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MARK SCHIEFELBEIN/AP

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., speaks during a hearing of the Senate Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Defense with Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force Gen. CQ Brown on Capitol Hill, on Wednesday.

Senators urge budget increase

Appropriators argue Pentagon needs more funds to invest in future

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Senate appropriators on Wednesday criticized the proposed Defense Department budget for fiscal 2025 as too low to invest in future military technology and meet threats from an increasingly dangerous world.

The White House's request for an \$895 billion defense budget sticks to a spending cap mandated by law last year, but lawmakers on the Senate Appropriations Committee indicated they will attempt to find a way around it to boost the Pentagon's coffers.

"We must be clear-eyed that this budget request would represent a real cut in funding for the Department of Defense," said Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, the top Republican on the committee.

The proposed spending plan represents a 1% increase from the prior year and falls nearly \$14 billion short of the \$22.5 billion needed to cover rising fuel costs and other expenses, according to Collins.

Sen. Jon Tester of Montana, the Democratic chairman of the committee's defense subpanel, said the military services and combatant com-

mands have provided Congress with unfunded priorities lists that total more than \$20 billion.

He also said the request for fiscal 2025, which begins Oct. 1, is \$10 billion below the funding level that the Pentagon had planned for before congressional fighting over the debt limit imposed caps on federal spending.

"We need a bigger number," Tester said during a hearing on the defense budget request. "If we're going to invest in future technologies, this number has to be bigger."

SEE BUDGET ON PAGE 7

Biden: US won't supply Israel for Rafah strike

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden said he would not supply offensive weapons that Israel could use to launch an all-out assault on Rafah — the last major Hamas stronghold in Gaza — over concern for the well-being of the more than 1 million civilians sheltering there.

Biden, in an interview with CNN on Wednesday, said the United States was still committed to Israel's defense and would supply Iron Dome rocket interceptors and other defensive arms, but that if Israel goes into Rafah, "we're not going to supply the weapons and artillery shells used."

Biden acknowledged that "civilians have been killed in Gaza" by the type of heavy bombs the U.S. has been supplying — his first validation of what administration critics have been loudly protesting, even if he still stopped short of taking responsibility. His threat to hold up artillery shells expanded on earlier revelations the U.S. was going to pause a shipment of heavy bombs.

However, Israel's military spokesman said the army has the weapons it needs to press ahead

SEE SUPPLY ON PAGE 11



PETROS KARADJIAS/AP

An Open Arms ship is docked at Larnaca port, Cyprus, on Wednesday, where food heading to Gaza is being loaded for eventual delivery.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Germany	\$4.052	\$4.603	\$4.959	\$4.303	Azores	..	..	\$4.809	..
Change in price	-1.0 cents	-0.1 cents	-1.6 cents	-5.3 cents	Change in price	..	..	-1.6 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.895	\$5.163	\$4.927	Turkey	..	..	\$4.625	\$4.721*
Change in price	..	-5.8 cents	-5.8 cents	-9.5 cents	Change in price	..	..	-1.6 cents	-3.4 cents
U.K.	..	\$4.603	\$4.959	\$4.303	Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective May 10. The change in price is from May 3.				
Change in price	..	-0.1 cents	-1.6 cents	-5.3 cents					

PACIFIC GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Japan	..	\$4.599	..	\$3.949	South Korea	\$3.729	..	\$4.629	\$3.979
Change in price	..	-2.0 cents	..	-5.0 cents	Change in price	-1.0 cents	..	-2.0 cents	-5.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.689	..	..	\$3.949	Guam	\$3.759**	\$4.309	\$4.659	..
Change in price	-1.0 cents	..	..	-5.0 cents	Change in price	-1.0 cents	No change	-2.0 cents	..
*DieselEFD **Midgrade									
Pacific prices for the week of May 10-16									

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates													
Euro costs (May 10)	\$1.05	Switzerland (Franc)	0.9074										
British pound (May 10)	\$1.22	Thailand (Baht)	36.83										
Japanese yen (May 10)	151.00	Turkey (NewLira)	32.2196										
South Korean won (May 10)	1333.00												
Commercial rates													
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769	<p>(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.)</p> <h2>INTEREST RATES</h2> <table> <tr> <td>Prime rate</td> <td>8.50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Interest Rates Discount rate</td> <td>6.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Federal funds market rate</td> <td>5.33</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3-month bill</td> <td>5.39</td> </tr> <tr> <td>30-year bond</td> <td>4.64</td> </tr> </table>		Prime rate	8.50	Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00	Federal funds market rate	5.33	3-month bill	5.39	30-year bond	4.64
Prime rate	8.50												
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00												
Federal funds market rate	5.33												
3-month bill	5.39												
30-year bond	4.64												
Britain (Pound)	1.2497												
Canada (Dollar)	1.3698												
China (Yuan)	7.2241												
Denmark (Krone)	6.9302												
Egypt (Pound)	47.3563												
Euro	0.9291												
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8164												
Hungary (Forint)	360.88												
Israel (Shekel)	3.7308												
Japan (Yen)	155.65												
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3075												
Norway (Krone)	10.8803												
Philippines (Peso)	55.31												
Poland (Zloty)	3.99												
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7502												
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3543												
South Korea (Won)	1367.99												

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MILITARY

China responds to Navy's Taiwan Strait trip

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

China's military labeled a U.S. guided-missile destroyer's Wednesday trip through the Taiwan Strait as "provocative" and dispatched aircraft and ships in response, state media reported.

The USS Halsey's passage through the 110-mile-wide channel that separates mainland China from Taiwan "demonstrates the United States' commitment to upholding freedom of navigation for all nations as a principle," the U.S. 7th Fleet said in a news release that night.

"No member of the international community should be intimidated or coerced into giving up their rights and freedoms," the Navy said in its release. "The United States military flies, sails, and operates anywhere international law allows."

Cmdr. Megan Greene, 7th Fleet spokeswoman, acknowledged Stars and Stripes' request for additional information but was not immediately able to provide a response Thursday morning.

The U.S. routinely sends warships and, less frequently, aircraft, through the strait in transits it describes as a routine means of traveling between the South China Sea and East China Sea.

China considers Taiwan, a functionally democratic island, to be a breakaway province that must be reunified with the mainland, by force if necessary. It typically condemns Navy trips through the waterway as aggressive and destabilizing for the region.

Within an hour of the announcement, Beijing issued its statement on the Halsey's transit. Naval Senior Capt. Li Xi "slammed the U.S.'s provocative move," the state-sponsored China Military Online wrote just after midnight Thursday.

China's Eastern Theater Command "organized naval and air forces" to monitor the Halsey's passage and said 7th Fleet had "publicly hyped" the situation, it wrote Wednesday in a post to its official Weibo account.

The transit comes just as Chinese President Xi Jinping is wrap-



U.S. Navy

The guided-missile destroyer USS Halsey steams through the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday.

ping up a five-day tour of Europe, where he's visited France, Serbia and Hungary to strengthen ties.

He arrived in Hungary late Wednesday night, The Associated Press reported that day.

The Halsey's passage through

the strait is at least the third for a U.S. destroyer this year. The guided-missile destroyer USS John Finn made the last two announced transits on Jan. 24 and March 5, evoking similar responses from Beijing.

A U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon made its own trip through the Taiwan Strait on April 17. China's Eastern Theater Command at the time said it scrambled fighter jets to monitor the surveillance aircraft's movements.

Videos show arrested US soldier with Russian girlfriend

By ROBYN DIXON
The Washington Post

The American soldier, Gordon Black, seemed smitten with the Russian woman he met while stationed until last month in South Korea. She poked fun at him, called him her "husband," prompted him to swear in Russian. Then, last fall, she returned to the Far Eastern Russian city of Vladivostok without him.

The woman, Alexandra Vashchuk, even photoshopped him out of a picture with her.

But when the lovestruck 34-year-old Army staff sergeant followed her to Russia — without notifying his commanders or getting permission — he landed in jail. He is charged with stealing from her, was ordered held until July 2 and faces up to five years in prison.

Black, 34, is married but going through a divorce, family members told The Washington Post. He was supposed to be on leave, returning to Fort Cavazos in Texas. Instead, he traveled to Vladivostok last month to see his girlfriend, they said.

Russian media reported that he flew there last month. The State Department has warned Americans against traveling to Russia, and the Pentagon has barred military personnel from traveling to the country.

Details of Black's murky love affair with Vashchuk, 31, were uncovered by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist Mark Krutov, who traced her TikTok account, which has since been made

"Oh God! Also funny, this chevron right here. [Touching a military patch.] It says KATUSA. You're not a saboteur by chance?"

Alexandra Vashchuk

Russian woman in relationship with Staff Sgt. Gordon Black

private.

In one video, the staff sergeant stands in his uniform looking at Vashchuk with doe-eyed incomprehension as she speaks in Russian, using a derogatory term for an American. "I came home, and there was this pindos," she said. "That's funny. Who are you? Who are you, man?"

Black takes a step, leans over and smooches her phone screen.

"Oh God! Also funny, this chevron right here," she says, touching the military patch on his shoulder. "It says KATUSA. You're not a saboteur by chance?"

The Korean Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA) is a training academy of the 8th Army in South Korea.

On Friday, Black faced the Perovomaisky district court in Vladivostok, charged with "theft causing significant damage." He was ordered jailed until at least July 2, pending trial.

Russian courts often prolong pretrial detention periods. For example, American journalist Evan Gershkovich of the Wall Street Journal, who was arrested while on assignment in the Urals city of

Yekaterinburg last year and charged with spying, has been jailed in Lefortovo high-security prison for more than a year. Gershkovich, his employer and U.S. officials vehemently deny the charges against him. But Russian courts have repeatedly prolonged his detention and denied his appeals to be released.

Black's arrest potentially complicates difficult back-channel negotiations between Washington and Moscow over the release of Americans held by Russia. Western officials have cited a growing Russian practice of hostage diplomacy — imprisoning Americans as bargaining chips to be used in prisoner exchanges.

The relationship vibe between Black and his Russian paramour seemed odd, according to social media videos. In one — which she captioned, "How does your husband assess relations between Russia and America?" — he gave a rambling answer critical of the U.S., President Biden and NATO, parroting Kremlin talking points justifying Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The relationship definitely

isn't good now," Black said, referring to the U.S. and Russia. "It was definitely better under Trump."

"America, I think, NATO is pretty aggressive, honestly," he added. "I understand Russia's position, obviously. They want to defend their country, you know."

Moscow contends, falsely, that its February 2022 invasion was a response to Western aggression, complaining that Washington is using Ukraine as a proxy to dismember Russia.

President Vladimir Putin has demanded that Western leaders accept Russia's illegal claim to have annexed a large portion of southeastern Ukraine and that they stop providing military assistance to Ukraine, which would pave the way for Russia to dominate the country.

Russia's demand for an end to Western weapons supplies to Ukraine resonates among many in former president Donald Trump's MAGA faction of the Republican Party, as well as in far-right and far-left political circles. Some argue that Ukraine must surrender land in return for peace, a position that is deeply unpopular in Ukraine itself.

In the video, Vashchuk asserted that Trump is better than Biden, and Black did not disagree, responding that "Biden, he's, he doesn't handle situations the way he should, and I think that's one of the bigger reasons things are the way they are now, and it's not just with Russia. Like, you can see it with other countries, too."

Vashchuk criticized NATO as "an aggressive structure" and said that Black "understands Russia's position; he understands Putin's position." She asserted that her circle of Russians, Americans and Europeans all believe in Putin's position.

One of the videos depicts Vashchuk alone, walking along a South Korean street a stone's throw from an American military base in Pyeongtaek in rural South Korea, about 37 miles south of the capital, Seoul.

"And this is, let's say, an American street for relaxation. We call it drunken street," she said, gesturing toward U.S. Camp Humphreys, America's largest overseas military base. "Just over there, behind the gates."

According to RFE/RL, Vashchuk said on TikTok that she had lived in South Korea for five years.

Other videos depict visits to nightclubs and bars, showing people dancing, drinking and what appear to be two Americans in civilian clothing passed out in one bar amid blaring music and disco lights.

According to Russian investigative outlet Agentstvo, Vashchuk reported Black to police for allegedly beating her and stealing about \$2,174. Agentstvo said she had made several reports to police in the past, accusing her mother of violence and of threatening violence on another occasion, as well as reporting a man who was living in her house for allegedly driving his car into another vehicle.

PACIFIC

Army general in Pacific sees NATO parallels

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

Chinese military expansion is pushing Asian nations into closer strategic partnership with the United States that has parallels to NATO in Europe, the top Army commander for the region said Wednesday.

“We can help them protect and defend their territorial integrity and national sovereignty,” Gen. Charles Flynn said during a teleconference with reporters.

Flynn, 60, is commander of the U.S. Army Pacific, which has 107,000 soldiers and civilian workers spread across 9,000 miles including Alaska, Japan, South Korea, Guam, American Samoa, and Saipan.

Chinese military and commercial operations throughout the Pacific region have other nations worried about counterbalancing Beijing’s influence and power, he said.

“The sense of the insidious, incremental and irresponsible be-

havior — and that’s how I frame the way the Chinese are acting out there — has created a groundswell on the work that we do,” Flynn said.

Chinese actions have created a more receptive attitude in many Asian and Pacific nations to work with the U.S. Army on shoring up their own forces and cooperating in mutual defense with neighboring states.

“They appreciate a stable and secure region,” Flynn said.

U.S. Army Pacific has its headquarters at Fort Shafter in Hawaii, where there will be a meeting of army commanders from 15 nations and representatives of more than 15 others next week at the LANPAC Symposium & Exposition. The event could help cement the military cooperation between the United States, its allies



Flynn

in the Pacific, and other nations.

Flynn said he has pointed out in previous forums that three of the largest land wars in the past 60 years — World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War — have all happened in the U.S. Army Pacific’s area of operations.

Now the command is being asked to assist in ways to build resistance to Chinese dominance and increased Russian military presence in Asia, he said. The stability of the region is also challenged by the regime in North Korea.

From wargames in Thailand to improved infrastructure in the Philippines to training security forces in Mongolia, Flynn said Wednesday that the region allows the U.S. military to practice major logistical moves — taking equipment and troops from the West Coast, Alaska and Hawaii to Southeast Asia, northern Japan and the Arctic Circle.

“This is just a massive piece of Earth,” he said.

It’s also a testing ground for weapons, which face sopping humidity and saltwater corrosion in Thailand during exercises there and sub-zero temperatures and wilderness conditions during multinational wargames in Alaska.

“We’re building new capabilities into the region, from intelligence capabilities to long-range precision fire to integrated air and missile defense,” Flynn said. “We can sustain that capability.”

He said year-round training exercises in different nations and environments teach practical lessons on what works, what needs improvement, and what needs to be changed.

“When we put that capability out there, really in a very granular way, from the maintainers to the commanders, to the noncommissioned officers and warrant officers, the effects of those conditions on the equipment” can be repeatedly challenged, Flynn said. “When we introduce our soldiers

and their leaders and these capabilities into the environment and those conditions, there’s great insights and lessons from that.”

He said military cooperation between nations in the Pacific region will take time to integrate in a way comparable to the NATO. The ability to move troops, weapons, and supplies across vast distances, weather, and terrain is a work in progress.

“Does it mean we have everything we need?” Flynn asked. “No. But what it does mean is that the Army recognizes that the investments out here are incredibly important.”

Flynn pointed to American help in improving airfields in the Philippines and a plan to deploy more supplies across the region to sustain troops in a protracted conflict as signs of progress in weaving together a unified response, particularly to China.

“The sum total of our structures, I would say, impacts in a very positive way out here,” he said.

Army divers begin upgrades to port on Philippine island

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

BASCO SEAPORT, Philippines — U.S. and Filipino army divers began clearing debris this week from this strategically important harbor on the northern Philippine island of Batan.

The improvements, which include deepening the harbor to allow visits by larger vessels, may take years, Capt. Ander Thompson, commander of the 7th Engineer Dive Detachment at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, said at the port on Sunday.

Soldiers from the Hawaii-based 25th Infantry Division helicoptered onto Batan that day to rehearse an air assault — the sort of mission they may need to execute if conflict breaks out over Taiwan or in the South China Sea.

Batan — about 120 miles south of Taiwan — and several nearby islands are next to the Bashi Channel, which links the Philippine and South China seas, where Beijing has territorial disputes with many of its neighbors, including the Philippines.

The channel is a route for China’s navy to the east coast of Taiwan and the Pacific. It’s also a potential transit point for U.S. forces headed to the Taiwan Strait from Guam.

The air assault was part of the annual Balikatan exercise involving 16,000 mostly U.S. and Filipino troops that began April 22 and wraps up with a ceremony Friday.

While helicopters buzzed over Batan, army divers equipped with rock-breaking equipment



The Seacor Lee visits Basco Sea Port on Batan Island, Philippines, on Sunday. The U.S.-flagged support vessel delivered aviation fuel for the Balikatan exercise.



A soldier from the 7th Engineer Dive Detachment at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, fuels a boat while working at Basco Sea Port.

and a large crane prepared to clear the harbor. Large rocks protrude from the water during low tide, blocking access to a pair of concrete boat ramps.

The port includes a 400-foot pier that can accommodate cargo ships. A U.S.-flagged support vessel, the Seacor Lee, was there Sunday delivering aviation fuel for the Army’s helicopters.

Thompson said the work crew — 17 U.S. divers and signal soldiers and nine divers from the Philippine army’s 525th Construction Battalion — will work

until early June, but the project is a multiyear effort.

The divers are using power tools to break up the rocks so that the crane can remove them.

It’s hard to say what the port might be used for in the future, but it could accommodate U.S. Navy ships, Thompson said.

In March, the Philippine Inquirer reported on talks between U.S. and local officials over the port project.

“The Philippine Navy and the Armed Forces are always preparing for any eventuality across

the spectrum of conflict from peace to crisis to wartime,” a Philippine Navy spokesman, Commodore Roy Vincent Trinidad, said in the report.

The project is a response to Chinese threats, said Grant Newsham, a retired Marine colonel and senior researcher with the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies in Tokyo.

“It is true of course that improved port facilities in the Batanes islands do help the local economy and are also useful in responding to natural disasters

(i.e. typhoons) that blow through this area frequently,” he told Stars and Stripes by email March 20. “But at the end of the day, the interest being shown to this part of the Philippines is driven by the [Chinese] aggression.”

The deepened port should, at a minimum, be able to support U.S. and Philippine destroyers and smaller vessels, Newsham said.

It would be extremely useful in the event of conflict over Taiwan and even shore-based anti-ship missiles on the island could cover a large area, Newsham said.

“Chinese ships trying to swing around the southern end of Taiwan or even land troops in the southern part of Taiwan will find themselves running a gauntlet of anti-ship missiles,” he said. “And the coverage provided by missile-armed ships operating out of Batanes makes things even worse for [China] — as the missile ranges are extended and from different attack vectors as well.”

MILITARY

\$392M price tag stalls bill to expand veterans benefits

Proposal seeks to aid with sexual trauma reporting for victims

By LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Legislation requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs to accept crisis center reports, personal statements and other evidence to support disability claims for military sexual trauma when an official report is missing from records has stalled in Congress over a projected \$392 million cost to deliver the benefits through 2032, according to lawmakers.

At issue is the Servicemember and Veterans' Empowerment and Support Act for expanding access to VA benefits and services related to military sexual trauma in cases where the service member did not go through the military chain of command to report a sexual assault or when the incident report is missing from military records.

Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, has introduced the bill in four sessions of Con-

gress — 2017, 2019, 2021 and 2023.

Tester said he plans to submit a portion of the bill as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act, an annual bill specifying expenditures for the Pentagon. The amendment will call for expanding disability and health care compensation for military sexual trauma to all former National Guard members and reservists.

Bills can only be introduced once per congressional session, which is why the legislation has been submitted every two years. The earliest that it can be re-introduced is 2025.

"I won't stop pushing until we ease this process for survivors. These veterans have simply endured the unimaginable, and we've got to deliver them the tools they need to address their trauma," Tester said.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates the proposed law change would drive up the VA's costs by \$392 million through 2032 to deliver disability compensation and health care for veterans filing or resubmitting claims related to military sexual trauma in cases where there is no incident report in military records.

"My medical examiner at the VA said I had a 'perceived' sexual attack. Do you know what a statement like that means to a woman? It happened. There were people there," said Diane Altiery, who said she was sexually assaulted during her military service in the Navy from 1990-1992.

Altiery, a former petty officer third class, said she reported the sexual assault in 1991 after the incident took place in her barracks at Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station, N.C.

But she said there was no follow-up by the military chain of command to her complaint about the incident.

"There was not an intervention or anything like that," Altiery said.

Her VA records show she was awarded disability compensation in 2023, 27 years after first filing a claim that was determined to be incomplete for lack of evidence. Her medical records include doctor's notes and consultations about the sexual assault.

But Altiery said her claim only received a second review after she hired an attorney who requested her medical military and VA records.

"It has been 20-some years of a lot of frustration. It should not be this difficult to receive services from the VA," Altiery said, adding she continues to experience mental health problems related to the assault.

"Shouldn't we be doing more to prevent this conduct in the first place? A lot of work needs to be done on changing the rules and regulation. But what we're also talking about is a cultural change," Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, said during a Senate VA committee hearing in April on military sexual trauma.

Veterans are now eligible for disability compensation for conditions related to military sexual trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions that resulted from or became worse after sexual assault or sexual harassment in the military.

Veterans already can submit alternative evidence — including personal statements from family members and reports from rape crisis centers — to support claims for PTSD, but the evidence is not always supported by processors, according to veterans service or-

ganizations.

"Military sexual trauma is pervasive," Julie Howell, associate legislative director of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, said last month at the Senate hearing on military sexual trauma.

She said a 2021 survey of membership found nearly 40% of respondents had experienced sexual assault or abuse while serving in the military, though most did not report it at the time.

Though the victims might experience PTSD and other mental health conditions, Howell said they often do not disclose the abuse, seek counseling or file claims for compensation until several years after leaving the military.

"When so many sexual assaults go unreported in the military, it is my belief that we need to require the VA to consider non-[Defense Department] evidence when reviewing claims for all MST-related mental health conditions," Tester said at the hearing.

An estimated 128,000 veterans in fiscal 2023 received VA disability compensation benefits related to military sexual trauma, which roughly doubled since 2019, according to the VA.



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PACIFIC

Okinawa prefecture discourages US flights

By KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Okinawa prefecture has objected to the U.S. ambassador’s upcoming visit to two islands east of Taiwan because he is planning to travel on U.S. military aircraft, according to official and media accounts.

The U.S. military asked the prefecture for clearance to use the Ishigaki and Yonaguni airports on May 17 for “transportation of personnel,” a spokeswoman for the prefecture’s Military Base Affairs Division told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday.

U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel is expected to visit Japan Ground-Self Defense Force bases and meet city officials on both islands, according to a

May 1 report by public broadcaster NHK that cited unnamed government officials.

The islands’ proximity to Taiwan and the Senkaku islets, a Japanese possession, puts them center stage as regional tensions simmer between China and the United States.

A Camp Ishigaki spokesman confirmed by phone Wednesday that the base had been notified of the ambassador’s visit, but he declined to provide further details.

U.S. Embassy Tokyo, U.S. Forces Japan and the Okinawa Defense Bureau did not immediately respond to phone and email re-



Emanuel

quests for comment Thursday.

The prefecture’s Airport Division approved the Yonaguni stop but rejected the one at Ishigaki because “it is not possible to park the aircraft during the requested time,” a division spokesman said by phone Wednesday.

The base affairs spokeswoman said the prefecture discourages U.S. military aircraft from visiting the islands.

“Civilian airports were built for civilian aircraft; our policy is that the U.S. military should refrain from using the airport except in case of emergency,” the spokeswoman said. “We are requesting it to assure a safe and smooth operation of those aircraft.”

The prefecture appealed Wednesday to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Okinawa Liaison Of-

fice and Okinawa Defense Bureau to ask the U.S. military to refrain from using both airports.

“This request does not have a legal binding power, and the U.S. military can use the airport if there is an open spot during the requested time,” the base affairs spokeswoman said.

It is customary in Japan for some government officials to speak to reporters on condition of anonymity.

In March, the prefecture similarly asked the U.S. Navy to cancel a three-day port call at Ishigaki, a popular tourist destination, by the USS Rafael Peralta.

The guided-missile destroyer made its rest stop, but local dockworkers went on strike in protest during its stay.

Yonaguni and Ishigaki are ap-

proximately 70 miles and 160 miles east of Taiwan, respectively.

Camp Ishigaki opened with anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles in March 2023. Japan plans to install an upgraded version of its Type-12 surface-to-ship missile there and on two other islands by 2026 to counter perceived threats from China and North Korea.

The Ground Self-Defense Force established a surveillance station at Camp Yonaguni and held a training exercise with U.S. Marines on the island in February, The Washington Post reported in March.

Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada in April 2023 ordered a Patriot missile-defense system deployed there following reports that North Korea planned a satellite launch.

Toxicologist testifies Navy jet fuel in water did not sicken plaintiffs

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

HONOLULU — Medical problems reported by residents of military housing in Hawaii in late 2021 were not caused by tap water contaminated by Navy jet fuel, a toxicologist said Wednesday in Hawaii federal court.

“I concluded that they were not toxicological,” Robyn Prueitt testified on behalf of the U.S. government, the defendant in a civil suit brought by military families alleging physical and mental illnesses from consuming the water.

Prueitt, who works for the environmental consulting firm Gradient, testified her conclusion was based upon the existing medical literature about the effects of JP-5 jet fuel exposure on human health and on the estimated amount of jet fuel in the plaintiffs’ tap water.

“There are no reliable human studies of JP-5,” she said.

The 17 plaintiffs, who lived in military communities near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in late 2021, say exposure to the tainted water sparked a host of medical problems, including headaches, nausea,

dizziness, brain fog, anxiety and tremors.

Plaintiffs testified last week that some medical issues remain after two years and in some cases have grown worse.

U.S. District Court Judge Leslie Kobayashi, who is hearing the case without a jury, has said numerous times from the bench that the purpose of the trial is to determine the cause of the alleged injuries and what compensation, if any, the plaintiffs should receive.

Plaintiffs attorney Kristina Baehr cross-examined Prueitt based on the toxicologist’s previously submitted, sworn declaration in the case.

Prueitt testified that stress from “the incident itself and the perception of the individuals” could have manifested in the conditions felt by the plaintiffs.

“Certain health symptoms can occur in individuals in response to an odorous chemical that is perceived to be unpleasant or unhealthy at exposure concentrations lower than the toxicity threshold, but these symptoms are a result of stress-induced responses to per-

ceptions of the odor as a health risk (i.e., a non-toxicological mechanism),” Prueitt stated in her declaration.

Baehr cited several studies examining the effects of JP-5 fuel on health that Prueitt did not include in her review, including a 2023 study in the Journal of Water and Health titled “Community health impacts after a jet fuel leak contaminated a drinking water system: Oahu, Hawaii, November 2021.”

“I did not consider reports that have self-reported symptoms,” Prueitt said.

“These types of studies are published all the time,” she said. “It doesn’t mean they are reliable.”

Earlier in the day, Walter Grayman, an environmental and civil engineer, testified for the defense about modeling he had formulated to determine levels of JP-5 jet fuel in the Navy’s water system between Nov. 24 and Dec. 5, 2021.

His model found that the contamination was limited to certain areas of the water system and that it was diluted relatively quickly during the 12-day period he analyzed.

His findings contrasted with



MARQUEON A. D. TRAMBLE/U.S. Navy

A Navy contractor inspects a water pipe that connects to a granular activated carbon system at the Red Hill well near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, in 2022.

modeling done by the plaintiffs’ water expert, Paul Rosenfeld, who testified earlier in the trial that JP-5 fuel entered the Navy’s water system in enough density to produce sheens on water in many homes.

Rosenfeld testified Tuesday that his “well-mixed” model considered that hydrocarbon liquids such as diesel and jet fuel will dissolve when mixed with water if the petroleum liquid is less than 5 milligrams per liter.

Concentrations greater than that will leave a sheen atop water, which residents across the Navy’s water system reported through early December 2021, he said.

“The entire system is highly interconnected,” Rosenfeld testified Tuesday.

Prueitt testified that she based her conclusions using Grayman’s model.

Questioned further by Baehr, Prueitt acknowledged that if Grayman’s model did not offer accurate JP-5 concentrations then her conclusions would “be off by that much.”

Marine caught fleeing Japanese convenience store with knife is charged

By KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A U.S. Marine suspected of attempted assault and robbery of an Okinawa convenience store on April 18 was officially charged Wednesday with attempted theft, said a spokesman for the Naha District Public Prosecutors Office.

Lance Cpl. Andrew Torres, 20,

of the III Marine Logistics Group at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, was then rearrested on suspicion of an April 3 convenience store robbery, according to a spokesman for Okinawa prefectural police.

After the April 18 incident, police said a man in black pants and a black hooded sweatshirt carried a knife into a Lawson between 12:53 a.m. and 1:03 a.m., went be-

hind the counter and tried to open the cash register. The store is in the Nodake district of Ginowan city.

The clerk, watching a security camera in the back office, saw the man at the register, ran from the store and called police from his cellphone, a police spokesman said last month. No customers were in the store at the time.

Officers arrested Torres run-

ning from the parking lot, with no money from the store in his possession.

Torres has been held by Okinawa city police since then, the police spokesman said by phone Thursday.

After he was charged Wednesday, Torres was immediately rearrested on suspicion of the April 3 convenience store robbery in Ginowan’s Aragusuku

district, the police spokesman said.

In that case, police say Torres threatened a clerk with a knife and stole about \$840 worth of yen.

Under the Japanese judicial system, prosecutors, not police, decide whether to file charges.

Some government spokespeople in Japan are required to speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

MILITARY

History rekindled for US vets in Pirmasens

Veterans reconnect with their service at Husterhöh Kaserne with audio tour stop

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes
PIRMASENS, Germany — American veterans are reconnecting with their long-ago service at Husterhöh Kaserne through a stop on an audio tour that was inspired by a social media group named for the former U.S. military base in Pirmasens.

City officials, veterans and residents gathered Wednesday at the old barracks hall, dubbed “the banana building” on account of its crescent shape, to launch the tour, which encapsulates both the American and German legacies of the site.

The audio tour features 19 steles with etched QR codes at historical sights in Pirmasens. The new Husterhöh stop on the route is the only bilingual one out of the 19.

Voiced by local German-American teen Gisela Looper and retired U.S. soldier Kenny Coleman, it tells of the area’s transformation from a military hub to a thriving civilian community.

It took shape from interactions in the Facebook community “Husterhoeh Kaserne,” connecting former U.S. military personnel who were stationed at the base, city officials said.

Marina Hilbert, a German citizen and the group’s administrator, said her journey began with social media searches for long-lost American friends who had left Germany decades earlier after their tour of duty.

Sharing photos of old haunts evoked memories for many veterans, Hilbert explained, and she



Marina Hilbert receives a challenge coin from U.S. Army Col. Deon Maxwell in Pirmasens, Germany, on Wednesday in recognition of her efforts to connect veterans through her Facebook group.

was drawn in by their fond memories of Pirmasens.

“Then questions quickly followed from the vets online: ‘Is my building still there?’ or ‘What about my landlords, are they still alive?’” she said. “And I just tried to help where I could.”

Today, the group of more than 1,800 members also supports a unique initiative known as the “care call” program.

Group members regularly contact listed members to check on their well-being. If a veteran doesn’t respond, the community takes further steps, with a volunteer checking in personally to ensure everything is OK.

Many members are aging, so the care call ensures that they remain

connected and supported, maintaining a lifeline of support and camaraderie, she said.

The bilingual audio guide is a joint effort between group members, city officials, the Pirmasens Youth Forum and the Pirmasens Historical Association.

It explores the local military history and also delves into the area’s culture and vernacular, which made an impact on veterans. One such word is “grumbeere,” or “ground berries,” the local name for potatoes.

Looper, whose parents work at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, noted the curiosity aroused by the American legacy, which lingers in the city’s street names.

“I like to think about how con-

fused some random German bureaucrats must be when they read about ‘Delaware Avenue’ on a letter, rather than the German words for street and alley,” she said. “Maybe the street addresses will pique people’s interest to find out more, and that is what the audio guide is here for.”

Built in 1938, the barracks initially served the Hitler Youth and were a training ground during the war, the guide explains. The site was handed over to the Americans by the French in March 1951.

Over the decades, it expanded to approximately 750 acres, hosting more than 10,000 American soldiers and their families by the 1990s.

Among the Cold War veterans

who reconnected via the Facebook group is Rufus Riley, who served as a missile crewman in Pirmasens under the 2/56 Air Defense Artillery for 10 years starting in 1972.

Riley, an African American who arrived as a young man amid the Vietnam War and rising racial tensions, said he’d heard about neo-Nazis before arriving in Germany.

“When I arrived, I saw large groups with flags and I thought they were already demonstrating,” he recalled. “But what it was, they were going to a soccer game. That was a relief!”

This initial misunderstanding marked the beginning of his deep connection with the city, where he would meet his future wife and become an active sports coach.

Following a scale-down of the U.S. military presence in 1997, the area faced economic challenges, leading to an urban development agreement in 1999 aimed at revitalizing the site for civilian use.

Edith Allison, who served at the base as an intelligence analyst from 1978 to 1981, returned to Germany a few years ago as a Department of Defense Education Activity teacher.

“Pirmasens was my first time this far away from home and has a special place in my heart,” she said. “When I came back for the first time in 2019, they were knocking down some of the buildings, and I thought it was dying.

“But there is a spark of life in that post,” she said. “It’s pretty cool.”

Only a small U.S. Air Force logistics facility today remains amid a shrinking presence of the former base.

“My Americans, my family as I call them, are always sad when they see the old buildings on post. But the buildings never were the Husterhöh,” Hilbert said. “It was always the people. Without them, there would be no Husterhöh.”

Budget: Senators cite security climate to urge more spending

FROM PAGE 1

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the Pentagon prioritized near-term readiness and support for service members over longer-term modernization investments, such as fifth- and sixth-generation aircraft, as a result of the budget cap.

“We had to make some tough, but responsible choices,” he told senators. “We decided not to invest in some modernization that would not deliver results before 2030, and we invested in our people and our families.”

Troops are set to receive a 4.5% pay raise under the budget request. Austin said the Defense Department would be able to make up for the 2025 funding shortfall in

modernization if lawmakers ensure future budgets include meaningful growth.

Air Force Gen. Charles “CQ” Brown, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said a lack of additional financial support in the coming years would be felt operationally five to 10 years from now, but a leaner 2025 budget is not expected to make an impact today.

Still, senators said Wednesday that it is reckless to shortchange the Pentagon at a time when Russia is waging war in Ukraine, Iran and its proxies are fanning violence in the Middle East and China is growing its military budget.

