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A new threat from above

Russian efforts to create anti-satellite weapons cause for US concern

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. has gathered highly sensitive intelligence about Russian anti-satellite weapons that has been shared in recent weeks with the upper echelons of government, according to four people who have been briefed on the intelligence. The people, who were not authorized to comment publicly, said the capability was not yet operational.

The intelligence sparked an urgent but vague warning Wednesday from the Republican head of the House Intelligence Committee, who urged the Biden adminis-

tration to declassify information about what he called a serious national security threat.

Rep. Mike Turner gave no details about the nature of the threat, and the Biden administration also declined to address it. But several leading lawmakers, including House Speaker Mike Johnson, cautioned against being overly alarmed.

A congressional aide said he understood that the threat relates to a space-deployed Russian anti-satellite weapon. Such a weapon could pose a major danger to U.S. satellites that transmit billions of

bytes of data each hour.

The aide, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, said it was not yet clear if the Russian weapon has nuclear capability, but said that is the fear.

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov described the claims about a new Russian military capability as a ruse intended to make the U.S. Congress support aid for Ukraine.

"It's obvious that Washington is trying to force Congress to vote on the aid bill by hook or by crook," Peskov said in remarks carried by

Russian news agencies. "Let's see what ruse the White House will use."

The threat Turner raised concerns about is not an active capability, according to U.S. officials familiar with the intelligence. One added that intelligence officials consider the threat to be significant, but it should not cause panic.

Turner issued a statement urging the administration to declassify the information so the U.S. and its allies can openly discuss how to respond.

SEE THREAT ON PAGE 9

Navy policy now permits tiaras, hands in pockets

BY MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy has lifted its ban on sailors keeping their hands in their pockets along with other uniform changes announced Wednesday in an updated service policy.

"Sailors are authorized to have hands in their pockets [and] when doing so does not compromise safety nor prohibit the proper rendering of honors and courtesies," the service memo said.

The policy changes take effect immediately, which resulted from feedback from sailors and requests from commanders, the memo said.

The Navy is also bringing back the female combination cover, known as the bucket cover, which was eliminated in 2018. The female combination cover can be worn by sailors of any rank with the service dress and dinner dress uniforms, as well as by chief petty officers and officers while in service khaki and summer white uniforms. The bucket cover cannot be purchased at Navy Exchange Uniform Centers and must be "privately obtained if desired for wear."

The service is also allowing female sailors to wear the tiara as an optional uniform component when wearing dinner dress blue and white jacket uniforms. Sailors can purchase the tiara from the Navy Exchange online as a "special order item."

Women can now wear false eyelashes or eyelash extensions that "project a natural appearance and are no longer than 14 millimeters in length as measured from the eyelid to the tip of the eyelash."

SEE NAVY ON PAGE 9

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES								
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel				
Germany	\$3.601	\$4.116	\$4.468	\$4.518	Azores	..	..	\$4.318
Change in price	+5.6 cents	+4.4 cents	+5.0 cents	+21.0 cents	Change in price	..	..	+5.0 cents
Netherlands	..	\$4.625	\$4.893	\$5.129	Turkey	..	..	\$4.134
Change in price	..	+11.9 cents	+11.8 cents	+11.8 cents	Change in price	..	..	\$4.691*
U.K.	..	\$4.116	\$4.468	\$4.518	Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Feb. 16. The change in price is from Feb. 2.			
Change in price	..	+4.4 cents	+5.0 cents	+21.0 cents				

PACIFIC GAS PRICES								
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel				
Japan	..	\$4.109	..	\$4.159	South Korea	\$3.279	..	\$4.139
Change in price	..	+5.0 cents	..	+21.0 cents	Change in price	+6.0 cents	..	+5.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.269	..	..	\$4.159	Guam	\$3.299**	\$3.819	\$4.169
Change in price	No change	..	..	+21.0 cents	Change in price	+5.0 cents	+4.0 cents	+5.0 cents
					*DieselEFD **Midgrade			
					For the week of Feb. 16-22			

EXCHANGE RATES		
Military rates		
Euro costs (Feb. 16)	\$1.05	Switzerland (Franc)
British pound (Feb. 16)	\$1.23	Thailand (Baht)
Japanese yen (Feb. 16)	147.00	Turkey (NewLira)
South Korean won (Feb. 16)	1301.00	
Commercial rates		
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769	
Britain (Pound)	1.2582	
Canada (Dollar)	1.3494	
China (Yuan)	7.1138	
Denmark (Krone)	6.9179	
Egypt (Pound)	30.9000	
Euro	0.9280	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8199	
Hungary (Forint)	360.88	
Israel (Shekel)	3.6280	
Japan (Yen)	149.93	
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3080	
Norway (Krone)	10.5368	
Philippines (Peso)	55.88	
Poland (Zloty)	4.03	
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7502	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3458	
South Korea (Won)	1331.56	
INTEREST RATES		
Prime rate	8.50	
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00	
Federal funds market rate	5.33	
3-month bill	5.39	
30-year bond	4.44	

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MILITARY

More US personnel using weight-loss pills

Service members' prescriptions have risen sharply since coverage approved

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Weight-loss prescriptions for U.S. service members remain low but have risen sharply since 2018, when the Defense Department began authorizing coverage of medications for active-duty troops struggling with weight control, according to a first-of-its-kind study. Monthly prescriptions across all services rose from seven in January 2018 to 816 in June 2023, an analysis of DOD electronic health records during that same period shows. The data was published in the most recent Medical Surveillance Monthly Report, a peer-reviewed journal of the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Division. “The findings indicate a significant rise in the ... prevalence of weight loss prescriptions over time,” the report said, including a four-fold increase in 2022.

That trend corresponds to the Defense Health Agency approval of semaglutide in 2021 for weight management. Sold under the brand names Ozempic and Wegovy, the drug was originally approved by the Food and Drug Administration for diabetes. It was later shown to suppress appetite. The surveillance study looked at a wide range of demographics and characteristics, including sex, age, service, race, rank, occupation, history of type 2 diabetes and body mass index. Among the findings: higher prescription rates were associated with women, service members over 40, Black non-Hispanic personnel, those in the Navy and health care workers. By rank, senior personnel had higher rates of prescriptions for weight-loss drugs, peaking in the spring of 2023, at 307 prescriptions per 100,000 for officers in the pay grades of O-4 and above. The



EDWARD GARIBAY/U.S. Army

Active-duty service members increasingly have been prescribed weight loss medications since 2018, when the Defense Department authorized insurance coverage of those drugs.

rate was 145.7 per 100,000 people for enlisted members above E-5. During the same period, April to June 2023, the rate of prescriptions for Navy personnel was 157.1 per 100,000, compared to 43.2 in the Marine Corps. For the Army and Air Force, the rates were 91.3 and 101.7, respectively. In general, some of the trends correlated with obesity prevalence in the U.S. military, the study said, including ethnicity and age, and by service, where the Navy has the highest rate, the report said. But not all findings corresponded to previously observed obesity rates. For example, men in the military tend to be more overweight compared to women, and among professions, obesity is seen more among repair and engineering occupations than the health

care field, according to the study. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2017 allowed weight loss drugs to be part of the pharmacy benefit under Tricare for medically necessary treatment of obesity. Patients must get prior authorization from their doctor and have a body mass index higher than 29, or 26 if they have a related condition such as hypertension, diabetes or sleep apnea. Lifestyle changes such as diet modifications and exercise are required six months prior to starting therapy. Phentermine comprised the largest number of prescriptions throughout the surveillance period, the report found. But a significant portion were seen later from semaglutide, the study found. The report recommended further study to evaluate the effectiveness of the drugs “in weight management and safety for use among service members in austere and deployed environments.”

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Lawmakers again seeking creation of Space National Guard

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A group of senators is again seeking to create a Space National Guard, arguing it would boost readiness and efficiency and retain talent. The establishment of a combat reserve component for the military's newest service has been discussed in Congress for years but has so far failed to become law amid congressional resistance and opposition from the White House. A reintroduced bill in the Senate to create a Space National Guard is reigniting the discussion. More than a dozen Republican and Democrat senators are supporting the legislation. “The U.S. needs to innovate in order to combat the New Axis of Evil’s increasing aggression,” said Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., one of the bill’s sponsors. “By establishing a Space National Guard, we will be better prepared to take on the challenges from Communist China, Iran, Russia and North Korea.” The Space Force was created in 2019 to protect American interests in space, including maintaining satellites that are used for communications, observing the weather and monitoring missile launches from other coun-

tries. Proponents have said a reserve component would allow the Air National Guard units now conducting space missions to move out of the jurisdiction of the Air Force, which no longer performs space missions, and put members of those units on clear career paths. “This legislation would require no additional personnel, units, or facilities, and would improve communication, reduce costs, allow these dedicated space warfighters to continue supporting the Space Force’s missions at a high level,” wrote lawmakers who introduced a Space National Guard bill in the House in 2023. Congress last year instructed the Pentagon to explore the feasibility of moving space functions performed by the Air National Guard to the Space Force, including the possibility of creating a Space National Guard. But efforts to establish a Space National Guard have struggled to gain traction on Capitol Hill beyond the drafting stages of the National Defense Authorization Act, an annual bill setting Pentagon policy. The White House continues to voice strong opposition to a Space National Guard, contending it would create “new bureau-



MAURICIO CAMPINO/U.S. Air Force

A group of senators is seeking to create a Space National Guard, arguing it would boost readiness and efficiency and retain talent.

cracy with far-reaching and enduring implications and expense.” The Congressional Budget Office estimated in 2020 that it would cost at least an additional \$100 million per year to maintain the component. The National Guard Bureau in 2021 disputed that assessment and said a Space National Guard would not create additional expenses because personnel and other resources would be transferred from existing organizations. It estimated a one-time cost of about \$200,000 for new signs and other changes. The National Guard Association of the United States, a lobbying group for National Guard issues, has long advocated for a Space National Guard. It said last year that a reserve component would give the service “surge-to-war capability” to meet the challenges posed by near-peer adversaries. Nearly 1,000 National Guard soldiers and airmen perform space-related operations across 14 units in seven states and one U.S. territory, according to the association. The Space Force is in the midst of figuring out how to integrate part-time guardians into its workforce as required by the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act. The new hybrid model will allow service members to switch between full-time and part-time work without officially transferring to a National Guard unit or a Reserve component. shkolinikova.svetlana@stripes.com
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Mass casualty alert, drill coincide at naval hospital

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa, prepped for a mass casualty exercise on Thursday, suddenly found itself handling the real thing. A Light Tactical Vehicle with eight to 10 Marines aboard rolled onto its side at the Jungle Warfare Training Center on the island’s north end, 3rd Marine Division spokesman Maj. Clay Groover told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday afternoon. Some Marines suffered potential concussions, back pain, soreness and dizziness, but none of the injuries were life-threatening, Groover said. “There will be an investigation on this afterwards,” he said. “Everyone seems to be OK at this point.” At 1 p.m. the naval hospital, where the Marines were being treated, alerted its Facebook followers it was involved in a “real world” mass casualty event. At about 2:10 p.m. the hospital posted: “This is not an exercise. We are currently experiencing a real-world emergency involving multiple patients.” It provided no other details.

Stars and Stripes reporter Mari Higa contributed to this report.

EUROPE

Trump’s NATO remarks loom over security meeting

Days before European conference, ex-president said US should not defend allies with lower military spending

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Donald Trump’s declaration that he would encourage Russia to “do whatever the hell they want” to some NATO allies has once again put the former American president on center stage in Europe, where angst over a potential second term is overshadowing discussions this week stretching from Brussels to Munich.

On Friday, Vice President Kamala Harris and other global leaders will gather in Munich for an annual security conference centered around instability in Europe connected to Russia’s war in Ukraine, turmoil in the Middle East and questions about China’s military ambitions in Taiwan.

Against that backdrop, Trump’s recent statement that he would oppose defending allies from a Russian attack, depending on whether those countries spent enough on their militaries, is looming over events.

In Brussels, NATO defense minister talks got underway Thursday with the formal agenda focused on boosting ammunition production to replenish stockpiles that have been depleted while supporting Ukraine in its two-year-old war against Russia.

But the talk quickly turned to

Trump and whether a possible second term would undercut the essence of the NATO alliance, which is organized around the principle that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who will head to Munich after NATO’s meeting wraps up Thursday, has been peppered with questions the past two days about what the implications of a Trump second term would mean for NATO.

While he didn’t indicate a return of Trump would mean the end of NATO, he issued several rebukes.

“We know that any suggestion that we are not there to protect and defend all allies will undermine the security of all of us and put at risk our soldiers, our personnel who are on the front lines to protect the whole alliance,” Stoltenberg said Thursday. “So one for all, all for one applies for all allies and is the heart of NATO.”

However, Trump’s comments, made during a campaign event in South Carolina on Saturday, have cast doubt on the reliability of the U.S. commitment to that core NATO principle should the Republican frontrunner return to office.

During his tenure, Trump frequently criticized allies for falling short on a NATO pledge that members dedicate 2% of their re-

spective GDP to their militaries, complaining that the situation amounted to free-riding on American military might.

While other U.S. presidents have also complained about Europe’s underinvestment in defense, Trump’s hectoring on the issue also entailed the threat that he wouldn’t defend members he deemed security backsliders.

Some critics have suggested that Trump’s focus on defense spending is less about wanting to build up allied militaries and more about hastening NATO’s demise.

