal 4x100-meter relay for the United States at the 1924 Olympics in Paris. Two years later, she finished her historic swim in 14 hours, 31 minutes, besting the men's record by nearly two hours.

Although the accomplishment was heralded at the time, Ederle, who died in 2003 at age 98, is no longer the household name she was when her feat of endurance made global headlines and prompted a ticker-tape parade through Manhattan.

"I just feel so, so lucky to be able to retell the story for a modern world," Rønning said, "and put Trudy Ederle's name back on the map."

When the movie introduces Ederle, a second-generation German immigrant who was advised not to swim after childhood measles hampered her hearing, she's a plucky teenager with a thirst for swimming but a lack of formal training.

In portraying Ederle's years-long journey from amateur to elite, Ridley mapped out a swimming evolution that begins with a sluggish doggy paddle and ends with the bent-arm stroke Ederle used to traverse the Channel.

While replicating an Olympian's fine-tuned technique may seem daunting, Ridley said Ederle's earlier, rawer swimming scenes threw her for more of a loop.

DISNEY/AP

Daisy Ridley, who plays swimmer Gertrude Ederle, during the production of "Young Woman and the Sea." To prepare for the role, Ridley swam three to four times a week for several months.

"The doggy paddle, honestly, was one of the hardest things," Ridley said. "Whenever Siobhan asked us to do doggy paddle, I said, 'Please, can we not do doggy paddle? I'll do it on the day. I just don't need to practice.' It was so difficult."

Suppressing any temptation to re-create the English Channel with a water tank or green screen, Rønning always knew he wanted to film in the open water. For Ridley, shooting in the Black Sea came with concurrent priorities: To swim fast enough to keep up with the boat filming her; to maintain the distance from the camera necessary to stay in focus; and, of course, to actually act and convey Ederle's blend of joy, fear and determination.

The cold temperatures — Rønning said the water hovered around 60 degrees during filming — heightened the challenge. To boot, Ridley endured a strained chest muscle during filming she said still bothers her, as well as an osteoma and an infection in her left ear.

"It's always challenging making a movie," Rønning said. "But then when you put it on the ocean where you literally have so many moving parts, it does make it more complex. It's hard and it's stressful and I have an actor in the water whose teeth are [chattering], but I think in the end it's worth it."

"Young Woman and the Sea" also focuses on the societal hurdles Ederle overcame at a time when access to pools remained restricted for many women, female swim teams were severely underfunded and some officials actively undermined female athletes. (Jabez Wolffe, Ederle's coach played by Christopher Eccleston, was alleged to have intentionally sabotaged her first attempt to cross the Channel.)

Fittingly, the film is coming out during a watershed moment for women's athletics. Caitlin Clark is taking basketball by storm. The likes of Katie Ledecky, Simone Biles and Nelly Korda are bracing for the Olympic spotlight this summer in Paris. The England women's soccer team (aka the Lionesses) is developing a fervent following in Ridley's native country.

But as the actor pointed out, many of the obstacles Ederle faced remain relevant in a race for athletic equality that's far from finished.

"It is wonderful that the Lionesses did what they did and Caitlin Clark did what she did," Ridley said. "But there are also so many people who still do not have the visibility they should and do not have the pay that they should. So it's an ongoing conversation ... and hopefully [the film] continues to help push the conversation forward."

"It is wonderful that the Lionesses did what they did and Caitlin Clark did what she did. But there are also so many people who still do not have the visibility they should and do not have the pay that they should. So it's an ongoing conversation ... and hopefully [the film] continues to help push the conversation forward."

"Young Woman and the Sea" star Daisy Ridley
on the watershed moment in women's athletics

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEW

Coloring outside the lines

Filmmakers bring wild, artistic experimentation to 'Bad Boys' template with flimsy 4th installment, 'Ride or Die'

By Katie Walsh
Tribune News Service

The first "Bad Boys" came out in 1995, which means we're officially entering the "aging action star" territory with this franchise. The fourth installment, "Bad Boys: Ride or Die," is directed by the up-and-coming action filmmaking team Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah, known as Adil & Bilall, who took over directing duties from Michael Bay with 2020's "Bad Boys for Life."

There seem to be two options for the action star — and franchise — that's getting up in years. One can either take the Tom Cruise route, returning to a text that was originally all flash and sensation, and infusing it with a sense of soulful poignancy as the character (and actor) reckons with what he's sacrificed in his pursuit of pure adrenaline (e.g., "Top Gun: Maverick"). The other option is to join the crude, cynical supergroup known as "The Expendables," where beloved action stars josh and jostle for a cash grab.

But the "Bad Boys" franchise has taken another tack. Adil & Bilall take the basic scaffolding and structure of the previous films — the Miami setting, the character archetypes that stars Will Smith and Martin Lawrence have established and Bay's distinctive visual language — and then freestyle on top of it. Adil & Bilall dutifully pay homage to Bay's signature visual style, aping his constantly moving camera, low Dutch angles and the signature "Bad Boys shot," in which the camera circles around Smith and Lawrence as they stand up into frame, staring into the distance. But they treat the "Bad Boys" template like a coloring book, scribbling with their own wild artistic experimentation on top of these lines.

"Bad Boys: Ride or Die" is a declaration of action independence, using new technology like drones, and infusing the film with the visual language of video games. Bay himself utilized drones with a certain gonzo artfulness in his 2022 film, "Ambulance," but Adil & Bilall use their drones to follow people and movement in space, explore the geography of interiors and transcend screens within screens.

They also use wild, rapidly swapping first-person-shooter-style POV shots in the shootouts, which are legible to the average gamer even if they don't always make cinematic sense. They can easily get away with layering in this kind of stylistic experimentation because the beats of "Bad Boys" are so familiar, and in "Ride or Die," are essentially perfunctory.

Sony Pictures Entertainment and Columbia Pictures photos

Will Smith, left, and Martin Lawrence team up again as Miami police detectives Marcus Burnett and Mike Lowrey in the fourth "Bad Boys" installment, "Ride or Die." Directing team Adil & Bilall take the basic structure of the previous films and freestyle on top of it.

In the film, Marcus (Lawrence) and Mike (Smith) try to clear their deceased captain's name after he was posthumously framed for corruption, accused of sharing intel with drug cartels.

Writers Chris Bremner and Will Beall offer a story that is wide but shallow. There's certainly a lot of plot, and even more characters, even if we don't get to know them all that well. This convoluted yarn concerns the bad boys' deceased Captain Howard (Joe Pantoliano), who has been posthumously framed for corruption, accused of sharing intel with drug cartels. Marcus (Lawrence) and Mike (Smith) seek to clear his name but find themselves at odds with Howard's U.S. Marshal daughter, Judy (Rhea Seehorn), bent on vengeance, and their colleague Rita (Paola Nuñez), who has brought the charges with her attorney/mayoral candidate fiance Lockwood (Ioan Gruffudd). Their only chance at fingering the real bad guy is Mike's drug dealer son Armando (Jacob Scipio), who has been imprisoned for the bloody chaos he wrought in "For Life."

Meanwhile, our guys are grappling with their own mortality and post-traumatic stress disorder. After a near-death experience at Mike's wedding, Marcus finds himself spiritually renewed, feeling invincible, euphoric, babbling about his past lives. Mike, on the other hand, is gripped with anxiety as a newlywed and as a "new" father.

But this simply provides the playground upon which the filmmakers can experiment and Lawrence can clown to his heart's content. His performance is garish, but there's something about him that just wears you down over the course of two hours — one must simply submit to his comedic ministrations. The first half of the film is overly concerned with Marcus' sugar addiction, and during one shootout in an interactive art gallery/creative space, he has a single sip of fruit punch and reacts as if he's freebased crystal meth. That theme is quickly dropped for other equally cartoonish bits, such as a run-in with a redneck militia, a callback to their infiltration of the Ku Klux Klan in the second movie and a side quest to a strip club, where they tangle with Tiffany Haddish.

"Bad Boys: Ride or Die" never quite finds its tone, but then again, the franchise has always walked the strange line of goofy and hard, teeter-tottering between Lawrence and Smith, and despite the cinematic experimentation and a couple of impressively nasty fight scenes (courtesy of the younger actors), this installment favors the goofy. It's a thin tapestry of lore with some interesting creative embellishments, but without any real interest in character, it feels flimsy and disposable. You could do worse, but you could certainly do better.

"Bad Boys: Ride or Die" is rated R for strong violence, language throughout and some sexual references. Running time: 115 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

What others are saying

Minutes into this fourth installment, Martin Lawrence's Miami detective Marcus Burnett clutches his heart at partner Mike Lowrey's wedding and drops dead.

Never fear. Given the two choices in the title, Marcus chooses to ride on. He's jolted back to life, well, enlivened, snapping awake with the zest of a Ziegfeld girl and dancing through traffic as he boasts of his immortality. Lawrence's high spirits also defibrillate the franchise. Turns out the Bad Boys films needed less swagger and more dorky, goofy joy.

— Amy Nicholson
The Washington Post

"Ride or Die" is about a fight to redeem a tarnished legacy. No, not that one.

... Of course, the real image restoration that's going on here is for Smith. "Ride or Die" was in development in 2022 when Smith strode onto the Oscar stage and smacked Chris Rock. The film was temporarily put on hold. Options were weighed.

But 2020's "Bad Boys for Life" made a hefty $424.6 million before COVID-19 shut down theaters. Watcha gonna do?

— Jake Coyle/AP

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Disney

Daisy Ridley as Trudy Ederle, the first woman to swim the English Channel in "Young Woman and the Sea."

Deep, uncharted waters

Ridley shines in 'Young Woman and the Sea,' an effectively stirring, though not very faithful, film about real-life swimmer Trudy Ederle

By Lindsey Bahr
Associated Press

In August 1926, a 19-year-old New Yorker named Trudy Ederle became the first woman to swim the English Channel. Only five men had finished the 21-mile trek from Cape Gris-Nez in France to Kingsdown Beach in England before — a harrowing journey through frigid waters, unpredictable tides, currents and swarms of jellyfish. Ederle swam 35 miles that day and still beat their times by about two hours.

Don't worry if this doesn't sound familiar. Ederle is not what you might call a household name, but she soon could be thanks to Daisy Ridley, who portrays the competitive swimmer in the inspirational new film "Young Woman and the Sea." It is a classically made and effectively stirring sports drama for everyone that feels right on the big screen. Families with young daughters should make this a special priority — this is one of those empowering stories that (mostly) avoids cloying clichés.

Just don't try to write a school paper off of the movie or regale pals with your newfound knowledge of Ederle at a summer Olympics party. Written by Jeff Nathanson and directed by Joachim Rønning, the movie takes extensive liberties with some significant details surrounding her history-making swim. It even glosses over the fact that she won a gold medal at the 1924 Olympics in Paris in the 400-meter freestyle relay. "Young Woman and the Sea" dwells on the high hopes for Ederle, who had set more than a dozen records in women's swimming, but only won bronze medals by herself.

They weren't going to let facts get in the way of the truth — or, more accurately, a tidy story with symmetry and emotional payoff. If you want the entire story, the film was adapted from Glenn Stout's exhaustively researched book "Young Woman and the Sea: How Trudy Ederle Conquered the English Channel and Inspired the World." But we don't go to the movies to learn: We go to be entertained.

This story paints Ederle as a survivor, a child of German immigrants who defeated measles and then rose to defy expectations as an exceptional athlete. By 1920, white women were beginning to make headway in sports like tennis and swimming but still beholden to strict standards of "femininity." Remember those etiquette classes in "A League of Their Own"? In this film, Trudy is assigned a misogynist coach who is more concerned with keeping her separated from the men and on a dainty diet of fruit than actually helping her to succeed with proper nourishment and advice.

Nathanson's script puts a special emphasis on Trudy's relationship with her sister Meg (Tilda Cobham-Hervey), also a swimmer, and her mother (Jeanette Hain) who pushes for the girls to learn and helps keep them in lessons with a determined instructor, Lottie Epstein (Sian Clifford).

Epstein's positive influence on Trudy is spotlighted, but the fact of her management of the women's swimming teams during three Olympic Games in the 1920s is brushed aside in service of creating a male antagonist. Charitably, it is a shorthand way to illuminate the very real sexism they all faced. It also erases Epstein's real accomplishments in order to do so. This is a film that's also very white, though they do include one Black swimmer who bonds with Ederle as they both train for the Channel.

But the broader history is there for those who are curious, and on its own terms, this is a story that will keep you engaged.

Much of that has to do with Ridley, who aside from "Star Wars" has not been blessed with the most memorable roles. As an executive producer on "Young Woman and the Sea," she is perhaps signaling a new phase in her career in which she has more control over things. Trudy Ederle was a great choice, a perfect melding of actor and character that also shows dimensions we didn't get to see from "Star Wars'" Rey.

A successful film like this is also a stark reminder that movies have only scratched the surface of the fascinating history of women in competitive sports. It doesn't seem like a coincidence that more than a few of them have gone on to be classics. But maybe after this and "Nyad," open-water swimming can take a bit of a breather.

"Young Woman and the Sea" is rated PG for thematic elements, some language and partial nudity. Running time: 129 minutes.

'Summer Camp,' newest entry in Keaton-verse, not worth more than a shrug

By Katie Walsh
Tribune News Service

Roadside Attractions

Kathy Bates, Diane Keaton and Alfre Woodard play childhood friends who come back together for a summer camp reunion.

The Diane Keaton Industrial Complex is a fascinating and understudied media mini-phenomenon. Once or twice a year for the past six or so years, she anchors an ensemble comedy about the perils and pleasures of getting older, surrounded by a fabulous, Oscar-worthy cast, in which she essentially plays "Diane Keaton," or a cartoonishly frazzled, overdressed caricature of "Diane Keaton." On the higher end, there's "Book Club" (2018) and "Book Club: The Next Chapter" (2023), and then you have "Poms" (2019) about a group of friends who start a cheerleading squad at a retirement home, and "Mack & Rita" (2022), about a 30-year-old who magically wakes up as her 70-year-old self, and the 2024 inverse of that, "Arthur's Whisky," and on and on.

Her performances in these films are harried repeats of her charming turn in Nancy Meyers' "Something's Gotta Give" (2003), but rather than being ensconced in a fabulous Hamptons manse, she's usually being thrust into increasingly zany circumstances (cheerleading, a ropes course, beach yoga) to diminishing returns. It's wonderful that she's working and seems to be having fun, but the subgenre is such a strange curio that one has to take stock at a certain point. It's like Keaton has assembled her own Adam Sandler-style movie camp, inviting her award-winning friends for an untaxing jaunt while giving a young female filmmaker the opportunity to direct a feature film. It's a fun idea, but it's a shame about the cinematic results.

The latest of these ventures is "Summer Camp," with actors Kathy Bates, Alfre Woodard, Dennis Haysbert, Eugene Levy and Beverly D'Angelo and Castille Landon as writer/director. Keaton plays workaholic widow Nora, who is pressured into her 50-year camp reunion by her friend, celebrity self-help guru Ginny Moon (Bates), alongside their third pal, emergency room nurse Mary (Woodard).

You can probably guess that over the course of the weekend, these longtime camp friends are going to thrill at being back together and delight in their old crushes (Levy, wearing a stupefyingly sculpted hairpiece) before old resentments come rushing out.

They'll all do a bit of self-reflection and have an epiphany about their current stasis, and then proceed to the teary catharsis and a renewed outlook.

There are sparks of insight that do come floating to the top, before they're undercut by some prank or pratfall, or, regrettably, a food fight (followed by a pillow fight). The script touches on some topics and themes that could be interesting to explore in a different genre, like Moon's manipulations of her friends through her self-help slogans (black comedy), or Mary's realization that she's trapped in a toxic marriage to an incompetent husband (domestic drama). In fact, only Woodard delivers an actual performance, not that it's allowed to fully shine. Every time the film seems on the precipice of insight, Josh Peck scares a horse or Betsy Sodaro unleashes an unhinged ad-lib, and it's back to wacky.

Landon's aesthetic is bright, flat and colorful, marked by predictable rhythms and an overuse of popular pop songs intermingled with a standard-issue "whimsical comedy" score by Tom Howe. The most interesting design elements of these kinds of films are usually the wigs (Bates sports an orange bob here), as well as Keaton's costumes. In "Summer Camp," she wears her signature bowler hats and glasses, and performs archery in a three-piece suit. In one of the film's only legitimately (and unintentionally) funny jokes, Ginny Moon gives Nora a makeover and her new look is a full skirt paired with a crisp white Oxford and a giant belt, one of Keaton's most iconic outfits going back to "Because I Said So" (2007), something real Keaton-heads would clock right away.

While there are pops of piquancy in Landon's script, her direction and the performances (with the exception of Woodard) fail to inspire much more than a shrug. "Summer Camp" is only mildly interesting as another entry in the Keaton-verse.

"Summer Camp" is rated PG-13 for sexual material, strong language and some underage smoking. Running time: 95 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Trying to sell Powell's face as forgettable

Attractive actor gives big leading man energy as undercover 'Hit Man' in film that requires much suspension of disbelief

BY LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

For a guy like Glen Powell, the ascent to movie stardom isn't really a question. It's more like an inevitability.

Blessed with that square jawline, those bright green eyes, a flop of dirty blonde hair and the kind of symmetrical smile that would seem suspect if it weren't so darn charming, he's a Disney prince before they all became the bad guys. And he's got the kind of effortless, high-wattage charisma that ensures a career beyond soaps and procedurals, the typical resting ground for the laughably handsome. Powell has something, you believe, going on behind the eyes.

This is all to say that suspension of disbelief is a prerequisite going into "Hit Man," a decently entertaining action-comedy-romance about a fake hit man from filmmaker Richard Linklater, who co-wrote the script with Powell. It made a brief stop in theaters and is now streaming on Netflix.

Based on a "somewhat true story" though it may be, this is a film that asks its audience to buy into the idea that the characters in this film believe that Powell's face is bland and forgettable. This has everything to do with his character, Gary Johnson, a philosophy professor in New Orleans who lives a quiet, solitary life in the suburbs tending to his two cats, birding, tinkering with electronics and helping the local police install surveillance equipment for sting operations. He drives a Honda Civic and wears ill-fitting polo shirts, knee-length jean shorts and socks with his semi-orthopedic sandals. And, of course, like many hot guys in disguise before him, he's got a pair of wire-rimmed glasses. Why he dresses like your middle-aged uncle in 1992 is anyone's guess. Were he in Bushwick, it might not even look odd. But this is a movie and we know that Gary is predestined for a glow-up.

NETFLIX/AP

Philosophy professor Gary (Glen Powell), right, goes undercover in various disguises as a hit man, like the one at left, in the movie "Hit Man," now streaming on Netflix.

Not that "Hit Man" allows itself to have any fun with the makeover aspect. No, once plain Gary is thrown into this amateur undercover work (by Retta and Sanjay Rao), we only get to see the final looks he wears to meet all the people looking to hire a hit man. He dips into the theatrical for these occasions, sporting wigs, makeup, accents and fake tattoos in his attempt to be what he thinks each specific person thinks a hit man should be, which is moderately amusing.

But besides a brief bit showing him watching a wig and makeup YouTube tutorial, his transformations are not exactly investigated. There's no shopping montage, no Harvey Fierstein-type character helping him find his way around the college theater department's costume room and no apparent budgetary concerns or discussions, which seems odd for a guy who is only doing this undercover stuff for an extra paycheck. In a movie that perhaps had a better engine behind it, questions like these might evaporate with the laughter and enjoyment of a fairly silly premise. "Hit Man" does not quite have that, though. Again, that suspension of disbelief is necessary.

Things do pick up with the introduction of The Girl, Madison (Adria Arjona, terrific despite being awfully underdeveloped), an unhappy wife looking to get rid of her cruel husband. Gary meets her as "Ron," who acts and dresses like the leading man of an action movie, or a cocky off-duty movie star, with well-fitting jeans and tight Henleys and cool-guy jackets showing off his inexplicably ripped physique.

And he treats Madison differently than the many other characters he's helped put behind bars whose stupidity, trashiness and ugliness are all played for madcap comedic effect. She, he decides, doesn't really want this — a grace he extends to no one else. He talks her out of hiring him to kill the bad husband, whom she promptly leaves without incident before moving into a nice house and beginning a steamy romance with Ron.

Again, questions arise about how this woman whose husband didn't allow her to work and who was so scared of him that she was ready to hire a hit man has managed to escape so smoothly. But, you know, good for her and good for us, because the chemistry between her and Powell is electric and ravenous, up there with that of George Clooney and Jennifer Lopez in "Out of Sight."

But the honeymoon only lasts so long, and things soon get tricky as Ron starts to become Gary's dominant character. This all builds to a fairly exciting third act with the introduction of an actual murder and the possibility of being exposed by an increasingly suspicious and crooked cop (played with slimy perfection by Austin Amelio). And you can't help shake the feeling that it needed something else: a bigger twist, a stickier conflict, some heightened stakes.

"Hit Man" was a movie that got some breathless praise out of the fall film festivals, which might be to its detriment. It's perfectly enjoyable: a glossy, easy-to-digest Powell showcase that isn't trying to be anything but fun. But the second coming of the action-comedy-romance, it's not.

"Hit Man" is rated R for language throughout, sexual content and some violence. Running time: 115 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

'Idea Man' documentary about Muppet creator Henson is as exciting as he was

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

There are moments when the spark of creation suddenly ignites and history stops. Like when the Wright brothers got a plane to fly. Or when Oreo added double filling. Maybe just as resonant was when Jim Henson cut up his mother's green coat into odd shapes and added Ping-Pong balls for eyes.

At that moment, he birthed Kermit the Frog, who would go on to enchant generations. Kermit's humble beginnings are part of the engrossing and enlightening documentary "Jim Henson: Idea Man," and it's apt to start with the sweetly outgoing Kermit, who is in many ways Henson's alter ego.

The Ron Howard-directed Disney+ movie is a kinetic mix of show clips, interviews, bloopers, behind-the-scenes workplace videos, home movies and artist sketches — as animated as Henson's Muppets, who educated millions on "Sesame Street" and entertained even more on "The Muppet Show."

Viewers are walked chronologically through Henson's early life in rural Mississippi, his teaming up with his wife, Jane, on early late-night TV appearances, his often oddball sensibility, his self-doubt, embrace of educational TV, his marriage crumbling, the red-hot height of fame and then the fall with "Labyrinth." It's as definitive as you can get. We even learn why he chose to grow a beard: acne scars.

It's also a portrait of a driven, brilliant creative man who wanted to be taken seriously as an artist and had lifelong ambivalent feelings about becoming America's favorite preschool entertainer. Writer Mark Monroe makes it seem as if he often felt straightjacketed, like an arm stuck in a puppet's felt body.

Watchers will walk away with a deeper understanding of a man who had such an outsized presence in their childhoods. Once you realize that Henson was, in his heart of hearts, really a experimental filmmaker, you better understand the wacky, psychedelic videos on "Sesame Street" or why The Great Gonzo eats a rubber car tire to "Flight of the Bumblebee."

The voices Howard has wrangled are fantastic, from Frank Oz (the Burt to Henson's Ernie), puppeteer Fran Brill, puppet builder/costume designer Bonnie Erickson and actors Jennifer Connelly and Rita Moreno. Henson's own short diary entries — "attend seminar in Cambridge re: Children's TV workshop" — are also put to good use, as is footage from his funeral, a joyous affair.

One weird quibble is the decision by Howard — who apparently met Henson once, briefly — to put his interview subjects in a sterile, gray room with brick walls. Why keep going back there to celebrate a figure who opposed formality?

Frank Oz, the voice of Miss Piggy and Ernie who was Henson's puppeteering partner in crime for decades, is wonderfully honest about his yin-and-yang relationship with Henson as are Henson's children about their father, who died in 1990.

AP

Muppet creator Jim Henson, the subject of the new documentary "Jim Henson: Idea Man, " poses with one of his creations at his New York City office in 1984.

There are fascinating moments — like when we learn that Kermit wasn't originally a frog at all — to ones more sublime, like how Miss Piggy made her dramatic entrance as a star in her own right. Viewers may shake their head when learning that all the networks initially passed on "The Muppet Show" and it had to be made in England.

It's a documentary, ultimately, about creativity and a singular mind, one who dreamed up a gaggle of friends for life: Big Bird, Cookie Monster, the Count and, of course, Kermit, stitched from an old coat.

"Jim Henson Idea Man" is rated TV-PG. Running time: 108 minutes. Now streaming on Disney+.

Italy's Ravenna: once mighty, still glorious

Ravenna is on Italy's tourist map for one reason: its 1,500-year-old churches decorated with best-in-the-West Byzantine mosaics. While locals go about their business, busloads of tourists slip in and out of this town near the Adriatic coast to bask in the glittering glory of Byzantium, the eastern Roman Empire.

Imagine ... it's AD 540. The city of Rome has been looted, the land is crawling with barbarians and the Roman Empire is crumbling fast. Into this chaos comes the emperor of the East, Justinian, bringing order and stability — and an appreciation for mosaic art.

As the westernmost pillar of the Byzantine Empire, Ravenna was a flickering light in Europe's Dark Ages. To fully appreciate the mosaics in its ancient churches, bring your binoculars and take in every last detail. Sit in a wooden pew, front and center, and feel yourself transported to a spiritual world.

My favorite church in Ravenna is Justinian's Basilica di San Vitale. The building's octagonal shape — very much an Eastern style — actually inspired the construction of the magnificent Hagia Sophia church built 10 years later in Constantinople (now Istanbul). While it's impressive enough to see any 15-centuries-old church, it's even more exciting to see one decorated with brilliant scenes in marble and glass mosaics — each chip no bigger than a fingernail. High above the altar, Christ is in heaven, overseeing creation.

To the left of the altar, running things here on earth, is Emperor Justinian — sporting both a halo and a crown to show he's leader of the church and the state.

The mosaics on the walls and ceilings of San Vitale sit at a tipping point in time, when European art shifted from the style of ancient Rome to that of the Middle Ages. Above the altar, Christ is beardless, in the manner of the ancient Romans, but nearby, decorating an arch, is a bearded Jesus, the standard medieval portrayal. Yet both scenes were created by artists of the same generation.

Rick Steves

The humble-looking little Mausoleum of Galla Placidia has the oldest — and to many, the best — mosaics in Ravenna. Predating Justinian, the mosaics here are purely ancient. Even Jesus is dressed in gold and purple, like a Byzantine emperor.

