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# EUROPE & PACIFIC WEEKEND EDITION



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Purdy proves invaluable to 49ers  
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# STARS AND STRIPES®

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MALIK LEWIS/U.S. Marines

**U.S. Marines from the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit and soldiers from Japan's 1st Amphibious Rapid Deployment Regiment finalize coordination during a training exercise March 15 at Combined Arms Training Center Camp Fuji, Japan.**

## Turning to 'a historic alliance'

### US, Japan deepen military ties to counter threats from China, N. Korea

**BY DOUG G. WARE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Japan will take a more proactive role in its own defense as part of an agreement Wednesday between the United States and Japan to deepen their military and security cooperation and bring more stability to the Indo-Pacific region.

"Today, we welcomed a historic alliance decision to optimize U.S. force posture in Japan," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said at a joint news conference as part of the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee meeting at the State Department.

Enhancing bilateral cooperation to counter potential threats from China and North Korea

### PACIFIC

Taiwan's air force shows off fighters defending threatened airspace  
**Page 4**

was at the center of the talks, which included Austin, Japanese defense minister Yasukazu Hamada, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Japanese foreign minister Yoshimasa Hayashi.

The leaders said the driving force for the new arrangements boils down to making it eas-

ier for Washington and Tokyo to uphold rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, a region that has taken on increased importance in recent years due to tension over the sovereignty of Taiwan and provocative Chinese actions in the South China Sea.

An adjustment of U.S. troops in Okinawa and Japanese plans to build new runways on an island used for military exercises are part of the new agreement. Tokyo has also agreed to develop counter-strike capabilities and double defense spending by 2027, pledges that signal a major shift in traditional Japanese military policy.

**SEE ALLIANCE ON PAGE 4**

### COVID-19

## Service members believe mandate reversal doesn't address damage

**BY ALISON BATH**  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — Some active-duty service members who refused the COVID-19 vaccine and faced expulsion from the military say a recent Defense Department announcement rescinding the mandatory inoculation order is a hollow victory.

The action, which was announced earlier this week by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and is required by the defense authorization bill passed last month, doesn't address damage to military careers or restore the faith of service members sidelined by their refusal to take the vaccine, said Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Caroline Crumbacker.

"It feels like I should be able to take a breath and feel like I got the outcome I wanted," said Crumbacker, who is assigned to Naval Support Activity Naples in Italy and isn't certain whether she will continue her military career past her January 2025 enlistment end date. "But at the same time, I can't let my guard down."

Crumbacker and other unvaccinated service members said they felt trivialized and ostracized because of their objections and were sidelined when it came to deployments, training and other opportunities.

The Pentagon directive issued Tuesday lets commanders continue to decide whether unvaccinated service members are assigned or deployed to any country, including those with a vaccine requirement. Such restrictions may limit career progression.

"I feel like the next four years would be me trying to undo the

**SEE VACCINE ON PAGE 5**

# BUSINESS/WEATHER

## EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	Azores	..	..	\$4.326	..
Germany	\$3.641	\$4.109	\$4.437	\$4.931	Change in price	..	..	+2.7 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.458	\$4.727	\$5.277	Turkey	..	..	\$4.418	\$4.619*
U.K.	..	\$4.045	\$4.373	\$4.867	Change in price	..	..	-0.4 cents	-3.4 cents

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Jan. 13. The change in price is from Jan. 6.

## PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	South Korea	\$3.329	..	\$4.129	\$4.619
Japan	..	\$4.099	..	\$4.599	Change in price	+3.0 cents	..	+3.0 cents	-4.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.309	..	..	\$4.599	Guam	\$3.319	\$3.789	\$4.109	..

\*DieselEFD \*\*Midgrade  
Pacific prices for the week of Jan. 13-19

## EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		South Korea (Won)	1247.66
Euro costs (Jan. 13)	\$1.05	Switzerland (Franc)	0.9327
Dollar buys (Jan. 13)	0.9027	Thailand (Baht)	33.27
British pound (Jan. 13)	\$1.19	Turkey (NewLira)	18.7802
Japanese yen (Jan. 13)	129.00		
South Korean won (Jan. 13)	1213.00		

(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.)

Commercial rates		Prime rate	7.50
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769	Interest Rates Discount rate	5.00
Britain (Pound)	1.2117	Federal funds market rate	4.33
Canada (Dollar)	1.3421	3-month bill	4.69
China (Yuan)	6.7437	30-year bond	3.67
Denmark (Krone)	6.9080		
Egypt (Pound)	29.6011		
Euro	0.9287		
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8094		
Hungary (Forint)	370.30		
Israel (Shekel)	3.4336		
Japan (Yen)	130.64		
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3057		
Norway (Krone)	9.9734		
Philippines (Peso)	55.13		
Poland (Zloty)	4.36		
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7561		
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3291		

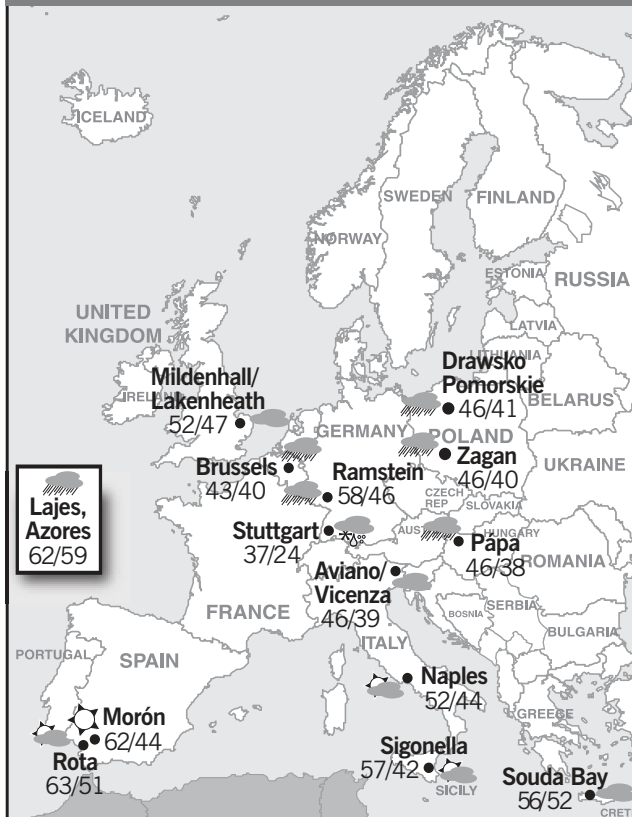
## INTEREST RATES

## WEATHER OUTLOOK

### FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



### FRIDAY IN EUROPE



### SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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## STARS AND STRIPES

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## MILITARY

# DOD civilians push for medical care access

BY KELLY AGEE  
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Defense Department civilian employees in Japan mounted an email and phone campaign directed at Congress this week, hoping to reverse a Pentagon decision to reduce their access to medical care at military hospitals.

The group behind the campaign, Japan Civilian Medical Advocacy, also started a petition drive last year after the Defense Health Agency's Indo-Pacific region announced it would limit civilians' access to on-base care. The petition had more than 2,000 signatures as of Thursday.

"Let Congress Know We Are Still Here!" reads a Sunday post on the group's Facebook page. "Help us contact representatives across the United States, letting them

know that DHA continues to put a chokehold on the [Military Treatment Facilities] here in Japan and has further restricted our access to regular care."

Many civilians were caught off guard in October when DHA announced they should make plans to find health care in the surrounding Japanese communities. Limited access to care has created a crisis that puts individuals, their coworkers and their families at risk, according to the post.

The DHA Indo-Pacific region director, Army Maj. Gen. Joseph Heck, said in October the agency is mandated by law to prioritize health care for active-duty service members and their families.

As of Jan. 1, DOD employees like schoolteachers, commissary workers and contractors are limited to urgent or acute care

and some specialty clinics at base hospitals. Some U.S. civilian employees of Stars and Stripes fall into this category.

For routine health maintenance and ongoing care for chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease or cancer, they are encouraged to seek Japanese health care providers. The alternative is to rely on space-available appointments after the military hospitals schedule service members and their families. Yokosuka Naval Base, the homeport of the U.S. 7th Fleet, in September became the first installation in Japan to limit civilian employees to space-available appointments for most health care needs.

"At this point more bases are being impacted, so there are more voices wanting to be heard," Amber Malone, a teacher at The Sullivans Elementary School at Yokosuka,

told Stars and Stripes on Wednesday by Facebook Messenger.

Malone, of Carmel, Maine, said she contacted offices in her home state for U.S. Sens. Angus King, an independent, and Susan Collins, a Republican, whose staff members took her information and promised to pass it on to their offices in Washington, D.C.

Staffers at both offices said they hadn't heard of the issue, Malone said. She said she provided them with position statements from her Facebook group, the Yokosuka, Atsugi and Zama Civilian Medical Forum, along with updated space-available policies from DHA and other information.

agee.kelly@stripes.com  
Twitter: @KellyA\_Stripes

## Oldest living Pearl Harbor survivor marks 105th birthday

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Flag-waving admirers lined the sidewalk outside the National World War II Museum in New Orleans on Wednesday to greet the oldest living survivor of the Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbor as he marked his upcoming 105th birthday.

"It feels great," Joseph Eskenazi of Redondo Beach, Calif., told reporters after posing for pictures with his great-grandson, who is about to turn 5, his 21-month-old great-granddaughter and six other World War II veterans, all in their 90s.

Eskenazi turns 105 on Jan. 30. He had boarded an Amtrak train in California on Friday for the journey to New Orleans. The other

veterans, representing the Army, Navy and Marines, flew in for the event.

They were visiting thanks to the Soaring Valor Program, a project of actor Gary Sinise's charitable foundation dedicated to aiding veterans and first responders. The program arranges trips to the museum for World War II veterans and their guardians.

Eskenazi was at the Army's Schofield Barracks when the Dec. 7, 1941, attack began, bringing the United States into the war.

About 2,400 servicemen were killed.

Eskenazi and his fellow veterans lined up for pictures Wednesday amid exhibits of World War II aircraft and Higgins boats, designed for beach landings.



GERALD HERBERT/AP

World War II veteran Joseph Eskenazi, who at 104 years and 11 months old is the oldest living veteran to survive the attack on Pearl Harbor, sits with fellow veterans, his great grandchildren Mathias, 4, Audrey, 1, and their grandmother Belinda Mastrangelo, at an event celebrating his upcoming 105th birthday at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, on Wednesday.

## Marines cite 'loss of trust,' fire school's commander

BY ROSE L. THAYER  
Stars and Stripes

Marine Corps Col. John L. Medeiros was fired Tuesday from his post as the commander of the Assault Amphibian School at Camp Pendleton due to a "loss of trust and confidence" following an investigation into a nonfatal training accident that occurred at the California base, service officials said.

Brig. Gen. Farrell J. Sullivan, commander of the Marine Corps' Training Command, made the decision to relieve Medeiros because of information obtained while investigating the October accident, according to a news release from the command.

However, the release does not clarify if the information was re-

lated to the accident or another issue.

The investigation into the training accident is ongoing, according to the command.

On Oct. 13, an Amphibious Combat Vehicle assigned to the school suffered a "reported mechanical malfunction" and overturned into the surf, according to a USNI report.

No injuries were reported, but the incident led the Marine Corps to stop waterborne operations in the surf zone until further review.

The wheeled ACV is replacing the Marine Corps' aging fleet of tracked Assault Amphibious Vehicles, and Training Command said Wednesday that the Marine Corps is prioritizing safety and stand-



Col. John L. Medeiros

dization in its training environment as part of the transition.

The command did not say who will serve as the school's commander until a replacement is named.

The Assault Amphibian School trains Marines on ACV and Assault Amphibious Vehicle operations and maintenance.

thayer.rose@stripes.com  
Twitter: @Rose\_Lori

## Soldier killed, another held in altercation at Fort Rucker

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
Stars and Stripes

An Army private at Fort Rucker was killed Tuesday in an altercation with another soldier at the Alabama post, service officials said Wednesday.

Pvt. Abdul N. Latifu, 21, of the Bronx in New York City, died Tuesday afternoon of injuries that he sustained during the altercation just before noon, said David C. Agan Jr., a Fort Rucker spokesman. The other soldier involved in the incident, who has not been publicly identified, was taken into custody by Fort Rucker Public Safety Department officers, Agan said.

Latifu and the other soldier were trainees in the Army's Ad-

vanced Individual Training program at Fort Rucker. AIT is the second stage of initial military training for enlisted soldiers.

Latifu was training to become an Army air traffic control operator, Agan said. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 13th Aviation Regiment, 1st Aviation Brigade at the program.

Army Criminal Investigation Division agents are investigating the incident. No formal charges against the soldier detained had been filed as of Wednesday.



Latifu

## PACIFIC

# Taiwan shows off jets tasked with defense

By **SETH ROBSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

HSINCHU AIR BASE, Taiwan — Mirage fighter jets soared over this air base near the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday, a routine day for aircraft that answer threats to their nation's airspace.

The aerial display by the French-made multirole, single-engine, fourth-generation fighters was part of drills that Taiwan is holding this week to show off its military capabilities ahead of this month's Lunar New Year holiday.

Dozens of local and foreign journalists watched the fighters ascend with glowing afterburners, touch down a short time later and taxi to camouflaged concrete hangars.

Taiwanese planes scramble as if by schedule as the island's military responds to regular approaches by Chinese military aircraft. Beijing considers democratic, self-governing Taiwan to be a breakaway province that must be reunified with the mainland, by force if necessary.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense issues daily statements about Chinese military activities in the waters and airspace around the island. At 6 a.m. Wednesday,

for example, the ministry reported eight Chinese aircraft and three vessels in the previous 24 hours.

Taiwanese armed forces monitored the situation and tasked aircraft, naval vessels and land-based missile systems to respond, according to the ministry.

Tensions around Taiwan spiked Aug. 3, when former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi stopped in Taipei on a broader tour of Asia. The visit prompted China to stage weeklong live-fire drills that encircled the island and included ballistic missile launches.

Taiwan's defense ministry tweeted Thursday morning that 15 Chinese military aircraft and warships had been detected around the island in the past 24 hours. A subsequent tweet said six of the aircraft crossed the strait's median line and entered Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone.

Standing in front of a large Taiwanese flag, near a pair of jet fighters and rows of bullets and missiles, Mirage pilot Lt. Col. Wu "Bomber" Bong-yeng told journalists: "Fight as we train; train as we fight."

Members of the Hsinchu-based 2nd Wing, which operates 54 Mi-



PHOTOS BY SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

**A Taiwanese air force pilot climbs out of a Mirage 2000 fighter jet after a demonstration flight over Hsinchu Air Base, Taiwan, on Wednesday.**



**Taiwanese air force Mirage 2000 fighter jets taxi at Hsinchu Air Base, Taiwan, on Wednesday.**

rage 2000s, are ready to defend Taiwan's airspace, he said.

Taiwanese pilots don't just scramble to meet Chinese planes,

Wu said. They also train regularly for real-world missions.

Wu declined to say whether he had personally intercepted Chi-

nese aircraft approaching Taiwan, but said: "We are fighter pilots. We are prepared to face every type of challenge."

China was recommitted in the new year to "safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity" and "smashing plots for Taiwan independence," a spokesman for its Taiwan Affairs Office said Wednesday, according to The Associated Press.

"The malicious support for Taiwan independence among anti-China elements in a few foreign countries are a deliberate provocation," Ma Xiaoguang said at a bi-weekly news conference, according to the news agency.

robson.seth@stripes.com  
Twitter: @SethRobson1

## Alliance: New pact includes creating quick-strike force on Okinawa

FROM PAGE 1

"I'm grateful that we're meeting at such a consequential time as Japan strengthens its own defense and further contributes to regional peace and stability," Austin said.

Another part of the new pact includes creating the 12th Marine Littoral Regiment — an improved quick-strike force — on Okinawa by 2025. Austin said the unit will be quicker, more lethal, more capable and will operate with more intelligence, surveillance and transportation capabilities.

Austin said the enhanced agreements reflect the "ironclad commitment" by the United States to defend Japan with all its capabilities, including nuclear weapons, and counter China's "destabilizing actions" in the region.

Colin Kahl, the undersecretary of defense for policy, called the growing U.S.-Japanese alliance an "enduring cornerstone of a free



ALEX BRANDON/AP

**Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada, from left, Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, speak Wednesday.**

and open Indo-Pacific."

In recent weeks, the Pentagon has repeatedly identified China as the top U.S. military and economic competitor and has labeled North Korea as a prominent "pacing challenge."

"We agree that [China] is the greatest shared strategic challenge," Blinken said. "Our alliance has never been more crucial to realizing a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific."

The deepening ties between Washington and Tokyo also will include new cooperation in space, the officials said Wednesday. However, specifics on this won't be shared until later this week.

"We agreed that attacks to, from or within space present a clear challenge," Blinken said. "That is significant."

Wednesday's talks were a prelude to a meeting at the White House on Friday between Biden

and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Earlier this week, Kishida struck a new defense pact with Britain that is also aimed at reining in China. Hamada will meet with Austin again at the Pentagon on Thursday.

Tensions have been rising for years between the U.S. and China over several issues — from trade to the coronavirus and Taiwan's status as a sovereign territory. Other tensions have centered on various Chinese military actions in the South China Sea. Most recently, the Pentagon said a Chinese fighter jet in late December unsafely "buzzed" an Air Force reconnaissance plane there — at one point coming within about 20 feet of the U.S. aircraft's nose, forcing the pilot to take quick action to avoid a crash.

Beijing claims China owns parts of the South China Sea and all of Taiwan.

Some experts contend Wednesday's agreement with Japan is not

enough if the United States wants to effectively manage the problems that China presents now and in the future.

"We may have some tests [with China] that may come upon us in the next five to seven to 10 years," Michele Flournoy, the undersecretary of defense for policy under former President Barack Obama, said Tuesday during a discussion at the Rand Corp. in Washington. "I don't think we understand the Chinese calculus."

Like Blinken, Flournoy helped co-found WestExec Advisors, a Washington consulting firm in 2017. She also worked in the Pentagon during former President Bill Clinton's administration and she was said to be a serious candidate for defense secretary under Biden until Austin got the job.

"I don't think we understand [our adversaries] well," Flournoy said.

ware.doug@stripes.com

## MILITARY

# US personnel save 2 lives in Horn of Africa

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Elite U.S. Air Force pararescue troops and other quick-reaction forces were involved in the rescue of two people at an undisclosed location in the Horn of Africa, military officials said Thursday.

The mission, carried out in late December, entailed a sizable force that included an HC-130J recovery aircraft, Guardian Angels from the 347th Rescue Group and combat rescue helicopters,

the 435th Air Expeditionary Wing said in a statement.

“Alert crews were activated during the pre-dawn hours and responded quicker than the required theater response times,” said the Ramstein, Germany-based wing, which has forward-based units in Africa.

The rescue team operated under the command of the 449th Air Expeditionary Group and the Joint Personnel Recovery Center.

The two people rescued were from a partner force, the 435th wing said in a statement. The mil-

itary declined to say what country the troops were from, but the U.S. provides a wide range of assistance to Somalia’s military.

In the Horn of Africa, the U.S. operates out of Djibouti, home to Camp Lemonnier, and in neighboring Somalia, where U.S. special operations troops work with forces involved in a decadeslong fight against Islamic militants.

In recent years, U.S. troops also have come under occasional attack in Somalia, where they have operated out of remote military outposts.

The December rescue was “in and out” of the undisclosed area “without incident,” the statement said.

Rescuers rushed to the nearest medical facility for surgery, according to the air wing.

The HC-130Js were then called to move the more seriously wounded person to another location for further treatment. Both injured people survived, the wing said.

The rescue unit responds to emergency battlefield situations to return American or partner

forces to friendly control, said Lt. Col. Thaddeus Ronnau, regional director of the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa’s joint recovery center.

“While personnel may be behind enemy lines or far from needed support, this team is equipped to travel great distances and fight their way in and out if necessary to make the mission happen,” Ronnau said in the statement.

vandiver.john@stripes.com  
Twitter: @john\_vandiver

## Vaccine: Many waivers were denied

FROM PAGE 1

past year-and-a-half, two years just to get back to the spot where I was already competitively (for advancement),” said Crumbacker, who at one time thought she would complete 20 years in the Navy. “Why would I want to stay in an organization that treated me like that when (I) was struggling?”

Although Austin rescinded his August 2021 mandate requiring troops to be vaccinated against COVID-19, he made it clear he believed the order was correct, saying the department would continue to promote and encourage the vaccinations.

“All commanders have the responsibility and authority to preserve the department’s compelling interest in mission accomplishment,” Austin stated.

While the memo ended pending involuntary separations for unvaccinated service members who asked for waivers on religious, medical or administrative grounds, it didn’t help the thousands already pushed out of the service solely for refusing the vaccine.

Austin said 96% of all active-duty and reserve service members combined are fully vaccinated.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says COVID-19 vaccinations are safe and effective in preventing disease and mini-

mizing the risk of hospitalization or death in immunized people who contract the virus.

A 2022 study found that mRNA vaccines were 90% effective in preventing death from COVID-19 in adults 60 days after they received a second booster shot, according to data on the CDC website.

Many unvaccinated service members who sought waivers saw their requests denied.

For example, the Navy and Army have involuntarily separated 1,639 and 1,851 active-duty service members, respectively, for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine, according to the latest data available on their websites.

In addition, 402 Navy reserve sailors have been involuntarily separated for refusing the vaccine. No Army National Guard or Army Reservists have been separated for the same reason, the data show.

Meanwhile, the Navy has approved 16 permanent medical and 51 permanent religious accommodation requests for active-duty and reserve personnel. The Army had approved 65 permanent medical and 123 permanent religious waiver requests as of Dec. 8.

Involuntary separation data for the Air Force wasn’t included with its December COVID-19 update.

For the Marine Corps, 3,717 of

its members had been separated as of Dec. 1 for refusing the vaccine, according to the service’s website.

The service had approved 23 waivers on religious grounds and 333 medical or administrative exemptions, according to the data.

Army Sgt. Louis Paulsen, who is assigned to a base near Naples, Italy, said his request for a religious accommodation and subsequent appeal were denied.

On Thursday, he was uncertain whether he still faces an adverse action because of his refusal to take the vaccine. Paulsen said he hadn’t received any notification of a change in his status and was not aware of a documented change in Army policy.

Even if there weren’t consequences, Paulsen, who joined the Army 5½ years ago, said he probably wouldn’t continue past his 2024 enlistment end date.

He said his faith in the Army has been destroyed because the service didn’t follow its requirements when it came to offering the least restrictive means to meet its objectives and accommodate his Roman Catholic beliefs.

The Catholic Church deemed the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines “morally permissible” in 2021 but left room for objections of conscience.

“There are means of protecting



ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

**Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Caroline Crumbacker refused to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. She said that despite the Defense Department’s decision this week to end its mandate for service members to get the shot, she is undecided about staying in the Navy past her enlistment end date.**

force health while still accommodating religion,” said Paulsen, who named face masks and social distancing as among those options. “Those are the least restrictive means other than forcibly having people put something into their body that very seriously compromises their religion in a permanent, nontemporary fashion.”

Paulsen also is disappointed

that the Defense Department has not indicated a willingness or plan to evaluate the COVID-19 vaccination policy or the treatment of vaccine objectors.

“There’s no lessons learned here,” Paulsen said. “This could happen again.”

bath.alison@stripes.com  
Twitter: @alisonbath\_

## Fort Stewart soldier sentenced to more than 3 years in prison for fraud

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

ATLANTA — A soldier based at Fort Stewart, Ga., convicted of stealing millions of dollars of federal money from student loan and coronavirus relief programs will spend some 3½ years in prison, the Justice Department announced Monday.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Dara Buck was sentenced to 42 months in federal prison Jan. 5 by U.S. District Court Judge R. Stan Baker af-

ter she pleaded guilty last year in the multipart scheme that bilked the U.S. government out of at least \$4.5 million. Buck, 39, pleaded guilty July 14 to charges including conspiracy to commit a crime against the U.S. government.

Baker also ordered Buck to pay restitution of almost \$3.7 million in the case and serve three years of supervised release after her prison term is completed.

Prosecutors described Buck’s crimes as “a prolific fraud

scheme” in announcing her guilty plea in July. They said she admitted to submitting more than 150 fraudulent applications for small business relief during the coronavirus pandemic via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act’s Paycheck Protection Program, known as PPP.

Prosecutors charged Buck had received some \$3.5 million through fraudulent PPP applications. She admitted to sharing some of those funds with other

conspirators, prosecutors said. They did not identify others involved in Buck’s scheme.

Buck also admitted she falsely submitted Department of Veterans Affairs certifications for those deemed totally and permanently disabled to the Department of Education, resulting in her securing more than one dozen student loans worth more than \$1 million for herself and other conspirators, prosecutors said.

“While serving in the U.S. Army,

Dara Buck engaged in a massive scheme to defraud the taxpayers of the nation she was sworn to serve,” U.S. Attorney Davis H. Estes wrote in the July statement. “With our law enforcement partners, we are committed to identifying and holding accountable those who defraud COVID-19 relief programs to feed their self-serving greed.”

dickstein.corey@stripes.com  
Twitter: @CDicksteinDC

## EUROPE

# Russia presses deadly assault for gain in east

By **ANDREW MELDRUM**  
*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia said Thursday that its forces are edging closer to capturing a salt-mining town in eastern Ukraine, which would mark an elusive victory for the Kremlin but come at the cost of heavy Russian casualties and extensive destruction of the territory they claim.

More than 100 Russian troops were killed in the battle for Soledar over the past 24 hours, Ukraine's Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said in televised remarks.

"The Russians have literally marched on the bodies of their own soldiers, burning everything on their way," Kyrylenko said while reporting that Russian forces had shelled a dozen towns and villages in the region in the past day.

Russian forces are using mortars and rockets to bombard Soledar in an unrelenting assault, struggling for a breakthrough after military setbacks have turned what the Kremlin hoped would be a fast victory into a grinding war of attrition that has dragged on for nearly 11 months with no end in sight.

"Civilians are trying to survive amid that bloodbath as the Russians are pressing their attacks," Kyrylenko said.

Soledar's fall would be a prize for a Kremlin starved of good battlefield news in recent months, after losing the significant city of Kherson in December. It would also offer Russian troops a springboard to conquer other areas of the eastern Donetsk province that remain under Ukrainian control, particularly the nearby strategic city of Bakhmut.

The Russians' tactic in the assault on Soledar is to send one or two waves of soldiers, many from the private Russian military contractor Wagner Group who take heavy casualties as they probe the Ukrainian defenses, a Ukrainian officer near Soledar told The Associated Press. When Ukrainian troops suffer casualties and are exhausted, the Russians send in another wave of highly-trained soldiers, paratroopers or special forces, to get a new toehold on the battlefield, said the Ukrainian officer, who insisted on anonymity for security reasons.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov praised the "selfless and



PHOTOS BY LIBKOS/AP

Ukrainian army Grad multiple rocket launcher fires rockets at Russian positions in the frontline near Soledar, Donetsk region, Ukraine, on Wednesday.

**"Civilians are trying to survive amid that bloodbath as the Russians are pressing their attacks."**

Pavlo Kyrylenko  
Donetsk governor

courageous action" of Russian troops, which he said is helping them to press forward in Soledar.

"Gigantic work has been done in Soledar," he said.

Peskov, however, stopped short of confirming a claim by Wagner Group owner Yevgeny Prigozhin, who boasted about capturing Soledar on Wednesday.

"There is still a lot to be done and it's too early to stop and rub our hands, the main work is still ahead," he said in a conference call with reporters.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's deputy defense minister, Hanna Malyar, said at a briefing Thursday: "The enemy continues the assaults, but suffers significant losses and is not successful."

The AP was unable to verify the claims made by either side.

Russia's Defense Ministry made no mention of Soledar in its



Ukrainian soldiers on their positions in the frontline near Soledar, Donetsk region, Ukraine.

daily briefing on Thursday. The ministry announced Wednesday that the country's top military officer — the chief of the military's General Staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov — was put in charge of the military operation in Ukraine. He replaces Gen. Sergei Surovikin, who was demoted to deputy only three months after he was installed in that job.

Ukrainian officials also said they were taking note of personnel changes at the top levels of the Russian military command, describing them as a sign that Moscow isn't achieving what it had hoped.

"Personnel changes would not occur with such frequency if they were doing well," a senior Ukrainian military official, Brig. Gen.

Oleksiy Hromov, said.

Fighting continued elsewhere in Ukraine.

The deputy head of Ukraine's presidential office, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, reported Thursday that two civilians were killed and a further eight were wounded in Russian attacks on Wednesday.

Citing data from regional officials, Tymoshenko said that one civilian died and five were wounded in the southern Kherson province, where shells hit a maternity hospital, private houses and apartment buildings, while one person was killed in Donetsk.

Two people were wounded in the southeastern Zaporizhzhia province, with one further civilian sustaining injuries in the southeastern Dnipropetrovsk province.



A Ukrainian soldier gives chocolate to children standing guard with national flags at their improvised checkpoint close to Sloviansk, Donetsk region, Ukraine, on Wednesday.

## Navy veteran held in Russia is released, US officials say

*The Washington Post*

A U.S. Navy veteran who had been detained in Russia for nine months was released on Thursday, according to U.S. officials and others familiar with the matter.

Taylor Dudley, 35, of Michigan, had been held since April in the Russian province of Kaliningrad,

located between Poland and Lithuania. He was released at a border crossing with Poland and was traveling to the United States with a team working for former New Mexico governor Bill Richardson, according to a statement from his center, which negotiates for the release of hostages and prisoners abroad.

U.S. officials confirmed the release. It appeared that the U.S. government did not reciprocate with the release of any Russian prisoners, as it has in the past, including with professional basketball player Brittney Griner who was exchanged for convicted arms trafficker Viktor Bout.

A U.S. official described the re-

lease as the result of consular negotiations and was unaware of any role played by outside parties.

"The U.S. Government has no information about a role played by any outside actor in this case. The U.S. Government is focused on providing consular services to Americans. We are all grateful to our embassies in Moscow and

Warsaw for their long-standing work on this case," the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to describe internal negotiations.

Dudley reportedly had been attending a music festival in Poland when he was detained. It was not clear why he crossed the border into the Russian province.

## NATION

# Snowpack helps California combat drought

BY HAYLEY SMITH

Los Angeles Times

At the University of California, Berkeley Central Sierra Snow Laboratory in Donner Pass on Wednesday, snow was piled so high that lead scientist Andrew Schwartz no longer needed stairs to exit the second floor.

"We just walk directly out onto the snow!" Schwartz said. The nearly 11 feet of snow surrounding the lab was the deepest he'd seen so far this year.

The piles of powder are the result of a series of powerful atmospheric river storms that have pummeled California over the last two weeks. The storms have claimed at least 19 lives as they topple trees, overtop levees and send people scrambling for higher ground.

But while the storms have delivered chaos, they have also helped to make a dent in drought conditions. The state's snow water equivalent — or the amount of water contained in the snow — was 226% of normal on Wednesday, marking a high for the date not seen in at least two decades.

The last time snowpack neared such a high on Jan. 11 was in 2005, when it was 206% of normal, according to state data.

Even more promising, the Sierra snowpack on Wednesday measured 102% of its April 1 average, referring to the end-of-season date when snowpack in California is usually at its deepest. This is the first time



PATRICK GRILEY, MAMMOTH LAKES TOURISM/AP

**Snowboarders make their way through a heavy snowfall in Mammoth Lakes, Calif., on Monday. The piles of powder are from the atmospheric river storms that have pummeled California over the last two weeks.**

that's happened on Jan. 11 in at least 20 years.

"102% of average with another week of stormy weather coming up is absolutely fantastic," Schwartz said. "And assuming we don't see complete and absolute dryness like we did last year, it's shaping up to be a winter that, at the very least, will prevent us from going into further drought, if not help pull us out of the drought."

But Schwartz and other experts were cautious about celebrating too soon. The measurements are not static and could change depending on how the rest of the wet season develops. Last season, for example, a soggy December gave way to a bone-dry January, February and March.

Forecasters say it's too soon to be certain what the coming months will bring. Mike Anderson, state cli-

matologist at the Department of Water Resources, said two more atmospheric rivers were heading for California before conditions are expected dry up around Jan. 20.

Longer-range forecasts are fuzzier, he said, with the latest seasonal outlooks from the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center showing equal chances of wetness or dryness in most of Northern California through March. But there is a

chance of one more atmospheric river to close out January.

"We're definitely looking to be in a better situation than we were last year, where everything shut off for a good three months, and there will be that opportunity to continue to make some additions to that snowpack before we get to April 1," Anderson said.

DWR water operations manager Molly White said reservoirs were also seeing boosts from the storms, with some smaller reservoirs recovering fully from drought-driven deficits. But the state's two largest reservoirs, Lake Shasta and Lake Oroville, remain far from full, topping out at 42% and 47% of capacity, respectively, on Wednesday.

The atmospheric rivers also haven't had much effect on Southern California's other major water source, the Colorado River, which remains at perilous lows.

Although rain is helpful, it's snow that holds the most value for the state's water supply, said Schwartz, of the Berkeley Snow Lab. While rainfall comes in pulses that can sometimes lead to massive amounts of flooding or be difficult to capture, snow melts slowly and provides a constant source of water, especially in warmer months when it's needed most.

But like water, too much snow can also pose a threat. When rain falls on snow, it can create ice layers or even make the snow too heavy, which can potentially give way to avalanches.

## Suspect in Idaho deaths appears in court; multiday preliminary hearing set for June

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — The man charged in the stabbing deaths of four University of Idaho students will have a preliminary hearing in late June, when prosecutors will try to show a judge that they have enough evidence to justify the felony charges.

Bryan Kohberger waived his right to a speedy preliminary hearing during a status conference Thursday morning. The 28-year-old Washington State University graduate student is charged with four counts of first-degree murder and burglary, and has not yet entered a plea and is waiting to learn whether prosecutors in the high-profile case will pursue the death penalty.

He appeared in court wearing an orange T-shirt and pants, and gave the judge short one-word answers when she asked him if he understood his rights during the roughly five-minute-long hearing.

Kohberger's attorney, Anne Taylor, told Magistrate Judge Megan Marshall that Kohberger was willing to waive his right to a speedy preliminary hearing, which would have required that it be held within two

weeks. The hearing itself will likely take four or five days, Taylor said.

"He's willing to waive timeliness to allow us time to obtain discovery in the case and be prepared," Taylor told the judge.

Latah County Prosecutor Bill Thompson said he had no objection to waiting until June or even July for the preliminary hearing.

Marshall set the preliminary hearing for June 26 at 9 a.m., expecting it to last for five days.

The Nov. 13 slayings of Madison Mogen, Kaylee Goncalves, Xana Kernodle and Ethan Chapin left the rural community in Moscow, Idaho, grief-stricken and afraid, prompting nearly half of the university's students to leave town for the perceived safety of online courses.

Weeks went by without a named suspect and few details were released, but on Dec. 30 Kohberger, a graduate student studying criminology from the university located just 10 miles away — was arrested at his parents' home in eastern Pennsylvania. Kohberger was extradited to Idaho last week.

University of Idaho students returned from winter break to start

classes on Wednesday, many of them coming together for the first time since news of the attack spread across campus.

A general feeling of relief was in the air, university spokesperson Jodi Walker said on Wednesday.

"I think everybody's happy to be back under the circumstances," she said. "They're relieved that an arrest has been made, and ready to focus on the semester."

At the preliminary hearing, the prosecutor will be expected to show the magistrate judge that he has enough evidence to justify moving forward with the felony charges; the defense will try to point out holes in the prosecutor's case to show that the charges should be dropped.

If the magistrate judge agrees that there is evidence to justify the charges, the case will be "bound over" into Idaho's 2nd District Court, and a district judge will take over. Then Kohberger will have a chance to enter a plea. If he pleads not guilty, the case will begin working toward a trial.

Thompson has 60 days from the time Kohberger enters a plea to say if he will seek the death penalty.

## Flight delays, cancellations minimal a day after outage

Associated Press

Delays and cancellations among flights across the United States were minimal on Thursday, a day after a system that offers safety information to pilots failed, grounding U.S. air traffic and leading to thousands of stranded travelers.

There were 636 delays into, within or out of the U.S. as of Thursday morning, according to flight-tracking website FlightAware. There were 82 cancellations.

The Federal Aviation Administration said Wednesday that preliminary indications "traced the outage to a damaged database file." The agency said it would take steps to avoid another similar disruption.