China is planning a 7.2% spending increase on defense.

“If the world were becoming

safer, then perhaps such a reduction could be absorbed with little risks to national security,” Collins said. “But unfortunately, that is not the world in which we live.”

Tester described the security climate as the most dangerous in his lifetime, comparing it to the tense confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cuban Missile Crisis in the early 1960s.

“We need to understand what risk a lower budget creates for our military personnel, our operations around the globe and our modernization efforts,” he said. “We’ve got to get a budget done so the men and women in uniform supported by the civilians of the Department of Defense can go about their busi-

ness of keeping America safe.”

Other lawmakers have also voiced support in recent weeks for circumventing the debt limit deal and giving the Pentagon more money.

Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, argued in an op-ed last month that the budget in its current form shrinks the Navy and Air Force, underfunds operations in the Indo-Pacific region by \$11 billion and slashes \$900 million from missile defense programs.

“Fortunately, Congress has the power of the purse and can demonstrate to the world that America still pursues peace through strength,” he wrote in The Hill.

Democrats are unlikely to agree to a deal that would raise the cap without also exceeding limitations on domestic spending.

Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, the Democratic chairwoman of the appropriations committee, agreed Wednesday that the defense budget was “inadequate” but said other federal agencies are also in need of more resources.

“As members talk about how we might increase investments to better meet our defense needs, we cannot ignore our needs here at home as well,” she said. “When it comes to additional resources above the caps, which the vice chair and others have mentioned, I’m going to insist on parity for non-defense spending.”

MILITARY

Navy offers bonuses for language abilities

BY SHANNON RENFROE
Stars and Stripes

Sailors proficient in Russian or any one of 13 other high-demand languages may be able to add a one-time \$500 bonus to their paycheck under a new Navy testing program.

Central and Eastern Europe dominate the list, with 11 of the 14 languages chosen for the bonus program. They include Bulgarian, Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Slovak and Ukrainian. The three others are Hausa, Kurdish-Sorani and Thai.

Multilingual sailors can test for up to two languages in a month, which would make them eligible for a one-time \$1,000 bonus.

Because the service aims to identify untapped linguistic skills, rated language professionals aren't eligible for the extra cash. That group includes foreign area officers, cryptologic interpreters and graduates of the Defense Language Institute.

Navy personnel who are already receiving a regular monthly foreign language proficiency bonus through a language-coded assignment are also ineligible.

Skill in most of the selected languages will be assessed through Defense Language Proficiency Tests or an oral interview, which must be done no later than Sept. 30.

Assessments will be based on the Interagency Language Round-



JOHN BELLINO/U.S. Navy
Seaman William Hube explains the steering of the amphibious transport dock ship USS Arlington to Ukrainian children during a port visit in Riga, Latvia, in 2022.

table scale. Sailors can qualify for the bonus either by scoring a 2+ on the listening and reading portions of a proficiency test or by achieving the same score in speaking via the interview.

However, there is no proficiency test for Estonian, Latvian and Slovak, so an interview is the only option. For Lithuanian, an interview isn't possible, leaving the proficiency test as the sole evaluation method.

The 2+ rating is generally considered to be close to the level of understanding of an educated native speaker.

These languages support current operations with partners and allies, aligning with those identified as critical by the Defense Department and the Navy, according to an administrative message issued in late April.

The ongoing impact of the Russia-Ukraine war for the U.S. and its allies is evident in the language selections. Aside from Russian and Ukrainian, all the European languages in the program are representative of NATO member countries.

Deputies killed airman after entering wrong apartment

BY DAVID FISCHER
Associated Press

MIAMI — The family of a 23-year-old Black U.S. Air Force airman who was fatally shot by sheriff's deputies at his off-base apartment in Florida last week will join civil rights attorney Ben Crump for a news conference Thursday calling for transparency in the investigation.

Crump said in a statement released Wednesday that Okaloosa County Sheriff's deputies responding to a disturbance call at the apartment complex in Fort Walton Beach burst into the wrong unit and fatally shot Senior Airman Roger Fortson when they saw he was armed with a gun. Fortson was home alone and on a FaceTime call with a friend when deputies arrived at his door, Crump said.

Fortson was based at the Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field.

According to Crump, the woman, whom the attorney didn't identify, said Fortson heard a knock at the door. He asked who was there but didn't get a response. A few minutes later, Fortson heard a louder knock but didn't see anyone when he looked through the peephole, Crump said, citing the woman's account.

The woman said Fortson was concerned and went to retrieve his gun, which Crump said was legally owned.

As Fortson walked back through his living room, deputies burst through the door, saw that



U.S. AIR FORCE/AP
Senior Airman Roger Fortson was based at the Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Fla.

Fortson was armed and shot him six times, according to Crump's statement. The woman said Fortson was on the ground, saying, "I can't breathe," after he was shot, Crump said.

Fortson died at a hospital, officials said. The deputy involved in the shooting was placed on administrative leave pending an investigation.

The woman said Fortson wasn't causing a disturbance during their FaceTime call and believes that the deputies must have had the wrong apartment, Crump's statement said.

"The circumstances surrounding Roger's death raise serious questions that demand immediate answers from authorities, especially considering the alarming witness statement that the police

entered the wrong apartment," Crump said.

"We are calling for transparency in the investigation into Roger's death and the immediate release of body cam video to the family," Crump said. "His family and the public deserve to know what occurred in the moments leading up to this tragedy."

The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office didn't immediately respond to requests for comment about Crump's statements. But Sheriff Eric Aden posted a statement on Facebook on Wednesday afternoon expressing sadness about the shooting.

The sheriff's office said in a statement last week that a deputy responding to a call of a disturbance in progress at the apartment complex reacted in self-defense after encountering an armed man. The office did not offer details on what kind of disturbance deputies were responding to or who called them.

The sheriff's office also declined to immediately identify the responding deputies or their races. Officials said earlier this week that the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the local State Attorney's Office will investigate the shooting.

Fortson was assigned to the 4th Special Operations Squadron as a special missions aviator, where one of his roles as a member of the squadron's AC-130J Ghost rider aircrew was to load the gunship's 30 mm and 105 mm cannons during missions.

Fort Cavazos soldier charged with conspiracy to commit murder

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — A soldier assigned to Fort Cavazos was arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit murder for his role in helping his incarcerated brother plot to kill a woman, her two children and her boyfriend, according to Connecticut state police.

Sgt. Jeremiah Russell Peikert, 30, sent payments in July 2022 totaling \$250 to his brother's cellmate at a Montville prison in Connecticut as a finder's fee to locate a hitman to kill the four people, according to police documents. The soldier told Connecticut state police that he knew his brother wanted to hurt the woman but did not know he wanted to kill her or anyone else.

The victims of the plot included a 29-year-old woman, a 10-year-old girl, a 1-year-old girl and a 23-year-old man, according to police documents.

"I initially did not want any involvement in this plan, and I reluctantly transferred the money. I eventually did because Josh and [the cellmate] kept pressuring me to send the money for 'the job,'" Peikert wrote in a statement to police. "I had thoughts of notifying the police and/or [the woman], but I never did, but know I should have."

Peikert is a network communication systems specialist with the 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade who enlisted in 2012, according to Fort Cavazos, which is in Texas.

Connecticut state police on May 1 traveled to arrest Peikert in Fort Worth, Texas. He appeared two days later in court in Norwich, Conn., where bond was set at

\$500,000, according to police records. He is also charged with conspiracy to commit risk of injury to minors.

His brother, 31-year-old Joshua Peikert, is incarcerated and faces the same charges.

Authorities first became aware of the situation October 2022, when the woman contacted the Groton Police Department after receiving a letter from the cellmate involved in the plot to alert her that she faced danger, according to police.

The case was given to state police who interviewed the cellmate, who is not named in police records. He told police that he advised Joshua Peikert that it would cost \$10,000 per person. He said Peikert told him that was "doable" and said he would pay half up front and half afterward.

Joshua Peikert provided his cellmate the victims' address, where they sleep and the location

of a spare key in the outdoor electrical outlet to gain access to the home, according to police documents.

The cellmate said he never intended to hire a hitman or commit any violence, nor did he intend to contact anyone to do the job, but said he charged a \$500 finder's fee. Soon after, the cellmate received \$250 in his prison account from Jeremiah Peikert.

Joshua was released and reincarcerated and continued to ask his old cellmate about the hit. The cellmate told police that he "played dumb" and acted as if his brother had messed up the money transfer.

While in the prison's medical facility, the cellmate said he wrote and sent the letter. He was later transferred to a different prison.

The cellmate also provided police with a handwritten letter from Joshua Peikert that detailed all the information about the woman's

home, which she later confirmed to police as accurate.

Police also confirmed Jeremiah Peikert did transfer \$250 in two transactions into the cellmate's prison financial account in July 2022. The cellmate called the soldier three times that month. During the call, the cellmate told Jeremiah that the individual hired for the job had gone to Florida, where he was arrested for fighting with a police officer and he doesn't know when the man will return.

"The good news is that the job is going to get done because the payment, the agreement went through. The bad news is it may take a little while to happen, maybe two weeks," the cellmate told him.

In December 2023, Connecticut state police interviewed Jeremiah Peikert at Fort Cavazos where he admitted to the transfers and that he knew his brother was trying to have the woman hurt.



Jeremiah Peikert

NATION

Storms hit South amid week of deadly weather

BY KRISTIN M. HALL
AND GEORGE WALKER IV
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Tenn. — A wave of dangerous storms began crashing over parts of the South on Thursday, a day after severe weather with damaging tornadoes killed at least three people in the region.

A heavy line of storms swept into Atlanta near the end of the morning rush hour. Busy hub airports in Atlanta and Charlotte, N.C., reported delays. The National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center cited an "enhanced risk" for severe weather from Texas to South Carolina.

The storms continue a streak of torrential rains and tornadoes this week from the Plains to the Midwest and, now, the Southeast. At least four people have died since Monday. The weather comes on the heels of a stormy April in which the United States had 300 confirmed tornadoes, the second-most on record for the month and the most since 2011.

Nearly a quarter-million homes and businesses still lacked power Thursday in several Southern states after storms the night before, according to PowerOutage.us.

One in Tennessee damaged homes, injured people, toppled power lines and trees, and killed a 22-year-old man in a car in Claiborne County, north of Knoxville, officials said. A second person was killed south of Nashville in Columbia, where officials said a likely tornado blew homes off



GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

A storm-damaged car is seen along Blackburn Road on Thursday in Columbia, Tenn.

their foundations.

Bob Booth had just gotten home to Columbia from Georgia and was sitting down to watch television when he heard a "crazy racket."

"I get up and look out, and it was all hell breaking loose outside," Booth said. "Then the top half of one of my trees goes down across the road."

Booth said he was told it would be a while before his power was restored. One neighbor, he said, lost all trees except one that

would have destroyed his house: "So that guy is blessed."

In Spring Hill, not far from Columbia, retired pastor Walter Shell said he and his wife grabbed their two dogs and headed for the basement when his phone alerted him to a tornado.

"It missed where me and my wife were standing by about 4 inches. It went around," he said. "It pays to pray, I can tell you."

Torrential rains led to a flash flood emergency and water res-

cues northeast of Nashville. A temporary ground stop was issued at Nashville's main airport, and the weather service issued a tornado emergency, its highest alert level, for nearby areas.

Schools were closed Thursday in several Tennessee counties. In Georgia, some districts north of Atlanta canceled in-person classes or delayed start times because of storm damage overnight that included fallen trees on houses and vehicles around Clarkesville. No injuries were reported there.

"We're just trying to clean up right now and wait for the next round," said Lynn Smith, director of the Habersham County Emergency Management Agency.

A strong tornado damaged at least 20 homes in northern Alabama's DeKalb County and caused injuries but no deaths, officials said.

In North Carolina, a state of emergency was declared Wednesday night for Gaston County, west of Charlotte, after a storm that toppled power lines and trees, including one that landed on a car. One person in the car was killed and another was taken to a hospital, officials said.

The storms followed heavy rain, strong winds, hail and tornadoes in parts of the central U.S. on Monday, including a twister that ripped through an Oklahoma town and killed one person. On Tuesday, the Midwest took the brunt of the bad weather. Tornadoes touched down in parts of Michigan, Ohio and Indiana, according to the weather service.

Michigan's Kalamazoo area was hard hit as a FedEx facility was ripped apart, with downed power lines trapping about 50 people.

Tornadoes were also confirmed near Pittsburgh, in central Arkansas and in northern West Virginia. The West Virginia twister was at least the 11th tornado this year in the state, which sees two tornadoes in an average year.

Both the Plains and Midwest have been hammered by tornadoes this spring.

Daniels spars with Trump attorney over cash-for-silence deal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Donald Trump's defense attorneys grilled Stormy Daniels on Thursday over the transaction at the center of the former president's hush money trial, pressing her on why she accepted a \$130,000 payment to keep quiet about her alleged sexual encounter with Trump instead of going public.

"Why didn't you do that?" attorney Susan Necheles asked, wondering why Daniels didn't hold a news conference as she had planned to tell reporters about the 2006 encounter, which Trump has denied ever happened.

"Because we were running out of time," Daniels said.

Did she mean, Necheles asked, that she was running out of time to use the claim to make money?

"To get the story out," Daniels countered. The negotiations happened in the final weeks of the 2016 presidential campaign, a critical point in the case against Trump because prosecutors are



ELIZABETH WILLIAMS/AP

Stormy Daniels testifies on the witness stand as a promotional image for one of her shows with an image of Trump is displayed on monitors in Manhattan criminal court Thursday in New York.

arguing that he and his allies snatched up these potentially damaging stories and buried them in an illegal effort to influence the November results. Trump has denied any wrongdoing.

Daniels returned for more testimony Thursday, avoiding eye

contact with the former president as she walked into the Manhattan courtroom and made her way to the witness stand.

Trump's lawyers have sought to paint the porn actor as a liar and extortionist who's trying to take down Trump after drawing money and fame from her story about him.

Turning pointedly to Daniels' career as an adult film actor, writer and director, Necheles asked: "You have a lot of experience in making phony stories about sex appear real?"

"The sex in those films is real, just like the sex in that room," Daniels replied. "The character themes might be different, but the sex is very real. That's why it's pornography, not a B movie."

Daniels was first called as a witness Tuesday, describing what she said happened during their 2006 encounter in graphic detail.

Trump scowled and shook his head through much of Daniels' description of their alleged sexual encounter after the two met at

a celebrity golf outing at Lake Tahoe where sponsors included the adult film studio where she worked. At one point, the judge told defense lawyers during a sidebar conversation — out of earshot of the jury and the public — that he could hear Trump "cursing audibly."

Daniels testified earlier this week that while she wasn't physically menaced, she felt a "power imbalance" as Trump, in his hotel bedroom, stood between her and the door and propositioned her.

As for whether she felt compelled to have sex with him, she reiterated Thursday that he didn't drug her or physically threaten her. But, she said, "My own insecurities, in that moment, kept me from saying no."

As Necheles continued comparing Daniels' testimony with past interviews, the witness insisted, "My story hasn't changed."

"You're trying to make me say that it changed, but it hasn't changed at all," she said.

Her testimony has been an ex-

traordinary moment in what could be the only criminal case against the presumptive Republican presidential nominee to go to trial before voters decide in November whether to send him back to the White House. Trump has pleaded not guilty and casts himself as the victim of a politically tainted justice system working to deny him another term.

As she negotiated a nondisclosure agreement with Trump's then-attorney Michael Cohen, Daniels was also talking with other journalists as a "backup" plan, she testified Thursday. Necheles accused her of refusing to share the story with reporters because she wouldn't be paid for it.

"The better alternative was for you to get money, right?" Necheles said.

Daniels said she was most interested in getting her story out and ensuring her family's safety.

"The better alternative was to get my story protected with a paper trail so that my family didn't get hurt," Daniels replied.

NATION

Some migrants will be subject to more stiff asylum rules

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration planned to propose a new rule Thursday aimed at speeding up the asylum claims process for some migrants — a potential prelude to broader actions from President Joe Biden later this year that would impose a bigger crackdown at the border.

It's meant to affect migrants with criminal records or those who would otherwise be eventually deemed ineligible for asylum in the United States. The proposal, which the Department of Homeland Security planned to announce Thursday, was confirmed by four people familiar with its contents who were granted anonymity to detail plans not yet public.

Under current law, a migrant who arrives at the border and undergoes an initial screening for "credible fear" — one criterion for asylum — is allowed to continue with the process even if they have a criminal background or would pose a security risk. A judge would later determine whether that migrant would be eligible for asylum.

The change would effectively let an officer at the initial screening stage make that determination, rather than waiting for a judge, according to the sources. They also said the proposal affects a relatively small number of migrants and those who would not be qualified to receive asylum protections anyway.

But despite those caveats, immigration advocates have previously raised questions about any changes to the credible fear process, saying that migrants are often doing these interviews immediately after surviving life-threatening perilous trips to get to the U.S.

Because of this, initial interviews are designed to have a relatively lower bar so that migrants aren't wrongfully deported, they

have said. And they've questioned how much legal help migrants who are in custody can actually get in order to prepare them for this key first step toward an asylum claim.

It will likely be months before Thursday's proposal, which was first reported by Politico, would actually go into effect. Biden has continued to mull larger executive action on the border, whose timing depends in large part on whether the number of illegal border crossings increases — they have been steadily decreasing since December.

The proposed rule also comes amid pressure from fellow Democrats and immigrant rights advocates to support immigrants already in the U.S.

Janet Murguía, the president of UnidosUS, a civil rights advocacy organization, said she met with Biden last week at the White House with other Latino leaders to push for relief for immigrants who do not have legal status but have been in the U.S. for years.

"I believe that President Biden is open to this notion that he can do something. He asked for more specifics," Murguía said. "We're going to make the case in the White House. We're going to make the case here in the Capitol, across the country, in every community."

At a news conference Wednesday, Latino and progressive congressional Democrats expressed frustration at the idea that the White House would clamp down on the border without also assisting immigrants who crossed the border illegally as children.

"Mr. President, we know what's in your heart. Let's reject the extremist messaging vilifying immigrants. Let's embrace our values as a nation of immigrants and provide relief for the long-term residents of the United States," said Sen. Alex Padilla, a California Democrat.



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., joined by Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., speaks to reporters at the Capitol in Washington on Wednesday after she tried and failed to oust Speaker Mike Johnson.

House rejects Greene's effort to oust Johnson, but chaos lingers

BY LISA MASCARO
AND KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hard-line Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene tried and failed in a brazen push to oust House Speaker Mike Johnson, but the resounding rejection by Republicans and Democrats tired of the turmoil does not guarantee an end to the GOP chaos.

One of Donald Trump's biggest supporters in Congress, Greene stood on the House floor late Wednesday and read a long list of "transgressions" she said Johnson had committed as speaker, from his passage of a \$95 billion national security package with aid for Ukraine to his reliance on Democrats to wield power.

Colleagues booed in protest. But Greene soldiered on, criticizing Johnson's leadership as "pathetic, weak and unacceptable."

After Greene triggered the vote on her motion to vacate the Republican speaker from his office, Republican Majority Leader Steve

Scalise quickly countered by calling first for a vote to table it.

An overwhelming majority, 359-43, kept Johnson in his job, for now.

"As I've said from the beginning, and I've made clear here every day, I intend to do my job," Johnson said afterward. "And I'll let the chips fall where they may. In my view, that is leadership."

It's the second time in a matter of months that Republicans have worked to oust their own speaker, an unheard of level of party upheaval with a move rarely seen in U.S. history.

While the outcome temporarily calms the latest source of House disruption, the vote tally shows the strengths but also the stark limits of Johnson's hold on the gavel, and the risks ahead for any Republican trying to lead the GOP.

Without Democratic help, Johnson would have certainly faced a more dismal outcome. All told, 11 Republicans voted to proceed

with Greene's effort, more than it took to oust then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy last fall, a first in U.S. history.

But by relying on Democratic backing, Johnson risks inciting more criticism that he is insufficiently loyal to the party.

And the threat still lingers — any single lawmaker can call up the motion to vacate the speaker.

Even though Trump provided a needed nod of support for Johnson at crucial moments, it's not bankable going forward. The former president posed an idle warning about potentially ousting the speaker as voting was getting underway.

"At some point, we may very well be, but this is not the time," Trump said on social media.

Trump also made clear he still valued Greene, perhaps his biggest ally in the House, even as he rejected her proposal. "I absolutely love Marjorie Taylor Greene," he said as he urged Republicans to table her motion.

Trump-affiliated group releases book outlining possible 2nd-term path

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Making future military aid to Ukraine contingent on the country participating in peace talks with Russia. Banning Chinese nationals from buying property within a 50-mile radius of U.S. government buildings. Filling the national security sector with acolytes of Donald Trump.

One of several groups trying to lay the groundwork for a second Trump administration if the for-

mer Republican president wins in November is out with a new policy book that aims to articulate an "America First" national security agenda.

The book, shared with The Associated Press before its release Thursday, is the latest effort from the America First Policy Institute. Like the Heritage Foundation's "Project 2025," the group is seeking to help Trump avoid the mistakes of 2016, when he entered the White House largely unprepared.

Beyond its policy efforts, the institute's transition project has been working to draft dozens of executive orders and developing a training program for future political appointees. Heritage has been building an extensive personnel database and offering its own policy manuals.

Both groups have stressed they are independent from Trump's campaign, which has repeatedly tried to distance itself from such efforts, insisting that the only

Trump-backed policies are those the candidate articulates himself.

Still, Fred Fleitz, the book's editor, noted that he and retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, who served for a time as Trump's acting national security adviser and wrote several of the chapters, have been in frequent touch with the former president, soliciting feedback and discussing topics such as Ukraine at length.

"We hope this is where he is. We're not speaking for him, but I

think he will approve," said Fleitz, who formerly served as the National Security Council's chief of staff.

He said he hopes the book will serve as "a guidebook that will be an intellectual foundation for the America First approach" to national security "that's easy to use."

"It's a grand strategy," added Kellogg. "You don't start with the policies first. You start with the strategies first. And that's what we've done."

MIDEAST



PETROS KARADJIAS/AP

A truck carrying food aid for Gaza to loading on the container ship Sagamore where on dock at Larnaca port, Cyprus, on Wednesday.

Supply: US sends first shipment of aid to newly built pier in Gaza

FROM PAGE 1

with its offensive in Rafah. Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari was asked at a news conference whether the army can conduct the operation without U.S. arms.

“The army has armaments for the missions it plans, and for the missions in Rafah too — we have what we need,” Hagari said.

Meanwhile, a shipment of humanitarian aid left a port in Cyprus and was on its way to the U.S.-built pier in Gaza, the first delivery to the newly built ramp, Cyprus’ foreign minister said Thursday.

The relief is desperately needed, with the United Nations saying people in Gaza are on the brink of famine and as Israeli troops ordered the evacuation of 100,000 Palestinians from Gaza’s southern city of Rafah.

The U.S. vessel, loaded with much needed humanitarian assistance, departed from the Larnaca port with the aim of transferring as much aid to Gaza as possible through the maritime corridor, said Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos.

The trip comes some two months after Biden gave the order to build the large floating platform several miles off the Gaza coast that will be the launching pad for deliveries.

The U.S. has historically provided enormous amounts of military aid to Israel. That has only accelerated in the aftermath of Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack, which killed some 1,200 people in Israel and led to about 250 being taken captive by militants. Biden’s comments and his decision last week to pause the

shipment of heavy bombs to Israel are the most striking manifestations of the growing daylight between his administration and Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government. Biden said Wednesday that Israel’s actions around Rafah had “not yet” crossed his red lines, but has repeated that Israel needs to do far more to protect the lives of civilians in Gaza.

The shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound bombs and 1,700 500-pound bombs, according to a senior U.S. administration official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. The focus of U.S. concern was the larger explosives and how they could be used in a dense urban area.

“Civilians have been killed in Gaza as a consequence of those bombs and other ways in which they go after population centers,” Biden told CNN. “I made it clear that if they go into Rafah — they haven’t gone in Rafah yet — if they go into Rafah, I’m not supplying the weapons that have been used historically to deal with Rafah, to deal with the cities, that deal with that problem.

“We’re not walking away from Israel’s security,” the Democratic president continued. “We’re walking away from Israel’s ability to wage war in those areas.”

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin earlier Wednesday confirmed the weapons delay, telling the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense that the U.S. paused “one shipment of high payload munitions.”

“We’re going to continue to do

what’s necessary to ensure that Israel has the means to defend itself,” Austin said. “But that said, we are currently reviewing some near-term security assistance shipments in the context of unfolding events in Rafah.”

It also comes as the Biden administration is due to deliver a first-of-its-kind formal verdict this week on whether the airstrikes on Gaza and restrictions on delivery of aid have violated international and U.S. laws designed to spare civilians from the worst horrors of war.

A decision against Israel would further add to pressure on Biden to curb the flow of weapons and money to Israel’s military.

Biden signed off on the pause in an order conveyed last week to the Pentagon, according to U.S. officials who were not authorized to comment on the matter. The White House National Security Council sought to keep the decision out of the public eye for several days until it had a better understanding of the scope of Israel’s intensified military operations in Rafah and until Biden could deliver a long-planned speech Tuesday to mark Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Biden’s administration in April began reviewing future transfers of military assistance as Netanyahu’s government appeared to move closer toward an invasion of Rafah, despite months of opposition from the White House. The official said the decision to pause the shipment was made last week and no final decision had been made yet on whether to proceed with the shipment at a later date.

Houthi rebels claim Gulf of Aden strikes

By JON GAMBRELL
Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Yemen’s Houthi rebels on Thursday claimed responsibility for two missile attacks in the Gulf of Aden on two Panama-flagged container ships that caused no damage.

The comments by Yemeni military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree and former Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi come as the allies of Hamas continue to pressure Israel over its continuing war on the militant group in the Gaza Strip.

The Houthis insist their assaults on shipping through the crucial waterway leading to the Suez Canal and onward to the Mediterranean Sea will continue as long as the war goes on. Meanwhile, Iran has already launched an unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel amid the war, bringing a yearslong shadow conflict between the two nations out into the light.

Saree in a prerecorded statement claimed attacks on the MSC Diego and MSC Gina. The Joint Maritime Information Center, a U.S.-led coalition of nations operating in the Mideast, said those two missile attacks happened early Tuesday.

“Neither were hit and all crew on

board are safe,” the center said. “The vessels were last reported proceeding to next port of call.”

The center added that the vessels were “likely targeted due to perceived Israeli affiliation.”

Both vessels were operating for Geneva-based Mediterranean Shipping Co., which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Saree did not say why it took the rebels two days to claim the attacks. He also claimed the Houthis targeted the MSC Vittoria, another container ship, in the Indian Ocean. An attack on that vessel, however, has not been reported or acknowledged by any authorities.

The Houthis have said their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are aimed at pressuring Israel to end its war against Hamas in Gaza, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians there, according to local health officials.

The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the U.S. Maritime Administration. Shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined because of the threat.



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Japan agency proposes allowing commercial fin whaling

Associated Press
 TOKYO — Japan’s Fisheries Agency has proposed a plan to allow catching fin whales in addition to three smaller whale species currently permitted under the country’s commercial whaling around its coast, officials said Thursday.

The proposal comes five years after Japan resumed commercial whaling within its exclusive economic zone after withdrawing from the International Whaling Commission. It ended 30 years of what Japan

called “research whaling” that had been criticized by conservationists as a cover for commercial hunts banned by the commission in 1988. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshi-

ing, said the government supports sustainable use of whales as part of Japan’s traditional food culture and plans to promote the industry. The agency said it is seeking public comments on the proposed plan and will seek its approval at the next

review meeting in mid-June. The agency decided to propose adding fin whales to the allowable catch list after stock surveys confirmed there has been a sufficient recovery of the fin whale population in the North Pacific.

Poland strengthening its border with Belarus to deter migration

Associated Press
 WARSAW, Poland — Poland’s defense minister said Thursday his country is strengthening the metal barrier along its border with Belarus to deter illegal migration. “We are mending the barrier on the Polish-Belarusian border, we are strengthening this barrier,” Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz said on private Radio Zet. “The spending on these purposes is the highest in (Poland’s) history.”

en the eastern frontier of NATO and the European Union. That presence has been increased since Russia’s aggression in Ukraine in 2022. He spoke in favor of Poland building bunkers, trenches and ditches along that border and the one with Russia’s exclave of Kaliningrad, steps the Baltic states have taken. Poland says a massive wave of illegal migration from Belarus, especially in 2022, was orchestrated by that country and by Russia to destabilize Poland and the European Union. The influx was largely curbed by the metal barrier that Poland completed last year.

Bread loaves recalled in Japan after ‘rat remains’ were found

Associated Press
 TOKYO — Loaves of bread have been taken off store shelves in Japan after the remains of “a small animal” believed to be a rat were found. Production of the bread was halted at a Tokyo factory, with 104,000 packages being recalled, according to Pasco Shikishima Corp. The company apologized and promised compensation. Japanese media reports said at

least two people who bought the bread in Gunma Prefecture, northwest of Tokyo, complained to the company about finding a rodent in the bread. The bread had been sold in various areas, including Ibaraki, Niigata, Kanagawa, Fukushima, Aomori and Tokyo, according to Pasco. The company, based in Nagoya city, central Japan, also makes rolls, bagels and muffins.

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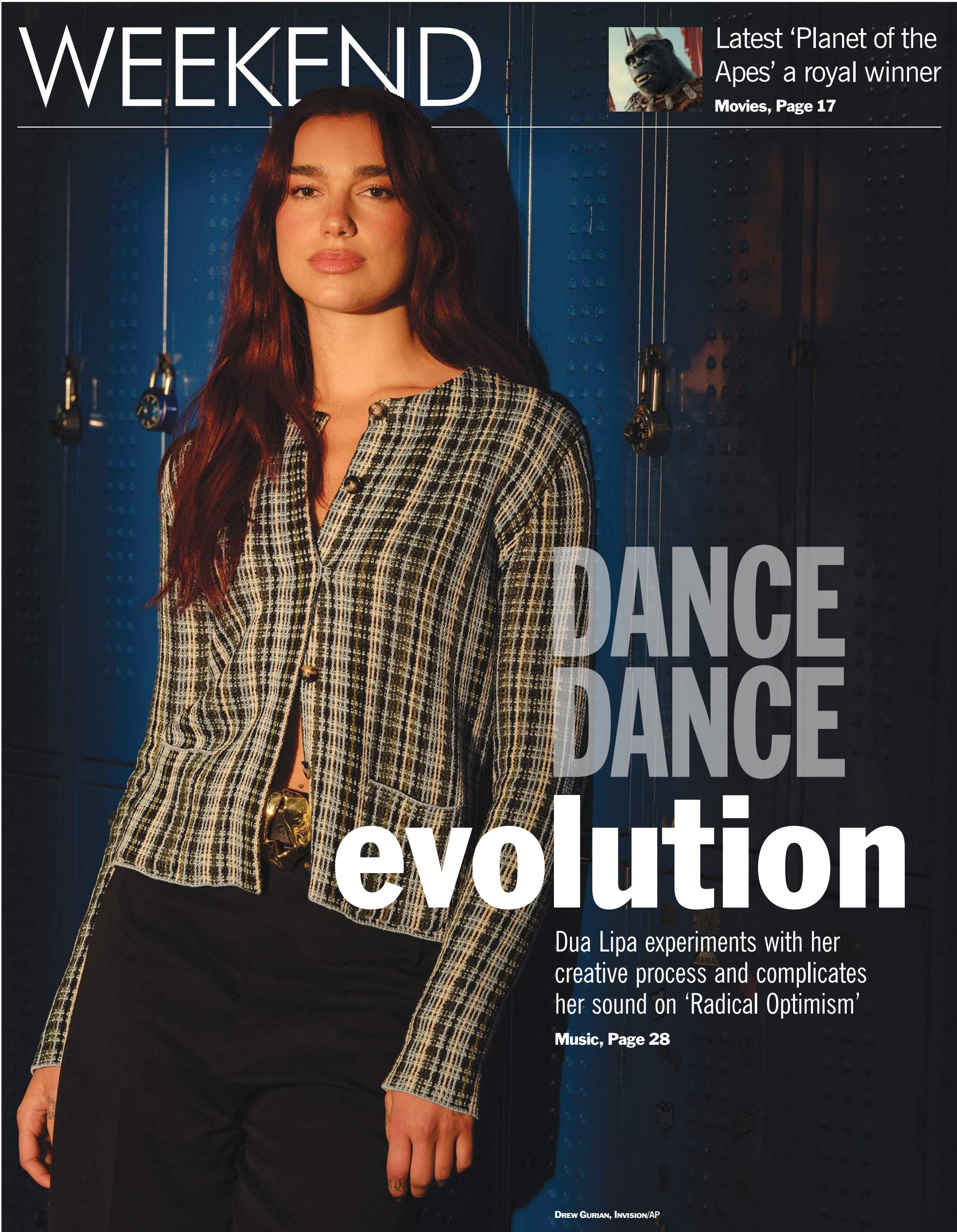
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Latest 'Planet of the Apes' a royal winner
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DANCE
evolution

Dua Lipa experiments with her creative process and complicates her sound on 'Radical Optimism'

Music, Page 28

DREW GURIAN, INVISION/AP

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Thinner, faster, brighter

Apple unveils new versions of iPad Pro, Air tablets

Associated Press

Apple on Tuesday unveiled its next generation of iPad Pros and Airs — models that will boast faster processors, new sizes and a new display system as part of the company’s first update to its tablet lineup in more than a year.

The showcase at Apple’s headquarters in Cupertino, Calif., comes after the company disclosed its steepest quarterly decline in iPhone sales since the pandemic’s outset, deepening a slump that’s increasing the pressure on the trendsetting company to spruce up its products. Apple is expected to make a much bigger splash next month during an annual conference devoted to the latest version of its operating systems for iPhones, iPads and Mac computers — software that analysts expect to be packed with more artificial intelligence technology.

Both lines of new iPads add bells and whistles but have adjusted prices to match. The iPad Pro sports a new thinner design, a new M4 processor for added processing power, slightly upgraded storage and dual OLED panels for a brighter, crisper display. Prices have been hiked to match its new offerings, with the 11-inch model going for \$999 and the 13-inch model fetching \$1,299.

The new iPad Air has the faster M2 chip, a new design, more base storage, a new 13-inch display option and a recentered camera. It will also support use of the new Apple Pencil Pro, which was a function previously exclusive to the Pro models. The 11-inch display will sell for \$599 while the new 13-inch model will fetch \$799.

However Apple did announce a price reduction for its 10th generation iPad, which will now retail for \$349, down from \$449.

Apple is trying to juice demand for iPads after its sales of the tablets plunged 17% from those of last year during the January-March period. After its 2010 debut helped redefine the tablet market, the iPad has become a minor contributor to Apple’s success. It currently accounts for just 6% of the company’s sales.