Another spot to gaze upon the sparkling mosaics of Ravenna is at the austere Basilica di Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, adorned with two huge and wonderfully preserved decorations above both sides of the nave. The tiny colored glass and gold-leaf mosaic pieces here are practically as brilliant and beautiful as they were in Justinian's time.

Justinian turned Ravenna into a pinnacle of civilization. After 200 years, however, the Byzantines got the boot, and Ravenna eventually melted into the background, staying out of historical sight for a thousand years. Today the local economy is stoked by a big chemical industry, the discovery of offshore gas deposits and the city's booming popularity as a cruise-ship stop.

RICK STEVES

Every centimeter of the sanctuary walls and ceiling in Ravenna's Basilica di San Vitale is decorated with beautiful Byzantine mosaics.

Ravenna is a doable, though long, day trip from Venice or Padua (about three hours by train each way) and worth the effort for those curious about old mosaics. The key sights are all easily walkable from the train station, but this is a fun city to do by bike. A handy bike-rental place is right next to the station. (I've long enjoyed doing my guidebook-research rounds in Ravenna on two wheels.)

At the town's center is Piazza del Popolo, created by Ravenna's Venetian rulers in the 15th century. A river once flowed here, but it silted up and became infested with mosquitoes. (Dante died here of malaria.) In the centuries since it was paved over, the people of Ravenna have treated this spot as their communal living room.

Today, in the shadow of Venetian facades, it's a fine place to join the old guys on benches, watching locals parade by, quite at ease about sharing their town with the world's most exquisite mosaics.

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

Take a closer look at the European Union at these sites

From June 6-9, the citizens of the countries that make up the European Union will head to the polls and vote for their Members of the European Parliament, or MEPs. As part of a process that takes place once every five years, EU citizens choose their representatives to the world's only directly elected transnational assembly. Working in close cooperation with the governments of EU countries, these MEPs shape and decide on the legislation that heavily influences lives across the European Union.

Karen Bradbury

But first, let's step back a bit. What is the European Union, exactly? In contrast to Europe, a geographical space, the EU is an economic and political union between 27 countries. With deep roots in a number of treaties signed in the aftermath of World War II, its initial purpose was to foster economic cooperation, based on the idea that economically interdependent countries are more likely to avoid conflict. What began as a strictly economic union has since evolved into an organization spanning many different policy areas, from climate, environment and health to external relations and security, justice and migration.

As a quick refresher, the countries of the European Union are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. (The United Kingdom left the EU in 2020.)

These elections provide us with a timely pretext to look at some of the institutions of the EU and how to go about exploring them.

EU seats of power

In an arrangement incorporated into the EU treaty since 1997, the institutions of the EU have three primary locations: the official seat and venue for most plenary sessions is Strasbourg, France; parliamentary committees meet in Brussels, Belgium; and Parliament's Secretariat (administrative staff) is based in Luxembourg. Both the Strasbourg and Brussels locations welcome individual visitors; Luxembourg accommodates groups only.

iStock

Visitors may explore the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany, on weekdays.

Strasbourg: The European Parliament welcomes visitors whenever plenary sessions are not being held. Visitors can experience the Hemicycle, the Parlamentarium Simone Veil and various permanent and temporary exhibitions. A free self-guided tour takes about one hour. Opening hours are 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Mon.-Fri and 9:30 a.m.-noon and 1 p.m.-6 p.m. Saturdays. The entry, located at Louise Weiss Building, 1 Allée du Printemps, is easily reached by public transportation. Online: tinyurl.com/2s3pscd4

Brussels: A visit to the Parlamentarium entails a multimedia-led journey through European history and integration, followed by an introduction to the functions of the Parliament. An interactive floor map takes visitors on a virtual tour around Europe, highlighting the diversity of the countries of the Continent. These visits, free of charge, take about 90 minutes and are available 1 p.m.-6 p.m. on Mondays, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Tues.-Fri. and 10 a.m.-6 p.m. on weekends. The visitor center is located at Esplanade Solidarnosc 1980. Online: tinyurl.com/4vwyc4cs

Other EU places

Europa Experience is the name given to multimedia spaces around Europe that offer insight into how the European Union works, how it affects the daily life of its citizens and how the EU nations work together to tackle today's most important challenges. These spaces are found in Berlin, Copenhagen, Luxembourg, Paris, Prague, Rome, Stockholm, Vienna, Ljubljana, Slovenia; Tallinn, Estonia; and Warsaw, Poland. All welcome visitors free of charge. Online: tinyurl.com/26p3v9rh

Frankfurt, Germany: The European Central Bank, or ECB, is the central bank of the European Union countries that use the euro. The ECB strives to maintain price stability by keeping inflation low, stable and predictable. The ECB Visitor Centre, located in the ECB's main building at Sonnemannstrasse 20, sheds light on the bank's role and responsibilities by means of interactive exhibits, videos and Q&A sessions and a 90-minute tour available on weekdays. Online: tinyurl.com/597ntp3a

Brussels, Belgium: The House of European History takes visitors on a journey along the long and winding road of the Continent's past, exploring its myths and discoveries and times of chaos and cohesion, before challenging them to contemplate its future. A visit, which takes around 90 minutes, is free. Opening hours are 1 p.m.-6 p.m. Mon., 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Tues.-Fri. and 10 a.m.-6 p.m. on weekends. The building is located at Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 135.

The summer drink we need

With only 2 ingredients — wine or juice and sparkling mineral water — German schorle is both effortless and refreshing

REY LOPEZ/For The Washington Post

From left, German schorle, a low-alcohol summer sipper, made with cherry juice, apple juice, rosé and riesling, and all mixed with mineral water.

BY KARA ELDER
The Washington Post

Summer's imminent arrival brings with it a need for something chilled, carbonated and, above all, easy. It's hard to deny the restorative powers of Italy's spritz, Spain's tinto de verano or a cold draft beer. But it took a recent trip back to Germany, where I lived for five years, to remind me that in a country famous for brewing, it's the lesser-known effervescent beverage that offers peak relief. To be truly effortless, look to the schorle, in which a mere two ingredients — wine or juice plus sparkling mineral water — unite to make the ideal summer sip.

"Here in our region, it's like a daily drink," said Joachim Wegner, the winemaker at Weingut Wegner in Bad Dürkheim, near the Rhine River in southwest Germany. "If you go to Bavaria, it's beer. But here, especially at festivities, the article No. 1 is schorle."

While the ratio of wine to water is up to the drinker, when sold by an establishment, by law, schorle (pronounced "SHORE-luh") must be at least 51% wine.

"But we also have customers who say they want less wine," he said. With lunch earlier that day, he'd made one with 10% wine, "just to give the water some aroma."

Wine is not the only beverage that takes well to the schorle treatment — you'll also find them made with a variety of juices.

"It's basically the nonalcoholic drink of Germany," said Berlin-based author Luisa Weiss, whose next cookbook, "Classic German Cooking," comes out in October.

Even at a biergarten, you'll see adults ordering an apfelschorle, a mixture of apple juice and sparkling water. "It's refreshing, it's thirst-quenching, it's isotonic," Weiss said.

Simple though it may be, with only two ingredients, the selection of both matters. The wine or juice should be one you enjoy drinking plain; if you add water to a mediocre beverage, you're only making it last longer. The water, too, needs to be relatively flavorless, though its minerals and carbonation will affect the overall flavor of the schorle.

"I sometimes think that people — customers, producers — think we can take any wine and make a schorle of it," Wegner said. "But this is a totally wrong attitude, because the problem is a good schorle needs always a good wine, but not high-end wine."

In Germany's Palatinate region, a dry, acidic riesling is the quintessential choice; rosé is also common.

"But we, too, like to drink a schorle with sauvignon blanc, for example," said Wegner, who added that some international wines, such as vinho verde, are worth trying, too.

The wine should be fruity, acidic and aged in stainless steel tanks, not wood (mineral water can bring out off flavors when mixed with wood barrel-aged wine), and it should be relatively low in alcohol content.

"Not a wine with 13 or 14% alcohol, this is not the wine for Schorle," Wegner said.

Also important: temperature.

"Schorle has to be cold, refrigerated," he said. "At fests we start at 4 to 5 degrees Centigrade," or around 40 degrees Fahrenheit. You can use ice if you must, he said; just be sure it's made with filtered water.

In a juice schorle, apple is the classic.

"It's refreshing, and the acidity goes well with the mineral water," Weiss said. For a special treat, she recommends black currant or, if you can find it, rhubarb.

"I was at a clinic earlier this year, and in the communal kitchen they had an array of juices and mineral water, like that's the standard offering," Weiss added. "There was tea, coffee and a schorle bar. It's very German."

Melanie Hubach

Winemaker Joachim Wegner, left, with his son Philipp Wegner at Weingut Wegner in Bad Dürkheim, near the Rhine River in southwest Germany.

When choosing a water, you can pick out your preferred bubbly — of the brands widely available in American markets, I liked Gerolsteiner (German) and Topo Chico (Mexican) when mixed with a fruity, dry rosé — but to really understand how mineral waters affect wine, it helps to ask a water expert.

Typical minerals include calcium, magnesium, sodium, potassium and sulfates, and each plays a role in a schorle.

"Calcium can give a smoother mouthfeel and enhance the sweetness of a wine; it would also help balance acidity in wine or juice," said Anistacia Barrak-Barber, a water sommelier based in Colorado. "Magnesium gives a subtle bitterness, and it can enhance the perception of sweetness in the wine."

Sodium adds saltiness and balances sweetness.

"Potassium would affect the mouthfeel of the whole beverage, give it more body or texture, and it would feel more round and smooth," she said.

And sulfates could lend a bitter taste.

"If you were mixing a wine with a lot of tannins and the water had a lot of sulfates, it might go super bitter on you," she said.

As with the wine or juice, acidity in the water (based on the pH scale, where 1 to 6.9 is acidic, 7 to 7.1 is neutral, 7.1 to 14 is alkaline) is also worth consideration.

"Alkaline water can taste slippery in your mouth; it has a smooth, soft feeling," Barrak-Barber said. "With acidic, you'll get those sour, bitter, metallic kind of flavors."

Germany boasts hundreds of water brands, available not only with or without bubbles, but in varying degrees of bubble strength.

"Another 'rule' would be matching the level of the carbonation in the water to the wine's acidity," Barrak-Barber said.

"High acid wine can handle more carbonation without becoming too acidic or tart."

Gerolsteiner and Topo Chico both fall under the bold carbonation category, which are like "large, loud fireworks in your mouth," she said.

Grocery stores carry the big brands, but check out the options at international markets and on websites such as salacious-drinks.com, which also provides information on mineral contents.

You could also seek out local-to-you waters, sourced from springs owned by small companies who practice responsible land stewardship. Avoid plastic bottles, which can leach chemicals (and disagreeable taste) into water.

Wegner, the winemaker, recommends a water with strong enough bubbles to last once mixed. I found that Mountain Valley, Purely Sedona and Mineragua, while each enjoyable on their own, didn't hold their carbonation long enough once I added wine to the glass.

The most important thing to keep in mind when mixing a schorle: It's all up to your tastes. Try a few different wines, juices and waters — starting with a 50-50 ratio — to find what you like, and revel in the fact that with only two ingredients, you've got a complex, refreshing drink to sip all summer long.

"Here in our region, it's like a daily drink. If you go to Bavaria, it's beer. But here, especially at festivities, the article No. 1 is schorle."

Joachim Wegner
the winemaker at Weingut Wegner in Bad Dürkheim, Germany

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

PHOTOS BY JENNIFER H. SVAN/Stars and Stripes

A Playmobil city with various buildings and busy streets is part of the "We Love Playmobil" 50th anniversary exhibition at the Historical Museum of the Pfalz in Speyer, Germany. Visitors can catch the exhibition through Sept. 15. The exhibition stretches across more than a half-dozen rooms.

Museum celebrates 50 years of Playmobil

Variety of dioramas on display in Speyer as part of temporary exhibition, which teaches guests about history of German toy

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

For people who think Legos are way cooler than German rival Playmobil, a temporary exhibition at the Historical Museum of the Pfalz in Speyer may change their mind.

A variety of elaborate, three-dimensional Playmobil worlds, from the whimsical to the educational, make up the museum's "We Love Playmobil" exhibition, an ode to the German line of plastic toys that has captured children's imaginations for 50 years.

My teenage son, who has boxes of assorted Legos, told me Playmobil is for "little kids" and at first scoffed at a museum visit. Our only Playmobil set, long gone, was an aquarium that came with a dolphin and tiny fish to "feed" the dolphin.

Unlike Lego bricks, which are for builders, Playmobil comes mostly preassembled and ready to use, with an emphasis on imagination and role-playing.

Those themes are on display across more than a half-dozen rooms that are part of the museum's exhibition, which even impressed my son.

The dioramas are complex, with hundreds of pieces and figures from Playmobil collections through the years. Some depict historical scenes, such as a settlement from ancient Rome, complete with a fort with watch towers and a colosseum.

Elsewhere, pharaohs and pyramids populate an ancient Egypt set, while samurai mill about a feudal Japan display. Other sets are more interactive, such as one called "space western," which shows aliens on a desert landscape with moving constellations choreographed to music.

The first Playmobil figures, after the German line of toys was launched in 1974, were a knight, a construction worker and a Native American.

Some of my favorites included the "vampire's ball," with costumed characters and an imposing castle, and a traveling circus with animals and a big top.

If seeing all these miniature worlds sparks a desire for creative play, there are numerous stations throughout with smaller Playmobil sets with which both adults and children can tinker.

The exhibition takes visitors back to the beginning of Playmobil. Informational signs are in German, so Google Translate comes in handy.

The Playmobil story starts with Hans Beck, a patternmaker at the German toy manufacturer Geobra Brandstaetter who began sketching simple childlike figures.

He developed the first Playmobil toy, a 3-inch plastic figure with a smiling face and called a "Klicky," in the early 1970s. Playmobil was launched in 1974 with three types of characters: construction workers, knights and Native Americans.

It soon after became the best-selling toy in Germany and over time became a cult classic, like Barbie, Lego and Steiff, according to museum information.

One display shows how Playmobil figures evolved over the years, from those three basic characters to a ghostly wizard in chains from 2000 and on to a white-bearded centaur with wings from 2023. The first "pregnant" figure was marketed in 2012.

Famous people past and present are part of the Playmobil world, too. They include Lady Gaga, Elvis Presley, Joan of Arc, Leonardo da Vinci and Vincent Van Gogh.

You can even take some Playmobil home, courtesy of a small shop set up inside the museum. The exhibition runs through Sept. 15. Public parking spaces are down the street from the museum. Just follow the signs.

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On the QT

Location: Domplatz, Speyer, Germany
Hours: 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday; also open the same hours on Mondays that are public holidays.
Cost: Entrance fees Tuesday through Friday are 15 euros for an adult ticket and 7 euros for children 3 and up and students up to 27 years old; on weekends and holidays, those prices go up to 16 euros and 8 euros, respectively.
Information: Online: museum.speyer.de; Email: info@museum.speyer.de; Phone: +49 6232 13 250

Jennifer H. Svan

Nothing Floridian about this spot

Kabul comes alive at oddly named Miami Food K-Town eatery offering authentic Afghan cuisine

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

By the K in Lautern shopping center in Kaiserslautern, Germany, is a new eatery mysteriously called Miami Food, but if you go there expecting a sampling of South Florida, you're in for a shock.

Miami Food is an Afghan restaurant offering dishes such as kabuli pulao, bolani and chapli kabab. This was a delightful discovery for me because after more than three years reporting in Afghanistan for Stars and Stripes, I had grown to love the country's cuisine.

On my visits to the restaurant, I often heard Dari and Pashto, the biggest Afghan languages, as customers eagerly ordered baked goods. Most often, they were buying bolani, a thin stuffed flatbread that I enjoyed often while in Afghanistan.

It was a perfect light snack to grab from local food carts for a few cents on my walk back to the office after a day of work. The bolani at Miami Food lived up to that of my memories.

Each piece is baked and includes a thin, flaky layer of bread on the outside, with savory and lightly spiced potatoes or onions inside. I found myself going to the restaurant daily for lunch in hopes of getting a bolani before they sold out.

My favorite dinner dish at Miami Food is the kabuli pulao, consisting of marinated lamb under an ample pile of steamed rice and adorned by raisins and carrots. Known as the national dish of Afghanistan, it served as the centerpiece of so many lunches and Ramadan dinners while I was reporting there.

The lamb meat was soft enough to tear apart with a fork, and I could tell that the cooks took their time in making it tender. The rice was soft and fluffy, and glistened from the meat juices it had been cooked in.

Afghan cuisine is not spicy, but it is rich. The carrots and raisins added sweetness that cut through the savory meatiness of the dish.

It's recommended that you order kabuli pulao with Afghan flatbread and a cup of tea. Having bread with a pile of rice might seem like being on the verge of carbohydrate overload, but this is not a dish for those on a diet.

Shirendel Gulahmad is owner of the Afghan eatery Miami Food.

AFTER HOURS GERMANY

Miami Food

Address: Fruchthallstrasse 19, Kaiserslautern, Germany
Hours: Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-10 p.m.; Saturday-Sunday, 9 a.m.-11 p.m.
Prices: Kabuli pulao and biryani rice dishes are 10 euros and come in ample portions. Pizzas are 8 euros. Pastries and breads are 2 euros apiece or less. Cash only for the time being, but the restaurant intends to set up payment by card in the future.
Information: Phone: +49 01577 6934126, Online: tinyurl.com/z9vkubzr

J.P. Lawrence

Restaurant owner Shirendel Gulahmad told me he knows that Afghanistan isn't what comes to mind when people hear the name Miami Food.

Gulahmad said he chose it out of affection for American culture. When he arrived in Germany 38 years ago after fleeing the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, he took a liking to the 1980s crime drama "Miami Vice," he said.

Now, Gulahmad hopes to share Afghan culture through food with U.S. troops at the bases around Kaiserslautern. He said he doesn't intend to alter Afghan recipes to German and American tastes, but he might introduce Syrian and Kurdish food at some point in the future.

There are other restaurants in the area that specialize in Afghan or Persian cuisine. But Miami Food, despite its misleading name, cooks the culinary fare that transported me back to Kabul most, and to the memories and meals I shared there.

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PHOTOS BY J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

Don't be fooled by the name of Miami Food. Located next to the K in Lautern mall in Kaiserslautern, Germany, the restaurant offers authentic Afghan food.

Miami Food in Kaiserslautern offers cuisine popular in Afghanistan such as lamb curry, kabuli pulao and chapli kabab.

The headliner dish at Miami Food in Kaiserslautern is kabuli pulao, a rice-and-lamb entree known as the national dish of Afghanistan.

The Afghan-style flatbread at Miami Food is fluffy and stretchy on the inside and crunchy on the outside.

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WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Stepping out, up in wild western Tokyo

Great time of year for mountain hikes on Honita, Kawanori

BY JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

There's still time to enjoy a cool breeze in the mountains west of Tokyo before the June rains and summer heat catch the city in their respective grips.

Of the myriad mountain trails that begin from Okutama, a forested mountain enclave within the city bounds, the climb up Mount Honita, elevation 4,022 feet, will get your lungs pumping and your heart pounding. Stretch it to cover an ascent of nearby Mount Kawanori at 4,471 feet and earn yourself a cardiopulmonary attaboy.

The 5-mile trek up Honita and down to the train station in Hatonosu town starts from Okutama Station, a 1½-hour ride on the Ome Line from Fussa Station, a half-mile from Yokota Air Base. From Fussa, transfer at Ome for Okutama.

You'll know you're in the right car if all your fellow travelers are kitted out in backpacks and hiking boots. Take notes, because Japanese outdoor lovers are both fashionable and well-equipped.

At the Okutama Station, exit and turn right, head for the limestone processing plant, the behemoth ahead that resembles a colliery, and cross the bridge over the Tama River.

Turn right on the far side and follow the road to another bridge at a fishing concession on the river. Stay left on the road to an intersection with a sign in Japanese that indicates a dead end ahead.

Turn right, heading uphill about 100 yards or so to what looks like a pump house where a trail above a retaining wall on the hillside doubles back past what looks like an abandoned home. The trail is a shortcut that avoids several switchbacks and returns you to the road and to the trail proper.

Soon, a sign to your right in a curve of the road will indicate where the trail departs from the pavement and pitches into the forest. From here, it's another mile or so uphill to the Honita summit. The trail will climb boldly in places but provides a welcome switchback in others.

This walk began on a morning forecast to be overcast but was instead drizzly with plenty of mist moving through the woods, casting a gloomy aspect along the path. The climb imposed its toll, but soon enough the trail topped a ridge where a ray of sunshine lit the way ahead.

The terrain eased its pitch. The imposing cedar formations gave way to a leafy forest chaos of oak and birch. Except for occasional bird calls, the woods were quiet, devoid of the city sounds — traffic, trains, construction — that ring out even from Okutama.

This respite site was still a respectable climb to the summit; after a pause for rehydration, I pressed on. Nearing the top of Honita, the forest breaks open for a view of the city below; at the peak itself are two stout benches set among trees.

I descended from there to the pass below in the gap separating Honita from the adjacent peaks, one of which is Kawanori. The afternoon was getting late and with four miles to the next mountaintop and back, I opted to save that trek for another a day.

Happily, the walk from the gap to the station in Hatonosu 2½ miles below was the next-best part of the trip. An easy stride through open forest eventually dropped into a shorter, steeper section, parts of which were eroded into rocky gullies. No matter, though; the trail is well marked with signs in Japanese and English along the way.

It eventually empties into Hatonosu itself and the descending street leads straight to a rail crossing at the station. For 130 yen, a vending machine across the street delivered a refreshing sports drink. Day hikers ebbed and flowed through the small station's turnstiles, all eager to escape the Tokyo cityscape for just an afternoon of mountain time.

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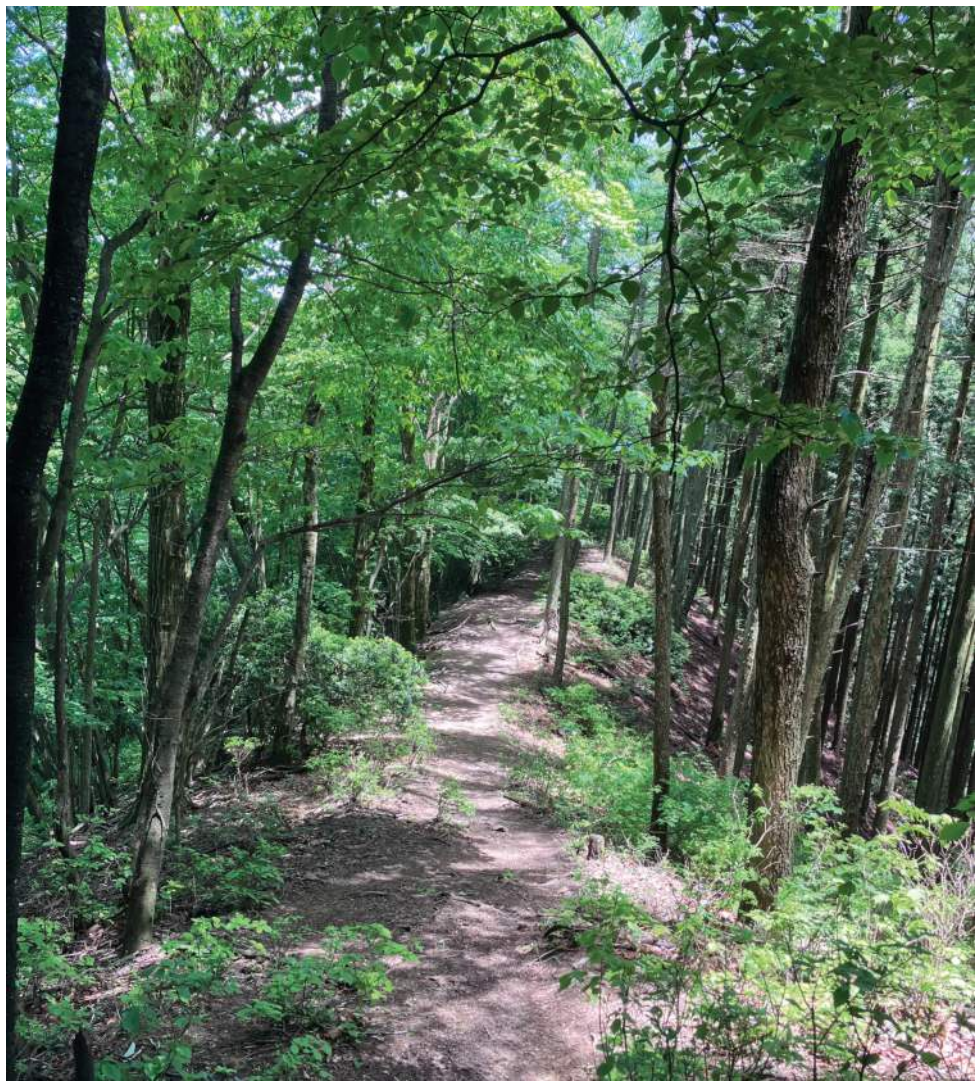
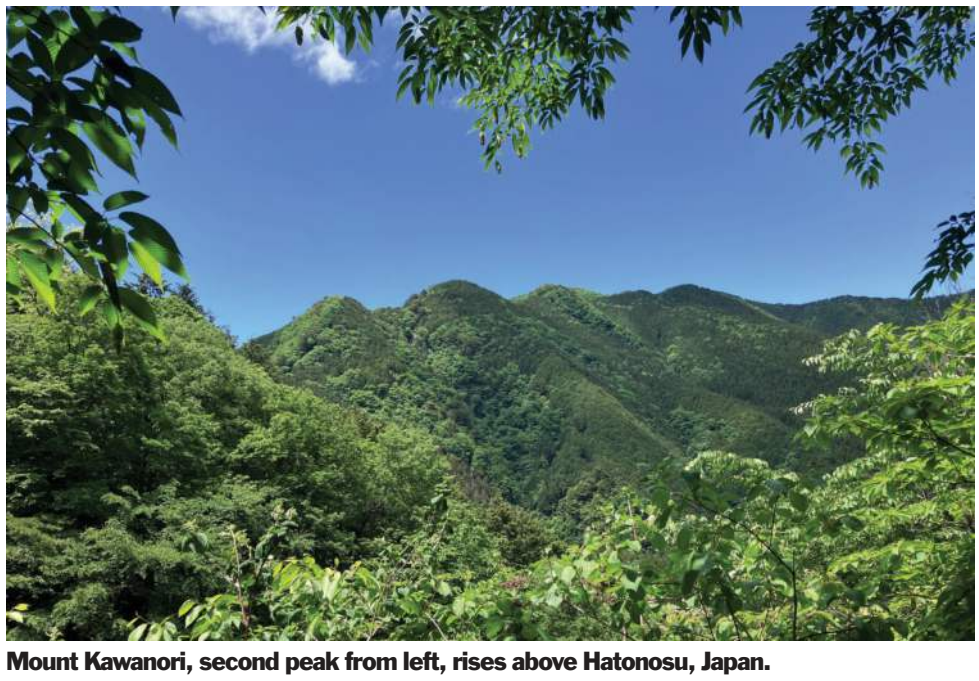


PHOTOS BY JOSEPH DITZLER/Stars and Stripes

Sunlight illuminates the path atop the summit of Mount Honita above Okutama, Japan.