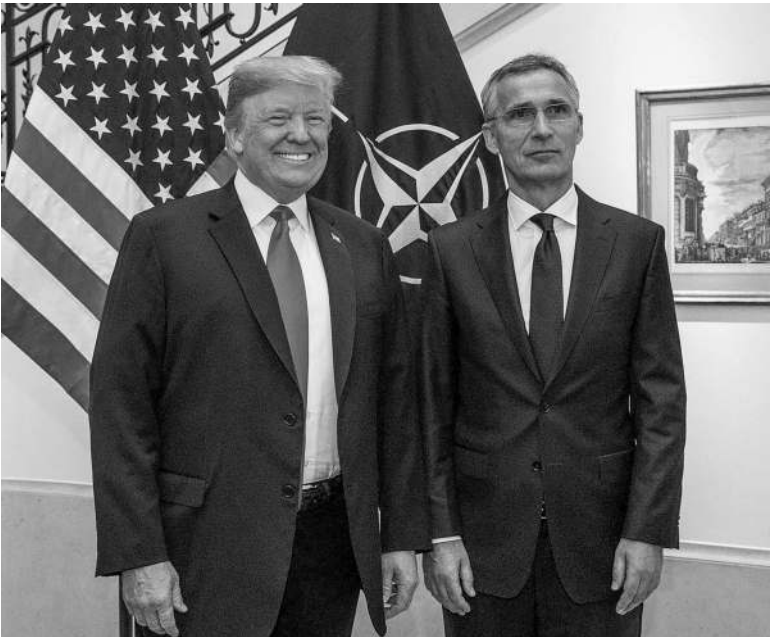
“I was there when he almost withdrew, and he’s not negotiating,” former Trump national security adviser John Bolton told Politico on Tuesday. “His goal here is not to strengthen NATO, it’s to lay the groundwork to get out.”

In Europe, numerous leaders have condemned Trump’s recent remarks.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Trump’s statements were “irresponsible and dangerous and solely in the interests of Russia.”

Stoltenberg on Thursday was asked whether Trump’s comments meant that Europe should prepare to go it alone depending on how the U.S. election turns out.

While Europe has stepped up defense investments in recent



Then-President Donald Trump meets with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg in Brussels in 2018.

years, “that is not an alternative to NATO ... We should not pursue any path that indicates that we are trying to divide Europe from North America,” Stoltenberg said.

Indeed, Europe has a long way to go to come close to matching U.S. military capabilities, given that American defense expenditures represent about two-thirds of military spending by alliance members, according to NATO data.

Still, the Pentagon budget covers American global commitments far beyond Europe, while members on the Continent con-

centrate their spending closer to home.

Meanwhile, allies in Europe continue to make progress on the issue that has been at the heart of Trump’s complaints. Stoltenberg said 18 of NATO’s 31 members will hit the 2% of GDP spending target this year and that combined spending by European members also will hit the 2% mark.

“That is another record number,” Stoltenberg said ahead of Thursday’s ministerial.

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Trump eyes NATO makeover and end to Ukraine war if elected

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump is considering scaled-back commitments to some NATO members and a push for Ukraine to negotiate an end to the war with Russia if he returns to power next year, according to people familiar with the matter.

Among possible moves in a second term, Trump allies have discussed essentially a two-tiered NATO alliance, where Article 5 — which requires common defense of any member under attack — would apply only to nations that hit defense-spending goals, according to the people, who asked not to be identified and cautioned that no policy decisions have been finalized. Others are advocating new tariffs on laggard countries, they said.

Trump advisers have also discussed getting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and

Russian President Vladimir Putin around a negotiating table early in a potential second term, according to the people.

The initiatives, if pursued, would upend decades of U.S. policy, fracturing a defense alliance that has shaped European security since the Cold War and worrying allies in Asia about Washington’s commitment to counter China.

One adviser to Trump said the promise of severing U.S. military aid could help get Ukraine to the negotiating table, while the threat of increased U.S. assistance could prompt Russia. Advisers including Larry Kudlow and Robert O’Brien have also publicly pushed for tougher sanctions on Russia’s central bank to sway Putin.

The people added that the Trump campaign is not currently in talks with Russian or Ukrainian intermediaries.

Putin: Russia prefers Biden win over Trump because he is ‘more predictable’

Associated Press

MOSCOW — President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that Russia would prefer to see President Joe Biden win a second term, describing him as more experienced than Donald Trump.

Speaking in an interview with a correspondent from Russian state television, Putin declared that he will work with any U.S. leader who is elected, but noted that he would

prefer Biden’s victory when asked who would be a better choice from the point of view of Russia.

“Biden, he’s more experienced, more predictable, he’s a politician of the old formation,” Putin said. “We will work with any U.S. leader the American people trust.”

Putin’s comments were his first about the upcoming U.S. presidential election, likely to pit Biden against Trump, and come as ten-

sions between Republicans and Democrats are high over Biden’s attempts to send more military aid to Kyiv.

However, Trump’s recent statements calling into question U.S. funding for Ukraine and saying he wants to shake up the NATO alliance could better serve Putin. Biden accused Trump on Tuesday of having “bowed down to a Russian dictator.”

Trump stands by comments on defending allies

Associated Press

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. — Former President Donald Trump said Wednesday that if he returns to the White House, he would not defend NATO members that don’t meet defense spending targets, days after he set off alarms in Europe by suggesting he would tell Russia to attack NATO allies he considered delinquent.

Speaking at a campaign rally in South Carolina, he retold the story of his alleged conversation with

the head of a NATO member country that had not met its obligations. This time, though, he left out the line that drew the most outrage — encouraging Russia “to do whatever the hell they want.”

“Look, if they’re not going to pay, we’re not going to protect. OK?” he said Wednesday.

Trump also cited an interview Putin gave Wednesday to Russian state television in which he said he would prefer Biden as president.

“Putin is not a fan of mine,”

Trump said.

President Joe Biden has excoriated Trump for his remarks about NATO, calling them “dangerous,” “un-American,” and “shocking.” Biden has also pushed for a foreign aid package to assist Ukraine as it fights Russia’s invasion. Trump has opposed the aid and said Wednesday that the U.S. should instead provide a loan to Ukraine.

“Why should you just hand it over to them?” he said.

MILITARY

Watchdog finds treatment gap among DODEA students

Some children who are sexually victimized at school can't access counseling services

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Children who are sexually victimized by fellow students at on-base schools can't get counseling and needed services through the military if their parents are civilians, a treatment gap that may put them and others at risk, a government watchdog agency said.

The disparity shuts out thousands of Department of Defense Education Activity students from DOD case management and treatment plans that the children of active-duty service members receive if they're subjected to harmful sexual behavior in school, according to a Government Accountability Office report released Tuesday.

Those behaviors include bullying or coercing others to send sexual content, taking sexual photos of others to exploit them and sexual assault, according to the report.

The dependents of civilian workers also don't qualify for counseling and services when

they harm other students. And few of the military's Family Advocacy Program clinicians are qualified to work with youths who may be victimizing others, despite DOD requirements, the report stated.

The restriction is the result of a Military Community Advocacy Directorate decision to make such services solely available to military dependents.

That determination leaves "nearly one in five DODEA students who are civilian-dependent with limited options for treatment," the GAO said.

A lack of immediate, trauma-informed clinical services hurts students, who may be experiencing depression or thinking of harming themselves.

Qualified clinicians who offer immediate intervention services can help break the cycle of problematic sexual behaviors, the report stated.

"Children and youth exhibiting these behaviors can continue to harm, disrupt school climate, and pose safety concerns to them-

selves and others," the GAO said.

The GAO recommended that DOD evaluate the impact of the restriction on the well-being of children attending DODEA schools.

The report also said the military should better monitor efforts to train clinicians.

"Without addressing these weaknesses, DOD risks ongoing challenges in ensuring that students who are harmed by or exhibit problematic sexual behavior receive the support needed to assure the safety of the DODEA community," the GAO said.

DOD concurred with both recommendations.

The GAO study was conducted from August 2022 through February 2024 and included visits to 11 schools.

The areas visited were Fort Liberty and Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, and three overseas: Kaiserslautern/Ramstein and Stuttgart in Germany, and Vicenza in Italy.

The study also included a review of unwanted sexual behavior reports at DODEA schools.

Researchers found that a sizeable number of DODEA students were dependents of civilians.

Most live overseas, where barriers to treatment are profound due to cultural and language barriers, few qualified professionals, and long waitlists and commutes for care.

For example, 29% of the 24,850 students attending DODEA schools in Europe are civilian dependents. There are 66,000 students attending DODEA schools worldwide, predominantly in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, according to the report.

One clinician working for the military said that counterparts working locally off-base "do not have the expertise or experience needed to treat students yet advertised themselves as a legitimate source of care," the report stated.

Unwanted sexual behaviors are classified in three categories: normative but inappropriate, cautionary and problematic. They include actions ranging from unwanted touching to sexual assault.

Problematic sexual behaviors, which can involve assault, warrant corrective action and support, the report stated.

In analyzing the severity of incidents reported at DODEA schools from March through May 2023,

the GAO found "the large majority of the 154 reported contact sexual acts were classified as cautionary or problematic."

The researchers acknowledged that DOD had taken steps to better support students affected by problematic sexual behaviors. But it should improve how it assesses efforts to build up low participation in family advocacy services, they said.

The GAO also said that the Pentagon should have DODEA review the unwanted sexual behavior reporting process, especially when it came to the time spent investigating, and the stigma associated with normative sexual behavior incidents.

DOD partially concurred with that recommendation, saying it could improve methodologies but would remain committed to protecting students against "unwelcome and offensive conduct of a sexual nature, even if technically an act is classified as normative for the age and development level of the student exhibiting this behavior."

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MILITARY

‘Home is where the Army sends us’

Military families share the challenges of living and thriving while being stationed in Alaska

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

Alice Byrne was enjoying life as an Army wife, raising five children while her husband, Matthew, served at Tripler Army Medical Center near Honolulu.

In 2022, Capt. Byrne, an internist, showed Alice his new orders. He'd been assigned to Bassett Army Community Hospital at Fort Wainwright.

The family would be moving 3,000 miles north to Fairbanks, Alaska.

"I left Honolulu kicking and screaming," Alice Byrne said. "It was absolute paradise."

Halfway through her husband's three-year stint in central Alaska, Byrne, 38, said she has been surprised at the upside of the adventure of living at the Army's northmost outpost. Not just for her and Matthew, 37, but for the five children — Benjamin, 10, Michael, 9, Mary Kate, 7, Daniel, 5, and Gabriel, 2. Depending on timing, they will likely be joined by the end of the year with the family's own native Alaskan — Alice is pregnant and the couple plan to name the girl Maggie.

The family recently made a 5-kilometer, cross-country ski trek. They had to carry everything they needed — food, fuel, medical supplies — on skis. It took three hours in minus 25 degree temperatures to reach their destination. The isolation is one of the big draws of such retreats.

The experience for Alice Byrne was unlike anything in Waikiki.

"It was peaceful — the stars at night, we had an amazing aurora borealis — it really is magical," Byrne said. "Now we all have that memory for the rest of our lives," she said.

Byrne chalks up part of the relative ease of transition to expectations of Army life and preparation for the assignment.

U.S. service members are used to moving. About 30% of the 1.4 million active-duty service members change duty stations each year, moving between about 750 installations in 80 countries, according to the Defense Department. About 51% are married and 39% have children, according to a 2023 survey by the National Institutes of Health.

The Army is the largest service branch, with 452,000 active-duty soldiers.

"Home is where the Army sends us" is an old saying for families who will move several times throughout a military career. It's sold at wooden signs on Etsy and stitched in pillows hawked on eBay.

Brandy Ostanik-Thornton, a self-described "sourdough" —



U.S. Army

Alice Byrne, second from left in foreground, with her five children at a ski-in cabin near Fort Wainwright, Alaska. On the porch behind them is her husband and father of the children, Capt. Matthew Byrne, an Army internist at the garrison's medical facility.



EVE BAKER/U.S. Army

Brandy Ostanik-Thornton is a Fort Wainwright medical center public affairs employee who first came to the Fairbanks area as a child in 1977.

slang for a longtime Alaska local — was an early convert to the state. She arrived as a toddler in 1977 when her father was assigned to Eielson Air Force Base, about 20 miles south of Fairbanks.

"My parents fell in love with it, and I then fell in love with it," she said. "Alaska is my home by choice."

Ostanik-Thornton, 50, has lived in other parts of the United States but Fairbanks is home. She works in the public affairs office of Fort Wainwright's medical center.

She's also an unofficial ambassador for Alaska when newbies arrive with trepidation and dread about their new assignment.

"For people who haven't been here, Alaska can seem like a big chunk of ice," Ostanik-Thornton said. "I tell them to be with other people going through the same change in their lives. Share the experience."

When summer rolls around, the daylight hours stretch to 20 hours

or more, and tourists arrive gushing about it. The payoff is easy for soldiers and spouses to see.

"The Army sent you to a place where people spend thousands of dollars to vacation," she said. "And the Army is paying you to be here."

John Pennell, spokesman for the 11th Airborne Division, the Army's command for Alaska, said soldiers require Army approval to bring their families to Alaska, similar to the permission needed for families at overseas postings.

Soldiers must have "concurrent travel" orders to bring family members. Spouses and children must each complete an "exceptional family member" screening and have "command sponsorship." About 12% of family members are identified as having special needs, according to the Army.

The process ensures those planning to come to Fort Wainwright won't have medical conditions or require educational assistance that isn't available at the small, distant garrison and community, Pennell said.

