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WEEKEND
EDITION

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Saban retires;
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YENDI BORJAS/U.S. Air Force

U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Joseph Bazemore conducts a check prior to launching a B-1B Lancer at Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., in September. The B-1 Lancers stationed at Ellsworth have been grounded pending an investigation into a crash last week.

B-1 bombers grounded

Decision comes after Lancer crashed in South Dakota

By DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

The B-1 Lancers stationed at Ellsworth Air Force Base have been grounded as investigators try to figure out what caused one of the bombers to crash last week, service officials said.

A B-1 Lancer crashed Jan. 4 as it was attempting to land in low-visibility conditions at the base in southwestern South Dakota. All four members of the crew ejected safely before the plane crashed.

The 28th Bomb Wing at the base said the

plane was performing a training mission with another B-1 Lancer when it crashed. At the time, the air temperature was below freezing and visibility was poor due to low clouds, officials said.

"[The planes] conducted a local training sortie as a formation. The lead aircraft landed successfully and the second aircraft crashed," said Col. Derek Oakley, commander of the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth. "Three of the aircrew were treated on base for minor injuries and released, and one airman is currently being treated at a local hospital for non-life-

threatening injuries."

Oakley said no other troops or civilians on the ground were affected by the crash, which was entirely contained to the Air Force base.

The 28th Bomb Wing commander also said the B-1 bombers at Ellsworth AFB were grounded on the day of the crash, and a spokesperson for the base said "no hard dates have been set" for the Lancers to return to flight.

"We are carefully assessing checklists and safety procedures to resume flight operations

SEE GROUNDED ON PAGE 6

Iran's navy seizes oil tanker in Gulf of Oman

By JON GAMBRELL
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran's navy seized an oil tanker on Thursday in the Gulf of Oman that once was at the center of a major crisis between Tehran and Washington, officials said, a seizure that further escalates tensions in the Mideast waterways.

The vessel was once known as the Suez Rajan and was involved in a yearlong dispute that ultimately saw the U.S. Justice Department seize 1 million barrels of Iranian crude oil on it.

The seizure also comes after weeks of attacks by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels on shipping in the Red Sea, including their largest barrage ever of drones and missiles launched late Tuesday. That has raised the risk of possible retaliatory strikes by U.S.-led forces now patrolling the vital waterway, especially after a United Nations Security Council vote on Wednesday condemning the Houthis and as American and British officials warned of potential consequences over the attacks.

Iran's state-run television acknowledged the seizure late Thursday afternoon, hours after armed men boarded it.

"The violating oil tanker Suez Rajan ... stole Iranian oil by leading it to the Americans and delivered it to the Americans," state TV said. It said Iran's navy, rather than its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, conducted the seizure. Past tense incidents at sea have largely involved the Guard.

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, which provides warnings to sailors in the Middle East, said

SEE TANKER ON PAGE 12

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Germany	\$3.482	\$4.041	\$4.392	\$4.237	Azores	..	..	\$4.242	..
Change in price	-1.6 cents	-1.4 cents	-1.7 cents	-4.8 cents	Change in price	..	..	-1.7 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.451	\$4.729	\$4.899	Turkey	..	..	\$4.058	\$4.610*
Change in price	..	+8.3 cents	+8.8 cents	+5.1 cents	Change in price	..	..	-1.7 cents	No change
U.K.	..	\$4.041	\$4.392	\$4.237	Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Jan. 12. The change in prices is from Jan. 5.				
Change in price	..	-1.4 cents	-1.7 cents	-4.8 cents					

PACIFIC GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Japan	..	\$4.029	..	\$3.879	South Korea	\$3.159	..	\$4.069	\$3.909
Change in price	..	-2.0 cents	..	-5.0 cents	Change in price	-1.0 cents	..	-1.0 cents	-5.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.119	..	..	\$3.879	Guam	\$3.189	\$3.739	\$4.099	..
Change in price	-2.0 cents	..	..	-5.0 cents	Change in price	-1.0 cents	-2.0 cents	-1.0 cents	..
*DieselEFD **Midgrade									
Pacific prices for the week of Jan. 12-18									

EXCHANGE RATES													
Military rates													
Euro costs (Jan. 12)	\$1.07	Switzerland (Franc)	0.8535										
British pound (Jan. 12)	\$1.24	Thailand (Baht)	35.09										
Japanese yen (Jan. 12)	141.00	Turkey (NewLira)	29.9976										
South Korean won (Jan. 12)	1283.00												
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>											
Britain (Pound)	1.2724												
Canada (Dollar)	1.3398												
China (Yuan)	7.0989												
Denmark (Krone)	6.8076												
Egypt (Pound)	30.9019												
Euro	0.9129												
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7525												
Hungary (Forint)	346.02												
Israel (Shekel)	3.7408												
Japan (Yen)	145.92	<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>4.21</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	4.21
Prime rate	8.50												
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00												
Federal funds market rate	5.33												
3-month bill	5.39												
30-year bond	4.21												
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3074												
Norway (Krone)	10.3271												
Philippines (Peso)	56.06												
Poland (Zloty)	3.97												
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7502												
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3322												
South Korea (Won)	1318.39												

WEATHER OUTLOOK



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PACIFIC

US, China meet to discuss military relations, security

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

Beijing will make no “concession or compromise” regarding Taiwan, Chinese military officials told their U.S. counterparts during the first face-to-face military dialogue between the two countries in four years.

U.S. and Chinese representatives met at the Pentagon on Monday and Tuesday to discuss military-to-military relations, global security and regional issues, according to readouts of the meeting released Wednesday by the Pentagon and China’s Defense Ministry. The discussions — led by Michael Chase, deputy assistant secretary of defense for China, Taiwan and Mongolia, and Chinese army Maj. Gen. Song Yanchao — were the first between the two global powers’ militaries since 2021; direct talks were shelved after former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022.

President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in November during the Asia-Pacific

Economic Cooperation forum in San Francisco, where Xi agreed to resume the talks, the Pentagon said in its news release.

Chase “underscored the importance of maintaining operational safety” in the Indo-Pacific and reiterated the United States’ promise to “fly, sail and operate safely and responsibly wherever international law allows,” according to the Pentagon’s news release.

China urged the U.S. to “reduce military presence and provocative actions in the South China Sea,” Beijing’s defense ministry said in its news release.

China will make no “concession or compromise on the Taiwan question and demanded the U.S. abide by the One China principle,” the release states.

Under the “One China” policy, the U.S. acknowledges Beijing’s view that it has sovereignty over Taiwan, which split from the mainland in 1949, but considers the island democracy’s status unsettled.

Beijing also called on the U.S. to “stop arming Taiwan, and not sup-



ALEXANDER KUBITZA/U.S. Navy

Defense official Michael Chase, center, hosts Chinese delegates at the Pentagon on Tuesday, the first face-to-face military dialogue between the two countries in four years.

port Taiwan independence,” according to the release.

China considers Taiwan, a functionally independent democracy since 1996, as a breakaway province that must be reunified with the mainland, by force if necessary.

The military dialogue coincided with a visit from Taipei’s de facto ambassador to the U.S., Alexander Yui, Taiwan’s Foreign Ministry said in a new release Wednesday.

Yui met Tuesday with House Speaker Mike Johnson and said the two countries’ relationship is based on “such shared values as freedom and democracy,” accord-

ing to the release. Yui also said he hopes to continue working with Congress. China protested the meeting and called on the U.S. to break official ties with Taiwan, according to a transcript of Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning’s press conference on Wednesday.

“There is only one China in the world. Taiwan is an inalienable part of China. China firmly opposes the U.S. having any form of official contact with the Taiwan region,” she said.

The Biden administration is already planning to send an unofficial delegation to Taiwan following Taipei’s presidential election

this weekend, The Associated Press reported Thursday, citing an unnamed senior administration official.

The official indicated that an in-person meeting is “the most effective way” to convey U.S. policy to the new Taiwanese government, the report said.

While the delegation would be made up of former senior officials and technically be an “unofficial visit,” the move could still drive a wedge between the tenuous relationship between Washington D.C. and Beijing.

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No US boots on ground as Japan responds to deadly earthquake

By SETH ROBSON
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Japan has yet to accept a week-old offer of U.S. military aid for an area hit hard by a deadly 7.6-magnitude earthquake that struck on New Year’s Day.

Japan is not taking any assistance from other nations, a spokesman for Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Thursday by email.

“The Japanese government is currently making every effort to save lives and provide assistance to disaster-stricken areas, and we are uniformly not accepting any personnel and material assistance from various countries and regions at this time considering the situation in the area as well as the work required to build a system to accept such efforts,” the spokesman wrote.

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

The quake collapsed buildings, shredded highways and, as of Thursday, has killed 213 people in towns and villages on the Noto Peninsula, according to reports in Japanese media.

“We will consider how to re-



U.S. Marine Corps

U.S. Marines and Japanese soldiers work together to clear debris at a school in Ishinomaki, Japan, in 2011.

spond to offers for assistance from each country/region, taking into account the above policy, as well as the damage situation and local needs,” the Foreign Affairs spokesman said.

U.S. forces readied logistical support, food and other supplies for quake victims, U.S. Ambassa-

dor to Japan Rahm Emanuel wrote Jan. 5 on X, formerly Twitter. U.S. helicopters would help move resources to and from the disaster zone, he told the Kyodo News agency the previous day.

Japanese citizens’ pleas for U.S. support in the disaster’s aftermath have also appeared on X.

“I clearly remember the U.S. helicopters flying around finding areas that were isolated without assistance and bringing aid during Operation Tomodachi during the Great East Japan Earthquake, but why can’t they do it this time?” @jirosukyHDD wrote Monday in Japanese.

More than 20,000 American troops worked alongside their Japanese allies during Operation Tomodachi, the U.S. military response in March 2011 to a magnitude 9 earthquake in northeastern Japan, the most powerful the country has ever recorded.

“To those affiliated with the U.S. Forces: Please provide assistance,” @samurai_634 wrote Sunday in Japanese. “The assistance remains insufficient even a week after the earthquake occurred. Please deploy on an emergency to the coasts of Noto Peninsula and provide transport assistance from the waters.”

Yokosuka Naval Base, home of the U.S. 7th Fleet in Japan, responded Wednesday in Japanese on its official X account: “U.S. Forces cannot act alone but upon request from the Japanese government, the U.S. Forces can coordinate with the government, draw

on past experience, and cooperate with the Self-Defense Forces. Although the situation is severe, we hope that the necessary support will reach everyone as soon as possible. Our hearts are with you all.”

A spokesman for U.S. Forces Japan, Air Force Maj. Thomas Barger, by email Wednesday said, “We remain ready to support as needed.”

Emanuel and President Joe Biden offered messages of sympathy following the earthquake.

The U.S. Embassy in Tokyo announced a \$100,000 aid package Jan. 5 that includes essential resources like blankets, water, and medical supplies through Pace Winds Japan, a nongovernmental organization.

“We sincerely appreciate the condolences and offers of support from the United States and other countries and regions in response to the damage caused by the recent Noto Peninsula earthquake, which are encouraging to the affected areas,” the Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

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MILITARY

Senators want DOD to work with spouses

Shaheen, Ernst seek uniform policy on leave to help with employment during moves

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Two senators have called on the Defense Department to create a standard policy on leave without pay that they say will help military spouses retain employment and benefits within the department despite frequent moves with their service member.

“As you know, service members are generally relocated to new duty assignments every two to three years, and these moves create challenges for working military spouses who are forced to seek new employment,” Sens. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., and Joni Ernst, R-Iowa and an Army veteran, wrote in a letter sent Wednesday to Ashish S. Vazirani, acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

Granting leave without pay would eliminate a break in federal

employment, which causes some workers to have fewer jobs available to them because some positions are only open to current federal employees. It also would eliminate the loss of certain accrued leave and the potential loss of agency-matched contributions to Thrift Savings Plan accounts that have not yet vested.

“The Department of Defense really should be walking the walk when it comes to military spouse employment,” said Maria Donnelly, an Army spouse who has been working on this subject with other spouses for the past year.

Those efforts have led to a bill being introduced in the House and Senate that would create a similar leave-without-pay policy across the entire federal government. Shaheen and Ernst are not sponsors of that bill, the Resilient Employment and Authorization Determination to

Increase National Employment of Serving Spouses Act, or READINESS Act.

However, Shaheen believes this more narrowed approach could have a higher likelihood of success, according to her office.

“It’s really incumbent on the Defense Department to show other federal agencies that it can be done and lead the way,” Donnelly said. “The Department of Defense has the authority to do it already. It’s really important that the senators are asking these questions of DOD.”

Frequent moves with the military can make it difficult for spouses to obtain full-time employment and keep it during moves. Unemployment among military spouses is about 21%, according to the Defense Department. For more than a decade, unemployment for military spouses has been higher than the

national average, which is now less than 4%, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

While the Pentagon has spent millions of dollars to help spouses find employment, Donnelly pointed out this policy update would be a no-cost solution that could impact the estimated 5,500 military spouses who work for the Defense Department.

Some Defense Department agencies and military service departments now offer to move military spouses into a leave-without-pay status instead of forcing them to resign their job during a move, according to the senators. However, the time afforded in the status varies drastically across the Defense Department.

The Air Force grants one year, while the Army only 90 days, but both allow for up to two years of ex-

tensions. The Navy does not have a specific policy for the spouses of service members who are reassigned, according to the senators. In the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, spouses can potentially get up to five years of leave without pay.

“These various policies, and the fact that many employees are not afforded any such option creates a confusing and unfair system,” wrote Shaheen and Ernst, who are both members of the Senate Armed Services Committee. “Therefore, we urge the department to establish a standardized policy for the military departments and agencies directing a baseline amount of leave without pay for federal civilians when their service member spouses change duty locations.”

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DOD survey asks spouses about persistent quality of life issues

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department is asking more questions about finances and remote work in its latest spouse survey, which follows earlier data that indicated declining satisfaction with the transient military way of life.

The biennial poll includes questions about spouse employment, child care and well-being in the hope that the information collected can be used to tackle some of the challenges affecting military families, a DOD statement said Wednesday.

Family and policy programs will be adjusted in accordance with the results to prioritize the most pressing needs of the nearly 600,000 active-duty spouses and their families across all branches of the armed forces, the DOD said.



JACQUILYN DAVIS/U.S. Marine Corps

Marine Corps spouses attend a roundtable at Camp Lejeune, N.C., in October. The Defense Department has launched its latest biennial survey to assess the impact of military life on spouses and families.

“We can hear directly from them about what is and isn’t working,” Patricia Montes Barron, deputy assistant secretary of defense for military community and family policy, said in the statement.

Issues like spouse unemployment, access to affordable child care and financial pressures have persistently surfaced in DOD polling.

Overall, spouses’ satisfaction with military life has steadily declined since the survey was launched in 2012.

In the last poll, conducted between July and November 2021 and released in February 2023, 49% of respondents said they were satisfied with their lives in the military. That was down from 56% in 2019.

Military spouse unemployment was at 21%, according to the most recent findings, which is six times

the average of the U.S. general population. It’s been at that level or higher since 2015.

A quarter of respondents also reported experiencing low or very low food security.

The survey, conducted by the Pentagon’s Office of People Analytics in collaboration with its Military Community and Family Policy office, uses probability-based sampling and weighting to ensure the results are generalizable to the population of military spouses, the statement said.

It takes an average of 20 minutes to complete.

The survey will be available for about eight weeks, the statement said. It can be found at www.dod-surveys.mil.

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Former USAF officer pleads guilty to funding animal torture videos

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

A former Air Force officer accused of crowdfunding graphic videos produced overseas of monkeys being tortured and killed pleaded guilty in federal court in Oregon this week and now faces up to five years in prison.

David Christopher Noble, 48, entered the plea Wednesday on charges of conspiring to engage in animal crushing as well as creating and distributing animal crush videos, according to a Justice Department statement the same day. His sentencing is set for April 24.

Noble served six months in military detention and was dismissed

from the Air Force in 2006 after being court-martialed for fraud and an unprofessional relationship, prosecutors said.

The Justice Department statement said Noble was an officer but did not list his rank at the time of his expulsion.

Investigators searching Noble’s house found that his phone contained dozens of animal abuse videos, which prosecutors described as “stomach churning” and “horrific,” a government memo in June said.

Noble administered an online group in which for at least a year, members pooled funds to produce, brainstorm and share videos

showing the torture and killing of monkeys in Indonesia, authorities said.

Prosecutors said they do not think the Indonesian videographers and the children who helped produce the videos would have done so without the funding and encouragement of Noble and others in the group.

As the administrator of the group, Noble decided on the admission of new members and also used his control to remove members who were perceived to be “liabilities,” the indictment said.

The group was renamed multiple times in an apparent attempt to mask its purpose, with innocuous

names such as German Shepherd Club, Walt Disney World Fans and Fall Foliage Folks, prosecutors said.

The DOJ statement gives Noble’s place of residence as Prineville, Ore., but he moved to the Las Vegas area last year, according to the Las Vegas Review-Journal. He was arrested in Henderson, Nev., in June, the Justice Department said.

In one instance, Noble sent money to fund a 10-minute video in which an infant monkey was slowly tortured and mutilated, prosecutors in Las Vegas said in a memo.

After the video was posted to the group, Noble messaged his ap-

proval and sent additional money as a tip, the memo said.

Authorities also found months of chat messages related to the videos, according to a grand jury indictment of Noble in May. In one message cited by Las Vegas prosecutors, he wrote, “I love the screams as his bones are shattered over and over!”

Investigators said Noble did not deny his involvement in the group but claimed his true intention was to prevent animal torture and expose such activities, according to court documents.

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MILITARY

2nd ID: Base water safe to drink despite post

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The 2nd Infantry Division said Thursday that multiple tests found the water on this Army base is safe to drink despite a report on Facebook that it was not.

U.S. Army W.T.F! moments, a Facebook page with 1.4 million followers that posts about life in the U.S. military, uploaded a screenshot Wednesday of a message from an unidentified source alleging that water in an unspecified barracks was “not safe to drink.”

“Using the water to shower is ok, but please do not drink it,” the message said.

“Get bottled water.”

“We don’t know the cause or severity but it includes Hovey and Casey,” the message said, referring to a pair of camps north of Seoul.

The post tagged Eighth Army, headquartered at Humphreys, about 40 miles south of the capital. Neither the author of the uploaded post nor its intended recipients were identified in the image.

Four hours after the Facebook post, the 2nd ID, also headquartered at Humphreys, replied to the original post to say the garrison’s Directorate of Public Works and the 65th Medical Brigade tested the base’s water on Tuesday and Wednesday.

“Leadership responded immediately” to the concerns and multiple water tests revealed that “the water was safe to drink,” the command replied.

“We are working closely with garrison and leaders at every echelon to ensure our soldiers and families have clean potable water,” it added.

The division started an investigation after a soldier living in a Humphreys barracks expressed concerns Tuesday about their room’s tap water, 2nd ID spokesman Maj. Taylor Criswell told Stars and Stripes by email Thursday.

The soldier’s leaders, “out of precaution,” advised their soldiers not to drink the bar-

racks’ tap water until a safety test was complete, he said.

The soldier’s concern was isolated to one building; water quality issues on base are “not a regular occurrence,” Criswell said.

“Drinking water on the installation is tested monthly to ensure it remains safe and clean,” he said. The garrison will administer more tests this week out of “an abundance of caution.”

Humphreys is the largest U.S. military base overseas. It has roughly 35,500 personnel and is home to several military commands in South Korea, including Combined Forces Command, U.S. Forces Korea and the U.N. Command.

Red Hill fuel exposure registry still a work in progress

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The best hope of tracking and investigating short- and long-term health effects of people exposed to the 2021 Red Hill jet fuel leak in Hawaii is the establishment of an independently operated registry, a physician with the Defense Health Agency said Tuesday.

But, more than two years after the spill that contaminated the Navy’s drinking water system used by thousands, such a registry remains a work in progress, Col. John Oh, chief of the occupational and environmental health division with the Defense Health Agency, said during a webinar Tuesday.

“It should have been operational like a year ago; I wish it could have been,” said Oh, who prefaced his remarks by saying they reflected his opinions, not those of the agency or the Defense Department.

“[T]he most important reason for enrolling in the registry is that it’s the best means to study the long-term health impacts from the fuel release,” said Oh, calling the contamination “an open public-health investigation.”

“We want to partner with those exposed to the fuel release to help get answers,” he said. “Public



CHELSEA D. MEILLER/U.S. Navy

Army Cpl. Alexandria Ayotte passes out water to residents of Aliamanu Military Reserve in February 2022, in the wake of tap water contamination from the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

health investigations can take time, and this can be frustrating.”

Oh offered no timeline for when the registry could possibly open for enrollment by those who experienced consequences of the fuel spill. “I couldn’t say for sure at this point,” he said.

Shortly after the contamination, the Navy established the Red Hill Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness Sys-

tem Incident Report, a database of service members and their family members living in military communities affected by the spill.

The DHA describes this database on its website as “Registry 1.0.” It cannot receive or store individual health questionnaires as planned for in the upcoming registry. Thousands of residents in military housing communities on and near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-

Hickam were relocated in the months after the November 2021 water contamination as the Navy flushed the distribution system.

Some complained of a host of conditions, such as rashes, headaches, nausea, dizziness and vomiting. Scores have joined a lawsuit filed in federal court seeking compensation. Anyone potentially exposed to the contamination would be eligible to enroll in the registry, regardless of whether they had any connection to the military.

The registry would track health over time, investigate health effects of exposure and provide information and support, according to the DHA’s website.

Oh spent most of the hourlong webinar fielding written questions submitted by people who were affected by the contamination.

He invariably returned to the registry each time he was asked about how best to assess symptoms or conditions arising from exposure.

For example, one questioner asked how infants and children would be affected after exposure to tainted water that had been used for cooking or washing clothes.

“I think the answer is that we

don’t have any specific information on infants and children and whether they will differ from adults in terms of the type of symptoms they experience acutely,” he said.

Many parents are concerned about possible long-term developmental effects on children exposed to the contaminated water, Oh said.

“And again, I think that’s why we really need to have this independent Red Hill registry,” he said. “I encourage everyone, particularly parents, to enroll everyone in your family into the independent Red Hill registry because we really need to ... try to understand this particular issue.”

DHA is working with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry under the Department of Health and Human Services to develop the registry.

“We are planning for the registry to be a grant to an independent organization, such as a university,” he said. “The beneficiary of a grant is the community, and that’s different than a contract, which serves the interests of the agency that sponsored the contract.”

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Navy warns of fraudsters looking to steal from those seeking Lejeune payout

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Navy and Justice Department warned this week of attempts to steal personal information or money from individuals filing claims or lawsuits over toxic water at the Marine Corps’ Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Navy and Justice Department officials on Monday warned of an uptick in reports of “unscrupulous people and companies” soliciting those seeking government compensation for illness or deaths linked to contaminated drinking water at the Marine Corps base.

Most of the recent scams reported have been via telephone or email solicitation, according to the departments. As of December, nearly 150,000 people had filed claims under the 2022 Camp Lejeune Justice Act seeking compensation for illnesses or wrongful deaths associated with the toxic drinking water at Camp Lejeune between August 1953 and December 1987, Navy officials said.

The Navy and Justice Department urged all individuals contacted by suspected scammers to contact their lawyers representing them in their cases or the Na-

vy’s Camp Lejeune Claims Unit, or CLCU, if they have not hired an attorney. The CLCU can be contacted by phone at 757-241-6020 or by email at CLClaims@us.navy.mil.

The Navy added the following information about potential fraud in Camp Lejeune cases:

■ The Justice Department and the Navy will never request money or payment from those filing Camp Lejeune Justice Act claims.

■ Those represented by attorneys in Camp Lejeune Justice Act claims should direct all inquiries to those attorneys for verification.

■ Authorized emails from the Navy will be sent only from CLClaims@us.navy.mil. Individuals filing claims can forward any email messages received to that address to verify authenticity.

■ Claimants receiving a phone call claiming to be from the CLCU or offering assistance with claims, should ask for the person’s name and position, then call the CLCU at 757-241-6020 to verify.

■ Those represented by an attorney will never be contacted by the Justice Department or Navy directly. All correspondence will be directed through claimants’ at-

torneys.

The federal government has estimated more than 1 million service members and civilians were likely exposed to the base’s water, which was found to be contaminated primarily by dry-cleaning chemicals that leaked into wells from an off-post business. Those chemicals have been linked to neurological disorders, including Parkinson’s disease, cancers, reproductive issues and other health defects.

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MILITARY

DOD IG set to review Austin hospital stay

Study of procedures, policies follows controversy over undisclosed visit

By Matthew Adams
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin’s handling of his undisclosed hospitalization will be investigated by the Defense Department inspector general, the office announced Thursday.

Robert Storch, the inspector general, disclosed the review in a memo to Austin, Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks and other officials, saying his office would begin the investigation this month.

“The objective of the review is to examine the roles, processes, procedures, responsibilities and actions related to the Secretary of Defense’s hospitalization in December 2023-January 2024 and assess whether the DoD’s policies and procedures are sufficient to ensure timely and appropriate notifications and the effective transition of authorities as may be warranted due to health-based or other unavailability of senior leadership,” Storch wrote.

The IG review comes after the Pentagon announced Monday that it would conduct a 30-day review of the incident.

Austin, 70, has been in hospitalized since Jan. 1 after experiencing complications from a surgery conducted Dec. 22 to treat prostate cancer. The secretary has come under scrutiny for failing to notify President Joe Biden and other federal officials about his illness and hospital stay.

During Austin’s medical treatments, no one at the Defense Department notified the White House, Hicks, Congress or the public for several days. On Jan. 2, Austin transferred some of his more pressing responsibilities to Hicks, who was on vacation in

Puerto Rico. Biden learned of the secretary’s prostate cancer diagnosis Tuesday morning, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said earlier in the week.

Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Ala., who is chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, launched a formal inquiry Tuesday into Austin’s failure to disclose his illness and hospitalization. Rogers is asking Austin, Hicks and Austin’s chief of staff, Kelly Magsamen, to answer detailed questions and hand over documents related to delays in informing the White House, top Pentagon officials and lawmakers about Austin’s medical condition.

“As you must be aware, this lack of transparency is inexcusable and could have resulted in calamity,” Rogers wrote in a letter to Magsamen. “Congress must understand how this unacceptable breakdown in disclosure concerning the secretary’s capacity to lead the [Defense] Department occurred.”

All Republican senators on the Senate Armed Services Committee submitted a letter Wednesday to the secretary with questions regarding what unfolded.

“Our branches of government share a sacred obligation to work together to keep the American people safe. We cannot do this without clear and open communication,” the senators wrote. “Your statement provided on Jan. 6 is wholly insufficient to address the situation.”

The Washington Post reported Thursday that Rep. Chris Deluzio, member of the House Armed Services Committee, a former Navy officer and a freshman Democrat from Pennsylvania, called for Austin’s resignation.



NATE GARCIA/U.S. Army

Spc. Estrella “Star” Dorado Marin, left, was a member of the Army’s World Class Athlete Program who competed in freestyle wrestling.

Army grieves loss of wrestling star who died after emergency surgery

By Jennifer H. Svan
Stars and Stripes

The Army is mourning the unexpected loss of a young soldier-athlete who had her sights set on an Olympic gold medal in freestyle wrestling this summer.

Spc. Estrella “Star” Dorado Marin, 21, died Jan. 3 in Thornton, Colo., of complications from emergency surgery, the Army said in a statement Wednesday.

She had experienced numbness in her upper extremities from blood clots, her family told the Army.

Dorado Marin, whose nickname came from the English translation of her first name, enlisted in the Army in 2020 as a fuel supply specialist and later joined the service’s World Class Athlete Program as a freestyle wrestler.

Dorado Marin and her younger sister, Spc. Adriana Dorado Marin, made world teams in their respective weight classes, Estrella at 117 pounds and Adriana at 121 pounds.

Less than a year apart, the sisters “were two peas in a pod,” said their aunt, Patricia Lopez, according to an Army statement.

While growing up in Denver, Estrella began wrestling at age 12

and her sister soon followed. Adriana Dorado Marin said in an Army statement that her big sister “never got into trouble, and the dedication with everything she did drove me to be like her.”

The two also were fiercely competitive and often were practice partners.

“Sometimes, we couldn’t practice together because we would go so hard that we would fight,” she said.

Estrella Dorado Marin wanted to qualify for the Olympic team at 116 pounds and win gold in this summer’s Games in Paris, said Sgt. 1st Class Jermaine Hodge, the Army’s women’s freestyle assistant coach.

“There is no doubt she would have made the Olympics,” Dorado Marin’s family said on a GoFundMe page set up to help cover funeral expenses.

She won silver medals at the under-20 Pan-American Championships in 2022 and last year’s Armed Forces Wrestling Championships, and she placed fifth at the U.S. Open in Las Vegas in 2023, according to the Army.

The loss is also devastating for those who competed with her in the Army’s program for world-class athletes in Olympic-san-

ctioned sports, which is based at Fort Carson, Colo.

“Grief is the price we pay for love,” said Staff Sgt. Jenna Burkert, an Army freestyle wrestler, in a Jan. 7 Facebook post. “My mind can’t understand how a week ago we talked about cupcakes and today she is gone.”

“I will never forget you, Star. You made me better.”

Megan Black-Campion, a former Army wrestling teammate of Dorado Marin, said she first met her while working as a recruiter assistant in the Colorado National Guard.

“I can’t think of one time where you weren’t the hardest-working wrestler in the room,” she said. “Star, I can’t think of a more fitting name for you. You put off such a beautiful light, no matter what room you were in.”

Besides Adriana, she is survived by an older sister, Dominique, a grandmother, many aunts, uncles, cousins “and a wrestling community that will be forever impacted by ... knowing such a magnificent and truly special individual,” according to the GoFundMe page.

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Grounded: B-1 bomber to be replaced by new B-21 Raider by mid-2030s

FROM PAGE 1

when safe to do so,” Oakley said. The base said Air Force authorities arrived at Ellsworth on Tuesday to begin conducting their investigation, which Oakley said will take “weeks to months to complete.”

“I will not speculate on the cause of the mishap,” he said.

“Losing an aircraft is difficult, but I cannot overemphasize that we have four safe aircrew.”

B-1 bombers at Dyess Air Force Base in Texas, the service’s only other installation with Lancers, are not affected by the grounding and are still able to fly.

The B-1 Lancer is a heavy bomber that’s been in service since the

mid-1980s and is one of just three strategic bombers still in use by the Air Force.

The plane can fly at supersonic speeds and can carry as many as four crew members. The Air Force is planning to retire its B-1 fleet by the mid-2030s. The aircraft will be replaced by the new B-21 Raider, which was unveiled

last year and made its first flight in November.

Since the B-1 Lancer entered service, about a dozen of the planes have been destroyed in crashes.

Eight airmen were killed in two separate B-1 crashes in 1992 and 1997 and three died in another crash in Colorado in 1987.

Two B-1 Lancers from Ellsworth Air Force Base were called on to perform a flyover at the 2023 Rose Bowl game because the B-2 Spirit, which typically handles that duty, was grounded at the time while the Air Force investigated a different incident.

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NATION

Summations heard in Trump NYC fraud trial

BY MICHAEL R. SISAK
AND JENNIFER PELTZ
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Barred from giving a formal closing argument, Donald Trump still got a brief chance to speak in court at the conclusion of his New York civil trial Thursday, calling the proceedings “a fraud on me” before the judge cut him off.

“We have a situation where I am an innocent man,” the former president said. “I’m being persecuted by someone running for office and I think you have to go outside the bounds.”

After about six minutes, Judge Arthur Engoron — who had denied Trump permission earlier to give a closing statement at the trial — cut him off and recessed for lunch.

The exchange took place hours after authorities responded to a bomb threat at the judge’s house.

Police checked out the threat at Engoron’s Long Island home, which came a day after he denied the former president’s extraordinary request to deliver his own courtroom close, officials said. The proceedings were not delayed.

Trump, the leading contender for the Republican presidential nomination, has repeatedly disparaged Engoron, accusing him in a social media post Wednesday night of working closely with the New York attorney general “to screw me.”

“At this moment the judge is not letting me make the summation because I’ll bring up things he doesn’t want to hear,” Trump said as he walked into the courtroom, characterizing the decision as “political interference.”

“Forty-four days of trial — not one witness came into this courtroom, your honor, and said there was fraud,” Trump lawyer Christopher Kise said, contending his



Former President Donald Trump, with lawyers Christopher Kise and Alina Habba, attends the closing arguments in the Trump Organization civil fraud trial at New York State Supreme Court on Thursday.

client “should get a medal” for his business acumen instead of punishment he deemed the “corporate death penalty.”

At 5:30 a.m. on Thursday, hours before the trial’s final day was to begin, Nassau County police said they responded to a “swatting incident” at Engoron’s Great Neck home. Nothing amiss was found at the location, officials said.

The false report came days after a fake emergency call reporting a shooting at the home of the judge in Trump’s Washington, D.C. criminal case. The incidents are among a recent spate of similar false reports at the homes of public officials.

Taking the bench a few minutes late, Engoron made no mention of the incident at his home.

On Wednesday, Engoron had nixed an unusual plan by Trump to deliver his own closing remarks in the courtroom, in addition to sum-

mations from his legal team, after lawyers for the former president would not agree to the judge’s demand that he stick to “relevant” matters.”

That left the last words to the lawyers in a trial over allegations that Trump exaggerated his wealth on financial statements he provided to banks, insurance companies and others.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, a Democrat, wants the judge to impose \$370 million in penalties. Trump says he did nothing wrong. He contends outside accountants that helped prepare the statements should’ve flagged any discrepancies and that the documents came with disclaimers that shield him from liability.

The former president had hoped to make that argument personally, but the judge — initially open to the idea — said no after a Trump lawyer missed a deadline for agreeing

to ground rules. Among them, Engoron warned that Trump couldn’t use his closing remarks to “deliver a campaign speech” or use the opportunity to impugn the judge and his staff.

“This entire case is a manufactured claim to pursue a political agenda,” Kise said in his closing argument. “It has been press releases and posturing but no evidence.”

Lawyers from James’ office were to deliver their closing argument Thursday afternoon.

Trump returned to court as a spectator Thursday despite the death of his mother-in-law, Amalija Knave, and the launch of the presidential primary season Monday with the Iowa caucus.

Since the trial began Oct. 2, Trump has gone to court nine times to observe, testify and complain to TV cameras about the case, which he called a “witch hunt and a disgrace.”

He clashed with Engoron and state lawyers during 3½ hours on the witness stand in November and remains under a limited gag order after making a disparaging and false social media post about the judge’s law clerk.

Thursday’s arguments were part of a busy legal and political stretch for Trump.

On Tuesday, he was in court in Washington, D.C., to watch appeals court arguments over whether he is immune from prosecution on charges that he plotted to overturn the 2020 election — one of four criminal cases against him. Trump has pleaded not guilty.

In New York, James sued Trump in 2022 under a state law that gives the state attorney general broad power to investigate allegations of persistent fraud in business dealings.

Kise argued the case amounted to the “weaponization” of a consumer protection statute and, urging Engoron to consider his legacy as a judge, warned that a ruling in the state’s favor would have a chilling effect on every company doing business in the state.

Engoron decided some of the key issues before testimony began. In a pretrial ruling, he found that Trump had committed years of fraud by lying about his riches on financial statements with tricks like claiming his Trump Tower penthouse was nearly three times its actual size.

The trial involves six undecided claims, including allegations of conspiracy, insurance fraud and falsifying business records. Trump’s company and two of his sons, Eric Trump and Donald Trump Jr., are also defendants.

Besides monetary damages, James wants Trump and his co-defendants barred from doing business in New York.

Hunter Biden expected to plead not guilty on federal tax charges

BY COLLEEN LONG
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden’s son was headed back to court on Thursday for arraignment in Los Angeles on federal tax charges filed after the collapse of a plea deal that could have spared him the spectacle of a criminal trial during the 2024 campaign.

Hunter Biden was expected to plead not guilty to nine felony and misdemeanor tax offenses. The charges stem from what federal prosecutors say was a four-year scheme to skip out on paying the \$1.4 million he owed to the IRS and instead use the money to fund an extravagant lifestyle that by his own admission included drugs and alcohol.