“The enhancements were both needed and predictable, in a maintenance sort of way, and may help stanch some of the revenue loss in that product line,” Forrester Research analyst Dipanjan Chatterjee said of the new iPads. “But it’s nothing to get terribly excited about.”

All the new models will be available in stores starting May 15.



Apple unveiled its redesigned 11-inch and all-new 13-inch iPad Air this week, supercharged by the M2 chip.

AP

Brew fermented drinks at home with iGulu’s system



iGULU/TNS photos

The iGulu F1 fully automated home brewing system.

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

Beer lovers can make and drink their own unique beer with the new iGulu F1 fully automated home brewing system. The iGulu F1’s brewing process uses automated technology to create high-quality craft beers and non-alcoholic drinks like kombucha.

The countertop appliance (13.5-by-14.5-by-20.5 inches), which iGulu states is as easy to use as making your morning coffee, has an eco-friendly design and smart interactive touch screen. It integrates fermentation, cooling and dispensing functions. The iGulu companion app controls the brewing with real-time monitoring, adjusts the fermentation and cooling and stores customized recipes.

It supports a wide range of ingredients and flavors to easily create and brew personalized beer recipes. iGulu beer brewing ingredient kits include Pale Ale, Bavarian Wheat and Amber Lager, and a Stout option is listed as coming soon. The F1 specifications list the brewing capacity as one gallon, the average brew time of seven or more days and the average cooling time of four hours. All can vary based on the brew type.

The iGulu F1 has three main functions. Fermentation can make beer, cider, wine, kombucha and more. Refrigeration Preservation uses rapid cooling technology to preserve freshness for up to two weeks. Dispensing uses a dual pneumatic gas engine and a specific bartending-style tap handler.

Inside the F1 are advanced sensors that continuously monitor the brewing process and fermentation temperature within the range of 35 to 86 degrees Fahrenheit. This helps home brewers maintain a consistent brewing pressure, ensuring quality and consistency. Beer freshness will last for up to 30 days with a carbon dioxide gas cylinder tank. iGulu states the F1 has compatibility with most 3L-5L beer kegs, including Heineken.

The actual brewing is done in three easy steps: add ingredients from the brew kit with filtered water and select the beer style from the touch-screen menu. The

third step is the best: pouring your homebrew into your favorite mug.

With a detachable design, cleaning and maintenance should be hassle-free. It’s currently offered for \$699, on sale from \$749, and includes three brewing kits. Extra brewing kits start at \$17.99. An iGulu F1 116 ounce Tritan Fermentation Keg is \$59.99. Online: igulu.com

Morel Audio’s new Biggie compact wireless speaker has big, room-filling dynamic sound and a compact minimalist design.

The 7-by-7-by-4.5-inch, 5.7-pound speaker has Bluetooth 5.3 for a 164-foot range. It produces distortion-free, clear and crisp sound coming from precision handcrafted drivers. They feature a two-way bass reflex system with a custom-made 4-inch woofer and a 1-inch soft dome tweeter for accurate, immersive sound. The Biggie has DSP technology and TWS pairing for two Biggie speakers (sold separately) to enable stereo sound.

Controls on board include a 3.5 mm auxiliary port, and the control panel has power, volume, Bluetooth pairing and TWS mode. Playtime will run for 20 hours before a 2-hour USB-C charge is needed for the 2,600 mAh lithium-ion battery. Fast charging for 20 minutes will give about four battery hours of playtime.

Online: morelhifi.com; \$299



The iGulu F1 can make beer, cider, wine, kombucha and more.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

A journey through the grieving process

Crafted as a tribute to creator’s late father, Tales of Kenzera: Zau about a boy who tries to bring his Baba back to life

By GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

When crafting Tales of Kenzera: Zau, Abubakar Salim thought of his father, who passed away from cancer 10 years ago. The founder of Surgent Studios said his father believed that dead is dead, and that he didn’t want his son to spend time dwelling on his end.

That didn’t happen. Salim established a game studio, gathering a team of 30 to create a video game that’s a tribute to his father. Tales of Kenzera not only brings to life the Bantu culture of his father’s native Kenya, but it also carries part of Salim’s story. It’s about a boy named Keberi, who is mourning the death of his father. He searches through his late parent’s belongings and discovers a book he had written about Zau, a shaman of Amandla.

Making a deal

That’s the video game’s narrative frame as players mainly control Zau, who has made a deal with Kalunga, the god of death. If the young shaman can exorcise three great spirits who refuse to move on, then Kalunga would return his Baba back to Zau. That journey takes the young man through three realms that will test players’ combat and platforming skills in this Metroidvania-style adventure.

As Zau, players start off with the Sun and Moon masks. The Sun Mask specializes in powerful melee combat while the Moon Mask lets the protagonist attack from afar with projectiles. In combat, players need to switch between the two masks and use them strategically while dashing to avoid enemy attacks.

More powers are added over time. The Moon Mask can freeze foes so that players can switch to the more powerful Sun Mask to deal major damage. In other scenarios, players will have to match the mask to the color of foes’ Spirit Shields to defeat them. It may sound simple, but when dealing with a several flying adversaries and shield-toting warriors, it becomes hectic.

Thankfully, combat does grow easier over time as players gain Ulogi soul energy from defeated foes that they can use to earn Shaman Points. Players spend that resource on upgrades to Zau’s attacks to make them more powerful.

Platforming as tough as combat

The interplay between masks also extends to the platforming. For example, an acquired power lets Zau destroy barriers when he has the Sun Mask and rebuild temporary platforms with his Moon Mask. Players will have to switch and activate the masks while jumping around a level. Elsewhere, a fiery spear for the Sun Mask is needed to activate switches that open doors, but players will have to race to the opening before time runs out.

Like in other Metroidvania titles, areas are gated and they can be accessed via assorted powers, but for Zau, they’re hidden away in the Shaman Shrines scattered around the world. Other abilities include a glide that lets him jump longer distances, a directional dash and the ability to lasso anchor points to zip to other areas. It takes a lot of time to master these moves because they’re so



ELECTRONIC ARTS/TNS photos

Zau is the protagonist in Tales of Kenzera: Zau. In order to resurrect his dead father, Zau makes a deal with the god of death, who wants a shaman to exorcise three spirits unwilling to move on. The game follows Zau through three realms in which he will have to use the varying abilities of his Sun and Moon Masks to fight foes along the way.



The Metroidvania-style adventure has a handful of enemy types, and they all pose new challenges to overcome and patterns to learn. Sometimes players will have to battle waves of foes in challenge rooms.

dependent on timing and positioning. At times, players will want to throw the controller or pull their hair out because of the learning curve.

Interestingly enough, the powers lend themselves to speedy traversal, and that flows into the challenge of Tales of Kenzera. The difficulty doesn’t come from puzzle-like rooms, but rather is focused on how quickly players can navigate obstacles. The harder scenarios require quick reaction times, and knowing the intricacies of such abilities as the cool-down time on a directional dash.

The details in the hidden power-ups

Players learn the finer details of these platforming and combat mechanics by tackling the challenges hidden in the world. Players will run across Shaman challenges that reward them with trinkets, which in turn offer stat tweaks and bonuses. Players can mix and match these to complement a playstyle. Meanwhile, challenge rooms reward players with the ability to equip more trinkets at once, but they have to go through trials in which they must defeat waves of foes. Other places such as Reflection Points are easier to locate and offer the big bonus of more health.

Although Salim says Tales of Kenzera should take about eight to 10 hours to finish, the game may take long-



The Sun and Moon Masks also influence Zau’s environment. Eventually Zau picks up a power that lets him use his Sun Mask to destroy barriers and his Moon Mask to rebuild temporary platforms.

er for some. It has a handful of frustrating levels that punish players with instant death spikes and brutal checkpoints, forcing them to do some sections repeatedly until they get them right. There’s a lot of trial and error, but that difficulty perhaps mirrors the struggle that Salim said he had with his father’s death.

The harder moments, including ones with dark clouds, convey the raw emotions and mood of that grieving process. Meanwhile, the stories at the heart of the world’s three regions explore other aspects of loss. Unfortunately, the storytelling in these parts of Tales of Kenzera doesn’t always hit the right notes. The backstory behind the little girl Liyana and Impundulu, the great spirit of the sky, is touching, but others, such as that of the one aged warrior Bomani, who worries about the fate of his son, are less developed.

That makes the journey a mixed bag, but at its core, Tales of Kenzera still has an emotional truth. It’s a game about grieving and accepting loss just as Salim ultimately did. Deeper than that, though, the process allowed him to keep his father’s memory and culture alive and share it with the wider world.

Platform: PlayStation 5, Nintendo Switch, Xbox Series X and Series S, PC
Online: ea.com/games/tales-of-kenzera/zau

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

A battle of the breakfast treats

‘Unfrosted’ is Seinfeld and friends’ spoof of the origin story of Pop-Tarts toaster pastries

By Ty Burr
The Washington Post

The film “Unfrosted” may be the Platonic ideal of the Netflix movie: ephemeral, edible, enjoyable, forgettable.

It’s essentially Jerry Seinfeld inviting everyone in his Rolodex to come on over for an extended hang to parody the current craze for trademark biopics — you know, those corporate biographies of beloved/nostalgic brands: “Air,” “BlackBerry,” “Tetris,” “Flamin’ Hot,” et al. “Unfrosted” gives them the Mad magazine treatment — lightly roasted with a lot of nuts.

While this is hardly the real story of how Pop-Tarts were forged by the Kellogg’s breakfast cereal company in 1964, it’s also not NOT the story. There was a rivalry between Kellogg’s and Post Cereals, both of Battle Creek, Mich., and there was a Marjorie Merriweather Post, a visionary business executive and one of the few female CEOs of her day. But she almost certainly did not look or act like Amy Schumer, who plays her here.

Nor was there an Edsel Kellogg (Jim Gaffigan), the hapless heir to the cornflakes empire, or a go-getter Kellogg’s product development vice president named Bob Cabana (Seinfeld). And Thurl Ravenscroft, who voiced Tony the Tiger, was not a pretentious British thespian — but that hardly matters when it’s Hugh Grant in the striped suit.

Directed by Seinfeld and written by him with Barry Marder (“Bee Movie”) and “Seinfeld” scribes Spike Feresten and Andy Robin, “Unfrosted” is breezily silly stuff, very much in the star’s treehouse of early ’60s TV and pop culture references. An early scene takes place at the (fictional) Bowl and Spoon Awards — “the night that cereal salutes itself” — where Kellogg’s cleans up in such categories as “Easiest to Open Wax Bag” and “Best Use of Niacin.” But the Post CEO and her chief minion (Max Greenfield) have a breakthrough product in research and development: a jam-filled pastry called Country Squares. (That part is true, actually.) Desperate to beat Post to market, Edsel and Bob launch



Melissa McCarthy, Jerry Seinfeld and Jim Gaffigan as a breakfast scientist; Kellogg’s product development vice president Bob Cabana; and Edsel Kellogg, heir to the cornflakes empire, respectively, in “Unfrosted.”

an effort to come up with a “breakfast dingus” of their own. (Also true, more or less.)

Melissa McCarthy is on hand as a loose-cannon breakfast scientist (not true), who brings in a crack team of celebrity “taste pilots” (didn’t happen) to help develop the rival treat; they include exercise maven Jack LaLanne (James Marsden), ice cream purveyor Tom Carvel (Adrian Martinez), bike manufacturer Steve Schwinn (Jack McBrayer) and Chef Boyardee (Bobby Moynihan). Not true times 4, but you’re getting the sense of the cheerfully crowded stateroom that is this movie.

“Unfrosted” treats its cameo appearances as a game of whack-a-mole, and while there are some that are just too good to spoil, I can let on that Christian Slater is quite scary as the chief milkman enforcer for the Organized Milk cartel — this movie’s version of

the Teamsters — and comedian Bill Burr as President John F. Kennedy wears his Boston accent and fraudulent toupee with civic pride.

The hit-to-miss joke ratio is decent — about three gags land for every one that gets stuck in the toaster — and the writers don’t throw away a single idea, so if the bit with the escaped sea-monkey ravioli doesn’t make you laugh, the throwaway reference to a nonsugar sweetener called Carcin-O-Sweet or the suggested cereals for the Russian market (Borscht Loops, Count Vodkula) probably will.

In their enthusiasm to skewer everyone and everything, the filmmakers sometimes push the envelope. One scene features Grant’s Thurl Ravenscroft dressed as the QAnon Shaman leading rioting cereal mascots past police barricades to stop the (FDA) certification of Pop-Tarts.

Too soon? With a grimly effective Jan. 6 documentary (“The Sixth”) also coming to video on demand, just maybe.

But that’s taking Jerry’s little backyard barbecue more seriously than it warrants. (That he can make a comedy this edge-free while publicly complaining that wokeism is ruining everything is a sign we’re in worse shape than he thinks.)

Kellogg’s did eventually get Pop-Tarts to grocery stores first, where they sold out in two weeks. “Unfrosted” suggests that Nikita Khrushchev and the Cuban sugar crisis (a real thing) may have played a part. And this antic comedy confection — made with “double the sugar and triple the gluten,” to quote one of the characters — tastes g-r-r-r-reat! (Well, more like pretty good.)

“Unfrosted” is rated PG-13 for suggestive references and language. Running time: 93 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

Shields, Bratt deserve more in contrived ‘Mother of the Bride’

By Lindsey Bahr
Associated Press

Romantic comedies are in a destination wedding rut. Perhaps it’s a collective post-COVID-19 wanderlust kicking in, or, more cynically, some combination of tax credits and a place producers want to spend time. But between “Ticket to Paradise,” “Anyone But You,” “Shotgun Wedding” and now Netflix’s “Mother of the Bride,” the conceit is starting to curdle.

The problem is bigger than the setting, of course. There’s only so much heavy lifting a picturesque location, photogenic bodies and enviable resort outfits can do to make up for a lame story. Also, the appeal of an out-of-reach travelogue is limited in this age of influencers living wildly extravagant lifestyles around the clock on Instagram and TikTok (not to mention the sharp ways “White Lotus” has skewered and luxuriated in those worlds).

“Mother of the Bride,” now streaming on Netflix, wonders what might happen if you find out a few days before the wedding that your kid (Miranda Cosgrove) is marrying the offspring of the guy who broke your heart. That’s what happens to Brooke Shields’ Lana. She arrives in Phuket, Thailand, for her daughter’s wedding, meets the groom (Sean Teale), and turns around and sees that his father is her college ex, Will (Benjamin Bratt). Barely a minute passes before they both fall into a pond.

Later, she’ll walk in on him emerging from the shower, hit him in a sensitive spot playing pickleball and, after they’ve made some progress, overhear the wrong conversation at the wrong time. This is a movie that is adhering to some kind of romantic comedy checklist, but whose



Brooke Shields and Benjamin Bratt play exes who learn their kids are getting married in “Mother of the Bride.”

ingredients add up to very little in the end.

Our tolerance for a silly setup in a romantic comedy is usually pretty generous if we’re given a clever, charming script and authentic emotions. Just think of how ridiculous so many of the greats sound on paper, from “Sabrina” to “Sleepless in Seattle”? Is it fair to compare “Mother of the Bride” to Nora Ephron and Billy Wilder? Maybe not, but it never hurts to be aware of a North Star, which veterans like screenwriter Robin Bernheim Burger and director Mark Waters no doubt are. Just look at the title. This movie even has a romantic foil in a younger doctor (Chad Michael Murray) who is smitten with Lana, which can’t help but remind of Keanu Reeves in Nancy Meyers’ “Something’s Gotta Give.”

But this is so wildly contrived from the start that you

never get to that moment where you’re enjoying it enough to stop asking questions, such as, did Lana never do an internet search for Will in the 20 years they’ve been apart and find out that he’s a wildly rich and successful businessman? Or why would a major corporation offer an intern who has a barely maintained lifestyle Instagram that she started freshman year of college “six figures” to help promote their luxury hotels? Why are we supposed to root for these young people with seemingly infinite resources (one of their wedding presents is a multimillion Tribeca loft) who agree to get married in a month because a brand asks them to? Maybe more fundamentally, did the kids and a wedding have to be involved in this story at all? Does it make the idea of Will and Lana getting back together too weird to be fun? Couldn’t they have simply run into one another at a resort?

I won’t go so far as to say that “Mother of the Bride” feels like an artificial intelligence creation, but it does feel at least a little stitched together from pieces of other romantic comedies of varying quality. Why cast a capable comedian like Rachael Harris as the best friend only to have her say lines like “Is he on the menu”? Or give Wilson Cruz so little to do as Will’s brother?

And it’s a shame, too, because Shields and Bratt came ready to play, to fall in the pond and be minimally clothed for comedy’s sake. There must be a new generation of romantic comedy writers and directors who grew up on Ephron and Meyers out there and are ready to give us something that’s commercial and glossy but also smart and fun to revisit (ahem, remember “Set It Up”?). Maybe they just need to be given a shot.

“Mother of the Bride” is rated PG. Running time: 90 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Primate vs. primate

‘Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes’ poses uncomfortable questions as it ramps up violence, jaw-dropping effects

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Fans of the “Planet of the Apes” franchise may still be mourning the 2017 death of Caesar, the first smart chimp and the charismatic ape leader. Not to worry: He haunts the next episode, the thrilling, visually stunning “Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes.”

We start with Caesar’s funeral, his body decorated with flowers and then set alight like a Viking, before fast-forwarding “many generations later.” All apes talk now and most humans don’t, reduced to cavemen loincloths and running wide-eyed and scared, evolution in reverse.

Our new hero is the young ape Noa (Owen Teague) who is like all young adult chimps — seeking his father’s approval (even chimp dads just don’t understand) and testing his bravery. He is part of a clan that raises pet eagles, smokes fish and lives peacefully.

That all changes when his village is attacked not by humans but by fellow apes — masked soldiers from a nasty kingdom led by the crown-wearing Proximus Caesar (Kevin Durand, playing it to the hilt). He has taken Caesar’s name but twisted his words to become a tyrannical strongman — sorry, strongape.

Unlike the last movie, which dealt with man’s inhumanity to animals — concentration camps included — ape-on-ape violence is in the cards here, including capturing an entire clan as prisoners. Proximus Caesar’s goons use makeshift cattle prods on fellow apes and force them to work while declaring “For Caesar!”

Screenwriter Josh Friedman has cleverly created a movie that examines how ancient stories can be hijacked and manipulated, like how Caesar’s nonviolent message gets twisted by bad actors. There’s also a lot of “Avatar” primitive naivete, which makes sense since the reboot was shaped by several of that movie’s makers.

The movie poses some uncomfortable questions about collaborationists. William H. Macy plays a human who has become a sort of teacher-prisoner to Proximus Caesar — reading Kurt Vonnegut to him — and won’t fight back. “It is already their world,” he rationalizes.

Along for the heroic ride is a human young woman (Freya Allan, a budding star) who is hiding an agenda but offers Noa help along the way. Peter Macon plays a kindly, book-loving orangutan who adds a jolt of gleeful electricity to the movie and is missed when he goes.

The effects are just jaw-dropping, from



20TH CENTURY STUDIOS/AP

Proximus Caesar, played by Kevin Durand, is a tyrannical strongape in “Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes,” capturing an entire clan of apes as prisoners and forcing it to work.

the ability to see individual hairs on the back of a monkey to the way leaves fall and the echoing crack of tree limbs. The sight of apes on horseback, which seemed glitchy just seven years ago, are now seamless. There are also inside jokes, like the use of the name Nova again this time.

Director Wes Ball nicely handles all the thrilling sequences — though the 2½-hour runtime is somewhat taxing — and some really cool ones, like the sight of apes on horseback on a beach, a nod to the original 1968 movie. And like when the apes look through some old illustrated kids’ books and see themselves depicted in zoo cages. That makes for some awkward human-ape

interaction. “What is next for apes? Should we go back to silence?” our hero asks.

The movie races to a complex faceoff between good and bad apes and good and bad humans outside a hulking silo that holds promise to each group. Can apes and humans live in peace, as Caesar hoped? “Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes” doesn’t answer that, but it does open up plenty more to ponder. Starting with the potentially crippling proposition of a key death, this franchise has somehow found new vibrancy.

“Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes” is rated PG-13 for intense sequences of sci-fi violence and action. Running time: 145 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

‘The Sixth’ a chilling documentary about the US Capitol insurrection

By TY BURR
The Washington Post

At first, you may be wondering why A24, the film distributor known for edgy independent fare, is opting not to release “The Sixth” in theaters and is instead sending it straight to streaming services. Having seen the movie, I think I understand.

This chilling documentary by Andrea Nix Fine and Sean Fine, immersing a viewer in the sounds, sights, sensations and shock of Jan. 6, 2021, is best watched not at a public screening, with a restive and possibly argumentative audience, but at home, attended to with sober concentration and preferably older children or grandchildren by one’s side. Civics lessons rarely come this disturbing or this convincing.

The Fines, Oscar-winning documentarians (“Inocente,” 2012), have drawn upon an immense trove of news and personal footage to re-create the events of the daylong attempt by Donald Trump supporters to storm the U.S. Capitol building and halt the official tabulation of votes that would certify Joe Biden as the 46th president. Images from news cameras, body cameras,

security cameras and cellphones have been cut together by editors Jeff Consiglio and Chrystie Martinez Gouz to create an Argus-eyed mosaic of insurrection. A discreetly ominous score by H. Scott Salinas rumbles beneath the sounds of chaos that build from early morning on the 6th and culminate in the breaching of the police line outside the Capitol by a mob estimated at 10,000 and the invasion of its corridors by 1,200 rioters.

“The Sixth” relies on the stories of six narrators who were there, told directly to the camera and in voice-over. Two officers with the D.C. police, Christina Laury and Daniel Hodges, provide harrowing accounts from the white-hot center of the assault, while their boss, Robert J. Contee III, named acting chief of the D.C. police only four days earlier, gives us the broader vantage point. Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-Md.), who had buried his 25-year-old son, Tommy, the day before, recalls events as he saw them from the House chamber, while Erica Loewe, deputy communications director for then-House Majority Whip James E. Clyburn (D-S.C.), gives us the view from the barricaded con-

gressman’s office as the mob pounds on the door. Finally, news photographer Mel D. Cole was in the crowd of Trump supporters as the day progressed from rally to march to riot, and it’s through his lens and memories that we come closest to the attackers themselves.

These are the true believers in Trump’s Big Lie, and they are terrifying. Mostly male, many of them armed, all of them swollen with self-righteous rage, the rioters are seen as individuals and as a seething, pulsating, unified mass of hate. “It was the crowd that was the weapon,” says Officer Hodges, and in the footage of that day, we see that weapon used to crush him and his fellow officers. The police were assaulted with poles, boards, their own batons and bear spray far more harmful than pepper spray. A rioter screams at Hodges to “give me your helmet! I paid for that helmet!”

“These people made it clear that they wanted to kill certain members of Congress,” the officer tells the filmmakers.

Embedded in the mob, photographer Cole documented D.C. police Officer Michael Fanone



A24/Change Content

Protesters gather outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in a scene from A24 documentary “The Sixth.”

being beaten with pipes and attacked with a stun gun; Fanone suffered burns, a heart attack and traumatic brain injury.

“I came for war, man,” one ebullient rioter tells Cole, who expresses horrified amazement that these were the same people who normally expressed their belief that “blue lives matter.” “Not that day,” he says.

Questions remain unanswered by the film, and they nag at history. Among them: Why did the Defense Department hold back National Guard troops stationed nearby while the battle raged for four hours and Contee was forced to call in local officers from Virginia, Maryland and New Jersey? With their arrival, the tide of battle turned and, in

Cole’s words, “It was just weirdly ... over.” Loewe recalls being led by police out of the Capitol building and seeing a handcuffed rioter laughing. “It was *funny* to him,” she says with disbelief.

“The Sixth” documents a singular tragedy in the life of America with an immediacy that makes one grateful for recording technology. “I felt embarrassed for all of us,” says Cole, shaking his head. “For all of America.” A true patriot watches “The Sixth” with a deep sense of shame that this happened to our country and a deeper determination to never let it happen again.

“The Sixth” is rated R for mob violence and language. Running time: 111 minutes. Now streaming on Apple, Google Play, Prime Video and YouTube.

WEEKEND: MOVIES



PHOTOS BY ERIC LACISTE, UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

From left, Ryan Gosling and Aaron Taylor-Johnson, with stunt actors Ben Jenkin, Logan Holladay and Justin Eaton, posing with director David Leitch on the set of "The Fall Guy."

The rough-and-tumble life of the 'Fall Guy'

Action extravaganza about the performers who fuel the mayhem of movies is intended to redefine the role of stunt work

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

There are two things to keep in mind while being burned alive for a movie scene.

The first, says stunt performer Ben Jenkin, is not to breathe in a flame. That would be bad.

Jenkin was reminded of that over and over before doing his first fire burn (and then seven more) in David Leitch's "The Fall Guy," an action extravaganza that affectionately celebrates the rough-and-tumble lives of stunt performers.

The other thing: Keep moving.

"Moving forward and keeping the fire behind you allows you to breathe and to control the fire," Jenkin says. "Movement is your friend."

That would make a decent slogan for stunt performers who have, since the early days of Hollywood, fueled the mayhem of movies. Since at least when the facade of a house fell around Buster Keaton in "Steamboat Bill, Jr." (stillness can also be your friend when it comes to stunts), stunt performers have played a vital role in sustaining the illusion of countless car chases, bar fights, rooftop leaps and, yes, guys on fire.



UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

Based on the 1980s Lee Majors TV series, "The Fall Guy" is a comic, behind-the-scenes ode to the nature of stunt work and on-set life.

By its nature, it's nearly anonymous work, with stunt performers doubling for daintier stars. But Leitch, a longtime stuntman before he became a director, hopes "The Fall Guy," now in theaters, redefines the role of stunt work in Hollywood.

"The Fall Guy," which features nearly every kind of stunt imaginable, arrives as a growing chorus is calling for a new Os-

car category for stunt performance.

"It was never really about: The individual stunt performer needs to be recognized," says Leitch, who spent years as Brad Pitt's double before transitioning to directing with "John Wick." "It was more about the contribution of the department. We create these sequences, whether it's for Paul Thomas Anderson or Adam Sandler or James Cameron."

The most eye-catching stunts come in big-budget action movies like "The Fall Guy," but nearly every studio movie involves some stunt work.

Take Chris O'Hara, head of Stunts Unlimited and the stunt designer on "The Fall Guy." He's not only a veteran of innovative, stunt-heavy films like "The Matrix" and the Jason Bourne series, but he was also the guy who caught Saoirse Ronan when she leapt out of a (seemingly) moving car in Greta Gerwig's "Lady Bird."

With "The Fall Guy," O'Hara is the first person to be credited as a "stunt designer," a designation that's been approved by SAG-AFTRA and the Directors Guild. To O'Hara, that credit better represents what's usually called stunt coordination. Conceptualizing and crafting elaborate sequences requires more than making sure everyone stays safe.

"To be seen by the film community as stunt designers hopefully brings more light to what we really do," O'Hara says. "Back in the day, stunt guys were the cowboys. Now we are creative. We create amazing things, just like a production

SEE STUNT ON PAGE 19

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Stunt: Ongoing campaign seeks Oscars category recognition

FROM PAGE 18
designer does or a costume designer does.”

Falls leading to ‘Fall Guy’

When they were starting out in Los Angeles, Leitch and O’Hara lived together. Their garage was stuffed with mats and air bags. They dug a hole in the backyard and put a trampoline in it. “The landlord never caught us,” says Leitch, grinning.

They, along with four other stuntmen including Chad Stahelski, set out with big ambitions to make their mark on Hollywood. While cutting their teeth on TV shows like “Buffy the Vampire Slayer,” they trained. Some were gymnasts, some drivers, some martial arts experts.

“It was a nonstop circus of skills you need, but it’s fun to learn them,” Leitch says. “Hard on your body, but fun.”

They became masters of their craft — or at least mostly. Leitch never got driving down. On “The Mexican,” he crashed an El Camino into its only backup, another El Camino.

But eventually, filmmaking seemed like one more skill to hone. Leitch had become adept at previsualizing sequences as a moving storyboard to show directors how an action scene would move and fit together. Plus, he was accustomed to keeping a cool head in extreme circumstances.

How scary could directing be compared to standing on a ledge as a production raced to get a high fall in before the day’s light went?

“When you’ve had life-and-death stakes, what’s the worst that can happen in a scene?” Leitch says. “I have to cut it differently?”

Leitch has since become a sought-after action director, helming films like “Atomic Blonde,” “Deadpool 2” and “Bullet Train,” in which Pitt starred. That was a full-circle moment for the former star-stuntman tandem, but “The Fall Guy” might be more so. Based on the 1980s Lee Majors TV series, it’s a comic, behind-the-scenes ode to the nature of stunt work and on-set life.

Ryan Gosling stars as Colt Seavers, a veteran stuntman and double for star Tom Ryder (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) whose romance with a fellow crew mem-

ber, Jody Moreno (Emily Blunt), is severed after an accident on set only to fitfully resume years later.

By then, Jody is directing her first feature and Colt is brought in as a stuntman, including for that fire-burn scene.

For Leitch and Kelly McCormick, his wife and production partner, both the stunts and the love story of “The Fall Guy” have a touch of autobiography. After a yearslong working relationship, McCormick and Leitch were married in 2014 and together run their production company, 87North.

“Maybe I am a little bit like Jody,” McCormick says. “I’m definitely the one that would set you on fire eight times.”

“Would you?” Leitch replies.

“Only if it was safe,” says McCormick, laughing.

Star’s startling admission

At the SXSW premiere of “The Fall Guy,” Gosling proudly announced what few actors do: He did not do his own stunts. The movie required five stuntmen to double as Gosling, including Jenkin and Logan Holladay. In the film, Holladay sets a new record for cannon rolls of a vehicle, rolling a Jeep Grand Cherokee 8½ times down a Australian beach. In one of the movie’s many ironic moments, you can see Holladay strapping Gosling into the car just before the scene.

Before working in film, Jenkin was accomplished in parkour. “I feel right into stunts,” he puns. His gift for contorting himself through the air and landing on the designated spot has made him one of the most sought-after stuntmen.

Still, “The Fall Guy” was the busiest he’s ever been on a movie. “I can’t remember how many times I went through a pane of glass,” Jenkin says.

Some moves were new for Jenkin, like getting hit by a car.

“Hips over hood,” Leitch advised him.

“When you’re a kid and you watch Jackie Chan running down the street and he’s chasing a bus and then he hooks onto the bus with an umbrella, you’re like, “That’s so cool,”” Jenkin says.

“Now we get to live that. Me and Ryan were surfing a door across the Harbour Bridge holding onto the back of a bin truck with a shovel. When do you get to do things like that?”



ERIC LACISTE, UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

Stuntman Ben Jenkin on the set of “The Fall Guy.” Jenkin, one of star Ryan Gosling’s five doubles, offers advice: “Moving forward and keeping the fire behind you allows you to breathe and to control the fire.”

An Oscar for stunts?

Though the campaign has been ongoing for years, it will take time for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences to embrace a new category (though it did so recently by adding an award for casting directors). They have some strength in numbers; stunt professionals make up the largest group of members in the academy’s Production and Technology branch.

“It’s not that they want more recognition than any other sort of department. These days, they’re in almost every film,” McCormick says. “They are front and center working with all the other departments — including, by the way, they go to post. A lot of times they are helping the editor find the way through a sequence. I haven’t had a hair person come to post ever.”

For some stunt performers, it’s the family business. Troy Brown’s first stunt was the 2005 Vin Diesel comedy “The Pacifier,” for which his father, Bob Brown, was stunt coordinator. Troy jumped out of a helicopter into the ocean. He was 5.

“Stunts was just everything I



Universal Pictures

Gosling as accomplished stuntman Colt Seavers and double for fictional star Tom Ryder (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) in “The Fall Guy.”

knew,” Troy Brown says. “It started out with my dad in the front yard jumping off of stuff into a port-a-pit. I just thought it was super fun, so I’d do it every day.”

In “The Fall Guy,” Brown makes the biggest jump of his career, falling 150 feet from a helicopter and landing on an air bag used by his father. During it, his dad was standing next to the

bag, talking his son through the jump.

“I’m going out of this helicopter backwards and I’m lining it up as best I can,” Brown says. “When I get out there and I’m about go backwards off of this thing, I have my dad on the radio giving me the green light for the bag: ‘You can go whenever you want. We’re good, we’re good, we’re good.’”

“To be seen by the film community as stunt designers hopefully brings more light to what we really do. Back in the day, stunt guys were the cowboys. Now we are creative. We create amazing things, just like a production designer does or a costume designer does.”

Chris O’Hara

head of Stunts Unlimited and the stunt designer on “The Fall Guy”

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Scandinavia’s wrecks, rafts and replicas

Scandinavia’s Viking days are long gone, but its legacy of maritime exploration (and plunder) continues to capture our imagination. Tap into the region’s seafaring heritage by visiting excellent museums in Stockholm, Oslo and just outside Copenhagen.

Scandinavia’s entrance into civilized Europe was swift and dramatic. On June 8, 793, a fleet of pirates came ashore on the northeast coast of England and sacked the Lindisfarne monastery, slaughtering monks, burning buildings and looting sacred objects. Their victims called them “Normanni,” “Dani,” “Rus” — or worse — but the name they gave themselves came from the inlets and bays (vik) where they lived: the Vikings.

Strategically located along one such Danish inlet is Roskilde, about 30 minutes from Copenhagen — home to Denmark’s Viking Ship Museum. Here, you’ll see a ship like the one Leif Eriksson took to North America a thousand years ago, two longships, a wind-powered coastal trader and a small row/sail hybrid that was used for whaling and hunting seals. These five ships were all deliberately sunk during the Viking era to block the entrance to this strategic and rich city, and finally raised from their salty grave in 1962.

Along with the ships inside, outside you can watch the creation of replica Viking ships — and for less than \$20, sail around Roskilde’s fjord in one of these replicas.

Norway has long had another Viking Ship Museum, along with three more nautical museums, clustered in Bygdøy, a park-like peninsula just across the harbor

from downtown Oslo. The Viking Ship Museum, however, is closed for a much-needed renovation until 2026. When it reopens, as the much larger, state-of-the-art Museum of the Viking Age, it will once again show off two finely crafted, majestic oak Viking ships dating from the ninth and 10th centuries, and the scant remains of a third vessel — icons from those days of pillage and plunder. The new facility is specially designed to preserve these precious vessels, as well as an impressive collection of remarkable artifacts that



Rick Steves

give insight into Viking culture.

