**FOOTBALL:** SEC schools are beefing up schedules **Page 48**

**MUSIC:** David Gilmour shines on at 78 **Page 28**

**MOVIES:** 'Rebel Ridge' star has simmering power **Page 16**

EUROPE & PACIFIC WEEKEND EDITION

**VIDEO GAMES**
Astro Bot gives childlike wonder back to players
**Page 18**

STARS AND STRIPES®
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Volume 83 Edition 107 ©SS 2024 FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2024
平成12年4月5日 第三種郵便物認可 日刊(土日除く)
発行所 星条旗新聞社 〒106-0032 東京都港区六本木7丁目23番17号 定価￥100
$1.00

CAITLINN BELCHER/U.S. Army Reserve

**Sgt. Myles Shoemaker of the Maryland Army National Guard trains Ghanaian soldiers in room clearing tactics in Damongo, Ghana, on May 16. Ghana is among the countries the U.S. is looking at working with more in light of recent coups and mounting terror threats in West Africa.**

# Reset and recalibrate

## US troops in West Africa take new positions amid coups, terror groups

BY JOHN VANDIVER
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — American troops are taking up new positions in parts of West Africa to give a boost to counterterrorism efforts upended following U.S. Africa Command's recent ejection from strategic bases in Niger.

AFRICOM's Gen. Michael Langley on Thursday said his command is in the early stages of a reorganization that will emphasize coordination with "like-minded" states.

"We are pivoting to some degree," Langley said during a news briefing from his Stuttgart headquarters.

Benin, Ivory Coast and Ghana are some of the countries involved as AFRICOM begins to "reset and recalibrate some of our assets," Langley said.

The moves come after the U.S. was forced to halt military cooperation with Niger following a coup last year that eventually led to the closure of bases that served as major hubs for U.S. counterterrorism missions. The centerpiece of AFRICOM's mission in West Africa was a drone base in the Saharan city of Agadez, which cost the U.S. more than $100 million to set up.

There are no indications that the Pentagon is looking to replicate a site of such scale elsewhere on the continent. But concerns over a growing terrorism threat from an array of Islamic extremist groups fanned out across the Sahel has put many countries under strain.

While ISIS and al-Qaida linked groups have long been present in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, they have metastasized and moved toward the northern borders of Ivory Coast, Ghana and Benin, Langley said.

"We are in consultations … to decide what level of capacity they need to be able to successfully counter terrorism," Langley said.

Langley said West African extremist organizations have aspirations of attacking the U.S. homeland. Nonetheless, such groups haven't yet shown any capacity to strike out beyond the region, calling into question how realistic those larger ambitions are.

**SEE RESET ON PAGE 7**

# Retired Army general takes command of '28 Olympics

BY MATT WAGNER
*Stars and Stripes*

Reynold Hoover sees plenty of parallels between putting on the Olympics and running an Army command.

This is the first time the retired lieutenant general has taken responsibility for any sporting event, let alone one the size of the Summer Olympics and Paralympics in Los Angeles in 2028.

But when LA28's new CEO looks through the lens of his nearly 40 years in uniform, it all comes down to four things: planning, operations, logistics and security. He's done that many times, with one significant difference.

"I've told the staff, though, 'Look, we're not being shot at, we're not at war and nobody's dying,'" Hoover said during an interview last week at LA28's Paris offices during the Paralympic Games. "When we put it in perspective, it's just a really big military operation. We get the right people in the right places and we're off to the races."

Taking his oath at the U.S. Mil-

**SEE OLYMPICS ON PAGE 7**

MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

**Reynold Hoover, the CEO of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic and Paralympic Games, is a retired U.S. Army lieutenant general.**

# BUSINESS/WEATHER

## EUROPE GAS PRICES

| Country | Super E10 | Super unleaded | Super plus | Diesel |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Germany | $3.645 | $4.200 | $4.562 | $3.964 |
| Change in price | -5.3 cents | -4.4 cents | -4.3 cents | -7.0 cents |
| Netherlands | .. | $4.432 | $4.707 | $4.574 |
| Change in price | .. | -9.6 cents | -9.8 cents | -9.3 cents |
| U.K. | .. | $4.200 | $4.562 | $3.964 |
| Change in price | .. | -4.4 cents | -4.3 cents | -7.0 cents |
| Azores | .. | .. | $4.412 | .. |
| Change in price | .. | .. | -4.3 cents | .. |
| Turkey | .. | .. | $4.228 | $4.425* |
| Change in price | .. | .. | -4.3 cents | No change |

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

## PACIFIC GAS PRICES

| Country | Super E10 | Super unleaded | Super plus | Diesel |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Japan | .. | $4.199 | .. | $3.609 |
| Change in price | .. | -5.0 cents | .. | -7.0 cents |
| Okinawa | $3.289 | .. | .. | $3.609 |
| Change in price | -5.0 cents | .. | .. | -7.0 cents |
| South Korea | $3.319 | .. | $4.239 | $3.639 |
| Change in price | -5.0 cents | .. | -4.0 cents | -6.0 cents |
| Guam | $3.349** | $3.899 | $4.269 | .. |
| Change in price | -5.0 cents | -5.0 cents | -4.0 cents | .. |

***DieselEFD **Midgrade**
**Pacific price for the week of Sept. 13-19**

## EXCHANGE RATES

| Military rates | |
|---|---|
| Euro costs (Sept. 13) | $1.07 |
| British pound (Sept. 13) | $1.27 |
| Japanese yen (Sept. 13) | 137.00 |
| South Korean won (Sept. 13) | 1306.00 |

| Commercial rates | |
|---|---|
| Bahrain (Dinar) | 0.3769 |
| Britain (Pound) | 1.3055 |
| Canada (Dollar) | 1.3601 |
| China (Yuan) | 7.1192 |
| Denmark (Krone) | 6.7624 |
| Egypt (Pound) | 48.4121 |
| Euro | 0.9062 |
| Hong Kong (Dollar) | 7.8022 |
| Hungary (Forint) | 358.49 |
| Israel (Shekel) | 3.7398 |
| Japan (Yen) | 142.08 |
| Kuwait (Dinar) | 0.3054 |
| Norway (Krone) | 10.8189 |
| Philippines (Peso) | 56.09 |
| Poland (Zloty) | 3.89 |
| Saudi Arabia (Riyal) | 3.7526 |
| Singapore (Dollar) | 1.3040 |
| South Korea (Won) | 1341.38 |
| Switzerland (Franc) | 0.8535 |
| Thailand (Baht) | 33.53 |
| Turkey (NewLira) | 33.9058 |

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

## INTEREST RATES

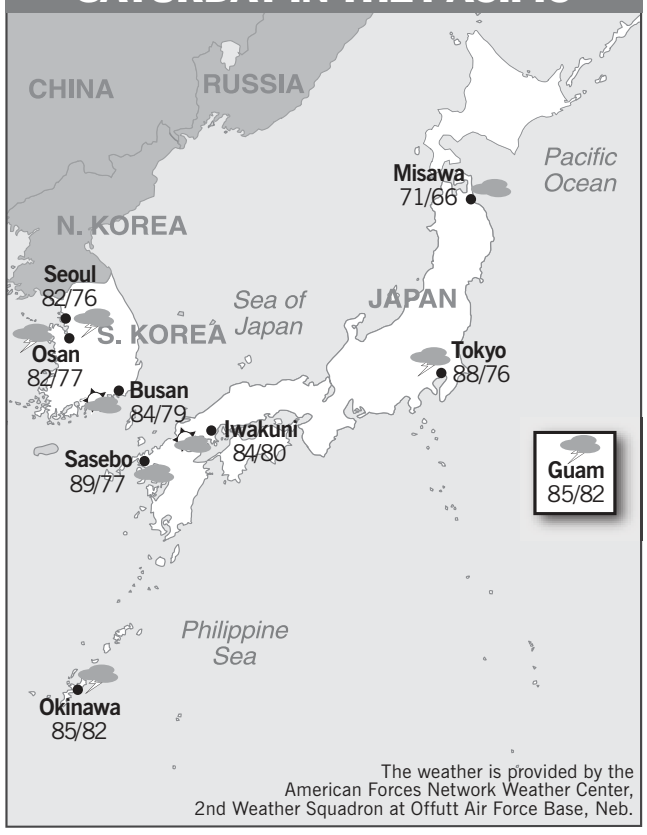
| | |
|---|---|
| Prime rate | 8.50 |
| Interest Rates Discount rate | 6.00 |
| Federal funds market rate | 5.33 |
| 3-month bill | 5.02 |
| 30-year bond | 5.33 |

## 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.

## TODAY IN STRIPES


Classified ..... 46
Comics ..... 34,38-39
Crossword ..... 34,38-39
Opinion ..... 40
Sports ..... 41-48
Weekend ..... 13-34



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MILITARY

# Army post revamps vehicle registration process

## Move comes after photos of soldiers camping out to ensure a slot surface

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
*Stars and Stripes*

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — A U.S. Army post in Bavaria this week announced changes to its vehicle registration appointment process after photos surfaced online of soldiers camping out overnight to ensure a coveted walk-in slot.

The vehicle registration office at U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach on Wednesday relaunched its online appointment scheduler and revamped hours as it transitions to a hybrid system of walk-ins and appointments.

The changes come as the U.S. military in Germany continues to grapple with a problem that has upended commutes to work and in some cases left military families without a legally operable vehicle.

The problem remains most acute in the Kaiserslautern Military Community, home to Ramstein Air Base and several Army posts. There were 1,624 people in the online queue at the Kapaun main vehicle registration on Thursday around noon, and most appointments for new registrations were booked through late December.

Ansbach has wrestled with its own problems.

The office switched to walk-in only in July after customers complained that the lead time to schedule an appointment was too great, garrison spokeswoman Gerlinde Hoyle said in a statement.

But that led to complaints about restrictions on the number of walk-ins available per day.

"The corrected model of opening hours will better serve the various types of service for our customers," Hoyle said.

Under the hybrid system, time will be set aside to assist soldiers and their families going through permanent change of station moves, Hoyle added.

However, customer demand may remain a challenge.

The Ansbach office is authorized for only three staff members and there are no plans to assign soldiers to the office in the future, Hoyle said.

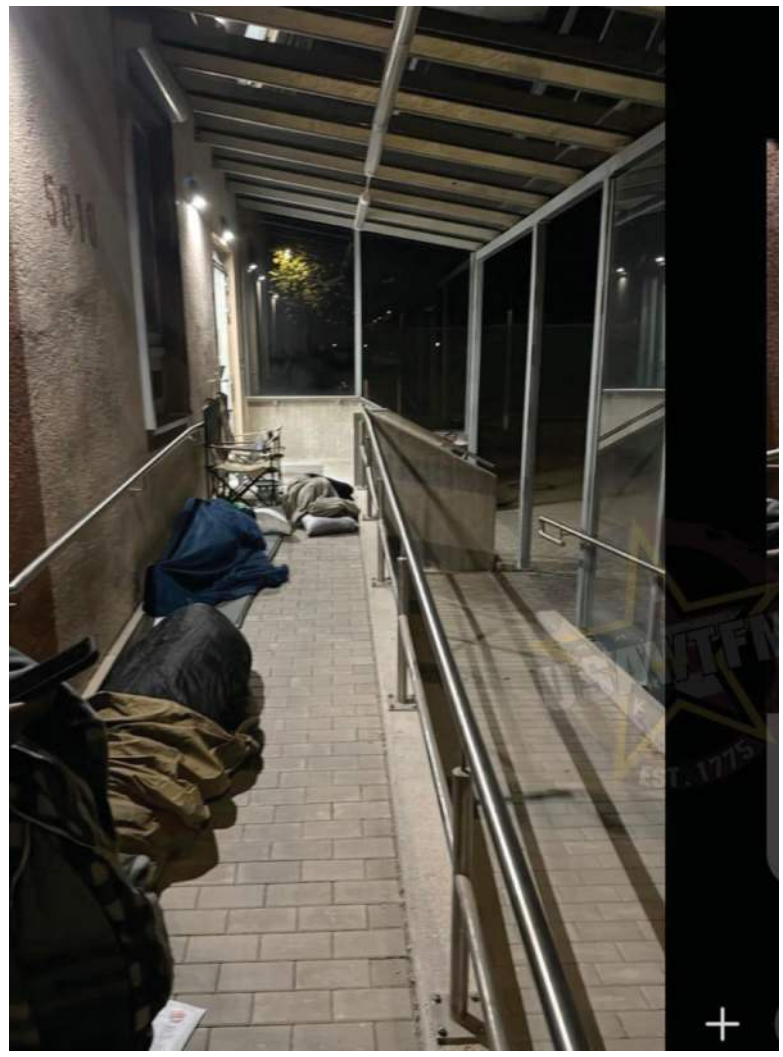
Ansbach in previous years has asked service members to help with vehicle registration temporarily.

The changes were announced days after the "U.S. Army W.T.F! moments" Facebook page posted photos of the soldiers on the ground in their sleeping bags. The post drew over 2,100 comments.

While the photos could not be independently verified, Hoyle said the service members were not encouraged to queue outside business hours.

Starting next week, the registration office will be open 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday for appointments only. Appointments can be made online.

The office will see in- and out-processing soldiers only from 8 a.m. to noon on Wednesday, and walk-ins from noon to 3 p.m.



Facebook

**Photos posted to social media on Sept. 6 appeared to show soldiers sleeping outside the U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach vehicle registration office in Germany.**

Other bases in the region have had varied success in recent months by adding staff and making tweaks.

Officials at Ramstein last month opened a new substation to ease the burden at neighboring Kapaun, which handles vehicle matters for all services.

Some customers who have used the substation have said that it was considerably quicker than Kapaun, though the Ramstein location can't handle some functions, such as issuing temporary plates and initial registrations.

The Army has also reopened services in the Kaiserslautern area at its post in Sembach.

Officials at Tower Barracks in Grafenwoehr, part of U.S. Army Garrison Bavaria, rolled out a proprietary online scheduling system July 1 that limited the number of appointments one person could make, thus freeing up precious calendar space, spokesman Andreas Kreuzer wrote in an emailed statement Thursday.

The base has cut their no-show rate from 60% to 5%.

Mark Heeter, a spokesman for the Army's Installation Management Command-Europe, said the issues at vehicle registration offices across Germany were isolated and not the norm.

"While vehicle registration requirements are greater in the summer months due to the PCS season, most of our Army garrisons did not experience significant challenges with vehicle registration backlogs," he wrote in a statement Wednesday.

Other services experienced similar issues in recent months, he said.

Stars and Stripes reporter Lydia Gordon contributed to this report.

# North Korea launches at least two ballistic missiles in latest test

BY JOSEPH DITZLER, HANA KUSUMOTO AND YOO KYONG CHANG
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea fired several short-range ballistic missiles into the sea east of the Korean Peninsula on Thursday, according to South Korea's military.

The missiles launched around 7:10 a.m. from the area around Pyongyang and continued toward the East Sea, or Sea of Japan, according to a statement from South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff just before 9 a.m.

At least two missiles flew over 220 miles and reached a peak altitude of 62 miles before falling into the sea, according to a joint news release by the Japanese Ministry of Defense and Cabinet Secretariat.

Both nations' militaries tracked and monitored the missile flights and shared the information with the U.S., according to the respective news releases. Data from the flights was being analyzed, according to the South Korean joint chiefs.

South Korea's military "strongly condemns North Korea's missile launch as a clear provocative act that seriously threatens peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula," the joint chiefs stated.

Japan protested to North Korea, also strongly condemning its actions, according to its release.

"The series of actions by North Korea, including the repeated launches of ballistic missiles, threaten the peace and security of Japan, the region and the international community," the Defense Ministry said in the release.

A representative of South Korea's office for North Korean Nuclear Affairs conferred by phone with Seth Bailey, the U.S. deputy special representative for the North Korea, and Akihiro Okochi, of Japan's Asian and Oceanian affairs bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, following Thursday's launches, a spokesman for the South Korean Ministry of Unification said by phone Thursday.

"The three countries condemned the North's ballistic missile launch as a clear violation of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions and a grave threat to the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and the international community," the spokesman said. Some South Korean government officials speak to the media on a customary condition of anonymity.

The Japanese government put out an alert at 7:17 a.m. on X that North Korea had launched what they suspected was a ballistic missile. It also provided information to aircraft and ships traveling in the vicinity but has received no reports of damage from the missiles' re-entry.

The launch, the North's first weapons firing in more than two months, came three days after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to redouble efforts to make his nuclear force fully ready for combat with the United States and its allies.

Kim made the pledge saying North Korea faces "a grave threat" because of what he called "the reckless expansion" of a U.S.-led regional military bloc that is now developing into a nuclear-based one.

Last week, North Korea also resumed launches of trash-carrying balloons toward South Korea.

Since 2022, North Korea has significantly accelerated its weapons testing activities in a bid to perfect its capabilities to launch strikes on the U.S. and South Korea.

The U.S. and South Korea have responded by expanding military drills that North Korea calls invasion rehearsals.

Prior to Thursday, North Korea this year had launched nearly 40 ballistic missiles in eight separate days of testing, according to the South's Ministry of National Defense.

Pyongyang last fired two ballistic missiles, one of them a short-range variant, off its eastern coast on July 1.

The second, unidentified missile flew about 75 miles eastward in an abnormal flight trajectory before the South Korean military lost track of it, the joint chiefs said at the time.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

### Note to readers

Because of the Korean holiday of Chuseok, delivery of Monday and Tuesday's editions of Stars and Stripes will be delayed by a day for readers in South Korea.

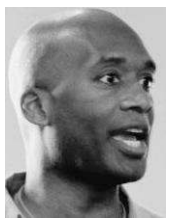
PACIFIC

# I Corps leader nominated to command USFK

By Joseph Ditzler
*Stars and Stripes*

The Pentagon on Thursday named Army Lt. Gen. Xavier Brunson as the nominee to command U.S. Forces Korea, a triple-hatted position that includes leading the Combined Forces and United Nations commands.

President Joe Biden nominated Brunson, commander of I Corps at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., to succeed Gen. Paul LaCamera, who took command on the Korean Peninsula in July 2021, according to a statement from Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. If approved by the Senate, Brunson would also pin on the fourth star of a full general.


Brunson

Previously, Brunson has led the 7th Infantry Division and served as deputy commander for operations of the 10th Mountain Division. For a year, he was XVIII Airborne Corps chief of staff for Operation Inherent Resolve, the decade-old fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, according to the General Officer Management Office.

As USFK commander, he would lead the approximately 28,500 U.S. troops in South Korea. The head of the Combined Forces Command oversees the U.S. and South Korean headquarters charged with deterring or combating aggression from North Korea. U.N. Command is the 18-nation force that maintains peace and upholds the armistice that ended hostilities during the Korean War in 1953.

The two sides in that conflict technically remain at war.

Brunson is the eldest of three sons whose father, Albert Brunson, a retired Army sergeant major, served in the Vietnam War, according to a profile produced by Lewis-McChord on Feb. 16, 2022.

According to the Army and his LinkedIn page, Brunson is a 1990 graduate of Hampton University in Virginia, a historically Black, private college, where he joined the Omega Psi Phi fraternity, lettered in football and was commissioned as a second lieutenant through the ROTC. He holds a master's degree in national security and strategy from the Army War College.

"All I've ever wanted was to be a Soldier," Brunson said in the Army profile. "I've never aspired to be a doctor, a lawyer or an educator. I just wanted to be a Soldier, because that's what I saw in my dad. Going into the Army was a natural continuation for me after being with a group of men (Omega Psi Phi) that I really wanted to be around every day."

Brunson's younger twin brothers, LaHavie and Tavi Brunson, also served. LaHavie Brunson was a staff officer at Headquarters, Department of the Army, and Tavi Brunson commanded the 528th Sustainment Brigade until July 2023, but now describes himself as "professional citizen," according to the brothers' LinkedIn profiles.

Luis Garcia/Stars and Stripes

**Soldiers line up for food Thursday outside the new Qdoba restaurant at Camp Humphreys, South Korea.**

# Qdoba offers Mexican-style food option at Humphreys

By David Choi
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — Sgt. Armando Estrada, a utilities equipment repairer assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division, was the first customer at the grand opening Thursday of one of two Qdoba restaurants at this Army base.

Estrada, who purchased a drink and a burrito bowl, was one of about a dozen customers who lined up shortly before the Qdoba inside the Family Mini Mall at Humphreys opened for business.

"I wanted to be one of the first, but I didn't think I was going to be the first person to walk up to it," Estrada said.

Estrada said he was excited about Qdoba's opening on base due to the dearth of Mexican food options in Pyeongtaek city, about 40 miles south of Seoul.

"I'm Mexican myself and although it's not 100% Mexican food, it's something that's closest to what I can get from home," he said. "I'm excited because I've been to a few places off base and I haven't seen many Mexican restaurants."

Bringing Qdoba to Humphreys is part of an initiative by the Army and Air Force Exchange Service to provide healthier food options for service members and their families, two AAFES officials said at the restaurant opening. Qdoba offers pulled pork tacos and other items with less than 600 calories and has vegetarian and vegan options.

An estimated 68% of active-duty troops are overweight or obese, according to an October report published by the American Security Project, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization. The report also determined that obesity rates among active-duty service members had more than doubled from 2012 to 2022.

A second Qdoba restaurant at Humphreys opens Friday at the Sentry Food Court, Air Force Col. Jason Beck, the AAFES Pacific Region commander, said Thursday. A fast-casual style eatery, Qdoba serves Mexican-inspired food at more than 740 locations in the United States and Canada.

Twenty employees have been hired to operate the two restaurants, AAFES general manager George McNamara said Thursday.

Qdoba first appeared in the Pacific region last month with a franchise at Kadena Air Base and Camp Foster on Okinawa, Japan, according to an AAFES news release Aug. 12. Qdoba restaurants are also at several stateside military bases, such as Fort Carson, Colo., and Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

Qdoba chief growth officer Jeremy Vitaro said perishable ingredients are locally sourced.

# Yokota set to be first Pacific base to roll out flu vaccines this season

By Kelly Agee
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Medical professionals at this airlift hub in western Tokyo are prepping to administer flu shots ahead of other Indo-Pacific bases as flu season approaches.

"We want to safeguard our community against the spread of infectious diseases; increasing vaccination rates will lead to a reduction in the number of flu cases," Dr. (Capt.) Lusine Zakharian, 374th Medical Group medical director of allergy and immunizations, said in an email from the wing public affairs office Sept. 4.

The flu season typically stretches from December to March, but struck early in Japan last year, the Japan Times reported in September 2023.

This year, influenza is already quickly spreading across the country, according to Sept. 4-10 data from the Japan Ministry of Health. Some schools closed to prevent further spread.

Yokota is planning shot lines for flu vaccinations on Sept. 19 and 26, and Oct. 1 and 3, said Master Sgt. Nathaniel Allen, a spokesman for the 374th Airlift Wing.

The base planned to start Tuesday but had estimated the vaccine arrival date based on last year's date and so was off by one week, he said.

Active-duty personnel, Tricare beneficiaries, Defense Department civilians, including schoolteachers, their families and contractors required to get vaccines, such as Child Development Center Employees, and other eligible beneficiaries may receive their shots at the walk-in lines.

The vaccine will be available at the medical group immunizations clinic for anyone who can't make the lines, Zakharian said. Demand will dictate whether the clinic will provide walk-in or appointment-based service, she said.

The vaccines are sourced from the United States, Zakharian said. They are the same ones offered in the U.S. and are FDA approved.

Most U.S. bases in the Indo-Pacific won't start vaccinating until October.

"We usually receive them near the end of September and start vaccinating in early October," said Capt. Casey Bell, a spokesperson for Andersen Air Force Base, Guam.

Active-duty personnel will have priority, followed by all other beneficiaries, Bell said. However, contractors must obtain their flu shots from an outside facility. School employees and other beneficiaries may expect their shots in mid- to late October.

Osan Air Base in South Korea also expects to administer the shots next month, Maj. Kippun Sumner, spokesman for the 51st Fighter Wing, said Friday.

U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa won't receive the shots till mid-October, Trey Savitz, a hospital spokesman said Thursday.

Yokosuka Naval Hospital, south of Tokyo, will distribute the vaccine to the base and tenant commands starting Oct. 24, hospital spokesman Daniel Taylor said.

PACIFIC

# US, Italian ships drill in South China Sea

By Alex Wilson
*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. Navy drilled alongside Italian warships this week in the South China Sea, the third time the two allies have worked together in the Indo-Pacific this year, the service announced Thursday

An Australian P-8 Poseidon aircraft also took part in the four-day maneuvers, according to the Navy.

The unnamed drill ran Sunday through Wednesday and included the U.S. guided-missile destroyer USS Russell, an Australian P-8A Poseidon aircraft and the Italian navy's aircraft carrier ITS Cavour, frigate ITS Alpino and multipurpose combat ship ITS Raimondo Montecuccoli, according to a U.S. 7th Fleet news release Thursday.

The Cavour and Alpino on Aug. 9 joined the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln for a drill somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, a first for the U.S. and Italian navies, although the two regularly train together elsewhere in the world.

The two ships drilled together again Aug. 18 through 21 on similar scenarios with the guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey in the Philippine Sea, according to an Aug. 22 release from 7th Fleet.

"These multilateral exercises are a concrete demonstration of the advances we are making alongside our allies and partners in the region," 7th Fleet commander Vice Adm. Fred Kacher said in the Thursday release. "They present dynamic opportunities to hone our skills in one of the most complex maritime regions in the world."

The South China Sea is almost entirely claimed by China, which sometimes aggressively asserts its claims over those of other nations in the region, including the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Besides an international hotspot, it is also a critical world trade route.

In 2023, among other commerce, 10 billion barrels of petroleum and petroleum products and 6.7 trillion cubic feet of liquefied natural gas passed through the South China Sea, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

This week's exercise was meant to improve cooperation and readiness between the three countries and "reassure regional allies and partners of continued U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," 7th Fleet spokeswoman Lt. Cmdr. Jamie Moroney told Stars and Stripes by email Thursday.

She did not provide a precise location for the exercise other than the South China Sea.

A spokesperson for the Italian carrier strike group did not immediately respond to Stars and Stripes' email request Thursday afternoon.

During the exercise, the ships and aircraft practiced fixed-wing air defense, anti-submarine warfare, general tactics, surface warfare and command and control scenarios, according to the news release. They also exchanged subject matter experts between the ships.

"This multilateral exercise has been another great opportunity to highlight the professionalism of our crews and the ability to join, train and be ready to operate together, projecting our forces for months, away from home," Rear Adm. Giancarlo Ciappina, the Italian carrier strike group commander, said in the release.

The Italian strike group is amid an "operational campaign in the region," Ciappina said in the Aug. 22 news release.

The campaign goals are to regularly train with allies while "ensuring security at sea and promoting economic prosperity through the Indo-Pacific region," he said.

The U.S. and its European allies have steadily pivoted manpower, resources and attention to the Indo-Pacific over the past decade, primarily due to concerns over China, North Korea and Russia.

# Australian official calls for Navy SEALs to work, train Down Under

By Seth Robson
*Stars and Stripes*

A former Australian Special Air Service officer now serving in his country's parliament wants U.S. Navy SEALs to train local troops to dive from nuclear-powered submarines Down Under.

A detachment of SEALs should join Submarine Rotational Force-West, scheduled to begin operations at HMAS Sterling, near Perth, in 2027, Andrew Hastie, the Liberal Party shadow defense minister, told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday.

The former SAS troop commander and Afghanistan war veteran trained to dive from Australian conventional submarines. He pitched his proposal in an opinion piece published Wednesday in The Australian newspaper.

Hastie, a House of Representative member elected from a district near HMAS Stirling, recently toured the USS Hawaii at the naval base. The Virginia-class fast-attack submarine arrived Aug. 26 for several weeks of maintenance by American and Australian technicians.

The visit is designed to build local skills ahead of the deployment in 2027 of one British and four U.S. nuclear-powered boats to the naval base under the 2021 AUKUS defense pact, named for members Australia, United Kingdom and the United States.

As part of the pact the U.S. has pledged to arm Australia with at least three Virginia-class submarines starting in 2032, before Australia can build as many as five new nuclear-powered AUKUS vessels. Hastie checked out bunks on the Hawaii that can house a platoon of SEALs with space for their weapons and gear. He also saw the lockout chamber that allows divers to emerge from the vessel underwater, he said.

"I have a large and growing navy presence in my district," Hastie said. "I am expecting to have American kids in our schools."

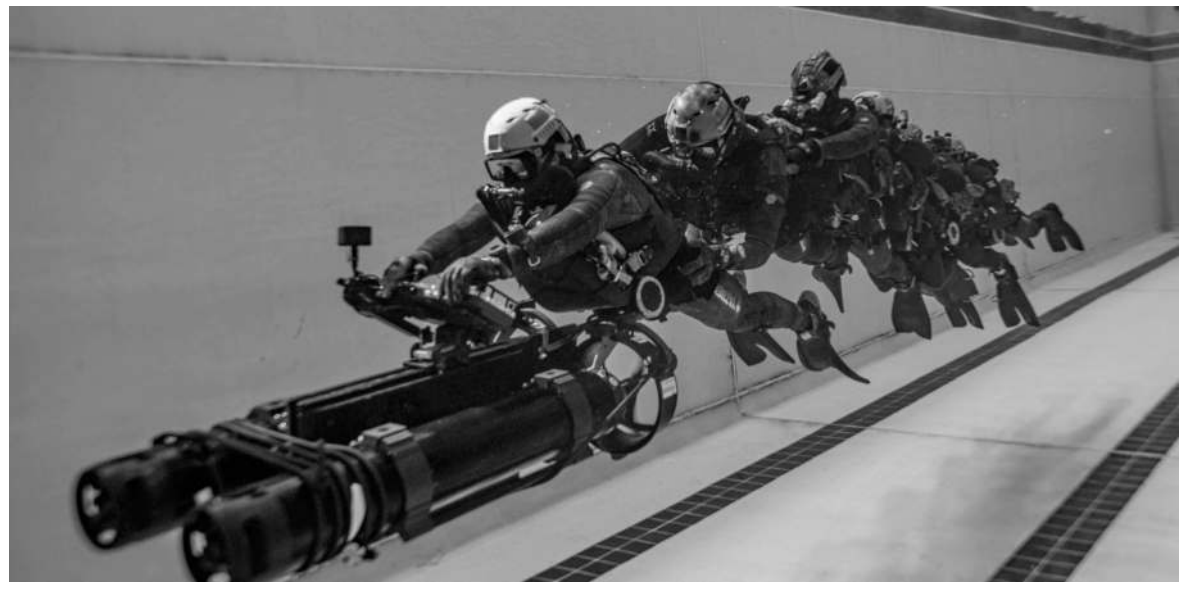
The SEALs could train on the same world-class facilities as Australia's Special Air Service Regiment at Campbell Barracks, Perth, he said.

The proposal has the backing of former SAS Regiment commander Duncan Lewis who was quoted in The Australian on Wednesday as saying: "I strongly support what Andrew's saying."

Nuclear-powered submarines should come to Australia with complete capabilities, Lewis said.

"And one of those capabilities is the deployment of special forces from the submarines," he said. "In the U.S. context, that is done by U.S. Navy SEALs."

The Naval Special Warfare Center in San Diego referred questions about a potential Navy SEAL mission in Australia to the Naval Special Warfare Command, which did not immediately respond to emailed questions Thursday.



Trey Hutcheson/U.S. Navy

**An Australian lawmaker wants Navy SEALs to train local troops to dive from nuclear-powered submarines.**

Navy Cmdr. Matthew Comer, a spokesman for U.S. Indo-Pacific command, said by email Thursday that AUKUS focuses only on capabilities development, such as the plan for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines.

Outside AUKUS, the U.S. conducts "high-end defense cooperation with Australia to include special operations," he said.

The Australian navy has diving specialists, but SAS divers are likely to work from the nuclear-powered submarines for covert patrol insertion and extraction, former Australian assistant defense secretary Ross Babbage wrote in an email to Stars and Stripes Wednesday.

"Training with U.S. Navy SEALs to make the most of the capability provided by Australia's new nuclear-powered submarines will be a valuable extension of the existing covert capabilities held by the SAS," he said.

The SAS and its forebearers have experience operating from conventional submarines dating back to World War II, said Carlyle Thayer, an emeritus professor at the University of New South Wales and a lecturer at the Australian Defence Force Academy.

"SAS troopers can be launched and recovered from Australia's Collins-class (diesel-electric) submarines," he said, by email Thursday. "However, the Collins-class submarine can only launch while surfaced and its range is limited."

# Australia strips medals from commanders over war crime allegations

*Associated Press*

MELBOURNE, Australia — Several serving and former Australian military commanders have been stripped of medals over allegations of war crimes committed during the Afghanistan war, Defense Minister Richard Marles said Thursday.

Holding commanders to account for alleged misconduct of Australian special forces between 2005 and 2016 was recommended by Maj. Gen. Paul Brereton in his war crime investigation.

Brereton found that around 25 Australian Special Air Service Regiment and Commando Regiment troops were involved in the unlawful killings of 39 Afghans.

Marles wrote to commanders of those troops about medals they had received for their service during the periods war crimes allegedly occurred.

He did not specify to Parliament how many he had written to or identify their ranks, citing privacy concerns.

MILITARY

# WWII vets join Dutch royalty to fete liberation

## Festival marks 80 years since end of Nazi occupation in Netherlands

PHOTOS BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

**Queen Maxima of the Netherlands escorts World War II veteran Kenneth Thayer, 99, into a ceremony in Mesch, Netherlands, on Thursday, to mark 80 years since the beginning of the country's liberation.**

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
*Stars and Stripes*

MESCH, Netherlands — American World War II veterans and U.S. soldiers now serving joined the king and queen of the Netherlands on Thursday to mark 80 years since the start of the country's liberation from Nazi occupation.

On Sept. 12, 1944, soldiers with the Army National Guard's 30th Infantry Division crossed the Dutch-Belgian border into Mesch, making it the first Dutch village to be liberated by Allied forces.

Kenneth Thayer, 99, a former private first class who was assigned to the unit, drove into Thursday's commemoration ceremony on a vintage military vehicle next to King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima.

"Today, 80 years later, we not only reflect on the event of that time, but also on the fact that we have been living in a free and democratic country since Sept. 12, (1944)," Jos Coumans, the chairman of the Netherlands' Remembrance Committee, said while announcing Thayer's entrance.

The 30th Infantry Division, known as Old Hickory, entered the Netherlands with a goal to advance into German-occupied territory as part of the broader Allied push following the invasion of Normandy about three months earlier.

Shortly afterward, U.S. troops entered Maastricht, the first Dutch city to be liberated. The entire country was freed by May 5, 1945.

U.S. Army Europe and Africa Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Michael Wickman, who attended the commemoration, said it was important to remember the efforts made eight decades ago.

"As long as we keep acknowledging and recognizing the challenges that we faced through oppression and tyranny, I think it helps us into the future to remember the things we did in the past, and hopefully it provides us with inspiration when we face challenges like this again, such as what we're seeing between Russia and Ukraine," Wickman said.

Citizens lined the streets of Mesch and clapped as the veterans made their way from the ceremony to a festival ground, where reenactors gathered and 1940s music was played amid plenty of American flags.

"The feeling I get coming back here is so great. The people have been so wonderful everywhere I go," said Dominick Critelli, a former U.S. Army staff sergeant with the 95th Infantry Division who served in the war. "They respect you and do anything they can for you. And I'm so happy to see them. I love them, all of them."

**World War II reenactors at a ceremony in Mesch, Netherlands.**

Thursday marked the beginning of more than a week of 80th anniversary celebrations in the Netherlands. It follows commemorations of D-Day and the liberation of Belgium, among other events of 1944.

Thousands of Americans died freeing the Netherlands, including about 4,000 in Operation Market Garden, a large-scale Allied operation aimed at securing key bridges to allow a rapid advance into Germany's industrial heartland, the Ruhr. The operation ultimately failed in its objectives.

The Army's 101st Airborne Division participated in Market Garden, and about 100 of its soldiers traveled from Fort Campbell, Ky., to the Netherlands to participate in commemorative activities.

"It means a lot to see what the soldiers before us did. It sets a high bar to live up to," said division spokesman Lt. Col. Martin Meiners. "Fortunately, right now we're not deployed to any combat situation, but if we do, we can draw on that history and that experience and that pride that comes with that eagle patch."

Hundreds of schoolchildren filled the festival grounds following the official speeches.

"Educating the kids about the war is the most important thing," said Jan-Thijs Koppen, leader of a reenactment group that was dressed up as soldiers from the 30th Infantry Division. "We want to keep the stories of the veterans alive because history matters."

# Advocates, volunteers pack supplies for new Fort Cavazos families

BY ROSE L. THAYER
*Stars and Stripes*

BUDA, Texas — Roughly two dozen workers from a food distribution company spent Wednesday morning packing 240 boxes filled with dry goods, toiletries and household supplies to help newly arrived military families at Fort Cavazos.

The pantry restock boxes were part of a $250,000 donation from the national corporation US Foods to the Military Family Advisory Network, a nonprofit supporting military families, particularly when it comes to making certain that troops can get enough food to feed their families.

"[These boxes] help them get ahead and realize they are not in this alone," Shannon Razsadin, CEO of MFAN, told the group of workers who volunteered their morning to pack the boxes full of supplies including cereal, peanut butter, soap and MFAN-branded playing cards.

With only a handful of the volunteers identifying as connected to the military in some way, Razsadin used the event to share the experiences of service members. Most people know about the contributions made by troops but might not always know the challenges that they face because pride can stop service members from asking for help, she said.

Each year about 400,000 military families move from one duty station to another, which MFAN research has found can put a strain on finances.

In its latest report released earlier this year, MFAN found most families incur between $500 and $1,000 in expenses during a military move that are not reimbursed.

Duty station moves happen on average every 2½ years.

"It's one thing to say we've donated, it's another to understand the individuals, the military service members and families, who we're impacting in our community," said Taylor McIntyre, area president for US Foods. "It's so important to see where the need is and how we are contributing against it."

The boxes, which contain about $150 worth of products, are available to any family who has arrived at Fort Cavazos in the last three months and will be distributed through 12 partner organizations, including Army Community Service, Armed Services YMCA and the American Red Cross, as well as in the community offices of some on-base housing neighborhoods.

Also included in the box is a survey regarding the family's ability to purchase food based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's short-form food security scale. Those who meet certain criteria can qualify to receive $125 worth of groceries for free for three months through MFAN's partnership with Instacart, a grocery delivery company.

MFAN's research found more than 25% of active-duty military families have not been able to buy enough food for their family. More than half of those respondents also reported moving duty stations within the previous two years.

Once the volunteers from US Foods finished packing the boxes Wednesday, the company planned to drive the supplies 95 miles north to Fort Cavazos.

US Foods and MFAN planned the volunteer event to occur on the 23rd anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which has since become a federally recognized day of service.

The pantry restock program is available only at Fort Cavazos, but Razsadin said there are plans to expand it based on where the organization identifies the greatest need. For more information, go to www.mfan.org.