The court appearance will also include a discussion over future



Hunter Biden sits in on a House Oversight Committee hearing in Washington on Wednesday.

court dates and filing deadlines. Meanwhile, Hunter Biden has also been charged in Delaware with lying in October 2018 on a federal

form for gun purchasers when he swore he wasn’t using or addicted to illegal drugs. He was addicted to crack cocaine at the time. He’s also accused of possessing the gun illegally and has pleaded not guilty in that case.

The accusations all come from a yearslong federal investigation into Hunter Biden’s tax and business dealings that had been expected to wind down over the summer with a plea deal in which he would have gotten two years’ probation after pleading guilty to misdemeanor tax charges. He also would have avoided prosecution on the gun charge if he stayed out of trouble.

The deal unraveled when a federal judge who had been expected to approve the deal instead began to question it. Now, the tax and gun

cases are moving ahead as part of an unprecedented confluence of political and legal drama: As the 2024 election draws closer, the Justice Department is actively prosecuting both the president’s son and Donald Trump, the Republican front-runner.

Hunter Biden’s original proposed plea deal with prosecutors had been pilloried as a “sweetheart deal” by Republicans, including Trump. The former president is facing his own criminal problems — 91 charges across four separate cases, including that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election, which he lost to Biden, a Democrat.

Hunter Biden’s criminal proceedings are also happening in parallel to so far unsuccessful efforts by congressional Republi-

cans to link his business dealings to his father. Republicans are pursuing an impeachment inquiry into President Biden, claiming he was engaged in an influence-peddling scheme with his son. Hunter Biden defied a congressional subpoena to appear for closed-door testimony, insisting he wanted to testify in public. He made a surprise appearance at a congressional hearing on Wednesday as House Republicans took steps to file contempt of Congress charges.

No evidence has emerged so far to prove that Joe Biden, in his current or previous office, abused his role or accepted bribes, though questions have arisen about the ethics surrounding the Biden family’s international business dealings.

NATION

Haley, DeSantis tear into each other's records

By MEG KINNARD,
STEVE PEOPLES
AND MICHELLE L. PRICE
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — In their most hostile encounter yet, Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis attacked each other early and often in Wednesday's Republican primary debate rather than focus on Donald Trump, the absent front-runner, as both tried to demonstrate they were the strongest alternative to the former president. DeSantis and Haley called each other liars and insulted each other's records and character in the opening minutes of the debate. They seemed to relish the chance to go head to head without their lower-polling rivals interrupting, as in past debates. The two Republicans instead drilled into each other's policy ideas and directed viewers to dueling fact-checking websites their campaigns set up. The one-on-one format displayed their sharp differences over issues ranging from foreign policy to abortion less than a week before the Republican primary process begins in Iowa. But it was unclear whether the debate could reshape a race that's been dom-

inated by Trump, who had the stage to himself at a separate Fox News event in Des Moines where he was seldom challenged and teased the audience about whom he'd pick as his running mate. Standing at lecterns an arm's length apart, DeSantis and Haley fired off detailed critiques and sarcastic quips from the beginning. "You're so desperate. You're just so desperate," the former U.N. ambassador interrupted DeSantis at one point. The Florida governor in turn said Haley's "got this problem with ballistic podiatry, shooting herself in the foot every other day." In one of her most brutal critiques, Haley ridiculed DeSantis for the turmoil within his political operation, with several rounds of personnel changes and new strategies along with the millions spent on his behalf. "Why should we think you can manage or do anything in this country?" Haley asked. DeSantis accused Haley of being beholden to big donors and of flip-flopping on conservative issues. "We don't need another mealy-



ANDREW HARNIK/AP

Former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, right, looking at Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, left, at the CNN Republican presidential debate at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, on Wednesday.

mouthed politician who just tells you what she thinks you want to hear just to try to get your vote, then to get into office and to do her donors' bidding," DeSantis said of Haley. One rare point of agreement was that Trump should have been onstage too. When asked about Trump's comments in 2022 calling for the "termination" of parts of the Constitution over his lie that the 2020 election was stolen, Haley was blunter than DeSantis about criticizing the president she once worked for. "That election, Trump lost it. Biden won the election," Haley said. She also said the Jan. 6, 2021, storming of the U.S. Capitol by his

supporters "was a terrible day and I think President Trump will have to answer for it." DeSantis, who has been suggesting the party will need to nominate someone other than Trump because of his legal challenges, predicted that the former president would likely end up being convicted for the criminal charges he faces for his efforts to overturn the election. "I don't think he gets through that," DeSantis said of one of Trump's trials. "So what are we going to do as Republicans?" Wednesday's debate was especially important for Haley, a politician long known for her disciplined approach to messaging. That reputation has been tested

recently after a series of gaffes, including her failure to mention slavery as the root cause of the Civil War and a quip that New Hampshire voters will have a chance to "correct" the results that emerge from Iowa. The debate offered Haley a chance to reset a campaign that has come under fresh scrutiny by everyone from her GOP rivals to President Joe Biden, a sign that her opponents in both parties see her as a rising contender. DeSantis has bet his campaign on Iowa's caucuses and has vowed to win them despite trailing badly in most state polls. He has visited all of Iowa's 99 counties and has the endorsement of Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds.

Trump enjoys relaxed town hall while rivals go in on fiery debate

Associated Press
NEW YORK — As Donald Trump's two main Republican rivals slugged it out Wednesday on an Iowa debate stage, the former president appeared across town on a Fox News Channel town hall in a counterprogramming move where few discouraging words were heard. Trump walked onstage to cheers and chants of "USA," stayed at the end to sign autographs and heard one audience member blurt out "love you" after he took her question. He was barely challenged by questioners who left several challenging topics on the table — like Trump's false claims about the 2020 election, his support for Capitol insurrectionists and legal arguments this week in which his

lawyers claimed he had immunity from any potential crimes he might have conducted while in office. When asked about his previous statements that a second term as president would be about retribution for his enemies, Trump said he wouldn't have time for it. "The ultimate retribution," he said, "is success." It was Trump's first live appearance on Fox News since 2022, and how the network handled it was closely watched. It came less than a year after Fox agreed to pay Dominion Voting Systems \$787 million to settle a lawsuit related to lies told in the aftermath of the 2020 election. Fox instituted a soft ban against Trump in the opening days of the Biden administration, and the for-



CAROLYN KASTER/AP

Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump speaks during a Fox News Channel town hall in Des Moines, Iowa, on Wednesday.

mer president has complained about some of its personalities being insufficiently loyal to him. His standing atop 2024 presidential polls, however, put him in a position of strength. While Fox held Iowa town halls with Ron DeSantis and Nikki Haley outside of prime-time hours in the past week, Trump's town hall aired in direct competition with the CNN debate between his two rivals.

Chris Christie suspends campaign for presidency

Associated Press
WINDHAM, N.H. — Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie on Wednesday suspended his Republican presidential bid just days before Iowa's leadoff caucuses, ceding to growing pressure to drop out of the race from those desperate to deny Donald Trump a glidepath to the nomination. Addressing supporters at a New Hampshire town hall, Christie said he had come to the conclusion that he had no pathway to victory. "Campaigns are run to win. That's why we do them," he said. "It's clear to me tonight that there isn't a path for me to win the nomination." "My goal has never been to be just a voice against the hate and division and the selfishness of what our party has become under Donald Trump," he added, vowing to continue to warn the party and the country about the dangers of a

second Trump term. "I am going to make sure that in no way do I enable Donald Trump to ever be president of the United States again. And that's more important than my own personal ambition," he said. Christie did not immediately endorse any of his rivals and instead continued to lace into them in his remarks for failing to directly target Trump for fear of alienating the front-runner's loyal supporters. Underscoring his deep frustrations, he was overheard on a hot mic before the event began criticizing former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley. "She's going to get smoked," he said in an audio broadcast on the campaign's livestream feed. "She's not up to this." He was also overheard saying Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis had called him, petrified, but the audio was cut before he finished the thought.

NATION



MIKE STEWART/AP

A Tesla charging station is seen last year in Woodstock, Ga.

Biden awards \$623M to build EV charging network across the US

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is awarding \$623 million in grants to help build an electric vehicle charging network across the nation.

Grants being announced Thursday will fund 47 EV charging stations and related projects in 22 states and Puerto Rico, including 7,500 EV charging ports, officials said.

“America led the arrival of the automotive era, and now we have a chance to lead the world in the EV revolution — securing jobs, savings and benefits for Americans in the process,” said Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. The new funding “will help ensure that EV chargers are accessible, reliable and convenient for American drivers, while creat-

ing jobs in charger manufacturing, installation and maintenance for American workers.”

Congress approved \$7.5 billion in the 2021 infrastructure law to meet President Joe Biden’s goal of building out a national network of 500,000 publicly available chargers by 2030. The charging ports are a key part of Biden’s effort to encourage drivers to move away from gasoline-powered cars and trucks that contribute to global warming.

But progress on the network has been slow. Ohio and New York are the only states that have opened charging stations under the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure program.

Several other states, including Pennsylvania and Maine, have broken ground on federally fund-

ed projects and are expected to open stations early this year. A total of 28 states, plus Puerto Rico, have either awarded contracts to build chargers or have accepted bids to do so.

Since Biden took office in 2021, EV sales have more than quadrupled and reached more than 1 million last year. The number of publicly available charging ports has grown by nearly 70% to 168,426, White House climate adviser Ali Zaidi said.

That number is about one-third of the way to Biden’s goal, with six years remaining.

“We are on an accelerating trajectory to meet and exceed the president’s goal to hit 500,000 chargers and build that nationwide backbone,” Zaidi told reporters Wednesday.

Judge OKs nation’s 1st execution with nitrogen gas in Ala.; appeal planned

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Alabama will be allowed to put an inmate to death with nitrogen gas later this month, a federal judge ruled Wednesday, clearing the way for what would be the nation’s first execution using a new method the inmate’s lawyers criticize as cruel and experimental.

U.S. District Judge R. Austin Huffaker rejected inmate Kenneth Eugene Smith’s request for a preliminary injunction to stop his scheduled Jan. 25 execution by nitrogen hypoxia. Smith’s attorneys have said Alabama is trying to make Smith the “test subject” for an untried execution method after he survived the state’s previous attempt to put him to death by lethal injection.

Smith’s attorney, Robert Grass, said he will appeal the decision but declined further comment.

The question of whether the execution can ultimately proceed could end up before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Smith, now 58, was one of two men convicted of the murder-for-hire of a preacher’s wife that rocked Alabama in 1988. Prosecutors said Smith and the other man were each paid \$1,000 to kill Elizabeth Sennett on behalf of her husband, who was deeply in debt and wanted to collect on insurance.

Alabama Attorney General



Smith

Steve Marshall praised Wednesday’s decision, saying it moves the state closer to “holding Kenneth Smith accountable for the heinous murder-for-hire slaying” he was convicted of committing.

“Smith has avoided his lawful death sentence for over 35 years, but the court’s rejection today of Smith’s speculative claims removes an obstacle to finally seeing justice done,” his statement added.

The state’s plans call for placing a respirator-type face mask over Smith’s nose and mouth to replace breathable air with nitrogen, causing him to die from lack of oxygen. Three states — Alabama, Mississippi and Oklahoma — have authorized nitrogen hypoxia as an execution method, but none has used it so far.

Inflation rises fueled by food, housing prices

By PAUL WISEMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Higher rents and food prices boosted overall U.S. inflation in December, a sign that the Federal Reserve’s drive to slow inflation to its 2% target will likely remain a bumpy one.

Thursday’s report from the Labor Department showed that overall prices rose 0.3% from November and 3.4% from 12 months earlier. Those gains exceeded the previous 0.1% monthly rise and the 3.1% annual inflation in November.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, though, so-called core prices rose just 0.3% month over month, unchanged from November’s increase. Core prices were up 3.9% from a year earlier, down a tick from November’s 4% year-over-year gain. Economists pay particular attention to core prices because, by excluding costs that typically jump around from month to month, they are seen as a better guide to the likely path of inflation.

Overall inflation has cooled more or less steadily since hitting a four-decade high of 9.1% in mid-2022. Still, the persistence of still-elevated inflation helps explain why, despite steady economic growth, low unemployment and healthy hiring, polls show many Americans are dissatisfied with the economy — a likely key issue in the 2024 elections.

The Federal Reserve, which began aggressively raising interest

rates in March 2022 to try to slow the pace of price increases, wants to reduce year-over-year inflation to its 2% target level.

Overall, the progress against inflation has been significant. A year ago, the 12-month rise in the consumer price index was 6.5% — way down from a four-decade high of 9.1% in June 2022 but still painfully high. And wage gains have outpaced inflation in recent months, meaning that Americans’ average after-inflation take-home pay is up.

There are solid reasons for optimism that inflationary pressure will continue to recede in the coming months.

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York reported this week, for example, that consumers now expect inflation to come in at just 3% over the next year, the lowest one-year forecast since January 2021. That’s important because consumer expectations are themselves considered a telltale sign of future inflation: When Americans fear that prices will keep accelerating, they will typically rush to buy things sooner rather than later.

But that nasty cycle does not appear to be happening.

And when Fed officials discussed the inflation outlook at their most recent meeting last month, they noted some hopeful signs: An end to the supply chain backlogs that had caused parts shortages and inflation pressures and a drop in rent costs, which is beginning to spread through the economy.

Engine maker to repair 600K Ram trucks after its scandal

Associated Press

DETROIT — Engine maker Cummins Inc. will recall 600,000 Ram trucks as part of a settlement with federal and California authorities that also requires the company to remedy environmental damage caused by illegal software that let it skirt diesel emissions tests.

New details of the settlement, reached in December, were released Wednesday. Cummins had already agreed to a \$1.675 billion civil penalty to settle claims — the largest ever secured under the Clean Air Act — plus \$325 million

for pollution remedies.

That brings Cummins’ total penalty to more than \$2 billion, which officials from the Justice Department, Environmental Protection Agency, California Air Resources Board and the California Attorney General called “landmark” in a call with reporters Wednesday.

“Let this settlement be a lesson: We won’t let greedy corporations cheat their way to success and run over the health and wellbeing of consumers and our environment along the way,” California Attorney General Rob Bonta said.

NATION

Speaker Johnson facing pushback on spending deal

By Kevin Freking
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As Speaker Mike Johnson gathered House Republicans behind closed doors Wednesday to sell the spending deal he reached with Democrats, one thing quickly became clear: many GOP lawmakers weren't buying it.

Rep. Warren Davidson of Ohio left early, saying he'd had enough. "I'm not going to sit there and listen to that drivel, because he has no plans to do anything but surrender," Davidson said.

In the afternoon, 13 Republicans refused to support a routine procedural vote setting the stage for considering three GOP-led bills. A similar revolt occurred in June when, for the first time in some 20 years, such a routine vote was defeated, essentially grinding the House to a halt.

"We needed to send a message that what's going on with this announced agreement is unacceptable," said Rep. Bob Good, R-Va., the chairman of House Freedom Caucus, made up many of the House's most conservative lawmakers.

House Republicans are off to a raucous start in their first week back in Washington after an extended holiday break. The open criticism of the speaker and the parliamentary standoff reflects deep divisions within the party that have continued despite new leadership, raising questions about his ability to unite the conference.

Most Republicans are still voicing support for Johnson, saying he



Johnson

is doing the best he can with such a slim majority and Democrats in control of the Senate and White House. But it took only eight Republicans to oust Rep. Kevin McCarthy as speaker last year — along with 208 Democrats. A similar revolt from just a handful of Republicans would leave Johnson vulnerable as well.

Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, told Fox News he's not going to say what would trigger a motion by him to seek Johnson's removal, but "we've got to do better than this." Rep. Tim Burchett, R-Tenn., said "a lot of people are talking about" a motion to vacate Johnson from the speakership. But the Tennessee Republican who helped oust McCarthy said he's personally not there "yet."

"There is a lot of division with the conference. We've got a brand new leader, but it's kind of the same ol' song and dance," Rep. Steve Womack, R-Ark., told reporters upon exiting Wednesday's closed-door meeting of House Republicans.

Facing reporters afterward, Johnson said he was not concerned about losing his job.

"Look, leadership is tough. You take a lot of criticism, but remember, I am a hardline conservative. That's what they used to call me," Johnson said. "I come from that camp."

He called the spending deal a "down payment on restoring us to fiscal sanity in this country." He also said that if Republicans "demonstrate we govern well" it would help them grow their majority in the next Congress, which could help them get more of the spending cuts they want down the road.

"We're going to turn this thing completely around, and I can't wait to do it," Johnson said.



MARK SPONSLER/AP

Rescue crews work at the scene of an avalanche at a California ski resort near Lake Tahoe on Wednesday in California. The avalanche roared through a section of expert trails at the resort, killing one person.

Avalanche at California ski resort kills one person, injures 3 others

Associated Press

RENO, Nev. — An avalanche roared through a section of expert trails at a California ski resort near Lake Tahoe on Wednesday, sweeping up four people and killing one, as a major storm with snow and gusty winds moved into the region, authorities said.

The avalanche occurred about 9:30 a.m. and prompted Palisades Tahoe to close as search crews combed the area under the K-22 lift, which 30 minutes earlier had opened for the first time this season. It serves "black diamond" runs for skilled skiers and snowboarders.

Skier Mark Sponsler said he arrived at the KT-22 lift amid howling winds and white-out conditions to find it shut down. Unbeknownst to him, the avalanche had just hit.

He spoke to someone who was in the second group to ride up the lift that morning. That person was in the lift and watched the disaster from above, said Sponsler, a veteran weather forecaster and founder of stormsurf.com.

"There was screaming, there were skis and poles and a hand

sticking up out of the snow," Sponsler said the witness told him.

The avalanche debris field spanned about 150 feet wide, 450 feet long and 10 feet deep, the sheriff's office said.

"This is a very sad day for my team and everyone here," said Dee Byrne, president of Palisades Tahoe.

The Placer County Sheriff's Office identified the person killed as Kenneth Kidd, 66, a resident of nearby Truckee and Point Reyes. One person suffered a lower leg injury and two others were treated for unspecified injuries and released, officials said.

The avalanche occurred on steep slopes in the GS Gully area. Michael Gross, vice president of mountain operations, said ski patrols had been on the slopes checking the avalanche conditions since Sunday.

"They've been up there doing control work, evaluating weather conditions, setting up all safety markings, hazard markings, et cetera, to get them prepared for today's opening," Gross said at a news

conference Wednesday.

The cause of the avalanche is under investigation, officials said. It happened as a powerful storm was expected to bring as much as 2 feet of snow to the highest elevations by early Thursday.

Palisades, the site for the 1960 Winter Olympics, is on the western side of Lake Tahoe, about 40 miles from Reno, Nev. Winds at the top of Palisades resort were gusting between 31 mph and 38 mph at the time of the avalanche.

Dan Lavelly, 67, of Reno is a season pass holder at Palisades and skied mostly at Alpine Meadows on Monday when there was very little snow and the KT-22 lift was closed.

The KT-22 run along the side of the lift is where the giant slalom was held during the 1960 Olympics, he said.

"Really good skiers love it because it's really steep," he said. "I remember when I was really young I was skiing around there. I fell over and slid like two-thirds of the way down the mountain. There was no way to stop because it's just so steep."

Starbucks sued by consumer group over its claim of ethical sourcing

Associated Press

A consumer advocacy group filed a lawsuit against Starbucks on Wednesday, saying the company's claim that its coffee is ethically sourced is false and misleading.

The National Consumers League cited media reports of abuses on farms that supply coffee and tea to Starbucks. The group said the cases cast doubt on Starbucks' packaging, which states that the company is "committed to 100% ethical coffee sourcing."

Starbucks said Wednesday it was aware of the lawsuit and will "aggressively defend against the asserted claims." The lawsuit was filed in Superior Court in the District of Columbia.

Among the incidents cited in the lawsuit was a 2022 case in which police rescued 17 workers — including three teenagers — from a coffee farm in Brazil where they were made to work outdoors without protective equipment and lift 130-pound sacks of coffee. The

case was covered by Reporter Brasil, a group of journalists that investigates workers' rights and environmental issues.

Starbucks said Wednesday it had no information about that case.

"We take allegations like these extremely seriously and are actively engaged with farms to ensure they adhere to our standards," the company said.

The lawsuit also cites a 2023 report by the BBC exposing rampant sexual abuse and grueling working

conditions on the James Finlay tea plantation in Kenya. James Finlay was a supplier to Starbucks at the time, but Starbucks said Wednesday it no longer buys tea from that plantation.

Starbucks buys around 3% of the world's coffee. The company says it works with 400,000 farmers in more than 30 countries.

Starbucks developed ethical sourcing guidelines in 2004 and uses third parties to verify conditions at its suppliers. The company says

it has zero tolerance for child labor and requires farmers to provide a safe, fair and humane working environment.

But the National Consumers League said Starbucks is misleading consumers by failing to disclose that its certification program doesn't guarantee ethical sourcing.

The group is asking the court to stop Starbucks from engaging in deceptive advertising and require it to run a corrective ad campaign.

WORLD

Zelenskyy rules out cease-fire with Russia

Ukrainian president says Moscow would only use it to rearm

Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday ruled out a cease-fire as his country fights off the Russian invasion, saying the Kremlin's forces would use the pause to rearm and regroup in order to overwhelm Kyiv's troops.

"A pause on the Ukrainian battlefield will not mean a pause in the war," Zelenskyy said during a visit to Estonia. "A pause would play into (Russia's) hands. It might crush us afterward."

Limited cease-fires have occasionally been proposed since Russia launched its full-scale war in February 2022, but have never taken hold.

Both sides are scrambling to replenish their weapons after 22 months of fighting and are facing the prospect of a protracted conflict. With the roughly 930-mile front line mostly static during winter, they both require artillery shells, missiles and drones that enable long-range strikes.

Zelenskyy said Moscow is receiving artillery shells and missiles from North Korea and drones from Iran. On Jan. 4, the White House cited U.S. intelligence officials as saying that Russia acquired ballistic missiles from North Korea and is seeking them from Iran.

Zelenskyy was in the Estonian capital of Tallinn as part of a two-day swing through Baltic countries, which have been among Ukraine's staunchest supporters.

He met with Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, who gave him a shirt



Estonia's Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, right, shakes hands with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during their meeting in Tallinn, Estonia, on Thursday.

with the Estonian word "Kaitsetahe" — "The will to defend" — printed on the front, which Zelenskyy wore as he addressed parliament.

"Tyranny must be defeated. Tyranny must be a loser," Zelenskyy said. "Always. Always. Always."

Zelenskyy said he and Kallas also discussed Ukrainians who fled to Estonia when the war began, telling a news conference that any of them who are of draft age "need to help Ukraine and be in Ukraine."

His comments came as lawmakers in Kyiv returned a draft

law on mobilization to the government for amendments, saying it might contain human rights violations, among other concerns, officials said.

The draft law aims to impose restrictions on citizens who have evaded mobilization duties, as Ukraine has grappled with shortages of military personnel.

Zelenskyy said last month that Ukraine's military wants to mobilize up to 500,000 more troops, but also said he had asked the brass to spell out the details on what is "a very sensitive matter" before deciding whether to grant their wish.

He has also been pressing allies

to provide Ukraine with more support on top of the billions of dollars in military aid from the West.

"Ukraine needs more, it needs better weapons," President Alar Karis said during a news conference with Zelenskyy at the Presidential Palace.

"We must boost military production capabilities so that Ukraine may get what it needs," he said. "And it's not tomorrow, they should get it today."

European Union countries have so far provided \$93 billion of support for Ukraine, Karis said. But the support has slowed, alarming Ukrainians who would find it hard

to stand alone against their bigger neighbor.

A plan by the administration of President Joe Biden to send \$60 billion in new funding to Kyiv is being held up in Congress. Europe's pledge in March to provide 1 million artillery shells within 12 months has fallen short, with only about 300,000 delivered.

Zelenskyy has said Ukraine particularly needs air defense systems to fend off Russian aerial onslaughts that have repeatedly hit civilian areas, although Moscow officials have insisted they only aim at military targets.

Recent massive Russian barrages — more than 500 drones and missiles were fired between Dec. 29 and Jan. 2, according to officials in Kyiv — are using up Ukraine's air defense resources and leaving it vulnerable unless it can secure further weapons supplies.

Zelenskyy won a pledge of more support from Lithuania on Wednesday, and was heading to Latvia after Estonia.

The small eastern European countries are among Ukraine's staunchest political, financial and military supporters. Some in the Baltics have feared they could be Moscow's next target.

The three countries were seized and annexed by Josef Stalin during World War II and regained independence with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. They joined NATO in 2004, placing themselves under the military protection of the United States and its Western allies.

On Wednesday night, a Russian S-300 missile hit a hotel in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, injuring 13 people including a Turkish journalist, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said. The city has been attacked for four straight nights, he said.

South Africa tells top UN court Israel is committing genocide in Gaza

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — A continent away from the war in Gaza, South Africa accused Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinians there and pleaded with the United Nations' top court Thursday to order an immediate halt to the country's military operation. Israel has vehemently denied the allegations.

South African lawyers said during the opening arguments that the latest Gaza war is part of a decadeslong oppression of the Palestinians by Israel.

The two-day hearing is the public side of a landmark case, one of the most significant to be heard in an international court and which goes to the heart of one of the world's most intractable conflicts.

South Africa is seeking binding

preliminary orders to compel Israel to stop its military campaign in Gaza, in which more than 23,000 people have died, according to the health ministry which is run by Hamas.

"Genocides are never declared in advance, but this court has the benefit of the past 13 weeks of evidence that shows incontrovertibly a pattern of conduct and related intention that justifies as a plausible claim of genocidal acts," South African lawyer Adila Hassim told the judges and audience in the packed, ornate room of the Peace Palace in The Hague.

"Nothing will stop the suffering except an order from this court," she said.

Israel, however, has said it is battling a fierce enemy in the Gaza Strip that carried out the deadliest

attack on its territory, killing more than 1,200 people, since its creation in 1948. Israel said it is following international law and is doing its utmost to avoid harm to civilians. It blamed Hamas for the high toll, saying its enemy embeds in residential areas.

South Africa has turned a deaf ear to such arguments, insisting Israel committed genocide by design.

"The scale of destruction in Gaza, the targeting of family homes and civilians, the war being a war on children, all make clear that genocidal intent is both understood and has been put into practice. The articulated intent is the destruction of Palestinian life," said lawyer Tembeka Ngcukaitobi.

"What state would admit to a genocidal intent? Yet the distinctive

feature of this case has not been the silence as such, but the reiteration and repetition of genocidal speech throughout every sphere of the state in Israel," he said.

Ahead of the proceedings, hundreds of pro-Israeli protesters marched close to the courthouse with banners saying "Bring them home," referring to the hostages held by Hamas since it attacked Israel on Oct. 7.

One of the Israeli protesters outside the court was Michael Nevy, 42, whose brother was kidnapped by Hamas. "People are talking about what Israel is doing, but Hamas is committing crimes against humanity every day," he said.

At a separate demonstration nearby, pro-Palestinians protesters waved flags saying: "End Israeli Apartheid Free Palestine"

and chanting "Netanyahu criminal" and "Ceasefire now!"

In a sign of how seriously Israel is taking the accusation, it has sent a strong legal team to defend its military operation launched in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks. Israel often boycotts international tribunals or U.N. investigations, saying they are unfair and biased.

A decision on the request for so-called "provisional measures" will likely take weeks. The case is likely to last years.

While Israel has vehemently denied the allegations, it is unclear whether it will heed any order from the court to halt operations. If it doesn't, it could face U.N. sanctions, although those may be blocked by a U.S. veto.

Israel's lawyers were set to address the court Friday.

MIDEAST

Tanker: Data show vessel heading toward Iranian port

FROM PAGE 1

Thursday's seizure began early in the morning in the waters between Oman and Iran in an area transited by ships coming in and out of the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all traded oil passes.

The U.K. military-run group described receiving a report from the ship's security manager of hearing "unknown voices over the phone" alongside with the ship's captain. It said further efforts to contact the ship had failed and that the men who boarded the vessel wore "black military-style uniforms with black masks."

The private security firm Ambrey said that "four to five armed persons" boarded the ship, which it identified as the oil tanker St. Nikolas. It said the men covered the surveillance cameras.

The tanker had been off the city of Basra, Iraq, loading crude oil bound for Aliaga, Turkey, for the Turkish refinery firm Tupras. Satellite-tracking data analyzed by The Associated Press last showed the Marshall Islands-flagged tanker had turned and headed toward the port of Bandar-e Jask in Iran.

The St. Nikolas was earlier named the Suez Rajan, associated with the Greek shipping company Empire Navigation. In a state-

ment to the AP, Athens-based Empire Navigation acknowledged losing contact with the vessel, which has a crew of 18 Filipinos and one Greek national.

"Empire have no such knowledge of a court order or the Iranian navy having seized their vessel, and have still not been contacted by anyone," the company said.

Attention began focusing on the Suez Rajan in February 2022, when the group United Against Nuclear Iran said it suspected the tanker carried oil from Iran's Khargh Island, its main oil distribution terminal in the Persian Gulf. Satellite photos and shipping data analyzed at the time by the AP supported the allegation.

For months, the ship sat in the South China Sea off the northeast coast of Singapore before suddenly sailing for the Texas coast without explanation. The vessel discharged its cargo to another tanker in August, which released its oil in Houston as part of a Justice Department order.

In September, Empire Navigation pleaded guilty to smuggling sanctioned Iranian crude oil and agreed to pay a \$2.4 million fine over a case involving the tanker.

The U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, which patrols the Mideast, did not respond to a request for comment over the incident.



After the vessel, then-Suez Rajan, headed for America, Iran seized two tankers near the Strait of Hormuz, including one with cargo for major U.S. oil company Chevron Corp. In July, the top commander of the Revolutionary Guard's naval arm threatened further action against anyone offloading the Suez Rajan, with state media linking the recent seizures to the cargo's fate.

Since the collapse of Iran's nuclear deal, waters around the strait have seen a series of ship seizures by Iran, as well as assaults targeting shipping that the U.S. Navy has blamed on Tehran. Iran and the Navy also have had tense encounters in the waterway.

The U.S. and its allies also have been seizing Iranian oil cargoes since 2019. That has led to a series of attacks in the Mideast attributed to the Islamic Republic, as well as ship seizures by Iranian mili-

tary and paramilitary forces that threaten global shipping.

The Houthis say their attacks are aimed at halting the suffering of Palestinians in Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. However, the rebels have increasingly targeted ships with tenuous or no ties to Israel.

Meanwhile, satellite tracking data analyzed by the AP on Thursday showed that an Iranian cargo vessel suspected of being a spying platform in the Red Sea had left the waterway. The data showed the Behshad had transited through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait into the Gulf of Aden.

The Behshad has been in the Red Sea since 2021 off Eritrea's Dahlak archipelago. It arrived there after Iran removed the Saviz, another suspected spy base in the Red Sea that had suffered damage in an attack that analysts attributed to Israel.

Taliban arrest women, girls in headscarf cases

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The United Nations mission in Afghanistan said Thursday it was deeply concerned by recent arbitrary arrests and detentions by the Taliban government of women and girls for allegedly violating dress codes regarding the Islamic headscarf, or hijab.

The mission said it was looking into claims of ill treatment of women and extortion in exchange for their release, and warned that physical violence and detentions were demeaning and dangerous.

The Taliban said last week that female police officers have been taking women into custody for wearing "bad hijab." It was the first official confirmation of a crackdown on women who don't follow the dress code imposed by the Taliban since they returned to power in 2021 — a crackdown that has echoed events in neighboring Iran.

The U.N. statement said hijab-enforcing campaigns in the capital, Kabul, and the province of Daykundi have been ongoing since Jan. 1, with large numbers of women and girls warned and detained.

A spokesman for the Vice and Virtue Ministry, Abdul Ghafar Farooq, earlier Thursday rejected reports that women and girls were being arrested or beaten for wearing "bad hijab" and called it propaganda from the foreign media.

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SAILING DATES

OCT 5- 12 2024 (SPLIT - DUBROVNIK)	OCT 19- 26 2024 (SPLIT - DUBROVNIK)
OCT 12- 19 2024 (DUBROVNIK - SPLIT)	OCT 26 - NOV 2 2024 (DUBROVNIK - SPLIT)

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WEEKEND



Bigger dreams
for Coco Jones
Music, Pages 28-29



Messiah complex

Fanciful ‘Book of Clarence’ puts spin on Biblical tale

Movies, Pages 16-17

LaKeith Stanfield,
left, stars in
“The Book of Clarence.”
LEGENDARY ENTERTAINMENT-SONY/AP

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Best of CES

Among the most interesting news and gadgets from tech’s big show: a robot bartender, AI twins, transparent TVs

Associated Press

CES 2024 kicked off in Las Vegas this week. The multi-day trade event put on by the Consumer Technology Association was set to feature swaths of the latest advances and gadgets across personal tech, transportation, health care, sustainability and more — with burgeoning uses of artificial intelligence in every direction.

From developments in vehicle tech, to wearables designed to improve accessibility, to the newest smart home gadgets, here is some of the best stuff on display this year:

Your own personal bartender

Ryan Close loves a good cocktail, but he’s the first to admit that he is a terrible bartender.

That’s why, he said, he created Bartesian, a cocktail-making machine small enough to sit on your kitchen counter. Its newest iteration, the Premier, can hold up to four different types of spirits. It retails for \$369 and will be available later this year.

On a small screen, you pick from 60 recipes — like a cosmopolitan or a white sangria — drop the cocktail capsule into the machine, and in seconds you have a cocktail over ice. Lemon drop is Bartesian’s most popular recipe, according to Close.

Letting the right ones in

It can be tricky to keep track of your furry friends in and out of the house — but a new pet door might make it a little easier.

Tech startup Pawport has unveiled a motorized pet door that will let your pet come and go as he or she pleases — while keeping other critters out. An accompanying collar tag that will open the door when your pet is near. But there’s also customizable guardrails.

The product, which can slide directly onto existing pet door frames, can be temporarily locked for specific pets or set to “curfews” using the Pawport app or with remote control through compatible virtual assistants like Amazon’s Alexa and Google Assistant.

Pawport’s pet door and app are currently available for preorder and are set to make their ways into homes during the second quarter of 2024.

Smart locks go biometric

It’s 2024; of course your face can unlock your phone. And your front door is next.

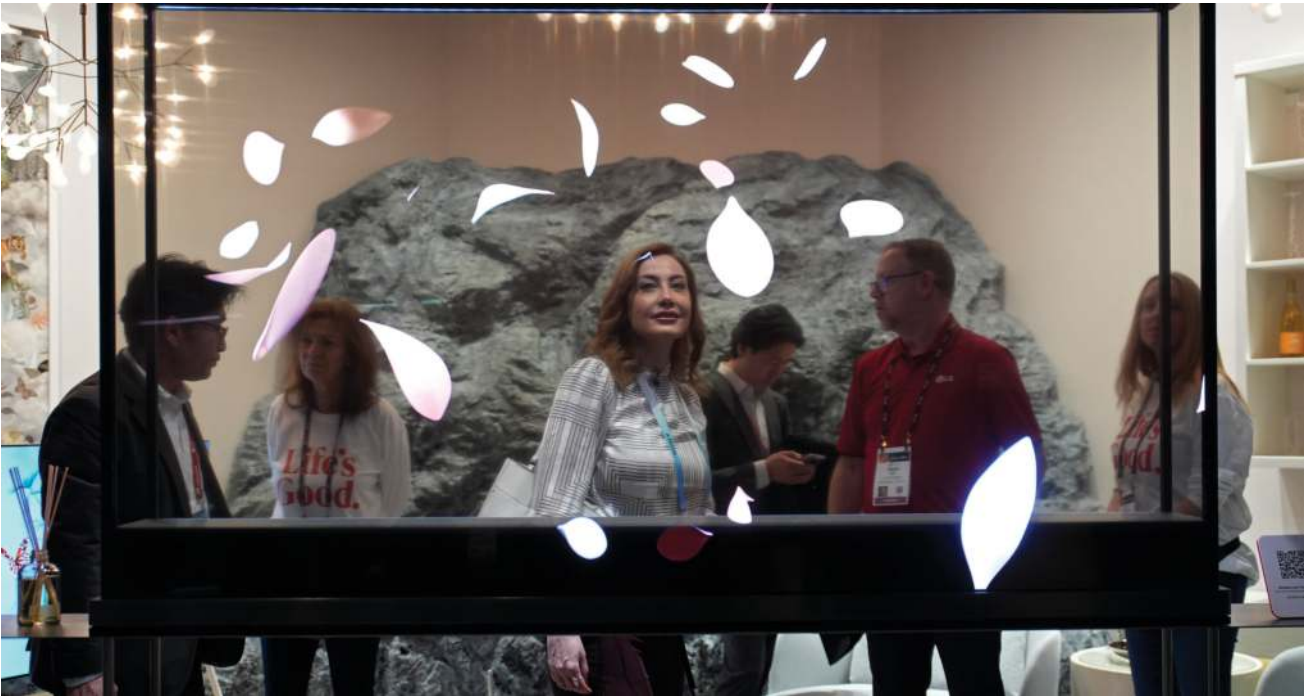
Lockly, a tech company that specializes in smart locks, is showcasing a new lock with facial recognition technology that allows consumers to open doors without any keys. The new smart lock, dubbed “Visage,” is set to hit the market this summer. In addition to facial recognition, this lock will feature a biometric fingerprint sensor and secure digital keypad for alternative ways of entry — similar to past Lockly products. Visage is also compatible with Apple HomeKey and Apple Home.