The Kon-Tiki Museum next door houses two ships built by the larger-than-life anthropologist, seafarer and adventurer Thor Heyerdahl. In 1947, the Norwegian explorer and his crew constructed the Kon-Tiki raft out of bamboo and balsa wood. They set sail from Peru on the crude and fragile craft, surviving for 101 days on fish, coconuts and sweet potatoes. About 4,000 miles later, they landed in Polynesia. The point of this expedition was to show that early South Americans could have settled Polynesia. (While Heyerdahl proved they could have, anthropologists doubt they actually did.) In 1970, Heyerdahl’s Ra II made a similar 3,000-mile journey from Morocco to Barbados — on a vessel made of reeds — to prove that Africans could have populated the Americas.

Stockholm’s Vasa Museum is my favorite maritime museum anywhere, with the



CAMERON HEWITT/Rick Steves’ Europe

Visitors to Denmark can view replica Viking ships in Roskilde’s harbor and even sail one.

chemically petrified, ultimate warship housed in a state-of-the-art museum. This impressive ship sank just minutes into her maiden voyage: It was 1628, and the Swedish king was eager to expand the reach of his domain with a formidable new ship. Unfortunately, his demands to build the ship 172 feet tall, but narrow and laden with an extra row of cannons, made it extremely unstable. As it sailed out, all the sailors went to one side on this top-heavy boat, waved at their loved ones ... and about 1,000 yards from its dock, the most

expensive ship in Europe tipped over and sank to the bottom of Stockholm’s harbor, where it sat in the mud for more than 300 years. In 1961, with the help of steel cables and huge inflatable pontoons, the Vasa rose again from the deep. This awe-inspiring ship is a time capsule from an era when Sweden was a European power and was gearing up to expand its empire.

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

Let’s go ride a bike, or learn more about them, at these events

The wind in one’s hair, gradually unfolding scenery at eye level and the rhythmic rotation of the pedals— there’s a special kind of freedom that comes from riding a bike. From lazy days where the way is the goal to long-distance rides over mountain ranges, here are just a few things to do from the seat of your trusty two-wheeled companion or with it in mind.

Trade shows

Visiting a trade show could help you determine which type of cycle fits you best. Some of the most important fairs coming up include:

Willingen, Germany: The BIKE Festival Willingen, a fair organized by BIKE magazine, bills itself as Germany’s largest mountain bike festival, with some 130 manufacturers present, along with test bikes and a bike park May 24-26. Online: tinyurl.com/59vt39ae

Frankfurt, Germany: The VELOFrankfurt fair, centered around the themes of urban mobility and an eco-friendly lifestyle, takes place May 25-26 at the Eissporthalle. Online: velo-frankfurt.de

The much bigger Eurobike event is the place where manufacturers show off their latest wares. Three days are set aside for tradespeople, followed by a bike festival July 6-7 open to all. Online: eurobike.com/frankfurt/en.html

Birmingham, England: The National Cycling Show presents the chance to try and buy bikes, parts and lifestyle accessories. It takes place at the N.E.C. June 15-16. Online: nationalcyclingshow.com

Auto-free days

On certain Sunday afternoons, along what’s normally a busy stretch of highway, towns of a tourist region will all



iStock

Bicycling is a very popular way to get around in Europe.

band together to create a so-called auto-free day. Along a stretch of road blocked to traffic, local businesses, clubs and volunteer organizations will set up stands offering sizzling sausages, cooling drinks, coffee and cake or other treats. Many such days out can be reached by train, making it a true car-free day from start to finish.

Merzig – Konz, Germany: SaarPedal presents the chance to explore the scenery along 25 miles of the Saar River Valley from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. May 19. Online: tinyurl.com/mr4c7hha

Worms – Oppenheim, Germany: Rheinradeln offers a 16-mile stretch running through the Rheinhessen wine region from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. May 26. Online: rheinradeln.de

Bad Mergentheim – Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Germany: This 30-mile route through the Tauber Valley offers as its starting (or end) point one of Germany’s most intact and beautiful medieval cities.

Join the club

The ADFC (Allgemeiner Deutscher Fahrrad-Club), or German Cyclist’s Association, is a club for bicycle riders that promotes the use of a bike as a means of both everyday transportation and recreation. The club’s activities include holding organized rides for members, affixing codes on bicycles to help the police in returning stolen property to its rightful owner and advocating for cyclists’ rights and interests. Members can opt to take part in a hospitality exchange service known as Dachgeber, or Roof Provider, in which ADFC members provide simple accommodation to their fellow members free of charge and can take advantage of the same. Online: adfc.de

Watch a race

Italy: While not the country’s most famous race (that’s the Giro d’Italia), one that could be fun to see, or with proper training take part in, is the Nove Colli, or Nine Hills. Considered one of the most prestigious of all Granfondo (long distance) races, participants must pedal a distance of 127 miles over terrain both flat and mountainous within 12 hours. The spectacularly scenic route passes along mostly closed roads in the Emilia-Romagna region. The race’s 2024 edition is scheduled for May 19. Online: novecolli.it/en-GB

France: For the first time ever, that most famous of all bike races, the Tour de France, will not end in Paris. The route has been changed to avoid the other huge event to take place there this summer — the Olympic Games. The first race day, known as the Grand Depart, will get underway in Florence, Italy, on June 29. Four stages will be held in Italy before the race hits French soil.

Major Italian cities the tour will pass through include Rimini, Cesenatico, Bologna, Piacenza and Turin. The race will end in Nice on July 21. Online: letour.fr

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

More than just playing Games

France’s 2024 events go beyond Olympics

By Scott Hartbeck
TravelPulse

France is hot, and we’re not just talking about the catwalks in Paris or the yacht clubs on the Riviera.

There is no denying that 2024 will be a huge year for travel in The Hexagon, with so much going on across the country. Plenty has been said and written about the Paris Summer Olympics (and will be in the coming months), but here I will set that massive event to the side and focus instead on other reasons to visit France this year.

Some of the events could be perfect bookends to a trip to see the Games or serve as inspiration for a completely different adventure.

Making an impression

After the Olympic Games, the second most talked about celebration in France will be the events surrounding the 150th anniversary of Impressionism, with Normandy being the best place outside of Paris to celebrate. The fifth edition of the Normandy Impressionist Festival (March 22-Sept. 22) will take place across the region, and some parts will have an unexpected American influence. In Rouen, look for an exhibit showcasing the works of renowned American artist Whistler, as well as the 12th edition of the sensational summer light and sound show at Rouen Cathedral.

In Paris, the Normandy region will sponsor a spectacular exhibit titled “Paris 1874: The Impressionist Moment” at the Musée d’Orsay (March 16-July 14). The event will feature more than 100 masterpieces, including paintings, sculptures, photographs and much more.

Saluting the heroes of summer ’44

The 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings and the ensuing Battle of Normandy will take place on June 6, and the military operation that forever changed history will be honored with pomp and circumstance all over the region. In addition to official observations that will require invitations, there will be fireworks displays over the five landing beaches on June 1, art installations and dozens more events (think parades, parachuting, historical reenactments and concerts) during the D-Day Festival.

Normandy (June 1-16). There will also be events surrounding the 80th anniversary of Operation Dragoon, which was a significant French-American landing that took place in Southern France on Aug. 15, 1944. Expect commemorative events to take place in the region.

The Tour cycles south

No discussion of sports in France would be complete without a mention of the Tour de France (June 29-July 21), the most iconic bicycle race on the planet. This year, the race will traverse a 2,000-mile-plus loop through some of the most breathtaking landscapes in France. The route changes for each edition of the race, but the mountain stages in the Pyrenees and Alps are a constant, and these regions make for exciting fan experiences. The 2024 race will start in Florence, Italy, before finishing somewhere other than Paris for the first time in a century. Due to the Olympics, the Tour will finish up in the jewel of the Riviera: Nice.

Setting sail

The Vendée Globe, which is another one of the biggest French sporting events this year, will actually start in New York City. On May 24, sailors will gather at the Statue of Liberty for a host of prerace celebrations before embarking on a grueling 3,200-mile journey across the Atlantic Ocean to France. Then, on Nov. 10, the 10th edition of the Vendée Globe will set sail from the coastal town of Sables d’Olonne in the Vendée region of France. Known as the Everest of the Seas, this nonstop solo race will see about



DREAMSTIME/TNS photos

A sensational summer light and sound show happens at Rouen Cathedral in Rouen, France.

40 skippers navigating the globe, and while you’re not allowed to tag along with them, it will be the perfect excuse to discover the beautiful coastal region of Vendée, which is home to long sweeps of beach and a breathtaking bay.

Flower power

Also in the Vendée region, the Les Floralies de Nantes — one of Europe’s most prestigious international horticultural shows — will take place at the impressive Domaine de La Chabotterie (May 17-26). This 18th century estate sits within 100 acres of meadows and forest, and the festival will showcase the imaginative creations of 200 participants hailing from France and beyond. As a nod to the Summer Olympics, the 2024 edition has been dubbed “Flower Games” and will feature five themed areas: water, childhood, intellectual, physical and garden.

Summer festivals galore

Bordeaux has been bubbling up on travel lists for a while now, and the 2024 edition of the famed Bordeaux Fête le Vin (June 27-30), the premier wine tourism festival in the city, will be the perfect excuse to get to know it better. Set against the backdrop of the Garonne River, the event will offer a delightful experience for wine lovers and curious travelers alike. The party will start early, as from June 20, a host of events will take place in the lead-up to the festival at the city’s renowned wine cellars, restaurants and cultural venues.

You’ll be surrounded by tunes all over the country on June 21 as the Fête de la Musique will see musicians of all levels (both amateur and professional) take to the streets across France to show off their skills. You’ll be able to



Boats in the channel in Les Sables d’Olonne, France, take part in the Vendée Globe nonstop solo race, known as the Everest of the Seas.

experience a wide range of musical genres (and talent) as everything from rock groups to choirs and orchestras strut their stuff.

Every other year, the coastal town of Dieppe hosts one of the most colorful kite festivals in the world, and in 2024, the Dieppe International Kite Festival is back and better than ever. More than just a gathering of kite lovers, this festival celebrates global unity, highlighting the rich diversity of people and cultures on the planet. Expect the sky above the beach in Dieppe to be splashed with a kaleidoscope of colors and shapes and for you to leave feeling a little better about the state of the world.

Ending the year in style

The end of the year will see numerous reasons to visit France.

Montmartre — arguably the most atmospheric neighborhood in Paris — will bubble over with fun once again during the annual Montmartre Wine Festival (Oct. 9-13). This event celebrates the

neighborhood and its winemaking tradition.

In Lyon, the Festival of Light (Dec. 5-8) will adorn the city with a dazzling display of bulbs that help illuminate the dark early winter nights and launch thousands of social media stories. From the special “light tunnels” to the experience of seeing the city’s fine architecture bathed in light, it’s an event you won’t soon forget.

While holiday festivities take place all over the nation, the Alsace region is arguably the capital of Christmas markets as charming small towns like Riquewihr and Eguisheim shine bright in addition to the larger cities in the region: Colmar and Strasbourg. Expect timber-framed facades, warm baked goods and plenty of vin chaud, the local take on mulled wine.

Last but certainly not least, Notre Dame Cathedral is scheduled to officially reopen on December 8, more than 4 ½ years after the devastating fire. This will be a special time to be in Paris, no doubt.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



The souk in Muharraq, Bahrain, still maintains many of its traditional facades but has been updated with modern construction amid a push by the country to boost tourism through architectural revitalization.

PHOTOS BY SHANNON RENFROE/Stars and Stripes



Sophia bookstore is nestled in the souk, and also offers a cafe for shoppers.



The souk has shops selling everything from clothing and household goods to perfumes, spices and gold jewelry.

On the QT

Address: Road 53, Al Muharraq, Bahrain
Hours: 9 a.m.-11 p.m. daily
Cost: Taxi, \$8 from NSA Bahrain, Juffair area (street parking is available and Pearling Path Car Park is nearest to the souk)

Shannon Renfroe

A Bahraini blend of the old and the new

Muharraq Island souk features juxtaposition of traditional facades, market life and modern architectural statements

BY SHANNON RENFROE
Stars and Stripes

On historic Muharraq Island, north of Manama, Bahrain, there's a duality to the souk, which blends traditional market life and architectural innovation while underscoring Bahrain's recent architectural revitalization to boost tourism.

The souk entry connects directly to the Pearling Path, a UNESCO World Heritage site that recalls the time when pearling dominated the local economy before the discovery of oil.

At the heart of the structural revival is Swiss architect Valerio Olgiati's 72,000-square-foot Brutalist concrete structure, which serves as the Pearling Path visitors center.

This building, located over the remnants of an amara — a combination of market, factory and warehouse — features geometric cutouts in the ceiling that offer ample shade.

Olgiati described it as “an urban room with the scale of a public park,” providing a communal space for residents and tourists.

While exploring Muharraq souk, I saw how restored traditional homes and modern architectural statements seamlessly blend despite their juxtaposition. The market is a labyrinth of alleys, but instead of feeling lost, there is a sense of adventure in deciding whether to turn left or right.

Expect to be bombarded by shopkeepers calling out, haggling over prices as



A distinctive entry point to the souk is the Brutalist concrete structure designed by Swiss architect Valerio Olgiati. It serves as a visitors center for the Pearling Path UNESCO World Heritage site.



A baker prepares to pull bread from a traditional tannour oven near the souk in Muharraq on April 28. Bread from local bakeries is a cheap and delicious food option to enjoy while exploring the souk.



In Muharraq, people will likely come across many stray cats that wander the neighborhood and are fed by residents.

they hawk goods ranging from gold jewelry to counterfeit Nike items. The place abounds in chaos, which peaks in the evenings, but all that bustle sets the region's



Traditional facades are still prevalent at the souk in Muharraq despite concerted efforts to modernize its architecture.

markets apart from any other. Visiting on quieter days allows for more intimate exploration. However, the real treasure lies in engaging with people and

gaining a deeper understanding of their crafts and culture.

I was invited into a traditional bakery, where bread was made in a tannour, a time-honored clay oven. Bahrain hadn't even reached its peak summer temperatures yet, and standing near the heat radiating from the oven gave me a tremendous respect for the baker's work.

In a swift movement, he slapped the dough against the inner wall of the tannour, where it sticks, held in place by the intense heat. It took only seconds for the dough to puff up and bubble to a golden brown.

With a hooked metal rod, the baker carefully peeled the bread from the stone wall of the tannour. I was deeply moved by his generosity when he offered me bread without asking for anything in return.

Interestingly enough, Bahrainis make up only 47.8% of the island's population while the rest are from other countries, which leads to a rich exchange of cultural practices and perspectives.

The Muharraq souk stands out as more than just a traditional Middle Eastern market. It's an immersive combo of architecture, culture, history and commerce.

Make sure you have comfortable walking shoes, and choose your visiting time based on whether you prefer a mob scene or a more intimate experience. You're all but guaranteed to leave with your hands, heart and stomach full.

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WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

An Italian find for eagle eyes

Savor twists on the taste of Umbria at covert, rustic Grifo ‘griffin’ restaurant in Kerzenheim

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes
For a land known more for fried pork and sausage, Germany has quite an abundance of Italian restaurants enticing patrons with the lure of a Mediterranean-inspired meal.

Finding a genuinely good Italian restaurant here, however, involves more than just spotting the cliché red-and-white-checked tablecloths.

In Italy, a good trattoria or a stellar restaurant is often just a follow-the-local-crowd away from discovery, especially around 8 or 9 p.m., when Italians often dine.

Tucked away in the quaint village of Kerzenheim, a 30-minute drive from Kaiserslautern, Grifo Restaurant offers just such a hidden find. Following an emphatic recommendation on social media, my wife and I visited this inconspicuous spot on a recent weeknight.

Housed in an old farm building from the 1600s complete with charming wooden beams and exposed rock walls, the eatery set a rustic yet cozy stage for culinary delights ahead.

The warmth of the interior struck me immediately. With only about 30 seats in the main dining room and a few extra in an anteroom during the summer months, the space felt intimate and inviting for a quiet dinner for two or a relaxed evening with friends.

We later found out that an outside seating area is available in the summer. Beneath the main dining area, a vaulted cellar adds another layer to the restaurant’s charm. This space offers seating for larger groups and has become a cultural hub in the small village, hosting art and entertainment.

Reopened in the wake of the pandemic in June 2021, Grifo puts a special emphasis on the lesser-known but highly acclaimed Umbrian cuisine, which is reimagined to appeal to contemporary and local palates, according to its owners. Its name is Italian for griffin, an important symbol in the city of Perugia, which is the capital of Umbria.

Our culinary journey began with the mixed Italian “surprise” appetizer platter. The board



Restaurant Grifo

Address: Eisenberger Strasse 1, Kerzenheim, Germany
Hours: Wednesday through Saturday, 5:30-10 p.m.; Sunday and German holidays, noon-2 p.m., and 5:30-10 p.m.
Prices: Appetizers start at 9.50 euros. Main courses range from the home-made tortelloni mozzarella priced at 16.90 euros to more indulgent options like the Irish beef rump steak at 27.90 euros. Seafood options include the John Dory filet for 25.90 euros. Wines start at 3.50 euros, soft drinks at 3 euros and beers also from 3 euros. Espresso is available for 2.20 euros, and the ice cream-topped affogato costs 3.70 euros.
Information: Online: griforestaurant.de
Alexander Riedel

included classics like cold-cut salami, and tomato and mozzarella drizzled with balsamic vinegar. It also had unexpected additions such as potato croquettes and fried onion rings, which seemed more attuned to a German or American palate than a truly Italian one.

But it was an enjoyable and hearty start to our meal. A vegetarian option is the light bruschetta plate with chickpea and basil pesto toppings.

For the main course, I opted for the homemade vegetarian tortellini with mushroom cream sauce from the seasonal menu. The pasta, filled with a smooth ricotta cheese mixture, was cooked to al dente perfection, beautifully complemented by the sauce, which was enhanced with rich truffle oil.

The spring menu version comes with a delightful sun-dried tomato cream sauce with a drizzle of balsamic reduction.

Meanwhile, my wife enjoyed the pork fillet in herb crust, accompanied by Parmesan potato puree and a wild herb salad, dressed lightly and topped with a teriyaki glaze and onion crumble. The portion sizes were just right, especially after our appetizer.

Grifo also offers a full menu page of its take on the pinsa, a pizza cousin with a smaller, thicker base. The vegetariana is



PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL/Stars and Stripes

Constructed about four centuries ago, the building that houses Grifo Restaurant in Kerzenheim, Germany, is steeped in history. Originally a farm building, it features such characteristic elements as thick stone walls and heavy wooden beams.



The quaint alley leading to Grifo in Kerzenheim. Grifo is nestled between rustic farm buildings; its entrance seems almost hidden.

generously topped with mozzarella, grilled zucchini, bell peppers and mushrooms on a crispy crust. It’s a solid must-try for pizza lovers.

While I found options as a vegetarian, this Grifo is a haven for meat lovers. The menu features a variety of smoked meats, such as crispy guanciale, which our waiter told us adds a savory richness to classic carbonara.

The selection extends to robust and familiar offerings like the Irish beef rump steak, and the Kalbskotelett nach Mailänder Art, a Milanese-style veal chop that Grifo combines with the crispness of lime mayo. The homemade agnolotti pasta, filled with wild boar, reflects the Umbrian use of game and local ingredients.

Dessert was another highlight. I couldn’t resist the crispy lemon, a clever creation of white chocolate dusted in yellow, encasing a gooey tart lemon center. It was a treat for the eyes and the taste buds.

My wife’s choice, the blueberry “bomb,” mirrored the appearance of an actual blueberry but several times the size, revealing a lush blueberry ganache with a heart of wild blueberry jelly.

Tucked away in the old charming farmstead, Grifo is easily missed if you blink. It’s a noteworthy destination for those seeking a blend of rustic charm and taste of Umbria in the heart of Germany’s western Pfalz.

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An appetizer platter of cold-cut salami, croquettes, fried onion rings, tomato and mozzarella drizzled in balsamic vinegar.



A plate of homemade vegetarian tortellini filled with ricotta cheese and served in a rich mushroom cream sauce, which is enhanced with a hint of truffle oil.



A tender pork fillet encased in a crispy herb crust, accompanied by Parmesan potato puree and a wild herb salad dressed with a teriyaki glaze and onion crumble.



A vegetarian pinsa with a crispy crust topped with mozzarella cheese, grilled zucchini, bell peppers and mushrooms.



This visually deceptive white chocolate dessert shaped and colored like a lemon features a tangy citrus center.



The blueberry “bomb” dessert features blueberry ganache and a core of wild blueberry jelly. It is much bigger than the actual fruit.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



Get active in Akigawa Valley

PHOTOS BY JUAN KING/Stars and Stripes

When the weather warms, an abundance of guests escape the bustle of the city an hour away to visit western Tokyo's Akigawa Valley for a dip in the river and to barbecue nearby.

Springtime is the best time to explore area in western Tokyo

BY JUAN KING
Stars and Stripes

Akiruno, just an hour's drive from central Tokyo, boasts scenic countryside and plenty of outdoor activities, including hiking and fishing.

Surrounded by a range of mountains, including Mounts Mitake, Hinode and Mazukari, Akigawa Valley is another of Japan's peaceful getaways from city life. I recently drove out there with my family on a crisp, sunny day.

After parking in a free lot, we headed down stone stairs toward Ishibune Bridge, a picturesque, 315-foot span over the Minamiaki River. We crossed while taking in the sounds of nature, including water rushing over the rocks below.

Walking along a narrow, wooded trail, we came upon Seoto-no-yu, a popular onsen that offers a free outdoor foot spa. For a short time, you can sit, take off your shoes and soak your feet in the refreshing shallow pool.

We continued farther along the stone path and up a hilly, rocky pathway toward a flower garden called Otsu Hana-no-sato. During cherry blossom season, you can see weeping cherry trees, rhododendrons and other flowers. The best time to see the flowers is from late March to early April.

After trekking uphill for a bit, we found some areas closed off due to the danger of collapsing rocks. A little disappointed, but grateful for the exercise, we returned downhill to the onsen.

For a longer rejuvenation period, Seoto-no-yu offers high alkaline baths for 1,000 yen, or about \$7, for three hours per adult. However, no visible tattoos are permitted. It's 500 yen for children.

Cafe Sesaragi, inside the onsen building, offers a nice selection of food and beverages. Seating for about 45 includes regular tables and traditional Japanese tatami mat floor seating.

On the QT

Directions: About an hour's drive from central Tokyo to the parking area at 1379 Tokura, Akiruno, Tokyo 190-0173.

Times: Open all day. Nighttime hiking is discouraged.

Costs: Entrance to the valley is free. Seoto-no-yu's onsen fee is 1,000 yen for adults; 500 yen for children.

Food: Inside Seoto-no-yu, Cafe Sesaragi and Ishifune, a Japanese restaurant, offer plenty to choices. There are also vending machines near the cafe.

Information: Phone: 042-558-1111; Online: akiruno-kanko.com

Juan King

Just outside the cafe you'll find more than a dozen chaise longues facing an open, grassy area for outdoor lounging.

Departing the onsen building once again, we climbed another set of stairs that eventually descended toward an area we had not visited. We quickly found another bridge, the Nagatake, that took us across the river.

On the other side and below the bridge are cabins next to the riverbed that are available for rent. Signs warn of black bears and macaques, or snow monkeys, and to report them if you spot them.

During the summer, an abundance of guests come for a dip in the river and to barbecue nearby. There are plenty more areas to explore, including Odake Cave, about five miles away. With more time, my family and I will be visiting again soon.

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Ishibune Bridge is a picturesque 315-foot span that across the Minamiaki River in western Tokyo.



People relax at Cafe Sesaragi inside Seoto-no-yu in Akiruno, Tokyo. The eatery offers a varied selection of food and beverages.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY JENNESSA DAVEY/Stars and Stripes

Pacific Grill may be the perfect spot for a tasty meal or a relaxing drink near Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

Happy hour, healthy food

Celebrate tropical flavors at new Pacific Grill near Yokosuka Naval Base

BY JENNESSA DAVEY
Stars and Stripes

Just steps away from Yokosuka Naval Base's main gate, right off Blue Street, is a new bar and grill that specializes in meats infused with tropical flavors.

The meal selection at Pacific Grill may be small, but you'll find some big flavors here.

The staff is welcoming and helpful, offering attentive service that makes you feel right at home. Whether you're craving a tasty meal or seeking to unwind with a drink, this atmosphere makes Pacific Grill the perfect place to go.

The owner is a native of the Yokosuka area and has a bar named Tom's in the Honch area near the base.

To celebrate its recent opening, Pacific Grill has been offering happy hour every day from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., when select drinks and shots are 500 yen.

You'll find a variety of finger foods and sandwiches to choose from. The main menu features things like Spam musubi — a popular snack in Hawaii — beef meatballs in a mushroom sauce and a salmon poke bowl.

My salmon poke bowl arrived with a tropical salsa featuring pineapples — a light, healthy meal — but other menu items will serve if you're very hungry.

There's grilled pork with mayo, grilled beef with mango-pine salsa, grilled salmon with mango salsa and a grilled tropical teriyaki chicken bowl.

For a quick bite, happy hour or



Some drinks and shots are 500 yen from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. daily.



The salmon poke bowl features a tropical salsa with pineapples.

indulging in a leisurely dinner, Pacific Grill promises a fun and comfortable dining experience.

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AFTER
HOURS
JAPAN

Pacific Grill

Location: Fujikake, Bldg. 1F, Cho-2-10 Odaki, Yokosuka Shi, Kanagawa 238-0008

Hours: Open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday; 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. Monday.

Prices: Appetizers cost between 700 yen and 1,000 yen; entrees, from 1,100 to 1,500 yen; beverages, 300 to 800 yen.

Dress: Casual

Directions: About an 8-minute walk from Yokosuka's main gate.

Information: Phone: 050-8888-4977

Jennessa Davey

Spinach pesto pasta helps kids, adults eat their greens

BY BECKY KRYSTAL
The Washington Post

If you're the kind of parent who has successfully sneaked vegetables into the food you serve to your kids, I salute you. I am neither clever nor energetic enough to pull off this feat.

My son, though? Too clever for his own good. My halfhearted attempts at benign culinary subterfuge have not succeeded, and, frankly, I'm OK with that. I'd rather he be fully aware of the vegetables he's eating that he can appreciate on their own.

My earliest and most successful endeavor at integrating vegetables in a more palatable manner was kale pesto. I started making it when my son was a toddler. He ate it for a while, and then he told me that something was not tasting right. The kale was coming on too strong, as it tends to do when featured raw in large amounts.

What could I use instead? Baby spinach was the obvious answer. Nutritionally speaking, the two greens are not identical. Kale is higher in certain essential minerals and vitamins, including calcium and vitamin C, but considering the amount of dairy and citrus consumed in our house, I wasn't concerned. Spinach is still packed with lots of good stuff, especially potassium and vitamin A. Crucially, it breaks down to almost nothing, volume-wise, when run through the food processor, meaning I could use a lot of it to pack as much as possible into my pesto. In fact, the formula I settled on uses almost twice as much spinach as basil.

Even beyond the appealing helping of greens, this recipe has one other huge family-friendly advantage: It makes a lot, and it stores well. You'll end up with about 2 cups of pesto, enough for 2 pounds of dried pasta. I've written the recipe so that you use half the pesto now and save the rest in the freezer.

A recipe that's fast (30 minutes!), easy, make-ahead, tasty and full of greens? I'd call that a parenting win.

Spinach Pesto Pasta

6 servings (about 8 cups)
Total time: 30 mins

Ingredients

1½ cups (about 5½ ounces) pecan halves and pieces
½ to 1 teaspoon fine salt, to taste, plus more as needed
1 pound curly or ridged dried pasta, (fusilli, rotini, cascatelli)
1 garlic clove
Packed 3 cups (2½ ounces) fresh basil leaves (from 1 4-ounce package)
1 (5-ounce) bag or clamshell baby spinach, divided
¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
Freshly ground black pepper
Freshly grated or shaved parmesan, for serving (optional)

Directions

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 350 degrees. Arrange the pecans in a single layer on a small sheet pan and toast in the oven for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring halfway through. Transfer to a plate or bowl to cool slightly.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil, then salt the water to taste. Add the pasta and cook according to the package instructions until al dente. Reserve about 1 cup of the pasta water, then drain. Return the pasta to the pot.

While the pasta cooks, combine the pecans and garlic in a food processor and pulse until the nuts are finely chopped. Add the basil, half of the spinach and half of the oil, the lemon juice, a generous grind of black pepper, and ½ teaspoon to 1 teaspoon salt, to taste. Process until pureed. Add the remaining spinach, turn the food processor back on and gradually stream in the remaining oil until smooth. Taste, and season as desired.

Transfer half of the pesto to the pot with pasta and gently toss to evenly coat, splashing in the reserved pasta water 1 tablespoon at a time, as needed, to loosen the sauce.

Garnish with the parmesan, if using, and serve.



PHOTOS BY SCOTT SUCHMAN/For The Washington Post

Left: Spinach pesto. Right: Spinach Pesto Pasta.

WEEKEND: FOOD

More than just a bowl of noodles

In Japan, ramen both a staple food as well as a tourist attraction

By YURI KAGEYAMA
Associated Press

Spicy, steaming, slurpy ramen might be everyone's favorite Japanese food.

In Tokyo, long lines circle around blocks, and waiting an hour for your ramen is normal. What awaits might be just a dive, but a hot bowl of ramen rarely fails to hit the spot.

Often cooked right before your eyes behind dingy counters, the noodle dish starts here at around 1,000 yen (\$6.50), and comes in various flavors and local versions. There's salty, soy-based "shoyu" or "miso" paste. Perhaps it's red-hot spicy with a dash of chili. Sometimes there's no soup at all but a sauce to dip the noodles in.

The curly noodles are lighter than the darker buckwheat "sobu," or "udon," which are also usually flatter or thicker.

Global success

Ramen has also surged in popularity in the U.S., South Korea and other countries. Retail sales in the United States have risen 72% since 2000, according to NielsenIQ, a sales tracker. In the 52 weeks ending April 13, Americans bought more than \$1.6 billion worth of ramen.

In restaurants, versions beyond the traditional soup are appearing, said Technomic, a research and consulting company for the restaurant industry. Del Taco, a Mexican chain, recently introduced Shredded Beef Birria Ramen, for example.

Packaged ramen that's easily cooked in hot water at home is called instant noodles; it's pre-cooked and then dried. The story of how Momofuku Ando invented instant ramen in a backyard shed in 1958, when food was still scarce, is the stuff of legend in Japan. He went on to found the food giant Nissin Foods.

Although convenient, instant noodles aren't the same as the ramen served at restaurants.

The experience

Some Japanese frequent ramen shops twice or three times a week. They emerge, dripping with sweat, smacking their lips.

"I'm probably a talking bowl of ramen," says Frank Striegl as he leads a dozen American tourists through the back alleys of Tokyo's funky Shibuya district on what he calls "the ultimate ramen experience."



PHOTOS BY EUGENE HOSHIKO/AP

A staff member prepares small bowls of noodles for participants of Tokyo Ramen Tours at Shinbusakiya, a ramen shop that offers "Hokkaido classics," in the Shibuya district of Tokyo on April 2.

"It's not just, of course, about eating delicious ramen, but also learning about it."

Frank Striegl
Tokyo Ramen Tours guide

The crowd is led behind a shabby doorway, sometimes down narrow stairs, to a dimly-lit table where ramen gets served in tiny bowls, practically the size of a latte cup, or about a quarter of a regular ramen bowl. That's so guests have enough room in their tummies to try out six different kinds of ramen, two at each spot during the tour.

One restaurant, Shinbusakiya, offers "Hokkaido classics" from the northernmost main island, while another, Nagi, offers "Fukuoka fusion," from the southern main island of Kyushu. It includes a green ramen, similar to pasta al pesto. Syuuichi, which means "once a week," features curry-flavored ramen.

"It's not just, of course, about eating delicious ramen, but also learning about it," said Striegl, a Filipino American who grew up in Tokyo. He calls ramen "people's food."

"A lot of countries around the world have their version of ra-



Frank Striegl, bottom right, a guide of Tokyo Ramen Tours, talks to participants of a tasting tour at Nagi, which offers "Fukuoka fusion" ramen, in the Shibuya district of Tokyo on April 2.

men in a way," he said. "So I think because of that, it's a dish that's easy to understand. It's a dish that's easy to get behind."

While the tour participants were relishing their noodles, Striegl outlined a brief history of ramen: Its roots date back to the samurai era, when a shogun took a fancy to Chinese noodles, setting off the localizing journey for ramen that continues today.

Katie Sell, a graduate student on Striegl's tour, called ramen "a kind of comfort food, especially in the winter. Get a group of friends, go have some ramen and just enjoy it."

Kavi Patel, an engineer from New Jersey, said he was glad he included the humble ramen tour on his trip to Japan, along with more established attractions like

the ancient capital of Kyoto and the deer park in Nara.

"I'm having good fun," he said.

Adjusting to change

While ramen has never been more popular in Japan, ramen places have struggled because of the pandemic, the weakening Japanese yen and the higher cost of wheat imports and energy, according to a study by Tokyo Shoko Research.

One beneficiary of the pandemic is a home delivery service for frozen, professionally cooked ramen. Called takumen.com, it boasts some 500,000 subscribers in Japan.

Another Tokyo operation, Gourmet Innovation, has signed on 250 of the country's top ramen joints to sell packaged versions of

their soups, noodles and toppings, to be heated up in boiling water and served at home.

Co-founder and executive Kenichi Nomaguchi, who hopes to expand his business overseas, says ramen and animation are Japan's most successful exports.

Why ramen? Unlike pasta or curry, ramen is difficult to replicate at home, he said. Making it from scratch involves hours of cooking stock, with pork, beef or chicken, various fish or bonito flakes, and "kombu" kelp. Some stock uses oysters.

Lots of variety

Besides the different soup stocks and flavors, onions, grated garlic, ginger or sesame oil can be added for extra punch. Toppings can include bean sprouts, barbecued pork, boiled or raw eggs, seaweed, fermented bamboo shoots called "menma," chopped green onions, cooked cabbage, snow peas or corn.

Some insist a bowl of ramen is not complete without a slice of narutomaki, a whitefish cake with a pink spiral pattern.

Unusual varieties include coffee ramen and ramen topped with ice cream or pineapple.

Jiro-style ramen, named for a legendary restaurant in Tokyo, features mounds of vegetable toppings, huge steak-like barbecued pork and pungent, grated garlic seeped in a fatty pork-based stock.

"Impact is important. So the pork has to be big so it's truly memorable," said Kota Kobayashi, who serves Jiro-style ramen at his chain, "Ore No Ikiru Michi," which translates to, "The way I live my life."

Kobayashi is a former professional baseball player at the Yokohama Bay Stars, and played with the minor league Cleveland Guardians before switching to his ramen business.