Mount Kawanori, second peak from left, rises above Hatonosu, Japan.

Hikers will descend from Mount Kawanori and Mount Honita to Hatonosu, seen here on May 28, along a well-marked trail labeled in Japanese and English.

A small, trailside shrine stands on the forested slope above Hatonosu, Japan.

On the QT

Directions: Take the JR Chuo or Ome lines from Tokyo to Fussa, and the Ome Line to Okutama, with a change of trains in Ome. Return via the Ome Line from Hatonosu.
Times: Hike the trail in daylight, but come prepared with a lamp, water and proper clothing.
Cost: Free to hike.
Dress: Take quick-dry clothing, boots or shoes with a good tread, water and snacks. A rain jacket is a good idea.
Food: Hatonosu and Okutama both have cafes and restaurants within two blocks of the stations.
Information: Online: tinyurl.com/mpusm3jf

Joseph Ditzler

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

PHOTOS BY LUIS GARCIA/Stars and Stripes

Pasta Vino in Pyeongtaek, South Korea, has a rustic veneer that conceals a myriad of Italian food options.

Italian food lovers' dream

Pasta Vino offers wide selection of pizza, pasta and wine in Pyeongtaek

BY LUIS GARCIA
Stars and Stripes

Pasta Vino is a delicious example in Pyeongtaek, South Korea, of Italian cuisine, a staple on any list of the world's best-loved food.

Just five minutes from Osan Air Base's walk-in gate, this rustic-veneered restaurant features such a wide selection of appetizers and pastas with tomato or cream sauces that deciding on your choice can be overwhelming.

My party's dinner started with an appetizer of fried mushrooms (15,000 won, or about $11) that came accompanied by a freshly made marinara sauce. The soft texture of the mushrooms combined with the fresh sauce made it a pleasant opener.

The chicken alfredo linguine (15,000 won) arrived with garlic buttered bread on the side, and it was good with a rich, creamy sauce, light on the chicken but generous on the pasta.

We also ordered bacon-and-mushroom spicy tomato spaghetti (14,000 won) and were surprised by how good it was.

AFTER HOURS S. KOREA

Pasta Vino

Location: 317-23 Sinjang-dong Pyeongtaek-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea
Hours: Open 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday and Tuesday; 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday.
Prices: Simple soups start at about $10; pizzas and more elaborate dishes top out at $18.
Dress: Casual
Directions: A five-minute walk from Osan Air Base's walk-in gate.
Information: 031-666-1617

Luis Garcia

As the name implies, Pasta Vino serves a variety of wines, but also has nonalcoholic options such as sodas and juices.

Overall, Pasta Vino proved to be a satisfying Italian experience, and it's worth a visit if you don't mind the high calorie counts.

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Fried mushrooms were accompanied by fresh marinara sauce.

Pasta Vino's chicken alfredo linguine was heavy on the pasta.

Shelled shrimp add big flavor to this simple tomato sauce

BY CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL
Associated Press

In Venetian scampi alla busara, large, sweet, shell-on prawns are bathed in a sauce made with fresh tomatoes and flavored with a splash of white wine, smashed garlic cloves and a sprinkling of pepper flakes. Pairing scampi alla busara with al dente pasta is a delicious, though not strictly traditional, combination.

In this recipe, we use shelled shrimp in place of prawns for convenience; the tails are used to give the dish a rich, savory note.

To build flavor in the simple tomato sauce, we remove the tails from the shrimp and sauté them in olive oil with garlic until the garlic begins to brown. White wine is added to the pan and reduced, creating a garlicky sauce base.

The tails and garlic are removed from the reduction and ripe plum tomatoes are added, along with fresh basil, sugar and red pepper flakes. The sauce is simmered until the tomatoes are softened and jammy and the juices have fully evaporated. The shrimp are cooked directly in the sauce until they turn pink, then finish with the pasta and a bit of pasta water.

MILKSTREET/AP

Shrimp are cooked directly in the sauce for Spaghetti with Shrimp, Tomatoes and White Wine.

Spaghetti with Shrimp, Tomatoes and White Wine

Start to finish: 45 minutes
Servings: 4 to 6

Ingredients

1 pound spaghetti
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided, plus more to serve
4 medium garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
1½ pounds extra-large shrimp (21/25 per pound), peeled (tails removed and reserved) and deveined
⅓ cup dry white wine
2 pounds ripe plum tomatoes, cored and chopped
1 cup lightly packed fresh basil, torn
2 teaspoons white sugar
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes

Directions

In a large pot, bring 3 quarts water to a boil. Add the spaghetti and 2 teaspoons salt; cook, stirring occasionally, until just shy of al dente. Reserve about 1 cup of the cooking water, then drain the pasta and return it to the pot; set aside.

In a 12-inch skillet over medium, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil until shimmering. Add the garlic and shrimp tails, then cook, stirring occasionally, until the garlic begins to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the wine, bring to a simmer and cook, stirring, until it has reduced by about half, 2 to 3 minutes. Using tongs or a slotted spoon, remove and discard the garlic and shrimp tails.

Into the wine reduction, stir the tomatoes, half of the basil, the sugar, pepper flakes and ½ teaspoon each of salt and black pepper. Bring to a simmer over medium-high, then reduce to medium and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes are softened and jammy and the juices have fully evaporated, 12 to 15 minutes.

Add the shrimp and cook, stirring occasionally, until they begin to turn pink, about 2 minutes. Pour the mixture over the spaghetti in the pot, then add the remaining 2 tablespoons oil and ½ cup of the pasta water. Cook over medium, tossing with tongs, until the sauce clings to the spaghetti and the shrimp are cooked through, 3 to 4 minutes; add more cooking water 1 tablespoon at a time if the mixture looks dry.

Off heat, taste and season with salt and pepper, then stir in the remaining basil. Serve drizzled with additional oil.

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WEEKEND: FOOD

Color us inconsistent

Some companies looking to replace artificial food dyes while others keeping them because they create more vibrant hues

BY DEENA SHANKER AND LESLIE PATTON
Bloomberg

Froot Loops will keep their artificially brightened colors. Some Pop-Tarts will lose them. Welcome to the ongoing experiment that is the American breakfast.

The two companies formed after Kellogg Co. split last year are now facing new regulations on the use of artificial food dyes, leaving them to chart their own courses in a controversial area for highly processed foods, especially those designed for kids.

Snack company Kellanova, which makes Pop-Tarts and Rice Krispies Treats, is working to replace artificial additives in some of its products with natural alternatives after the dye in them was banned by one state. But breakfast-cereal maker WK Kellogg Co. is keeping its dyes because they haven't yet run afoul of new legal restrictions, even though the company found a way to do without these colorings for essentially the same products sold in Canada.

Kellanova's actions may be a harbinger of what's to come as food companies navigate legislation on the use of the dyes. Last year, California banned certain chemicals used in foods and candy as of 2027, after saying they caused health problems. Among those was food coloring Red No. 3, which is already prohibited from most uses in Europe. This year, a proposed bill in the state would ban seven more dyes, including Red No. 40, Yellow No. 5 and Blue Nos. 1 and 2, from its public schools because they have been linked to cancer, neurobehavioral issues and hyperactivity. Other states are now considering bans of their own.

Now Kellanova is trying to find substitutes for Red No. 3, which is in MorningStar Farms veggie bacon, some Pop-Tarts Bites and Eggo waffles of the unicorn-cotton-candy variety.

"Our R&D team is working to find appropriate alternative ingredients," a spokeswoman said in an email.

The company is also looking at options for Red No. 40, found in certain Pop-Tarts and Rice Krispies Treats, so that they can be in compliance should the time come.

Kellogg's Froot Loops and Apple Jacks both use Red No. 40, not Red No. 3, so the cereals aren't (yet) affected by legislation. And it's resisting change because Americans simply don't like duller options.

The company had spent "significant resources" looking into what kinds of colors consumers around the world want in their cereals, according to an April 2024 position paper viewed by Bloomberg News.

"There is better reception to our cereal recipes that utilize natural-color alternatives within the Canadian market, than in the US," it states.

Still, if at some point a state law hits its cereal portfolio, the company will have to find alternatives.

"When faced with any regulatory changes that do apply to us — federal or state — WK Kellogg Co. would of course make the required changes to ensure compliance," the company told Bloomberg.

LUCIA BURICELLI/Bloomberg

Canadian Froot Loops, left, have a duller color palette than the American version because the Canadian version doesn't use artificial dyes like the American version does.

WK Kellogg Co. maintains that more than 80% of its cereal sales come from products that don't contain the dyes at issue. But it has continued to use them in kid-targeted breakfast food, including limited-edition options like glitter-covered Caticorn and brightly colored Baby Shark cereals, and the still available blue and red ICEE Cereal.

The bans didn't appear out of thin air — questions about food-dye safety have swirled around the industry for years. Nearly 10 years ago, companies said they'd take them out, not out of safety concerns but to align with consumer preferences. In 2015, Kellogg said it hoped to remove artificial dyes from its recipes, Kraft said it would take them out of its iconic macaroni and cheese and General Mills said it would take them out of cereals. The following year, Mars said it would remove "all artificial colors from its human food products."

Macaroni and cheese was the lone success story: Kraft Heinz announced in 2016 that it hadn't been using the dyes for months, replacing them with spices like turmeric and paprika, and consumers were none the wiser.

But Kellogg, General Mills and Mars had no such luck. Dyes came back to Trix cereal in 2017. By 2021, Skittles maker Mars had thrown in the towel as well, saying consumers wanted "the current vibrant palette" that only artificial dyes could offer.

Mars found that consumer expectations "differ widely across markets," so it was using "locally tailored" approaches, a spokesperson told Bloomberg. General Mills didn't respond to a request for comment.

Dr Pepper now as popular as Pepsi but still cloaked in mystery

BY EMILY HEIL
The Washington Post

"Prune juice." "Barbecued water." "Elixir of the gods."

Those are just some of the phrases used to describe Dr Pepper, the un-pin-downable soda brand whose secret recipe is said to include 23 flavors. This week, we learned that the purplish-red canned beverage had joined Pepsi to become the nation's second-best-selling soda, behind category-dominating Coke, according to trade publication Beverage Digest. (Dr Pepper is technically a smidgen ahead, but it's essentially a tie.)

That news might have surprised even some of Dr Pepper's most ardent fans, many of whom revel in the kind of weird aura that surrounds their beloved, inscrutable drink. But Pepsi's fortunes have declined, and the good doctor's have risen, and now each brand represents 8.3% of the soda market. (Coke is ahead comfortably with 19.2%.)

The drink's story started in 1885 at Morrison's Old Corner Drug Store in Waco, Texas. There, pharmacist Charles Alderton was supposedly inspired by the intermingled scent of the various fruit syrups used to flavor sodas, and so he created the blend to achieve the concoction's now-iconic flavor.

iStock

More than a century later, among the shelves of bland corporate products, Dr Pepper has always felt like a freaky anomaly, a brand shrouded in mystery. Here are some of the questions surrounding it:

Who was Dr. Pepper?

We don't, in fact, know whether there was an actual medical doctor who served as the drink's namesake; history is unclear on this point. According to the Dr Pepper Museum in Waco, researchers have collected more than a dozen stories about the name's origin. Several fanciful ones involve a Virginia pharmacist named Dr. Charles Pepper, for whom the owner of Morrison's drugstore once worked. The younger man was said to have fallen in love with the boss' daughter, and persuaded Alderton to name the drink in her honor. More likely, though, is the common practice at the time to add "Dr. So-and-so" to the labels of products said to have health benefits, according to the myth busters at Snopes.com.

What are its 23 flavors?

Although the company has, over the years, boasted about the 23 flavors that make up the taste, Dr Pepper has been extremely cagey on this point. See how carefully Adrian Sepcic, the company's senior manager for research and development, describes it as "a blend of fruit flavors and extracts." Dr Pepper Canada even pokes fun at the secrecy surrounding it, with a feature on its website promising to reveal the list, only inviting users on an endless scroll.

The exact recipe is cloaked in mystery: According to Snopes, the master formula for Dr Pepper is divided in two and kept in separate bank vaults in Dallas. Amateur soda sommeliers have suggested the list is amaretto, almond, blackberry, black licorice, caramel, carrot, clove, cherry, cola, ginger, juniper, lemon, molasses, nutmeg, orange, prune, plum, pepper, root beer, rum, raspberry, tomato and vanilla.

Is there prune juice in it?

No, the company has stated unequivocally that it does not contain prune juice. The myth has persisted, even though its origins are as murky as a Dr Pepper float. The folks behind the Dr Pepper Museum blame none other than Bob Hope: "We believe the rumor was started by a comment by Bob Hope when he was visiting the Waco area at one time," the museum's website states. It doesn't say what, exactly, the joke was, but some people have suggested it was something along the lines that if Dr Pepper did contain prune juice, he would know where its fans were at 10, 2, and 4 p.m., echoing the brand's long-running tag line suggesting people drink it for an afternoon boost. Har-har.

But wait! It's possible that it contains prune flavor, just not juice. And some internet sleuths have theories that one of the fruit flavors it contains is plum, which is, of course, a prune in its undried form. So its possible that tasters picking up on notes of prunes might be on to something.

No more period?

Medical doctors use a period after the abbreviation, but let's recall that Dr Pepper is not a practicing physician. The company says it dropped the period in the 1950s, a move many people suspect was to improve its legibility on labeling and in advertisements.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

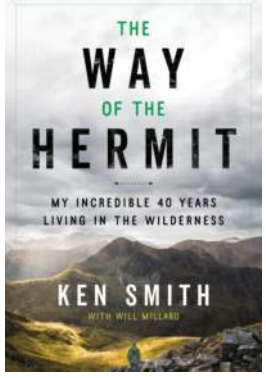
‘Way of the Hermit’ details life in wilderness

By Laurie Hertzel
For The Washington Post

Ken Smith has spent most of his life alone in the wilderness. For years, he was a “homeless nomad,” wandering through Alaska, Canada and Scotland. Now in his late 70s, he is simply a hermit, living in the Scottish Highlands in a cabin he built of fallen trees.

The word “hermit” might bring to mind ancient monks in stone huts or, possibly, the Unabomber. But Smith is a gregarious hermit, downright jolly. His new book, “The Way of the Hermit,” is in part an effort to dispel myths about what it means to be a hermit. “More often than not, introversion and reclusion, the fundamental character traits of a hermit, have become closely associated with those who have a real visceral anger and forceful hostility toward humankind,” he writes. “This is absolutely not the way of the hermit, and is a dreadful smear on all those who prefer the quiet life — all introverts, as well as hermits and recluses.”

Smith didn’t move to the wilderness to find God or to avoid people; he moved to the wilderness to become part of nature. When he first visited the Highlands at age 15, Smith “felt immediately at ease when wandering alone in those mountains,” he writes. “They spoke to me in a way that nowhere else had.” He might not have thrown himself wholeheartedly into the hermit life had it not been for an assault he suffered in his 20s.



Leaving a pub late at night, he was jumped by “a gang of eight lads with shaven heads,” who beat him, kicked him and left him for dead. He was hospitalized for months and underwent four brain surgeries. After recovering, he decided to live the life he wanted rather than one “stuck indoors in a suit and tie, trapped behind a desk.”

And so off he went, to the Yukon.

The first half of this book is a rip-roaring read, filled with death-defying adventures — fighting off grizzly bears; avoiding a charging bull moose; nearly freezing in an ice-encrusted tent. Smith falls into a raging river, loses his supply pack and nearly drowns. Still, he loved it all: “It was intoxicating, invigorating and utterly liberating.” Smith is a good storyteller. Written with Welsh writer Will Millard, his book flows smoothly, with just enough of the vernacular to give it personality.

In the second half of the book, Smith settles down on the shores of a remote Scottish loch, builds a cabin, plants a garden. Compared with his nomadic adventures, this is a downright civilized life, even though it’s an eight-mile walk to the nearest road, nine miles more to collect his mail and nine miles beyond that to town for groceries.

He still has brushes with death — his cabin burns down; he endures tremendous storms and the coldest winters on Scottish record. But at this point, the book morphs into a sort-of wilderness how-to guide: how to build a cabin, catch a fish, tap a birch tree, remove a tick.

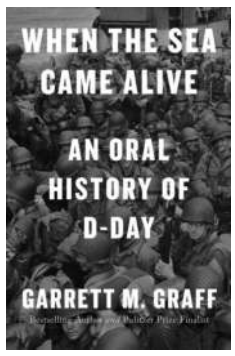
So what has he learned? His opinions about his life decisions remain firm: “I’ve spent the majority of my life living outside the conventions of mainstream society, and I’ll tell you what I think is weird, and it ain’t the hermit. It’s how entire generations of people have been conned into believing that there is only one way to live, and that’s on-grid, in deepening debt, working on products you’ll probably never use, to line the pockets of people you’ll never meet, just so you might be able to get enough money together to buy a load of crap you don’t need, or, if you’re lucky, have a holiday that takes you to a place, like where I live, for a week of the happiness I feel every day.”

Is he never lonely? Does he miss his family? Does he ever wish for a wife or a partner?

What we are left with is a love story to the mountains in the mist, the pulsating northern lights and the red deer at dawn. And to independence. Maybe that is enough.

When the Sea Came Alive

Garrett M. Graff



Writing about the Allied invasion of Normandy, Graff is treading onto familiar history with his latest book.

From books by historian Stephen Ambrose to films like Steven Spielberg’s “Saving Private Ryan,” there’s ample works chronicling the June 6, 1944, landing during World War II that ultimately led to the downfall of Nazi Germany.

But in “When The Sea Came Alive: An Oral History of D-Day,” Graff weaves together hundreds of eyewitness accounts to create a history that stands alongside those works, expanding readers’ understanding of D-Day and offering a new, complete portrait in time for the 80th anniversary commemorations.

The oral history begins with a look at the planning of the operation, going back to 1943, and the buildup of personnel and equipment in the months leading up to the operation.

Graff uses a wide array and diversity of voices that give a fuller picture of the lead-up to the invasion, as well as the fighting itself. The book excels in highlighting the experiences of Black soldiers who landed on D-Day beaches and women who were part of the story, such as correspondent Martha Gellhorn.

But it should come as no surprise that the most harrowing portions of the book remain the landing and the battles that occurred on D-Day itself, with vivid firsthand accounts. Graff’s skills at sifting through the accounts and documents propel the action throughout the book.

Graff’s book is a testimony to the value in preserving memories from grand historical events, demonstrating how much can be unearthed from even the most familiar stories.

— Andrew DeMillo/AP

First Frost

Craig Johnson

Walt Longmire, the sheriff of fictional Absaroka County, Wyo., returns in Johnson’s 20th crime novel.

The action takes place in two time periods, the present day and the summer of 1964. Walt and his pal Henry Standing Bear, whose football careers at the University of Southern California recently came to an end, have enlisted in the military with the expectation that they will be sent to Vietnam. Their plan is to drive cross-country to their assigned training facilities, but they have barely made it to Arizona when Walt’s truck runs off the road, stranding them in the small desert town of Bone Valley.

The town, they soon find, is as unwelcoming as its name. Get out as soon as you can, they are repeatedly told. Sometimes it’s a warning, sometimes a threat. Clearly something is wrong here, and Walt can’t let go of the mystery.

Meanwhile, back in the present, the sheriff is under investigation for a fatal shooting recounted in “The Longmire Defense,” last year’s installment of the series. The victim was a member of a wealthy and politically powerful family, which is now out for vengeance.

The author moves smoothly between the two time periods, keeping both stories moving at a crisp pace. The old story is the more suspenseful one involving, among other things, murderous drug smugglers, a former judge who runs Bone Valley like a dictator, and a dark secret about the incarceration camps of Japanese Americans during World War II that had once operated nearby.

Readers new to the series won’t have difficulty following the action, and longtime Longmire fans are likely to appreciate the main character’s backstory.

— Bruce DeSilva/AP

Fire Exit

Morgan Talty

Talty’s poignant first novel explores the charged question of what constitutes identity — family or tribe?

Charles, the narrator, is a white man who lives across the river from the Penobscot Nation in Maine. For years he has watched from afar as Elizabeth, the child he fathered with a Native woman, grows up on the reservation with her mother, Mary, and her Native stepfather, Roger. He longs to tell her the truth about her paternity, but Mary insists on keeping it a secret.

Charles’ desire is driven in part by a history of mental illness in his family.

Sadly for Charles, biology has been destiny. The son of a white mother and father, he was raised on the reservation by Louise and her second husband, Fredrick, a Native man. But at age 18, he had to leave the reservation because of a tribal law that barred anyone who was not Native from living on the land. It was that same law that prompted Mary to tell him, after she found out she was pregnant with his child, “The baby can’t be yours.”

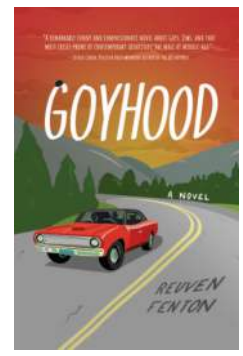
Charles, however, has little use for the complicated, controversial “blood quantum” rules that many tribes use to keep track of citizenship. Despite his racial identity as a white man, he feels connected to the people and the land where he grew up.

The conflict between Mary and Charles comes to a head when Elizabeth, who has grown up to be a deeply troubled young woman, goes missing and Charles is enlisted to help find her during a nor’easter of epic proportions. It is a gripping ending to a thoughtful, heartfelt exploration of what it means to be part of a family and a community. Is it a matter of blood, biology or simply the bonds of love?

— Ann Levin/AP

Goyhood

Reuven Fenton



In the beginning was ... a lie. One day, a rabbi knocked on the door of a woman with a Jewish-sounding last name in a small town in Georgia to recruit new members for his synagogue. When he asks if she knows of any Jews in the area, Ida Mae Belkin admits to being one herself. This comes as a shock to her 12-year-old twins Marty and David, who grew up believing in not much more than the national pastimes of TV and fast food.

Fast forward some 20 years and Marty, who has become a religious scholar at a Brooklyn yeshiva and goes by the more Jewish-sounding name of Mayer, finds out via Ida Mae’s suicide note that she lied and he and David are not in fact Jewish. That means his marriage to devoutly Orthodox Sarah is effectively null and void since she never would have consented to marry someone outside the faith.

What to do? Clearly, the only solution is to convert to Judaism “on the down-low,” as Mayer’s pot-smoking rascal of a brother puts it, and in the meantime, take a road trip through the Deep South to, well, relax.

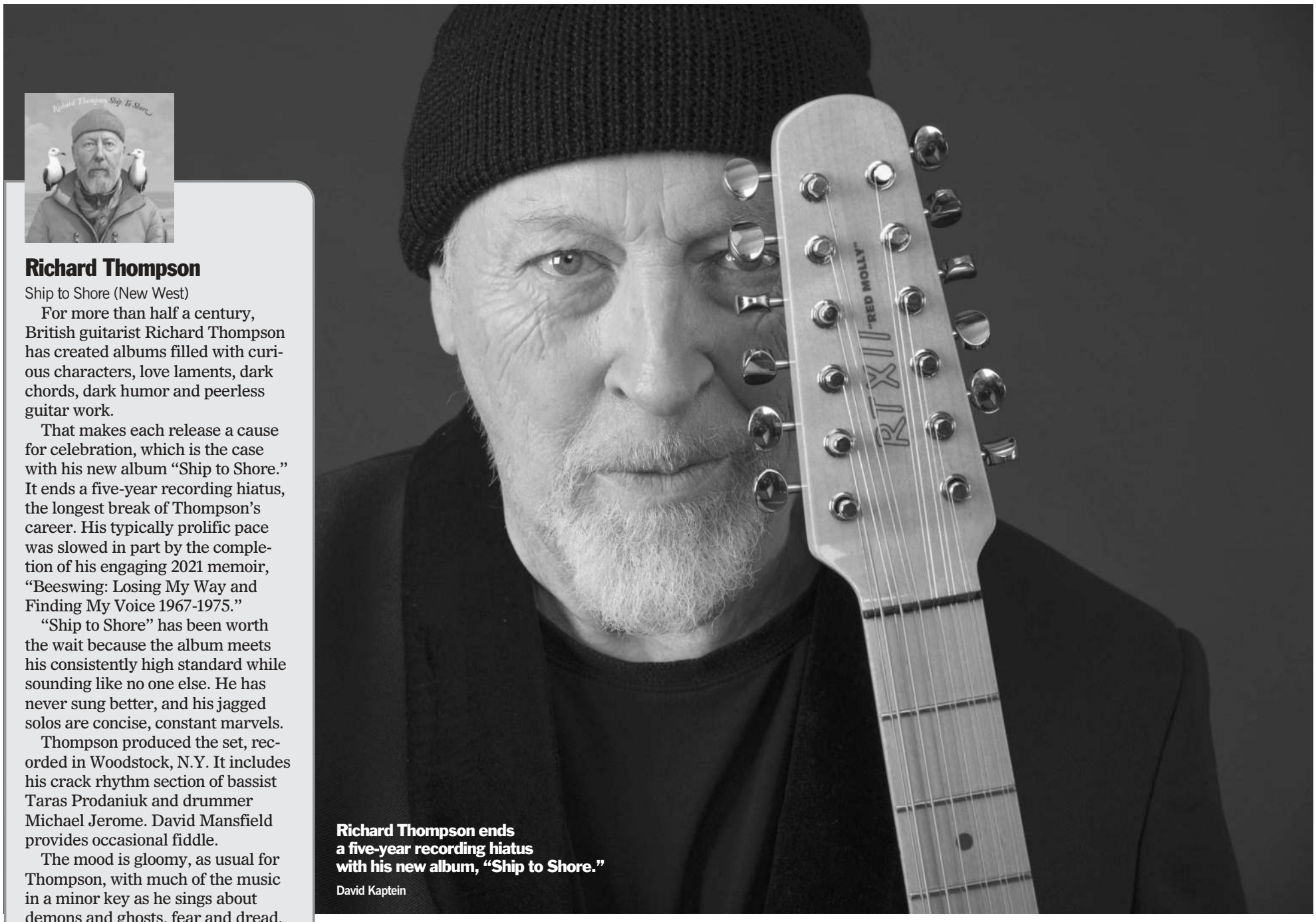
So begins Fenton’s quirky debut novel, which takes the classic literary theme of the journey — think Homer’s “Odyssey” or Jack Kerouac’s “On the Road” — and gives it a decidedly unorthodox twist.