AI twinsies

Have you ever wondered what it’s like to be a twin? Rex Wong, CEO of Hollo AI, says his company has created “AI personalization technology” that can create your digital twin in mere minutes after uploading a selfie and voice memos in a phone app expected to launch this month.

Wong said he wanted to create a technology that could help digital creators and celebrities connect with their fans in a new way.

Standing next to a television screen projecting her AI clone, Los Angeles-based content creator McKenzie Brooke told AP that her digital twin will allow her to in-



PHOTOS BY JOHN LOCHER/AP

Visitors examine an exhibit of an LG transparent TV Jan. 9 during the CES tech show in Las Vegas.



Content creator McKenzie Brooke, left, stands next to a rendering of an AI twin Jan. 8 at the Hollo AI booth. The company has created what is calls “AI personalization technology” that can create your digital twin in minutes after uploading a selfie and voice memos in a phone app. It’s expected to launch later this month.

teract 24 hours a day with her followers across various social media platforms — and make money off of it.

“It’s not a 9-to-5 job. It’s a 24-hour job. There’s no break,” she said, noting that she posts more than 100 times a day just on Snapchat, a photo-sharing social media platform. “Now I have my AI twin who is able to talk to my audience, but it talks the way I would talk.”

PlayStation controller makes a cameo

Sony Honda Mobility returned to the CES this year with some updates to its Afeela electric vehicle. While the car itself may not be any closer to moving out from being a concept, Sony had some fun with it and drove it onto the stage with a PlayStation controller.

President of Sony Honda Mobility Izumi Kawanishi was quick to point out that Afeela owners likely won’t be driving cars using controllers in the future.

Hyundai sees a future in hydrogen

Hyundai on Monday spotlighted its future plans for utilizing hydrogen energy. Beyond hydrogen-powered fuel cell vehicles, the South Korean automaker pointed to the possibilities of moving further into energy production, storage and transportation — as Hyundai works towards contributing to “the establishment of a hydrogen society.” Company leaders say this sets them apart from other automakers.

“We are introducing a way to turn organic waste and even plastic into clean hydrogen. This is unique,” José Muñoz, president and global Chief Operating Officer of Hyundai Motor Company, said in Monday.

Adding AI to your car

Samsung has announced that it is collaborating with Hyundai to develop “home-to-car” and “car-to-home” services for all Kia and Hyundai vehicles.

What that means is that people will be able to use Sam-

sung’s SmartThings service to set their car’s cabin temperature or open its windows, and when you’re in your car, you’ll be able to control your home’s lights and interact with any of your connected smart devices.

Samsung also announced a team-up with Microsoft to bring more Copilot AI functions to Galaxy smartphones.

A ‘pawfect’ pet companion?

Busy families with dogs may want to be on the lookout for a new AI-powered robot that promises to play with, feed and even give medicine to their furry best friends.

Consumer robotics firm Ogmen displayed its ORo pet companion, an autonomous robot designed to assist with pet care by feeding, providing medicine and even playing with your dog using a ball launcher built into its chest.

Transparent TVs are here

Consumer electronics giants LG and Samsung have unveiled transparent TVs at the show, and LG says its OLED-powered display will go on sale later this year.

Almost invisible when turned off, LG’s 77-inch transparent OLED screen can switch between transparent mode and a more traditional black background for regular TV mode.

“The unique thing about OLED is it’s an organic material that we can print on any type of surface,” explains David Park of LG’s Home Entertainment Division. “And so what we’ve done is printed it on a transparent piece of glass, and then to get the OLED picture quality, that’s where we have that contrast film that goes up and down.”

Content is delivered wirelessly to the display using LG’s Zero Connect Box, which sends 4K images and sound. When not being watched as a traditional TV, the OLED T can be used as a digital canvas for showcasing artwork, for instance.

Samsung’s transparent MICRO LED-powered display showed off the technology as a concept.

Ads coming to shopping carts

Food companies advertise all over the grocery store with eye-catching packaging and displays. Now, Instacart hopes they’ll start advertising right on your cart.

The San Francisco-based grocery delivery and technology company unveiled a smart cart that shows video ads on a screen near the handle. General Mills, Del Monte Foods and Dreyer’s Grand Ice Cream are among the companies that will advertise on the carts during an upcoming pilot at West Coast stores owned by Good Food Holdings.

Instacart says a screen might advertise deals or show a limited-edition treat, like Chocolate Strawberry Cheerios. It might also share real-time recommendations based on what customers put in the cart, like advertising ice cream if a customer buys cones.

Instacart got into the cart business in 2021 when it bought Caper, which makes smart carts with cameras and sensors that automatically keep track of items placed in them. Instacart says it expects to have thousands of Caper Carts deployed by the end of this year.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

A classic building toy enters a new frontier

Lego Bricktales an immersive, intuitive experience in VR

BY GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

In this age of video games, toys have faded in popularity as gadgets and screens become what children want. Teddy Ruxpin's time has come and gone and the reign of Furby has passed, but Legos remain the eternal childhood toy.

Aside from their timeless quality, a reason that the iconic Danish toy has continued to grow in popularity is that the Lego Group wasn't afraid to dabble in video games. Lego Star Wars, Lego Jurassic World and other titles brought the concept of the toy to a new generation and turned its members into fans.

Now, the toy is entering another new frontier — virtual reality — as Thunderful Group brings ClockStone Studio's project to the Meta Quest series of devices. The game doesn't ask players to become a minifigure and venture through block worlds, but rather, it lets them create a character and move it through intricate dioramas.

In Bricktales, the protagonist's mad scientist grandpa is in trouble. His theme park is in disrepair and the mayor is threatening to shut it down. Out of the blue, one of grandpa's probes named Rusty returns from outer space. It's now a highly advanced piece of technology and has a plan to save the park. Using grandpa's portal-generating device, players will travel through five worlds. The goal in each is to help the inhabitants in need so that players can earn a Happiness Crystal, a source of limitless energy that will help fix and power the theme park.

Building on a fun process

Bricktales came out on consoles and iOS a few months ago, but on the Meta Quest 3, it's a much more absorbing and natural experience. The game can be played in full virtual reality or mixed reality though the formats don't change the experience. Players still control their character as they talk to the inhabitants and figure out how to help them.

That's mainly done by building. In this part of Bricktales, they're given a set number of Legos and they'll have to create a bridge, reconstruct a fallen sales shack or perform other tasks. When using a console controller, however, there's a dissonance as players fiddle with the bricks.

On the other hand in VR, it's a more intuitive and immersive



THUNDERFUL PUBLISHING/TNS photos

In Lego Bricktales, players create a character and travel through five different worlds. The goal in each is to help the inhabitants along the way and in doing so earn Happiness Crystals. Players will use the energy source to help fix and power their grandpa's theme park so that the mayor doesn't shut it down.



Bricktales came out on consoles and iOS a few months ago, but on the Meta Quest 3, it's a much more absorbing and natural experience. The game can be played in full virtual reality or mixed reality, though the formats don't change the experience.



Players will enjoy looking around Bricktales' beautifully complex dioramas that are reminiscent of Lego dollhouses. They're packed with secrets such as collectible animals that players can grab to get a reward.

experience. Players can move their figure around and add or remove pieces quickly and easily. The whole process feels more natural, as if players were working with actual Legos — without the messy cleanup.

The other element is that the structures they make are tested before they're approved. A test robot is sent out or the developers let physics take over. If players don't design intelligently, the structures fall apart.

At first, the builds are easy and straightforward, but by the end, Bricktales will test players' creation skills as they'll have to put together more complex contraptions. One of the hardest tasks is creating a structure that catches rain and moves it into a bucket.

Exploring and upgrading

Building is the best part of the game, but the exploration part isn't bad either. ClockStone Studio designed beautifully complex dioramas, and players will enjoy looking around them as if they were Lego dollhouses. They're packed with secrets such as collectible animals that players can grab to get a reward.

More importantly, by exploring, players will also find ways to upgrade the robot sidekick Rusty, which is key to advancing the narrative of the linear campaign and obtaining Happiness Crystals. Each world holds power-ups that can, for example, turn Rusty into a jetpack so players can smash objects blocking the way. Another turns the device into an X-ray machine that allows invisible objects to be seen. The robot can also turn into a portable water hose so that the hero can clean up objects or fill wells. The sidekick also helps players teleport between areas and surf down twisting purple energy beams.

The levels are designed in a way that allows players to learn the intricacies of each upgrade so that they can use it later to solve more difficult puzzles. The ramp-up is done nicely so it's not too difficult. The only problem I ran across is that in the bigger levels, it can be hard to figure out which character to speak with in order to advance the story.

The Bricktales campaign isn't long, but once players are done, they'll have tons of collectibles to grab or creations to refine. While Bricktales works better in VR rather than on a console, it's still a perfect introduction for this cutting-edge gaming frontier.

Platforms: Meta Quest 3 (reviewed), Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 5, PlayStation 4, Xbox Series X and Series S, Xbox One, PC, macOS, iOS and Android

Online: thunderfulgames.com/games/lego-bricktales

WEEKEND: MOVIES

An alternative take on the Biblical epic

‘Book of Clarence’ tells tale of fictional Black man in weeks leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion that includes modern quips

By Rodney Ho
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Hollywood used to love the big Biblical epic movie back in the 1950s and 1960s with classics such as “Ben Hur,” “Spartacus” and “The Greatest Story Ever Told.”

Jeymes Samuel, a 34-year-old British musician and producer whose breakthrough film was the 2021 Western “The Harder They Fall,” loved these movies and missed them.

“But even watching those movies, they never resembled the world I grew up in,” said Samuel, during an interview in Atlanta last month at the Four Seasons Hotel. “Bible stories are all about the hood, people from the land of the have-nots. I just didn’t know anyone who looked like Charlton Heston or Marlon Brando.”

So Samuel created “The Book of Clarence,” an unusual take on the weeks leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion, featuring an entirely fictional yet complicated character named Clarence. A skeptic of Jesus with a comedic air about him, Clarence is played by Oscar-nominated actor and FX’s “Atlanta” cast member LaKeith Stanfield. The film, shot in Italy in late 2022, is now in theaters.

Samuel said the film idea had been percolating in his head for many years but only came to fruition when he cast Stanfield on the set of “The Harder They Fall.”

“I knew I had Clarence. He was delivered to me on a golden chariot,” Samuel said. He looked at Stanfield and said, “The movie only became real to me when I found you.”

Stanfield said once he read the script, “it was ride or die. I had a religious upbringing. A lot of the themes in the script were familiar to me. ... Clarence’s story identified directly with me.”

Clarence, to Stanfield, “is a regular guy who happened to be around in the time of Jesus and the apostles. We never hear from the people who were around him and how they looked up to a messiah. I wanted to emulate that and situate a story with Black skin in a story we’re not typically seen in.”

Stanfield said he hopes Clarence’s journey “resonates with people so they can see themselves in him and his brother,” a twin who is an apostle of Jesus, also played by Stanfield.

In Clarence, he added, “I hope you want to be better and do better, to bring your family up, find your faith and find your



PHOTOS BY LEGENDARY ENTERTAINMENT, SONY/AP

LaKeith Stanfield, left, who plays both Clarence and his twin, confers with director Jeymes Samuel on the set of “The Book of Clarence.” When Samuel and Stanfield worked together on the 2021 western “The Harder They Fall,” Samuel said he knew he had his Clarence.

“Bible stories are all about the hood, people from the land of the have-nots.”

Jeymes Samuel
director, “The Book of Clarence”

foundation.”

Samuel, while writing the script for “The Book of Clarence,” focused on his own ideas and didn’t worry about what others might think of his take on a classic Biblical story, which includes modern-day quips and jokes.

“You cannot create truth under scrutiny or judgment,” he said. “You have to eradicate the notion of other eyeballs and stay in your tunnel. It was just a really, really exciting ride from script to screen.”

When he pitched “The Book of Clarence” to studios, all of them said no — except Legendary Entertainment, which has made films such as “Dune,” “Godzilla vs. Kong” and “BlacKkKlansman.”

They gave Samuel the budget



Teyana Taylor plays Mary Magdalene in “The Book of Clarence.” Stanfield says the film situates “a story with Black skin in a story we’re not typically seen in.”

and creative space to make the film he wanted to make.

“I honestly felt like a spirit was running through me and everyone else on set,” Stanfield said. “This was bigger than us as actors and filmmakers and creators. This was something that God I feel had let us in. We were walking with God the entire time.”

Stanfield returned the favor, lauding Samuel for his boldness and intelligence and as someone who is “as obedient to his crazy.”

Some of the scenes are so wild,

they might throw some viewers for a loop. At the same time, Stanfield said, “we would never make a movie to blatantly offend. That’s silly child’s play. We want to sit at the table and have a conversation. I want people to feel inspired. I want them to not just live, but know.”

There is, for instance, a hookah scene where those who smoke literally float into the air.

“That scene took a few days,” Stanfield said. “It read to me as normal. When you raise the bar, by understanding the vision, it

made perfect sense to me.”

The most revelatory scene for Stanfield was when Clarence attempts to walk on water.

“I realize I had to find my balance,” he said. “That wasn’t a camera trick. I had to trust the process. It was not easy getting through that. I didn’t know what was happening beneath me. ... We made one of those most iconic images: a Black man walking on water. It’s beautiful.”

Samuel cast some major A-list stars in smaller roles including Benedict Cumberbatch, Alfre Woodard, James McAvoy and David Oyelowo.

“They’re all great artists,” Samuel said. “I believe I’m a great communicator of my art. I’m fortunate to be able to collaborate with people I love.”

The film also took full advantage of Matera, Italy, a stone city that dates back thousands of years and was also the site for Mel Gibson’s 2004 film “The Passion of the Christ.”

“Stone buildings. Horses. Livestock. Beautiful Black skin and robes,” Samuel said. “I’d touch those walls and it felt like a bunch of history surging through me. It felt like a magical environment I knew existed inside of me manifested in front of me. This strangely felt like home.”

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

An unholy mess

‘Book of Clarence’ looks at Jesus story through Black lens, but lack of cohesion, consistency undermine creative effort

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Somewhere between the sacred and profane, comedy, drama and satire comes “The Book of Clarence,” a retelling of The Greatest Story Ever Told that arrives in theaters appropriately between Christmas and Easter.

It’s a remarkably idiosyncratic approach by rising auteur Jeymes Samuel, who for this Biblical-era tale is director, producer, writer and composer. You have to kind of hand it to him: Who else would have the audacity to tackle Jesus in his or her second outing?

“The Book of Clarence” — with a stunning cast that includes LaKeith Stanfield, James McAvoy, Anna Diop, Benedict Cumberbatch, Alfre Woodard and David Oyelowo — careens through tones and sentiment, silly in one and then horrific in another. Samuel says he wants viewers to have a “wicked good time” but really it’s a bit of a muddled, unholy mess.

It is 33 AD in Jerusalem and Stanfield plays Clarence, a street hustler in robes who likes getting high — in one cool, surreal scene he floats into the air like a balloon — and dreams up schemes to get rich quick. He’s got the hots for a local beauty but owes a ton of coins to that beauty’s loan-sharking brother.

Clarence is called the “village’s mischief

maker” and even his mother thinks he needs to get his act together. “I’m not a nobody,” he tells his twin brother, Thomas (also Stanfield, naturally). “A man who lacks honor is a nobody,” his brother replies. We know things are going to end painfully for Clarence because one of the first images in the movie is of him on a cross.

Clarence doesn’t believe in God and certainly doesn’t believe that the local guy named Jesus is capable of miracles. It’s a scam to him. He tries to become a 13th apostle to pay off his debts. When that fails he decides to pretend to be a messiah, too, and get paid for so-called tricks.

Samuel, whose previous movie was the all-Black Western “The Harder They Fall,” has some creative ideas, like using a chariot race to honor both “Ben Hur” and “Fast & Furious,” as well as wonderfully capturing the Last Supper like a painting come alive. He apes biblical epics in his title fonts and the opening and closing of the camera’s iris. He mixes stilted language — “I must make haste” — with modern turns (“I’ve got the cobblestones on lock.”) This is the first Biblical epic to uses the term “dumbass.”

But Samuel never stays with any idea for long and “The Book of Clarence” lacks cohesion, as well as consistency, even if the acting is superb, especially from a soulful Stanfield. Is Samuel honoring



LEGENDARY ENTERTAINMENT, SONY/AP

James McAvoy, left, and LaKeith Stanfield in “The Book of Clarence.” Stanfield plays the titular Clarence, the “village’s mischief maker,” who doesn’t believe in Jesus.

sword-and-sandal epics? Updating them? Mocking them? Looking at the Jesus story through a Black lens is a fascinating approach, but the payoff is poor.

There are plenty of messiahs here — like Spider-Men in the multiverse — but it is not clear what the filmmaker wants to say with them. A critique of celebrity? A message about entertainment? That faith comes even to those who have none? That we kill all our saviors? It’s not even clear if this is a pro- or anti-religious movie.

Samuel comments powerfully on us today when white Roman police stop-and-frisk Black Jerusalem residents, but then wastes the potential of the great setup with a swanky dance party and cool choreographed moves. He makes us shudder as nails are pounded into Clarence’s flesh,

yet also includes humor at the crucifixion — from the actual guys doing the dying. He has a scene with brutal rock throwing and yet also a recurring goofy bit about lightbulbs appearing over Clarence’s head.

It’s a mind-melting piece of filmmaking, having elements of both Monty Python’s “Life of Brian” and “The Ten Commandments.” Add to that an exciting soundtrack of more than a dozen songs by Samuel (even one with Jay-Z, also a producer on the movie), and “The Book of Clarence” is worth a look simply for its sheer daring. But we wouldn’t go so far as to say its creator walks on water.

“The Book of Clarence” is rated PG-13 for strong violence, drug use, strong language, some suggestive material and smoking. Running time: 136 minutes.

Horror film ‘Night Swim’ stays afloat, but only for so long

BY MARK MESZOROS
The News-Herald (Willoughby, Ohio)

You learn not to expect that much from a horror movie being released the first week of the year, when theater auditoriums continue to draw folks with higher-profile movies that hit on or around Christmas Day.

However, “M3GAN” — a tale of an artificial intelligence designed for children going epically out of control — arrived in that window last year with a fun mix of scares and laughs.

That provided hope that “Night Swim” — an offering from the “M3GAN” triad of Universal Pictures, Atomic Monster and BlumHouse that washed into theaters this month — would be similarly entertaining. But while “Night Swim” stays afloat for a while, it drowns in its third act.

The problem isn’t that “Night Swim” — written and directed by Bryce McGuire, who based it on his 2014 short film of the same name and shares the story credit with Rod Blackhurst — eschews the mildly campy tone that worked well for “M3GAN.” After all, a haunted backyard swimming pool is, as you come to observe, deadly serious business. But then it IS a problem that “Night Swim” scores so many, seemingly unintended, chuckles during its climactic stretch when things go off the deep end.

Until then, we get acceptable if by-the-numbers stuff, McGuire introducing us to the Waller family, led by former Milwaukee Brewers third baseman Ray (Wyatt Russell, “The Good Lord Bird”) and teacher Eve (Kerry Condon, “The Banshees of Inisherin”), the parents of teen Izzy (Amélie Hoeferle, “The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes”) and her younger brother, Elliot (Gavin Warren, “Fear the Walking Dead”). They’re on the hunt for a new home and settle on a fixer-upper with a seemingly long-unused pool that appeals to Ray,



Universal Studios

Gavin Warren is among the cast of “Night Swim.” He plays the Walker family’s youngest, Elliot.

whose career ended because of his battle with multiple sclerosis.

In fact, when we meet Ray, he’s battling headaches and blurred vision, his new doctor suggesting the MS has progressed significantly. And yet, after the pool’s been rehabilitated, he seems to be benefiting miraculously from its spring water: A wound on his hand heals quickly, and he feels better than he has in a long time, with subsequent medical tests looking very promising.

On the other hand, the remaining Wallers have less triumphant experiences with the pool, especially when each goes for a ... NIGHT SWIM! (Sorry, we couldn’t resist.) We’re talking spooky visions and worse.

Each Waller gets his or her own subplot. While the thread of the undersized Elliot struggling with the game that made his father famous doesn’t really lead anywhere, McGuire gets a bit more from the crush Izzy develops on a boy in the junior varsity swim club she’s joined. The game of “Marco Polo” they play in the pool — at night, of course, while her parents are away — is when “Night

Swim” is at its frightening best. Eve, meanwhile, sets out to investigate the pool’s problematic past by chatting with a former owner of the home (Jodi Long, “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings”), a conversation that doesn’t exactly go, well, swimmingly.

“Night Swim” never manages to feel all that original, and, to be fair, McGuire in the production notes cites many movies as inspirations for it, adding that he set the film’s prologue “in the ’80s” as a nod to films including “Poltergeist,” “Burnt Offerings” and “Jaws.” (The text at the beginning of that cold open informs us that it’s taking place in summer 1992, but whatever.)

Again, “Night Swim” has its effective moments, thanks in part to behind-the-scenes folks including director of photography Charlie Sarroff (“Smile”) and editor Jeff McEvoy (“M3GAN”).

But by the time the water has had its way with Ray, putting the rest of the family in extreme danger, we’re already looking for a beach towel. That this final act doesn’t work isn’t all Russell’s fault, but the actor has been much better in television shows: “Lodge 49,” “The Falcon and the Winter Soldier” and the recent “Monarch: Legacy of Monsters.” Possessed (and pool-obsessed) dad just may not be on his tool belt.

At points in “Night Swim,” when a Waller is night-swimming for his or her life while submerged in the magical water, the pool seems incredibly large and quite deep, occasionally almost infinitely so. We were never quite sure if this was a supernatural quality of the pool, as a character never references it, or merely a visual choice made to heighten the audience’s experience.

It matters not, as the increasingly wet affair is, ultimately, rather constrained and shallow.

“Night Swim” is rated PG-13 for terror, some violent content and language. Running time: 98 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Still trying to make ‘fetch’ happen

‘Mean Girls’ gets casting, musical, technological updates in slick and fizzy new film, once again written by Tina Fey

By JOCELYN NOVECK
Associated Press

The first “Mean Girls,” that compulsively watchable high school-based social satire by Tina Fey, came out in 2004. The Broadway musical opened in 2018. Now it’s 2024, and we have a screen adaptation of the theater adaptation. How long will this reconfiguring go on? Is there a limit? Or ... does the limit not exist?

Forgive us that utterly blatant setup for one of the original’s most famous lines. It’s just that some of them are so darned memorable. Like, “You can’t sit here!” — screeched. Or when Regina, the haughtiest queen bee ever to carry a cafeteria tray, scathingly tells her minion Gretchen, who’s trying out her new word “fetch,” to “Stop trying to make ‘fetch’ happen. It’s NOT going to happen!!”

But even in “Mean Girls 17,” should it come to that, someone will still be trying to make “fetch” happen. And it’s actually not a bad word to describe the experience of watching the new “Mean Girls” — a slick, fizzy bit of entertainment that’s occasionally delightful and usually fun, even if the translation to 2024 definitely has its rough spots.

If you’ve recently re-watched the first film, you may be surprised here at how many lines remain, word for word. What’s impressive is how many still work — unlike some social comedies that felt right 20 years ago but have scenes that fall with a thud now (see “Love Actually”).

There are exceptions, though. I’ll confess to feeling queasy throughout about the “dumb girl” character who remains in the Plastics, Regina’s social group. There is, thankfully, no more reference to a coach sleeping with a student, which would not have been funny, even with Jon

Hamm as the coach. Slut-shaming has been conspicuously toned down — the insult in Regina’s famous Burn Book is now “cow” and not “slut.”

On the other hand, fat-shaming? That’s still there, as when the camera zooms in rudely on the rear end of a character who’s gained a few pounds.

As for the casting, some of it works wonderfully, particularly the duo who introduce the film, which is again written by Fey, with music by Jeff Richmond (her husband), and lyrics by Nell Benjamin. Damian, the beloved character described affectionately by Janis as “almost too gay to function” (but that’s only OK when she says it), and Janis, his best friend, a talented artist whose fallout with Regina left her in the dirt socially, function almost as quasi-narrators. Jaquel Spivey, of Broadway’s “A Strange Loop,” is hilarious and also moving as Damian — you wait for each new line, and he wastes none of them. And Auli’i Cravalho as Janis has a gorgeous voice and charismatic screen presence.

Angourie Rice is the new Cady, the Lindsay Lohan role, a home-schooled math whiz who arrives in suburban Chicago straight from Kenya, where her mother was doing zoological research, into the snake pit of high school. Rice is a sweet presence but not as convincing in the “bad Cady” moments as Lohan. As for the Plastics, singer Reneé Rapp, formerly Regina on Broadway, imbues the role with powerhouse vocals and an angrier edge than the excellent Rachel McAdams did — when she’s enraged, boy, you feel it.

Once again, Cady begins her first school day in math class with Ms. Norbury, once played by Fey — and again by Fey! Tim Meadows is also back as the principal, Mr. Duvall; both look older, but certainly not



PARAMOUNT/AP

From left: Avantika as Karen, Angourie Rice as Cady, Reneé Rapp as Regina and Bebe Wood as Gretchen in “Mean Girls: The Musical.”

by two decades.

The Plastics — Regina, needy Gretchen (Bebe Wood) and intellectually challenged Karen (Avantika) — adopt Cady and teach her the rules: Wear pink on Wednesdays. No tank tops two days in a row. A ponytail? Once a week. Also: You can’t date someone’s ex-boyfriend, because those are “the rules of feminism.” At such moments, one can literally hear Fey writing the line. (Side note: Please come back to the Golden Globes, Tina, and bring Amy Poehler.) (Speaking of Poehler, she is missed as Regina’s “cool” mom but aptly replaced by Busy Philipps.)

Things go south quickly when Cady falls for Regina’s ex, Aaron, who sits in front of her in Advanced Placement Calculus (leading to the excellent lyric “Calculust.”) Regina isn’t going to give up Aaron without a dirty fight. So Cady, aided by Damian and Janis, plots to bring Regina down from inside, pretending to be a loyal Plastic. But at what point does Cady stop

pretending and BECOME a Plastic? (Ask Janis.)

Directors Samantha Jayne and Arturo Perez Jr. keep the action moving briskly. A key visual difference is technology. In the 2004 film, friends spoke to each other on the telephone, in split screens. Now, of course, gossip and bullying take place via social media. In some ways, this makes it all seem more vicious. When Regina takes an embarrassing tumble onstage at the Christmas performance, we witness a social media shaming that is much more cruel than anything that happened in the 2004 version.

And yet, it’s believable, of course. One comes away from this latest “Mean Girls” thinking that in some ways, things may have gotten better for high schoolers than they were in 2004 — but in other ways, things have only gotten meaner.

“Mean Girls: The Musical” is rated PG-13 for sexual material, strong language and teen drinking. Running time: 112 minutes. Now playing in select AAFES theaters.

‘The Kitchen’ a compelling near-future dystopia

By LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

The near-future is bleak for the working class of London in “The Kitchen,” a well-executed film about a familiar kind of urban dystopian nightmare. Here London is, ironically, sunnier than the Los Angeles of “Blade Runner,” but the mood is as dire.

In this world, the have-nots are crammed together in hellish Brutalist high-rises, a slum-like development that its residents call “The Kitchen.” With frequent police raids and constant monitoring, there is the whiff of rebellion in the air. But at least for the purposes of this story, tensions have not yet boiled over into a proper revolution — the rage is manifested in smaller, petty crimes, like a smash-and-grab jewelry raid.

Our protagonist Izi (rapper Kano) has a stable job, selling “eco” and “humane” burial plans to the desperate, grieving poor. Everything is whitewashed and slick and just a little sinister. He and his colleagues wear clinical scrubs as they sell people on the idea of turning their deceased loved ones into plants.

He also has a plan: To get out. He’s saved enough money to escape The Kitchen and has finally broken through the logjam of a waitlist to get into one of the luxury apartment buildings in town. A single occupancy for a single guy. Naturally the film won’t let him go that easy, but the complication isn’t just financial: A kid enters the picture.

One day at work he notices that a woman he once dated is being given a funeral on the premises. Inside, he discovers her son Benji (Jedaiah Bannerman), a teen who doesn’t know who his father is. The two dance around the obvious question, and Benji ends up on Izi’s doorstep in need of something — help, lodging, care — but again, these things go largely unspoken. Benji is at a sliding doors kind of moment in which the fast cash from the dangerous smash-and-grabs seems almost worth the risk. What does he have to lose anyway?

“The Kitchen” was directed by “Get Out’s” Daniel Kaluuya and Kibwe Tavares, who has turned his gaze before on the intersection of architecture, race and class in “Robots of Brixton.” Kaluuya co-wrote the script with Joe Murtagh, inspired out of a story he heard about “kids doing million-dollar heists in a minute for 200 pounds.” “The Kitchen” may lag at times, but it’s an astonishing feat for two first-time feature directors with beautifully raw sequences of both emotion and action.

It is quite a pleasure to watch Izi and Benji navigate this awkward relationship, both wondering how much they should trust one another. But in this world of urban isolation it’s clear, at least to us, that they need each other — no matter how much you’re rooting for Izi to make it out. There are also moments of humor in this rather serious affair, including Izi’s frustrating conversation with an artificial intelligence customer service representative.



Netflix

Kano, left, as Izi and Jedaiah Bannerman as Benji in near-future urban dystopian film “The Kitchen.”

Like so many futuristic dystopias, “The Kitchen” is really about the present — about class divides and wealth gaps and unaffordable housing and the ways in which it’s all getting worse so quickly. This is one of those films that would have been fun on the big screen with its urgent action sequences and propulsive nightclub scenes, but it’s a perfect small-screen watch, too. And, hopefully, the beginning of a big directing career for Kaluuya and Tavares, who have proved that they have something worthwhile to say and the vision to make it entertaining as well.

“The Kitchen” is rated R for language. Running time: 107 minutes. Now on Netflix.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Nature rules in England’s Lake District

For more than a century, North England’s verdant, hilly Lake District has attracted nature lovers. The great poet Wordsworth lived, trekked and was inspired here. Whether you’re a serious hiker or someone who prefers to peruse panoramas from inside a pub, it’s easy to enjoy the English outdoors in this green landscape of gentle ridges, serene lakes, rock fences, stone bridges and fluffy sheep.

The district’s southern lakes are handier to London and more promoted, but I like to focus on the northern lakes — Ullswater, Buttermere and Derwentwater — which are every bit as scenic, with nowhere near the crowds.

The town of Keswick, near Derwentwater Lake, is my favorite home base for the region. It was an important mining center through the Middle Ages, but slate, copper and lead gave way to tree-hugging tourists in the 19th century.

One of the area’s most photographed and popular lakes, Derwentwater, has four islands, good boat service and plenty of trails. Cruises run around the lake and to trailheads — including the one to Catbells, a 1,480-foot hill above Derwentwater.

One summer, I finally struggled up and over Catbells — a walk I’d recommended for years (and felt guilty for having never actually hiked in its entirety).

The hike confirmed the soundness of the advice I’d long heard about Britain’s weather: Don’t wait for it to get better. Blustery winds and wet skies are part of the scene. The majority of “bad weather” comes with broken spells of brightness. As they say here, there’s no bad weather ... just inappropriate clothing. And if you’re in a hiking area and your clothing is inappropriate, your B&B host can likely loan you a heavy coat.

And, oh, the joy of a pub after a good hike. When your face is weather-stung and your legs ache happily with accomplishment, a pub’s ambience sparkles even brighter.

When you’re done hiking, Keswick is a delight for wandering. The town’s centerpiece, Moot Hall (meaning “meeting hall”), was a 16th-century copper warehouse. Graphite was first discovered here centuries ago. In 1832,



Rick Steves



Rick Steves

For more than a century, nature lovers have come to England’s Lake District to hike its hills.

the first crude Keswick pencil factory opened; today you can learn its history at the Derwent Pencil Museum.

About three miles east of Keswick, there’s a mini-Stonehenge drenched in Lake District beauty: the Castlerigg Stone Circle. For some reason, 70 percent of England’s stone circles are here in the northern region of Cumbria. Castlerigg is one of the best and oldest in Britain, and an easy

stop for drivers. The circle — 90 feet across and 5,000 years old — has 38 stones mysteriously laid out on a line between the two tallest peaks on the horizon. They served as a celestial calendar for ritual celebrations.

I like to imagine this setting when ancient people filled the clearing in spring to celebrate fertility, in late summer to commemorate the harvest and in the winter to mark the winter sol-

stice. Festival dates were dictated by how the sun rose and set in relation to the stones. The more that modern academics study this circle, the more meaning they find in the placement of the stones. For maximum “goose pimples” — as they say in England — be here at sunset.

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

Plenty of reasons to travel throughout the Continent in 2024

With the holidays behind us and fewer events demanding our attention, these are fine days for planning travel expeditions. From Olympics to openings to anniversary years, there’s plenty to look forward to in Europe in 2024.

Expert recommendations

Guidebook gurus and major travel publications are never short of advice. A sampling of suggestions includes Lonely Planet’s promotions of Donegal, Ireland, for coastal walks and soaring sea cliffs; the País Vasco, or Basque Country, in Spain for its culinary scene and plethora of fiestas; and to a familiar favorite, Tuscany, Italy, for exploration of Etruscan culture and to relish its role as host to the start of this year’s edition of the Tour de France. The world’s best-known bike race kicks off on June 29 with the opening stage from Florence to Rimini, followed by a jaunt from Cesenatico to Bologna and a trek across Piedmont that concludes in Turin on July 1.

Fodor’s Go List includes Albania for scenery reminiscent of the Riviera at a much better price, Tirana’s vibrant café culture and wines the world knows nothing about but should. Rouen, France, makes the grade for its Seine-side beauty, historical connections and top-notch art museums. Bergen, Norway, is tagged for its colorful, pint-sized yet perfectly formed harbor and a fish market, while Sighisoara, Romania, gains mention for its land-that-time-forgot medieval lanes and squares juxtaposed against dark legends.

Frommers Best Places to Go makes a convincing argument for the islands of Scotland and the cooler temperatures they offer. Frommers gives the Hebrides a nod for sea life, seafood and sea sports including kayaking; the Orkneys gain mention for sea stacks and a connection with farming and fishing stretching back 5,000 years.



Karen Bradbury



iStock

A billboard in Paris reminds passersby that the Olympic summer games come to town in July.

New tourist infrastructure comes online

Via Transilvanica is an 870-mile-long trail coursing through the diverse and largely untrampled regions of Romania. Meant to be traveled by foot, bike or horse, markers at every kilometer along the way expound upon the history and significance of the surroundings.