"When I quit baseball, I chose ramen as my way of life," he said with a smile.

He can wax philosophical about ramen. One cultural difference he has observed is that Americans tend to leave the noodles and drink all the soup, while the Japanese mostly do the opposite.

And taste is only part of what makes good ramen. One must also offer entertainment, Kobayashi said.

At his restaurants, the chopsticks are tucked in a box on a shelf, so first-time visitors ask where they are. Repeat customers go straight to that box. Kobayashi calls out, "Welcome back," making the customers feel a connection, even if he doesn't remember a thing about them.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Erik Larson examines Civil War

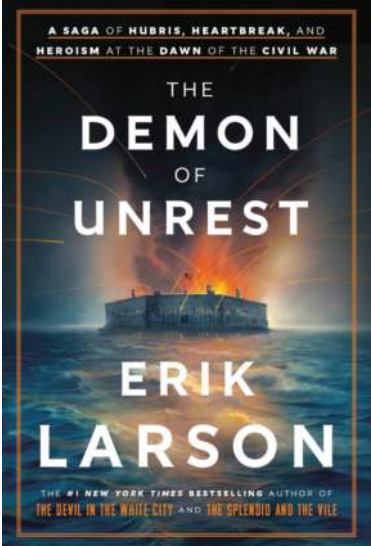
‘The Demon of Unrest’ puts new spin on familiar subject by covering events leading up to conflict

By CHRIS HEWITT
Star Tribune

We know the American Civil War’s stories of carnage and heartbreak from movies, biographies and Ken Burns, but the most interesting thing about the latest from “The Devil in the White City” writer Erik Larson is that it covers the run-up to war, the events that came before more than 600,000 people died.

There may be a tendency to think of the war in the same breath as Abraham Lincoln, but Larson, whose history-but-make-it-fun books include “Isaac’s Storm” and “The Devil in the White City,” argues it had much more to do with what Lincoln’s predecessor, James Buchanan, did or did not do. Mostly the latter. Buchanan is president for more than half of the 499-page book, in which he’s portrayed as lazy, underqualified and bizarrely ambivalent about slavery.

As in his other work, Larson employs details that rescue the humanity of historic figures we’re more likely to think of as



statues than people: When Lincoln, about to take his oath of office, couldn’t figure out what to do with his top hat, bitter rival Stephen Douglas held it for him with a smile.

Other details bring moments to life: Larson describes the half-built Washington Monument, from which an American flag flew in supposed triumph while

states began to secede, as “more a symbol of failure.”

In a foreword, Larson indicates he was already at work on “Demon” when the events of Jan. 6, 2021, unfolded. But, even if that weren’t the case, some events in “Demon” would seem shockingly familiar, including a violent, organized effort to seize control of our nation’s capitol in order to prevent a new president from taking office.

It’s alarming to read about this divided country going down a similar path more than 150 years ago and, seemingly, learning nothing from it. The immediacy of the story in “Demon” — as well as on-the-ground reports from inside South Carolina’s Fort Sumter, an early Union bulwark — lend the book vigor, especially in the first 300 pages.

The last 200 pages, as Lincoln takes office and assembles the team that would help him strategize through war and into peace, aren’t as gripping. Larson sometimes repeats himself (I lost count of how many times he

wrote that Lincoln couldn’t spell “Fort Sumter”). And, as he notes in his acknowledgments, much of this territory was covered in Doris Kearns Goodwin’s magnificent “Team of Rivals.”

When in doubt, Larson returns to stories that reveal human foibles. He quotes extensively from the diaries of Mary Chesnut, whose husband was a senator until South Carolina seceded (Burns also used her diaries).

The diaries also help Larson remind us that, for a time, the South was a foreign country. Although the years have settled Lincoln into near-sainthood, Chesnut has no kind words for him or for the bureaucracy that she sees as robbing her of a way of life — although she cares little for the lives of the 450 humans her family enslaved.

I wish “Demon” told us more about Black people of the time. There are references to enslaved men fighting for the South and about others fleeing plantations, but their untold stories will have to wait for another book.



‘The Ministry of Time’

Kaliane Bradley

This utterly winning book involving time travel, romance and spy missions violates not so much the laws of physics as the boundaries of genre. Imagine if “The Time Traveler’s Wife” had an affair with “A Gentleman in Moscow.”

The story is narrated by an unnamed woman who gets a lucrative job in a top-secret government agency dealing with high-value refugees.

The interesting thing about these refugees is not where they come from, but when. The newly established Ministry has figured out how to expatriate people from the past. To avoid causing temporal chaos in the future, the first batch of time travelers are people who were just about to die, doomed folks plucked from “historical war zones, natural disasters and epidemics.” As you might imagine, these expats arrive in the present day wildly discombobulated. Some don’t survive the journey, and those who do have a hard road ahead. So much has changed in the present day that acclimation isn’t easy. The antique refugees need careful instruction about how to dress, speak and behave in modern London.

The narrator is assigned to help Cmdr. Graham Gore, an officer snatched from a doomed seafaring expedition in 1845.

Initially, much of the comedy here stems from his stiff-upper-lip astonishment at the world’s technological innovations. In utter wonderment, he flushes the toilet 15 times. He stares at airplanes not quite believing. He completely rejects the proposition that the world is full of microscopic germs.

What feels initially like a time-traveling romance soon turns on curious questions about the possibility of moral progress.

Unsurprisingly, the Ministry of Time has a more sinister purpose than resettling time-traveling refugees. The novel also digs deep into what it means to be out of time and out of place.

— Ron Charles
The Washington Post

‘Real Americans’

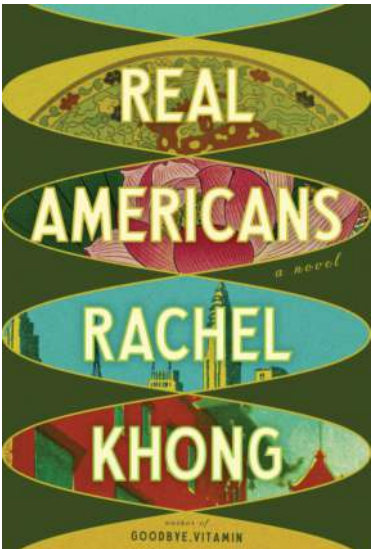
Rachel Khong

Khong’s second novel is a sweeping, multigenerational saga. “Real Americans” — the title alone suggests its weighty subject — wrestles with issues of class, race and the genetic component of disease. Though largely a work of social realism, it has a touch of science fiction, with characters experiencing “blips” in existence, when time itself seems to get stuck.

The novel is narrated by three members of the same family: May, the Chinese-born matriarch; her American daughter, Lily; and Lily’s biracial son, Nick. It opens in 1999, when Lily, 22, is working as an unpaid intern at a media company, a few months away from her NYU graduation.

At a holiday party, she meets her boss’ nephew, Matthew, five years older and heir to a pharmaceutical fortune. Tall and “golden haired,” he is likable and self-assured. Lily, on the other hand, is insecure, unambitious and prone to ruminating about what a disappointment she is to her mother, a brilliant scientist who specializes in — spoiler alert — genetic engineering.

Nonetheless, they fall in love, get married and, after much difficulty, have a baby. That child, a boy named Nick with blond hair and blue eyes, narrates the second section, which begins in 2021, when he is a teenager and is being raised by his



mother, now single.

Wondering why he does not, as his best friend says, “look Chinese,” the two of them search an online genetic database and find Matthew, his long-lost white father. Nick’s subsequent decision to go to Yale (Khong’s alma mater) sets up a series of dramatic encounters on the East Coast with the dad he never knew.

The most vivid character in the book is Nick’s grandmother May, who grew up in China during the Cultural Revolution and fled to America after making a pact, of sorts, with the devil. She narrates the third section of the book in 2030, when she is dying. Only then are the riddles of Lily and Nick’s discombobulated lives finally explained.

— Ann Levin/Associated Press

‘Crow Talk’

Eileen Garvin

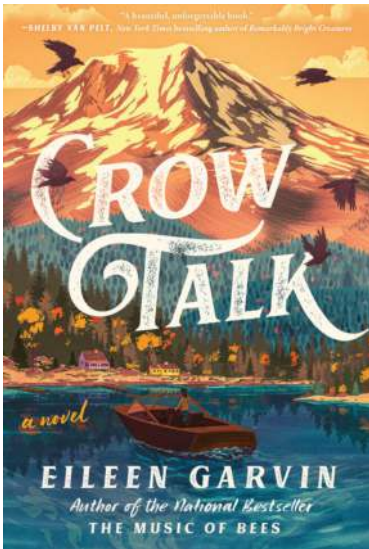
Crows have long been associated with death, but this novel offers a fresh perspective; creepy, dark and morbid becomes beautiful, wondrous and transformative.

“Crow Talk” provides a path for healing in a meditative and hopeful novel on grief, largely set in secluded Beauty Bay on idyllic Lake June. It’s where Frankie spent the long summer days of her childhood, where she first learned to listen to birds and began her lifelong pursuit of studying them with her handy field book of Pacific Northwest birds — a gift from her beloved father — always at her side.

Now she’s well past the field guide and working on her master’s thesis. But between problems at school, her mother’s icy distance and no longer being able to confide in her father and get his advice, Frankie is adrift. She seeks refuge at the family’s little cabin in the Washington woods.

Meanwhile, Anne is dealing with her own loss. Finding herself unable to write music and on leave from her teaching job, she goes with her husband and their son for a late-season stay at their cabin on Beauty Bay. There, they nervously await the results from a study on their 5-year-old, Aiden, who has mysteriously stopped talking.

Doors begin to open when Frankie takes in an injured crow,



drawing Aiden and Anne’s intrigue. Their crow talk could be the catalyst they need for growth and healing.

Unready to face their sorrow and unable to share their grief, it’s not until almost halfway in that Frankie and Anne finally reveal what they’re mourning.

Flipping the perspective among the three characters, Aiden’s chapters are the most beautiful and intriguing. The short, often mythical interpretations of what’s going on around him draw on his beloved fairy tale book, offering a peek into the way he sees himself and the world, drawing comparisons between Aiden and the crows.

Like Aiden, crows are incredibly smart and have a lot to say, if only we could understand them.

— Donna Edwards/AP

WEEKEND: MUSIC



DREW GURIAN, INVISION/AP

Dua Lipa poses for a portrait to promote her new album, “Radical Optimism,” on April 26 in New York. Lipa sought new sounds with the help of Tame Impala’s Kevin Parker.

Dua Lipa is all about ‘Radical Optimism,’ in her music and other pursuits

BY MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

Dua Lipa is floating in the ocean, the sun just beginning to set behind her. She looks strong, serene — save for the looming threat of a massive shark, fin just breaching the surface a few feet away.

The image is the cover of her third album, “Radical Optimism,” out May 3. It is an apt visual representation for an album about finding and protecting your peace in dangerous waters — a thematic maturation for the Grammy Award-winning pop superstar, who has long identified her sound as “dance-crying.”

That cheeky term encapsulates the clubby jubilation of her biggest pop hits, but “Radical Optimism,” with its psychedelic electro-pop, complicates it.

“There’s definitely something more cathartic that comes with the third album,” she told The Associated Press recently.

“‘Future Nostalgia’ was my chance for me to be able to do a very polished pop-

dance-disco record,” she says of her 2020 sophomore release. “Radical Optimism,” alternatively, was informed by what she’s learned from touring the world over the past few years — drawing influence from trip hop and Britpop and including new-found interest in live instrumentation.

“It was so much more free flowing,” she says of her latest album’s creative process. “And it didn’t have a formula, per se, but I

always had that pop sensibility in the back of my mind. But I wanted to just experiment and try and create something new. But I think this was always kind of the album that I’ve always wanted to make.”

In more ways than one: Around her first album, Lipa wrote down that she’d like to work with Tame Impala’s Kevin Parker — specifically on her third album. The manifestation worked, and he became a crucial collaborator on “Radical Optimism.”

“It was almost like something deep down, instinctively, was telling me that it was something earned,” she says. “That over time I would be able to go in and work with a creative that I was so inspired by, and to be in a room and learn from him.”

As for the album’s title: “It’s euphoric, it’s togetherness,” she says.

“Dance music has such a long history of creating such a safe space. And I just want to embody that,” she adds.

She’s been working hard to get there. Lipa, now 28, began her career at age 15, when she convinced her family to let her move from Kosovo to London, where she was born, to pursue a pop career. She



WARNER MUSIC/AP

Lipa sought to experiment and incorporate a wider range of influences on her third album, “Radical Optimism” (above).

went to school, modeled, and in 2017 released her eponymous debut album with the blockbuster dance-pop hits “New Rules” and “One Kiss.” Then came the nu-disco electropop of 2020’s “Future Nostalgia,” which solidified her status as one of pop music’s biggest players. Not bad for a unique voice in the streaming

SEE HOPEFULNESS ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

Lipa’s latest is controlled dance pop

BY ELISE RYAN
Associated Press

In the chorus of “Whatcha Doing,” the fifth track on Dua Lipa’s latest album, she sings: “But if control is my religion / And I’m headed for collision / Lost my 20/20 vision,” referencing the unexpected pull of a new partner.

That sentiment proves true on “Radical Optimism,” a controlled collection of dance tracks, ripe with earworms. Control is Lipa’s religion — often for better, sometimes for worse.

Lipa, 28, won the Grammy for best new artist in 2019, after a four-year stretch that saw her release a debut album to critical and commercial success and then emerge as a radio mainstay with the supremely catchy single “New Rules.” But it was 2020’s “Future Nostalgia” that solidified Lipa’s place in pop music: She was not only a vocal force, but a proven hitmaker.

“Levitating,” that album’s lead single, spent 77 weeks on Billboard’s Hot 100 — the longest run on the chart for a song by a woman — and was named Billboard’s No. 1 song of 2021, despite never reaching the top spot (it peaked at No. 2). It fit easily within Lipa’s roster of enduring radio and dancehall hits, a list

that began with “New Rules” and expanded to include “IDGAF,” “One Kiss,” “Physical,” “Don’t Start Now” and most recently, “Dance the Night,” the existential crisis-inducing dance track from “Barbie.”

That’s all a hard act to follow. “Radical Optimism” has, in some ways, already pulled its weight — largely because the tracks released ahead of the album —

“Houdini,” “Illusion” and “Training Season” — have the classic Lipa hooks that first drove her rise, making for easy pop listening: “Catch me or I go Houdini” — nice — “you think I’m gonna fall for an illusion” — no — “training season’s over” — got it.

Told in Lipa’s confident tone, these lyrical quips paint an energetic but vague image of love lost, found and forgiven. Lipa doesn’t typically include overly

specific references to her life in her love songs, instead distilling experiences into tight phrases that capture just enough to make them relatable without requiring much analysis. In that sense, there’s a controlled familiarity to “Radical Optimism” — one that Lipa is capable of harnessing to coax listeners into her commanding beats, and into a dance.

In the album’s best moments, that sense of familiarity not only works to Lipa’s advantage but also proves that she is fluent in the language of modern pop music. In others, it muddies the thematic vision that Lipa and the album are pushing — which might be stronger told with a fresh pop dialect.

Lipa worked with Tame Impala’s Kevin Parker on parts of the album, telling AP that she had sought his collaboration since

making her first record. Parker’s influence is heard in the strongest tracks: “Houdini” and “Illusion.” (Lipa chose the right lead singles, it seems, so much so that their power weakens the punch of the rest of the album.)

There are other bright spots: Lipa’s soaring vocals on “Falling Forever” are sure to mobilize both dancers and singers. “Happy For You,” about looking back on a relationship and being happy with how both parties have moved on, is perhaps the most personally revealing of Lipa’s real-life optimism.

“Anything For Love” sees Lipa attempt to free herself of the control that often sharpens her tracks. The song starts with Lipa in conversation in the studio before evolving into a piano-backed ballad and then an upbeat, layered production. The pieces are strong, but the track ends before that collaged vision can coalesce, leaving it feeling unrealized.

But if “End Of An Era,” the album’s opening track, is to “Radical Optimism” what “Future Nostalgia” was to its namesake album, Lipa knows this is just the beginning of a shift: “One chapter might be done, God knows I had some fun / New one has just begun,” she sings.



Pet Shop Boys
Nonetheless (Parlophone/Warner)

Once upon a time, on Pet Shop Boys’ first single, “West End Girls,” vocalist Neil Tennant sang the lines, “We’ve got no future / We’ve got no past / Here today, built to last.”

Fifteen studio records later, there possibly isn’t a better verse that captures the timelessness of the stone-faced British pop duo that appears to, indeed, be built to last.

Known for their synthesizer-backed dance tracks with emotionally resonant lyrics, Tennant and keyboardist Chris Lowe created their own style of electric pop — influenced by glam rock and disco — that has stood the test of time with consistent releases over the years.

Their latest album, “Nonetheless,” falls right in line with the pattern.

Tennant’s simple-sounding vocals tell stories of loneliness, longing and love, elevated by bumping electronic beats and orchestral harmonies in this bittersweet masterpiece.

Lowe’s synthesizer skills bring each track to life, as always, and the dichotomy between heart-wrenching lyrics and dance-inducing instrumentals is a poignant reflection of human emotion.

Catchy track “Why am I dancing?” is a perfect example. Head-bopping beats and triumphant trumpets and strings accompany the lyrics, “Why am I dancing when I’m so alone? / Maybe I can celebrate on my own.”

Nostalgia for another time and place seeps throughout “Nonetheless.” Tennant reflects on starting out on his own in “New London boy,” and he yearns for a feeling just out of reach in “A new bohemia.”

“The secret of happiness” feels like falling in love in an old Hollywood movie with a sweeping orchestral arrangement, while final track “Love is the Law” takes a more ominous turn with lyrics describing the feeling such as: “It waits and watches / Weaves and dodges / Catch it like a cold / No one is immune.”

Packed with gems, “Nonetheless” is sure to delight both old and new fans and shows that the duo isn’t slowing down any time soon.

— Kiana Doyle
Associated Press

Hopefulness: Singer strives to be ‘violently happy’ in pursuits

FROM PAGE 28

era, where capturing the attention of the masses — and sustaining it — has never been more of a challenge.

In 2024, her pop songs contain a kind of learned elasticity. The melodies stack atop unusual synth sounds, the vocal range stretches (particularly on the cut “Falling Forever”), the dance breaks inspired by U.K. rave culture and format-benders Primal Scream and Massive Attack — they’re all elements Lipa says she wouldn’t have dared attempt on her last album. That came from working with Parker, producer Danny L Harle, songwriter Tobias Jesso Jr. (known for his work with Harry Styles and Adele), and Lipa’s longtime collaborator Caroline Ailin.

“She understands how to handle a lot of opinions in the room, including her own,” Jesso tells the AP. “She doesn’t value hers above anyone else’s, she simply uses the ones which work best for what she is trying to achieve.”

“We were a band,” Lipa says of the group. The first day they wrote “Illusion.” The second day, “Happy for You.” (“I’d never written a song like that before,” she points out. “And I loved that version of myself.”) The third day, the post-disco pop of



Apple TV+

Dua Lipa also has been acting more. She played Mermaid Barbie in the 2023 blockbuster “Barbie” and a sultry spy in this year’s “Argylle” (above).

“Whatcha Doing.” In bright, airy studios in London and Malibu, Calif., they finessed what became Lipa’s most ambitious — and euphoric-sounding — record yet.

That experimentation appears across Lipa’s endeavors, too. She’s acting more — “little baby roles!” she says with a smile — after playing Mermaid Barbie in the blockbuster “Barbie” (she also contributed the ubiquitous, Grammy-nominated song “Dance the Night” to the soundtrack) and LaGrange, a sultry spy in “Argylle” (a brief performance AP film critic Jake Coyle described as the movie’s best few minutes).

In 2022, she founded a news-

letter called Service95, what she views as an extension of a childhood blog, to “tell stories from all around the world, not solely from a Western lens,” she says. It has grown into a website, podcast and book club: “It’s just another hobby of mine that I’ve somehow managed to turn into a job, which is just great,” she says, smiling.

“My day job, which is my music career, which I love, comes with constantly being online. And I think for me, at least now I’m searching for other things, and not doomscrolling on Twitter,” she says of her media enterprise. “At least this way I’m, like, learning something new about the world. I love having that kind of duality in my life.”

It’s a duality fueled by curiosity, like when Lipa made headlines late last year for challenging Apple CEO Tim Cook in an interview on her podcast over reports of children in the Democratic Republic of Congo mining cobalt for iPhones.

“That was scary, and really exciting,” she says. “You never really know what to expect when you go in to interview someone.”

A few days after visiting the AP’s New York headquarters, Lipa appears at a public high school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan to speak to students

in a conversation moderated by Drew Barrymore.

“One of the things I admire about her is how incredibly intelligent she is,” Barrymore says in her introduction, commending Lipa for not only being an “icon,” but someone who is “globally aware.”

In conversation, Lipa is generous and warm, particularly to a freshman drama student named Dolce, who is also Albanian, and expresses a desire to make it in the entertainment industry. Lipa tells her that identity, intentionally or not, is woven into her music.

At the end of the event, Lipa says she feels “optimistic about life overall, everything that comes with it,” and takes a moment to look out at the audience. “I’m the most optimistic about the next generation.”

And then, almost as swiftly as she arrived, Lipa leaves. A lingering positivity permeates the air. It recalls something she told the AP earlier in the week: that she strives to be “violently happy” in life and in her endeavors.

“You sometimes have to push yourself into that feeling,” she says. Remaining grateful is “definitely a muscle that needs to be exercised.”

On “Radical Optimism,” she’s written the workout soundtrack.

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

A new era for ‘Doctor Who’

Bad Wolf production company taking the long-running series forward with Disney+

BY TRACY BROWN
Los Angeles Times

Bad Wolf, the name of the production company founded by Jane Tranter and Julie Gardner, is a “Doctor Who” reference.

Before teaming up for this joint venture in 2015, the industry veterans had worked together for years in various roles at the BBC and BBC Worldwide. One of their earliest projects was the 2005 “Doctor Who” revival from showrunner Russell T. Davies.

Those who’ve watched that first season will pick up on the reference — a message scattered throughout time and space to lead the show’s time-hopping heroes to a specific moment.

For Tranter and Gardner, calling their company Bad Wolf was an acknowledgment that their professional journeys had always been leading up to its founding.

What the name wasn’t, however, was “an indication that we had set up Bad Wolf with the idea that we would ever be making ‘Doctor Who,’” says Tranter during a joint video call with Gardner. But “‘Doctor Who’ came along and it was unexpected, [but] it’s a very welcome experience.”

“I’m still in shock years later,” Gardner added. “I had quite an emotional response because that had been a very special time.”

Launching Friday, the new season of “Doctor Who” continues the show’s transition into a new era with new lead actors and new ambitions marked by a partnership with Disney+, where it will stream exclusively, to a global audience. The series airs in the U.K. on BBC and is produced by Bad Wolf and BBC Studios Productions.

After an introductory adventure in last year’s Christmas special, Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson’s chapter as the Fifteenth Doctor and his companion Ruby Sunday, respectively, properly gets underway.

Despite their previous roles in bringing the long-dormant “Doctor Who” back to television screens with the revival, executive producers Tranter and Gardner as well as Davies, whose first stint as showrunner on the series ran from 2005 to 2010,

don’t consider this homecoming as doing things “again.”

“I don’t talk about coming back because it’s a new show,” says Davies, a lifelong “Doctor Who” fan whose “first memory of life” is of the series. “I wanted the show to be bigger. I wanted to take the show forward. I wanted to be with a big streamer. I honestly believe in the show.”

Similarly, the “Doctor Who” team refers to this new season with Gatwa and Gibson as Season 1, despite it being the 14th season of the revival (the original ran from 1963 to 1989).

The British sci-fi series follows the Doctor, an alien Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey who explores time and space using a time machine known as the TARDIS, which from the outside looks like a blue police box. Joining the Doctor on their adventures is usually a companion (sometimes more than one). The Doctor is known for the ability to regenerate and take on a new humanoid form in near-death situations.

“It’s just got an inexplicable charm and magic to it,” says Gatwa of the long-running show. “It satisfies our curiosity as hu-

“Often with the regeneration of the Doctor comes a new era. What it means is that the show, by necessity, gets a kind of injection of freshness because the Doctor changes, the writers change, the showrunner changes, the producers change. I think that is a critical part of why the show has lasted for so long.”

Jane Tranter
co-founder of Bad Wolf; executive producer of new season of “Doctor Who”

mans as to what on earth could be out there. And because it’s a TV show, we get that adventure once a week, [and] the show evolves with us.”

A staple of British pop culture, the family-friendly series is often passed down generationally as kids are introduced to it by the adults in their lives. Although a show with decades of backstory and lore could be intimidating for new viewers, regeneration helps keep “Doctor Who” accessible.

“Often with the regeneration of the Doctor comes a new era,” Tranter says. “What it means is



Millie Gibson, left, as the teenage Ruby Sunday, and Ncuti Gatwa as the Fifteenth Doctor in an episode of “Doctor Who.” Gibson is one of the Doctor’s youngest companions.

that the show, by necessity, gets a kind of injection of freshness because the Doctor changes, the writers change, the showrunner changes, the producers change. I think that is a critical part of why the show has lasted for so long.”

That the Fifteenth Doctor emerged through a new mythical type of regeneration called bi-generation — which saw the Fourteenth Doctor split into two beings instead of transforming into a new form — is a clear signal that “Doctor Who” has entered into a new era.

For Tranter and Gardner, any

ed drama series “The Night of,” dark comedy “I Hate Suzie” and workplace drama “Industry.”

“We have very eclectic tastes,” Tranter says. “We both like working on a small scale and we like working on a big scale.”

In 2022, the production announced that Gatwa, 31, would take on the mantle of the Doctor, making him the first Black actor in the role. A Scottish actor born in Rwanda, he was mostly cast in stage productions before landing a breakout role in Netflix’s “Sex Education.” And in his outings so far as the Fifteenth Doctor, Gat-

wa describes the two characters as “besties” who are “very cheeky” and “cause mischief together.”

“I think what makes their dynamic and the relationship so special is they’re each other’s chosen family,” he says. “They both have the connection of being adopted, being foundlings, so there’s that emotional bond.”

At 18, Ruby is one of the Doctor’s youngest companions and is actually portrayed by a teenager (Gibson is 19). Gatwa admits that it wasn’t until Gibson was cast that all of the aspects of his Doctor clicked for him.

“Ruby’s very, very good at being positive in these crazy situations,” said Gibson, who grew up watching “Doctor Who” with her dad. “I think what’s really beautiful [in their relationship] is that Ruby actually challenges the Doctor and he kind of likes it.”

The mystery of Ruby’s past is something that will be explored over the course of the season. Davies says their adventures will include encounters with babies in space, meeting the Beatles in the 1960s, a visit to a war-torn alien world in the far future and even to a royal ball outside the city of Bath in England in the 1800s before facing “the greatest evil the Doctor has ever faced” in the finale.

For Davies, “one of the good things about 2024” is that people are now more open to speaking up about their feelings. He teases

wa exudes a more mischievous, youthful energy.

“I thought, who do I want young viewers to look up to and to emulate in a tough world?” says Davies, who mentions how “we live in heavy times.” “I want people, of all ages, frankly, to turn from the news and to turn from whatever aggression there is online and to come to a nice, safe space, where we’ll have a good time.”

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Q&A



Sean Bean as Thomas Cromwell, a real-life political player who sends Matthew Shardlake on a mission to solve a murder.



Arthur Hughes as the title character in C.J. Sansom's popular historical novels: Matthew Shardlake, a disabled lawyer who solves puzzles and problems during the reign of King Henry VIII. Hughes himself has a disability, radial dysplasia.



Anthony Boyle portrays the codpiece-wearing rogue Jack Barak in "Shardlake."

PHOTOS BY DISNEY+, HULU/AP

Bringing Sansom's Tudor novels to life

'Shardlake' actors discuss their experiences portraying the characters in the historical mystery author's popular books

By HILARY FOX
Associated Press

Matthew Shardlake steps out of the pages of the late C.J. Sansom's popular historical mystery novels and into a new show, bringing with him disability representation.

"We don't see a lot of leading disabled characters," says Arthur Hughes, who plays the title character. "Well, we might, but they might not be played by disabled actors."

Shardlake is a clever lawyer who solves puzzles and problems during the reign of King Henry VIII. He is also disabled. The character is referred to as a "hunchback" by a rude rival in the books — an example of the attitude of the Tudor period, with no allowance or acceptance of differences.

"I really hope the disabled audience can see that and see maybe some of the parallels with the world we live in today. And also just to show that a disabled actor can play a leading part," says Hughes, who was born with radial dysplasia.

Joining him in the show are Anthony Boyle, as codpiece-wearing rogue Jack Barak, and Sean Bean portraying Thomas Cromwell, the notorious and real-life political player who sends Shardlake on a mission to solve a murder at a monastery. New episodes are available Wednesdays on Disney+ in the U.K. and Hulu in the U.S.

The actors spoke to The Associated Press about the importance of casting, the comfort of a codpiece and coldness of old castles. The interview was conducted before Sansom's death April 27. Answers have been edited for brevity and clarity:

Associated Press: So who read the books?

Bean: I read the first three, but a long time ago. Forty years or so.

Was the appeal that you already knew this world?

Bean: Yes, when I found out it was based on C.J. Sansom's books, I thought, I've read those,

you know. It was something I really wanted to be involved with, and when I was offered the role of Cromwell, (I was) delighted.

Shardlake himself, he's a great role.

Hughes: It was a really, really enjoyable role. He's a complicated guy. Kind of strong but vul-

nerable and compromised in many ways within himself, within the job he's got. But I think, ultimately, a really good, just man. And a great story to go through and an interesting world to navigate. It was a lot of fun. We had a ball.

He's also a very cool character.

Hughes: Yeah, I found reading the books, he's a very interesting character, but there's something a little weak and afraid and meek in him and actually, I wanted him to be stronger and stoic. Still vulnerable and lonely and isolated and maybe somewhat awkward, but I wanted him to have a kind of inner strength. This is a disabled man navigating a really difficult world for him, and I think he'll need that kind of inner strength burning inside him.

Codpiece.

Boyle: Yes, let's talk about it. It's something.

Was it comfortable?

Boyle: I sort of had to tell myself — this is the leather jacket of the era. It was like getting your codpiece on and going out, like, this looks all right. Once I got over that hurdle, I loved it and I actually felt a bit naked without it. So I did take one from set. It's in the wardrobe. I'm hoping if the show does well, people will watch it and it will be the new sort of fashion statement this summer. You know, everyone's knocking

about with codpieces.

You've been jumping around historical periods quite a lot recently.

Boyle: Someone said to me, I've done so many period dramas, it looks like I've got a face that just can't comprehend the internet. And they just keep putting me in these sort of random period dramas because I look like I don't know how to work Deliveroo.

Hughes: That's brilliant.

Thomas Cromwell is a really interesting historical figure — what was your take on him?

Bean: I'm not sure I quite liked him, but I admired his resolute character. He's very headstrong and very, very sure about himself, about what he was doing. But he obviously takes a lot of pleasure in the dissolution of the monasteries and the robbing and everything that goes on changing the religion completely, to accommodate Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn. And he sees Shardlake, he knows he's a very intelligent, very gifted man and it's an interesting relationship that we have.

There was talk about doing something with this before, but with an able-bodied actor. How important is it for you that Shardlake is represented properly?

Hughes: I think having those leading roles, especially in this

Tudor world that Shardlake lives in, which is built in ableism every day, but which is backed up by God and by everything that everyone's taught. And also to show that a disabled actor can play a leading part. And he's written as a disabled man and even some of the smallest things about growing up a bit different, looking different — Shardlake will feel all those things and I've felt those things. Maybe I don't have to kind of manufacture that so much.

What was it like filming the 16th century? It looks really cold.

Boyle: It was very cold. We were up there in freezing Budapest and I was wearing tights and a codpiece. All I can remember from the whole shoot, how cold it was. I remember riding horses, which was a laugh. We had good fun on those, didn't we?

Hughes: We did.

Boyle: It was a good craic. Riding into Scarnsea on the back of these horses. The sets were amazing. It really did make you feel like you were in that time period. Looking 'round, you didn't have to really act that much because it was 360. We were on set. We were in the muck. We filmed these amazing locations, these castles and monasteries. And you didn't have to do much thinking, you were just in it.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

9 ways to stay safer while exercising alone

Fitness experts say the biggest dangers for runners, hikers can be managed with the proper gear and preparation

By Allison Salerno
Special to The Washington Post

Melissa Hart finds joy in running alone. “It is just magical,” she said. A few times a week, the 54-year-old takes to the trails near her home in Eugene, Ore. Solo.

“I’m really busy, and I don’t have time to run with anybody and sacrifice that alone time and that meditation to run with somebody and just talk,” said Hart, a writer and teacher.

An estimated 168 million Americans exercise outdoors, including hiking, walking and running. The benefits to body and spirit are indisputable. Time in nature lowers stress levels and can ease both anxiety and depression.

But fear can make some people, especially women, hesitant to venture into nature alone, particularly after high-profile tragedies like the killings of nursing student Laken Riley in Athens, Ga., in February and teacher Eliza Fletcher in Memphis in September 2022. Both women were attacked while running alone.

Fitness experts say that while dangers exist — crime, but more frequently, injuries — they can be well managed with preparation.

“The biggest danger for runners/hikers ... are falls that can break bones, followed by encounters with cars for road runners, along with other uncontrollable environmental factors,” such as sudden weather changes or animal encounters, said Jean Knaack, CEO of the Road Runners Club of America.

Knaack, 52, has been running on her own since her 20s.

“When my kids were really little, it was like that was my time when I could kind of step away, get a little break, being a full-time working mom,” she said.

Here are nine tips for staying safe while running or hiking outdoors:

Trust your instincts and stay aware

Knaack advises women to trust their instincts, vary their running routes, avoid oversharing on social media and stay aware of their surroundings.

Lizeth Aparicio, 32, grew up running with her father near their home in Chino Hills, Calif. Today she is in a running club, but she mostly runs alone.

“It’s your time for you to just be with yourself and take care of yourself first so you can do the rest that comes with a crazy life,” said Aparicio, an account

manager for a sports app. Aparicio, who was hit by a car in a crosswalk when she was in college, now runs in bike lanes, facing traffic, and scoots to the side when cyclists approach.

Prepare for your known health risks

For Maria Wishart, 50, of Duncannon, Pa., her service dog, Boots, is an essential part of her trail-safety preparations. As a solo hiker and backpacker with severe asthma, Wishart relies on Boots, a 3-year-old Australian shepherd/Australian cattle dog mix, who has been trained to predict Wishart’s asthma symptoms and does so with about 95% accuracy.