The breakdown showed how much American air travel depends on the computer system that generates alerts called NOTAMs — or Notice to Air Missions.

Before a plane takes off, pilots and airline dispatchers must review the notices, which include details about bad weather, runway closures or other temporary factors that could affect the flight. The

system was once telephone-based but moved online years ago.

The system broke down late Tuesday and was not fixed until midmorning Wednesday. The FAA took the rare step of preventing any planes from taking off for a time, and the cascading chaos led to more than 1,300 flight cancellations and 9,000 delays by early Wednesday evening on the East Coast, according to FlightAware.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg told a news conference that the problems "led to a ground stop because of the way safety information was moving through the system."

Buttigieg said his agency would now try to learn why the system went down.

Pilots and safety officials have complained about NOTAMs for years, saying there are too many of them and that some are unnecessary and written in cryptic abbreviations.

The FAA said in a 2020 report that it modernized the distribution of the notices through a standardized digital format that was to be completed in July of that year.

## NATION

# Another Biden search yields more papers

From wire reports

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden's legal team found additional classified documents when they searched a second location after finding secret government papers in a different Biden office in early November, according to a person familiar with the investigation.

Earlier this week, an attorney for Biden said the president's personal lawyers had discovered a small number of classified documents at the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, an institute in downtown Washington that Biden started after serving as vice president. People familiar with the matter said that discovery involved about 10 classified documents.

Biden's lawyers notified government agencies, and the Justice Department opened an investigation to see how the classified material got there and whether there was any other material that should be under government lock and key.

Legal representatives for the president found additional classified material at a second location, a person said Wednesday, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation. The person would not say when that material was found. The second batch of classified material was first reported by NBC News.

Spokesmen for the Justice Department, the FBI and the White House declined to comment Wednesday.

Biden acknowledged on Thursday that a document with classified markings from his time as vice president was found in his "personal library" at his home in Wilmington, Del., along with other documents found in his garage.

Biden told reporters at the White House that he is "cooperating fully and completely" with a Justice Department investigation into how classified information and government records made their way to his home and the office of his former institute in Washington.

White House officials have said that Biden's lawyers quickly handed over found documents to the National Archives and Records Administration — the agency tasked with handling presidential records.

A Biden lawyer said the classi-

fied documents at the Penn Biden Center were found Nov. 2, when one of his personal attorneys opened a locked closet to pack up the contents. The White House Counsel's Office notified the Archives, which took possession of the documents the following day, a Biden lawyer said.

That discovery came not long before Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed a special counsel, Jack Smith, to oversee the agency's criminal investigation into former president Donald Trump's possible mishandling of hundreds of classified documents that were taken to Mar-a-Lago after his presidency ended. Officials have said the investigation of Trump concerns not just the possible mishandling of government secrets but also possible obstruction of justice or destruction of records.

To review the discovery of Biden classified documents, Garland tapped U.S. Attorney John R. Lausch Jr., a holdover from the Trump administration. Depending on what this initial investigation yields, Garland could decide to appoint a special counsel.

While the Biden case has obvious echoes of the Mar-a-Lago investigation into Trump's conduct, the details provided by Biden's lawyer Monday suggest key differences that could factor heavily in whether the Biden documents become a criminal matter.

Biden's lawyer Richard Sauber said the Biden documents were discovered by the president's lawyers and voluntarily turned over to authorities. By comparison, in Trump's case, NARA officials pressed for material to be handed over, and then Trump's office was served with a grand jury subpoena demanding their return. After Trump's lawyers delivered 38 classified documents in response to the subpoena, an FBI search recovered more than 100 additional classified documents that were not turned over to authorities.

Much of the criminal investigation into the keeping of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago has centered on what officials have described in court papers as possible obstruction of the efforts to recover all of the documents. So far, no such allegation has been leveled in the Biden matter, though it is at an earlier stage.



JOHN MINCHILLO/AP

Protestors march on the streets around Montefiore Medical Center during a nursing strike, Wednesday, in the Bronx borough of New York.

## New York City nurses return to work after deal ends strike

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Two New York City hospitals have reached a tentative contract agreement with thousands of striking nurses that ends this week's walkout that disrupted patient care, officials announced Thursday.

The nurses, represented by the New York State Nurses Association, walked out early Monday after negotiations with management ran aground at Mount Sinai Hospital, in Manhattan, and Montefiore Medical Center, in the Bronx. Each has over 1,000 beds and 3,500 or more union nurses.

Nurses began returning to work at both hospitals Thursday morning, with New York Gov. Kathy Hochul greeting returning nurses

at Mount Sinai just before dawn.

Hochul, a Democrat, said that with the new three-year contract, "they'll receive a well-deserved 19% pay increase here. Also better benefits, higher wages for those with higher education, and again, a working environment that allows them to focus on patient care."

The union has stressed staffing levels as a key concern, saying that nurses who labored through the grueling peak of the coronavirus pandemic are stretched far too thin because too many jobs are open. Nurses say they have had to work overtime, handle twice as many patients as they should, and skip meals and even bathroom breaks.

The agreements with both hospitals include concrete, enforceable staffing ratios, the union said. The agreement with Montefiore also included what the union described as community health improvements and nurse-student partnerships to recruit local nurses from the Bronx.

"Through our unity and by putting it all on the line, we won enforceable safe staffing ratios at both Montefiore and Mount Sinai where nurses went on strike for patient care," NYSNA President Nancy Hagans said in a statement. "Today, we can return to work with our heads held high, knowing that our victory means safer care for our patients and more sustainable jobs for our profession."

## First lady has cancerous skin lesions removed

The Washington Post

First lady Jill Biden had two cancerous skin lesions removed Wednesday, the president's physician said, with all cancerous tissue fully removed from both.

Biden underwent a scheduled outpatient procedure at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center that is commonly known as Mohs surgery, said Kevin O'Connor, initially to remove a lesion above her right eye.

During that procedure, doctors confirmed that the lesion was basal cell carcinoma, the most common form of cancer diagnosed in the United States. During Biden's pre-operative prepa-

ration, physicians also identified a lesion on the left side of Biden's chest whose appearance was consistent with basal cell carcinoma, O'Connor said. That lesion was also removed using Mohs surgery, O'Connor said, and all of the cancerous tissue

was removed.

In addition, doctors identified a small lesion on Biden's left eyelid during the procedure, but did not conclude that it was likely to be basal carcinoma. They removed

it and sent it to a lab for "standard microscopic examination."

Experts said Biden has an excellent prognosis since her skin cancer was identified and removed early. Basal cell carcinoma is far less serious than other forms of skin cancer, such as melanoma and squamous cell carcinoma, because its lesions rarely metastasize.

Additionally, the cure rate for Mohs surgery is about 98%, said Mathew Avram, director of the Dermatology Laser and Cosmetic Center at Massachusetts General Hospital. There is a very small chance of recurrence, Avram said.



Jill Biden



## NATION

# Inflation eases to 6.5% over past 12 months

By **CHRISTOPHER RUGABER**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Rising consumer prices in the United States moderated again last month, bolstering hopes that inflation's grip on the economy will continue to ease this year and possibly require less drastic action by the Federal Reserve to control it.

Inflation eased to 6.5% in December compared with 12 months earlier, the government said Thursday. It was the sixth straight year-over-year slowdown. On a monthly basis, prices actually slipped 0.1% from November to December, the first such drop since May 2020.

The softer readings add to growing signs that the worst inflation bout in four decades is gradually waning. Still, the Fed doesn't expect inflation to slow enough to get close to its 2% target until well into 2024. The central bank is expected to raise its benchmark rate by at least a quarter-point when it next meets at the end of this month.

Even as it gradually slows, inflation remains a painful reality for many Americans, especially with such necessities as food, energy and rents having soared over the past 18 months.

For now, inflation is falling, with the national average price of a gallon of gas declining from a \$5 a gallon peak in June to \$3.27 a gal-

lon as of Wednesday, according to AAA.

Supply chain snarls that previously inflated the cost of goods have largely unraveled. Consumers have also shifted much of their spending away from physical goods and instead toward services, such as travel and entertainment. As a result, the cost of goods, including used cars, furniture and clothing, has dropped for two straight months.

Last week's jobs report for December bolstered the possibility that a recession could be avoided. Even after the Fed's seven rate hikes last year and with inflation still high, employers added a solid 223,000 jobs in December, and the unemployment rate fell to 3.5%, matching the lowest level in 53 years.

At the same time, average hourly pay growth slowed, which should lessen pressure on companies to raise prices to cover their higher labor costs.

Another positive sign for the Fed's efforts to quell inflation is that Americans overall expect price increases to decline over the next few years. That is important because so-called "inflation expectations" can be self-fulfilling: If people expect prices to keep rising sharply, they will typically take steps, like demanding higher pay, that can perpetuate high inflation.



TED SHAFFREY/AP

A Rolling Stones T-shirt is displayed in the Westfield Garden State Plaza shopping mall in Paramus, N.J.

## Jobless aid claims lowest in 15 weeks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. applications for unemployment benefits fell to their lowest level in 15 weeks as the job market continues to show resiliency in the face of attempts by the Federal Reserve to cool the economy.

The number of Americans applying for jobless aid for the week ending Jan. 7 fell by 1,000 to 205,000, from 206,000 the

week before, the Labor Department said Thursday.

The four-week moving average of claims, which softens some of the week-to-week volatility, fell by 1,750 to 212,500.

Jobless claims are generally viewed as a proxy for layoffs, which have been relatively low since the pandemic wiped out millions of jobs in the spring of 2020.

The labor market is closely monitored by Federal Reserve policymakers, who raised interest rates seven times last year in a bid to slow job growth and bring down stubbornly high inflation.

About 1.63 million people were receiving jobless aid the week that ended Dec. 31, a decline of 63,000 from the week before.

On Monday, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York said that consumers now anticipate inflation of 5% over the next year. That's the lowest such expectation in nearly 18 months. Over the next five years, consumers expect inflation to average 2.4%, only barely above the Fed's 2% target.

Still, in their remarks in recent

weeks, Fed officials have underscored their intent to raise their benchmark short-term rate by an additional three-quarters of a point in the coming months to just above 5%. Such increases would come on top of seven hikes last year, which led mortgage rates to nearly double and made auto loans and business borrowing

more expensive.

Futures prices show that investors expect the central bank to be less aggressive and implement just two quarter-point hikes by March, leaving the Fed's rate just below 5%. Investors also project that the Fed will cut rates in November and December, according to the CME FedWatch Tool.

## Guantanamo Bay lawyer faces criminal charges

Associated Press

BANGOR, Maine — A defense lawyer in Maine who once represented detainees at the Guantanamo Bay military prison has been charged with several criminal counts, and a prosecutor is recommending his disbarment, court records show.

Scott Fenstermaker was charged with trespassing, assault, reckless conduct and attempted theft in November, according to the records.

Fenstermaker told the Bangor Daily News that the November charges were filed after an argument broke out while he was trying to persuade a towing company owner to release his client's car from an impound lot. He said he was working in his capacity

as a lawyer at the time and it's "not like I was going out and burglarizing homes in my free time."



Fenstermaker

The court case against Fenstermaker is currently awaiting a new judge. A letter from the Maine Board of Overseers of the Bar states that the prosecutor working on Fenstermaker's case is seeking his disbarment.

Fenstermaker worked as a lawyer in New York for three decades and once represented a person who prosecutors said was a courier for Osama bin Laden, the Daily News reported.

## Mont. seeking prior authorization for abortions covered by Medicaid

Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. — State officials in Republican-controlled Montana want to require prior authorization before its health department pays for abortions for people covered by Medicaid, a proposal critics say would reduce access and delay or even prevent abortion care for low-income women in the state.

The Department of Public Health and Human Services is taking public comment Thursday on the proposed rule to require doctors to provide more medical information before Medicaid would agree to pay for an abortion to save a woman's life or any other medically necessary reason. The information would include the number

of her pregnancies and children.

Montana is one of 16 states whose Medicaid program is required to cover the costs of "medically necessary" abortions based on state law or a court order, according to the Guttmacher Institute.

A 2019 federal report said seven states at that time, which were not listed, required prior authorization before Medicaid would cover abortion services.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services did not immediately respond to a phone message Wednesday seeking more information.

"Given the time sensitive nature of abortion care, requiring doctors to obtain prior authorization be-

fore providing care creates an unnecessary obstacle that may result in delays in care and increase in costs for patients," said Cat Duffy with the National Health Law Program.

In Montana, abortion is legal until 24 weeks of gestation. A 2021 law that sought a reduction to 20 weeks is being challenged in court while the state also indicated it wants the Montana Supreme Court to overturn a ruling that the state Constitution's right to privacy guarantees access to legal abortion.

The proposed rule would only allow physicians — not physician assistants or advanced practice nurses — to provide Medicaid-funded abortion care.

## NATION

# US spies lag rivals in using open sources

By **NOMAAN MERCHANT**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As alarms began to go off globally about a novel coronavirus spreading in China, officials in Washington turned to the intelligence agencies for insights about the threat the virus posed to America.

But the most useful early warnings came not from spies or intercepts, according to a recent congressional review of classified reports from December 2019 and January 2020. Officials were instead relying on public reporting, diplomatic cables and analysis from medical experts — some examples of so-called open source intelligence, or OSINT.

Predicting the next pandemic or the next government to fall will require better use of open source material, the review found.

“There is little indication that the Intelligence Community’s exquisite collection capabilities were generating information that was valuable to policymakers,” wrote the authors of the review, conducted by Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee.

That echoes what many current and former intelligence officials are increasingly warning: The \$90 billion U.S. spy apparatus is falling behind because it has not embraced collecting open-source intelligence as adversaries including China ramp up their efforts.

This doesn’t diminish the importance of traditional intelligence. Spy agencies have unique powers to penetrate global communications and cultivate agents. They scored a high-profile success when the Biden administration publicized ultimately correct intelligence findings that Russian President Vladimir Putin intended to invade Ukraine.

But officials and experts worry that the U.S. hasn’t invested enough people or money in analyzing publicly available data or taking advantage of advanced technologies that can yield critical insights. Commercial satellite imagery, social media and other online data have given private companies and independent analysts new powers to reveal official secrets. And China is known to have stolen or acquired control over huge amounts of data on Americans, with growing concerns in Washington about Beijing’s influence over widely used apps like TikTok.

“Open source is really a bellwether for whether the intelligence community can protect the country,” said Kristin Wood, a former senior official at the CIA who is now chief executive at the Grist Mill Exchange, a commercial data platform. “We collectively



ALEX BRANDON/AP

**Kateryna Stepanenko, a Russia analyst, works at her desk at the Institute for the Study of War on Wednesday in Washington.**

as a nation aren’t preparing a defense for the ammunition that our adversaries are stockpiling.”

Intelligence agencies face several obstacles to using open source intelligence. Some are technological. Officers working on classified networks are often not able to easily access the unclassified internet or open data sources, for example. There are also concerns about civil liberties and protecting First Amendment rights.

But some experts also question whether agencies are held back by a reflexive belief that top-secret information is more valuable.

Rep. Jim Himes, a Connecticut Democrat and longtime Intelligence Committee member, said he believed there needed to be “some cultural change inside places like the CIA where people are doing what they’re doing for the excitement of stealing critical secrets as opposed to reviewing social media pages.”

In one 2017 test held by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, a human team competed against a computer programmed with algorithms to identify Chinese surface-to-air missile sites using commercial imagery.

Both the humans and the computer identified 90% of the sites, Stanford University professor Amy Zegart wrote in the book “Spies, Lies, and Algorithms,” but the computer needed just 42 minutes — and it took the human team 80 times longer.

Reports created using commercial satellites, online posts and other open sources — like the daily analyses on Russian and Ukrainian military tactics published by the Institute for the Study of War — are widely read by lawmakers and intelligence officials.

“There is a lot of open-source capability that the U.S. intelligence community can pretty much rely on to be there,” said Frederick Kagan, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute who oversees the creation of those reports. “What it needs to do is figure out how to leverage that ecosystem instead of trying to buy it.”

Most of the 18 U.S. spy agencies have open-source programs, from the CIA’s Open Source Enterprise to a 10-person program in the Department of Homeland Security’s intelligence arm. But top officials acknowledge there isn’t consistency across those programs in how they analyze open-source information or how they use and share it.

“We’re not paying enough attention to each other and so we’re not learning the lessons that different parts of the (intelligence community) are learning, and we’re not scaling solutions,” said Avril Haines, the U.S. director of national intelligence, at an industry event last year sponsored by the Potomac Officers Club. “And we’re not taking advantage of some of the outside expertise and information and work that could be taken advantage of.”

The Open Source Enterprise headquartered at the CIA is the successor to the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, where for generations employees monitored broadcasts to translate them for analysts.

Much of that work was transformed in the last decade. Where people once had to travel long distances to pick up tapes of radio broadcasts in remote places or areas where Americans weren’t welcome, sensors now transmit more signals automatically. And machine translation has largely taken the place of people who had to listen to the tapes and transcribe them.

But officials acknowledge they have to do more.

Haines has begun multiple open-source reviews since becoming director of national intelligence and is expected to finalize recommendations this year. Some people involved in those reviews have suggested that the Open Source Enterprise no longer be designated as leading OSINT efforts across the spy agencies, said people familiar with the reviews who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal government deliberations.

Three people familiar with Open Source Enterprise say the center had cut its budget for multiple years running prior to last year. They argue that’s a sign that open-source work has not always been prioritized at a consistent level.

The CIA recently appointed new leadership for the Open Source Enterprise and in 2021 created a “mission center” dedicated to technology.

There’s no consensus on whether the U.S. should create a new open-source agency or center. Supporters say a new organization could focus on adopting advanced technologies and creating more useful products, while opponents question whether it would be unnecessary bloat and take away resources from other agencies.

Carmen Medina, a retired CIA deputy director of intelligence, now studies how spy agencies can incorporate outside ideas and encourage employees to be more creative and intuitive.

She suggests a pilot program in which a cell of open-source analysts would compete for a number of years against the regular output of people with top-secret clearances.

Medina and others who have worked in top positions and briefed White House officials think that on most days, an open-source group would be competitive and might even produce better analysis using information that’s broadly available.

## Florida manatee deaths drop in 2022 but starvation is still a concern

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Manatee deaths dropped in 2022 from a record high the year before, but Florida wildlife officials said Wednesday that chronic starvation caused by water pollution remains a major concern.

Preliminary statistics show 800 recorded manatee deaths last year in Florida, according to the state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. That compares with more than 1,100 in 2021. Both numbers are higher than the average annual deaths of the marine mammals.

The new numbers come as state and feder-

al officials are feeding thousands of pounds of romaine lettuce to manatees at a warm-water power plant on Florida’s east coast in an effort to slow manatee starvation deaths. Threatened animals were fed more than 200,000 pounds of lettuce in the initial trial program last year.

FWC manatee biologist Michelle Pasawicz said the feeding program certainly helped some individual manatees, but the decline in deaths may also be attributed to the weaker, sickest animals perishing in the earlier months of the die-off.

“The manatees do appear to generally be in

better shape overall,” Pasawicz said during an online news conference. “I think we were helping some manatees for sure. A milder winter definitely gives the manatees a better chance.”

So far about 30,000 pounds of lettuce paid for through donations has been fed to manatees at the site on the Indian River Lagoon, near Cape Canaveral. Another 25,000 pounds is on its way, Pasawicz said, as more manatees show up.

“This is a marathon. It’s going to last us for several months,” said Jon Wallace of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



LYNNE SLADKY/AP

**Manatees swim in a canal where discharge from a nearby plant warms the water in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in 2010.**

# WORLD

## EU-member Sweden says rare earth deposits found

Associated Press

KIRUNA, Sweden — The beginning of the end of Europe's dependency on China for precious rare earth materials may lie buried deep under the rugged reaches of northern Sweden, well above the Arctic Circle.

Sweden's iron-ore miner LKAB said Thursday it has identified "significant deposits" in Lapland of rare earth elements that are essential for the manufacture of smartphones, electric vehicles and wind turbines.

The government-owned company that mines iron ore at Kiruna, nearly 600 miles north of Stockholm, said there are more than 1 million tons of rare earth oxides.

According to LKAB, it's the largest known deposit of its kind in Europe. But the company warned

that it could take at least a decade before mining starts.

Swedish Industry Minister Ebba Busch called Sweden "a gold mine" following the discovery. Her announcement came as the EU's executive Commission puts the finishing touches to a proposal for its Critical Raw Materials Act that should help developing reliable and solid supply chains.

Rare earths now reach into the lives of almost everyone on the planet, turning up in everything from hard drives to elevators and trains. They are especially vital to the fast-growing field of green energy, feeding wind turbines and electric car engines.

But the EU is lagging well behind competitors on the market, getting around 98% of its rare earth minerals from China, with none of them mined in Europe.

## Australia nixes Afghanistan cricket series over Taliban

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Afghanistan cricket officials blasted Australia's decision on Thursday to cancel their men's one-day international cricket series.

Cricket Australia cited recent heavier restrictions on women's rights in Afghanistan by the Taliban government for axing the three ODIs in March in the United Arab Emirates.

The Afghanistan Cricket Board said it was "extremely disappointed and saddened by the pathetic statement" from Cricket Australia and it would complain to the International Cricket Council.

It accused CA of prioritizing political interests over fair play and

sportsmanship, undermining the integrity of the game, and damaging the relationship between the two countries.

"Cricket has played a significant role in promoting unity and national pride in Afghanistan," the board said. "After years of war and conflict, cricket has helped to bring people together and provide a sense of normalcy to the country. It has also been an important source of hope and inspiration for all Afghans, particularly young people."

When Kabul fell to the Taliban in 2021, women were banned from playing sports on the grounds that doing so would contravene Islamic laws requiring their hair and skin to be covered.



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# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Dungeness crab harvest delayed off Pacific coast

**WA** SEATTLE — The key Dungeness crab harvest areas from Klipsan Beach, Wash., to Cape Falcon, Ore., will not open until Feb. 1 because surveys found legal-sized males still lacked enough recoverable meat in their shells.

A policy group that includes the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife made the announcement late last week, The Seattle Times reported.

The late start to the 2022-23 commercial season is a disappointment to crabbers. Last season, the harvest started Dec. 1, 2021.

The Dungeness crab harvest is Washington state's most valuable commercial fishery.

## Cigarette sales go up in smoke over 20 years

**WI** MADISON — Cigarette sales in Wisconsin plummeted over the past 20 years, fueled by higher taxes and smoking bans, a report released Wednesday showed.

The number of packs of cigarettes purchased in the state dropped from 420 million in 2001 to just under 193 million in 2022, the Wisconsin Policy Forum report said. On a per capita basis, more than 32 packs of cigarettes were sold per resident in 2022 compared with nearly 78 in 2001.

During that time span, a statewide smoking ban took effect, taxes were increased on cigarettes three times and there was a growth in substitute products like vaping, the report noted. The statewide smoking ban, which included bars and restaurants, took effect in 2011. State taxes were increased in 2002, 2008 and 2009, while federal taxes also increased in 2002 and 2009.

The report notes that due to higher taxes in Wisconsin, some smokers may have illegally smuggled cigarettes or legally purchased them in other states where taxes are lowered.

## Suit: School ban on BLM shirts is discriminatory

**GA** SPRINGFIELD — A Georgia school district is being sued by students who say they were barred from wearing Black Lives Matter T-shirts to school events while their white peers regularly wear shirts printed with Confederate flags.

The lawsuit was filed last week in U.S. District Court against school administrators in Effingham County. It says the district's unfair application of its dress code is part of a broader pattern of discrimination and "deliberate indifference to acts of racial animosity" that violate the civil rights of Black students.

School administrators in Effingham County have cited a district-wide policy prohibiting clothing that "may contribute to disruption," the lawsuit says, to keep students



RUSS DILLINGHAM, (LEWISTON, MAINE) SUN JOURNAL/AP

## A good brisk run

Members of the Bates College cross country track team practice in below-freezing temperatures in Lewiston, Maine, on Monday.

from wearing Black Lives Matter shirts.

One of the student plaintiffs was denied entry to a high school football game because she wore a Black Lives Matter shirt, the lawsuit said. It alleges that white students in the school district regularly wear shirts printed with Confederate flags.

Effingham County School Superintendent Yancy Ford said in a statement to news outlets that the district had not yet been served with the lawsuit. He said any response to its claims would be made in court.

## Election official misused pandemic relief money

**MS** JACKSON — An election commissioner in Mississippi's largest county has pleaded guilty to fraud and embezzlement charges related to misuse of pandemic relief money from a group funded by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

Hinds County Election Commissioner Toni Johnson, 37, of Clinton, entered the guilty plea Monday as jury selection was beginning for her trial, court records show. She will have to resign and will no longer be able to serve in any office handling public money, according to the state auditor's office.

Johnson was chairwoman of the Hinds County Election Commission in 2020 and 2021. According to the state auditor's office, she used COVID-19 response money from the Center for Tech and Civic Life to buy two 85-inch televisions and per-

sonal protective equipment, which she purportedly had delivered to her own home and one other private home.

In the plea deal, Johnson is expected to avoid prison time.

## Program lets some victims shield their addresses

**TN** NASHVILLE — The Tennessee secretary of state is encouraging victims of human trafficking, stalking, domestic abuse or any sexual offense to protect their addresses from public disclosure under a free state program.

Secretary of State Tre Hargett's office said the Safe at Home address confidentiality program provides approved applicants a substitute address that can be used for voter registration, government services such as a driver's license, access to assistance programs, and other legal needs.

The address can be used by anyone in that household. Safe at Home applicants can complete an application with a partner agency listed at SafeAtHomeTN.com. They can also call 615-253-3043 to find a partner agency.

The program launched in 2019 and was expanded in 2021.

## Police: Teacher's injury from pellet gun superficial

**VT** BARRE — Charges will be forthcoming after a high school teacher suffered a superficial injury after being hit with a

projectile fired from a pellet gun that had been brought to school by a student, Barre police say.

Police say the incident occurred at about 2:45 p.m. on Tuesday as students at Barre's Spaulding High School were being released for the day.

Two students were identified as having brought pellet guns to school, one of which was reported to have been involved in the incident, police say.

In a social media post, Spaulding administrators say they are working with Barre police to ensure the safety of the community, but they cannot reveal many details of the incident.

"We'd like to re-emphasize to our students and staff the importance of 'See something, Say something,'" the post said.

## Lobster fishermen must report more about catch

**ME** PORTLAND — Fishermen in Maine, the state responsible for about 80% of the nation's lobster haul in 2021, must now report more detailed information such as when, where and how many they catch.

Few had to report until this year, making Maine the only state that harvests lobster that didn't require full details, according to the Portland Press Herald.

Fishermen started having to share the additional information with the state and regulators at the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries

Commission beginning Jan. 1.

Fishermen in the state brought in about 109 million pounds of lobster in 2021.

## At least 20 horse deaths tied to contaminated feed

**LA** BATON ROUGE — At least 20 horses in Louisiana have died after ingesting bacteria found in some alfalfa hay cubes from a manufacturer in Colorado, state agriculture officials said.

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry began notifying livestock owners and others about potential problems with some bags of "Top Of The Rockies Alfalfa Horse Cubes" in mid-December after horses in Louisiana and three other states began showing neurological symptoms consistent with botulism, state officials said.

The FDA said at least 98 horses in Louisiana, Texas, Colorado and New Mexico have showed symptoms including muscle tremors, trouble swallowing or eating, difficulty standing or collapse. At least 45 of those animals have died or were euthanized due to declining health after eating the cubes.

The department said it had confirmed with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the California Animal Health & Food Safety Laboratory that Clostridium botulinum type C was in the alfalfa cubes, which causes equine botulism, The Advertiser reported.

# WEEKEND



Anti-Flag still going strong on 13th album  
**Music, Page 28**



Aubrey Plaza and Will Sharpe rest within view of a smoking Mount Etna.



Meghann Fahy and Plaza explore Noto, known for its 18th-century architecture.

# Scenes in Sicily

See the sites where 'The White Lotus' filmed on the Italian island for yourself

**Travel, Page 20**



Haley Lu Richardson and Leo Woodall take in another beautiful Sicilian view in the second season of "The White Lotus."

HBO photos

## WEEKEND: GADGETS &amp; TECHNOLOGY

## Cooking up smart tech

Highlighting some of the food gadgets on display at CES 2023 in Las Vegas

By CARA RUBINSKY  
Associated Press

From an artificial intelligence oven that promises to warn you when your food is about to burn to a mixing bowl designed to take the hassle out of tracking calories, food tech was a key theme at this year's CES tech show in Las Vegas.

Brad Jashinsky, a director analyst at research firm Gartner, said big companies often use CES to make attention-seeking announcements about products that are currently out of reach for most consumers, but may become more widespread and affordable in the coming years.

Also on display was tech that could help restaurants and others reduce food waste and improve supply chains, which Jashinsky said could have a huge impact on their bottom lines.

For those who want to become better home cooks, there was plenty of tech aimed at mostly affluent consumers.

Here are some products that caught our eye:

**Easier nutrition tracking**

VersaWare is designed for people frustrated by trying to track their nutrition in traditional apps.

It provides a cutting board and a mixing bowl, each attached to a phone-sized device that will display recipes and other information. As you cook, you note what ingredient you're adding and it weighs it and calculates the nutritional information. At the end, you have the statistics for whatever you're making without having to do the math yourself.

The appliances will sync to the company's app, which will include recipes automatically tailored to your nutritional goals — you'll need to decide how comfortable you are sharing that information. For example, if your nutrition plan says a recipe should have 25% less calories, VersaWare says its AI can figure out how to get it there.

"We're trying to shoulder the burden of nutrition tracking," said CEO Jacob Lindberg.

The company is still raising money and hopes to launch in the third quarter of 2023. They haven't determined pricing. The cutting board and mixing bowl will be sold separately.

**Reducing food waste**

Knowing exactly when an avocado is perfectly ripe may sound a bit niche, but Dutch startup OneThird thinks it's a key to helping reduce food waste.

The company unveiled an avocado scanner designed for supermarkets that's currently being tested in Canada and can tell you whether an avocado is still firm or ready to eat.

OneThird already works with growers, distributors and others along the supply chain to predict the shelf life of avocados, tomatoes, strawberries and blueberries and is working to add more produce.

According to the United Nations, nearly a third of all food globally is thrown away. Reducing that would mean less food waste being tossed into methane-producing landfills.

Another Dutch startup, Orbisk, helps restaurants reduce food waste by tracking where and when it's happening.

**Interactive cooking classes**

Blok wants to be the Peloton of cooking classes.

It's a large cutting board with a docking station and a digital display where subscribers will be able to watch live cooking classes taught by professional chefs and chat with other participants.

Creators Alissa and Tony Frick envision groups of family members and friends doing classes together virtually four or five times a month. The classes will all be 30 minutes or less. The idea was born during the pandemic, when the Fricks couldn't get together to cook meals with their family.

"We missed that so much," Tony Frick said.

The Fricks have sold 100 units that will be delivered this summer and are hoping to scale up production after that. They anticipate selling the cutting board for \$299 or \$399, with an app subscription expected to cost \$9.99 a month.

**Uncertainty-free cooking**

Some people love to experiment in the kitchen. If you're not one of them, there's the Tramontina Guru.

The Brazilian company's smart induction cooktop promises to help you make perfect risotto, steak au poivre and caramel toffee, among 200 other recipes.

An app guides you through every step of the cooking



JOHN LOCHER/AP

An image from the Orbisk food waste monitor is displayed on a computer Jan. 3 during CES Unveiled, before the start of the CES tech show in Las Vegas.

process. You can even choose whether you'd like your meat to be rare, medium or well done.

You weigh your ingredients in the pot on the cooktop. When you're ready, you press a button and the cooktop heats to the right temperature for the right amount of time.

"This takes out the guesswork," said Tramontina head chef Flavia Gois.

The basic set including an induction cooktop and pot will be available in the U.S. this spring for \$299.

**A very smart mixer**

GE unveiled a smart mixer that lets you weigh your ingredients in the bowl while you're working.

The GE Profile also has an auto sensor that can monitor changes in texture and viscosity and adjust speed accordingly. It shuts itself off automatically to avoid overmixing.

And it has voice control so you don't have to stop what you're doing and wash your hands off to operate it.

All that precision doesn't come cheap — the mixer costs \$999.95 and is only available at Crate & Barrel.

## Jabra Talk 65 headset offers approximately 14 hours of talk time

By GREGG ELLMAN  
Tribune News Service

Jabra's newly launched Talk 65 Bluetooth 5.1 mono headset is a perfect choice for mobile workers.

The headset has a pair of noise-canceling microphones built into a boom, which works as advertised to cancel and cut 80% of the background noise on the user's end of the Talk 65. The microphones enable your caller to hear what you want them to hear: your voice.



JABRA/TNS

The Jabra Talk 65 is a Bluetooth headset that can pair with up to eight devices and cuts 80% of background noise.

On-ear controls worked well in the ergonomically designed black headset for power, volume and answering calls. It is designed to wrap around your ear for comfort and to ensure it stays in place. A USB charge (cable included) will produce about 14 hours of talk time, and the Bluetooth range is 300 feet. An IP54-rated construction will protect against small water splashes, sweat and dirt/dust. Three ear gel sets are included (small, medium and large).

A .41-inch speaker is inside, which also works well for streaming content and listening to voice assistants and GPS directions. The Talk 65 can be paired with up to eight Bluetooth devices and simultaneously with two Bluetooth connections. Online: jabra.com; \$99.99

With the Sensibo AirQ sensor, controlling your home air conditioner or heat pump is a breeze, at home or away. After an easy installation, your air system will

become an intelligent climate machine and save you money.

The Sensibo AirQ is a small piece of hardware you keep in any room to take control of the air settings and quality. The Sensibo AirQ supports any air conditioner or heat pump system with remote control. The 10,000-plus models it works with are listed on the Sensibo website.

With this system, the temperature can be adjusted from anywhere on a smartphone with the Sensibo app, using planned or manual schedules, or geofencing.



Geofencing sets virtual boundaries around your home. Then the app for the device determines your location to know if you are home or away, and whether the system should be on or off.

Other features include the ability to set filter reminders and send commands with voice assistants such as Alexa and Google Assistant. The Sensibo AirQ also connects to Apple HomeKit and other smart home platforms.

The app displays the live condition of the indoor air quality as well as the levels of volatile organic compounds (VOC) and carbon dioxide (CO2).

A single kit sensor is \$129, the double starter kit is \$258, the family kit with three sensors is \$357 and an expert kit with four is \$476.

Online: sensibo.com

The Sensibo AirQ can control your home's air temperature and quality via an app.

SENSIBO/TNS

## WEEKEND: MOVIES



Marvel Studios

Mantis (Pom Klementieff), left, Groot (voiced by Vin Diesel), Star-Lord (Chris Pratt), Drax (Dave Bautista) and Nebula (Karen Gillan) star in “Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3.”

# Up in the air

Questions surround this year’s slate of superhero films

BY DAVID BETANCOURT  
*The Washington Post*

**N**ew year. New superhero movies. And the newly relevant question of who will be the champion of comic-book cinema in the near future. As Marvel Studios enters its fifth phase of connected-universe dominance, the renamed DC Studios and its new co-head James Gunn will be trying to get back in the game. And then there’s Sony, which continues to make Spider-Man villain movies that don’t feature Spider-Man in hopes of creating its own winning franchise. Will 2023 mark the last year of Marvel Studios not having a worthy challenger? Will any of the DC heroes on the big screen matter enough this year to survive the red pen of Gunn as he plans his future slate? Is a Kraven the Hunter movie really happening? We’ll be here covering it all for you. In the meantime, here’s a look at the 2023 superhero movie slate:

## ‘Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania’ (Feb. 17)

Ant-Man is Marvel’s funniest franchise (although the Thors seem to be taking aim at that title of late). That’s saying something in a Marvel Cinematic Universe where humor is a key ingredient in every offering. Ant-Man making it to trilogy status off the comedic chops of lead actor Paul Rudd would be a big deal itself, but that takes a back seat to the movie debut of the MCU’s next Thanos: the time-traveling Kang the Conqueror, played by Jonathan Majors. He first appeared as a variant of the supervillain in an episode of “Loki” on Disney+ but is now the big bad guy that all MCU offerings are marching toward from here on out, as we’re now at the beginning of the studio’s Phase 5. He’s the central cause of a new team of Avengers assembling in two future films, “Kang Dynasty” and “Secret Wars,” in 2025 and 2026, respectively.