The Army calls the posting "remote and austere" — the description that the service gave the \$4,000 incentive bonus for Fort Wainwright soldiers with dependents to ensure their families had the clothing and gear needed for the Alaska winter. That's twice the bonus for troops going to the relatively urbanized Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, the 11th division's main base and headquarters.

Despite the challenges, many soldiers bring their families.

The Army said along with about



NOGA AMI-RAV/Stars and Stripes

7,000 soldiers, Fort Wainwright has 6,500 dependents of troops, plus 2,400 civilian employees and contractors. Another 7,800 retirees and veterans call the Fort Wainwright area their home.

For Alice Byrne, the big changes started with smaller numbers. According to the 2020 census, her hometown of New York City has 8.8 million residents. Oahu, including Honolulu, is home to 1 million people. Alaska's count is just more than 732,000 statewide. Fairbanks tops out at just less than 32,000.

Then there's the weather. According to the National Weather Service, the length of days in Hawaii falls between 11 hours in winter and 13.5 hours in summer. Average high temperatures in summer were in the mid-80s, while winter average low temperatures were in the low 60s.

At Fort Wainwright, the days have less than four hours of direct sunshine at the winter solstice in late December and more than 21 hours at the summer solstice in late June, according to the weather service. Travel Alaska, the state tourism agency, boasts in advertising that when factoring in ambient light before sunrise and after sunset, Fairbanks had more than 70 days in summer with 24-hour daylight.

Temperature extremes tended toward one direction: lower. Being just 150 miles from the Arctic Circle, Fort Wainwright's average high temperature in summer struggled to stay above 70 degrees, but it dove to an average of minus 15 degrees in the depths of winter, the weather service said.

Hawaii simplified most family wardrobe decisions for Alice Byrne.

"The kids could run outside in T-shirts, swimsuits and sandals," she said.

The realities of Fort Wain-

wright in winter meant even a short trip to the supermarket required significant logistical preparations.

"It takes at least an hour to get ready just to go outside," Byrne said. "It's minus 20. You must remind the kids that they need a base layer, a fleece layer, snow pants, an insulator, and a windproof top."

Byrne topped off the family's outerwear with beanies over balaclavas wrapped in scarves. The family usually travels with backup clothes.

"It may say 'waterproof,' but kids will find a way to get wet," she said.

With the right planning and execution, Byrne said going outdoors in the winter isn't something to just endure but to enjoy. Being a rare human on a ski trail or tucked away in a remote cabin will be the stuff of future family tales in decades to come.

"We'll say, 'remember that time in Alaska ...'" Byrne said.

Ostanik-Thornton said she loves the winter most of all.

"There's something about the northern lights," she said. "Unless you have seen them in person, you don't understand. At night, there are millions of stars. During the days, the snow twinkles on the trees. It's a really special place."

Ostanik-Thornton knows not every soldier will leave Alaska with warm feelings. She roots for those who stay beyond their first hitch — or longer. No matter how they feel, duty in Alaska will be something they'll recall and recount in years ahead, unlike their stints in many bases in the lower 48 states.

Ostanik-Thornton said, for her, there is no turning back.

"I will never leave Alaska," she said. "This place gets in your bones."

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PACIFIC



MATTHEW MACKINTOSH/U.S. Army

A pair of Defense Department task forces are emptying fuel and planning the closure of Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, after a jet-fuel spill leaked into the aquifer.

Full cost of closing Red Hill fuel facility remains unknown, IG says

By Wyatt Olson
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department has not adequately informed Congress of the anticipated costs of fully cleaning up the environment around the Red Hill underground fuel tanks in Hawaii after their closure, a government watchdog report said Wednesday.

A pair of Defense Department task forces are emptying fuel and planning the closure of Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam after a 2021 jet-fuel spill leaked into the aquifer.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in March 2022 ordered the World War II-era facility permanently closed.

Navy officials expect closure will be completed in 2027, with a plan to remediate decades of fuel contamination in the surrounding soil only being developed after that, the Government Accountability Office said in a 49-page report.

But the cost of remediating the site — after numerous spills and leaks over the past 80 years — remains a question mark, the GAO said.

“DOD had not, as of the end of fiscal year 2023, communicated information to Congress about total fiscal exposures for anticipated Red Hill remediation activities for fiscal years 2025 and beyond,” the report states.

“Specifically, DOD is aware of millions of dollars of costs that it is likely to incur as part of the Red Hill remediation and closure,” the GAO said. “It is also aware of numerous other costs for significant tasks that it cannot estimate at this time.”

In a report issued in Novem-

ber, a working group of Hawaii state and local officials estimated that as much as 2 million gallons of fuel may have leaked and spilled into the ground in the years since the facility was built.

Unknown future costs

The GAO report recommends that the Defense Department clearly identifies “anticipated costs for defueling, remediating, and closing Red Hill in supplemental reports or other budget materials, updating the information as more is learned.”

Among the costs projected for 2025 and beyond are \$10 million annually to operate a water treatment plant for the area; \$3 million for removing pipelines; hundreds of thousands of dollars each year for the Defense Health Agency to track health effects on those who were affected by tap water contamination; and hundreds of thousands more annually to extract petroleum vapors from the soil, the GAO said.

The costs of other needed cleanup methods remain unknown until dismantling the facility is further along, the GAO said.

The Defense Department estimated some costs in a 2022 report to Congress, but that projection did not cover expense estimates for fiscal years 2025 and beyond, the GAO said.

During that period, the Defense Department will “incur substantial costs related to remediating and closing Red Hill,” the GAO said.

“For fiscal year 2025 and beyond, DOD has indicated that the President’s budget request will include costs related to cleanup and closing of Red Hill as part of the normal budget process,” GAO said. “However, DOD offi-

cials stated that they did not discuss in detail with congressional oversight personnel the known and unknown future costs related to the closure of Red Hill.”

Closure in place

Congress has already appropriated large sums of money to deal with the Red Hill disaster. It appropriated \$1 billion in 2022 — funds that remain available through September 2024 — for improving infrastructure and defueling at Red Hill.

Congress later appropriated an additional \$200 million for similar purposes.

As of Sept. 30, the Defense Department had obligated about \$629 million of those funds and spent \$67 million of it, the GAO said.

For the Defense Department, many unknowns make estimating Red Hill costs difficult.

For example, regulators with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Hawaii Department of Health have not yet approved the closure method for the 20 massive underground tanks.

The Navy’s preferred method is to clean the tanks and leave them in place, rather than remove or fill them, the GAO said.

The Navy is in discussions with the EPA and Hawaii Health Department over how that would be done, the GAO said.

Some local Hawaiians, however, insist that the tanks be permanently altered so they can never again be used to store fuel.

Filling or removing the tanks would add to the as-yet-unknown final costs of closing Red Hill.

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Navy’s largest overseas fleet gets new lead

By Alex Wilson
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A veteran surface warfare officer took the helm of the U.S. 7th Fleet on Thursday amid a flurry of naval activity in the South China Sea and surrounding areas.

Vice Adm. Fred Kacher took command of the Navy’s largest overseas fleet during a ceremony at Yokosuka’s Fleet Theater. Departing is Vice Adm. Karl Thomas, 7th Fleet’s longest-serving commander, who’s led the Yokosuka-based naval force since July 2021.

Kacher most recently served as acting superintendent for the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., but most of his career has been spent aboard destroyers, cruisers and other warships.

“Suffice it to say, I’m deeply honored to lead what I’ve long believed is one of the most historic and consequential commands in the United States Navy,” Kacher, who was promoted to vice admiral that morning, told the audience.

The 7th Fleet “at any given time” has 50-70 ships and submarines, 150 aircraft and more than 27,000 sailors and Marines, according to its official website.

Its operations area covers more than 48 million square miles, from the International Date Line to the India-Pakistan border, from the Kuril Islands in the north to the Antarctic in the south.

About half the world’s population and 36 maritime nations, including China, Russia, India, North and South Korea, fall within that space.

Thomas will take over as the Navy’s director of naval intelligence, a position that also carries the title of deputy chief of naval operations for information warfare.

He was nominated by President Joe Biden for the position in March 2023 and confirmed on Dec. 5, according to congressional records.

Thomas, during Thursday’s ceremony, referenced 7th Fleet’s informal “Fights On!” motto, which he said equates to a mindset of always being ready.

“We are ready, with forward

presence, to deter those who wish to disrupt the status quo, and to assure our partners and allies of our commitment to the Indo-Pacific,” he said.

“We are ready with, with our best ability, to respond to a humanitarian crisis or search and rescue efforts, and to help those that are in need.”

Under Thomas’ watch, 7th Fleet has steadily grown partnerships between allied navies in the region and, in some cases, expanded its activities.

Dual aircraft carrier drills, for example, were once considered a rarity. They became more commonplace during Thomas’ tenure.

The USS Carl Vinson and USS Theodore Roosevelt in late January held an exercise with a Japanese helicopter destroyer in the Philippine Sea. In November, the USS Ronald Reagan and the Carl Vinson joined up for similar drills.

Those kinds of activities allow the 7th Fleet to be “so prepared and resolute” that it deters “any challenge to the rules-based international order or the status quo,” he said.

In the South China Sea, which China claims as its territorial waters, 7th Fleet ships have repeatedly trained in the past several years alongside allies such as Australia, Japan and the Philippines.

Last week, the littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords trained alongside a Philippine patrol ship in the region. A day prior, on Feb. 8, the Gabrielle Giffords and the guided-missile destroyer USS John Finn trained with a Japanese destroyer and an Australian frigate.

While Thomas was a career aviator, Kacher brings a different set of skills to the fleet. He previously led the Japan-based Expeditionary Strike Group Seven and served as commander of Destroyer Squadron 7, based in Singapore.

Other posts include executive officer aboard the guided-missile destroyer USS Barry and commander of the guided-missile destroyer USS Stockdale.

Off ship, he held such positions as vice director for operations at the Joint Staff and chief of staff for U.S. Pacific Fleet’s Naval Surface Force.

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Kacher

MILITARY

‘Profound bond that unites us all’ seen in grief

Hundreds gather at Yokota to remember fallen Osprey aircrew

BY KELLY AGEE
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — More than 700 people gathered Thursday at this airlift hub for a memorial service and retreat ceremony honoring the crew of an Air Force CV-22B Osprey that crashed nearly three months ago in southern Japan, killing all aboard.

The 1 1/2-hour memorial service began at 10 a.m. inside Yokota’s Taiyo Community Center to remember the eight fallen crewmembers of call sign Gundam 22.

“As we gathered today to honor the crew and families of Gundam 22, I was reminded of the profound bond that unites us all — not just as Airmen, but as a community of friends, family members, and local partners that extends beyond borders,” Col. Andrew Roddan, commander of Yokota’s 374th Airlift Wing, told Stars and Stripes by email that evening.

Stars and Stripes did not attend the service, honoring a request by the family of some fallen crewmembers that media not cover the event.

Service dress Thursday was the uniform of the day for the 21st Special Operations Squadron and 753rd Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, base spokesman Capt. Danny Rangel said by email ahead of



JEREMY STILLWAGNER/Stars and Stripes

Airmen pay tribute to the fallen CV-22B Osprey aircrew during a retreat ceremony at Yokota Air Base, Japan, on Thursday. Eight airmen died Nov. 29 when their Osprey fell into the sea just off Yakushima, an island in southern Japan.

the service.

No other details were provided by base spokespeople that evening.

A half-hour before sunset, approximately 600 people, mostly airmen in uniform, gathered for a brief retreat ceremony on the athletic field outside Yokota’s Samurai Fitness Center.

The 5 p.m. assembly faced flags outside the

wing headquarters building as the Japanese and U.S. national anthems, followed by taps, played across the base on the public address system.

The formations were dismissed, and the crowd walked off slowly and quietly.

“In honoring their memory, we recommit ourselves to the mission they served with such honor, ready to face the challenges

ahead with the same resolve and spirit they showed,” Roddan wrote in his email. “Their sacrifice will forever be etched in the heart of Yokota and our entire Air Force family.”

The crew from Yokota’s 21st Special Operations Squadron — part of the 353rd Special Operations Wing headquartered at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa — perished Nov. 29 when their Osprey fell into the sea just off Yakushima, an island in southern Japan.

By Dec. 10, searches by U.S. and Japanese personnel had recovered the remains of seven airmen: Staff Sgt. Jake Galliher, 24, of Pittsfield, Mass.; Maj. Luke Unrath, 34, of Riverside, Calif.; Tech. Sgt. Zachary Lavoy, 33, of Oviedo, Fla.; Capt. Terrell Brayman, 32, of Pittsford, N.Y.; Staff Sgt. Jake Turnage, 25, of Kennesaw, Ga.; Senior Airman Brian Johnson, 32, of Reynoldsburg, Ohio; and Maj. Jeff Hoernemann, 32, of Andover, Minn.

The Air Force called off the search for the remaining crew member, Maj. Eric “Doc” Spendlove, 36, of St. George, Utah, on Jan. 11.

A preliminary probe found that a material failure, not a crew error, led to the fatal crash. The Pentagon responded by grounding its entire Osprey fleet, about 400 aircraft across the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps, pending further investigation results.

The Defense Department believes it has identified the mechanical failure that led to the crash, an unnamed U.S. defense official told The Associated Press last week. It is now weighing how the aircraft can be returned to service.

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Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders set for tour of Korean Peninsula

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders, continuing an NFL tradition 45 years old, will soon visit U.S. Army bases in South Korea to boost morale, give makeup tips and show support for troops serving overseas.