The Trans Dinarica trail, launching in 2024, will be the first bicycle route to connect the Western Balkans. The 2,090-mile trail, rated as moderately difficult, will weave through Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia, serving up a menu of mountain ranges, lakes, rivers and the Adriatic Sea.

UNESCO site expansion

The 2023 World Heritage Committee Session concluded with the addition of an impressive 45 new sites to the World Heritage List. Just a few of its latest European

inscriptions include the Eisinga Planetarium in Franeker, Netherlands, whose mechanical scale model of the solar system completed in 1781 helped shape our understanding of the cosmos; the Jewish-Medieval Heritage of Erfurt, Germany, where a synagogue, mikvah and residence illustrate the life of a Jewish community and its coexistence with a Christian majority during the Middle Ages; and the Funerary and memory sites of the First World War (Western Front), 139 locations in Belgium and northern France that testify to the vast scale of the war.

Openings and anniversaries

On April 15, 2019, a fire broke out at the Notre Dame Cathedral, razing its roof and spire. Following five years of extensive restoration, Paris’ most recognizable church is set to reopen to visitors on Dec. 8.

Paris is also set to host a major exhibition. From March 26 through July 14, the city’s Musée d’Orsay will stage “Paris 1874: The Impressionist Moment,” consisting of some 130 works by artists including Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, Camille Pissarro, Paul Cézanne and others.

Sporting endeavors

Two major events of the sporting world will no doubt occupy much of the public’s viewing time this summer. The UEFA EURO 2024 is the official name for the European Championship soccer tournament set to unfold June 14-July 14. The venues for the games in host nation Germany include arenas in the cities of Berlin, Cologne, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Gelsenkirchen, Hamburg, Leipzig, Munich and Stuttgart.

Paris will host the Olympic Games from July 26-Aug. 11. Much of the sporting celebration will unfold along the Seine, near iconic landmarks including the Eiffel Tower and the Grand Palais. The city’s development plans lean heavily upon the use of existing or temporary venues.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL



PHOTOS BY LORI SWANSON, PIONEER PRESS/TNS

The Gullfoss is the king of Iceland’s waterfalls, where tons of icy water flows majestically down double ledges — one 36 feet tall and the other 69 feet — into a deep canyon.

Falling for Iceland

Northern lights prove elusive, but wild land of lava fields, hot springs and tiny horses proves fantastic in other ways

By LORI SWANSON
Pioneer Press

Last summer, I woke to the sounds of my family oohing and aahing as it watched the northern lights dance across a lake in Wisconsin. I had never seen this atmospheric phenomenon before, so I ran down to the dock and looked over the water. The sky was so vibrant green that I felt like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz looking out at the Emerald City. It was magical. I was so excited that I shared my photos with everyone.

My neighbor made a print of the picture on canvas so I could look at the lights all summer. My sister’s boyfriend gave me a coffee cup for Christmas that lights up with the northern lights when hot coffee gets poured into it. Needless to say, I was hooked, so when I traveled over the rainbow to Iceland to get a closer look, it was no surprise to anyone.

Iceland bound

My travel group consisted of two girlfriends and my sister, all on the same quest to see the northern lights in all their vibrant glory. We were so excited that we made reservations to see the lights the first night we got to Reykjavik. We caught the bus at 10 p.m. and drove 45 minutes to a dark location with no city lights. Hundreds of travelers had the same idea, so

300 heads peered at the dark sky in hopes of seeing dancing bursts of color. We waited and waited and waited ... finally, there was a faint green spot in the sky (actually you could only see it through your camera lens). Shortly thereafter, it was time to leave. The good news is that if you book a northern lights tour and you get skunked, you can rebook it for another night. We still had high hopes.

Iceland is a small country with the ma-



Iceland’s Blue Lagoon is a geothermal spa with saunas, steam rooms and a swim-up bar. The warm water and its natural active ingredients create a mixture perfect for relaxing and cleansing. Its white silica mud gently cleanses and exfoliates the skin.

jority of the population living in the town of Reykjavik. Much of the dramatic landscape beyond Reykjavik is defined by stout Icelandic horses, volcanoes, erupting geysers, hot springs and lava fields. Earthquakes are common in Iceland, and although a few took place during our visit — including one that was over 3 on the Richter scale — we didn’t feel any of them. Iceland has many volcanic systems currently considered active, with the last one

erupting in July 2023, only 19 miles from Reykjavik.

The tour we booked was with a hotel and included breakfast every morning, buses for sightseeing and transfers to and from the hotel/airport. Reykjavik is easy to walk around in, and Iceland has been crowned the safest country in the world for the past 14 years by the Global Peace

SEE ICELAND ON PAGE 21

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Iceland: Other attractions include Reynisfjara beach, Thingvellir National Park

FROM PAGE 20
Index. We were never worried about walking, day or night. The cost of our tour with airfare was just under \$2,000 apiece (which did not include the cost of riding Icelandic horses).

Blue Lagoon

The Blue Lagoon, another can't-miss attraction, is a spectacular geothermal spa where lava and thermal water meet, and the outcome is superb. The warm water and natural active ingredients (mineral salts, silica and blue-green algae) create a mixture perfect for both relaxing and cleansing. We upgraded our package to get robes and additional mask treatments. The Blue Lagoon's white silica mud gently cleanses and exfoliates the skin.

It was hysterical to watch the white masks hardening—everyone floats around the pool looking like Michael Myers in the Halloween movies. If the experience wasn't so relaxing, it could be frightening. The Blue Lagoon also has a swim-up bar that provides guests with a free drink with the entrance package. The pools are huge, and although a lot of people were at the spa, there was plenty of room and it didn't feel cramped or crowded. There are steam rooms and saunas for your use. The best tip we heard was to go there your first day, as it has storage lockers for luggage. (We got into Iceland in the early morning, and room check-in isn't until noon or later.) This would have been a great way to unwind from our six-hour flight.

South Shore adventure

To see more of the country, we hopped on a bus and headed for the south shore of Iceland, which has mostly farm landscapes with Icelandic horses and sheep roaming in the fields. We had clear skies, so we caught both of the area's two most famous volcanoes in the distance: Mount Hekla (last eruption in 2000) and Eyjafjallajökull (last eruption in 2010). The plan was to visit waterfalls, a black sand beach and glaciers while we were there.

The first stop was the Skogafoss Waterfall, which is considered to be one of the largest waterfalls in Iceland. There is a steep staircase that leads to the top of the falls. Although we did not take the stairs, it was easy to get up close to the falls, which drop 197 feet, spraying the bottom with large droplets in every direction. No one walked away without getting wet — but everyone was smiling ear to ear. While

we were there, the water drops in the air mixed with sunlight to produce a vivid rainbow. In fact, while taking a photo we noticed we were standing in a full circle rainbow — a first for all of us.

Just a short drive away, we stopped at a small lake formed by Sólheimajökull Glacier. Hikers of all ages were putting metal crampons on their boots and using spiked walking sticks to climb part of the glacier. The glacier is retreating at a fast rate (about the size of an Olympic swimming pool annually), and with climate change could virtually disappear in 100 years or so.

The next stop was the Reynisfjara black sand beach, with its extraordinary rock formations and basalt sea stacks. It is one of the most magnificent beaches in Iceland. While its black sand and rock formations are spectacular, the beach is considered dangerous. Visitors are asked not to turn their backs to the ocean and to maintain a 3-foot distance from the water due to "sneaker waves." These devious rogue waves appear suddenly, surging up the beach and carrying unaware beachgoers into the ocean.

Our final stop of the day was Sejalandsfoss Falls, which has a full circle pathway that stretches around the cascading falls. My sister and I found two heart-shaped rocks, and in honor of our dad and aunt we put their initials on them and threw them into the falls. I knew my dad would have been amused because my rock barely made it into the water. I imagined him saying, "Nice job," and laughing.

Northern lights, part 2

On our way back, our tour director mentioned that tonight was a go for the aurora borealis. We hopped on another bus and headed out, again, in an attempt to see the emerald lights dazzle in the pitch-dark sky. The tour manager got everyone excited by telling us that even though we couldn't see the lights, she could, and it promised to be a spectacular night of dancing lights spiraling over our heads.

As we got closer, we could see the light green hue in the sky — this is what we were waiting for. We jumped off the bus and ran to get a prime spot in front of the hundreds of others waiting to see the phenomenon. I held my camera up to the light green hue and shot a photo — the picture of the green hue looked much better than the faint green hue I was looking at. Another tour guide



LORI SWANSON, PIONEER PRESS/TNS

Reynisfjara black sand beach has spectacular rock formations and basalt sea stacks but dangerous waves.

told us how lucky we were to be out there and see this, then he turned around and said that he was going to get a hot chocolate. That's when we knew it was over and this light hue was the best we would get for the night. Skunked again.

Icelandic horses

Both my sister and I own horses and wanted to experience riding Icelandic horses. They are the only horse breed allowed in Iceland. If they are exported, they can never return to Iceland.

These stocky, resilient horses (do not call them ponies) have survived volcanic eruptions and harsh ice winters. The horses have unique gaits called the tolt and the skeio. The tolt is a smooth and fast four-beat gait (at least one foot on the ground at all times). The tolt is useful in helping the horse easily navigate the rocky and uneven terrain of the volcanic landscapes. The skeio is a flying pace (super-fast, lateral gait — both legs on one side touch the ground at the same time) and at some points there are no hooves in contact with the ground. Icelandic horses can reach the speed of 30 miles per hour in the skeio gait. It seems like everyone in Iceland has had an Icelandic horse at one time or another. They are very fun horses to ride, but unfortunately, they also raise these beautiful animals for meat.

Northern lights, part 3

Finally, we wised up and put the northern lights app on our phones so we could get up-to-date information on the timing and potential strength of the lights each night. The app showed the No. 6, which means a high probability of seeing the lights. Knowing this could be it, we ran from our hotel rooms up to the rooftop. We excitedly saw the green hues in the sky sur-

rounding us — they looked promising, and we didn't have to take a bus to get there. I took a few photos and again, and while they looked much better than what we saw with our eyes, there was still no Emerald City. I felt we didn't get skunked, but my fellow travelers thought we did.

Golden Circle

Every local we talked to said to be sure to do the Golden Circle tour. It was a great tip. We encountered volcanic craters, geothermal pools, geysers, a geothermal farm and a national park.

We also saw a family-run tomato farm and horse stable called Fridheimar. The farm is home to about 10,000 plants in their hydroponic greenhouses that use low-cost geothermal heating to create Mediterranean-like conditions year-round. The annual harvest is around 370 tons. The tomatoes are picked by hand and pollinated by bumblebees that live within the greenhouse. There is a restaurant and bar right in the greenhouse, serving up anything tomato: soup, jam, pickles, drinks, sauces and even just plain tomatoes. We tried the soup and a coffee tomato drink — all delicious.

We continued to the geothermal fields of geysers, with bubbling mud pools and the high-spouting Strokkur Geyser, which erupts every four to eight minutes, reaching almost 100 feet in the sky. Strokkur is the most active geyser in Iceland. Molten magma has to be close to the surface of the Earth to make the rocks hot enough to boil water.

Lastly, we visited Gullfoss, the king of Iceland's waterfalls, where tons of icy water flows majestically down double ledges into a deep canyon. Gullfoss consists of two falls — the smaller cascade is 36 feet tall, and the bigger, 69 feet. There is a two-

mile path weaving in and out of different stages of the waterfalls with breathtaking views from all angles.

Our last stop was Thingvellir National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where the world's oldest parliament met for centuries on the shores of Iceland's largest lake. The national park is part of the Atlantic Ocean ridge that runs through Iceland and defines the boundary between the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. Paths are built through the large erosion cracks that run through the Earth's crust, letting you see exactly what is happening to the Earth as it shifts and eventually sinks into the ocean. In the visitor center, there is a map showing the five continents before and after they became separated by water. In time, the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates will continue to shift and those continents, too, will be separated by water.

Of note: Everything is expensive in Iceland, so be prepared. We discovered that Icelandic sweaters and wool could be found for sale throughout Reykjavik.

Every meal we had was delicious — we wanted to try many things so most meals consisted of small plates, but everyone must try the hot dogs that Iceland is famous for (they are not really hot dogs, just served on a hot dog bun). We also found an inside ice bar in the middle of downtown — who knew?

After a great trip, we were ready for our journey home, even though we never properly saw the northern lights. However, I can use the app to continue looking for the aurora borealis in my own backyard. Honestly, though, it probably won't stop me from returning to Iceland in hopes of seeing the true Emerald City shine in the sky.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



Kyle Alvarez/Stars and Stripes

A 270cc kart is positioned in the pit on the 700-meter track at Red Lodge Karting in England. This kart is used for open practice sessions for the general public. Stars and Stripes reporter Kyle Alvarez rode a 270cc during his visit.

Zoom here for a good time

Red Lodge go-kart facility, located about 15 minutes from RAF Mildenhall, offers both children and adults opportunity to practice racing and compete

By KYLE ALVAREZ
Stars and Stripes

Have you ever seen something from a distance and thought “maybe one day” or “next time”? For me, that day was a recent Monday, when I booked a session with Red Lodge Karting in England.

I’ve lived in Red Lodge for three years and driven by the go-kart business, which is about 15 minutes from RAF Mildenhall, more times than I can count. I could always hear the roaring engines as I headed into downtown Bury St Edmunds or came back from the movies.

During its nearly 30 years in business, Red Lodge has built up a large clientele and even a pedigree. Four-time British Touring Car champion Ashley Sutton had his humble beginnings there, circuit manager Mick French said.

“Yeah, I taught him way back when he was just 8 years old,” French said. “We used to call him ‘Snail’ back then.”

The track has come a long way, according to Mick. It’s maintained well and just looks like a lot of fun.

For my 15-minute session, I chose the 270cc kart on the 700-meter track. It was a Monday afternoon, and I was the only one there to ride. I had never driven a “big boy” kart and was happy to be going solo.

I walked onto the pit area where the karts were staged. After a brief final check by track supervisor Lewis Allen, I was off.

It was fun slowly building up speed and getting used to the feel of the kart. Drivers can track their times and view a graph of their times on each lap. The track supervisor monitors your times from the track booth electronically, and will print out the data.

I had a blast seeing my times drop by a few seconds with each lap. Afterward, I was smiling from ear to ear.

Red Lodge Karting

Location: Link Road, Red Lodge Bypass, Bury St Edmunds, England
Prices: Practice sessions, 24 pounds per person; open race for drivers ages 16 and up, 64 pounds per person; group events, 50 pounds per person
Hours: Monday through Friday, 9:30 a.m.-9 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 9:30 a.m.-6 p.m. May close early depending on the number of bookings
Information: Phone: +44 1638 552316; Online: redlodgekart-ing.com

Kyle Alvarez

Fifteen minutes was the right amount of time for a first session. I felt like I had my money’s worth, and as fun as it was, my hands were quite tired from the constant handling of the wheel and turns.

Besides racing, if customers book ahead of time, they can also participate in clay shooting on the grounds.

Later, I was shown the various karts that are available. The one I drove is considered the practice kart for general public use.

They have nicer, sleeker-looking karts for private parties ranging from 10 to 100 people. Kids karts, which are for drivers ages 7 to 17, have smaller engines.

On Saturdays, French runs a training program to teach children to ride.

Additionally, once a month they have a competitive circuit for adults. It turns out that kart racing is serious business in the U.K., with professional and sponsored races.

All in all, it was a great experience that I would do again, especially with friends.

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Kyle Alvarez/Stars and Stripes

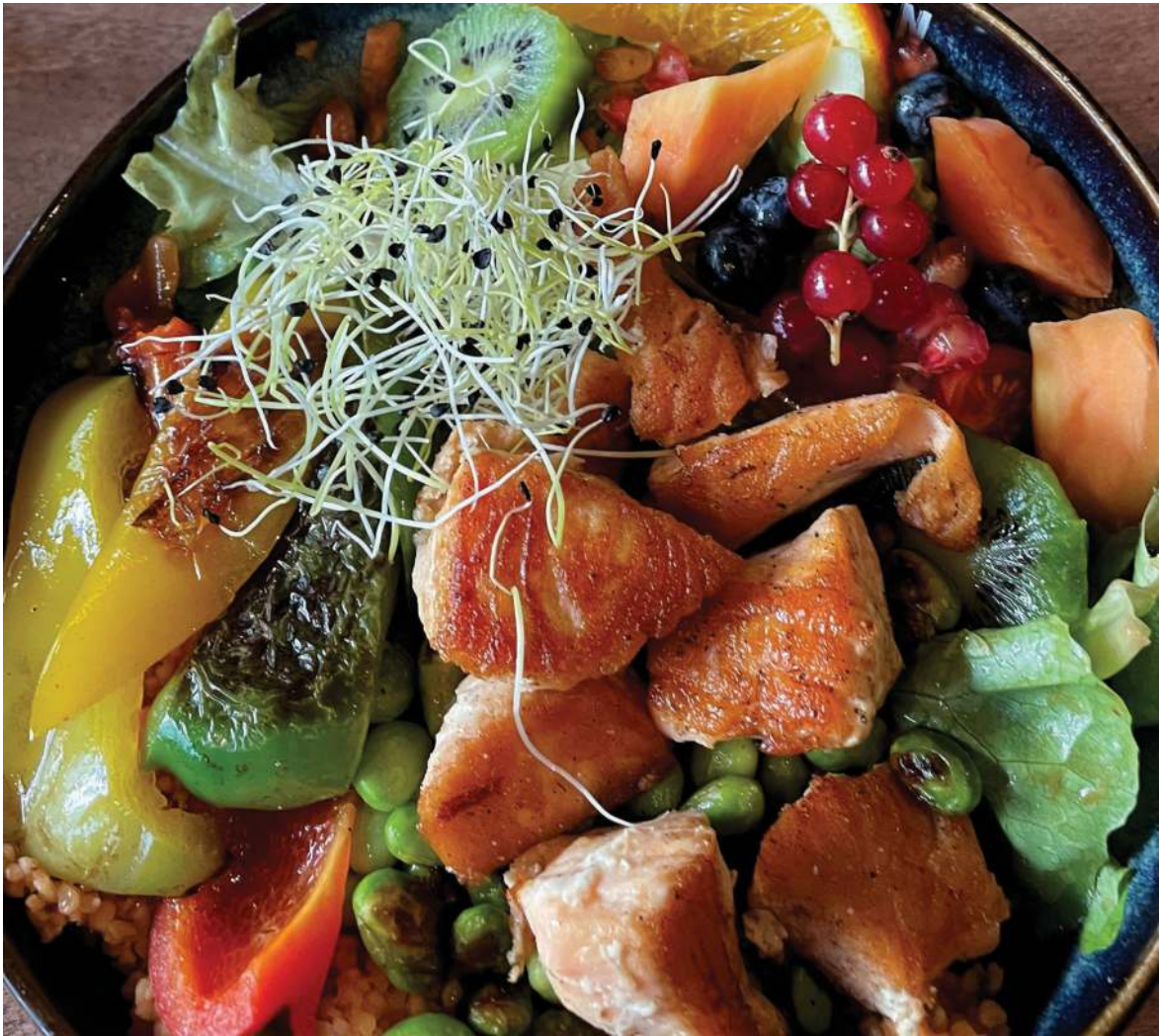
Red Lodge Karting in England offers both public and private sessions as well as assorted events, allowing drivers to experience the thrill of karting in various ways.



Lewis Allen

Alvarez suits up for his 15-minute go-karting session at Red Lodge in Bury St Edmunds, England, on Dec. 8.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



JOHN VANDIVER/Stars and Stripes

The Mediterranean-style bowl of bulgur wheat and vegetables topped with salmon at Kitchen in the suburban Stuttgart town of Boeblingen. The restaurant features organic, locally sourced food.

Stuttgart’s green Kitchen

Restaurant on Boeblingen’s Motorworld site caters to health-conscious and prides itself as a zero-waste ‘pioneer,’ but seems a bit overpriced

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The former state airport in Boeblingen, Germany, positioned in the figurative backyard of the Mercedes Benz Group’s major crosstown factory, was redeveloped several years ago into the sprawling Motorworld complex.

The convention location, not far from the headquarters of U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart, capitalizes on the metro area’s ties to the automobile industry with various special exhibits and galleries that center on all things connected to “das auto.”

But the site also includes a mix of eateries that have added some variety to Boeblingen’s otherwise boring restaurant scene.

An addition dating from 2019 is the simply named Kitchen, which uses organic ingredients and emphasizes natural and regionally sourced products. It also touts itself as a “pioneer in the zero-waste movement.”

On a recent visit, I was less concerned about that and more interested in trying something new.

The atmosphere inside is clean



AFTER
HOURS
GERMANY

Kitchen

Address: Charles Lindbergh Strasse 7, Boeblingen, Germany
Hours: Monday through Thursday, 11:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m.; Sunday, 2-10:30 p.m.
Prices: Bowls begin at 18.90 euros, with 140 grams of meat options adding 8 to 16 euros. Sandwiches and burgers start at 17 euros; salads start at 13 euros.
Information: Phone: 07031 205 1974, Online: kitchen-bb.de

John Vandiver

and modern, and the menu boasted vegetarian and meat dishes, as well as finger foods and fancy salads. A companion and I went with the lunch menu, which had a variety of bowl options, pasta and wraps.

I picked the bowl topped with grilled salmon, which involved a bright mix of flavors. It had edamame, currants, kiwi and oranges tossed together with grated

carrots and other veggies.

It all rested on a bed of bulgur wheat with a zesty dressing. My counterpart went with a similar bowl, but his had strips of grilled steak as a topping.

His assessment: “not bad.” I thought it was a touch better than that, given the surprising assortment of flavors.

Still, we concurred that the price of roughly 25 euros each was too steep for what was offered. We also were united in thinking that our assessment would have been more favorable at 15 euros per bowl.

On a return visit to Motorworld, I think I would be inclined to go with one of the other options on the grounds, including the regional chain brewery Wichtel, which serves its own beer and a reliable menu of pizza and southern German specialties.

Tower 66 Steakhouse also is a good destination for a solid steak and burgers, and the prices there are more affordable than what Kitchen charges.

Still, going green is important and if money isn’t a major consideration, Kitchen is worth a try.

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Canned chickpea liquid creates an elegant soup

By CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL
Milk Street/For The Associated Press

Though we often prefer the flavor and texture of dried beans, canned beans have a leg up and not just because of convenience — the super-starchy liquid in which the beans are packed is like an ingredient itself. Reserving the liquid to add to a soup or stew as it simmers lends body and creates a creamier, velvety consistency.

We use the liquid too in this recipe from our book “Cook What You Have,” which draws on pantry staples to assemble easy weeknight meals. It adds richness to an elegant soup built on pureed chickpeas and a whole head of slowly simmered garlic.

Cumin, cayenne and garlic add a bold kick to complement the chickpeas’ earthiness, while carrots and onion add sweetness.

If you own an immersion blender, you can use it to puree the soup directly in the saucepan; the texture won’t be perfectly smooth, but the flavors still will be great.

Chickpea and Garlic Soup with Cumin-Spiced Butter

Start to finish: 1 hour (25 minutes active)

Servings: 4

Ingredients

5 tablespoons salted butter, cut into 1-tablespoon pieces, divided
1 medium yellow onion, chopped

2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped

Kosher salt and ground black pepper

3 teaspoons cumin seeds, divided

¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper OR red pepper flakes, plus another ¼ teaspoon (optional)

Two 15½-ounce cans chickpeas, 1 cup liquid reserved, rinsed and drained

1 head garlic, outer papery skins removed, top third cut off and discarded

1 teaspoon white OR black sesame seeds

Directions

In a large saucepan over medium-high, melt 2 tablespoons butter. Add the onion, carrots and ½ teaspoon salt; cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are lightly browned, 4 to 6 minutes. Add 1 teaspoon cumin seeds, ¼ teaspoon cayenne and ¼ teaspoon black pepper; cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add the chickpeas and the 1 cup reserved liquid, the garlic, 4 cups water and ¼ teaspoon salt. Bring to a boil over

medium-high, then reduce to medium-low, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the garlic is soft when the head is squeezed with tongs, 30 to 35 minutes.

Remove the pot from the heat. Squeeze the garlic cloves from the head into the chickpea mixture; discard the empty skins. Let the chickpea mixture cool for about 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a small saucepan over medium-high, melt the final 3 tablespoons butter. Add the final 2 teaspoons cumin seeds and cook, stirring, until fragrant and the butter has stopped foaming, 1 to 1½ minutes. Add the sesame seeds and another ¼ teaspoon cayenne (if using); cook, stirring, until the sesame seeds are toasted and fragrant, about 1½ minutes. Remove from heat, cover and set aside.

Using a blender and working in batches so the jar is never more than half full, puree the chickpea mixture until smooth. Return the soup to the pan and cook over medium-low, stirring often, until warmed through, 2 to 5 minutes. (Alternatively, use an immersion blender to puree the soup directly in the saucepan.) Taste and season with salt and black pepper. Serve drizzled with the butter mixture.

Optional garnishes: Lemon wedges, chopped fresh cilantro



MILK STREET/AP

Chickpea and garlic soup with cumin-spiced butter.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Destinations for children at heart

From climbing walls to karaoke, Japanese fun centers have something for everyone

By RAY McINTOSH
For Stars and Stripes

Whether you have children or are a child at heart, one-stop shop, inter-active sports and entertainment sites in Japan can be a fun way to spend a day.

Two separate franchises — Crospo and Round1 — provide a range of activities for children and adults, from ball pits to climbing walls, arcades, Ping-Pong and karaoke.

The Crospo location in Hachioji is situated between Yokota Air Base and Camp Zama and can be reached by train.

Round1 has around 20 locations in Tokyo, with one close to nearly every military base in the metro area. Round1 sites are a five-minute drive from Yokota’s East Gate, 30 minutes from Yokosuka Naval Base and Camp Zama and 40 minutes from Naval Air Facility Atsugi.

At both franchises, guests pay by the hour and for access to certain areas and activities.

Most Crospo and Round1 locations have sections for young children with climbing areas, slides, swings and other activities. Older kids and adults may choose from trampolines, bowling alleys, arcades, Ping-Pong, darts and karaoke.

Many of the same activities are found at either Crospo or Round1, but each company provides something unique.

Round1 has electric vehicles (at some locations) for use under staff supervision, such as go-karts, mini dirt bikes, hoverboards, Segways and electric bulls.

Round1 also focuses more on

sports. Depending on location, you may find basketball, bubble soccer, roller skating, inline skating, hoop throwing, kick-boxing, billiards, pool, curling, batting and pitching areas, tennis, archery, frisbee, golf, squash and even skateparks.

Crospo has more activities for outdoor-oriented skills.

The Chiba location has a shooting/survival game (for a fee) and a free parkour course. Both Crospo locations have climbing walls; Chiba’s is exceptionally tall.

Crospo also has more activities for young children. The Chiba location has a pool stocked for children’s fishing, a “coloring circuit” and animatronic dinosaurs as well as photo ops.

Both Crospo locations provide changing stations near the children’s areas and free massage chairs for adult patrons.

Staff at either business generally speak only Japanese and displays provide information only in Japanese; a mobile phone translator app may be useful.

Most Crospo locations have stairs or escalators and are not wheelchair or stroller accessible; most Round1 locations have elevators and are generally accessible for wheelchairs or strollers.

Food and drinks are sold at both establishments, including alcoholic beverages for adults.

American-style food such as chicken nuggets, hot dogs, corn dogs, pizza and french fries are available at both Crospo and Round1.

Round1 advertises fried rice, squid balls and bubble milk tea; Crospo also offers traditional Japanese food, including cooked bugs at their Chiba location.



PHOTOS BY KELLY AGEE/Stars and Stripes

A Round1 patron shoots hoops at the location in Musashimurayama, Japan. Round1 provides a range of activities for children and adults, from ball pits to climbing walls, arcades, Ping-Pong and karaoke.



An aisle of UFO catchers at the Round1 in Musashimurayama, Japan.

On the QT

Directions: Round1 has many locations in the Tokyo area. Cros-po has two: one is a 10-minute walk from Hachioji Station’s south exit, and another is a 12-minute walk from the west exit of Hama-no Station in Chiba.

Times: Vary by location.
Costs: Depends on age, date and activities.

Food: You’ll find everything for American favorites like chicken nuggets and hot dogs to Japanese staples.

Information: Online: round1.co.jp; cro-spo.com

Ray McIntosh



Round1 has around 20 locations in Tokyo, with one close to nearly every military base in the metro area.



Round1 patrons play arcade games, left, and pool, right, at Round1’s Musashimurayama location.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY JUAN KING/Stars and Stripes

Bronco Billy Steak House was established in Japan in 1978 and today has more than 130 locations.

Staking a beefy claim

Bronco Billy Steak House brings a taste of the Wild West to Tokyo

BY JUAN KING
Stars and Stripes

Dining out with the family recently, I finally had the opportunity to sample some meaty selections at a place in western Tokyo that had caught my interest.

Bronco Billy Steak House is a spacious eatery in Akishima, just a short drive from Yokota Air Base. The restaurant was established in Japan in 1978 and today has more than 130 locations.

We found ample free parking at lunchtime and once inside were quickly seated. The dining area accommodates more than 100 guests.

The salad bar featured a nice selection of fresh green lettuce, fruits, cold pasta and other offerings. I helped myself to some potato salad, macaroni salad and my favorite, melon soda, from the drink bar.

We found several delicious choices on the lunch and grand menus, which, together with the children's menu, is available all day.

From the grand menu, I chose Kuroge Wagyu, a hamburger of Japanese Black beef with a sirloin option, a side of fries and a bowl of steaming rice. With the soup, salad bar and drink bar tacked on, the bill came to a little over 2,000 yen, or less than \$14.

Steaks and hamburgers were



Steaks and hamburgers are cooked on a charcoal-flame grill near the front of the eatery.

cooked on a blazing charcoal-flame grill near the front of the restaurant. At the table, the server sliced our hamburgers down the center on a sizzling iron plate to complete our well-done request.

The meat was thick and tender, and no toppings were needed to make it enjoyable besides the grilled onions underneath.

My final mouthfuls were of a few scoops of green tea and vanilla gelato and some coffee jelly with cream from the salad bar.

I had no problems with any of the selections and everything, including the service, was satisfactory.

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Bronco Billy Steak House

Location: 1-1-18 Tsutsujigaoka, Akishima, Tokyo, 196-0012
Hours: Open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday; 10:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Saturday and Sunday
Prices: Expect to pay 800 yen or more. Credit cards accepted.
Dress: Casual
Directions: Short drive from Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo. Google Plus code: P9FF+46 Akishima, Tokyo.
Information: Phone: 042-549-1136; Online: www.bronco.co.jp. Parking and takeout are available.

Juan King

7 ways to cook faster

BY BECKY KRYSTAL
The Washington Post

As much as I enjoy cooking, I usually don't want to spend more time in the kitchen than I absolutely have to.

However, speed isn't everything. Working too quickly can lead to errors or, worse, injuries. That said, there are ways to be a faster, more efficient cook. Here are some of our top tips.

Read the recipe. Multiple times. Any time you put into studying the recipe before you set foot in the kitchen will pay off once you start cooking. Errors can be just as time-consuming, or more so, than a few rounds of reading in advance, so make the investment up front. Plus, analyzing the ingredients and steps first will familiarize you with the broad strokes of the recipe, meaning less slowing down in the process. Pay particular attention to substitution suggestions, sub-recipes (some cookbooks separate them) and ingredients that are listed once but used at multiple points (often specified as "divided").

Check your ingredient supplies. This tip goes hand in hand with reading the recipe. Make sure you have all the ingredients at home before you get to work. There's nothing that will bring a recipe to a screeching halt like realizing you don't have what you need, prompting an unplanned excursion or forcing you to try to figure out an appropriate substitution. Although I realize this strategy is not for everyone, I subscribe to the approach of pulling all the ingredients out before I start cooking.

See what can be made ahead. If you know your time for making the bulk of a dish is limited, figure out what you can do in advance while you may already be in the kitchen doing something else. Recipes will often tell you what works well to make ahead, but be on the lookout for more. Dressings and sauces store very well. Chopped or even roasted vegetables can hold for a day in the refrigerator. Ditto grated cheese. Other components — pie crusts, pizza doughs — need time to rest. (Again, read the recipe early and often.)

Take advantage of downtime. Well-written recipes will specify what other ingredients or parts of

the process you can tackle while a different part of the dish is cooking, though it never hurts to study up and see where you can shave off overall time. Sometimes that means putting off the prep for certain elements. If an ingredient is being used as a garnish or stirred in at the end, do you need to have it done before you start cooking? No. Can you make a sauce while your meat roasts? Absolutely. This is the kind of thing to flag when you first read the recipe.

Let your tools do the work for you. You may already have tools in your kitchen that can make cooking faster, so why not use them? Are you a slow chopper? Pull out your food processor to break down vegetables, especially where size and shape don't matter, such as with soups, stews or sauces that will be cooked down or blended. The food processor can also make quick work of grating cheese or cutting butter into flour for pie crusts.

Air fryers speed up roasting vegetables or small cuts of meat, among many other things. An Instant Pot can steam vegetables or cook rice in minutes. Of course, you must decide whether there's a trade-off in terms of additional equipment to clean, but that may be a compromise worth making.

Use good store-bought shortcuts where they make sense. While not all shortcut ingredients you can get at the store are worth your money, some really can save you time and help you get dinner on the table faster. Pizza dough, puff pastry, concentrated broth bases and peeled, chopped butternut squash are a few of our favorites. And don't sleep on the frozen food aisle, either; frozen vegetables can be an affordable way to get healthy, already prepped ingredients.

Practice, practice, practice. Speed and efficiency are often the result of increasing competence. The more you cook and hone your skills, the faster you'll get. The more you make one particular recipe, the faster it will go. Don't get discouraged if you don't see an immediate improvement. It's often a gradual process. Then, one day, it hits you all of a sudden that you're in and out of the kitchen quicker than you expected.

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STARS AND STRIPES

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Is it safe to hold your baby on a flight?

Jan. 5 Boeing blowout stokes fears of what could have happened

By KELLY KASULIS CHO
The Washington Post

When a loud banging erupted on Alaska Airlines Flight 1282 on Jan. 5 and a hole in the plane's wall suddenly revealed the night sky and buildings below, few people understood what was unfolding. The cockpit door had swung open, the aircraft was rapidly depressurizing and the flight's first officer was jerked forward, losing her headset.

The accident started when the door plug in the plane's main body blew out, causing frigid, roaring winds to overtake the cabin. Flight attendants quickly turned their attention to four unaccompanied minors and three additional small children they knew were on the plane without a seat, according to accounts relayed by Jennifer Homendy, chair of the National Transportation Safety Board.

"They didn't know what was occurring. They were certainly concerned," Homendy said Monday, citing interviews with flight attendants, which she described as "very emotional."

"This was a really significant event with zero information at the time. There is a lot of trauma that they are working through," she said.

Pilots safely carried out an emergency landing of the plane, a Boeing 737 Max 9, and the accident has prompted an NTSB investigation.

At least twice during news conferences this week, the NTSB has stressed that both it and the Federal Aviation Administration recommend that parents or guardians buy separate seats for infants on flights instead of holding them in their laps. The FAA does not require plane tickets for children under 2, and some adults might skip purchasing a separate seat to save money or avoid the headache of finding approved child aviation restraint system devices, which include some car seats and harnesses.

Still, aviation experts say there's no confusion about what's safe.

"If there had been a passenger holding a kid close to where that panel blew off, the explosive force was such that a kid being held would have been torn from the hands of their parents, and they would have been sucked out of the plane," said Kwasi Adjekum, an assistant professor at the University of North Dakota's



iStock

The National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Administration both strongly recommend that parents or guardians buy separate seats for infants on flights instead of holding them in their laps. However, the FAA does not require plane tickets for children under 2.

Department of Aviation. "The practice of holding kids on your lap, especially for takeoff and other vulnerable phases of flight — it's highly frowned upon and discouraged."