## ‘Shazam: Fury of the Gods’ (March 17)

Asher Angel returns as Billy Batson, who when he says the word “shazam” is struck by lightning and transforms from a kid into an adult superhero (played by Zachary Levi). Helen Mirren and Lucy

Liu star as furious goddesses Hespera and Kalypso, who are none too pleased that Billy and his sibling superheroes have access to the power of the gods.

## ‘Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3’ (May 5)

Gunn may be the Kevin Feige of DC Studios now, but there’s still the matter of finishing up his pop music-infused “Guardians of the Galaxy” trilogy, which is likely the job that got him the big chair at DC in the first place (that and his mini Suicide Squad/Peacemaker universe). Future event-level Avengers movies aside, this could be the last we see of characters such as Peter Quill (Chris Pratt), Rocket Raccoon (Bradley Cooper) and Groot (Vin Diesel) in the MCU. Given that Gunn himself has hinted that a major character will die in “Vol. 3,” this is shaping up to be the movie where the music stops.

## ‘Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse’ (June 2)

This is the highly anticipated sequel to 2018’s Academy Award-winning “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse” with the African American/Puerto Rican Miles Morales (Shameik Moore) as the lead arachnid kid. Spider-Gwen (Hailee Steinfeld) is also back and helping Miles face



Warner Bros. Pictures

These adopted siblings’ power to turn from kids into superheroes angers goddesses Hespera and Kalypso in the “Shazam” sequel.

off against the wall-crawler of the far future, Spider-Man 2099 (Oscar Isaac). The Spider-Verse is undeniably Sony’s No. 1 solo spider franchise.

## ‘The Flash’ (June 16)

“The Flash” was supposed to be a big deal, rumored to be a time-travel story that would serve as a reset for future DC movies. But it now just may be a goodbye flick, as Gunn has made clear most if not all of the Zack Snyder Justice League era will not be a part of his new vision at DC Studios. That doesn’t mean “The Flash” won’t have its moment. It’s (so far) outrun the many recent controversies of lead actor Ezra Miller and is still set to mark the return of Michael Keaton as Batman, which could go down as the geek culture moment of 2023.

## ‘The Marvels’ (July 28)

This “Captain Marvel” sequel — in Marvel Studios’ first franchise to feature a superheroine in the lead role — is also a mini-Avengers movie of sorts, connecting to two other MCU Disney+ series. Monica Rambeau (Teyonah Parris) of “WandaVision” and Kamala Kahn (Iman Vellani) of “Ms. Marvel” also star alongside Brie Larson’s Captain Marvel.

## ‘Blue Beetle’ (Aug. 18)

DC’s first Latino superhero movie stars “Cobra Kai’s” Xolo Maridueña as Jamie Reyes, who discovers a blue scarab that turns him into an alien-like bug being. Any franchise potential depends on the box-

office response. If “Blue Beetle” has a strong cultural moment, Gunn might have to add it to his big board. Otherwise, this film could be a sequel-less solo outing.

## ‘Kraven the Hunter’ (Oct. 6)

Sony continues to try to turn Spider-Man villains into viable movie franchises. The Venom franchise has been hit or miss. Vampire flick “Morbius” didn’t have the bite the studio was hoping for. “Kraven the Hunter,” starring Aaron Taylor-Johnson in the lead role, is the next attempt. Can it change the narrative? Or will the only spider-movies that matter be the animated ones and the MCU Spider-Man movies Sony makes jointly with Marvel Studios?

## ‘Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom’ (Dec. 25)

“Aquaman” was a billion-dollar breath of fresh air for DC. Its sequel is likely the end for Jason Momoa’s undersea franchise given all the changes going on at DC Studios. If we do see Aquaman again under the watchful eye of Gunn, it will most likely be with a new actor. Gunn has already said he’s bringing a new Superman to the screen, meaning this movie is the official end of the Snyder Justice League universe. Gunn has mentioned he’d consider bringing former Superman Henry Cavill back in a new DC role, and the same could be said for Momoa, who has equal box-office appeal.

## WEEKEND: MOVIES

## Butler binge

Get ready for the star's latest, 'Plane,' by watching his other action and rom-com films from the past decade

BY KATIE WALSH  
Tribune News Service

The latest Gerard Butler actioner, "Plane," lifts off this weekend, a brawny thriller that knows just what it is and delivers on that promise. It makes for an opportunity to take a perusal through Butler's career, as he's settled comfortably into his mid-budget action-hero role in the past decade, with the results often more entertaining than not.

Though Butler appeared as Dracula in "Dracula 2000" (streaming on Starz), cropped up in Angelina's Jolie's "Tomb Raider" sequel "Cradle of Life" in 2003 (streaming on HBO Max), and co-starred as the Phantom in Joel Schumacher's 2005 "Phantom of the Opera" (available to rent on all platforms), it seems the world didn't much sit up and take notice of Butler as a major star until Zack Snyder stripped him down to his skivvies to play King Leonidas in "300" (rent it on all platforms), which became a phenomenon back in 2006.

Despite his success as the Spartan general, Butler's newfound stardom took him down the rom-com path for awhile, as he put in turns opposite Hilary Swank in "P.S. I Love You" in 2007 (rent on all platforms), Katherine Heigl in 2009's "The Ugly Truth" (streaming on Starz or available to rent), and Jennifer Aniston in 2010 in "The Bounty Hunter" (streaming on Hulu and available to rent). During this era, he managed to star in the wacky video game action thriller "Gamer" (2009), directed by Mark Neveldine and Brian

Taylor (stream it on Netflix, Prime Video and Hulu).

But in recent years, Butler has stayed in a specific lane, and if you're a fan of that lane, his work is quite satisfying. Often, it's "Gerard Butler Saves The World," quite literally, in "Greenland" (2020), when he outrides an asteroid hitting the Earth. If it sounds insane, it is, but "Greenland" is also better than it has any right to be (stream it on HBO Max), which is par for the course with the latest Butler blockbusters.

There's 2018's "Hunter Killer," a zippy submarine thriller in the vein of "The Hunt for Red October" or "Crimson Tide," in which Butler captains a sub through treacherous waters in order to prevent a coup in Russia (rent it on all platforms). Or, there's his role as Secret Service agent Mike Banning in the bloody, bombastic "Has Fallen" trilogy, comprised of "Olympus Has Fallen" (2013), "London Has Fallen" (2016, streaming on Netflix) and "Angel Has Fallen" (2019), in which Butler plays a Secret Service agent with a very specific set of skills (single-handedly preventing terrorists from attacking world leaders).

In between all those "Has Fallens," Butler co-starred in Alex Proyas' delightfully campy and over-the-top take on ancient mythology, "Gods of Egypt" (2016) in which Butler (a Scotsman), Nikolaj Coster-Waldau (a Dane) and Geoffrey Rush (an Aussie) play a bunch of Egyptian gods. It's completely daffy but so much fun. Rent it on all platforms.



CHARLES SYKES, INVISION/AP

Gerard Butler, shown at a "Plane" screening on Jan. 10 in New York, can also be seen in a number of other action films over the past decade.

Often, Butler is even more fun to watch when he's breaking bad, such as in 2009's "Law Abiding Citizen," directed by F. Gary Gray and co-starring Jamie Foxx (stream it on HBO Max), in which Butler plays a grieving man who takes justice into his own hands.

But Butler's most entertaining recent action role might be in Christian Gudegast's underrated "Heat" knockoff "Den of Thieves," which sees Butler eating a doughnut out of a bloodied box in the

middle of a crime scene, chopping it up in a Benihana opposite a hulking-out Pablo Schreiber and shouting into a phone, "they're addicted to heists!" In "Den of Thieves," Butler is the chaotic cop in the vein of Al Pacino's Vincent Hanna; Schreiber is a Long Beach-bred Neil McCauley on steroids. The two circle each other, then clash in a downtown L.A. bank heist/shootout and it's wildly entertaining (if you like that kind of thing). Stream it on Netflix to cap off your Butler binge.

## Grounded action keeps pilot Butler's 'Plane' on course

BY KATIE WALSH  
Tribune News Service

The villains of the 2022 holiday season were the airlines, so it's an apt moment for the Gerard Butler action vehicle "Plane" to take flight. The inciting incident involves a cost-cutting safety checker at Trailblazer Airlines insisting that Captain Brodie Torrance (Butler) pilot through a storm instead of around it in order to save fuel during a New Year's flight from Singapore to Tokyo. Of course, since this is a Gerard Butler action film, the passengers on Trailblazer Flight 119 don't end up stranded for days in an airport but rather fighting for their lives on a remote island in the Philippines ruled by a separatist militia whose primary source of income is hostages.

Not to worry though, because Butler's Brodie isn't your average airline pilot: He's an airline pilot who can kill bad guys with his bare hands. Plus, he has backup in the form of Mike Colter, and the two actors make a fine, fun and appealingly masculine pair in "Plane."

Consider this meet cute: Brodie Torrance is a widowed former Royal Air Force pilot stuck flying long-haul budget flights thanks to a viral video in which he put down an unruly passenger with a chokehold (his signature move, as we'll come to find out). Louis Gaspere (Colter) is a convicted murderer who has been on the lam for 15 years, now being extradited from Bali to the United States. When Louis ends up on Brodie's flight, sparks fly (from machine gun fire) as they battle the aforementioned separatist militia to save the passengers and get Brodie back to his daughter Daniela (Haleigh Hekking) in Hawaii.

Jean-Francois Richet's "Plane" is as efficient, economical and effective as its title, which is a good one, actually



LIONSGATE/TNS

Mike Colter, left, and Gerard Butler must rescue their "Plane" passengers from a separatist militia after they are stranded on an island in the Philippines.

— clear, descriptive, communicates what the film is about. The characterization in the screenplay is lean to the point of scanty, but we're given just enough to suffice.

Much like the aircraft itself for the majority of "Plane," this taut thriller remains grounded and gritty, and once we're on land, Puerto Rico — subbing for the Philippines — offers a sense of texture and realism to the humid

setting. Richet strings the tension methodically, alternating with bursts of chaotic violence, showing us that Brodie is capable of both method and madness. Sometimes it's a carefully orchestrated and silent extraction of hostages, sometimes it's a brutal, bruising brawl as Brodie wrestles an assailant into submission, captured in a single handheld take. Butler's fighting style is similar to the film's: brawny, unshowy, effectual and explosive only when necessary.

Far away from the steamy Filipino jungles, we see the inner workings of the Trailblazer war room, headed up by Tony Goldwyn in full hambone mode as crisis manager David Scarsdale, bossing around the top executive (Paul Ben-Victor) and calling in the mercenaries. With Butler's stoic heroism, plus the behind-the-scenes corporate jockeying, "Plane" feels like the action-thriller version of "Sully" with a nod toward Tobias Lindholm's "A Hijacking," but without the bleak condemnation of a corporate culture that negotiates the price of human lives.

The villains on the ground are a group of bloodthirsty rebels with great hair, and the leader, Junmar (Evan Dane Taylor), is so cool, you almost want to root for him (considering they crashed onto his island), but there is, of course, the murdering of innocent hostages. However, please don't expect any political nuance or social commentary out of "Plane." If you go into it expecting nothing more than to enjoy watching Butler sweatily manhandle some bad guys, you'll be more than satisfied with the ride "Plane" offers — a well-executed hunk of pulpy entertainment.

"Plane" is rated R for violence and language. Running time: 107 minutes. Now playing at select AAFES theaters.



## WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS



SONY PICTURES/AP

**Grumpy and isolated, Tom Hanks is forced out of his comfort zone by his cheerfully chaotic neighbors in ‘A Man Called Otto.’**

# Making a connection

Hanks stars as an isolated grump in ‘A Man Called Otto’

BY KATIE WALSH  
Tribune News Service

The “Grumpy Old Men” era seems to come for all of our lovable movie stars, including Tom Hanks, who easily slides into this new phase with “A Man Called Otto,” a remake of the Oscar-nominated Swedish film, “A Man Called Ove.” It’s not easy to translate the famously dry and somewhat bleak Scandinavian humor to a sunnier, more optimistic American worldview, but writer David Magee and director Marc Forster manage to maintain the melancholy of the original film, which is based on the book by Swedish author Fredrik Backman.

Set in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, “A Man Called Otto” is a story about the loss of human connection in a modernized and rapidly changing world, and the effort it takes to knit a community through the ties that bind: personal ones. It is also a story about the transformative nature of grief, and the beauty and cruelty of life lived in moments both mundane and monumental.

If these lessons are all a little bit obvious, and somewhat maudlin, well, yes, they are, in “A Man Called Otto,” but that doesn’t make them any less effective. Forster’s sweet spot seems to lie at the juncture of the sentimental and the strange, using unique story concepts as a way to explore existential themes, not shying away from the harsher aspects of humanity, but always finding a bright side. The trailers for the film don’t give away the true nature of the story, focusing more on the comedic elements without revealing any of the tragedy behind Otto’s cantankerousness, but trust that it is there.

Without someone to live for, Otto’s minor annoyances have become his *raison d’être*, righting minor wrongs like irregularly sorted recycling and incorrectly displayed parking permits. It’s his grum-

pinous that keeps him clinging to this mortal plane, and his cheerfully chaotic neighbors who offer the friction to keep his gears regrettably grinding.

Forster assembles an ensemble to surround Hanks, and the standout is Mexican actress Mariana Treviño, who plays Marisol, a harried, determined, heavily pregnant mom of two who moves in across the street with her husband Tommy (Manuel Garcia-Rulfo). Marisol doesn’t back down from Otto and calls him out on his rudeness, and the hapless young parents bring over food and guilelessly request favors from their new neighbor, forcing him out of his comfort zone with their own naturally exuberant expectations of community.

Forster and cinematographer Matthias Koenigswieser bring a Scandinavian-inspired coldness to the look and feel of “A Man Called Otto,” the color palette desaturated, the compositions angular. But the bleakness of this world does not require much contrivance to feel familiar — this community is crumbling thanks to corporate capitalist rot and digital disconnect.

Despite this well-earned despair, there is an irrepressible warmth, too, because this is a Hanks family affair. Hanks’ wife, Rita Wilson, is a producer alongside her husband, and a couple of her folk songs crop up throughout, while Wilson and Hanks’ son Truman Hanks plays young Otto in flashbacks.

While this sometimes results in tonal inconsistency, tilting toward the treacly, the cumulative effect of the story’s twists and turns is powerful, if somewhat predictable. Treviño’s effervescent and empathetic performance as Marisol keeps the narrative on track, both actress and character proving to be the saving grace for this curmudgeonly fellow, and film.

“A Man Called Otto” is rated PG-13 for mature thematic material involving suicide attempts, and language. Running time: 126 minutes. Now playing in select AAFES theaters.

# No need to RSVP to this muddled ‘House Party’ remake

BY KATIE WALSH  
Tribune News Service

Fun fact about Reginald Hudlin’s 1990 classic comedy “House Party” starring comedic duo Kid ‘n Play: it was selected for preservation in the National Film Registry in the Library of Congress for being “culturally, historically or aesthetically significant,” no doubt referring to the high-top fade and iconic kick-step dance that it popularized. It’s no wonder that New Line and Warner Bros. fired up the reboot machine for this title some three decades later to give the concept a fresh new 2020s spin, especially with basketball superstar LeBron James on board to develop, produce and appear in the project.

The good news is that after a few delays, the “House Party” remake, directed by acclaimed music video and commercial director Calmatic in his feature debut, is in theaters. The bad news is that this one is definitely not headed for the Library of Congress. This comedically and narratively muddled take on the title (not even the original premise) is deeply unfunny and downright tiresome.

Back in 1990, Kid ‘n Play portrayed two high school students sneaking out to a house party and finding adventure along the way. In the remake, Jacob Latimore and Tosin Cole star as 20-something best friends Kevin and Damon (pronounced “Duh-mon”), two ne’er-do-well party promoters by night, house cleaners by day, who find themselves working at LeBron James’ mansion and



WARNER BROS. PICTURE/TNS

**Shakira Ja’nai Paye, left, and Tosin Cole in ‘House Party.’**

decide to throw a party there while he’s away.

As a wise man (Danny Glover in “Lethal Weapon”) once said, “I’m too old for this [expletive],” and indeed that may be the case with “House Party,” in which watching these two unlikable morons make a series of increasingly idiotic decisions with regard to James’ home, art collection and championship trophies, becomes a truly unbearable endurance test for anyone watching who has ever rented an Airbnb.

The careless property damage might be worth it if there were any stakes or sense of narrative momentum to the script by Stephen Glover and Jamal Olori. Kevin keeps claiming he needs to throw the party to earn money

for his daughter’s school (custody seems to be a factor), because his musty homemade beats aren’t making him any money, and his parents (Bill Bellamy and Nia Long in an unfortunately short appearance) are selling their home. Damon’s motivation seems to be that he just wants to floss in a borrowed mansion for Instagram glory.

The film drifts from one scene or scenario to the next without much to thrust it forward; when Kevin gets frustrated with Damon, claiming the party’s out of control, it seems to be only because it’s the appropriate time in the story for that to happen, not that the party itself is actually out of control. The saggy, baggy narrative is knit together with celebrity cameos and Y2K nostalgia — the best moment comes from a surprise performance by Juvenile, and singer Mya has a legitimate supporting role.

The comedy waffles between nonsensically heightened and realistically grounded, often alternating between the two modes at random, never landing on a tone. The only semi-interesting part of the film features rapper/actor Scott Mescudi, aka Kid Cudi, as himself, and an “Eyes Wide Shut”-style “Illuminati” party. It’s a momentary diversion, but Mescudi is a captivating screen presence, and that’s the house party we’d actually like to see — not this messy, frustrating remake that doesn’t manage to justify its own existence.

“House Party” is rated R for pervasive language, drug use, sexual material and some violence. Running time: 100 minutes. Now playing in select AAFES theaters.

## WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



SQUARE ENIX/TNS

**Crisis Core:** Final Fantasy VII Reunion follows Zack Fair as he teams with the game's eventual villain to hunt down his mentor.

# Fresh spirit, magical reunion

Crisis Core re-release just the first entry in the Final Fantasy VII comeback series

By EBENEZER SAMUEL  
New York Daily News

It's been 16 years since Square Enix first released Final Fantasy: Crisis Core on the PlayStation Portable console, and in that time gaming has changed plenty. An era ago, portable games and major-console games could be different experiences. Not anymore.

That's especially important to me because the game's re-release, Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII Reunion, offers me a new chance to appreciate a title I didn't properly love all those years ago. Square is in the midst of a Final Fantasy VII resurrection, headed by FF VII Remake in 2021, and another episode of that due out (hopefully) late this year. Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII Reunion is the latest entry into the FF VII comeback.

It's also a game with a spirit all its own. Crisis Core follows the story of Zack Fair, another spiky-headed protagonist, but one wholly different from the more well-known Cloud of FF VII fame. Fair makes a brief appearance in the original FF VII, sacrificing himself so Cloud can escape. And in Crisis Core, he finally gets his story told.

It's this story that draws you to the game — and it shines when given the big-screen remake treatment. That's partly because of Zack's story, and partly because of the backstory of what you already know from Final Fantasy VII. Where Cloud is brooding and isolationist, Zack, who becomes a soldier in Shinra and winds up fighting alongside more venerable heroes likes

Angeal and the eventually-infamous Sephiroth, is impressionable, excitable, quippy. From beginning to end of the game, he seems built to juxtapose Cloud, and you can't help but embrace him in a different way.

You quickly invest in his story, too, and the tale doesn't just develop him. You get a strong look at Sephiroth in a new way, especially as the tale develops and Zack finds himself teaming with the eventual villain to hunt down his mentor.

This was a good tale nearly two decades ago, but it's even better now. Square overhauls all the visuals, and you see it in the details of both Sephiroth and Zack's hair, and the texture of the material on Zack's Shinra uniform. Those visuals extend to several extremely detailed locations, many of which we'll see again when Remake Part II arrives. Add in stellar voice acting, and the tale comes to life in a way that it never did on my tiny PSP screen. It all makes Sephiroth's tale terrifically sad; the pathos easily held my attention.

You're playing this game for that fantastic story, but the gameplay holds up its end of the bargain too. Where the original FF VII's turn-based mechanics feel dated today, Crisis Core always had a more modern approach to combat. It was essentially about hack-and-slash action in self-contained battles you'd expect from Final Fantasy.

The twist though: the DMW, or Digital Mind Wave, which was essentially a constantly playing game of slots. When things aligned in battle, Zack was given special

in-combat bonuses (imagine spending no-MP cost for a time), or granted chances to summon or pull off limit moves. It leads to frenetically paced combat that challenges you to target key enemies, remember their weaknesses and take advantage of your bonuses. There's no button-mashing here: Use the advantages you have when you have them or you'll get flattened. Other standard gameplay conventions, such as materials and equipment, give you more to dive into and explore as well.

Just two relics hold back the excellent gameplay. First is a holdover from the game's portable days: You have a lot of ultra-short sidequests in this game. That makes sense since this was originally built for on-the-go gaming: Ultra-quick missions mean lots of bite-sized gameplay. You'll just wish Square tied these missions into the story better; they feel like filler content, absent much of the voice acting and brilliant cutscene of the main story.

The other issue: The overwhelming amount of random battles (many in those sidequests). Most modern JRPGs offer some options to avoid these battles; here, you'll have to take them on.

By and large, though, they're worth undertaking simply because the story and presentation are so magical. This isn't just a PSP game any longer. It's a key piece of FF VII lore, and it finally gets its proper due now.

**Platforms:** PlayStation 4 and 5, Xbox 1, Xbox Series, Nintendo Switch, PC

**Online:** [jp.square-enix.com/ccffvii\\_reunion](http://jp.square-enix.com/ccffvii_reunion)

# BTS sends Goose Goose Duck up the Steam charts

By ALYSE STANLEY  
The Washington Post

A surprising new entry topped Steam's list of the most-played games last week: Goose Goose Duck, a 2021 social deduction game similar to Among Us, only starring geese and ducks instead of crewmates and imposters. It peaked at more than 560,000 concurrent players on Jan. 5, surpassing major titles like Apex Legends, Elden Ring and Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II. And it has the BTS fanbase, known as the ARMY, to thank.

The free-to-play game's popularity has grown steadily since V from the K-pop group BTS — real name Kim Tae-hyung — played it on a livestream. He began streaming Goose Goose Duck on Nov. 27 on the social networking app Weverse, where he's also played multiplayer titles like the original Among Us and Fall Guys. (Weverse is owned and operated by Hybe, the company behind BTS.)

In Goose Goose Duck, players take on the role of geese and must work together to suss out the dastardly ducks hiding among them in disguise. It shares a similar premise and 2D visuals of Among Us, but with a more extensive list of game modes and possible roles for players, including other birds like the Dodo, who wins by getting voted off, or the Vulture, who wins by eating the remains of their less-fortunate crewmates.

Goose Goose Duck first released in October 2021 after a six-month early access period, and on average saw a few thousand players each day. After Tae-hyung began streaming it, the number of concurrent players shot up almost immediately, from around 15,000 at the start of November to 160,000 by the end.

According to industry analyst Daniel Ahmad, Goose Goose Duck has been going viral in Asian markets over the past month. "We've been tracking the title since late November when it first started gaining traction. Interesting to see it's only really starting to receive attention globally now," he said in a Jan. 5 tweet.

With that spotlight has comes its fair share of issues. Earlier last week, the flood of new players briefly overwhelmed developer Gaggle Studios' servers, resulting in an outage.

"We appreciate all the love and support, we expected a large increase in players but not like this," the indie studio wrote in an update on Steam. "250k increase of our already massive player base was too much. We're working on increasing capacity as fast as we can and will keep everyone updated. We apologize for the inconvenience, we're all working hard to make sure everyone can play."

The outpouring is indicative of the sheer popularity of BTS, one of the world's most successful recording artists with tens of millions of fans. The group, which is currently on hiatus, has previously made waves in the games industry with its collaborations with popular titles Cookie Run: Kingdom and Fortnite.

## WEEKEND: TRAVEL

# Idyllic Istria calls along Croatia's coast

The Istrian Peninsula, jutting out into the northern Adriatic Sea, offers some of the best of coastal Croatia and nearby Italy, but with fewer crowds. It's an inviting mix of Roman history, vineyard-draped hill towns and pastel seaside villages with a whiff of Venetian flair.

While the peninsula has its share of tacky and forgettable resort towns, the seafront port of Rovinj — like a little Venice on a hill — is one of my favorite small towns on the Mediterranean.

Rising dramatically from the Adriatic as though being pulled up to heaven by its grand bell tower, there's something particularly romantic about Rovinj. Some locals credit the especially strong Venetian influence here — it's the most Italian town in Croatia's most Italian region. Rovinj's streets are delightfully twisty, its ancient houses are crumbling and its harbor still hosts a real fishing industry.

Pula, on the other hand, isn't quaint. Istria's biggest city is an industrial port town with traffic, smog, and sprawl ... but it has the soul of a Roman poet. Between the shipyards, you can discover some of the top Roman ruins in Croatia, including its stately

amphitheater — an intact mini-Colosseum that marks the entry to a seedy Old Town with ancient temples, arches and columns.

Of the dozens of amphitheaters left around Europe and North Africa by Roman engineers, Pula's is the sixth-largest, and one of the best-preserved anywhere.



Rick Steves

Throughout the Middle Ages, scavengers scraped the amphitheater clean, leaving just the outside intact. Standing inside, though, you can imagine when it was ringed with two levels of stone seating and a top level of wooden bleachers.

Most tourists in Croatia focus on the coast. For a dash of variety, head inland to check out the hill towns. In Istria, my favorite two are tiny, rugged and relatively untrampled: the artists' colony of Grožnjan and popular Motovun, with sweeping views of the surrounding countryside.

Grožnjan is a trapped-in-a-time-warp Istrian hill town, artfully balanced on the tip of a vine-and-olive-tree-covered promontory. Its stony, leafy, rough-cobbled lanes are lined



RICK STEVES/Rick Steves' Europe

Croatia's small town of Rovinj is like a little Venice on a hill, offering heavy doses of Italian-style romance.

with art galleries and, like most Istrian towns with any tourism, shops selling locally produced olive oil and truffle oil. Not long ago, Grožnjan was virtually forgotten. But now artists have taken up residence here, keeping it Old World but with a spiffed-up, bohemian ambiance.

Dramatically situated high above vineyards, Motovun (pop-

ulation: about 1,000) is the best known and most touristed of the Istrian hill towns. And for good reason: Its hilltop Old Town is particularly evocative, with a colorful old church and a ram-part walk with spine-tingling vistas across the entire region. It's hard to believe that race-car driver Mario Andretti was born this tranquil, traffic-free hamlet.

These days, some travelers even mention Istria in the same breath as Tuscany or Provence. While that may be the region's malvazija wine and truffle oil talking, Istria is, by any measure, a delight in itself.

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

## Trending destinations include sunny spots in Greece, Spain

A dreary winter's day can often be brightened by the mere thought of vacations on sunny shores and cultural hotspots. While cities such as Paris, Amsterdam and Barcelona, and holiday destinations along Spain and Italy's best beaches will never lose their allure, the travel industry tends to make much of its so-called "trending destinations," particularly at the start of a new year. Here are a few of the places the travel press assures us are worthy of our precious time and money in 2023.

### Albania

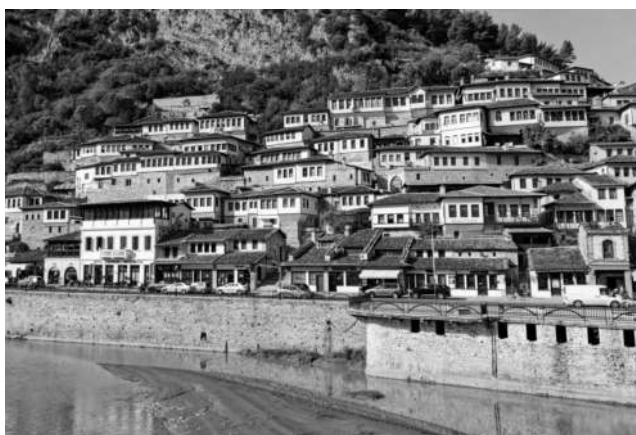
From the end of World War II until 1992, Albania was led by a strict and cruel communist dictator who kept his people isolated from the rest of the world, and although it's now open to visitors, the country retains its sense of an exotic otherness. Stunning natural landscapes and a culture of hospitality count among its strongest assets. Exploration of the country would logically start in capital Tirana, a city undergoing a major facelift. Here, café culture and a bustling nightlife scene come at prices that don't break the bank. Cities begging for exploration further afield include Gjirokastër, known for its gorgeous castle and Ottoman architecture; Berat, called the City of a Thousand Windows; and Kruja, a town with stunning vistas over the Adriatic and a bustling bazaar. The term Albanian Riviera refers to a string of touristic coastal villages between Palasa and Lukove, of which Saranda is the main town. Those in search of pristine nature will find alpine landscapes, glaciers, forests and waterfalls in the Valbona Valley National Park.



Karen Bradbury

### Kalambaka, Greece

Kalambaka, also spelled Kalabaka or Kalampaka, is a town in central Greece known for a geological wonder,



iStock

**Berat, known as called the City of a Thousand Windows, is among Albania's travel treasures.**

giant sandstone cliffs rising like extended fingers from the valley floor. Perched atop and around these 1,000-foot-high rocks are caves showing evidence of human settlement dating back some 130,000 years. The area's biggest draw by far, however, are the monasteries built atop the soaring rock formations. Of the six still in existence, the largest and best known is the Holy Monastery of Great Meteoron, whose main church dazzles with a profusion of bling and with beautiful 16th-century frescoes. Back in town, dozens of bars, taverns and restaurants cater to the profusion of tourists.

### Málaga, Spain

Andalucía's second-largest city after Seville lies along the ever-popular Costa del Sol, an area known for its mild climate even in winter. Among its most iconic sights are the Alcazaba de Málaga, a fortified palace, and its soaring cathedral, considered a gem of the Spanish Renaissance.

In 2023, the city honors its beloved native son Pablo Picasso upon the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his death. The Museo Casa Natal Picasso and Museo Picasso Malaga will host several exhibits of the creator of Cubism's works, while other institutions organize tours, lectures and musical performances.

### Montenegro

This compact nation with a population of only 620,000 enchants visitors with its wild mountain landscapes, deep-cut gorges and a sparkling coastline. Top sights include Kotor, an extremely well-preserved fortified medieval town surrounded by the limestone cliffs of a narrow fjord; the Ostrog Monastery, built into a nearly vertical cliff; and Sveti Stefan, an island village connected to the mainland by causeway. Adrenaline-seekers are encouraged to make way to Tara Canyon, the world's second-deepest canyon, for epic whitewater rafting, while lovers of dramatic scenery will swoon over the endless tunnels and bridges encountered along the 296-mile journey by rail from Bar to Serbia's capital Belgrade.

### Vilnius, Lithuania

The cozy, understated capital of Vilnius celebrates its 700th anniversary in 2023 with a cultural calendar packed with art, music, performance and more. The first major event takes place Jan. 25-28, as the Vilnius Light Festival scatters interactive art installations throughout the Old Town. Another highlight is set for July 25, the feast day of St. Christopher, the city's patron saint. The "As Young as Vilnius Music Festival" is a day of free classical and popular contemporary musical performances at Vingis Park. From January through September, another initiative celebrates the city's longstanding connection with opera. First-time visitors will enjoy exploring the city's center, named a UNESCO World Heritage Site for the extravagance of its Baroque architecture.

## WEEKEND: TRAVEL

# A 'White Lotus' Sicily itinerary

Included are locations featured in the show's 2nd season as well as other must-see spots

By ERICA FIRPO  
The Washington Post

Sicily is a Mediterranean paradise, where beauty, culture and history converge — a magical land forged by the mercurial Mount Etna, one of the world's most active volcanoes. Etna's dominating presence metaphorically divides the island into an idyllic east and a bustling west. It's the volcano's mythology and volatility that make Sicily the perfect setting for the latest season of HBO's "The White Lotus" as the ultrarich get scammed, hide affairs, face existential dread — and perhaps even kill. Murder aside, if this season has inspired you to plan your own Italian holiday, we've gathered the real-life "White Lotus" locations, from Sicily's east to west — plus, all sights guests missed while stabbing each other in the back.

## East Sicily

### The 'White Lotus' hotel

Tanya, her assistant Portia and the rest of the tormented White Lotus guests disembark in Taormina, the coastal hilltown so close to Mount Etna that the Greeks made it a backdrop for their Teatro Greco, an ancient theater. The subsequent centuries bequeathed Roman, medieval and Baroque architecture to create a postcard-perfect destination, including the Four Seasons' San Domenico Palace, the real-life hotel that serves as The White Lotus.

Perched on the cliffs overlooking the Ionian Sea, San Domenico Palace was formerly a 14th century convent. It's as luxurious as you see in the small screen — 111 rooms and suites, panoramic views, courtyards and

gardens with old-world charm.

The hotel's white-tablecloth restaurant is a nightly backdrop in the show — so much so that it makes you wonder why guests aren't out experiencing the rest of Sicily's dining scene. Even Cameron points out in one episode: "I don't know why they keep giving us these menus. We know it back to front by now." But at least it's not the average flavorless hotel restaurant; it's the Michelin-starred Principe Cerami with Sicily-inspired dishes and a view. The crew can also be seen at Anciovi, San Domenico Palace's pool terrace restaurant. La Cambusa, a beachside restaurant and bar in nearby Giardini Naxos, is used as The White Lotus beach club.

Then there's Bar and Chiostro, the piano bar in the show, which features a cocktail called the



HBO photos

Meghann Fahy and Aubrey Plaza take in the architecture during their trip to Noto in "The White Lotus."

Gelosia e Mandolino — inspired by Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton's famous explosive fight at the hotel.

But the guests are missing out on nearby gems by only hotel dining: the Michelin-starred Otto Geleng at the Grand Hotel Tirmeo, beachside La Capinera and the quaint Tischi Toschi.

### Seaside

With about 922 miles of coastline, it's no wonder that the beach plays a supporting role in the show. Some of eastern Sicily's most picturesque beaches are just off Taormina, like Isola Bella, a tiny island connected to the mainland by a narrow path. Some of the beach scenes, however, were filmed in the sandier Cefalù, which is located in northern Sicily. There are also small coastal towns to explore that dot Sicily's coastline, such as Letojanni, Furci Siculo and Giarre.

### 'The Godfather'

In Episode 3, Albie, Bert and Dominic make an excursion to Fiumefreddo di Sicilia to the palatial Castello degli Schiavi villa — the famed "Godfather" home and hideout for Michael Corleone where his first wife, Apollonia, is killed. Meanwhile, just north of Taormina is the tiny village Savoca, where the granita di limone — a frozen lemon treat — at Bar Vitelli is divine, and the backdrop is a step back in time. This is where Michael first laid eyes on Apollonia.

### Etna

The altitude, intense sunlight and notable temperature differentials make Etna the place for winemaking. Take a tip from Harper, Ethan, Cameron and Daphne (minus the awkward tension) and go to Passopisciaro for a day of wine tasting at Planeta's Feudo di Mezzo, an estate on Etna's northern slope.



Theo James, Fahy, Will Sharpe and Plaza hang out on the beach in Taormina in Season 2, Episode 1 of the show.

"Etna is an inimitable terroir unique to the world," Vito Planeta, head of Planeta's cultural projects, said in an email. "Remarkable temperature ranges, mineral-rich volcanic soils, a mountain viticulture with great personality and a concentration of beauty, nature and landscape." For thrill-seekers and volcano-hunters, head to Nicolosi, a small town on the southern slope. Go Etna organizes guided volcano excursions in off-roading vehicles and trekking excursions where you'll step into a landscape of fumaroles and craters.

### Inland

While the Sicilian coast is gorgeous, inland is worth exploring, especially the Val di Noto in southeastern Sicily. Of its eight towns, top of the list are Noto, Modica and Ragusa, a triumvirate of Sicilian Baroque. Each city feels like a fairy tale, with ornate cathedrals and palaces of yellow sandstone.

On Daphne and Harper's trip to Noto, they take in the architecture, but miss out on foodie landmark Caffè Sicilia, where chef

Corrado Assenza creates Sicily's very best Sicilian cassate (a traditional cake) and cannoli. Just outside of Noto is Villa Elena, interior designer Jacques Garcia's home, which is used as Quentin's villa in Palermo.