Over the course of their journey, the brothers will adopt a one-eyed dog, almost get blown up in a fireworks store and eventually scatter Ida Mae’s ashes in the Great Smoky Mountains.

Fenton, a longtime reporter for the New York Post, has written a big-hearted novel about the enduring importance of faith and family. While some of the plot twists are a little meshuga — the Yiddish word for crazy — overall, the book is a lot of fun.

— Ann Levin/AP

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS



Richard Thompson ends a five-year recording hiatus with his new album, "Ship to Shore."
David Kaptein

Richard Thompson

Ship to Shore (New West)

For more than half a century, British guitarist Richard Thompson has created albums filled with curious characters, love laments, dark chords, dark humor and peerless guitar work.

That makes each release a cause for celebration, which is the case with his new album "Ship to Shore." It ends a five-year recording hiatus, the longest break of Thompson's career. His typically prolific pace was slowed in part by the completion of his engaging 2021 memoir, "Beeswing: Losing My Way and Finding My Voice 1967-1975."

"Ship to Shore" has been worth the wait because the album meets his consistently high standard while sounding like no one else. He has never sung better, and his jagged solos are concise, constant marvels.

Thompson produced the set, recorded in Woodstock, N.Y. It includes his crack rhythm section of bassist Taras Prodaniuk and drummer Michael Jerome. David Mansfield provides occasional fiddle.

The mood is gloomy, as usual for Thompson, with much of the music in a minor key as he sings about demons and ghosts, fear and dread, hard times, PTSD and heartache — lots of heartache. Love blinds, causes confusion, goes wrong and melts away. "Romance," he concludes, "is overrated" in the song "Trust."

There are bits of Britishness, such as when Thompson rhymes flirty and dirty with shirt-y on "Maybe," an uncharacteristically bouncy tune that evokes the 1965 pop charts until it veers into a wild bridge. He explores an interest in Renaissance music on "The Old Pack Mule," a ditty with appropriately ghoulish guitar and a sing-along chorus.

Other highlights include "Turnstile Casanova," driven by a bright guitar hook and jovial singing, and "Life's a Bloody Show," the tale of a dead soul who bears a resemblance to "Fergus Laing," the clownish scoundrel in a 2015 Thompson song of the same name that was soon overtaken by actual events.

The set opens with "Freeze," a shanty and a call to stay active. Thompson, 75, follows that advice, and on the closing "We Roll," he reflects on suitcase living that's a result of his still-busy concert schedule.

"I must be crazy," the road warrior muses, but there are new songs to be sung.

— Steven Wine
Associated Press

Nelson takes it back to Texas, with notes of Mexico

By Andrew Dalton
Associated Press

Willie Nelson has never in his long life not wanted to be making music.

After 2023 saw him celebrate his 90th birthday with an epic two-night concert celebration at the Hollywood Bowl, get inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and release two studio albums along with the usual constant touring, 2024 finds him as unretired as ever, with the May 31 release of "The Border."

It's his 152nd album, counting live collections and collaborations, according to Texas Monthly, which recently took on the titanic task of ranking them ("The Border" is No. 55).

While his last studio album, "Bluegrass," explored the music of Kentucky, the new one — produced by longtime collaborator Buddy Cannon and released by Sony's Legacy Recordings on streaming, CD and vinyl — is firmly planted in his native Texas and its stark southern borderlands.

Inflections of Mexican music have run through almost all of Nelson's work, but he occasionally leans into it, as he did with the 1998 masterpiece "Teatro."

He does the same — sort of — with "The Border," whose best tracks have heavy doses of the sounds of Mexico.

That includes the stark, dark title track,

Willie Nelson

The Border (Legacy)

written by Nelson favorite Rodney Crowell with Allen Shamblin and sung from the perspective of a Border Patrol agent. It begins like a Western with a standoff between the law and the cartels.

"There's a price on the head of every Border Patrol," Nelson sings.

But then comes a shift, when the agent despairs for his life and his family and empathizes with the people he takes into custody.

"From the shacks and the shanties come the hungry and poor," he sings, "some to drown at the crossing, some to suffer no more."

Nelson delivers the lines with a darkly direct rasp reminiscent of the final recordings of his Highwaymen bandmate Johnny Cash.

Elsewhere, he employs the jazz-inspired vocals, developed decades ago, that have served him so well in his elder years, like a pitcher who has lost his fastball but can still get guys out with change-ups and curves.

He throws jazzy spitballs through "What If I'm Out of My Mind," a Western swing tune in the style of Texas' Bob Wills, written by Nelson and Cannon. The duo wrote about half the songs on the album, and they're generally the strongest.

A standout is "Kiss Me When You're Through," a driving-into-the-sunset tune marked by Nelson's Latin-influenced guitar and the harmonica of Mickey Raphael, the only surviving member of the Family Band that backed Nelson for decades.

There's not a bad song in the bunch. If there's fault to be found with "The Border," it's that the stark desert tone established in the beginning isn't sustained, and at times it swerves from bluesy rockers to country shuffles that are downright breezy.

In one of its more esoteric tracks, "Hank's Guitar," written by Cannon and Bobby Tomberlin, Nelson sings from the first-person perspective of Hank Williams' titular instrument.

"He held me close against his chest and he wrote 'Your Cheatin' Heart," Nelson sings. In the end, the guitar gets packed into the blue Cadillac in which Williams died at age 29.

It's a reminder of how lucky we've been to have had Nelson — arguably second only to Williams in country music greatness — for so much longer.

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

Twenty One Pilots

Clancy (Fueled by Ramen)

The end of an era has come for Twenty One Pilots, and what an ending it is.

The alternative pop-rock duo, made up of vocalist Tyler Joseph and drummer Josh Dun, have long been candid about anxiety and depression, themes often represented in Joseph's lyrics as he sings, raps and occasionally screams while Dun drums at an incredible pace.

Those topics have existed since the beginning of their career, but reached new creative heights on 2015's "Blurryface," when the duo introduced a concept album series that would carry them to 2018's "Trench," 2021's "Scaled and Icy," to its ambitious conclusion: 2024's "Clancy."

For those of you who haven't been following the narrative with each release, here's a summary: In the cement-walled city of Dema on the lush continent of Trench, Nico, an embodiment of insecurity also known as Blurryface, controls the confined citizens with a group of mystical leaders called the Nine Bishops. Joseph is a citizen who gets out, is tracked down, escapes again, joins a rebellion, is recaptured and escapes again.

Leading up to "Clancy," Joseph gains the same mystical power as the Bishops and prepares to return to Trench to free the other citizens.

It's a lot of pressure to put on a finale album that wraps up an almost decadelong arc, but "Clancy" more than delivers. Full of vim and vigor and crammed with nostalgic callbacks, it's a triumphant end of an era.

It begins with "Overcompensate," an electrifying jump-start to the album. "If you can't see, I am Clancy / Prodigal son, done running, come up with Josh Dun / Wanted dead or alive," Joseph raps in his familiar syncopated cadence.

A fear of relapsing to past patterns is prevalent throughout, first with the track "Backslide," in which Joseph sings, "I don't wanna backslide to where I started from," and then calls back to it later with "Snap Back," singing, "It's a new adaptation / It's a backslide / I hate the surprise / And now it's all gone / All of that progress."

Nonetheless, the story's hero pushes on, as Joseph calls on listeners to do in the simple "Oldies Station." In the chorus, each syllable enunciated with uplifting piano notes, he sends a simple message: "When darkness rolls on you, push on through."

The duo has come a long way, and it seems as though it's only up from here. Just with a new journey.

— Kiana Doyle
Associated Press

Sebastian Bach

Child Within the Man (Reigning Phoenix)

Sebastian Bach's latest solo album, "Child Within the Man," is a reminder that every once in a while, a man and a moment meet.

This is that time for Bach and his former band, Skid Row. The vintage-sounding album has everything that made Bach a force and offers a tantalizing glimpse into what he could bring to a reunited Skid Row.

Together, Bach and Skid Row were fixtures of hard rock radio in the late '80s and early '90s with songs like "Youth Gone Wild," "18 And Life" and "I Remember You." But since parting ways in 1996, neither has had anything close to the level of success they had together.

The lead singer job in Skid Row is currently vacant; Halestorm's Lzzy Hale filled in on a handful of shows, but she has her own career to tend to.

The timing of Bach's solo album could not be better, and it shows a fierce performer in prime fighting form. It's not hard to picture the opening track "Everybody Bleeds" being belted out at a packed stadium by a reunited Skid Row.

Bach has new, creative ammunition that he could bring to a Skid Row reunion on tracks like "Crucify Me" and "Hard Darkness." They're the sort of hard, tightly played rockers at which the band excelled, signs of what once was and could be again.

— Wayne Parry
Associated Press

RM

Right Place, Wrong Person (BigHit)

All seven members of BTS are currently serving South Korea's compulsory enlistment for men of a certain age — and in what should feel like an absence, the K-pop boy band is keeping their fans occupied with a steady release schedule of eclectic solo material. Next up is rapper RM's second solo full-length album, "Right Place, Wrong Person."

The thoughtful leader of BTS, RM is usually philosophical in his solo work, often unafraid to take big sonic risks, sometimes with big rewards. On "Right Place, Wrong Person," he continues to ask the big questions atop elastic, genre-averse production.

The title track opens the bilingual album, with RM repeating the album's title over and over in a deep, almost militaristic cadence — before exploding into asymmetrical production ornamented by his gothic baritone.

From there follows the wet, funky bass of "Nuts"; the avant-garde "Around the world in a day" with the inventive guitarist Moses Sumney; and the haunted hip-hop of "Domodachi," featuring British rapper Little Simz with ferocious drums and jazz-like improvisational instrumentation, a sensibility that continues into the following "Interlude." There are few genres that strike fear in RM.

Or maybe they do, and that's the point: Thematically, the album centers on the artist considering his own identity — one of the most famous people on the planet expressing that he feels out of step with the world. Naturally, the music mirrors that frustration, curiosity and meditation. "Groin'" is frustrated, raw rap and perhaps the most profane he has been to date. "Heaven" is dreamy shoegaze; he's a rapper who can live inside '90s alternative rock and own it.

The album's closer, "Come back to me," is yet another demonstration of RM's penchant for collaboration: Kuo from the Taiwanese band Sunset Rollercoaster plays guitar and bass on the laidback pop-rock song; OHHYUK from the South Korean band HYUKOH composed and arranged it. "Come back to me" is a whistle-along acoustic pop tune, but as the first song released off the album, it failed to encapsulate its maximalist spirit.

"Right Place, Wrong Person" benefits from RM's big, existential questioning — and like the other pop philosophers that came before him, it doesn't offer any answers. And it doesn't sound like it is supposed to.

— Maria Sherman
Associated Press

Brad Mehldau

After Bach II/Après Fauré (Nonesuch)

Grammy-winning jazz pianist Brad Mehldau connects the dots as though they were so many 16th notes.

His two new albums, "After Bach II" and "Après Fauré," use classical music as a foundation for solo explorations that draw a through line from Art Tatum to Thelonious Monk to Bill Evans to Keith Jarrett to Philip Glass. It all sounds like Mehldau, and it all goes back to Bach.

"After Bach II" is a sequel to Mehldau's absorbing 2018 album, "After Bach." Once again, interpretations of Bach pieces alternate with original compositions inspired by him. "Après Fauré" follows a similar format, with the French composer's work bookending four short original Mehldau compositions.

It's music to delight a church choir or nightclub crowd. And, as Mehldau writes in the liner notes for the Fauré album, "music that breathes austerity and weirdness."

Bach was an acclaimed keyboard improviser, so it's fitting his Goldberg Variations are treated to Mehldau's improvised variations. The seven include two in a 5/8 time signature and one in 7/4, creating a weird and wild flow that is very 21st century.

Mehldau's variations are bracing and daring, breathtaking and beautiful, spiritual and psychedelic. Blue notes emerge from the contrapuntal complexity as he tests the limits of Bach's music, showing there are none.

— Steven Wine
Associated Press

Various Artists

Everyone's Getting Involved: A Tribute to Talking Heads' Stop Making Sense (A24)

In 1984, Talking Heads' concert film and live album "Stop Making Sense" captured the alt-rock quartet at the height of their powers.

Forty years later, a new 4K restoration of the film is streaming on MAX, and A24 Music has released "Everyone's Getting Involved: A Tribute to Talking Heads' Stop Making Sense."

The album features contributions from 16 recording artists covering each track on "Stop Making Sense."

The sheer variety of talent — everyone from Miley Cyrus to the National — is appropriate for a band that freely incorporated punk, funk, global pop and early hip-hop elements. This tribute to an endlessly inventive band should please old fans and inspire some new ones.

Cyrus comes in like a wrecking ball on the first track, reimaging the spare "Psycho Killer" as a full-blown dance anthem. She makes some bizarre changes to the lyrics: "I love you psycho killer / I'm-a love you forever / You know I'll never run away," she sings.

The others play it a little safer.

The National follow the opening track with an earthy rendition of the lovely ballad, "Heaven." Later, Paramore offers a faithful rendition of "Burning Down the House." Both are meticulously executed, but it is hard not to wonder what greater risks might have yielded.

The tribute also features some terrific contributions from up-and-coming artists.

Blondshell, the musical moniker of LA musician Sabrina Teitelbaum, shines on "Thank You for Sending Me an Angel" with soaring vocals over power chords.

The Linda Lindas follow Blondshell with an energetic rendition of "Found a Job." They play it fast and tight and, among the artists on this tribute, perhaps best capture the goofy fun that was so central to the Talking Heads' appeal.

The sum of it all is a varied but remarkably coherent album from a broad array of artists that's a testament to the enduring excellence of "Stop Making Sense."

— Jim Pollock
Associated Press

Cosmo's Midnight

Stop Thinking and Start Feeling (RCA)

They say nothing good happens after 3 a.m. But something great definitely happens at the stroke of midnight — Australian duo Cosmo's Midnight's joyful new album, "Stop Thinking and Start Feeling." Their third full-length aims to get audiences to turn off their inner self-nag and surrender to the magic of reinvented EDM disco funk.

And what a successful endeavor that is: "Stop Thinking and Start Feeling" is a certified party playlist banger.

Cosmo's Midnight, made up of twins Cosmo and Patrick Liney, have been toiling away at their craft since 2012. They've been working on this particular album for three years; it was born as a post-pandemic meditation and release. The band traveled to London, the U.S. and Australia to work on the album, where they found artistic kindred spirits in the form of an eclectic list of collaborators.

"Bang My Line," featuring Tkay Maidza, adds a little rap into their groove mix, while "Gimmie Some More," featuring Zimbabwean-American artist Shungudzo, brings cute beats. "Can't Do Without (My Baby)" introduces island bird sounds and the party spills onto the dance floor. From "Fantasy" featuring dance-pop duo Franc Moody to "Borrowed Time" with Aussie singer-songwriter Forest Claudette, there's a throughline of catchy funk, modern disco, retrofitted EDM and everything sexy in between.

If the third time's a charm, with this studio album, the band might be onto something — and here's hoping it brings musical recognition outside Australia. Maybe everyone can all learn to relax and start feeling the rhythm, just like Cosmo's Midnight.

— Cristina Jaleru
Associated Press

WEEKEND: MUSIC & VIDEO GAMES

Crossover creatures

Pop-rock band Imagine Dragons didn't set out to become the sound of gaming culture, but it's been a great fit

By Gene Park
The Washington Post

A decade ago, former games journalist Geoff Keighley was busy planning the first Game Awards, a project to build some prestige and pomp around video game award ceremonies.

He had already booked famed Nintendo composer Koji Kondo to perform on piano a medley of songs from the Legend of Zelda franchise, but he wanted a little more sound to fill the Las Vegas stage. And then he remembered: A young band called Imagine Dragons was climbing charts and fresh off a memorable Grammys performance with Kendrick Lamar. The Las Vegas group would become Kondo's backing band.

"That Koji Kondo moment was super fun and last minute," Keighley recalls to The Washington Post. "It was a combo of the show being in Vegas, their hometown, and knowing they're big gamers."

Imagine Dragons has been all over gaming culture ever since. Of all the band's accomplishments — filling stadiums and arenas, even performing Beatles songs in front of Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr — playing with Kondo remains a highlight, says the band's frontman Dan Reynolds. He didn't grow up listening to the Beatles; he grew up listening to the "Athletic Theme" from Super Mario World.

"I geeked out harder on that than when we played in front of McCartney," Reynolds says.

Reynolds says the band's ties to gaming trace all the way back to when publisher Ubisoft asked to use its song "Radioactive" on trailers for the 2012 game Assassin's Creed III. Reynolds loved the series and gave the green light right away.

Daniel Pearson, Las Vegas Review Journal/TNS

Dan Reynolds, lead singer of Imagine Dragons, says the band's ties to gaming go back to 2012, when publisher Ubisoft asked to use its song "Radioactive" on trailers for the game Assassin's Creed III.

Since then, various game companies have kept approaching the band. Epic Games' iOS game Infinity Blade III featured the band's name and song "Monster" (a collaboration that first caught Keighley's attention, leading to the Game Awards show). In 2017, Nintendo created a Super Bowl trailer to launch the Switch console with the band's hit single "Believer." Riot Games and Netflix commissioned the band to write "Enemy," the theme song for the hit animated series "Arcane," now approaching 1.5 billion streams on Spotify.

"It's not like we're going around knocking on doors," Reynolds says, laughing. "They just started reaching out, and we said, 'Absolutely, this is amazing.' Look, I'm really tall, 6 foot 4, never played sports, always did music and drama, so people probably think I'm not a gamer, but it's my bread and butter. It's our world."

Reynolds grew up playing old-school adventure games published by Sierra Entertainment, then became a big fan of Blizzard games like Warcraft, StarCraft and Diablo.

"Then Dark Souls took over my life," Reynolds says, adding that the band is always gaming on tour. "We've been late onstage because we're playing League of Legends." (Leaving a multiplayer League match early can result in a ban.)

Last year, the band released "Children of the Sky," a collaboration with composer Inon Zur for the launch of Starfield, a marquee Xbox game that lets players explore about a thousand planets. Again, it happened because someone from Bethesda Game Studios emailed the band's manager about a collaboration.

Now the band is about to release its sixth studio album, "Loom," on June 28. It features more of the band's signature sound: danceable anthems drenched in reverb and soaring choruses. The latest single, "Nice to Meet You," is a fun, funk-inflected dance track about Reynolds' experience with a partner's friends getting involved in their dating life.

"I grew up listening to singer-songwriters, Dylan, Billy Joel, Paul Simon, Cat Stevens. But I love pop music," Reynolds says, explaining the airy, upbeat feel of the record. "I like to create big choruses and songs that I want to hear, and I happen to be in a healthier, happier place with this record, so hopefully that's reflected in it."

Many Imagine Dragons lyrics revolve around Reynolds' struggle with depression. Hype classics like "Thunder" are about Reynolds gassing himself up despite overwhelming self-doubt.

Criticism of the band tends to focus on the tension between its marketability and its supposed place in rock music. The Imagine Dragons sound is radio-friendly, approachable and clean, perfect for marketing material. And Reynolds' choruses are so catchy and concise, you could easily imagine them backing a product launch.

At the same time, Imagine Dragons is one of the few remaining mega acts filling arenas with a real-life electric guitar loud and visible onstage. Critics of the band jeered when the group topped Billboard's rock charts. Reynolds, for what it's worth, agrees with them. He owns being a pop act.

"I really think the sentiment of Imagine Dragons 'keeping rock alive' is kind of a silly sentiment," he says. "When I think of rock, I think Nirvana, Foo Fighters, Queens of the Stone Age. I think of a very specific genre that I love, but that's not what Imagine Dragons has ever wanted to be or tried to be, and it's not our influences."

Reynolds says he and the group are happy with their sound. They write all their songs based on personal experiences, he says. He focuses on pop hooks, citing classical composers like Chopin and Bach, whom he describes as "very pop."

"I can genuinely say we've never created a record where we're saying, 'What do you want, critics? What do you want to hear right now?'" Reynolds says. "I just write songs I want to play. If I'm going to perform them for the next two years, I'd better like them. We're trying to make sounds that feel good on the ears and make you feel something. And all I'm doing is writing about what's going in my life. And this happens to be a happy time."

And many times, that will mean writing music for the hobby and entertainment medium he's loved since he was a kid.

"My MO from the very beginning is just following the kid in me. What would little Dan Reynolds love to be a part of?"

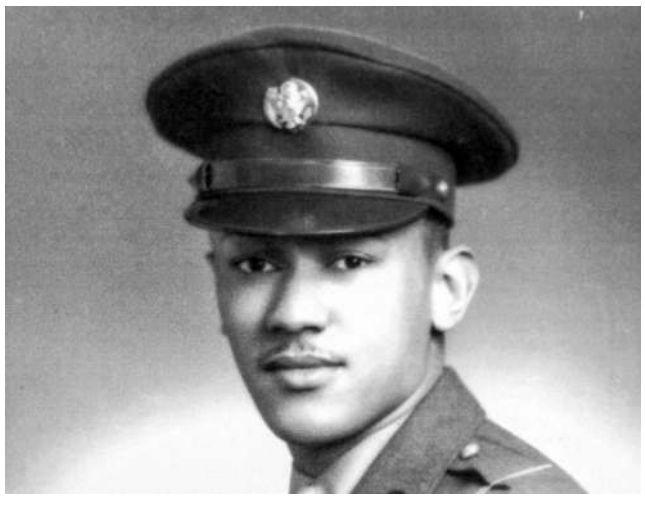
WEEKEND: TELEVISION

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC/AP photos

Francesco Di Rauso portrays combat medic Waverly Woodson Jr., below, who served with the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion on D-Day, in "Erased: WW2's Heroes of Color."

Giving the 'Erased' their due

Idris Elba helps tell stories of WWII 'Heroes of Color' in new docuseries



BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

One of Idris Elba's grandfathers fought in World War II, but he doesn't know what he endured. No pictures or stories survive.

"That part of my family's history has been erased somewhat," Elba says.

That helped fuel the actor's push to narrate and executive-produce the four-part National Geographic docuseries "Erased: WW2's Heroes of Color," which premiered Monday ahead of the 80th anniversary of D-Day on June 6. Episodes will also later be available on Disney+ and Hulu.

More than 8 million people of color served with the Allies, and the series digs deep to focus on how some fared at D-Day, Dunkirk, Pearl Harbor and the Battle of the Bulge.

It tells the story of the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion, the only all-Black combat unit to fight on the D-Day beaches, and Force K6, a little-known Indian regiment of mule handlers from the British army trying to evacuate at Dunkirk.

The series uses archival footage, descendant interviews, soldier journals and actor portrayals — a mix that Elba says he found visceral and moving.

"It really did actually impact me just in the narration booth, watching the imagery, looking at the faces, wondering about my own personal connection. Could my grandfather be one of the people in one of the pieces? That was what I thought about. So, it did definitely resonate with me."

The series also highlights stories like that of Doris Miller, a mess attendant aboard the USS West Virginia who after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor raced to an unattended anti-aircraft gun and fired at the planes until forced to abandon ship.

He had never been trained to use the gun because Black sailors serving in the segregated steward's branch of the Navy were not given the gunnery training received by white sailors. Miller's bravery earned him the Navy Cross.

"It just feels like a privilege and an honor to be able to shed some light on their stories," says director Shianne Brown, who helmed the D-Day episode.

Her episode highlighted Waverly Woodson, Jr., a medic who was wounded by shrapnel during the landing but nevertheless spent the next 30 hours treating the wounded and the dying on Omaha Beach. He would note: "There's no such thing as a color barrier in action."

Brown says that observation proved so powerful: "If your leg has just been blown off, you need a medic to help you. At that moment, you're not going to say to Waverly, 'No, I don't want you to treat me.'"

The series points out that many soldiers of color who fought the Nazis in Europe went home — the Indians back to British colonization and Black Americans to bitter racism — and began agitating for change because of what they'd witnessed and earned. Civil rights icon Medgar Evers, after all, was at D-Day.

"A lot of these men and women never felt like they were human before going to Europe and then being treated like a normal human being by the white population," Brown says. "I can't even imagine how that would have felt for them. You've been fighting against Hitler and the Nazis and against fascism and hate, and you go home and you experience racial terror."

The filmmakers found very little footage of non-white soldiers in the archives and so were moved when they finally came across images of a Black unit marching in central England before D-Day or Black soldiers cheering the fall of the Nazis.

"It was just very odd to see a Black man in Nazi Germany," Elba says.

Elba urged the directors and editors to try to put the audience into the action, like the films "Saving Private Ryan" or "Dunkirk" do. That meant filming re-creations of bombings in villages in France, wading into the ocean with heavy gear and soldiers enduring beach strafing.

"I was really encouraging of the filmmakers to really go for it," he says. "Giving you a little glimpse of, from a fictional perspective, what it might have looked like and how heroic these soldiers were."

At the same time, the filmmakers wanted to show how horrible and frightening combat can be, the randomness of casualties and the agonizing wait before deployment.

"We don't want to glorify what's going on, but we actually wanted to paint the heroism in a way that was relatable to the way we've seen films of this nature," Elba says.

Get some gains in the great outdoors

Experts offer their tips for starting an exercise routine outside when you're not fond of working out in the gym

By Albert Stumm
Associated Press

Between the sweat smell, fluorescent lights and omnipresent television screens, April Herring has never connected with going to the gym.

Instead, she runs, bikes, hikes, plays tennis, pickleball and football — anything to get her exercise outside as often as possible.

"Fresh air, sunshine, the variety of the trees as the seasons change," said Herring, an administrator at Carroll Community College in North Maryland. "There's something about the energetic healing quality of nature."

The health benefits of spending time in nature have long been established, and exercise in general, of course, improves physical and mental well-being.