In the days following the plane's emergency landing, two cellphones, a seat headrest, a window frame and stray parts were found scattered in residential areas. Experts say that easily could have happened to any adult who wasn't wearing a seat belt or any child — especially small children.

"A kid in a car or passenger vehicle below a certain weight — they have to be in a car seat. So why would a parent be allowed to hold a kid in their lap on a commercial flight?" said Anthony Brickhouse, an aerospace safety professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. "That, to me, is just a gap in the system. And unfortunately, in safety, a lot of times, changes aren't made until there's a tragedy."

Yet tragedies have already occurred. In 1989, a United Airlines flight crash-landed in Sioux City, Iowa, killing 112 people. At least one child being held on a lap died on the flight, and three other infants were injured after

attendants told parents to bundle them in blankets and place them on the floor. In 1995, an infant girl also died after a parent followed similar instructions ahead of a crash in Charlotte. Those two accidents have fueled calls for a change in regulations.

"A kid in a car or passenger vehicle below a certain weight — they have to be in a car seat. So why would a parent be allowed to hold a kid in their lap on a commercial flight?"

Anthony Brickhouse

aerospace safety professor, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Unrestrained children may not fall out of an aircraft, but they could still be injured or killed during sudden changes in speed, severe turbulence or accidents. The No. 1 cause of pediatric injuries on airplanes is unexpected turbulence, according to the FAA.

"It's basic physics. If something isn't properly restrained and that vehicle rapidly deaccelerates, that something is going to

want to keep moving," Brickhouse said.

For years, the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA and the American Academy of Pediatrics have advocated for the FAA — which sets rules for flight safety — to require guardians to secure

infants and toddlers. But some have argued that doing so would make air travel more expensive for families and push them to drive cars instead.

"The argument is that, statistically, there are more fatalities driving with kids than flying with kids," Adjekum said.

In other parts of the world, some airlines require that parents use a belly loop belt for infants, which is secured around

the child's abdomen and then tethered to the guardian's seat belt. This restraint device is banned by the FAA, with some research suggesting that the belt may still allow infants to hit the seat in front of them or get crushed by the adult if they're jerked forward. Adjekum said U.S. regulators were also concerned that the belts would slow down the evacuation of planes because they can be difficult to detach.

"Think of the recent Japanese accident. The rule is that, within 90 seconds, we are supposed to evacuate the aircraft," he said, referring to a collision in Tokyo this month between a Japan Airlines aircraft and a Coast Guard plane. "It adds to the complexity because that child is now tethered to the parent and is a potential obstruction hazard" to other passengers, he added.

Many car seats can be used as airplane restraint devices, so long as the tag says they meet aviation safety standards, Adjekum said. However, the FAA warns that counterfeits of approved devices are frequently for sale online and suggests that consumers purchase directly from manufacturers.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Get cozy

19 new stories to help readers survive winter

By CHRIS HEWITT
Star Tribune

It’s chilly out there, people. It’s reading time!
Year-end holidays are the most popular season to give books. And now we’re heading into the best time to read them — while nestled in a Slanket, with a warm beverage, of course. Fortunately, publishers are keeping the promising titles coming. As you plot your reading Excel spreadsheet for winter and spring (that’s a thing, right?), here are upcoming titles to reserve slots for:

‘An American Dreamer: Life in a Divided Country’

by David Finkel
I’ve already read Laurie Hertzels’s upcoming (rave) review of Pulitzer Prize winner Finkels’s nonfiction look at an Iraq War veteran who is disillusioned by the political divides ripping apart the country he fought for. You can dive into the book when it’s published on Feb. 13.

‘The Blueprint’

by Rae Giana Rashad
Set in both 1800 and 2030, this debut novel is about a Black woman named Solenne who escapes from her dreary life — she’s forced to be the lover of a white senator in the near future, when choice no longer exists — by writing about an ancestor named Henriette. As she works, she realizes what they have in common: Both are enslaved. Coming Feb. 13

‘Candy Darling’

by Cynthia Carr
Carr’s complex, urgent biography of artist David Wojnarowicz, “Fire in the Belly,” was a phenomenal achievement. Here, she turns her attention to the transgender Andy Warhol “superstar” whose life was not as glamorous as it appeared. Coming March 19

‘The Deerfield Massacre’

by James L. Swanson
If you couldn’t put down Swanson’s riveting “Manhunt,” about the search for John Wilkes Booth after he assassinated Abraham Lincoln, the historian has a new challenge for you. It’s the true story of a deadly, little-remembered 1704 clash between colonists and Indigenous people. Coming Feb. 27

‘The Demon of Unrest’

by Erik Larson
The insomniac in the latest nonfiction from the author of “The Devil in the White City” and “Thunderstruck” is Abraham Lincoln. In the first five months of his presidency, he stayed up nights worrying about: state after state seceding from the U.S., a secretary of state who was plotting against him and the souls of millions of enslaved Americans. Coming April 30

‘End of Story’

by A.J. Finn
A woman is summoned by a famous



mystery novelist to help him write a memoir and, possibly, figure out what happened to his family, who vanished two decades earlier. It’ll be interesting to see how the press tour goes for the pseudonymous Finn, who became a superstar when he published the 2018 blockbuster “The Woman in the Window,” but whose star dimmed when the New Yorker revealed many of his claims about himself were untrue. Coming Feb. 20

‘Ferris’

by Kate DiCamillo
The world is lucky to have DiCamillo writing in it. Even luckier that she’s prolific. In addition to “Orris and Timble: The Beginning” kicking off a new series in April, she also has the middle-grade “Ferris,” with a title character who shares traits with other DiCamillo heroines: She’s a spirited tween, dealing with extraordinary circumstances and rambunctious relatives. Coming March 5

‘The Husbands’

by Holly Gramazio
I had only to finish the first chapter to consider this funny, suspenseful novel a must-read. After a night of many cocktails, Lauren returns to her London apartment to be greeted by a menacing stranger who somehow broke in, won’t leave her alone and claims to be her husband. As the title suggests, he’s not the only spouse. Coming April 2

‘Lies and Weddings’

by Kevin Kwan
The “Crazy Rich Asians” writer returns with another comic novel that includes a big wedding, family deception and piles of cash. Coming May 21

‘The Light Eaters’

by Zoë Schlanger
The staff reporter at the Atlantic concentrates on climate and the environment in a book of popular science that aims to reveal that plants have saved us, time and

time again. She also explains how they pull that off. Coming May 7

‘Long Island’

by Colm Tóibín
The Irishman can write all the novels he wants about Jesus’ mother (“The Testament of Mary”) and Henry James (“The Master”). But what readers have been clamoring for is more Eilis Lacey, who came to America from Ireland in “Brooklyn.” “Long Island” is set a couple of decades after “Brooklyn,” when Lacey’s homeland beckons her. Coming May 7

‘Martyr!’

by Kaveh Akbar
Does a painting discovered in an art gallery hold the key to the life story of a poet who is addicted to pills and booze? He thinks so, so he journeys into the past, with the help of a dying painter who lives in the Brooklyn Museum. Coming Jan. 23

‘My Heavenly Favorite’

by Lucas Rijneveld
If your tastes veer more to discomfort, this Graywolf Press novel might be the ticket. The title character is a Dutch farmer’s daughter who believes she is meant to be a boy. Which presents a dilemma for a veterinarian who sympathizes with the child and possesses a few surgical skills. Coming March 5

‘The Princess of Las Vegas’

by Chris Bohjalian
The premise sounds goofy, but in the hands of the author of “The Flight Attendant” and “The Lioness,” it holds promise. An American whose job is impersonating Princess Diana Spencer in a Vegas cabaret act is drawn into the murder of a casino’s owner. Did she do it? Did the senator boyfriend who’s dumping her? Or her mysterious sister? Maybe the paparazzi struck again? Coming March 19

‘Sipsworth’

by Simon van Booy
Look, Ann Patchett is not just a great novelist (“Tom Lake”). She’s also a voracious

reader and the owner of a bookstore. So, when she writes “I loved it” on the cover of a book, you listen. The novel is about an octogenarian named Helen who, following the death of her husband and son, feels ready to join them. Until she finds a new reason to live. Coming May 7

‘The Sleepwalkers’

by Scarlett Thomas
The description of this chiller had me at the word “gothic” and then grabbed me by the throat when it name-dropped “Strangers on a Train” author Patricia Highsmith. It’s about a newlywed couple whose honeymoon gets weird fast because of a hotel owner who seems to want to get with the husband. There also are ominous stories about previous hotel guests whose vacation ended when they drowned. Coming April 9

‘This Strange Eventful History’

by Claire Messud
The “Emperor’s Children” novelist spins a tale that draws on her own family’s itinerant history. Messud follows a clan over seven decades, from Algeria in the 1940s to the United States in the 2010s. Coming May 14

‘Table for Two’

by Amor Towles
“A Gentleman in Moscow” and “The Lincoln Highway” may have been Towles’ biggest sellers, but my favorite is his witty “Rules of Civility,” about bright young things in mid-century Manhattan. These six stories return to that “Civility” world. Coming April 2

‘Where Rivers Part’

by Kao Kalia Yang
A Hmong woman named Tswb flees her family’s war-torn village in Laos, meets a man, escapes to the U.S. and raises her children, who include the author of this memoir. Yang also has a book for young people, “The Rock in My Throat,” coming this spring. Coming March 19

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Growing up in the spotlight

Coco Jones talks Grammy nods, obstacles, pay equity

BY JONATHAN LANDRUM JR.
Associated Press

Coco Jones was so obsessed with fine-tuning her skills as a singer that she tried to mimic Beyoncé’s Olympic-style training of singing while running on a treadmill.

Jones didn’t own a treadmill, but her father and former NFL player, Mike Jones, had an elliptical machine she often used as an alternative. Since her Disney child-star days, the singer-actor has been determined to apply the same work ethic as the best in hopes of breaking through on her terms.

For Jones, that time is now following several pivotal moments: After she starred on the 2012 Disney Channel musical “Let It Shine,” she struggled to maintain stardom and fell out the spotlight until she created a new buzz through viral TikTok videos before unveiling her reshaped image as Hilary Banks on Peacock’s “Bel-Air.”

Jones went on to earn five Grammy nominations through her well-received EP “What I Didn’t Tell You.” It was anchored by her hit ballad “ICU,” which garnered a remix from Justin Timberlake. She’s up for best new artist, R&B album, traditional R&B performance, R&B song and R&B performance.

In a recent interview, Jones spoke with The Associated Press about pushing through her rough patches, EGOT status possibly being on her vision board and her thoughts after Taraji P. Henson’s passionate words on Hollywood’s pay disparity.

AP: When you recorded your EP, did you foresee Grammy nominations?

Jones: I definitely didn’t think “How far could this go?” I was only focused on what was in front of me, who I wanted to present myself to as in front of the world. I hadn’t released music with a label since I was 16 years old, so my expectations were all over the place. I don’t even think I really understood how it works as an adult to release a project and what it means to have a rollout. I was a kid when all of those conversations were being had way above me. My expectation

“Everything can and will get better. But it doesn’t get better if we don’t do anything, if we don’t say anything.”

Coco Jones
on facing colorism in her career

was within myself and my leaving everything in this booth every time. I’m giving the world the most fearless version of myself. ... My expectations have been blown out of the water.

How much did your fame through “Bel-Air” play a role in reestablishing yourself?

It really opened a lot of doors, because before my music came out, “Bel-Air” came out. It’s always so helpful for people to see a rebranded version of you — especially if you’re trying to change, if you’re trying to give something new. A very powerful way to be projected to the world is through TV and film as well as music. It all helped with shifting the narrative that I’m not that little kid from the Disney Channel anymore. I can be this upper echelon Bel-Air girl, and I can be an artist, and you’re going to respect both of them because they’re both going to hit hard in different ways.

You went through a phase after “Let It Shine” when you put out music with little fanfare. How did you maintain your confidence?

Finding confidence in the in-between stage was only through God. I had placed my value in this industry. If I had a great show, great movie, great song, anything worth talking about, then yeah, you should be confident. Look at what you’ve done. Look at what you’re presenting to the world.

When I didn’t have those things, I didn’t really know what to say or what to sing about. I



REBECCA CABAGE/AP

Coco Jones poses for a portrait on Dec. 28 in Los Angeles. She’s up for best new artist, R&B album, traditional R&B performance, R&B song and R&B performance at the Grammy Awards on Feb. 4.

didn’t really fit into the roles that were being sent to me. I didn’t know when my next perfect match would be an opportunity that I didn’t feel like was forced or I could do better. I didn’t have much to brag about. I had to find a different version of value that really comes from my passion and my tenacity.

Who helped you through those tough times?

I leaned on my mama the most during the rough patches of my career. My mom was my first everything. She was my first vocal coach, first stylist, hair and makeup, glam manager, tour manager, first co-writer, first co-producer. She was everything.

When there was nobody to believe in me, she helped me prove myself and continue to push through those hurdles.

Which is your biggest passion: Singing or acting?

If we’re talking in general, singing or acting. Yes, singing for sure. It’s not about playing a role. It’s genuinely therapeutic to just peel back all the layers and say the rawest, realest version of your truth. I think that’s the most comfortable second nature. But acting. There are films and shows that just eat the content and the quality. ... You get to relive a movie that just holds you tight. That is also really dope. I love them for different reasons. I

love acting because it’s a challenge, and you kind of get to separate you personally from the job. Sometimes it’s a nice little break. I can’t wait to play a role where I get to be, like, crazy because I feel like I’m very composed. I’m a little goofy, but I can get crazy. One day I’ll get to do that through acting.

You’ve dealt with colorism in your career. What were your thoughts after hearing about Taraji P. Henson shedding tears regarding the gender and racial pay gap in Hollywood for Black women?

Everything can and will get

SEE COCO ON PAGE 29

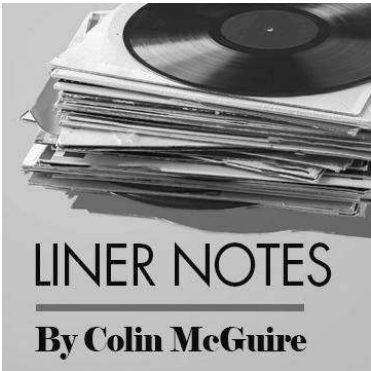
WEEKEND: MUSIC

Swift makes history as McCartney tops a chart

It's slow season for live music. With the holidays dominating the past three to four weeks, tour announcements have been sparse while anticipation for this stuff has been overshadowed by anticipation for other stuff (Christmas gifts, New Year's resolutions ... college football bowl games). But fear not, friends, because Liner Notes takes no weeks off! As such, let's begin with the one thing we've used each month we tackle live music: Pollstar's Live 75 Chart.

As we've often mentioned, the list ranks worldwide active tours by average tickets sold for shows performed over the past 30 days and for the week of Dec. 18 (the most recent week Pollstar released data for this specific metric), we have a familiar face at the top of the chart: Sir Paul McCartney. The curious part about it? A quick internet search reveals that ... well ... he has no gigs on the books. But considering how he finished up a South American run the week before Dec. 18, we got what we got. And what we got was an average of about 42,000 tickets sold over the 30 days preceding the most recent list.

Also in the top 10 were RBD, who came in at No. 2 with roughly 37,000, 50 Cent (yes, that 50 Cent), who finished fourth with a little more than 16,000 tickets sold for shows performed in the 30-day time period, and then the Eagles, surprisingly bringing up the rear, barely cracking the top 10 (No. 10), with about 12,500



tickets moved. Not on the list? Taylor Swift, who has been taking a tiny bit of time off, attending football games and readying the inevitable re-release of her "Eras" tour film, this time with super high-def 19K resolution. Speaking of Swift, it was announced at the end of last year (or, well, a few weeks ago), that the pop star grossed more than \$1 billion with that aforementioned "Eras" tour — \$1,039,263,762, to be exact — and that was the first time in history anyone has ever done such a thing. Perhaps even more impressive was the fact that she did it all in only eight months. That's right: The defining star of a generation only needed about 66% of the year to rake in more than a billion dollars through her live performances.

Impressive. Not as impressive? The Sphere, the Las Vegas pet project that made headlines with U2 concerts and its constant, gigantic smiling-face emoji on the Vegas Strip. Something tells me we'll be writing more consistently about this



MJ Kim photo; Stars and Stripes

As touring wound down heading into the holidays, a short South American swing put Paul McCartney at the top of Pollstar's Live 75 Chart for the week of Dec. 18.

in 2024 as less than a year into its opening, the thing has already named a new general manager (which, in layman's terms, can be translated into "uh oh"). According to reports last week, Ed Lunger will be the new senior vice president and GM of the thing as he replaces Raul Gutierrez for

reasons unknown. Here's hoping he fares better than his predecessor if only because the Sphere seems like a fun idea and nobody likes to see Big Ambitious Music Projects fail, right?

And finally, a tour! Stray Kids, one of the many K-pop groups already taking over the world,

announced in a video last week that they will be hitting the road in 2024. No dates, cities or timeframes were announced, but hey: What's a tour roundup without news of an actual tour? Not much, I tell you. Not much.

Anyway, happy new year and happy concert-ing!

Coco: Singer preps debut solo album as she dreams bigger

FROM PAGE 28

better. But it doesn't get better if we don't do anything, if we don't say anything, if we aren't transparent and honest. I think hiding and pretending that everything's OK will perpetuate stagnant energy.

But being honest and being vocal about things that you want to change, can always make change and always inspire. It just makes your platform worth any meaning. That's why I try to speak up so much on colorism and on being patient with your journey because we're Black women, and it does take a different path with us to get where we rightfully deserve to be.

I'm so grateful for women like Viola (Davis) and Kerry (Washington) and Angela Bassett and Taraji. They all have paved a way for me, and it'll just get better with time because they'll continue to kill it at every opportunity and speak up and not be afraid to push back and be honest and demand more. They'll teach us the same. Then we'll teach the next generation. And one day, maybe when my kids are my age, it won't be such a surprise that we are all the same. You see Black women as much as you see white women and you see any color of women. It's just all normal because that's the real world.

We are all these different stories that deserve to be represented in music and in TV and film. With time, it'll get there. We just have to keep pressing the narrative.

When should we expect your debut studio album?

If it was up to me, I would want my debut album to

"I'm so grateful for women like Viola (Davis) and Kerry (Washington) and Angela Bassett and Taraji (P. Henson). They all have paved a way for me."

come out in March or April because I would want to go on tour when it's warmer. It was so cold this tour. We need to warm it up, but that's just me.

You have a photo of Beyoncé holding several Grammys, but you replaced her face with yours. Have you created a similar vision board for an EGOT?

I did tell myself that (this new) year I need to take my goals up higher. I pretty much did everything that I wanted to do so far. I have to believe bigger. I have to expect more from myself. To be an EGOT is a huge, huge, huge flex. I've done theater before. I could do it again. I don't see why not. Maybe it'll be on the vision board, maybe it'll be added. I definitely want to go bigger and dream bigger.



REBECCA CABAGE, INVISION/AP

WEEKEND: TELEVISION



RAUL ROMO/For The Washington Post

Lilly Singh has become more selective about her projects since the cancellation of her late-night talk show on NBC after only two seasons. She'll ask herself: "Does this align with what I'm trying to do in life?"

Satisfying Lilly Singh

YouTube star seeks more fulfilling path after cancellation of late-night show

By SONIA RAO
The Washington Post

There are two sticky notes clinging to the computer monitor in Lilly Singh’s home office. The first reads, “Appreciation over expectation.” The second, “Compassion over confusion.”

Singh, 35, is a Canadian YouTuber whose channel took off in the early 2010s. She didn’t expect to make it big goofing around under the display name Superwoman or playing her Indian immigrant parents in comedy sketches, but she gained a fan base of young brown girls who longed to see their experiences reflected online. Her charisma attracted a broader audience, earning her 14.5 million subscribers on the platform, and she rode that success into the mainstream, hosting events and booking minor acting roles.

Maybe that isn’t why her name rings a bell. In 2019, NBC hired her to host “A Little Late with Lilly Singh,” filling the 1:35 a.m. time slot originated eons ago by Bob Costas and held for more than 17 years by Carson Daly. She was the only woman hosting a late-night talk show on network television. “A Little Late” embraced that fact, also centering on Singh’s queer and South Asian identity. It was canceled after two seasons.

This left her wondering what went wrong. Was her comedy a bad fit for the network? Granted fewer resources than her late-night counterparts, had she been set up to fail? Did anyone even notice? After all, the show aired at 1:35 a.m. Maybe the lesson wasn’t about how to rise to the expectations of traditional media, but how to avoid the constraints altogether.

She’s moved on. So has NBC. (“Lilly’s unique talent and fresh perspective are what drew us to collaborate with her ... and we continue to be fans of both her and her work,” Katie Hockmeyer, NBC’s executive vice president of late-night programming, said in a statement. The network ceased to produce original content for Singh’s desolate time slot, which is now occupied by local programming.)

Whatever, right? Sustaining a career in the public eye takes determination and thick skin. One moves on as one must, but, like most YouTube stars who build brands off their personal identities, Singh receives criticism that can be quite cutting. A comment may not just point out that a joke didn’t land, but also assert that she herself has never once been funny.

She has come to expect intense feedback, but wavers on how to handle it. Working in entertainment can feel “very heightened,” she says. “The highs are super high ... and the lows are, ‘Everyone in the world hates me.’” The talk show sparked those low feelings when it garnered middling reviews and subpar ratings, even in its wee-hours time slot. She reframed its cancellation as a sign to redirect her energy.

“I am stubborn by nature,” she reflects. “I feel like I have something to prove.”

Singh apologizes for the messy state of her office. There are a few papers strewn about in an otherwise immaculate room. The bookshelves are organized by color. A desk calendar is similarly coded by hue. Several copies of the self-help book she released in 2022, “Be a Triangle: How I Went From Being Lost to Getting My Life Into Shape,” rest in a neat stack at the corner of her desk.

SEE SINGH ON PAGE 31

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Singh: Comedienne’s latest projects include gender-equality advocacy

FROM PAGE 30

She sits in front of a framed poster of a Hollywood Reporter magazine spread from a few years ago. It reads, “Lilly Singh seizes the night.” It hangs above the plaque she received from YouTube when she hit 10 million subscribers. Singh is proud of her achievements. She’s proud of her work ethic, describing her level of focus as “both amazing and bad,” in that she will spend endless hours on any given task until satisfied with the results.

These days, that includes projects put out under her Unicorn Island Productions banner (which produces the animated children’s series “The Mindful Adventures of Unicorn Island” and recently announced it was developing a new drama series starring “Bridgerton” actress Charithra Chandran) and gender-equality advocacy campaigns carried out by the company’s philanthropic arm.

“I really like a life where I have my toes dipped in a bunch of different things,” she says.

Singh was the second daughter born to a Punjabi Sikh immigrant family in the Scarborough district of Toronto. To some of her elders in India, she says, her birth was “a disappointment.” They had hoped for a boy who would carry on the family name and duties. She spent years challenging inherited notions of how a girl was supposed to behave.

She was told girls weren’t supposed to dance in public, for instance, but still captained a bhangra dance team at York University. After graduating in 2010, she worked a tedious job at a collections agency and found a creative outlet on YouTube. It took a few tries before she discovered her niche, gradually building a following with observational comedy directed at a second-generation South Asian audience.

It would be years before Singh posted videos under her own name. She started out as Superwoman, and in her earliest videos, such as “Official Guide to Brown Girls,” recruited friends to play other second-generation Indians and fictional versions of her parents.

“The only reason I decided to start playing them myself was that, with the pace at which I was making videos and shooting, my friends were like, ‘We’re busy. We’re not coming to your house every day,’” she says.

Singh donned a wig and drew on a beard to play her bumbling father, and wore a dupatta over her hair to play her strict mother. The characters, while exaggerations of Indian immigrants that could veer into stereotype, helped her forge a sense of community with young people from similar families. Singh says she has “a complex with feeling seen,” which makes it all the more rewarding when others tell her they recognize themselves in her work. Making videos helped her navigate a period of depression.

Her parents hoped she would apply to graduate school. With fewer than 50,000 followers at the time, she countered with the idea of becoming a full-time YouTube creator. They agreed to give her a year to prove she could turn her hobby into a career.

This was when YouTube started to become “a more viable, actual business” by ramping up its advertising, according to Mark Bergen, author of “Like, Comment, Subscribe: Inside YouTube’s Chaotic Rise to World Domination.” In 2017, Forbes estimated Singh’s net worth at \$10.5 million, ranking 10th on the magazine’s list of the world’s highest-paid YouTube stars.

First-generation YouTubers like Singh pioneered the now-ubiquitous approach of maintaining “this parasocial relationship with the audience,” Bergen said. “You treat them like a regular fixture in your life, and they do the same to you. That’s a core difference that has never really translated to TV.”

YouTube once seemed as though it could serve as a launchpad for Hollywood careers, according to Bergen, who likened this potential to “Saturday Night Live” stars landing major film and television roles. But as time went on, it became clear success in new media wouldn’t always translate.

Singh initially said no when NBC came to her with the idea of hosting a late-night show — which would require a great deal of her time and earn her less money than she was making on YouTube — but signed on after a member of her team pointed out that, as an Indian and bisexual host, she could help “break the mold of what the staple in

traditional media is.”

“I’ve had the honor and the absolute tragedy of being the first in a lot of things,” she says.

Some of her apprehension toward late-night TV was warranted. She recalls experiencing a “steep learning curve,” going from a crew of five to 100.

“I didn’t even know what 70% of those jobs were,” she adds. At the same time, she struggled to meet demands with the allocated resources. The budget required them to shoot 96 episodes of “A Little Late” over three months — or two to three episodes a day, according to Singh. She could only afford a fraction of the writers employed by comparable shows.

The first season was awkward. Singh’s monologues — often related to her identity on a more superficial level, whether about the difficulties of having long hair or being vegetarian — could seem forced and more generic than the video diaries that made her famous. She doesn’t fault her writers for this, noting that their schedule didn’t allow for much time to rewrite jokes, but admits that she would only personally watch 10 of the season’s nearly 100 episodes.

“The other ones ... are not good,” she says. “We all know that.”

The loudest critics of “A Little Late” took issue with how often Singh brought up being a bisexual woman of color, but she says she was also scolded for not addressing her identity enough: “It’s just an impossible situation. The No. 1 culprit is that there isn’t enough representation. ... You have to be everything.” It stung even more when she received criticism from other YouTubers, because “that’s a community that has held me.”

She also felt she was tasked with appealing to viewers of Jimmy Fallon and Seth Meyers, whose talk shows aired before hers, while still expected to bring in a new audience.

“I really like a life where I have my toes dipped in a bunch of different things.”

“Those are two goals that compete against each other,” she says. “I think there are actual greater systemic issues here about what it means when we bet on minorities and women. Is that an actual bet, or are you wasting everyone’s time?”

The second season of “A Little Late” aired during the pandemic and played more to her strengths. Recording monologues at home recalled the intimacy of her YouTube videos. Writer Romen Borsellino, who was hired for Singh’s second season, said the staff aimed to “build a show around her style, rather than trying to fit her into this preexisting [late-night] structure.” It introduced a segment called “Lilly’s Rants,” in which she delivered directly to the camera the sort of pointed cultural commentary she did in, say, “Official Guide to Brown Girls.” Borsellino, who previously worked for the Obama administration, collaborated with Singh on political segments as well.

“She expanded the topics ... to things that had previously been outside of her wheelhouse,” Borsellino said. “I think the approach describes Lilly in a lot of ways, and her willingness to collaborate.”

Though Singh’s first season dropped less than 10% in ratings from those of Daly’s final year in the 1:35 slot, Nielsen reported that the second season of “A Little Late” fell another 27%. Singh says she feels “a little bit like that show never got a fair chance. It is a bit of an asterisk in my life, where if I have a little bit of doubt, I’m like, ‘What if I did this? What if this happened? What if I do that?’ But ... the universe taught me everything I needed to learn, to do something greater.”

Framed portraits of Colin Kaepernick and Malala Yousafzai hang in a hallway off Singh’s kitchen. She tries to learn by example and often praises the women of color she believes paved the way for her, such as Mindy Kaling.

The two self-help books Singh has published “are part of who I am,” she states. The first — 2017’s “How to Be a Bawse: A Guide to Conquering Life” — is a product of

millennial hustle culture, which she says she still believes in. The second, “Be a Triangle,” presents a more balanced approach to seeking fulfillment in a career: “This book is, why does any of that matter and what does any of that mean? Because at the end of the day, that can’t be who you are. You can’t be your work.”

Since the cancellation of her talk show, Singh has thought more carefully about the projects she takes on. She says the biggest question she asks is whether she will have fun, the main reason she starred in “The Muppets Mayhem” on Disney+ and currently hosts the CTV game show “Battle of the Generations.” Other considerations are close behind: “Does this align with what I’m trying to do in life? Does this align with my mission in some way? My purpose?”

Her first attempt at advocacy work came in 2015, when she launched the #GirlLove campaign to inspire girls and women to support one another.

“And that’s all great,” she says. “But I now know that’s a very surface-level issue when it comes to gender equality.” She has spoken at the U.N. General Assembly in support of empowering the youth through education.

Through Unicorn Island Fund, the philanthropic branch of her company, she has traveled the world for a firsthand look at gender-equality issues. She visited India last year, where UIF awards grants to organizations across the country that advocate for the equal treatment and education of girls.

Marni Tomljanovic, a communications specialist who serves as UIF’s head of impact, said “it’s really rare when you find somebody who is as constantly curious as Lilly.”

“It just p—es me off how girls and women are treated,” Singh says. “I’ve seen it in my industry, I’ve seen it in my family, I’ve seen it time and time again.”

Advocacy work makes Singh feel safer, in a way: “Selfishly, it really does create a barrier against criticism when you know that in your day, you are changing people’s lives and helping people in a way that you can see and that is very practical.”

Her advocacy isn’t immune to backlash. For the past few months, the comments under Singh’s social media posts have requested her to use her platform to speak in support of Gaza. The comments grew in intensity the longer she refrained. In mid-November, she posted a lengthy statement opining through the lens of gender equality.

“What’s happening in Gaza is tragic,” she wrote in the caption. “And it will continue to negatively impact the progress of girls & women, with ripple effects felt worldwide.”

Singh received more criticism from those who perceived it as too neutral a stance. A few hours before making the post, she tells me over the phone about her approach to making public statements.

“I made a promise to myself two years ago that I would not post about something if I didn’t know what the hell I was talking about,” she says. “Viewing any issue through the gender lens, I feel like my knowledge lies there and I’m confident in sharing facts about that.”

She mentions therapy several times throughout our initial conversation and is open about viewing herself as a work in progress. One of her fears, she says, is “that I have chosen a career that perhaps is not designed for a human mind.” What does it do to someone to have navigated young adulthood on such a prominent platform?

She grapples with the growing recognition that many of her biggest critics tend to be other South Asian people, but tries to remind herself that her most loyal fans are, too: “Every time I’m arguing with [someone online], there’s another brown girl being like, ‘Ignore him. You raised me. I love you.’ Why am I ignoring that?”

Could it be time for Singh to take a break? She might not be designed for that, either.

A glass door in her office looks into her very LA backyard of fake grass and concrete walls. She gestures through it to a single white Adirondack chair. For the time being, it serves as her reprieve. Sometimes she sits in it and does nothing, save for some breath work. She uses that time to meditate, to center herself, to assess her future priorities.

“I have a lot of energy,” she says. “When I put it into something, I want to create a lot of energy as well.”

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS



Many products, such as granola or snack bars, that are marketed as nutritious are actually laden with sweeteners and other additives.

9 red flags to identify ultra-processed food

BY ANAHAD O’CONNOR
The Washington Post

To improve your eating habits this year, you don’t need to count calories or carbohydrates. Instead, focus on how much your food has been processed before it gets to your dinner table.

If you’re like most people, you eat a lot of ultra-processed foods and don’t even realize it. Many of these foods — protein and granola bars, low-fat yogurts and breakfast cereals — sound like healthful choices.

But ultra-processed foods are formulations of industrial ingredients that are designed by manufacturers to achieve a certain “bliss point,” which causes us to crave and overeat them. Ultra-processed foods make up a majority of the calories most people consume, and scientists say they are a driving force behind the multiple diet-related illnesses that are shortening our life spans.

“Empowering yourself with the knowledge of what you’re about to eat or what you’re about to feed your family is critical,” said Nicole Avena, a visiting professor of health psychology at Princeton University.

So how can you free yourself from the grip of ultra-processed foods? Start by reading the labels on the foods in your fridge, pantry and the grocery aisle. We’ve created a simple guide to help you spot nine red flags that signal a food probably is ultra-processed:

Thickeners, stabilizers or emulsifiers

Look for ingredients such as soy lecithin, guar gum, xanthan gum, carrageenan, mono- and diglycerides, or carboxymethylcellulose. Ultra-processed foods often

contain dyes to make them look appealing, preservatives to give them a long shelf life and thickeners, stabilizers and emulsifiers to improve their texture or to keep their ingredients from separating as they sit on store shelves for weeks or months at a time.

Added sugars and sweeteners

Try to avoid foods with corn syrup, cane sugar, malt syrup or molasses on the label. If you want extra sweetness, add your own sugar or honey.

“Most people would add less honey or sugar than you will find in the packaged versions,” Devries said. “That’s much healthier than relying on the yogurt company to determine how much sugar or honey or additives you should eat.”

Ingredients that end in ‘-ose’

Examine the label for sucrose, maltose, dextrose, fructose or glucose. These are other names for added sugars.

Artificial or ‘fake’ sugars

Look for aspartame, sucralose, acesulfame-k, saccharin or stevia. Sweeteners and artificial flavors are another hallmark of ultra-processed foods. Sugar and sweeteners often are added “to mask the off-putting taste from the preservatives and other ingredients that are added in,” said Avena, author of the new book “Sugarless.”

Many store-bought English muffins, for instance, contain an array of emulsifiers, preservatives and sweeteners. But you wouldn’t know that unless you looked at the ingredients. “They don’t taste sweet and yet they have added sugar,” Avena said.

Health claims

Ultra-processed foods often have buzzy marketing claims on their packages. Many products that are marketed as nutritious are actually laden with sweeteners and other additives. These products include breakfast cereals, granola, flavored yogurt, snack bars, salad dressings and canned soups.

Low-sugar promises

Does the label say that the product is low in added sugar? That can be a red flag, because manufacturers often replace the added sugar in their products with artificial sweeteners.

Instant and flavored varieties

“When it’s instant, it’s usually mechanically altered in a way that degrades it,” Devries said. If you like oatmeal

for breakfast, buy the product that has only oats in it and nothing else.

Don’t be tempted by foods offered in a variety of fruity or other flavors. If you like fruit-flavored yogurt, buy plain yogurt and add your own fresh fruit. Many fruit-flavored yogurts contain not just fruit but several other additives such as cane sugar, cornstarch, “natural flavors” and juice concentrates. Yogurt should have just two ingredients: Milk and cultures (i.e. probiotics).

Could you make it in your kitchen?

When in doubt, look at the ingredient label and ask yourself whether you could make it at home. Ultra-processed foods contain additives that are not typically used in home kitchens. They are often transformed into textures and shapes not found in nature — things like frosted cereals, doughnuts, hot dogs and chicken nuggets.

To be sure, you don’t have to avoid all processed foods. Instead, think of food processing as a spectrum, ranging from minimally processed foods all the way to ultra-processed foods. Minimally processed foods come from plants or animals with minimal alteration. Think whole grains, vegetables, eggs, milk and meat. Processed culinary ingredients are used to cook and season food in homes and restaurants. They include butter, sugar, spices, salt and olive oil.

Processed foods include items such as canned vegetables, bacon, cheeses, smoked fish, canned tuna and freshly made breads. Most processed foods are things you can make in your own kitchen. They typically contain two or three ingredients, but they’re still recognizable as versions of things found in nature. Some examples would be a jar of unsweetened apple sauce, tofu, hummus, tomato sauce and frozen fruits and vegetables.