Pop over to Modica, a city built into a gorge, with labyrinthine streets and stairwells that connect its alta (high) and bassa (low) neighborhoods. Modica is the epicenter of Sicily's chocolate; Cioccolato di Modica is an IGP "protected geographical indication" product whose history stems back to centuries-old Spanish techniques. For a taste, head to Antica Dolceria Bonajuto, where they've spent more than 100 years making chocolate bars and confections.

Like Modica, Ragusa is a divided town: Ragusa Superiore (upper) and Ragusa Ibla (lower). The ancient Ibla has a magical maze of churches, palaces and narrow streets, and it boasts Michelin-starred Duomo and Locanda Don Serafino. But most importantly is Cantunera, the

SEE WHITE LOTUS ON PAGE 21



Fahy, James, Plaza and Sharpe visit a vineyard at Planeta's Feudo di Mezzo estate on Mount Etna in Season 2, Episode 5.

## WEEKEND: TRAVEL

# A tropical escape awaits you in 2023

These 4 Caribbean islands are open again for visitors to experience their natural beauty, a variety of outdoor activities

BY VALENTIN FUENTES  
*TravelPulse*

Virtually every Caribbean island has lifted restrictions after the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic has passed, although in some cases there are specific requirements travelers can quickly meet. These four island destinations have opened their doors for millions of travelers and stand out as can't-miss destinations as we enter the new year:

## Anguilla

This island, located off the coast of St. Maarten, welcomes tourists with an excellent hotel infrastructure, a wide range of activities, extraordinary natural areas and first-class cuisine in restaurants that offer international dishes with Caribbean fusion.

Little Bay is one of the most popular places on the island. There, visitors enjoy hours of snorkeling and swimming in crystal-clear waters. However, it should be noted that this spot does not have any services for tourists, so bring the towels and drinks necessary to spend the day.

In addition, several tour operators in Anguilla offer day sailing trips with lunch included in fabulous locations such as Prickly Pear Cays, a pair of protected islands classified as Wildlands by the Eastern Caribbean Natural Management Programme.

For history and culture lovers, there are two must-see sites: the James Ronald Webster Memorial and the Heritage Museum. The latter is located near East End Salt Pond and features an extensive collection of artifacts and photographs telling the island's history, including its eras of slavery and phosphate trade.

## Cayman Islands

This beautiful Caribbean spot has regained momentum after the pandemic. It is again visited by tourists from all over the world, especially from the United States, as it's just an hour away from Miami.

Tourists can dive among incredible reefs, participate in water sports and tour cultural attractions designed for couples and families. Plus, the hotels and restaurants on the Cayman Islands are top-notch, which ensures visitors a very comfortable stay.

In Grand Cayman, one of the three islands that make up this fabulous destination, visitors can enjoy the appeal of the famous Seven Mile Beach and North Sound, where there is a large colony of rays that can be seen by snorkel-



DARREN ORNITZ, AURORA ANGUILLA RESORT & GOLF CLUB/TNS

**A view from the Aurora Anguilla Resort & Golf Club. Anguilla, an island off the coast of St. Maarten, has crystal-clear waters, perfect for snorkeling and swimming.**

ing or diving. In Cayman Brac, visitors will find impressive stone caves and an abyss, where they can dive along a sunken ship. This island also has a beautiful forest ideal for bird watching.

## St. Lucia

This Caribbean island, recovering from the effects of the pandemic, has traditionally been one of the most visited destinations in the world, with a rate of 2.3 tourists per resident. The extraordinary island combines fine white sand beaches, rainforests, flower fields and other scenic landscapes.

Located next to the islands of St. Vincent, the Grenadines and Martinique, this volcanic island has, in addition to its beaches and jungles, great mountains such as the famous Peter Piton and Gros Piton, ideal places for excursions and trekking along its lush trails. Most of St. Lucia's hotel infrastructure is located on the west coast, where visitors can enjoy extraordinary views of the Caribbean and volcanic landscapes.

The island offers plenty of places to enjoy outdoor activities and water sports, especially in the Marigot Bay area, where visitors can discover abundant marine life during long snorkeling sessions. Windsurfing and kayaking are also available.

In addition to these activities, tourists can tour the island on foot or by bike to enjoy nature, including banana, coconut, mango and guava trees. Soufrière is one of the most recommended cities for those visiting St. Lucia due to its popular tourist areas such as Sulfur Springs, a place full of natural pools, and the Toraille Waterfall, where tourists can cool off during the day.

## Grenada

This inviting Caribbean island is a paradise for lovers of nature exploration with its many waterfalls and rainforests that are home to a wide variety of animal species, such as monkeys, birds and reptiles.

In addition to boasting extraordinary beaches, Grenada is a historic place visitors can tour. St. George, the capital, is a cozy setting full of colonial architecture inherited from England and France, like the Fort St. George, built by the French in the 18th century on a high mountain providing a sweeping view of the island.

St. George also offers excellent markets for handicrafts and fruit and vegetables, as well as restaurants serving local specialties and international cuisine made with fresh local produce. Here, visitors can enjoy beautiful views of the bay, surrounded by Georgian-style houses, sailboats and private yachts.

## White Lotus: West Sicily has a different vibe than East Sicily

### FROM PAGE 20

corner shop where chef Sandro Pace serves his award-winning fried rice balls, known as arancini, which he says are best enjoyed "in bites."

### West Sicily

Etna, though located more eastern, is the great divide for Sicily.

"Eastern Sicily has a personality that reflects the energy of Etna — tenacity and determination," says Agata Polizzi, an art historian and Palermo native. "Palermítani are perhaps more easygoing. Remember we didn't grow up under an active

volcano but instead, for centuries Palermo was the capital of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies and has always been the center of culture."

Palermo is bustling and beautiful and has a completely different vibe from the coastal and hill towns. Located in the northwest of Sicily, the port city has opened its doors to everyone since its foundation, which shaped Sicilian history, architecture and culture from the ancient Phoenicians to contemporary artists.

The old city center has Sicilian decadence with remnants of palaces and centuries-old street markets while its

outskirts calm down with promenades and beaches. We only get a brief glimpse of the city when Portia and Jack dine-and-dash on arancini. But there's much more to explore.

Vecchio Centro is the historic center where you'll find iconic crossroads Quattro Canti, Palermo Cathedral, Norman Palace (also called Royal Palace), the historic Vucciria and Ballaro markets, as well as Piazza Marina, the city's ancient square and port. Northwest neighborhood Zisa, named for the medieval Moorish palace La Zisa, has become an arts hub with Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa — former-

ly factories and warehouses — and ZA-Centrale, a contemporary arts center. Politeama is the contemporary city center and home to the Teatro Massimo opera house — where Tanya takes in "Madama Butterfly."

Just southwest of the city is Monreale and UNESCO World Heritage site Cathedral di Monreale, which is decorated with Byzantine-style mosaics. On the way to Monreale is Villa Tasca, which is used as the Noto villa where Daphne and Harper spent the night. And for a little beach time, head northwest to Mondello or east to Cefalù.

## WEEKEND: TRAVEL



Details of frescoes in the House of Vettii. The frescoes were preserved remarkably by coats of paraffin wax during previous restoration work done on the opulent house.

# Roman ruins rise from the ashes

A newly restored house in Pompeii offers glimpse of elite life in doomed city

BY FRANCESCO SPORTELLI  
Associated Press

The newly restored remains of an opulent house in Pompeii that likely belonged to two former slaves who became rich through the wine trade offer visitors an exceptional peek at details of domestic life in the doomed Roman city.

On Tuesday, the House of Vettii, *Domus Vettiorum* in Latin, was formally unveiled after 20 years of restoration. Given fresh life were frescoes from the latest fashion in Pompeii wall decoration before the flourishing city was buried under the volcanic ash furiously spewing from Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD.

The unveiling of the restored home is yet another sign of the rebirth of Pompeii, which followed decades of modern bureaucratic neglect, flooding and pillaging by thieves in search of artifacts to sell.

That is delighting tourists and rewarding experts with fresh insights into the everyday life of what is one of the most celebrated remnants of the ancient world.

"The House of the Vetti is like the history of Pompeii and actually of Roman society within one house," Pompeii's director, Gabriel Zuchtriegel, gushed as he showed off an area of the domus known as the Cupid Rooms last month.

"We're seeing here the last phase of the Pompeian wall painting with incredible details, so you can stand before these images for hours and still discover new details," the archaeological park's energetic director told The Associated Press ahead of the public inauguration.

"So, you have this mixture: nature, architecture, art. But it is also a story about the social life of the Pompeian society and actually the Roman world in this phase of history," Zuchtriegel added.

Previous restoration work, which involved repeated application of paraffin over the frescoed walls in hopes of preserving them, "resulted in them becoming very blurred over time, because very thick and opaque layers formed, making it difficult to 'read' the fresco," said Stefania Giudice, director of fresco restoration.

But the wax did serve to preserve them remarkably.

Zuchtriegel ventured that the fresh "readings" of the revived fresco painting "reflect the dreams and imagination and



PHOTOS BY ANDREW MEDICHINI/AP

Columns frame the "peristylum," or courtyard, in the Ancient Roman *Domus Vettiorum*, House of Vettii, in the Pompeii Archaeological Park, near Naples, Italy, on Dec. 14. One of Pompeii's most famous and richest domus, it contains exceptional works of art and tells the story of the social ascent of two former slaves. It opened its doors Wednesday after 20 years of restoration.

anxieties of the owners because they lived between these images," which include Greek mythological figures.

And who were these owners? The Vettii were two men — Aulus Vettius Conviva and Aulus Vettius Restitutus. In addition to having part of their names in common, they shared a common past — not as descendants of noble Roman families accustomed to opulence, but rather, Pompeii experts say, almost certainly, as once enslaved men who were later freed.

It is believed that they became wealthy through the wine trade. While some have hypothesized the two were brothers, there is no certainty about that.

In the living room, known as the Hall of

Pentheus, a fresco depicts Hercules as a child, crushing two snakes, in an illustration of an episode from the Greek hero's life. According to mythology, Hera, the goddess wife of Zeus, sent snakes to kill Hercules because she was furious that he was born from the union of Zeus with a mortal woman, Alcmena.

Might Aulus Vettius Conviva and Aulus Vettius Restitutus have recognized their own life story in some way in the figure of Hercules who overcame challenge after challenge in his life?

That's a question that intrigues Zuchtriegel.

After years in slavery, the men "then had an incredible career after that and

reached the highest ranks of local society, at least economically," judging by their upscale domus and garden, Zuchtriegel said. "They evidently tried to show their new status also through culture and through Greek mythological paintings, and it's all about saying, 'We've made it and so we are part of this elite'" of the Roman world.

Pompeii's architect director of restoration work, Arianna Spinosa, called the restored home "one of the iconic houses of Pompeii. The residence "represents the Pompeian domus par excellence, not only because of the frescoes of exceptional importance, but also because of its layout and architecture."

Ornamental marble baths and tables surround the garden.

First unearthed during archaeological excavations in the late 19th century, the domus was closed in 2002 for urgent restoration work, including shoring up roofing. After a partial reopening in 2016, it was closed in 2020 for the final phase of the work, which included restoration of the frescoes and of the floor and colonnades.

**"The House of the Vetti is like the history of Pompeii and actually of Roman society within one house."**

Gabriel Zuchtriegel

Director of the Pompeii Archaeological Park

## WEEKEND: FOOD &amp; DINING



Oysters with ponzu and soy sauce-based flourishes at Muku.

# An island of authenticity

## Ramen that far surpasses your Oodles of Noodles is a reality in Germany

BY ERIK SLAVIN

*Stars and Stripes*

To think of ramen solely in terms of a square puck and a flavor packet is to live a life of sadness sheathed in a dumpling wrapper of despair.

Am I being too harsh? Then you've probably never had good ramen.

The instant variety did sustain me through my early adult years, and I'm not above turning to it in a pinch for a snack.

But a good bowl of freshly made ramen transcends that. It's the difference between just getting by in a dorm and living the life in that sweet apartment downtown.

Unfortunately, most restaurants in the German hinterlands serve bland Asian food that resembles a parody of the Starcourt Mall food court circa 1984, complete with that highly questionable chop suey font on the signs.

But head to Germany's cities and you'll find islands of authenticity. Dusseldorf and Frankfurt have sizable Japanese communities, and they do not abide lesser attempts at their go-to comfort food.

There are at least three ramen restaurants worth eating at in Frankfurt, which is close enough for service members living in Wiesbaden or day-tripping from the Kaiserslautern area.

If I had to choose one on the merits of its food and atmosphere, it would be Muku. My



**AFTER HOURS**  
**GERMANY**

### Muku

**Address:** Dreieichstrasse 7, Frankfurt  
**Cost:** Ramen, 14-16 euros; tapas from 10 to 35 euros.

**Hours:** Thursday to Sunday, noon-2:30 p.m., last order 2 p.m.; Wednesday to Sunday, 6-10:30 p.m., last order 10 p.m.

**Information:** Phone: +49 (0) 69 4844 5153; Online: muku-ramen.com

Erik Slavin

first thought after eating the food here was how this place is good enough to thrive in Japan.

It turns out that it does. Muku opened in Frankfurt's Sachsenhausen district in 2010 and years later opened branches in Kofu and Kamakura. Its food is also served in Japan Airlines' first class and business class lounges in Frankfurt.

Muku has an industrial chic feel, with lots of wood and intimate lighting serving to counterpoint the high ceiling and gunmetal-gray walls. The ramen prices are reasonable for Germany, at 13 to 16 euros per bowl, and the dish comes in five varieties.

During three visits, our dining party consisted of Japanese people and your faithful reviewer, who lived for nine years in Yokohama, where ramen in its popular form was invented.



PHOTOS BY ERIK SLAVIN/Stars and Stripes

The yamatani ramen, which includes pork and chicken, at Muku in Frankfurt, Germany. The restaurant offers ramen in several styles. The restaurant also has branches in Kofu and Kamakura, Japan.

The short version is that we enjoyed everything we ate. The majority vote for winner among the varieties was the Muku ramen, a soy-based broth with pork, spinach, spring onion (which can be easily removed if you're like me) and firm noodles.

The broth had a complexity and heft you don't find in store-bought soup. The soy sauce base isn't usually my favorite style, but this had savoriness without tasting oversalted.

The pork-bone broth, or tonkotsu, ramen was another winner among the heavier bowls; I'd add a soft-boiled egg for this. For something lighter, the yamatani ramen and its combination of chicken and pork with bamboo shoots is a good option.

You could easily stick with this and have an affordable lunch or dinner. However, Muku also serves tapas, which is Spanish for "small plates of food that empty my wallet but don't fill my stomach."

Many of the decidedly seasonal Japanese tapas cost as much as or more than the ramen. They're also very hard to say no to if you like fresh hamachi (yellowtail) sashimi, plus-size oysters in ponzu, fried chicken with accents of sake and mirin, spring rolls and a host of things you just don't normally see in Europe.

The presentation of the food, which is a big part of Japanese cuisine, is painfully authentic for those feeling nostalgic for the country. There is a wide variety of pricey nihonshu, more pop-



The hamachi (yellowtail) sashimi at Muku. The restaurant rotates its small-plate specials but always has ramen on the menu.

ularly known as sake, but I'd suggest a half-liter mug of Asahi beer if you're going to imbibe.

So what's not to like about Muku? Getting a reservation will make you feel like a lottery winner. While lunch is first-come, first-served, you're probably not getting dinner without calling ahead, and forget about weekends.

The service is prompt, the staff is very friendly and kids can be provided with crayons if they get antsy, but all that attention comes at the cost of picking up the phone sometimes.

It took a few days of calling before someone picked up and took down our first reservation.

If you can't get through and still want authentic ramen in Frankfurt, there are pretty good options.

Ramen Jun has two locations and a waiting list at the door that moves fairly quickly if they're busy. Among its several offerings, I'd suggest the cold ramen on a summer day or the spicy ramen if you like the heat.

If the Westend location of Ramen Jun is closed, Takumi is a two-minute walk from there. Vegetarians will be happy with their miso ramen.

Whichever ramen you choose, eat it while it's hot and feel free to slurp those noodles. It's polite in this setting.

You may not want to go back to the instant ramen in your cabinet too quickly after getting the good stuff. But don't worry. Those squares and cups of noodles have plenty of shelf life.

slavin.erik@stripes.com  
Twitter: @eslavin\_stripes

## WEEKEND: FOOD &amp; DINING



PHOTOS BY KELLY AGEE/Stars and Stripes

Demode Diner specializes in American-style burgers and other cuisine steps from Yokota Air Base, Japan.

# Oasis of American fare

Demode Diner quickly serves up burgers, hot dogs and milkshakes in a retro-vintage setting just outside of Yokota Air Base in Japan

BY KELLY AGEE  
Stars and Stripes

Right outside of Yokota Air Base on Route 16, also known as Base Street, lies the perfect destination for anyone craving American-style cuisine.

The location is convenient, and the staff quickly serves up burgers, hot dogs and shakes for an off-base lunch break or dinner.

Inside Demode, patrons are treated to the classic diner aesthetic, including a variety of tunes on the sound system from the likes of Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles and Tom Jones.

The floor is checkered, and the inside offers booths, much like a 1950s diner. The walls display vintage items such as toy robots and neon signs.

Popular items on the menu include a variety of classic burgers like the BLT, the Tex-Mex and a fried onion burger. The portions are also “American” sized.

I ordered the Vegetarian Burger, which comes with a side of fries, and a root beer float for 2,100 yen, or about \$16.20. The burger’s base was a coleslaw-type mix topped with black olives, corn, tomato and avocado.

I liked the bun, which was buttery and toasted to perfection. The fries were thin and crispy. The delectable float was topped with soft-serve ice cream.

My co-worker ordered the Smoky Bacon and Egg Burger and a berry shake for about \$20.45. The burger was topped



## Demode Diner

**Location:** 1121 Kumagawa, Fussa, Tokyo 197-0003

**Directions:** A 5-minute drive from Yokota Air Base’s main gate.

**Hours:** Open 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Monday through Friday; 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

**Price:** Burgers, sandwiches and hot-dogs range between 1,440 – 1,600 yen or \$11.01 – \$12.23

**Information:** Online: [kiwa-group.co.jp/demode\\_fussa](http://kiwa-group.co.jp/demode_fussa)

Kelly Agee

with an egg and a big slice of bacon, which was not quite American style, but he approved, and particularly liked the runny egg. The shake was topped with thick and creamy whipped cream.

A specialty item, if customers are brave enough, is the Fussa Two Pounds Big Tower Burger for about \$38.57. The giant burger lives up to its name, standing about a foot tall and filled with two pounds of meat. This giant burger can be split up between a family or group.

Other menu items include a grilled cheese sandwich, cheese dog, cheese nachos and a chili cheese potato. Drink options include a variety of teas, including mint, ice mango tea and iced tea and a selection of fruit juices,



The Smoky Bacon and Egg Burger was a little surprising, but still delicious, with a side of fries from Demode Diner.



The Vegetarian Burger with a side of fries has a coleslaw-type mix as a base and is served on a buttery, perfectly toasted bun.

milk, coffee and sodas.

Parking is available for up to 12 vehicles. An English menu and seating for 80 inside and outside are available. Dogs are allowed in the outside seating area.

If the '50s and '60s American diner vibe is your jam, then Demode is a must.

agee.kelly@stripes.com  
@KellyA\_Stripes

# One-pot rice and beans dish full of comfort, Persian flavor

BY G. DANIELA GALARZA  
The Washington Post

Whenever I got sick as a kid, my mom wouldn’t make chicken soup — she’d serve me mushy rice and yogurt. Many rice-eating cultures eat rice and yogurt together as a meal or to ease an upset stomach. I grew to love the simple meal. It’s still something I yearn for, whether I’m feeling under the weather or just want a dose of comfort.

This recipe for herby rice and beans, served with a pat of butter and a dollop of yogurt, is a grown-up version of my childhood comfort food. It was inspired by two Persian dishes: sabzi polo, an herbaceous rice often served with kebabs or roasts, and ghormeh sabzi, a stew of herbs, lamb and kidney beans.

I’ve adapted this recipe to use dried herbs, which are easy to find year-round.

I borrowed the multistep, one-pot technique from a method Iranians sometimes use to make rice dishes such as tahdig. You start by boiling rice in plenty of salted water, as though it’s pasta, before steaming it. I like adding a dried lime — a signature ingredient in ghormeh sabzi — to the water, to start flavoring the rice as it cooks. You don’t need to rinse it before boiling it this way.

That same pot gets rinsed out, dried and used to saute a big bunch of sliced scallions until they start to caramelize. Then in goes lots of finely chopped spinach and several tablespoons of dried herbs, including fenugreek.

Next, it’s time to mix it all together: The parcooked rice goes in, along with a (drained and rinsed) can of kidney beans. Stir well, so the greens fall in among the grains. Then, cover tightly and allow the rice to finish cooking in the residual moisture on low heat. After about 12 minutes, you’ll have wonderfully fluffy rice, tinted green and studded with plump beans. It’s delicious topped with a pat of butter and creamy yogurt on the side.

## Herby Rice and Beans

### Ingredients

Fine salt  
1/4 cups (8 3/4 ounces) basmati rice  
1 dried lime (lemon omani), punctured in a few places  
3 tablespoons olive oil  
1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced  
2 cups (2 ounces) packed baby spinach, finely chopped  
2 tablespoons dried dill  
2 tablespoons dried parsley  
2 teaspoons dried fenugreek leaves, crushed  
Freshly cracked black pepper  
One (15-ounce) can kidney beans, preferably no-salt-added, drained and rinsed  
Butter, for serving (optional)  
Fresh parsley or cilantro sprigs, for serving (optional)  
Plain yogurt, for serving (optional)

### Directions

Bring a large (at least 4 quart) pot of well-salted water to a rolling boil. (It’s important that the water tastes salty so that it seasons the rice as it cooks.) Add the rice and dried lime, and stir to be sure the rice doesn’t stick to the bottom of the pot. Boil until the rice is al dente, about 10 minutes. Pour the rice and lime into a sieve to drain. Rinse out the pot well and dry it.

In the same pot over medium-high heat, heat the olive oil until it shimmers. Add the scallions and cook, stirring, until they start to brown, about 3 minutes. Add the spinach and cook, stirring, until wilted and bright green, about 2 minutes.

Stir in the dill, parsley, fenugreek and a few grinds of pepper. Gently fold in the rice, lime and kidney beans, allowing the greens to fall among the grains. Cover tightly, decrease the heat to low, and cook — without peeking! — for 12 minutes.

Uncover and, using a fork, fluff the rice. Serve hot, family-style or on individual plates, with a pat of butter on top, and fresh herbs and yogurt on the side, if desired.

4 servings (makes 8 cups)



REY LOPEZ/For The Washington Post

Herby Rice and Beans uses dried herbs, which can be easier to find.



# WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY KELLY AGEE/Stars and Stripes

JP/DC, an AC/DC tribute band, takes a bow July 24 after a performance at Bauhaus in Tokyo's Roppongi district. Bauhaus schedules three to five shows a month in the genres of classic, heavy metal and hard rock from the 1970s by local artists, cover bands and the Bauhaus Band.

## Keeping the beat

Bauhaus, a bar and music venue in Tokyo, has been showcasing rock in Roppongi for 40 years

BY KELLY AGEE  
Stars and Stripes

In the heart of Roppongi, Tokyo's nightlife district, one hard-rocking venue stands apart in block after city block of pop and dance clubs.

Bauhaus, a rock bar and music venue, features live music and room for about 70 people in the basement of the Minato-ku Urban building.

Bauhaus has been keeping rock alive for 40 years by showcasing classic, heavy metal and hard rock from the 1970s to the present day, according to its website. The club schedules three to five shows a month by local artists, cover bands and the Bauhaus Band, which performs a catalogue of classic rock and pop tunes, from Aerosmith to Adele.

Price of admission depends on the show, but it comes with a free drink. Instead of a drink voucher, the club uses red guitar picks printed with "Bauhaus — No rock no life. Since 1981," a really neat touch for

music fans.

I saw AC/DC and Scorpions tribute bands for 4,000 yen or about \$30. Tickets can be booked online, in English, or by the phone. The staff speaks English, so it is quite easy. Some shows sell out, so consider buying tickets in advance. I booked mine two weeks in advance.

I was impressed with both bands' performances. I am more of an AC/DC fan, which was the main reason I went to the venue. The lead singer sang early AC/DC songs such as "Highway to Hell" and sounded exactly like their early lead singer, Bon Scott, but he switched perfectly to the style of current frontman Brian Johnson on later hits such as "Back in Black."

Even the cocktails have a hard-rock theme. The Bohemian Rhapsody, Stairway to Heaven and Kill the Kind go for 800 yen or \$5.86. Bauhaus also sells pretzels, sausage, pizza and other food.

agee.kelly@stripes.com  
Twitter: @KellyA\_Stripes



Magazine covers featuring rock musicians line a hallway at Bauhaus in Tokyo.

### Bauhaus

**Location:** 7-13-2 Roppongi, Urban Building B1, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-0032 Tokyo Minato-ku

**Directions:** A short walk from Roppongi Station via Exit 7

**Hours:** Open generally from 6 p.m. to midnight Tuesday through Saturday

**Prices:** Snack foods for 600 yen. Finger foods for 800 yen. More substantial fare like pizza for 1,000 to 1,500 yen.

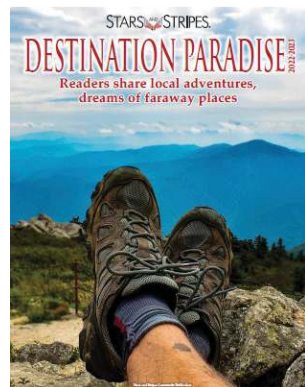
**Dress:** Casual

**Information:** Online: rockbarbauhaus.com

Kelly Agee



JP/DC, an AC/DC tribute band, performs "You Shook Me All Night Long" on July 24.



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STARS AND STRIPES

## WEEKEND: FOOD

# What's the beef with protein from a lab?

Cultivated meat may help curb high emissions, food insecurity and weakening biodiversity, but it has caveats

By Coco Liu  
Bloomberg

**C**ultured meat. Cultivated meat. Lab-grown meat. Cell-based meat. Whatever you call it, the newest addition to alternative protein is having a bit of a moment. Over the past few months, Singapore's government wined and dined VIP guests with cultivated meat at COP27, lab-grown chicken passed its first hurdle with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and a landmark global agreement to protect biodiversity applied new pressure to rethinking how beef, pork, chicken and seafood are produced.

Advocates of cultivated meat say it could be an answer to soaring agricultural emissions, deteriorating biodiversity and alarming food insecurity, while critics worry that the high cost of cultivated meat, alongside its regulatory hurdles and unproven scalability, make it mostly hype for now. Everyone agrees that many questions remain. For now, here's what we know about the present and potential future of meat grown in a lab:

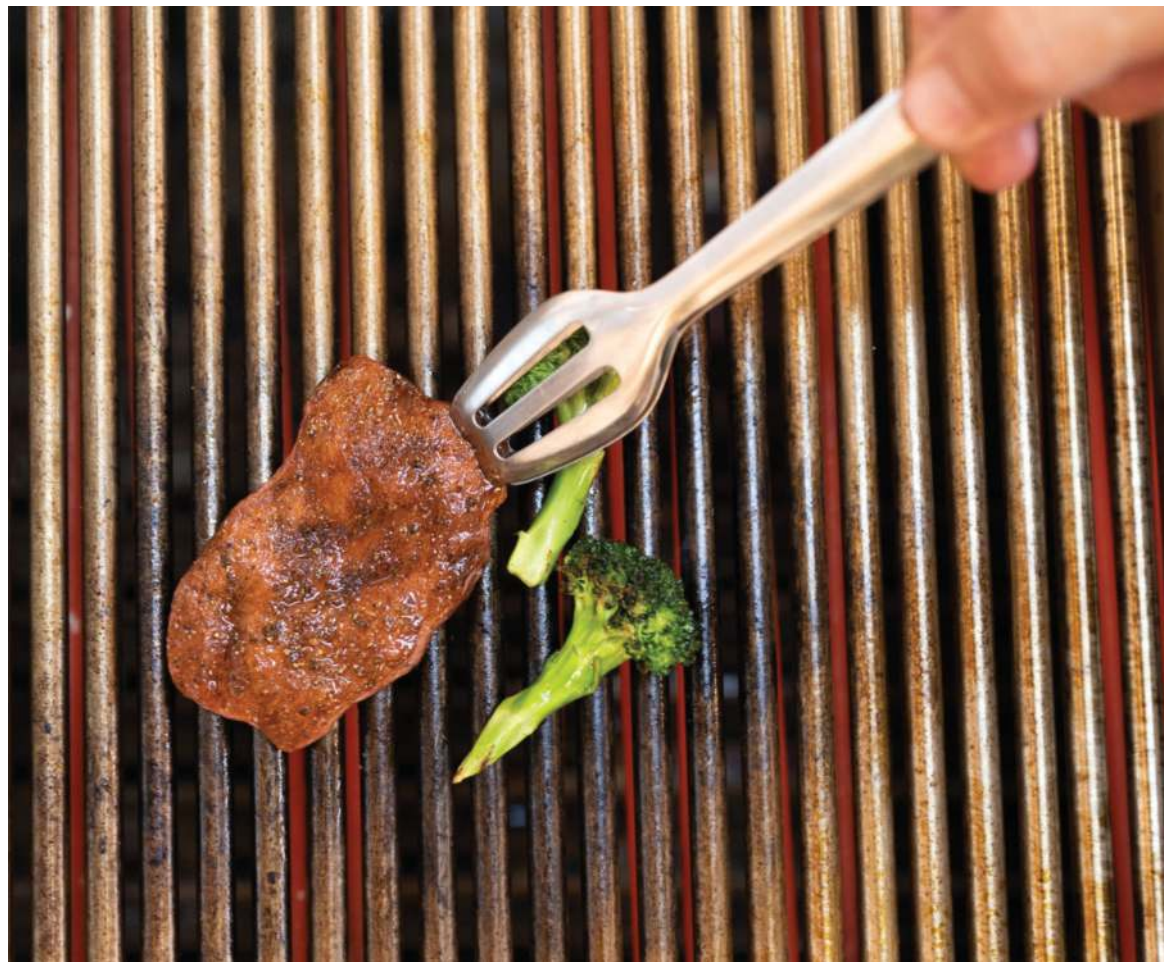
## What is cultured meat?

Cultured or cultivated meat is made by harvesting cells from live animals, "feeding" the cells with nutrients so they can grow in a bioreactor and turning the result into a product consumers can eat.

Take fish maw, for example. The swim bladder of a fish, it's considered a delicacy in many Asian countries. To create a lab-grown version of croaker fish maws, scientists from Hong Kong-based Avant Meats place fish cells in a culture medium containing dozens of different nutrients and store them in a bioreactor connected to an oxygen tank. Within weeks, those cells proliferate into tissues the size of a grain of rice, at which point they're ready for assembly into larger pieces.

The science behind cultivated meat isn't new — cell cultures were first used in medical research in 1907 — but applying that idea to meat gained traction after a Dutch pharmacologist presented the world's first cell-based vitro hamburger on television in 2013.

Today, more than 100 companies around the world are trying to create cell-based protein, ranging from lab-grown lamb to lab-grown oysters and even lab-grown foie gras. Different proteins present different complications, though: Makers of cell-based seafood don't have the advantage medical research



CORINNA KERN/Bloomberg

**A chef grills a piece of cultivated thin-cut steak in the Aleph Farms Ltd. development kitchen in Rehovot, Israel, in November. Lab-grown meat may help relieve food insecurity and restore biodiversity.**

gives those cultivating mammalian cells, for example. And meats made up of more complex tissue and texture can be more difficult to construct — a process known as "scaffolding" that holds together muscle, fat and connective tissue to recreate meat's structure.

## How is it different from plant-based meat?

Plant-based meat refers to meat that is made from soy or other non-meat ingredients — Impossible Foods Inc. and Beyond Meat Inc. are two of the more high-profile companies producing plant-based meat products. Cultivated meat, on the other hand, is produced by cultivating animal cells directly. It has the exact same nutrition as conventionally produced beef, pork, poultry and seafood — though both plant-based and cell-based meats are still perfecting the taste and texture.

The other big difference between plant-based and cultivated protein is availability. Plant-based meat is still struggling to reach consistent price parity with regular meat — and commands less than 1% of the global market, according to an estimate from Good Food Institute Asia Pacific — but it is sold in restaurants and grocery stores around the world. For now, the commercial sale of

lab-grown meat is only legal in Singapore, a country of 5 million that is focused on dramatically reducing its reliance on food imports.

Experts say that's unlikely to change anytime soon. Scaling up the production of cultivated protein from a pilot stage to a commercial level requires technological advances, industry observers say, and massive bioreactors required for mass manufacturing don't exist yet.

Regulatory hurdles also remain. In the U.S., the FDA recently told Upside Foods that it had no questions about the safety of the company's cell-based chicken for human consumption, but the California-based startup still needs more approvals, including from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which jointly oversees the rollout of cultivated meat. Elsewhere, policymakers in China, Israel and the Netherlands have signaled support for cell-based meat, but none have approved commercial sales.

## Can vegetarians eat cultivated meat?

Technically, cultivated meat is not vegan or even vegetarian: It's made from growing cells taken from real animals. But people become vegetarians for different reasons, ranging from concerns

over animal rights to fears about the use of antibiotics and hormones in livestock. Many vegetarians avoid meat in an effort to keep from exhausting environmental resources. On some of these fronts, cell-based meat might be a viable alternative.

"If you believe that taking anything from an animal, including a cell, is exploitative, then you won't be [eating cultivated meat]," says Sonalie Figueras, founder of sustainability website Green Queen. "But if your focus is more on reducing the overall impact of [animal] suffering, then you would probably eat it."

## Is it better for the environment?

Cell-based meat can play a vital role in helping restore biodiversity, which has long been threatened by traditional agriculture. Consider, for example, that clearing land for cattle ranching is responsible for about 80% of deforestation in the Amazon.

But when it comes to the climate impact of cultivated protein, the answer isn't entirely straightforward. Growing meat from cells in bioreactors does use far less land than traditional farming and avoids a lot of the emissions associated with, for example, cow burps. It could also allow companies to produce meat

closer to their consumers, reducing the amount of fuel needed to deliver foodstuffs.

But growing meat in bioreactors demands significant amounts of electricity, particularly at scale. That makes cultivated pork and chicken a viable option to reduce emissions only if its production is powered by wind, solar and other renewable energy sources, according to one 2021 study by Dutch environmental consultancy CE Delft. The same study finds cell-based beef, on the other hand, can achieve more climate gains than its farmed counterpart no matter what kind of power is used to make it, because conventional cattle ranching is so resource-intensive.

## What's 'wrong' with cultivated protein?

Most doubts about cultivated protein have to do with its limitations: For now, it's still highly expensive to produce, which makes widespread sales — even with regulatory approval — difficult to imagine anytime soon. Indeed, nearly a decade after the world's first cultivated vitro burger was created at a phenomenal cost of \$325,000, the only commercially available cultivated meat is sold in small amounts in Singapore and made by San Francisco-based Eat Just. The company says it will take eight years for its products to become cost-competitive with conventional meat.

Transparency has also been a point of contention. Jaydee Hanson, a policy director at the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit Center for Food Safety, says makers of cultivated protein rarely disclose how they keep the cells growing. That can sometimes expose problematic processes and raise new questions about ethicality, like for example the use of the blood of unborn calves as a medium for cell culture. (Some cultivated protein companies, however, are making efforts to ditch all production materials of animal origin.)

Then there's the more quotidian but equally important challenges: appearance, texture and taste. On a November night at the Four Seasons in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, a dozen COP27 attendees dined on grilled chicken thigh with mushroom rice, a dish made using Eat Just's cell-based chicken. The entree was met with mixed results.

"It's got the look [of chicken]," one guest commented.

"I can definitely tell it's not chicken," noted another. "It's too smooth."

## WEEKEND: BOOKS

# ‘Spare’ willing to share lots of dirt

Prince Harry's explosive memoir reveals details about the royal's upbringing, family and media relationship

BY HILLEL ITALIE  
AND JILL LAWLESS  
Associated Press

From the book's opening citation of William Faulkner, to Prince Harry's passionate bond with his wife Meghan, you could almost call the Duke of Sussex's memoir "The Americanization of Prince Harry."