Combine the two and you double down on what adults need to stay healthy, said Debbie Rhea, professor in kinesiology at Texas Christian University.

"We've got to get outside. We've got to be active," Rhea said. "If we're going to live long lives, this is what it's about."

Getting started on an outdoor routine, however, might not be as easy as signing up for another gym membership. Here's how to get going:

AP photos

A couple cycles in the Cleveland MetroParks in Parma Heights, Ohio, on March 25, 2020. The health benefits of spending time in nature have long been established, and exercise in general improves physical and mental well-being.

Start simple with what you like

If you haven't been active for a while, think back to the activities you enjoyed years ago, suggested Connie Sciolino, founder of the Alpine Training Center in Boulder, Colo., a gym that trains athletes for outdoor mountain sports.

People who like occasionally hiking or biking should start building an aerobic base by taking progressively longer walks or rides. Once you're comfortably in the 35- to 45-minute range, start adding some intensity to build strength, she said.

"If jogging is their main activity, I would send them to bleachers or do some up-down on stairs, either in sprint format or put a pack on their back," she said.

Rhea cautioned against jumping back into a sport you used to play without preparing your body for the proper movement.

"Let's say they're in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and they haven't sprinted and now they try to run around those bases," she said. "They're probably going to hurt an Achilles or a hamstring or something by doing something too fast."

Then build strength with what's around

A side benefit of exercising outside is that there's no need to buy expensive equipment, trainers say.

After warming up with your preferred aerobic activity, add strength training by using your body weight and what is available in the built environment. That could be finding a picnic table or low wall and placing your hands shoulder-width apart to do leaning pushups. Then turn around, put your hands on the same surface and lower your body for dips that work your triceps.

For working your legs, add squats with your feet shoulder-width apart, looking straight ahead with your back straight. Add lunges by taking giant steps and bending down into the space between your feet. For the core, find a patch of grass to do situps.

Start with eight to 10 repetitions, or no more than you are comfortable with, and add sets with short breaks in between as you get stronger.

For a more complete workout, find a park or trail with outdoor exercise equipment, which is installed in one-third of park agencies, according to the National Recreation and Park Association. The equipment can range from basic pullup bars to gym-style bench presses and rowing machines.

And many cities, including Chicago, San Antonio and Atlanta, offer free group classes outdoors.

How to stay motivated, even in bad weather

When it inevitably rains or the weather turns colder, it helps to keep in mind an old axiom: There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.

"If we have the clothing for whatever the temperatures are that we may be in, then we're more likely to go outside to be active when we need to," Rhea said.

She suggested investing in a jacket that breathes and a light hat with a brim you can use on sunny or rainy days.

Trainer Katie Higginbotham recommended having a contingency plan for inclement weather. Pick an area with surfaces that won't get slippery when wet or somewhere with some tree shelter so as not to be bombarded by rain.

On those days, having a regular exercise buddy really helps, said Higginbotham, who oversees quality control for TrainFitness, a U.K.-based private training provider.

"If you know someone is there waiting for you, it's difficult to say no at the last minute," she said.

Finally, it helps to set a goal, whether that is training for a 5K charity walk or a triathlon. If you're working toward something, it keeps you motivated to keep going, Sciolino said.

"When you have that day marked on your calendar, you have to perform these things or die out there," she said.

Kayakers ply the choppy waters of Grand Lake on Aug. 5, 2020, in Grand Lake, Colo. Other ways to exercise outside include running and playing sports.

WEEKEND: FAMILY

ANDRES KUDACKI/AP

Gionna Durham, 13, left, spends time in the kitchen Jan. 27 as her sister Grace Durham, 11, right, draws in their home in New York. Staying off of social platforms can be challenging, isolating and at times liberating.

Teens without social media

Families finding positives, negatives to navigating adolescence offline

BY JOCELYN GECKER
Associated Press

Kate Bulkeley's pledge to stay off social media in high school worked at first. She watched the benefits pile up: She was getting excellent grades. She read lots of books. The family had lively conversations around the dinner table and movie nights on weekends.

Then, as sophomore year got underway, the unexpected problems surfaced. She missed a student government meeting arranged on Snapchat. Her Model U.N. team communicates on social media, too. Even the Bible study club at her Connecticut high school uses Instagram to communicate with members.

Gabriela Durham, a high school senior in Brooklyn, says navigating high school without social media has made her who she is today. She is a focused, organized, straight-A student with a string of college acceptances. Not having social media has made her an "outsider," in some ways. That used to hurt; now, she says, it feels like a badge of honor.

With the damaging consequences of social media increasingly well documented, some parents are trying to raise their children with restrictions or blanket bans. Teenagers themselves are aware that too much social media is bad for them, and some are initiating social media "cleanses" because of the toll it takes on mental health and grades. But it is hard to be a teenager today without social media.

This is a tale of two families, social media and the ever-present challenge of navigating high school.

Both families have experienced the rewards and pitfalls of trying to avoid social media in a world that is saturated by it.

Kids who use social media for more than three hours a day face double the risk of depression and anxiety, according to studies cited by U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy.

Those were the concerns of the Bulkeleys and Gabriela's mother, Elena Romero. Both set strict rules starting when their kids were in elementary school. They delayed giving phones until middle school and made social media off limits until 18. They educated their children on the impact of social media on young brains, on online privacy concerns, on the dangers of posting things that can come back to haunt you.

Growing up without social media has meant missing out on things. Everyone but you gets the same jokes, practices the same TikTok dances, is up on the latest viral trends. When Gabriela was younger, that felt isolating; at times, it still does. But now, she sees not having social media as freeing.

"It's gotten to a point where everyone wants to look the same instead of being themselves," she says.

There is also friend drama on social media and a lack of honesty, humility and kindness that she feels lucky to be removed from.

Gabriela does spend time on her phone. She texts with friends, listens to music and consults a navigational app to and from dance classes. The phone for her is a distraction limited to idle time.

In the upscale suburb of Westport, Conn., Kate Bulkeley was perfectly content to not have social media. But the 15-year-old needed Instagram in the process of building up extracurricular activities.

"I needed it to be co-president of my Bible study club," Kate explains.

As Kate's sophomore year started, she told her parents that she was excited to be leading a variety of clubs but needed social media to do her job. They agreed to let her have Instagram for her after-school activities, which they found ironic and frustrating.

Schools talk the talk about limiting screen time and the dangers of social media, says Kate's dad, Russ Bulkeley. But technology is rapidly becoming part of the school day. Teachers will ask students to take out their phones to photograph material during class time.

Ultimately the Bulkeleys gave in to Kate's plea because they trust her, and because she's too busy to devote much time to social media.

Both Kate and her younger sister Sutton wrap up after-school activities that include theater and dance classes at 8:30 p.m. most weeknights. They get home, finish homework and try to be in bed by 11.

Kate spends an average of two hours a week on her phone. That is significantly less than most, according to a 2023 Gallup poll that found over half of U.S. teens spend an average of five hours each day on social media. She uses her phone mainly to make calls, text friends, check grades and take photos.

Kate is embarking slowly on the apps. She has set a six-minute daily time limit as a reminder not to dawdle on Instagram.

From what Sutton, 13, has seen, social media has changed in the past few years. It used to be a way for people to message and to get to know each other.

"It's kind of just about bragging now," she says. "People post pictures of their trips to amazing places. Or looking beautiful. And it makes other people feel bad about themself."

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari

Smoking, business sense not in this teen's skill set

If you read last week's column, "The near death of a teenage saleswoman," you'll recall that many years ago, my father convinced me to take a summer job as a traveling saleswoman for his industrial chemical company, despite that fact that I had no interest in business, knew nothing about sales and was only 19.

While the rest of my friends were tanning, playing Asteroids and going to the mall, I was trying to grasp boring things like solvents, accounts receivable, surfactants, agitators, pallets and invoices. Two weeks into the job, I was still clueless, but my father sent me out on the road.

"No expense account, only commissions. The more you sell, the more you'll make," he told me in his characteristic School-of-Hard-Knocks way. I was assigned the region that included my home state, Pennsylvania, along with Delaware, Maryland, Northern Virginia and the District of Columbia.

My father instructed me to drive to Ocean City, Md., and then make my way back to Pennsylvania, staying in hotels and selling products over the course of a week. Clearly, he was grooming me to take over his company one day, and I didn't have the heart to tell him that I'd prefer a hot poker in the eye. I felt like a disappointment, and hoped that I'd develop business sense by the time I graduated from college.

The five-hour drive to Ocean City was actually enjoyable from the seat of the air-conditioned company car. But once I arrived, the pressure was on to sell something. Reluctantly, I visited several potential clients as instructed by my dad, but failed to make a sale that day.

Exhausted and defeated, I searched for a hotel, but without an expense account, I couldn't afford the touristy accommodations in Ocean City. So, I drove 10 miles inland, where I spotted a sign blinking "$69 a night" over a parking lot containing tractor trailers.

The manager hesitated when handing me the keys. "It's upstairs at the end of the hall," the weathered woman said. "You know the bathroom's shared, right?"

Too tired to get back in my car, I lied, "No problem." I found my room and the shared bathroom, both of which seemed clean enough. Once locked in my room, I fell face first onto the green bedspread and was soon fast asleep.

At sunrise, I was awakened by the sound of diesel engines. I found the hallway empty and tiptoed to the bathroom. What had appeared clean the night before was now — after a fleet of truck drivers had blown through — a dank, dripping mess, marred by hairs and unmentionable bodily substances.

An hour later, I was back in my company car, headed to Washington. Facing another stressful day as an unskilled teenage traveling saleswoman, I wondered, "How will I ever survive this summer without being disowned by my father?"

Stopping for gas at a 7-Eleven in Crofton, Md., I spied an advertisement for menthol cigarettes behind the counter. "Buy two packs and get shades for free!" it promised. I wasn't a smoker, but I'd seen other drivers looking so relaxed in their cars, one hand dangling casually out the window, a cigarette clamped between two fingers. "Maybe there's something to it," I thought.

Wearing my new sunglasses, I decided to light up my first cigarette while I was in traffic on the Beltway. Taking a long drag of minty smoke, I felt a surge of calm. "Maybe I CAN make it through this summer job!" I thought.

With my smoking hand dangling outside the window, I flicked ashes like a pro. Finishing the first cigarette, I lit up another, embracing my new identity as a smoker. But three more puffs in, a wave of nausea turned me as green as my pack of menthols.

Turns out, I wasn't good at smoking, either.

That summer, my father realized I wasn't going to follow in his footsteps, and I realized that smoking, just like business, wasn't the business for me.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

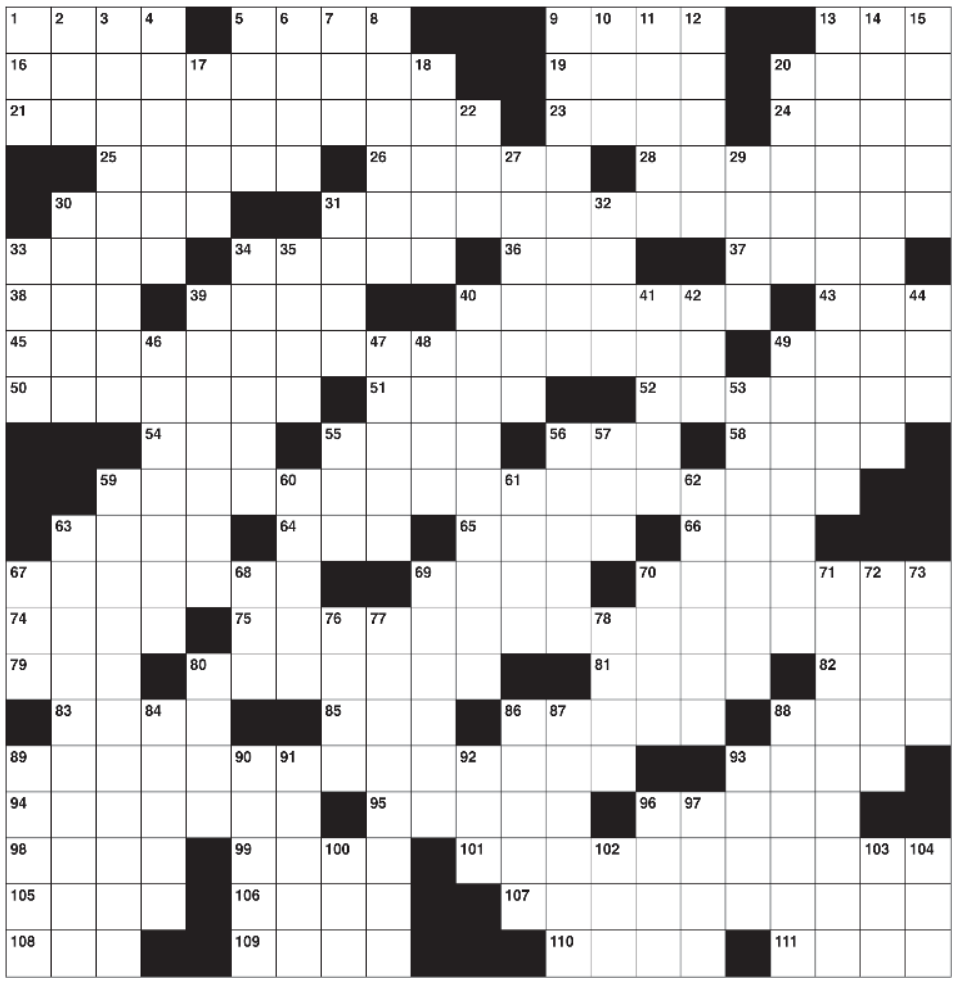
WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

ROUGHLY SPEAKING

BY JOHN KUGELMAN / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

John Kugelman is a software engineer and musician from Gainesville, Va. Despite only starting to make puzzles in 2023, he is The New York Times's most-published Sunday crossword constructor this year (with three). As a lifelong puzzle solver, he doesn't know why it took him so long to discover crossword construction — "I wish I'd thought of it 20 years ago!"



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83 Dude, in lingo
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93 Nonmetric unit . . . or a metric unit
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96 Astounding
98 It comes from the Greek for ''indivisible''
99 Any of six Russian monarchs
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63 Deal that brings in a big crowd
67 Common file type
68 Its iconic chimes were trademarked in 1950
69 Razor sharpeners
70 Random guess
71 Queen song from which a pop icon took her name
72 Astronaut's blackout preventer
73 GPS guesses
76 Part of A.D.
77 Investigated
78 Terrain in ''Wuthering Heights''
80 Class where students learn about squares and planes
84 Author of ''The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy''
86 ''Things Fall ____'' (Chinua Achebe novel)
87 Abase
88 Prevailed
89 Drummer Neil of Rush
90 Like the three sisters of ''Macbeth''
91 ''In your dreams!''
92 Sitcom extraterrestrial
93 Some Christmas trees
96 Common sports injury sites, for short
97 Stimulate
100 New England's Cape ____
102 Court grp.
103 Bluesy instrument, in brief
104 Prefix with valent

GUNSTON STREET

"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

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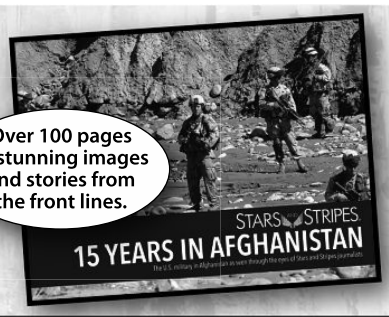

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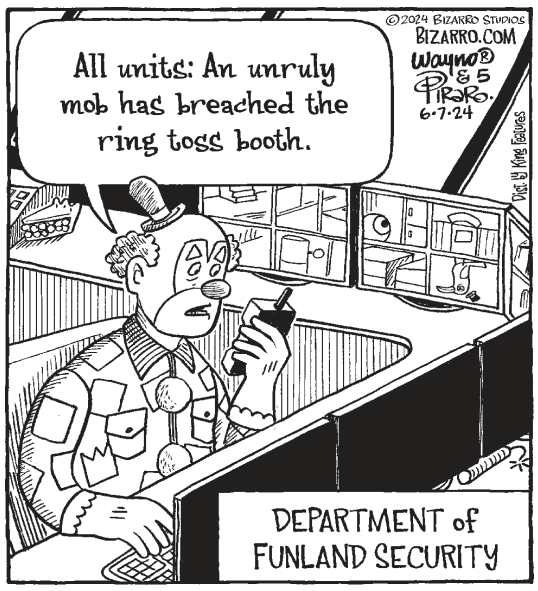
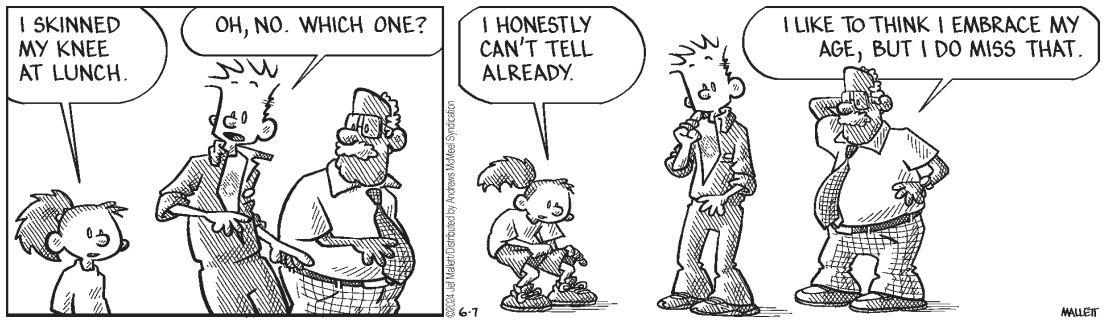
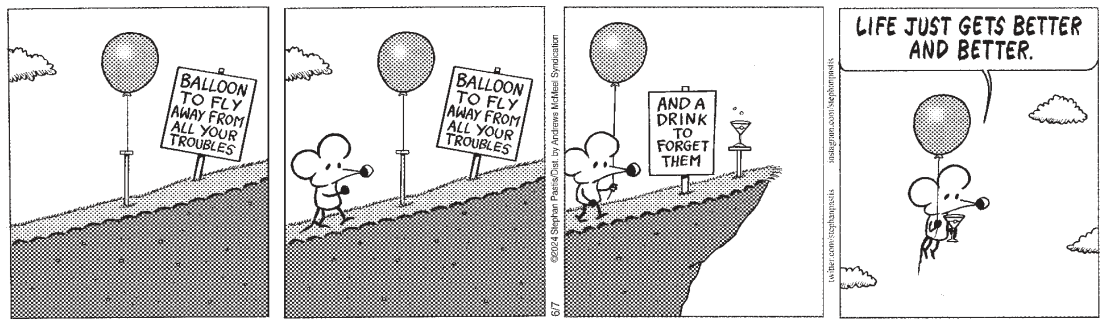


Loose Parts

Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



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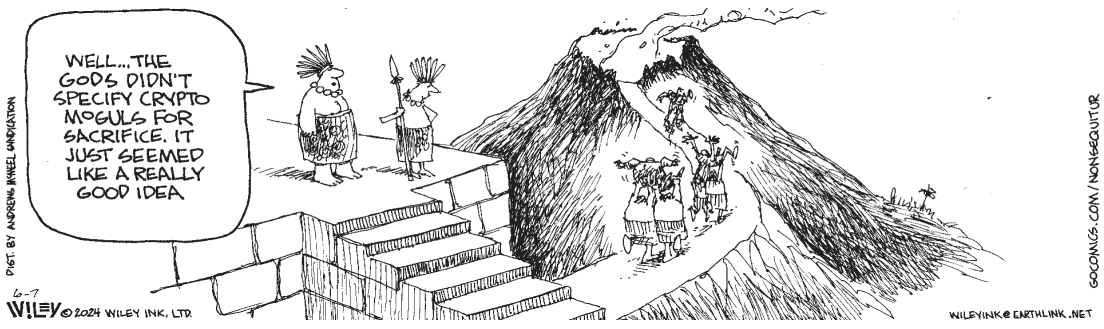
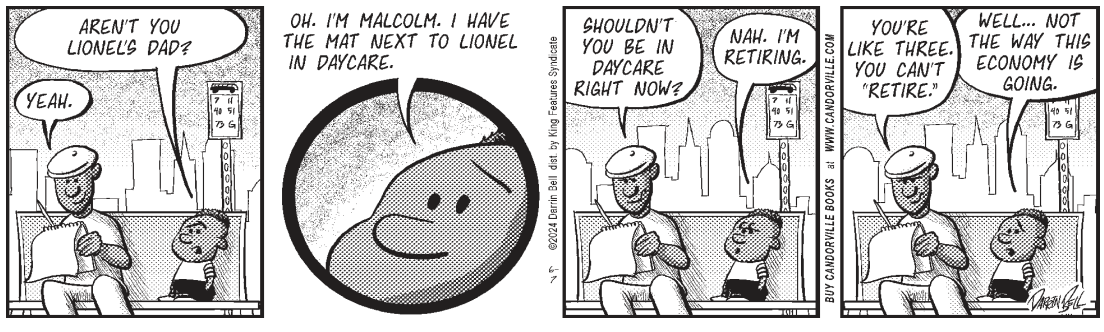


Candorville



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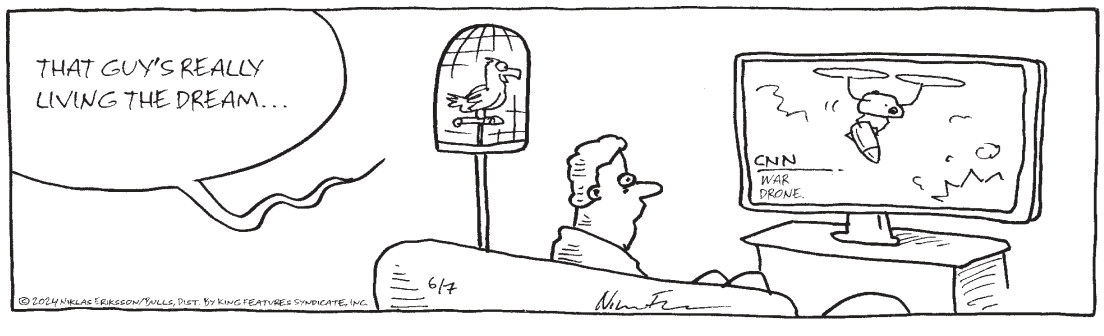
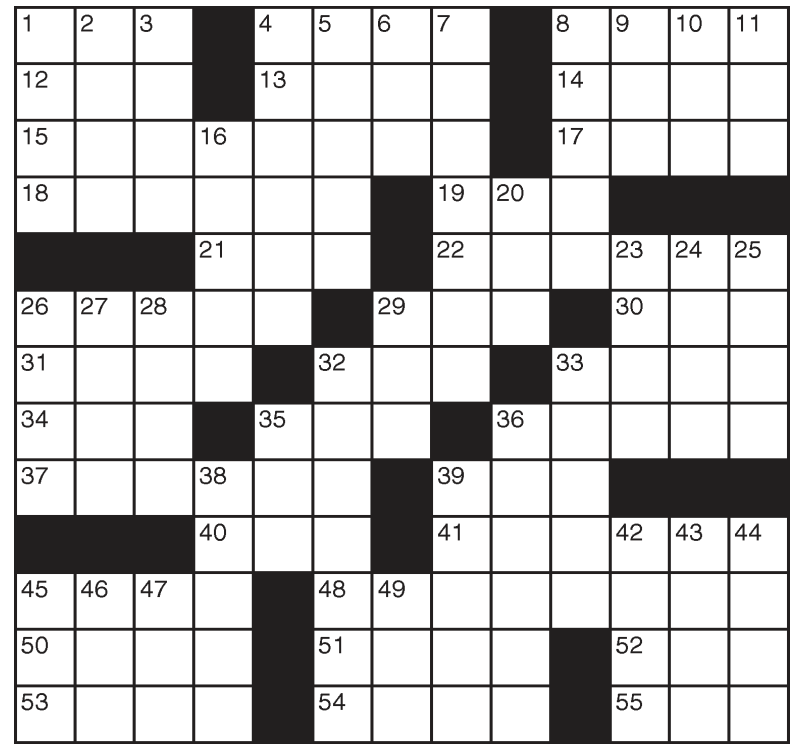


Beetle Bailey

Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Granola morsel
4 Poodle's name, in cartoons
8 Asset
12 Nipper's co.
13 "Be that — may ..."
14 Cracker name
15 Poison remedy
17 Cruising
18 Persevere
19 Hit hard
21 French article
22 Missing
26 Parsley piece
29 Business mag
30 Actress Ruby
31 Sulk
32 Astern
33 Goalie's goal
34 Foreman foe
35 Connections
36 Sportscaster Rashad
37 Like skim milk
39 Roman 401
40 Blackbird
41 New staffers
45 Activist Brockovich
48 One-fourth of a circle
50 Monarch
51 Celestial bear
52 FDR project
53 Pantheon members
54 Stately trees
55 Wd. from Roget

DOWN

1 Spoken
2 Teen's woe
3 "Toodle-oo!"
4 Getting tired
5 "This — for the record books!"
6 In shape
7 Recurring
8 Baby carriages
9 Fleur-de- —
10 Multipurpose truck
11 "Nobody Gets Me" singer
16 Arctic native
20 Jackson 5 hit song
23 Wax-coated cheese
24 Saint Petersburg's river
25 Ticked (off)
26 Bridge
27 Casual shirt
28 Botch up
29 Conditions
32 It's nothing new
33 Bake eggs
35 McKellen of "Richard III"
36 Nike rival
38 Vampire's teeth
39 Deep gorge
42 Vittles
43 Jealousy
44 Jazz legend Getz
45 Heart chart (Abbr.)
46 Carnival city
47 Ky. neighbor
49 Web address

Answer to Previous Puzzle

S	A	R	I		T	O	M	B		S	O	W
A	M	I	D		A	R	I	A		T	R	E
L	O	V	E	S	T	O	R	Y		O	E	D
T	R	E	A	T	S			E	A	R	L	S
			L	E		C	U	R	R	Y		
R	U	T	S		E	A	R		T	A	B	S
I	S	O			L	B	S			R	O	I
C	O	P	Y		M	I	A		S	C	O	T
		S	E	W	O	N		F	U			
T	U	T	S	I			T	E	N	D	E	R
I	T	O		S	T	O	R	Y	L	I	N	E
C	A	R		P	E	T	A		I	O	T	A
S	H	Y		S	T	O	P		T	R	O	D