MILITARY

# Olympics: Hoover plans to raise bar for LA Games

FROM PAGE 1

itary Academy on July 2, 1979, Hoover described himself as a "back-of-the-class cadet." He left West Point as a military policeman before shifting to explosive ordnance disposal in the Army and National Guard. He worked in that role during Operation Desert Storm in Iraq.

He later deployed as commander of the Joint Sustainment Command in Kandahar, Afghanistan, from 2009 to 2010. His last assignment was as the deputy commander of the U.S. Northern Command at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., which is now a Space Force installation.

On the civilian side, Hoover served in various roles at the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Homeland Security Department during the George W. Bush administration.

Happily retired, Hoover settled into mentoring at the Army War College. But when he got a call "out of the blue" about the LA28 job, he hopped on the opportunity.

"What better way to come back and capstone nearly 40 years in uniform than do this?" said Hoover, who began the job June 10. "To unite the world, unite the nation, unite LA through sport and do it at a time when I think the nation and the world and LA and all of us could use some uniting."

Hoover has had brushes with the Olympics for decades.

The 63-year-old fondly recalled watching 1980's Miracle on Ice as a plebe at West Point. The hockey semifinal in which the Americans upset the heavily favored Soviet Union squad at Lake Placid, N.Y., was the first time he and his fellow freshmen were allowed in the dayroom with TV privileges.

He then worked in EOD support for the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake City.

He likened the difference between his time at the Winter Games and taking over as CEO of the Summer Games as the change between serving as a captain in Desert Storm in 1990-91 and deploying as a brigadier general during the surge in Afghanistan 18 years later.

"As I think back on Salt Lake City, I was that captain at a very tactical level, and now I'm at the very senior, strategic, operational level of planning and thinking and delivering what'll be the best Games ever," Hoover said.

A soccer player in his youth who got into rugby later in life, Hoover and the rest of the LA28 organization spent much of the Summer Games in Paris as part of an International Olympic Committee observation program for future Games hosts.

Meanwhile, Hoover followed active-duty soldiers and veterans who competed in Paris closely. He got emotional when discussing the performances of Paralympians Army Sgt. 1st Class Elizabeth Marks, Marine veterans Dennis Connors and Jorge Salazar, and Army veterans Bobby Body and Jason Tabansky, among others.

Hoover said he carries the names of the five soldiers under his command in Afghanistan who were killed. He also recalled the shooting at the Texas base now called Fort Cavazos in 2009 that left 13 dead. He was stationed there at the time.

"I carry all that with me, probably a little PTSD, and I do cheer a little louder for the veterans on the field of play out of respect for what they did for all of us," Hoover said.

With the Paris Paralympic Games ending last weekend, the Olympics community turns its attention first to Milano Cortina, Italy, for the 2026 Winter Games and then to Los Angeles.

Hoover said Los Angeles has a tough act to follow with Paris. He acknowledged Southern California can't re-create the iconic venues that the City of Light could, with beach volleyball competition in front of the Eiffel Tower.

Yet the U.S. group has plans to make sure the Games not only equal the majesty of Paris but surpass it in a Hollywood sort of way.

"We intend to raise the bar again so that when Brisbane '32 looks back and people are going to say what they were saying to us. 'LA28 has raised the bar. What are you guys going to do?'" Hoover said.

LANCE POUNDS/U.S. Army

**From left, then-Lt. Gen. Reynold Hoover, U.S. Northern Command deputy commander, Maj. Justin Douglas and Sgt. Maj. Brad Anderson review a digital X-ray of a simulated suspicious device at a 2018 explosive ordnance disposal competition at Fort Carson, Colo.**

# Bills aim to ease 'difficult problems' for disabled vets

BY LINDA F. HERSEY
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — More than a dozen bills for improving veterans services were introduced Wednesday to House lawmakers in a series of brief hearings, from covering the cost of prosthetics for amputees who play sports to helping ensure veterans in crisis can access mental health care close to home.

"Each of these bills would attempt to improve the delivery of health care to the men and women who have served. These bills include creative solutions that would seek to address difficult problems," said Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, R-Iowa, the chairwoman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee's subpanel on health.

The subpanel heard testimony from lawmakers sponsoring the bills and veterans groups supporting the legislation. Several pieces of legislation focused on providing unconventional resources and assistance that are not part of traditional medical care at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Veterans Supporting Prosthetics Opportunities and Recreational Therapy Act would provide coverage for prosthetics and other adaptive equipment that veterans who are amputees use to participate in sports and other recreational activities.

The new legislation would recognize prosthetic devices and other adaptive equipment for sports and recreational use as medically necessary, said Miller-Meeks, the bill's sponsor.

Though the VA provides equipment and services to disabled veterans, the prosthetics must be deemed medically necessary.

Rules now potentially limit VA approval for the equipment when it is used for athletics and recreational activities, said Clark Pennington, chief operating officer of the Independence Fund, which helps provide mobility and adaptive technologies to veterans.

"This legislation will ensure veterans seeking to enjoy and benefit from the physical and psychological aspects of recreational activities will now be guaranteed access to the prosthetics they need to thrive," he said.

The Service Dogs Assisting Veterans Act, also known as the SAVES Act, is another piece of legislation that would seek to enhance the life of veterans with disabilities and help them to live independently.

The bill would authorize the VA for the first time to award grants to nonprofit organizations to provide service dogs to eligible veterans with traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health conditions.

Nonprofit organizations that train and offer service dogs to veterans with mental health conditions now exclusively depend on donations to fund operations, supporters said.

Rep. Morgan Luttrell, R-Texas, a former Navy SEAL, introduced the bill and said VA funding would decrease the time that veterans seeking a service dog must wait to receive one.

The SAVES Act would allow the VA to subsidize the costs to train and certify service dogs to help veterans suffering with mental health issues, according to the nonprofit K9s for Warriors

A critical tool for screening suicide risks among veterans would be reauthorized under the Sergeant Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Act, which provides grants to non-VA, community-based organizations.

The program would continue under legislation titled No Wrong Door for Veterans. Non-VA organizations would receive funds to screen veterans for mental health and brain injuries and disorders, Miller-Meeks said.

# Reset: West African effort coincides with series of coups that limited US access elsewhere

FROM PAGE 1

While Langley didn't detail what the recalibrated mission in West Africa could look like, an AFRICOM team has been assembled to chart the way forward.

The Wall Street Journal on Wednesday reported that a U.S. Special Forces team is already operating in Benin's capital, Cotonou, to advise troops there.

The newspaper also reported the U.S. is spending $4 million to refurbish taxiways and aircraft to support contracted helicopter and medic teams placed in Benin to assist with the evacuation of local forces wounded in battle. Green Berets also have been placed in Ivory Coast, where contracted surveillance pilots are providing intelligence support, the Journal said.

The emphasis on partnering with Benin and Ivory Coast coincides with a series of coups in other countries in the region, such as Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. The coups require AFRICOM to cease direct military cooperation under U.S. law.

Still, Langley said lines of communication with coup leaders will remain open while higher U.S. command authorities determine the "breadth and depth" of the relationship going forward.

Mixed in with the upheaval brought on by terrorist groups is Russia's increasing influence on the continent.

Russian government and paramilitary troops have established a presence in numerous countries, including Mali and more recently Niger.

"Russia has been destabilizing, from the Central Africa Republic all the way into Libya and across the Sahel," Langley said.

NATION

# Back to the swing states for Harris, Trump

## Vice president in NC, former president in Ariz. after debate, 9/11 commemoration events

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump are making a beeline for swing states that they hope to flip in their favor this year, both of them trying to expand their narrow paths to victory in a closely fought presidential campaign.

Harris has her sights set on North Carolina, where she scheduled rallies in Charlotte and Greensboro on Thursday, her first political events after she buoyed supporters with her commanding performance in Tuesday's debate.

Trump is heading west to Tucson, Ariz., as he looks to stabilize his campaign, which continues to struggle to recalibrate nearly two months after Harris replaced President Joe Biden at the top of the Democratic ticket. Although Harris' team said she's willing to do another debate, the Republican candidate has waffled.

"Are we going to do a rematch?" Trump said Wednesday. "I just don't know."

The candidates are barnstorming one day after they marked the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, a somber occasion that provided little respite from partisan politics in a high-speed campaign season.

At a fire station in Shanksville, Pa., close to where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed after passengers fought back against their hijackers, Trump posed for photos with children who wore campaign shirts. One of the shirts proclaimed former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Biden and Harris were "dumb and dumber and dumbest."

Biden and Harris visited the same fire station earlier in the day. Someone there offered Biden a red-white-and-blue baseball hat that said "Trump 2024," and suggested the president put it on to demonstrate his commitment to bipartisan unity. Biden briefly put it on and flashed a wide grin.

YUKI IWAMURA/AP

**From left, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., Democratic presidential nominee Vice President Kamala Harris, President Joe Biden, former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Republican presidential nominee former President Donald Trump and Republican vice presidential nominee Sen. JD Vance, R-Ohio, await the start of the 9/11 Memorial ceremony on the 23rd anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks, on Wednesday, in New York.**

Only a handful of battleground states will decide the outcome of the election.

Democrats haven't won North Carolina's electoral votes since 2008, when President Barack Obama was elected for the first time. However, Trump's 2020 margin of victory of 1.3 percentage points was his narrowest win of any state that year, and Democrats hope that North Carolina's growing and diversifying population will give them an edge this time.

Harris' campaign said Thursday's trip will be her ninth to the state this year, and recent polls show a tight race. More than two dozen combined campaign offices — supporting Harris and the rest of the party's candidates — have been opened, and popular Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper is one of her top surrogates.

Republicans have been confident about Trump's chances in the state, and the former president held rallies there in August.

Registered independents — known in North Carolina as unaffiliated — are the state's largest voting bloc and are usually key to determining outcomes in statewide elections. A state Supreme Court ruling this week affirming that Robert F. Kennedy Jr. must be removed from North Carolina ballots could bring additional votes Trump's way given Kennedy's endorsement.

The state's Republican Party has dismissed concerns that a poor showing by its gubernatorial nominee, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, could harm the electoral chances of other party candidates, including Trump.

Democratic nominee Josh Stein and his allies have hammered Robinson for months on the airwaves and social media for his past harsh comments on abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. Stein, the state attorney general, had a lead over Robinson in several recent polls of North Carolina voters.

Arizona is another state where the presidential race could be shaped, at least in part, by down-ballot races. Kari Lake, a prominent Republican election denier who lost her campaign for governor in 2020, is running for the U.S. Senate seat that's being vacated by Kyrsten Sinema.

Lake exemplifies the rightward shift of the state party in the Trump era. She's opposed by Democratic Rep. Ruben Gallego, who was leading in several recent polls, although the race was close in another.

Republicans have won Arizona in nearly every presidential election since World War II, but Biden eked out a narrow victory in 2020.

The rise of Arizona Democrats has been driven by the arrival of transplants from blue states and a political realignment that has seen suburban voters — particularly college-educated women — shift away from Republicans.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, Harris' running mate, held a rally in the state on Tuesday ahead of the debate, and the Democratic ticket campaigned together there last month.

Republicans still outnumber Democrats in Arizona, but a third of voters are independent. Ohio Sen. JD Vance, Trump's running mate, appeared last week in a heavily Republican area of metro Phoenix with Charlie Kirk, the founder of an influential conservative youth group.

Trump was last in Arizona two weeks ago for a news conference along the U.S.-Mexico border, where he drove one of his most effective attacks on Harris over the number of people crossing the border to seek asylum, followed by a rally at a former hockey arena in the Phoenix area.

# USPS deficiencies could disrupt voting, election officials warn

**BY JOHN HANNA AND CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY**
*Associated Press*

TOPEKA, Kan. — State and local election officials from across the country on Wednesday warned that problems with the nation's mail delivery system threaten to disenfranchise voters in the upcoming presidential election, telling the head of the U.S. Postal Service that it hasn't fixed persistent deficiencies.

In an alarming letter, the officials said that over the past year, including the just-concluded primary season, mailed ballots that were postmarked on time were received by local election offices days after the deadline to be counted. They also noted that properly addressed election mail was being returned to them as undeliverable, a problem that could automatically send voters to inactive status through no fault of their own, potentially creating chaos when those voters show up to cast a ballot.

The officials also said that repeated outreach to the Postal Service to resolve the issues had failed and that the widespread nature of the problems made it clear these were "not one-off mistakes or a problem with specific facilities. Instead, it demonstrates a pervasive lack of understanding and enforcement of USPS policies among its employees."

The letter to U.S. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy came from two groups that represent top election administrators in all 50 states. They told DeJoy, "We have not seen improvement or concerted efforts to remediate our concerns."

"We implore you to take immediate and tangible corrective action to address the ongoing performance issues with USPS election mail service," they added. "Failure to do so will risk limiting voter participation and trust in the election process."

The Postal Service on Wednesday reiterated DeJoy's assurances that it's well positioned to swiftly deliver election mail despite being in the midst of a network modernization that has caused some delivery hiccups. Mail is currently being delivered in 2.7 days on average, officials said, but the Postal Service is still urging voters not to procrastinate.

"We are ready to deliver. We were successful in 2020 delivering a historic volume of mail in ballots; also in 2022 and will do so again in November 2024," Adrienne Marshall, director of Election Mail and Government Services, said in a statement.

The two groups, the National Association of Secretaries of State and the National Association of State Election Directors, said local election officials "in nearly every state" are receiving timely postmarked ballots after Election Day and outside the three to five business days USPS claims as the standard for first-class mail.

The letter comes less than two weeks after DeJoy said in an interview that the Postal Service was ready to handle a flood of mail ballots expected as part of this November's presidential election and as former President Donald Trump continues to sow doubts about U.S. elections by falsely claiming he won in 2020.

That year, amid the global pandemic, election officials reported sending just over 69 million ballots in the mail, a substantial increase from four years earlier.

While it's likely that number will be smaller now, many voters have embraced mail voting and come to rely on it. And both Democrats and Republicans have launched efforts to push supporters to vote early, either in person or by mail to "bank" their votes before Election Day on Nov. 5.

NATION

# After hitting La., Francine weakens, still soaks South

By Jack Brook and Sara Cline
*Associated Press*

MORGAN CITY, La. — Francine weakened Thursday after striking Louisiana as a Category 2 hurricane that knocked out power to hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses, sent storm surge rushing into coastal communities and raised flood fears in New Orleans and beyond as drenching rains spread over the northern Gulf Coast.

New Orleans awoke to widespread power outages and debris-covered streets. Just before sunrise, streetlights on some blocks were working but large swaths of the city were without power. The roar of home generators was evident outside some houses.

Some 3 to 6 inches of rain were possible in parts of Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia and the Florida Panhandle, with up to 10 inches possible in some spots in parts of Alabama and Florida, forecasters said, warning of the potential threat of scattered flash flooding as farflung as Jackson, Miss.; Birmingham, Ala.; Memphis, Tenn.; and Atlanta.

Francine slammed the Louisiana coast Wednesday evening with 100 mph winds in coastal Terrebonne Parish, battering a fragile coastal region that hasn't fully recovered from a series of devastating hurricanes in 2020 and 2021. It then moved at a fast clip toward New Orleans, pounding the city with torrential rains.

In New Orleans, rushing water nearly enveloped a pickup truck in an underpass, trapping the driver inside. A man who lives nearby grabbed a hammer, waded into the waist-high water, smashed the window and pulled the driver out. It was all captured on live TV by a WDSU-TV news crew Wednesday night.

After guiding the man to shore, Miles Crawford said: "I just had to go in there [and] do it."

"I'm a nurse, so got to save lives, right?" Crawford, an emergency room nurse at University Medical Center, said seconds after the rescue. In an interview later outside his home, Crawford had a large bandage on his hand, cut in the rescue.

"I'm used to high-stress, high-level things on a daily basis," he said. "We deal with things like that all the time, so it was nothing out of the ordinary."

There were no immediate reports of deaths or injuries. TV news broadcasts from coastal communities showed waves from nearby lakes, rivers and Gulf waters thrashing sea walls. Water poured into city streets amid blinding downpours. Oak and cypress trees leaned in the high winds, and some utility poles swayed back and forth.

As the sun rose Thursday in Morgan City, about 30 miles from where the storm's center made landfall, Jeffrey Beadle, 67, emerged from the hotel room where he had sheltered for the night as the streets flooded and blasts of wind battered town.

Gerald Herbert/AP

**A Weather Channel journalist reports near a damaged building in the aftermath of Hurricane Francine, in Morgan City, La., on Thursday.**

Beadle left his home in low-lying Bayou Louis, about 10 miles outside town, on Wednesday afternoon as the rain picked up and left almost all his possessions there. He had lived there for 30 years without suffering any major damage but he was worried this time would be different because his home had been right in the hurricane's path. He had loaded his car and was preparing to return to check on his home.

"There's nobody over on that end I can call," he said. "I don't know what I am going to, bruh. Hope everything's good."

The storm was downgraded Thursday from a tropical storm to a tropical depression with maximum sustained winds of 35 mph as it churned north-northeast over Mississippi near 12 mph, the National Hurricane Center said. Francine was expected to continue weakening, becoming a post-tropical cyclone later in the day, and to slow down as it turns to the north over the next day, moving over central and northern Mississippi through early Friday.

# Firefighters in Calif. hope cool weather slows blazes

*Associated Press*

WRIGHTWOOD, Calif. — Firefighters battling three major wildfires in the mountains east of Los Angeles took advantage of cooler weather Wednesday as they slowly gained the upper hand, but not before dozens of homes were destroyed and thousands of people were forced to evacuate.

California is only now heading into the teeth of the wildfire season but already has seen nearly three times as much acreage burn than during all of 2023. The wildfires have threatened tens of thousands of homes and other structures across Southern California since they accelerated during a triple-digit heat wave over the weekend.

No deaths have been reported, but at least a dozen people, mainly firefighters, have been treated for injuries, mostly heat-related, authorities said.

In the small community of Wrightwood, about 90 minutes outside Los Angeles, authorities implored residents to flee the exploding Bridge Fire, which has burned more than a dozen homes in the area.

Resident Erin Arias said she was racing up the mountain when she got the order to leave and did, grabbing her passport and dog. On Wednesday, she and her husband doused water on the roof of their still-standing home. Their cat was missing, she said.

"It's absolutely scary," Arias said, looking at the burned embers of her neighbor's home. "We're really lucky."

The full extent of the damage caused by the fires remained unclear. The three blazes are:

■ The Airport Fire in Orange County, which has burned more than 35 square miles. The fire was 5% contained Wednesday night and was reportedly sparked by heavy equipment operating in the area. Orange County Fire Capt. Steve Concialdi said eight firefighters have been treated for injuries, mostly heat-related. One resident suffered smoke inhalation and another burns, he said. Several homes burned in El Cariso Village.

■ The Line Fire in the San Bernardino National Forest, which was 18% contained Wednesday and had charred 57 square miles. The blaze has injured three firefighters. Authorities said it was caused by arson in Highland. A suspect was arrested Tuesday.

■ The Bridge Fire east of Los Angeles, which grew tenfold in a day and has burned 78 square miles, torched at least 33 homes and six cabins and forced the evacuation of 10,000 people. The cause of the fire is not yet known. It remained zero percent contained Wednesday night.

Gov. Gavin Newsom sent National Guard troops in to help with evacuations, and the White House said President Joe Biden was monitoring the situation.

Gregory Bull/AP

**Members of Riverside County Cal Fire walk up a hillside while battling the Airport Fire on Wednesday, in El Cariso Village, Calif.**

# Weinstein indicted on new charges ahead of retrial

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — Disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein has been indicted on additional sex crimes charges ahead of his retrial in New York, Manhattan prosecutors said at a hearing Thursday.

The indictment will remain under seal until Weinstein's arraignment on the new charges, which is scheduled for Sept. 18.

Weinstein, 72, is recovering from emergency heart surgery Monday at a Manhattan hospital to remove fluid on his heart and lungs and was not at Thursday's hearing.

Prosecutors retrying Weinstein's overturned rape conviction disclosed last week that they had begun presenting to a grand jury evidence of up to three additional allegations against Weinstein, dating as far back as the mid-2000s.

They include alleged sexual assaults at the Tribeca Grand Hotel, now known as the Roxy Hotel, and in a Lower Manhattan residential building between late 2005 and mid-2006, and an alleged sexual assault at a Tribeca hotel in May 2016.

Because the indictment is under seal, it was not known whether the new charges involved some or all of the additional allegations.

Prosecutors had been seeking to retry Weinstein after New York's highest court, the Court of Appeals, overturned his 2020 conviction on rape and sexual assault charges earlier this year and ordered a new trial.

It remains to be seen whether the new charges will be included in the retrial, as prosecutors hope, or handled as a separate case by the court.

The new charges come after prosecutors in Britain announced last week that they would no longer pursue charges of indecent assault against Weinstein, who was the most prominent villain of the #MeToo movement in 2017 when women began going public with accounts of his behavior.

Weinstein, who co-founded the film and television production company Miramax, maintains that any sexual activity was consensual.

At Thursday's hearing, Judge Curtis Farber ruled that because of Weinstein's health concerns, he will be allowed to remain at Bellevue Hospital indefinitely instead of being moved back to the city's Rikers Island jail complex.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office had signaled for months that new charges were imminent against Weinstein, who was once one of the most powerful people in Hollywood, having produced films such as "Pulp Fiction."

Weinstein, who had been serving a 23-year sentence in New York when his conviction was quashed, was convicted in Los Angeles in 2022 of another rape.

His 16-year prison sentence in that case still stands, but his lawyers appealed in June, arguing he did not get a fair trial in Los Angeles.

NATION

# Harvard sees drop in Black enrollment

## Slight decline is first admitted since affirmative action ruling

By Michael Casey
*Associated Press*

BOSTON — There was a slight decline in the number of Black students in Harvard University's freshman class, the first admitted since a Supreme Court ruling struck down affirmative action in higher education.

The impact of the ruling is still coming into focus at selective universities around the country, with some reporting significant swings in the numbers of students of color and others seeing little change.

In a case sparked by challenges to admissions plans at Harvard and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the court's conservative majority last year barred colleges from considering race, leaving many searching for new ways to promote student diversity.

Data released Wednesday by Harvard showed 14% of incoming students identified as Black, a drop of 4% from the class before it. Latino students made up 16% of the freshman class, an increase of 2% while Asian-American numbers remained the same at 37%.

"We have worked very hard for many decades to ensure that students from every background come to Harvard and make a difference to their fellow classmates, the nation, and the world," William Fitzsimmons, dean of admissions and financial aid, said in a statement. "We will continue to fulfill our mission, even as we continue to follow the law with great care."

For students of color, drops in their numbers can dramatically affect the campus environment, said Jeannie Park, the co-founder and a board member of Coalition for a Diverse Harvard.

"Harvard must address why it fell short, especially compared to other colleges," Park said in a statement. "Practices such as reinstating test-optional applications and ending legacy and donor preferences — and much more — must be instituted asap."

Richard Kahlenberg, director of the American Identity Project at the Progressive Policy Institute, said he welcomed the preservation of "robust levels" of racial diversity and questioned how Harvard adapted its admissions practices.

"The million-dollar question is whether Harvard achieved racial diversity legally, by giving a boost to economically disadvantaged students of all races or by cheating and employing covert racial preferences," said Kahlenberg, who testified as an expert witness for the plaintiffs in the Harvard trial, Students for Fair Admissions.

The enrollment changes at Harvard mirror what has been seen at some other colleges, although the declines in the number of Black students have been sharper at some other schools.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology saw the percentage of Black students drop from 15% to 5% while Amherst College saw a decline from 11% to 3%. At Tufts University, the drop was closer to Harvard's data, falling from 7.3% to 4.7%.

UNC reported drops in enrollment among Black, Hispanic and Native American students in its incoming class. At Yale, the University of Virginia and Princeton, the change in the number of Black students year-over-year was less than a percentage point.

Many colleges did not share the demographics of applicants, making it impossible to know whether fewer students of color applied, or were admitted but chose not to attend.

Experts say the end of affirmative action is one of several factors that shaped thefreshman classes. Some colleges are changing standardized test requirements. And the federal government's botched rollout of a new financial aid form complicated decisions of students nationwide on where and whether to attend college.

CARLSBAD NATIONAL PARK SERVICE / AP

**After a bag of Cheetos was dropped off trail in the Big Room at Carlsbad Caverns National Park near Carlsbad, N.M., this summer, tiny microbes and insects fed on the contents, triggering growth of mold.**

# Small Cheetos bag has large impact on cavern creatures

*Associated Press*

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — A bag of Cheetos gets dropped and left on the floor. Seems inconsequential, right?

Hardly.

Rangers at Carlsbad Caverns National Park in southern New Mexico describe it as a "world-changing" event for the tiny microbes and insects that call this specialized subterranean environment home. The bag could have been there a day or two or maybe just hours, but those salty morsels of processed corn made soft by thick humidity triggered the growth of mold on the cavern floor and on nearby cave formations.

"To the ecosystem of the cave it had a huge impact," the park noted in a social media post, explaining that cave crickets, mites, spiders and flies soon organized to eat and disperse the foreign mess, essentially spreading the contamination.

Park guide Joseph Ward said the Cheetos spill could have been avoided because food is not permitted beyond the underground lunchroom.

The bright orange bag was spotted off trail by a ranger during one of the regular sweeps that park staff make through the Big Room, the largest single cave chamber by volume in North America, at the end of each day.

The Big Room is a popular spot at Carlsbad Caverns. It is a magical expanse filled with towering stalagmites, dainty stalactites and clusters of cave popcorn.

After the bag was discovered in July, cave specialists at the park settled on the best way to clean it up.

Most of the mess was scooped up, and a toothbrush was used to remove rings of mold and fungi that had spread to nearby cave formations. It was a 20-minute job.

# Share of foreign-born US residents highest since 1910, survey says

*Associated Press*

MIAMI — The percent of U.S. residents who were foreign-born last year grew to its highest level in more than a century, according to figures released Thursday from the most comprehensive survey of American life.

The share of people born outside the United States increased in 2023 to 14.3% from 13.9% in 2022, according to estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual American Community Survey, which tracks commuting times, internet access, family life, income, education levels, disabilities, military service, and employment, among other topics.

International migrants have become a primary driver of population growth this decade, increasing their share of the overall population as fewer children are being born in the U.S. compared to years past.

The rate of the foreign-born population in the United States hasn't been this high since 1910 when it was 14.7%, driven by waves of people emigrating in search of a better life around the end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th century.

"We knew that here you can have savings, live well. Here you can have normal services such as water and electricity," said Luciana Bracho, who moved legally to Miami from Venezuela as part of a humanitarian parole program with her boyfriend, parents and brother in April 2023.

**"Here you can have normal services such as water and electricity."**

**Luciana Bracho**
immigratn from Venezuela

In 2023, international migrants accounted for more than two-thirds of the population growth in the United States, and so far this decade they have made up almost three-quarters of U.S. growth.

The growth of people born outside the U.S. appears to have been driven by people coming from Latin America, whose share of the foreign-born population increased year-over-year to 51.2% from 50.3%, according to the estimates.

Latin America was the only world region to experience an increase among U.S. residents born in another country, as the share of foreign-born residents from Europe and Asia dropped slightly.

Among the states with the largest year-over-year bumps in the foreign-born population was Delaware, going to 11.2% from 9.9%; Georgia, to 11.6% from 10.7%; and New Mexico, to 10.2% from 9.3% The share of the foreign-born population dropped slightly in the District of Columbia, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota and Oregon.

The Census Bureau figures don't distinguish whether people are in the United States legally or illegally.

NATION

# Tech billionaire quickly takes 1st private spacewalk

By Marcia Dunn
*Associated Press*

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A tech billionaire performed the first private spacewalk hundreds of miles above Earth on Thursday, a high-risk endeavor reserved for professional astronauts — until now.

Tech entrepreneur Jared Isaacman teamed up with SpaceX to test the company's brand new spacesuits on his chartered flight. The daring feat also saw SpaceX engineer Sarah Gillis going out once Isaacman was safely back inside.

This spacewalk was simple and quick — less than two hours — compared with the drawn-out affairs conducted by NASA. Astronauts at the International Space Station often need to move across the sprawling complex for repairs, always traveling in pairs and lugging gear. Station spacewalks can last seven to eight hours.

Isaacman emerged first from the hatch, joining a small elite group of spacewalkers who until now had included only professional astronauts from a dozen countries.

"Back at home, we all have a lot of work to do. But from here, it sure looks like a perfect world," Isaacman said as the capsule soared above the South Pacific. Cameras on board caught his silhouette, waist high at the hatch, with the blue Earth beneath.

The commercial spacewalk was the main focus of the five-day flight financed by Isaacman and Elon Musk's company, and the culmination of years of development geared toward settling Mars and other planets.

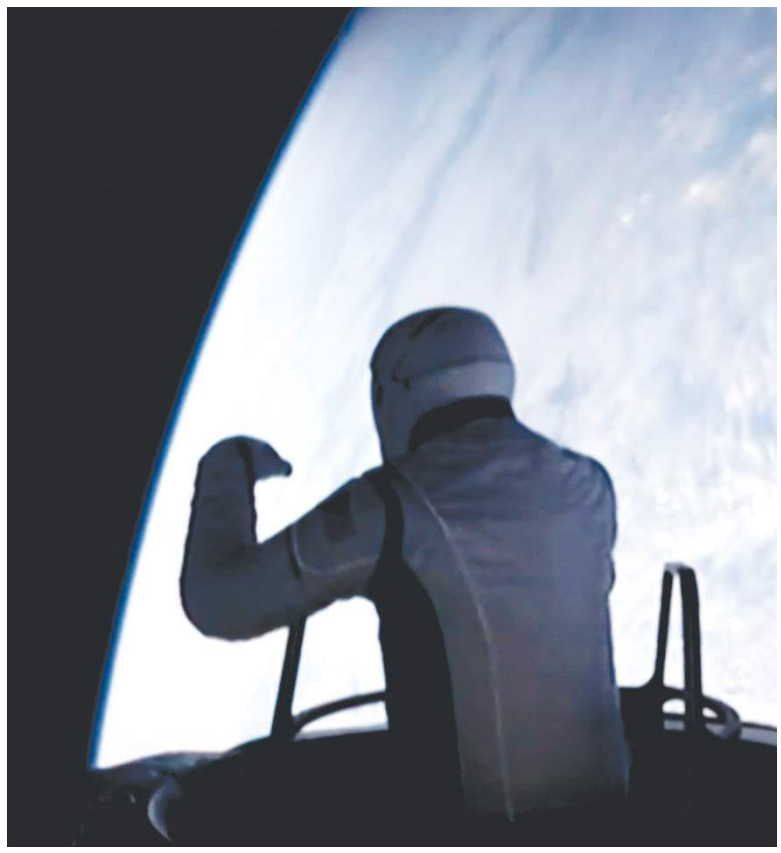
All four on board donned the new spacewalking suits to protect themselves from the harsh vacuum. They launched on Tuesday from Florida, rocketing farther from Earth than anyone since NASA's moonwalkers. The orbit was reduced by half — to 460 miles — for the spacewalk.

This first spacewalking test involved more stretching than walking. Isaacman kept a hand or foot attached to it the whole time as he flexed his arms and legs to see how the spacesuit held up. The hatch sported a walker-like structure for extra support.

After roughly 10 minutes outside, Isaacman was replaced by SpaceX engineer Sarah Gillis to go through the same motions. Gillis bobbed up and down in weightlessness, no higher than her knees out of the capsule, as she twisted her arms and sent reports back to Mission Control.

Each had 12-foot tethers but did not unfurl them or dangle at the end unlike what happens at the space station, where astronauts routinely float out at a much lower orbit.

More and more wealthy passengers are plunking down huge sums for rides aboard private rockets to experience a few minutes of weightlessness. Others have spent tens of millions to stay in space for days or even weeks. Space experts and risk analysts say it's inevitable that some will seek the thrill of spacewalking, deemed one of the most dangerous parts of spaceflight after launch and reentry but also the most soul-stirring.



SpaceX/AP

**Tech billionaire Jared Isaacman led the start of the first private spacewalk Thursday.**

# Jobless aid claims rise slightly but remain low

*Associated Press*

Slightly more Americans filed for unemployment benefits last week, but layoffs remain at historically low levels despite two years of elevated interest rates.

Jobless claims rose by 2,000 to 230,000 for the week of Sept. 7, the Labor Department reported Thursday. That number matches the number of new filings that economists projected.

The four-week average of claims, which smooths out some of week-to-week volatility, ticked up by 500, to 230,750.

The total number of Americans collecting jobless benefits rose by a modest 5,000, remaining in the neighborhood of 1.85 million for the week of Aug. 31.

Weekly filings for unemployment benefits, considered a proxy for layoffs, remain low by historic standards, though they are up from earlier this year.

During the first four months of 2024, claims averaged a just 213,000 a week, but they started rising in May. They hit 250,000 in late July, adding to evidence that high interest rates were finally cooling a red-hot U.S. job market.

Employers added a modest 142,000 jobs in August, up from a paltry 89,000 in July.

# Assault case emerges as CIA shields extent of problem

*Associated Press*

LEESBURG, Va. — At an impromptu party in the office to celebrate his 50th birthday, a veteran CIA officer got drunk, reached up a colleague's skirt and forcibly kissed her in front of stunned coworkers, prosecutors alleged in the latest case of sexual misconduct to spill from the spy agency into a public court.

An Associated Press investigation found Donald Asquith's alleged assault last year happened just days after the CIA promised to crack down on sexual misconduct in its ranks — even as the agency has refused to disclose details on the extent of the problem. A recent 648-page internal watchdog report that found systemic shortcomings in the CIA's handling of such complaints was classified as "secret," shielded as a potential threat to national security.

"It is inconceivable that sexual misconduct could be considered a state secret," said Kevin Carroll, an attorney who represents several women in the agency who have made complaints.

The watchdog report followed an earlier AP investigation that found at least two dozen women in the CIA came forward to authorities and Congress with accounts of sexual assaults, unwanted touching and what they described as a campaign to silence them.

**Burns**

Many were emboldened by a CIA officer trainee who went to police in 2022 after the agency failed to take action against a colleague she accused of assaulting her with a scarf in a stairwell at CIA headquarters. Some of those women now say they have faced retaliation, including the victim of the stairwell attack, who was terminated less than six months after suing the agency.

"I believed in the institution implicitly and I also believed all of the things the agency said it was doing to rectify what I saw as an epidemic," said one of those women, who was not named because the AP does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual assault. "I realize now that was just lip service."

Asquith's case could prove even more embarrassing to the CIA given his lengthy clandestine service overseas and the brazenness of the alleged conduct. It also happened in June 2023, less than a month after CIA Director William Burns announced sweeping reforms intended to keep women safe, streamline claims and more quickly discipline offenders. "We must get this right," he said.

Asquith was charged in April in suburban Washington's Loudoun County, Va., with misdemeanor assault and battery following a monthslong sheriff's probe into the boozy party in an off-site CIA office attended by at least a dozen people.

His accuser, a CIA contractor, told authorities that she repeatedly rebuffed Asquith's advances but that he kept pulling closer, rubbing her leg without her consent and making a series of inappropriate sexual comments, as well as "grunting noises and thrusting motions."

Asquith then "placed his hand up her skirt to her thigh numerous times causing her skirt to lift up, possibly exposing her underwear," said court documents.

The woman told investigators she slapped Asquith's hand away and got up to leave, but that he intervened as she approached the door and asked for a "booby hug" before grabbing her with both hands around her back and rubbing his groin and chest on her. She said Asquith then "forcibly hugged her and kissed all over her face and mouth without her consent."

Asquith did not respond to repeated requests for comment. His lawyer, Jon Katz, hung up when called by the AP.

"CIA takes allegations of sexual assault and harassment extremely seriously," the agency said in a statement, adding that within days of the incident it restricted Asquith's contact with the alleged victim and he retired three months later.

Asquith's case comes amid a flurry of activity surrounding sexual misconduct accusations at the CIA, including ongoing state and federal criminal investigations into an undercover officer in Europe suspected of knowingly infecting at least three CIA colleagues with an incurable sexually transmitted disease. The agency has not explained why that officer remains overseas.

# WORLD

## Blinken, UK counterpart discuss Ukraine requests to use Western arms in Russia

*Associated Press*

WARSAW, Poland — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrapped up a three-nation, Ukraine-focused European tour in Poland on Thursday after hearing repeated appeals from Ukrainian officials to use Western-supplied weaponry for long-range strikes inside Russia.

Blinken traveled to Warsaw after spending a day in Kyiv with British Foreign Secretary David Lammy during which they pledged to bring the Ukrainian requests to their leaders.

President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer are to meet in the United States on Friday amid signs both Washington and London are growing more receptive to allowing the Ukrainians to use their arms to hit targets farther inside Russia than previously OK'd.

"As what Russia's doing has changed, as the battlefield has changed, we've adapted," Blinken said at a news conference in Warsaw.

Biden has allowed Ukraine to fire U.S.-provided missiles across the border into Russia in self-defense, but has largely limited the distance they can be fired.

POLICE OF THE DONETSK REGION/AP

**A police officer looks at a Red Cross vehicle that was destroyed in a Russian strike in Ukraine's Donetsk region on Thursday.**

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization issued a stark warning on Thursday about a potential health crisis in Ukraine as the country faces its third winter of war since Russia's full-scale invasion.

The warning came as three Red Cross staff members were killed by artillery strikes in eastern Ukraine on Thursday. The deadly strikes, which left two others wounded, hit a Red Cross truck that was delivering firewood in the war-divided Donetsk region, the organization said.

Just last week Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and pushed back on the long-range ask, noting that Ukraine has already been able to strike inside Russia with its own internally produced systems including drones.

## Blinken: US to keep pressing Israel on humanitarian sites

*Associated Press*

WARSAW, Poland — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken says the United States will continue to urge Israel to do more to spare humanitarian sites in the Gaza Strip after an Israeli airstrike on a U.N. school complex sheltering displaced Palestinians killed six U.N. staffers.

When asked on Thursday at a news conference in the Polish capital about Israel's bombing of the school complex in central Gaza the day before, Blinken told reporters that "we need to see humanitarian sites protected."

"That's something we continue to raise with Israel," he said.

Wednesday's strike on the U.N.-supported al-Jaouni Preparatory Boys School in Nuseirat refugee camp, in central Gaza, killed at least 14 people, including two children and a woman, hospital officials said. Among those killed were six staffers from the U.N. Palestinian refugee agency, known as UNRWA, the main U.N. relief agency in Gaza.

UNRWA described the strike as the deadliest single incident for its staff members. Among those killed at the school, it said, were the manager of the shelter and others working to help the thousands of displaced people taking refuge there, including teachers.

The head of UNRWA, Philippe Lazzarini, said at least 220 UNRWA staffers have been killed in Gaza since Israel's military offensive began in response to Hamas' deadly Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

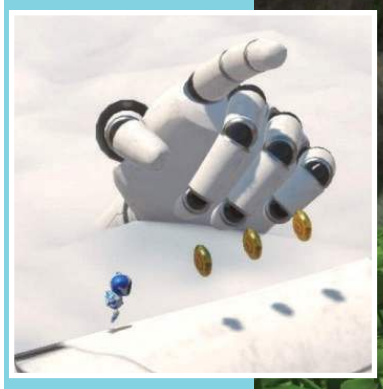
The Israeli military said it was targeting Hamas militants planning attacks from inside the school.