Eight of the Cowboys cheerleaders will make a USO-sponsored tour of four bases: Camp Walker in Daegu city on Feb. 22; Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek city Feb. 23-24; and Camp Bonifas and Camp Casey, less than 15 miles from the Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Korea, Feb. 25-26.

“The entertainment mission at the USO is to connect with and uplift

our service members and their families,” USO Global Entertainment Vice President Jennifer Wahlquist said in an email Tuesday.

The cheerleaders will have meals with soldiers, present cheer shows, hold meet-and-greet photo sessions, host a youth cheer clinic and put on makeup tutorials for spouses, Wahlquist said. The cheerleaders are also scheduled to partake in cultural events and tour the DMZ.

The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders organization has made 85 USO tours, Wahlquist said.

NFL cheerleaders routinely visit U.S. military bases overseas just before and after the Super Bowl.

Cheerleaders from the Cincinnati Bengals, Seattle Seahawks and Minnesota Vikings hosted a cheerlead-



U.S. Army

Cheerleaders from the Cincinnati Bengals, Minnesota Vikings and Seattle Seahawks pose at Camp Zama, Japan, on Monday.

ing clinic at Camp Zama, Japan, Feb. 10. They also attended a Super Bowl party with service members.

Other NFL cheerleader visits include Camp Kosciuszko in Poland on Feb. 8 and the Pacific Missile

Range Facility, also known as Barking Sands, in Hawaii on Feb. 2.

The NFL has raised more than \$66 million for military service organizations, including the USO, the Wounded Warrior Project and the Pat Tillman Foundation, since 2011, according to its website.

“We are grateful for the men and women serving in our armed forces for the many sacrifices they make every day while defending our country,” NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said in a Nov. 1 news release. “Their courage and dedication assure us so many important freedoms, and the opportunity to enjoy a little football.”

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Army reservist dietitian dies in noncombat incident in Kuwait

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

An Army dietitian with more than 20 years of service time died Sunday in a non-combat incident in Kuwait, service officials said Wednesday.

Lt. Col. Troy E. Bartley was serving at Camp Arifjan at the time of his death, which is under investigation, according to an Army statement. Officials declined to provide additional details about the incident that



Bartley

the Army’s 3rd Medical Command of the 1st Theater Sustainment Command since July,

caused Bartley’s death, citing the probe.

Bartley, 57, of Alton, Ill., was a reservist who had served since 2003 and was a veteran of the war in Iraq, according to the Army. In Kuwait, he had served as a dietitian with

charged with aiding U.S. troops in Kuwait and the broader Middle East with dietary health while deployed.

During his Army career, Bartley commanded a company and a battalion and served as a brigade executive officer, according to the Army.

Bartley is at least the fourth Reserve soldier to die while deployed to the Middle East in recent weeks. Army Staff Sgt. William Jerome Rivers, Sgt. Kennedy Ladon

Sanders and Sgt. Breonna Alexsondria Moffett were killed in a one-way attack drone strike Jan. 28 at a small base in northeast Jordan known as Tower 22. Rivers, Sanders and Moffett were reservists assigned to a Georgia-based engineering unit, who were deployed in support of anti-Islamic State operations in the region.

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MILITARY

Austin returns to work days after being released

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes
WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin returned to work at the Pentagon on Thursday, a few days after being released from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for non-surgical procedures to correct a bladder problem.

The secretary has been working from home since Tuesday when he was released from the hospital in Bethesda, Md. Austin, 70, was transported Sunday afternoon to the hospital. By 5 p.m., Austin transferred the functions and duties to Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks. Air Force Gen. Charles “CQ” Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the White House and Congress were notified.

The doctors at Walter Reed said Sunday night that Austin was admitted to a critical care unit after a series of tests and evaluations. They provided an update Monday

that Austin underwent non-surgical procedures that required general anesthesia to address his bladder problem.

“His diagnostic evaluation identified the cause of his bladder issue and it was corrected with non-surgical procedures on Feb. 12,” said John Maddox and Gregory Chesnut, doctors at the medical facility. “He progressed well and was discharged to his home today. He is anticipated to continue his full recovery.”

The statement did not specify what was revealed or what kind of procedures were performed.

Austin virtually participated Wednesday in the Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting. In his opening remarks to about 50 nations, he said the contact group would work on resourcing Ukraine’s most critical near-term needs, “including its urgent need for more artillery, ammunition and air defense missiles.”

The secretary had surgery in

December for prostate cancer and was later hospitalized in January for complications from the procedure. However, he failed to provide proper notification to appropriate government officials.

Austin returned to the Pentagon on Jan. 29 after being absent from the building for nearly a month because of his health. He had been released from Walter Reed on Jan. 15 after spending about two weeks there following the surgery, which was conducted Dec. 22.

Austin faced public scrutiny after he failed to notify President Joe Biden and other government officials about his illness and hospitalization.

Biden did not learn of Austin’s prostate cancer until Jan. 9. His actions have sparked several reviews of what took place.

The Pentagon announced last week that it completed its internal review of Austin’s hospitalization, which the defense secretary is



CESAR J. NAVARRO/U.S. Air Force

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin walks with Japan’s Defense Minister Minoru Kihara at the Pentagon in October 2023.

now reviewing himself. Austin is also scheduled to testify before the House Armed Services Committee on Feb. 29 about his failure to notify the needed officials about his illness.

He has publicly apologized for not disclosing his prostate diagnosis, the surgery that followed and complications that led to an

extended hospital stay.

His cancer was discovered during a regular health screening in early December. He was admitted to the hospital about three weeks later for surgery, which required general anesthesia.

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Threat: Official urges surveillance renewal

FROM PAGE 1

He also sent an email to members of Congress saying his committee had “identified an urgent matter with regard to a destabilizing foreign military capability” that should be known to all congressional policy makers. He encouraged them to come to a SCIF, a secure area, to review the intelligence.

Turner has been a voice for stronger U.S. national security, putting him at odds with some Republican colleagues who favor a more isolationist approach. He has called for the renewal of a key U.S. government surveillance tool while some fellow Republicans and liberal Democrats have raised privacy objections.

And he supports continuing U.S. military aid for Ukraine in its war against Russia at a time that the funding remains uncertain because of opposition in the Republican-led House.

Johnson said he was not at liberty to disclose the classified information. “But we just want to assure everyone steady hands are at the wheel. We’re working on it and there’s no need for alarm,” he told reporters at the Capitol.

Democratic Rep. Jim Himes, the ranking member of the Intelligence Committee, said in a statement that the classified information is “significant” but “not a cause for panic.”

The Senate Intelligence Committee said it has been tracking

the issue.

“We continue to take this matter seriously and are discussing an appropriate response with the administration,” Sen. Mark Warner, the Democratic committee chairman, and Sen. Marco Rubio, the Republican vice chairman, said in a statement. “In the meantime, we must be cautious about potentially disclosing sources and methods that may be key to preserving a range of options for U.S. action.”

The rapidly evolving threat in space was one of the primary reasons that the U.S. Space Force was established in 2019. A lot of that threat has to do with new capabilities that China and Russia have already developed that can interfere with critical satellite-based U.S. communications, such as GPS and the ability to quickly detect missile launches.

In recent years the U.S. has seen both China and Russia pursue new ways to jam satellites, intercept their feeds, blind them, shoot them down and even potentially grab them with a robotic arm to pull them out of their programmed orbits. One of the key missions of the Space Force is to train troops skilled in detecting and defending against those threats.

In its 2020 Defense Space Strategy, the Pentagon said China and Russia presented the greatest strategic threat in space due to their aggressive development of

counterspace abilities, and their military doctrine calling for extending conflict to space.

The White House and lawmakers expressed frustration at how Turner raised his concerns. His announcement appeared to catch the Biden administration off-guard.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters at the White House that he already had been due to brief Turner and other senior congressional leaders on Thursday. Sullivan did not disclose the topic or provide any other details related to Turner’s statement.

“I’m focused on going to see him, sit with him as well as the other House members of the Gang of Eight, tomorrow,” Sullivan said. “And I’m not in a position to say anything further from this podium at this time.”

He acknowledged it was not standard practice to offer such a briefing.

“I’ll just say that I personally reached out to the Gang of Eight. It is highly unusual, in fact, for the national security adviser to do that,” Sullivan said. He said he had reached out earlier this week.

Johnson said he sent a letter last month to the White House requesting a meeting with the president to discuss “the serious national security issue that is classified.”

He said Sullivan’s meeting was in response to his request.

US seizes Iranian missile parts heading to Houthis

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

U.S. maritime forces in the Middle East recently seized advanced weaponry stashed aboard a ship from Iran headed to Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, military officials said.

A team from the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Clarence Sutphin Jr. discovered more than 200 packages of medium-range ballistic missile components, explosives, and communication and network equipment after boarding the vessel in the Arabian Sea on Jan. 28, U.S. Central Command said Thursday.

They also found underwater and surface drone components,

anti-tank guided missile launcher assemblies and other military equipment, according to a statement.

“This is yet another example of Iran’s malign activity in the region,” Gen. Michael Erik Kurilla, commander of CENTCOM, said in the statement. He added that Iran’s continued supply of advanced conventional weapons to the Houthis violates international law.

The statement did not identify the boarded vessel nor did it say if people aboard the ship were detained.

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Navy: Uniform guidelines updated

FROM PAGE 1

Female sailors are also allowed to wear T-shirts specifically designed for women if the shirts adhere to the Navy’s requirements for color, fabric and neck configuration.

“The intent of this policy update is to address expressed dissatisfaction regarding the required wear of male or unisex T-shirts that are not designed to fit female bodies,” the memo said.

All sailors are now allowed to wear black or navy blue leggings

or tights with the service’s physical training shorts and wear “commercially procured coyote brown backpacks” while in the Navy working uniform.

Other uniform changes include allowing chaplains to wear their new insignia warfare pin, which the military service announced in December, and the Navy’s forthcoming drone pilots to wear their wings.

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WORLD

Israeli forces storm Nasser Hospital in Gaza

Military says it was seeking remains of hostages believed to be inside

Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — Israeli forces stormed the main hospital in southern Gaza on Thursday, hours after Israeli fire killed a patient and wounded six others inside the complex. The Israeli army said it was a limited operation seeking the remains of hostages taken by Hamas.

The raid came a day after the army sought to evacuate thousands of displaced people who had taken shelter at Nasser Hospital in the city of Khan Younis, the focus of Israel's offensive against Hamas in recent weeks. The war shows no sign of ending, and the risk of a broader conflict is growing as Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah step up attacks after a particularly deadly exchange on Wednesday.

The military said it had "credible intelligence" that Hamas had held hostages at the hospital and that the hostages' remains might still be inside. Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the chief military spokesperson, said forces were conducting a "precise and limited" operation there and would not forcibly evacuate medics or patients. Israel accuses Hamas of using hospitals and other civilian structures to shield its fighters.

A released hostage told The Associated Press last month that she and over two dozen other captives had been held in Nasser Hospital. International law prohibits the

targeting of medical facilities, but they can lose those protections if used for military purposes.

The troops were searching several hospital buildings after ordering all medical staff and patients to move into an older building in the compound, said Shaban Tabash, a nurse at the hospital. Doctors were unable to provide treatment to the patients in the building, which was not properly equipped.

"The situation of patients is difficult," Tabash told the AP.

Separately, Israel launched airstrikes into southern Lebanon for a second day after killing 10 civilians and three Hezbollah fighters Wednesday in response to a rocket attack that killed an Israeli soldier and wounded several others.

It was the deadliest exchange of fire along the border since the start of the Israel-Hamas war. Israel and Hezbollah — an ally of Hamas — have traded fire on a daily basis.

Hezbollah has not claimed responsibility for Wednesday's rocket attack. Sheikh Nabil Kaouk, a senior member of the group, said it is "prepared for the possibility of expanding the war" and would meet "escalation with escalation, displacement with displacement, and destruction with destruction."

Negotiations over a cease-fire in Gaza, meanwhile, appear to have



ADEL HANA/AP

Palestinians pray for relatives killed in the Israeli bombing of the Nusseirat refugee camp in the Gaza Strip at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah on Thursday.

stalled, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive until Hamas is destroyed and scores of hostages taken during the militants' Oct. 7 attack are freed.

Nasser Hospital has been the latest focus of Israeli military operations that have gutted Gaza's health sector. Israeli troops, tanks and snipers have surrounded the hospital for at least a week, with heavy fire all around it. Several people have been killed inside the compound in recent days, according to health officials.

Overnight, a strike slammed into a hospital ward, and video

showed medics scrambling to wheel patients on stretchers down a corridor filled with smoke or dust. A medic used a cellphone flashlight to illuminate a room where a wounded man screamed in pain as gunfire echoed outside. The AP could not authenticate the video but the footage was consistent with its reporting.

The strike killed one patient and wounded six others, all of whom were already being treated for previous wounds, said Dr. Khaled Alserr, one of the remaining surgeons at Nasser Hospital.

"The situation is escalating every hour and every minute," he

said.

Hours later, troops moved into the hospital compound, staff said. Footage posted online showed patients massed together in the old hospital building, with a row of beds lining a hallway.

Airstrikes late Wednesday in central Gaza killed at least 11 people, including four children and five women, according to hospital records. Relatives gathered around bodies wrapped in white shrouds outside Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah before the remains were placed in a truck to be taken for burial.

Missile strikes Russian city after Ukraine regions hit

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A missile strike on the Russian city of Belgorod near the Ukraine border on Thursday killed six people, including a child, and injured 18 others, a Russian official said. It was the latest in exchanges of long-range missile and rocket fire in Russia's war on Ukraine.