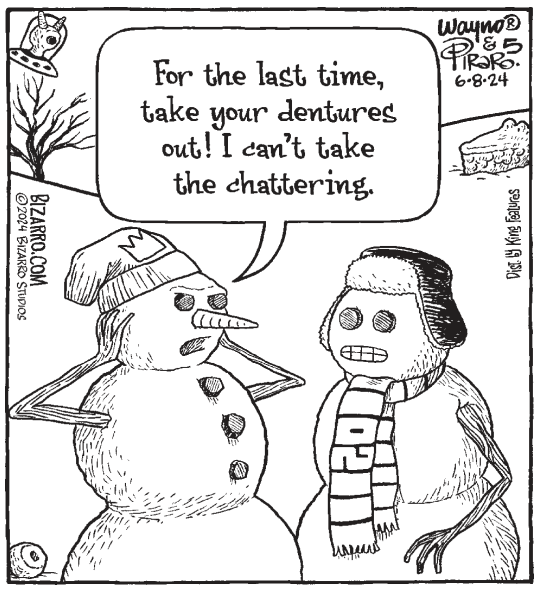
6-7 CRYPTOQUIP

R B K O Z X Z F R M W R V K J L I Z R P V I G W Z W J P "J O" M F J P "M O," N R H O K K O J K L Z J P Z I Z N Z P K M B U G F X F R U Z?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: NAME OF A BIG REAL-ESTATE AGENCY FOUNDED BY A WELL-KNOWN LITERARY SLEUTH: SHERLOCK HOMES.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: O equals H

Bizarro



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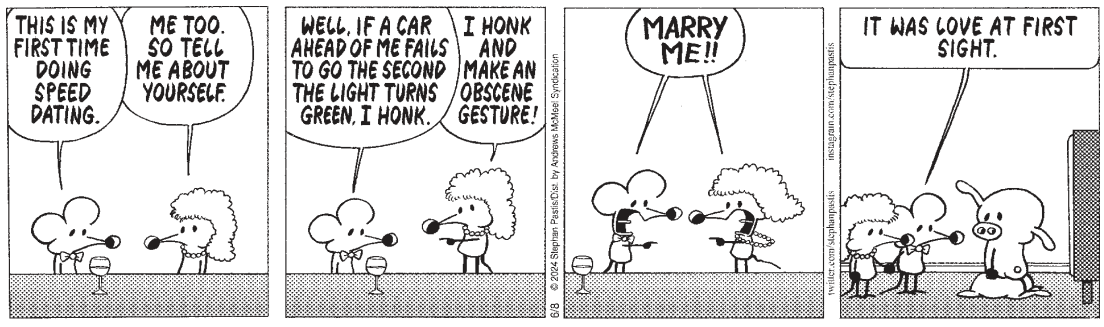
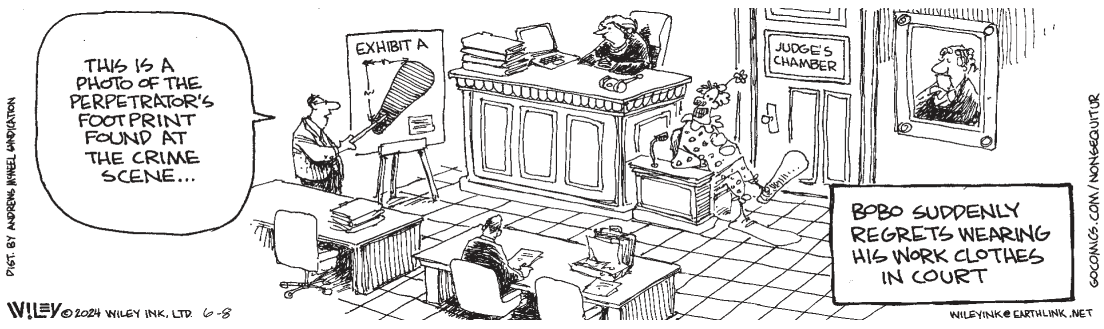
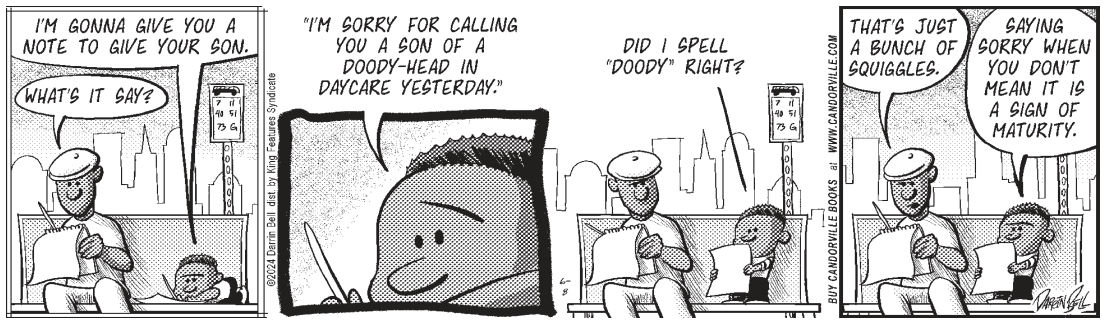


Non Sequitur



Candorville



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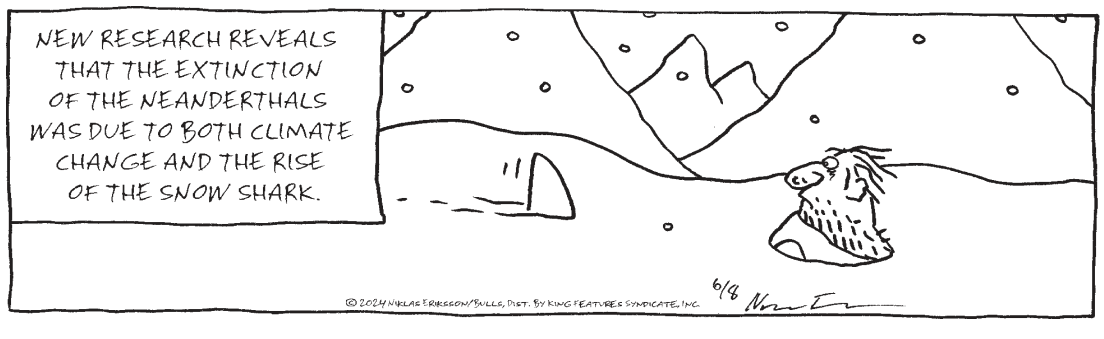
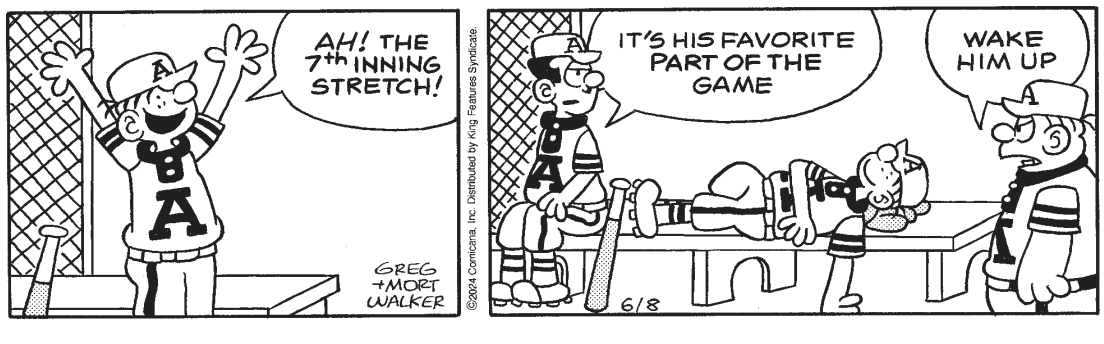


Beetle Bailey



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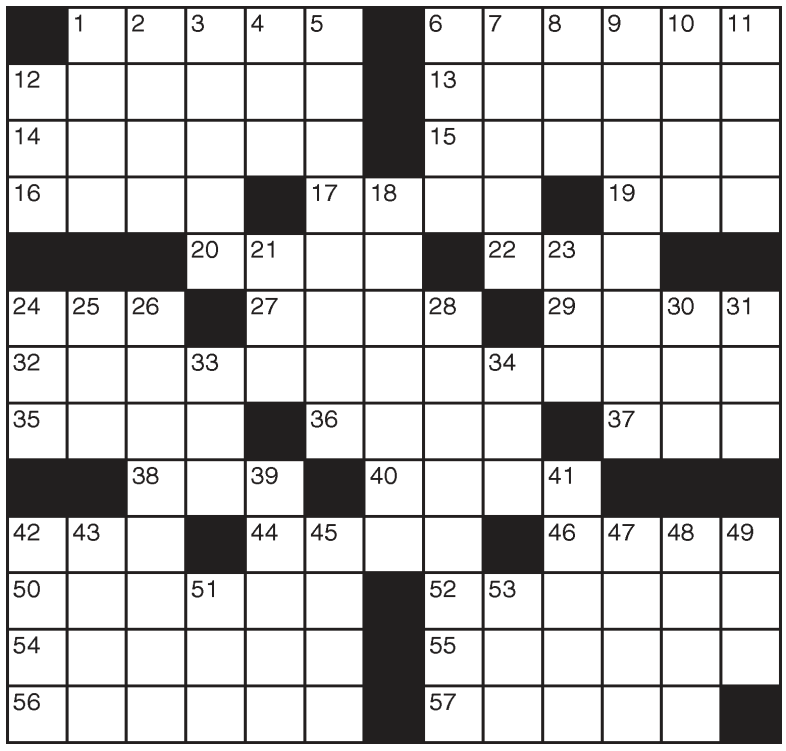

ACROSS

1 Bee bite
6 Mark of disgrace
12 Muse of astronomy
13 Try to rip open
14 "Mask" actor Eric
15 Writer Hemingway
16 Lighten
17 Eternities
19 Greek vowel
20 Body powder
22 Poetic dusk
24 Cranberry territory
27 Utah ski resort
29 Remain
32 Brunch dishes with Emmentaler
35 Hen pen
36 Practice pugilism
37 100 percent
38 Pas' mates
40 Russian river
42 Fr. holy woman
44 "— fan tutte"
46 Taxi alternative
50 Ban
52 Townies
54 Open, as a sleeping bag
55 Pendant with a photo
56 Easy two-pointers
57 Poppy drug

DOWN

1 Madrid miss (Abbr.)
2 New Mexico resort
3 Cove
4 Little louse
5 Swift antelopes
6 British gun
7 Succinct
8 007 creator Fleming
9 Chinese drink
10 Sail support
11 "— girl!"
12 Employ
18 "Armed" sea creature
21 Small batteries
23 Night school subj.
24 Abbr. in an email
25 Discoverer's call
26 Euclid's study
28 Texas city
30 Pac. counterpart
31 Designer monogram
33 Ecol. watchdog
34 Geological period
39 Place for a massage
41 Emmy-winner Susan
42 Motown genre
43 Albacore, e.g.
45 They give a hoot
47 Capital of Azerbaijan
48 Grade sch.
49 Letters after Q
51 Baseball's Gehrig
53 "Alley —"

Answer to Previous Puzzle

O	A	T		F	I	F	I		P	L	U	S
R	C	A		A	S	I	T		R	I	T	Z
A	N	T	I	D	O	T	E		A	S	E	A
L	E	A	N	I	N		R	A	M			
			U	N	E		A	B	S	E	N	T
S	P	R	I	G		I	N	C		D	E	E
P	O	U	T		A	F	T		S	A	V	E
A	L	I		I	N	S		A	H	M	A	D
N	O	N	F	A	T		C	D	I			
			A	N	I		H	I	R	E	E	S
E	R	I	N		Q	U	A	D	R	A	N	T
K	I	N	G		U	R	S	A		T	V	A
G	O	D	S		E	L	M	S		S	Y	N

6-8 CRYPTOQUIP

H UYNKDB LNUNWYP EQ XYTQLY EJY QMUYK QA N TQEENWY TJYYIY ANTEQKB, XRE HE MNIU'E HU EJY TRKPI.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF THE PERIODIC TABLE INCLUDED AN "AH" OR AN "OH," MIGHT THAT BE AN ELEMENT OF SURPRISE?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: T equals C

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OPINION

On immigration, too-little-too-late strikes again

BY GEORGE F. WILL
The Washington Post

In autopsies of Joe Biden's presidency, one word will be explanatory: disorder. From urban crime to campus tumults to inflation's comprehensive disruption — the currency becoming emaciated — Americans fear societal fraying. The most infuriating provocation is immigration. An essential attribute of national sovereignty — control of borders — has been sacrificed on the altar of "equity," with collateral damage far from the southwestern border. Far-flung communities — their hospitals, their schools — experience the truth that "every state is a border state."

A young man from Honduras is released into the national interior, where he replicates a pattern as old as immigration, going where other Hondurans have settled, in cities far from the Rio Grande. He has responded to incentives concocted on the banks of the Potomac.

Biden's syntactical labyrinths are amusing, until they aren't. In a 2019 Democratic presidential primary debate, he said: "I would in fact make sure that there is, that we immediately surge to the border — all those people are seeking asylum. They deserve to be heard." They heard *him*.

When caravans of migrants headed north during Biden's presidency, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said they considered Biden "the immigrant president." Many headed for cities that performative progressives had declared "sanctuaries" that would not cooperate with federal immigration enforcement. Chicago, a sanctuary since 1985, is now buckling under the cost of its moralizing. In New York, a sanctuary since 1989, illegal immigration "will destroy" the city, Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat, says. Virtue signaling has costs.

On his first presidential day, Biden committed his administration to "advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality." His Department of Homeland Security said it would apply Biden's words "in the immigration and enforcement context."

Writing in City Journal about "a border crisis by design," Jeffrey H. Anderson, president of the American Main Street Initiative, calls today's crisis the result of Biden's "unprecedented refusal to enforce federal immigration law," which requires that asylum seekers be detained rather than released while their claims are adjudicated.

So, many aliens arriving at Biden's deliberately porous border sought rather than evaded Border Patrol officers. Anderson says that in December 2020, Donald Trump's last full presidential month, 17 aliens were released into the nation. Two Decembers later, 191,142 were. Biden's administration justified this erasure of law as "prosecutorial discretion." Also writing in City Journal, the Manhattan Institute's Steven Malanga says, "By late 2022, the immigration court backlog had swelled to 1.6 million people," who could largely ignore this coagulated process.

In August 2020, officials reported detaining five attempted entries in the El Paso, Texas, sector, then operating under a presidential order allowing officials to summarily expel illegal border crossers. In August 2022, that order having been rescinded, officials detained 3,453. In Kinney County, Texas, sheriff's deputies made 67 arrests for smuggling in 2021, but 3,045 in 2022, when security cameras showed about 21,500 people crossing the border with impunity.

Polls have concentrated Biden's mind. On Tuesday, he announced that he will faithfully execute his executive order intended to contain the wreckage wrought by his refusal to perform his core constitutional duty to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed." New restrictions will take effect when illegal crossings exceed 2,500 a day. The arithmetic is: 912,500 (approximately the population of Biden's Delaware) in a year could melt into the nation, as under today's system. Regarding border security, as when combating inflation or aiding Ukraine, Biden is a too-little-too-late president.

Presidents from both parties have become geysers of executive orders, imposing tariffs, essentially banning internal combustion vehicles, forgiving student debts, altering the legal status of millions of immigrants, etc. What fun.

Until it isn't. Until the public, taught by presidential highhandedness that presidents can do whatever they please, blames them for whatever problems persist. This is both unfair and richly deserved. Today's Congress, which has been well-described as cable television's largest green room, escapes blame for the immigration disaster because the public, fixated on the presidency, knows that, for Congress, governance is a spectator sport.

This nation, with an aging population, increasing life expectancy, declining birthrate and entitlements transferring trillions of dollars from employees to retirees, needs lots of legal immigrants to replenish its workforce. That the government cannot provide for this is a failure second only to the nation's fiscal shambles. In five months, Biden, who is too busy "saving democracy" to attend to mundane matters of public order, might find that the immigration inundation is the most politically lethal of his multiplying failures.

How states can optimize opioid settlement funds

BY KELLY A. O'CONNOR
Chicago Tribune

Kudos to John Oliver and HBO's "Last Week Tonight" for their coverage of the opioid crisis and the resultant settlement. Many states are struggling to use the settlement funds effectively, and some are already repeating the waste, fraud and abuse involving Big Tobacco settlement funds ($206 billion) in the 1990s. But it's still early, and states can course-correct and optimize use of the money.

Opioid settlement funds began coming to states in 2022. More than $50 billion will be distributed to states and municipalities to fix the opioid crisis over the next 18 years, but so far, results have been underwhelming. The lack of transparency prevents us from knowing where money is being spent — and understanding what's working and what's not.

States are struggling to balance speed with efficacy. State and local leaders are facing pressure from individuals and families, community members, companies (including fraudsters), potential grant recipients and the media for money to be dispersed quickly. But few states have a strategic plan or the capabilities in place to ensure transparency, effective oversight and performance measurement to ensure dollars are spent on the right things.

Despite the pressure to spend and urgency of this mission, it's a big mistake to hand out money without a clearly defined strategy, based on user research in communities to understand needs and root causes, and measurable outcomes. Executing the strategy will require a plan across an ecosystem of opioid crisis drivers such as treatment, education, prevention, law enforcement and criminal justice, employment, housing, harm reduction and other social services. States need to start small, measure and improve continuously based on data and feedback.

■ Assemble the right team. States need a core team of experts in substance use disorder and large-scale program management. Key roles would include a chief financial manager, grants manager, medical experts, technology experts, outreach lead and senior program manager. Small, empowered teams with the right skills could make a tremendous amount of progress and work with bureaucracy to get things done quickly.

■ Understand needs and root causes before any "solutioning." A common problem that comes with large amounts of funding is that teams start to build solutions right away — before they talk to the people they are trying to help. It's critical to work directly with individuals struggling with addiction, their families, and other stakeholders to understand root causes and needs. It's likely that 80% of needs are similar across all states, so identifying the 20% of unique needs in a state is critical.

■ Create a strategic plan. You can't fix just one part of the opioid crisis (e.g., law enforcement) without addressing the entire ecosystem. Understanding how dependencies work across treatment, education and prevention, law enforcement and criminal justice, mental health, housing, employment, harm reduction and other social services is critical to success.

■ Set up secure technology to enable accountability and oversight. States will need secure, digital tools to not only track, allocate and report on settlement funds, but also to communicate progress. Hiring skilled technology leaders would ensure states have tools to share information with each other and the public.

■ Start small — with everything. States should not be awarding multimillion-dollar grants immediately. Start with micro-grants (less than $50,000) and measure results, so recipients can prove their capabilities before getting larger sums of funding. Not everything is going to work — and that's OK. Fail fast, and don't sink good money after bad. Take a "test-and-learn" approach with everything.

■ Take a transparent approach from Day 1. Build a culture of transparency from the start. A well-designed, secure website that communicates relevant information is a proactive way to keep stakeholders informed. Enhance the website as you go.

The opioid crisis continues to metastasize across the country, ravaging communities and destroying families. States can balance speed with efficacy by taking a more strategic, results-driven and iterative approach, while building a culture of collaboration and transparency from the start.

Kelly A. O'Connor lives in Washington and worked with the Barack Obama and Donald Trump administrations. She lost her sister Jenny to the opioid crisis in 2017.

SCOREBOARD/SPORTS BRIEFS

COLLEGE BASEBALL

NCAA Division I Super Regionals

Best-of-three; x-if necessary
At Knoxville, Tenn.
Friday: Tennessee (53-11) vs. Evansville (38-24)
Saturday: Game 2
x-Sunday: Game 3
At Tallahassee, Fla.
Friday: Florida St. (45-15) vs. UConn (35-24)
Saturday: Game 2
x-Sunday: Game 3
At Charlottesville, Va.
Friday: Virginia (44-15) vs. Kansas St. (35-24)
Saturday: Game 2
x-Sunday: Game 3
At Morgantown, W.V.
Friday: West Virginia (36-22) vs. North Carolina. (45-14)
Saturday: Game 2
x-Sunday: Game 3
At Lexington, Ky.
Saturday: Kentucky (43-14) vs. Oregon St. (45-14)
Sunday: Game 2
x-Monday: Game 3
At Athens, Ga.
Saturday: Georgia (42-15) vs. NC State (36-20)
Sunday: Game 2
x-Monday: Game 3
At Clemson, S.C.
Saturday: Clemson (44-14) vs. Florida (32-28)
Sunday: Game 2
x-Monday: Game 3
At College Station, Texas
Saturday: Texas A&M (47-13) vs. Oregon (40-18)
Sunday: Game 2
x-Monday: Game 3

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Connecticut	9	0	1.000	—
New York	8	2	.800	1½
Atlanta	4	3	.571	4
Chicago	3	5	.375	5½
Indiana	2	9	.182	8
Washington	0	9	.000	9

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	7	2	.778	—
Las Vegas	5	2	.714	1
Seattle	6	3	.667	1
Phoenix	4	6	.400	3½
Dallas	3	5	.375	3½
Los Angeles	2	7	.222	5

Tuesday's games
Connecticut 76, Washington 59
New York 88, Chicago 75
Seattle 80, Phoenix 62

Wednesday's games
Las Vegas 95, Dallas 81
Minnesota 86, Los Angeles 62

Thursday's games
Chicago at Washington
New York at Atlanta

Friday's games
Indiana at Washington
Dallas at Los Angeles
Minnesota at Phoenix
Seattle at Las Vegas

Saturday's games
New York at Connecticut
Atlanta at Chicago

AUTO RACING

NASCAR Cup points leaders

Through June 3

1.	Denny Hamlin	534
2.	Kyle Larson	513
3.	Chase Elliott	507
4.	Martin Truex Jr.	490
5.	William Byron	488
6.	Tyler Reddick	473
7.	Ty Gibbs	465
8.	Christopher Bell	437
9.	Brad Keselowski	437
10.	Alex Bowman	417
11.	Ross Chastain	417
12.	Ryan Blaney	405
13.	Bubba Wallace	371
14.	Chris Buescher	368
15.	Chase Briscoe	358
16.	Joey Logano	354
17.	Kyle Busch	348
18.	Austin Cindric	305
19.	Daniel Suárez	290
20.	Josh Berry	264
21.	Carson Hocevar	259
22.	Todd Gilliland	258
23.	Noah Gragson	255
24.	Michael McDowell	255
25.	John H. Nemechek	228
26.	Erik Jones	228

COLLEGE SOFTBALL

NCAA Division I World Series

At Oklahoma City
Double elimination
Thursday, May 30
UCLA 4, Alabama 1
Oklahoma 9 Duke 1, 6 innings
Texas 4, Stanford 0
Florida 1, Oklahoma St. 0
Friday, May 31
Alabama 2, Duke 1, Duke eliminated
Stanford 8, Oklahoma St. 0, 6 innings, Oklahoma St. eliminated
Saturday, June 1
Oklahoma 1, UCLA 0
Texas 10, Florida 0
Sunday, June 2
Florida 6, Alabama 4, Alabama eliminated
Stanford 3, UCLA 1, UCLA eliminated
Monday, June 3
Florida 9, Oklahoma 3
Texas 1, Stanford 0, Stanford eliminated
Tuesday, June 4
Oklahoma 6, Florida 5, Florida eliminated

Championship Series
Best-of-three; x-if necessary
Wednesday: Oklahoma 8, Texas 3
Thursday: Oklahoma vs. Texas
x-Friday: Texas vs. Oklahoma

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League

BOSTON RED SOX —Reinstated OF Tyler O'Neill from the 10-day IL. Optioned C Tyler Heineman to Worcester (IL). Placed RHP Chris Martin on the 15-day IL, retroactive to June 2. Recalled RHP Zack Kelly from Worcester.

DETROIT TIGERS — Placed RHP Alex Faedo on the 15-day IL. Recalled RHP Mason Englert from Toledo (IL).

HOUSTON ASTROS — Optioned LHP Parker Mushinski to Sugar Land (PCL). Selected the contract of RHP Nick Hernandez from Sugar Land. Transferred RHP Jose Urquidy to the 60-day IL from the 15-day IL.

KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Agreed to terms with 3B Kevin Padlo on a minor league contract.

OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Reinstated RHP Joe Boyle from the 15-day IL and optioned him to Las Vegas (PCL)..

TAMPA BAY RAYS — Reinstated RHP Zach Eflin from the 15-day IL. Optioned RHP Justin Sterner to Durham (IL).

TEXAS RANGERS — Sent 2B Justin Foscue to Arizona Complex League (ACL) Rangers on a rehab assignment.

National League

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS — Sent SS Geraldo Perdomo to Reno (PCL) on a rehab assignment.

MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Recalled LHP Aaron Ashby and RHP Tobias Myers from Nashville (IL). Placed LHP Robert Gasser on the 15-day IL, retroactive to June 2. Optioned RHP Janson Junk to Nashville.

NEW YORK METS — Selected the contract of C Joe Hudson and optioned him to Syracuse (IL). Transferred RHP Shintaro Fujinami to the 60-day IL from the 15-day IL. Released C Omar Narvaez and RHP Jorge Lopez.

SAN DIEGO PADRES — Agreed to terms with LHP Luke Westphal on a minor league contract.

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Optioned OF Luis Matos to Sacramento (PCL). Reinstated LF Austin Slater from the 7-day IL. Sent RHP Austin Warren to the Arizona Complex League (ACL) Giants on a rehab assignment.

BASKETBALL
Women's National Basketball Association

CONNECTICUT SUN — Signed G Veronica Burton to a rest-of-season contract. Waived C Queen Egbo.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

BUFFALO BILLS — Placed OL Tommy Doyle on the reserve/physically unable to perform (PUP) list.

CAROLINA PANTHERS — Released OL Ilm Manning with an injury settlement.

CLEVELAND BROWNS — Announced head coach Kevin Stefanski and general manager Andrew Berry received contract extensions. Signed S Brady Breeze. Waived K Lucas Havrisik.

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Waived WR David White with an injury designation.

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS — Signed draft pick WR Xavier Worthy.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Released C Corey Linsley.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Signed draft pick G Layden Robinson.

PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Signed DBs Cameron Sutton and Grayland Arnold. Waived WR Izaiah Gathings.

TENNESSEE TITANS — Signed draft pick DT T'Vondre Sweat.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

LOS ANGELES KINGS — Signed LW Andre Lee to a one-year, two-way contract.