Bereaved boy, troubled teen, wartime soldier, unhappy royal — many facets of Prince Harry are revealed in his explosive memoir, often in eyebrow-raising detail. Running throughout is Harry's desire to be a different kind of prince — the kind who talks about his feelings, eats fast food and otherwise doesn't hide beyond a prim facade.

Like an American.

From accounts of cocaine use and losing his virginity to raw family rifts, "Spare" exposes deeply personal details about Harry and the wider royal family. Even Americans may flinch when he confides that a trip to the North Pole left him with frost-bitten genitals that proved most irritating during his brother's wedding to Kate.

Even Americans may flinch when he confides that a trip to the North Pole left him with frost-bitten genitals that proved most irritating during his brother's wedding to Kate.

## Brotherhood

The book opens with a famous quote from Faulkner, bard of the American South: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

Harry's story is dominated by his rivalry with elder brother Prince William and the death of the boys' mother, Princess Diana, in 1997. Harry, who was 12 at the time, has never forgiven the media for Diana's death in a car crash while being pursued by photographers.

The loss of his mother haunts the book, which Harry dedicates to Meghan, children Archie and Lili "and, of course, my mother."

The opening chapter recounts how his father Prince Charles — now King Charles III — broke the news of his mother's accident but didn't give his son a hug.

Harry reveals that years later he asked his driver to take him through the Pont de l'Alma tunnel in Paris, site of the fatal crash, hoping in vain that it would help end a "decade of unrelenting pain." He also says he once consulted a woman who claimed to have "powers" and to be able to pass on messages from Diana.

Harry adds that he and William both "pleaded" with their father not to marry his long-term paramour Camilla Parker-

Bowles, worried she would become a "wicked stepmother."

Harry also is tormented by his status as royal "spare" behind William, who is heir to the British throne. He recounts a long-standing sibling rivalry that worsened after he began a relationship with Meghan, the American actor he married in 2018.

He says that during an argument in 2019, William called Meghan "difficult" and "rude" (the kind of insults an upper-class Englishman might reserve for Americans), then grabbed him by the collar and knocked him down. Harry suffered cuts and bruises from landing on a dog bowl.

Harry says Charles implored the brothers to make up, saying after the funeral of Prince Philip in 2021: "Please, boys — don't make my final years a misery."

Neither Buckingham Palace, which represents King Charles III, nor William's Kensington Palace office has commented on any of the allegations.

## Admiration for grandparents

Harry writes with admiration and some affection about Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip. He remembers Philip's "many passions — carriage driving, barbecuing, shooting, food, beer," and above all how he "embraced life," as did his mother. "Maybe that was why he'd been such a fan" of Princess Diana, Harry recalls.

Meanwhile, he acknowledges being intimidated at times by his grandmother, if only because she was the queen. She is no more helpful than anyone else in containing the media leaks, but she is often seen as sympathetic to his wishes, never more so than when she approved of his marriage of Meghan.

Harry also sees her as an engaging, even humorous person beyond her otherwise proper bearing. Reflecting on her death last year he remembers whispering jokes into her ear or convincing her to participate in a widely seen promotional video of the Invictus Games, in which she one-ups the Obamas in a sparring contest.

"She was a natural comedienne," he writes, calling her "wicked sense of humor" a prized confidence between the two. "In every photo of us, whenever we're exchanging a glance, making solid eye contact, it's clear. We had secrets."

## Wild teenage years

The memoir suggests the media's party-boy image of Harry during his teen and young adult years was well-deserved.

Harry describes how he lost his virginity at 17 — in a field behind a pub to an older woman who loved horses and treated the teenage prince like a "young stallion." It was, he says, an "inglorious episode."

He also says he took cocaine several times starting at the same age, in order to



ALBERTO PEZZALI/AP

Prince William, left, and Prince Harry walk behind the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II being pulled past Buckingham Palace following her funeral service Sept. 19 at Westminster Abbey in central London. Harry says he and William spoke very little that day.

"feel different." He also acknowledges using cannabis and magic mushrooms — which made him hallucinate that a toilet was talking to him.

## Army revelations

Harry offers extensive memories of his decade in the British army, serving twice in Afghanistan. He says that on his second tour, as an Apache helicopter co-pilot and gunner in 2012-2013, he killed 25 Taliban militants.

Harry says he felt neither satisfaction nor shame about his actions, and in the heat of battle regarded enemy combatants as pieces being removed from a chessboard, "Bads taken away before they could kill Goods."

Veterans criticized the comments and said they could increase the security risk for Harry. Retired Col. Richard Kemp said it was "an error of judgment," and regarding enemy fighters as chess pieces is "not the way the British trains people."

"I think that sort of comment that doesn't reflect reality is misleading and potentially valuable to those people who wish the British forces and British government harm," he told the BBC.

The Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021, and Harry's words have drawn protests in the country. Afghan Foreign Ministry spokesman Abdul Qahar Balkhi called the Western invasion of Afghanistan "odious" and said Harry's comments "are a microcosm of the trauma experienced by Afghans at the hands of occupation forces who murdered innocents without any accountability."

## A regular guy

Yes, he's a prince, but he isn't above stopping for burgers and fries at an In-N-Out, or getting clothes from a chain outlet. He's also a compulsive watcher of "Friends" and relates most to the wisecracking Chandler Bing, played by Matthew Perry. And because he's a prince, he got to meet another "Friends" star, Courteney Cox, and indulge in chocolate psychedelic mushrooms at her Los Angeles home.

## The real villain

Harry shares painful words about his father and brother, but his real anger is directed at the British media, and at those within the royal circle who cooperated and otherwise stood aside. While Charles remains apparently indifferent to the press, the rest of the family is obsessed with media coverage, Harry writes, himself as much as any of them. He expresses despair over what he calls endlessly false stories about him, the racist caricatures of his wife and of the press' unnerving knowledge of his whereabouts and private correspondence. "One has to have a relationship with the press," he is told by the royal staff.

## Personal journey

Harry credits Meghan with changing the way he sees the world and himself. He says he was "awash in isolation and privilege" and had no understanding of unconscious bias before he met her.

The young prince notoriously wore a Nazi uniform to a costume party in 2005, and claims in the book that William and his now-wife Kate encouraged the choice of outfit and "howled" with laughter when they saw it.

He was recorded using a racist term about a fellow soldier of Pakistani descent in 2006, but says he did not know the word was a slur and that the soldier was not offended.

Meghan and Harry cited the U.K. media's treatment of the biracial American actor as one of the main reasons for their decision to quit royal duties and move to the U.S. in 2020.

The book gives no sign that royal family relations will be repaired soon. Harry told ITV in an interview to promote the book that he wants reconciliation, but that there must be "accountability" first.

In the final pages, Harry describes how he and William walked side by side during the funeral procession of Queen Elizabeth II in September, but spoke barely a word to one another.

"The following afternoon, Meg and I left for America," he says.

## WEEKEND: MUSIC



Anti-Flag enters the new year with the same lineup that solidified the band in 1999.

Atom Splitter PR

# Longevity and 'Lies'

## Anti-Flag is on top of its game with 13th album

By SCOTT MERVIS  
*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

**A**nti-Flag is becoming an anomaly in the rock world, entering 2023 with the same four guys who solidified the band in 1999.

There's a reason for the longevity, says drummer Pat Thetic.

"It's really unusual — incredibly unusual — and it's a testament to the fact that we have a mission with the band. We have a belief structure, and we make allowances to be able to keep that mission going."

That included spending the latter part of '22 touring every weekend, as far as Montreal and Alabama, even though two of the members — Thetic and guitarist Chris Head — now have small children at home.

"Rock 'n' roll disrupts your relationships, you know. That's the nature of the beast," the drummer says. "We thought doing weekends would make it less disruptive. But, to be honest with you, after doing this for 25, 30 years, there's no way to do rock 'n' roll without it being disruptive to your personal life. It's just the nature of it."

This will be another busy year, as the Pittsburgh punk band launches it with the release of its 13th album, "Lies They Tell Our Children," the follow-up to 2020's "20/20 Vision." The album, produced by Jon Lundin (Good Charlotte, Senses Fail, Sleeping With Sirens), was recorded at the band's new headquarters

SEE LONGEVITY ON PAGE 29

## Collective Soul's Ed Roland on 360 guitars, his Elton John piano and Billy Joel rejection

By RODNEY HO

*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*  
Collective Soul takes its name seriously.

It is not a fractious crew, relatively speaking. The Atlanta-based band over three decades has generated a coterie of pop-rock classics, performed thousands of times and retains three original members.

The current five-member lineup has been together for nearly nine years, with Jesse Triplett the most recent addition as lead guitarist in early 2014.

"This is the lineup that will be

forever," lead singer Ed Roland said in a recent interview. "We just enjoy each other's company.

"Every night, we're like little kids. We hop out and hug each other. We have fun onstage. We love what we do."

In 2022, the first year since 2019 that could be construed as "normal" for most touring bands, Collective Soul released its 11th studio album, "Vibrating," and performed 61 times.

Here are some highlights from the interview:

■ **Breakthrough hit "Shine"** being by far the band's most

popular song on Spotify: "I'm so appreciative that 'Shine' has allowed me to continue to write. As a songwriter, I'd still put it in my top 20. We never get tired playing it. When I go to Publix and the cashier hands me change, they don't get clapped for it. I have a job where I get claps every night."

■ **On the band's past two albums:** "You get older. You get wiser. I'd say our two most recent albums 'Vibrating' and 'Blood' are the best work we've

SEE ROLAND ON PAGE 29



DAVID ABBOTT/David Abbott

Collective Soul released its 11th album, "Vibrating," in 2022.

## WEEKEND: MUSIC

**Longevity:** New record includes an array of collaborations with special guest artists

FROM PAGE 28

in Sharpsburg, with the drums cut at Mr. Smalls Studio.

Anti-Flag considers "Lies They Tell Our Children," released Jan. 6, a concept album about an American political system "that's putting profit above people," in the words of co-frontman Chris #2. The band is at the top of its game on a loud and boisterous set of protest anthems tackling such issues as political corruption ("Sold Everything"), for-profit health care ("Modern Meta Medicine"), the treatment of immigrants ("Shallow Graves") and the exploitation of workers ("WORK\_STRUGGLE").

Straying from its tried-and-true thrashy punk, Anti-Flag provides tasty elements of screamo, pop and Celtic punk with an array of special guests, including Jesse Leach (Killswitch Engage), Tim McIrath (Rise Against), Brian Baker (Bad Religion), Ashrita Kumar (Pinkshift), Shane Told (Silverstein) and Stacey Dee (Bad Cop/Bad Cop).

"It was a conscious attempt," Thetic says. "We're like, 'All right, let's try and bring other voices on to our record and see how it goes.' They do this in hip-hop all the time. In rock, it's not really done."

"It's awesome to do it because within rock you see people all the time in passing on tours and doing different events but you don't really get to actually work together. It's like opening up a present when you get their version back and you open it up on the computer and it's like 'Oh [expletive], that sounds awesome!'"

Bringing in Leach, for example, on "Meta Modern Medicine" makes the song one of the heaviest that Anti-Flag has ever recorded.

"He may not be completely in line with us, musically, but socially and politically, he's very similar to what we're trying to achieve," Thetic says.

Kumar's contribution to "Imperialism" makes the song pop-catchy while also "changing the whole perspective from just geopolitical imperialism to a personal level of imperialism," Thetic says.

As for the choice of Lundin as producer, Thetic



Atom Splitter PR

**Anti-Flag considers its new release, "Lies They Tell Our Children," a concept album about the American political system.**

says, "He brought an energy and a focus on modern music that we struggle with and a focus on the technology, because we are not as skilled in the technology, obviously, of getting great guitar sounds and great drum sounds. He helped us find the sound we were looking for."

Anti-Flag will hit the road in February on a cross-country U.S. tour and return to Europe in June to deliver the band's message, which they've always described as anti-war, anti-imperialist and anti-Wall Street but not anti-American.

It's the message that will keep driving Anti-Flag toward a 25th anniversary with this same lineup.

"We've been able to be consistent," Thetic says, "in that we agree on all the same tactics and beliefs. Sometimes the details of how to achieve the goals differ, but the goals of the band have always been the same. We don't argue in the band about what battles were fighting. We might argue about whether this chord is the right chord or not, or whether this drum part is to this or too that, but the main mission of the band has been the same from the beginning, and we've all been consistent on that."

**Roland:** Singer's band plans to record four-song Elvis EP

FROM PAGE 28

ever done."

■ **On playing the big hits at every concert:** "You gotta play what got you here. Those get bigger applause, as they should. I'm fine with that."

■ **On joining Hootiefest in April 2023 with Hootie & The Blowfish in Cancun, Mexico:** "We came from the same label at the same time. Mark Bryan, the band's guitarist, and I had a band once, the Sweet Tea Project. He played mandolin. Darius [Rucker] had Jesse [Triplett] for awhile. It's an inbred Southern thing. We've worked with the other bands, too. [Everclear and Gin Blossoms.] We're all at that certain part of our lives. We're all at peace."

■ **Elvis Presley EP plans:** "We became friends with someone who owns Elvis Presley's old home in Palm Springs, Florida. We plan to record there. We are looking to do a four-song EP of Elvis songs for Record Store Day. We will do 'Bossa Nova Baby,' 'All Shook Up,' 'Kentucky Rain' and 'Burning Love.'"

■ **Roland being Roland:** "My wife gets on me all the time. We'll be taking a long weekend vacation and we see a bar band. I'll give them \$100 to play for 15 minutes. I don't tell them who I am. I play my songs and they think, 'Wait a second. You sound like the real guy!' Then they realize it's me."

■ **Not dyeing his hair but not**

cutting it short: "I'm now gray haired. But I also wear it long. Not many people pushing 60 do that. So is that Einstein, or that guy from Collective Soul?"

■ **His guitar obsession:** "I own 360 guitars. I have four storage spaces for guitars. If I see it and like it, I buy it. I have played every one of them. Eddie Van Halen gave me his guitar. We toured with Van Halen. Eddie and I became pals. ... Kids will come over and I'll give them a guitar. It's a joy to share them."

■ **His Elton John piano:** "He used to spend a lot of time in Atlanta. One time, we got together and had dinner. He knew how much I respected him and he respected me. He was a mentor. We'd give each other gifts. One time he got me a grand piano. I was shocked. He said, 'You gotta take it. I only want you to promise me you'll write songs on it.' I'm like, 'Done!' I write a lot on it. Getting a piano from a pop hero you grew up with. What else is there?"

■ **The Billy Joel pitch:** By 2002, Billy Joel hadn't recorded new pop music in 20 years so John set it up for Roland to meet him because Roland wanted to produce an album with him. "I told Billy I wanted to make 'Glass Houses Part 2.' I told him the rawness of it meant a lot to me as a kid. I would love to be part of it. Billy shut me down."

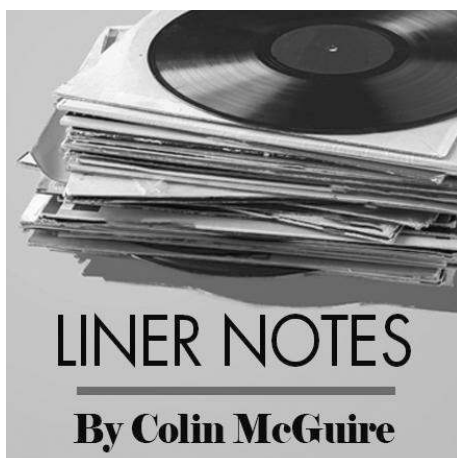
"Nope," he said. "Nice meeting you."

## International appeal drives tours as Bad Bunny leads live music world

**W**ith the advent of YouTube, the obsession with looking at live entertainment through a cell-phone's camera lens and a general disinterest in leaving the house anymore, live music isn't quite what it used to be. Out is a time when tours felt unmissable and summers were reserved for outdoor amphitheater mega-bills around which some fans might even plan entire vacations. In is ... Taylor Swift?

That's not a shot at Swift, mind you; it's just that live music isn't nearly as much of an Important Thing as it was, say, 10 or 20 years ago. Still, according to Pollstar, perhaps the most celebrated temperature-taker of all things live music, the business is far from dead — and it's certainly not dead if you happen to be a pop star from anywhere not named "America." According to its latest Live 75 chart, which tracks active tours by the average tickets sold for shows that happened over the past 30 days, four of the top five artists began their musical journeys outside the U.S.

The leader in the clubhouse, of course, is Bad Bunny, who clocked in at about 40,000 tickets sold per show, raking in somewhere around \$6.5 million a night over the past three months. The only artist



to come close to Bunny over the past 30 days in the Live 75 is Daddy Yankee, who garnered about 35,000 tickets per show. From there, the numbers drop considerably as Harry Styles clocks in at about 16,000 tickets a concert, followed by Lizzo, who earned a little less than 15,000 tickets a show and then Dua Lipa, who rounded out the top five with about 14,000 tickets a night.

For those keeping score, that's two artists from Puerto Rico in Bunny and Yankee, two from the UK in Lipa and Styles, and then the Houston-by-way-of-Detroit

Lizzo. The lesson? If you want to sell concert tickets in 2023, appeal to a worldwide audience.

Speaking of Styles, he's getting ready to finish up the U.S. run of his most recent tour in Los Angeles at the end of this month before heading to Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea and Denmark, among a handful of other countries for a slate that will run off and on from late February to mid-July. Buzzy English duo Wet Leg will join him on a solid portion of the dates as the tour's opening act, and the only thing that makes more sense than that band joining that guy out on tour is ... nothing.

As for tours announced in the past few weeks, it turns out Janet Jackson will be hitting the road with Ludacris in mid-April. That jaunt will cover arenas throughout the U.S. and is set to run until mid-June. The Weeknd, whose "Blinding Lights" was recently anointed the most-streamed song ever on Spotify, also announced plans to extend what feels like a tour that will never end (remember when it took over the Super Bowl halftime show 5,000 years ago?), as he plans to go to Europe, Colombia, Mexico and South America beginning this summer. As of this writing, that trek will feature 27 stops

from June to October.

And then there are a couple of fun packages that recently revealed their plans for the coming months on the road, if only for nostalgia's sake. First, there's the creatively titled "Twenty" tour that will feature Ruben Studdard and Clay Aiken of "American Idol" fame. Mostly turning up in casinos and theaters stateside, the run begins in April and will wrap up in May ... unless viewers at home vote them off first.

Sorry. Couldn't resist.

The other act who is both ready to give you some 1990s/2000s nostalgia feels and hop in a tour bus (or van) in the coming weeks? Third Eye Blind. They'll set out March 10 in New Orleans for something called, shockingly, the "Evening With Third Eye Blind" tour. The slate will migrate east from New Orleans before the band returns to its native California to bid adieu (for now, at least) in mid-April. No word yet on whether they plan to lose the rest of their year by touring in either the summer, fall or winter. To say that after all these years, those guys have semi-charmed lives would be a massive understatement at this point.

OK. Again. Sorry. Couldn't resist.

Anyway, happy concert-ing!

## WEEKEND: TELEVISION

# Another coming of age

'The Best Man: The Final Chapters' TV series focuses on 'midlife metamorphosis'

BY JEVON PHILLIPS  
*Los Angeles Times*

Over the Christmas and New Year's holidays, many people participated in nostalgic activities and went to familiar places where they celebrated growing up and growing closer to those around them. Peacock's "The Best Man: The Final Chapters," the series that ends the movie franchise created by director Malcolm D. Lee, could've been the cozy socks around the TV fire in the households of certain Black Generation Xers.

Since its launch with 1999's "The Best Man," the actors and characters have grown with their target audience from young adulthood to middle-age. The relatability of the characters from the film and its 2013 sequel "The Best Man Holiday" has led to groups of friends identifying members in their own personal cliques by which one corresponds to a member in the cast.

Is someone a Jordan? Uber capable, ambitious, in charge. A Harper? Artistic, single-minded, career-focused. Or even a Lance? Alpha male dealing with life's changes and raising kids in 2022. The cast includes almost all of the original actors: Morris Chestnut as Lance, Melissa De Sousa as Shelby, Taye Diggs as Harper, Regina Hall as Candy, Terrence Howard as Quentin, Sanaa Lathan as Robyn, Nia Long as Jordan and Harold Perrineau as Murch. The series, which debuted Dec. 22 and takes place a few years after "Holiday" in the characters' timeline, catches up with the cast as relationships evolve and past grievances resurface in what the show is calling "a midlife crisis meets a midlife renaissance."

"The impetus for writing 'Best Man' was the opportunity for upwardly mobile, educated, successful or aspirational Black folks — middle-class Black folks — to see themselves reflected on the screen. So I think that the chemistry between the actors and the characters feels very familiar and real and authentic," says creator, writer and director Malcolm D. Lee.



PHOTOS BY PEACOCK/TNS

Nia Long as Jordan Armstrong, Harold Perrineau as Julian Murch, Melissa De Sousa as Shelby and Morris Chestnut as Lance Sullivan return to the screen in "The Best Man: The Final Chapters," a TV series that ends the "Best Man" film franchise.



Brittani Nichole Tucker as Paris Holiday in "The Best Man: The Final Chapters." The series expands on the female characters' stories more than the movies do.

"They deal with some very real-world feelings, situations and complexities that I think people appreciate. People want to keep revisiting these characters because they know them, they are them, or they have friends that are them."

With successful sequels, the conventional thinking is that there must be something new added. Bigger. Better. Different. Even with themes of aging,

tolerance with your kids, career transitions and more, a subtle change of storytelling perspective might be the most noticeable difference. Executive producer Dayna Lynne North came into a situation and onto a set that had 20 years of friendship and a couple of successful movies weaved into it. The actors knew what worked and had insight into their characters that went beyond what was on screen

or on the page. North was a fan of the franchise and had been inspired by its representation of relationships.

"When we met, I told (Malcolm Lee) that I very much relate to these characters. I relate to that idea of friends who love each other but can also have those moments of life. 'You get on my nerves, but I still love you,'" North says. "I remember getting to USC and feeling like I had found my tribe of artsy Black film and theater and art nerds. It was deeply relating to this friend group in 'The Best Man' ... that they were each other's chosen family."

Despite the love, North did come in with a critical eye. A veteran of television, having worked on series such as "Veronica Mars" and "Insecure," North also understood that in the transition from a two-hour feature to an eight-episode series, stories would need to expand. This also gave her and Lee the opportunity to "step back and, in this iteration of the franchise, (ask) 'How can we open up the women's stories?'"

"(Lee) wanted to write a romantic comedy from a Black man's point of view. That was the whole reason he wrote 'The Best Man.' It's right there in the title, right? He wanted to create it in an era of 'Love, Jones' and 'Waiting to Exhale' and those kind of films for men," North says.

SEE BEST MAN ON PAGE 31

**"When I set out to make the show and called it 'The Final Chapters,' it was not like just a catchy name. What I believe, and I still believe it, is that I don't have any more to tell. I guess people may want that, but I think it's better that you keep people wanting more rather than, as they say in television, jump the shark."**

Malcolm D. Lee

"The Best Man" creator, writer and director

## WEEKEND: TELEVISION

**Best Man:** Actor praises series creator for keeping storylines fresh, surprising**FROM PAGE 30**

“But for me, coming into it as a Black woman, I had always felt like the women were just counterparts to the men’s story. They rode side saddle, and the women in the franchise, to me thus far — and I think Malcolm would acknowledge the same thing — had kind of been written as bit parts while the men’s stories were centered. And so that was definitely something that I was excited about and something I think he wanted to do as well.”

The actors felt the new energy in the storytelling, and North’s physical presence was also helpful as the show continued to develop during filming.

“It was really great having her on set. I love Dayna because she was a great new sound in our ears,” Perrineau says. “I’m a little older than the characters. So for me, she brought this real current ‘I’m in the middle of this’ kind of perspective that was really helpful for me to dive in and go ‘Oh, OK, I see what you all are dealing with and what you’re feeling, and it all makes sense.’”

De Sousa also noticed the emphasis on the women’s storylines, and was a part of making it happen. She approached Lee and expressed that it was “really important to me this time around that [he] show a full woman, a full human being with all dimensions of light and character” for her role.

“I have to have some meat,” she says. “I have to have some emotion. I don’t want to just be a funny scene stealer, which is great. Not going to complain about that. But you have to show her heart.”

Besides the focus on women, the series delves into life transitions that affect most people in their 40s and 50s — raising kids/young adults, career adjustments, health concerns and even reevaluating relationships. Each iteration of “The Best Man” followed the characters through their growing pains, and “The Final Chapters” will continue that.

“One of the things that I was excited about was, like, the idea of midlife metamorphosis, because midlife doesn’t have to be a crisis, right? It doesn’t. I mean, it’s a common cliché and a well-known phrase, but it’s another coming-of-age for me,” North says.

Chestnut’s Lance encapsulates much of that coming-of-age change that all of the characters are going and have gone

through. An aging professional football player, a widower in the process of moving on and a father trying to understand his son whose gender difference confuses him, Chestnut has not only seen his character’s growing pains, but has watched as the franchise continued to attract fans and become a cult favorite.

“I think the one thing that Malcolm has done very well is present the audience with something that they don’t expect, which is really hard in a sequel,” Chestnut says. “A lot of people came to see ‘The Best Man Holiday’ and just expected to laugh and have fun — but then they had to deal with death. In ‘The Final Chapters,’ they’re not expecting it to end [the way that it does]. So I think Malcolm does a good job, again, of keeping people on their toes.”

In this era of sequels and prequels and streaming breakouts, it’s unexpected that this would be the end for a franchise that may have been given a bit of new life with the series. Lee has made it clear, though, that this is it for the ‘Best Man’ cinematic universe. For the creators and cast, the end was, in a word, satisfying.

“When I set out to make the show and called it ‘The Final Chapters,’ it was not like just a catchy name. What I believe, and I still believe it, is that I don’t have any more to tell. I guess people may want that, but I think it’s better that you keep people wanting more rather than, as they say in television, jump the shark,” Lee says.

“I guess, as we talked about it in our writers’ room, we wanted to walk away from these characters in a way that felt authentic and in a way that felt satisfying,” North says. “We wanted to honor what felt right to the character’s journey and then also what feels right to the story. At a certain point, I think a story, if you listen with your intuition, a story will start to speak to you. And we all did our best to listen and pay attention and find that balance.”

For Perrineau, whose character experienced a big dramatic shift during the series, the end seemed inevitable and was worth it: “I feel really satisfied with the entire journey from ‘The Best Man’ to the end of this thing as ‘The Final Chapters.’ If we never see those characters on screen again, I would feel satisfied that we actually did something that was wonderful and relevant.”



KIN CHEUNG/AP

Australia’s Ajla Tomljanovic reacts Nov. 13 during a match at the Billie Jean King Cup tennis finals in Glasgow, Scotland. “If you’re not winning the event, you’re a loser every week,” says Tomljanovic.

# Baseline strategy

Netflix tennis docuseries ‘Break Point’ short on surprises, best for introducing new or casual fans to the sport’s current players

By HOWARD FENDRICH  
Associated Press

Less than 10 minutes into the first episode of “Break Point,” a Netflix docuseries about professional tennis, Nick Kyrgios is seen practicing before last year’s Australian Open and is heard contemplating aloud whether he ever will appear again at the tournament.

“I don’t know if this is going to be the last time,” Kyrgios says. “Nothing good lasts forever, though, yeah?”

That captures the vibe around tennis lately, what with the retirements of Serena Williams, Roger Federer and Ash Barty all arriving in 2022. It also helps open a window onto the tumult and pressure — a word invoked repeatedly during the series’ first five episodes — that are constant factors for the WTA and ATP athletes who are back on the Grand Slam stage as play began Jan. 9 at Melbourne Park.

This is not the first time Kyrgios, who wound up reaching his first Grand Slam final at Wimbledon in July, has voiced questions about his future and, indeed, there are not a ton of outright surprises for those who follow the sport closely. That said, there are occasional unexpected moments during the first half of Season 1’s 10 episodes (the rest are scheduled for release in June), such as when Kyrgios discusses his drinking habit with his manager or when Maria Sakkari says in Episode 3 that she “retired for four days” after blowing a match point and losing in the 2021 French Open semifinals.

“Break Point” is, in some ways, an advertisement for tennis, introducing casual fans — or folks who really haven’t been fans at all — to some of the on-court characters, laying out basic rules and formats, and offering limited recaps on last season’s events.

There is not an effort to completely cover what went on in the sport. One example of something only briefly addressed: an unvaccinated Novak

Djokovic’s will-he-or-won’t-he-play-in-Australia saga that fascinated the world for more than a week. Barty’s historic championship at the Australian Open and stunning retirement soon after are left unexplored.

“At the end of the day, the show is about the human condition, and what this particular sport does to the human condition and how people respond to being in this place and this time. And it’s very relatable,” said executive producer James Gay-Rees, who also is one of the people behind “Formula 1: Drive to Survive.”

“They’re human beings that potentially we can all relate to,” Gay-Rees said in a video interview. “If that is the case, then anybody can watch it and find something.”

There is a mix of recent and archival footage. There are interviews with coaches, agents, family members, significant others, journalists and former players such as Chris Evert, Martina Navratilova, Andy Roddick and Maria Sharapova.

The emphasis is on current players’ tales and travails, although do not expect a ton of gossip or infighting. There are tears. There is frankness, particularly in the “confessional”-style, look-straight-into-the-camera sessions so popular on reality TV.

Paula Badosa, a Spaniard once ranked No. 2, talks in Episode 4 about dealing with depression. Taylor Fritz, the highest-ranked American man, gives viewers a behind-the-scenes look in Episode 3 at a player dealing with an injury before the biggest match of his career. Ajla Tomljanovic, an Australian player who beat Williams at the U.S. Open in the 23-time major champion’s final match, offers insight into the grind of the job.

“If you’re not winning the event, you’re a loser every week,” says Tomljanovic, whose since-ended relationship with 2021 Wimbledon runner-up Matteo Berrettini occupies much of Episode 2. “That’s why I think tennis is really brutal.”

## WEEKEND: HEALTH &amp; FITNESS



**Ozempic, an injection that keeps blood sugar levels in check for patients with type 2 diabetes, has been in shortage for about four months, according to the database maintained by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.**

iStock

# No fair shot with off-label prescribing

Drugs for diabetes like Ozempic in short supply due to celebrity, social media hype around their weight-loss benefits

BY EMMA COURT  
Bloomberg News

**F**or more than a month, Shane Anthony, a 57-year-old auto mechanic, hasn't been able to get his diabetes medication.

Ozempic, an injection that keeps blood sugar levels in check for patients with type 2 diabetes, has been in shortage for about four months, according to the database maintained by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and is backordered at Anthony's Seattle pharmacy. Without the Novo Nordisk A/S-made prescription, he has suffered recurring dizzy spells while repairing cars. Alternative medications are either out of stock or not covered by his insurance.

While increased demand and supply chain delays have left multiple medicines from the antibiotic amoxicillin to Adderall in short supply, the reason for a lack of certain diabetes drugs is unusual: Doctors are prescribing them to non-diabetics who want to use them for weight loss.

"All these famous people, stars who don't need to lose weight, are going and getting it," Anthony said. "I need it to stay healthy and not die."

For the more than 35 million people who live with type 2 diabetes, the shortages have added yet another layer to managing an already complicated and costly chronic illness. They've also exposed weaknesses in America's use of off-label prescribing, which allows physicians to hand out drugs to treat a different condition than the one for which they were officially approved. When those medications are hard to find because of celebrity and social-media hype, patients with diabetes suffer.

Ozempic, known generically as semaglutide, is one of a class of diabetes drugs known as GLP-1 receptor agonists that have been around for nearly two decades. It was first approved in the U.S. in 2017 for use in those with type 2 diabetes. Ozempic mimics a hormone involved in appetite

and eating, helping to stimulate insulin production and lower patients' blood glucose levels. It also often leads to them shedding pounds.

Francisco Prieto, a family physician in Sacramento, Calif., sees at least one person with diabetes per week who is having trouble filling their prescription for Ozempic. Patients call multiple pharmacies and drive around town to see if it's in stock, but some still haven't been able to get it, said Prieto, who also does advocacy work for the American Diabetes Association.

Recently, one of Prieto's patients experienced a three-week delay filling a prescription for Trulicity, a similar type 2 diabetes drug that's also seeing increased demand for weight-loss use. Prieto prescribed a lower dose, and recommended that the patient take two injections a week. He described the compromise as "less than ideal, but better than nothing."

Without their medication, patients with diabetes could be at higher risk for heart disease, heart attacks, infections like COVID-19, disability and even death, Prieto said. And while getting a different prescription can be an option, it can come with new hurdles, including insurance coverage and closer monitoring in case the alternative doesn't work as well.

Both new and established users of Ozempic are being affected by periodic supply disruptions. A representative for manufacturer Novo Nordisk said in a statement that the issues are expected to continue through January. The company cited "incredible demand" and short-term capacity limitations at some factories, and

said that it's investing to grow manufacturing.

Higher doses of Ozempic that aren't usually given to new patients are available, and Novo's other GLP-1 drugs for diabetes aren't in short supply, though there may be normal delays at pharmacies, the company said. In an earnings presentation in November, Novo said that its sales, as measured in Danish kroner, grew by 26% in the first nine months of the year, largely because of higher demand for Ozempic and other diabetes drugs.

Eli Lilly & Co.'s Trulicity and Mounjaro, both approved to treat type 2 diabetes, are

also seeing demand that's resulting in backorders on some doses at pharmacies, a Lilly spokeswoman said. The drugs were listed as being in shortage by the FDA on Thursday. Lilly isn't having supply chain or manufacturing issues, though the company is working to double man-

ufacturing capacity for the category by the end of next year, the spokeswoman said.

Though off-label prescribing is common and legal in the U.S., it has long created issues. In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, people took an unproven drug called hydroxychloroquine, which they believed helped with the virus. That created shortages for patients who take it for lupus and arthritis.

Ozempic is a good candidate for off-label use for obesity, which is also considered a disease and can put people at higher risk for other conditions: Official ads for the drug say patients lose on average up to 12 pounds when taking it. It's

just not clear that everyone using the drug has a medical need for it.

On TikTok, some videos featuring the hashtag #Ozempic have been viewed more than a million times. Medical spas offer the prescription alongside shots of Botox and laser hair removal. Sponsored ads on Google promise weight loss with no exercise or dieting. A plastic surgeon brags on Facebook about using the drug to lose 10 pounds she gained during the COVID-19 pandemic, and says to call her office to get started.

The FDA doesn't regulate this kind of prescribing. That means many decisions about what to do are up to individuals.

"Which disease is most acute and most severe? Which has alternatives? How adequate are those alternatives?" said Holly Fernandez Lynch, an assistant professor of medical ethics and law at the University of Pennsylvania. "These are the kinds of questions that would help you figure out which patients should have priority access."

Fernandez Lynch said a judgment would depend on the individual case. But those who just want to lose a few pounds shouldn't take a scarce resource that someone else needs, she said.

In Seattle, Anthony has recently been able to get an alternative diabetes drug. It's a much older treatment that requires twice-a-day injections before mealtimes, which he didn't have to think about with Ozempic and has found challenging. It's too soon to know how well it will work for him. He also received a letter stating that starting in February, his pharmacy will need an official type 2 diabetes diagnosis to fill an Ozempic prescription.

Prieto, the family physician, said his patients are scared and alarmed about the shortage — especially if the drug has really helped improve their health.

"Right now, diabetes is the greater danger, and those folks have a higher need for the drug," he said.

**"All these famous people, stars who don't need to lose weight, are going and getting it. I need it to stay healthy and not die."**

Shane Anthony  
uses Ozempic for his type 2 diabetes



## WEEKEND: FAMILY



iStock

As soon as a baby's first tooth erupts, it's time to start using fluoride toothpaste.

# Babies and brushing

Even the tiniest teeth need to be cared for so cavities don't form

By DR. DAVID M. KROL

American Academy of Pediatrics

**T**ooth decay (dental caries) is one of the most common chronic childhood diseases in the United States. The good news is there are ways to prevent it.

Even the tiniest teeth can decay. There are habits you can start now to keep your baby's teeth healthy. And when that first tooth shows up, there are ways your pediatrician can keep it healthy, too. Here is what you need to know.

Everyone, even babies, can get tooth decay. Children living in poverty, in ethnic or racial minority groups, or with special health care needs are at more risk for dental decay. Other reasons a child could be high risk include:

- The child's mother or main caregiver had tooth decay in the past 12 months or does not have a regular source of dental care.

- White spots appear on the child's teeth. These spots are a sign the tooth is losing calcium and minerals that keep it strong.