Blinken blamed Hamas for continuing to hide its fighters among civilians and said the bombing "underscores the urgency" of reaching a cease-fire in the embattled territory.

# WEEKEND

## Pink Floyd's Gilmour putting past behind him

**Music, Pages 28-29**



Team Asobi photos

# Perfect playmate

Astro Bot on PlayStation 5 captures a childlike sense of wonder, adventure while tapping into haptic controller's true potential

**Video games, Page 18**

Travel & Food — 20-25 Books — 27 Television — 30-31 Health — 32 Crossword — 34

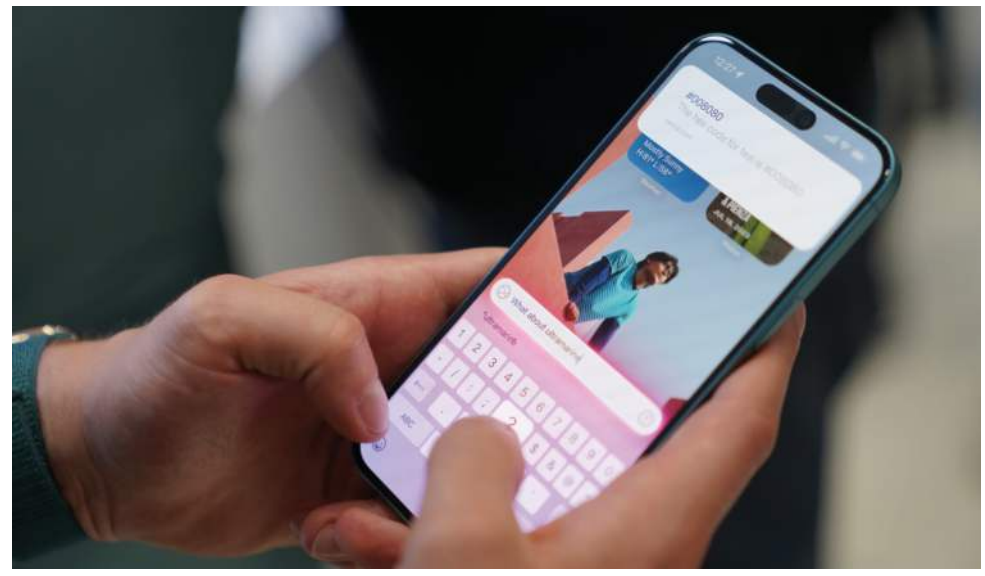
# Warning: Fees ahead

## Ready or not, paid subscriptions are coming for the software in phones, smart speakers, cars and more

BY SHIRA OVIDE
*The Washington Post*

You are used to forking over money once to buy a TV set, smartphone, computer or smart speaker, and that's it.

But we are approaching new territory in which manufacturers may charge ongoing fees for software in technology that had previously been free. This is a crossing of the subscription Rubicon.



JUNNE ALCANTARA/The Washington Post

**The iPhone 16 Pro, shown Monday during an Apple Event, will contain AI. Bloomberg News reports that Apple is contemplating charging for these AI features down the road.**

Amazon plans to introduce a remodeled version of Alexa next month with artificial intelligence features and charge you up to $10 a month for it. It would be first time in Alexa's 10-year history that you will be asked to pay directly for the voice assistant.

Samsung executives have said they could consider a subscription fee for AI capabilities in smartphones that cost up to $1,900.

And Apple's half-baked AI features for the newest iPhone operating system? Apple is contemplating charging for them down the road, Bloomberg News has reported. (Apple said Monday that its newest iPhone operating system will be free. The company declined further comment.)

Paying for the internet features in your devices isn't new, but it's been mostly limited to lesser-used gadgets or optional add-ons such as the Oura health-tracking ring, Samsung TV set art (really), car safety services and iCloud storage.

What's changing is the willingness of companies to charge you for features that are fairly essential to gadgets used by many millions of people. You might not like it, but it's coming.

### Why more gadgets charge you a subscription fee

There's a cliché in the technology industry: Hardware is hard.

It costs a lot of money to develop a new phone, video camera or face computer before it hits store shelves. And if the device is unpopular or the company can't persuade you to pay enough for it, the company might be toast.

But what if you paid for the product *and* a monthly fee, maybe forever? That changes the financial equation for companies — and you. Some examples:

■ The $170 Hatch alarm clock offers a $4.99 monthly subscription. There's a home kitchen sous vide cooker with a subscription app. Printer ink is sold as a subscription.

■ If you buy Peloton home exercise equipment, you are probably also paying a subscription for the company's online fitness classes. Tesla is among the car companies with subscription fees for driver assistance features.

"There are a lot of benefits of the subscription model when you do it really well for customers, but the bar is really high," said Amy Konary, who founded a subscription think tank at Zuora. The company's software helps companies with subscription billing and strategy.

Konary said it can feel predatory to be asked for a subscription fee for features you've previously used for free, or to use the basics with products you paid for, including cars, smartphones and smart speakers.

But, she said, people tend to be more receptive to subscriptions if you feel like you are getting something new and valuable for your monthly fee.

Konary used her car as an example. Basic digital maps and navigation don't cost extra, and customers expect that as a basic. Satellite maps with enhanced navigation features do require a subscription.

### Alternatives to subscriptions

Companies hope that AI is like the enhanced mapping Konary described: Something you will find so much more useful than the basics that you will be willing to pay for it. We'll see.

Samsung has committed not to charge for AI features in its smartphones until after 2025. The Post has reported that a "Classic Alexa" version will remain free even when Amazon starts charging for an AI Alexa.

Large consumer device manufacturers and carmakers have generally kept issuing new and more helpful basic software features for their products at no extra cost. It's new territory if they make more software upgrades such as AI features or car cruise control available only with a subscription.

An intriguing idea came up in a consumer survey conducted for Zuora's Subscribed Institute. The majority of respondents said that if they had to pay for AI features, they preferred to pay only for what they used, and not a monthly subscription fee.

Imagine paying a couple bucks every time you asked AI Alexa to help with homework, and not $5 a month no matter whether you used it zero times a day or 20.

If you're old enough, you've experienced this pricing approach for your technology devices. It's how people used to pay for each long-distance phone call or cellphone text message.

Now we just pay a monthly subscription fee for all that.

# S1 Ultra dash cam records in 4K high definition

BY GREGG ELLMAN
*Tribune News Service*

Unfortunately, many of us will have car accidents. And even if we're not at fault, that can be hard to prove. Having a video of an incident is priceless, and that's where having a dash cam does the trick, with the extra set of eyes recording every move.

A Miofive press release described its new S1 Ultra as the ultimate witness to accidents and vandalism and the definitive option for top-tier road safety and video clarity.

The MioFive S1 Ultra has everything you would want in a dash cam. Features include controlling the recorded videos with the companion app, available on iOS and Android. The device has dual 4K high-definition cameras for front and rear views, built-in 5G Wi-Fi (2.4G and 5G), Bluetooth 4.2, GPS and a 3-inch IPS display. The recorded videos are of exceptional quality, with a resolution of up to 3840 by 2160P @30 fps Ultra HD, thanks to the 8-megapixel sensor with no interpolation. The built-in polarizer function further enhances the video quality, making it crystal clear.

The front camera has a wide-open f1.8 lens with a 140-degree field of view; it records in 4K UHD 3840 by 2160P @30 fps quality. The rear camera has a 112-degree field of view, an f2.0 lens, and 4K UHD 3840x2160P @25 fps quality. The low f-stops provide for excellent night vision and performance in low-light driving conditions.

Recordings are kept on an endless loop on microSD cards up to 512GB. A 64GB microSD card is included to get you started, but upgrading to a 512GB card is not expensive (about $40 on Amazon) and highly recommended. But there is an option to cut the quality setting of the recording, allowing more video to be stored on a memory card.

The built-in GPS records everything in real time, including your driving speed and compass information with exact locations. The dash cam's recordings can be easily downloaded using Wi-Fi and Bluetooth.

Other features include multiple 24-hour parking modes. The parking mode requires the purchase of a hardwire kit. When the car is parked, the S1 Ultra detects an impact, automatically turns the unit on and records video. The app allows for complete video control and the ability to zoom in on a sign or license plate or select a specific time or incident to edit those frames.

Setting up the MioFive S1 Ultra is as simple as unpacking it, cleaning the inside of your windshield where it will hang and installing the 3M adhesive sticker. Then, peel off the protective sticker from the bracket and attach it to the center of the 3M adhesive sticker. Both a USB cable and a cigarette lighter USB adapter are included.

Online: miofive.com; $199.99

MIOFIVE/TNS

**The MioFive S1 Ultra front camera has a wide-open f1.8 lens with a 140-degree field of view; it records in 4K UHD 3840 by 2160P @30 fps quality.**

WEEKEND: MOVIES

# Technically speaking

AP

**James Earl Jones, shown at the Academy Awards in 2012, died Monday at age 93. His voice could live on through artificial intelligence, a potential trend that many voice actors fear.**

## Actors see promise, peril in AI's ability to immortalize voices like the late James Earl Jones'

By Sarah Parvini
*Associated Press*

Over the course of an acting career that spanned more than six decades, James Earl Jones' voice became an indelible piece of his work as a performer.

On screen, Jones, who died Monday at 93, brought to life a reclusive writer coaxed back into the spotlight in "Field of Dreams" and a haughty king of a fictional land in "Coming to America." On stage, he won two Tony Awards for "The Great White Hope" and "Fences." His work as a voice actor — the regal dignity of his portrayal of Mufasa in "The Lion King" and the menacing and deep timbre he lent to Darth Vader in "Star Wars" — helped cement his place as a legendary actor among generations of fans.

But in the wake of his death, an aspect of Jones' career has come to the fore: consenting to the use of artificial intelligence to replicate his performance as Darth Vader after he stepped away from the role. Skywalker Sound and the Ukrainian company Respeecher used AI to re-create Jones' villain for the 2022 show "Obi-Wan Kenobi" on Disney+. Mark Hamill's voice was also "de-aged" using Respeecher for his appearance as Luke Skywalker in "The Mandalorian."

Voice actors say they fear AI could reduce or eliminate job opportunities because the technology could be used to replicate one performance into a number of other movements without their consent — a concern that led video game performers with the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists to go on strike in late July.

To some, Jones' decision to allow AI to replicate his voice raises questions about voice acting as an art but also potentially helps lay the groundwork for transparent AI agreements that fairly compensate an actor for their performance with consent.

Zeke Alton, a voice actor and member of SAG-AFTRA's interactive media agreement negotiating committee, said it's "amazing" that Jones was involved in the process of replicating his voice.

"If the game companies, the movie companies, gave the consent, compensation transparency to every actor that they gave James Earl Jones, we wouldn't be on strike," Alton said. "It proves that they can do it. They just don't want to for people that they feel don't have the leverage to bargain for themselves."

Hollywood's video game performers announced a work stoppage — their second in a decade — after more than 18 months of negotiations over a new interactive media agreement with game industry giants broke down over AI protections. Members of the union have said they are not anti-AI. The performers are worried, however, the technology could provide studios with a means to displace them.

Concerns about how movie studios will use AI helped fuel last year's film and television strikes by the union, which lasted four months.

Jones, who overcame a childhood stutter, said in previous interviews that he was "happy to be able to talk at all, because there was time when I couldn't." His goal, he said, was for his voice to be clear. Speaking with The Associated Press in 1994, he said that he tried to make Darth Vader "more human and more interesting." But George Lucas, the filmmaker who created "Star Wars," advised him to "go back to a very narrow band of expression" because the mechanical parts of the villain's body would make it difficult for him to sound more human.

Neither Skywalker Sound nor Respeecher responded to a request for comment. But a sound editor with Skywalker Sound told Vanity Fair that Jones signed off on the use of archival recordings to keep Darth Vader alive and that he guided Darth Vader's performance for the Disney+ show as "a benevolent godfather."

Crispin Freeman, an actor who has done voice matching work replicating Orlando Bloom's voice in "Pirates of the Caribbean," said that the technology may take away voice matching roles but doesn't harm "the ability of future artists to blaze their own trails" in new roles.

"We always need to keep reinventing new stories as we're going forward, and not simply relying on the old stuff," he said. "Rather than worrying, 'Oh, will someone else be able to be Darth Vader,' why don't we make a new 'Star Wars' character that's as compelling as Darth Vader?"

Jones' contract could set an example of properly bargaining with an actor over their likeness, said Sarah Elmaleh, chair of SAG-AFTRA's interactive negotiating committee. Elmaleh, a voice actor, said there is a chance for these tools to be used in "meaningful, smart artistic decisions."

"I worry about a world where we conflate the superficial qualities of a person's voice with their performance," she said.

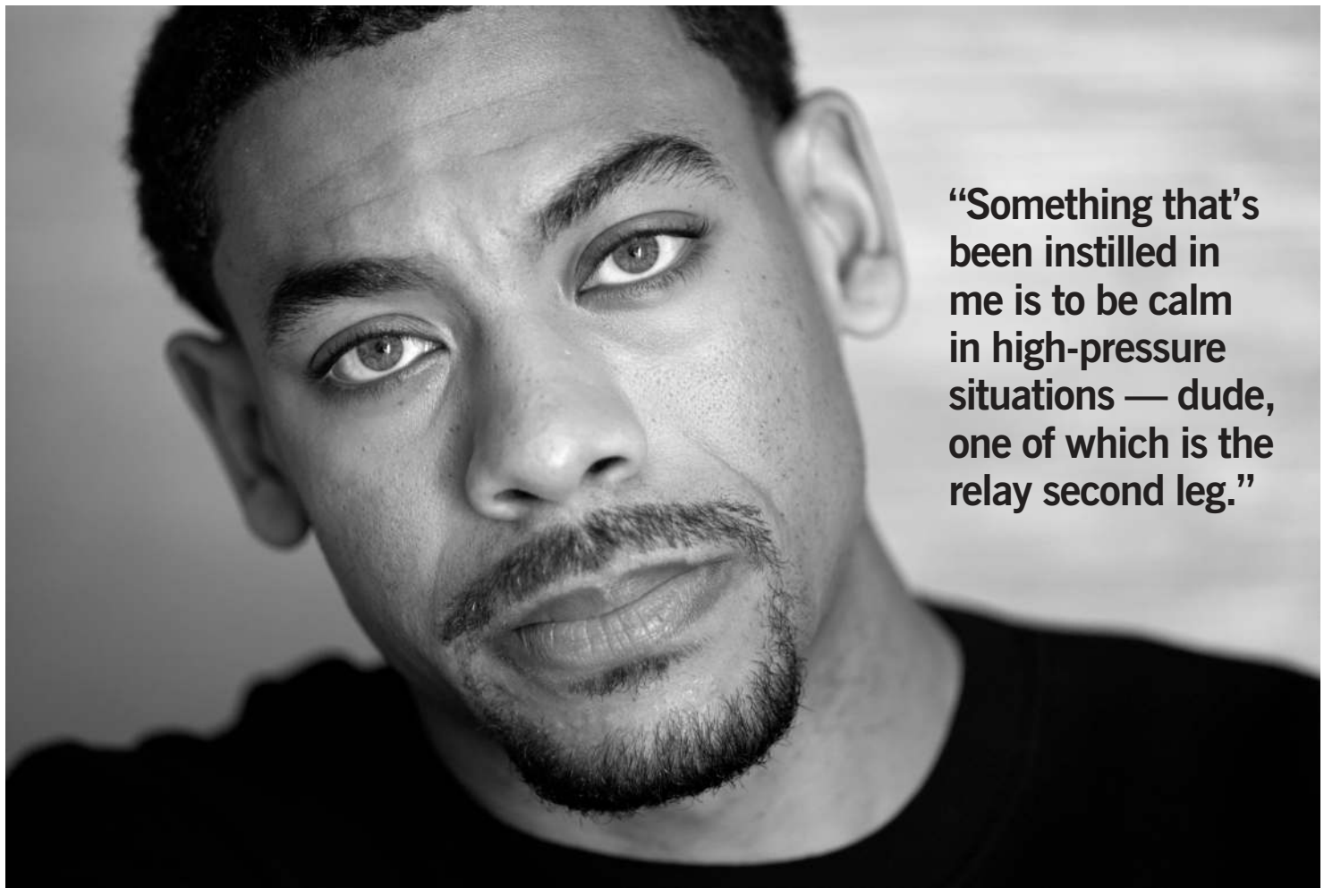
Alton, the voice actor, said he wonders about what the use of Jones' voice as Darth Vader would mean if it were used for another 100 years and people forgot "all of the different things that built him into the iconic character that he was."

"It's just a disembodied voice at that point. It's part of the neutering of art that generative AI has the potential to do, and it's sort of a heady subject, but it's very important for us as a world to consider what we want our entertainment and our art to be in the future," he said. "Do we want it to be human, or do we want it to be bland?"

WEEKEND: MOVIES

# The unruffled rising star of 'Rebel Ridge'

## Aaron Pierre's lead role in Netflix thriller shows actor's startling power in stillness




CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

**Actor Aaron Pierre, shown in January, stars as Terry Richmond in Jeremy Saulnier's Netflix thriller "Rebel Ridge." He'll also voice Mufasa on the big screen in December in Barry Jenkins' "Mufasa: The Lion King."**

BY JAKE COYLE
*Associated Press*

Before Aaron Pierre wanted to act, he wanted to be the fastest man in the world.

Growing up in West Croydon in London, Pierre was drawn to track and field. He thought gold medalist sprinter Maurice Greene was the coolest man on Earth. Pierre ran the 60-meter, the 100-meter and second leg of the 4x100 meter relay.

"Something that's been instilled in me is to be calm in high-pressure situations — dude, one of which is the relay second leg," Pierre says, speaking by Zoom from his apartment in Los Angeles. "When the whole school is out and you get that baton, you've got to just focus on one foot in front of the other."

How fast Pierre can put one foot in front of the other is a point of interest not just because of the quickening pace of his career. (This December, he'll be the voice of Mufasa in Barry Jenkins' "Mufasa: The Lion King.") It's also because for a guy who can be really fast, the 30-year-old Pierre, as an actor, has startling power in stillness.

In Jeremy Saulnier's "Rebel Ridge," a taut, suspenseful thriller that debuted Sept. 6 on Netflix, Pierre plays Terry Richmond, a former Marine who, while biking, is stopped by police and has a bag of money — bail money for his cousin — confiscated. What follows is a tense and evolving standoff with the rural town's corrupt police department and its chief (a terrific Don Johnson). And until he isn't, Pierre's Richmond is unyieldingly patient and unthreatened. He's a preternaturally calm martial arts expert. A demure Rambo.

"I had to employ a level of trickery on my brain," Pierre says. "This character that Jerry Saulnier has written and created is so badass. It's understandably, deeply tempting to do too much. I said to Jeremy I had to do my best to normalize how cool Terry Richmond was."

"Rebel Ridge" is one of those overwhelmingly clear moviegoing experiences: Pierre is so obviously a star in the making. From the moment he rides into town on a bike ("a modern-day horse," Saulnier says), he commands the screen with a singular potency. He has the body of a chiseled athlete but the heavy, melancholy eyes and resonant baritone (this is a man who's inheriting a role voiced by James Earl Jones, after all) of a Shakespeare-trained thespian.

Though Pierre has been seen in a number of earlier films and series (Jenkins' "The Underground Railroad," last year's sci-fi drama "Foe"), "Rebel Ridge" is his first lead role.

"Once I got on a Zoom with Aaron, I had only seen a clip of 'Underground Railroad' and that was enough to sell me," Saulnier says. "I saw the chops. I saw his presence. I said, 'That's it. That's my guy.'"

Saulnier, the writer-director of "Green Room" and "Blue Ruin," is one of the most gifted genre craftsmen in Hollywood. "Rebel Ridge" is his first film in seven years, but it's a reminder of his prowess in lending thrillers earthy authenticity and rich atmosphere.

"I miss texture," Saulnier says. "Like seeing shocks on cars and knowing you're in a real vehicle, even when you're doing a dialogue scene. That level of veracity, I think, is being removed from moviemaking. If the top tier filmmakers with $100 million-plus budgets can't sell an interior car dialogue sequence, let's just go back to basics."

Saulnier first cast John Boyega in "Rebel Ridge," but Boyega departed the film just as it was starting production. Saulnier calls that rupture "water under the bridge."

"John and I would both agree that it was the best path for both of us. There's no ill will at all," Saulnier says. "Whatever pressure system that got created when we were looking to cast that role ended up this very unique experience. When I see the film and how people are reacting to it now, it's just undeniable how amazing an actor Aaron Pierre is."

Pierre grew up in a counsel estate (government housing) in West Croydon. His father, he says, is an actor, teacher and life coach; his mother has been, among other things, a project manager. He speaks glowingly about them and of his London youth.

"West Croydon is my favorite place in the world. It truly enormously contributed to the man I am today," Pierre says. "It really instilled the importance of intentionality in me. It also contributed massively to how I view my journey, my career's journey. For me, as much as I am deeply passionate about what I do and wouldn't want to do anything else, before that I am a son, I'm a brother, I'm a friend. I'm many things before I'm an actor."

Pierre began acting as a teenager and ultimately graduated from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. In summer of 2018, he landed the role of Cassio in a production of "Othello" at the Globe Theatre that starred Andre Holland and Mark Rylance. Barry Jenkins happened to catch it and that night messaged Pierre through Twitter.

"I was convinced that someone was having a laugh at my expense," Pierre laughs. That led to "The Underground Railroad."

Working with Jenkins, Pierre began finding himself as a screen actor. Jenkins, he says, taught him to put truth and honesty above all else in performance. On his first day on set, Jenkins approached him about an important scene that wasn't landing.

"Barry came up to me and was like, 'Aaron, I love what you've done on these first few takes, but we're not landing on the truth right now. I need you to find the truth, and I need you to find it now because the sun is going down,'" Pierre recalls, chuckling.

"Rebel Ridge" brought many new demands, though, including being first on the call sheet. The film had had a tortured path to production, through the pandemic and Boyega's unexpected exit. But Saulnier remained committed to making it how he envisioned.

"There were certainly forks in the road where I could have tapped out, and been fine," Saulnier says. "I dug in and made sure whatever version we ended up with, if it wasn't the best version possible, it would have been better on a shelf. The fight was to hold the line at quality."

Saulnier was inspired by real-life instances of civil asset forfeiture, which is when police can seize money purely on suspicion. There are some echoes of movies like "Mississippi Burning," Saulnier grants, in how "Rebel Ridge" captures a Black man ensnarled by Southern racism. But Pierre's Richmond is a more modern figure, who encounters a prejudice that has merely gone just below the surface, hiding beneath legal cover.

"One of the many things that appealed to me about this character was his ability to regulate his emotions even in moments which are undeniably, blatantly unjust and intentionally so," Pierre says. "He does it in a way that's so not demonstrative and so not braggadocious that even when he's articulating how patient he's being with you, you still might not quite understand. He's not bringing out his extensive martial arts certificates or résumé. He's just trying to share with you that you're approaching a line."

For Saulnier, "Rebel Ridge" is the first film he's made that, though it is enveloped with a sinister, shadowy darkness, is less reliant on high levels of brutality. Instead, "Rebel Ridge" heats up with a slow burn made possible by Pierre's simmering performance.

"It's been a long time coming, this moment," Pierre says, with gratitude. "And I'm just doing my best to be present in it."

# WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

## The host from hell

### Sinister, unhinged James McAvoy headlines the unsettling 'Speak No Evil' about dangers of not trusting your instincts

BY JOCELYN NOVECK
*Associated Press*

Has there ever been a horror film set in a country home with a decent cell signal?

Nope, and there's no signal at Paddy and Ciara's house, either, deep in the English countryside. Soon, that landline will be cut, too, but we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Paddy and Ciara are that fun-but-somewhat-odd British couple whom Louise and Ben, early in "Speak No Evil," meet on their idyllic Tuscan family holiday. Americans based in London, Louise and Ben are at loose ends, with both job and relationship issues. And so, when the new acquaintances write to invite them for a country weekend, they decide to go.

After all, how bad could it be?

Don't answer that. There are many such moments in the first two-thirds of "Speak No Evil," a Hollywood remake of the 2022 Danish film, here starring a deeply menacing James McAvoy. Moments where Louise and Ben, out of mere politeness and social convention, act against their instincts, which tell them something is wrong — very wrong.

Director James Watkins and especially his excellent troupe of actors, adult and children alike, do a nice job of building the tension, slowly but surely. Until all bloody hell breaks loose, of course. And then, in its third act, "Speak No Evil" becomes an entertaining but routine horror flick, with predictable results.

But for a while, it's a way more intelligent film. And the jumpy moments work — I'll confess to literally springing out of my seat when someone uneventfully turned on a power drill.

We begin in stunning Tuscany, where Louise (Mackenzie Davis, in the film's most accessible and empathetic performance) and Ben (Scoot McNairy, all nerves and insecurity) are vacationing with 11-year-old daughter Agnes (Alix West Lefler). At the pool, they meet Paddy (McAvoy) and Ciara (Aisling Franciosi), a British couple with a disabled son, Ant, apparently born without a proper tongue.

One day in town, Paddy offers Agnes a ride on his Vespa. Louise is frightened to see her daughter disappear on the motorbike with a strange man, but it would be churlish to say no, right?

In briefly sketched backstories, we learn that Louise and Ben moved to London for Ben's job, but he was soon downsized out. As for Paddy, all we know is he's a doctor.

At least, we think he is. The Americans, accepting the weekend invitation back in England, arrive at the secluded country home in the dead of night. Immediately something feels off. The rooms are quirky but musty, the sheets stained. How can a doctor live like this, Louise asks? Ben brushes off her concern, quipping that even Downton Abbey is in terrible shape.

When the couple cooks dinner, Paddy proudly explains they've butchered their prize goose in their guests' honor. He proffers Louise a forkful — even though he well knows she's a vegetarian. Louise is disgusted but, politely, takes a bite.

Daughter Agnes, too, is freaked out. She's being made to sleep on the floor next to Ant (Dan Hough, poignant in a role with no words.) And the next evening, when everyone dresses for a special dinner out, Paddy and Ciara inform Louise and Ben that the kids will stay home with a strange male babysitter. "We've had mannies before," Ben tells Louise, unconvincingly.

Soon, though, we have the obligatory attempt to flee, followed by the "Oh no, we have to go back" moment — you know, where you're yelling: "No!" But return the family does.

In perhaps the movie's most effective scene, the two kids have put together a dance routine. The parents sit back proudly to watch, but repeatedly, Paddy stops the routine to admonish, brutally, his son, telling him he's out of rhythm. McAvoy, a terrific actor who has made villainy part of his potent toolbox, is truly chilling as he becomes unhinged by his son's inability to keep time.

Then there's the scene fans of "The Shining" will recognize as the "Here's Johnny," Jack Nicholson moment. By then, everything's gone off the rails, and it's time for the blood to flow, predictably.

If there's a moral here, it's to trust those instincts when things feel wrong. But if movie characters did that, the horror genre would not exist.

Still, there's some satisfaction to be had, especially in the creative use of household implements to inflict pain and death. Revenge, they say, is a dish best served cold — except in horror films, where it is served raw and bloody, with a side of toxic cleaning fluid.

"Speak No Evil" is rated R for some strong violence, language, some sexual content and brief drug use. Running time: 110 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

**James McAvoy plays Paddy, one half of an odd British couple who invite an American family to their secluded country home in England for a weekend in "Speak No Evil."**

## Pierre tackles lawlessness in tight, taut, tension-filled 'Rebel Ridge'

BY MARK KENNEDY
*Associated Press*

"Rebel Ridge" opens with a shot of a lanky, muscular stranger riding into a small, corrupt Southern town — a scene we've all seen plenty of times. Except this stranger isn't in a truck or on a horse. He's on a bicycle.

It's one of many ways that writer-director Jeremy Saulnier both honors and has fun with movie conventions on his way to making clearly one of the best things on Netflix.

The tight, taut and tension-filled "Rebel Ridge" is the story of a former Marine who arrives in Shelby Springs, La., to post his cousin's bond and gets sucked into taking on its shady law enforcement department.

The last time a relative came to help his cousin from the clutches of a less-than-ideal small town Southern legal system it was a comedy with Joe Pesci and a hero named Vinny. If you ever needed a hint that this isn't that movie, the opening sequence is scored to Iron Maiden.

The movie stars Aaron Pierre as our former Marine, Terry Richmond, a man with mad martial arts and survival skills (he catches fish with his bare hands), and, on the opposite side, Don Johnson as the courtly but deadly chief of police, as venal as Richmond is noble. Both seem absolutely to adore their gun-slinging, testosterone-filled roles.

Saulnier — who dealt with frontier justice and lawlessness in his previous "Blue Ruin" and "Green Room" — has given this action-thriller loads of social context: racism, opioid addiction, the cash bail system, small-town funding and militarized cops.

NETFLIX/AP

**Zsané Jhé and Aaron Pierre (right) star in "Rebel Ridge," a story about a former Marine's run-in with shady law enforcement in a small, corrupt Southern town.**

Like its leading man, "Rebel Ridge" is a lean, muscular movie with few over-the-top special effects, save for Pierre's spectacular eyes. It's a triumph of small-budget, naturalistic filmmaking, where cars on a gravel road kick up choking clouds of dust and arm bones crack when pressure is applied.

The script is spare — allowing for some homespun poetry like "You know the thing about a pissing contest? Everybody gets piss on their boots" — and without an ounce of fat. So if a bottle of coconut water is brought up in one scene, it's going be used in another. There are interesting camera angles, like the back seat of a speeding car or a tense cellphone call inside an old-fashioned phone booth.

There's also great use of dramatic underscoring by Brooke and Will Blair, who build discordant waves that grow slack, only to reappear like a shark. The score — including "Wayfaring Stranger" by Neko Case or "Right Brigade" by Bad Brains — are heard only on car radios or headphones or playing in restaurants. Distant thunder sounds often.

Our former Marine — described by one officer as "unarmed but considered dangerous" — forges an unlikely ally in a court clerk, played winningly by AnnaSophia Robb, and there's a plumb role for James Cromwell, too.

"Rebel Ridge" has whiffs of all kinds of other movies, from "First Blood" to spaghetti Westerns, while the script even humanizes the bad guys — "Just because you was right doesn't make us wrong," the chief says to our hero.

There's a conspiracy at the heart of the town and you likely won't be able to turn off the film before finding out if one well-trained stranger can save the day, as things gloriously escalate. "It's gotten out of hand. Real soup sandwich," says our hero. That's not what ended up on your TV screen, though — it's the very opposite of a mess.

"Rebel Ridge" is rated TV-MA for language, smoking and violence. Running time: 131 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

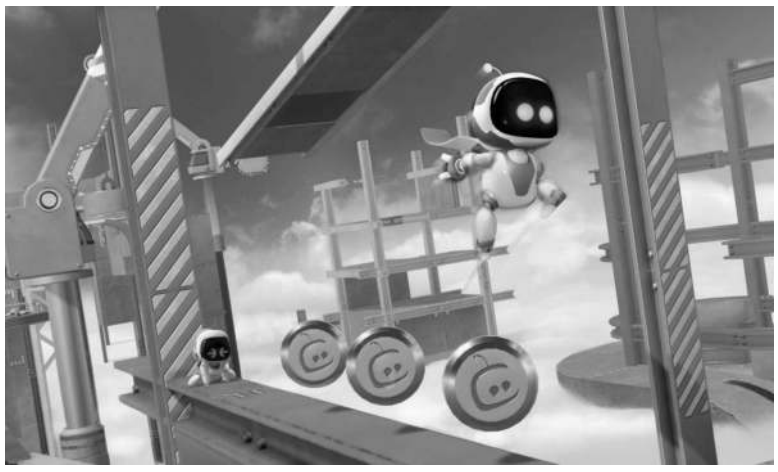
# WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Team Asobi photos

**Astro Bot captures what is for many a long-forgotten sense of play, and wonderfully uses the PlayStation 5 haptic controller to bring players into the game's world. So many games these days throttle the controller with abrasive feedback, but Astro Bot taps into the controller's true potential.**

# Astro Bot reminds both kids, adults why we play

## PlayStation 5's ecstatic platformer re-creates sense of childlike wonder using technomagic, high-fidelity visuals, constantly changing mechanics



**Moment-to-moment jumping and enemy bopping feels as good in Astro Bot as it does in Mario titles, but it's enhanced by the number of things on screen that are moving and reacting to the player.**

By Gene Park
*The Washington Post*

In the mail room of my apartment building, I often watch kids play among the stacks of boxes on the floor. The children are tiny, and the boxes are big enough to form a believable cityscape for imaginative siblings. I'll never forget that when we are young and the world feels that big, the possibilities of play feel endless.

I think about those kids and my own childhood experiences when playing Astro Bot, the latest PlayStation Studios title from Team Asobi. There's a level that gives the robot hero the ability to shrink at any given moment. At the touch of a button, a child's bedroom can become a treacherous, yawning cavern.

I relate this all to studio director Nicolas Doucet, who has a keen understanding of how a child's first impressions of the world can last forever. He thinks of what he felt as a child and how recapturing that feeling was a priority for him and the 65-strong at Team Asobi in Tokyo. He thinks of what he saw in his 5-year-old daughter when she finally picked up a controller and moved characters on a screen.

"When she played a video game for the first time, I saw in her eyes something that happened that I am not capable of having anymore," Doucet said in an interview from his Tokyo home. "That bit is too precious. The generation before, they dedicated themselves to make us feel that way. So we have to dedicate ourselves to give that back."

Capturing that long-forgotten sense of play is why Astro Bot, now out for PlayStation 5, is not only the best game created for modern-day consoles but sits comfortably alongside Nintendo's Mario titles as among the finest games ever made.

Astro was first introduced in 2013 as a demonstration of the PlayStation 4's augmented reality capabilities. In 2018, Team Asobi (it means play in Japanese) created Astro Bot Rescue Mission, a revolutionary virtual-reality platformer that centered the player's head as the camera. Moving and swiveling your head revealed new secrets as you controlled Astro Bot around a virtual world that appeared around your body. And for the PS5's launch, Astro's Playroom was a pack-in title that demonstrated the DualSense controller's immersive haptics and audio technology, as well as was a celebration and museum of PlayStation history.

The new Astro Bot expands on Playroom in every way, celebrating 30 years of PlayStation and referencing 169 video game titles and characters that got their start on Sony's platforms. But the game's greatest achievement is its ability to throw in fun gameplay mechanics and ideas every few minutes. The first level alone features a waterslide funneling into a big pool complete with floaties and fish before letting players exit as an inflatable, floating balloon. That level then lets you shrink down to size and jolts the controller with the nearby footsteps of now-giant cats; walking across a giant clock will rattle the controller in time with the giant ticking hands.

The gameplay inspirations for Astro Bot are obvious and plentiful, but Asobi still innovates by taking full advantage of the PlayStation 5 and its capacity for high-fidelity visuals and CPU-pushing physics. Moment-to-moment jumping and enemy bopping feels just as good as in Mario titles, but it's often enhanced by the number of things on screen that are moving and reacting to the player — all while this action is reflected back into your hands with delightful accuracy in the controller haptics. Thanks to Team Asobi's previous role as a research and development firm, Astro Bot demonstrates the full potential of a medium made possible by fusing art and science.

Much like how Astro's VR game created the sensation of placing your body in the game world, playing Astro Bot feels like reaching into the game through the controller. When inflating or deflating the aforementioned balloon robot, the R2 button flaps and flutters under your finger like a trigger-activated fart.

Ideas like the balloon began with engineers poking and prodding to create new haptic sensations that pair with gameplay elements, said Animation Director Jamie Smith. Animators and art designers didn't get involved until the entire team decided they were fun ideas worth building out. Smith's team breathed life into this action on screen.

"We knew from that demo that this feels great; this is a really fun feeling of haptics," Smith said. "Now what we need to do is incorporate this into the gameplay ... and the animation has to match the feeling of the haptics, the immediacy of control."

Pair this with the controller's speaker emitting sounds like those of a deflating balloon and you get what Team Asobi has dubbed "technomagic," technology that empowers the audience to do and feel impossible things.

That technomagic, and the game's ideas-per-minute design, contribute to a sense that the rest

SEE PLAY ON PAGE 19

# WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

## **Play:** Too much reliance on console history the only flaw

FROM PAGE 18

of the games industry, and PlayStation's other studios, haven't really been able to tap into the PS5's true potential, particularly its controller. So many games these days based around guns and swords throttle the controller with the same abrasive feedback, and here comes Astro Bot with puffy balloons inviting the player to hop aboard and feel the bounce under our palms.

Astro is also magnificently relatable as a character. "VIP bots" that caricature iconic game characters mean there's probably an Astro Bot hero for everyone. It's a dream come true for Art Director Sebastian Brueckner, who grew up drawing superheroes.

"You have these characters do these fantastical stories in your head and you want to show your friends what they can do. Now we get to this age where computer graphics evolved so much and you could create what was on the front of the box," Brueckner said. "That's the important part. It's about you going on the adventure to find your own story; that's the beauty of making this kind of content."

If there's any flaw in this otherwise perfect game, it's actually the reliance on PlayStation's history. Astro Bot features countless cameos from other games but also molds five levels around the gameplay features from other games. Three of the five homage levels are based around PlayStation's modern titles, and the gameplay of all these levels suffers because the original works are all third-person action games featuring over-the-shoulder camera angles. The levels based on older, more diverse titles only underscore how the variety in PlayStation games has narrowed to cinematic blockbusters. These sections are still delightful distractions, especially when their Hollywood-production theme songs each receive a funky Astro remix.

Astro Bot's elegant video game design uses only three buttons to let players express a variety of movements and actions, even those replicated from more complicated games. It is engineered so every action creates some delightful sound or movement. That level of pacing and design is deceptively hard to pull off despite the simplicity of the genre.

Team Asobi

**Astro Bot celebrates 30 years of PlayStation by referencing 169 characters and titles that got their start on the consoles.**

"It's true of so many things in life. Like simple dishes, it can actually be hard to execute because you can't cheat. You can feel every ingredient," Doucet said. "We think kids can be fooled by playing anything, but that's not the case. They also see through quality. It's very important for us to know that for some people, this is going to be their first game ever. I remember my first games. They've never left me."

The end of a level showered me in millions of colorful jewels — letting me live out my dashed hopes of diving into gold like Scrooge McDuck. I spent minutes letting the jewels douse my bot, and I felt the sprinkles crash against me through the controller. It was like the video game equivalent of a cold shower on a hot day, rejuvenating and breezy.