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

LAFC — Signed G Thomas Hasal to a contract through the 2025 season.

MINNESOTA UNITED — Signed F Samuel Shashoua to a contract through the 2024 season pending receipt of his international transfer certificate (ITC) and P-1 visa.

SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES — Named Vassili Cremanzidis head sporting strategist.

COLLEGE

RANDOLPH-MACON — Named Johnny Kennevan assistant men's basketball coach.

PRO SOCCER

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Inter Miami CF	10	3	5	35	42	27
Cincinnati	10	3	3	33	23	16
NYCFC	9	5	2	29	24	17
New York	8	3	5	29	29	22
Charlotte FC	7	6	4	25	18	18
Toronto FC	7	7	3	24	26	26
Columbus	6	2	6	24	21	13
Philadelphia	4	4	8	20	27	23
Nashville	4	5	7	19	20	22
D.C. United	4	6	7	19	25	31
Orlando City	4	7	5	17	16	24
CF Montréal	4	7	5	17	23	35
Atlanta	4	8	4	16	22	21
Chicago	3	8	6	15	17	29
New England	3	10	1	10	11	27

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Real Salt Lake	9	2	6	33	36	19
LAFC	9	4	3	30	28	19
Minnesota	8	3	4	28	27	20
LA Galaxy	7	3	7	28	31	25
Vancouver	7	5	4	25	24	19
Austin FC	6	6	5	23	21	25
Houston	6	6	4	22	18	18
Colorado	6	7	4	22	29	31
Portland	5	7	5	20	32	32
Seattle	4	6	6	18	19	19
St Louis City	3	4	8	17	23	25
FC Dallas	3	8	4	13	17	24
San Jose	3	11	2	11	24	39
Sporting KC	2	9	5	11	24	31

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Saturday, June 1
Seattle at Columbus ppd.
Toronto FC 2, D.C. United 2, tie
St Louis City 3, Miami 3, tie
New York 1, Orlando City 0
CF Montréal 2, Philadelphia 2, tie
Chicago 2, LA Galaxy 1
Minnesota 3, Sporting Kansas City 1
New England 2, Nashville 1
Real Salt Lake 5, Austin FC 1
Vancouver 2, Colorado 1
Los Angeles FC 1, FC Dallas 0
Houston 2, Portland 2, tie

Sunday, June 2
Charlotte FC 3, Atlanta 2

Saturday's games
New York at New England
Seattle at Sporting Kansas City
FC Dallas at Minnesota
Portland at St Louis City

Friday, June 14
Columbus at New York City FC

Saturday, June 15
Houston at Atlanta
D.C. United at Charlotte FC
Real Salt Lake at CF Montréal
Vancouver at New England
Nashville at New York
Los Angeles FC at Orlando City
Miami at Philadelphia
Chicago at Toronto FC
St Louis City at FC Dallas
Austin FC at Colorado
Sporting Kansas City at LA Galaxy
Cincinnati at San Jose
Minnesota at Seattle

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Orlando	8	0	3	27	20	10
Kansas City	7	0	4	25	26	15
Washington	8	3	0	24	25	16
Portland	6	4	1	19	24	16
Gotham FC	5	2	3	18	10	7
Chicago	5	5	1	16	15	15
North Carolina	5	6	0	15	13	14
Louisville	2	2	6	12	15	12
San Diego	3	4	3	12	9	9
Houston	3	5	3	12	11	18
Angel City	3	5	2	11	11	16
Bay FC	3	8	0	9	15	23
Seattle	2	8	1	7	11	20
Utah Royals FC	1	9	1	4	6	20

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Friday's games
Houston at Louisville
Orlando at San Diego

Saturday's games
Angel City at Gotham FC
Washington at Utah Royals FC
Bay FC at Chicago
North Carolina at Portland

Sunday's games
Seattle at Kansas City

Friday, June 14
Chicago at Kansas City

Saturday, June 15
Gotham FC at Louisville
San Diego at Washington
Orlando at North Carolina
Angel City at Houston

BRIEFLY

Expanded CFP set to begin Dec. 20

Associated Press

The first year of the 12-team College Football Playoff will kick off with a first-round game on Dec. 20 and conclude with the title game one month later in Atlanta.

The CFP announced its entire schedule Wednesday. The four first-round games will be Dec. 20 and 21. ABC and ESPN will televise games Friday and Saturday night with an 8 p.m. EST kickoff, while TNT will have the Dec. 21 afternoon games at 12 p.m. and 4 p.m. The afternoon games will go up against a pair of NFL games with Houston-Kansas City at 1 p.m. and Baltimore-Pittsburgh at 4:30 p.m.

The four first-round games, which will be played on college campuses, will be announced Dec. 8. TNT has a pair of games through a sublicense with ESPN.

ESPN's $7.8 billion deal with the CFP, which was announced in March, allowed it to sublicense games to other networks. Financial terms of the sublicense were not announced.

The quarterfinals, semifinals and championship will air on ESPN.

The top four conference champions will receive first-round byes. The quarterfinals will begin Dec. 31 with the Fiesta Bowl at 7:30 p.m. New Year's Day will kickoff with the Peach Bowl at 1 p.m. followed by the Rose Bowl in its traditional 5 p.m. spot and the Sugar Bowl at 8:45 p.m.

The semifinals are the Orange Bowl on Jan. 9 and Cotton Bowl on Jan. 10. Both have 7:30 p.m. start times before the championship game takes place Jan. 20 in Atlanta.

Browns give extensions to Stefanski, Berry

CLEVELAND — For most of two decades, the Browns were an NFL laughingstock — often dysfunctional, rarely relevant.

Kevin Stefanski and Andrew Berry helped change Cleveland.

And they're not going anywhere.

The Browns rewarded Stefanski, the reigning AP Coach of the Year, and Berry, one of the league's bright, young general managers, with multiyear contract extensions Wednesday after they brought success and stability to an organization that had little before their arrival.

The extensions have been expected for months and were announced as the Browns were on the practice field.

Terms of the deals were not immediately known. Both Stefanski and Berry had one year left on five-year deals signed in 2020.

Before Stefanski and Berry were hired, the Browns had two winning seasons, one postseason appearance, a 101-234-1 record — including an 0-16 finish in 2017 — in 21 years since their 1999 expansion rebirth.

Stefanski led the Browns to an 11-6 record and a playoff appearance last season despite a rash of injuries, including losing quarterback Deshaun Watson with a shoulder injury after six starts. Cleveland started — and won — with four different QBs.

Daniel, Robinson-O'Hagan complete track sweeps

EUGENE, Ore. — Kentucky pole vaulter Keaton Daniel and shot putter Tarik Robinson-O'Hagan of Mississippi both completed NCAA indoor/outdoor sweeps on Wednesday night at the outdoor track and field championships.

Daniel cleared 18 feet, 7¼ inches to become the first Wildcat to win both indoor and outdoor NCAA pole vault championships in the same season.

Robinson-O'Hagan led wire to wire in reaching 68-6 on his final throw to become the 17th thrower in Division I history to claim indoor and outdoor titles in a season.

USC topped the team standings with 19 points. Georgia was second with 13, followed by California with 12.5.

JC Stevenson of USC won the long jump with a personal record of 26-11¾. Stevenson, whose previous best was 26-5, moved from seventh place to win the event on his final attempt with the third-best mark in program history.

Rowan Hamilton became Cal's first men's hammer champion since 1922 with a collegiate-best throw, and a school record of 253.2. It was his fourth national collegiate title, with the previous three coming while at the NAIA-member British Columbia.

New Mexico freshman Habtom Samuel took a tumble in the 10,000-meter race before finishing with a winning time of 28 minutes, 7.82 seconds. Samuel became the first male in school history to win an NCAA outdoor 5,000 or 10,000 title. Weini Kelati won the women's 10,000 in 2019 for the Lobos.

Marc Minichello led from the first javelin throw and put it away with a 264-9 for his second NCAA title — but first with Georgia.

TRACK AND FIELD

‘Mo’s Throwers’ practically family

Sought-out coach has put together large group of international athletes

BY JANIE MCCAULEY
Associated Press

BERKELEY, Calif. Mohamad Saatara unpacks the laser measuring tape and focuses in as discus world record-holder Mykolas Alekna steps into the cage and lets one fly.

Alekna methodically makes his way to where the throw has landed and waits for Saatara to announce the result: “70.60,” the well-traveled University of California coach shouts out.

Alekna moved across the world from Lithuania to Berkeley so he could train with Saatara and attend school. He is part of a close-knit community of athletes around the globe, some of them Olympians who have stayed well after their collegiate careers to train under Saatara.

“We have a really great group here, a lot of international students, a lot Americans, too, so a very nice mix,” Alekna said. “I’m really happy I can be friends with people from around the world. I’m really happy to be a part of this group.”

Caisa-Marie Lindfors is from Sweden and transferred from Florida State. Olympic hammer thrower Camryn Rogers came from Canada. And Carolina Visca from Italy.

They’re Mo’s Throwers. They’re practically family.

Coach Mo, as they call him, is at the center of their team culture.

“Mo is this group. The main reason most people are here is Mo,” Dutch hammer thrower Audrey Jacobs said. “I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for Mo so I’m very thankful for him. Moving away is a really big step, but totally worth it. We have such an amazing group and a really, really good coach. It’s a big decision, but Mo made it a pretty easy one.”

Others share that sentiment.

Lindfors strolls across the grass at Edwards Stadium between discus sets to place a tiny Swedish flag into the ground marking the spot of her throw. They recently started doing this — Jacobs’ idea to keep everyone from mixing up their throws.

There’s a British flag. An American flag, too.

“It’s really cool to see how much diversity we have on our team and how we all kind of have our own little thing like this,” Jacobs said.

Rogers, the world hammer throw champion, arrives midafternoon to get to work. She placed fifth in the hammer throw at the Tokyo Olympics, the highest-ever finish by a Canadian woman in the event.

This is her seventh year training under Saatara, and her world title last year in Budapest was the first by a Canadian woman in 20 years.

> **“Mo is this group. The main reason most people are here is Mo.”**
>
> **Audrey Jacobs**
> Dutch hammer thrower

Rogers immediately sensed a good vibe around the program when she made her official recruiting visit.

“The team was one of the things that drew me in a lot,” she said. “My flight home is only two hours, I’m really not that far, but still you have a visa, you’re far away from your family, so many things are changing all at once when you go to college, then when you’re in a different country it’s even more.

“So being able to find a group of people that I thought I could come into and have a second family with and feel supported by was really important to me.”

In a fold-out chair behind the throwing cage sits Saatara. The Iranian-born coach records video of the athletes and offers his wisdom to both college and pro athletes who are here because of his outstanding reputation. He has coached everywhere from Michigan and Northern Arizona to Cal Poly Pomona and his alma mater, Cal State Los Angeles, where he was an All-American hammer thrower.

“Don’t tighten up on the hammer like that,” Saatara instructs Kegan Schroeter.

“Patient, patient, more patiently. See, now you have more power,” he offers Lindfors. “There you go. That’s pretty good.”

Saatara cherishes this tranquil space tucked away in their secluded track complex in busy downtown Berkeley — only a couple of exceptional Alekna heaves away from a bustling main street through campus.

Coach Mo hopes to have as many as 15 of his athletes at the Paris Olympics this summer representing multiple countries.

“He’s one of the best coaches in the world,” Alekna said.

And Saatara takes great pride in the diversity of his program.

“I try to make it an environment where it’s not necessarily calm but peaceful, so you can focus really well and do your work,” Saatara said. “Throwing takes a lot of mental effort, energy and focus. We try to make an environment, it’s obviously very energetic but you want to make it a peaceful environment.”

Alekna used a redshirt season to focus on the Paris Games. Competing unattached, he landed a world-record discus throw of 74.35 meters on April 14 in Oklahoma, topping the previous world-best set in 1986 by 28 centimeters — a mark his father, Virgilijus, just missed in his day.

“It’s an enormous accomplishment, because the record he broke was the oldest record in track and field,” Saatara said.

“We’re not thinking about chasing records, we’re just thinking about preparing for the main championships.”

Like Alekna and so many others, Visca craved a chance to live in a new place, get her education and throw the javelin after spending her entire life in Rome.

“I was like ‘OK, I want something different for my life,’ so coach Mo was really welcoming with me,” she said. “I think it will be one of the best experiences I will ever have in my life.”

PHOTOS BY JEFF CHIU/AP

Lithuanian discus world-record holder Mykolas Alekna prepares to throw during practice May 2 in Berkeley, Calif. He set the record with a throw of 74.35 meters on April 14 in Oklahoma.

California track and field coach Mohamad Saatara, left, talks with Sweden’s Caisa-Marie Lindfors at practice. The man known as Coach Mo hopes to have as many as 15 of his athletes at the Paris Olympics this summer.

BASEBALL

MLB scoreboard

American League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	44	19	.698	—
Baltimore	39	21	.650	3½
Boston	31	31	.500	12½
Tampa Bay	31	31	.500	12½
Toronto	29	32	.475	14

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	40	20	.667	—
Kansas City	36	26	.581	5
Minnesota	33	28	.541	7½
Detroit	31	31	.500	10
Chicago	15	47	.242	26

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Seattle	35	28	.556	—
Texas	30	32	.484	4½
Houston	28	35	.444	7
Oakland	25	38	.397	10
Los Angeles	24	38	.387	10½

National League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	44	19	.698	—
Atlanta	34	25	.576	8
Washington	27	34	.443	16
New York	27	35	.435	16½
Miami	21	41	.339	22½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	36	26	.581	—
Chicago	31	31	.500	5
St. Louis	29	31	.483	6
Pittsburgh	29	32	.475	6½
Cincinnati	29	33	.468	7

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	38	25	.603	—
San Diego	32	33	.492	7
San Francisco	30	33	.476	8
Arizona	29	33	.468	8½
Colorado	21	40	.344	16

Wednesday's games

Boston 9, Atlanta 0
St. Louis 4, Houston 2
Tampa Bay 5, Miami 3
Toronto 3, Baltimore 2
N.Y. Yankees 9, Minnesota 5
Texas 9, Detroit 1
Chicago Cubs 7, Chicago White Sox 6
Oakland 2, Seattle 1
L.A. Angels 3, San Diego 2
N.Y. Mets 9, Washington 1
Philadelphia 2, Milwaukee 0
Cincinnati 12, Colorado 7
San Francisco 9, Arizona 3
Pittsburgh 10, L.A. Dodgers 6
Kansas City at Cleveland, ppd.

Thursday's games

Baltimore at Toronto
Kansas City at Cleveland
Seattle at Oakland
L.A. Dodgers at Pittsburgh
Atlanta at Washington
Minnesota at N.Y. Yankees
Chicago Cubs at Cincinnati
Colorado at St. Louis
Boston at Chicago White Sox
Arizona at San Diego

Friday's games

Milwaukee (TBD) at Detroit (Olson 1-6)
Minnesota (Ryan 4-4) at Pittsburgh (Keller 7-3)
Atlanta (Sale 8-1) at Washington (Irvin 3-5)
Baltimore (Irvin 5-2) at Tampa Bay (Civale 2-4)
L.A. Dodgers (Yamamoto 6-2) at N.Y. Yankees (Poteet 2-0)
Chicago Cubs (Steele 0-2) at Cincinnati (Lodolo 5-2)
Cleveland (Allen 6-3) at Miami (Weathers 3-5)
San Francisco (Webb 4-5) at Texas (Lorenzen 3-3)
Boston (Criswell 3-2) at Chicago White Sox (Crochet 5-5)
Seattle (Miller 5-5) at Kansas City (Lynch 0-0)
Colorado (Gomber 1-3) at St. Louis (Lynn 2-3)
Houston (Valdez 4-3) at L.A. Angels (Canning 2-5)
Toronto (Bassitt 6-6) at Oakland (TBD)
Arizona (Pfaadt 2-4) at San Diego (King 4-4)

Saturday's games

Philadelphia vs. N.Y. Mets at London
San Francisco at Texas
Minnesota at Pittsburgh
Atlanta at Washington
Toronto at Oakland
Chicago Cubs at Cincinnati
Seattle at Kansas City
Baltimore at Tampa Bay
Boston at Chicago White Sox
Milwaukee at Detroit
Colorado at St. Louis
Cleveland at Miami
L.A. Dodgers at N.Y. Yankees
Arizona at San Diego
Houston at L.A. Angels

UK league small but full of passion

By Ken Maguire
Associated Press

LONDON — This might be the year, mate. The London Mets are the defending champs, but they're looking beatable.

The London Capitals have been close, and they've got ace pitcher Masa Hashiguchi.

Talk about a subway series.

These two National Baseball League teams meet for the first time this season later this month.

And they might meet at the pub afterward.

Baseball at the highest club level in Britain is competitive, but it's a league in which babysitters are just as important as balls and strikes. Teams are a mélange of locals and expats — some with college and minor league experience. Only one guy throws 90 mph. Just about everyone works or goes to school.

Sometimes just getting to midweek practice is a task.

"A Zoom call — I might have my baseball pants on and still a dress shirt on the top, getting ready to run out the door as soon as I can," Capitals manager Cole Ryan said.

The destination is Finsbury Park, home to both the Mets and Capitals. They're part of the same club — headlined by the Mets. The London Mets Baseball & Softball Club is the largest in the United Kingdom and the Mets have won the NBL title for seven years running.

The Capitals were dominating a lower division, so they moved up, and they've been giving the Mets a good run. Good enough to get to the finals, anyway, where they've lost to the Mets the past five years.

"It's more like a big brother, little brother situation in a sense," Mets coach Derrick Cook explained at a recent game in Enfield, just north of London. "It's like, 'Hey, the big brother is good at everything and the little brother is always trying to beat the big brother.'"

It's as if the Mets are the New York Yankees, and the Capitals are, well, the Mets.

The New York version of the Mets are in town this weekend for a two-game series against the Philadelphia Phillies.

Soccer is the dominant sport here, with the current focus on England's chances in the upcoming European Championship. There are also eyeballs on the cricket T20 World Cup.

Indeed, the Finsbury Park baseball diamond had been used for cricket until being abandoned because it was too easily waterlogged. Players unwind and install the outfield fence — a flimsy plastic piece anchored by stakes — before each game, and the leftover cricket pavilion has become handy as a baseball clubhouse with moss on the roof and Mets' trophies inside.

Ken Maguire/AP

London Capitals pitcher Masa Hashiguchi, right, is the ace of the squad and has helped foster a strong rivalry with the London Mets, the reigning National Baseball League champions.

The club rents the facilities from the city. It's a short walk from the Manor House tube station to the gap in the wooden fence that separates the field from a busy street. They still use equipment the Yankees donated in 2019 during MLB's debut in Europe — baseballs are in sparse supply in the U.K., so the Mets keep their gameday stockpile under lock and key.

Cook, a Chicago native and IT network engineer, played college baseball and — this comes up a lot — did a Google search when he moved to London in 2009 and found the Mets.

The Mets attract some of the best players. Many are in their 20s and 30s. A handful of youngsters have come through the system and played some U.S. college ball. London native Freddy Mosier has pitched for the Mets, Britain's national team and Middlebury College in Vermont.

The league is amateur but the Mets have in the past used "import" players — not paid to play exactly, but rather to work as a coach, help with groundskeeping and promote the game in schools.

There's no import this year because the visa prices have increased, but any new player is still free to join a team.

Geremias Valencia, who had been in the Los Angeles Dodgers system, was so new to the Mets last month that after hitting a home run in his first game, a teammate was overheard asking "What's his name?" while the Panamanian outfielder was rounding the bases.

MLB World Tour: London Series
Philadelphia Phillies (44-19)
vs. New York Mets (27-35)
AFN-Sports
7 p.m. Saturday CET
2 a.m. Sunday JKT

Hashiguchi, the Capitals' ace, said he sees different Mets lineups all the time for their 7-inning affairs.

"They say like 'Oh, he's from Germany but just temporary,' or 'He's from U.S. college but just temporary.' So a lot of good players there, but always changing," the 33-year-old Japanese right-hander said.

Hashiguchi moved to London a few years ago with his wife, who is British.

"I want to beat the champion to be a champion," said Hashiguchi, a physiotherapist who now trains on his own because he has two young children. "So I joined the Capitals because it's more challenging for my baseball career."

Hashiguchi took the loss against the Mets in 2021's single-game final when Rich Minford hit a homer to the New River — a man-made canal built in 1613 to route fresh water to Londoners — beyond center field.

A year later, Hashiguchi threw 148 pitches in a semifinal victory. The bad news for the Capitals? The final was the next day. Then last season, the final switched to a three-game series. Hashiguchi won Game 1, but the Mets cruised in the doubleheader a day later.

Hashiguchi, who has also played in Australia, throws breaking balls for strikes and has an 86 mph fastball. On Sunday at Finsbury Park, he made quick work of Bristol-based Vetra BC's lineup — a mix of Lithuanian and Latin American expats. Wives, girlfriends, babies and dogs attended, and a foul ball landed by the pick-up soccer game nearby.

The Capitals aren't the only threat to the crown. The Essex Arrows are currently in first place in the six-team NBL, and the Sheffield Bruins swept the Mets in a recent doubleheader.

"As the standard of the NBL rises, our players are more prepared to go over and face the better teams in Europe," said Joe O'Connell, the Mets' commissioner of adult teams.

The Mets are competing this week in the third-tier European Federation Cup in Zurich, Switzerland.

Cook, the Mets coach, says rivalries aside, it's a close-knit league where players drive long distances and line fields for the joy of the game.

"The dedication across the league is there. Guys are playing because they really just enjoy playing, they love this game."

COLLEGE BASEBALL/COLLEGE SOFTBALL

Title still elusive for dominant Tennessee

BY TERESA M. WALKER
Associated Press

No. 1 national seed Tennessee has established itself as the dominant post-pandemic baseball program.

All that's missing is a national title.

The Volunteers' 204 victories and 540 home runs since the start of the 2021 season are the most of any Division I program. They've won two SEC regular-season titles and two conference tournament championships.

Their nation-leading and program-record 159 homers this season are the most since the 1997 LSU "Gorilla Ball" team hit a record 188.

Now the Vols are trying to slug their way to two more victories to reach a third College World Series in four years and second straight. The Vols will host Evansville (38-24), who knocked off No. 16 East Carolina for its first regional championship, in the best-of-three Knoxville Super Regional starting Friday.

Coach Tony Vitello, hired by Tennessee in June 2017, has the Vols rolling, going 12-0 to win four straight regionals.

"I think the last three years have been a compound effect of some lessons learned and some things gained by other people that came before these guys," Vitello said.

The Vols will still have to deal with the nation's top seed not winning the national title since 1999 when the CWS began its current format. For now, they're focused on trying to be among the eight teams advancing to the CWS starting June 14 in Omaha, Neb.

JOHN PETERSON/AP

No. 1 national seed Tennessee, led by head coach Tony Vitello, center, is looking to add a national title to its post-pandemic dominance. The Volunteers' 204 wins and 540 home runs are the most in D1 since 2021.

Centerfielder Hunter Ensley, who played in Omaha last June, said the Vols put together three pretty complete offensive games in the regional. The message after advancing was enjoy briefly as just another step.

"There's a lot to do for the rest of the week to get better for this weekend regardless of who we play," Ensley said.

Evansville left fielder Mark Shallenberger said the key to pulling off big upsets is focusing on one pitch and hit at a time. That's what helped the Aces make program history.

"Pressure's off of us," Shallenberger said before double-checking to make sure Evansville's next stop is Knoxville. "We're playing baseball. We're enjoying this awesome atmosphere. ... This ship ain't sunk yet."

Evansville will have to do something that few opponents have managed against the Vols, who've shown off their power all season. They've homered in 57 of 64 games, including 12 while winning three games in the regional.

Worse for opponents is trying to figure out who to avoid with Tennessee's power spread throughout the lineup. All-SEC second baseman Christian Moore has a team-high 29, and he's just one of 15 different Vols with at least one home run. Six have at least 11 home runs.

Nine different Vols have had a grand slam with Tennessee tying 1996 Oklahoma (66 games) with 12 grand slams. Only 2003 Arizona State (14 in 68 games) has had more.

Vitello knows he has a large group of infielders led by 6-foot-3 first baseman Blake Burke and a pair of 6-foot-1 players in Moore and third baseman Billy Amick, who transferred from Clemson last summer. He also sees teammates who take pride and trust each other to come through with big hits, almost coaching each other.

"You never know who it's going to be that day, but I think everyone is involved and contributing, which makes it fun," Vitello said.

Even when Moore, Burke and Amick — Tennessee's three leadoff hitters — combined to go 1-for-13 in the regional clincher over Southern Miss, four different Vols combined to hit five home runs. Cal Stark had two.

Christian Ostrander saw Tennessee last year as Southern Miss' pitching coach before being promoted last offseason. He sees Vitello having a more experienced and mature roster than a year ago when the Vols went into Hattiesburg and beat Southern Miss to clinch the program's sixth CWS berth all-time.

Combined with Tennessee's lengthy lineup, Ostrander said the Vols are a handful no matter who they face next.

"You can't catch your breath. You have to execute, and if you give them a little bit of something they can hurt you because they can do so many things," Ostrander said. "It's just a very, very, very good lineup and a very good program, very good team."

Oklahoma win away from 4th straight Women's CWS title

BY CLIFF BRUNT
Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Oklahoma needs just one more win to make softball history.

Tiare Jennings' two-run homer in the first inning sparked an 8-3 win over Texas on Wednesday night that left the Sooners one victory short of a record fourth straight Women's College World Series title.

Oklahoma (58-7) had nine hits and three home runs against a Texas squad that had thrown three one-hit shutouts in three World Series games.

Sooners coach Patty Gasso said the plan was to help pitcher Kelly Maxwell by scoring early. Maxwell had pitched a complete game the previous day in a semifinal win over Florida, and Gasso felt the senior might need some support.

"It's something that we really talked about, is trying to set the tone, give Kelly an opportunity to get settled," Gasso said. "Very, very important. It was a goal of ours. They checked a lot of boxes tonight."

Jennings had two hits and three RBIs and Kinzie Hansen had two hits, including a two-run homer, for the Sooners in Game 1 of the best-of-three series. The second-seeded Sooners could clinch their eighth overall championship in Game 2 on Thursday night.

Oklahoma was calm after the first game.

"You see us here and we're not overjubilant because we know there's still a lot of work to do against a very, very good team that has very good pitchers, very good hitters," Gasso said. "I mean, we know what's in front of us still. So you don't see us celebrating. There's still a lot of work to do."