Most ultra-processed foods are found in the middle aisles of a grocery store. Shop the perimeter where stores stock fresh, whole foods, said Albert-Laszlo Barabasi, a professor at Northeastern University and a lecturer at Harvard Medical School who studies ultra-processed foods. “Most of the foods that are fresh are good for you,” he said.

If you choose to buy ultra-processed foods, avoid “family size” and choose single-serving items. Large packages are designed to make you overeat, said Marion Nestle, a professor emeritus of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University and the author of “Soda Politics.” “If you can’t stop eating from big packages, don’t buy them,” she added.

WEEKEND: FAMILY

Suiting up for school

3rd grade students in Maine inspire ‘Dapper Wednesdays’ trend by dressing their best

By PRAVEENA SOMASUNDARAM
The Washington Post

Looking out at the cafeteria tables, Dean Paquette’s eyes widened when he saw what two students were wearing. The 8-year-olds, third graders at Chelsea Elementary School in Chelsea, Maine, were dressed in suits — James Ramage in navy blue and Lincoln Bolitho in gray — both wearing ties that matched. Paquette, a bus driver and staff member who works with special education students, was impressed by the formal wear, and he went to the boys’ table to compliment them.

“Look,” Paquette recalled telling James and Lincoln in October. “The next time you wear suits, I’m in.”

Paquette, 55, wanted to join the students to show them it was “OK to dress up,” he told The Washington Post. “None of the other kids were really doing that,” he said.

The following Wednesday, Paquette walked into the cafeteria to meet them, wearing a black suit and a tie printed with piano keys and colorful music notes.

Others quickly took notice of Paquette, James and Lincoln wearing suits once a week. A few classmates and teachers joined in, dressing up every Wednesday in fancier clothing than usual. Then Chelsea Elementary administrators invited the entire student body to participate in “Dapper Wednesdays.”

Now, officials at other schools in the district have said they want to take part, said Chelsea Elementary Principal Allison Hernandez.

“It’s nice to see kids getting recognized just for being themselves and for wanting to bring a little bit more good and cheer,” Hernandez said.

It all started with a birthday wish. In April 2022, James asked his parents for a suit for his seventh birthday after seeing Max Fuller wear suits on the sitcom “Fuller House.” It “looked cool” on the character, James recalled thinking, and he wanted to give it a try himself.

His parents bought him a navy blue suit, and he started wearing it to school that year, when he was in first grade.

He stuck out in the crowd of children walking through the doors when he wore it the first time — but not in a bad way, he said. His teachers were quick to compliment his suit, words of encouragement that made him want to continue wearing it into the next school year.

“They said I looked good, and I looked really good in it,” James said. “It just made my heart feel really good.”

He kept dressing up the next year, attending class in blazers and button-downs, sometimes paired with a tie or fedora to match.

The praise James received inspired his best friend, Lincoln, to also wear suits to school this year as the two began third grade.

“I was like, I think that might feel nice if I get some



Helen Wright

Chelsea Elementary School Principal Allison Hernandez and third graders Lincoln Bolitho, left, and James Ramage pose on a “Dapper Wednesday,” which the boys sparked at the Maine school this year.

compliments,” Lincoln said.

The duo decided they’d start wearing suits on Wednesdays.

The first week they wore them, Paquette, a former music teacher, spotted the pair in the cafeteria, pledging to join them next time.

“Dressing up is good,” Paquette said. “In my teaching for 34 years, I wore a shirt and a tie every day. That doesn’t happen anymore.”

For a few weeks, the trio met in the cafeteria to check out each other’s outfits. With each passing week, more students joined in.

They get off the bus on Wednesdays wearing ties around crisp, collared shirts and colorful tulle dresses that peek out from their coats, Hernandez said. She compliments the students — and watches as they compliment one another.

“That’s just such a simple thing that we can do,” Hernandez said. “And I love supporting the kids in their efforts, no matter what they’re doing. This is just such an easy thing.”

On Nov. 27, a Monday, the school sent a notice encouraging students and staff to join in “Dapper Wednesday,” describing it as a way to “showcase you looking your best while celebrating your own personal style.”

Two days later, James wore a black suit with a gray fedora. Lincoln wore an all-white suit and a striped tie with a paisley pattern. Paquette joined them again with a suit and Santa Claus tie — and a box of 40 black bow ties for students who wanted to wear them. That day, about a third of the school’s 276 students joined in, Hernandez said.

For upcoming “Dapper Wednesdays,” Paquette said the school plans to buy more bow ties, as well as hair bows. After that, he also hopes to keep a stash of thrifted dress shirts students can borrow to participate.

As for James and Lincoln, they plan to keep the suits and ties as a part of their school style for years to come.

“I think I might bring it to my high school,” James said.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Less is more, especially if we’re eating leftovers

“Less is more,” they say.

Whoever “they” are, I wish they’d speak up. Please convince me, once and for all, that less is best. I’ve always wanted to live according to minimalist doctrine, but somehow the concept has always eluded me.

All my life, I’ve said too much, eaten too much and spent too much. I’m an overthinker, I pack too much for trips and I try too hard to make people laugh. I collect a lot of useless crap, I cook enough to feed an army and I talk too loudly. I keep too many clothes and shoes, I have too many hobbies and I watch too much reality TV. I make too many lists, I plan more than I can do and I expect too much of myself.

Countless nights I’ve gone to bed regretting things I’ve said, wondering if I’ll ever learn to keep my big mouth shut. I’ve dreamt of becoming someone that doesn’t seek attention, someone that eats serving sizes, someone with a subtle sense of style, someone with quiet dignity, someone that drives the speed limit, someone that isn’t the last to leave every party.

In our modern world with so many pressures, it should be easy to give up more for less, right? However, after years of overindulging in everything from gossip magazines to guilt to guacamole, I’ve become addicted to excess.

After much (too much, of course) soul-searching, I decided that my New Year’s resolution should be “Less is more in 2024.” Proud of this witty rhyme, I also penned a clever ditty to sing when the urge to overdo hit me: “Eat less, pay less, sit less, say less.” I wholeheartedly believed this new mantra would finally help me lose weight, stop spending, exercise and keep my trap shut.

In essence, I’d finally become what I’ve always wanted to be — LESS of myself.

However, within days of implementing my New Year’s resolution, I reached a roadblock.

When our freezer drawer wouldn’t shut due to numerous unidentifiable frost-coated packages of God knows what crammed inside, I proclaimed that I would not buy food because there was already plenty in our house. In the days that followed, I mined our overstuffed freezer, refrigerator and pantry, pairing items that might make a decent meal.

A brick of mystery meat? A shriveling onion? A rib of rubbery celery? A limp carrot? A dusty can of condensed soup? A bit of stale bread? A box of hardening raisins? A half a bag of stiff marshmallows? A jar of capers from the Bush administration? Voila! Dinner is served!

Like a good military spouse preparing for a PCS move, I dug deep into the dark corners of our kitchen and began concocting strange casseroles to feed my family. Alas, by the end of that week, our refrigerator was packed again, not only with unwanted leftover casseroles, but also with containers of the takeout food my family had ordered in desperation. My plan to “eat less” had failed miserably.

One morning while digging through my closet for an outfit that would accommodate my menopause-enhanced girth, I had the sudden urge to buy new clothes. Resisting my old ways, I remembered the saying, “Use it up, wear it out, make do or do without.” I selected a trusty pair of pants that I’d had for years, proud of myself for adhering to my “pay less” goal. However, by mid-afternoon, the waistline of those pants was so tight, I thought I might lose circulation in my legs. Fearing amputation, I made a beeline for TJ Maxx.

Striving to “sit less,” I signed up for a Boot Camp fitness class. However, after the first class, a group of women invited me to coffee, where I became overly excited about making new friends and blathered my life story in excruciating detail, in direct violation of the “say less” principle.

Although I haven’t given up on the notion that “less is more,” I realize that becoming less of myself in 2024 will take more time, more energy and more willpower.

A lot more.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa’s book, “The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com.” Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

IT'S GOING DOWN

BY MATT LINZER AND RAFAEL MUSA / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Matt Linzer, of San Francisco, is a former professional ballet and contemporary dancer who now works in graphic design and art. Rafael Musa, also of San Francisco, is a software engineer at Airbnb. This is Matt's second puzzle for The Times, Rafa's ninth. After Matt solved Rafa's Pride-themed puzzle in the paper last June, he reached out for help in developing this one's theme. — W. S.

ACROSS

1 ‘That guy?’

4 Not in gear

8 Soccer kickoff?

11 Cheese used in spanakopita

15 Antidiscrimination measure of 1990, in brief

16 Signified

18 ‘‘Hang loose’’ hand sign

21 Sonicare competitor

23 Before midnight: Sloth, e.g.

25 Before midnight: One with major influence

27 Like about 60 percent of the world’s population

28 Sloth, e.g.

29 When to see the 86-Down

30 Blanche’s sister in ‘‘A Streetcar Named Desire’’

32 Reality star Theresa of ‘‘Long Island Medium’’

34 Blond or brown quaff

35 ____ Lingus

36 After midnight: Ointments infused with cottonwood or calendula, e.g.

38 Fleece

40 After midnight: Journey’s ‘‘Open Arms’’ and Guns N’ Roses’ ‘‘November Rain,’’ e.g.

42 See 71-Down

45 TikTok post, informally

46 Prepared, as a report

49 Actress Lindsay

52 Chai, for one

55 Cedar Rapids college

56 ‘‘Despicable Me’’ supervillain

58 Hookup that might get kinky?

59 Big acronym in purifying filters

60 ‘‘What hath ____ to do with sleep?’’: Milton

62 Before midnight: Devices with warm water and massaging rollers

64 Kind of rock . . . or where to see it

66 Bygone Palm smartphone

67 Saint ____ (Caribbean nation)

68 Before midnight: Some household expenses

70 Branch offices, e.g.

75 Journalist Couric

76 Wagering sites that closed in N.Y.C. in 2010, in brief

77 After midnight: Event for Cowboys or Broncos

78 ‘‘Can’t win ’em all’’

82 Some adobe abodes

83 Clarified-butter variety

84 Fourth ingredient in a classic three-ingredient sandwich

85 After midnight: Synchronized swimming

86 Forbid

87 Before midnight: Surpass

90 Run up, as debts

92 Mexican shawls

95 Beam

96 Ice-cream name

97 ____ Spring (2010s protests)

99 Drag queen and TV personality Bianca ____ Rio

100 Potter’s pal at Hogwarts

103 ESE or NNW

105 Conjunction used in logic

107 Eddie Bauer competitor

109 After midnight: Totally lose it

113 ‘‘Ack! All these options sound great!’’

116 Middle name for musician Sean Lennon

118 Unacquainted with

119 Where to see the 86-Down

120 Star sign?

122 Final image in a preschooler’s book, maybe

123 Toledan title

124 Japanese crispy cutlet

125 Vexation

126 Rapid transit?

127 Pranks with rolls, informally

128 Bring (in)

129 Start to make fiction fact?

DOWN

1 Laughs

2 Latin expression that’s almost always abbreviated

3 Condo-organizing Kondo

4 Romantic profession

5 App coder, for short

6 Home to the Wat Xieng Thong temple

7 Physicist Fermi

8 College athletics channel

9 Device placed under a tongue

10 Snore, idiomatically

11 ‘‘Seriously?’’

12 Greek god whose name is an anagram of a flower

13 Try

14 Aspirin alternative

17 Sublet offerer

19 It’s got all the answers

20 BART part

22 ____ Rabbit

24 Event for Cinderella

26 Foot part

31 Fighting

33 Title roles for Norman Bates and Patrick Bateman

37 Phishing targets

39 Evacuation survival pack

41 Qatar’s capital

42 ‘‘Balderdash!’’

43 Word with space or rock

44 Lab tube with a bulb

47 Mary Jane

48 Computer circuitry components

50 Wildfire debris

51 Duck Hunt console, in brief

53 Sugar source

54 Transported, as some emergency goods

57 Gas, e.g.: Abbr.

61 Cosmetic goop

62 Bike-ride mishaps

63 Great time

65 Holy chambers in Judaism

69 Wad (up)

70 ‘‘Same for us!’’

71 With 42-Across, ‘‘Lust for Life’’ singer

72 Chevy S.U.V.

73 Make edits to

74 Like some dives or jams

78 ‘‘I didn’t need to know all that!’’

79 Largest ethnic group of China

80 Bart Simpson catchphrase

81 Go all over

82 A mushroom’s is called a pileus

86 End-of-December tradition depicted five times in this puzzle

88 Empire’s call

89 Giving a once-over

91 Subjects to a tirade

93 Hinging (on)

94 Form of algae also known as rockweed

98 Physiques, for short

101 Like most award shows

102 Belgian river in a W.W. I battle

103 Spacey sort

104 Less welcoming

106 Nonelective courses: Abbr.

108 Brewskis

110 ‘‘The father of American literature,’’ per Faulkner

111 Geek Squad specialist, informally

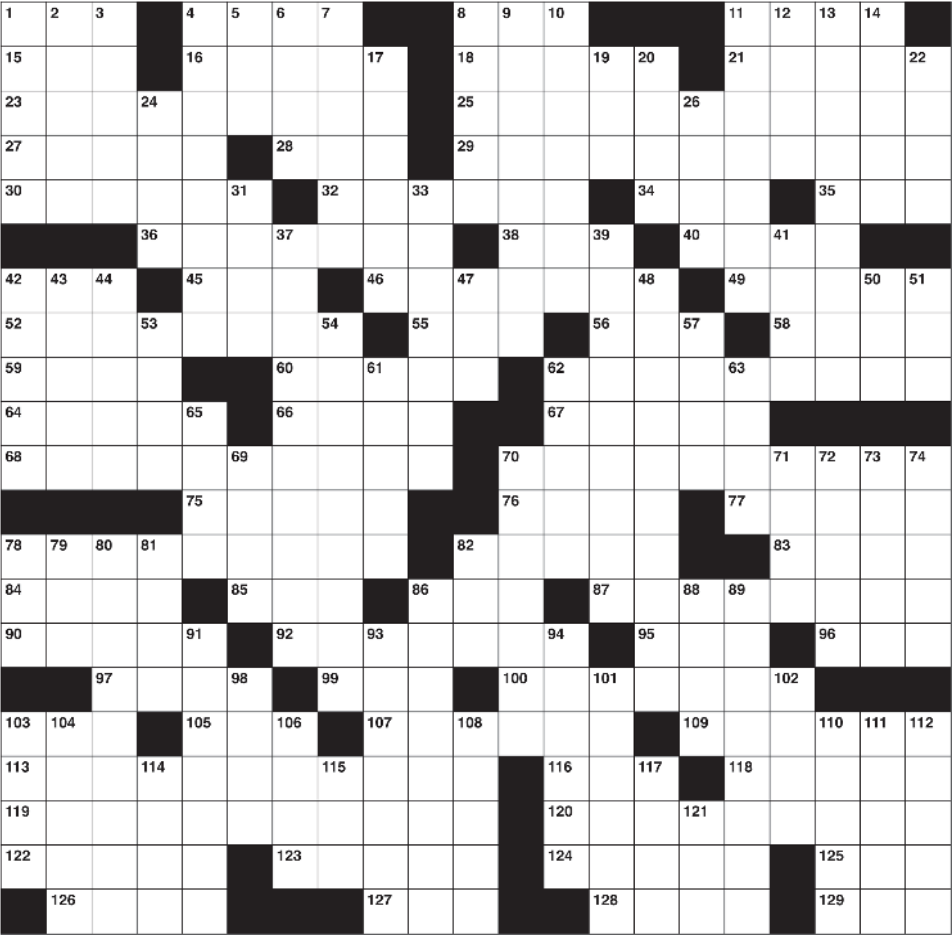
112 TV and radio host Andy

114 Brand owned by Hasbro

115 Pool accessory

117 Mathematician Neugebauer

121 Spanish bear



61 Cosmetic goop

62 Bike-ride mishaps

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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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Announcements040Automotive140

SCAM FADS

Classifieds scams can target both sellers and buyers with classified advertisements.
Be aware of the common red flags.
Some of the latest Scam fads are:

- Vehicle buyers wanting to buy sight unseen and have the vehicle shipped through an agent using paypal.
- People saying Free Dog (different breeds) for adoption.

SELLER BEWARE

Individuals placing classified advertising should use discretion in concluding the sale of their property. Not all potential buyers are reputable or honest. Stars and Stripes suggests that you take precautions to ensure that potential buyers are reputable and will be able to fulfill the terms of the sale. Stars and Stripes is not liable for the contractual relationship between sellers and buyers of merchandise advertised in the newspaper or on the web site.

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No one covers the bases the way we do.
STARS AND STRIPES[®]
However you read us, wherever you need us.

Sell Your Stuff!



Take the fuss out of packing up for your next PCS—sell everything with Stripes *free classifieds!*
STARS AND STRIPES[®]

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The Exchange offers excellent employment benefits including an associate transfer program, spousal hiring preferences and benefits retention.



JEREMY PATTERSON
ARMY RESERVIST
FORT CAVAZOS

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aafes.media/apply



SERVING THE BEST CUSTOMERS
IN THE WORLD SINCE 1895

SCORE



BIG GAME

SAVINGS AT YOUR COMMISSARY

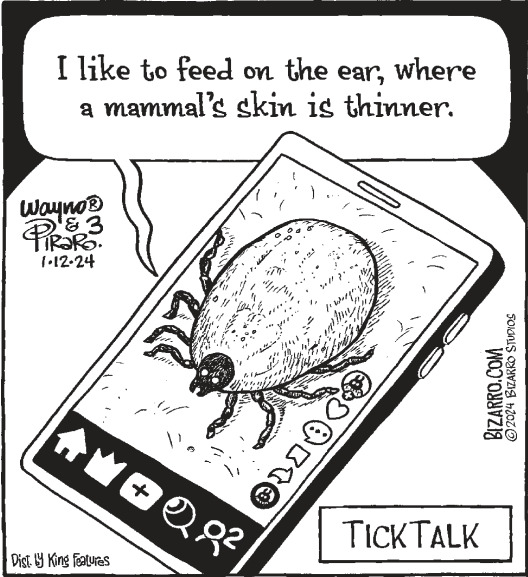


commissaries.com



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Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11
12						13				14		
15						16				17		
		18			19				20			
21	22			23				24				
25			26		27		28					
29				30			31			32	33	34
			35			36			37			
38	39	40				41		42		43		
44					45				46			
47				48				49			50	51
52				53				54				
55				56				57				

- ACROSS
- 1 Platters

6 Aries

9 — Zedong

12 Popular typeface

13 Mayo ingredient

14 Corn serving

15 Virile

16 Java neighbor

18 2009 Hilary Swank biopic

20 Lake bird

21 Dugout item

23 Director Howard

24 Together (with)

25 Like lemons

27 “All kidding —”

29 “Doctor Zhivago” star

31 Acting ruler

35 Commercial cow

37 North Sea feeder

38 Diving bird

41 L-P link

43 Bond rating

44 Green land

45 Intensify

47 Strauss opera

49 Boxer’s dream

52 Moment

53 Insult

54 Bankrupt energy company

55 Superlative suffix
- 56 CIA operative

57 Distributed, as cards
- 22 Satisfied sigh

24 Citrus drink

26 Celebrated “Jeopardy!” host

28 Cara or Castle

30 Land in la mer

32 Hyundai model

33 Cagers’ gp.

34 Bubble —

36 “Whatever works”

38 Gaggle members

39 Ticks off

40 Upright

42 Chose

45 Plumbing problem

46 Aachen article

48 Pro Bowl stats

50 Online guffaw

51 Tolkien creature

Answer to Previous Puzzle

T	A	S	S	W	E	T		S	W	U	M
A	D	E	N	I	R	A		H	I	L	O
T	A	R	O	S	A	L		A	N	N	E
A	M	B	U	S	H		C	A	V	E	A
			T	I	L			T	E	L	
W	E	B	S		I	N	T	E	R	I	M
A	L	A		S	A	O			S	O	S
D	I	C	T	A	T	E	D		S	T	A
		K	I	N			O	W	L		
R	O	L	L	O	N		L	E	A	V	E
E	V	I	L		A	R	I		V	I	D
D	E	S	I		G	I	S		I	V	E
O	R	T	S		S	A	T		C	A	N

1-12

CRYPTOQUIP

OMIWAHQJRRXEUHE

XIEIWEACIORFGLIER

UIQM EUIL ORQCI XAJJAWGQE

WDALI WHOIO: LVOEIDV LIHE.

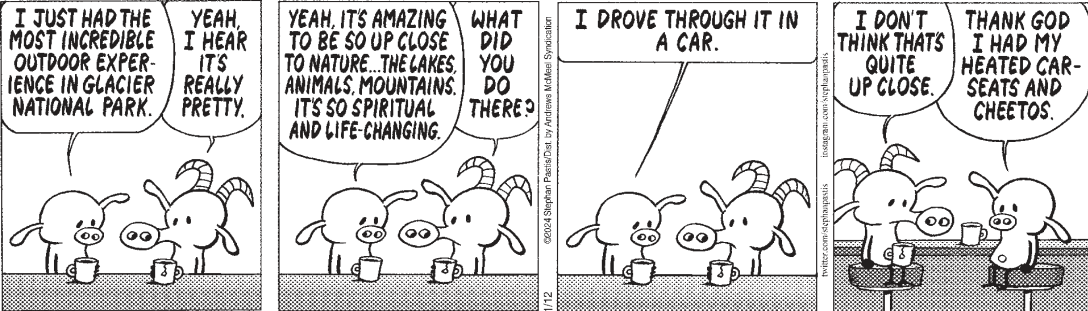
Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: THE MALE DEER FOUND NO DATE WITH WHOM TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL FOREST GATHERING, SO HE WENT STAG.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: J equals F

Frazz



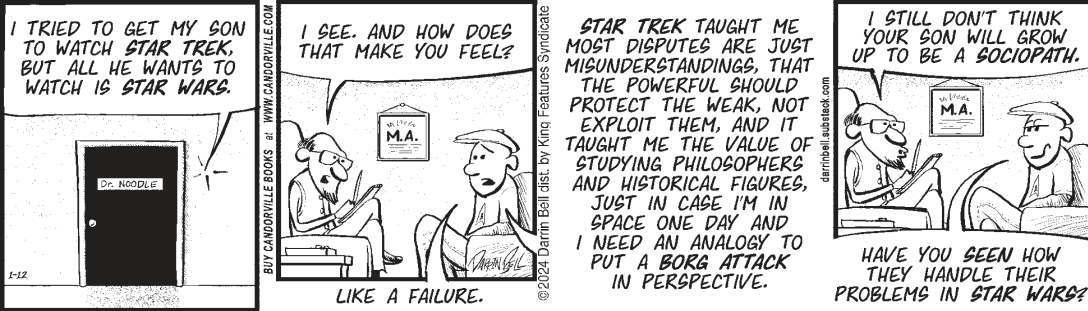
Pearls Before Swine



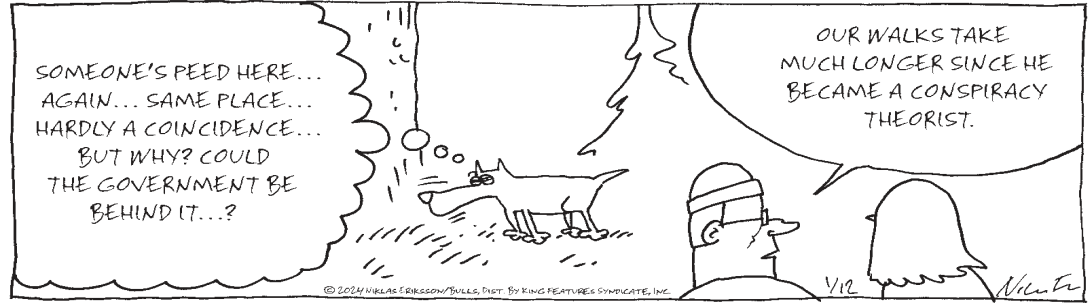
Non Sequitur



Candorville



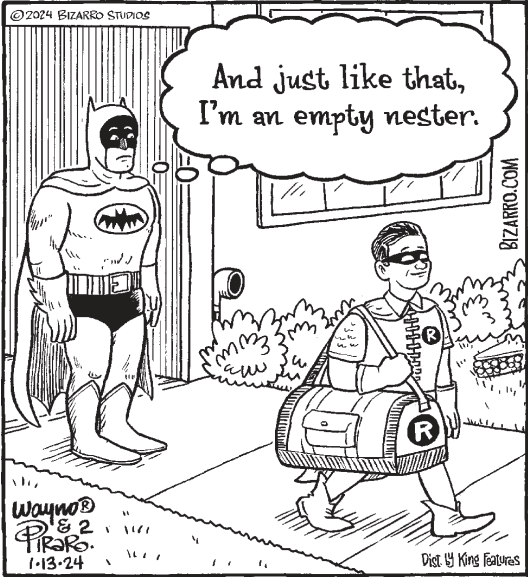
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



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				

ACROSS

- 1 Second U.S. president
- 6 Upper body
- 11 Broccoli bit
- 12 Teeing off
- 14 Totally behind
- 15 Provide apparel for
- 16 Computer acronym
- 17 Off-center
- 19 Math ratios
- 20 Whack
- 22 Part of RSVP
- 23 Jokes
- 24 "Failure — an option!"
- 26 Landlocked country in South Africa
- 28 Corn product
- 30 Drunkard
- 31 The Fab Four
- 35 Biblical realm
- 39 Performs
- 40 Knight's address
- 42 Wild guess
- 43 Sigma preceder
- 44 Edition
- 46 Weep
- 47 Cleanser brand
- 49 Icy downpours
- 51 Naval rank
- 52 Small drum

- 53 Word on the street?
- 54 Crept furtively

- 23 Rome invaders
- 25 Up to
- 27 "Mayday!"
- 29 "The Golden Notebook" author
- 31 Zingers
- 32 Canyon comebacks
- 33 Lacking a musical key
- 34 Bro's sib
- 36 Long list's shortener (Abbr.)
- 37 Composer Bela
- 38 Bottomless gulf
- 41 Corrodes
- 44 One-named supermodel
- 45 Carolina college
- 48 Docs' org.
- 50 Outback bird

Answer to Previous Puzzle

D	I	S	C	S		R	A	M		M	A	O
A	R	I	A	L		E	G	G		E	A	R
M	A	N	L	Y		S	U	M	A	T	R	A
			A	M	E	L	I	A		L	O	N
B	A	T		R	O	N			A	L	O	N
T	A	R	T		A	S	I	D	E			
S	H	A	R	I	F		R	E	G	E	N	T
			E	L	S	I	E		E	L	B	E
G	R	E	B	E		M	N	O		A	A	A
E	I	R	E		D	E	E	P	E	N		
E	L	E	K	T	R	A			T	I	T	L
S	E	C		D	I	S			E	N	R	O
E	S	T		S	P	Y			D	E	A	L

1-13

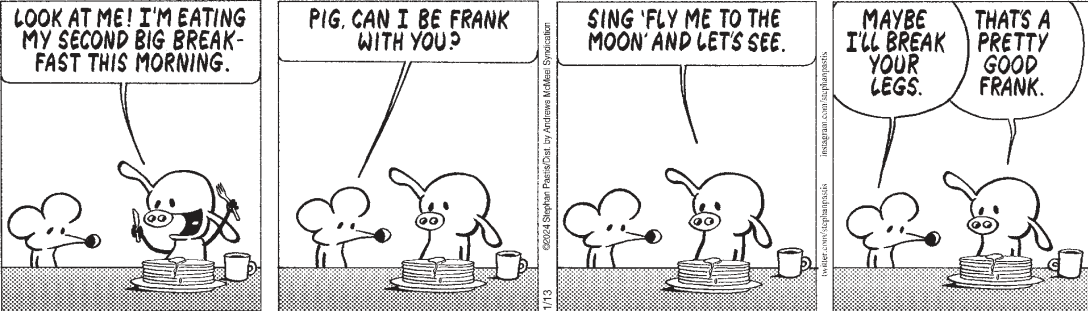
CRYPTOQUIP

QTIN GUETN WDUGUSIYL ISK
KZFHNZK JISL HJ NTZ AHA
LUSEZD LNUSE TIFZ US
WHGGHS? AHYUWZ DZWHDKL.
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SPECIAL FOOD THAT
DETECTIVES CONSUME TO HELP THEM SOLVE
DIFFICULT CRIME CASES: MYSTERY MEAT.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: A equals P

Frazz



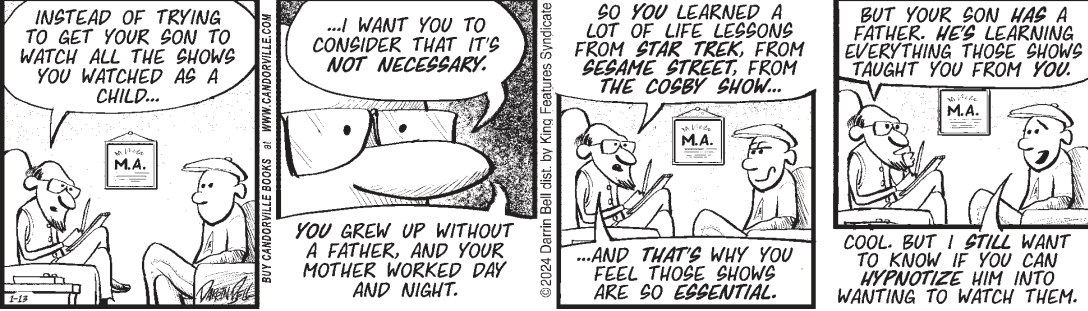
Pearls Before Swine



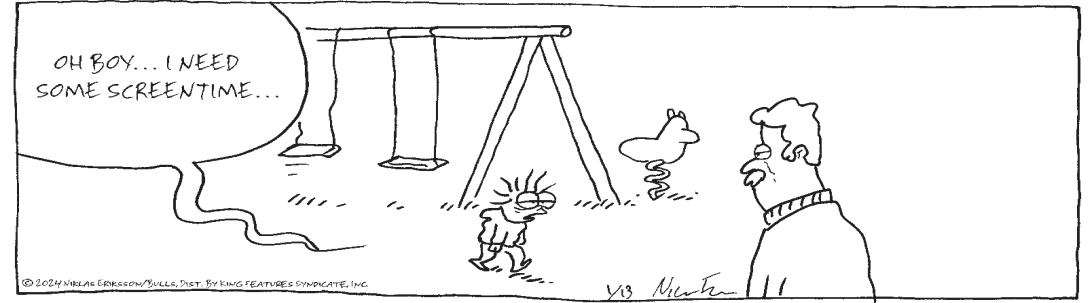
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



stripes.com

Email Jacqueline Smith at ombudsman@stripes.com.

Josh Rogin is a columnist for the Global Opinions section of The Washington Post.

SCOREBOARD

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Wednesday's men's scores	
EAST	
Boston U. 72, American 68	
Bucknell 86, Lehigh 80	
Chicago St. 75, Fairleigh Dickinson 74	
East Carolina 73, Temple 62	
Lafayette 69, Colgate 64	
Loyola (Md.) 71, Army 65	
Marshall 79, Georgia Southern 74	
Navy 80, Holy Cross 70	
Northwestern 76, Penn St. 72	
St. John's 75, Providence 73	
Syracuse 69, Boston College 59	
UMass 81, La Salle 65	
Wright St. 101, Robert Morris 76	
SOUTH	
Belmont 67, Illinois St. 60	
Charleston Southern 86, Gardner-Webb 74	
Charlotte 84, Tulsa 76	
Furman 82, The Citadel 68	
Georgia 76, Arkansas 66	
High Point 84, UNC-Asheville 79	
Jacksonville St. 61, Liberty 51	
Kennesaw St. 88, Stetson 70	
Louisville 80, Miami 71	
Memphis 107, UTSA 101, OT	
Mississippi 103, Florida 85	
Mississippi St. 77, Tennessee 72	
North Carolina 67, NC State 54	
Queens (NC) 78, Florida Gulf Coast 75	
Troy 79, Louisiana-Lafayette 73	
UCF 65, Kansas 60	
Virginia Tech 87, Clemson 72	
W. Carolina 80, ETSU 66	
Winthrop 81, Presbyterian 71	
Wofford 74, Mercer 73	
MIDWEST	
Bradley 86, Evansville 50	
Butler 69, Marquette 62	
Drake 89, Indiana St. 78	
Green Bay 68, IUPUI 58	
Murray St. 77, Missouri St. 53	
N. Iowa 67, Ill.-Chicago 59	
Oakland 70, N. Kentucky 65, OT	
S. Illinois 77, Valparaiso 68	
Saint Louis 88, Saint Joseph's 85	
UConn 80, Xavier 75	
Wisconsin 71, Ohio St. 60	
Youngstown St. 93, Fort Wayne 85	
SOUTHWEST	
Sam Houston St. 78, W. Kentucky 74	
TCU 80, Oklahoma 71	
FAR WEST	
California 82, Colorado 78	
Washington St. 72, Southern Cal 64	
Men's AP Top 25 schedule	
Saturday's games	
No. 1 Purdue (14-1) vs. Penn St. (8-7)	
No. 2 Houston (14-0) at TCU (11-3)	
No. 3 Kansas (13-1) vs. No. 9 Oklahoma (13-1)	
No. 5 Tennessee (11-3) at Georgia (11-3)	
No. 6 Kentucky (11-2) at Texas A&M (9-5)	
No. 7 North Carolina (11-3) vs. Syracuse (10-4)	
No. 8 Arizona (12-3) at Washington St. (10-5)	
No. 11 Duke (11-3) vs. Georgia Tech (8-6)	
No. 14 Baylor (12-2) vs. Cincinnati (12-2)	
No. 15 Wisconsin (11-3) vs. Northwestern (11-3)	
No. 16 Auburn (12-2) vs. LSU (9-5)	
No. 18 BYU (12-2) at UCF (9-4)	
No. 19 San Diego St. (13-2) at New Mexico (13-2)	
No. 20 Utah St. (14-1) at UNLV (7-6)	
No. 21 Clemson (11-3) vs. Boston College (10-4)	
No. 22 Creighton (11-4) vs. St. John's (11-4)	
No. 25 Texas (11-3) at West Virginia (5-9)	
Wednesday's women's scores	
EAST	
American 91, Boston U. 87, 2OT	
Army 55, Loyola (Md.) 45	
Colgate 58, Lafayette 46	
Duquesne 71, George Washington 54	
Holy Cross 69, Navy 54	
La Salle 75, St. Bonaventure 71	
Lehigh 69, Bucknell 63	
UConn 85, Providence 41	
Villanova 53, Georgetown 51, OT	
SOUTH	
Charleston Southern 83, Gardner-Webb 61	
Chattanooga 66, Mercer 57	
George Mason 79, Davidson 41	
High Point 64, UNC-Asheville 50	
Jacksonville St. 78, Liberty 63	
Middle Tennessee 64, Louisiana Tech 61, OT	
Old Dominion 71, Coastal Carolina 57	
Presbyterian 59, Winthrop 43	
Radford 64, Longwood 59	
Richmond 79, UMass 65	
South Florida 68, Tulsa 52	
Troy 90, Louisiana-Lafayette 44	
UAB 73, East Carolina 64	
UTSA 73, FAU 60	
VCU 57, Fordham 54	
W. Kentucky 76, Sam Houston St. 60	
MIDWEST	
Akron 70, Cent. Michigan 62	
Ball St. 67, Buffalo 62	
Bowling Green 69, E. Michigan 57	
Chicago St. 105, Cougars 37	
Cincinnati 64, UCF 63	
Cleveland St. 74, Detroit 53	
Creighton 89, Butler 53	
Fort Wayne 79, Oakland 59	
Illinois St. 76, S. Illinois 43	
Indiana 75, Penn St. 67	
Iowa 96, Purdue 71	
Iowa St. 74, West Virginia 64	
Kansas 87, Baylor 66	
Kansas St. 74, Oklahoma 57	
Kent St. 69, Miami (Ohio) 38	
Loyola Chicago 61, Rhode Island 56	
N. Illinois 67, Ohio 62	
Northwestern 74, Wisconsin 69	
Toledo 82, W. Michigan 55	
SOUTHWEST	
Houston 79, BYU 69	
Oklahoma St. 71, Texas Tech 58	
Texas 72, TCU 60	
FAR WEST	
Air Force 75, Nevada 71	
Colorado St. 61, Fresno St. 55	
New Mexico 71, Utah St. 67	
UNLV 91, San Jose St. 55	
Wyoming 72, San Diego St. 55	