- Tan, brown or black spots appear or you see cavities (pits) on the teeth. This is a sign that the tooth is decaying.

Fortunately, your family's tap water probably has fluoride added to it. Fluoride has been added to drinking water since 1945.

Fluoride is a natural mineral that can slow down or stop cavities from forming. When you drink fluoridated water every day, the fluoride makes it hard for bacteria in your mouth to make acid. Fluoride also rebuilds tooth enamel (the outer layer of the tooth), and it even makes teeth stronger.

Check with your local water utility agency to find out if your water has fluoride. The health benefits work when the drinking water has 0.7 mg/L of fluoride. If your community water supply does not have fluoride or you live on a private well, ask your doctor if you should get a prescription for fluoride drops or chewable tablets for your child.

As soon as your baby's first tooth erupts, it's time to start using fluoride toothpaste. Here's how to do it:

- Use a tiny smear — the size of a grain of rice — until age 3. Clean the teeth at least twice a day. It's best to clean them right after breakfast and before bedtime.

- Use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste when your child is 3 years old. Teach your child to spit without rinsing.

- Assist or supervise kids during tooth brushing until they master the task, usually at around 10 years of age.

Do not put your baby to bed with a bottle at night or at nap time. It is also not a good idea to let your baby use a bottle filled with a sweet drink or dip your baby's pacifier in anything sweet like sugar or honey. If you do put your baby to bed with a bottle, fill it only with water. You can give your baby about 4-8 ounces of water per day starting at around 6 months. (Remember, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding as the sole source of nutrition for your baby for about 6 months.)

When your baby is 6 months, your pediatrician will start to do oral health checkups and apply fluoride varnish. Pediatricians are trained to apply fluoride varnish because many young children do not see or have access to a dentist until they are older. All infants and children should have fluoride varnish every 6 months until age 5. Children might need it every 3 months if they have a higher risk of dental decay.

Varnish is used to help prevent or slow down tooth decay. It is painted on the top and sides of each tooth and hardens quickly. The process is safe and does not hurt.

Fluoride varnish is a "preventive care service" for children. This means all public and private health insurance plans should cover fluoride varnish. No part of the cost should be shared by patients or families.

Oral health starts early. Be ready to discuss your family's plan for a "dental home." All children need access to a dentist for regular care. See your child's dentist by their first birthday or within six months of their first tooth. At this first visit, your dentist can easily check your child's teeth and determine the frequency of future dental checkups.

## THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



# One man's fast is another man's feast

"What should I make for dinner?" I asked my Navy retiree husband, Francis, the other day, like I have a million times in our 29-year marriage.

"I'm not having dinner tonight," he replied with an expression of disciplined superiority — a most unusual response from Francis. His love for pasta, pizza, bread, cheeseburgers, hoagies, sausages, meatloaf, anything drenched in mayonnaise, cookies, peanuts and cheese and crackers was well known in our family.

Sensing my shock and confusion, Francis explained, "A medical assistant is coming tomorrow morning at eight-thirty to do a health check that's required for our new life insurance policy to be approved. She has to do vitals, a blood draw, a urine sample, and I'm supposed to fast for 12 hours beforehand. So, I'm just going to have a snack for dinner," he said, proud of himself for going the extra mile.

We'd made the decision to get more life insurance a while back, after I told Francis I was nervous that, God forbid anything should happen to him, I'd be left with our large mortgage payment, my small second income from two jobs, and would likely be forced to sell the house and move again.

He made the mistake of suggesting, "You could just turn the house into a bed and breakfast." I reminded him that I neglected my career as a lawyer to follow him around for 28 years of active-duty service in the Navy through 11 moves, took the primary role in raising our three children and maintaining our home, and currently have two part-time jobs that keep me far too busy to "just turn the house into a bed and breakfast."

We contacted our financial manager who, after admonishing us for not buying more life insurance a long time ago, set us up with new policies. The health check was required before the policies would activate.

After announcing his fast, Francis foraged in the pantry for the "light snack" he'd decided would be a substitute for his normal dinner, and toddled off to the living room to watch reruns of "House Hunters."

An hour later, I found him lying across the love seat with a load of crumbs on his sweater. I noticed his glass of bourbon on ice, and two empty bags on the floor — one for tortilla chips and one for cheese popcorn. "I finished off a couple snacks that had already been opened," he explained as if he'd done our family some kind of favor.

I was in the kitchen baking cookies with our daughters when Francis sneaked back to the pantry. "Are you sure you don't want a little dinner?" I offered, but he waved me off, refreshed his cocktail and returned to the living room cradling something under his arm.

I found him later, with a bag of gingersnaps on his chest, chewing one and holding the next one between his thumb and forefinger. There was a jar of dry-roasted peanuts wedged between his hip and the love seat cushion. "It's not eight-thirty yet," he mumbled through chomps, "I still have a few more minutes left."

At nine-fifteen, I was in the laundry room when I heard our daughters yell, "Dad, you're supposed to be fasting!" I poked my head into the kitchen to see Francis foraging in the cheese drawer of the refrigerator.

"Honey!" I blared, worried that his blood test was already coursing with salt, alcohol and sugar. "Why didn't you just eat dinner?" He tsked and moped back to the love seat.

A week later, Francis haughtily announced, "Our new life insurance policy was approved!" Although his intonation said "How dare you doubt me!" the look on his face showed unmistakable relief. I was relieved that I would no longer be required to "just turn the house into a bed and breakfast."

"So," Francis asked with an unflinching tone of self-satisfaction, "What's for dinner?"

Read more at [themeatandpotatoesoflife.com](http://themeatandpotatoesoflife.com) and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: [meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com](mailto:meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com)



## FACES

# Guitar virtuoso Jeff Beck dies

BY HARRISON SMITH  
AND BRIAN MURPHY  
*The Washington Post*

Jeff Beck, the British guitar virtuoso who rose to prominence in the 1960s as a member of the Yardbirds, moving the group into the rock-and-roll vanguard before establishing himself as an influential, prolific and breathtakingly adventurous solo artist, died Jan. 10 at a hospital near his home in Surrey, England. He was 78.

The cause was bacterial meningitis, said his publicist Melissa Dragich-Cordero.

Widely considered one of the greatest guitarists in history, Beck shifted seamlessly between genres, recording albums that drew on hard rock, heavy metal, jazz fusion, blues, funk, electronic music and Indian raga. Playing a Fender Stratocaster with the amps turned way up, he helped unleash new sonic possibilities with the guitar, expanding the instrument's vocabulary along with contemporaries including Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and his friend Jimmy Page.

"I don't care about the rules," he once said. "In fact, if I don't break the rules at least 10 times in every song then I'm not doing my job properly."

During his brief tenure with the Yardbirds, Beck helped pioneer the use of feedback and distortion, developing a hard-edged new sound that informed hits such as "Heart Full of Soul," "Shapes of Things" and "Over Under Sideways Down." He later formed the Jeff Beck Group, a rotating group

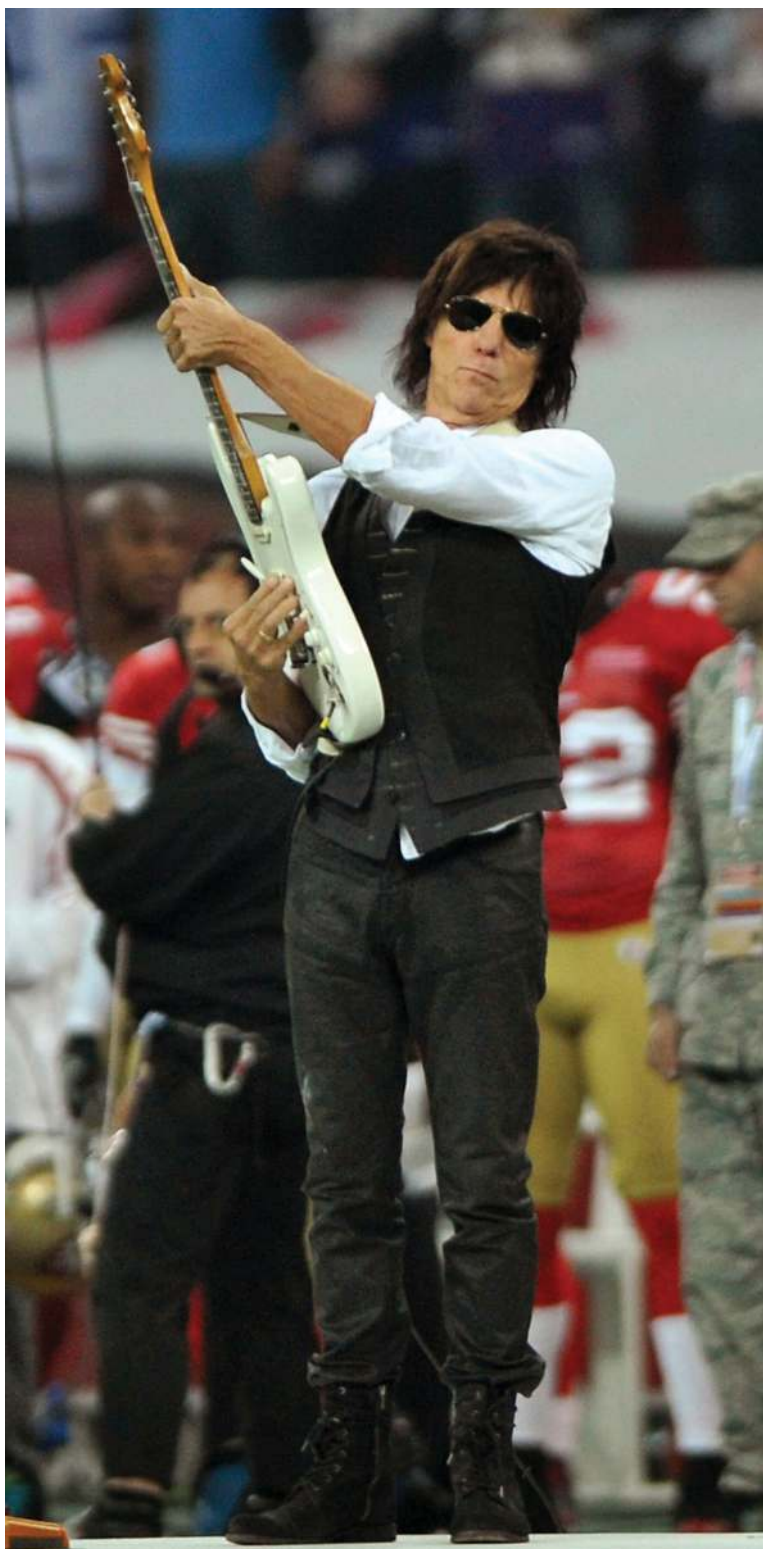
of musicians that initially included singer Rod Stewart and bassist-guitarist Ronnie Wood. That lineup was featured on his 1968 solo debut, "Truth," which peaked at No. 15 in the United States and showcased his blues-influenced playing style, notably on a psychedelic cover of Willie Dixon's "I Ain't Superstitious."

"At every break, Beck's aqueous wah-wah tone makes his instrument sound like it's talking," Rolling Stone later wrote, including the song on its list of the 100 greatest guitar tracks.

Beck received eight Grammy Awards and was twice inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, first as a member of the Yardbirds in 1992 and then as a solo artist in 2009. But his standing as a brilliant and inventive musician was shadowed somewhat by his reputation as a moody loner.

After collaborating with Stewart, Beck worked with singers as varied as Macy Gray, Buddy Guy, Wynonna Judd, Cyndi Lauper and Luciano Pavarotti. He also recorded predominantly instrumental albums such as "Blow by Blow" (1975), which reached No. 4 on the Billboard chart, and joined supergroups including Beck, Bogert & Appice, a power trio that featured bassist Tim Bogert and drummer Carmine Appice. In the 1980s he played with the Honeydrippers, a rock group that included Page and his former Led Zepelin bandmate Robert Plant.

Survivors include his wife, Sandra Cash Beck, whom he married in 2005.



Jeff Beck, shown in London in 2010, died Tuesday at age 78. Beck was known for his work with the Yardbirds and the Jeff Beck Group.

## Golden Globes viewership hits a near-record low

NBC's telecast for the 80th Golden Globes on Tuesday averaged a near-record low of 6.3 million viewers, according to Nielsen, the second-smallest audience for the annual ceremony and only slightly better than the viewership garnered by the Globes press conference held during the 2008 writers' strike.

After a diversity and ethics scandal caused NBC to take the Globes off the air last year, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association's attempted comeback didn't gain back viewers and instead might have lost them. The 2021 edition, held bicoastally during the pandemic, was watched by 6.9 million. The pre-pandemic 2020 Globes drew an audience of 18.4 million.

NBC moved the show from its traditional Sunday slot to Tuesday this year. The awards were also live-streamed on Peacock for the first time. (Digital viewership wasn't released Wednesday.)

## Other news

■ Penguin Random House announced Wednesday that first day sales for Prince Harry's tell-all memoir "Spare" topped 1.4 million copies, a record pace for non-fiction from a company that also publishes Barack and Michelle Obama, whose "Becoming" needed a week to reach 1.4 million when it was released in 2018.

■ "Abbott Elementary" creator and actor Quinta Brunson announced Wednesday on Twitter that the mockumentary-style comedy series has been renewed for a third season.

■ Joni Mitchell has been chosen to receive the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song. Mitchell, 79, is widely regarded as among the greatest singer-songwriters of her time, with her best known works including "Chelsea Morning," "Big Yellow Taxi" and "Free Man in Paris." Mitchell will be honored March 1 at a tribute concert airing March 31 on PBS stations.

■ Dr. Dre, Missy Elliott and Lil Wayne will be honored Feb. 2 at the Recording Academy's second annual Black Music Collective event during Grammy week. The academy announced Wednesday that the three Grammy winners and executive Sylvia Rhone will receive the Global Impact Award for their personal achievements in the music industry.

■ Lizzo, Taylor Swift and Harry Styles lead the 2023 iHeartRadio Music Awards nominations with seven nods each, with Jack Harlow and Drake close behind with six each. The iHeartRadio Music Awards honor the most played artists of the year on their stations and app, and fans can vote in several categories until March 20. The awards will be aired March 27 on Fox.

From wire reports

## 'Banshees,' 'Everything' and Zendaya get SAG nominations

BY JAKE COYLE  
*Associated Press*

In nominations to its 29th annual awards, the Screen Actors Guild heaped honors on the casts of the anarchic indie hit "Everything Everywhere All at Once" and the Irish tragicomedy "The Banshees of Inisherin," while throwing some curveballs into the Oscar race.

The awards contenders, voted on by the Hollywood actors' guild SAG-AFTRA, were announced Wednesday on Instagram Live. The nominees for the guild's top award, best ensemble, are: "Babylon," "The Banshees of Inisherin," "Everything Everywhere All at Once," "The Fabelmans" and "Women Talking."

The SAG Awards, which will be held Feb. 26, are considered one of the most reliable Oscar bellwethers. Seldom does a movie or performance not nominated by the screen actors win at the Academy Awards. Actors make up the biggest percentage of the film academy, so their choices have the largest sway.

Last year, all the top SAG winners — the cast

of "CODA," Will Smith, Jessica Chastain, Troy Kotsur and Ariana DeBose — all repeated their wins at the Oscars.

Coming off their wins at the Golden Globes on Tuesday night, Steven Spielberg's "The Fabelmans" and Martin McDonagh's "The Banshees of Inisherin" (a co-leading five SAG nods) increasingly look like this year's front-runners, along with Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's "Everything Everywhere All at Once" (also five SAG nominations).

Up for best performance by an female actor in a leading role are: Cate Blanchett ("Tár"), Viola Davis ("The Woman King"), Ana de Armas ("Blonde"), Danielle Deadwyler ("Till") and Michelle Yeoh ("Everything Everywhere All at Once").

Nominated for best performance by a male actor in leading role are: Austin Butler ("Elvis"), Colin Farrell ("The Banshees of Inisherin"), Brendan Fraser ("The Whale"), Bill Nighy ("Living") and Adam Sandler ("Hustle").

Nominated for male actor in a supporting

role are: Paul Dano ("The Fabelmans"), Brendan Gleeson ("The Banshees of Inisherin"), Barry Keoghan ("The Banshees of Inisherin"), Eddie Redmayne ("The Good Nurse") and Ke Huy Quan for "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

Up for female actor in a supporting role are: Angela Bassett ("Black Panther: Wakanda Forever"), Hong Chau ("The Whale"), Kerry Condon ("The Banshees of Inisherin"), Jamie Lee Curtis ("Everything Everywhere All at Once") and Stephanie Hsu ("Everything Everywhere All at Once").

On the TV side, nominated for best ensemble in a drama series are: "Better Call Saul," "The Crown," "Ozark," "Severance" and "The White Lotus." Up for best comedy series ensemble are the casts of "Abbott Elementary," "Barry," "The Bear," "Hacks" and "Only Murders in the Building." Julia Garner came away a double nominee, for "Ozark" and "Inventing Anna." Zendaya scored her first SAG nomination for her leading performance in "Euphoria."

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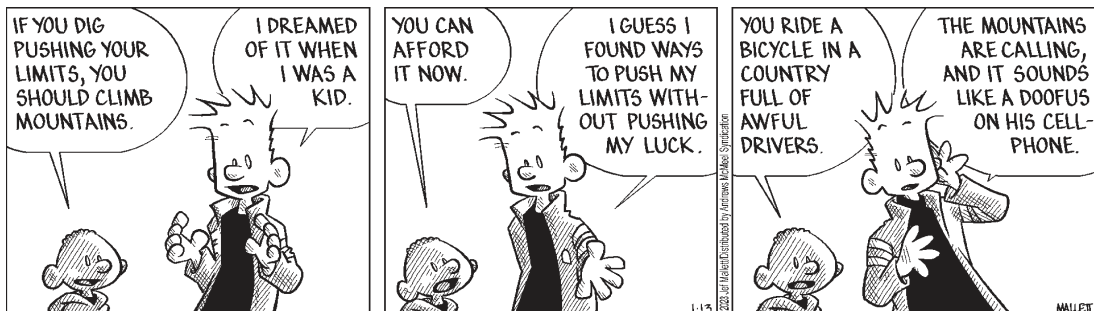


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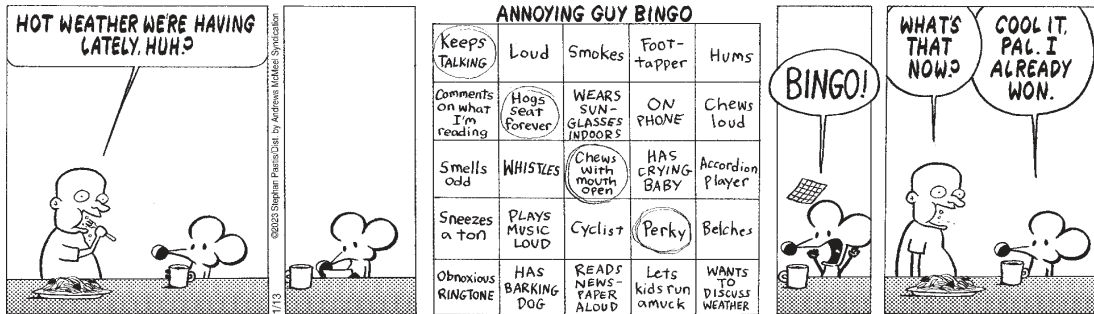
Frazz



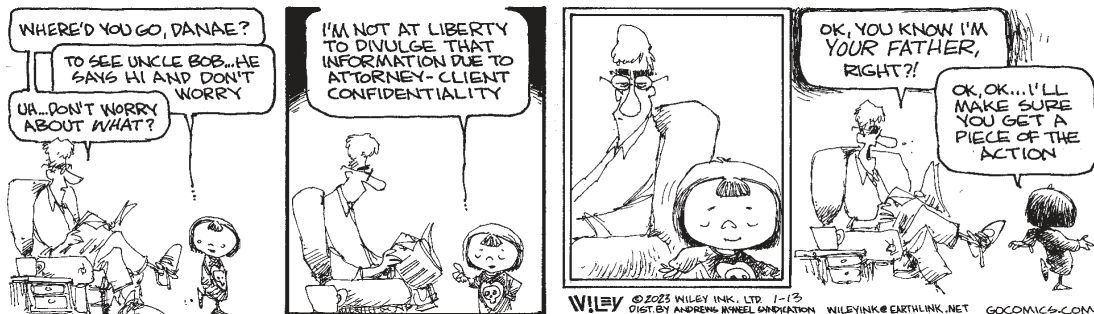
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



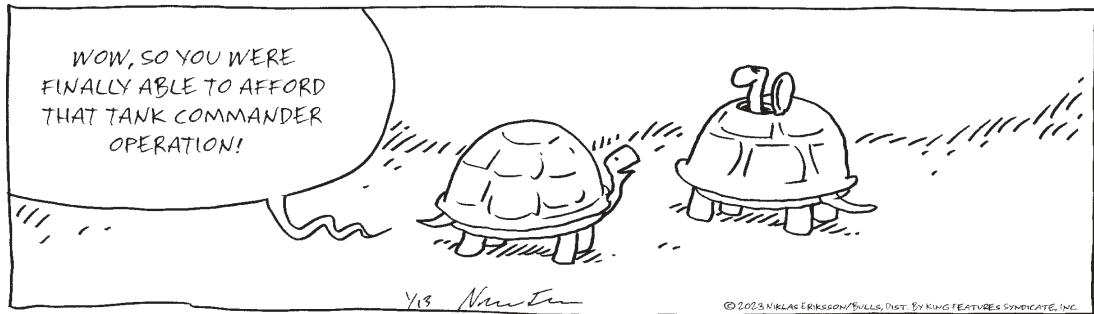
Non Sequitur



Candorville



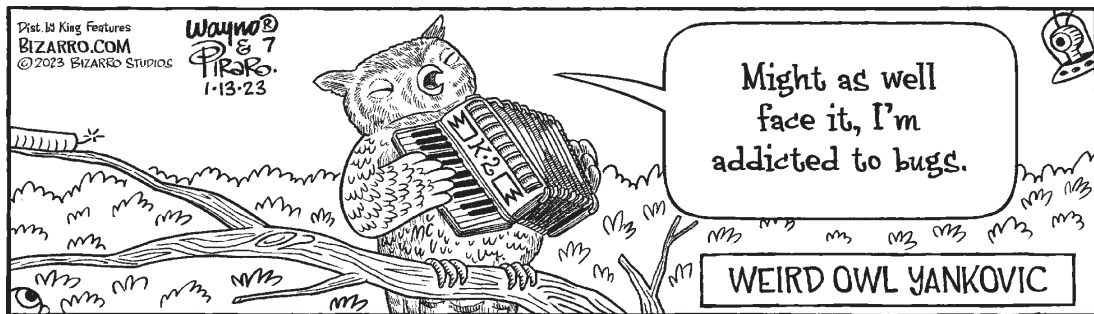
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



### 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 Showy parrot
- 6 Lith., once
- 9 Pooch
- 12 "The Devil Wears —"
- 13 Tic-tac-toe win
- 14 Mess up
- 15 Macho types
- 16 Name of B.B. King's guitar
- 18 Like some pools
- 20 Amorphous mass
- 21 ISP option
- 23 Expert
- 24 Diplomat Silas
- 25 Tex. neighbor
- 27 Fess up
- 29 "Night" author Elie
- 31 Prolific inventor
- 35 Entangle
- 37 Prefix with conference
- 38 Freak out
- 41 "Aladdin" monkey
- 43 Animal doc
- 44 Greek vowels
- 45 Shrimp recipe
- 47 Wilbur Wright's brother
- 49 "The — Express"
- 52 Never, in Bonn
- 53 Oft-pierced body part
- 54 "Lights" singer Goulding

- 55 Pitcher Maglie
- 56 Sit-up targets
- 57 Plow pioneer

- 22 Enjoy Vail
- 24 Carried out
- 26 Home of St. Francis

#### DOWN

- 1 Speedometer stat
- 2 Exist
- 3 Composer Saint-Saëns
- 4 Mideast gulf
- 5 Comedian Sykes
- 6 Flew alone the heart
- 7 Tart
- 8 Sinbad's bird
- 9 Actress Reese
- 10 Acrylic fiber
- 11 Loon's cousin
- 17 "No need to explain!"
- 19 Florida city
- 21 Part of DJIA Des'—
- 28 Peach —
- 30 SASE, e.g.
- 32 Figaro's home
- 33 Flamenco cheer
- 34 Mosquito barrier
- 36 Indy autos
- 38 Drudges
- 39 Places in the heart
- 40 Orange variety
- 42 Called a strike?
- 45 Thick chunk
- 46 North —
- 48 Salonga of "Miss Saigon"
- 50 Melody
- 51 R&B singer

#### Answer to Previous Puzzle

S	T	O	P	M	A	V	C	E	N	A
C	A	R	L	E	P	I	A	X	E	L
O	R	C	A	D	E	E	R	T	E	S
T	A	H	I	N	I	W	E	I	R	D
			T	O	E	M	O	E		
M	A	S	S	V	A	C	U	M	E	D
M	L	I	A	M	O	E	L	O		
M	E	D	E	L	L	I	N	A	S	K
		E	V	E	S	U	N			
A	L	C	O	V	E	U	H	A	U	L
H	E	A	L	G	U	M	L	S	A	T
M	E	R	V	A	N	E	O	S	S	O
E	R	S	E	D	O	D	G	R	E	W

1-13

#### CRYPTOQUIP

K R V B W W Y H K C Q M N W W P K V X,  
 L Y Q W R X Y C A A V T Q N C T H X B W P O  
 I T M N L W M Y T X W H N W O ' P W  
 N V R W - X V I W H P W Y H X.

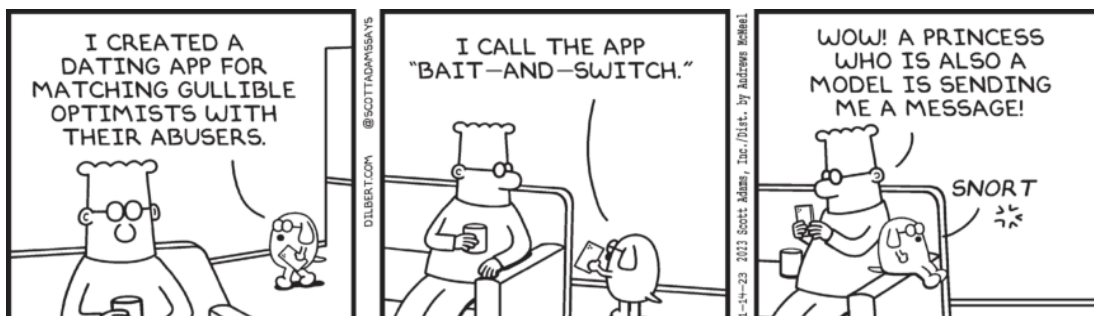
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: TO SPEAK ON TWO-WAY RADIOS IN THOSE NORTH AMERICAN MOUNTAINS, COULD PEOPLE USE ROCKY-TALKIES?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals G

Frazz



Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



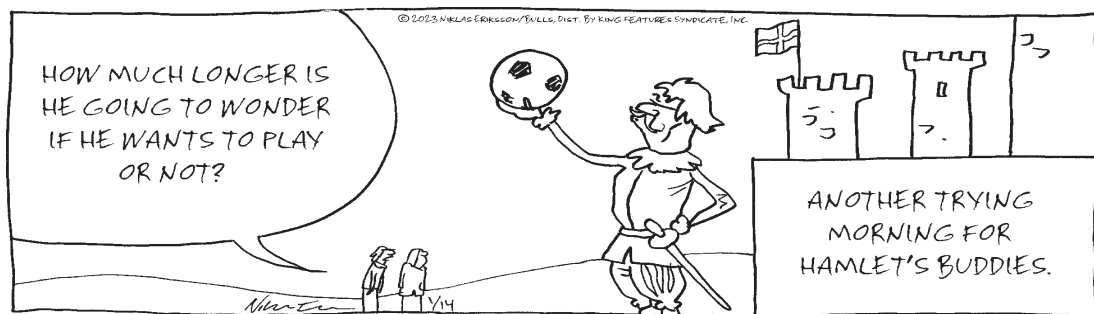
Non Sequitur



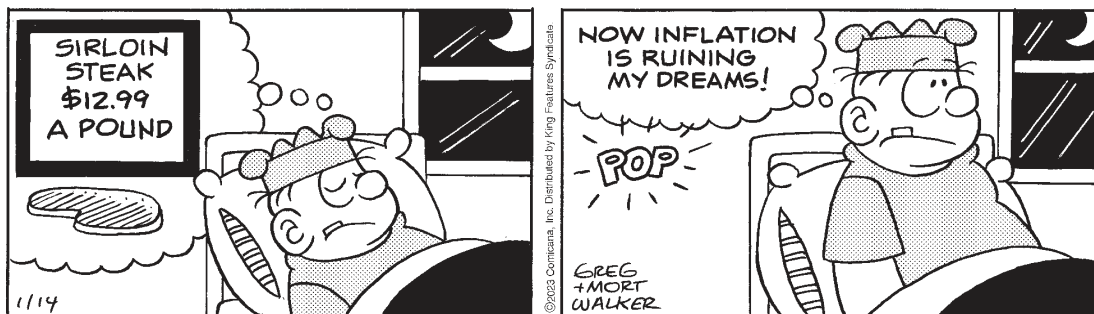
Candorville



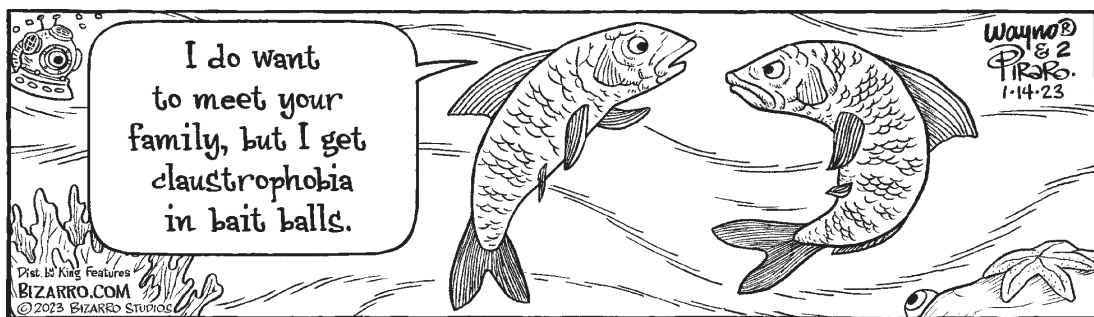
Carpe Diem



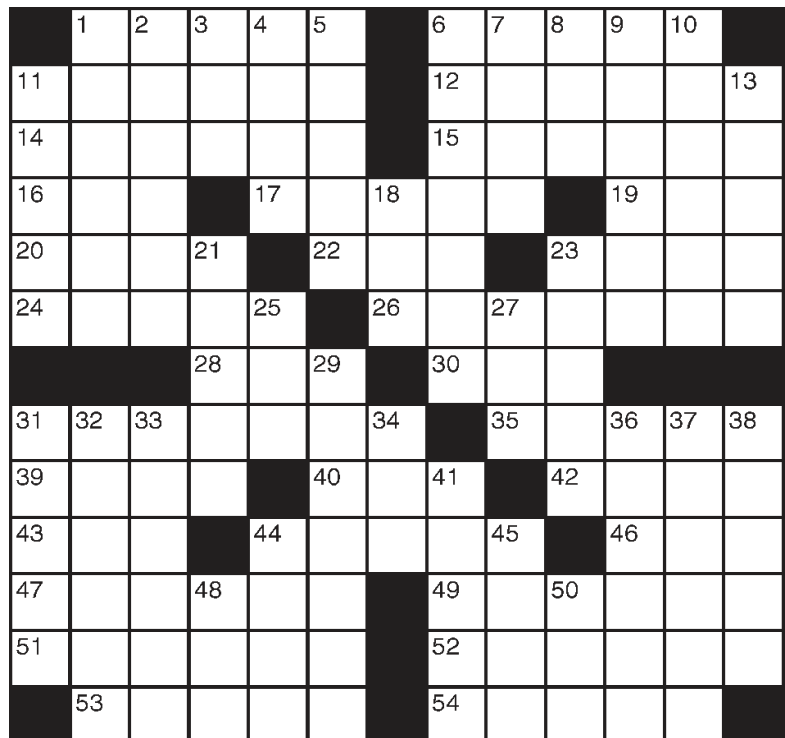
Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



### Eugene Sheffer Crossword



#### ACROSS

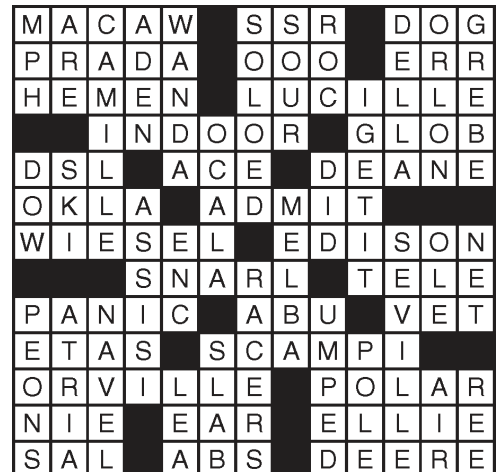
- 1 Wee hr.
- 6 Calm intervals
- 11 Clef variety
- 12 Large bay windows
- 14 Like a duck's feet
- 15 Familiar adage
- 16 Post-op area
- 17 Bags
- 19 Canonized Fr. woman
- 20 Corn seasoning
- 22 USN officers
- 23 Future flower
- 24 Characteristic
- 26 "Now, listen to me ..."
- 28 Small batteries
- 30 Longoria of TV
- 31 Supervise
- 35 Redacts
- 39 Director Wertmuller
- 40 SASE, e.g.
- 42 Country singer Evans
- 43 Computer key
- 44 Garlicky mayo
- 46 Dogtag wearers (Abbr.)
- 47 Swindled
- 49 Verdi works
- 51 Zealous

#### DOWN

- 1 Mine vehicle
- 2 Outer space cloud
- 3 Recede
- 4 Pub orders
- 5 Olympic prize
- 6 Quick glance
- 7 Web addresses
- 8 Cover
- 9 Tenant
- 10 Actor Christian
- 11 Plot surprise
- 13 Bjorn Borg, for one
- 18 Dol. fractions

- 21 Pageant crown
- 23 Herrings' cousins
- 25 Prof's helpers
- 27 Prior night
- 29 Investigate
- 31 "Get Here" singer Adams
- 32 Sun-blocking cap parts
- 33 Write cryptograms
- 34 Rock producer Brian
- 36 "Amen to that!"
- 37 Court contests
- 38 Impudent
- 41 Nearby
- 44 "If it — broke ..."
- 45 Apple product
- 48 Mauna —
- 50 Work unit

#### Answer to Previous Puzzle



1-14

#### CRYPTOQUIP

OW R ZRYFQ KRYNQZ CW ZR JL  
 OA WSZZ CW NDSYNDQA,  
 EQPKZQA R JL PCAXSQA, OA OE  
 R YQZOFCSA EYRNE?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I LOVE EATING CHEERIOS, BAGELS AND DOUGHNUTS VERY MUCH BECAUSE THEY'RE HOLE-SOME TREATS.  
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Z equals L

## STARS AND STRIPES

## OPINION

## Contradictions in the US medical system in full view

BY CORY FRANKLIN  
Chicago Tribune

In a recent “Monday Night Football” game, Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin suffered cardiac arrest and collapsed on the field. An immediate response by the trainers, stadium medical staff and the superb intensive care team at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center saved Hamlin’s life. The University of Cincinnati is one of the best places in the U.S. — or the world — for the young man to have been treated.

The episode was a vivid illustration of the contradiction of the American medical system: Our sophisticated emergency treatment is unrivaled even as the comprehensive U.S. patient care system remains the world’s most expensive and possibly the most dysfunctional.

Nowhere has this paradox been more evident than during the COVID-19 pandemic. No country has better care for patients with advanced COVID-19, whose lungs are severely damaged by the coronavirus. But these represent only a fraction of all COVID-19 deaths because most patients die of underlying chronic health conditions or untreatable complications. This is where the U.S. is failing, and, consequently, U.S. mortality and deaths per capita are higher than in most of the world.