Mia Scott hit a solo homer for No. 1 Texas (55-9), but there weren't many more highlights.

ALONZO ADAMS/AP

Oklahoma's Tiare Jennings homers against Texas in Game 1 of the Women's CWS championship series on Wednesday in Oklahoma City.

Now, the Longhorns will embrace the role of underdog.

"It's a mind game," Texas coach Mike White said. "Champions reframe. How can we reframe from this loss, what we're facing right now, come out and have a better game and see if we can play some good softball?"

It was another chapter in the storied rivalry between the programs, which will both leave the Big 12 for the Southeastern Conference next year. Oklahoma beat Texas in the national championship series in 2022. Texas won the Big 12 regular-season title this year, but Oklahoma won the conference tournament.

The Sooners played Tuesday while Texas had the day off, but Maxwell negated any edge the rest might have provided for the Longhorns. A day after tossing 148 pitches against Florida, she threw 119 against the Longhorns. She gave up one earned run and four hits and struck out eight.

"This is it," Maxwell said. "This is my last opportunity. I'm just going to do everything I can to keep this team in it. I know that they have my back and I've got theirs."

NBA FINALS

MICHAEL CONROY/AP

Boston Celtics head coach Joe Mazzulla, center, celebrates with his team after completing a sweep of the Indiana Pacers in the Eastern Conference finals on May 27 in Indianapolis.

Celtics follow Mazzulla's 'craziness' until very end

BY KYLE HIGHTOWER
Associated Press

BOSTON — When Celtics guard Derrick White stood in the corner behind the 3-point line late in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference finals as teammate Jaylen Brown drove into the lane, drew defenders and flipped a pass toward him, White felt prepared for the moment.

That's because Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla had simulated scenarios just like it throughout the season.

"It starts in practice with them championship stations that Joe loves to do," White recalled. "It starts there and then just continue to trust one another."

White trusted that Brown would make the correct basketball play. He did, and it ended with White connecting on a tie-breaking 3 that ultimately secured Boston's place in the NBA Finals and a matchup with the Dallas Mavericks.

The play may also be a perfect example of how in his second year as coach, Mazzulla has managed to help the Celtics recover from the disappointment of a season that ended on the cusp of the Finals a year ago, to a run this season that again has them four wins away from capturing the franchise's 18th championship.

White's shot, Mazzulla said, is a microcosm of the kind of a team culture he's tried to cultivate over the past two years. One that puts details first.

"Things that you can't take for granted," said Mazzulla, who at age 35 is the youngest head coach to reach the NBA Finals since Bill Russell (also 35) did it in 1969. "Sometimes it's as small as getting the ball inbounds. But just try to pick little things that we see on a nightly basis that can impact winning and can affect losing. And we just practice them over, over and over again until they become second nature."

What's equally become central to the Celtics' success this season is the buy-in to an egoless, team-first philosophy in which individual credit is secondary on a roster loaded with current and past All-Stars like Jayson Tatum, Jaylen Brown and Jrue Holiday, along with White, 7-footer Kristaps Porzingis, and a deep bench.

Meanwhile, Mazzulla has also benefited from working alongside a coaching staff he was able to choose this offseason. That's something he didn't have last season after being thrust into a job he didn't expect to have following predecessor Ime Udoka's suspension just days before the start of training camp.

Lead assistant Charles Lee and Sam Cassell have helped Mazzulla tweak a system build around 3-point shooting and defense, which saw the Celtics rank first and third, respectively, in offensive and defensive rating during the regular season.

Those rankings have remained the same this postseason for a team that is 6-0 on the road and 3-0 in close-out games.

But as much as Mazzulla and his staff have been driving home their philosophies via X's and O's, they've also continued to focus on the mental aspects of the game.

Last season it was in film sessions that began with Mazzulla showing the team images of sand castles, which he used as a metaphor that even the best castles get washed away by the daily tide — requiring them to be rebuilt.

It was something Tatum said was "a little cheesy" but "something we bought into."

Mazzulla's tactics were on display again during a blowout win back in March over Phoenix. He went viral after he sprinted to contest Phoenix's Royce O'Neale's practice basket heading into a timeout.

"I saw a guy going in to get a shot and he hadn't made one and I didn't want him to feel good about himself going to the bench," Mazzulla explained at the time. "That's the bench rule. ... If I'm going to ask the guys to contest, staff's going to do the same thing."

Holiday acknowledged that Mazzulla's style is unique, but one that he's come to appreciate during his first season in Boston.

"You go with it. You go with the craziness," Holiday said. "I think maybe it's controlled madness. I think it's definitely his way of preparing us and I feel like preparing himself. And I feel like it's been working. It's fun. It's different. ... Joe definitely brings a spark and some weird energy."

Scoreboard

Finals

(Best-of-seven; x-if necessary)
Boston vs. Dallas

Thursday: at Boston
Sunday: at Boston, **AFN-Sports, 2 a.m. Monday CET; 9 a.m. Monday JKT**
Wednesday, June 12: at Dallas
Friday, June 14: at Dallas
x-Monday, June 17: at Boston
x-Thursday, June 20: at Dallas
x-Sunday, June 23: at Boston

Irving's late claim of Mavericks just getting started proven right

BY TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

Kyrie Irving was not making a threat, nor was he boasting, nor was he saying anything that would be considered outlandish. It was the final week of the regular season. He and the Dallas Mavericks had just clinched a division title and Irving was asked to talk about what it means.

He didn't look back. He looked ahead.

"We just know that the job isn't finished," Irving said in Miami that night. "And we're just getting started."

Turns out, he was right. The Mavericks — who spent most of February and March looking destined for the play-in tournament, a team that was barely better than a mediocre 26-23 after 49 games — figured things out just in time, and a trip to the NBA Finals is their reward.

Dallas visited Boston in Game 1 of the NBA Finals on Thursday night. It's a matchup of the teams with the NBA's two best records since Feb. 1; Boston has gone 39-9 in that span, Dallas 36-15. Boston also had the best record in the league before Feb. 1 (37-11), while Dallas was only 14th best in that stretch (26-22).

"It doesn't happen a lot of times (where) you go from the lottery to the Finals," Mavericks coach Jason Kidd said. "But we truly believe that we had the pieces."

A year ago, they didn't. When this season started, they didn't have all the pieces they needed, either. But since swinging trades for Daniel Gafford and P.J. Washington in February, the Mavericks have been one of the best teams in the league — and going 16-2 in one late stretch of the regular season only reinforced Irving's belief that something good was happening.

"That's the type of confidence that I felt the majority of this playoffs, just no matter what's going on — in the beginning of the game, middle of the game, before the game — our words of affirmation and positivity go a long way," Irving said.

In the current NBA playoff format, which goes back to 1984, Dallas is only the fifth team seeded No. 5 in its conference or lower to make the Finals. Miami did it last year as a No. 8 seed after doing it in 2020 as a No. 5 seed, New York did it in 1999 as a No. 8 seed and Houston did it in 1995 as a No. 6 seed. Of those teams, only the Rockets went on to win a title.

But this Dallas team has been playing as well as anybody.

The Mavericks are 11-1 in these playoffs when they score more than 100 points. They've won five in a row on the road during this postseason run, matching their longest such streak from the regular season. They have a player in Irving who has won the Finals before, a coach in Kidd who won a title as a player — with Dallas, no less — and arguably the best player in this postseason in Luka Doncic, who is headed to the title series for the first time.

Irving was right. The Mavs were just getting started. And now they have a chance for the perfect finish.

"I think we've got a great team," Doncic said. "But most importantly, we've got great guys, some great guys on the team. From players to coaches, everybody on the team, we have great guys and that's the most important thing. We stay together and we just play basketball."

MATT KROHN/AP

Dallas Mavericks guard Kyrie Irving answers questions during a news conference after the Mavericks defeated the Minnesota Timberwolves in Game 5 of the Western Conference finals May 30 in Minneapolis.

STANLEY CUP FINAL

Knoblauch turned Oilers' season around

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

When Kris Knoblauch became coach of the Edmonton Oilers, they had lost 10 of their first 13 games and the Stanley Cup was the last thing anyone on the team was talking about.

Since then, no team in the NHL has won more games and Knoblauch is a big reason they are in the final. It comes as no surprise to those who know Knoblauch to see him making the most of his first chance to be an NHL head coach.

"He's paid his dues, he's worked hard and now he's getting an opportunity," said veteran coach Rob Daum, whom Knoblauch played for at the University of Alberta from 1999-2004 . "A lot of times coaches get maybe too much credit and too much blame when things go good or bad, but I think in this situation because of the circumstances when Kris took the team over, it's hard to ignore the impact he's had on this team."

The fall struggles feel far away now, with the Oilers in the Final against Florida and four victories away from the franchise's first championship since 1990. None of this seemed possible under Jay Woodcroft. Knoblauch replaced him Nov. 12 and brought a straightforward, calm approach to a star-studded team that needed a steady hand.

The organization found that in the 45-year-old from the Saskatchewan prairie, who has traversed North America with wife Autumn and children Marek and Emry. He abandoned his dream of being a police officer to go into coaching, a path that has allowed him to make use of his education degree.

"He's not a teller and a yeller — he's a teacher," said longtime junior hockey executive Sherry Bassin, who owned the Erie Otters of the Ontario Hockey League during part of Knoblauch's run there. "He's a student of the game."

JEFF MCINTOSH, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

Oilers coach Kris Knoblauch congratulates goalie Stuart Skinner after eliminating Dallas in the Western Conference finals. Knoblauch took over after the Oilers lost 10 of their first 13 games this season.

A decade after coaching Connor McDavid in Erie, Knoblauch has again gotten the best out of the sport's biggest star and his teammates, from Leon Draisaitl to goaltender Stuart Skinner. Daum believes Knoblauch is the same person he was more than two decades ago.

"He doesn't really get worked up over too much, and he's not screaming in your ear or whatever it may be," said Detroit forward Alex DeBrincat, who played three seasons for Knoblauch in Erie. "It kind of keeps that calm vibe on the bench, and I think you just kind of stick to the game plan and play your game."

Coach's approach

Bassin recalls one day walking into Knoblauch's office — in the front of the building, right by the door so he could greet players and staff every day — and noticed a binder filled with hundreds of practice drills open on the desk. Written across the diagrams in red ink were the words, "DOES NOT WORK."

Knoblauch refused to throw it out; he wanted to remind himself and be better next time, something that he translates to his players.

"He always wants the best out of you, and that's the way he's always taught," said Tampa Bay defenseman Darren Raddysh, who played five Erie seasons under Knoblauch. "Whether it's in video or just having a conversation with him, you just feel that sense of calmness with him and you can kind of just take his lead."

And those interactions are rarely straight criticism. After a regular-season loss, Knoblauch called injured players Dylan Strome and Andre Burakovsky into his office to tell him he thought Erie could have won if they were in the lineup.

"That kind of confidence that he instilled in guys, I think it just builds for the future and it makes you want to play for a guy like that," said Strome, who considers Knoblauch one of his favorite coaches. "(He) just created that winning culture and was a lot of fun to play for."

Solving challenges

Knoblauch broke into the NHL as an assistant with Philadelphia in 2017 and spent two seasons there before four years running the American Hockey League's Hartford Wolf Pack. He has shown a knack for handling difficult situation.

This postseason alone he made two major calls: pulling Skinner for journeyman backup Calvin Pickard in the second round against Vancouver before going back to his starter, and inserting defenseman Philip Broberg into the lineup three games into the Western Conference finals, trailing 2-1 in the series.

Edmonton has not lost since.

"That's the art of coaching: managing your players, managing your team to give yourself the best chance to win, knowing who gives you the best chance to win, understanding the personalities involved, understanding your team," Daum said.

Knoblauch clearly understands his team and what buttons to push, doing so in such an unassuming way that Bassin describes him as a "down-home country boy."

It's that style that has gotten the Oilers this far and made so many root for Knoblauch to hoist the Cup.

AP sports writer Tim Reynolds in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., contributed.

Chasing: Perry has lost three Cup Finals over last five years

FROM PAGE 48

team at the pinnacle of the sport. Sure, he was with the Canadiens in 2021 when they came back from 3-1 deficit in the first round against Toronto and lost to Tampa Bay in the Final. But games then were played in empty or nearly empty arenas because of the pandemic.

"When I was in Montreal, it was COVID …. I think we had 3,000 or 4,000 fans, that was it in a place like the Bell Centre," Perry told the Canadian Press. "It's not quite the same. It's a different atmosphere, a different animal, when you have fans."

Perry has lost three Cup Finals in the last half-decade, but he isn't alone. Adam Henrique, Mattias Janmark and Mattias Ekholm are among the Oilers who have fallen short in Finals. They hope that experience can drive them to victory this time.

Henrique was a rookie when he got to his first Final. He was part of a New Jersey Devils team that lost to Los Angeles in 2012. At the time, he was naive about just how hard it is to get that far.

"You think we'll just be in the playoffs next year and hopefully get back here and get another opportunity," Henrique said. "But that doesn't happen. There's a lot that goes in behind the scenes and with contract situations. There is so much that changes team to team, every single year. To be here and go on a run has been a lot of fun."

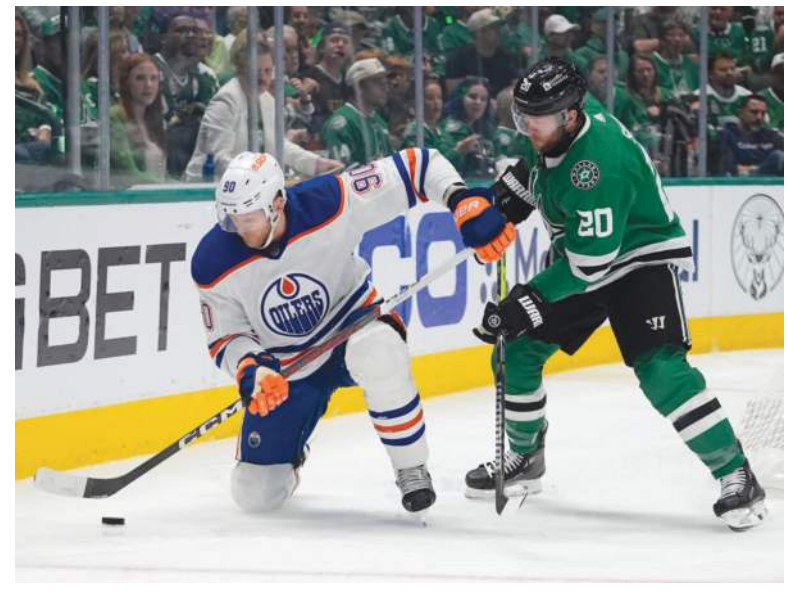
The Panthers, of course, lost the 2023 Final to Vegas. It was not a close series. The Golden Knights won it in five — and three of the four wins were blowouts. Will Florida be able to take that experience forward?

"Experience is good," Oilers coach Kris Knoblauch. "I don't know how much experience is beneficial. You can ask the Buffalo Bills how important Super Bowl experience is."

Scoreboard

Stanley Cup Final
(Best-of-seven; x-if necessary)
Florida vs. Edmonton

Saturday: at Florida, **AFN-Sports, 2 a.m. Sunday CET; 9 a.m. Sunday JKT**
Monday: at Florida, **AFN-Sports, 2 a.m. Tuesday CET; 9 a.m. Tuesday JKT**
Thursday, June 13: at Edmonton
Saturday, June 15: at Edmonton
x-Tuesday, June 18: at Florida
x-Friday, June 21: at Edmonton
x-Monday, June 24: at Florida



JULIO CORTEZ/AP

Edmonton Oilers right wing Corey Perry, left, won his first Stanley Cup with Anaheim in just his second season in the NHL.

FRENCH OPEN

THIBAULT CAMUS/AP

Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates winning her semifinal match of the French Open against Coco Gauff of the United States at the Roland Garros Stadium in Paris on Thursday. Swiatek is going for her third straight title.

Swiatek tops Gauff in semis

No. 1 seed to face No. 12 Paolini for championship

BY HOWARD FENDRICH
Associated Press

PARIS — Iga Swiatek is as good as it gets in tennis at the moment, especially at the French Open. It's been that way for quite some time, so her unyielding success against Coco Gauff just about everywhere — and certainly at Roland Garros — should come as no surprise by now.

Swiatek continued her mastery over Gauff and extended her winning streak in Paris to 20 matches with a 6-2, 6-4 victory in the semifinals on Thursday.

"For sure, it was intense," said the No. 1-ranked Swiatek, who claimed five of the last six games after trailing 3-1 in the second set. "I'm happy that I just was consistent with my tactics and didn't overthink stuff and just went for it at the end."

In Saturday's title match, Swiatek will face No. 12 Jasmine Paolini of Italy, a 6-3, 6-1 winner against unseeded 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva of Russia in the second semifinal.

Swiatek is trying to earn her fourth championship in five years at the French Open and can become the first woman with three in a row since Justine Henin from 2007-09.

Swiatek improved to 11-1 overall against No. 3 seed Gauff, the reigning U.S. Open champion. That is more victories than Swiatek has accumulated against any other player — and includes head-to-head wins at the clay-court Grand Slam tournament three years in a row, including in the 2022 final and last year's quarterfinals.

Scoreboard

Thursday
At Stade Roland Garros
Paris
Purse: Euro 19,280,000
Surface: Red clay
Women's Singles
Semifinals

Iga Swiatek (1), Poland, def. Coco Gauff (3), United States, 6-2, 6-4.

Jasmine Paolini (12), Italy, def. Mirra Andreeva, Russia, 6-3, 6-1.

"She is progressing a lot. You can see by her results. Last year's U.S. Open, for sure, showed that she's tough. At this age, it's kind of obvious that she's going to just grow. So it's nice to see her handling well everything around her, because it's not easy," said Swiatek, who turned 23 last week. "I'm sure we're going to have plenty more really intense matches on the really highest level."

As far as Gauff is concerned, perhaps a different opponent would be preferable.

Swiatek, who is 4-0 in major finals, has been at her dominant best for most of the past two weeks, following up on titles at clay events in Rome and Madrid.

Putting aside a three-set, second-round victory over four-time major champion Naomi Osaka, when she was forced to save a match point, Swiatek has ceded a total of merely 17 games in her other five matches in Paris.

Displaying her usual brand of powerful-but-clean groundstrokes, Swiatek needed only 10 winners to advance on Thursday, in part because she made only 14 unforced errors — while Gauff finished with 39.

This is what Swiatek does to whoever is across the net, particularly on clay: With defense and precision, she makes them hit so many shots that eventually the mistakes are bound to come.

There was a similar dynamic in the other semifinal. The key statistics were these: Paolini saved all six break points she faced, and she made just 10 unforced errors to Andreeva's 29.

"I was nervous in the first set," Paolini said, "but ball after ball, I was getting relaxed."

It did not take long for Swiatek to assert herself on a sunny afternoon in Court Philippe Chatrier, where several spectators waved red-and-white flags of her native Poland — even drawing an admonition from chair umpire Aurélie Tourte in the second set.

When Gauff missed the mark early, she really missed. One return went off her racket frame. Another flew 10 feet long. The opening game ended when Gauff wildly hit a swinging volley that landed way out, too, handing over a break.

Swiatek went up by a double break at 4-1 when Gauff netted a backhand, then slapped her thigh and smacked her racket against a bag on her sideline bench. There were other examples of negative body language from Gauff: a bowed head here, slumped shoulders there.

It's not as though she did not have some chances to make more of a match of this.

In each of Swiatek's first two service games, she faced a break point. But each time, Gauff failed to convert.

Sinner, Alcaraz will renew rivalry

BY HOWARD FENDRICH
Associated Press

PARIS — Jannik Sinner is just 22, and Carlos Alcaraz just 21, yet they've already built quite a rivalry heading into their French Open semifinal on Friday.

Spain's Alcaraz owns two Grand Slam titles and spent time at No. 1 in the rankings. Italy's Sinner won the Australian Open in January and will ascend to No. 1 next week. This will be their ninth meeting; the series is tied at 4-all.

"No one has ever played like Alcaraz. No chance. And Sinner? The same thing," said Mats Wilander, who was ranked No. 1 and won three of his seven Grand Slam titles at Roland Garros in the 1980s. "They're like, 'Whoa! What and where did they come from?'"

The other men's semifinal Friday is Norway's Casper Ruud, twice the runner-up in Paris — to Rafael Nadal in 2022 and to Novak Djokovic in 2023 — against Germany's Alexander Zverev, a finalist at the 2020 U.S. Open, an Olympic gold medalist and into the final four at Roland Garros for the fourth consecutive year. Zverev is involved in an ongoing court case in Berlin connected to his former partner's accusation he caused her bodily harm.

No. 4 Zverev vs. No. 7 Ruud is not a bad matchup as far as tennis goes. But it's No. 2 Sinner vs. No. 3 Alcaraz that is capturing all of the buzz.

That's because they are widely considered the likely next two greats of the game and because of how exciting some of their past contests have been, most notably Alcaraz's victory in the U.S. Open quarterfinals two years ago that ended at 2:50 a.m. after five sets of thrill-a-minute, back-and-forth action.

"I hope he and I keep playing each other for the next 10 years," said Alcaraz, who went on to win the championship in New York that year and also triumphed at Wimbledon last year. "He makes me a better player. He makes me wake up in the morning and try to improve."

Alcaraz arrived in Paris with some concerns about his right forearm. Sinner came in nursing a hip injury. Those issues kept them out of the clay-court Italian Open last month, but they have looked just fine at the French Open: Each has dropped just one set through five matches.

They seem to bring out the best in one another while forging a new path in their sport. Both can cover the court as well as anyone, the 6-foot-2 Sinner with his instincts and lanky limbs and the 6-foot Alcaraz with his "How did he possibly get to that?" fleetness and reflexes.

Both are capable of hammering the ball, eliciting gasps from spectators. Both are all-court players with admirable variety (Alcaraz's drop shots, for example, might just be the best in men's tennis). Both elicit heaps of praise from opponents.

Alcaraz was asked what it's like to face Sinner.

"Well, you have to run like it is a marathon, side-to-side. I think he has nothing bad. Everything he does, he does it perfectly. The way that he hits the ball is unbelievable. The way he moves — really, really well. He pushes you to the limit on every ball, on every point. I think it is the hardest thing to face Jannik," Alcaraz said.

"At the same time, I love that," he continued. "I love these kind of matches. I love this kind of challenge. ... I love to find solutions, to find a way to beat him."

Alcaraz won their most recent encounter, in a semifinal on a hard court at Indian Wells, Calif., in March on the way to the title there. That ended a 19-match winning streak for Sinner.

"He showed already so many things that, for sure, you are always impressed when you play against him," Sinner said.

RYAN SUN/AP

Carlos Alcaraz, of Spain, left, talks with Jannik Sinner, of Italy, after beating him at the BNP Paribas Open on March 16 in Indian Wells, Calif.

SPORTS

One thing missing

Nation's most dominant team still chasing elusive championship ›› College baseball, Page 44

STANLEY CUP FINAL

JEFFREY T. BARNES/AP

Edmonton Oilers right wing Corey Perry is the only player to make it to the Stanley Cup Final with five different teams. But he's only been on the winning team one time.

Still chasing his second Cup

It's been 17 years since Edmonton's Perry raised his first

Associated Press

Corey Perry won his first Stanley Cup championship in his second NHL season with the Anaheim Ducks. Seventeen years later, he is still looking for ring No. 2.

It is not for lack of trying.

The veteran Edmonton forward is about to play in his fourth Cup Final in the last five years after falling short as a member of the Dallas Stars, Montreal Canadiens and Tampa Bay Lightning. He is the first NHL player to play in the Final with five different teams. Going 1-3 has sparked chatter about the "Perry Curse" online.

"I never had the opportunity to play for a Stanley Cup (again) until five years ago," said Perry, who is 39. "So, there was 12 years, 13 years, in between. You never really know if you're going to get back there. Every year goes by and you're out in the first round, second round, third round. And you're just like, 'ugh, maybe next year.' And they just keep adding up."

The Oilers open this year's Final in Florida against the Panthers on Saturday night.

Perry spent 14 years in Anaheim, collecting 776 points across 988 games. A two-time first-team All-Star, he won the Hart and the Maurice Richard trophies after his 50-goal, 98-point season in 2010-11. He is among the select group of players to win a Cup, Olympic gold (twice) and a world championship for Team Canada.

By now familiar with reaching the Final, this is the first time Perry can savor being on a Canadian

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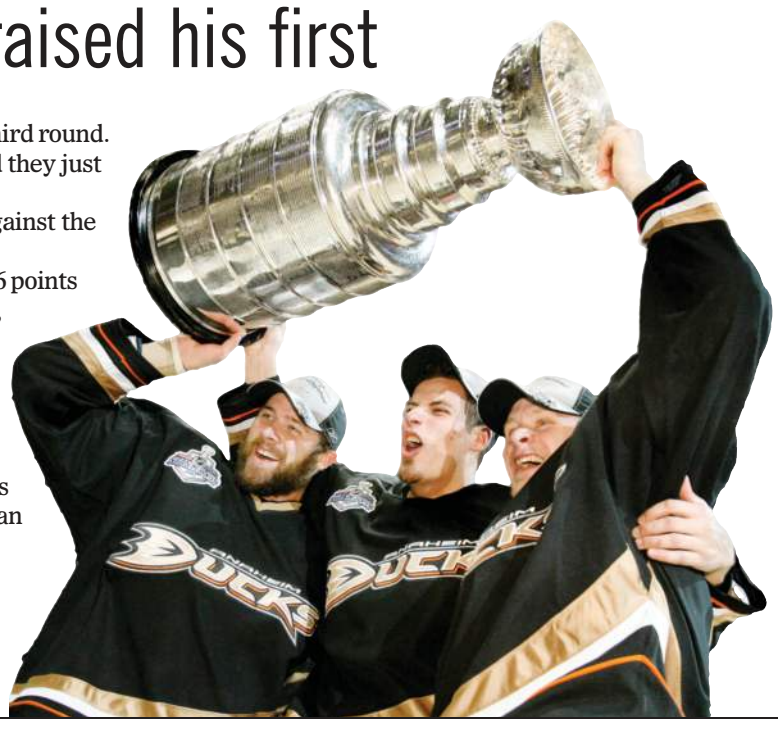

Perry, right, hoists the Stanley Cup with Dustin Penner, left, and Ryan Getzlaf after winning it in 2007.

MARK AVERY/AP

US coach has diverse group of throwers

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