Boots warns Wishart of impending asthma attacks, which prompts her to use her albuterol inhaler and rest. Sometimes, all Wishart needs is a pause to slow her breathing; other times, she stops to rest before resuming her hike.

Tell others where you are going

Let a family member or friend know “where you are going, the trails you are hiking, when you will return and how, and your emergency plans,” the website HikeSafe advises.

Check the weather — often

“Make sure to keep checking the forecast during the hike, because weather at the top of the mountain can be unpredictable and temperature can drop 30 to 50 degrees in a short time, even in the summer,” according to the Emily M. Sotelo Safety and Persistence Charitable Foundation, which is named after a young woman who died hiking in the White Mountains of New Hampshire in November 2022.

Cultivate situational awareness

“If you feel something wrong in your gut, don’t be polite. Just get out of the situation. If you don’t feel comfortable in an emergency, always call 911,” said Dakota

Jackson, director of visitor engagement for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

Carry 10 essentials

The American Hiking Society recommends essentials including a first-aid kit, appropriate footwear and a map and compass as a backup to GPS. Bring calorie-dense food for the hike and some extra in case you get lost or delayed. Bring plenty of water and a way to purify it. Dress in layers so you’re prepared for weather changes. Bring a knife or multi-tool, as well as a whistle, light and tools for starting an emergency fire. Sun protection and shelter are also on the list.

For hikers, it’s the elements, not crime, that are the biggest factors in outdoors mishaps, Jackson said.

“The biggest risks for any hiker or trail runner, not just for women, are tick-borne illnesses, being underprepared for your hike or weather situation, and slips and falls while you’re out hiking alone,” she said.

Jackson, 31, hiked the length of the Appalachian Trail in 2015.

“My days were typically spent alone,” she said. “There is a sense of freedom to it because you have nowhere to be but where you are — on trail. It’s very empowering because you have everything that you need on your back.”

Use headphones on low volume

Knaack, of the Road Runners Club of America, advised: “Keep the volume low enough that you can maintain awareness of your surroundings. Don’t zone out in unpopulated areas — especially on quiet trails.”

Carry a satellite beacon

The device can send emergency SOS messages. The Fowler-O’Sullivan Foundation, created to honor missing Pacific Crest Trail hikers Kris Fowler and David O’Sullivan, gives free Garmin inReach devices to PCT hikers every year as part of its mission to keep hikers safe.

Wishart also carries two working cellphones, a cell charger and a satellite communicator, and she wears a custom bracelet with her name and emergency contacts on it. The goal, she said, is that in the event of an injury or illness that leaves her disoriented or worse, her husband can be contacted and medical personnel will know her medical condition and medications.

Focus on fitness

Wishart also encouraged hikers to do yoga daily. She said it improves her mobility and balance on trail and reduces the chance of injuries. She also always lets at least one person know her route and when she expects to return.

Until she began hiking in 2013, “I did not trust people, especially men,” she said, because of an assault she survived in her late 20s. “Going out on the trail taught me to trust people again.”



WEEKEND: FAMILY



A new paint color and warning that a shift is coming can help ease a grown child into a change to their bedroom. iStock

‘Adult-ification’ of a space

How parents can transition a grown child’s bedroom — without any drama

By JENN MCKEE
Special to The Washington Post

When Lizzie Haney returned to her parents’ home near Grand Rapids, Mich., for her first Christmas break from college, she discovered two changes in her room.

The first — her mother’s “adult-ification” of the space, taking down old posters and adding new, more sophisticated bedding and decor — felt like a loving gesture, a nod to Lizzie’s maturing tastes. The other felt like a personal attack.

Her dad “had put some of his suits and things in her closet,” says Haney’s mother, Dana Hoebeke. “It was empty. She’d taken everything with her. But she’d brought clothes home with her, obviously, so she came back out, and she was like: ‘What’s that stuff doing in my closet? Get it out of here!’”

Haney, a self-proclaimed neatnik, had a rough first semester living with two less-than-tidy roommates. So even this practical appropriation of her usually ordered closet rankled.

“Coming home ... that first time definitely rattled me,” says Haney, who adds that her reaction may have been tempered had her parents given her a heads-up. “Transparency probably would have been nice.”

Talking through planned changes to a childhood bedroom can certainly avoid hurt feelings. But therapists say this kind of collaboration can also serve as a way to help parents and grown children transition into a new, markedly different phase of their relationship.

The benefits of working together

“When children become young adults, both parties must negotiate a new version of their parent-child relationship,” says Nanette Freedland, a family therapist in the San Francisco Bay Area who regularly counsels empty nesters.

Specifically, young adult children are experiencing a post-adolescent round of what psychologists call “individuation,” wherein they establish themselves as separate, independent entities. Parents are decentered as the primary authority in the child’s life, and the young adult becomes responsible for more, or all, of their own decisions. Including a grown child in the conversation about how you might repurpose their room (or even a part of it) can smooth the way for this shift, because it demonstrates respect for them as a mature adult.

“It’s almost a representation of what we want to do in our adult relationships, which is talking about expectations and desires,” says Tracy Dagleish, a family therapist in Ottawa and the author of the book “I Didn’t Sign Up for This.”

Inviting the young adult’s feedback reaffirms their new role within the family, so both child and parent can shift gears into a relationship that feels more peer-like. Plus, conversations about a childhood room can act as a gateway to more difficult topics, such as whether the parents plan to downsize and sell their home altogether. “It’s wonderful grist for the mill to talk about,” Freedland says.

How to transition the room

Parents should approach conversations about a childhood bedroom gently, but also with an eye toward problem-solving, says therapist and interior designer Anita Yokota, author of the book “Home Therapy.” She suggests language such as: “‘OK, if you still want your childhood twin bed there, then can we make space for the sewing machine here?’ It’s about negotiating the space, and emphasizing that, ‘We’re not throwing you out, but we’re transitioning the space, since there’s a new season now in our family.’”

Two possible entry points for collaboration are: Shopping for a new bed: Your grown child will probably still sleep in their old room when they return for visits, so this is a great way to give them a say in their comfort. Yokota suggests considering a Murphy bed, which is again on trend, thanks to the flexibility it provides. “When [the homeowner] does need someone to sleep in the room, they can pull down the bed, and it can still really be stylish.”

Choosing a new paint color: Although parents and adult children probably won’t agree on every design detail, selecting a paint color can be a fun and simple way to take one step toward a room’s renovation. Start by talking about current favorites and what moods different hues evoke, then grab some swatches and see where the conversation goes.

When a grown child resists change

“Occasionally, [parents] are surprised by their young adult saying: ‘You cannot touch anything in that room. Everything in there is sacred,’” says Freedland, who notes that this may indicate that the child is feeling insecure about their new stage in life. “It’s a really scary thing to just leave home and cut ties.”

If this happens, Freedland advises pausing the room conversation: “Parents should take the time to learn what is troubling their young adult,” she says.

However, Dagleish notes that a failed first attempt shouldn’t mark the end of the discussion.

“In the parenting role, we need to understand that we go back again,” she says. “Just because it’s an uncomfortable conversation, that doesn’t mean we don’t have it.”

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari

Military spouses find ways to make it work

Every weekday, for six months, I reported to a windowless room in downtown Washington, D.C. It contained a conference table and chairs, file boxes, harsh fluorescent lighting and a dozen temporary law clerks like me. For eight hours each day, we sat at that table reviewing thousands of documents in the file boxes that were stacked high around us.

We were paid only \$9 per hour. It was 1993, and my Navy husband and I were newlyweds. I’d resigned from my job as a litigation attorney in a Pittsburgh law firm to become a Navy wife. In Pittsburgh, I had a cushy office, a secretary, my Pennsylvania law license on the wall, a decent salary and a clear path to success.

In D.C., I was unlicensed, unemployed and desperate for a job to pay my humongous student loan debts.

After a month of searching, an agency called “Law Clerk Temporaries” finally placed me at MCI’s Legal Office with the other temporary law clerks. We were hired to review documents in preparation for a class action fraud case.

During the first few days, we all kept quiet while we worked, but eventually we began to speak. By the end of the week, I’d formed mental bios of the key players in the room.

There was Tory, an older clerk with a superiority complex that had permission to leave early on Tuesdays to teach a first-year legal writing class at a local law school.

Corrine, a Columbia Law School graduate, actually was superior, but was also sweet and kind. She’d eventually get snapped up by a good law firm, but I respected her for slogging away for a pittance rather than resting on her laurels.

Clayton, a geeky Catholic University Law School graduate, had a dry sense of humor and red hair.

Wendy, an accounting major, wore a huge engagement ring and perfectly painted nails. She spoke often about her upcoming wedding and her demanding future in-laws.

And finally, Marcus, a finance major with a flair for pocket squares, pinstripes and wing-tipped shoes. Marcus chattered all day, using big words in the wrong context and leaning dangerously back in his office chair.

I’d go home each night and tell my new husband Francis who said what in the windowless room each day. Francis was entertained, and I was grateful to at least have good stories to supplement my lousy pay.

Eventually, my initial amusement about my coworkers turned to irritation, which was only natural considering the tedious monotony of our work and our tight proximity to each other. In fact, everyone became annoyed.

“I don’t care!” Tory yelled at Clayton one day, before storming out, bellowing, “I’m going to my REAL job, losers!” Clayton grinned, pleased to have gotten a rise out of Tory.

Corrine was never rattled, but Wendy was in tears one afternoon. “These people are driving me nuts, too,” I whispered to console her.

“Huh?” she responded. Apparently she was upset that the custom wedding yarmulkes her in-laws ordered didn’t match her color scheme.

My last straw came one day when Marcus was yapping away and lounging precariously in his chair with his wing-tips dangling above the floor. “Marcus, you’re full of it!” I finally snapped. Clayton smiled, fully enjoying the drama.

“You’re so hoydie paloydie!” Marcus retorted. “Wait, did you just call me ‘hoydie paloydie’? I’ve heard of hoi polloi and hoity toity, but ‘hoydie paloydie’? Now that’s rich!” I barked, wishing Marcus’ chair would finally tip over.

Eventually, we PCSed to another state in which I didn’t have a license to practice law, but I found a better law clerk job, and forgot about my fellow temps. Strangely enough, I don’t regret taking that first job after marriage. It taught me my first military spouse lesson: In the face of less-than-ideal circumstances, there’s respect in just making do.

WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

THE SOUNDS OF MUSIC
BY MIKE ELLISON / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

Mike Ellison, of Henderson, Nev., works in business analytics. Before that, he majored in music education and served as a band director, hence the theme you see here. This puzzle has a rare double revealer, found at 42- and 52-Down, which cleverly sums up the wordplay.

- ACROSS
- 1 Cartoondom’s “Princess of Power”

6 Flat formation

10 Jockish sort

13 Short request at a salon?

19 What a conductor might wear to a concert

20 Ice cream parlor request

22 Gazing angrily

23 Split

24 One of a trio of famous tenors

25 “Breaking Bad” and “The Wire,” for example

26 Comparative that’s an inadvisable starting choice in Wordle

27 Tableau

28 Rodgers and Hammerstein’s only musical written for TV

30 Zenith’s opposite

32 Talk smack about

34 Mangy mutt

35 Disney voice role for Idina Menzel

36 Some kicks

38 Exec in tech

40 Pollen carrier

42 Like many roofs

46 What Beethoven’s next symphony would have been

48 Some

53 Needle holder

54 Reference online

55 Percussive shaker

56 ____ Colonies, communal society that went on to form an appliance company

57 1988 No. 1 country hit for Randy Travis

60 Bumpkin

61 Locale for one leg of the Triple Crown of Motorsport

63 Grammy-winning Beyoncé hit of 2009

64 Staccato marking

66 ____ Smith, drummer for Alice Cooper

67 With 76-Across, genre for Fall Out Boy

68 Classical singers?

70 Slopes attire resembling overalls

73 New wave’s Adam ____

74 First word when thanking Mr. Roboto

76 See 67-Across

77 Lennon who co-wrote the Oscar-winning short “War Is Over!”

78 Admits

80 Settings for timers

82 Rapper who shares part of his name with the world’s tallest building

86 Golf gimme

87 Robert Matthew Van ____, real name of rap’s Vanilla Ice

89 Sweetened cornmeal in Mexican cuisine

90 Mounted on

92 Amount after deductions

93 Expels

94 Hats worn by Napoleon

95 Steely Dan hit that charted for 19 straight weeks

97 Brief instant

98 Kind of billiards with no pockets

99 Musical’s beginning

103 Buster

105 Like bossa nova or salsa

107 Question asked in a “Les Misérables” song

111 Classic tune inspiring a joke about eels

114 “Toodles”

116 Marsalis family patriarch

118 Mark who played Luke Skywalker

119 Doctor’s note, perhaps

121 “Easy on Me” singer

122 Narrow soccer victory

123 Musical slide

124 Female fox

125 Guitar cords?

126 Ages upon ages

127 ExxonMobil brand, abroad

128 Necessity for beer or bread

DOWN

1 Rouse

2 Chinese province known for its spicy cuisine

3 What guacamole often costs

4 Get hitched again

5 Groupies, e.g.

6 Beatles hairdos

7 Written in code?

8 Cuts off

9 Flexible position

10 “That’s such a bummer!”

11 Campus mil. program

12 ____ chiasm, section at the lower front part of the brain

13 Disorienting thing to wake up from

14 Fabled monster

15 Trumpet

16 Bumpy ride?

17 Eurasian mountain range

18 Pioneer in electricity

21 Gradually increase in volume

29 Small lump

31 Irritate

33 Suspicious, informally

37 Actress Russell of “The Americans”

39 Quattro x due

41 Marketplace originally called AuctionWeb

42 Cut back . . . or an alternative title for this puzzle?

43 Bit of living room footage

44 “I’ll be with you shortly”

45 Singing Simone

46 Cash coffers

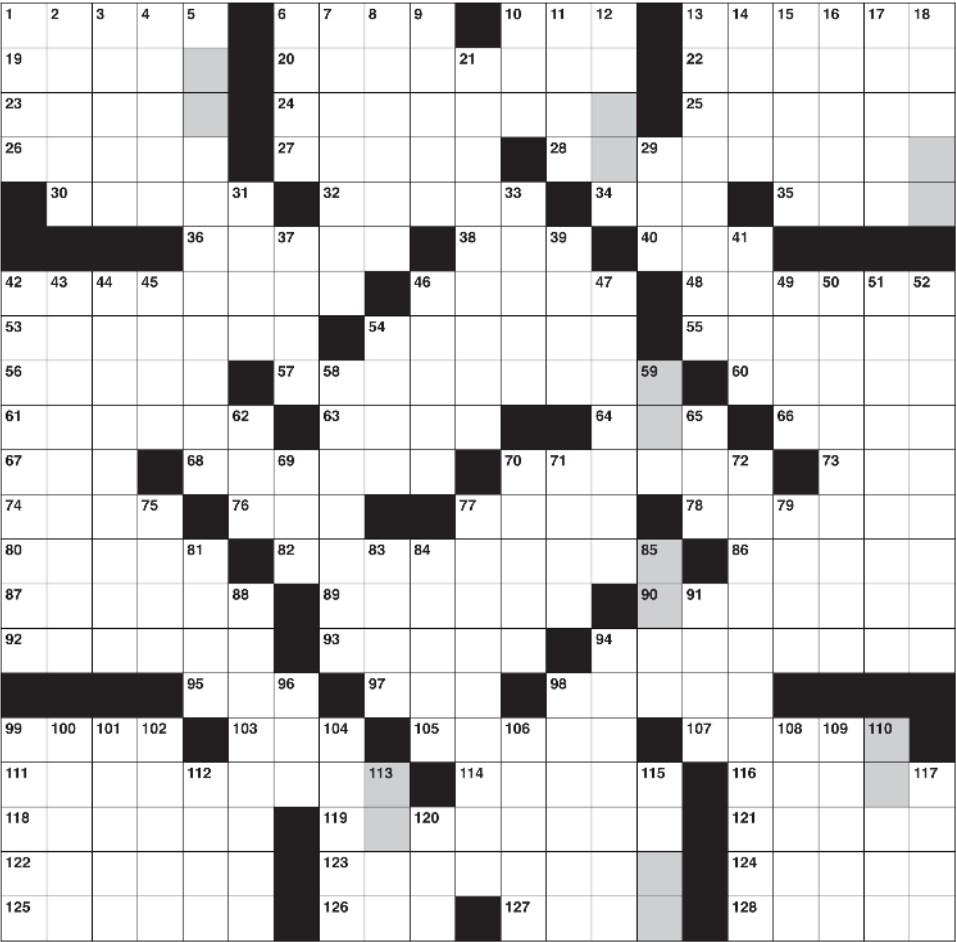
47 Whose performances were as astonishing as all get-out?

49 Hotel-room freebie

50 Go driving

51 Destroyer of a castle, perhaps

52 Autumn colors . . . or an alternative title for this puzzle?



- 54 Term in both finance and linguistics
- 58 Gladys Knight’s backup group
- 59 Weep
- 62 Scotch sampling
- 65 Twirling one’s hair, e.g.
- 69 Part of a Battleship guess
- 70 Some special ops personnel
- 71 Vegetable with a “dinosaur” variety
- 72 Like musical mixes that overly emphasize bass notes
- 75 Doing mess hall duties, for short
- 77 Featured performances
- 79 One of a trio of famous Catherinees
- 81 Hit (with), as a fine
- 83 Closes, as a suitcase
- 84 Prepare to pop the question
- 85 Science exhibition
- 88 Audience, to an advertiser
- 91 Barge type
- 94 Trees that can grow multiple acres wide
- 96 Grocery checkout staple
- 98 Some Olds of old
- 99 Eldest of the Three Musketeers
- 100 Gregorian song
- 101 More subdued
- 102 1986 autobiography of the “Queen of Rock ’n’ Roll”
- 104 Comic pianist known as the “Clown Prince of Denmark”
- 106 To the point
- 108 Throwback hit
- 109 Speaker’s voice?
- 110 Jazz trumpeter Davis
- 112 Goof
- 113 Corporate move, for short
- 115 Footwear retailer founded in Montreal
- 117 Email folder
- 120 “The end”

GUNSTON STREET



“Gunston Street” is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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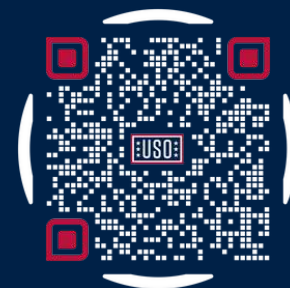
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Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15			16						17			
18							19	20				
			21				22			23	24	25
26	27	28				29				30		
31					32				33			
34				35				36				
37			38				39					
			40				41			42	43	44
45	46	47			48	49						
50					51					52		
53					54					55		

ACROSS

1 Prohibit
4 Blender sound
8 Dross
12 — carte
13 Leak slowly
14 Single
15 Like Rudolph
17 Charged bits
18 Criticize harshly
19 Stashed
21 Dawn goddess
22 Feral feline
26 Rene of
 “Ransom”
29 Farm pen
30 Olympic skater
 Midori
31 “Cold As Ever”
 rapper
32 ICU pros
33 Radiate
34 Ga. neighbor
35 Solidify
36 Senior member

54 Hankerings
55 "Toy Story 2"
toy store

DOWN

1 Taverns	28 Barking mammal
2 Actor Baldwin	29 NBC weekend
3 Zilch	show
4 “Yay!”	32 Soviet fighting
5 Garden aids	force
6 Noun-to-	33 “— Fly Now”
verb suffix	(“Rocky” theme)
7 Fiery cinnamon	35 Belly
candies	36 Misgivings
8 Trombone part	38 Fountain drinks
9 Bathroom,	39 Auto style
in London	42 “— la Douce”
10 New England	43 Furnace fuel
cape	44 Termini
11 Some fridges	45 Cotillion celeb
16 A-bomb trial	46 Lyricist Gershwin
20 Glacial	47 Scale notes
23 Easter bloom	49 Shoe width

Answer to Previous Puzzle

D	A	T	A		P	E	R	K		J	A	B
E	L	A	M		I	M	A	N		E	L	O
J	U	D	Y	B	L	U	M	E		T	O	O
A	M	S	T	E	L				A	M	B	E
				A	D		T	I	D	A	L	
R	I	J	N		L	B	S			Y	A	W
L	I	U			A	O	L			C	E	O
S	I	N	S		D	N	A			E	K	E
			E	N	D	E	D		M	A		
P	A	B	L	O				K	A	R	A	T
Y	O	U			J	U	I	C	E	B	A	R
L	U	G			O	R	C	A		U	R	I
E	T	S			S	E	E	R		D	E	M

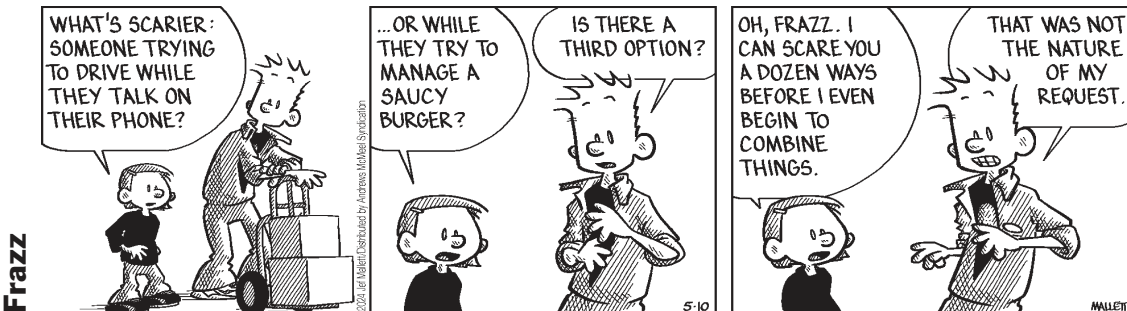
5-10

CRYPTOQUIP

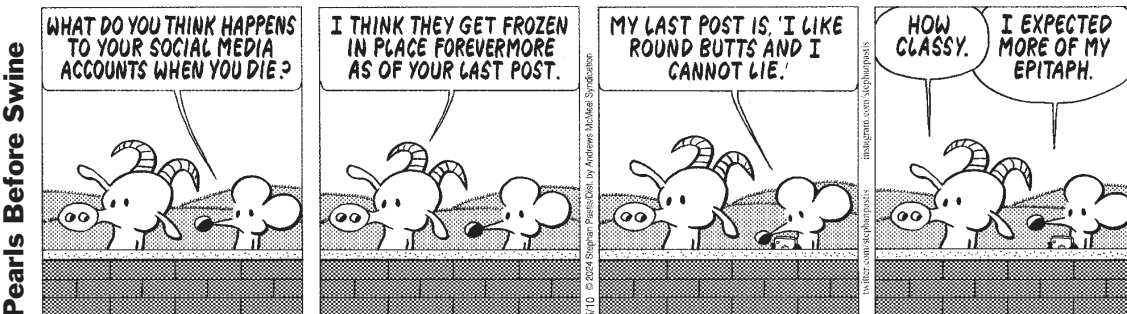
Z Q P E R K K A F X E Q R I J P
 U T I - H A L R I J U A H R W X A B B R W X V
 Z A T H O K P S E A Q R K K E A F P W Q ?

“SAT’VX TIOXV P LXKE!”
Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: BECAUSE I’M MAKING
 ITEMS BY HAND AS A WAY TO PUT OFF DOING
 OTHER WORK, AM I PRO-CRAFT-INATING?
Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: V equals R

Frazz



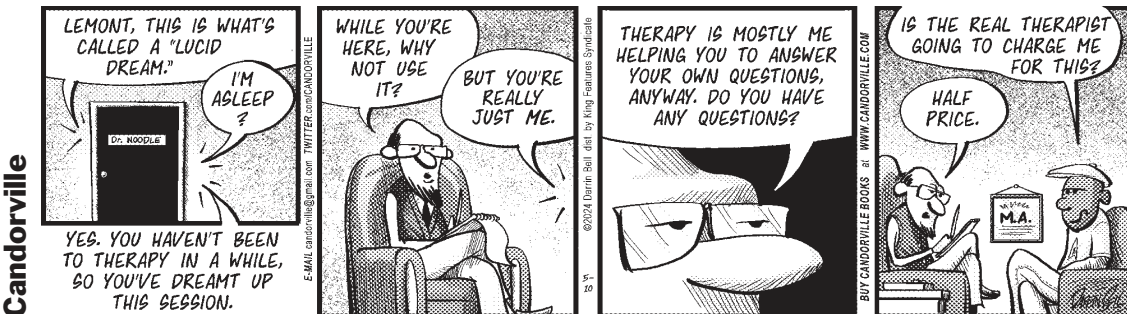
Pearls Before Swine



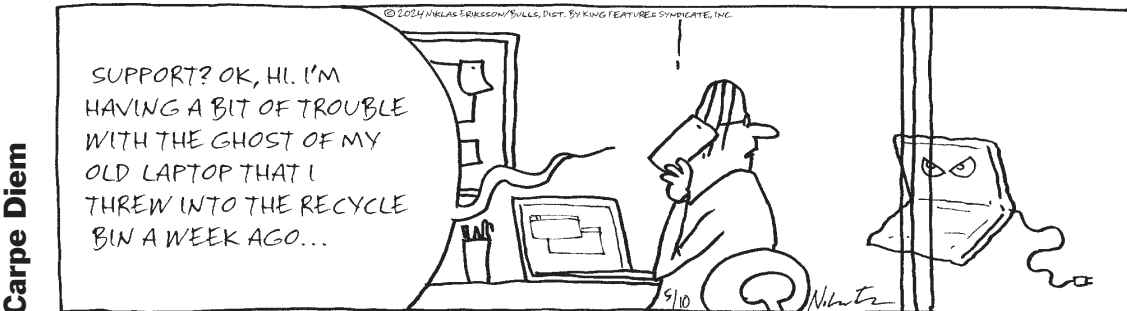
Non Sequitur



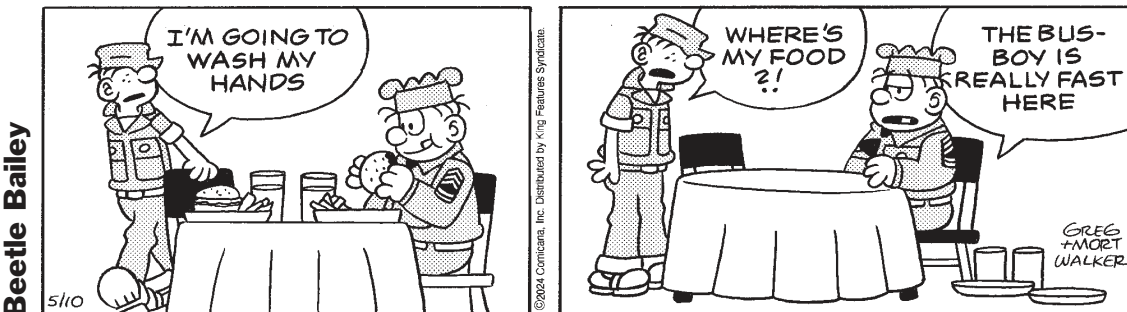
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



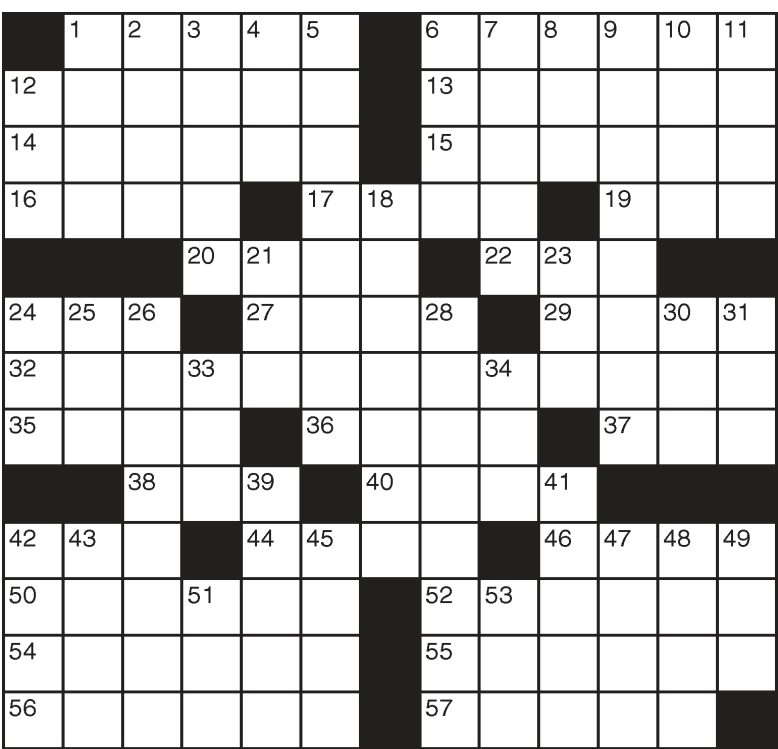
Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



- ACROSS
- DOWN
- 23 Rug cleaner, briefly
- 24 British "Inc."
- 25 Sushi fish
- 26 In a prudent way
- 28 Linear
- 30 Physics particle
- 31 Busy insect
- 33 Shelter
- 34 Shrill bark
- 39 — Ababa
- 41 Boutique
- 42 Anti-fur org.
- 43 Actor Jannings
- 45 "Como — uted?"
- 47 Novelist Jennifer
- 48 Aspic shaper
- 49 Pea holder
- 51 Curved letter
- 53 Not 'neath

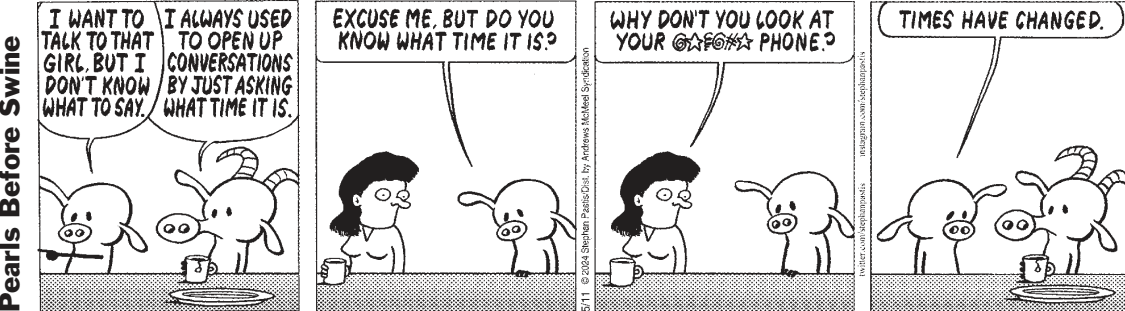
Answer to Previous Puzzle



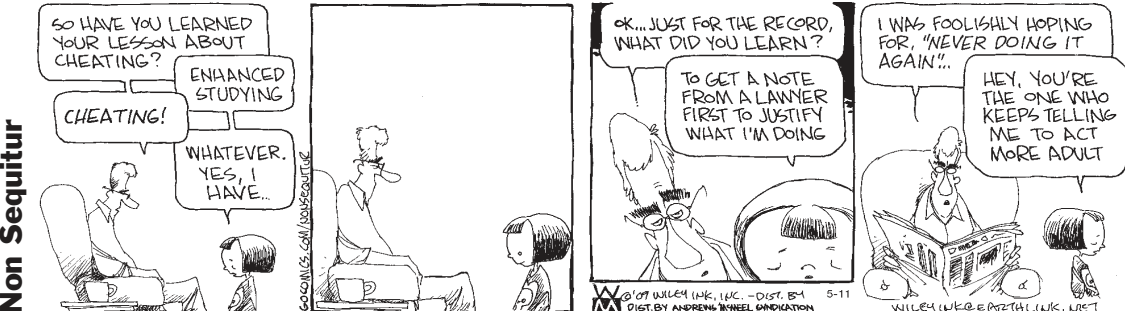
Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



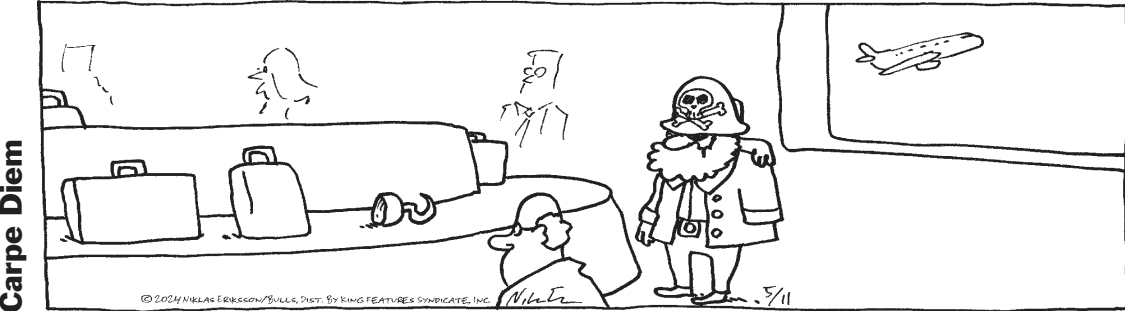
Non Sequitur



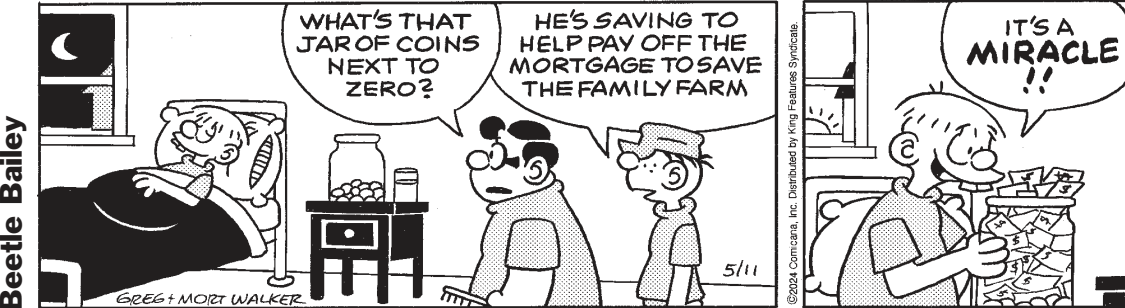
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



5-11 CRYPTOQUIP

VYVKVLH NRYGKLVA SCLS CLN

LY TMSATIT HRWRYX ZGA

KSRIVHLSRYX ELZZTRYLSTN

NARYWK: STL ATM.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT IS SOMETHING A PUN-LOVING POLICE OFFICER WOULD SAY TO HIS STOMACH? "YOU'RE UNDER A VEST!"

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: V equals U



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OPINION

In defense of not voting, if circumstances warrant

By **GEORGE F. WILL**
The Washington Post

Time was, presidential years featured solemn sermonettes about the citizen's duty to vote, and the virtue of prodding the apathetic to plod, even if sullenly, to the polls. There has, however, always been a twofold difficulty with such civic piety: Even in normal times — remember those? — there was no such duty. And hectoring the uninterested and indifferent to express their opinions with ballots must lower the caliber of election results.