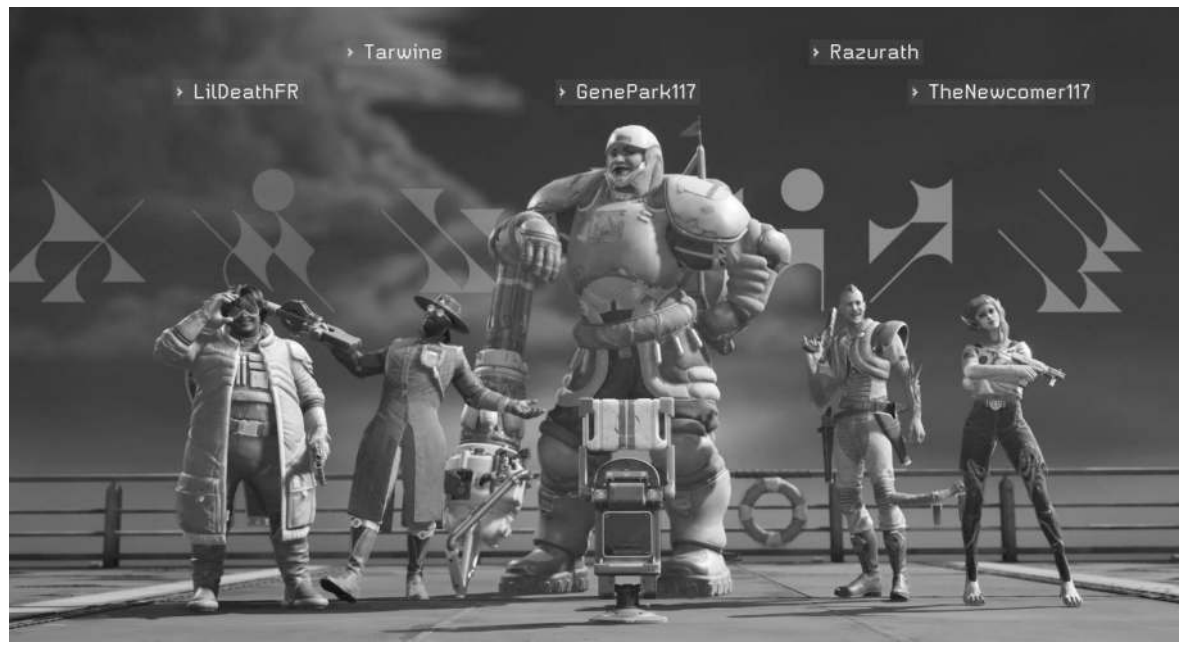
**Astro Bot's elegant video game design uses only three buttons to let players express a variety of movements and actions.**

"When you open a door and a lot of acorns fall on you, you can feel each one in the controller. So you start running around because it's just fun," Doucet said. "There is no goal to that. It doesn't get you a trophy; it doesn't get you back in the game. But that has probably more value than anything else. In fact, it's the fundamentals of play."

By centering the fundamentals of play, Astro Bot reminds us *why* we play. It's also a passionate reminder why PlayStation is even called that in the first place.

**Platform:** PlayStation 5

**Online:** teamasobi.com/games/astro-bot-rescue-mission




PlayStation

**Concord's most distinguishable mode is Rivalry, which was too complicated to act as a marketing hook.**

# A chase for fool's gold

## Why Sony pulled ambition game Concord offline after only two weeks

BY GENE PARK
*The Washington Post*

I have a lifelong fascination with empty, dead amusement parks. When you grow up in an area as desolate as I did, you don't need a Ferris wheel to move for it to provide some entertainment.

Theme parks shut down for a variety of reasons — in the real world and in the video games we wander around. Games like Fortnite and Call of Duty have become mega-attractions in this way: perpetual moneymaking operations, staffed by thousands, that are in no danger of closing down. Unfortunately, the games industry is filled with amusement park owners hoping to become the next Disneyland — or, well, Minecraft. So many games are becoming expensive cautionary tales. But when players flee and their creators pull active support, I stick around dead live services (including multimillion-dollar failures like Avengers and Anthem) until the doors close. It's lonely, but also nostalgic.

Throughout 2023, Sony PlayStation proudly touted that it was working on 12 of these games, then later announced plans to cut that ambition by half. As part of this plan, last year Sony acquired Firewalk Studios, which spent at least six years creating Concord, a five-vs.-five shooting game released Aug. 23 on PlayStation 5 and PC.

Last week — less than two weeks later — Firewalk and PlayStation announced that they are refunding all purchases of Concord and that the game would be taken offline Sept. 6. This was not a surprise to anyone who was tracking the health of the game on Steam, PC's most popular platform. Concurrent Steam players never peaked past 697, and throughout each day, the game was played by mere dozens of concurrent players. By contrast, a live-service game should have at least tens of thousands of players to be considered healthy. Games such as Fortnite boast a million players at all times. When the beta version of Concord became available free in its second week, it lost its audience anyway. People who tried the game were not returning.

Much has been said about the failure of this game. To sum up what has already been written by others: The game charged $40 when other similar games, such as Overwatch 2 and the upcoming Marvel Rivals, can be played free. Its genre, the "hero shooter" popularized by Overwatch, has been dwindling in popularity since that game's 2016 release, and Concord simply took too long to make to benefit from the trend. In July, I called it an "expertly crafted big bet" that's "a few years late." The hero-shooter genre relies on creating appealing characters to lure people into the concept, and the ones in Concord fell short. The character designs weren't just unappealing; sometimes they were revolting.

Which is before we even get to the gameplay. Here's my perspective as someone who tried to play and enjoy the game for its two weeks of existence: There is only one unique game mode in Concord, called Rivalry. In a game where players are asked to become attached to these characters, Rivalry demands players swap around to different characters. It incentivizes building up team statistics by strategically choosing different options, a mechanic inspired by deck-building card games.

I tried to test this mode as much as I could, but on the PlayStation 5, it would take me up to 10 minutes for the game to find enough players who wanted to play this mode. Sometimes the game would just give up. So, from my experience, players rejected the most distinguishable offering Concord has. It's an overdesigned set of rules created to distinguish it from deathmatch and zone-control modes, but it's too complicated to act as an elevator-pitch marketing hook. With an organized team of friends, the mode can click, but it simply falls apart if you're not able to meet that criteria.

When PlayStation revealed the game design in May, a 10-minute presentation couldn't communicate why Concord should pull you away from other games. Instead, the game was sold with exasperating jargon, talking about how it is about "leaning into the asymmetry of the characters, really pushing the possibility space of two different characters colliding; it's all about creating opportunities for improvisation." That word salad was never going to be a winning hook.

There *is* good in Concord buried under this trend-chasing, expensive project. The written histories of its world and its 16 characters can be found, if you really try, through a lore menu, yet promise a far more engaging story than what the game was able to present. It's easy to picture a better title telling a better story and giving these characters the game they deserve. The real bummer of Concord is that, in chasing the fool's gold of "live service" and infinite growth, it may have killed the few good ideas that could've saved it. There was good intention here to entertain and delight, but instead, it has become another dead amusement park — and not even one I want to keep exploring.

# Time travel on Rome's ancient Appian Way

It's fitting that it was the expansion-minded ancient Romans who built Europe's first super highway — they understood the value of good roads to growing an empire. And the Appian Way, begun in 312 BC, was the engineering wonder of its day. It connected Rome with Capua (near Naples), ignoring natural contours and running in a straight line for much of the way. Eventually it stretched 430 miles to Brindisi — gateway to the East — where Roman ships sailed for Greece and Egypt.

While our modern roads seem to sprout potholes right after they're built, sections of this marvel of Roman engineering still exist. When I visit Rome, I get a thrill walking on the same stones as Julius Caesar or St. Peter. Huge basalt paving blocks form the sturdy base of this roadway. In its heyday, a central strip accommodated animal-powered vehicles, and elevated sidewalks served pedestrians.

Fortunately, about the first 10 miles of the Appian Way is preserved as a regional park (Parco dell'Appia Antica). In addition to the roadway, visitors can see ruined Roman monuments and two major Christian catacombs.

Getting here from the center of Rome is easy by taxi, Metro or bus. It's best to come on a Sunday or holiday, when the whole park is closed to car traffic, and it becomes Rome's biggest pedestrian zone. You can rent bicycles at the Appia Antica Service Center, though some find the old paving stones too bumpy for biking.

Rick Steves

As you stroll or bike along the road, you'll see tombs of ancient big shots that line the way like billboards. While pagans didn't enjoy the promise of salvation, those who could afford it purchased a kind of immortality by building themselves big and glitzy memorials. One of the best preserved is the Tomb of Cecilia Metella, built for the daughter-in-law of Rome's richest man. It's a massive cylindrical tomb situated on the crest of a hill.

Of course, early Christians didn't have that kind of money. So they buried their dead in mass underground necropolises — catacombs — dug under the property of the few fellow Christians who owned land. These catacombs are scattered all around Rome just outside its ancient walls, including two inside this park.

Rick Steves

**The ancient paving blocks of the Appian Way can be seen in a park just outside of central Rome.**

The tomb-lined tunnels of the catacombs stretch for miles and are many layers deep. Many of the first Christians buried here were later recognized as martyrs and saints. Others carved out niches nearby to bury their loved ones close to these early Christian heroes. While the bones are long gone, symbolic carvings decorate the walls.

By the Middle Ages, these catacombs were abandoned and forgotten. Centuries later they were rediscovered.

The Appian Way has two major Christian catacombs, each offering visitors a half-hour underground tour to see the niches where early Christians were buried.

The Catacombs of San Sebastiano also has a historic fourth-century basilica with holy relics and some pagan Roman tombs. The larger Catacombs of San Callisto is the burial site for several early popes and for St. Cecilia, patron saint of music, who was killed for converting to Christianity. Her tomb is marked with a copy of a famous statue by Stefano Maderno.

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# Fall brings an abundance of fests that fete food and drink

Does autumn have a taste? An abundance of festivals centering around food and drink would certainly suggest so. From silky soups to tangy sauerkraut, here are five fabulous flavors for fall and some places in which to enjoy them:

**Pumpkin:** Gorgeous gourds can be ogled as well as consumed on the grounds of Ludwigsburg Castle, in the German city of the same name. Each year, the castle gardens named Blühendes Barock host a fanciful exhibition of hundreds of thousands of pumpkins in all colors, shapes and sizes, artfully arranged into sculptures and installations adhering to a certain theme. In 2024, Women's Power will inspire the creations. On nearly every weekend of the exhibition, on now and running through Nov. 3, one can find themed events, to include a pumpkin regatta in which participants paddle watercraft carved from giant pumpkins (Sept. 21-22) and the preparation of Germany's biggest pot of pumpkin soup (Sept. 28-29). Tickets to the exhibition cost 16 euros for adults and 7 euros for those ages 4-14. Online: tinyurl.com/3yv9vs5r

Karen Bradbury

**Cabbage:** Germany gives kraut its proper due in the form of many fun festivals.

The town of Leinfelden-Echterdingen, found just south of Stuttgart, is known for its cultivation of a specific type of cabbage known as Filderkraut, which has a pointy tip. From Oct. 18-20, the Filderkrautfest plates up culinary treats in the form of sauerkraut, cabbage cakes, stuffed cabbage leaves, soups and more. The accompanying program includes live music ranging from oompah to Latin American rhythms and the exceptional opening of shops on festival Sunday. Online: tinyurl.com/2bw77mxu

Eltville, a town on the Rhine just west of Wiesbaden, hosts what's commonly referred to as the Rheingau region's last big fest of the season. From Oct. 31-Nov. 4, the Kappeskerb & Weinlesefest will celebrate cabbage and the grape harvest simultaneously. The program includes live music nightly and a "wine village" set up next to the train station, where the town's excellent wines, both still and sparkling, can be sipped and sampled. A parade takes place Nov. 2 at 3 p.m. Online: tinyurl.com/3zt6pea2

iStock

**Ludwigsburg castle hosts a fanciful exhibition of hundreds of thousands of pumpkins arranged into sculptures. Plenty of pumpkin-related snacks are also available at the exhibition, which runs on weekends until Nov. 3.**

**Chestnuts:** Chestnuts have been cultivated in Europe for thousands of years, and no wonder: they are energy-rich, easy to prepare by roasting, boiling or grinding into flour, and just plain tasty. Today, dozens of communities with a historical connection to the cultivation of chestnuts celebrate their bond with this versatile superfood.

In Germany, celebrations take over Annweiler am Trifels Oct. 5-6 in the form of the "Keschdefeschd." The cute community close to the French border will be home to numerous stands offering sweet and savory treats, from spreadable creams to liqueurs, mustards, honey and bread. Other regional specialties such as game, cheese and wine will be offered. At 11 a.m. Oct. 5, the Chestnut Princess will be crowned. The event runs from 11 a.m.-6 p.m. both days. Online: tinyurl.com/4zp72nm6

Ludwigsburg celebrates its love of chestnuts with its Kastanienbeutelfest, or Chestnut Bag Festival, a downtown event held on a Sunday on which shops have special permission to open. On Oct. 13, visitors can check out designer, art and gourmet markets or sample dishes featuring chestnuts. There's also a children's program. Online: tinyurl.com/24yw3wah

From tip to toe, Italy's residents also celebrate their marroni and castagne. Combai, a town in Treviso, pays homage to the beloved nut Oct. 4-27 with its annual Festa dei Marroni, a chance to sample amazing and unexpected chestnut-based dishes. Marradi, a traditional mountain village in the province of Florence, celebrates on all Sundays in October with stands and cultural events. Those based in Sicily can take part in three days of fun, which the community of Mezzojuso hosts Oct. 25-27.

**Cheese:** Many of Switzerland's cows have recently returned from their summer in the Alpine pastures, and their milk is as delicious as it gets. Throughout the fall, various cheese markets allow the public to taste products made from this milk. Some upcoming cheese markets in Switzerland organized by cheese-festival.ch include those in Huttwil Sept. 21-22; Thun Sept. 28; Bern Oct. 12; Lucerne Oct. 19, Appenzell Oct. 26-27 and Rapperswil-Jona Nov. 9. Online: cheese-festival.ch

Another fine place to sample cheese is at the Lugano Autumn Festival, set to take place Oct. 5-6. Visitors can taste competition-winning cheeses as decided by the jury of the Swiss Cheese Awards organization, presented at a dedicated market. Ticino's wine offerings and folkloric performances make the proposition all the more alluring. Online: luganoeventi.ch/it/festa-autunno-lugano

# WEEKEND: TRAVEL

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**Tourists crowd around the Trevi Fountain in Rome. It is the city's largest baroque fountain and one of the most famous fountains in the world.**

# Taming tourism at the Trevi Fountain

## Locals frustrated with crowding near Roman monument but not happy about potential plan to restrict access

**By Natalie B. Compton**
*The Washington Post*

After yet another summer of overtourism woes in Italy, officials in Rome are considering new measures to limit crowds at the Trevi Fountain, one of the country's most famous sites.

Alessandro Onorato, a tourism councilor for Rome, said in an email to The Washington Post that the government wants to implement a timed ticket system to access the basin of the fountain, "a monument that needs to be protected and preserved." The ticket would be free for Romans and a "symbolic price" of 1 or 2 euros for travelers.

"We want to make a visit to the Trevi Fountain truly a unique and serene experience, without shoulder-to-shoulder with other tourists or pushing our way in," Onorato said. "And we also want to prevent visitors from eating on the steps, a sandwich or an ice cream, or worse, from jumping into the water."

Reuters reported that Rome's mayor, Roberto Gualtieri, said such a plan was a "concrete" possibility and that Italy's tourism minister, Daniela Santanchè, was open to a program for controlling visitation at the fountain similar to that at the Pantheon. The Italian Culture Ministry debuted a 5-euro ticket system at the Pantheon last year.

Tourism hit record numbers in Italy in 2023, and the country's popularity shows no signs of waning. Next year, the Vatican is celebrating a "Jubilee" year, which takes place every quarter-century. The 2025 Jubilee is expected to bring an additional 30 million pilgrims to Rome, the Associated Press reported.

The impending influx "does make it worth considering some way to control the crowds," said Kathy McCabe, host of the travel show "Dream of Italy" on PBS.

McCabe has fond memories of visiting the Trevi Fountain decades ago when there were, at most, a few handfuls of people appreciating the baroque masterpiece. Today, it's a different experience, with masses of tourists crammed around the perimeter jockeying for a view or selfie.

McCabe says the fountain, like the name of her show, represents the dream of Italy, "of what it once was and what we hope it would be," she said. And at the same time, it's the reality of Italy: a place struggling to cope with its immense popularity.

She's conflicted about crowd mitigation measures but understands where city officials are coming from.

"Maybe it's something they could just do in the high season," she said. "But like in many places across Europe, almost every month is high season now in Rome."

Unlike the Pantheon — a former Roman temple that visitors now pay to go inside — the Trevi Fountain is an open-air destination nestled in the meeting of three roads that melds into the neighborhood. Critics of the proposed ticketing system say cordoning off the fountain would be disruptive.

"Moving through the streets is already so unpleasant due to the numerous bottlenecks," said Katie Parla, a Rome-based author and tour guide who has lived in the city for more than 21 years.

She added, "I don't think that visitors or locals will benefit from constricting a very, very intensely trafficked part of the city."

Flavio Scannavino, general manager of the Hotel De' Ricci, located about a mile from the Trevi Fountain, agrees that it's difficult to get around the city during high season because of the throng of visitors. He welcomes a way to better regulate the flow of foot traffic, especially ahead of the Jubilee.

However, Scannavino calls any proposed fee to see the fountain "in bad taste."

"I don't think it's right that the people have to pay to enjoy this beauty," he said.

Parla also believes such limitations are antithetical to the essence of the fountain, which was inaugurated as a work of public art commissioned by Pope Clement XII in the 18th century.

"And yet, access to the Trevi Fountain for local residents is increasingly complicated by the enormous hordes of tourists that start even at 6 in the morning these days — which is pretty unprecedented," she said.

Simone Amorico, CEO of the private tour operator Access Italy, passed by the fountain on Thursday afternoon. Even in September, after the peak summer rush has come and gone from the city, "it's the busiest place in Rome," he said of the site. "It's very crowded, even in low season."

Amorico isn't sure whether any effort to restrict access will pass, particularly in the timeline proposed by Onorato.

Rules are "not easy to change" in Italy, he said.

But he's in favor of any effort to regulate the fountain. Echoing Santanchè, he pointed to the recent changes at the Pantheon.

"There was overtourism there, too, but now you need to book a time slot and it's a lot better, actually," he said. "There has to be some sort of prevention against overtourism in these popular monuments."

Parla said the Pantheon changes haven't been perfect, calling the process of buying admission a "mess" because of a complicated website and a confusing ticket office location.

"I'm not encouraged by the sort of precursor to this and just generally don't agree with charging for public art," she said.

Parla would rather see the city come up with a strategic communication plan to market other less-visited historic sites, such as Museum of the Palazzo Massimo or the Basilica of Sant'Agostino.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

# Skip crowds, queues at Didiland in Alsace

## Under-the-radar theme park in France offers full day of amusement for kids and perks for parents as well

BY HEATHER BENIT
*Stars and Stripes*

A faded sign at French theme park Didiland calls the park Paradise Island, which it is for young children, providing a full day of amusement and nearly instant gratification.

I wouldn't call Didiland paradise, but the under-the-radar park in the Alsace region offers perks for parents as well. Even in peak summer season, the crowds are small and the lines are short.

Entrance fees are 26.50 euros for adults and 24.50 euros for children at least 1 meter (a little over 3 feet) tall. While those prices add up for a family, it's a comparatively good value. For example, Holiday Park in Hassloch, Germany, charges 49.50 euros for adults and 44 euros for kids.

At 17 acres, Didiland is small and the rides are more comparable to those of a rural Kerwe-style fair than to a major theme park like Europa Park and Holiday Park. But Didiland doesn't have vendors and kitsch to spend extra money on. It's all about the rides.

My family recently joined two others for a day trip to the park. We left the Kaiserslautern area at 9 a.m. and arrived by 10:30 a.m. That was with no traffic, one bathroom break and a carsick kid.

A washed-out sign along the side of the road discreetly directed us to a parking lot that sits next to a cornfield. The setting gave off American Midwest vibes.

A crowd had already gathered at the entrance, but we had bought tickets online in advance and skipped the queue.

Our strategy for staying together and maximizing our day was to follow the park's numbered map, which guides visitors from the entrance through 41 attractions, mostly rides for young children like antique car driving, a merry-go-round and a water playground.

There's also a restaurant and a section with more adventurous rides like a spinning roller coaster and rafting. Maps are only in French or German but are easy to follow in either language.

A measuring stick at the entrance of each ride determines whether children are tall enough to ride alone, with an adult or not at all.

For example, at the Pirate Tower, a pirate ship that soars back and forth like a nauseating swing, children under roughly 3 feet 7 inches can't ride at all, children from about 4 feet 3 inches can ride with an adult, and anyone taller than 4-foot-3 can ride alone.

The 2½-year-old in our group had to sit out some rides, but the three boys, ages 3-5, were able to ride everything in the Le Petit section with an adult companion. The lines were short or nonexistent during our August visit.

Rides closed at noon for a lunch break, making the line for lunch more than an hour long at the only eatery that was open that day.

We ordered chicken nuggets and french fries for the kids and salads and bratwurst for the adults. Fries with nuggets, one salad, one bratwurst and a drink came to 26 euros. The menu options were very limited. Later we got ice cream for about 2 euros.

Our favorite attractions were the Wild River ride, which floats gently through the water before a steep, splashing drop, and the water playground, which was a chaotic scene of wet kids running around but a good way to cool off and burn energy before the drive back.

There are only a few days left in Didiland's 2024 schedule. The park closes from October until April, with its last day this year being Sept. 22. Check the schedule before going because the park is open only three days a week in September.

If you go, bring a swimsuit and pack a lunch. That way, you can avoid both the extra expense and the long line for food when the rides close, ensuring a stress-free day at Didiland.

benit.heather@stripes.com

**A sign points drivers to the parking lot for Didiland theme park in Morsbronn-les-Bains, France, just an hour and a half by car from Kaiserslautern, Germany.**

### On the QT

**Address:** 1 Route de Gunstett, Morsbronn-les-Bains, France
**Prices:** 26.50 euros for adults and 24.50 for children in the 2024 season. Check online for group rates and specials.
**Hours:** 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. in April-June and September; 10 a.m.-6 p.m. in July and August. Closed October-April. Open all week in July and August but only Wednesdays and weekends in June and September. Check the season's schedule online.
**Information:** billetterie.didiland.fr

Heather Benit

PHOTOS BY HEATHER BENIT/Stars and Stripes

**A ferris wheel is one of 41 attractions at Didiland in Morsbronn-les-Bains, France. The rides are more more comparable to those of a rural Kerwe-style fair than to a major theme park like Europa Park and Holiday Park.**

**Didiland amusement park is located in the countryside of Alsace. The park appears old and run-down from above, but it's clean and surrounded by trees. The setting gives off American Midwest vibes.**

**The water playground was a favorite attraction for the kids during an August visit to Didiland. There's also a train that takes visitors around the 17-acre amusement park.**

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

# Trust L'intuition for a great meal

## Belgium eatery's menu changes each month, cooked by young talent

BY MATT WAGNER
*Stars and Stripes*

PHOTOS BY MATT WAGNER/Stars and Stripes

**L'intuition in Houdeng-Aimeries, Belgium, which is 20 minutes away from Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, has three large rooms that allow it to host up to 80 people, according to the restaurant's website. The grounds can hold banquets and other celebratory events.**

My intuition hasn't failed me yet when it comes to choosing restaurants during various stops in Europe.

A recent reporting trip to Mons, Belgium, kept that streak going thanks to an establishment whose very name was validation.

Advance scouting for eateries led me to L'intuition in the village of Houdeng-Aimeries, just 20 minutes away from Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. I missed my rescheduled reservation time by 10 minutes, though, so I figured the restaurant would tell me to buzz off.

Yet when I showed up, the hostess welcomed me as if it were nothing. That warmth foreshadowed the rest of the evening at L'intuition.

The restaurant opened right before Christmas last year, which explained why I couldn't find too much information on it, and the menu changes every month.

The hostess allowed me to explore the restaurant and grounds, which she said can hold banquets and other celebratory events. L'intuition has three seminar rooms accommodating up to 80 people, and the back of the property consists of a spacious lawn.

My French is nonexistent, making it a relief to know we could communicate in English. With the hostess translating the menu and specials, I didn't have any problems picking my dinner.

Originally, I had planned just on getting a croquette and the daily special, a pork fillet glazed with soy sauce. Yet when she pointed out that the feta cheese in a pasta dish came from a dairy farm 3 miles away, I decided to add that.

I first received a slice of bread with local butter and a zucchini soup, which was good but perhaps a bit warm for a late summer evening.

The shrimp-filled croquette came with a few slices of lettuce covered in a raspberry vinaigrette dressing. The croquette was the right blend of crunchy on the outside and gooey on the inside, and the dressing was a nice surprise.

Next was the pasta with tomatoes, feta cheese and tomato sauce. I was hesitant because I'm not normally a fan of the usual grocery store tomatoes. But the yellow variety that night were so sweet that I enjoyed them for the first time in my life. It went well with the tartness of the dish's red berries.

I was pleased and already full. The pork fillet was left, and when it was placed in front of me, I struggled to start.

The host came out to ask my opinion a few minutes later and saw that I hadn't touched the pork or the vegetable medley of potatoes, green beans, a carrot, cauliflower and a section of a radish whose name got lost in translation.

Eventually, I managed to lift my knife and fork to start, and suddenly I had room to spare.

The first bite clinched it as the best piece of pork I've ever eaten. The fillet was so tender and juicy that I inhaled it.

The vegetables made me feel a little less guilty about my choice. I at least had a few healthy items to consume while acting like gluttony personified.

I had to send my compliments to the chef, and that's when the hostess told me he's 23 years old. He's a can't-miss talent.

I'm glad I trusted my gut instinct, and I cannot suggest L'intuition enough. Whether you go there just for a regular meal or a special occasion, it is fantastic.

wagner.mathew@stripes.com
@MWagsStripes

AFTER HOURS BELGIUM

### L'intuition

**Address:** Rue de l'Hospice 59, Houdeng-Aimeries, Belgium
**Hours:** 12-2 p.m. and 6:30-9 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; 6:30-9 p.m. Saturday; 12-2 p.m. Sunday
**Prices:** Between 10 and 34 euros ranging from appetizers to main dishes.
**Information:** Online: lintuition.be; Phone: +32 470105104

Matt Wagner

**The shrimp croquette was served with lettuce and a raspberry vinaigrette dressing. Patrons also could order two croquettes as an appetizer.**

**The fresh pasta with seasonal tomatoes and red berries comes with feta cheese made at a local dairy farm.**

**The pork fillet glazed in soy sauce was a daily special on Aug. 27. Served with the meat was a medley of vegetables.**

**L'intuition in Houdeng-Aimeries, Belgium, seen here from the restaurant's private parking lot, opened Dec. 20. Its menu changes every month, and ability to speak French isn't a prerequisite.**

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

# A fair way to pass the time

## Modest 9-hole course invites those deployed Down Under in Darwin to work on golf swing

BY SETH ROBSON
*Stars and Stripes*

Gardens Park Golf Links isn't on par with St. Andrews or Pebble Beach, but it's a fun place to work on your skills without going far from central Darwin, Australia.

The nine-hole course near George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens bills itself as a golf oasis in this northern Australian port town.

The course is close enough to reach on foot from downtown. It's also within range of the electric scooters and bicycles available to rent throughout the city.

The 55-acre facility, flanked by some high-rise apartments and hotels, includes plenty of shady trees, a few streams and drains and a small pond near the clubhouse.

You can rent a golf cart or walk, with or without a trundler.

The fairways were a little rough during a round in late July (dry season in the Northern Territory). But if you bend the rules and allow generous placing, you can find plenty of grassy spots to hit from.

The greens are about half the size of what you'll find at a fancy course, and they're shaped like upside down desert bowls.

However, the putting surfaces are reasonably paced and consistent.

The round starts and ends with par 3s. The eighth hole is also a par 3, but you can hit the rental set's driver on the other holes as long as you're not Bryson DeChambeau or John Daly.

Holes four and five feature elevated tee boxes. The fairway is quite narrow on hole four and there's a good chance your drive ends up in a concrete drain.

Holes five and seven are relatively short par 4s, and a solid tee shot on either might reach the green.

There's a mini-golf course next to the clubhouse, which has a pro shop and licensed bar. There's a shady area with tables and chairs next to the building where you can cool off with a beer or a soda.

If you'd like a more challenging round at a nearby course, head to Darwin Golf Club, close to Darwin International airport, or Palmerston Golf and Country Club, another 20 minutes' drive away, but make sure you book a tee time.

robson.seth@stripes.com
@SethRobson1

PHOTOS BY SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

**The nine-hole Gardens Park Golf Links near George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens in Darwin, Australia, is a fun place to work on your skills without going far from the city center.**

### On the QT

**Directions:** Address: 1 Chin Quan Rd, The Gardens NT 0820
**Times:** Open daily, 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.
**Costs:** Nine holes for A$15, or about $10; 18 holes are $25; rent clubs for $15 and a cart for $30; a minigolf round is $8.
**Food:** Drinks and snacks are available at the pro shop.
**Information:** Online: gardensparkgolf-links.com.au

Seth Robson

**Gardens Park Golf Links includes mini golf next to the clubhouse.**

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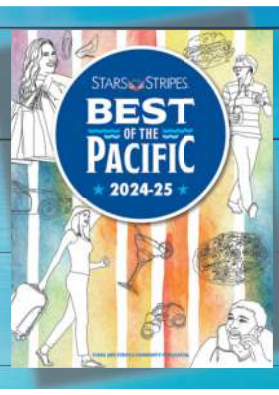

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# WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

PHOTOS BY BRIAN MCELHINEY/Stars and Stripes

**The gordita plate at Mesilla Kitchen in Okinawa city. Marine Corps veteran Andre Park owns the new eatery, which serves fare that reflects the cultural diversity of the southwestern United States.**

# New from New Mexico

## Mesilla Kitchen doles out hefty, satisfying portions in Okinawa city

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY
*Stars and Stripes*

Craving a taste of Southwestern cuisine — specifically, New Mexican cuisine — on Okinawa? You're not alone.

Marine Corps veteran Andre Park, owner of Mesilla Kitchen near Gate 2 Street in Okinawa city, said he's amazed at how many of his fellow New Mexicans are on the island.

"At least two to three people a day tell me, 'I'm from Albuquerque,' 'I'm from Rio Rancho,'" he recently told Stars and Stripes.

Before opening the brick-and-mortar location three months ago, Park operated a food truck on the island for about a year and a half.

"A lot of the customers were like, 'Hey, when are you going to open a restaurant? When are you going to open a restaurant?'" Park said. "So, about a year before I decided to get out, we started working on it."

Judging from the crowd on that recent night, Park does brisk business. The cozy restaurant was packed with off-duty service members and American families (Park says about 8-10% of his business comes from Okinawans).

Customers order by filling out paper slips for the table. It was easy to figure out, and the waitstaff are American so any questions will be answered without awkward language faux pas.

You can customize menu items — I ordered the gordita plate (fried masa pockets stuffed with meat, cheese, lettuce and tomato) with one carnitas gordita and one pollo asada gordita.

The food came fast despite the crowd. Tortilla chips and a guacamole appetizer offered a preview of the generous portions to come — there was more than enough guac for every chip, unlike at some stingier restaurants I've been to in the States — and everything tasted homemade.

I am no expert when it comes to New Mexican food. Park explained how "it's not authentic Mexican food, it's New Mexican food, which is a blend of Mexican, Native American and all the cultures that are there."

My party was surprised when we ordered the enchilada plate and received tortillas piled high with pollo asada chicken, cheese and sauce — almost like a deconstructed enchilada.

The plates come with Spanish rice and refried beans. These are American portions, not Okinawan, and my dining partner couldn't finish her plate (no such problems on my end, however).

You can order double meat with any dish for an additional 500 yen, although that might not be necessary; the enchiladas and gorditas were stacked and satisfying with a normal helping.

I'm a huge fan of carnitas, and Mesilla's version did not disappoint. However, I'd order the pollo asada again over it. The chicken was tender, moist and superbly seasoned. Other choices include carne asada and red chile meat, and the menu also offers New Mexican-style tacos, chilaquiles, sopapillas and options for the kids.

Mesilla Kitchen is open for dinner Wednesday through Sunday and breakfast on Saturdays and Sundays. Park said he'd like to expand to lunch and is looking for more chefs.

mcelhiney.brian@stripes.com
@BrianMcElhiney

**AFTER HOURS OKINAWA**

### Mesilla Kitchen

**Location:** 4-16-1 Misato, Okinawa City, Okinawa
**Hours:** 5 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday; 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Saturday and Sunday
**Prices:** 1,500 to 2,500 yen per person for dinner, or about $10.55 to $17.58
**Information:** @Mesilla_Kitchen on Instagram

Brian McElhiney

**Marine Corps veteran Andre Park, owner of Mesilla Kitchen in Okinawa city, said he's amazed at how many of his fellow New Mexicans are on the island.**

# Charred corn and broccoli salad with miso a smoky, savory dish

BY ELLIE KRIEGER
*The Washington Post*

This recipe makes the most of the deep flavor coaxed out of fresh corn and broccoli when they are cooked under (or over) an open flame.

TOM MCCORKLE/For The Washington Post

**Charred Corn and Broccoli Salad pairs well with any protein.**

### Charred Corn and Broccoli Salad

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

**Ingredients**

*4 ears corn, shucked*
*2 tablespoons neutral oil, such as avocado or canola, divided*
*¼ teaspoon fine salt, divided*
*1 head broccoli (1½ pounds), trimmed and cut into 1½-inch florets*
*2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice (from 1 lemon)*
*1 tablespoon shiro (white) miso*
*¼ cup mayonnaise*
*1 teaspoon honey*
*½ teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger*
*⅛ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper*
*½ cup thinly sliced scallions, white and green parts (from 2 large scallions)*

**Directions**

Position a rack about 6 inches away from the broiling element and preheat the broiler on high.

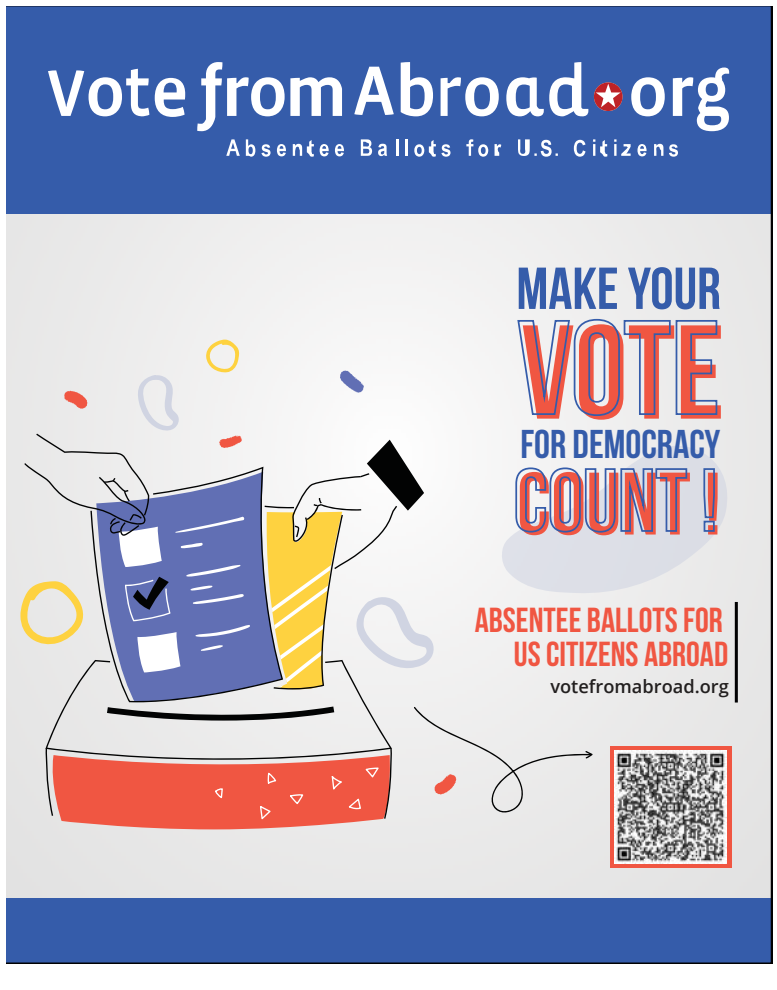
Place the corn in a medium bowl. Drizzle it with 1 tablespoon of the oil and sprinkle with ⅛ teaspoon of the salt. Toss to coat evenly, rubbing the oil into the cobs with your hands as needed.

Arrange the corn on a large sheet pan and broil for about 2 minutes, or until starting to char. Rotate the corn a quarter turn, and broil for another 2 minutes, or until starting to char on top.

Meanwhile, in the same bowl used for the corn, toss the broccoli with the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil and ⅛ teaspoon of salt. Remove the sheet pan with the corn from the broiler, push the corn to one side and arrange the broccoli in a single layer on the other side. Rotate the corn a quarter turn again, and then continue to broil, for about 2 minutes. Rotate the corn the final quarter turn, stir the broccoli and broil for another 2 minutes, or until both vegetables are nicely charred. Transfer the vegetables to a cutting board to cool.

While the vegetables are cooling, make the dressing. In a small bowl, whisk together the lemon juice and miso until emulsified. Add the mayonnaise, honey, ginger and pepper, and whisk to thoroughly combine.

When the vegetables are cool enough to handle, coarsely chop the broccoli, and cut the kernels off the corn and transfer them to a large bowl. Add the scallions and the dressing, and toss to combine. Serve right away.



# Parties of one

## As the trend of dining alone in public expands, restaurants adapt with seating, specific menus

BY DEE-ANN DURBIN AND ANNE D'INNOCENZIO
*Associated Press*

Parisa Imanirad, a scientist and cancer researcher from San Francisco, is married and has a wide circle of friends. But once or twice a week, she goes to a restaurant by herself.

Imanirad said dining alone gives her time to think or read. She tries not to touch her phone and relishes the silence.

"It's like a spa, but a different type," Imanirad said during a recent solo lunch at Spruce, an upscale restaurant in San Francisco.

Imanirad isn't alone in her desire to be alone. In the U.S., solo dining reservations have risen 29% over the past two years, according to OpenTable, the restaurant reservation site. They're up 18% this year in Germany and 14% in the United Kingdom.

Japan even has a special term for solo dining: "ohitorisama," which means "alone" but with honorifics spoken both before and after the word to make parties of one feel less hesitant. In a recent survey, Japan's Hot Pepper Gourmet Eating Out Research Institute found that 23% of Japanese people eat out alone, up from 18% in 2018.

As a result, many restaurants in Japan and elsewhere are redoing their seating, changing their menus and adding other special touches to appeal to solo diners.

"Even so-called family restaurants are increasing counter seats for solitary diners, and restaurants are offering courses with smaller servings so a person eating alone gets a variety of dishes," said Masahiro Inagaki, a senior researcher at the institute.

OpenTable CEO Debby Soo thinks remote work is one reason for the increase, with diners seeking respites from their home offices. But she thinks there are deeper reasons, too.

"I think there's a broader movement of self-love and self-care and really ... enjoying your own company," Soo said.

The pandemic also made social interactions less feasible and therefore less important while eating out, said Anna Mattila, a professor of lodging management at Penn State University who has studied solo dining. And smartphones help some restaurant patrons feel connected to others even when they're by themselves, she said.