PRO BASKETBALL

NBA	
EASTERN CONFERENCE	
Atlantic Division	
	W L Pct GB
Boston	29 8 .784 —
Philadelphia	23 13 .639 5½
New York	22 15 .595 7
Brooklyn	16 21 .432 13
Toronto	15 23 .395 14½
Southeast Division	
	W L Pct GB
Miami	21 16 .568 —
Orlando	21 16 .568 —
Atlanta	15 21 .417 5½
Charlotte	8 27 .229 12
Washington	6 31 .162 15
Central Division	
	W L Pct GB
Milwaukee	25 12 .676 —
Indiana	22 15 .595 3
Cleveland	21 15 .583 3½
Chicago	18 21 .462 8
Detroit	3 35 .079 22½
WESTERN CONFERENCE	
Southwest Division	
	W L Pct GB
New Orleans	23 15 .605 —
Dallas	22 16 .579 1
Houston	18 18 .500 4
Memphis	14 23 .378 8½
San Antonio	6 30 .167 16
Northwest Division	
	W L Pct GB
Minnesota	26 11 .703 —
Oklahoma City	25 11 .694 ½
Denver	26 13 .667 1
Utah	19 20 .487 8
Portland	10 26 .278 15½
Pacific Division	
	W L Pct GB
L.A. Clippers	24 13 .649 —
Sacramento	23 14 .622 1
Phoenix	19 18 .514 5
L.A. Lakers	19 19 .500 5½
Golden State	17 20 .459 7
Wednesday's games	
Sacramento 123, Charlotte 98	
San Antonio 130, Detroit 108	
Indiana 112, Washington 104	
Boston 127, Minnesota 120, OT	
Oklahoma City 128, Miami 120	
Atlanta 139, Philadelphia 132, OT	
Chicago 124, Houston 119, OT	
New Orleans 141, Golden State 105	
Utah 124, Denver 111	
L.A. Clippers 126, Toronto 120	
Thursday's games	
Brooklyn at Cleveland	
Boston at Milwaukee	
Portland at Oklahoma City	
New York at Dallas	
Phoenix at L.A. Lakers	
Friday's games	
Houston at Detroit	
Indiana at Atlanta	
Sacramento at Philadelphia	
Charlotte at San Antonio	
Golden State at Chicago	
L.A. Clippers at Memphis	
Orlando at Miami	
Portland at Minnesota	
Toronto at Utah	
New Orleans at Denver	
Saturday's games	
Houston at Boston	
Washington at Atlanta	
Golden State at Milwaukee	
New York at Memphis	
Orlando at Oklahoma City	
Chicago at San Antonio	
New Orleans at Dallas	
L.A. Lakers at Utah	
Sunday's games	
Indiana at Denver	
Charlotte at Miami	
L.A. Clippers at Minnesota	
Sacramento at Milwaukee	
Phoenix at Portland	
Scoring leaders	
Through Wednesday	
	G FG FT PTS AVG
Embiid, PHI	27 314 276 935 34.6
Doncic, DAL	34 388 231 1142 33.6
Antokmpo, MIL	36 420 277 1132 31.4
G.-Alxnder, OKC	35 395 266 1099 31.4
Durant, PHO	30 311 203 889 29.6
Tatum, BOS	34 321 198 951 28.0
Fox, SAC	31 309 147 866 27.9
Young, ATL	34 292 248 946 27.8
Mitchell, CLE	27 255 141 735 27.2

PRO HOCKEY

NHL	
EASTERN CONFERENCE	
Atlantic Division	
	GP W L OT Pts GF GA
Boston	40 24 8 8 56 136 109
Florida	40 26 12 2 54 128 100
Toronto	38 21 10 7 49 140 121
Tampa Bay	42 20 17 5 45 137 145
Detroit	40 20 16 4 44 144 136
Montreal	40 17 17 6 40 113 140
Buffalo	41 17 20 4 38 122 139
Ottawa	36 14 22 0 28 119 131
Metropolitan Division	
	GP W L OT Pts GF GA
N.Y. Rangers	39 26 11 2 54 132 112
Carolina	40 22 13 5 49 137 122
Philadelphia	41 21 14 6 48 120 115
N.Y. Islanders	40 18 12 10 46 123 135
New Jersey	38 21 15 2 44 135 136
Washington	38 19 13 6 44 94 117
Pittsburgh	39 20 15 4 44 121 106
Columbus	42 13 20 9 35 126 155
WESTERN CONFERENCE	
Central Division	
	GP W L OT Pts GF GA
Winnipeg	40 27 9 4 58 137 94
Colorado	42 27 12 3 57 155 130
Dallas	40 24 11 5 53 149 122
Nashville	41 22 18 1 45 129 130
Arizona	39 20 17 2 42 118 117
St. Louis	39 20 18 1 41 110 125
Minnesota	40 17 19 4 38 118 134
Chicago	41 12 27 2 26 95 153
Pacific Division	
	GP W L OT Pts GF GA
Vancouver	41 27 11 3 57 160 107
Vegas	41 23 13 5 51 133 115
Los Angeles	37 20 10 7 47 124 94
Edmonton	37 21 15 1 43 133 114
Seattle	40 17 14 9 43 111 117
Calgary	41 18 18 5 41 127 134
Anaheim	40 14 25 1 29 102 133
San Jose	41 9 29 3 21 81 171
Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.	
Wednesday's games	
Philadelphia 3, Montreal 2, SO	
Dallas 7, Minnesota 2	
Colorado 3, Vegas 0	
Thursday's games	
Anaheim at Carolina	
Edmonton at Detroit	
Los Angeles at Florida	
New Jersey at Tampa Bay	
Ottawa at Buffalo	
San Jose at Montreal	
Seattle at Washington	
Toronto at N.Y. Islanders	
Vancouver at Pittsburgh	
Chicago at Winnipeg	
N.Y. Rangers at St. Louis	
Calgary at Arizona	
Boston at Vegas	
Friday's games	
Nashville at Dallas	
Philadelphia at Minnesota	
Saturday's games	
N.Y. Rangers at Washington	
San Jose at Ottawa	
Vancouver at Buffalo	
New Jersey at Florida	
Anaheim at Tampa Bay	
Colorado at Toronto	
Edmonton at Montreal	
Los Angeles at Detroit	
Philadelphia at Winnipeg	
Pittsburgh at Carolina	
Seattle at Columbus	
Arizona at Minnesota	
Boston at St. Louis	
Dallas at Chicago	
N.Y. Islanders at Nashville	
Calgary at Vegas	
Sunday's games	
Washington at N.Y. Rangers	
Detroit at Toronto	
PWHL	
	W L T OW OL Pts GF GA
Minnesota	3 0 0 0 0 9 9 3
Montreal	1 1 0 1 0 5 9 8
New York	1 2 0 0 0 3 9 9
Toronto	1 2 0 0 0 3 4 9
Ottawa	0 0 0 0 1 1 2 3
Boston	0 1 0 0 0 0 2 3
Teams awarded three (3) points for a regulation win, two (2) points for an overtime or shootout win, one (1) point for an overtime or shootout loss, and zero (0) points for a regulation time loss.	
Wednesday's games	
Montreal 6, New York 3	
Minnesota 3, Toronto 1	
Saturday's games	
Ottawa at Toronto	
Boston at Montreal	
Sunday's game	
New York at Minnesota	

TENNIS

Hobart International	
Wednesday	
At Hobart International Tennis Centre	
Hobart, Australia	
Purse: \$267,082	
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor	
Women's Singles	
Round of 16	
Viktoriya Tomova, Bulgaria, def. Tatjana Maria (9), Germany, 6-0, 6-1.	
Arantxa Rus, Netherlands, def. Varvara Gracheva (8), Russia, 6-2, 6-3.	
Elise Mertens (1), Belgium, def. Anna-Karolina Schmiedlova, Slovakia, 6-2, 6-3.	
Yuan Yue, China, def. Wang Xinyu (4), China, 7-5, 6-3.	
Zhu Lin (3), China, def. Caroline Dolehide, United States, 5-7, 6-3, 6-4.	
Emma Navarro (2), United States, def. Magdalena Frech, Poland, 6-3, 6-3.	
Daria Saville, Australia, def. Sofia Kenin (6), United States, 7-6 (3), 6-1.	
Yulia Putintseva, Kazakhstan, def. Marie Bouzkova (5), Czech Republic, 6-4, 1-6, 6-3.	
Adelaide International 1	
Wednesday	
At Memorial Drive Tennis Centre	
Adelaide, Australia	
Purse: \$922,573	
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor	
Women's Singles	
Round of 16	
Jessica Pegula (2), United States, def. Bernarda Pera, United States, 4-6, 6-2, 6-3.	
Laura Siegemund, Germany, def. Ana Bogdan, Romania, 6-4, 7-5.	
Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, Russia, def. Katerina Siniakova, Czech Republic, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2.	
Marta Kostyuk, Ukraine, def. Taylor Townsend, United States, 6-3, 2-6, 6-4.	
Jelena Ostapenko (6), Latvia, def. Caroline Garcia, France, 6-4, 5-7, 6-4.	
Elena Rybakina (1), Kazakhstan, def.	

DEALS	
Wednesday's transactions	
BASEBALL	
Major League Baseball	
American League	
BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Agreed to terms with INF Errol Robinson on a minor league contract.	
CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Sent 3B Zach Re-millard outright to Charlotte (IL).	
KANSAS CITY ROYALS — Agreed to terms with RHPs Dan Altavilla, Luis Cessa and Tyler Duffey, LHP Sam Long, C Rodolfo Duran and INFs Mike Brosseau and Cam Devanney on minor league contracts. Agreed to terms with LHP Kris Bubic on a contract.	
NEW YORK YANKEES — Named Pat Roessler assistant hitting coach.	
SEATTLE MARINERS — Named Danny Farquhar pitching strategist and assistant pitching coach. Claimed RHP Mauricio Llovera off waivers from Boston.	
TEXAS RANGERS — Agreed to terms with RHPs Shane Greene, Jonathan Holder and Austin Pruitt on minor league contracts.	
National League	
ATLANTA BRAVES — Agreed to terms with RHP Huaras Ynoa on a contract.	
COLORADO ROCKIES — Agreed to terms with RHP Cal Quatrill on a contract.	
NEW YORK METS — Agreed to terms with RHP Yackels Rios on a minor league contract.	
PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Agreed to terms with RHP J.T. Brubaker on a contract.	
ST. LOUIS CARDINALS — Named Paul Be-monti Coach at Springfield (TL) and Elvis Ro-riguez hitting coach at Peoria (ML).	
BASKETBALL	
National Basketball Association	
CHICAGO BULLS — Assigned F Julian Phillips to the Windy City Bulls of the G League.	
INDIANA PACERS — Assigned Gs Ben Sheppard and Jarace Walker to the Indiana mad ants of the G League.	
LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS — Re-signed F Kawhi Leonard to a veteran extension. Assigned G Kobe Brown and F Mason Plumlee to the Ontario Clippers of the G League.	
LOS ANGELES LAKERS — Assigned G Ja-len Hood-Schifino and F Maxwell Lewis to the South Bay Lakers of the G League.	
MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES — Assigned F Jake LaRavia to the Memphis Hustle of the G League.	
MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES — Re-called Fs Leonard Miller and Josh Minott from the Iowa Wolves of the G League.	
WASHINGTON WIZARDS — Recalled G Patrick Baldwin, Jr. from the Capital City Go-Go of the G League.	
FOOTBALL	
National Football League	
ATLANTA FALCONS — Signed WRs Chris Blair and Austin Mack, DBs Natrone Brooks and Lukas Denis, LBs Milo Eifler and Donovan Mutin, OTs John Leglue, Tyler Vrabel and Ryan Swoboda, G Justin Shaffer, RB Carlos Washington, S Tre Tarpley and FB Robert Burns to futures contracts for 2024.	
BALTIMORE RAVENS — Designated WR Devin Duvernay to return from injured reserve to practice. Signed WR Dan Chisena. Released RB Jake Funk from the practice squad.	
CHICAGO BEARS — Signed DB Douglas Coleman and LS Cameron Lyons to futures contracts.	
CLEVELAND BROWNS — Designated S Grant Delpit to return from injured reserve to practice. Signed CB Kalon Barnes to the practice squad.	
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Declined the ac-tivation of OT Kule Tenuta from injured re-serve.	
KANSAS CITY CHIEFS — Signed QB Ian Book, WR Jacob Copeland RB Hassan Hall and DE Jordan Smith to future contracts for 2024.	

Cristina Bucsa, Spain, 6-3, 7-5.
Daria Kasatkina, Russia, def. Anna Kalin-skaya, Russia, 5-7, 6-4, 7-5.
Ekaterina Alexandrova, Russia, def. Ve-ronika Kudermetova (8), Russia, 6-4, 7-5.
Men's Singles
Round of 16
Christopher O'Connell, Australia, def. Alexander Shevchenko, Russia, 6-3, 6-1.
Nicolas Jarry (2), Chile, def. Matteo Arnaldi, Italy, 6-7 (5), 7-6 (7), 6-4.
Jack Draper, Britain, def. Miomir Kecma-novic, Serbia, 5-7, 7-6 (9), 7-6 (7).
Sebastian Korda (3), United States, def. Lorenzo Sonego, Italy, 6-4, 7-6 (10).
Tommy Paul (1), United States, def. Alex Bolt, Australia, 6-3, 6-2.
Jiri Lehecka (7), Czech Republic, def. Du-san Lajovic, Serbia, 7-5, 4-6, 6-3.
Alexander Bublik (8), Kazakhstan, def. Daniel Evans, Britain, 4-6, 6-2, 6-1.
World Tour ASB Classic
Wednesday
At ASB Tennis Arena
Auckland, New Zealand
Purse: \$661,585
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Men's Singles
Round of 16
Alexandre Muller, France, def. Francisco Cerundolo (3), Argentina, 6-1, 6-1.
Daniel Altmaier, Germany, def. Felix Auger-Aliassime (4), Canada, 7-6 (9), 7-5.
Taro Daniel, Japan, def. Max Purcell (8), Australia, 6-2, 6-4.
Ben Shelton (1), United States, def. Fab-ian Marozsan, Hungary, 6-3, 6-4.
Roberto Carballes Baena, Spain, def. Se-bastian Ofner (7), Austria, 7-5, 6-3.
Arthur Fils (6), France, def. Nuno Borges, Portugal, 6-2, 6-0.
Alejandro Tabilo, Chile, def. Botic Van de Zandschulp, Netherlands, 7-5, 6-3.
Cameron Norrie (2), Britain, def. Luca van Assche, France, 6-3, 6-7 (6), 6-1.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Signed RB Jaret Patterson to a futures contract.
LOS ANGELES RAMS — Designated B Duke Shelley to return from injured re-serve to practice. Signed DE Earnest Brown to the practice squad.
MIAMI DOLPHINS — Signed LB Melvin In-gram from the practice squad to the active roster. Signed OLB Malik Reed to the practice squad.
NEW YORK GIANTS — Signed LB Tomon Fox to a futures contract.
PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Signed P Brad Wing to the practice squad. Reinstated S Damontae Kazeem from the suspended list. Placed S Trenton Thompson on injured re-serve.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Signed DB Ter-rance Mitchell and DE Sam Okuayinonu to the practice squad. Placed DB Taylor Haw-kins and CB Jason Verrett on the practice squad injured list.
SEATTLE SEAHWKS — Announced a mu-tual agreement with head coach Pete Car-roll to leave his position and become an advisor with the organization.
HOCKEY
National Hockey League
ANAHEIM DUCKS — Claimed D Gustav Lindstrom off waivers from Montreal.
ARIZONA AVALANCHE — Returned LW Justin Kirkland to Tucson (AHL) on loan.
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS — Reassigned LW Brett Seney to Rockford (AHL).
COLORADO AVALANCHE — Placed RW Chris Wagner on waivers.
DALLAS STARS — Recalled G Matthew Murray from Texas (AHL).
DETROIT RED WINGS — Assigned F Alex-andre Doucet to Toledo (ECHL) from Grand Rapids (AHL).
EDMONTON OILERS — Recalled D Philip Kemp from Bakersfield (AHL).
FLORIDA PANTHERS — Reassigned D Evan Nausea from Florida (ECHL) to Char-lotte (AHL). Returned F Mackie Samoskev-ich to Charlotte.
TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS — Returned G Dennis Hildeby to Toronto (AHL). Recalled G Ilya Samsonov from Toronto.
VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS — Returned D Kaedan Korczak to Henderson (AHL). Ac-tivated G Adin Hill from injured reserve.
WASHINGTON CAPITALS — Reassigned G Mitch Gibson from Hershey (AHL) to South Carolina (ECHL).
SOCCER
Major League Soccer
AUSTIN FC — Signed M Micah Burton to a contract through 2027
COLORADO RAPIDS — Signed G Adam Beaudry to a four-year contract. Acquired M Jesper Loffelsend from Real Salt Lake in exchange for a second-round 2025 Super-Draft pick, a 2024 international roster slot and \$100,000 in conditional general alloca-tion money (GAM).
D.C. UNITED — Named Troy Lesesne head coach.
FC CINCINNATI — Transferred F Brandon Vazquez to CF Monterey (Liga Mex).
FC DALLAS — Signed D Omar Gonzalez to a one-year contract.
ORLANDO CITY FC — Signed F Facundo Torres to a three-year contract.
INTER MIAMI CF — Signed D Tyler Hall to a contract through 2027 and D Israel Boat-wright to a contract through 2027.
PORTLAND TIMBERS — Signed D Sawyer Jura to a MLS NEXT Pro contract through 2025 and will join the first team on an MLS contract for 2026 and 2027.
REAL SALT LAKE — Signed D Kevin Boni-la to a one-year contract.
SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES — Signed M Jack Skahan to a contract through 2025 with an option for 2026.
National Women's Soccer League
WASHINGTON SPIRIT — Signed D Casey Krueger to a three-year contract.
NJ/NY GOTHM FC — Named Saara Has-soun chief of staff and Zayne M. Thomp-son chief soccer officer.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

No. 1 ranking brings validation, pressure

By DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

Phil Martelli still remembers, nearly two decades later, the exact moment when he realized the team he was coaching at tiny Saint Joseph's in Philadelphia was about to become the No. 1-ranked team in college basketball.

"I was at home, watching Stanford play somebody in the Pac-10, and they were the other team — they were 1 and we were 2," Martelli said. "And I was watching the game and I realized that they were going to lose, and I remember turning to my wife and saying, 'Let's go get something to eat. We're about to be the top team in the country and it's going to get crazy.'"

They went to Bertucci's, a pizza joint in the Philly suburbs, and had a relatively peaceful dinner. The next morning, they went to Mass, then headed to Staten Island to watch Central Connecticut State, where Martelli's son was an assistant coach.

"Then on Monday," Martelli recalled in an interview with The Associated Press, "I gathered my team. And I said to them, 'At some point in practice our athletic director, Don DiJulia — he's going to come in and tell us we're the No. 1 team in the country. But that does not change who we are. There may be more attention on us. Just be ready to be thankful.'"

Indeed, when the fresh AP Top 25 was released March 8, 2004, the Hawks were No. 1.

The stay would be brief — they lost to Xavier that week in the Atlantic 10 Tournament — but it left an indelible impression on Martelli and the entire program. Saint Joseph's had become one of just 61



Villanova's Jalen Brunson, left, Mikal Bridges and their teammates celebrate after the NCAA championship game against North Carolina on April 4, 2016. Villanova reached No. 1 for the first time earlier that season.

schools to ever reach No. 1 in the 75-year history of The Associated Press men's basketball poll, even if it was destined to become one of seven to be there for a single week.

"It's funny," said Martelli, now an assistant coach at Michigan. "I remember right where I was sitting. I have this little den off my family room, and I sat in that den and I was like, 'I cannot believe this is going to happen.'"

Martelli saw reaching No. 1 as validation for a program that had

some success in the 1960s but had never achieved national acclaim. Other coaches, players and fans tend to view reaching No. 1 through much different lenses.

Duke has spent 145 weeks there, more than any program in poll history, and UCLA once spent 46 consecutive weeks on top, a record that may never be broken. For them, and schools such as Kentucky and North Carolina, it may not be such a big deal.

For a school like Saint Joseph's

or city rival Villanova? It's a truly big deal.

It brings national attention to the school, and with that flows donations and fan support. Games are suddenly sold out, tip-offs are dictated by television, and merchandise and ticket sales help the bottom line for the entire athletic department.

Jay Wright remembers the first time Villanova reached the top spot. For all the success the Wildcats had under Rollie Massimino, including the 1985 national championship, they had never been No. 1 until Feb. 8, 2016.

"I do remember the excitement of everybody saying it's the first time. I remember that," said Wright, who led the Wildcats to the national title that season, and another two years later, and now serves as a TV analyst following his 2022 retirement.

"I remember the first time we broke into the top 20," he continued. "I remember my wife and kids made a little poster for me when I walked in the garage door. Had it on the garage door: 'Top 20 Congratulations, Daddy.' That was the first time we were in the top 20 in the AP Top 25, you know, in our tenure at Villanova. That was a big deal."

The beauty of college basketball is that the champion is decided on the court, rather than the court of public opinion. Ever since its inception in 1949, the AP Top 25 has generated season-long debate over who is best in the land — and then the teams sort things out at tournament time.



Syracuse (11-4)
at No. 7 North Carolina (12-3)
AFN-Sports
6 p.m. Saturday CET
2 a.m. Sunday JKT



No. 5 Tennessee (11-4)
at Georgia (12-3)
AFN-Atlantic
6 p.m. Saturday CET
2 a.m. Sunday JKT

In fact, the last team to enter the NCAA Tournament ranked No. 1 and actually win it was Kentucky in 2012. It's only happened four times since the tourney expanded to 64 teams in 1985.

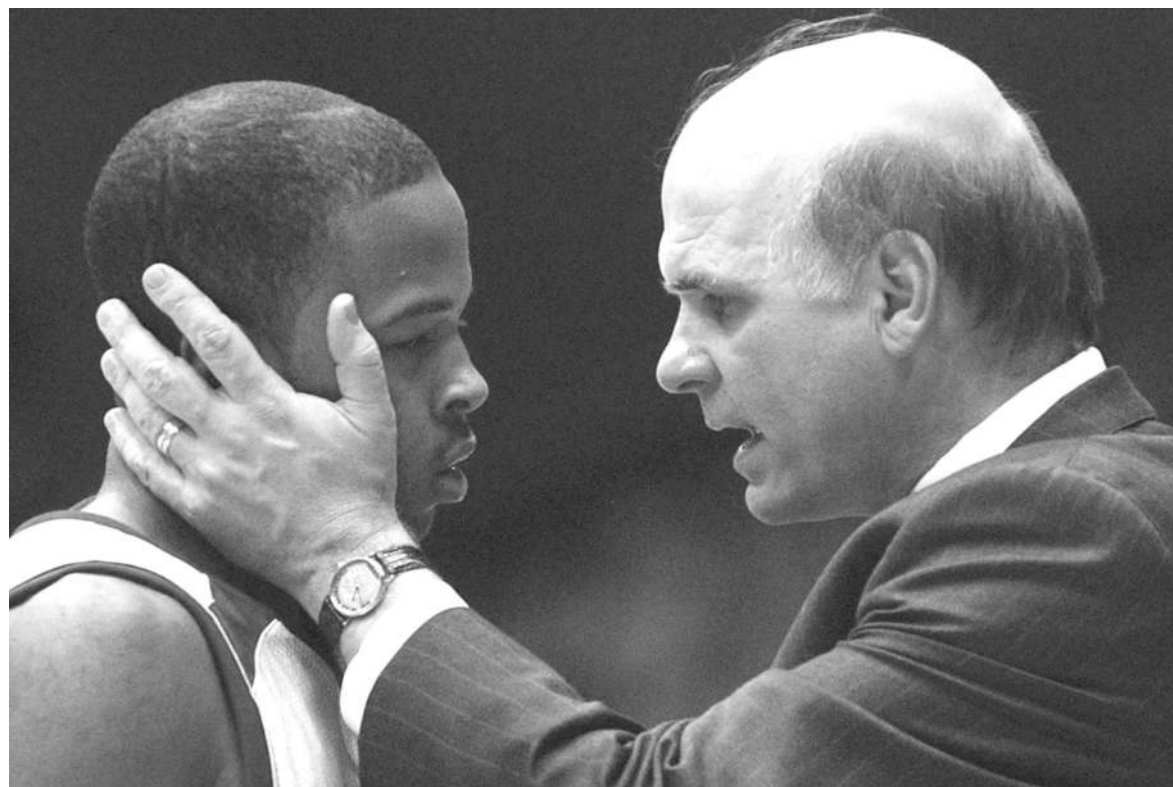
Yet having the "1" next to a school's name on TV and in newspapers and on websites means something to those who spend their careers striving for excellence. And it means something to the fans.

"I do think fans care about it more than players. The coaches are the last on that list," Michigan State coach Tom Izzo said with a laugh. "But it is an honor. I do respect it."

Izzo acknowledged an undeniable pressure that comes with being No. 1. More people are paying attention, nobody wants to get knocked from the pedestal once they reach it, yet every opposing team will have put a little extra into preparing for a game against the nation's top-ranked team.

"We were the No. 1 team at Louisville and Kentucky," said Rick Pitino, now the coach at St. John's, "and I will say, the '96 pressure was as much pressure as I've experienced at Kentucky and Louisville, that year, because it was a given from start to finish that we were the prohibitive favorite to win it all, and every night you had to bring it."

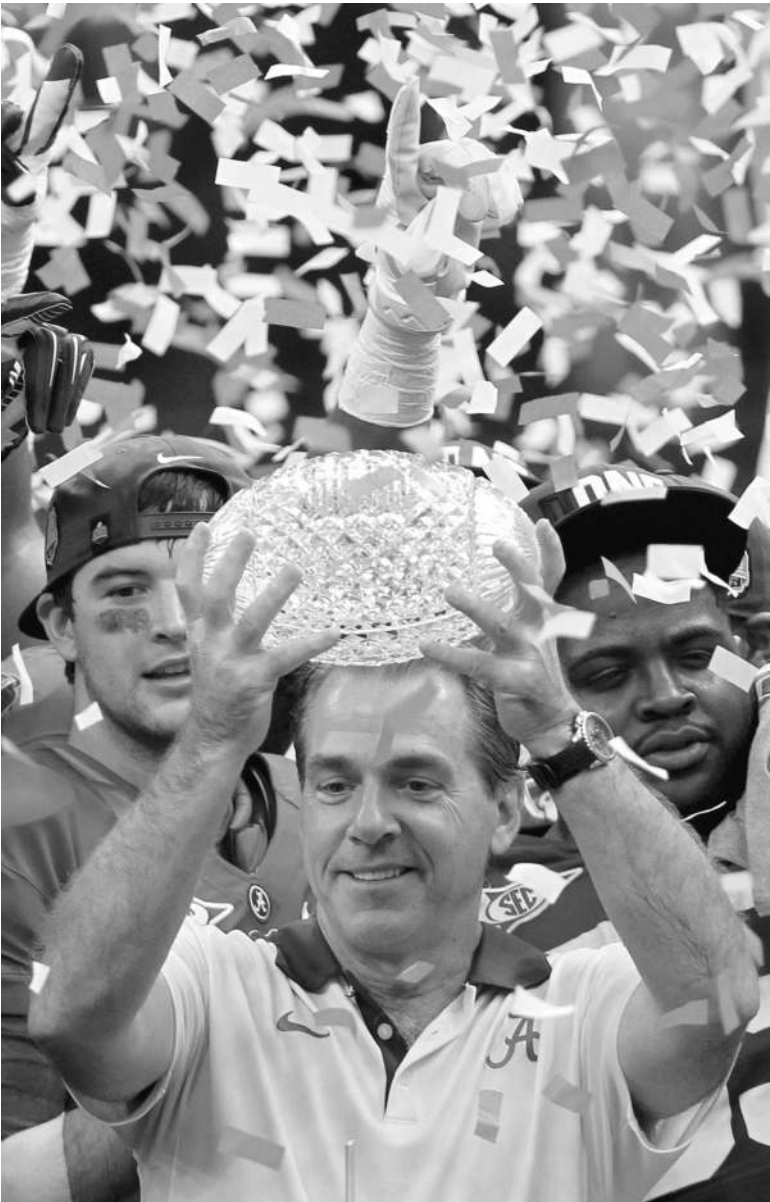
"It was always a big deal for us," Wright said of becoming No. 1. "I know our school talked about benefiting from it, that people were talking about your university every week, which is really the main goal of sports on a college campus: to market the university. And the poll is huge in that your name is out there nationally, all week, you know? For consecutive weeks. And we felt like that was just great for us and our program, but really beneficial for the university."



AL BEHRMAN/AP

Saint Joseph's coach Phil Martelli talks with guard Dwayne Lee during a game in March 2003. A year later, Martelli's Hawks were undefeated and voted No. 1 for the first time. They lost that week.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



Above: Head coach Nick Saban holds up the trophy as he celebrates with his players after winning his second national championship at Alabama with a 21-0 victory over LSU on Jan 8, 2012. Below: Saban won his first national title as a head coach during his tenure at LSU.



Retires: Saban restored Tide program to powerhouse status

FROM FROM 48 seasons at Alabama. He won his first with LSU in 2003. His Tide teams were ranked No. 1 in the AP poll in a remarkable 15 straight seasons, breaking the old record of seven held by Miami.

Saban’s wife, Terry, posted about their “incredible run” at Alabama on the Facebook page for Nick’s Kids Foundation.

“We hope that the Saban legacy will be about helping others and making a positive difference in people’s lives as well as the winning tradition on the field,” Terry Saban wrote.

Saban’s tutelage helped launch the head coaching careers of Georgia’s Kirby Smart, Texas’ Steve Sarkisian and Mississippi’s Lane Kiffin, among others.

He finished just shy of the top in his final season, leading the Tide from a shaky start to a Southeastern Conference championship and back into the College Football Playoff before falling in overtime to Michigan in a semifinal game at the Rose Bowl.

Alabama athletic director Greg Byrne called him “one of the greatest coaches of all time, in any sport.”

Saban led the Tide to nine SEC championships and won his first national title at Alabama with a 14-0 season in 2009. Titles came

again in 2011, 2012, 2015, 2017 and 2020. He also won the SEC with LSU in 2001 and 2003.

After a 7-6 debut in 2007, Saban won at least 10 games in his final 16 seasons.

It wasn’t until the rise of Dabo Swinney’s Clemson teams in the late 2010s and later Smart’s Georgia Bulldogs that any school could be considered a consistent threat to the Tide.

Saban has stepped away as the fabric of college football undergoes dramatic change. Colorado’s Deion Sanders, a coach who has sought to capitalize on the intervention of players profiting financially from their play on the field, said on social media “College Football just lost the GOAT.”

“WOW! I knew it would happen 1 day soon but not this soon,” he wrote. “The game has change so much that it chased the GOAT away. College football let’s hold up our mirrors and say HONESTLY what u see.”

Saban made a two-year foray into the NFL with the Miami Dolphins before returning to college to revive one of the nation’s most storied programs, which hadn’t won a national title in 15 years. Saban is 297-71-1 as a college head coach, with stops at Toledo, Michigan State and LSU. But Alabama is where he cemented his status as one of college football’s greatest coaches.

He coached Alabama’s first four Heisman Trophy winners and numerous NFL players, going 206-29, a winning clip of 87.7%. His teams produced 44 first-round draft picks, including last year’s No. 1 quarterback Bryce Young.

During that span, he also adapted to the changing times of up-tempo offenses, churning out high-scoring teams after winning with some of the nation’s best defenses, along with the new NIL and transfer rules.

He led Toledo to a Mid-American Conference championship in 1990, his lone season as that program’s coach. Saban worked as Bill Belichick’s defensive coordinator with the Cleveland Browns for four seasons before becoming the first Michigan State coach to lead his first three teams to bowl games.

“I think he’s the greatest coach in the history of football,” Michigan State basketball coach and longtime Saban friend Tom Izzo said in a telephone interview Wednesday. “There are a lot of great coaches, but what he’s done and the consistency that he did it — in an era where so many people and things are coming at you — is remarkable.”

Saban’s latest team dealt with

Saban coaching record				
Year, College	W	L	T	PCT
1990, Toledo	9	2		.818
1995, Michigan St.	6	5	1	.542
1996, Michigan St.	6	6		.500
1997, Michigan St.	7	5		.583
1998, Michigan St.	6	6		.500
1999, Michigan St.	9	2		.818
2000, LSU	8	4		.667
2001, LSU	10	3		.769
2002, LSU	8	5		.615
2003, LSU	13	1		.929
2004, LSU	9	3		.750
2007, Alabama	7	6		.538
2008, Alabama	12	2		.857
2009, Alabama	14	0		1.000
2010, Alabama	10	3		.769
2011, Alabama	12	1		.923
2012, Alabama	13	1		.929
2013, Alabama	11	2		.846
2014, Alabama	12	2		.857
2015, Alabama	14	1		.933
2016, Alabama	14	1		.933
2017, Alabama	13	1		.929
2018, Alabama	14	1		.933
2019, Alabama	11	2		.846
2020, Alabama	13	0		1.000
2021, Alabama	13	2		.867
2022, Alabama	11	2		.846
2023, Alabama	12	2		.857
Total	297	71	1	.806

Bowl history				
1995 Independence Bowl	—	lost to LSU 45-26.		
1996 Sun Bowl	—	lost to Stanford 38-0.		
1997 Aloha Bowl	—	lost to Washington, 51-23.		
1999 Florida Citrus Bowl	—	beat Florida, 37-34.		
2000 Peach Bowl	—	beat Georgia Tech 28-14.		
2001 Sugar Bowl	—	beat Illinois 47-34.		
2002 Cotton Bowl	—	lost to Texas 35-20.		
2003 Sugar Bowl	—	beat Oklahoma 21-14.		
2004 Peach Bowl	—	beat Miami 40-3.		
2007 Independence Bowl	beat Colorado, 30-24.			
2008 Sugar Bowl	lost to Utah, 31-17.			
2009 BCS Championship	beat Texas, 37-21.			
2010 Capital One Bowl	beat Michigan State, 49-7.			
2011 BCS Championship	beat LSU, 21-0.			
2012 BCS Championship	beat Notre Dame, 42-14.			
2013 Sugar Bowl	lost to Oklahoma, 45-31.			
2014 Sugar Bowl	lost to Ohio State, 42-35.			
2015 Cotton Bowl, CFP National Championship	beat Michigan State, 38-0; beat Clemson, 45-40.			
2016 Peach Bowl, CFP National Championship	beat Washington, 24-7; lost to Clemson, 35-31.			
2017 Sugar Bowl, CFP National Championship	beat Clemson, 24-6; beat Georgia, 26-23.			
2018 Orange Bowl, CFP National Championship	beat Oklahoma, 45-34; lost to Clemson, 44-16.			
2019 Citrus Bowl	beat Michigan, 35-16.			
2020 Rose Bowl, CFP National Championship	beat Notre Dame, 31-14; beat Ohio State, 52-24.			
2021 Cotton Bowl	beat Cincinnati, 27-6; lost to Georgia 33-18.			
2022 Sugar Bowl	lost Kansas State, 45-20.			
2023 Rose Bowl	lost to Michigan, 27-20.			
NFL				
Year, Team	W	L	T	Pct
2005, Miami	9	7		.563
2006, Miami	6	10		.375
Total	15	17		.469

plenty of adversity early, including a loss to Texas, but rebounded with the emergence of quarterback Jalen Milroe to upset then-No. 1 Georgia in the SEC championship game.

SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey feels Saban isn’t done entirely with college football.

“Knowing Nick? He’s not walking away from the game. He’s walking away from a role,” Sankey said.

AP sports writers Larry Lage and Ralph Russo contributed to this report.