Hours earlier, Russia fired two dozen cruise and ballistic missiles at a broad area of Ukraine, hitting multiple regions after a midnight strike in Ukraine's northeast killed five people in an apartment building, authorities said.

Five of the 18 people injured in Belgorod, a city of around 340,000 people, were children, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Telegram. Tass news agency reported that 15 people were hospitalized.

A shopping center and a school stadium were hit in Belgorod, according to Roman Starovoit, the governor of Russia's Kursk region, which is next to Belgorod. "There are many casualties: dead



Kharkiv Regional Gov. OLEH SUNYIEHUBOV'S OFFICE/AP

Firefighters examine the site of Russia's missile attack on an apartment building in Ukraine's Kharkiv region, on Thursday.

and wounded," he said on Telegram.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said air defense systems destroyed 14 missiles over the Belgorod region that were launched by Ukraine using a RM-70 Vampire multiple launch rocket system.

Belgorod city, 25 miles north of the Ukrainian border, has been a

regular target of Ukrainian fire, putting its residents on edge. Dozens of people were killed and injured in an attack there over Russia's New Year holiday weekend.

Those assaults have undermined President Vladimir Putin's attempts to reassure Russians that life in the country is largely going on as normal.

In Ukraine, five people were killed and 10 were wounded in the nighttime attack on the village of Velykyi Burluk, in the Kharkiv border region, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said.

Hours later, missiles the targeted the capital Kyiv, the southern Zaporizhzhia region and Lviv in western Ukraine, among other places. The Ukrainian air force said it intercepted 13 of the 26 missiles fired across the country.

Frequent Russian long-range bombardments are occurring as the almost two-year war has become bogged down in mostly trench and artillery warfare, which is destructive but is not bringing much change to the 930-mile front line.

Thursday's salvos on Ukraine were notable for the geographic spread of its targets and the wide variety of missiles deployed by the Kremlin's forces.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says that one of his priorities is improving Ukraine's air defense systems. He is due in

France on Friday to sign a bilateral security agreement as part of his efforts to ensure continuing Western military support.

Zelenskyy's office announced he would also travel Friday to Berlin for talks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

On Saturday, Zelenskyy will give a speech at the annual Munich Security Conference in Germany. He also is to hold bilateral meetings there with U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris and some European leaders as well as heads of major corporations.

The Russian missiles used on Thursday included Iskander ballistic missiles, Kalibr cruise missiles, guided aviation missiles and adapted S-300 anti-aircraft missiles.

Ukraine has also struck targets in Russian territory deep behind the front line. A fire broke out at an oil depot in Russia's Kursk region after an attack by a Ukrainian drone, Starovoit, the governor, said Thursday. There were no casualties, he said.

NATION



ALYSSA POINTER/AP

Fulton County Special Prosecutor Nathan Wade testifies during a hearing on the Georgia election interference case, on Thursday, in Atlanta. The hearing is to determine whether Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis should be removed from the case because of a relationship with Wade.

Witness: Romance older than Georgia prosecutors claimed

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A former friend and co-worker of Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis testified Thursday that Willis' personal relationship with a special prosecutor began before she hired him to lead the election interference case against Donald Trump.

Robin Yeartie's testimony directly contradicts statements from Willis and Wade that their personal relationship didn't begin until after Wade was hired in November 2021. Wade later testified that his relationship with Willis began in early 2022.

The differing testimony came in a hearing that could determine whether Willis should be removed from the case accusing Trump and others of conspiring to overturn the

2020 presidential election results in Georgia. Willis' removal would be a stunning development in the most sprawling of the four criminal cases against Trump. An additional delay would likely lessen the chance that a trial would be held before the November election, when he is expected to be the Republican nominee for president.

In a court filing earlier this month, Willis and Wade said they were not in a personal relationship when Wade was hired, and that he and Willis shared travel expenses and never lived together. But Yeartie, who previously worked in the district attorney's office, testified that she saw Wade and Willis hugging and kissing prior to November 2021.

Since the allegations of an inap-

propriate relationship surfaced last month in a motion filed by Trump co-defendant Michael Roman, the former president has used them to try to cast doubt on the legitimacy of Willis' case. Other Republicans have cited them in calling for investigations into Willis, a Democrat who's up for reelection this year.

Roman, who has since been joined by Trump and several other co-defendants, is asking Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee to toss out the indictment and to prevent Willis, Wade and their offices from continuing to be involved in the case.

Willis argued she has no financial or personal conflict of interest that justifies removing her or her office from the case.

No delay: Trump hush-money trial set for March 25

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Donald Trump's hush-money trial will go ahead as scheduled with jury selection starting on March 25, a New York judge ruled Thursday, turning aside demands for a delay from the former president's defense lawyers.

The decision means that the first of Trump's four criminal prosecutions to proceed to trial is a case centered on years-old accusations that he sought to bury stories about extramarital affairs that arose during his 2016 presidential campaign. Other cases charge him with plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 election and illegally hoarding classified documents at his Florida estate.

In leaving the trial date intact, Judge Juan Manuel Merchan noted a delay in the separate prosecution in Washington related to efforts to undo the election. That case, originally set for trial on March 4, has been effectively frozen pending the outcome of Trump's appeal on the legally untested question of whether a former president enjoys immunity from prosecution for actions taken in the White House.

Noting that he had resisted defense lawyer urgings from months ago to postpone the trial, Merchan said: "I'm glad I took that position because here we are — the D.C. case did not go forward."

The hush money trial is expected to last six weeks, the judge said. Assuming the New York case

remains on schedule, it will open just weeks after the Super Tuesday elections, colliding on the political calendar with a time period in which Trump will be looking to sew up the Republican race and emerge as the presumptive nominee in this year's presidential contest. His attorneys cited that schedule in vigorously objecting to the March trial date.

"We strenuously object to what is happening in this courtroom," said defense lawyer Todd Blanche, adding that "the fact that we are now going to spend, President Trump is now going to spend, the next two months working on this trial instead of out on the campaign trial running for president is something that should not happen in this country."

Trump made a similar case after leaving the courtroom, telling reporters that "instead of being in South Carolina and other states campaigning, I'm stuck here," he said.

"We'll just have to figure it out," he added. "I'll be here during the day and I'll be campaigning during the night."

The case centers on payoffs to two women, porn actor Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal, as well as to a Trump Tower doorman who claimed to have a story about Trump having a child out of wedlock. Trump says he didn't have any of the alleged sexual encounters.

Trump's legal team has argued that no crime was committed.

Pearl Harbor survivors die within weeks of each other at 102, 99

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Two survivors of Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 died in recent days, one of whom had attended the 82nd annual commemoration of the attack in Hawaii in early December.

Edward Carroll, who celebrated his 99th birthday last week in Long Beach, Calif., died Tuesday morning, the nonprofit Pacific Historic Parks announced the same day on X, formerly Twitter.

Carroll, who lived in Kanosh, Utah, was one of only five survivors to attend the December ceremony.

Sterling Cale, 102, a longtime Hawaii resident, died Jan. 20 surrounded by his family at his home just west of Honolulu, the organization announced Wednesday.

Cale, a veteran of World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars, was hospitalized last month for unspecified conditions, according to the post by Pacific Parks, for which Cale had been a longtime volunteer.

Cale had been set to attend the December ceremony but was forced to cancel due to health issues.

On the morning of the Dec. 7, 1941, Cale had left his overnight shift as a hospital corpsman at the Pearl Harbor dispensary, according to his book, "Sterling Cale: A True American." He tells of hearing gunfire and seeing smoke, which he initially regarded as part of a training exercise. The reality dawned on him after he saw the Rising Sun flag on the fuselage of one of the planes flying overhead. He worked at pulling dozens of men out of the harbor waters



Carroll

that were ablaze with burning fuel and oil.

In coming days, he was assigned to remove the remains of sailors and Marines who died

aboard the USS Arizona.

In his book, Cale explained why he was reluctant to visit the USS Arizona Memorial, doing so only in 1974, 12 years after it had opened.

"I didn't want to reflect," he wrote. "I knew I would recognize many of the names on the wall and wondered about what happened to them. Pearl Harbor haunted me, but I did my best to put it behind me, focus on the present and be positive about everything."



Cale

Funeral services for Cale are scheduled for March 7 at Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery in Kaneohe. He will be buried beside his wife, Victoria, who died in 2019.

Carroll enlisted in the Navy in April 1941, and was a top student at the Aviation Mechanic School, Pacific Historic Parks said in its post.

He was only 16 years old when he arrived in Pearl Harbor on Dec. 4, 1941, assigned to a crew that would be testing a new model of plane being sent to Hawaii. He was sleeping in his quarters on Ford Island when the attack began.

"The first thing I really saw was

all the airplanes," Carroll told KHON-TV in Honolulu during an interview in December.

"Thousands of them it looked like. Looked like a swarm of mosquitoes. And the man handed me a rifle and said go shoot. But what are you gonna do with a rifle against an airplane?"

He manned a sandbag post with that rifle.

Later in the war while flying a PBY Catalina near Guadalcanal, Carroll was shot down. He and the other 21 crew members survived. They were rescued after five hours in the water.

He was discharged from the Navy in 1945.

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NATION



CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP

A person is taken to an ambulance following a shooting Wednesday at the Kansas City Chiefs' Super Bowl celebration in Kansas City, Mo. One woman was killed, and at least 22 others were injured.

Gunfire at Chiefs' parade kills 1, wounds at least 22

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Authorities in Kansas City said Thursday that the mass shooting that unfolded amid throngs of people at the Chiefs' Super Bowl celebration appeared to stem from a dispute between several people.

Police Chief Stacey Graves said that the 22 people injured in the shooting ranged between the ages of 8 and 47 years old, half of whom were under the age of 16. A mother of two was also killed.

Three people were detained — including two juveniles — and firearms were recovered during the mayhem, police said. But investigators are calling for witnesses, people with cellphone footage and victims to call a dedicated hotline.

"We are working to determine the involvement of others. And it should be noted we have recovered several firearms. This incident is still a very active investigation," Graves said at a news conference.

The shooting outside Union Station occurred despite the presence of more than 800 police officers who were in the building and nearby, including on top of structures, said Mayor Quinton Lucas, who attended with his wife and mother and ran for safety when the shots rang out. But he doesn't expect to cancel the upcoming St. Patrick's Day parade.

"We have parades all the time. I don't think they'll end. Certainly we recognized the public safety challenges and issues that relate to them," Lucas said.

Throngs had lined the parade route before the shooting. Players rolled through the crowd on double-decker buses, as DJs and drummers heralded their arrival.

It's unclear exactly how many people attended the Chiefs' Super Bowl parade. When the Kansas City Royals won the World Series in 2015, an estimated 800,000 people had flocked to that victory parade.

Witnesses described confusion as gunshots began, sounding to some like fireworks.

Some people didn't run at first but others immediately scrambled for cover. The rally music initially continued playing despite the havoc. And then, within moments of the shooting stopping, some people were walking as if nothing happened.

A shooting wounded several people last year in Denver after the Nuggets' NBA championship and gunfire rang out last year at a parking lot near the Texas Rangers' World Series championship parade.

The woman killed in the shooting was identified by radio station KKFI-FM as Lisa Lopez-Galvan, host of "Taste of Tejano." Lopez-Galvan, whose DJ name was "Lisa G," was an extrovert and devoted mother, said Rosa Izurieta and Martha Ramirez, two childhood friends who worked with her at a staffing company.

"She's the type of person who would jump in front of a bullet for anybody — that would be Lisa," Izurieta said.

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WEEKEND



Looking for the next big retro hit
Music, Pages 28-29

FUN WITH FIGHTING

Video games, Page 15

Battle system, customization help Tekken 8 pack a punch



Bandai Namco

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Best solid-state hard drives for 2024

The best external drives are compact solid-state drives (SSDs for short) that use flash memory and don't have any moving parts like larger traditional hard drives, which are equipped with mechanical platters and a moving read-write head to access data.

However, the big issue is that SSDs, while having come down in price over the past few years, tend to be expensive, particularly for higher-capacity drives. Top-end SSDs designed for video professionals now offer lightning-quick transfer rates as high as 3,000MB/s so long as they're connected to newer computers with the speediest USB-C interfaces (for example, the latest Macs have Thunderbolt ports that will allow you to transfer 50GB files in less than a minute). Specific USB-C cables are also required to get top speeds.

Most of the options on this list of the best external hard drive models will work across platforms — whether you have a Windows PC, Mac computer, PlayStation or Xbox — so long as the drives are correctly formatted for the right platform. Many of them include cables or adapters to accommodate USB-C and USB-A ports. But if they don't happen to be included, you can easily buy dongles for about \$12.

Three of CNET's top picks for the best external solid-state drive are below. These (or nearly identical models with less storage capacity) have been used or anecdotally tested by CNET editors:

SanDisk Extreme Portable 1TB SSD

Rugged external mini SSD
CNET TAKE: Western Digital, which owns SanDisk, sells its WD My Passport SSD as well this SanDisk External Portable SSD for basically the same price. We like the design of this model a little better and it's technically ruggedized with an IP65 rating, meaning it can withstand a sustained spray of water. Also, it's dust- and shock-resistant and has a USB-C interface. The latest version offers speeds up to

1,050MB/s (just over 1GB per second) and is right around \$100 for the 1TB version. While step-up models like the SanDisk Extreme Pro offer faster read/write speeds with the right computer, that may be overkill unless you regularly work with very large files. Your speed will vary if you're moving a mishmash of files to or from the USB drive, but when copying a single large file you should be able to get close to those fast transfer speeds.