What accounts for the high U.S. death rate? A look at the national map is illuminating. The states with the highest deaths per capita are overrepresented in the South — Alabama, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Arkansas — along with West Virginia and Arizona. These states, some of the poorest in the country, are among those with the highest rates of obesity and diabetes and the lowest

rates of COVID-19 vaccination. Also of note, West Virginia and Arizona are two states with significantly older populations.

The limited evidence suggests that some combination of age, obesity, diabetes and low vaccination rate, in the setting of poverty, creates conditions for a higher COVID-19 mortality rate. Determining the relative importance of these factors requires performing a statistical technique known as multivariate analysis, and since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been relatively few studies of this type to try to ascertain how much each factor contributes to death from COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention should address this research gap.

The worldwide mortality situation is similar. Countries in Eastern Europe, which along with Peru are the only countries in the world with more deaths per capita than the U.S., are also relatively poor and old. Like the high-COVID-19 states in the U.S., Eastern Europe has high rates of obesity and diabetes and low COVID-19 vaccination rates. Eight in 10 people in some parts of Eastern Europe are obese or pre-obese. Diabetes is 2.6 times more prevalent in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. And among European countries with the lowest vaccination rates, all are in Eastern Europe.

Without improvements in basic health delivery and infrastructure, no matter how many effective ventilators and other sophisticated equipment the U.S. has, we will have a comparatively high mortality as long as COVID-19 persists. We cannot control our aging population — demography is destiny — but in the short term, we can target this population for vaccination more aggressively.

Our patchwork health care system, in which primary care is often fragmented and

insurance-dependent, has done little to address our twin epidemics of obesity and diabetes. There are new breakthrough drugs for both conditions, and those should be made available and affordable for all patients who meet the treatment indications. A national program to encourage lifestyle changes — better diet and more exercise — is essential.

All this may not be enough. Cutting mortality from COVID-19 may require rethinking our long-term approach. The vaccines have been effective and lucrative for the drug manufacturers but have reduced interest and funding for the exploration of other treatments for people who are infected with the virus.

The current strategy of updating vaccines in an attempt to immunize against new variants may fail because viral mutations could occur faster than our ability to keep pace. Our efforts would be better directed toward a universal coronavirus vaccine and new treatments, especially antiviral medications for patients to take in the event of COVID-19 infection. We need a “penicillin miracle” for COVID-19.

Life is a series of contradictions. Hamlin was at once unlucky and lucky. COVID-19 is a disease of the well-fed and affluent and simultaneously a disease of the poor. In that respect, the government and medical community should make a concerted effort to improve the quality of care for the urban and rural poor, as well as for the Indigenous American community, which has been hit hard by the pandemic.

The pandemic is a clarion call for us to make health care more ambitious and more equitable.

Dr. Cory Franklin is a retired intensive care physician.

## EDITORIAL

Terry Leonard, Editor  
leonard.terry@stripes.com

Robert H. Reid, Senior Managing Editor  
reid.robert@stripes.com

Sean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation  
moores.sean@stripes.com

Ann Pinson, Digital Managing Editor  
pinson.ann@stripes.com

## BUREAU STAFF

## Europe/Mideast

Erik Slavin, Europe & Mideast Bureau Chief  
slavin.erik@stripes.com  
+49(0)631.3615.9350; DSN (314)583.9350

## Pacific

Aaron Kidd, Pacific Bureau Chief  
kidd.aaron@stripes.com  
+81.42.552.2511 ext. 88380; DSN (315)227.7380

## Washington

Joseph Cacchioli, Washington Bureau Chief  
cacchioli.joseph@stripes.com  
(+1)(202)886-0033

Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News  
bowers.brian@stripes.com

## CIRCULATION

## Mideast

Kevin R. Miller, Circulation Manager  
miller.kevin@stripes.com  
xsscirculation@stripes.com  
+49(0)631.3615.9136; DSN (314)583-9136

## Europe

Karen Lewis, Community Engagement Manager  
lewis.karen@stripes.com  
memberservices@stripes.com  
+49(0)631.3615.9090; DSN (314)583.9090

## Pacific

Mari Mori, customerhelp@stripes.com  
+81-3 6385.3171; DSN (315)227.7333

## CONTACT US

## Washington

tel: (+1)202.886.0003  
633 3rd St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001-3050

## Reader letters

letters@stripes.com

## Additional contacts

stripes.com/contactus

## OMBUDSMAN

Ernie Gates

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## Lesson of the Ukraine war: There’s only 1 superpower

BY HAL BRANDS  
Bloomberg Opinion

It feels ghoulish to look for good news in Russia’s war in Ukraine, given how much misery that conflict has inflicted. But geopolitical tragedies can serve pedagogical purposes. If nothing else, this war has illustrated what a world without American power would look like — and what it looks like when America uses that unmatched power well.

My day job involves teaching Johns Hopkins University undergrads and grad students about international relations. I periodically have to remind myself that one can forgive millennials and members of Gen Z for having a jaded view of America’s global role.

For two decades, the standout events in U.S. foreign policy were costly, failed wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. If you’re not old enough to remember the reunification of Germany in 1990 or the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91, you may struggle to think of an international mega-crisis Washington managed with aplomb.

This isn’t to give credence to overwrought critiques of American statecraft in the two decades after the Cold War. Many foreign policy successes are invisible, because they involve preventing awful outcomes — perhaps additional, catastrophic terrorist strikes after 9/11; or a global depression in 2008-09 — as well as achieving good ones.

But if your consciousness of U.S. foreign policy is bookended by the Iraq invasion in 2003 and the humiliating withdrawal from Af-

ghanistan in 2021, you might wonder whether Washington really knows what it is doing. And if you grew up in a post-Cold War world where the global wars and vicious rivalries of the 20th century seemed like ancient history, you might ask what the value of the American-led international order really is.

The Ukraine War has been doubly enlightening. First, it starkly illustrates just how grim and brutal a post-American world might be. A Ukraine left to its own devices would have quickly succumbed to President Vladimir Putin’s invasion. It would now be suffering show trials, the execution and imprisonment of its leaders, and harsh punishment of anyone who resisted Russian rule.

The reason so many Eastern European countries have clamored to get into America’s alliance network over the past 25 years is that they understand that the sort of aggression and barbarism we have seen in Ukraine have been the norm for much of human history. Such outrages have simply been suppressed, to an unprecedented degree, by America’s self-interested but comparatively benign leadership since World War II.

Fortunately, the Ukraine war has also offered a timely case study in just how mighty and effective an engaged America can be. President Joe Biden’s administration hasn’t gotten everything right: Its early assessments of Ukraine’s will to fight were far too pessimistic, for instance, and its initial efforts to deter Russian nuclear escalation were muddled and confusing. But the overall performance has been pretty good, helping Ukraine thrive

in a war it wasn’t supposed to survive, and demonstrating that the world won’t be truly multipolar anytime soon.

America’s spies sniffed out Putin’s aggression months in advance and gave Ukraine critical warning on how the invasion would unfold. The U.S. has delivered real-time information that has allowed Kyiv to plan its most effective offensives and carry out its most spectacular strikes. That performance is presumably not lost on President Xi Jinping of China, who now must worry that any bid to attack Taiwan might quickly become the worst-kept secret on Earth.

Then there is the contrast between Russian military gear — tanks that combust catastrophically when hit, missiles that don’t get close to their targets — and American military equipment. By providing just 20 HIMARS rocket launchers, Washington helped Kyiv turn the tide of Europe’s largest land war since 1945; one wonders how much damage Ukraine might be doing with 40 of them instead.

Overconfidence can be deadly, and what has happened in Ukraine is no guarantee that Washington will succeed in the next crisis with Beijing, Moscow or Tehran. But a war in which the U.S. is not even directly involved has provided a vital lesson for America and its rivals: There’s still just one superpower.

Bloomberg Opinion columnist Hal Brands is the Henry Kissinger Distinguished Professor at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies, co-author of “Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China” and a member of the State Department’s Foreign Affairs Policy Board. This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.



# SCOREBOARD

## COLLEGE BASKETBALL

### Wednesday's men's scores

#### EAST

Army 72, American 60  
 Baylor 83, West Virginia 78  
 Binghamton 72, NJIT 71, OT  
 Bryant 86, Albany (NY) 69  
 Colgate 77, Boston U. 71  
 Delaware 72, Towson 59  
 Duquesne 92, Saint Joseph's 80  
 Hofstra 77, Monmouth (NJ) 57  
 La Salle 78, UMass 77  
 Lafayette 59, Navy 50  
 Lehigh 76, Holy Cross 58  
 Loyola (Md.) 67, Bucknell 57  
 Mass.-Lowell 80, Vermont 65  
 New Hampshire 71, Maine 58  
 Penn St. 85, Indiana 66  
 Rhode Island 68, St. Bonaventure 67  
 Syracuse 82, Virginia Tech 72

#### SOUTH

Campbell 78, SC-Upstate 63  
 Charleston Southern 106, High Point 69  
 Chattanooga 95, W. Carolina 76  
 Clemson 83, Louisville 70  
 Coll. of Charleston 71, UNC-Wilmington 69

Duke 77, Pittsburgh 69  
 ETSU 96, The Citadel 74  
 FAU 77, FIU 73, OT  
 Furman 84, Mercer 66  
 Gardner-Webb 79, Presbyterian 78, OT  
 Georgia 58, Mississippi St. 50  
 Miami 88, Boston College 72  
 NC A&T 80, Elon 71  
 Radford 66, Winthrop 52  
 Richmond 61, Davidson 57  
 Samford 83, Wofford 58  
 UCF 107, Memphis 104, 2OT  
 UNC-Greensboro 72, VMI 57  
 W. Kentucky 80, UAB 78  
 Wake Forest 90, Florida St. 75  
 William & Mary 81, Hampton 65

#### MIDWEST

Bradley 91, Evansville 46  
 Cincinnati 83, East Carolina 55  
 Illinois St. 76, Missouri St. 66, OT  
 Marquette 82, UConn 76  
 Rutgers 65, Northwestern 62  
 S. Illinois 69, Indiana St. 61  
 Saint Louis 63, George Mason 62  
 Xavier 90, Creighton 87

#### SOUTHWEST

Alabama 84, Arkansas 69  
 Houston 83, South Florida 77  
 Middle Tennessee 71, Rice 68  
 North Texas 67, Louisiana Tech 65  
 Tarleton St. 73, Chicago St. 63  
 Texas 79, TCU 75  
 Texas A&M 82, Missouri 64  
 Tulane 97, SMU 88  
 UTEP 69, UTSA 57

#### FAR WEST

Boise St. 84, UNLV 66  
 Texas Rio Grande Valley 103, Abilene Christian 86  
 UC Davis 62, CS Northridge 54  
 UC Irvine 70, Cal St.-Fullerton 65  
 UC Riverside 74, UC San Diego 68  
 UC Santa Barbara 60, CS Bakersfield 48  
 Utah Valley St. 71, Cal Baptist 67  
 Washington St. 66, California 51

### Wednesday's women's scores

#### EAST

Albany (NY) 63, Bryant 50  
 Army 77, American 56  
 Boston U. 72, Colgate 51  
 Bucknell 56, Loyola (Md.) 50  
 Butler 72, Georgetown 48  
 Duquesne 69, St. Bonaventure 38  
 East Carolina 72, Temple 51  
 George Washington 63, Fordham 57  
 Holy Cross 66, Lehigh 64  
 La Salle 69, George Mason 62  
 Lafayette 69, Navy 57  
 NJIT 62, Binghamton 57  
 Providence 64, Xavier 50  
 UConn 82, St. John's 52  
 Vermont 42, Mass.-Lowell 37

#### SOUTH

Campbell 51, SC-Upstate 49  
 E. Kentucky 85, Belkarmine 79  
 FAU 76, FIU 66  
 Gardner-Webb 90, Presbyterian 86  
 High Point 60, Charleston Southern 57  
 Longwood 75, UNC-Asheville 65  
 Louisiana Tech 81, North Texas 66  
 Middle Tennessee 85, Rice 56  
 Murray St. 64, Belmont 46  
 Radford 74, Winthrop 45  
 South Florida 58, Memphis 45  
 Tulane 76, Wichita St. 53  
 VCU 54, Richmond 51  
 W. Kentucky 75, UAB 71

#### MIDWEST

Akron 60, E. Michigan 43  
 Bowling Green 101, Cent. Michigan 68  
 Buffalo 69, Ohio 64  
 Creighton 75, Seton Hall 53  
 Dayton 66, Davidson 60  
 Evansville 65, Indiana St. 54  
 Ill. Chicago 51, Valparaiso 50  
 Iowa 93, Northwestern 64  
 Iowa St. 67, Kansas St. 56  
 Miami (Ohio) 84, Kent St. 76, OT  
 Missouri St. 78, S. Illinois 57  
 N. Iowa 70, Drake 69  
 Nebraska 80, Penn St. 51  
 Toledo 83, Ball St. 76  
 Villanova 71, DePaul 64  
 W. Michigan 79, N. Illinois 70  
 Wisconsin 84, Michigan St. 80, OT

#### SOUTHWEST

Oklahoma 89, Texas Tech 79  
 Oklahoma St. 70, Baylor 65  
 Tarleton St. 70, Texas Rio Grande Valley 60  
 UTEP 74, UTSA 67  
**FAR WEST**  
 Colorado St. 71, Boise St. 50  
 New Mexico 88, Nevada 58  
 S. Utah 70, Utah Valley St. 66  
 San Diego St. 49, Fresno St. 43  
 UC Davis 83, CS Northridge 73  
 UC Irvine 57, Cal St.-Fullerton 39  
 UC Riverside 67, UC San Diego 53  
 UC Santa Barbara 63, CS Bakersfield 62  
 UNLV 84, San Jose St. 58  
 Utah Tech 85, Abilene Christian 74  
 Wyoming 61, Air Force 60

## PRO FOOTBALL

### NFL injury report

**NEW YORK** — The National Football League injury report, as provided by the league (OUT: Player will not play; DOUBTFUL: Player is unlikely to play; QUESTIONABLE: Player is not certain to play; DNP: did not practice; LIMITED: limited participation; FULL: Full participation):

#### Wild Card Games

##### Saturday

**SEATTLE SEAHAWKS at SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS** — **SEATTLE:** DNP: G Phil Haynes (ankle), RB DeeJay Dallas (ankle/quadriceps), DB Xavier Crawford (hamstring), DE Shelby Harris (knee), NT Al Woods (achilles/NIR-resting player), RB Kenneth Walker III (ankle), G Gave Jackson (NIR-resting player). **LIMITED:** TE Noah Fant (knee), S Ryan Neal (knee). **FULL:** OLB Bruce Irvin (pectoral), WR Tyler Lockett (shin), OT Abraham Lucas (knee), G Damien Lewis (ankle), CB Tariq Woolen (ankle). **SAN FRANCISCO:** DNP: QB Jimmy Garoppolo (foot), CB Amry Thomas (ankle), DT Arik Armstead (foot, ankle), G Aaron Banks (ankle, knee), LB Demetrius Flannigan-Fowles (neck). **LIMITED:** DT Javon Kinlaw (knee), RB Christian McCaffrey (knee), OLB Dre Greenlaw (back). **FULL:** DE Nick Bosa (NIR-resting player), DT Kevin Givens

(knee).

**LOS ANGELES CHARGERS at JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS** — **LOS ANGELES CHARGERS:** DNP: WR Mike Williams (back). **FULL:** OLB Joey Bosa (groin), CB Bryce Callahan (groin), RB Zander Horvath (ankle), ILB Kenneth Murray (neck), LB Amen Ogbongbemiga (biceps), OT Trey Pipkins (knee), S Raheem Layne (thumb). **JACKSONVILLE:** DNP: LS Ross Maticic (back). **LIMITED:** QB Trevor Lawrence (toe), WR Jamal Agnew (shoulder), G Brandon Scherff (abdomen), WR Kendrick Pryor (shoulder). **FULL:** K Riley Patterson (knee).

##### Sunday

**MIAMI DOLPHINS at BUFFALO BILLS** — **MIAMI:** DNP: T Terron Armstead (toe/pectoral/knee/hip), LB Bradley Chubb (ankle/hand), OL Liam Eichenberg (hand), LB Melvin Ingram (NIR-resting player), T Kendall Lamm (ankle), RB Raheem Mostert (thumb), T Brandon Shell (knee/ankle), QB Tua Tgovaloa (concussion). **LIMITED:** QB Teddy Bridgewater (knee/right finger), FB Alec Ingold (thumb), LB Jaelan Phillips (toe/wrist), WR Jaylen Waddle (ankle), WR Cedrick Wilson Jr. (hip/groin), RB Jeff Wilson Jr. (illness). **FULL:** CB Kader Khouli (thumb), T Greg Little (achilles), QB Skylar Thompson (ankle). **BUFFALO:** DNP: DT Jordan Phillips (shoulder), S Jordan Poyer

## TENNIS

Giron, United States, 6-1, 6-7 (5), 6-2.  
 Jenson Brooksby, United States, def. Quentin Halys, France, 7-6 (3), 7-6 (2).

#### Men's Doubles

##### Quarterfinals

Nathaniel Lammons and Jackson Withrow, United States, def. Michael Venus, New Zealand, and Jamie Murray (4), Britain, 6-7 (2), 6-4, 12-10.

##### Quarterfinals

Lucas Miedler and Alexander Erler, Austria, def. Luis David Martinez, Venezuela, and Sebastian Baez, Argentina, 6-4, 6-0.

Nikola Mektic and Mate Pavic (1), Croatia, def. Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni, Argentina, 7-6 (3), 3-6, 10-5.

Marcel Granollers, Spain, and Horacio Zeballos (2), Argentina, def. Sander Gille and Joran Vliegen, Belgium, 6-4, 6-7 (6), 10-7.

Nathaniel Lammons and Jackson Withrow, United States, def. Fabrice Martin and Jeremy Chardy, France, 6-2, 7-6 (4).

### ATP Adelaide International 2

#### Thursday

**At Memorial Drive Tennis Centre Adelaide, Australia**

**Purse: \$642,735**

**Surface: Hardcourt outdoor**

#### Men's Singles

##### Quarterfinals

Jack Draper, Britain, def. Karen Khachanov (3), Russia, 6-4, 7-6 (3).

Kwon Soon Woo, South Korea, def. Mikael Ymer, Sweden, 6-1, 6-2.

Roberto Bautista Agut (4), Spain, def. Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (7), Spain,

## DEALS

### Wednesday's transactions

#### BASEBALL

##### Major League Baseball

##### American League

**BALTIMORE ORIOLAS** — Designated 1B Lewin Diaz for assignment.

**BOSTON RED SOX** — Agreed to terms with 3B Rafael Devers on a ten-year contract extension. Traded LHP Darwinzon Hernandez to Baltimore in exchange for cash considerations.

**DETROIT TIGERS** — Claimed RHP Edwin Uceta off waivers from Arizona.

**KANSAS CITY ROYALS** — Agreed to terms with RHPs Brooks Kriske, Mike Mayers, Nick Wittgren and INF/OF Matt Beaty on minor league contracts. Activated LHP Amir Garrett.

**MINNESOTA TWINS** — Agreed to terms with SS Carlos Correa on a six-year contract. Designated OF Kyle Garlick for assignment.

##### National League

**ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS** — Agreed to terms with RHP Zach Davies on a one-year contract.

**LOS ANGELES DODGERS** — Acquired INF Miguel Rojas from Miami in exchange for minor league INF Jacob Amaya.

**MIAMI MARLINS** — Sent SS Charles Leblanc outright to Jacksonville (IL). Designated RHP J.B. Bukauskas for assignment.

**MILWAUKEE BREWERS** — Sent RHP Trevor Kelley outright to Nashville (IL).

**PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES** — Sent RHP Francisco Morales outright to Lehigh Valley (IL).

**SAN DIEGO PADRES** — Named Phillip Wellman manager, Scott Mitchell pitching coach, Jimmy Jones assistant pitching coach, Raul Padron hitting coach, Brian Esposito bench coach, Josh DiLoreto and Maritza Castro athletic trainers, A.J. Russell strength coach, Austin Harris performance analyst and Cullen Mersch video analyst for El Paso (PCL). Named Luke Montz manager, Jeff Andrews pitching coach, Pat O'Sullivan hitting coach, Felipe Blanco bench coach, David Bryan athletic trainer and Travis Craven performance analyst for San Antonio (TL). Named Jonathan Matthews manager, Carlos Chavez pitching coach, Aaron Bray hitting coach, Shane Robinson bench coach, Lauren Gottschall athletic trainer, Chandler Craig strength coach, Gregory Bender performance coach and Jared Pollock video analyst for Fort Wayne (ML). Named Pete Zamora manager, Thomas Eshelmann pitching coach, Jed Morris hitting coach, Jhonaldo Pozo bench coach, Josevan Prieto athletic trainer, Mark Spadavecchia strength coach, Charles King perfor-

(NIR-resting player/knee), G Rodger Salfoid (NIR-resting player). **LIMITED:** WR Isaiah McKenzie (hamstring). **FULL:** QB Josh Allen (ankle/right elbow), CB Cam Lewis (forearm).

**NEW YORK GIANTS at MINNESOTA VIKINGS** — **NEW YORK GIANTS:** LIMITED: OL Jon Feliciano (back), DB Adoree Jackson (knee), LB Azeez Ojulari (ankle), DB Jason Pinnock (shoulder), DL Leonard Williams (neck). **FULL:** DB Xavier McKinney (fingers). **MINNESOTA:** DNP: CB Cam Dantzler (NIR-personal/ankle). **LIMITED:** LB Brian Asamoah (knee), C Garrett Bradbury (back), S Harrison Smith (knee). **FULL:** DL James Lynch (shoulder).

**BALTIMORE RAVENS at CINCINNATI BENGALS** — **BALTIMORE:** DNP: DE Calais Campbell (NIR-resting player), RB Gus Edwards (concussion), OLB Justin Houston (NIR-resting player), QB Lamar Jackson (knee), LS Nick Moore (illness), OLB Jason Pierre-Paul (NIR-resting player), G Ben Powers (NIR-resting player), T Ronnie Stanley (NIR-resting player), CB Brandon Stephens (illness). **LIMITED:** CB Marlon Humphrey (shoulder), QB Tyler Huntley (shoulder/right wrist), CB Marcus Peters (calf). **CINCINNATI:** DNP: G Alex Cappa (ankle), WR Tee Higgins (illness). **LIMITED:** CB Cam Taylor-Britt (groin).

6-3, 6-2.

#### Men's Doubles

##### Quarterfinals

Wesley Koolhof, Netherlands, and Neal Skupski (1), Britain, def. Edouard Roger-Vasselin, France, and Santiago Gonzalez (8), Mexico, 6-7 (7), 7-6 (5), 10-6.

Ivan Dodig, Croatia, and Austin Krajicek (3), United States, def. David Vega Hernandez, Spain, and Rafael Matos (7), Brazil, 6-3, 6-4.

Jean-Julien Rojer, Netherlands, and Marcelo Arevalo-Gonzalez (2), El Salvador, def. Robert Farah and Juan Sebastian Cabal (6), Colombia, 6-1, 6-7 (4), 10-4.

### WTA Adelaide International 2

#### Thursday

**At Memorial Drive Tennis Centre Adelaide, Australia**

**Purse: \$780,637**

**Surface: Hardcourt outdoor**

#### Women's Singles

##### Quarterfinals

Daria Kasatkina (5), Russia, def. Petra Kvitova, Czech Republic, 6-3, 7-6 (3).

Paula Badosa (9), Spain, def. Beatriz Haddad Maia, Brazil, 7-6 (5), 7-5.

##### Women's Doubles

##### Semifinals

Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, Russia, and Elena Rybakina, Kazakhstan, def. Lyudmyla Kichenok, Ukraine, and Jelena Ostapenko (3), Latvia, 6-4, 7-5.

Taylor Townsend, United States, and Luisa Stefani, Brazil, def. Marketa Vondrousova and Miriam Kolodziejova, Czech Republic, 6-2, 6-3.

Washington to the practice squad. Signed OL Solomon Kindley to a reserve/futures contract.

**PITTSBURGH STEELERS** — Signed WR Dez Fitzpatrick and DBs Madre Harper, Kenny Robinson and Chris Wilcox to reserve/futures contracts.

#### HOCKEY

##### National Hockey League

**BOSTON BRUINS** — Recalled LW Joonas Koppanen from Providence (AHL). Returned C Chris Wagner to Providence.

**CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS** — Recalled G Jaxson Stauber from Rockford (AHL). Assigned LW Brett Seney to Rockford.

**COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS** — Returned G Jet Greaves to Cleveland (AHL). Recalled F Trey Fix-Wolansky from Cleveland.

**LOS ANGELES KINGS** — Recalled D Jordan Spence from Ontario (AHL).

**MONTREAL CANADIENS** — Recalled RW Jesse Ylonen from Laval (AHL).

**NASHVILLE PREDATORS** — Recalled G Yaroslav Askarov from Milwaukee (AHL). Reassigned D Roland McKeown to Milwaukee.

**NEW YORK ISLANDERS** — Returned C Aatu Raty and D Robin Salo to Bridgeport (AHL).

**PHILADELPHIA FLYERS** — Reassigned F Zayde Wisdom from Lehigh Valley (AHL) to Reading (ECHL).

**PITTSBURGH PENGUINS** — Returned D Mark Friedman to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (AHL).

#### SOCCER

##### Major League Soccer

**ATLANTA UNITED** — Signed G Clement Diop to a one-year contract.

**COLUMBUS CREW** — Signed D Keegan Hughes to a one-year contract.

**INTER MIAMI CF** — Signed D Franco Negri to a two-year contract, pending receipt of his international transfer certificate (ITC) and P-1 visa.

**NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION** — Loaned G Djordje Petrovic to Serbia national team.

**NEW YORK CITY FC** — Re-signed M Justin Haak to a two-year contract.

**ORANGE COUNTY SC** — Signed D Ryan Doghman.

**PORTLAND TIMBERS** — Named Ned Grabovoy general manager.

**REAL SALT LAKE** — Agreed to terms with G Zac MacMath on a contract extension through the 2024 season with a club option for 2025.

##### National Women's Soccer League

**HOUSTON DASH** — Announced assistant coaches Sarah Lowdon and Matt Lampson have agreed to terms on new contracts. Signed M Havana Solaun to a one-year contract.

## PRO HOCKEY

### NHL

#### EASTERN CONFERENCE

##### Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Boston	40	32	4	4	68	156	88
Toronto	42	26	9	7	59	143	109
Tampa Bay	39	25	13	1	51	139	115
Buffalo	39	20	17	2	42	152	135
Florida	42	19	19	4	42	138	145
Detroit	39	17	15	7	41	121	134
Ottawa	40	18	19	3	39	120	127
Montreal	41	16	22	3	35	109	156

##### Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Carolina	41	25	9	7	57	130	113
New Jersey	41	26	12	3	55	141	109
N.Y. Rangers	42	23	12	7	53	138	116
Washington	44	23	15	6	52	143	123
Pittsburgh	40	21	13	6	48	133	121
N.Y. Islanders	42	22	17	3	47	130	116
Philadelphia	42	17	18	7	41	119	136
Columbus	40	12	26	2	26	103	158

#### WESTERN CONFERENCE

##### Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Dallas	42	25	11	6	56	146	111
Winnipeg	41	26	14	1	53	138	110
Minnesota	40	22	14	4	48	129	116
St. Louis	42	21	18	3	45	136	151
Nashville	40	19	15	6	44	112	117
Colorado	39	20	16	3	43	116	115
Arizona	40	13	22	5	31	110	149
Chicago	39	10	25	4	24	86	144

##### Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	42	27	13	2	56	140	120
Los Angeles	45	25	14	6	56	152	152
Seattle	40</						

# AUTO RACING/NBA

## 'It's just time'

Harvick's 23rd season in NASCAR will be his last

By JENNA FRYER  
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Kevin Harvick received the same answer nearly every time he asked another athlete how they decided to retire: Harvick would just know it was time.

The driver thrust onto the global stage when he was named Dale Earnhardt's replacement just days after Earnhardt's fatal 2001 crash will make this 23rd season his last in NASCAR. The 2014 Cup champion heads into his final year tied for ninth on NASCAR's career list with 60 victories, 13 consecutive playoff appearances and he's one of the final active drivers from the sport's halcyon days.



Harvick

"From talking to all the people I've talked to, it always came down to the same, 'Oh, you'll know, you'll know it is time, you'll know the right moment,'" Harvick said in an interview with The Associated Press ahead of his Thursday announcement.

"It's great to be able to go out on your own terms and plan it how you want it to go, but the biggest thing that sticks out to me is my kids. Being home with them and seeing the impact that you have with them when you are home, being able to be part of that daily process and be that father figure, it's just time."

At the end of this season he will turn his attention to Kevin Harvick Inc., his growing management business, the enjoyable time he's spent in the television booth, some bucketlist racing, and most importantly, his young racing family.

Harvick and his wife, DeLana, were adamant they would not raise racers but the slow early days of the COVID-19 pandemic gave father and son too much free time and 10-year-old Keelan is now karting on the international level. The young racer spent part of 2022 racing in Italy — sometimes traveling abroad without either parent — and Harvick figures he saw his son race only three times last year.

And then there's Piper, his 5-year-old daughter who now wants Dad's attention when she's in her own go-kart.

"You know, Keelan, he needs that father figure in his life, especially as he goes down the racing route," Harvick told the AP. "And then Piper probably asks to go to the go-kart track more than he does, and having to send her to the track by herself really frustrates me."

Harvick had already overcome the NASCAR odds of breaking into

the Southern-based sport from Bakersfield, Calif., when Richard Childress Racing said he'd be a Cup rookie alongside seven-time champion Earnhardt in 2002. But when Earnhardt was killed on the final lap of the 2001 season-opening Daytona 500, Harvick's career was upended.

He was in the rebranded No. 29 Chevrolet five days after Earnhardt's death — less than a week before the 25-year-old's planned wedding to DeLana — and that hectic season in the spotlight was a blur. Harvick won in his third start, less than a month after Earnhardt's death, and split his time between his new Cup ride and the Busch Series championship he was chasing.

Harvick competed in 69 NASCAR national races that season with a pair of Cup victories and five wins en route to the Busch title. He was busy but grew jaded by all the attention, the endless Earnhardt comparisons, and the pressure of replacing a superstar during a yearlong grieving period that had engulfed NASCAR.

Perhaps that is what made Harvick so tough.

He fought with his rivals often early in his career and was suspended for a Cup race in 2002 for his actions in a Truck Series race at Martinsville Speedway a day earlier.

But he never softened, not even after having children.

Harvick doesn't know if his grittiness developed from those first difficult years after Earnhardt's death, but acknowledges an internal pressure to do things his own way and carve out his own legacy that really ramped up around 2006. Some of Earnhardt's sponsors began pulling off the car and Harvick now had to stand on his own and prove his worth.

"We'd gotten through the tough years of transitioning from what Dale liked to what I liked, and through all those battles and conversations, you put your guard up and become a jerk," Harvick told the AP. "Looking back at it now, you can see that you could have handled things differently, but it was digging my heels in thinking 'I need to do this my way now' and that created some tensions. But I wouldn't trade anything other than Dale's death because all those things that came in the next five years were part of surviving and being successful and building something and learning what was right and what was wrong."

Harvick opens the season early next month with the exhibition Clash at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, followed by his final season-opening Daytona 500 on Feb. 19.

## NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	30	12	.714	—
Brooklyn	27	13	.675	2
Philadelphia	25	15	.625	4
New York	23	19	.548	7
Toronto	18	23	.439	11½
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	22	20	.524	—
Atlanta	19	22	.463	2½
Washington	18	24	.429	4
Orlando	16	26	.381	6
Charlotte	11	31	.262	11
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	27	14	.659	—
Cleveland	26	16	.619	1½
Indiana	23	19	.548	4½
Chicago	19	23	.452	8½
Detroit	12	33	.267	17
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	28	13	.683	—
New Orleans	25	17	.595	3½
Dallas	23	19	.548	5½
San Antonio	13	29	.310	15½
Houston	10	31	.244	18
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Denver	28	13	.683	—
Utah	21	23	.477	8½
Minnesota	20	22	.476	8½
Portland	19	21	.475	8½
Oklahoma City	18	23	.439	10
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Sacramento	22	18	.550	—
L.A. Clippers	22	21	.512	1½
Phoenix	21	22	.488	2½
Golden State	20	21	.488	2½
L.A. Lakers	19	22	.463	3½
Tuesday's games				
Philadelphia 147, Detroit 116				
Toronto 132, Charlotte 120				
Miami 112, Oklahoma City 111				
Utah 116, Cleveland 114				
Orlando 109, Portland 106				
Phoenix 125, Golden State 113				
L.A. Clippers 113, Dallas 101				
Wednesday's games				
Washington 100, Chicago 97				
Detroit 135, Minnesota 118				
Boston 125, New Orleans 114				
Milwaukee 114, Atlanta 105				
New York 119, Indiana 113				
Memphis 135, San Antonio 129				
Sacramento 135, Houston 115				
Denver 126, Phoenix 97				
Thursday's games				
Oklahoma City at Philadelphia				
Boston at Brooklyn				
Charlotte at Toronto				
Milwaukee at Miami				
Cleveland at Portland				
Dallas at L.A. Lakers				
Friday's games				
Atlanta at Indiana				
New Orleans at Detroit				
New York at Washington				
Golden State at San Antonio				
Oklahoma City at Chicago				
Phoenix at Minnesota				
Orlando at Utah				
Denver at L.A. Clippers				
Houston at Sacramento				
Saturday's games				
Milwaukee at Miami				
Boston at Charlotte				
Memphis at Indiana				
Atlanta at Toronto				
Cleveland at Minnesota				
Philadelphia at Utah				
Dallas at Portland				
Sunday's games				
New York at Detroit				
Houston at L.A. Clippers				
Golden State at Chicago				
Oklahoma City at Brooklyn				
Sacramento at San Antonio				
Orlando at Denver				
Dallas at Portland				
Philadelphia at L.A. Lakers				
Monday's games				
Boston at Charlotte				
Indiana at Milwaukee				
New Orleans at Cleveland				
Toronto at New York				
Golden State at Washington				
Miami at Atlanta				
Utah at Minnesota				
Phoenix at Memphis				
Houston at L.A. Lakers				



Rick Bowmer/AP

The Cavaliers' Donovan Mitchell reacts during a game against Utah on Tuesday, when he scored 46 points, well short of his season high.

## AROUND THE NBA

# Many layers lead to scoring binges

By NOAH TRISTER  
Associated Press

Giannis Antetokounmpo set a career high with 55 points in Milwaukee's win over Washington on Jan. 3 — and it wasn't even the week's top scoring performance in the NBA's Central Division.

That belonged to Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell, with a staggering 71 the previous night.

The NBA these past few weeks has featured an almost nightly display of one-upmanship among the best scorers. Whether it was Mitchell's extraordinary effort for the Cavaliers or Dallas' Luka Doncic reaching 50 points three times in a nine-day span, everywhere you turn, it seems like another player is putting up a huge total.

"I think there are a lot of layers to it. You just see night after night, guys are having enormous offensive games," Wizards coach Wes Unseld Jr. said. "It's fun to watch as a fan, of course. Frustrating when you're trying to game plan to stop some of these guys because they're scoring at all levels — the paint, threes, getting to the line."

Ten players have already scored 50 points in a game this season: Antetokounmpo, Mitchell, Doncic, Joel Embiid, Devin Booker, Anthony Davis, Klay Thompson, Pascal Siakam, Darius Garland and Stephen Curry.

Before 2016-17, no more than eight players had ever had a 50-point game in one season, according to Sportradar. Since then, at least 10 have done it every season, including a record 14 in 2021-22. Some of this is to be expected in what has become a very high-scoring era. NBA teams were averaging 113.8 points per game entering Monday night, the highest mark for the league since 1969-70. But the overall scoring environment tells only part of the story.

In that 1969-70 season, teams averaged 116.7 points, but only two players had a 50-point game. In 1984-85, the highest-scoring season

of the 1980s, teams averaged 110.8 points. But only five players produced a 50-point game that season.

So what's happening lately is not just higher scoring league-wide. Players are also producing huge games with remarkable frequency. Expansion may play a role. The number of teams is 30% higher than it was in 1985. More teams means more games.

But the sport has changed in other ways, too.

"Guys come into this league, and the most impressive thing is the skill set — the handle and the shooting," Golden State coach Steve Kerr said. "What's lacking, I think, is the foundation, the institutional knowledge that players used to have when they came into the league after a few years of college. Sometimes the defense isn't great. Transition defense is at an all-time low in this league."