NFL

Parting: Belichick thanks fans but mostly players who formed dynasty

FROM PAGE 48

peared in a jacket and tie and spoke first, followed by Kraft. The coach even smiled a couple of times — including when he conceded respect for the media “even though we don’t always see eye to eye.”

He also thanked the fans for “the sendoffs, the parades, the Sundays.” But most of his time was spent thanking the people throughout the organization, especially the more than 1,000 Patriots players he coached in his time there.

“Players win games in the NFL,” Belichick said. “I’ve been very, very fortunate to coach some of the greatest players to ever play the game.”

Kraft called the relationship a marriage that had required work and had come to an end.

“I’m very proud that our partnership lasted for 24 years,” Kraft said. “Bill has taught me a lot over those years, and we had high expectations for what we could achieve together. I think we were the only ones who had those expectations, and I think it’s safe to say we exceeded them.”

“We did,” Belichick agreed. “Thanks to you,” Kraft said.

Belichick, 71, became just the third coach in NFL history to reach 300 career regular-season victories earlier this season, joining Hall of Famers Don Shula and George Halas. With 333 wins including the playoffs, Belichick trails only Shula (347) for the record for victories by a coach.

But the Patriots ended this season 4-13, Belichick’s worst record in 29 seasons as an NFL head coach. It supplanted the 5-11 mark he managed in his last year in Cleveland in 1995 and again in his first year in New England in 2000. Including the playoffs, he ends his Patriots tenure with a 333-178 overall record.

Belichick is expected to resume his pursuit of Shula’s record elsewhere.

With his cutoff hoodies and ever-present scowl, Belichick teamed with quarterback Tom Brady to lead the Patriots to six Super Bowl victories, nine AFC titles and 17 division championships in 19 years. During a less successful — but also tumultuous — stint with the original Cleveland Browns, Belichick earned 37 of his career victories.

It’s not immediately clear who Kraft will tap to replace the future Hall of Famer.

Patriots linebackers coach Jerod Mayo won a Super Bowl ring playing under Belichick and has interviewed for multiple head coaching vacancies since becoming a New England assistant in 2019. Mayo turned down a few in-



STEVEN SENNE/AP

Patriots owner Robert Kraft, left, and former coach Bill Belichick embrace during a news conference Thursday to announce that Belichick, a six-time NFL champion, has agreed to part ways with the team.

terviews last offseason before signing a contract extension to remain with the Patriots.

Mike Vrabel, who was fired earlier this week by the Tennessee Titans and won three Super Bowls with the Patriots, is also expected to be a candidate for the head coaching job.

Belichick had been grooming offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels to replace him before McDaniels left following the 2021 season to become the coach of the Raiders. He has since been fired by Las Vegas. Belichick’s two sons, Steve and Brian, are also on the coaching staff.

Belichick’s exit from the Patriots comes just a day after another coaching great and longtime friend, Nick Saban, announced he’d retire after winning seven college national championships. Saban worked for Belichick’s father, Steve, in the 1980s as a coach at Navy, and Bill Belichick hired Saban as his defensive coordinator when he became Cleveland’s head coach in 1991.

The six Super Bowl wins tie Belichick with pre-merger mentors Halas and Curly Lambeau for the most NFL championships. Belichick also won two rings as Bill Parcells’ defensive coordinator with the New York Giants.

But the Patriots have stumbled to a 29-38 record since Brady departed following the 2019 season and missed the playoffs in three of those four seasons. Beginning in 2001 when Brady became the starting quarterback, the Patriots missed the playoffs only once — when Brady was injured in 2008. This marked New England’s fifth consecutive season without a playoff victory.

Belichick’s subsequent solutions at quarterback haven’t panned out.

Brady’s initial replacement,

Cam Newton, didn’t resemble the player who won the 2015 MVP award and was cut after a 7-9 finish in 2020. Meanwhile, Brady won his seventh Super Bowl ring with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers that same season.

Potential long-term replacement Mac Jones, a 2021 first-round draft choice, was a Pro Bowl selection as a rookie and led New England to the playoffs. But he regressed in Year 2 when Belichick put longtime defensive assistant Matt Patricia in charge of the offense. Jones didn’t fare much better this season when Bill O’Brien returned as offensive coordinator. He was benched four times before being replaced as starter by backup Bailey Zappe for the final six games.

That left the Patriots looking at a lengthy rebuild, with no candidate on the roster to bring stability to the sport’s most important position.

Belichick, who also served as the de facto general manager with final say on personnel decisions, was celebrated for his ingenuity managing the salary cap during the run of Super Bowl success. It included getting stars like Brady and others to accept cap-friendly contracts or adjust their deals to accommodate the signing of other players.

But that acclaim has waned in the years since Brady left, as a run of draft picks and high-priced free agents didn’t live up to expectations. In addition, Belichick has seen several members of his personnel and scouting departments leave for other jobs. The list includes his former player personnel director, Nick Caserio, who was hired as Houston’s general manager in 2021.

Now it won’t be Belichick making the decisions for the Patriots on or off the field.

KEY MOMENTS IN BELICHICK’S CAREER

January 2000 — With Bill Parcells’ resignation as Jets head coach, Belichick was supposed to be elevated to the job. Instead, Belichick scribbled “I resign as HC of the NYJ” on a napkin and attended his introductory press conference only to explain his decision. Soon after, Kraft anointed him as Patriots head coach, replacing the fired Pete Carroll and setting off another NFL-mediated negotiation over compensation.

April 2000 — Patriots select former Michigan quarterback Tom Brady 199th overall in the sixth round of the NFL draft. Belichick stashes him on the roster as the team’s fourth quarterback with Brady appearing in only one game his rookie season. The Patriots finish 5-11 in Belichick’s first season as New England’s coach.

2001 season — Belichick elevates Brady to Drew Bledsoe’s backup and in Week 2 of the season inserts him into the game against the Jets after Bledsoe sustains a concussion and collapsed lung following a hit late in the fourth quarter of a 10-3 loss. Brady is the starter the rest of the season. New England makes a run to the Super Bowl and upsets the St. Louis Rams’ “Greatest Show on Turf” to win the Patriots’ first Super Bowl.

2003 season — The Patriots win the Super Bowl for the second time in three seasons, claiming a 32-29 victory over Carolina in Super Bowl 38 at Reliant Stadium in Houston.

2004 season — The Patriots became a full-fledged dynasty and cement their place as the team of the 2000s with their third Super Bowl victory in four years, beating the Philadelphia Eagles 24-21. New England becomes only the seventh franchise to claim back-to-back titles. No team has achieved the feat since.

2006 season — The Patriots set an NFL mark with 10 straight postseason victories by beating the Jacksonville Jaguars 28-3. New England’s milestone surpasses the nine straight playoff victories by Green Bay in the 1960s.

2007 season — The season starts under a cloud when a New England videographer is accused of recording defensive signals by the Jets during the Patriots’ season-opening win. An NFL investigation validates accusations in a scandal that comes to be known as “Spygate.”

The Patriots respond by averaging an NFL-best 36.8 points per game and beating their first eight opponents by a combined 204 points. Brady wins the league MVP after leading the NFL with 4,806 yards passing and sets the single-season record with 50 TD throws. New England completes a perfect regular season, finishing with a 16-0 record. But its hopes of an unbeaten season end in 17-14 Super Bowl loss to the Giants.

2011 season — The Patriots finish the

regular season 13-3 and earn a trip to their fifth Super Bowl under Belichick. But they are again thwarted by the Giants in a 21-17 loss.

2013 — Aaron Hernandez, who the Patriots drafted in the fourth round in 2010 and was signed to a \$40 million contract extension in 2012, is arrested on a murder charge in friend Odin Lloyd’s slaying. The Patriots release him hours after his arrest. Hernandez is convicted of the murder in 2015.

2014 season — The Patriots finish their third straight regular season with 12 wins and earn their sixth trip to the Super Bowl in Belichick’s tenure. The game ends in dramatic fashion when undrafted rookie Malcolm Butler intercepts Seattle quarterback Russell Wilson’s short throw into the end zone and the Patriots end a decade-long drought without an NFL title by beating the defending champion Seahawks 28-24.

2016 season — The Patriots earn a fifth Super Bowl win in historic fashion, rallying from a 28-3 deficit in the third quarter to beat the Atlanta Falcons 34-28 in Super Bowl 51. It marks the largest comeback in the game’s history and the first overtime Super Bowl. The Patriots join the Pittsburgh Steelers (six), Dallas Cowboys (five) and San Francisco 49ers (five) as the only teams with at least five Super Bowl wins.

2017 season — Patriots make their eighth Super Bowl appearance under Belichick but lose to the Philadelphia Eagles on the “Philly Special” trick play.

2018 season — New England rebounds from the Super Bowl loss to the Eagles and makes its ninth Super Bowl appearance since the start of the Belichick-Brady era, beating the Rams 13-3 to capture the franchise’s sixth Lombardi Trophy. Belichick joins George Halas and Curly Lambeau as the only coaches with six NFL championships.

March 2019 — Brady leaves the Patriots in free agency and joins the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

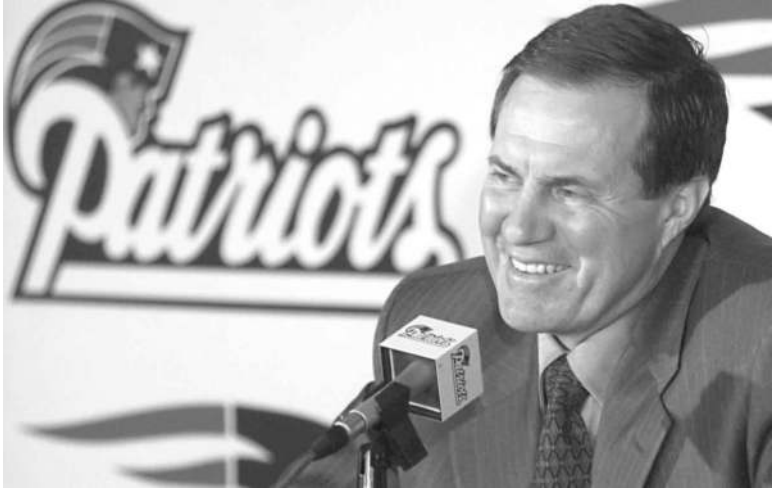
2020 season — The Patriots stumble to a 7-9 finish. Brady leads the Buccaneers to a Super Bowl win, earning his seventh ring.

2021 season — Rookie quarterback Mac Jones helps lead New England to a 10-7 regular season, earning its first playoff appearance since Brady’s departure. But the Patriots are bounced 47-17 in the wild-card round by Buffalo.

2022 season — The Patriots stumble to an 8-9 finish, their second losing season since Brady’s exit.

2023 season — Jones is benched with six games to play and the Patriots finish 4-13, the worst record of Belichick’s NFL coaching career.

Jan. 11, 2024 — Belichick and Kraft agree to part ways after 24 seasons and six Super Bowl championships.



VICTORIA AROCHO/AP

New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick addresses questions about the upcoming NFL Draft during a news conference at Foxboro Stadium on April 12, 2000, the year the Patriots drafted Tom Brady.

NFL

Carroll out after 14 seasons in Seattle

By **TIM BOOTH**
Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — Pete Carroll's mantra was "always compete" — it was the title of a book, after all.

And he did right up to the point where the ownership of the Seattle Seahawks decided it was time for a new voice to be in charge following 14 seasons.

After bringing the Seahawks two NFC championships and the team's only Super Bowl title, Carroll will no longer be the head coach in Seattle following the longest stretch of success in franchise history.

The decision seems less a firing and more a separation, but one the 72-year-old Carroll was at least somewhat forced to accept following discussions with ownership. Carroll will move into an undefined advisory role within the organization, according to Wednesday's statement from owner Jody Allen.

But it's clear that Carroll wanted to continue in the role he had and see if he could produce one more title team.

"I competed pretty hard to be the coach, just so you know," Carroll said during an emotional farewell news conference. "I just wanted to make sure I stood up for all of our coaches and the players and the things that we had accomplished. Not just so we could be the coach still, but so we could continue to have a chance to be successful and keep the organization going. That's what I was fighting for."

"In that regard, that's what I was representing in our discus-



LINDSEY WASSON/AP

Former Seattle Seahawks head coach Pete Carroll becomes emotional while speaking at a news conference Wednesday in Renton, Wash. Carroll will remain with the organization as an advisor.

sions," Carroll continued. "And we got to a good part, good, clean spot where it made sense, and I went along with their intentions."

With staff from throughout the facility, assistant coaches and a few current players filling the auditorium, Carroll spoke for more than 30 minutes through a mix of tears and laughter about a tenure that will be difficult for any coach to match in the future.

"I'm thrilled that we've had this run. I really am. This level of consistency that we've demonstrated is such that it makes you proud," Carroll said.

Carroll will step aside as the most successful coach in franchise history, but with an unsatis-

factory conclusion after several seasons of middling results, including a 9-8 record and no playoff berth in his final season.

He'll forever be lauded as the first coach to bring the Lombardi Trophy to Seattle with the Super Bowl 48 victory over Denver. Carroll finished with a 137-69-1 record in the regular season with the Seahawks. He led Seattle to five NFC West titles and 10 playoff victories.

But Carroll and the organization never fully recovered from what happened in Super Bowl 49 and Russell Wilson's goal-line interception in the final seconds. The core that took Seattle to those title games eventually unraveled and

"I competed pretty hard to be the coach, just so you know."

Pete Carroll
former Seahawks coach

while Carroll tried several different reboots, the Seahawks never again found that level of talent and chemistry to experience another title and wash away the memories of that painful loss.

Seattle also plateaued toward the end of Carroll's time, finishing with a losing record in 2021 followed by consecutive 9-8 seasons while falling short of becoming more of a contender in the NFC West.

The postseason was another problem. Seattle has not advanced past the divisional round since the 2014 playoffs and lost in the wildcard round in three of its past four postseason appearances.

"We lost our edge, really, the edge to be great, which was really how we ran the football and how we played defense. It wasn't as good as it needed to be," Carroll said.

The future for Seattle will be under the watch of a different coach and with general manager John Schneider entirely in control of personnel.

One of the unique aspects of Seattle's success was the marriage between Schneider and Carroll. It was Carroll that was hired

first in January 2010 before bringing aboard Schneider as his running mate. It was Carroll that retained final control over personnel decisions.

Now, it's flipped. Schneider will be making the call on the next coach and personnel.

"It's why this happened," Carroll said. "You want to know? I want him to have this chance. It's been 14 years he's been sitting there waiting for his opportunity and he deserves it. And he's great at what he does."

Despite the lackluster final chapter, Carroll's tenure in Seattle will be viewed as the most successful run since the franchise arrived in 1976. He ushered in a player-friendly environment built around allowing personalities to show within the defined structure of his system. Carroll preached competition, but made it fun along the way.

The Seahawks thrived under Carroll with the personalities of Marshawn Lynch, Doug Baldwin and Richard Sherman, for example. They plucked Wilson out of the third round and watched him help the team win a Super Bowl in his second season. Known for his defensive mind, Carroll created a defense that was the best of its era for multiple seasons and was at the foundation of those back-to-back teams which won NFC titles.

Several players expressed their appreciation for Carroll on Wednesday, including Wilson. Geno Smith, Bobby Wagner, Noah Fant and Tyler Lockett were among the handful of players to show up in person.

Unlikely playmakers lift Packers

By **STEVE MEGARGEE**
Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Jayden Reed and Dontayvion Wicks were coming off relatively disappointing finishes to their college careers when they began their rookie seasons in the NFL. Bo Melton spent much of the past two years toiling on practice squads.

The three of them have emerged as some of Jordan Love's most reliable playmakers while helping the Green Bay Packers make an unlikely postseason appearance. The Packers (9-8) visit the Dallas Cowboys (12-5) on Sunday.

"They're taking advantage of the opportunity they got and they're just trying to go out there and make the most of that," Love said. "And they're doing a really good job of it."

One of the most remarkable elements of Love's debut season as a starter is that he is not only throwing primarily to rookies and second-year pros, but that some of his top options have been in and out of the lineup with injuries.



BRUCE KLUCKHOHN/AP

Jayden Reed led the Packers in receptions, receiving yards and touchdowns as a rookie.

Christian Watson caught three touchdown passes in an overtime victory over the Cowboys as a rookie last season, but missed Green Bay's past five games with a hamstring injury. Romeo Doubs left the Packers' 17-9 victory over Chicago on Sunday with a chest injury. Both practiced on a limited basis Wednesday.

If they're unable to go, the Packers will be relying on Reed, Wicks and Melton to help pick up the

slack. They've done quite well in that regard so far.

These young receivers credit Love for helping the transition by getting to know each of them. They noted how Love hosted offensive players for dinners and team-bonding sessions on a couple of Mondays this season.

"Jordan just has a knack for every receiver," Melton said.

And the receivers sure have done their part as well.

Green Bay selected Reed from Michigan State in the second round and Wicks out of Virginia in the fifth round. Each produced 1,000-yard seasons in 2021 but weren't as productive the next year.

"I think we knew pretty early on that they were going to be able to make plays when their number is called," Watson said.

Reed has 64 receptions for 793 yards and has scored 10 total touchdowns (8 receiving, 2 rushing) to lead the Packers in all three categories. Wicks has caught 39 passes for 581 yards and four touchdowns.

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NFL PLAYOFFS

Tagovailoa shoulders a load as Dolphins go for 1st win since 2000

By Alanis Thames
Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — It has been more than 23 years since the Miami Dolphins won a playoff game.

Tua Tagovailoa gets a chance to stop that drought Saturday night.

The fourth-year quarterback will make his first postseason appearance when Miami visits the Kansas City Chiefs for a wild-card game this weekend. The Dolphins are seeking their first playoff victory since Dec. 30, 2000, when they beat Indianapolis 23-17 in overtime. The franchise has just three road playoff wins and only one (at Seattle on Jan 9, 2000) since 1972.

Tagovailoa has played in high-stakes games before. He was a freshman at Alabama when he replaced then-starter Jalen Hurts during the 2018 national championship game and led the Crimson Tide past Georgia for the school's fifth national title under Nick Saban.

The 25-year-old Tagovailoa has spoken about how those experiences helped shape his path to the NFL, but he couldn't quite find the words to describe the emotions of competing in his first playoff game.

"I don't think I could compare this to anything," Tagovailoa said Wednesday. "It's all new. Everything is all new. This is a different feeling than it was in the national championship game. Different feeling than it was in the SEC championship game. I think they all come with new feelings. The way I cope with it is go about my business the way I've been going about my business. Take care of my job and trust that my teammates will do the same."

Tagovailoa added that he hasn't



Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa walks off the field after losing to Buffalo last week. Miami travels to Kansas City on Saturday.

Scoreboard

Playoffs
Wild-card Playoffs Saturday, Jan. 13
Cleveland at Houston
Miami at Kansas City
Sunday, Jan. 14
Pittsburgh at Buffalo
Green Bay at Dallas
L.A. Rams at Detroit
Monday, Jan. 15
Philadelphia at Tampa Bay
Divisional Playoffs Saturday, Jan. 20-Sunday, Jan. 21
NFC lowest remaining seed at San Francisco
AFC lowest remaining seed at Baltimore
NFC two remaining seeds at higher seed
AFC two remaining seeds at higher seed
Conference Championships Sunday, Jan. 28

had a chance to sit down and reflect on his areas of growth this season — one that he finished as the NFL's leading passer with a career-high 4,624 yards — but probably one of the biggest differences is his health.

He started every regular-season game this year for the first time after dealing with various injuries since entering the NFL. He missed Miami's playoff game last year, a loss to Buffalo in a wild-card game, after being diagnosed with his second concussion of the season.

"It's a blessing that I get to play the entire season," Tagovailoa said. "I think anyone would say the same around the league that it's a blessing to make it this far. ... I don't take this for granted."

Now he has a chance to add a playoff win to his list of accomplishments ahead of a potentially lucrative offseason. The Dolphins exercised the fifth-year option on his rookie deal last March, but the sides are expected to discuss the possibility of a contract extension after this season.



Cowboys receiver CeeDee Lamb looks for yardage against the Commanders last week. Lamb had 135 catches for 1,749 yards this season but is more concerned with getting Dallas past the wild card round.

Cowboys' Lamb just getting started after career year

By Schuyler Dixon
Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — CeeDee Lamb learned to embrace No. 88 when Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones insisted he wear the number associated with some of the best receivers in club history.

Next he adjusted to the role of Dak Prescott's top target after the Cowboys decided it was his time two years ago and traded Amari Cooper.

Now the 2020 first-round pick has put together the best receiving season the storied franchise has ever seen, and believes he can be called one of the NFL's best.

Still, it's all just a start.

"I'm definitely one of the elite receivers in this game," Lamb said. "I worked my tail off to be that and to say that confidently. It's good to be elite, but how consistent? How long can you be elite is the next challenge. I'm looking forward to it. Can't wait."

But it will wait. First, Lamb wants to get the Cowboys (12-5) past the divisional round for the first time in 28 years.

Thanks in part to his breakout season, they're positioned better than either of his other postseason trips the previous two seasons.

Dallas, the No. 2 seed in the NFC, plays Green Bay (9-8) in a wild-card game Sunday at home, where the Cowboys have a 16-game winning streak. They will play at AT&T Stadium again if they win.

Ask Lamb about numbers, and

he's quick to respond with something about winning being the only thing that matters to him. It's just been hard to ignore the numbers this season — even for him.

Lamb broke both of Michael Irvin's club records from 1995 — the last time the Cowboys reached an NFC championship game, and won the franchise's fifth Super Bowl title.

The former Oklahoma standout's 135 catches were 16 more than anybody else in the NFL, and his 1,749 yards were second to four-time All-Pro Tyreek Hill. Lamb might be on the verge of his first All-Pro nod.

"It was a big moment for me, of course," Lamb said about talking to Irvin, one of the previous 88s and a three-time Super Bowl winner. "Now it's time to go chase the ring, was basically the end message. I'm with that. That's always been my end goal and still is."

The Cowboys were shocked when Lamb fell to them at No. 17 in a draft loaded at his position. Two receivers went before him, and six were taken in the first round.

It's been a steady climb ever since, from 935 yards to 1,102 and 1,359. And from five touchdowns to six, nine and then 12 this season, 13 with a rushing TD included.

Lamb scored at least one touchdown in each of the last nine regular-season games. Dez Bryant, another of the 88s, and Pro Football Hall of Famer Terrell Owens shared the previous record at seven straight games.

"It's just a constant ascension," offensive coordinator Brian Schottenheimer said. "What I think makes it so amazing is the opponents are trying to take him away. I mean, let's be honest. They're doing things to try to take him away. And he's still able to go out there and do that."

Schottenheimer said Lamb's football instincts are a big reason. He was already talking about that before what he saw as one of the best examples on Lamb's 92-yard touchdown against Detroit, the night he passed Irvin and finished with 13 catches for 227 yards.

Prescott had to escape pressure around the goal line, and Lamb broke the same direction as Prescott's scramble as his quarterback threw deep. The defender fell down, Lamb caught the ball near midfield and strolled into the end zone.

"That doesn't just happen," Schottenheimer said.

Prescott believes the connection has grown through a lot of work together, starting in the off-season and continuing once the games began. As for elite, Lamb's QB didn't think there was any waiting for that.

"On the day he showed up," Prescott said of when Lamb became elite. "Yeah, he had it all in him. We had another number one receiver here as well. I guess when Amari left and him really just understanding it's time for me to take this leap and take on this role. Yeah, from that moment."

NFL PLAYOFFS

On AFN



Cleveland Browns (11-6)
at Houston Texans (10-7)
AFN-Sports
10:30 p.m. Saturday CET
6:30 a.m. Sunday JKT



Miami Dolphins (11-6)
at Kansas City Chiefs (11-6)
AFN-Sports
2 a.m. Sunday CET
10 a.m. Sunday JKT



Pittsburgh Steelers (10-7)
at Buffalo Bills (11-6)
AFN-Sports
7 p.m. Sunday CET
3 a.m. Monday JKT



Green Bay Packers (9-8)
at Dallas Cowboys (12-5)
AFN-Sports
10:30 p.m. Sunday CET
6:30 a.m. Monday JKT



Los Angeles Rams (10-7)
at Detroit Lions (12-5)
AFN-Sports
2:15 a.m. Monday CET
10:15 a.m. Monday JKT



Philadelphia Eagles (11-6)
at Tampa Bay Buccaneers (9-8)
AFN-Sports
2:15 a.m. Tuesday CET
10:15 a.m. Tuesday JKT

Stafford embraces being ‘bad guy’

Former Lions QB still loves Detroit ahead of return

By GREG BEACHAM
Associated Press

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — Matthew Stafford arrived in Detroit as a hotshot 21-year-old quarterback. He left three years ago as a grown man with a wife and four daughters all born in Michigan.

During the 12 years in between, he desperately tried to end the Lions’ decades-long playoff victory drought. The Lions failed, but he formed a bond with Detroit that remains a foundational part of his character.

Although Stafford grew up in Texas and has now made a comfortable home in Southern California, he came of age in the Motor City.

“It’s an amazing city,” Stafford said Wednesday. “It’s an amazing group of fans. The organization does a heck of a job, and I know they’re going to be excited. It’s going to be a heck of an atmosphere. Probably one of the best we’ve played in in a long time. It’s a group of people that from my experience love the Lions, want what’s best for them. And now they’re playing good football.”

On Sunday night, Stafford will finally get to play in his first post-season game in Detroit. He’ll do it in the horned helmet of the Los Angeles Rams, the team he led to a Super Bowl championship in his first season after leaving the Lions.

Stafford is now in position to play a major role in extending the Lions’ postseason misery when Detroit hosts a playoff game for the first time in 30 years. While Stafford still holds Detroit dear,



ASHLEY LANDIS/AP

Los Angeles Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford walks off the field after a win over the New Orleans Saints on Dec. 21 in Inglewood, Calif. Stafford is set to return to Detroit after spending over a decade with the Lions.

he’ll understand if the city doesn’t feel the same way this weekend.

“I’m not a stranger to the situation, and understanding that I’m the bad guy coming to town,” Stafford said. “I’m on the other team, and they don’t want success from me. So whatever happens, happens. I’m going to go experience it.”

Stafford played in three road playoff losses during his time with the Lions, and he hasn’t forgotten his frustration at being unable to end the Lions’ decades of disappointment.

“I had a lot of experiences there over 12 years,” Stafford said. “All my daughters were born there. My wife and I went through things there that the team and the city, the town, everybody supported. So I have nothing but great memories there. Obviously didn’t get it done on the field as much as

I wish we could have, but the people that I was lucky enough to know and grow with are people that I’m still close with today and mean a lot to me.”

Stafford asked for a trade in early 2021 after the Lions embarked on yet another rebuild following three straight losing seasons.

Rams coach Sean McVay was dissatisfied with Jared Goff, his quarterback for the previous four seasons, and the teams reached a blockbuster deal.

Incredibly, this is the first playoff matchup in NFL history between two starting quarterbacks facing their former teams. Stafford already faced the Lions in 2021, leading the Rams to a narrow victory over Goff’s then-winless Lions at SoFi Stadium.

Stafford is still the leading passer in Lions franchise history with

45,109 yards and 282 TDs, but he is about to play at Ford Field for the first time since he left.

“I hope I don’t end up in the wrong (locker room),” Stafford said. “I do know it’s the same tunnel. ... There’s a lot leading up to it, I understand all that, but once the ball’s snapped, man, let’s go play football.”

Nearly all of the remaining Lions did not play with Stafford in Detroit and are downplaying the reunion of sorts, but defensive end Romeo Okwara is well aware everyone else is talking about it.

“I know everyone is running away with that storyline this week,” said Okwara, a teammate of Stafford’s during his last three years in Detroit. “Love Stafford. He’s a great teammate, great friend. But this week, it’s just about us and trying to win the game.”

Collins set to lead Texans after breakout year

By KRISTIE RIEKEN
Associated Press

HOUSTON — C.J. Stroud was blown away the first time he worked out with Nico Collins. Houston’s rookie quarterback knew immediately that the receiver was special.

“I said: ‘You’re a superstar,’” Stroud recalled.

Collins doesn’t remember the interaction but said that’s probably because Stroud is always encouraging him and providing positive feedback.

“I really don’t, but I believe he said it ... we always motivate each other, man,” Collins said. “I feel like that’s why things get kind of blurry.”

As the Texans return to the playoffs for the first time since 2019 on Saturday when they host the Cleveland Browns, Collins might not be considered a superstar across the league, but in Houston, there’s no doubting his status



Collins

as a top receiver.

“He’s a big-time playmaker for us, and he shows up every single day,” coach DeMeco Ryans said. “He hasn’t changed who he is. He still shows up in a humble manner. He shows up and he works hard every day at practice, and that’s why he continues to get better.”

Collins, a third-round draft pick in 2021, has had a breakout season with Stroud under center. After combining for just 927 yards receiving his first two years, this season he leads the team and ranks eighth in the NFL with 1,297 yards receiving despite missing two games.

So what helped him take his game to a new level this season?

“I just trust in my craft, trust in the grind I’ve been putting in in the offseason and just thank-

ing God for everything,” he said. “I feel like just getting better every single day has kind of been my mindset.”

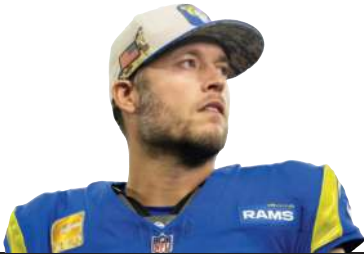
And having Stroud throwing to him certainly hasn’t hurt.

“That dude is special, man,” Collins said. “I tell you, the way he’s carried himself every single day, ever since he stepped foot here from Day 1, he’s got that ‘it factor’ with him.”

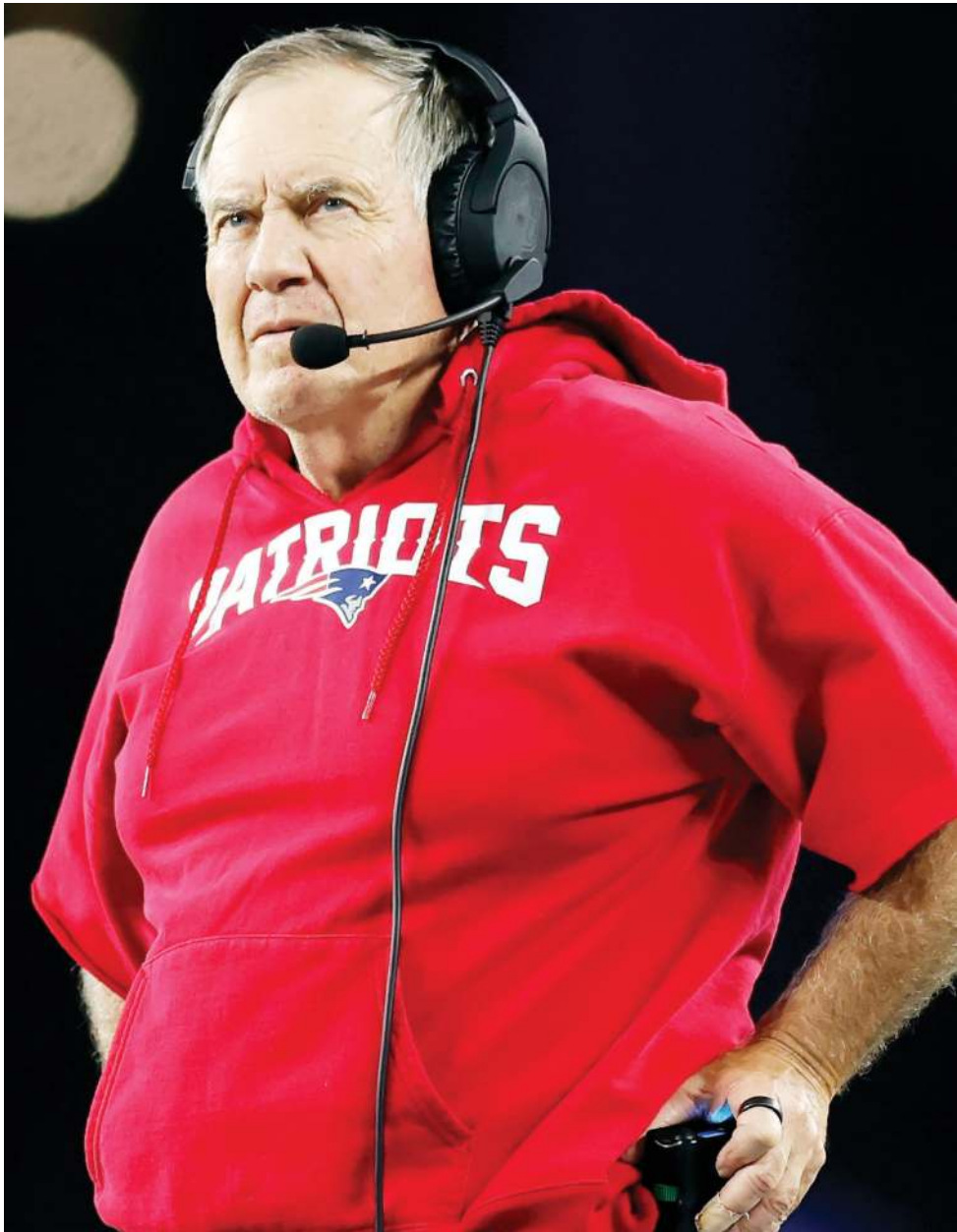
Collins joins Andre Johnson and DeAndre Hopkins as the only players in franchise history to have at least 1,200 yards receiving in a season. He’s proud to have his name associated with the two greatest receivers in team history.

“That’s big time,” he said. “Those are some big names, them names hold weight, and to be a part of that, it’s a blessing. But I feel like it’s only the beginning for me. I feel like it’s still room for improvement in my game and we’ll see what happens, but I think the sky’s the limit.”

SPORTS



A sort of homecoming
Rams QB Stafford returns to Detroit to face former team » **NFL playoffs, Page 47**



VASHA HUNT, LEFT, AND MICHAEL DWYER/AP

Nick Saban, left, won six of his seven national championships as head coach at Alabama, while Bill Belichick, right, won all six of his Super Bowls as head coach of the Patriots.

End of two iconic eras

Tide’s Saban retires with 7 national titles, most in major college football

BY JOHN ZENOR
Associated Press

Nick Saban’s coaching reign has come to an end. His dominance over college football, however, will forever linger in lore. Saban, who won seven national championships — more than any major college football coach — and turned Alabama back into a national powerhouse that shattered an Associated Press poll record for most consecutive seasons at No. 1, announced his retirement Wednesday. “The University of Alabama has been a very special place to Terry and me,” Saban said in a statement. “It is not just about how

many games we won and lost, but it’s about the legacy and how we went about it. We always tried to do it the right way.” Saban, 72, restored a Crimson Tide program once ruled by Paul “Bear” Bryant to the top of college football after taking over in 2007. As he stacked his wins, Saban’s celebrity status reached royalty levels in the state of Alabama. For a time, he was the sport’s overlord and there was little that could be done to stop him. Saban won six of his titles during his 17

SEE RETIRES ON PAGE 43

Patriots parting with Belichick, who guided team to 6 Super Bowl crowns

BY KYLE HIGHTOWER
Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Six-time NFL champion Bill Belichick agreed to part ways as the coach of the New England Patriots, ending his 24-year tenure as the architect of the most decorated dynasty of the league’s Super Bowl era. “It’s with so many fond memories and thoughts that I think about the Patriots,” Belichick said Thursday alongside owner Robert Kraft. “I’ll always be a Patriot. I look forward to coming back here. But at this time, we’re going to move on. And I look forward, excited for the future.”

INSIDE
Carroll out after 14 years as coach of Seahawks
Page 45

Neither Belichick nor Kraft took questions, though Kraft scheduled an availability for later in the day. Speaking to reporters from the podium where he had given so many terse, non-responsive postgame recaps, Belichick ap-

SEE PARTING ON PAGE 44

No. 1 ranking brings validation, pressure » College basketball, Page 42