WD Black P40 Game Drive
Best ultrafast gaming SSD for PCs and consoles

CNET TAKE: First released in 2022, the WD Black P40 has come down in price and is now pretty affordable (1TB is \$120 on amazon). It's an ultrafast SSD that's more geared toward recent Windows PCs equipped with USB 3.2 Gen2x2 dual-lane architecture that allows for a theoretical 20Gbps data transfer rate. But it can also be used with consoles and Macs. It's capable of speeds up to 2,000MB/s.

Rated for surviving drops of up to 2 meters, the drive is durable and has an RGB lighting element that can be customized with a Windows PC. You do pay a bit of a premium over the WD Black D30, which comes with a stand and is more geared to game consoles. But this drive is more future-proof as an increasing number of PCs get equipped with USB 3.2 Gen2x2.

OWC Envoy Pro FX
Best for pro Mac users
CNET TAKE: The 1TB version of Other World Computing's Envoy Pro FX goes for \$250, while SanDisk's flagship Pro-G40 SSD starts at around \$180 for a 1TB drive. Both offer top-end speeds (the Envoy Pro FX gets up to 2,800MB/s transfer speeds while the Pro-G40 tops out slightly higher at up to 3,000MB/s). While the OWC drive will work just fine with Windows and Linux computers, OWC has long catered to the Mac market, and this external SSD certainly plays well with Macs. Yes, it costs more than the Pro-G40, but it seems very well built with an aluminum chassis that does a good job dissipating heat (it doesn't heat up too much). Alas, it doesn't come with some sort of carrying case, but it's an impressive drive if you can afford it and are looking for ultrafast transfer speeds.



CNET/TNS photos
From top to bottom: The SanDisk Extreme Portable SSD, the WD Black P40 and the OWC Envoy Pro FX.

Proscenic P11 can transform from cordless vacuum to mop with ease

By Gregg ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

It's impossible to say what is the most versatile vacuum available, but the new Proscenic P11 Mopping 2-in-1 cordless vacuum has to be high on that list. With ease and the included accessories, it transforms back and forth from a vacuum to a mop.

The P11 is a stick vacuum loaded with features. First and foremost, it can be used as a standing vacuum and does a great job. The P11 is lightweight (5.2 pounds), can be swiveled 180 degrees and has LED lights on the front to see hidden debris.

A 400W digital motor powers it, producing 35kPa strong suction power. It has an ergonomic design, so it glides effortlessly over your cleaning area. The top-side LED display has a touch panel to change the three cleaning modes and displays the battery level, suction indicator, error messages and a full dust indicator. The filter is easy to remove, wash and replace.

Dirt is stored in a 22-ounce clear dustbin, so it's easy to see when it's full. Emptying it is simple: Assuming you are holding the P11 over a trash can, press a button to open a flap and empty it. The P11 is cordless, with an AC charging battery inside, rated to last up to 50 minutes of continuous use, which can vary depending on which features are being used.

In seconds, the Proscenic P11 converts from a vacuum to a mop with a detachable mopping base connecting to



PHOTOS BY PROSCENIC/TNS
The detachable mopping base of the Proscenic P11 Mopping 2-in-1 cordless vacuum connects to the back of its floor brush.

the back of the floor brush. It has an 11.5-ounce water tank. It features a five-layer whole-machine filtration system.

The P11 includes a few accessories for use as a hand-held vacuum. The 2-in-1 dusting brush or the long neck nozzle can also attach to the telescopic dust pipe for cleaning hard-to-reach areas such as ceiling corners. An AC power adapter, extra filter and wall mount are



The Proscenic P11 includes an extra filter, 2-in-1 dusting brush, long neck nozzle, wall mount and AC power adapter. There is a touch-panel LED display on the top of the unit, which displays the battery level, suction indicator, error messages and a full dust indicator.

included. The plug connects directly to the 2,000 mAh battery, which can be charged while mounted on the vacuum or off.
Online: proscenic.com; \$189.99

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



Bandai Namco photos

Jin Kazama, right, has to come to grips with his power as he battles his father, Kazuya Mishima, in Tekken 8. Their conflict drives the game’s story mode, “The Dark Awakens.”

Tekken 8 continues to play to its strengths

Latest entry in campy fighting franchise visually impressive, newcomer-friendly

By GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

At a certain point, one has to stop caring whether Tekken makes any sense and just go with the flow. That thought came across my mind as I watched Brian Cox from “Succession” narrate a catch-up video on the current state of the saga. The nearly 30-year-old franchise boils down to absurd Mishima family disputes in which father and son fight each other and the loser gets tossed off a cliff. That doesn’t necessarily mean they kill each other because just like in any soap opera no one traditionally dies in Tekken. They just come back angrier, more ruthless and perhaps with new abilities.

A destructive family feud

A dormant devil gene lies within the Mishimas’ bloodline, and it awakens in some family members when they’re in a crisis. It’s given them unbelievable durability.



Each of the other 32 characters also has a personal story that players can access in the Character Episodes option, but these don’t rise to the level of the epic one between Jin Kazama and his father, Kazuya Mishima.

The conflict between the two drives the story mode titled “The Dark Awakens.” It takes place across 15 chapters, in which players mostly take the role of Jin but have a chance to dabble with other characters within a woven narrative. They control characters in a tournament story arc in Chapter 10 as an alliance of fighters battles Kazuya’s G Corporation army. Again, everything’s over the top, but it’s enjoyable if you acknowledge this is all camp.

As for the fighting system, the developers kept elements of the previous iteration but tweaked them to cre-



Arcade Story allows players to customize the look of any fighter by unlocking costumes or spending fight money that they earn through other modes.

ate combat that rewards aggressive play. Rage Arts acts as a comeback mechanic that’s activated when health is below 25% and deals massive damage. It’s also accompanied by showstopping animation. Meanwhile, Power Crush is back and it’s a way for players to fend off aggressive opponents with its ability to absorb damage.

All of this is done with impressive visuals on the Unreal 5 engine. It’s one of most impressive-looking titles in the genre, and it’s full of just the right visual flourish without becoming gauche.

Bringing the heat

The new Tekken 8 feature is the Heat System, which can be activated at any time with a button or via a combo. The Heat State opens up more powerful moves and allows players to deal damage to blocking foes. The only issue is that it doesn’t last long and can be only used once per round. It’s easy for novices to pick up, but experts will thrive as they figure out how to deal damage and open up adversaries to combos. The system introduces a cat-and-mouse element as players figure out when to use it.

Producer Katsuhiro Harada also tried to make Tekken 8 more newbie-friendly with an alternate control scheme called Special Style. It lets players perform juggling air

combos and other complex maneuvers with a few button presses. It’s also a way for players to try out characters without feeling as though they need to spend hours in practice mode to memorize their combos.

Getting into the fighting game scene

One of the more interesting elements in Tekken 8 is the introduction of a new mode called Arcade Story. This is where players create an avatar and delve into the fighting game community. It’s reminiscent of the online mode in Street Fighter 6 except it has a simplistic plot in which players work up the ranks. They start off with friends at a small neighborhood arcade and enter tournaments, make a name for themselves and climb the ladder challenging others at higher-profile venues.

Arcade Story is actually a good way for novices to jump into the game as it slow-rolls players through aspects of the fighting systems. Unfortunately, it’s not very comprehensive or as easy to use. Despite that, the mode has another benefit: It’s also a path for newcomers to ease into online play. Arcade Story mimics the experience, and through its characters, it also highlights aspects of fighting game culture.

Tekken is not all about being the best fighter. Sometimes there are other reasons people play. One element the Story mode highlights is customization. In Tekken 8, players can customize the look of any fighter by unlocking costumes or spending fight money that they earn through different modes. The gear drastically changes the look of characters, allowing players to express themselves.

Most of all, gamers just want to play Tekken 8 for fun. Not everything has to be serious, and the developers bring back a mode called Tekken Ball, which adds a volleyball-ish element to the fighting game. It’s a blast and silly at times, but that’s something that Tekken has come to embrace. It’s a series that has turned the raw and awkward plot it has built into a funny and campy strength.

Platforms: PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X/S, PC
Official website: tekken.com

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

‘Madame Web’ spins itself into a knot

Johnson is fun enough as titular character in latest Sony ‘Spider-Man’ spinoff but plot is silly, messy and repetitive

BY LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

There is a lot of pretty niche comic book mythology swirling around Madame Web, the inspiration for the newest of Sony’s “Spider-Man” spinoffs.

This is a character who goes back to 1980 and whose powers of clairvoyance helped Peter Parker at some point. She’s elderly and blind and sits atop a web throne that keeps her alive. But to be honest, reading about her didn’t help give any more meaning or urgency to the Dakota Johnson movie that’s now in theaters. You’ve been warned.

“Madame Web” is striving to be a classic superhero setup movie, about how the future Madame Web — now just single gal paramedic Cassie Webb — comes to terms with her newfound power that allows her to see the future.

It’s also about the origins of a few other Spider-Women who are now just teenage girls, played by 20-somethings Julia Cornwall (Sydney Sweeney), Anya Corazon (Isabela Merced) and Celeste O’Connor (Mattie Franklin). But watching the flash-forwards to these three in their Spidey costumes makes you feel like there’s some Marvel TV show you forgot to watch that might make you care more.

A scene in which the film tries to sell the idea that all four women are connected in some cosmic way is wildly strained and



From left, Isabela Merced, Dakota Johnson, Sydney Sweeney and Celeste O’Connor play Spider-Girls in “Madame Web.”

inconsequential. It’s impossible to know what exactly the credited screenwriters (and “story by” credits) are responsible for, but “Madame Web” feels like the stitched-together product of a bunch of people who weren’t actually collaborating.

There is also an alarming amount of repetition in just under two hours. Part of this is because Cassie is learning about her powers and sees various incidents play out over and over, which, by the fourth set piece, starts to get very tedious. You forgive it, a little, because Johnson is

just always fun to watch and it at least serves a story purpose in theory. But then there’s all these scenes in which the bad guy, Ezekiel Sims (Tahar Rahim), is either seeing his future death at the hands of the Spider-Girls (or whatever we’re calling them) or barking at his associate (Zosia Mamet) to find them with her “Dark Knight”-era surveillance setup in his blandly cold penthouse.

We know Rahim to be a talented, charismatic actor, but Ezekiel is one of the duller, most thinly sketched superhero vil-

lains in recent memory. The movie doesn’t even withhold his own cosmic connection to Cassie as a reveal — it literally opens with him killing her mother (Kerry Bishé) who is on a spider research trip in the Amazon while very pregnant with her. The venom, and some Amazonian spider-people, save the baby.

Johnson’s singular performance style can make almost anything watchable. Her cool-girl deadpan is always interesting and funny and, thankfully, filmmaker S.J. Clarkson has the good sense to keep the camera on her as much as possible. She makes gems out of nothing and finds humor even while the script and story are crumbling around her. It’s too bad, because there could have been a more fun movie in here — Clarkson imbues it with a distinctly feminine and teenage energy that makes good use of its soundtrack. But it spins itself into a knot trying to justify a silly story instead.

The studio, it seems, is playing a very long game with this one. Cassie’s paramedic colleague is Ben Parker (Adam Scott), whose sister-in-law Mary Parker (Emma Roberts) is about to give birth. But one has to imagine after seeing “Madame Web,” that, ironically, whatever payoff was planned may be a vision that will not come to pass.

“Madame Web” is rated PG-13 for violence/action and language. Running time: 117 minutes. Now playing in select AAFES theaters.

Ben-Adir’s spectacular Marley obscured by overly simple storytelling in ‘One Love’ biopic

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

How can you contain the meaning of Bob Marley in a single biopic? The pioneering reggae artist’s life was too short, but his music has persisted infinitely, reaching far beyond the mountains of his native Jamaica, and he continues to be a global icon and a posthumous ambassador for Rastafarian culture 40 years after his death. But the man himself has been abstracted into an image for sale, a mere signifier adorning a dorm room poster, his songs of peace and freedom the dutiful standards of beach bar cover bands across the globe. Is it possible to tell the story of his life in a way that feels truthfully human?

These are the questions with which one wrestles in contending with the new biopic from Director Reinaldo Marcus Green, “Bob Marley: One Love.” But unfortunately, the film itself does not undertake these complex matters. Though the film promises to tell a culturally and politically specific story, what could have been daring is ultimately trite, relying on familiar music biopic tropes. It’s a shame, because at the center is a bravura performance from Kingsley Ben-Adir as Marley.

Ben-Adir is uniquely suited to this role. Like the singer, he is of Afro-Caribbean (Trinidadian, specifically) and English descent, and he nails Marley’s Jamaican patois, which Green allows to flow as thick as it is, without subtitles. Ben-Adir captures Marley’s voice and his wild physicality, and Green smartly keeps the camera focused on his face in the transfixing concert performances.

Lashana Lynch is also terrific as Rita Marley, Bob’s wife, backup singer and the mother to (part of) his brood, including Ziggy Marley, who produced the film. We track Marley’s life story partially through his romance with Rita, and she serves as a steadying force. But the screenplay isn’t entirely concerned with the personal, but rather

the political, or at least Marley’s symbolic function in politics — but only to a point.

“Bob Marley: One Love” opens with text explaining the violent unrest in Jamaica in 1976 but without substantive details — the first indication that this film is about to over-promise and under-deliver. We are told there are opposing political parties and gang leaders in conflict, though we are not told why, just that Marley is planning to play a peace concert to unite the nation and that it will change his life.