Nowadays, basically every top scorer has some degree of proficiency from three-point range, whereas back in the '80s, some stars largely ignored the shot and nobody attempted all that many.

"Guys are taking 15 or 16 threes in some games," Los Angeles Clippers coach Tyronn Lue said. "Teams are encouraging guys to take those shots, and if you take so many shots, and if you get hot and make some, you can score a lot of points."

So current players have a variety of ways they can accumulate points in a hurry, and the three-point shot affects the game even beyond that. With so many players capable of making open threes, teams can space the floor in a way that punishes double teams.

"You have to pick and choose the guys you try and double team and get the ball out of their hands because they are not great passers, but there are some guys who can score, but can also pick you apart with their passing," Lue said. "So, when you have guys like that, you want to let those guys try and get theirs and take everyone else out, but sometimes it can backfire on you as well."

# AUSTRALIAN OPEN



JOHN MINCHILLO/AP

Serena Williams waves to fans after losing to Ajla Tomljanovic in the third round of the U.S. Open tennis championships Sept. 2, 2022, in New York. The match was expected to be the last of Williams' career.

## Tennis starts to move on without Serena in earnest

By HOWARD FENDRICH  
Associated Press

Tennis will move on from Serena Williams. It has to. It might not be easy, mind you, given what a transcendent figure she was, on the court and off. But that is what sports do, even when superstars leave. They all leave, of course, and sports always move on.

The matches will be played, new stars will emerge, fans will continue to watch. And Williams will be missed, of course, by spectators, executives from the tours, tournaments and television, as well as by other athletes.

And as the Australian Open gets started Monday, the first Grand Slam tournament to be held since she walked away with a farewell at the U.S. Open in September, shortly before her 41st birthday tennis will get a real taste of what a post-Serena world looks like on a big stage.

That is the case even if her impact won't fade away, as U.S. Open tournament director Stacey Allaster put it: "She leaves an indelible legacy of grace and grit that will inspire athletes, female and male, for many generations to come."

There will surely be those who keep an eye on tangible data at Melbourne Park and as this season, and future seasons, go along. Numbers such as attendance figures and TV ratings will be parsed in an effort to gauge what effect there is from the departure of someone who earned status as a just-one-name-necessary celebrity.

In a way, that is all a bit beside the point, however. "Her legacy is really wide, to the point where you can't even describe it in words. She changed the sport so much. She's introduced people that have never heard of tennis into the sport," said Naomi Osaka, a 25-year-old from Japan who has won four Grand Slam titles but hasn't played a full match since August and will sit out the Australian Open. "I honestly think that she's, like, the biggest force in the sport. That's not intentionally trying to make (Roger) Federer or (Rafael) Nadal smaller. I just think she's the biggest thing that will ever be in the sport."

In recent decades, folks might have worried about what would happen when Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova stopped playing. Or when Bjorn Borg, John McEnroe and Jimmy Connors moved on. Or Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi. Or Steffi Graf. And so on.

"It's always a loss when you have great players leave. But I've been through six or seven generations of this," said Billie Jean King, a two-time inductee into the International Tennis Hall of Fame who won 12 Grand Slam trophies in singles and another 27 in women's or mixed doubles.

"I mean, I remember when Sampras left and when Martina and Chris left. I was like, 'Oh, no! What's going to happen?'

Well, Sampras was there, and guess what? There's Roger Federer. There's Nadal. ... It's the same thing with the women. We've got Iga (Swiatek) now, who's taken over," King said. "Every generation gets better, and the depth of women's tennis is better than it's ever been, and Serena is somewhat responsible for that, because every generation builds on the last generation."

Billie Jean King  
12-time major winner

Shortly after Williams lost to Ajla Tomljanovic in the third round at Flushing Meadows, another titan of tennis, 20-time major champ Federer, announced his retirement. Federer hadn't played an official match in more than a full year because of a series of knee operations.

For Williams, there were moments when she stepped away from competing for stretches, either because of health issues or simply because she wanted to spend time on other interests, which she thought contributed to her longevity.

But those she brought to tennis, whether players or fans, should last long beyond that timeframe.

"Serena got a lot of people interested in our sport. And now it's up to the next generation to do that," King said. "People always — the media — goes into this every time: 'Oh, they're leaving! Oh, what's going to happen?' Somebody always comes up to the top. The cream rises to the top."

## Unvaccinated Djokovic back in play, year later

By HOWARD FENDRICH  
Associated Press

Novak Djokovic had just wrapped up last season by winning the ATP Finals for a record sixth time when, rather than looking ahead to 2023, his mind immediately went back to the way 2022 began: He was unable to compete in last year's Australian Open after being deported from the country because he was not vaccinated against COVID-19.

That whole episode, and the decision to eschew the shots required for entry elsewhere, too, helped define his season and, perhaps to some, his legacy. So as he reflected on his triumph at the year-ending championships in Italy last November, Djokovic viewed it through the prism of what occurred in Australia last January.

"It feels deeply satisfying and, at the same time, huge relief, because of the circumstances that I have been through this year — situations earlier this year, of course, with Australia. ... That had an effect, obviously, on my start of the year," the 35-year-old from Serbia said. "For the first several months, I was trying to find that balance, game-wise but also mentally, in order to be able to come back to the court and find that tennis level that I need."

When the new Grand Slam season begins at the Australian Open on Monday morning, Djokovic will be back. Back in Australia — despite never getting inoculated against the coronavirus — thanks to government decisions to remove any vaccination requirements for visitors and to waive what could have been three-year ban for him as someone whose visa had been revoked. He's now back at a tournament he has dominated like no other, resulting in nine of his 21 major trophies, including the past three times he

played there.

He's also back in position to strive for elite status and to challenge his great rival Rafael Nadal for supremacy in the Grand Slam title chase. Sure, it is Nadal who is the defending champion and who owns a men's-record 22 majors. It is Djokovic, though, who will draw the most attention. And it is Djokovic who will be viewed as the favorite. Djokovic and Nadal have been placed on opposite halves of the bracket in the draw, meaning they can only meet in the final.

The lead-up to this Australian Open has been filled with talk about who will not be there: Serena Williams and Roger Federer ended their playing careers in 2022, as did Ash Barty; No. 1-ranked Carlos Alcaraz, former Australian Open finalist Marin Cilic and seven-time major champion Venus Williams are injured; former No. 1 and four-time Slam winner Naomi Osaka last played a completed match in August and announced on social media on Wednesday that she is pregnant and will be taking the year off. Another former top-ranked player, Simona Halep, is serving a provisional doping suspension.

Once play begins, the talk will squarely be about Djokovic, and most folks in the sport seem to agree he should be back in the field.

Nadal, for one, called it "good for tennis."

"It's nice to see cooler heads prevailing there, (after) politics got in the way," former U.S. Davis Cup captain Mardy Fish said.

Frances Tiafoe, an American who reached the U.S. Open semifinals, said: "We want the biggest players playing in the biggest tournaments in the world, regardless of everything else. We're trying to sell a product at the end of the day, and you want those big names at the big events."



HAMISH BLAIR/AP

Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a backhand return to Germany's Alexander Zverev in their quarterfinal match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, on Feb. 16, 2021.

## NFL PLAYOFFS

## Cowboys focus on defensive reboot

BY SCHUYLER DIXON  
Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Safety Jayron Kearsa was more than happy to reflect on a late-season blip from the Dallas defense when the regular season was still going on.

Now that the playoffs have arrived, it's a hard turn to 2023 for the Cowboys in Kearsa's mind.

"That leaves 2022 behind us, and let's start this new season that we have ahead of us the way that we need to start it," Kearsa said Wednesday. "What we did in the regular season means nothing."

In keeping with the idea of a reboot, the Cowboys will visit Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in a wild-card game Monday night with two defenders expected back in the lineup after missing several games with injuries.

Linebacker Leighton Vander Esch was out the final three games of the regular season with a neck injury, and is set to resume play-calling responsibilities that fell in part to Kearsa.

Defensive tackle Johnathan Hankins, a midseason trade acquisition designed to plug a leaky run defense, is on track to play after missing four games with a pectoral muscle strain.

The Cowboys (12-5) have already lost two cornerbacks to season-ending injuries in Anthony Brown (torn Achilles) and Jourdan Lewis (broken foot).

DaRon Bland, tied for second among NFL rookies with five interceptions, left last week's 26-6 loss to Washington in the regular-season finale with a chest injury but is expected to play against the Bucs (8-9).

"I feel great about where we are," coach Mike McCarthy said. "Anytime you can stand here and come Monday night you're going to have some guys disappointed they're not on the 48(-man roster). To me, that's as healthy as you can ask at this time of year."

The Cowboys led the NFL with

33 takeaways, becoming the first team since the 1972-74 Pittsburgh Steelers to lead the league in that category in consecutive seasons. Dallas also led the league in sacks most of the season, but recorded just six in the final five games.

There were other signs of trouble late in the season.

Kearsa conceded that the defense was trying to find its early season form after consecutive 40-34 scores in December — the first an overtime loss at Jacksonville and the second a home victory over Philadelphia, the NFC's top seed.

Dak Prescott's third pick-6 in the final four games and special teams gaffes boosted the Commanders early in last weekend's loss. But the Cowboys let Sam Howell and the Washington offense control the second half in the rookie quarterback's debut.

When Prescott missed five games after breaking a thumb in a season-opening loss to the Bucs, the defense carried the Cowboys to a 4-1 record in his absence. The late-season D wasn't nearly as dominant.

"Guys realize we're not where we were at the beginning of the year," Kearsa said after the Dec. 24 victory over the Eagles. "Just understanding that it's going to take the conversations, the tough conversations, that's going to get us back to where we need to be when it comes down to playing a relentless style of defense that's not really leaving anything to chance."

Whether it's the fresher reinforcements or banged-up sacks leader Micah Parsons, Kearsa sees the playoff opener as a recharge for everyone.

"Whether you're hurt or not, when the postseason starts, it's kind of like newfound energy," Kearsa said. "You feel good. You're ready to go. We know we're going to have everyone giving their best shot."



PATRICK SEMANSKY/AP

Washington Commanders wide receiver Terry McLaurin makes a catch for a first down against Dallas Cowboys cornerback Trayvon Mullen during the second half Sunday in Landover, Md.



JOSHUA A. BICKEL/AP

Cincinnati Bengals guard Hakeem Adeniji blocks Baltimore Ravens linebacker David Ojabo during the first half Sunday in Cincinnati. The Bengals won 27-16 ahead of a playoff rematch.

# Bengals will rely on O-line subs to slow down Ravens

BY MITCH STACY  
Associated Press

CINCINNATI — With guard Alex Cappa now sidelined, the Cincinnati Bengals are faced with starting two backups on the right side of the offensive line for Sunday's playoff game.

Coach Zac Taylor said Wednesday that Cappa's injury, suffered in last week's game, will keep him out of at least the opening playoff game against the Ravens. Beyond that, he can't say.

Cappa's injury came two weeks after right tackle La'el Collins was lost for the season to a knee injury. Hakeem Adeniji, whose struggles in pass protection in the postseason last year were conspicuous, is playing in place of Collins. Slotting in for Cappa will be Max Scharping, who started 33 games in Houston in his first three seasons and was claimed off waivers in September.

"The O-line is a continuity and repetition position," said center Ted Karras, who is responsible for making blocking calls at the line. "We've been repping all year, but it will be hard, especially to replace Alex because of our relationship, just how to ID the defense, how to distribute all our blockers. He's been a humongous help to me, saved me a few times over the season. So I had to step it up. Everyone's got to step it up. Max has a great opportunity in front of him, and I'm excited to see how he performs."

The 26-year-old Scharping said he's capable of holding down the key position.

"I've been here all year, so it's not necessarily anything lacking," he



JOSHUA A. BICKEL/AP

Ravens linebacker Justin Houston celebrates a sack of Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow in the second half in Cincinnati on Sunday.



**AFC wild-card playoff**  
Baltimore Ravens (10-7)  
at Cincinnati Bengals (12-4)  
AFN-Sports

2:15 a.m. Monday CET  
10:15 a.m. Monday JKT

said. "I'm just hoping to go out there and play to the best of my ability on each play and hopefully be there when (Karras) needs me most."

Cappa was the first free agent targeted — he got a four-year deal worth \$40 million — when Cincinnati began rebuilding its subpar offensive line before the season. It also brought in veterans Karras and Col-

lins, with rookie fourth-round draft pick Cordell Volson fitting in at left guard.

With Jonah Williams at left tackle, the offensive front was together for the first 15 games and became one of the team's greatest strengths through the eight-game winning streak to finish the regular season.

Offensive coordinator Brian Callahan said the scheme won't change much because of the new personnel on the right side.

"They've all been getting reps in all the things that we do and how we run them," Callahan said. "At this point in the year, it's hard to introduce all kinds of shiny new things that are really going to change who you are. We're still going to be who we are as an offense and run a lot of the things that we've run and have had success with over the course of the season."

# NFL PLAYOFFS



MATT ROURKE/AP

New York Giants quarterback Daniel Jones works out prior to a game against the Philadelphia Eagles on Sunday in Philadelphia. The Eagles won 22-16 in the Giants' last warm-up before the playoffs.

## Giants expecting increased intensity as playoff novices

By TOM CANAVAN  
Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — For most of the players on the New York Giants, the postseason is uncharted territory.

Of the 53 men on the Giants' active roster heading into Sunday's wild-card round game at the Minnesota Vikings, only 17 players have playoff experience. Roughly half of that number can be considered starters.

Quarterback Daniel Jones, running back Saquon Barkley, offensive tackles Andrew Thomas and Evan Neal, defensive linemen Leonard Williams and Dexter Lawrence, and safeties Xavier McKinney and Julian Love are postseason novices.

Veteran kicker Graham Gano is in the minority on a team making its first postseason appearance since 2016. He's one of five players who has made it to a Super Bowl. He is willing to talk to teammates about what's going to be different. The energy and tempo will increase.

"But really, it's the same game we've been playing since we were kids," Gano said. "I think that's the biggest thing, not to make more of it than what it actually is. It's exciting."

McKinney could hardly hide his excitement about getting to the playoffs in his third season. His path there had some obstacles.

McKinney broke bones in his left hand in an ATV-type accident while on vacation in Mexico during the Giants' bye week in No-



**NFC wild-card playoff**  
**New York Giants (9-7-1)**  
**at Minnesota Vikings (13-4)**  
AFN-Sports  
10:30 p.m. Sunday CET  
6:30 a.m. Monday JKT

vember. He had surgery and missed seven games, returning on Jan. 1. The last game he missed was against the Vikings.

"I'm excited, we're all excited here," McKinney said. "It's been a while for sure, but we're trying not to be too excited. When you're too excited, you screw up and bad things happen."

Wide receiver Isaiah Hodgins, acquired on waivers in November, isn't taking that approach.

"It's a different mode, you got to have a little bit of a different mentality and a different mindset and go in there and really attack, like tell yourself, I'm going to make these plays," Hodgins said. "I'm going to change the game and I'm going to make a name for myself with everybody watching."

Center Jon Feliciano, in the playoffs the past three years with Buffalo, said not much changes.

"It is a regular game, besides the fact that you go home if you lose," Feliciano said. "When you mess up in a regular game, it's not

the same as doing it here. If you're a competitor, you never want to lose. So for me, it's just the same old, same old."

For Williams, the wait to get to the playoffs was eight years. He doesn't want it to be a short trip, saying now is the time for players to sacrifice.

"We're trying to keep keep this thing riding, keep this train going and hopefully take it all the way," Williams said. "I mean, that's our mindset, but we can't afford to overlook any team. We have to take a week at a time."

Love said people outside the Giants' headquarters are probably more excited than the players. He also thinks the NFC North champion Vikings understand they will be in for a fight after beating New York 27-24 on Dec. 24 on a 61-yard field goal on the final play.

"I feel like no one is under the radar," Love said. "They know who we are, we've shown it for 17, 18 weeks or whatever it is. Teams know who we are, now we've just got to go show it and let our game speak for itself."

The Giants' practice Wednesday was far from normal. The number of media attending doubled to roughly 30-35 people.

Jones said the players understand the stakes.

"The only way we're going to play as well as we want to play is to prepare how we have all year, to trust our process and stick to that," he said. "So, that's largely been the conversation amongst the guys."

## Buffalo's Hyde, Crowder prep for possible return

By JOHN WAWROW  
Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — When Micah Hyde vowed he'd be ready to return in 2023 shortly after having surgery to repair a herniated disc in October, the Buffalo Bills safety was looking ahead to September.

Not January.

Lo and behold, three months later, Hyde practiced Wednesday and opened the door for a possible chance of returning to play at some point during the playoffs.

"I didn't sleep last night, and not because I was nervous or anything. It's just because I was too excited," Hyde said.

The 10th-year player, however, remained extremely cautious by saying that while his doctors cleared him for practice, they still have the final say on whether he's healed enough to play in a game.

"I feel good. I haven't had any setbacks and they have been killing me in the weight room having me do a thousand lunges," Hyde said, referring to trainers. "I'm ready to go, but it's not up to me."

Hyde, who has hurt in a win over Tennessee in Week 2, was joined at practice by receiver Jamison Crowder, who has been sidelined since breaking his ankle in a victory over Baltimore on Oct. 2.

Crowder, an offseason free agent addition, opened the season sharing slot receiver duties.

Both remain on the injured reserve list, but are eligible to practice over a three-week period after which the Bills have the option of activating them to the roster or



**AFC wild-card playoff**  
**Miami Dolphins (9-8)**  
**at Buffalo Bills (13-3)**  
AFN-Sports  
7 p.m. Sunday CET  
3 a.m. Monday JKT

ending their season.

Coach Sean McDermott ruled both out from playing Sunday, when the Bills (13-3) host their division rival Miami Dolphins (9-8) in a wild card playoff game.

Hyde was projected to miss six to eight months. After having surgery, he rejoined the team in Buffalo to rehab and also serve in a quasi-assistant coaching role.

Hyde is motivated because he doesn't want to miss out on a chance to be part of what could be a special season. He's also inspired to rejoin a team which has overcome a series of adversity this season: from two snowstorms a month apart disrupting the Bills schedule, to the chilling sight of safety Damar Hamlin going into cardiac arrest and having to be resuscitated on the field during a game in Cincinnati last week.

"All the things that we have been through, you name it, the weather, injuries, D-Ham's situation, just seeing my boys, my teammates go out there and continue to fight ... I have to give it a go," Hyde said.

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## NFL PLAYOFFS

# No: Purdy hasn't been performing like a rookie

FROM PAGE 48

games and has posted a 119 passer rating in his first five starts for the second-best mark for any quarterback in the Super Bowl era behind the 131.4 for Hall of Famer Kurt Warner.

With a win on Saturday, Purdy will be the first rookie quarterback drafted after the first round to win a playoff game since third-rounder Russell Wilson did it for Seattle in 2012.

"I feel like I'll do a lot of reflecting after the season," Purdy said. "Right now, I'm looking at it like, man, we got the Seahawks. Yes, it's playoffs, but for myself it's, I have to do my job. I'm not trying to think about this storybook ending or anything like that. It's, man, I have a great defense I have to play. I have to do my job in terms of getting the guys the ball and all that will fall into place, but definitely thankful for everything that has happened. We still have a ways to go."

The Niners players have long stopped looking at Purdy as an untested rookie as his play and demeanor are like that of a veteran.

Purdy showed flashes of that in training camp when he won a competition with Nate Sudfeld for a roster spot and it has only grown as he has gotten to play.

"As soon as he got into the game he was our guy," right tackle Mike McGlinchey said. "No matter whether you're a rookie, a five-year vet, a 10-year vet, it doesn't matter, you're the starting quar-



**NFC wild-card playoff**  
**Seattle Seahawks (9-8)**  
**at San Francisco 49ers (13-4)**  
 AFN-Sports  
 10:30 p.m. Saturday CET  
 6:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

terback and you have to do the starting quarterback's job. That's what he's done to an unbelievable degree."

Along with playing his first playoff game, Purdy has another first as he goes up against the same opponent for a second time.

Purdy went 17-for-26 for 217 yards, two TDs and no turnovers in a 21-13 win at Seattle last month despite getting no practice time during a short week of preparation because of injuries to his ribs and oblique.

While Purdy is healthier this time around, he knows Seattle might have some new wrinkles.

"I feel like I see something new almost every week, so obviously there's six games of film out there on me," he said. "There's still things that I'm sure coordinators are going to try to dial up and everything and try to get me to do some something different. But for myself, I just try to stay grounded in what the progression is, what the read is."



JED JACOBSON/AP

A fan wears a "Mr. Irrelevant" jersey for 49ers quarterback Brock Purdy. The term is applied to the last player taken in the NFL Draft.



GODOFREDO A. VASQUEZ/AP

Seattle Seahawks quarterback Geno Smith looks for a receiver while under pressure during a game against the New York Jets on Jan. 1 in Seattle. Smith will get his first playoff start Saturday.

# The next chapter

## Smith's comeback season continues in postseason

By **TIM BOOTH**  
*Associated Press*

RENTON, Wash. — Geno Smith smiled and joked about some of his teammates on Wednesday, showing none of the signs that might be apparent for someone about to add another first to the résumé in the 10th season of his career.

Smith certainly doesn't seem overly stressed with his first playoff start on the horizon.

"I've always had that thought process that if I did get an opportunity that this is where we should be," Smith said. "And like I said, it's not about me. It's about the team and everyone else around me, and how we are collectively coming together and how we collectively have gotten to the playoffs."

The next and maybe final chapter to what has been one of the best comeback stories in the league this season will take place this weekend when Smith and the Seahawks face San Francisco in the NFC wild-card game.

Seattle is a massive underdog to the 49ers and has been written off by most analysts as not being ready for the playoff stage. But that falls in line with Seattle's entire season — derided in the summer as not having enough talent, only to see Smith and his teammates defy those expectations and achieve just enough to sneak into the playoffs on the final day of the regular season.

Making the postseason provides a definition of success to the season for both Smith and the Sea-

## Scoreboard

### NFL playoffs

**Wild card**  
**Saturday, Jan. 14**  
 Seattle at San Francisco. **AFN-Sports, 10:30 p.m. Saturday CET; 6:30 a.m. Sunday JKT**  
 L.A. Chargers at Jacksonville. **AFN-Sports, 2:15 a.m. Sunday CET; 10:15 a.m. Sunday JKT**  
**Sunday, Jan. 15**  
 Miami at Buffalo. **AFN-Sports, 7 p.m. Sunday CET; 3 a.m. Monday JKT**  
 N.Y. Giants at Minnesota. **AFN-Sports 10:30 p.m. Sunday CET; 6:30 a.m. Monday JKT**  
 Baltimore at Cincinnati. **AFN-Sports 2:15 a.m. Monday CET; 10:15 a.m. Monday JKT**  
**Monday, Jan. 16**  
 Dallas at Tampa Bay. **AFN-Sports 2:15 a.m. Tuesday CET; 10:15 a.m. Tuesday JKT**

hawks. But he doesn't want getting there to be the end of the story.

"I don't think we should be getting hyped up right now or acting like this is our end goal because we have another goal in mind," Smith said. "Obviously it starts just one game at a time, one play, one practice at a time, staying focused on staying in the moment. But we know that we can't just say, 'Oh, we're happy to be in the playoffs.' There's more to it. We've got to stay focused on that."

Smith finished the season leading the NFL in completion percentage (69.8%) and fifth in passer rating (100.9). He set a number of franchise QB records and was the only quarterback in the league to play every snap this season.

But if Seattle is going to continue its playoff push past the matchup with the 49ers, it needs a better version of Smith than what it got

in the latter part of the season. Smith was great through the first 12 games with a passer rating of nearly 109, a completion percentage of 72.7% and 22 touchdowns against six interceptions. He was a big reason Seattle was 7-5 through those 12 games.

Smith was also partly to blame for the Seahawks finishing 2-3, a stretch that included Seattle's 21-13 loss to San Francisco on Dec. 15. Smith's completion percentage tumbled to 63.3% as some of the easy throws that made Seattle's offense work didn't connect. He threw five interceptions, including two in the loss to Carolina and two in Week 18 against the Rams. Smith was also sacked 15 times during that stretch.

"When we're in third-and-manageable, we've done great, and we've been able to execute, move the chains," Smith said. "For us, it's staying efficient on first and second down, me in particular getting the ball out, being efficient getting the ball to the guys in the right timing and to the right reads, and then everything else kind of goes from there."

San Francisco has been especially troublesome for Smith and the Seahawks. Smith has converted only two third downs via pass in 20 attempts against the 49ers over eight quarters this season. Seattle's only offensive touchdown in the two games came late in the fourth quarter of the 21-13 loss last month, a game where the Seahawks didn't run a play inside the 49ers' 20-yard line until the final drive.

## NFL PLAYOFFS

## Chargers not worried about lack of experience

By GREG BEACHAM

Associated Press

COSTA MESA, Calif. — Kyle Van Noy has already been everywhere the Los Angeles Chargers are trying to go on their franchise's first playoff trip in four years, and the veteran linebacker wants his new teammates to know their postseason inexperience means absolutely nothing on this journey.

"It's just about who comes out there and plays better," the two-time Super Bowl champion said Wednesday. "All the rest of it doesn't matter. I've told these guys that it's not about experience, and home-field advantage is a myth, too. Confidence matters, and that comes back to the preparation you've done."

Van Noy earned his two rings with the New England Patriots and racked up 12 games of playoff experience — more than a good chunk of his Chargers teammates combined — during his first eight years in the NFL.

Los Angeles (10-7) is headed to Jacksonville on Saturday for the Bolts' first playoff appearance since a two-game run after the 2018 season, which stands as the Chargers' only playoff appearance since the 2013 season back in San Diego.

Justin Herbert's showdown with Trevor Lawrence in both touted young quarterbacks' playoff debuts will get most of the attention heading into the game in Jacksonville, but many players on



MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP

**Quarterback Justin Herbert is among the many Chargers stars that have not played in the playoffs. But Herbert leads an offense that is similar to last season's Bengals, who reached the Super Bowl.**

both teams will be getting their first tastes of postseason pressure.

Just six Chargers remain from the 2018 playoff team, yet they comprise much of the current team's core: receivers Keenan Allen and Mike Williams, running back Austin Ekeler, pass-rusher Joey Bosa, safety Derwin James and cornerback Michael Davis.

"We're such a different team since then, but we're hungry every year," Ekeler said. "That's why we play the entire game, to get to the playoffs and continue to build on what we're doing. Finally getting back, I feel like we have a lot of guys that have made a lot of leaps in their career. Justin is coming along, and we brought in

veterans that can help us get there, and we finally put a product together."

Other Chargers have playoff experience with other teams, but Van Noy doesn't have to look far for an illustration of his belief in the unimportance of playoff experience.

"He's told us, 'Just look at Cin-

cinnati last year,'" Chargers linebacker Drue Tranquill said.

Indeed, the Bengals ended their franchise's five-year postseason drought and rolled all the way to the Super Bowl last season thanks to a gifted young quarterback, an impressive collection of playmakers around him, and an opportunistic defense. The Chargers have all of those things, and Tranquill is among the young leaders eager to show they can handle their first taste of playoff pressure.

Tranquill, now a four-year NFL veteran, will be playing in his first postseason game since his 12-0 Fighting Irish were thrashed 30-3 by Lawrence's Clemson Tigers in a College Football Playoff semifinal in December 2018.

"You know you're always going to hear about playoff experience, but good things will happen for this team if we play our game," Tranquill said. "Just got to play our brand of football."

Defensive coordinator Renaldo Hill is telling his players all about the importance of seizing playoff opportunities. He made it to just one postseason game in his 10 years as an NFL player, and his sole playoff experience in 11 years as an assistant coach came during his three-year stint as the Pittsburgh Steelers' defensive backs coach.

"We know it's a different temperature during the playoffs," Hill said. "I know our guys are up for the challenge. I told them that it's going to be a different feel."

## Late surge has Jaguars' Allen looking dominant again

By MARK LONG

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Josh Allen was the last player off Jacksonville's practice field Wednesday. The fourth-year pro spent extra time working through pass-rush drills and then a few more minutes chatting with a coach — an offensive coach.

Allen has started getting technique tips from Jaguars assistant offensive line coach Todd Washington. The recent tweak may have aided in Allen's late-season surge.

The Jacksonville linebacker has 23 quarterback pressures in his last five games. He also returned a fumble 37 yards for a touchdown in the closing minutes to beat Tennessee 20-16 last Saturday and secure the franchise's second AFC South championship.

It was just the latest game-altering play for Allen, who has half of his six sacks during Jacksonville's five-game winning streak and was named the AFC Defensive Player of the Week on Wednesday. He's essentially been the dominant force the Jaguars (9-8) thought they had when they



**AFC wild-card playoff**  
Los Angeles Chargers (10-7)  
at Jacksonville Jaguars (10-7)

AFN-Sports

2:15 a.m. Sunday CET

10:15 a.m. Sunday JKT

drafted him with the seventh overall pick four years ago and watched him make the Pro Bowl as a rookie.

Allen had been admittedly disappointing since, even going eight consecutive games this season without a sack. But he's taken his play to another level since mid-December, and the Jaguars are counting on him to continue his hot streak when they host the Los Angeles Chargers (10-7) in a wild-card game Saturday night.

"We're ready to take over," Allen said. "We're not in (the playoffs) for no reason. We worked our butts off to get to this point."



PHELAN M. EBENHACK/AP

**Jaguars linebacker Josh Allen returns a fumble for a touchdown in the second half against the Tennessee Titans on Saturday. Allen has half of his six sacks during Jacksonville's five-game winning streak.**

Allen maybe as much as anyone.

He was seemingly slow to adjust to the team's new 3-4 defensive scheme, one that sometimes requires him to drop into cover-

age. It was a somewhat uncomfortable spot even though it was role he handled well in college at Kentucky.

But Allen looked right at home off the ball against the Titans, es-

pecially when he scooped up Joshua Dobbs' fumble in full stride and went untouched the other way for the go-ahead score. He added a strip-sack on the ensuing possession that helped Jacksonville close it out.

"I think it's just being patient," Allen said. "I've always worked hard. It's just letting those opportunities come. I've been dialed in with myself a little bit more."

"Me working hard before and after practice and doing what I need to do and being where I need to be. I knew when the moment comes, when the opportunity comes, if I keep at it, good things are going to come."

Although Allen's sack totals are down, his 64 quarterback pressures this season rank fourth in the NFL, according to the league's Next Gen stats. More than a third of those have come in the last five weeks.

"I think it's Josh. He's made his mind up that it's the time of the season for him to turn it on, and he's turned it on," defensive coordinator Mike Caldwell said. "He's picked his game up, and he's doing a good job for us."

## SPORTS



## Back Down Under

This year, unvaccinated Djokovic allowed to play in Australian Open » Page 43

## NFL PLAYOFFS

## No longer irrelevant

After being taken with final pick, Purdy proves invaluable to 49ers

BY JOSH DUBOW  
Associated Press

**B**rock Purdy has passed every test he's faced so far in his remarkable rookie season.

Coming off the bench with no reps after Jimmy Garoppolo got hurt. Matching up against an all-time great like Tom Brady. His first road start in an intimidating stadium in Seattle. Coming from behind against the Raiders.

Next up for Purdy and the San Francisco 49ers is his first playoff game on Saturday against the Seahawks.

**"Right now, I'm looking at it like, man, we got the Seahawks. Yes, it's playoffs, but for myself it's, I have to do my job."**

**Brock Purdy**  
49ers rookie quarterback

"I'm not trying to make it bigger than what it is," Purdy said Wednesday. "Obviously, there's more on the line and everything. But I think having six games under my belt in terms of just playing in an NFL game and trying to win for four quarters has helped me get to this point. And all the guys in the locker room have my back. We've all grown together, so we're ready for what's ahead."

Purdy's journey from being "Mr. Irrelevant" as the last pick in the NFL Draft to perhaps the most important player on a Super Bowl contender has been an improbable one.

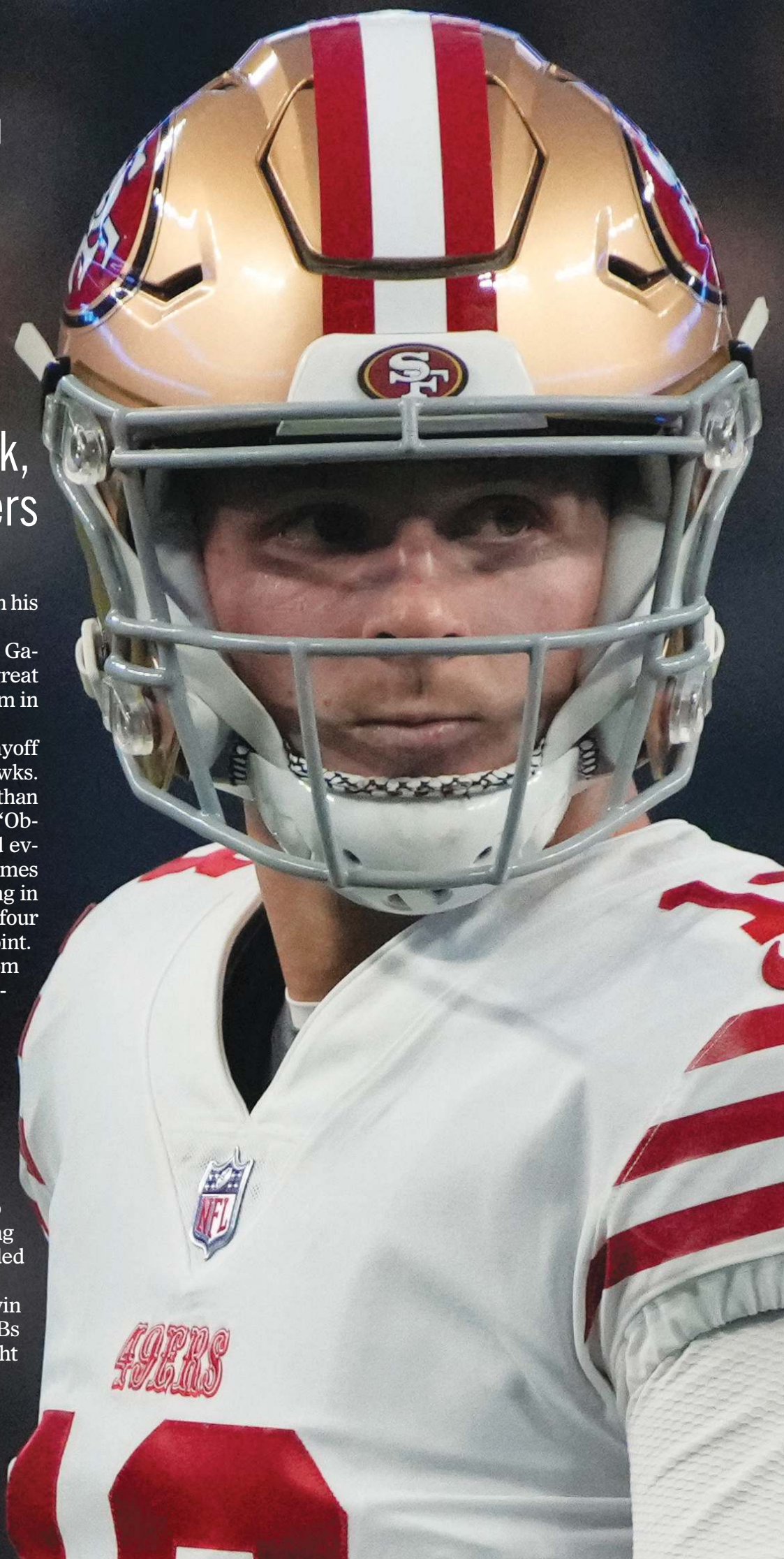
Purdy keeps reaching new milestones in every start as he piles up touchdown passes and wins, putting him in company with some heralded quarterbacks from the past.

Purdy is the first rookie QB since Ben Roethlisberger to win his first five starts, joined Justin Herbert as the only rookie QBs to throw multiple touchdown passes in at least six straight

SEE NO ON PAGE 46

Rookie quarterback Brock Purdy was forced into the 49ers' starting lineup after injuries to Trey Lance and Jimmy Garoppolo. He'll start his first playoff game Saturday when San Francisco hosts Seattle.

RICK SCUTERI/AP



NASCAR's Harvick will retire after season » Auto racing, Page 42