This is not a normal time. Granted, scores of millions of Americans normally — and reasonably — think their political options should be much better: The memory of man runneth not to a time when voters exclaimed, “What a divine presidential choice we have this year!” Still, 2024 is so abnormal, consider, without necessarily embracing, an argument in defense of principled nonvoting. Plainly put, the argument is: Elections register opinions. Abstaining from voting can express a public-spirited and potentially consequential opinion.

Regarding the supposed duty to vote, the right and ability to ignore politics is an attribute of a good society. (Totalitarian societies forbid *not* participating in the enveloping politics.) As for the supposed duty to become satisfactorily informed:

Polls showed that in 1964, two years after the Cuban missile crisis, only 38% of Americans knew that the Soviet Union was not a NATO member. In 2006, only 42% could name the government's three branches. The average American works harder at being informed when choosing a refrigerator than

when picking a president.

Many nonvoters' inertia reflects rational ignorance: The chance of any person's vote affecting an election result is vanishingly small, so why bother? In most years, the disposition of most states' electoral votes is not in doubt (this year, in perhaps at least 40 states), so why bother?

Writing in the Financial Times, Simon Kuper notes that the number of U.S. newspaper journalists has shrunk by two-thirds since 2005. That in 2023, for the first time, cable and broadcast TV combined accounted for less than half of U.S. television viewing. And that news is less than 3% of what users see on Facebook. Politicians are losing what Kuper calls the competition in “the attention economy”: “Why let journalists you don't trust tell you about politicians you don't trust?”

Still, voting gives the emotional satisfaction of participation in a national moment of shared responsibility and common purpose. This is one reason to regret the transformation of Election Day into Election Month — or more. This year, however, some might consider forgoing the satisfaction of voting to send the parties a message.

Competing but complacent manufacturers of a particular product — think automobiles; think the late 1950s to the mid-1960s — sometimes ignore consumer preferences. Remember the mercifully short life (1957-1959) of the Ford Motor Co.'s Edsel? This clunky chrome-laden, more-of-the-same sedan arrived just as something radically different — the Volkswagen Beetle — began to find customers: In 1959, the year of the Edsel's internment (sales: 44,891), 120,422 Bee-

Macron has right message but is wrong messenger

By **LEE HOCKSTADER**
The Washington Post

In March, Emmanuel Macron's official photographer posted arresting black-and-white photos of the French president pummeling a heavy bag, teeth bared, biceps swollen. The image Macron projected, of toughness and resolve, meshed with his hawkish determination to rally fractious Europeans against Russia's blood-soaked war in Ukraine.

The photos themselves were the subject of debate — riveting to some, ridiculous to others. But there is no dismissing the gravity of the president's analysis regarding Europe, reinforced with a forceful two-hour speech last month warning that the Continent faces an existential threat arising from Moscow's aggression, U.S. disengagement, and Europe's own economic torpor and rising populist illiberalism.

The trouble with Macron's vision is not the message, which is astute and deadly serious. It's the messenger. The French leader and France itself are punching below their weight.

After seven years, Macron's political fortunes are caught in what looks increasingly like a death spiral. The chasm between his lofty ambitions and straitened powers has widened, at a cost to his credibility at home and abroad.

His sharp read on Europe's travails is grounded in reality, but his ability to bend that reality to his will is diminished nearly to the point of impotence.

Part of the problem is that Macron himself is a jumble of contradictions — and the sum of them carries a whiff of hypocrisy.

The French leader has been the most consistent and full-throated advocate for tighter European integration and coordination in defense, finance, science and combating climate change. Yet he has failed to manage his own relations with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, the most recent example being Macron's call — with no consultations — that Europe consider sending troops to Ukraine. The result is that Macron is widely seen as aloof and arrogant and that the ties between Europe's two most powerful countries are frayed by discord and dysfunction.

He has pivoted from believing that his personal powers of persuasion could get Vladimir Putin to call off his full-scale invasion of Ukraine to insisting that nothing short of Russia's defeat will safeguard European security. At the same time, France has been a laggard in overall military aid to Kyiv, despite sending some important hardware.

Macron has made a strong argument that Europe, with a collective wealth that exceeds that of the U.S., must assume the lion's share of responsibility for its own security.

Yet France is only now approaching the annual defense spending goal set nearly two decades ago by NATO. And that benchmark, 2% of total economic output, has become obsolete, given Moscow's aggression and NATO's own redrawn plans to halt potential Russian incursions on the bloc's vulnerable eastern flank.

The power of Macron's message is also compromised by the fact that its intensity has mounted in tandem with his own political travails, infusing it with the taint of desperation.

Less than one-third of his countrymen approve of his performance in office. His centrist

ties were sold in the United States, en route to a peak of 569,182 in 1970, by which time its success had produced competitive emulators.

This year, many millions of voters so intensely dislike one or the other of the two major candidates, fury will propel them to the polls. But suppose bipartisan disappointment propelled millions to boycott the election? Imagine a dramatic upsurge in nonvoting that was explainable as a principled protest.

This could not be measured in exit polls because nonvoters do not enter the polls. But talented psephologists should be able to find a way to measure, from the mass of eligible voters, the size of a cohort that abstained because of thoughtful disgust.

In 1948, the first presidential election after World War II and Franklin D. Roosevelt's four elections, with the Cold War beginning, turnout might have soared. Actually, at 52.2% of eligible voters, it was the second-lowest of the past 80 years. (The lowest was 51.7% in the 1996 contest between President Bill Clinton and Sen. Robert Dole.) Much the highest turnout since World War II was 66.6% in 2020, the highest since 1904. It was 6.5 points above 2016, a result of pro- and anti-Donald Trump passions. High turnout is a more reliable indicator of national dyspepsia than of civic health.

It might be a constructive signal to both parties if, for the first time in a century, more than half the electorate would not vote. (Only 48.9% voted in 1924.) Voters' eloquent abstention would say that they will return to the political marketplace when offered something better than a choice between two Edsels.

coalition has lost its majority in the National Assembly. And his moderate political bloc is trailing anti-immigrant populists by nearly 2 to 1 ahead of elections for the European Parliament next month. Those are the very populists — anti-Muslim, chauvinist and, in some cases, sympathetic to Russia — who Macron correctly believes pose a threat to Europe's most fundamental values: tolerance, peace and liberty.

Compounding all those problems is France's economy, second largest after Germany's in the euro zone but facing a cash crunch amid swelling debt and deficits.

Even as Macron, now term-limited, pushes for more joint European defense borrowing, France's own chief public auditor recently warned that the service on French debt has doubled in the past three years. The auditor said it would exceed what the country spends on education or the military by 2027 without major changes.

Earlier this year, Macron warned his European partners against “cowardly” conduct in the face of Russian aggression. He has refused to back down from urging leaders to weigh putting European boots on the ground in Ukraine, despite overwhelming political opposition.

The trouble isn't that Macron's ideas lack heft. But at this point in his presidency — his standing diminished, his archrivals ascendant — his words amount to little more than a glancing blow in the fight over Europe's future.

Lee Hockstader has been The Washington Post's European Affairs columnist, based in Paris, since 2023. Previously he was a member of its editorial board, a national correspondent, a foreign correspondent, and a local reporter.

SCOREBOARD/SPORTS BRIEFS

TENNIS

Italian Open Wednesday At Foro Italico Rome Purse: Euro 7,877,020 Surface: Red clay Men's Singles Round of 128	
Yannick Hanfmann, Germany, def. Jakub Mensik, Czech Republic, 6-3, 6-2.	
Zhang Zhizhen, China, def. Daniel Elahi Galan, Colombia, 6-2, 7-5.	
Yoshihito Nishioka, Japan, def. Sebastian Ofner, Austria, 6-3, 2-6, 7-6 (4).	
Luciano Darderi, Italy, def. Denis Shapovalov, Canada, 6-7 (4), 6-3, 7-6 (4).	
Pavel Kotov, Russia, def. Alex Michelsen, United States, 6-1, 6-1.	
Nuno Borges, Portugal, def. Pedro Martinez, Spain, 6-7 (3), 6-4, 7-6 (8).	
Flavio Cobolli, Italy, def. Maximilian Marterer, Germany, 6-4, 6-2.	
Thiago Monteiro, Brazil, def. Gael Monfils, France, 6-2, 7-5.	
Alexander Shevchenko, Russia, def. Fabian Marozsan, Hungary, 6-3, 6-2.	
Terence Atmane, France, def. Christopher Eubanks, United States, 6-4, 6-4.	
Aleksandar Vukic, Australia, def. Diego Schwartzman, Argentina, 6-2, 6-2.	
Women's Singles Round of 128	
Tatjana Maria, Germany, def. Linda Fruhvirtova, Czech Republic, 7-6 (5), 3-6, 6-2.	
Elina Avanesyan, Russia, def. Cristina Bucsa, Spain, 6-7 (3), 6-0, 7-5.	
Lesia Tsurenko, Ukraine, def. Donna Vekic, Croatia, 6-2, 3-6, 7-6 (5).	
Anna Blinkova, Russia, def. Diane Parry, France, 6-2, 6-3.	
Bernarda Pera, United States, def. Caroline Dolehide, United States, 7-6 (6), 6-3.	
Aliaksandra Sasnovich, Belarus, def. Anna-Karolina Schmiedlova, Slovakia, 6-2, 7-6 (6).	
Brenda Fruhvirtova, Czech Republic, def. Taylor Townsend, United States, 3-6, 6-2, 6-0.	
Magda Linette, Poland, def. Zhu Lin, China, 6-2, 6-2.	
Naomi Osaka, Japan, def. Clara Burel, France, 7-6 (2), 6-1.	
Mayar Sherif, Egypt, def. Petra Martic, Croatia, 6-2, 6-2.	
Katerina Siniakova, Czech Republic, def. Nuria Brancaccio, Italy, 6-4, 6-2.	
Sofia Kenin, United States, def. Lucia Bronzetti, Italy, 6-3, 6-2.	

PRO HOCKEY

PWHL playoffs	
Semifinals (Best-of-five; x-if necessary) At Coca-Cola Coliseum, Toronto Toronto 1, Minnesota 0 Wednesday: Toronto 4, Minnesota 0 Friday: Game 2 Monday: Game 3 x-Wednesday, May 15: Game 4 x-Friday, May 17: Game 5 At Place Bell, Montreal Montreal vs Boston Thursday: Game 1 Saturday: Game 2 Tuesday: Game 3 x-Thursday, May 16: Game 4 x-Sunday, May 19: Game 5	

AUTO RACING

NASCAR Cup points leaders

Through May 6	
1. Kyle Larson	467
2. Martin Truex Jr.	438
3. Chase Elliott	412
4. Denny Hamlin	411
5. Tyler Reddick	374
6. Ryan Blaney	367
7. William Byron	362
8. Ty Gibbs	338
9. Alex Bowman	336
10. Ross Chastain	331
11. Chris Buescher	316
12. Kyle Busch	314
13. Christopher Bell	296
14. Chase Briscoe	290
15. Brad Keselowski	287
16. Bubba Wallace	283
17. Joey Logano	269
18. Daniel Suárez	250
19. Noah Gragson	216
20. Austin Cindric	215
21. John H. Nemechek	205
22. Carson Hocevar	200
23. Josh Berry	196
24. Todd Gilliland	190
25. Ricky Stenhouse Jr.	186
26. Michael McDowell	185
27. Erik Jones	181
28. Daniel Hemric	175
29. Ryan Preece	172

GOLF

LPGA Tour money leaders

Through May 6	
1. Nelly Korda	\$2,424,216
2. Maja Stark	\$1,156,868

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions	
BASEBALL Major League Baseball American League	
BOSTON RED SOX — Reinstated RHP Nick Pivetta from the 15-day IL and INF/OF Rommy Gonzalez from the 10-day IL. Optioned RHP Naoyuki Uwasawa to Worcester (IL:). Designated INF Zack Short for assignment.	
CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Selected the contract of 3B Zach Remillard from Charlotte (IL).	
MINNESOTA TWINS — Recalled RHP Josh Staumont from St. Paul (IL). Optioned RHP Jorge Alcala to St. Paul.	
NEW YORK YANKEES — Sent RHP Tommy Kahnle to Tampa (FSL) on a rehab assignment.	
OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Recalled C/1B Tyler Soderstrom from Las Vegas (PCL). Selected the contract of LHP Easton Lucas from Las Vegas. Recalled RHP Osvaldo Bido from Las Vegas. Placed INF Darell Hernaiz on the 10-day IL. Optioned LHP Hogan Harris to Las Vegas. Designated RHP Alex Speas for assignment. Sent RHP Freddy Tarnok to Las Vegas on a rehab assignment.	
SEATTLE MARINERS — Reinstated RHP Eduard Bazardo from the 15-day IL. Selected the contract of LHP Kirby Sneed from Tacoma (PCL). Placed LHP Tayler Saucedo on the 15-day IL. Optioned RHP Emerson Hancock to Tacoma. Transferred RHP Matt Brash from the 15-day IL to the 60-day IL.	
TAMPA BAY RAYS — Placed RHP Ryan Pepiot on the 15-day IL, retroactive to May 6. Reinstated RHP Taj Bradley from the 15-day IL.	
TEXAS RANGERS — Acquired OF Robbie Grossman from the Chicago White Sox in exchange from minor league RHP Anthony Hoopii-Tuionetoa. Designated LHP Kolton Ingram for assignment. Placed RHP Dane Dunning on the 15-day IL, retroactive to May 5. Recalled RHPs Jack Leiter and Owen White from Round Rock (PCL). Optioned INF Jonathan Omelas to Round Rock.	
National League	
CHICAGO CUBS — Sent OF Seiya Suzuki to Iowa (IL) on a rehab assignment.	
CINCINNATI REDS — Placed 3B Christian Encarnacion on the 10-day IL. Transferred LHP Brandon Williamson from the 15-day IL to the 60-day IL. Signed 1B Mike Ford.	
MIAMI MARLINS — Placed RHP Edward Cabrera on the 15-day IL. Reinstated LHP Braxton Garrett from the 15-day IL. Activated 3B Jake Burger.	
MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Reinstated OF Christian Yelich from the 10-day IL. Optioned INF Tyler Black to Nashville (IL).	
NEW YORK METS — Activated RHP Yohan Ramirez. Optioned RHP Cole Sulser to Syracuse (IL).	
ST. LOUIS CARDINALS — Placed C Willson Contreras on the 10-day IL. Recalled C Pedro Pages from Memphis (IL).	
SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Recalled OF Heliot Ramos from Sacramento (PCL). Placed RF Jorge Soler on the 10-day IL, retroactive to May 5.	
WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Sent RHP Matt Barnes outright to Rochester (IL).	
BASKETBALL Women's National Basketball Association	
SEATTLE STORM — Waived F Quay Miller, C Alaina Coates and G Kaela Davis.	
FOOTBALL National Football League	
ARIZONA CARDINALS — Signed LB Markus Bailey.	
ATLANTA FALCONS — Released OT Ryan Swoboda.	
DALLAS COWBOYS — Released WR Martavis Bryant. Signed TE's Brevyn Spann-Ford and Alec Holler, SS Emany Johnson, Julius Wood and Josh DeBerry, LBs Jason Johnson and Brock Mogensen, RB Nathaniel Peat, DT Denzel Daxon, DL Byron Vaughns and WRs Corey Crooms and Cam Johnson.	
DENVER BRONCOS — Released QB Ben DiNucci.	
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Waived WR Thyrick Pitts from injured reserve with a settlement.	
MIAMI DOLPHINS — Signed WR Odell Beckham Jr.	
MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Released WR Daylen Baldwin.	
NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Waived QB Kellen Mond and G Tommy Kraemer.	
PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Signed WR Scotty Miller to a one-year contract.	
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Waived DL Spencer Waage.	
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Waived QB Chevan Cordeiro.	
TENNESSEE TITANS — Released DE Shkel Brown.	
WASHINGTON COMMANDERS — Released LB Brandon-Bouyer-Randle, DB D'angelo Mandell and DE Joshua Pryor.	
HOCKEY National Hockey League	
ST. LOUIS BLUES — Signed LW Hugh McGing to a two-year, two-way contract extension.	
SAN JOSE SHARKS — Announced LW Oskar Lindblom signed a contract with Brynas of the Swedish Hockey League.	
VANCOUVER CANUCKS — Assigned RW Jonathan Lekkerimaki to Abbotsford (AHL) from the Swedish National Team loan.	

3. Hannah Green	\$861,302
4. Brooke M. Henderson	\$771,064
5. Haeran Ryu	\$688,620
6. Lydia Ko	\$639,222
7. Lauren Coughlin	\$573,600

PRO SOCCER

MLS	
EASTERN CONFERENCE	
	W L T Pts GF GA
Inter Miami CF	7 2 3 24 32 18
Cincinnati	6 2 3 21 13 9
Toronto FC	6 4 1 19 14 14
New York	4 2 5 17 16 16
Columbus	3 1 6 15 12 9
Charlotte FC	4 5 2 14 12 13
NYCFC	4 5 2 14 11 12
Philadelphia	3 2 5 14 19 16
D.C. United	3 3 5 14 16 17
Atlanta	3 4 3 12 14 11
CF Montréal	3 4 3 12 13 20
Nashville	2 3 5 11 14 18
Chicago	2 5 4 10 11 19
Orlando City	2 5 3 9 11 18
New England	2 7 1 7 7 18
WESTERN CONFERENCE	
	W L T Pts GF GA
Real Salt Lake	6 2 3 21 18 9
Minnesota	6 2 2 20 17 11
LA Galaxy	5 2 4 19 21 17
Vancouver	5 2 3 18 18 10
Colorado	5 3 3 18 18 15
Austin FC	4 3 4 16 14 13
LAFC	4 4 3 15 19 19
Houston	4 4 2 14 9 10
St Louis City	2 1 7 13 15 14
Sporting KC	2 4 5 11 18 19
Seattle	2 5 4 10 13 13
Portland	2 5 4 10 20 23
FC Dallas	2 6 2 8 10 15
San Jose	2 8 1 7 17 26
Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.	
Saturday's games	
D.C. United at Atlanta Nashville at Charlotte FC Miami at CF Montréal New England at New York Orlando City at Philadelphia New York City FC at Toronto FC Cincinnati at Columbus Austin FC at FC Dallas Houston at Sporting Kansas City Chicago at St Louis City San Jose at Colorado Real Salt Lake at LA Galaxy Vancouver at Los Angeles FC	
Sunday's game	
Seattle at Portland	
Wednesday, May 15	
Atlanta at Cincinnati New York at D.C. United Columbus at CF Montréal Miami at Orlando City New York City FC at Philadelphia Houston at Austin FC Charlotte FC at Chicago LA Galaxy at Minnesota Toronto FC at Nashville Los Angeles FC at St Louis City Vancouver at Colorado Seattle at Real Salt Lake San Jose at Portland	
NWSL	
	W L T Pts GF GA
Kansas City	5 0 3 18 21 12
Orlando	5 0 3 18 14 7
Washington	5 3 0 15 16 11
Portland	4 3 1 13 17 14
Chicago	4 3 1 13 11 11
North Carolina	4 4 0 12 12 10
Gotham FC	3 2 2 11 5 5
San Diego	3 3 1 10 7 6
Angel City	3 3 1 10 9 11
Louisville	1 1 5 8 10 7
Seattle	2 5 1 7 7 10
Bay FC	2 6 0 6 13 19
Houston	1 4 3 6 7 16
Utah Royals FC	1 6 1 4 5 15
Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.	
Wednesday's games	
Gotham FC 1, Houston 0 San Diego 2, Utah Royals FC 0 Kansas City 0, Seattle 0, tie	
Friday's game	
Washington at Louisville	
Saturday's games	
Bay FC at Orlando Seattle at Portland	
Sunday's games	
Utah Royals FC at Chicago North Carolina at Kansas City Houston at Angel City Gotham FC at San Diego	
Friday, May 17	
Portland at Houston Utah Royals FC at North Carolina San Diego at Bay FC	
Saturday, May 18	
Angel City at Washington Louisville at Kansas City	
Sunday, May 19	
Chicago at Gotham FC Orlando at Seattle	

BRIEFLY

Ohtani interpreter set to plead guilty

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The former interpreter for Los Angeles Dodgers star Shohei Ohtani has agreed to plead guilty to bank and tax fraud in a sports betting case in which prosecutors allege he stole nearly \$17 million from the Japanese baseball player to pay off debts, federal prosecutors said Wednesday.

The scandal surrounding Ipe Mizuhara shocked baseball fans from the U.S. to Japan when the news broke in March.

Mizuhara will plead guilty to one count of bank fraud and one count of subscribing to a false tax return, the U.S. Justice Department announced. The bank fraud charge carries a maximum of 30 years in federal prison, and the false tax return charge carries a sentence of up to three years in federal prison.

The plea agreement says Mizuhara will be required to pay Ohtani restitution that could total nearly \$17 million, as well as more than \$1 million to the IRS. Those amounts could change prior to sentencing.

Mizuhara will enter his guilty plea in the coming weeks and is set to be arraigned May 14, prosecutors said.

Mizuhara exploited his personal and professional relationship with Ohtani to plunder millions from the two-way player's account for years, at times impersonating Ohtani to bankers, prosecutors said. Mizuhara's winning bets totaled over \$142 million, which he deposited in his own bank account and not Ohtani's. But his losing bets were around \$183 million, a net loss of nearly \$41 million.

Nadal posts comeback victory at Italian Open

ROME — For a brief stretch on Thursday, Rafael Nadal looked every bit of a weary 37-year-old player nearing retirement.

Struggling to produce pace off both sides with his groundstrokes, committing an uncharacteristically high number of unforced errors and unable to stay in rallies, Nadal dropped the first set of his first-round match at the Italian Open against Belgian qualifier Zizou Bergs.

Then the fist-pumping, virtually-unbeatable-on-clay, 22-time Grand Slam champion version of Nadal emerged and the Spaniard rallied for a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 victory before an adoring crowd in what will likely be his final tournament at the Foro Italico.

Nadal was playing only his 10th match this year after missing nearly all of 2023 with a hip injury that required surgery. He's hoping to be competitive one last time at the French Open, where he is the record 14-time champion.

Rome, where he is a record 10-time champion, is Nadal's last big warmup tournament before Roland Garros starts on May 26.

Hornets hire Celtics assistant Lee as coach

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The Charlotte Hornets named Charles Lee as their head coach on Thursday, hoping he'll turn around the long-struggling NBA franchise.

The 39-year-old Lee joins the Hornets after serving as the Boston Celtics top assistant coach. Lee will complete the Celtics' playoff run before joining the Hornets on a full-time basis. Lee spent five seasons under Mike Budenholzer before joining the Celtics last summer.

Lee received a four-year deal from the Hornets, according to a person familiar with the situation. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because terms of the deal were not made public.

Lee replaces Steve Clifford, who announced before the end of the regular season that he was stepping down as Hornets coach after two seasons in his second stint with the club. The Hornets finished 21-61 this season, tied with the Portland Trail Blazers for the league's third-worst record.

Maple Leafs fire Keefe after early playoff exit

TORONTO — Sheldon Keefe is out as coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs, fired Thursday after another early exit from the NHL playoffs.

The move had been expected after Toronto lost to rival Boston in Game 7 last weekend, the fourth time in five years under Keefe that the team has lost in the first round. The Maple Leafs won just one playoff series since Keefe took over in November 2019.

"Today's decision was difficult," general manager Brad Treliving said in a statement. "Sheldon is an excellent coach and a great man. However, we determined a new voice is needed to help the team push through to reach our ultimate goal."

After the league's 19th coaching change since the end of the 2022-23 season, the team said the search for Keefe's replacement will begin immediately.

COLLEGE

Schools have firms handle in-house GMs

BY LARRY LAGE
Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Riley Ammenhauser has become a record-breaking, triple-jumping track athlete at Michigan and something of an entrepreneur.

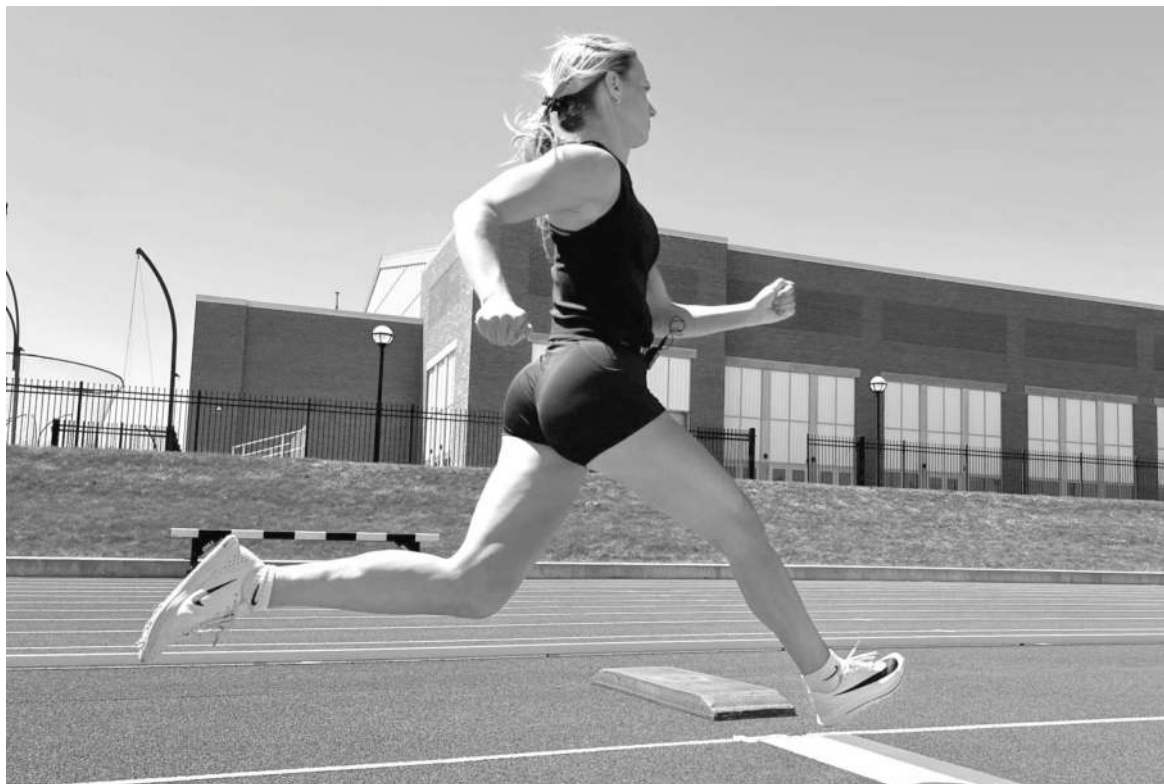
Leveraging her value with about 250,000 followers on social media, she has landed endorsement deals with Peloton, Gatorade and Lululemon while potentially setting herself up with a career as an influencer after hanging up her spikes.

“Coming into college, I just really didn’t know anything about NIL,” said Ammenhauser, a junior from Naperville, Ill. “I didn’t even know it was a thing, and I didn’t know that you couldn’t make money before.”

College athletes across the country have been making money — millions of it — since July 2021, when the NCAA cleared the way for them to earn money for the use of their name, image or likeness. The NIL era has upended college athletics like few things in its long history and forced conversations to the fore about everything from athlete unionization to revenue sharing.

Much of the money has flowed directly between brand and athlete, but the NCAA has encouraged schools to become more involved — even become the home base — for their athletes hoping to strike endorsement deals.

Many of those schools are not



LARRY LAGE/AP

Michigan junior Riley Ammenhauser has become a record-breaking, triple-jumping track athlete and something of an entrepreneur with about 250,000 followers on social media and several endorsement deals.

waiting:

Michigan became the 18th school to hire an NIL general manager in partnership with Altius Sports Partners, announcing Wednesday that NFL Players Association vice president Terése Whitehead will take on the role at her alma mater.

“For us, it’s the right time to bring in a company that has had

three years to develop strategies, connections to NIL space, connections to collectives, understanding that model,” athletic director Warde Manuel said.

The role is not cheap: Michigan alone will give the company more than \$250,000 in the first year to supervise the employee as part of a four-year deal, according to the terms in a contract

obtained via a Freedom Of Information Act request.

The NCAA has been steadfast in declaring that “pay to play” deals are not allowed and for nearly three years, schools were not permitted to solicit NIL deals or advise athletes on the pros and cons of potential opportunities. At most, recruiters could note that NIL deals were avail-

able to explore from booster-backed collectives or third-party organizations, some of which have contracts with schools to connect athlete and brands.

Most of the NCAA’s rules around NIL money have been challenged in court, and last month Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin signed a measure into law that allows state colleges and universities to directly pay their athletes through NIL deals as of July 1.

Altius said it expects to continue providing NIL GMs to schools.

“We have been telling schools for almost a year that this time was coming,” said Brittney Whiteside, an Altius Sports Partners vice president and a former Virginia deputy athletic director. “We think there’s great value in having an executive general manager on campus, having someone as the point person that is dialed into the landscape offering resources with a high level of expertise.”

Whitehead, the Michigan NIL GM, spent eight years at the NFLPA, where she managed a \$2.75 billion portfolio as a VP in charge of consumer products and strategy.

“My entire sports marketing journey has equipped me with invaluable experience, particularly in leveraging the individual and group NIL rights of professional athletes,” she said.

COLLEGE BASEBALL NOTEBOOK

LSU boosts playoff hopes with series win over Texas A&M

BY ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

With two weeks left in the regular season, LSU is scrambling to avoid becoming the third straight defending national champion to miss the NCAA Tournament.

The Tigers (31-18, 9-15) won two of three against then-No. 1 Texas A&M to take a giant step over the weekend, but they probably need to win four of their last six Southeastern Conference games to strengthen their status for an at-large bid.

LSU could also help itself with a good showing in the SEC Tournament. The Tigers are tied with Mississippi for the 12th and final spot in the conference tournament, two games ahead of Missouri.

“We’re still in the fight for a postseason bid,” coach Jay Johnson said, “and we’ve really improved over the last month. We’ve given ourselves a chance. In the last few weeks, we’ve put ourselves into the best position we possibly could to play postseason baseball. We’re just going to



MICHAEL JOHNSON, THE ADVOCATE/AP

LSU's Jake Brown slides back into first past a tag attempt by Texas A&M first baseman Blake Binderup on Sunday in Baton Rouge, La.

have to keep fighting.”

LSU has understandably struggled to replace the leadership, and performances, of pitcher Paul Skenes and center fielder Dylan Crews — the top two picks

in the 2023 Major League Baseball amateur draft.

The Tigers weren’t expected to struggle as much as they have, though. They had bad nonconference losses to Stony Brook and

Southern, and they lost five straight SEC series before winning two against the bottom teams in the league, Missouri and Auburn.

A pair of 6-4 victories locked up the series win over Texas A&M, which won Sunday’s game 14-4.

Next up for the Tigers is a trip to Alabama (29-18, 10-14) and then a home series against Mississippi (25-22, 9-15).

In the polls

Tennessee (39-9) took two of three at Florida for its seventh straight SEC series win and took over the No. 1 spot in the D1Baseball.com and Baseball America polls. The Volunteers’ 16-3 win Saturday was their fifth in SEC play that ended early because of the 10-run rule.

D1Baseball ranks Clemson (36-10) No. 2 and Texas A&M (40-8) No. 3. Baseball America has A&M second and Arkansas (40-9) third.

Nebraska no-no

Jackson Brockett’s no-hitter in

an 8-0 home win over Kansas State on Wednesday was the first since 1954 by a Nebraska pitcher in a nine-inning game. It was the Huskers’ first individual no-hitter since Anthony Kelley’s gem in a seven-inning game against Oklahoma in 1981. Brockett struck out a career-high 12 on 107 pitches in his first start of the season.

That’s just Syc(amores)

Indiana State swept Belmont for its 17th straight Missouri Valley Conference series win. The Sycamores (34-10, 17-4) are 43-7-1 in MVC games since the series winning streak started in 2022. Their 12-game home run streak ended with Sunday’s 6-4 win.

Good time Charlie

National home run leader Charlie Condon of Georgia has gone deep in seven straight games, two behind the NCAA record set by Nevada’s Tyler Bissetti in 2021 and tied by Florida’s Jac Caglianone last month. Condon has 33 homers in 47 games.

Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Baltimore	24	12	.667	—
New York	25	13	.658	—
Boston	19	18	.514	5½
Tampa Bay	19	19	.500	6
Toronto	17	20	.459	7½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	24	13	.649	—
Minnesota	21	15	.583	2½
Kansas City	22	16	.579	2½
Detroit	19	18	.514	5
Chicago	9	28	.243	15
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Texas	22	17	.564	—
Seattle	20	17	.541	1
Oakland	18	21	.462	4
Los Angeles	14	23	.378	7
Houston	12	24	.333	8½
National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	26	12	.684	—
Atlanta	22	12	.647	2
New York	18	18	.500	7
Washington	18	18	.500	7
Miami	10	29	.256	16½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	21	15	.583	—
Chicago	22	16	.579	—
Pittsburgh	17	21	.447	5
Cincinnati	16	20	.444	5
St. Louis	15	21	.417	6
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	26	13	.667	—
San Diego	20	20	.500	6½
Arizona	17	20	.459	8
San Francisco	17	21	.447	8½
Colorado	8	28	.222	16½
Wednesday's games				
L.A. Angels 5, Pittsburgh 4 Cleveland 5, Detroit 4, 10 innings Toronto 5, Philadelphia 3 Kansas City 6, Milwaukee 4 Oakland 9-11, Texas 4-12 Chicago White Sox 4, Tampa Bay 1 N.Y. Yankees 9, Houston 4 Atlanta 5, Boston 0 Minnesota 6, Seattle 3 Baltimore 7, Washington 6, 12 innings San Diego 3, Chicago Cubs 0 L.A. Dodgers 3, Miami 1 Arizona 4, Cincinnati 3 San Francisco 8, Colorado 6 N.Y. Mets at St. Louis, ppd.				
Thursday's games				
Arizona at Cincinnati Seattle at Minnesota San Francisco at Colorado Houston at N.Y. Yankees Cleveland at Chicago White Sox St. Louis at Milwaukee Kansas City at L.A. Angels				
Friday's games				
Chicago Cubs (TBD) at Pittsburgh (TBD) Houston (TBD) at Detroit (Mize 1-1) N.Y. Yankees (TBD) at Tampa Bay (Bradley 0-0) Arizona (TBD) at Baltimore (Irvin 3-1) Minnesota (Ryan 1-2) at Toronto (Kikuchi 2-2) Philadelphia (Suárez 6-0) at Miami (Rogers 0-5) Washington (Corbin 0-3) at Boston (Houck 3-3) Atlanta (Morton 2-0) at N.Y. Mets (Quintana 1-3) Cleveland (Carrasco 2-2) at Chicago White Sox (Crochet 2-4) St. Louis (TBD) at Milwaukee (TBD) Texas (TBD) at Colorado (TBD) Kansas City (Marsh 3-0) at L.A. Angels (Canning 1-4) Oakland (Blackburn 3-1) at Seattle (TBD) L.A. Dodgers (Glasnow 6-1) at San Diego (King 3-3) Cincinnati (Abbott 1-4) at San Francisco (TBD)				
Saturday's games				
Minnesota at Toronto Arizona at Baltimore Chicago at Pittsburgh Philadelphia at Miami Washington at Boston Atlanta at N.Y. Mets N.Y. Yankees at Tampa Bay Houston at Detroit Cleveland at Chicago White Sox Cincinnati at San Francisco St. Louis at Milwaukee Texas at Colorado L.A. Dodgers at San Diego Kansas City at L.A. Angels Oakland at Seattle				

Pirates calling up Skenes for debut

By WILL GRAVES
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Paul Skenes era is ready to begin in Pittsburgh.