"The social norms have changed. People don't look at solo diners anymore and think, 'You must be a loner,'" Mattila said.

The growth comes as more people are living alone. In 2019, the Pew Research Center found that 38% of U.S. adults ages 25 to 54 were living without a partner, up from 29% in 1990. In Japan, single households now make up one-third of the total; that's expected to climb to 40% by 2040, according to government data.

Increasing interest in solo travel — particularly among travelers ages 55 and over — is also leading to more meals alone.

On a recent solo trip to Lucerne, Switzerland, Carolyn Ray was stunned when the hostess led her to a beautiful lake-view table set for one, complete with a small vase of flowers. Ray, the CEO and editor of JourneyWoman, a website for solo women travelers over 50, said other restaurants have tried to seat her toward the back or pointedly asked if someone will be joining her.

Ray counsels women planning to dine alone to go somewhere else if they're treated rudely or given a bad table.

"It's almost like the world hasn't caught up with this idea that we are on our own because we want to be on our own and we're independent and empowered," she said. "We can go into any restaurant we want and have a table for one and feel good about it."

Shawn Singh, a Houston-based content creator and restaurant reviewer, said he eats alone about 70% of the time. If the idea of venturing out for a solitary meal is intimidating, he suggests going to lunch instead of dinner — when tables are usually more crowded with groups — or going early on a weekday.

"The best way to see a restaurant you've been wanting to see for a long time is definitely going solo," Singh said. "If I go at 5 p.m. and alone, I haven't been denied at one place ever."

Restaurants aren't always thrilled to seat a single diner at a table that could fit more. A Michelin-starred London restaurant, Alex Dilling at Hotel Café Royal, caused a stir last year when it started charging solo patrons the same price as two customers. Its eight-course dinner tasting menu, which includes caviar and Cornish squid, costs $280 per person.

The restaurant, which has only 34 seats, didn't respond to a request for comment. But its website doesn't allow reservations for less than two people.

Other restaurants say it's worth seating one person at a table made for two because solo diners tend to be loyal, repeat customers.

"While there may be a short-term loss there, I think we're kind of playing the long game and establishing ourselves as a place that's truly special," said Drew Brady, chief operating officer at Overthrow Hospitality, which operates 11 vegan restaurant concepts in New York.

Brady has seen an increase in solo diners since the pandemic, and says they're evenly split between men and women. At the company's flagship restaurant, Avant Garden, they make up as much as 8% of patrons.

In response, the restaurant teamed up with Lightspeed, a restaurant tech and consulting company, to develop a solo dining program.

Avant Garden now has a spacious table designed for solo diners, with a $65 four-course menu fashioned like a passport to enhance the sense of adventure.

If solo diners order a cocktail, a bartender mixes it tableside.

Mattila, at Penn State, said restaurants might want to consider additional changes.

Her research has found that solo diners prefer angular shapes — in lights, tables or plates, for example — to round ones, which are more associated with the connectedness of groups. They also prefer slow-tempo music.

Jill Weber, the founder of Sojourn Philly, a Philadelphia company that owns two restaurants and a wine bar, said she adds a communal table at special events like wine tastings so individuals have a place to gather. She also doesn't offer specials designed for two.

Weber, who is also an archaeologist, loves dining alone when she's traveling.

"There's something about not having to agree on where to go and everything that goes with that. You have the freedom to stay as long as you want, order what you want and sit with those things," she said. "It also feels brave sometimes."

HAVEN DALEY/AP

**Parisa Imanirad eats lunch alone at Spruce, an upscale restaurant in San Francisco, on Aug. 22. She says dining alone gives her time to think or read. "It's like a spa, but a different type."**

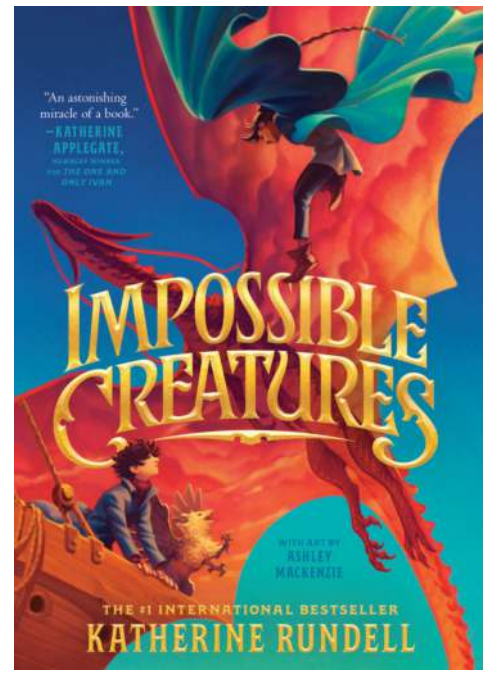
**"There's something about not having to agree on where to go and everything that goes with that. You have the freedom to stay as long as you want, order what you want and sit with those things. It also feels brave sometimes."**

**Jill Weber**
the founder of Sojourn Philly who enjoys dining alone when traveling

WEEKEND: BOOKS

# This generation's Tolkien

## Oxford fellow and author Katherine Rundell kindles imagination with 'Impossible Creatures'




**By Sophia Nguyen**
*The Washington Post*

Dragons never go out of style; so naturally, one of them arcs across the cover of Katherine Rundell's "Impossible Creatures," wings unfurled for maximum glory. That seems to have done the trick: The novel, newly available in the States, was an instant bestseller when it came out in Britain last year. It would be easy to overlook the little guy at the bottom left of the illustration — a baby griffin named Gelifen. He is the last of his kind and the true heart of Rundell's story, in which two kids, Mal and Christopher, must save a magic realm from environmental catastrophe. Griffins are "joy birds," a scientist tells them. "Cornucopial life admirers."

That also describes Rundell, a fellow at St. Catherine's College at Oxford and the latest in that university's celebrated tradition of scholar-fantasists — C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Philip Pullman. She is a high-spirited evangelist for her various passions (in no particular order: children's fiction, Renaissance literature and the natural world). Her first book for adults, "Why You Should Read Children's Books, Even Though You Are So Old and Wise," from 2019, was an essay-length retort to the colleagues who claimed that her talents were wasted on the genre. "I felt that that was so shortsighted, so ludicrous," she said. "A really great children's book can hook a child. It can put a fish hook through their imagination and root them in the world of books for the rest of their lives."

Next came "Super-Infinite," a fleet study of the poet John Donne that was widely admired for not only its intellect but also its forthright enthusiasm. Rundell will follow it in November with an essay collection, "Vanishing Treasures," paying tribute to various animal species. (A typical Rundellian declaration: "I did not believe in love at first sight; but I have found there's an exception, and that is the pangolin.") Opening one of her books is like seeing a missionary on your doorstep — chatty, bright-eyed, zealous. Somehow, Rundell makes you want to invite her in for tea.

**Rundell**

Rundell spent her formative years in wild spaces. At age 7, she moved to Zimbabwe, where her mother had family and her father worked as a diplomat, paying the young Rundell 50 pence for every poem she memorized (and extra if it came from the Renaissance). "My childhood was bedecked with the mad beauty of the living world," she said. "Just growing up in a space where you could be alongside things that grew and lived that weren't human, and weren't human-made — or really, human-cultivated."

That experience, along with her family's rage-inducing move to Brussels (where "all the birds look like they're going to a funeral"), inspired her first novel, published in the United States as "Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms," about a girl growing up on an African farm who is sent to an English boarding school. Rundell wrote the draft in a mad rush, in the month or so between her 21st birthday and starting a new job. Back then she didn't know what it was to live in the adult world, "but I did know what it was to be a child. This would be a place where I would feel on not just firm ground, but on ground which felt to me very, very alive." That first draft was bad — in retrospect, because she had tried cramming in every idea she ever had — but it gave her a taste for the work.

Her second book, "Rooftoppers," about a secret world above the buildings of Paris, made her realize she wanted to spend the rest of her life writing for children: "There was something about the imperatives for clarity and boldness that I just adored." She also felt compelled to speak to them about life's sorrows, because of an early experience of grief: the death of her foster sister when Rundell was 10. "I have always wanted to offer children a sense that — it would be a lie to say that everything is fine. Everything is *not* fine. But despite the pain that you will not be able to swerve — I do not know when it will come, but it will come — the beauty, and the astonishment, the generosity, the care, the love, is also real. It makes it worth all of your endurance."

All of Rundell's fiction has to please both her young self and her adult self, she said. The young self loves descriptions of food and elaborate contraptions, lots of jokes, and adventures "without overmuch adult interference." (Her next three novels featured resourceful, clever protagonists who raise wolf cubs, travel the Amazon river and cross the ocean to New York.) The adult self prizes complexity "and an acknowledgment of the little angry rat that lives inside the human heart."

But it isn't easy to tell where one self ends and the other begins. Rundell found some of the imaginary animals that populate "Impossible Creatures" in old manuscripts, while researching for her academic lectures: "Sometimes you would find, in the corners, doodles of chimeric figures, maybe a manticore."

The first draft of "Impossible Creatures" was overstuffed, and Rundell took pains to shave the manuscript down. There had to be enough detail to make the story shine, and enough left out so that the reader's imagination could fill in the rest. The greatest children's books pull off this balancing act, per Rundell: To this day, she can recount the hair color of the Pevensies of Narnia, "but they are never described in the book." Only by leaving space in the story can children feel comfortable inhabiting it, making it their own.

Rundell knew she had succeeded when, at public appearances, readers would come up to talk to her. They were usually around 11 or 12; they might have a younger sibling they were discussing the story with. They *knew*, of course, none of "Impossible Creatures" was real. But they wanted to ask, just to check. Just in case.

"I confess, I am fairly brutal," she said. In reply, she tells them: *The world is imagined. The creatures were imagined by people hundreds and thousands of years before me. But they tell us something about ourselves. And our creatures are just as extraordinary.*

Rundell hopes "to teach them the wonder muscle — so that wonder can be directed at the very real astonishments of this world."

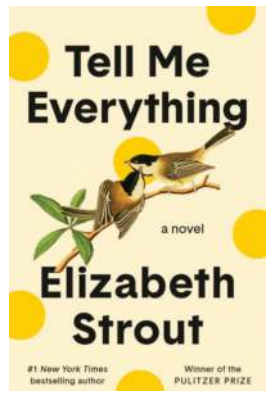
# Familiar worlds collide in Elizabeth Strout's 'Tell Me Everything'

**By Hamilton Cain**
*The Washington Post*

Perhaps it was inevitable that Elizabeth Strout would bring together the leads from her previous novels: In her canny, radiant new book, "Tell Me Everything," Lucy Barton, a famous author now ensconced in the coastal Maine town of Crosby, finally meets Olive Kitteridge, the ornery heroine of Strout's Pulitzer Prize-winning work. Sparks fly, igniting plotlines. "Tell Me Everything" gathers Lucy and Olive plus a vast ensemble cast beneath a single tent, a family (or frenemy) reunion. The kaleidoscope of spouses and ex-spouses, colleagues and generations shifts and shifts again, but always with Strout's agile grip on the dial.

This novel belongs to Bob Burgess, the 65-year-old lawyer last seen on leisurely walks with Barton in "Lucy by the Sea." Although the COVID-19 emergency has ebbed, Bob and Lucy have maintained their routine. Lucy still lives with her ex-husband William, the father of her grown daughters, with whom she's rekindled a romance. Bob feels listless within the shadow of his overbearing minister wife, Margaret, but a fresh legal challenge spurs him into action: the defense of a middle-aged hermit, Matt Beach, accused of murdering his elderly mother. The mystery forms the spine of "Tell Me Everything" as Strout toggles among characters. Bob confides most of his internal burdens to Lucy — the agonizing loss of his sister-in-law, concern for his alcoholic first wife, Pam — while keeping the investigation's details to himself.

His dilemmas anchor "Tell Me Everything," as does the evolving bond between Olive and Lucy, who forge a collaboration: an exchange of stories about "unrecorded lives." Olive has read Lucy's books and wants to share her own whoppers with a professional writer; Bob brokers an introduction. Ninety years old and a resident at Maple Tree Apartments, an assisted-care facility, Olive is an earthy counterweight to the "childlike" Lucy.




Even with sections set in Manhattan and Brooklyn, "Tell Me Everything" hits like a bucolic fable: "In October the foliage exploded, shattering the world with a goldenness. ... Yellow leaves fluttered everywhere; it was a thing of beauty. The days were cold and at night it rained, but in the morning there was the sun again, and all the glory of the natural world twinkled and nestled itself around the town." Strout's characters don't interrupt each other; they're not doomscrolling on their phones — they're listening. An intriguing question hovers over the story: An offstage "we" narrates, peeling away Crosby's layers — how do they know this information, are they complicit, who are they? Gossip, disclosures, remembrances, tall tales — all refer back to Strout's title, language as the bedrock of community.

Like Lucy, Bob is a naif; hence their connection. Their friendship deepens. The author writes about marriages, both successful and failed, avoiding the pitfalls of divorce literature currently in vogue. Her men and women are equally culpable in their betrayals. With her signature light touch, she skewers the parent-child relationship, sibling rivalries, the selfish instincts that steer us.

In the end, love is love is love. To everyone's surprise, a couple renews their vows. A girlfriend appears out of the blue. And Bob and Margaret maneuver around their problems. By learning to trust his own decency, Bob stumbles across peace and a wisdom that accrues with age. "He and Margaret — now that it was light late in the evenings — would go for a drive sometimes after their dinner, and they spoke with the intimacy of people who have been married for years," Strout writes. "One time she packed a picnic, the weather had turned warm again, and they sat at a public table a few towns away by an inlet of water and he felt an unhurried gladness move through him." Above all, "Tell Me Everything" is a novel of moods, how they govern our personal lives and public spaces, reflected in Strout's shimmering technique.

# WEEKEND: MUSIC

Gavin Elder

**David Gilmour released his first album in nine years, "Luck and Strange," on Sept. 6. The former Pink Floyd guitarist, 78, says he finally feels liberated from his past.**

## Pink Floyd's Gilmour reflects on feeling at ease with latest album

BY GEOFF EDGERS
*The Washington Post*

David Gilmour's first album in nine years is a family undertaking. Polly Samson, his novelist wife, wrote most of the lyrics for "Luck and Strange," and their 22-year-old daughter, Romany, sings harmonies and takes the lead on the moody "Between Two Points," covering a song by British indie-pop duo the Montgolfier Brothers.

At 78, Gilmour says he feels liberated from his past, particularly his half-century with Pink Floyd as it catapulted from London's psychedelic music underground to global platinum sellers who set the pace for progressive rock in the 1970s and '80s. But his new record will inevitably remind fans of Floyd.

The intimate, quietly aching vocal power of "Wish You Were Here" and "Comfortably Numb" is still very present, as are the soaring, melodic electric guitar leads that are unmistakably his. The title track even features the late Floyd keyboardist Richard Wright, spliced in from a jam captured in 2007.

But the music on "Luck and Strange" moves from baroque pop to arena rock to simple folk songs. Speaking last week from his home south of London, Gilmour said that as he worked on his new music, "I just felt totally at ease ... to be a bit truer to the moment that I'm living in."

**Washington Post: Normally, I would say to all of my rock heroes, "Oh, my gosh, please don't have a wife or a husband involved in an album. And definitely don't let the kid sing." But Polly's writing is beautiful, and, as you say, this album is as much hers as yours.**

**Gilmour:** I do say that. And it's true. We collaborate on absolutely everything. I mean, I do my little bit toward helping her with research when she's writing a book. And I think her lyrics are brilliant and I think particularly on this album, with the music, have come together to create something which for me is really exciting and satisfying.

**There's a sense of time passing and taking stock and a melancholy feeling that something's lost.**

The theme of aging is obviously quite dominant. Polly is really good at getting inside people's heads. On the subject of Covid, there was the belief at the beginning, which proved to not really be the case, that quite a percentage of the population could have died and particularly the elderly, of which I suppose I have to class myself.

And she was worried about all that stuff. And that was part of the conversations we had during that period of time.

**There are two things you've said that seem to be grabbing headlines as you talk about this album. Let's start with your saying this is the best album you've made since "The Dark Side of the Moon."**

Well, let me say that, you know, I can remember the moment of sitting down in the control room of Studio 3 at Abbey Road in 1973 and listening to the whole "The Dark Side of the Moon," because when you're making it, it's in bits, and you do joining bits and you do edits that connect all these things together.

And there was a moment — the first and only moment when we all sat together and listened to it all the way through. That was a moment of great joy and of satisfaction and the feeling of achievement that we'd really gone that extra mile. That feeling is what I have had here. This is not a concept album or anything like that, but it feels like a cohesive thing.

And the thrill of listening to the whole of this album all the way through was enormous. Nearly every car journey I take when I'm not walking that's an hour long, I listen to the album again, and I absolutely love it.

**The other big headline that you've made is: "David Gilmour backtracks on playing Pink Floyd songs in concerts." So what's that all about? First you said you'd play none. Now you're saying you'll play some. What should fans know as they come to these concerts?**

Well, I'm doing songs from as early as 1969 to as late as 1994 of Pink Floyd and some songs from my solo career. I'm pointing them in a certain direction that seems to fit with what I am doing now. There are not that many of them, but I changed my mind a bit and I did at one point say none of those things, but I was obviously a bit grumpy that morning.

**Do you feel something special when you play a song from 1973 or 1978, or is it like this is a dutiful role that I have to play for my fans?**

SEE GILMOUR ON PAGE 29

# WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

## Suki Waterhouse

Memoir of a Sparklemuffin (Sub Pop)

Suki Waterhouse is everywhere at once. A year after the hit show "Daisy Jones and the Six" reintroduced her music talents to a new audience, the indie-pop singer-songwriter-model-actress-entrepreneur opened for Taylor Swift on her record-breaking Eras Tour at London's Wembley Stadium. Now, Waterhouse has unveiled her second studio album, a sprawling 18-track release that never outstays its welcome and features plenty of shining moments.

"Memoir of a Sparklemuffin" is a vaguely ridiculous album title, referring to a colorful breed of jumping spider.

But it is an apt metaphor for her musical persona — unapologetic, iridescent and not afraid to bare fangs from time to time.

Waterhouse barnstorms through the opening third of the album with six songs that each run under three minutes. Opener "Gateway Drug" begins with spacious chords and mournful vocals and builds to a waltz-y crunch of garage guitar. "Supersad" ups the tempo with high vocals over a club-ready wall of guitar and synth sounds.

The single "Blackout Drunk" is an instant earworm, destined to be the most enduring track.

The catchy girl-group vocals and sharp handclaps belie darker themes. She sings, "Cause I can hardly wait to tell you all the s—— things that you've done / When you're up b-b-b-b-b-b-b-b-b-b-blackout drunk."

Waterhouse enlisted more than a dozen writers, producers and as many instrumentalists to collaborate with her on the project. The co-credits read like a mission statement of the musical territory to be covered: Jonathan Rado (known for his work with Father John Misty and Beyoncé), Brad Cook (Bon Iver, The War on Drugs), Rick Nowels (James Blake, Lana Del Rey) and Cigarettes After Sex's Greg Gonzalez.

Executive producer Eli Hirsch was instrumental behind the scenes, lending his own contributions on guitar, bass, keyboards and percussion. It is a high-wire act to work with so many contributors, and it wouldn't work without Waterhouse's vocal dexterity.

Throughout the release, she slides comfortably between '60s pop, '70s hippie jams, '90s alternative and contemporary alt-rock.

"Faded" drifts into dream-pop territory. The song starts with a lyrical flourish, "You used to call me Yoko cause I made a joke that all your friends are leaving."

The following track, "Nonchalant," maintains the mood with a jangle that evokes The Sundays.

Waterhouse shifts gears again with "My Fun," which opens with her singing about the nostalgic touch of summer: "Blood on the grass, blood on my knees." Like "Blackout Drunk," the song was co-written by Natalie Findlay of the band Ttrruuces.

Their collaboration summons Woodstock-era folk rock, complete with a goofy tooting flute.

Given the breadth of creative inputs and the high profile of the artist's personal life, it is hard to discern the degree to which "Memoir of a Sparklemuffin" is, well, a memoir. The album certainly offers glimpses; the melancholic "Model, Actress, Whatever" seems somewhat literal and specific to her experience.

Regardless of where the terrestrial Suki ends and the "Sparklemuffin" persona begins, the variety and pacing of the release make it enjoyable all the way through.

— Jim Pollock
The Associated Press

# Strait still warming hearts with his traditional country

By Maria Sherman
*Associated Press*

George Strait's 31st studio album, the feel-good "Cowboys and Dreamers," marks five decades of record releases; a titanic career for a Texas troubadour whose greatest ambition seems to have always been the same: Make pretty, plain-spoken songs about life's true pains and pleasures, and listeners will find their own resonance within them.

**George Strait**
Cowboys and Dreamers (MCA Nashville)

Across 13 songs in 47 minutes — his first collection since 2019's "Honky Tonk Time Machine" — Strait plays to his traditionalist country style without ever sounding derivative of his former records. That's the beauty of his particular songwriting: The songs on "Cowboys and Dreamers" could exist at any point in time across his career, not in a lazy atavistic fashion, but utilizing nostalgia as an effective art medium.

There are standouts for every mood across "Cowboys and Dreamers," best heard through an old truck's speakers while driving down an empty back road: The joyful single "Honky Tonk Hall of Fame," featuring Chris Stapleton, a cover of Waylon Jennings' "Waymore's Blues," and the Jimmy Buffet-informed vacation stomper, "MIA Down in MIA."

Privacy is required for the tear-jerking ballads with pedal steel that sounds like crying: Like on "The Little Things," "People Get Hurt Sometimes," "The Journey of Your Life" or, most severely, "Rent," written by Guy Clark and Keith Gattis; it begins with Strait offering a spoken-word tribute to the late Gattis.

Peggy Sirota

**George Strait's latest album is a feel-good set.**

"The war took my brother / The good Lord took my mother / And the years, well, I don't know where they all went," he later sings in its striking chorus. "Until that roll is called up yonder / All I can do is wonder / If I even did enough to make a dent / But I made a few good friends / And I always paid my rent."

Over the past two years, Strait has been on tour with Stapleton and Little Big Town. He's filled stadiums in states maybe not stereotypically associated with country music, but deep appreciators of the stuff, nonetheless. In June, at New Jersey's MetLife Stadium not far from New York City, Strait turned a space of tens of thousands across many demographics into something resembling the intimacy of those honky-tonks he's always singing about. Strait performed with a big band and a lot of heart, in a Western shirt and stiff, straight-starched jeans. (The closest a person can get to levitation is singing along to "Amarillo by Morning" in a stadium of tens of thousands, anyway.) There, as on "Cowboys and Dreamers," Strait's powers were in full force: Familiar sounds in a modern context. If you love Strait, you love him — and that makes it classic.

# Gilmour: Singer has no worries about becoming a hologram

FROM PAGE 28

I love the songs. I'm not ashamed of our career. We did great stuff. How could I not love it? But I don't love them more than the songs on this album that I'm doing now, or some of the other solo songs that I've done. And I like some of the later Pink Floyd songs just as much as some of the earlier Pink Floyd songs.

**It's complicated, I imagine, to pick those set lists. As someone who wasn't old enough for prime Pink Floyd, I wonder why you don't play something off your early solo records. "There's No Way Out of Here" or "Blue Light."**

Well, those first two albums, I haven't got any of those on the list. This time I listened to them. It just doesn't sound like the me that I am at the moment. And that's a hard thing to explain. "There's No Way Out of Here." It was a lovely song, you know? Again, it was a cover, but a great song, but I've got so much material to do that I want to do that. Some things just don't make the cut in the end. What can you do?

**You've seen so many artists sell their masters or publishing. Is that being considered?**

Yes. My reason for wanting to do it is I don't want to burden my kids with that whole legacy. And I also have had enough of the burdens of looking after that f—-ing legacy for the last nearly 40 years with the s—- and the arguments that go on. And I just want to be shorn of it.

**There's no fear of what happens when you're gone. Do you become a hologram? Do you get used in a toilet paper commercial? I saw your Pink Floyd bandmate Nick [Mason] talking recently about an AI version of Pink Floyd. Do these things worry you?**

No. I'll be dead. Who gives a s—- what anyone does?

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

# New Gotham series not so black & white

## Upcoming HBO show 'The Penguin' a character study of the charming but rage-filled Batman villain in a suit

By Tracy Brown
*Los Angeles Times*

One of the few scenes involving the Penguin in Matt Reeves' 2022 superhero crime thriller "The Batman" ended up on the cutting-room floor.

After a brief exchange with Selina Kyle at his nightclub, Oz Cobb, also known as the Penguin, can't help but lash out that his attempts at kindness were rejected.

"I know you don't see it yet. ... Nobody does," says Oz, portrayed by Colin Farrell, to Selina (Zoë Kravitz). "But one day, this city is going to be mine."

Upcoming HBO series "The Penguin," premiering Sept. 19, follows the midlevel gangster as he works to make good on that promise. Set one week after the events of "The Batman," the drama will see Oz try to fill the power vacuum that has been left in the criminal underbelly of Gotham. The show, originally designated a Max Original, was rebranded under the HBO banner as befits its prestige bona fides.

The eight-episode series sees an unrecognizable Farrell reprise his role and introduces other players in Oz's orbit, such as Cristin Milioti as Sofia Falcone, the daughter of the former Gotham kingpin Carmine Falcone, who is looking to avenge her father and take over the family business, as well as Rhenzy Feliz as Victor Aguilar, a teen whom Oz takes under his wing as his hired driver.

Showrunner Lauren LeFranc describes the series as "a character study on Oz" that will "get into his head psychologically ... dig[ging] deeper into who he is, into his past, into what he wants [and] what he fears."

"Oz is very smart and he's very calculated," says LeFranc during a recent video call. "He's also impulsive and a bit problematic and has a lot of rage built up inside of him. I also think he's charming and has a dark sense of humor. ... In the current climate of our world that we're in right now, I think there are many men like Oz, and that helps make him worth exploring."

A well-known member of the Batman rogues gallery, the Penguin, created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger, first appeared in the pages of "Detective Comics" No. 58 (1941). Also known as Oswald Cobblepot, he is generally depicted as a ruthless crime boss with an affinity for top hats and umbrellas (and birds). He is often drawn to physically resemble a penguin, dressed in a formal suit with a long bird-like nose, shuffling with a bit of a waddle.

Comic book writer Tom King, who is also working on HBO's DC comics-based "Lanterns" series, describes the Penguin as "iconic."

"The Penguin is one of those characters — and they are few and far between — that lives in the subconsciousness of not only America but the world," says King, whose bibliography includes more than 100 issues of "Batman" as well as a 12-issue "Penguin" series. "Everyone has an opinion on what the Penguin is and what he should be doing."

In addition to over 80 years' worth of comic book appearances, a number of Penguins have appeared on-screen. Burgess Meredith played the character in the 1960s "Batman" series, which starred Adam West as a campier iteration of the Caped Crusader. Danny DeVito portrayed a more fantastical take on Cobblepot, who was raised by penguins after being rejected by his parents, in "Batman Returns" (1992). More recently, the TV series "Gotham," which aired from 2014 to 2019, featured a more up-and-coming version of the Penguin played by Robin Lord Taylor. There are also numerous variations of the Penguin in video games and animation.

Farrell says Meredith's portrayal in the 1960s "Batman" series, which he grew up watching, was his introduction to the character.

> **"I wanted to do something where he was someone who had been underestimated ... somebody who was made fun of and overlooked. I wanted this sort of dark American dream. What success looks like for somebody in Gotham would come from a void at their center."**
>
> **Matt Reeves**
> an executive producer on "The Penguin"

"Like all else in 'Batman' '66, Burgess was funny and devilishly arch too," wrote Farrell in an email. "But playful, as that world of caper was. Danny was, well, as much Penguin as he was man. Psychotic and broken and dangerous to get too close to. Our Penguin would certainly [hew] closer to Danny's.

"Every iteration of the Penguin character is dangerous," he continued. "Each one is cerebral and a master of manipulation. Each one also seems dogged down by paranoia and a desire to be taken seriously and not made a mockery of. The biggest difference in all our efforts is the behavior that the film or television show calls for."

HBO/TNS

**In HBO's series "The Penguin," an unrecognizable Colin Farrell reprises his role from the 2022 film "The Batman" as Oz Cobb, short for Oswald Cobblepot, aka the Penguin. Farrell says his version of the villain hews closer to that of Danny DeVito in the 1992 "Batman Returns" film than Burgess Meredith in the '60s "Batman" TV series.**

Filmmaker Matt Reeves, an executive producer on "The Penguin," says his aim with "The Batman" was to introduce a version of Gotham that was grounded and for "it to be like [a city that exists] in our world."

With a grounded world comes grounded villains. After a deep dive into Batman's rogues gallery and noticing how many of them existed in reaction to Batman, Reeves considered a version of the Penguin who had yet to reach the status of a feared crime boss.

"I wanted to do something where he was someone who had been underestimated ... somebody who was made fun of and overlooked," says Reeves, describing Oz's journey as a "Scarface"-like ascent. "I wanted this sort of dark American dream. What success looks like for somebody in Gotham would come from a void at their center."

"We're custodians and guardians of the IP," says Dylan Clark, Reeves' producing partner and an executive producer on "The Penguin." "We're interested in the contemporary parts of the characters ... but there are aspects of the history of the Penguin in the comic book canon that I think fans will see and like."

Seeing this more grounded mobster version of Oz created by Reeves and Farrell (as well as prosthetics designer Mike Marino) helped LeFranc feel that this "was an opportunity to do something different."

"Every previous depiction [of the Penguin] that I was familiar with felt less grounded and was fantastical and interesting and fun and amazing in its own way," LeFranc says. "I think there's room for so many different types of a character. That's the beauty of DC having a canon like this. You can evolve and it should evolve. ... It's about honoring what came before and knowing that we're in modern times now."

For LeFranc, this meant moving away from past problematic tropes in comics, like villains being depicted with visible scars or disabilities to project a sense of otherness, and populating the world of "The Penguin" with more complicated female characters than have traditionally been featured in gangster shows.

"Oz respects women in the show," LeFranc says. "To a certain extent, he discounts everybody. He's a wily guy. But he respects someone like Sofia Falcone. To me, that's rooted in his love for his mother and his desire to have her be proud of him. He respects his mother, and he respects Sofia. ... That was essential for me to depict in a character like him."

While there have been previous incarnations of Oswald Cobblepot who hailed from a wealthy family, the Oz Cobb of "The Penguin" does not. And among the themes the series will touch on, according to LeFranc, are those around trauma, class and wealth disparity.

"The Penguin" arrives on TV just as King's "The Penguin" comic wraps its run, but it shows how even after 80 years of storytelling, there are still ways to stretch and reinterpret the iconic villain.

King's series with Rafael de Latorre also takes a more grounded approach to the character. But unlike the HBO series, which is about the Penguin's rise to power, the latest "Penguin" comic book story starts with a version of the character who is trying to retire from the criminal lifestyle.

For King, the book was an opportunity to explore "a contradiction" of the character's established lore that the writer loves.

"Batman's obvious obsession is crime," King says. "He wages a war on crime because of how his parents died, [but] the fact that Penguin as a criminal thrives in Gotham City makes zero sense. Because Batman should shut that down. He's just a guy with an umbrella."

Reeves believes the possibilities for these many interpretations is part of why comics and comic book adaptations can continue to appeal to audiences.

"The thing about comics is any time that somebody revisits these characters, there has to be a reinvention, so there are countless iterations of the characters," Reeves says. The audience "want certain things that they expect, but they also want to see what's different and how this is going to engage them in a way that's new."

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

# From Jim Crow to the 'Black Mecca'

## Peacock heist series 'Fight Night' an ode to Atlanta, '70s films

BY GREG BRAXTON
*Los Angeles Times*

Scores of films and documentaries about Muhammad Ali have spotlighted his historic 1970 comeback fight, which took place more than three years after he was stripped of his heavyweight title for refusing to be drafted during the Vietnam War.

But "Fight Night: The Million Dollar Heist," the latest project revisiting that monumental night, focuses on a main event that erupted away from the ring.

The eight-part Peacock miniseries zeroes in on a violent armed robbery just miles from the sold-out bout at Atlanta's Municipal Auditorium when thugs invaded an after-party attended by top Mafia bosses and made off with more than $1 million in cash and jewels. The incident, according to producers, was pivotal in positioning Atlanta away from its Jim Crow past and into a metropolitan destination for Black wealth — nicknamed the "Black Mecca."

Now streaming, "Fight Night" is based on the 2020 iHeart true crime podcast of the same name and features a top-line ensemble including Samuel L. Jackson, Taraji P. Henson, Terrence Howard, Don Cheadle and Kevin Hart.

While viewers will likely be drawn to the starry cast and Hart's dramatic lead turn as fast-talking hustler Gordon "Chicken Man" Williams, the project is distinguished by a distinctive stylistic vibe that captures the flavor of classic 1970s films, injecting it with the in-your-face swagger of blaxploitation fare such as "Shaft" and "Superfly." The old-school R&B score is crammed with vintage hits by Billy Paul ("Am I Black Enough For You?") and the Temptations ("Papa Was a Rolling Stone"), while much of the fast-paced action is shown from several angles simultaneously on the same screen.

"I was always fascinated by the aesthetic of those films, and the attitude where nothing is subtle and everything comes at you with propulsive music and fashion," said Craig Brewer, who directed four episodes, including the premiere. "It's about people who are desperate to get what they want, and what they need."

Peacock photos

**Kevin Hart stars as Gordon "Chicken Man" Williams in Peacock's "Fight Night: The Million Dollar Heist." Williams puts together a lavish party with gangsters like New York crime boss Frank Moten on the same night as Muhammad Ali's 1970 comeback fight, hoping to establish himself as a major mover and shaker.**

**From left, Terrence Howard (Cadillac Richie), Samuel L. Jackson (Moten) and Michael James Shaw (Lamar) also star in the eight-part Peacock series. Portraying the era with accuracy was important to Jackson, who lived in Atlanta at the time of the Ali fight.**

Shaye Ogbonna, who created the series, serves as showrunner and wrote some of the episodes.

"We've made something that you've never really seen before from a storytelling viewpoint," he said.

Ogbonna felt an added commitment to capture the authenticity and the importance of that evening and what it signified for Atlanta's Black population.

"This is personal for me, and for Craig," he said in a Zoom interview. "I'm a son of the city and a product of the community. With the themes and ideas we are exploring, there is a responsibility that I take very seriously. This is a high-level Black project with a lot of resources. It's important that the story is told correctly and accurately. You don't get a lot of opportunities like this."

At the center of the saga is Chicken Man, a desperate dreamer who sees a life-changing opportunity with the hoopla surrounding Ali's bout with Jerry Quarry. When he hears that New York City crime boss Frank Motin (Jackson) and other prominent gangsters will be traveling to Atlanta for the fight, he puts together a lavish party that he hopes will establish him as a major mover and shaker.

"At its heart, this story is about a city that is beginning to embrace its culture," Brewer said. "We see that process through the character of Chicken Man, dealing with these gangsters from New York and Chicago who look down on him and how that makes him feel."

When the party becomes a crime scene, he finds himself facing a former adversary — police detective J.D. Hudson (Cheadle) who has been tasked with protecting Ali and now must investigate the heist.

Ogbonna, who has penned several episodes of Showtime's "The Chi," and Brewer, whose directing credits include 2005's Memphis-set drama "Hustle & Flow" and Eddie Murphy's "Dolemite Is My Name," had never worked together previously before joining forces on "Fight Night." But they discovered they had similar interests.

"Our sensibilities are the same," Ogbonna said. "A lot of the movies we would talk about were movies of the '70s and blaxploitation. That informed the elevated cinematic aesthetic we wanted in telling this grounded Black story. That's the look we wanted."

Brewer was also influenced by Oscar-winning director Norman Jewison, who died in January and whose work often addressed social and political issues.

"I started doing a deep dive of his films. In the final number of 'Jesus Christ Superstar,' there's this moment that is '70s as all get-out with the Afros and the fashion," Brewer said. "I noticed the lights had these wonderful filters on them. I thought that would make a great look for the fight with Ali."

Another source of inspiration was Jewison's 1968 heist movie "The Thomas Crown Affair," one of the first major films to use split-screen technique.

"It's told in all these panels on the same screen," Brewer said. "That has been done by Quentin Tarantino and others who want to go in a '70s direction as a gimmick, but I found it had a wonderful storytelling function. You could reference something and see it at the same time from different angles."

Also instrumental to portraying that era with accuracy was Jackson, who lived in Atlanta at the time of the fight.

"Sam has an Atlanta connection," Ogbonna said. "Having him around was like having an historian on set. He got married in the church around the corner from where Chicken Man's party was."

Ogbonna said he is extremely proud of the finished product and hopes audiences will be entertained. He's also hopeful that the main purpose behind "Fight Night" is clear.

"I want them to know something about Atlanta that we now know as this American southern metropolis," he said. "It all started with these people, just regular folks who made decisions — some good, some bad. It's about aspirations. We know our history. The South had something to say, and we shouted it very loudly."

**"I want them to know something about Atlanta that we now know as this American southern metropolis. It all started with these people, just regular folks who made decisions — some good, some bad. It's about aspirations. We know our history. The South had something to say, and we shouted it very loudly."**

**Shaye Ogbonna**
"Fight Night: The Million Dollar Heist" showrunner, writer

# Which facial products should preteens use?

## Dermatologists say less is more when it comes to a tween's skin care routine

BY JOCELYN GECKER
*Associated Press*

Girls are bombarded on social media with advice from influencers touting elaborate skin care routines with high-priced serums, mists and creams. But what is the right skin care routine for preteens?

Simple is best, dermatologists say. Before puberty hits, most kids only need three things: a gentle cleanser, a moisturizer and sunscreen.

"That's it. Full stop. You don't need anything else," says Dr. Sheilagh Maguiness, a Minneapolis-based dermatologist.

She and other dermatologists around the U.S. have seen growing numbers of teen and preteen girls using anti-aging skin care products. In some cases, the adult-strength products have damaged young girls' skin. And the obsession with achieving the looks they see online has raised concern about the impact on their mental health.

Many of the popular products from Drunk Elephant, Glow Recipe and others — which can cost $70 or more — contain active ingredients like retinols and hydroxy acids intended for mature skin that can irritate young faces and damage the skin barrier. Experts say they are unnecessary and a waste of money for children.

"I hear all day, every day from all my patients who have children in their teens, and younger, that they are so fixated on all of these skin care products and TikTok trends and they've gone overboard," says Dr. Dendy Engelman, a dermatologist in Manhattan.

Here's what dermatologists say about what's safe for young skin and how families can navigate the fast-growing trend:

### Should kids use anti-aging products?

Teens and preteens don't need anti-aging products. Even the Personal Care Products Council, the trade association for cosmetics companies, says: "Anti-aging products are generally unnecessary for younger skin."

For tweens, dermatologists recommend brands of cleansers and moisturizers like Cetaphil, CeraVe and La Roche-Posay that are commonly available in drug stores.