The timeline is contained to a heady period between 1976 and 1978, interspersed with flashbacks and fantasy — a perfectly fine approach, even if the film feels edited within an inch of its life and structurally incoherent at times. However, there’s a real verve and energy as it opens, situating us in Marley’s Jamaican life, and the cinematography by Robert Elswit is antsy and roaming, following our protagonist in constant motion: singing, dancing, jogging, hugging, toking.

An assassination attempt on his and Rita’s lives by gunmen in his home rattles him. He performs the concert but jets off to London immediately thereafter, settling in to lie low and write his seminal album, “Exodus.”

It’s at this point that “Bob Marley: One Love” falls prey to the dreaded music biopic cliché trap. There are song-writing sessions with lightbulb moments, uptight record executives and sketchy managers and a wildly successful tour montage with the requisite shot of records flying off the shelf. We watch Marley go from flesh-and-blood human being in Ben-Adir’s embodiment to flattened image, though the film rarely regards this process critically.

Marley’s music has permeated global culture, though whether his message has been preserved is debatable. ‘One Love’ does include several scenes of Marley’s Rastafarian religion and his spiritual guides. These scenes are



Kingsley Ben-Adir gives a bravura performance as Bob Marley in “One Love,” nailing the singer’s Jamaican patois and capturing his voice and wild physicality.

as authentic as you will get in any Hollywood depiction, and the representation is deeply moving. Yet you wish to spend more time in this culture to understand why Marley was so called to it, what it provided him as a young man searching for meaning and chosen family and to understand the tenets of Rastafarianism that he hoped to share with the world.

But we’re left adrift in the story with only generic beats providing a life raft. There’s a nagging feeling that the filmmakers should have just let the story breathe, that it didn’t need to be overly contextualized and nonlinearly presented, that the man and his music could simply speak for himself, especially with Ben-Adir’s capabilities. Though the actor embodies Marley beautifully, the storytelling ultimately fails to pay tribute to one of the most singular and iconic artists of all time.

“Bob Marley: One Love” is rated PG-13 for marijuana use and smoking throughout, some violence and brief strong language. Running time: 104 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIES



SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT/Columbia Pictures

Dakota Johnson stars as Cassandra Webb, a superhero with the power of clairvoyance, in the latest Sony “Spider-Man” spinoff, “Madame Web.” Johnson says she “just loved that it was about a young woman whose power is her mind. And I thought that that was really important and inspiring.”

Looking beyond superhero stereotypes

‘Madame Web’ director, star both say they were intrigued by film’s focus on psychological power of clairvoyance

BY LESLIE AMBRIZ
Associated Press

One of the first things that struck director S.J. Clarkson about Madame Web was that this was a superhero who did not have superhuman strength. And unlike Batman, she couldn’t just buy herself some. No, Cassandra Webb has a different kind of power: clairvoyance.

This, the veteran television director found interesting.

“I saw the challenge of clairvoyance and the fact that it didn’t necessarily scream action as its biggest virtue,” Clarkson said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. “Because then we could explore the fact that you don’t need superhuman strength to be a superhero.”

How does one depict clairvoyance? Well, for that, she turned to the movies, re-watching Nicolas Roeg’s “Don’t Look Now,” Christopher Nolan’s “Memento” and “Inception” and the Wachowskis’ “The Matrix.”

“I just sort of went across the board looking at movies that had done that, you know, and some horror. I was trying to find that sort of thrilling, scary space,” she said.

“Madame Web” (currently in theaters) is the first of Sony’s “Spider-Man” spinoffs (including “Venom” and “Morbius”) that is centered on a woman. Clarkson had long admired Dakota Johnson as an actor and was thrilled to get the chance to direct her.

“I saw the challenge of clairvoyance and the fact that it didn’t necessarily scream action as its biggest virtue. Because then we could explore the fact that you don’t need superhuman strength to be a superhero.”



S.J. Clarkson
director, “Madame Web”

“She has such depth and breadth as an actor. She grounds everything. She finds the nuance and pathos in everything. But she’s also very funny,” Clarkson said. “It was important to me that we didn’t sort of, like, take ourselves too seriously. Yes, it’s a psychological thriller, but there needs to be moments of levity.”

Johnson was excited about the prospect too, even if she never thought she would be in a comic book movie.

“I just loved that it was about a young woman whose power is her mind,” Johnson said. “And I thought that that was really important and inspiring.”

And, perhaps most importantly, Johnson felt safe under Clarkson’s leadership.

“She just had everything under control,” Johnson said. “I didn’t worry for a second that it wasn’t going to be great. Ultimately, like in the edit or even on set, it’s just, she’s so detail oriented and she operates

on such a high level ... I just felt really held and I really, you know, trusted her.”

In Johnson, Clarkson said she found an “incredible collaborator throughout,” acknowledging the challenge of having to visually showcase the act of seeing into the future.

“Many of those scenes that she’s in, nothing’s happening. It’s just her reacting and me saying, this is what’s going to happen in the future when we film it, right? It really was a bit like clairvoyance for her in that she didn’t actually get to see it,” Clarkson said. “So to have that sort of partnership in that creative collaboration was imperative and invaluable, and we wouldn’t have what we have without it.”

Clarkson has television credits going back 20 years, to the BBC soap opera “Doctors.” A journeyman director, she’s helmed episodes of “Heroes,” where she first met a very young Sydney Sweeney;

“Dexter”; “House”; “Orange is the New Black”; “Succession”; and, most recently, all six episodes of Netflix’s “Anatomy of a Scandal,” which she also executive produced. And she’d had some superhero experience too with Marvel’s “Jessica Jones.”

She’s found both times that the “richness of the comics” provided her with an extraordinary foundation from which to leap.

“This is an origin story,” Clarkson said. “So for me it was like, how can we get the spirit and the essence of this character, and how can we take the things that we know about her and then work backwards and find out what would make the most interesting, fulfilling story with as much depth and breadth of that character to bring her to where she is today and where we will know that she’s going to be in the future?”

The movie also has some easter eggs for Marvel superfans, including the name of a diner where a crucial showdown happens, and a hat tip to “Madame Web’s” original creators, writer Denny O’Neil and artist John Romita Jr.

But for Johnson and Clarkson, the ultimate goal was to create something fresh.

“It feels really fun to be a part of something that’s also kind of removed and fresh and a new kind of take on a superhero movie,” Johnson said. “It’s so grounded and it’s more of like a psychological thriller than what I’ve seen superheroes do before.”

WEEKEND: MOVIES

A story of grief both personal and universal

Chinn’s directorial debut ‘Suncoast’ based on sibling’s hospice experience

By Lindsey Bahr
Associated Press

When writer-director Laura Chinn was a teenager in 2005, her mother moved her and her terminally ill brother to Florida. The idea was for him to spend his last days in hospice in peace. Instead, the place was mobbed by protesters and media because, as they’d quickly discover, Terri Schiavo was in that same hospice.

The circumstances provided the inspiration for Chinn’s directorial debut, “Suncoast,” starring Nico Parker as the teenager in question and Laura Linney as her mother. It’s now streaming on Hulu.

Though it’s not unusual for a filmmaker to draw on his or her life for narrative guidance, with-in this strange and fraught and emotional time Chinn saw an opportunity to tell not just her story but a more universal one about grief and empathy. And she got to work, using the skills she’d learned over the years, writing for and acting on television (including creating the series “Florida Girls”) and learning some new ones, too (like photography and how to shotlist).

Schiavo was in a vegetative stage for 15 years after a cardiac arrest at 26 in 1990 and had become the face of end-of-life legal rights, which, beyond the bitter disagreement between her husband and her parents, had ignited a national debate. In 2005, right before her death, it was a media and political frenzy.

“But also as a teenager being in that position, it gave me an opportunity to see a very political story that was on the news right up close and see that these were all human beings,” Chinn said.

The film is still mostly fiction, however.

“It’s important to know that while Kristine is certainly archetypally based on Laura’s mother, while there may be some similarities here and there, I was not intentionally playing her mother,” Linney said.

Likewise for Parker’s Doris, who is attempting some semblance of normalcy amid the turbulence in her teenage life, making new friends and pushing boundaries. Much to her surprise, she finds herself most comforted by a protester played by Woody Harrelson.

“She’s sort of wise beyond her



SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES/AP

Laura Linney, left, and Nico Parker play mother and daughter in “Suncoast,” writer-director Laura Chinn’s debut film. Though inspired by the Chinn family’s move to Florida to give Laura’s terminally ill brother peace as he spent his last days in hospice, the film is mostly fiction.

“I hope that people can walk away with it being able to express more of their own grief, feel more of their own grief and feel more connected just to the idea that we all go through this and that there’s not really a right or wrong way to do it. We’re all just kind of doing the best we can.”



Laura Chinn
director, “Suncoast”

years,” Chinn said. “This older person is someone she can connect with more so than the people her own age.”

Parker, who is the daughter of actor Thandiwe Newton and writer-director Ol Parker, cried the first time she read the script.

“I just couldn’t stop thinking about it,” she said. “I couldn’t stop saying lines.”

Plus the chance to work with Linney and Harrelson was one that Parker said she was “borderline begging” for.

“Woody’s the best; he’s so weird and so funny,” Parker said. “Then when the camera is on him — and him and Laura are similar that way — life just

beams out of him; he’s so present. Watching it up close is so interesting. I don’t know what happens in his face, but it’s just sunshine.”

Linney said for her, everything was right there in the script that made it easy despite the heavy material.

“I’m the daughter of a playwright, so the story comes first and you do everything you can to help move that along,” Linney said. “When the script is good and the people are good and you’re having a good time, it’s easy. It’s not painful. You’re not, like, beating your chest. You don’t go home depressed ... And there’s nothing better than feel-



SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES/AP

Parker, left, and Woody Harrelson in a scene from “Suncoast.” Parker’s character Doris connects more with the protester played by Harrelson than people her own age.

ing like you’re part of a younger artists’ launching.”

Este Haim and her partner Chris Stracey helped craft the score, inspired by the music of the period. All were especially excited to get permission to cover The National’s “Green Gloves,” sung by Monica Martin, for a pivotal moment when Doris is running to hospice.

She’d loved the song but didn’t realize how relevant it was until she read an interview with the group’s front man Matt Berninger about how it was about grief, and missing someone so much that you start wanting to wear their clothes.

“It’s really a perfect song,”

Chinn said.

The “Suncoast” world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival last month was a teary occasion. Chinn’s own mother ran out of tissues and a stranger was right there with another to hand off. It was a common sight in a theater full of sniffing. (“Suncoast” is funny as well.)

“I hope that people can walk away with it being able to express more of their own grief, feel more of their own grief and feel more connected just to the idea that we all go through this and that there’s not really a right or wrong way to do it,” Chinn said. “We’re all just kind of doing the best we can.”

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Verdun's lessons linger

World War I — “The war to end all wars,” which cost an estimated 40 million lives — is now more than a century in the past. While there are no more survivors to share their stories firsthand, WWI sights and memorials scattered across Europe, especially in France and Belgium, do their best to keep the devastation from fading from memory.

Perhaps the most powerful WWI sightseeing experience is located about 140 miles east of Paris at the battlefields of Verdun. It was here in 1916 that roughly 300,000 lives were lost in what’s known as the Battle of 300 Days and Nights. The longest single battle of World War I, it left the landscape barren for decades. Today, the traces of war are buried under thick forests.

Plenty of rusty battle remnants and memorials are still accessible. A string of battlefields can be found along an eight-mile stretch of road outside the town of Verdun. From here, it’s possible to see (with a guided tour, rental car, shuttle bus or taxi) the most important sights and appreciate the horrific scale of the battle.

You can ride through the eerie

moguls left by the incessant shelling, pause at melted-sugar-cube forts, ponder plaques marking spots where towns once existed and visit a vast cemetery.

To get a good overview, start at the Verdun Memorial Museum, which delivers gripping exhibits about the battle (with lots of information in English). The museum is rich in artifacts and works to pair German and French objects; for example, you’ll see a circa 1916 loaded-up German rucksack right next to a French one.

In one part of the museum, a battlefield replica — complete with mud, shells, trenches and WWI military equipment — is visible through the glass floor.

Another key sight for visitors is Fort Douaumont, just northeast of Verdun. Constructed in 1885, the fort was the most important stronghold among 38 hilltop fortifications that protected France from a German invasion. Built on top of and into the hillside, it ultimately served as a strategic command center for both Germany and France at



Rick Steves

various times. Soldiers were protected by a thick layer of sand (to muffle explosions) and a wall of concrete five to seven feet thick. Visitors today can experience these corridors, where soldiers were forced to live like moles, scurrying through two miles of cold, damp hallways.

Visitors can also climb to the bombed-out top of the fort to see the round, iron gun emplacements that could rise and revolve. From the perch at the top, looking out at fields leading to Germany and imagining the carnage in that horrible battle is an unforgettable experience.

The nearby Douaumont Ossuary is the tomb of unknown French and German soldiers who perished in Verdun’s muddy trenches. In the years after the war, a local bishop wandered through fields of bones — the remains of about 130,000 unidentified soldiers. Concluding that they deserved a respectful final resting place, he began raising money for the project — which was officially inaugurated in 1927. The building has 46 granite vaults, each holding remains from different sectors of the battlefield.