The top pick in last year’s amateur draft will make his major league debut for the Pirates on Saturday when they face the Cubs, a person with direct knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press.

The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity Wednesday because the Pirates hadn’t explicitly announced the promotion, although the club did send out a hype video of Skenes with “5.11.24.”

The 21-year-old, taken with the first pick last summer following a couple of standout years at LSU, has dominated opponents at Triple-A Indianapolis. Skenes, whose fastball regularly hits triple digits, is 0-0 with a 0.99 ERA in seven Triple-A starts, with 45 strikeouts in 27⅓ innings.

He is considered among baseball’s top prospects and comes with unusual star power for a baseball rookie, in part because of his relationship with LSU gymnast and social media influencer Olivia Dunne.

The Pirates have brought Skenes along slowly during the spring, methodically ramping up his pitch count at Triple-A. They have given him a little more latitude recently. He threw 75 pitches on April 30 and 66 on Sunday against Buffalo.

Skenes joins a rotation that includes 22-year-old rookie Jared



GERALD HERBERT/AP

Pittsburgh Pirates pitcher Paul Skenes throws in the fourth inning of a spring training game against the Tampa Bay Rays in Port Charlotte, Fla., on March 4. Skenes has a 0.99 ERA in seven Triple-A starts.

Jones, who has a 2.63 ERA through seven starts and whose 52 strikeouts were ninth in the majors entering Wednesday.

Pittsburgh has floundered of late following a strong start. The Pirates, who are off Thursday, are 6-16 over their last 22 games after falling to the Los Angeles Angels 5-4 on Wednesday.

Skenes’ arrival represents a significant milepost for the organization. General manager Ben Cherington has overseen a top-to-bottom overhaul since taking over in the fall of 2019. Some of the pieces he has acquired and/or developed since his arrival either are on the major league roster (Jones) or on the cusp.

It also starts the clock on Pittsburgh’s hopeful return to contention. The Pirates finished last in the NL Central from 2019-22 before taking a step forward last season. The expectation internally is for the competitive window to open either this year or next. Skenes could have an outsized impact on the timeline.

Contreras’ injury shows danger to catchers

By JAY COHEN
Associated Press

When catcher Willson Contreras of the St. Louis Cardinals was struck on his left arm by a swing Tuesday night, it was felt by former and current backstops all over the big leagues. Everyone from Salvador Perez in Kansas City to managers like Bruce Bochy and Rob Thomson.

It was especially painful for Contreras’ brother, William.

“It’s hard for me, too, because I love my brother. He plays every day. But he’ll be back,” said William Contreras, a catcher with the Milwaukee Brewers.

Willson Contreras’ broken left forearm was a scary reminder of the increasing danger for catchers who have moved closer to home plate over the years in an effort to steal strike calls at the bottom of the zone — and sometimes even lower.

When a hitter with a long swing stands at the back of the batter’s box, there is precious little room to maneuver.

“The risk is high. We just experienced it,” St. Louis manager Oliver Marmol said Wednesday. “It’s a huge risk, and it’s been talked about. Even in the offseason it was a topic of discussion because there was an increase in them. The more catchers are evaluated on framing, the closer they’re getting to the hitter to get that low pitch.”

Contreras got hurt with New York Mets slug-



Contreras

ger J.D. Martinez at the plate in the second inning. After he was hit by Martinez’s swing, the three-time All-Star tumbled over in obvious pain. He is expected to be sidelined at least six weeks following surgery for a fractured forearm.

“I’ve never seen anything like that,” said Royals manager Matt Quatraro, who caught in college and the minor leagues. “I feel terribly for him. I didn’t go back and watch it in super slow motion, but it’s devastating for him.”

Martinez was awarded first base on one of 33 catcher interference calls through Tuesday’s games, a slight increase from 30 at the same point last year, according to Sportradar. There were 96 catcher interference calls during the 2023 season, up from 74 the previous year and the majors’ highest total since at least 1974.

The increase has attracted the attention of Major League Baseball, which has held conversations with teams about the calls and positioning by catchers.

“MLB addressed it in spring training with us,” Oakland Athletics manager Mark Kotsay said, “in terms of talking about it with our catchers and making them aware that the catcher injury has increased over the last two years, especially with concussions and being hit in the head. So there’s definitely a fine line.”

Contreras has been one of St. Louis’ best hitters this season, so it’s a costly injury for the Cardinals. Bochy, the Texas manager, said that risk has affected how the Rangers position their catchers.

“We back them off just a hair, because, I tell you, the last thing you want to do is not just get hit in an arm, but maybe in the back of the head,” said Bochy, a former big league catcher. “That’s how close they’re getting, especially when the ball’s low.”

If the plays continue, Major League Baseball could bring the trend to its competition committee — which includes six owners, four players and one umpire — as part of its process for addressing safety concerns.

In the meantime, players and teams are identifying the hitters who put their catchers at increased risk.

Oakland outfielder Esteury Ruiz and Houston Astros slugger Kyle Tucker drew the most catcher interference calls in 2023 with seven apiece, two more than Chicago White Sox outfielder Luis Robert Jr. and Shohei Ohtani in his final season with the Los Angeles Angels. San Diego Padres infielder Jake Cronenworth has drawn three such calls already this year.

“We’re lucky enough to have good analytics on what guys are high risk of catcher’s interference, so it gives us kind of the depth piece to be able to move back or move forward on guys,” New York Yankees catcher Austin Wells said.

HOCKEY

Women's league off to promising start

PWHL's strong inaugural season coincides with growing appetite for women's sports

By **STEPHEN WHYNO**
AND **JOHN WAWROW**
Associated Press

Less than a year since getting off the ground, the Professional Women's Hockey League has staged its inaugural season with 72 games around North America televised or streamed and attendance records broken over and over, putting the sport in the spotlight like never before.

It could not be happening at a better time.

The PWHL's launch finally brings together the best players in the world on a regular basis and beyond the annual world championships or Olympics every four years. And it has placed the game firmly on the map at a time of heightened interest in women's sports, led by the Caitlin Clark effect in basketball and a quarter-century since Brandi Chastain and the U.S. soccer team rose to international prominence.

While it will still take time to catch up in a crowded landscape, the PWHL is off to a blazing beginning after decades of frustration, featuring fitful starts and stops, by putting it all together on the ice with a chance to capitalize on a growing appetite for elite women's sports.

"We all wanted things to happen faster, and it felt really difficult and challenging at times," Hall of Famer and PWHL senior VP of hockey operations Jayna Hefford told The Associated Press. "But now when you look back on it, you have to wonder if everything happened like it should have been and at the right time to allow us to see the success that we've seen to date."

That success is still in its infancy, though the first four-plus months of the PWHL has raised expectations of how fast and how much it can grow beyond the current six-team structure based in Boston, New York, Minnesota, Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa. A total of 392,259 fans attended games during the regular season at venues that included various NHL rinks and highlighted by a women's hockey-record crowd of 21,105 turning out at the Canadiens' Bell Centre for a Montreal-Toronto showdown last month.

Television broadcasts nationally in Canada and regionally in the U.S. markets have also attracted even more viewers to women's hockey in following the same path of progress the WNBA and the various pro women's soccer league incarnations previously enjoyed since the late 1990s and early 2000s.

"This has been in the works for quite a long time," said Amy Scheer, the PWHL's senior VP of business operations, who has also worked in the WNBA and NBA and for the NFL. "This has not happened overnight, and it continues to be a movement and it will have to continue to be a movement. There's no time where we can take our foot off the pedal and feel complacent or feel comfortable. This is hard work every single day."

As the puck drops on the playoffs this week, with an innovative format that allowed league-leading Toronto to pick its first-round opponent — the team chose to play fourth-seeded Minnesota — there's still plenty of work to be done.

Internally, advisory board member Stan Kasten acknowledged, "We still have a long way to go till we are an economic success," and an expert in women's sports is skeptical of the long term based on hockey's place behind football and other sports in the U.S., and until there are more teams and big-name stars to capture mainstream attention.

"You've got the kind of barrier of overcoming just the sort of marginalization of hockey in American culture and then on top of that added in this additional layer of the marginalization of women's sports in American culture," said Cheryl Cooky, professor of women's gender and sexuality studies



FRANK GUNN, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

Toronto's Brittany Howard drives Minnesota's Maggie Flaherty into the boards during the second period of a PWHL hockey game in Toronto on May 1. The two teams will face off in the first round of the playoffs.

at Purdue University. "Adding those together, it creates this sort of double jeopardy for women's hockey."

Cooky pointed to Chastain, Clark and others becoming the face of her sport to people beyond the fanbase as something women's hockey needs. American Hilary Knight and Canadian Marie-Philip Poulin are the biggest stars at the moment, including Knight making an appearance on "Satur-

day Night Live" in 2018. But there's also the inherent challenge of playing in helmets with cages that basketball and soccer do not have to overcome in building a pop culture following off the ice, court or field.

But that process is ongoing, placing the emphasis on the next generation, led by Sarah Nurse, Caroline Harvey, Laila Edwards and others, of building a loyal following around the continent.

"These kinds of role models that show women that they can be fierce, serious athletes, I can't think of anything better," Canadian Ambassador to the U.S. Kirsten Hillman said. "The strength of the fan support speaks to the fact that there was something missing, that there was something that was needed."

Speaking steps away from Hillman at a PWHL watch party at the Canadian Embassy in Washington last month, Bauer VP of marketing Mary-Kay Messier called the inaugural season "a watershed moment" for hockey because of the growth opportunity of getting more girls and women involved.

"It's a reflection of the passion of the people, and they're demanding to see the games and they're turning out in droves and breaking records is no longer a milestone — it's a track record," Messier said. "For brands that want to stay relevant, want to develop new audiences, you've got to get involved with girls and women's sports because that's a difference-maker."

The PWHL has deals with companies running the gamut from equipment manufacturers like Bauer and CCM to Canadian Tire, Molson, Tim Hortons and Barbie. More agreements are coming soon, as is eventual expansion, though that will have to wait, as will increased salaries for players and other modifications.

"We tried to be careful and conservative so that when we finally got going, we had a chance to succeed and that's the place we're at now," said Kasten.



RICHARD TSONG-TAATARI, STAR TRIBUNE/AP

Toronto goalie Kristen Campbell, left, celebrates with teammates after their overtime win against Minnesota on Feb. 27 in Minneapolis. Finally having the best players in the world in one league has provided the kind of jump start needed to try to catch up other sports in a crowded landscape.

NHL PLAYOFFS



DARRYL DYCK, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

The Vancouver Canucks' Conor Garland celebrates his goal next to the Edmonton Oilers' Darnell Nurse during Game 1 on Wednesday.

ROUNDUP

Canucks overcome 4-1 hole, stun Oilers

Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — Conor Garland broke a tie with 5:34 left and the Vancouver Canucks overcame a three-goal deficit to beat the Edmonton Oilers 5-4 on Wednesday night in Game 1 of the second-round playoff series.

Garland took a short pass from Dakota Joshua, faked a slap shot at the right circle and slipped a wrist shot between goalie Stuart Skinner's legs from a sharp angle for Vancouver's second goal in 39 seconds and third in 4:48.

"Everybody wants to be in that moment," Garland said. "We understand when you have to execute and when you dig a hole like that, you got to execute if you want to get back in the game. And I think that was the biggest thing in the third, that we just executed and buried our chances."

Game 2 is Friday night in Vancouver.

Elias Lindholm got the comeback started with 2:59 left in the second period. J.T. Miller cut it to 4-3 at 9:38 of the third, and Nikita Zadorov tied it with 6:13 remaining.

"Maybe four or five months ago, or maybe last year, you might have seen some frustration, some laziness or when something frustrated us, we take a bad penalty," coach Rick Tocchet said. "If you look at it, when they're 4-1, I thought we still stayed disciplined. We weren't pinching, we weren't

selling the farm. And I think that's maturity of the year, how we've kind of built our resolve."

Joshua scored early in the second period and assisted on Lindholm's goal.

"The belief is always there," Joshua said. "Just to know that you got to keep playing to the end, anything can happen."

Arturs Silovs stopped 14 shots for the Canucks.

Zach Hyman scored twice for Edmonton to take the playoffs goals lead with nine.

"They're a good team and they were doing everything they could to come back and we were doing everything we could to hold on to the lead," said Oilers captain Connor McDavid, who was limited to an assist. "That happens in the playoffs. You try to hold on to lead and sometimes you're maybe a little too passive."

Panthers 6, Bruins 1: Aleksander Barkov had two goals and two assists, Sam Reinhart added four assists and host Florida tied the second-round series with Boston at a game apiece.

The Panthers chased Bruins starter Jeremy Swayman early in the third period after four straight goals, then added two more against Linus Ullmark.

Charlie Coyle had the goal for the Bruins, who lost to Florida for the first time in six meetings this season. The series shifts to Boston for Game 3 on Friday night and Game 4 on Sunday night.

Goalie interference debate rekindled by 1st-round calls

By STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

Minutes after his team was knocked out of the NHL playoffs in a game that included two disallowed goals because of goaltender interference, Jon Cooper was careful to say those calls weren't the reason the Tampa Bay Lightning lost the series. He still had a problem with them.

Cooper, a two-time Stanley Cup-winning coach, pointed out the league has made one rule change after another to encourage offense. When Tampa Bay scored its first goal, Florida coach Paul Maurice successfully challenged to wipe it out for goalie interference; when on-ice officials ruled a later Lightning goal should not count for the same reason, Cooper challenged but the call was upheld. His team went on to lose 6-1 and he said afterward he didn't think there was enough evidence for either call.

It was clear this was the biggest controversy of the postseason so far.

At least one prominent colleague agreed with Cooper's sentiment, and many of the coaches left in the playoffs acknowledge there's a delicate balance when it comes to goalie interference, when the decision or a coach's challenge can swing a game or a series at the most important time of year.

"It's an area they're going to have to look at to shore up," said Carolina's Rod Brind'Amour, who sided with Cooper on the premise about goalies being overprotected for incidental contact. "We want to see goals, especially those ones when you're fighting around the net. If you knock a goalie over, that's goalie interference. But there should be a little more onus on just the common sense part of it."

After his Panthers were on the positive end of all three goalie interference challenges so far, Maurice felt he could be more philosophical about the topic than if he were in Cooper's chair. The veteran coach felt confident enough to challenge but wasn't entirely sure what the league's situation room would decide.

Still, he thinks goalie interference is clearer now than it was four or five years ago because the pendulum has swung from zero tolerance to more contact and settled in the middle.

"They've tried to narrow it," Maurice said. "If the goaltender can't get to the save, it's goalie interference. So, what I do (behind the bench) on that is truly 'spirit of the rule.' I try not to factor in all the things that are criteria that they tell you. Is (an opponent) in his crease to stop him from making a



WILFREDO LEE/AP

The Florida Panthers' Carter Verhaeghe skates into Tampa Bay Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy as defenseman Erik Cernak looks on in the first-round series. Verhaeghe was called for goaltender interference.

Scoreboard

Second Round	
(Best-of-seven; x-if necessary)	
EASTERN CONFERENCE	
Boston 1, Florida 1	
Boston 5, Florida 1	Wednesday: Florida 6, Boston 1
Friday: at Boston, AFN-Sports2, 1 a.m.	Saturday CET; 8 a.m. Saturday JKT
Sunday: at Boston, AFN-Sports2, 12:30 a.m.	Monday CET; 7:30 a.m. Monday JKT
x-Tuesday: at Florida	x-Friday, May 17: at Boston
x-Sunday, May 19: at Florida	N.Y. Rangers 2, Carolina 0
N.Y. Rangers 4, Carolina 3	N.Y. Rangers 4, Carolina 3, 2OT
Thursday: at Carolina	Saturday: at Carolina, AFN-Atlantic, 1 a.m.
Sunday CET; 8 a.m. Sunday JKT	x-Monday: at N.Y. Rangers
x-Thursday, May 16: at Carolina	x-Saturday, May 18: at N.Y. Rangers
WESTERN CONFERENCE	
Colorado 1, Dallas 0	
Colorado 4, Dallas 3, OT	Thursday: at Dallas
Saturday: at Colorado, AFN-Atlantic, 4 a.m.	Sunday CET; 11 a.m. Sunday JKT
Monday: at Colorado	x-Wednesday, May 15: at Dallas
x-Friday, May 17: at Colorado	x-Sunday, May 19: at Dallas
Vancouver 1, Edmonton 0	Wednesday: Vancouver 5, Edmonton 4
Friday: at Vancouver, AFN-Sports2, 4 a.m.	Saturday CET; 11 a.m. Saturday JKT
Sunday: at Edmonton, AFN-Sports2, 3:30 a.m.	Monday CET; 10:30 a.m. Monday JKT
Tuesday: at Edmonton	x-Thursday, May 16: at Vancouver
x-Saturday, May 18: at Edmonton	x-Monday, May 20: at Vancouver

save I think he can save? It's almost that simple."

What takes some of the simplicity out is the punishment: a 2-minute delay-of-game penalty for any unsuccessful challenge, either for goaltender interference or offside. Challenging for offside is usually more clear since it is based on video coaches watch closely; rarely do they get it wrong.

Goalie interference has become something like the definition of a catch in football, a moving target. As such, the calculus that goes into

challenging it is on a coach-by-coach, case-by-case basis.

"Time and score has something to do with it, the way your team plays has something to do with it," said Colorado's Jared Bednar, who led the Avalanche to the Cup in 2022. "The reality of the situation often is you better be sure it's goalie interference, if you're going to challenge it. If it's questionable, then you're likely not getting the call and sometimes when you're sure, you don't get the call. People that say they have it figured out, I would argue and disagree because we don't."

Bednar added that if there was a poll of NHL coaches, he thinks it would show the league hasn't yet established a clear standard.

Cooper credited Sergei Bobrovsky for duping officials to sell the calls and lamented how two skaters engaging in a net-front battle can be responsible for disallowing goals. Maurice pointed to a potential goalie interference situation in the Nashville-Vancouver series as interesting because of contact within the crease.

Brind'Amour echoed Cooper's use of the word "egregious" as a key need for evidence to reverse a call on the ice. And no one knows when the next time goalie interference will play a key role in a playoff game this spring.

"The puck's by the goalie on some of these and you get hit and then it's still — like, it's a judgment call — and so it's somebody's opinion and my opinion and your opinion might be different on these," Brind'Amour said. "That's why this whole thing is tough because it does come down to opinions."

NBA

Third time in 4 seasons: Jokic claims MVP award

By TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

Nikola Jokic did it all again. And the MVP trophy is his again. Jokic, the Denver Nuggets star from Serbia, was announced Wednesday night as the NBA's Most Valuable Player — his third time winning the award in the past four seasons, a feat that just six other players in league history have accomplished.

He averaged 26.4 points, 12.4 rebounds and 9.0 assists. Others averaged more in each category — and Jokic has had better years in each of those categories — but he was the only player to rank in the NBA's top 10 in points, rebounds and assists per game this season.

Jokic got 79 of a possible 99 first-place votes from the panel of reporters and broadcasters who cast ballots on awards when the regular season ended.

"It's got to start with your teammates," Jokic said on TNT, where the award was announced. "Without them, I'm nothing. Without them, I cannot do nothing. Coaches, players, organization, medical staff, development coaches ... I cannot be whoever I am without them."

It likely was not a coincidence that Jokic appeared on television

DID YOU KNOW?

This was the first time in the MVP award's 69-year history that international players went 1-2-3-4 in the voting. It was also the sixth consecutive year that a player born outside the U.S. won the award.

SOURCE: Associated Press

for the award announcement wearing a T-shirt commemorating the life of one of his mentors, Golden State assistant coach Dejan Milojevic, who died earlier this year.

Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander was second and Dallas' Luka Doncic was third, both getting into the top three of MVP voting for the first time. With Jokic from Serbia, Gilgeous-Alexander from Canada and Doncic from Slovenia, it marked the third consecutive season that three players born outside the U.S. finished 1-2-3 in the MVP balloting.

This time, the foreign dominance atop the NBA was even more pronounced: Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo, who is from Greece, was fourth — so this became the first time in the award's 69-year history that international players went 1-2-3-4 in the voting. It also became the sixth consecutive year that a player

born outside the U.S. won the award.

Jokic appeared on all 99 ballots, with 18 second-place votes and two third-place. Gilgeous-Alexander also appeared on every ballot, with 15 first-place votes, 40 second-place, 40 third-place, three fourth-place and one fifth-place.

Doncic was on all but one ballot and got four first-place votes. Antetokounmpo got one first-place vote on his way to fourth. New York's Jalen Brunson was fifth, followed by Boston's Jayson Tatum, Minnesota's Anthony Edwards, Sacramento's Domantas Sabonis and Phoenix's Kevin Durant.

"Some people say it's the best player on the best team," Jokic said, when asked to define an MVP. "To me, it's the guy who's the most valuable, the team couldn't play without him."

Jokic is now the ninth player to win the MVP award at least three times. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar won it six times, Bill Russell and Michael Jordan each won five, Wilt Chamberlain and LeBron James won four, and Moses Malone, Larry Bird and Magic Johnson are the other three-time winners.

AP sports writers Arnie Stapleton and Pat Graham in Denver contributed to this report.



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Denver center Nikola Jokic, right, was named MVP on Wednesday after averaging 26.4 points, 12.4 rebounds and 9.0 assists.

Act: Nuggets uncharacteristically lost composure in Game 2

FROM PAGE 48

Murray, who has been flummoxed by a strained left calf, a lost shooting touch and a paucity of whistles going his way, left Ball Arena without speaking to reporters after Games 1 and 2.

He met with the media after practice Wednesday but didn't have much to say about his actions that endangered players on both teams and Marc Davis' officiating crew or the fine issued by the league.

"Nah, I mean it is what it is and I take everything in full responsibility, so on to the next," Murray said when asked whether he had expected the fine and if he felt his punishment was appropriate.

Asked for an explanation of his actions, Murray said, "Yeah, on to the next. I mean, two days ago, not much for me to say about it right now."

When asked about issuing an apology or taking responsibility, Murray cut off the line of questioning by asking, "Do you have any basketball questions?"

Murray acknowledged the Nuggets lost their collective composure Monday night when the



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Nuggets forward Aaron Gordon argues with referee Pat Fraher after he was called for a foul during Game 2 on Monday in Denver.

Wolves hounded them into a 35% shooting performance even though their best defender, Rudy Gobert, who won the league's Defensive Player of the Year Award on Tuesday, was back in Minneapolis for the birth of his son.

"We've just got to be ready to play and not get frustrated with how the game goes sometimes and we allowed it to take us out of our game," Murray said. "So, we've

just got to stay composed and find a way to stick together during the game and figure it out. No matter what the scoreboard says, we've got to be able to claw back."

The towel Murray threw landed at the heels of Davis on the baseline but the heat pack skidded across the floor just as Karl-Anthony Towns was going for a layup.

Wolves coach Chris Finch

called Murray's actions "inexcusable and dangerous," saying somebody easily could have gotten hurt.

"I've never seen that from Jamal. That was very uncharacteristic," Malone said, attributing Murray losing his cool to "taking a charge and it's not called, not making shots at the level we know he's capable of making, being down 30 points to a team that we're trying to beat to get to the Western Conference finals."

"So when you put it all in the boiling pot, that's a lot to handle. And he didn't handle it the way he knows he needs to handle it, and I'm sure he told you guys that."

Coming off the first NBA championship in franchise history, the Nuggets have shown a fatigue in these playoffs that has plagued previous champions.

Unlike last year when they coasted at the end of the regular season with the top seed in the West already secured, the second-seeded Nuggets jockeyed with Minnesota and Oklahoma City until the final weekend of the season.

Murray missed 23 games this

season with a variety of lower body injuries and the constant double teams that opponents threw at Nikola Jokic is evident in the scars on his upper arms.

It's not just health but slow starts that have plagued the reigning champs ever since the playoffs began.

They've trailed by large margins in all seven of their postseason games. They bounced back against the Lakers to win in five, with Murray hitting a pair of game-winning buckets. But they've been bamboozled by Minnesota's swarming defense, size advantage and deeper bench and now have to beat rising star Anthony Edwards four times in five tries to make it to the Western Conference finals.

Malone said he showed his team nine clips of Game 2 "that kind of encapsulated that game and why we lost. And our players owned it. And my greatest challenge to them and I don't have an answer for whoever's going to ask me do these guys believe? I don't know. They all say they do but we will all find out collectively come Friday night."

NBA PLAYOFFS

Carlisle says Pacers didn't get 'a fair shot'

BY BRIAN MAHONEY
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Indiana coach Rick Carlisle said Wednesday that “small-market teams deserve an equal shot” during a complaint about the officiating in his team’s loss to the New York Knicks.

Carlisle was called for two technical fouls and ejected late as his Pacers fell 130-121, putting them in a 2-0 hole in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

He said the Pacers found 29 calls they felt were incorrect in their Game 1 loss, but he didn’t submit them to the NBA. He vowed he would be sending them this time.

“I’m always talking to our guys about not making it about the officials and, but, we deserve a fair shot,” Carlisle said.

“There’s not a consistent balance. It’s disappointing.”

Officials acknowledged an incorrectly called kicked ball violation late in Game 1, but the Pacers believed there were plenty of other instances of wrong whistles.

“In the playoffs, when you submit things, the other team can see what you submit. And so, there were 29 plays in Game 1 that we thought were clearly called the wrong way. I decided not to submit them because I just felt like we’d get a more balanced whistle tonight,” Carlisle said. “It didn’t feel that way.”

He cited a play in the third quarter where he felt the Knicks’ Josh Hart shoved All-Star point guard Tyrese Haliburton — who has been battling back spasms — in the back.

“It’s all over Twitter right now because a few people have showed it to me and JB DeRosa is looking right at it,” Carlisle said. “You can see he has vision of the play and he shoves Tyrese into the corner and there is no whistle. Right in the back. That was shocking and there were many others. But I can prom-

Scoreboard

Second round	
(Best-of-seven; x-if necessary)	
Eastern Conference	
New York 2, Indiana 0	
New York 121, Indiana 117	
Wednesday: New York 130, Indiana 121	
Friday: at Indiana, AFN-Sports, 1 a.m.	
Saturday CET, 9 a.m. Saturday JKT	
Sunday: at Indiana	
x-Tuesday: at New York	
x-Friday, May 17: at Indiana	
x-Sunday, May 19: at New York	
Boston 1, Cleveland 0	
Boston 120, Cleveland 95	
Thursday: at Boston	
Saturday: at Cleveland, AFN-Sports, 2:30 a.m. Sunday CET, 9:30 a.m. Sunday JKT	
Monday: at Cleveland	
x-Wednesday, May 15: at Boston	
x-Friday, May 17: at Cleveland	
x-Sunday, May 19: at Boston	
Western Conference	
Oklahoma City 1, Dallas 0	
Oklahoma City 117, Dallas 95	
Thursday: at Oklahoma City	
Saturday: at Dallas, AFN-Sports, 9:30 p.m. Saturday CET, 4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT	
Monday: at Dallas	
x-Wednesday, May 15: at Oklahoma City	
x-Saturday, May 18: at Dallas	
x-Monday, May 20: at Oklahoma City	
Minnesota 2, Denver 0	
Minnesota 106, Denver 99	
Minnesota 106, Denver 80	
Friday: at Minnesota, AFN-Sports, 3:30 a.m. Saturday CET, 10:30 a.m. Saturday JKT	
Sunday: at Minnesota	
x-Tuesday: at Denver	
x-Thursday, May 16: at Minnesota	
x-Sunday, May 19: at Denver	

ise you that we are going to submit these tonight. New York can get ready. They can see them, too.”

Haliburton said the Pacers needed to blame themselves, not the officials.

“At the end of the day we got outplayed. We were right there in the game,” Haliburton said. “But I like consistency, yeah. But let’s not pretend, like, that’s the only reason we lost. We just didn’t play good enough. But at the end of the day it’s 2-0.”

But Carlisle, who felt Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau’s yelling at the officials got a late double dribble violation against center Isaiah Hartenstein changed to an inadvertent whistle that allowed New York to keep the ball, wants things to change when the series moves to Indiana for Game 3 on Friday.



FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

The Knicks’ Jalen Brunson drives past the Indiana Pacers’ Andrew Nembhard during the second half of Game 2 of their second-round playoff series Wednesday in New York. The Knicks won 130-121.

Brunson plays with injury, sparks Knicks past Pacers

BY BRIAN MAHONEY
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jalen Brunson left the locker room on an injured leg, walked onto the court and sent the Madison Square Garden crowd into a frenzy, just as Willis Reed had exactly 54 years earlier.

As the roars turned into “MVP! MVP!” chants, Brunson tried to block out the pain in his body and the noise all around him as he warmed up at halftime.

“It was really cool to hear, but I just knew that I had to get my mind in the right place to figure out how I was going to attack the second half,” Brunson said.

He shook off his right foot injury to score 24 of his 29 points in the final two quarters, leading the New York Knicks to a 130-121 victory over the Indiana Pacers on Wednesday night for a 2-0 lead in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

On the anniversary of Reed’s dramatic emergence from the locker room before Game 7 of the 1970 NBA Finals to lead the Knicks to their first title, Brunson had missed the entire second quarter while the Pacers surged ahead to a double-digit lead.

Reed’s teammates have said they didn’t know if he would play that night. Brunson’s had no doubt.

“I mean, he’s a warrior. That’s all I got,” Donte DiVincenzo said. “There was no doubt in my mind that he’ll be back. All season long, no matter what is thrown at him, injury bug or whatever, he always bounces back. And we knew the severity of the game and every-

thing, so we knew, everybody had confidence he was coming back.”

Brunson fell short of becoming the second player in NBA history to score 40 or more points in five straight playoff games, but he gave the Knicks everything they needed to move halfway to their first Eastern Conference finals appearance since 2000.

“He’s a great leader, so I think the players all have respect for that, when a guy goes out and is willing to give whatever he has, and so that says a lot about him,” Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said.

OG Anunoby added a career playoff-high 28 points before leaving with a left hamstring injury in the third quarter for the injury-riddled Knicks, who have already lost three key players to season-ending injuries.

But they got Brunson back and received huge efforts again from his two Villanova teammates. DiVincenzo scored 28 points and Josh Hart had 19 points, 15 rebounds and seven assists for the No. 2-seeded Knicks.

Tyrese Haliburton rebounded from a poor Game 1 with 34 points, nine assists and six rebounds for the Pacers, who finished the game without coach Rick Carlisle after he got two technical fouls and was ejected.

“Small-market teams deserve an equal shot,” Carlisle said during a postgame complaint about the officiating. “They deserve a fair shot no matter where they are playing.”

The series moves to Indiana for Game 3 on Friday and Game 4 on Sunday.

Former Knicks forward Obi Toppin added 20 points in another strong effort by Indiana’s reserves, but the Pacers hurt themselves by shooting just 10-for-17 (59%) from the free-throw line.

Brunson made a 3-pointer for a 24-13 lead in the first quarter, giving the Knicks 10 baskets in their first 14 shots in a blistering start. But after Toppin made one for the Pacers on the other end, Brunson began waving to the bench for a substitution as he ran down the court on offense. That was early in an 11-0 run by Indiana to tie it.

The Pacers then made 15 of 22 shots in the second quarter, which Brunson sat out entirely, outscoring the Knicks 37-27 to take a 73-63 lead.

Brunson would only say he felt some discomfort and that once he warmed up, he knew he was going back into the game.

“I had a decision to make and I made a decision,” Brunson said.

Indiana’s lead was 79-70 before the Knicks stormed ahead with a 14-0 run, with Brunson contributing a three-point play during it as New York went ahead 84-79.

Anunoby was hurt soon after, appearing to injure his hamstring while trying to finish a fast-break layup, but Brunson guided the Knicks through the finish with 14 points in the fourth quarter.

The Knicks paid tribute to Reed’s return, one of the most memorable moments in NBA and Madison Square Garden history, during the first quarter. His No. 19 jersey, hanging in the rafters, was spotlighted, and Hall of Fame teammate Walt Frazier came on to the court for an ovation.



FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

Indiana Pacers head coach Rick Carlisle, right, argues with a referee in the second half of Game 2 on Wednesday. Carlisle was ejected.

SPORTS



Vancouver rallies past Edmonton
Canucks overcome three-goal deficit to win Game 1 » **NHL playoffs, Page 45**

NBA PLAYOFFS



PHOTOS BY DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Nuggets center Nikola Jokic, front, loses the ball to Timberwolves guard Mike Conley during the second half of Game 2 of their second-round playoff series Monday in Denver.

‘Act like it and play like it’

Malone reminds Nuggets they’re champions

BY ARNIE STAPLETON
Associated Press

DENVER — After a difficult-to-watch film session of their Monday night meltdown against Minnesota and an energetic practice Wednesday, Denver Nuggets coach Michael Malone gave his team a stinging reminder and made a request. “Guys, we’re the reigning world champions,” Malone said. “Act like it and play like it.” They did neither in their 108-80 Game 2 loss to the Timberwolves, who took a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven Western Conference semifinal series back to Minneapolis.



Murray

INSIDE
Jokic wins third MVP award
Page 46

On Tuesday, the NBA fined Nuggets point guard Jamal Murray \$100,000 for tossing a towel and a heat pack onto the court “in the direction of a game official during live play” in the second quarter of Game 2. Murray avoided a suspension and also dodged any punishment for making a money sign at an official earlier in the second quarter. A similar gesture by Timberwolves center Rudy Gobert in a regular-season game in March drew a \$100,000 fine from the league.

SEE ACT ON PAGE 46



Denver head coach Michael Malone says he showed his players clips of Game 2 “that kind of encapsulated that game and why we lost.”

Pirates calling up pitching prospect Skenes » MLB, Page 43