As puberty kicks in, teenagers might need to address skin issues brought on by hormonal changes like acne, excess oil, dark spots, blackheads and more. If an issue seems serious, it's best to consult a dermatologist.

When introducing a new product, especially if it contains a harsh ingredient, go slowly.

"If they really want to use a product and see what all the fuss is about say, 'How about we do a skin test before you rub it all over your face,'" says Maguiness, a professor of pediatric dermatology at the University of Minnesota. Dab a bit on the inner arm for a few days, and if there is no reaction, then maybe it's OK to try on the face.

### How to tell if a skin care product is harmful

Signs of an allergic reaction can range from redness, itchiness, flaking of skin, burning or stinging to patches of tiny bumps.

"Those are all signs to stop using a product," says Dr. Carli Whittington, a dermatologist at Indiana University School of Medicine. Continuing use of products that cause irritation can lead to more severe skin damage.

Often, kids don't realize that trendy products they are using contain harmful ingredients.

Dr. Brooke Jeffy in Scottsdale, Ariz., had an 11-year-old patient with a severe rash around her eyes. The child had been using a retinol eye cream that caused irritation and itchiness. The reaction worsened as she continued using it and scratched at her skin.

"She was using an eye cream for a condition she didn't have and has now created this dramatic problem that is going to take months to resolve," said Jeffy, one of many dermatologists now on TikTok and Instagram trying to debunk harmful social media trends with posts on "Do's and Don'ts" for tween skin care.

iStock

**Dermatologists say teens and preteens don't need anti-aging products. Before puberty, they should stick to using a gentle cleanser, a moisturizer and sunscreen from brands like Cetaphil and CeraVe that are commonly available in drug stores. Teenagers, on the other hand, may need other products to address skin issues brought on by hormonal changes like acne, excess oil, dark spots, blackheads and more.**

> **"I hear all day, every day from all my patients who have children in their teens, and younger, that they are so fixated on all of these skin care products and TikTok trends and they've gone overboard."**
>
> **Dr. Dendy Engelman**
> dermatologist in Manhattan

### How to encourage healthy skin care routines

Engelman suggests setting a timer for skin care, like some parents do to remind kids to brush teeth for two minutes. Children should not need more than five or 10 minutes for skin care, she says.

"When you have a 13-step skincare routine that takes 45 minutes a night, that is too much," she says.

Maguiness urges parents to talk with their skin care-obsessed kids about viral trends they're following and why.

"Treat it as a time to educate and ask questions: 'What are you seeing on social media? Do you think the celebrity is being paid by the company? Do you think they are trying to sell you something? Do you think this is actually good for your skin?'" she says.

BRITTAINY NEWMAN/AP

**Some preteens and teens are hooked on the "Get Ready With Me" videos they see on TikTok (#GRWM). Shown above: a GRWM video from beauty influencer Katie Fang. Social media compels young girls to buy high-priced products and obsess over creating the looks they see.**

Ask your adolescent what skin issue they are trying to address — acne, dark spots, et cetera — and try to build a basic routine around it, she says. Let them know the more things they put on their skin, the more it can be irritated.

The focus on skin care does have one benefit, dermatologists say.

"The one good thing that comes of this is wearing sunscreen to protect your skin. They are fully on board with that," Engelman says. Many influencers and the kids who follow them apply sunscreen as the final step of their routine, unlike many of her adult patients. "These children who are skin care obsessed have brought in that important step. So that is a silver lining of this trend."

WEEKEND: FAMILY

# If Grandma doesn't know, maybe Google can answer

## Checking out child-rearing queries in different regions of the country yields some surprising, amusing and occasionally disgusting insight

By Maureen Downey
*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

When my kids were young, I kept a stack of parenting books to consult on teething, toddler tantrums and bedtime routines. More often, however, I took my child-rearing questions to parents I met on the playground or in the neighborhood.

My own mother was no help. She had four children in proximity and always told me our early childhood years were a blur of wiping noses, changing diapers and applying bandages. Her usual response to one of my questions was, "Hell if I can remember."

Now, parents can consult Google. A new analysis tallied up the questions asked on Google related to parenting by state.

In my state of Georgia, the top question was "Why do kids wet the bed?"

My challenge was not kids wetting the bed but refusing to go to bed or stay in bed, putting me in alliance with parents in Arkansas, where the top question on Google was: "How to get toddler to stay in bed?"

I am not sure what to make of the bedtime-related question most frequently asked of Google in Montana: "How to put a kid to sleep in 40 seconds."

It's interesting to see the variety of perplexing questions that drive people to search the internet.

In the state of Washington, the top question is, "Why do kids eat boogers?"

Parents in California want to know, "Why are kids so loud?"

Florida poses a tough question, one that engenders a lot of debate in the parenting forums: "How to help a child lose weight without making them feel bad?"

Michigan also has a question that carries a heavy emotional weight: "Why is my kid so mean?"

### Google searches by state

Here are some of the other most popular parenting questions that each state searches that emerged in the Google search data analysis by VocoVision, a virtual learning and teletherapy platform.

Colorado: How to talk so little kids will listen
Hawaii: When do boys stop growing?
Illinois: How to teach a kid to ride a bike
Indiana: How many teeth do kids have?
Iowa: How to get toddler to stop hitting
Louisiana: Why won't my kid be quiet?
Maine: Why do toddlers bite?
Mississippi: Am I a good parent?
Missouri: Does my kid have ADHD?
New Mexico: Why do kids have so much energy?
Ohio: When to worry about rash on a child
South Carolina: What age should a kid get a phone?
West Virginia: Why is my kid cursing?

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari

# My recent crash course in online buyer's remorse

"Large canvas in antique frame," the caption read on the Facebook Marketplace post that caught my eye last week as I scrolled mindlessly through my phone. Intrigued, I poked the button to message the seller, "Is this item still available?"

Little did I know, my innocent inquiry was the opening salvo in a war of wits, wagers, wallets and willpower that would rage for three days.

Initially, my interest in the item was nothing more than casual curiosity, like online window shopping. The canvas was a print of an original painting depicting a mother and two young daughters on a frothy seashore. "Huh," I thought, "I'm a mother with two daughters." I'd spied the lure.

The beach scene was in shades of teal and white. "Matches our bedspread," I mumbled, envisioning the piece adorning the primary bedroom's blank north wall, giving the space a refreshing coastal vibe. I'd nibbled the bait.

The price seemed high, so I made a slightly lower offer, and the seller accepted. "Not a bad deal for a large antique frame," I thought, proud of myself for driving a hard bargain. The hook was firmly implanted into my fleshy cheek. I'd been caught.

On the second day, I arrived at the seller's house with cash to exchange for the fine antique item that would soon transform my bedroom into a home decorating triumph.

A short man with a craggy face walked out of the house carrying the frame. "Hey, I'm John," he said in a raspy smoker's voice. "Darla's gone, so I'll put this in your car." After he placed the frame into my back seat, I handed him the bundle of cash, smiled and waved goodbye.

Back home, I couldn't wait to carry the frame upstairs to our bedroom. All I needed was two nails, and voila! I'd soon be sleeping in a Coastal Living magazine cover.

On closer inspection, I noticed a modern-day label displaying mounting instructions on the thin particle board backing. I tapped the frame with a fingernail, and realized it was constructed out of hollow molded plastic, painted to appear antiqued. The poor-quality "canvas" appeared pixelated, as if it was a print of a digital photograph, likely reproduced without permission. The last indication that I'd been had — an oval sticker that clearly read, "Made in China."

I didn't know whether to be furious with the seller or myself. "Was I a sucker for not inspecting the frame before I handed cash over? Was the seller wrong for describing the frame as antique? Do I have the right to ask for a refund?"

Yes, yes, and well, yes and no.

The old adage "buyer beware" applies to all sales, regardless of consumer protection laws, moral obligations and principles of justice, fairness and common decency. Undoubtedly, I should have inspected the item before I paid for it. That said, buyers are entitled to free Purchase Protection for eligible orders on Facebook Marketplace, for items that don't arrive or arrive damaged/unusable, or items that don't match the seller's description on the product page. Other companies such as eBay and Etsy have similar buyer protection coverage, too. The frame I received clearly wasn't the antique described by the seller (more than 100 years old), so it was theoretically eligible for buyer Purchase Protection.

Unfortunately, I didn't qualify for Purchase Protection because it excludes local pickup transactions.

Regardless, even for a sucker like me, requesting refunds from online sellers can't hurt, especially knowing sellers need good reviews. "I'm sorry, but I was so disappointed to see that the frame isn't 'antique' as advertised," I began the message to the seller on the third day. "May I return it for a refund?" I asked as sweetly as possible.

The seller had me, hook, line and sinker. But my polite request must've softened her grip on that wad of cash, because in an act of decency, she released me back into the wild.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

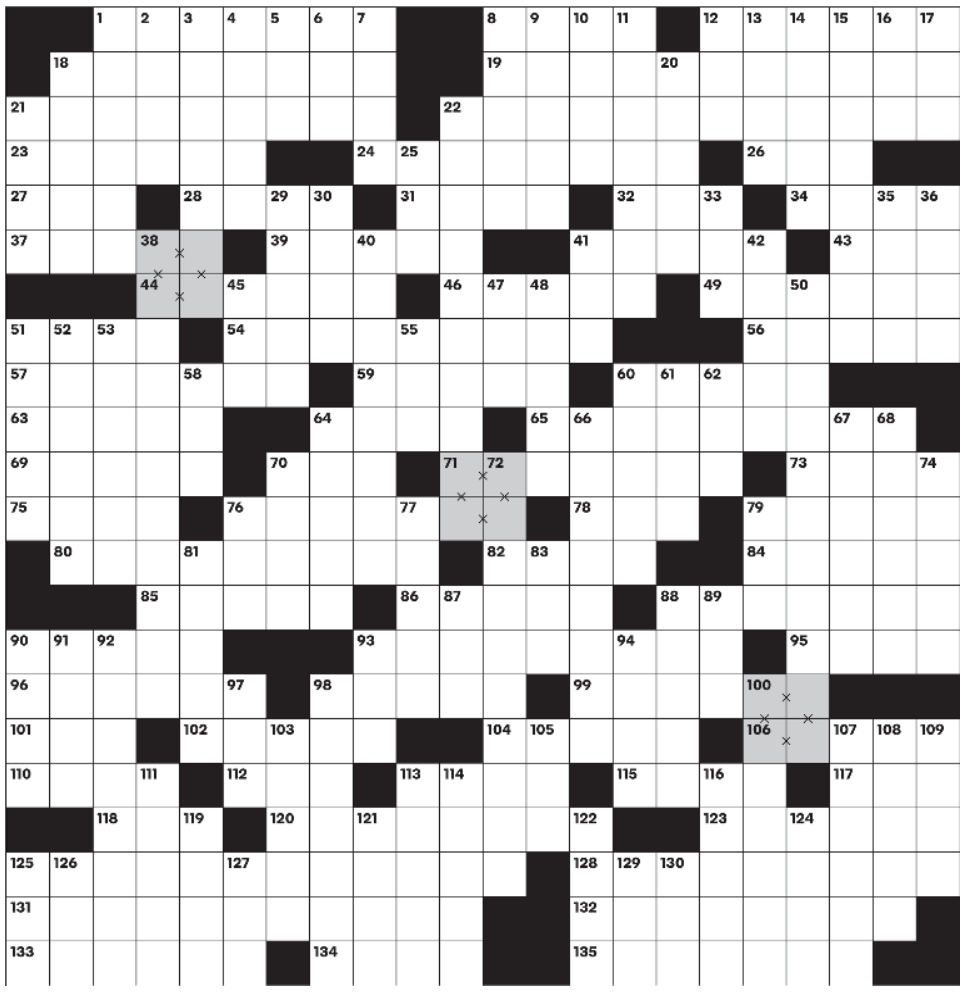
# WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

## NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

### PRODUCT INTEGRATION

BY CHANDI DEITMER AND MATTHEW STOCK / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

**Chandi Deitmer, of Cambridge, Mass., writes puzzles for Elevate Labs, which produces a brain-training app. Matthew Stock, of Gainesville, Fla., is a master's student in school counseling. As fellow math lovers, this puzzle's theme is a tribute to all of the math teachers they've had who inspired their curiosity and love of learning.**
**Note: Each square in the shaded areas is to be filled with a numerical digit.**



**ACROSS**

1 ''My hero!''
8 Demonstrate
12 Lentil-based stew from 42-Down
18 Wintertime traction aid
19 Magazine with ''Maison'' and ''Enfants'' spinoffs
21 Save money on one's city commute, say
22 One use of an endowment fund
23 Kitchen sampler
24 That's a wrap!
26 Complete group
27 Scrape (by)
28 Hermanas de su padre
31 Ecosystem formed by polyps
32 Goof
34 Lose, as layers
37 West Coast N.C.A.A. conference that lost 10 teams in 2024
39 Cries plaintively
41 ''Same!''
43 Newark alternative, in brief
44 Typical length of February
46 Lauds
49 Walking
51 Visual file format
54 Oscar-winning actor in Farmers Insurance ads
56 Writer whose work is hell to get through?
57 Surgeon's co-worker, casually
59 In which little gloves are worn
60 Long-lasting lip makeup
63 Podiatric woes
64 Tennis star Wawrinka
65 ''Arrr, welcome aboard me ship!''
69 Fermented Russian drink
70 Dedication preposition
71 Short nap
73 Cuts
75 Genesis creator
76 Location of elation, in an idiom
78 What astronauts do more slowly in space than on earth
79 College-athletics airer
80 Task recipient
82 Cuts
84 Expiate, with ''for''
85 Party ____
86 Botanist's study
88 Won without a sweat
90 Mattress supports
93 Source of a sleep-inducing narcotic in the ''Odyssey''
95 Give up
96 Brief glimpses of stars, say
98 Bucko
99 Surfing move with all of one's toes off the board
101 Word with one or minute
102 Parking spot for a camper
104 Summer pests
106 Like old Nintendo consoles
110 Put up with
112 Aussie boot brand
113 Vodka sold in blue bottles
115 Ooze
117 Like Dashboard Confessional's music
118 Not viable from the start, for short
120 Like a grass-roots approach
123 Specialty of Bordeaux
125 Aces
128 Press-on beauty products
131 Midtown Manhattan hot spot . . . or each of this puzzle's three shaded regions?
132 Reacted to a sudden noise, say
133 Assent that might be accompanied by eye-rolling
134 Colada fruit
135 Bicycles built for two

**DOWN**

1 ''One moment!''
2 ____ de rire (''dying of laughter,'' in French)
3 Coming-of-age celebration
4 Pac-Man platform
5 Jazz trombonist Dickenson
6 Period piece
7 For which one might ask for forgiveness
8 Do in, biblically
9 ''A Little Devil in America'' writer Abdurraqib
10 Like one Freudian stage
11 At the bottom of the standings, perhaps
12 Pop-____ (book genre)
13 ''It's too bad, but …''
14 Brightly colored birds, often
15 Winter Olympics event
16 Filmmaker Aster
17 Like many Christmas ornaments
18 Surfer's hand sign
20 Inbox greeting
21 Accelerate, with ''up''
22 Weight gained at the start of college, informally
25 The Magic, on scoreboards
29 Not out
30 ''____ who?''
33 Hundred Acre Wood resident
35 Awards feat, for short
36 Take out
38 Military honor with fired artillery
40 ''Are you for real?''
41 Hilton ____, Pulitzer-winning critic for The New Yorker
42 See 12-Across
45 Performs at a wedding, say
47 Early I.S.P.
48 ____ suite (attached living space)
50 Squad for the Invisible Woman and the Thing
51 One table in the high school cafeteria, maybe
52 Left no doubts about
53 Bring to a boil
55 Executive deg.
58 Web-feed inits.
60 Clues for bird-watchers
61 Squirt
62 Wake-up times, for short
64 Like Santa after Christmas, presumably
66 Noted leader of the Onondaga
67 Scandalous story
68 Longed (for)
70 Too low, musically
72 Always-open workout spots
74 Soft leather
76 Big-budget expense for a Marvel movie, for short
77 Clear up, in a way
79 ____ de vie (fruit brandy)
81 Surrealist James
83 Stumbling sounds
87 Smartphone-service inits.
88 Perfume, as at a Mass
89 On the ____ (often, informally)
90 Picket-line crosser
91 Transportation division
92 Lynne Cheney portrayer in 2018's ''Vice''
93 Turnt
94 ''Aw, darn!''
97 Crime-series spinoff with more seasons than the original
98 Mug alternative, at a coffee shop
100 One-fifth of a British pound
103 Letters of pride
105 Where Ross teaches paleontology on ''Friends,'' in brief
107 Contradicts
108 Exclamation after misunderstanding some Gen Z slang, say
109 Starchy side, familiarly
111 Ned who composed an operatic version of ''Our Town''
113 Exacting
114 ____ Strait, waterway bordering Japan
116 Edit
119 Lhasa ____
121 Like the New Year festival Songkran
122 [That's ridiculous!]
124 Golfer Jon
125 Pen
126 Word with black or bow
127 Suffix with doomer or consumer
129 French menu phrase
130 Reunion attendees

## GUNSTON STREET

"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

## RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE

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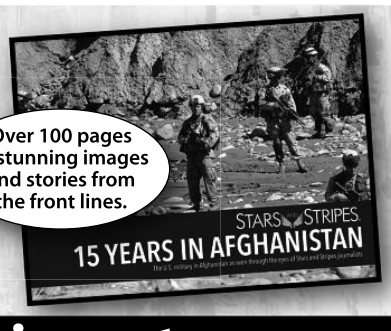


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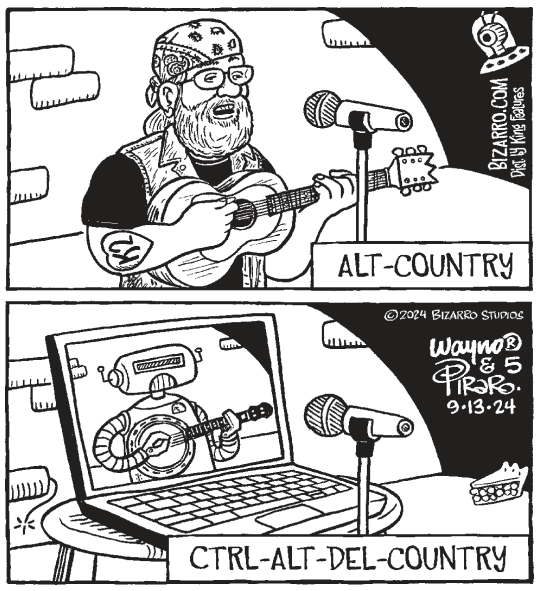
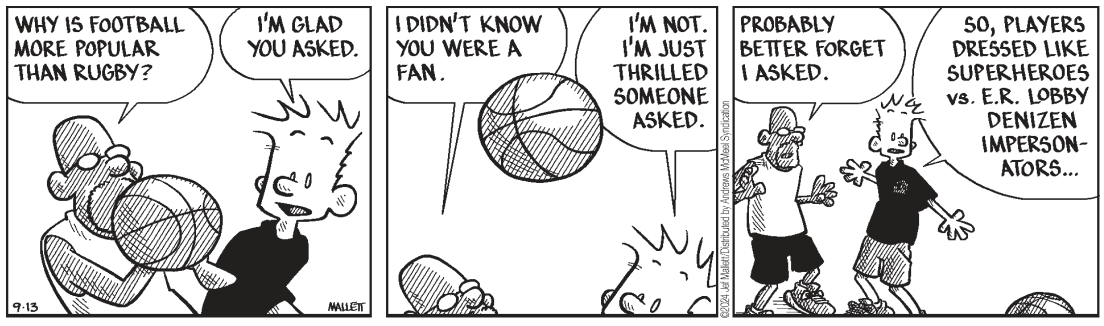
## Bizarro

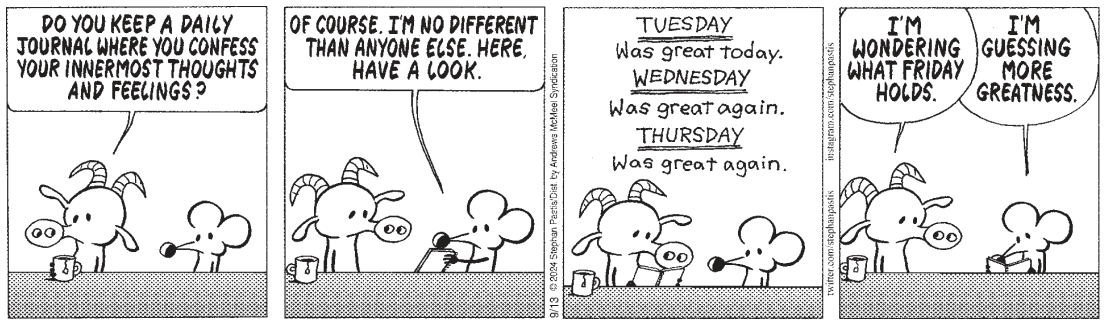



## Loose Parts

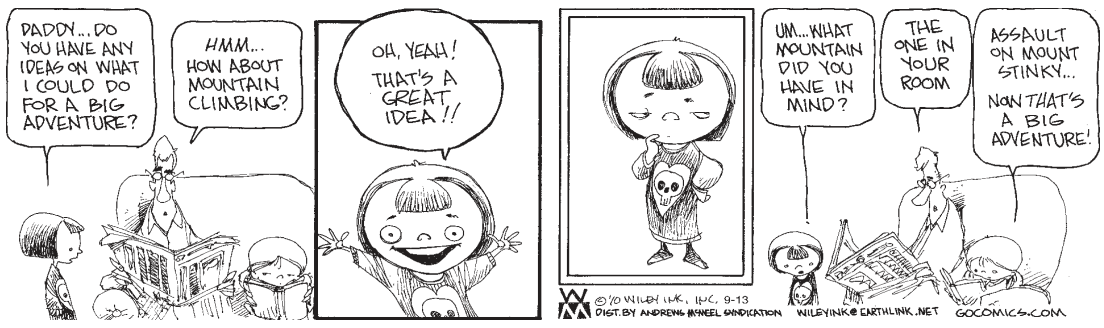
## Frazz



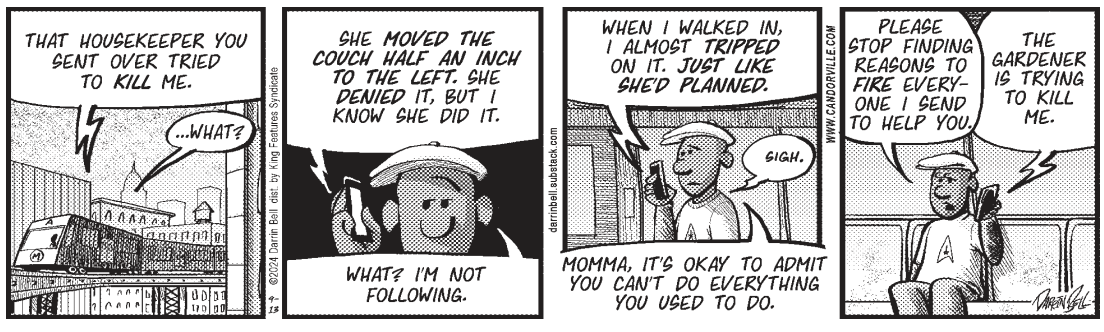

## Pearls Before Swine



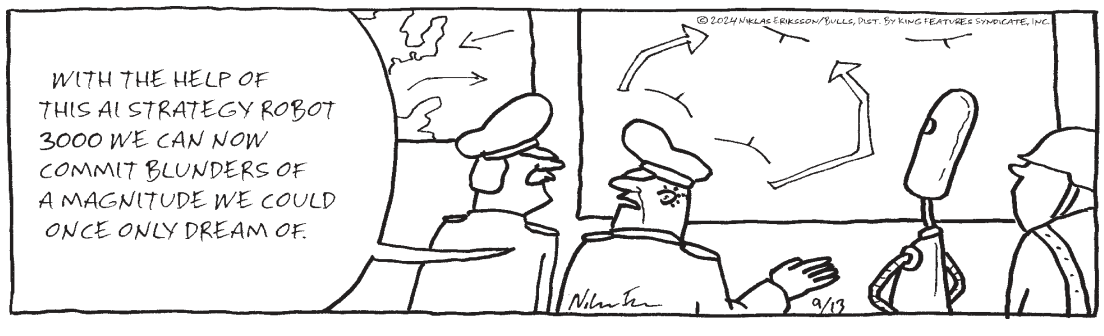

## Non Sequitur




## Candorville

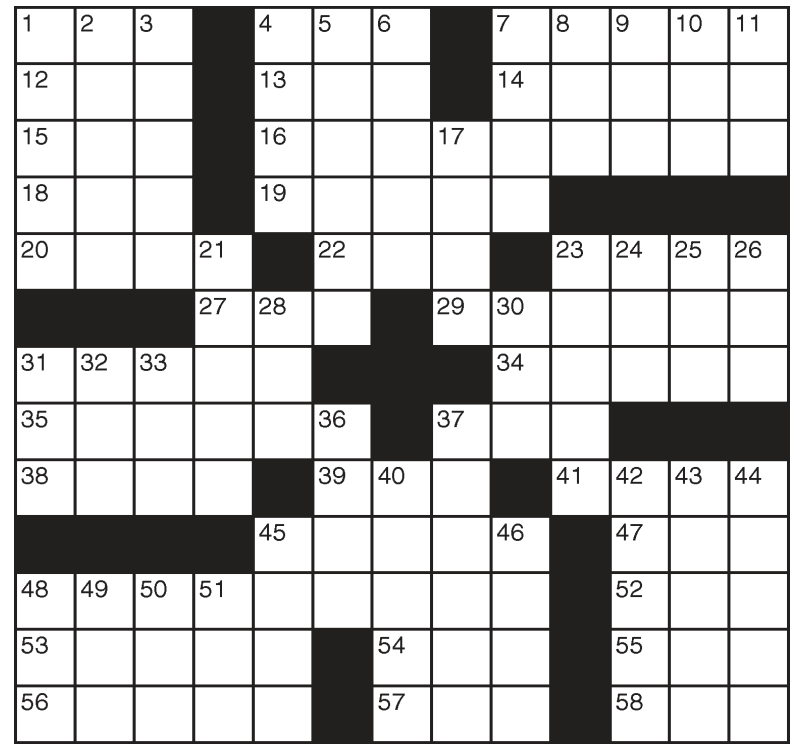



## Carpe Diem




## Beetle Bailey

## Eugene Sheffer Crossword



### ACROSS

1 '60s chic
4 Roman 650
7 Stranger, slangily
12 Jurist Fortas
13 Coach Parseghian
14 Brown shade
15 Science room
16 Basic seasoning
18 Big bird of Australia
19 Sidestep
20 Pre-college exams
22 Gallery display
23 Ready for harvest
27 Lynx, for one
29 Prolific inventor
31 Turning point
34 Gawked at
35 Canyon comebacks
37 Wildebeest
38 Nuisance
39 Martian mover
41 Cushions
45 Jack who eschewed fat
47 Director Ang
48 Blended seasoning
52 Flamenco cheer
53 Coffee flavor
54 Uncle, to Pedro
55 Doze (off)
56 Sourpuss
57 Aug. follower
58 Curvy letter

### DOWN

1 Bulls and rams
2 44th U.S. president
3 Opening night
4 Info
5 Necktie
6 Partner of parts
7 Regretted
8 Early hrs.
9 Cagers' gp.
10 Costa — Sol
11 Leftover bit
17 Low-calorie
21 Skedaddle
23 Construct
24 Oahu or Maui (Abbr.)
25 "The Raven" writer
26 Finale
28 Chowed down
30 Mafia boss
31 Vigor
32 "Rocks"
33 Pre-DVD format
36 Dines
37 Net defender in hockey
40 Dorm alternatives
42 Stag
43 Apollo's birthplace
44 Canary snacks
45 Small fastener
46 Corvette roof option
48 Texter's "Wow!"
49 Neither here — there
50 Hosp. area
51 Resistance unit

### Answer to Previous Puzzle

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P | E | R | | B | A | G | S | | S | P | A | M |
| A | T | A | | E | C | O | L | | O | R | S | O |
| R | A | S | C | A | L | L | Y | | N | O | E | L |
| | | P | O | T | | F | L | Y | A | W | A | Y |
| O | R | I | O | L | E | | Y | E | T | | | |
| D | O | E | | E | M | P | | S | A | M | B | A |
| E | S | S | O | | T | U | B | | S | A | U | L |
| S | A | T | E | S | | G | U | S | | S | N | L |
| | | | D | I | M | | S | T | I | C | K | Y |
| L | I | M | I | T | E | D | | A | C | A | | |
| A | S | A | P | | H | O | N | D | U | R | A | S |
| O | A | H | U | | T | O | N | I | | A | L | I |
| S | K | I | S | | A | R | E | A | | S | P | A |

## 9-13 CRYPTOQUIP

AEDV R WMSMHRBP QGWWRVUDB BTIEDU CGBARBU IAMCHSP MV QGWFRH, AERH ARI ED? HED ITBXMVX XDVDBRS.

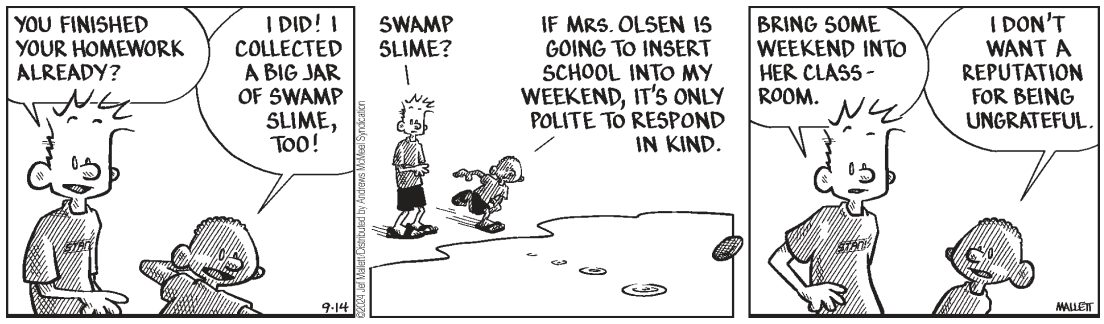
**Yesterday's Cryptoquip:** IF A FELINE NEEDS TO ORDER GOODS FROM HOME AND HAVE THEM DELIVERED, COULD IT USE A CAT-ALOG?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: A equals W

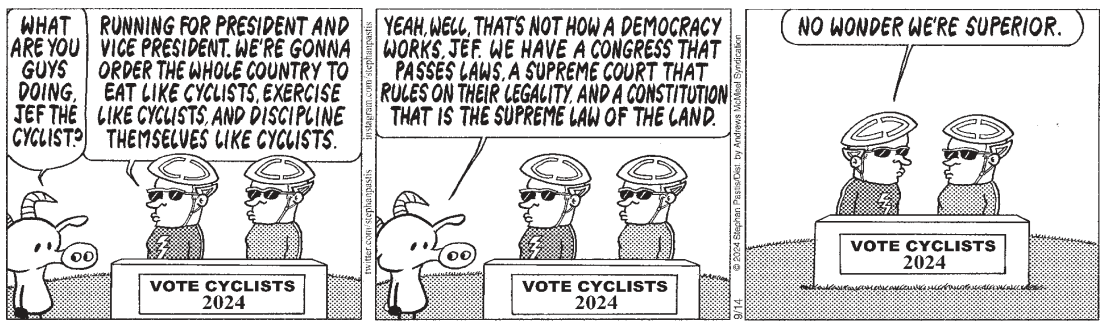
## Bizarro

## Loose Parts

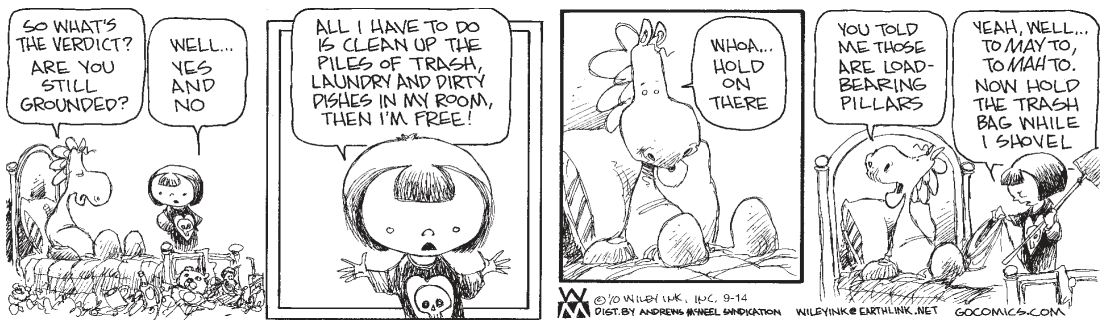
## Frazz



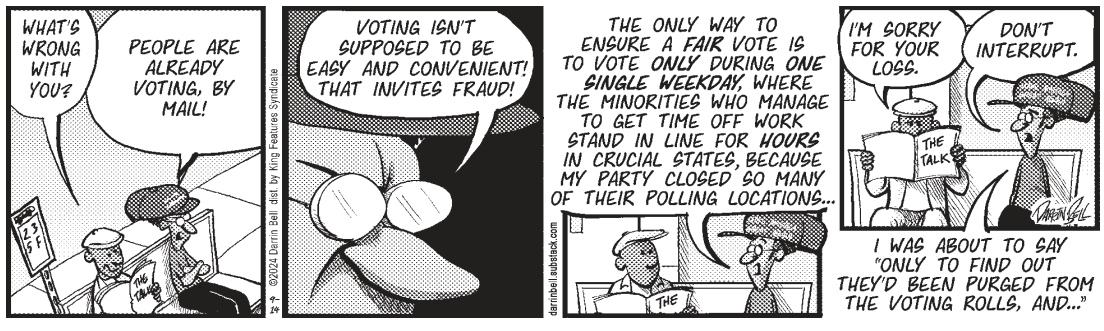

## Pearls Before Swine




## Non Sequitur




## Candorville

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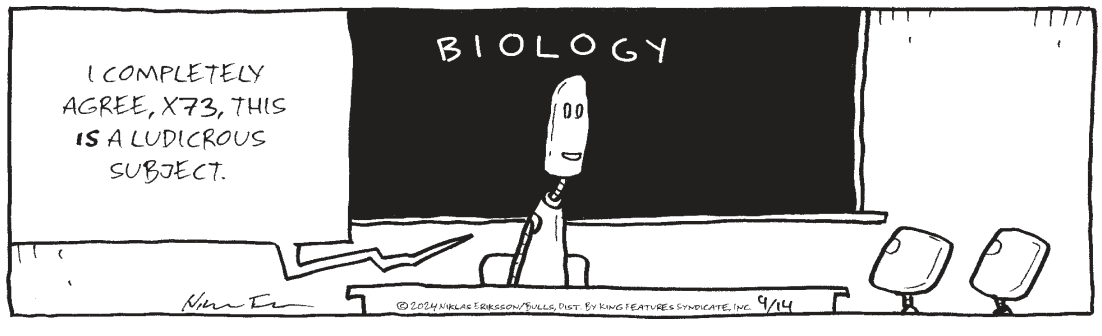
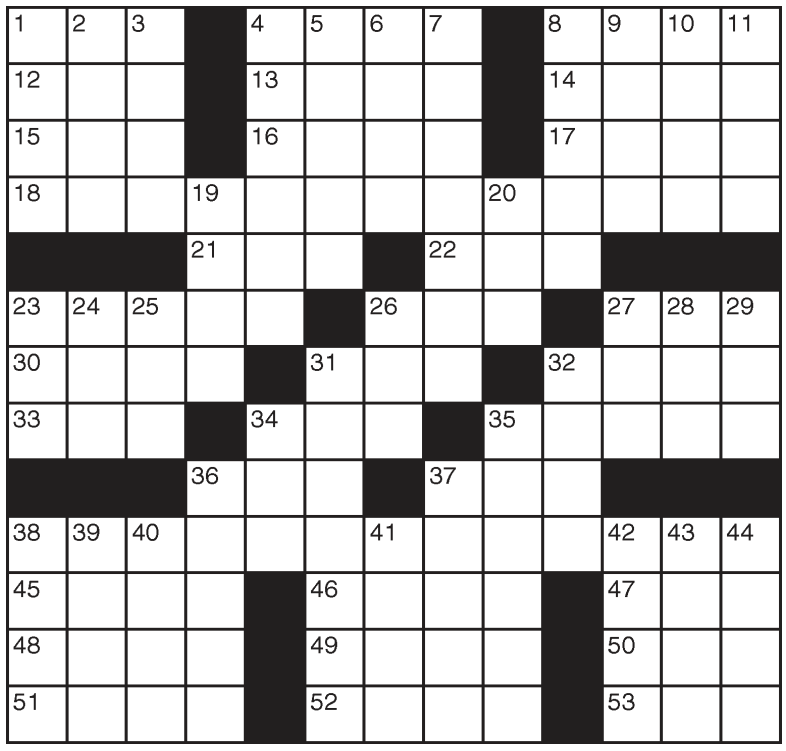



## Beetle Bailey

## Eugene Sheffer Crossword



### ACROSS

1 Springy dance
4 Men-only
8 Experts
12 French pal
13 Garage job
14 Barbie, e.g.
15 Dallas hoopster, briefly
16 "Swan Song" author Hilderbrand
17 Jacob's brother
18 Upstaging on stage
21 Ecol. watchdog
22 Caviar
23 Flamboyant
26 Up to
27 Lawyers' gp.
30 Help a crook
31 Lobbying gp.
32 Dutch cheese
33 Group of seals
34 Granola grain
35 "Welcome to Maui!"
36 Piercing tool
37 NYC airport
38 Crookery
45 Guesser's words
46 Decays
47 Expected
48 Garden intruder
49 Hosp. scans
50 Away from WSW
51 Rx amount
52 Prefix meaning "all"
53 Request

### DOWN

1 Toast toppings
2 Apple variety
3 Donate
4 Somnolent
5 Oklahoma city
6 Slightly
7 Not brand-name
8 "Skyfall" singer
9 Mozart's "— fan tutte"
10 Flair
11 Punch
19 Salamander
20 "You've got mail" co.
23 Maple tree product
24 "Veep" airer
25 British ref. work
26 Make lace
27 Ruckus
28 "Humbug!"
29 "I — Rock"
31 Sicily's capital
32 Israeli carrier
34 Barn bird
35 Tennis great Andre
36 Home
37 Allow entry
38 Columnist Maureen
39 Sweet sandwich
40 Employs
41 Campus digs
42 Notion
43 Cloister residents
44 Nerd's kin

### Answer to Previous Puzzle

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M | O | D | | D | C | L | | R | A | N | D | O |
| A | B | E | | A | R | A | | U | M | B | E | R |
| L | A | B | | T | A | B | L | E | S | A | L | T |
| E | M | U | | A | V | O | I | D | | | | |
| S | A | T | S | | A | R | T | | R | I | P | E |
| | | | C | A | T | | E | D | I | S | O | N |
| P | I | V | O | T | | | | O | G | L | E | D |
| E | C | H | O | E | S | | G | N | U | | | |
| P | E | S | T | | U | F | O | | P | A | D | S |
| | | | | S | P | R | A | T | | L | E | E |
| O | N | I | O | N | S | A | L | T | | O | L | E |
| M | O | C | H | A | | T | I | O | | N | O | D |
| G | R | U | M | P | | S | E | P | | E | S | S |

## 9-14 CRYPTOQUIP

J N K J T C B N A B G Q W H C N I H B H X A Y ' C Q A V S A U B I T L T U J T K C I Q P P W A V ? N A I P G U V Y ' B W A A L T C B Q T H Z N B S A X.

**Yesterday's Cryptoquip:** WHEN A MILITARY COMMANDER RUSHED FORWARD SWIFTLY IN COMBAT, WHAT WAS HE? THE SURGING GENERAL.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: N equals H

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Lt. Col. Katie R. Fidler, Europe commander
John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff
Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Pacific commander

## EDITORIAL

Robert H. Reid, Editor in Chief
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

David Schultz, District Manager
schultz.david@stripes.com
xsscirculation@stripes.com
+49(0)152.5672.5036; DSN (314)583-9111

### Europe

Carlo Aquino, Circulation Manager
aquino.carlo@stripes.com
memberservices@stripes.com

+49(0)631.3615.9136; DSN (314)583.9136

### Pacific

Mari Mori, customerhelp@stripes.com
+81-3 6385.3171; DSN (315)227.7333

## CONTACT US

### Washington

tel: (+1)202.886.0003

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# OPINION

## US does its 'national security' dance on TikTok

**By George F. Will**
*The Washington Post*

Justifying the law to block Americans' access to TikTok, the government says "national security" is threatened by the Chinese-owned video-sharing app that claims 170 million American users. A bigger threat, however, is the incessant use of that phrase to impart spurious urgency to agendas that are only tangentially, if at all, related to the nation's safety. Linguistic inflation transforms too many things into "national security" threats.

On Monday, in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, TikTok will challenge the law banning it from U.S. app stores. TikTok argues in its brief that the law demands a divestiture (from Chinese ownership) that is technologically and commercially impossible — and unprecedented: "Never before has Congress expressly singled out and shut down a specific speech forum. Never before has Congress silenced so much speech in a single act." In 2023, TikTok says, U.S. users uploaded more than 5.5 billion videos that were viewed worldwide more than 13 trillion times. TikTok argues that the ban violates the First Amendment's free speech guarantee and the guarantee of equal protection of the laws.

Granted, any company beholden to China's Leninist party-state will do what the Communist Party dictates. But labeling speech (often accurately, regarding TikTok) as foreign propaganda does not license government interference with it. In 1965, the Supreme Court *unanimously* overturned a law that burdened citizens' "right to receive" communist propaganda mailed from a foreign adversary.

TikTok also argues that the law violates the Constitution's takings clause by taking property without just compensation. And that the law, which is punitive, violates the Constitution's proscription of bills of attainder: *legislative* punishments of specifically targeted people or groups, which violate the separation of powers.

No Senate committee held hearings or issued a report on the legislation, and Congress enacted no findings to justify treating TikTok differently than other "foreign adversary controlled" apps. A House committee report expressed concern about "misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda." But government has no legitimate power to protect Americans from what the report calls "divisive narratives." Or from conjectural harms related to speech that does not lose constitutional protection because the government deems it untrue or unhelpful.

The TikTok law asks us to trust the government that evidently thinks we cannot be trusted to cope with propaganda. Trust the government that tried to suppress as misinformation true criticisms of the government's pandemic policies? The government that in a 12-month period extending into this election year overstated by *818,000* the number of jobs created during the Biden administration?

Before trusting government's solemnities about "national security" threats, read Tufts University professor Daniel W. Drezner's "How Everything Became National Security" in Foreign Affairs. He wrote, "The national security bucket has grown into a trough" capacious enough to contain problems ranging from "food security," HIV/AIDS, "biologic and genetic dangers," and "transnational criminal organizations" to "domestic extremism," "poverty," "environmental degradation" and certain "supply chains" (e.g., for cobalt and lithium). Drezner warned that "policy entrepreneurs … frame their pet issues as national security concerns" to unlock government resources.

Politicians unleash economic and "national security" nonsense in the service of their demagoguery. The Donald Trump-Kamala Harris consensus encompasses their opposition to allowing a corporation from a close ally (Japan) to purchase U.S. Steel for 40% more than its market capitalization, a sale favored by holders of 98% of U.S. Steel shares and unopposed by the U.S. military, which uses just 3% of domestic steel production.

In the TikTok affair, national security is the excuse for indulging the most dangerous urge: to control speech. In his splendid and alarmingly timely new book, "The Indispensable Right: Free Speech in an Age of Rage," George Washington University law professor Jonathan Turley correctly wrote U.S. history demonstrates that "anti-free speech impulses rest in the body politic like a dormant virus." Today, this virus is far from dormant — and not just in the fever swamps of academia.

The free expression of thought is, as Turley wrote, "the essence of being human." Opposition to it is the essence of bad presidencies.

President John Adams vigorously wielded the Alien and Sedition Acts. President Woodrow Wilson's wartime authoritarianism suppressed dissent. Kamala Harris would be the third president expressly hostile to free speech: In 2019, she told CNN that speech on social media without "oversight and regulation" by government "has to stop." Her running mate seems obedient: Tim Walz falsely declares that there is no First Amendment protection for "misinformation." Presumably, he and she will tell us what this is, in due time.

## America's military — death by a thousand drones

**By E.J. Antoni and Peter St. Onge**
*The Heritage Foundation*

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine over two years ago, politicians advocating for more U.S. taxpayer assistance to Ukraine have claimed we're bleeding Russia dry at a comparatively small cost. But when it takes a million-dollar American missile to knock out a thousand-dollar enemy drone, it looks more like we're the ones bleeding out — suggesting maybe we should quit the world-policeman racket.

That's doubly true given our most daunting national security challenges are the rise of China and the collapse of security at the border.

Neocons like Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., have called the more than $175 billion we've poured into the Ukraine meat-grinder "the best money we've ever spent," despite there being no articulated American goal in the conflict against which to evaluate that claim.

The original Biden-Harris premise of our involvement in the Ukraine was that we must exhaust Russia to get to victory, although it was never clear precisely how or why. The ruthlessness of the Russian strongman Vladimir Putin is not a logical justification given the atrocities committed by countless dictators around the world, and the existence of far worse humanitarian disasters in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Regardless, it's never been articulated precisely why the average American family should care who runs the Ukrainian city of Donetsk, especially with existential security issues on our wide-open southern border and a burgeoning Chinese military. Yet even if bleeding out Russia can be established as a national security issue worth over $175 billion, is that what's actually happening? In a word, no.

What the Ukraine conflict has definitively shown us is that the economics of modern war have changed, perhaps forever.

Footage recently emerged of $35,000 Russian Lancet drones taking out $10 million Abrams tanks and $5 million HIMARS. Similarly, the Houthi drones in Yemen being launched against Western shipping cost $20,000 while the surface-to-air missiles intercepting them cost as much as $4.5 million. That's a ratio of more than 100-to-1.

But that's just America's cost to build these weapons. It's fantastically expensive to transport them around the world. Transporting a tank to Ukraine is at least several hundred thousand dollars, and the cost of sending a guided-missile destroyer to meander around the Red Sea lobbing $2 million missiles is about $70 million per year — not including the missiles. And the spectacular cost in the Red Sea hasn't had much impact judging by insurance costs for Red Sea transit, which haven't improved much. Furthermore, American ships don't usually traverse the Red Sea; they use the Atlantic and Pacific oceans instead. We're spending millions to protect the shipping interests of Europe and China.

The carrier battle group we're sending as a show of force in the region is costing $7 million per day — about $2 billion per year — against much more cost-effective, newer drone technology. Perhaps the world-policeman role is bleeding out the policeman.

We've been here before. In 1906 the U.K. launched HMS Dreadnought. She was a revolution in battleship design, to the point that all ships before and after her became known as either pre-dreadnoughts or dreadnoughts. But instead of conferring permanent dominance upon the Royal Navy, Dreadnought bankrupted it.

Because those obsolete pre-Dreadnoughts, it turned out, were largely British. The U.K. has obsoleted its own military, yielding global dominance to the U.S., who with superior industrial might, could send more dreadnoughts down the slipways. The collapse of American industrial might vis-a-vis China now poses a similar challenge.

American policymakers must resist the temptation of using the military everywhere. They should instead focus scarce American resources on the most pressing national security challenges to the American people, including the threat posed by the cartels at the border. A more cost-effective strategy might be to stop being the world's policeman at a disproportionate cost to U.S. taxpayers and prioritize protecting our own national security interests instead.

*E.J. Antoni is a public finance economist, and Peter St. Onge is a visiting fellow, at The Heritage Foundation.*

# SCOREBOARD

## COLLEGE FOOTBALL

### Schedule

**Friday's games**
**MIDWEST**

UNLV (2-0) at Kansas (1-1)
Arizona (2-0) at Kansas St. (2-0)

**Saturday's games**
**EAST**

Mercyhurst (1-1) at Robert Morris (0-2)
CCSU (1-1) at St. Francis (Pa.) (1-1)
Lehigh (1-1) at LIU Brooklyn (0-2)
Marist (0-1) at Lafayette (1-1)
Stony Brook (1-1) at Fordham (0-2)
Georgetown (2-0) at Sacred Heart (1-1)
Umass (0-2) at Buffalo (1-1)
Holy Cross (0-2) at Bryant (1-1)
Coastal Carolina (2-0) at Temple (0-2)
Howard (1-1) vs. Morehouse (0-0) at East Rutherford, N.J.
Wagner (1-1) at Delaware St. (1-1)
Towson (1-1) at Villanova (2-0)
West Virginia (1-1) at Pittsburgh (2-0)
Monmouth (NJ) (0-2) at Maine (1-1)
Merrimack (0-2) at Bucknell (1-1)
Campbell (1-1) at Rhode Island (1-1)
Stonehill (0-1) at New Hampshire (1-1)

**SOUTH**

LSU (1-1) at South Carolina (2-0)
North Greenville (0-0) at The Citadel (1-1)
Memphis (2-0) at Florida St. (0-2)
Louisiana Tech (1-0) at NC State (1-1)
Va. Lynchburg (0-1) at Presbyterian (1-1)
Delaware (1-0) at NC A&T (1-1)
Charleston Southern (1-1) at Richmond (0-2)
Stetson (2-0) at Furman (0-2)
Texas A&M (1-1) at Florida (1-1)
VMI (0-2) at Georgia Tech (2-1)
Ball St. (1-0) at Miami (2-0)
Hampton (1-1) at Norfolk St. (1-2)
Appalachian St. (1-1) at East Carolina (2-0)
Edward Waters (0-0) at Alcorn St. (0-2)
N. Dakota St. (1-1) at ETSU (1-1)
W. Carolina (0-2) at Elon (1-1)
Mercer (2-0) at Chattanooga (0-2)
Virginia Tech (1-1) at Old Dominion (0-2)
SC State (1-1) at Georgia Southern (1-1)
William & Mary (1-1) at Wofford (2-0)
FIU (1-1) at FAU (0-2)
NC Central (1-1) at North Carolina (2-0)
UTEP (0-2) at Liberty (2-0)
Uconn (1-1) at Duke (2-0)
Gardner-Webb (0-2) at Charlotte (0-2)
West Georgia (1-1) at E. Kentucky (0-2)
Mississippi (2-0) at Wake Forest (1-1)
North Alabama (0-3) at UT Martin (0-2)
W. Kentucky (1-1) at Middle Tennessee (1-1)
Vanderbilt (2-0) at Georgia St. (1-1)
Georgetown (0-0) at Alabama A&M (1-1)
Point (Ga.) (0-0) at Davidson (1-1)
Tennessee St. (1-1) vs. Ark.-Pine Bluff (1-1) at Memphis, Tenn.
E. Washington (1-1) at SE Louisiana (0-2)
Alabama St. (1-1) at Samford (0-2)
MVSU (0-2) at Murray St. (0-2)
Southern U. (1-1) at Jackson St. (1-1)
South Florida (1-1) at Southern Miss. (1-1)
Toledo (2-0) at Mississippi St. (1-1)
Georgia (2-0) at Kentucky (1-1)
New Mexico (0-2) at Auburn (1-1)
Kent St. (0-2) at Tennessee (2-0)
Maryland (1-1) at Virginia (2-0)
Stephen F. Austin (1-1) at McNeese St. (1-2)

**MIDWEST**

Arkansas St. (2-0) at Michigan (1-1)
Cent. Michigan (1-1) at Illinois (2-0)
Alabama (2-0) at Wisconsin (2-0)
Cincinnati (1-1) at Miami (Ohio) (0-1)
Boston College (2-0) at Missouri (2-0)
W. Illinois (0-2) at Illinois St. (1-1)
Black Hills St. (0-0) at St. Thomas (Minn.) (0-2)
Idaho St. (1-1) at North Dakota (1-1)
Duquesne (0-2) at Youngstown St. (1-1)
Prairie View (1-1) at Michigan St. (2-0)
Notre Dame (1-1) at Purdue (1-0)
Morgan St. (1-1) at Ohio (1-1)
Nevada (1-2) at Minnesota (1-1)
Troy (0-2) at Iowa (1-1)
Colgate (0-2) at Akron (0-2)
Dayton (1-0) at Indiana St. (0-2)
Hanover (0-0) at Butler (2-0)
Bethune-Cookman (0-2) at W. Michigan (0-2)
Jacksonville St. (0-2) at E. Michigan (1-1)
Lindenwood (Mo.) (0-2) at Missouri St. (0-2)
Augustana (SD) (0-0) at S. Dakota St. (1-1)
Incarnate Word (1-1) at S. Illinois (1-1)
E. Illinois (1-1) at Northwestern (1-1)
N. Iowa (2-0) at Nebraska (2-0)
Indiana Wesleyan (0-0) at Valparaiso (0-2)

**SOUTHWEST**

North Texas (2-0) at Texas Tech (1-1)
Oklahoma St. (2-0) at Tulsa (1-1)
Tulane (1-1) at Oklahoma (2-0)
UAB (1-1) at Arkansas (1-1)
UTSA (1-1) at Texas (2-0)
Austin Peay (0-2) at Cent. Arkansas (1-1)
Weber St. (1-1) at Lamar (1-1)
Grambling St. (1-1) at Texas A&M Commerce (0-2)
Hawaii (1-1) at Sam Houston St. (1-1)
Louisiana College (0-0) at Houston Christian (0-2)
Air Force (1-1) at Baylor (1-1)
UCF (2-0) at TCU (2-0)
Rice (1-1) at Houston (0-2)

**FAR WEST**

Morehead St. (2-0) at Montana (1-1)
Washington (2-0) vs. Washington St. (2-0) at Seattle
Oregon (2-0) at Oregon St. (2-0)
Abilene Christian (1-1) at N. Colorado (0-2)
South Dakota (1-1) at Portland St. (0-2)
Albany (NY) (1-1) at Idaho (1-1)
Utah (2-0) at Utah St. (1-1)
Kennesaw St. (0-2) at San Jose St. (2-0)
Colorado (1-1) at Colorado St. (1-1)
Indiana (2-0) at UCLA (1-0)
W. Oregon (0-1) at Cal Poly (0-2)
UC Davis (1-1) at S. Utah (1-1)
Nicholls (0-2) at Sacramento St. (0-2)
N. Arizona (1-1) at Utah Tech (0-2)
BYU (2-0) at Wyoming (0-2)
New Mexico St. (1-1) at Fresno St. (1-1)
San Diego St. (1-1) at California (2-0)

## TENNIS

### Zavarovalnica Sava Ljubljana

**Wednesday**
**At TC ZTK Ljubljana**
**Ljubljana, Slovenia**
**Purse: Euro 100,000**
**Surface: Red clay**
**Women's Singles**
**Round of 16**

Nuria Brancaccio, Italy, def. Anastasiya Soboleva, Ukraine, 7-6 (6), 6-0.
Victoria Jimenez Kasintseva, Andorra, def. Matilde Paoletti, Italy, 7-5, 6-1.
Ella Seidel (5), Germany, def. Angela Fita Boluda, Spain, 4-6, 6-3, 6-1.
Nuria Parrizas Diaz (2), Spain, def. Ipek Oz, Turkiye, 6-0, 6-1.
Olga Danilovic (3), Serbia, def. Sinja Kraus, Austria, 6-2, 6-2.

### Jasmin Open

**Wednesday**
**At Skanes Family Hotel Monastir**
**Monastir, Tunisia**
**Purse: $267,082**
**Surface: Hardcourt outdoor**
**Women's Singles**
**Round of 16**

Sonay Kartal, Britain, def. Mai Hontama, Japan, 6-2, 6-2.
Sara Sorribes Tormo, Spain, def. Jana Fett, Croatia, 5-7, 6-3, 6-4.
Yuliia Starodubtseva, Ukraine, def. Diane Parry (3), France, 6-4, 6-4.
Rebecca Sramkova, Slovakia, def. Clara Burel (2), France, 7-6 (4), 7-5.

### Guadalajara Open

**Wednesday**
**At Panamerican Tennis Center**
**Guadalajara, Mexico**
**Purse: $922,573**
**Surface: Hardcourt outdoor**
**Women's Singles**
**Round of 32**

Kamilla Rakhimova, Russia, def. Victoria Azarenka (3), Belarus, 6-2, 3-0, ret.
Camila Osorio, Colombia, def. Veronika Kudermetova (7), Russia, 7-6 (5), 6-7 (2), 7-5.
Olivia Gadecki, Australia, def. Danielle Collins, United States, 6-3, 6-3.
Martina Trevisan, Italy, def. Renata Zarazua, Mexico, 6-4, 6-3.

### Tiriac Foundation Trophy

**Wednesday**
**At National Tennis Centre**
**Bucharest**
**Purse: $115,000**
**Surface: Red clay**
**Women's Singles**
**Round of 16**

Kathinka von Deichmann, Liechtenstein, def. Despina Papamichail, Greece, 2-6, 6-1, 6-2.
Alevtina Ibragimova, Russia, def. Alina Charaeva, Russia, 6-4, 6-4.
Marie Benoit, Belgium, def. Valentina Ryser, Switzerland, 6-4, 7-5.
Maria Carle (1), Argentina, def. Francisca Jorge, Portugal, 6-1, 6-3.

## AUTO RACING

### NASCAR Cup points leaders

**Through Sept. 9**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Ryan Blaney | 2071 |
| 2. | Christopher Bell | 2066 |
| 3. | William Byron | 2059 |
| 4. | Tyler Reddick | 2059 |
| 5. | Joey Logano | 2054 |
| 6. | Alex Bowman | 2053 |
| 7. | Austin Cindric | 2053 |
| 8. | Chase Elliott | 2050 |
| 9. | Daniel Suárez | 2048 |
| 10. | Kyle Larson | 2041 |
| 11. | Denny Hamlin | 2028 |
| 12. | Ty Gibbs | 2027 |
| 13. | Brad Keselowski | 2026 |
| 14. | Harrison Burton | 2011 |
| 15. | Martin Truex Jr. | 2008 |
| 16. | Chase Briscoe | 2006 |
| 17. | Ross Chastain | 696 |
| 18. | Chris Buescher | 691 |
| 19. | Bubba Wallace | 677 |
| 20. | Kyle Busch | 617 |
| 21. | Todd Gilliland | 510 |
| 22. | Carson Hocevar | 492 |
| 23. | Michael McDowell | 483 |
| 24. | Josh Berry | 469 |
| 25. | Ricky Stenhouse Jr. | 453 |
| 26. | Noah Gragson | 434 |
| 27. | Ryan Preece | 412 |

## PRO FOOTBALL

### NFL

**AMERICAN CONFERENCE**

**East**

| | W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Buffalo | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 34 | 28 |
| Miami | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 20 | 17 |
| New England | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 16 | 10 |
| N.Y. Jets | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 19 | 32 |

**South**

| | W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Houston | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 29 | 27 |
| Indianapolis | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 27 | 29 |
| Jacksonville | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 17 | 20 |
| Tennessee | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 17 | 24 |

**North**

| | W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pittsburgh | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 18 | 10 |
| Baltimore | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 20 | 27 |
| Cincinnati | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 10 | 16 |
| Cleveland | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 17 | 33 |

**West**

| | W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kansas City | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 27 | 20 |
| L.A. Chargers | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 22 | 10 |
| Denver | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 20 | 26 |
| Las Vegas | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 10 | 22 |

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**East**

| | W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dallas | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 33 | 17 |
| Philadelphia | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 34 | 29 |
| N.Y. Giants | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 6 | 28 |
| Washington | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 20 | 37 |

**South**

| | W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New Orleans | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 47 | 10 |
| Tampa Bay | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 37 | 20 |
| Atlanta | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 10 | 18 |
| Carolina | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 10 | 47 |

**North**

| | W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chicago | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 24 | 17 |
| Detroit | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 26 | 20 |
| Minnesota | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 28 | 6 |
| Green Bay | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 29 | 34 |

**West**

| | W | L | T | Pct | PF | PA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| San Francisco | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 32 | 19 |
| Seattle | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 | 26 | 20 |
| Arizona | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 28 | 34 |
| L.A. Rams | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 | 20 | 26 |

**Thursday's game**
Buffalo at Miami
**Sunday's games**
Cleveland at Jacksonville
Indianapolis at Green Bay
L.A. Chargers at Carolina
Las Vegas at Baltimore
N.Y. Giants at Washington
N.Y. Jets at Tennessee
New Orleans at Dallas
San Francisco at Minnesota
Seattle at New England
Tampa Bay at Detroit
L.A. Rams at Arizona
Cincinnati at Kansas City
Pittsburgh at Denver
Chicago at Houston
**Monday's game**
Atlanta at Philadelphia

## PRO BASKETBALL

### WNBA

**EASTERN CONFERENCE**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| x-New York | 30 | 6 | .833 | — |
| x-Connecticut | 26 | 10 | .722 | 4 |
| x-Indiana | 19 | 18 | .514 | 11½ |
| Chicago | 13 | 23 | .361 | 17 |
| Atlanta | 12 | 24 | .333 | 18 |
| Washington | 12 | 24 | .333 | 18 |

**WESTERN CONFERENCE**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| x-Minnesota | 27 | 9 | .750 | — |
| x-Las Vegas | 23 | 13 | .639 | 4 |
| x-Seattle | 22 | 14 | .611 | 5 |
| x-Phoenix | 17 | 19 | .472 | 10 |
| Dallas | 9 | 27 | .250 | 18 |
| Los Angeles | 7 | 30 | .189 | 20½ |

x-clinched playoff spot
**Wednesday's games**
Las Vegas 86, Indiana 75
Washington 89, Chicago 58
Seattle 90, Los Angeles 82
**Thursday's game**
New York at Dallas
**Friday's games**
Chicago at Minnesota
Las Vegas at Indiana
Seattle at Dallas
Washington at Atlanta
Connecticut at Phoenix

## PRO SOCCER

### MLS

**WESTERN CONFERENCE**

| | W | L | T | Pts | GF | GA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LA Galaxy | 15 | 6 | 7 | 52 | 53 | 38 |
| LAFC | 14 | 6 | 6 | 48 | 48 | 32 |
| Real Salt Lake | 13 | 6 | 8 | 47 | 53 | 36 |
| Colorado | 13 | 9 | 5 | 44 | 53 | 45 |
| Seattle | 12 | 9 | 7 | 43 | 41 | 32 |
| Vancouver | 12 | 8 | 6 | 42 | 44 | 35 |
| Houston | 11 | 8 | 8 | 41 | 37 | 31 |
| Portland | 11 | 9 | 7 | 40 | 55 | 46 |
| Minnesota | 10 | 11 | 6 | 36 | 44 | 45 |
| FC Dallas | 9 | 12 | 7 | 34 | 44 | 45 |
| Austin FC | 9 | 11 | 7 | 34 | 30 | 38 |
| Sporting KC | 7 | 14 | 7 | 28 | 45 | 53 |
| St Louis City | 5 | 10 | 13 | 28 | 40 | 53 |
| San Jose | 5 | 20 | 2 | 17 | 34 | 63 |

**EASTERN CONFERENCE**

| | W | L | T | Pts | GF | GA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Inter Miami CF | 18 | 4 | 5 | 59 | 62 | 40 |
| Cincinnati | 16 | 8 | 3 | 51 | 48 | 36 |
| Columbus | 14 | 5 | 7 | 49 | 52 | 28 |
| New York | 10 | 5 | 13 | 43 | 44 | 35 |
| NYCFC | 11 | 10 | 6 | 39 | 40 | 36 |
| Charlotte FC | 10 | 9 | 8 | 38 | 31 | 29 |
| Orlando City | 10 | 10 | 7 | 37 | 42 | 41 |
| Toronto FC | 10 | 15 | 3 | 33 | 36 | 50 |
| D.C. United | 8 | 12 | 8 | 32 | 43 | 56 |
| Atlanta | 8 | 12 | 7 | 31 | 36 | 38 |
| Philadelphia | 7 | 11 | 9 | 30 | 47 | 43 |
| New England | 8 | 15 | 3 | 27 | 30 | 51 |
| CF Montréal | 6 | 12 | 9 | 27 | 35 | 58 |
| Chicago | 6 | 14 | 8 | 26 | 34 | 50 |
| Nashville | 6 | 13 | 8 | 26 | 26 | 44 |

**Note:** Three points for victory, one point for tie.

**Saturday's games**
Nashville at Atlanta
Columbus at Cincinnati
New York City FC at D.C. United
Philadelphia at Miami
Charlotte FC at CF Montréal
New England at Orlando City
Austin FC at Toronto FC
New York at Chicago
Real Salt Lake at Houston
Minnesota at St Louis City
Portland at Colorado
San Jose at Vancouver
Los Angeles FC at LA Galaxy
**Sunday's game**
Sporting Kansas City at Seattle
**Wednesday, Sept.18**
Miami at Atlanta
Philadelphia at New York City FC
CF Montréal at New England
Columbus at Toronto FC
Charlotte FC at Orlando City
Vancouver at Houston
Colorado at Sporting Kansas City
Cincinnati at Minnesota
Chicago at Nashville
FC Dallas at Real Salt Lake
Austin FC at Los Angeles FC
LA Galaxy at Portland
San Jose at Seattle
**Saturday, Sept. 21**
Miami at New York City FC
New England at Charlotte FC
Orlando City at Columbus
Chicago at CF Montréal
Atlanta at New York
Houston at Austin FC
Los Angeles FC at FC Dallas
Minnesota at Sporting Kansas City
Cincinnati at Nashville
Toronto FC at Colorado
Portland at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at LA Galaxy
St Louis City at San Jose

### NWSL

| | W | L | T | Pts | GF | GA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Orlando | 14 | 0 | 5 | 47 | 36 | 12 |
| Washington | 13 | 4 | 2 | 41 | 39 | 21 |
| Kansas City | 11 | 3 | 5 | 38 | 43 | 28 |
| Gotham FC | 11 | 4 | 4 | 37 | 23 | 16 |
| North Carolina | 10 | 8 | 1 | 31 | 26 | 20 |
| Portland | 8 | 8 | 3 | 27 | 29 | 27 |
| Bay FC | 8 | 11 | 0 | 24 | 24 | 31 |
| Chicago | 7 | 10 | 2 | 23 | 25 | 28 |
| Angel City | 6 | 10 | 3 | 21 | 22 | 31 |
| Seattle | 5 | 9 | 5 | 20 | 23 | 32 |
| Louisville | 4 | 8 | 7 | 19 | 26 | 27 |
| San Diego | 3 | 9 | 7 | 16 | 15 | 24 |
| Utah Royals FC | 4 | 12 | 3 | 15 | 13 | 31 |
| Houston | 3 | 11 | 5 | 14 | 13 | 29 |

**Note:** Three points for victory, one point for tie.

**Friday's games**
Bay FC at North Carolina
Kansas City at Orlando
Chicago at Portland
**Saturday's games**
Angel City at Louisville
San Diego at Utah Royals FC
**Sunday's game**
Houston at Washington
**Monday's game**
Gotham FC at Seattle

## DEALS

### Wednesday's transactions

**BASEBALL**
**Major League Baseball**
**American League**

**BALTIMORE ORIOLES** — Sent LHP Danny Coulombe to Norfolk (IL) on a rehab assignment.
**BOSTON RED SOX** — Reinstated LHP Cam Booser from the 15-day IL. Placed LHP Brennan Bernardino on the 15-day IL.
**CLEVELAND GUARDIANS** — Assigned LHP Anthony Gose outright to Columbus (IL). Released RHP Scott Barlow.
**MINNESOTA TWINS** — Reinstated C Christian Vazquez from the paternity list and OF Manny Margot from the 10-day IL. Optioned 2B Michael Helman and C Jair Camargo to St. Paul (IL).
**OAKLAND ATHLETICS** — Placed RHP Ross Stripling on the 15-day IL, retroactive to Sept. 9. Selected the contract of LHP Kyle Muller from Las Vegas (PCL). Designated LHP Jack O'Loughlin for assignment.
**SEATTLE MARINERS** — Assigned 1B Jason Vosler outright to Tacoma (PCL).
**TAMPA BAY RAYS** — Suspended RHP Edwin Uceta for three games and fined an undisclosed amount for intentionally throwing at an opponent during a Sept. 10 game at Philadelphia.

**National League**

**ATLANTA BRAVES** — Placed RHP Reynaldo Lopez on the 15-day IL. Recalled RHP Daysbel Hernandez from Gwinnett (IL). Selected the contract of 2B Cavan Biggio from Gwinnett. Optioned LF Luke Williams to Gwinnett.
**MIAMI MARLINS** — Sent LHP Braxton Garrett to Jacksonville (IL) on a rehab assignment.
**PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES** — Assigned RHP Nick Nelson outright to Lehigh Valley (IL).
**ST. LOUIS CARDINALS** — Reinstated RHP Lance Lynn from the 15-day IL. Optioned RHP Chris Roycroft to Memphis (IL).

**BASKETBALL**
**National Basketball Association**

**BROOKLYN NETS** — Waived G Tyson Etienne.

**FOOTBALL**
**National Football League**

**ARIZONA CARDINALS** — Signed LB Julian Okwara to the active roster. Placed OL Jonah Williams on injured reserve. Signed OL Charlie Heck to the practice squad.
**CAROLINA PANTHERS** — Signed OLB Charles Harris to the active roster. Resigned TE Feleipe Franks to the practice squad.
**CLEVELAND BROWNS** — Placed LBs Mohamoud Diabate and Tony Fields II, DT Marice Hurst II and S Juan Thornill on injured reserve. Signed WR David Bell, CB Mike Ford Jr., LB Khaleke Hudson and DT Sam Kamara to the active roster. Signed DT Siaki Ika, TE Geogg Swaim and LB Luji Vilain to the practice squad.
**DENVER BRONCOS** — Signed WR Kaded Davis to the practice squad and RB Michael Burton the active roster. Placed RB Audric Estime on injured reserve.
**DETROIT LIONS** — Signed DL Kyle Peko to the active roster. Signed K Greg Joseph and DL Chris Smith to the practice squad.
**HOUSTON TEXANS** — Placed CB Jeff Okudah on injured reserve. Signed LB Rashad Weaver to the active roster and DBs Desmond King and Troy Pride to the practice squad.
**INDIANAPOLIS COLTS** — Signed CB Kelvin Joseph and S Ronnie Harrison to the practice squad. Released DE Titus Leo from the practice squad.
**LOS ANGELES CHARGERS** — Signed CB Dicaprio Bootle to the practice squad.
**LOS ANGELES RAMS** — Placed WR Puke Nacua, OT Joseph Noteboom and G Steve Avila on injured reserve. Signed OT Geron Christian, OL Dylan McMahon and DB Ahkello Witherspoon to contracts.
**NEW ORLEANS SAINTS** — Signed DB Shemar Jean-Charles to the practice squad.
**NEW YORK JETS** — Signed LB Jackson Sirmon to the practice squad.
**PHILADELPHIA EAGLES** — Signed DB Caden Sterns to the practice squad. Released TE Jack Stoll from the practice squad.
**SAN DIEGO PADRES** — Placed LHP Martin Perez on the paternity list. Recalled LHP Tom Cosgrove and OF Brandon Lockridge from El Paso (PCL). Optioned C Luis Campusano to El Paso.
**SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS** — Signed OT Chris Hubbard to the practice squad.
**TENNESSEE TITANS** — Signed DL James Lynch to the active roster. Signed OLB Kyron Johnson to the practice squad.

**HOCKEY**
**National Hockey League**

**TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS** — Signed D Jani Hakanpaa to a one-year contract.

**SOCCER**
**Major League Soccer**

**COLORADO RAPIDS** — Signed D Reggie Cannon to a three-and-a-half-year contract.
**LOS ANGELES FC** — Signed D Marlon Santos da Silva Barbosa to a one-year contract.

## GOLF

### LPGA money leaders

**Through Sept. 8**

| | | Trn | Money |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Nelly Korda | 13 | $3,601,630 |
| 2. | Yuka Saso | 14 | $2,648,812 |
| 3. | Ayaka Furue | 19 | $2,587,873 |
| 4. | Lydia Ko | 16 | $2,269,317 |
| 5. | Haeran Ryu | 19 | $2,181,809 |

NFL

# Saints continue prep for Cowboys despite impending hurricane

BY BRETT MARTEL
*Associated Press*

**New Orleans Saints (1-0)**
**at Dallas Cowboys (1-0)**
AFN-Sports2
7 p.m. Sunday CET
2 a.m. Monday JKT

METAIRIE, La. — New Orleans Saints coaches decided to spend Wednesday night at team headquarters as Hurricane Francine struck southeast Louisiana, figuring it would be safer and more productive than trying to commute home right when the worst weather was arriving.

"We'll probably find a corner of the room to lay down in at some point in time and get a little sleep," head coach Dennis Allen said. "The most significant weather is going to be this evening into the early morning hours, and so that's kind of when we'd be trying to wrap up. I don't see anybody trying to get out of here in that type of weather."

The Saints practiced an hour earlier than usual on their indoor field at team headquarters, after which players were dismissed to ride out the storm at home while coaches remained behind to work on the plan for Sunday's game against the Cowboys in Dallas.

"We do have a job to do, even when circumstances aren't perfect, we still have to focus," Saints quarterback Derek Carr said. "I'll be home studying tonight, you know, but I'll be doing it with all my kids sitting right next to me.

"I owe it to my teammates to be locked in and be ready to go for tomorrow," Carr continued. "We're human, but we also recognize we have a job to do. And we also recognize that, you know, our city has been through a lot. And so our prayers are with our whole state of Louisiana, you know, wherever this is passing through."

Francine struck Louisiana on Wednesday evening as a Category 2 storm that forecasters warned could bring deadly storm surge, widespread flooding and destructive winds on parts of the Gulf Coast.

It made landfall about 30 miles southwest of Morgan City, the National Hurricane Center announced at 4 p.m. CDT, packing maximum sustained winds near 100 mph.

Allen said the club hoped to be able to return to its normal schedule Thursday if greater New Orleans averted significant damage.

Saints headquarters is equipped with generator power and the facility has endured far stronger storms than Francine, including Katrina in 2005 and Ida in 2021 — although the team evacuated for those storms, and some others over the years, because of the level of danger they posed and the severe disruptions they caused to life in and around the city.

The last time the Saints evacuated for a major storm was for Ida, a Category 4 storm, in 2021. The team set up temporary operations in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, practiced at TCU and had its first home game moved to Jacksonville, Fla., where New Orleans memorably routed Green Bay, 38-3.

Given that Francine was not expected to be nearly as strong as a storm like Ida, the Saints decided this time that it made more sense to remain in New Orleans — but also to adjust schedules temporarily in a way that helped players and other personnel remain as safe as possible.

"We want everybody to be safe, and yet we still felt we could get our work done and keep everybody safe and not have to try to go through all the logistics to go through an evacuation," Allen said.

GERALD HERBERT/AP

**Head coach Dennis Allen and the rest of the Saints coaching staff chose to remain at team headquarters during Hurricane Francine.**

MATT SLOCUM/AP

**The Arizona Cardinals' Marvin Harrison Jr. disappointed in his NFL debut, getting one catch for 4 yards and being targeted only three times against the Buffalo Bills after generating hype as the No. 4 overall pick.**

# Cards insist Harrison will produce despite poor debut

BY DAVID BRANDT
*Associated Press*

**Los Angeles Rams (0-1)**
**at Arizona Cardinals (0-1)**
AFN-Sports2
10 p.m. Sunday CET
5 a.m. Monday JKT

TEMPE, Ariz. — Marvin Harrison Jr. had grandiose plans for his first professional football game, one he hoped would be filled with amazing catches, touchdowns and a victory for the Arizona Cardinals.

But as many players have found out over the decades, the NFL is rarely a fairy tale.

Harrison's pro debut turned out to be a snoozer. The No. 4 overall pick out of Ohio State had just one catch for 4 yards and was targeted only three times. To make it worse, the Buffalo Bills rallied for a 34-28 win over the Cardinals.

"Obviously, it wasn't great," Harrison said. "It definitely wasn't what I expected or what I wanted to happen, what the team wanted to happen."

The Bills had a lot to do with Harrison's quiet debut, paying much more attention to him on defense than a normal rookie receiver. He was double-teamed for a majority of the game, giving quarterback Kyler Murray little choice but to look for other options.

Murray said he wasn't worried about Harrison's lack of catches.

"Nothing changes," Murray said. "We've got the utmost confidence in what we're capable of doing. If you went back and watched the game, I think they did a good job of making sure he wasn't going to be single covered for the majority of the game.

"But I'll never lose confidence in Marv."

Second-year coach Jonathan Gannon had a similar response: "Yeah, he'll be fine. Marvin will be fine. He'll get back at it and go to work, but no one's going to put more expectation and pressure on him wanting to do well than himself. He'll be perfectly fine."

Harrison's lack of production last Sunday called into question Gannon's decision to sit the rookie for the majority of the preseason. The receiver played one series in the first exhibition game against the Saints, but otherwise had a seat on the bench next to Murray, who didn't play at all in the three preseason contests.

Harrison said NFL game action was much more intense than anything he experienced during camp.

"It's totally different," Harrison said. "You do a lot of things in shirts and shorts, then you go to practice and you've got pads on, you've got joint practices with the Colts, but there's nothing like live action."

Still, he understood Gannon's decision to keep several starters out of the preseason games.

"We all feel really healthy, and that's the most important thing," Harrison said.

Now the Cardinals are preparing for the Los Angeles Rams, who have given the franchise plenty of trouble over the past seven years. Arizona has lost 13 of 15 against the division rival going back to 2017, including a playoff game.

Harrison hopes his presence will help begin to reverse that trend. The rookie didn't blame anyone for his rough first game and said he knows from his experience at Ohio State that catches can be made when the opposing defense is trying to take him away.

"I've got to get open and catch the ball," Harrison said. "That's my job as a receiver. That's my job description."

NFL

# Raiders need more run defense vs. Ravens

By Mark Anderson
*Associated Press*

HENDERSON, Nev. — The hints were there in the preseason that the Raiders might struggle to defend the run, and coach Antonio Pierce let his feelings be known that it had to be cleaned up.

He's still not satisfied — for good reason.

Las Vegas had a legitimate chance to open the season Sunday with a road victory over their AFC West rival Chargers, but its second-half defense against the run was a key reason the Raiders left Los Angeles with a 22-10 loss.

The Chargers rushed for 150 of their 176 yards after halftime, using J.K. Dobbins' gains of 46 and 61 to set up the lead-changing field goal in the third quarter and game-clinching touchdown in the fourth, respectively.

"That's what keeps you humble in this game," Raiders defensive tackle Christian Wilkins said. "You never have all the answers. The job's never done until it's completely done, but that's just football. That's just how the game goes."

Now the Raiders go to Baltimore on Sunday to play a Ravens offense that features reigning Associated Press MVP and dual-threat quarterback Lamar Jackson and bulldozing running back Derrick Henry.

Jackson showed off his elusiveness in Thursday night's 27-20 season-opening loss at two-time defending champion Kansas City. He rushed for 122 yards on 16 attempts, and Ravens coach John Harbaugh said he didn't want to stop being aggressive even though it might put his franchise quarterback in harm's way.

But what makes Jackson especially dangerous is he can punish defenses that load up to limit his ability to run. He completed 26 of 41 passes for 273 yards in the opener, and Pierce said that Jackson's ability to beat teams with his arm complicates how to defend him.

"If you see our guys run up the field, running past the quarterback, just pack your bags, it's going to be a long day for the Raiders," Pierce said. "We have to do a good job. When I played, we played against (Michael) Vick. We called it a cage rush, kind of keeping him in. You see Lamar, he has the ability to slither his way out of it.

"Do you stay back in coverage or do you go attack the quarterback? So really critical up front that we are detailed and do our job and our assignment and what's actually in the game plan."

Harbaugh could also get Henry, who rushed just 13 times for 46 yards against the Chiefs, more involved but said he didn't want to turn him into a 30-carry workhorse. Even just a handful more rushes from him could mean trouble for the Raiders going against a back who has gained more than 1,000 yards in five of the past six seasons and had 937 over eight games in 2021.

Worse for the Raiders is knee injuries have weakened their depth at defensive end. Malcolm Koonce is on injured reserve, meaning he will miss at least the first month of the season. Tyree Wilson was injured at LA, and Pierce said it was "not looking good" he would play at Baltimore.

Those injuries have forced the Raiders to make some moves. They signed defensive end K'Lavon Chaisson to the practice squad Tuesday, and last week Charles Snowden was signed to the active squad and wound up starting and playing more than half the snaps.

Snowden, who had one tackle in that game, said having a full week to prepare should benefit him.

"There are small things in the game, nuances, things that the average eye might not see," Snowden said. "But to us, it could be the difference between a touchdown and a 5-yard stop. Getting to work with those and communicate with the guys throughout the week makes a huge difference."

Ashley Landis/AP

**Los Angeles Chargers running back J.K. Dobbins, right, picks up yards against the Las Vegas Raiders. The Chargers had 150 of their 176 rushing yards after halftime, and Dobbins had gains of 46 and 61 yards.**

**Las Vegas Raiders (0-1)**
**at Baltimore Ravens (0-1)**
AFN-Atlantic
7 p.m. Sunday CET
2 a.m. Monday JKT

# Commanders want Daniels passing more after running plenty in debut

By Stephen Whyno
*Associated Press*

ASHBURN, Va. — Jayden Daniels has spent his life as a quarterback developing a feel for when to take off and run.

"You don't want to get hit by 300 pound-plus people," he said Wednesday. "It's like just an instinct. That clock in your head is like, 'All right, it's time to go.'"

Daniels ran the ball 16 times in his NFL debut, rushing for 88 yards and two touchdowns in the Washington Commanders' season-opening loss at Tampa Bay. The coaching staff would certainly like to see their rookie quarterback and new face of the franchise tone that down moving forward.

"We'd love to see him remain a passer first, and I think it's going to come with more experience," coach Dan Quinn said. "(Sixteen) carries is not the model that we're looking for. ... I do think we'll continue to grow in that spot, but (it is) certainly not by design to have that many."

Daniels, the No. 2 pick out of LSU after winning the Heisman Trophy last season as the best player in college football, is one of the top prospects in the league largely because of what he can do with his legs, along with his right arm. Still, his 16 carries matched Baltimore's Lamar Jackson for the most of any quarterback in Week 1 and were more than Philadelphia's Jalen Hurts or Pittsburgh's Justin Fields, who are not as new to the pros.

Retired QB Ryan Fitzpatrick, who ran 574 times during his playing career, expressed caution and compared the situation to Anthony Richardson injuring his right shoulder last year as a rookie with Indianapolis, leading to season-ending surgery.

"As we saw with Anthony Richardson last year, it's exciting until it's not, until there is an injury and these are big boys out there in the NFL, so he's going to have to learn how to manage that a little bit," Fitzpatrick said on a video call previewing Amazon's "Thursday Night Football" broadcasts. "They're going to have to figure out the right balance because he is and has already shown he's one of the top, probably, three or four runners at the quarterback position in the NFL, and it's a big weapon and it causes a lot of problems for defenses."

Quinn as a defensive coach said having a dual-threat quarterback "creates a headache — one that I am more than happy to be a part of creating."

In the same vein, he wants Daniels — who completed 17 of 24 passes for 184 yards — to keep opponents guessing.

"Let a route develop or the option of checking it down to somebody else," Quinn said. "The great thing about him is it is our first game, and he's going to be an exceptional player. Are there choices, when to go, when to not? You do have to grow and learn into those, and I am 100% certain that he will."

Fellow rookie Luke McCaffrey, now a wide receiver after converting from quarterback in college, trusts Daniels to know when to pass and when to run.

"At the end of the day, the quarterback is always the one that sees the field and knows it," McCaffrey said. "There's always a fine balance. I think it's such a valuable weapon when you look at a quarterback, something that can help get an offense started, help spark it and help it be more efficient, too."

Chris O'Meara/AP

**Washington Commanders quarterback Jayden Daniels scrambles against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers during the first half Sunday in Tampa, Fla.**

# MLB/COLLEGE FOOTBALL

## Pirates expect Shelton to return as manager

BY WILL GRAVES
*Associated Press*

PITTSBURGH — Pittsburgh Pirates general manager Ben Cherington expects manager Derek Shelton to return next season.

Cherington said Wednesday that Shelton remains "the right person to manage this team in 2025" despite an August swoon that dropped the Pirates out of postseason contention.

"I think there's a lot to the job I believe he does really, really well and I also believe he works his tail off to continue to improve in a number of ways," Cherington said.

Shelton is 288-404 (.415) in nearly five full seasons in Pittsburgh, which swept a three-game series from Miami on Wednesday.

The Pirates hoped to take another step forward in 2024 behind rookie pitchers Paul Skenes and Jared Jones. While they were above .500 and in the middle of the wild-card race at the July 30 trade deadline, Pittsburgh has slumped down the stretch and is on pace to finish with around 76 wins, right where the franchise was in 2023.

Still, Shelton sees progress.

"We're in a definite, much better spot than we have (been) in the last two years with our starting pitching," Shelton said Wednesday. "We're deeper than we have been. We need to continue to build some things offensively and continue to grow that depth."

Cherington hired Shelton in November 2019 to handle the major league roster as Cherington began a top-down overhaul of the organization. The steps back toward relevance have been difficult. The Pirates finished last in the NL Central in each of Shelton's first three seasons as Cherington traded away veterans like Joe Musgrove and Josh Bell while restocking the minor league system.

The team upped its record to 76-86 a year ago and 2023 top overall pick Skenes' arrival in the majors in mid-May gave the franchise the kind of buzz it has lacked since reaching the playoffs three straight years from 2013-15.

While Skenes has dazzled — he is 10-2 with a 2.10 ERA through 20 starts — the bullpen has been a mess and the lineup has struggled to produce regularly. The Pirates are near the bottom of the National League in every major offensive category, including runs (11th), home runs (13th) and on-base plus slugging percentage (14th).

Though Cherington endorsed Shelton, he was less committed to the rest of the coaching staff. Hitting coach Andy Haines' job status is likely up in the air with runs continuing to be hard to come by.

"We will get to the end of the season and have an opportunity to look at the entire (coaching) group and decide, again consistent with the point about faster improvement and more improvement, if any adjustments are necessary to give ourselves a better chance to do that," Cherington said.

The Pirates already have started making changes to the scouting department, though Cherington declined to call it an "overhaul."

The major league roster remains a work in progress. The team moved 6-foot-7 shortstop Oneil Cruz to center field earlier this month after he struggled defensively. Third baseman Ke'Bryan Hayes is dealing with back problems that limited his power. They currently have three catchers under control for next year — 2021 top overall pick Henry Davis, Endy Rodriguez and Joey Bart — and a glaring need at first base if they don't re-sign Rowdy Tellez, who has rebounded from a slow start.

Designated hitter Andrew McCutchen, who on Tuesday night reached the 20-homer plateau for the 10th time in his career, wants to come back next season and Cherington is optimistic that will happen.

"We would love to find a way for Andrew to finish his career in a Pirates uniform," Cherington said.

GENE J. PUSKAR/AP

**Since 2020, Pittsburgh Pirates manager Derek Shelton has a 288-404 record going into Friday, with the Pirates 70-76 so far this year.**

## Scoreboard

### American League

**East Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| New York | 84 | 62 | .575 | — |
| Baltimore | 83 | 64 | .565 | 1½ |
| Boston | 74 | 72 | .507 | 10 |
| Tampa Bay | 71 | 75 | .486 | 13 |
| Toronto | 69 | 78 | .469 | 15½ |

**Central Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cleveland | 84 | 62 | .575 | — |
| Kansas City | 80 | 67 | .544 | 4½ |
| Minnesota | 78 | 68 | .534 | 6 |
| Detroit | 75 | 71 | .514 | 9 |
| Chicago | 33 | 114 | .224 | 51½ |

**West Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Houston | 77 | 68 | .531 | — |
| Seattle | 74 | 72 | .507 | 3½ |
| Texas | 70 | 76 | .479 | 7½ |
| Oakland | 64 | 82 | .438 | 13½ |
| Los Angeles | 60 | 86 | .411 | 17½ |

### National League

**East Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Philadelphia | 88 | 58 | .603 | — |
| New York | 80 | 66 | .548 | 8 |
| Atlanta | 79 | 67 | .541 | 9 |
| Washington | 65 | 80 | .448 | 22½ |
| Miami | 54 | 92 | .370 | 34 |

**Central Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Milwaukee | 83 | 62 | .572 | — |
| Chicago | 75 | 71 | .514 | 8½ |
| St. Louis | 73 | 72 | .503 | 10 |
| Cincinnati | 71 | 76 | .483 | 13 |
| Pittsburgh | 70 | 76 | .479 | 13½ |

**West Division**

| | W | L | Pct | GB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Los Angeles | 87 | 59 | .596 | — |
| Arizona | 82 | 64 | .562 | 5 |
| San Diego | 82 | 65 | .558 | 5½ |
| San Francisco | 72 | 74 | .493 | 15 |
| Colorado | 54 | 92 | .370 | 33 |

**Wednesday's games**

Pittsburgh 3, Miami 1
Cleveland 6, Chicago White Sox 4
N.Y. Mets 6, Toronto 2
Arizona 14, Texas 4
Philadelphia 3, Tampa Bay 2
Detroit 7, Colorado 4
Washington 5, Atlanta 1
Minnesota 6, L.A. Angels 4
Boston 5, Baltimore 3, 10 innings
N.Y. Yankees 4, Kansas City 3, 11 innings
St. Louis 2, Cincinnati 1
Oakland 5, Houston 4
Seattle 5, San Diego 2
San Francisco 13, Milwaukee 2
L.A. Dodgers 10, Chicago Cubs 8

**Thursday's games**

Colorado at Detroit
Cincinnati at St. Louis
Oakland at Houston
Miami at Washington
Boston at N.Y. Yankees
Tampa Bay at Cleveland
Texas at Seattle
Milwaukee at San Francisco

**Friday's games**

N.Y. Mets (Quintana 8-9) at Philadelphia (Nola 12-7)
Baltimore (Eflin 10-8) at Detroit (TBD)
Kansas City (TBD) at Pittsburgh (Ortiz 6-5)
Miami (Cabrera 4-6) at Washington (Herz 3-7)
Boston (Houck 8-10) at N.Y. Yankees (Schmidt 5-3)
St. Louis (Fedde 8-9) at Toronto (Gausman 12-11)
Tampa Bay (Littell 6-9) at Cleveland (Bibee 11-7)
L.A. Dodgers (Knack 2-3) at Atlanta (Schwellenbach 5-7)
Oakland (Ginn 0-1) at Chicago White Sox (Crochet 6-11)
Cincinnati (Aguiar 1-0) at Minnesota (Ober 12-6)
Chicago Cubs (Assad 7-5) at Colorado (Gomber 5-10)
Houston (TBD) at L.A. Angels (Aldegheri 1-1)
Milwaukee (Myers 7-5) at Arizona (Rodriguez 22-2)
Texas (deGrom 0-0) at Seattle (TBD)
San Diego (Cease 12-11) at San Francisco (Webb 12-9)

**Saturday's games**

Boston at N.Y. Yankees
Kansas City at Pittsburgh
St. Louis at Toronto
N.Y. Mets at Philadelphia
Miami at Washington
Baltimore at Detroit
Tampa Bay at Cleveland
Cincinnati at Minnesota
Oakland at Chicago White Sox
L.A. Dodgers at Atlanta
Chicago Cubs at Colorado
Milwaukee at Arizona
San Diego at San Francisco
Houston at L.A. Angels
Texas at Seattle

COLIN HACKLEY/AP

**Boston College quarterback Thomas Castellanos celebrates with fans after his team defeated Florida State on Sept. 2 in Tallahassee, Fla.**

## BC visits Mizzou in Top 25 battle

BY DAVE SKRETTA
*Associated Press*

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Missouri coach Eli Drinkwitz does not have fond memories of the last time his team faced Boston College.

It was three years ago, and the second-year Tigers coach was not exactly thrilled by the idea of playing in the Northeast, where Missouri has little recruiting base or fan support. And while he was mostly complimentary of the Eagles in the week leading up to the game, Drinkwitz rankled plenty of their fans when he referred to "the great state of Massachusetts."

Since, you know, Massachusetts is technically a commonwealth.

The result didn't improve Drinkwitz's memory, either. The Tigers rallied to force overtime only to get beaten 41-34, then have to watch thousands of Boston College fans storm the field.

"That game was hard for a lot of different reasons," said Drinkwitz, whose No. 6 Tigers get the return game against the No. 24 Eagles on Saturday. "I didn't think we played particularly well. There was a lot of noise around that game for comments made by me. Learned a hard lesson as a head coach there. And obviously the emotional swings — we came back, tied it up, they scored in overtime, we threw a pick in overtime. First time I had to deal with a crowd rushing the field."

Things are a whole lot different for both schools these days.

The Tigers (2-0) were still in rebuilding mode back then, but they are now in the College Football Playoff conversation. They won 11 games last year, and they have yet to allow a point through two games this season, a first for the program since 1935.

Boston College (2-0) is also different. Bill O'Brien is back in college football after spending last season as offensive coordinator of the Patriots, and the former Penn State coach has already engineered a road win over Florida State and a rout of Duquesne.

"This is the best team we play. No question about it. Probably the best team we played BC-wise in a number of years, to be honest with you," O'Brien said. "When you win a couple of games, every game gets more important. I think that's the cool thing about college football. ... That's what these guys have to understand. Every game becomes harder."

### Health check

Luther Burden III, who left last week's game in the second quarter with an illness, and fellow wide receiver Theo Wease Jr., who had 10 catches for 149 yards despite a sore hip, are both probable, Drinkwitz said this week. Tight end Brett Norfleet (shoulder) and cornerback Ja'Marion Wayne (hamstring) were questionable.

### Dink and dunk

Missouri has one of the deepest wide receiver groups in the SEC, especially when Burden and Wease are at full speed. Opponents have taken note, forcing quarterback Brady Cook into short passing plays rather than deep shots down the field.

"Teams don't really want to give up explosive plays versus our wide receiver corps, so we have to be willing to make them defend us in a different manner," Drinkwitz said. "Our offensive staff has done a good job of finding out what their defensive plan is for us, and then finding something — whether it was in the game plan or not — that defeats this or defeats that."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

# ACC finds success with plug-and-play QBs

By Pete Iacobelli
*Associated Press*

CLEMSON, S.C. — Quarterbacks come and go, especially these days where several ACC teams have had quick success with new passers who have had only a few months on campus.

Several first-year passers with experience are making an immediate impact: Syracuse's Kyle McCord, Miami's Cam Ward and Wake Forest's Hank Bachmeier are among the country's top 10 quarterbacks after transferring.

"Sometimes it's seamless, sometimes it takes a while," said N.C. State coach Dave Doeren, who had Virginia's Brennan Armstrong for a season last year before adding Grayson McCall from Coastal Carolina this fall.

Seamless or not, it's a new plug-and-play reality for college football.

## Making the right choice

Miami coach Mario Cristobal wanted more consistency. He added Ward, the Washington State standout who was voted ACC preseason player of the year before taking a snap for Hurricanes.

Ward has excelled, becoming the first quarterback in Miami's long, talent-filled history to throw for 300 yards or more in his first two games.

Cristobal found a willing, fifth-year player in Ward, prepared to do what it takes for the 10th-ranked Hurricanes.

"He takes it on every single day. He wants to make this team better. He wants to make sure we stay a driven, unselfish, hardworking team," Cristobal said.

**No. 5 Mississippi (2-0)**
**at Wake Forest (1-1)**
AFN-Atlantic
12:30 a.m. Sunday CET
7:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

McCord is doing big things at Syracuse for first-year coach Fran Brown. He already provided a signature victory as the Orange defeated then-No. 23 Georgia Tech 31-28 last week. McCord passed for 381 yards and four touchdowns.

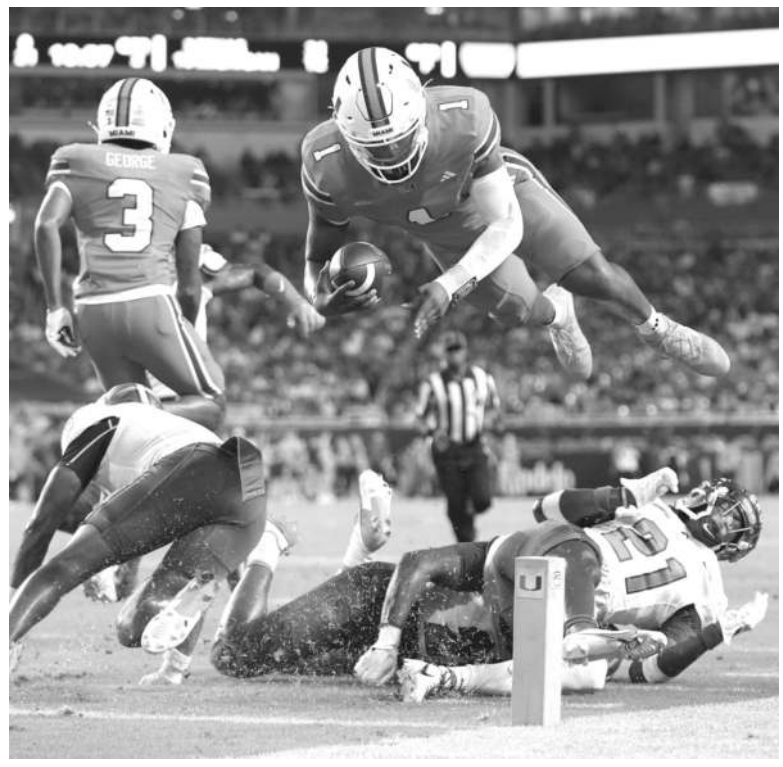
## Finding the right fit

ACC Network analyst and former Florida State quarterback EJ Manuel thinks it's essential for transfer players like Ward and McCord to find a program that fits their talents.

"A lot of these players that do go into the portal are choosing landing spots that match their skill set," he said. "That's really important."

Bachmeier, the fifth-year player at Wake Forest, played at Boise State and Louisiana Tech. He is ninth nationally with 666 passing yards and four touchdowns.

At Pitt, one-time Alabama passer Eli Holstein has the Panthers off to a 2-0 start for the first time since they won the ACC title in 2021. Holstein rallied Pitt from 21 points down to beat Cincinnati 28-27 last week with 302 yards and three touchdowns. Holstein, a second-year freshman, is 12th in the country with 638 passing yards.



Lynne Sladky/AP

**Miami quarterback Cam Ward scores a touchdown against Florida A&M last weekend. Ward is the first quarterback in Miami history to throw for 300 yards or more in his first two games.**

Pitt coach Pat Narduzzi believes so much depends on the player, including their willingness to become part of their new team and not rely on what they did elsewhere.

"Maybe the one thing I know is just be detailed" in adding the right person, he said. "I'm going to make sure I dot the 'Is' and cross the 'Ts' as far as what we're doing in that range. I want to make the right move."

Louisville brought in 25-year-old Tyler Shough, in his seventh year after playing at Oregon and Texas Tech.

Cardinals coach Jeff Brohm said Shough has a history of injuries, largely when he takes off running. So Brohm has tried to keep him in the pocket in the 19th-ranked team's 2-0 start.

"We have to try to make him play as great as he possibly can every week. That's our goal, to make him stand out, be efficient, throw for yards and produce points," Brohm said. "We think he can do it."

## Occasional struggles

Not every transition goes as smoothly. Just look at defending ACC champion Florida State. With longtime leader Jordan Travis off to the NFL, Seminoles coach Mike Norvell added former Clemson and Oregon State quarterback D.J. Uiagalelei.

Florida State, No. 10 when the season began, has fallen out of the rankings after losses to Georgia Tech and Boston College.

Norvell said the defeats are not solely on Uiagalelei, now in his fifth college season. "But there have been issues," the coach said. "I say 'issues,' it's not pointing to one person, one group. I think we have to be more consistent overall as an offense."

Manuel said he thinks coaches who add experienced quarterbacks are still adjusting to the game's new model. They would much rather have a young recruit who can sit and learn rather than having to go with a newcomer, no matter how talented.

"I'm sure coaches would much prefer that old model," Manuel said. "But in the current state of where we are with the coaches, the pressure for them to win and to win right now, that's why they go to the portal."

AP sports writers Aaron Beard, Tim Reynolds, Will Graves, Gary Graves and Stephen Hawkins contributed.

# Pac-12 adding four schools

By Ralph D. Russo
*Associated Press*

The Pac-12 is adding Boise State, Colorado State, Fresno State and San Diego State, starting in 2026, to join Oregon State and Washington State in a rebuilt Conference of Champions.

The additions rob the Mountain West of four of its more prominent schools and successful football programs, most notably Boise State, and still leave the Pac-12 two schools short of the eight they need to have in place in two years by NCAA rule.

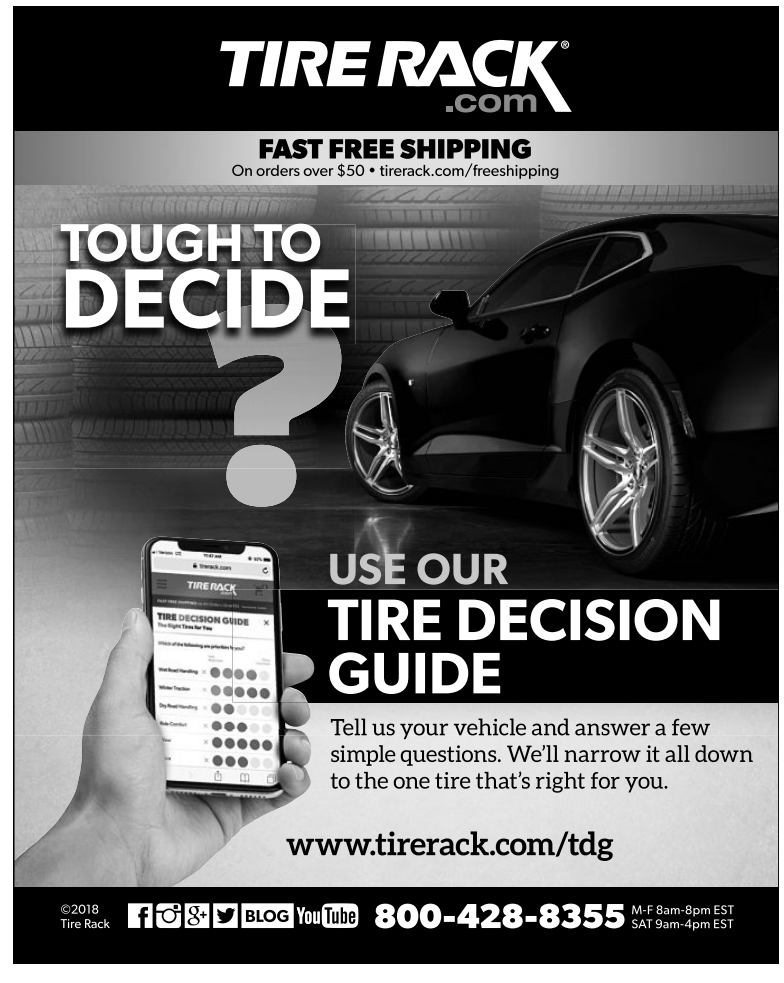
The Pac-12 and the departing schools will likely be on the hook for about $110 million in exit fees and penalties to the Mountain West.

Still, it is a remarkable comeback for a conference left for dead a year ago when 10 members scattered to other power conferences after it was unable to secure a media rights deal that schools believed could keep them competitive with other leagues.

Lydia Ely/AP

**Boise State is one of four schools joining the Pac-12 in 2026.**

"For over a century, the Pac-12 Conference has been recognized as a leading brand in intercollegiate athletics," Commissioner Teresa Gould said in a statement. "We will continue to pursue bold cutting-edge opportunities for growth and progress, to best serve our member institutions and student-athletes. I am thankful to our board for their efforts to welcome Boise State University, Colorado State University, California State University, Fresno, and San Diego State University to the conference. An exciting new era for the Pac-12 Conference begins today."



COLLEGE FOOTBALL

# Cupcakes: Schedule strength factors into playoff formula

FROM PAGE 48

Even with a field featuring the five highest-ranked conference champions and seven at-large teams, schedule strength always figures heavily into the formula. The CFP selection committee uses a strength-of-schedule rating provided by SportSource Analytics that includes components such as wins and losses, scoring differential and game location.

In any event, the SEC as a whole appears to face the toughest path to the CFP after sending only Alabama last season.

Fifth-ranked Mississippi (2-0) might be the exception with games against FCS-level Furman — which the Rebels walloped 76-0 in their opener — and Georgia Southern. But a test looms on Saturday at ACC counterpart Wake Forest, their second consecutive FBS foe after beating Middle Tennessee 52-3 last week.

"Better than the first two opponents and on the road, so it's a really good measuring stick for where we're at," Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin said of the pending meeting against the Demon Deacons eager to rebound from a 4-8 season.

**No. 16 LSU (1-1)**
**at South Carolina (2-0)**
AFN-Sports2
6 p.m. Saturday CET
1 a.m. Sunday JKT

**Tulane (1-1)**
**at No. 15 Oklahoma (2-0)**
AFN-Atlantic
9:30 p.m. Saturday CET
4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

**No. 1 Georgia (2-0)**
**at Kentucky (1-1)**
AFN-Sports
1:30 a.m. Sunday CET
8:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

Schools such as No. 3 Texas, No. 4 Alabama and No. 15 Oklahoma are sticking strictly with upper-division opponents before starting league play.

Oklahoma (2-0) will host Tulane on Saturday, its second matchup against the American Athletic Conference in three weeks. It follows last week's 16-12 win over Big 12 rookie Houston. The Sooners are 13½-point favorites according to BetMGM but face a Green Wave squad that went 11-3 last fall and is 23-5 over the past two seasons, including a bowl win over USC in 2022.

"It prepares you for the season," said Sooners coach Brent Venables, whose team opens SEC play next week against No. 7 Tennessee. "I just think with better competition, the better you get. That brings out the best in everybody."

The Crimson Tide's lone FCS foe is Mercer on Nov. 23, a week before hosting archrival Auburn. Alabama visits Wisconsin on Saturday, seeking a sharper performance in a game that may have seemed more intriguing years ago, before the Badgers fell off a bit.

Like Georgia, No. 16 LSU opened in Las Vegas against No. 23 USC in an attractive Labor Day matchup of football powerhouses. Though the Tigers fell 27-20 on a late touchdown — followed by coach Brian Kelly pounding a table in frustration afterward — he welcomed the rare showdown between teams that shared the 2003 national championship.

It was scheduled before conference realignment, a seismic change that now has USC moving from the Pac-12 Conference to the Big Ten while LSU has to deal with Oklahoma and Texas in the SEC. As much as Kelly loved the pairing, he said beforehand that he wasn't sure whether it could continue given the shifting landscape.

Missouri coach Eli Drinkwitz doesn't have a preference for non-conference challenges, focusing more on the SEC gauntlet that he believes will carry more weight. With the transfer portal's huge role in affecting roster makeup, he added that it's hard to know how strong an opponent will be years down the road.

But sometimes, the current schedule provides a surprise challenge. Drinkwitz is curious to see how his sixth-ranked Tigers (2-0) handle No. 24 Boston College, which topped then-No. 10 Florida State 28-13 to wrap the first weekend.

"This test will not define our season one way or another," he said. "But it does give you a sense of where you're at."

AP sports writers Cliff Brunt, Brett Martel, Teresa M. Walker and John Zenor contributed to this report.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| | GERMANY | UNITED KINGDOM | U.S.A |
|---|---|---|---|
| Phone: | +49-(0)6134-2592730 | +44-(0)1638-515714 | +1-972-602-1670 Ext. 1701 |
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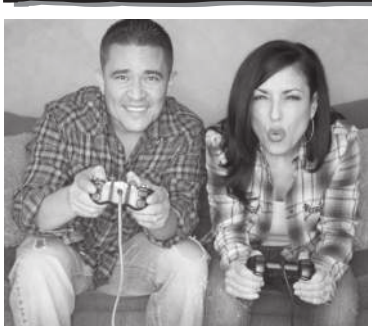

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# COLLEGE FOOTBALL

MICHAEL CATERINA/AP

**Notre Dame center Ashton Craig, left, and guard Sam Pendleton line up against Northern Illinois on Saturday. The Irish are in rebuild mode along the offensive line this season.**

## No. 18 Irish counting on young offensive line to grow quickly

**By Curt Rallo**
*Associated Press*

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Notre Dame's young, inexperienced offensive line handled the hostile environment at Texas A&M just fine.

Then came the home opener everyone wants to forget — a 16-14 loss to Northern Illinois.

Two weeks into the season, the Fighting Irish (1-1) are languishing at No. 104 in total offense and while outsiders want to blame the linemen, coaches believe there's plenty of blame to share.

"One play it's a running back, one play it's an offensive lineman, one play it's a receiver, one play we're not making the best decision with the football. We're all taking turns," offensive coordinator Mike Denbrock said. "We have to get to the point where one by one, position group by position group, we eliminate ourselves from that equation."

The reset begins Saturday when No. 18 Notre Dame renews its longtime in-state rivalry with a trip to Purdue (1-0), which had a bye last week.

And while Denbrock may be right about finding solutions at other positions, the focal point this week has been squarely on the group that has been in rebuild mode from the moment its top two linemen, Joe Alt and Blake Fisher, left for the NFL. Losing Alt's projected replacement at left tackle, Charles Jagusah, with a season-ending torn right pectoral muscle in August only made the task more challenging.

Right tackle Aamil Wagner, a third-year player, left guard Sam Pendleton, a second-year player,

**No. 18 Notre Dame (1-1)**
**at Purdue (1-0)**
AFN-Sports2
9:30 p.m. Saturday CET
4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

and left tackle Anthonie Knapp, a true freshman, each made their first college starts against the Aggies.

So the Irish are leaning heavily on center Ashton Craig and right guard Billy Schrauth, two third-year players, to help. And even though it may not appear the Irish made progress last week, coach Marcus Freeman saw something else.

"It might not look like it sometimes when you're watching film, but they did a good job protecting the quarterback," Freeman said. "We have to trust that they're going to protect you around the edge, we've got to step up and make those throws. I thought they did a good job in the run game, too. There were a couple times we might have misidentified somebody or they rocked back and made a play in the run game. Overall, I thought our five offensive linemen, they played better Week 2 than they did Week 1."

Experience isn't the only obstacle Notre Dame is contending with.

Knapp acknowledges he's not built like a traditional tackle so he's trying to figure out how to gain the edge against experienced defensive linemen who may be bigger or faster than he's accustomed to.

Northern Illinois was one example. The Huskies defense had nine returning starters and limited the Irish to 123 yards rushing and 163 yards passing while allowing two sacks. Quarterback Riley Leonard also threw two interceptions.

But Knapp isn't making excuses. He's simply trying to navigate the learning curve.

"I try to find every edge I can get," Knapp said. "I'm not too big. I'm 290-ish, which isn't the ideal size for a left tackle at Notre Dame. Any edge I can get watching film, a notebook full of what their moves are, what their tendencies are, I try to study that the best I can."

Denbrock, like Freeman, saw progress last week.

And, like Freeman, Denbrock understands there's more to Notre Dame's woes than meets the eye. The Irish are one of five FBS teams with no TD passes through the first two weeks and there have been issues with route-running, pass protection, decision-making and drops — even if fans increasingly want to point to the linemen.

"It looks like a long and dusty trail right now, doesn't it? There's just such incredible inconsistency across the board," Denbrock said. "I actually thought we made some progress up front. I thought our communication was better. I thought there were spots during the game where we started to feel ourselves as far as the dominant unit I feel those guys can develop into. That's going to be a work in progress as we gain experience."

# An odd weekend for rivalry games

### Longtime matchups lose appeal as non-league contests

**By Tim Booth**
*Associated Press*

A matchup between the Big Ten and the Pac-12 traditionally would be a clash of differing styles between schools from the Midwest and the West Coast.

Better yet, it could invoke images of the San Gabriel Mountains and the manicured grass of the Rose Bowl in "The Granddaddy of Them All."

This year, it means a pair of century-old rivalry games oddly placed in Week 3 of the season between in-state schools now bitterly divided by the new reality of college football.

The game formerly known as The Civil War a nonconference game? The Apple Cup played at a neutral site with fans on both sides of the debate calling for an end to the yearly matchup? Neither game played in November or December?

What in the name of Keith Jackson is going on here?

"It'll feel weird to play them at a neutral site, so to speak, a non-campus site. It'll be weird to play them in September and probably will be a little weird (overall)," Washington State athletic director Anne McCoy said. "But the general emotion and sentiment at the end of the day won't be any different, which is this would be a great game to win."

The rubble that remained from the collapse of the Pac-12 a year ago created the situation that will play out Saturday with the oddest of rivalry weekends. Oregon State will host No. 9 Oregon in Corvallis, while up the road Washington State and Washington will play at a neutral site in Seattle that won't feel very neutral.

They are both non-league contests for the first time since the early 1960s. The two remaining schools grasping onto the Pac-12 flag take on their two in-state opponents that bolted for an opportunity in the Big Ten.

Left in the wake is an odd mix of emotions — anger, resentment and resignation are all part of the atmosphere that surrounds the two games. And no one seems to know the right feeling to have.

"Rivalry games are always personal," Washington State center Devin Kylany said.

"It's still a rivalry game. I'm looking forward to playing in it," Washington linebacker Carson Bruener said. "Obviously there is the difference of not playing at the end of the year and playing it Week 3, but the intensity is still there and we all know it."

While there appears to be a

**No. 9 Oregon (2-0)**
**at Oregon State (2-0)**
AFN-Sports
9:30 p.m. Saturday CET
4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

cloud of apathy surrounding the Apple Cup, there seems to be some true buzz for the game in Corvallis. There are standing-room-only tickets being sold for the matchup at Reser Stadium.

And there's genuine intrigue, too. The Ducks started the season ranked third in the country and struggled in consecutive home wins over Idaho (24-14) and Boise State (37-34). Meanwhile, the Beavers thumped Idaho State (38-15) and shut out San Diego State (21-0) last week on the road.

Oregon State coach Trent Bray said there's no need to explain the magnitude to his players.

"They know of it. They're aware of it. The biggest is the opportunity to go out and compete at the national level, (on) the national stage, and show what we can do and do it against a great opponent. I think that's the bigger focus for our guys," Bray said.

While Reser Stadium is likely to be buzzing — the sound of chainsaws will be prominent — the Apple Cup could be played in front of a half-empty stadium. Reported ticket sales for the game at the home of the Seattle Seahawks are in the range of 35,000-40,000 due in part to high prices and the game not being part of the season-ticket package for either school.

It's added to the overwhelming indifference about the future of the game that started almost immediately after the demise of the Pac-12 in the summer of 2023. There are segments of each fan base that would rather move on.

Washington State President Kirk Schulz thinks that despite a feeling of apathy, continuing the game is for the betterment of football fans in the region.

"They didn't have to continue to do it and we could have both said, you know, screw the other school, and I think our fans at the end of the day would miss out," Schulz said. "Look, maybe we win, maybe we don't. But I just think it's good for Division I football, for the Pacific Northwest, for our two schools to play once a year. I'm a big pro-rivalry guy."

# SPORTS

## Hunkering down

Saints opt to remain in New Orleans during Hurricane Francine ›› NFL, Page 42

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

JOHN BAZEMORE, ABOVE, AND STEVE MARCUS, BELOW/AP

**Tough nonconference games like Clemson-Georgia, above, and USC-LSU, below, may become the norm from now on as SEC teams try to strengthen their schedules.**

# No more cupcakes

## SEC teams playing tougher nonconference schedules

BY GARY B. GRAVES
*Associated Press*

One unknown to scheduling nonconference opponents years in advance is whether those future foes are as attractive when game day finally arrives as they were when the contract was signed.

So-called "cupcake" guarantee games against overmatched lower-tier foes often end up providing a lopsided win along with valuable experience for reserves and underclassmen.

But judging from the September schedules of Southeastern Conference contenders Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and newcomers Texas and Oklahoma, a beefed-up out-of-league menu is preferred over cupcakes. And with some teams, sweets are out altogether.

Schedule strength is no small matter with the College Football Playoff now expanded to 12 teams. How much credit that earns with the CFP committee won't be known until the initial rankings are revealed on Nov. 5, but this season suggests that SEC teams aren't easing into their league seasons.

"I like playing good opponents," said Georgia coach Kirby Smart, whose top-ranked Bulldogs blew out then-No. 14 Clemson 34-3 in their opener, an atmosphere he likened to a playoff.

Smart would know, having won national titles in 2021 and '22 before just missing the four-team field last season. He added, "The fan base likes it, it makes for a better offseason. So, I'm certainly glad we were able to play a really good team, a good program like Clemson."

SEE CUPCAKES ON PAGE 46

## Pirates expect Shelton to return as skipper ›› MLB, Page 44

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