For all that’s sobering to remember here, these Verdun



Rick Steves

Behind France’s largest WWI cemetery, with graves planted with red roses, Douaumont Ossuary holds the remains of more than 130,000 unknown French and German soldiers.

memorials also offer visitors something beautiful to see: German, French and European flags wave alongside each other, as if to exclaim, “We learned, and we won’t do this again.” Say what you like about the European Union, it’s hard to deny what a great accomplishment it has been to weave together the economies of two historic enemies —

and foster the empathy that comes with getting to know each other. More than 100 years later, we live in a different world, built on a solid foundation for maintaining European peace — a lesson that bears repeating.

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Don’t miss these fascinating temporary museum exhibitions

High upon the inexhaustible list of reasons to visit one of Europe’s great cities is to check out its wonderful museums. When what’s on show isn’t part of a permanent collection, it’s important to act fast or miss it. Here’s a list of just some of the 2024’s most anticipated temporary exhibitions across Europe, in chronological order:

Amsterdam, Netherlands: The Rijksmuseum has dedicated a show to a major figure of the Dutch Golden Age with its exhibition “Frans Hals,” on now through June 9. The exhibition centers on the artist’s easygoing and animated style that earned him a reputation as a forerunner of impressionism. Online: rijksmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/frans-hals

Ostend, Brussels, and Antwerp, Belgium: The 75-year anniversary of the death of the Flemish artist James Ensor will be marked by a number of exhibitions, activities and events. In Ostend, the seaside city in which Ensor was born and spent most of his life, the Mu.ZEE Oostende hosts an exhibition of its native son’s still life paintings through April 14. In Brussels’ Bozar Centre for Fine Arts, “James Ensor: Maestro” shines a light on not only his art but his writings and musical composition with an anthology consisting of some 100 works; the show runs Feb. 29-June 23. In Antwerp’s KMSKA, “Ensor’s wildest dreams. Beyond Impressionism,” Ensor’s works will be displayed alongside his contemporaries, sources of inspiration and successors Sept. 28-Jan. 19, 2025. Online: visitflanders.com/en/ensor2024

Paris: The Musée d’Orsay takes visitors on a journey through time with its exhibition “Paris 1874: Inventing Impressionism,” running March 26-July 14. The collection of works on display is a nod to an 1874 privately organized exhibition featuring works by Renoir, Monet, Pissarro, Cezanne, Degas, Morisot and Sisley and other art-



Karen Bradbury



The Baltimore Museum of Art: The Cone Collection

“Matisse – Invitation to the Voyage,” an exhibition coming to The Fondation Beyeler in Basel, Switzerland, in September, will be the first Henri Matisse retrospective in the German-speaking world in almost 20 years.

ists. Although the show was sparsely attended and widely mocked in reviews, today it’s considered a vital part of the birth of the Impressionist movement. Online: musee-orsay.fr/en/whats-on/exhibitions/paris-1874-inventing-impressionism

London: Tate Modern shines a spotlight onto the groundbreaking work of an early 20th century circle of Munich-based artists through an exhibition titled “Expressionists: Kandinsky, Münter and The Blue Rider,” set to run April 25-Oct. 20. At the start of the 20th century, the work of a circle of friends and close collaborators known as The Blue Rider managed to transform modern art through their experimentation with color, sound and light. This story of their friendship and mutual support as told through art features more than 130 works including

paintings, sculptures and photographs. Online: tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/expressionists

Basel, Switzerland: The Kunstmuseum Basel will be home to “When We See Us: A Century of Black Figuration in Painting” May 25-Oct. 27. Following its debut in Cape Town, South Africa, the exhibition explores Black self-representation and consciousness from pan-African and pan-diasporic perspectives. The show features more than 200 works produced by Black artists working globally over the course of the past century. Online: kunstmuseumbasel.ch/en/exhibitions/2024/when-we-see-us

Oslo, Norway: The Munch Museum plans the May 25 launch of an exhibition titled “Edvard Munch: Horizons.” The show explores the artistic currents that shaped Europe between 1880 and 1950, a timespan that roughly corresponds to the Norwegian artist’s career. Munch’s work will be hung alongside that of artists including Emil Nolde, Oscar Kokoschka, Gabriele Münter, Alexej von Jawlensky, Raoul Dufy and others, bringing his output into the context of European Modernism. Online: munch-museet.no/en/exhibitions/edvard-munch-horizons

London: The National Gallery will stage “Van Gogh: Poets and Lovers,” a major retrospective devoted to one of Europe’s best-known artists, Vincent Van Gogh, from Sept. 14-Jan. 19, 2025. Among the more than 50 works to be displayed are “Starry Night Over the Rhône,” “The Yellow House,” “Wheat Field with Cypresses” and “Sunflowers.” Online: nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/van-gogh-poets-and-lovers

Basel, Switzerland: The Fondation Beyeler stages a show around a leading figure in modern art with “Matisse – Invitation to the Voyage,” coming Sept. 22-Jan. 26, 2025. The first Henri Matisse retrospective in Switzerland and the German-speaking world in almost 20 years rounds up some 80 works highlighting the development and diversity of the artist’s oeuvre. Online: fondationbeyeler.ch/en/exhibitions/henri-matisse

WEEKEND: TRAVEL



PHOTOS BY ANDREA SACHS/The Washington Post

The Icon of the Seas has the largest water park at sea, with the tallest drop slide and the first family raft slides at sea.

Does Icon live up to hype?

Reporter joins maiden voyage on world’s largest cruise ship to find out

BY ANDREA SACHS
The Washington Post

On the fifth hour of their shore excursion, the cruise ship passengers were losing steam. Many slumped in their seats as a smaller boat shuttled them from Nevis to St. Kitts. Others closed their eyes and mechanically sang along to such wedding reception standards as “Y.M.C.A.” and “Cha-Cha Slide.” As soon as the Icon of the Seas came into view, however, everyone perked up.

The group had toured a sugar plantation, a rum distillery and Alexander Hamilton’s birthplace. Yet the biggest attraction of the day was the mother ship they had boarded three days earlier in Miami. The hulking vessel dwarfed the Caribbean landscape and cast a long shadow over the water. For several seconds, the sun disappeared.

“It’s a monster, isn’t it?” a passenger exclaimed as he snapped photos of the world’s largest cruise ship.

Royal Caribbean International’s newest showpiece took its maiden voyage on Jan. 27, dethroning the previous titleholder for size, the cruise line’s Wonder of the Seas. Its stature is frightening or exciting, depending on your position. The 1,198-foot-long ship weighs 250,800 gross tons. Jay Schneider, the company’s chief product innovation officer, said it can accommodate up to 7,508 guests, depending on cabin occupancy. There is also room

for more than 2,000 crew members.

“I was nervous about how many people were going to be stuck on this ship,” said Alecia Bimonte, 45, a Tampa-based teacher sailing with her husband, Anthony. “But once we got on and saw everything, it put me at ease.”

The Icon is all about the superlatives. It boasts the largest ice skating rink at sea, the tallest drop slide at sea and the most expansive pool at sea. Its long list of “firsts at sea” includes a suspended infinity pool, a walk-up champagne bar and a chief dog officer named Rover.

“For me, as a cruise ship nerd, this ship puts it all over the top,” said Danny Genung, a cruise travel planner and owner of Harr Travel in California, who was accompanying almost 70 clients. “I’ve never seen anything close to the excitement or the buzz.”

To experience the enormousness of the Icon, we booked passage on the inaugural cruise. As we explored its 20 decks from forward to stern, we would try to answer the burning question: Is bigger better, or did Royal Caribbean go overboard?

Boarding is a breeze

For Icon’s first revenue voyage, Royal Caribbean capped the number of passengers at just under 5,000 to

SEE ICON ON PAGE 21



The Icon of the Seas and one of its (smaller) sister ships on CocoCay, Royal Caribbean’s private island in the Bahamas. The Icon is the world’s largest cruise ship.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Icon: Ship has plenty of space, activities, but experience may change at full capacity

FROM PAGE 20

smooth out any kinks. The company will gradually welcome more guests until it reaches full capacity, just in time for spring break.

At the Miami terminal, Royal Caribbean’s app has helped remove the pain points typically associated with the check-in process. After showing my passport and grinning for the camera, I waltzed on board — 12 minutes flat. Before heading to my stateroom to pick up my SeaPass card, the room key with onboard purchasing power, I swung by the karaoke bar. A crew member demonstrated how to use a life jacket, checked my name off on a clipboard and then returned to singing softly to herself.

The muster-at-your-leisure drill may have confused some passengers. Two and a half hours before departure, the cruise director announced that 700 people had not completed their safety briefing. “They can’t sail without checking in,” he warned.

Fortunately, they figured it out. At around 5:30 p.m., the captain blew the horn, and the Icon shuddered to life.

Icon tip: To expedite the arrival process, check in on Royal Caribbean’s app, fill out your health questionnaire within 24 hours of departure and dump all of your liquids before you reach security.

What to do onboard

The Icon offers several eastern and western Caribbean itineraries. The seven-day cruises include three ports and three at-sea days, so cruisers have a lot of ship time.

Royal Caribbean does its best to prevent boredom. Passengers can soak in nine whirlpools and lounge at seven pools, including the Hideaway, an adults-only infinity pool with a glass wall that reminded me of an aquarium exhibit.

“It was a lot of people in a tiny space, and you see their legs,” Bimonte said. “It was murky with all the sunblock and everything else. I didn’t want to go in there.”

Most of the adventurous activities are on Thrill Island, one of eight “neighborhoods,” or thematic zones. At Crown’s Edge, an attraction that loosely combines high lining and zip lining, participants in jumpsuits and harnesses step gingerly along the side of the ship before the skyway drops, catapulting them over the water and back to the landing pad. The high-flying feat takes only a few minutes, or longer if you stop to pose for the staff photographer shouting at you to smile.

There’s a water park featuring six rides of varying scream levels. Two towers include three rides each; Schneider said this will alleviate waits. Royal Caribbean designed the attraction with 2,000 kids in mind so that no one will have to stand in line for more than 20 minutes.

At Storm Chaser, a mat race down a twisty slide, my already short wait was cut in half when a crew member pulled me to the front of the line because I was solo. I raced against an Irishman who bested me by four seconds. He told me to not feel bad; his slide was faster.

To recover from the adrenaline rush, I attended a hair demo at the spa’s beauty salon. Only three of us showed up, and even with those odds, I didn’t win the free curl and comb. At the Ladies Pampering Party, women with flawless skin walked around the room squeezing lotions and serums onto our fingertips. The lone man onstage flashed an iridescent white smile and described the virtues of teeth bleaching. After the event, which felt like a QVC taping, I grabbed my \$50 spa coupon and fled.

From then on, I swore off all “self-improvement” activities. I played pickleball, learned to dance the bachata and attended a stretch class with an instructor who called out positions like a drill sergeant.

Icon tip: To save money on the Crown’s Edge, book a spot on a port day, when the price drops. Check the Cruise Compass for spa specials, such as \$169 for a 75-minute massage.

Bars and restaurants

There weren’t enough hours in the seven-day cruise to eat and drink at all 40-plus restaurants, bars and lounges. I created a meal plan to prevent myself from getting overwhelmed or overfed.

The dining options are split between complimentary venues and specialty restaurants that charge a cover fee or a la carte prices. For my one splurge, I reserved a table at Izumi in the Park, which serves Japanese cuisine including Benihana-style teppanyaki and takeout sushi. On a warm evening under an oval cutout framing a starry sky, I sat outside in the Central Park neighborhood, slurping udon noodles and sipping sake as recorded birds chirped and cruisers in tuxedos and ball gowns strolled by. The dinner probably wouldn’t pass muster in Tokyo, but I grade on a curve.

Not one for formality, I ate most of my meals at the Windjammer buffet, where singing crew members dressed in hamburger, taco and chicken leg

costumes remind diners to wash their hands before eating. For anytime snacks, I swung by Pearl Cafe, the only venue open 24/7, and the new AquaMarket, a food hall with crepes, Mediterranean, mac-and-cheese and other casual favorites.

The Dining Room evoked old-school cruising, with set dining times (unless you choose My Time Dining), white tablecloths, assigned tables and a team of attentive servers who never let your water glass drop below the halfway mark. The cavernous space covers three floors and fits more than 2,600 diners, who dig into such classics as escargot a la bourguignonne and chicken cordon bleu.

I ordered the spring pea risotto, which came with a surprise hair. The head waiter was apologetic, and I received numerous phone calls from him and guest services about the incident. He even chased me down at Windjammer, asking me to give the Dining Room another chance. Originally from India, he offered to cook me any dish I desired.

On the last night of the cruise, he presented me with a bowl of yellow dal that he said tasted like his uncle’s back home. All was forgiven.

Icon tip: If a specialty restaurant is booked for dinner, try lunch, which usually has more openings and costs less.

Shows sell out in advance

Royal Caribbean opens up its reservations system months before the sailing, so cruisers can start filling up their social calendars with specialty restaurants, shore excursions, onboard activities and entertainment. Icon passengers pounced.

A week before the ship set sail, I scrolled through scores of sold-out events and activities on the app. I snagged a matinee ticket for “The Wizard of Oz” and an evening reservation for the premiere of “Starburst: Elemental Beauty,” an ice skating performance inspired by the periodic table. However, “Aqua Action!” — a splashy spectacle with divers, acrobats and aerialists — was fully booked. So was the comedy show at the Attic, one of the smaller venues. (The 1,219-seat Royal Theater, where Dorothy and Toto perform, is one of the largest.)

Schneider said passengers without reservations should not lose hope. The cruise line often releases additional seats during the sailing. You can pore over the app or save time and go directly to a box office, where the crew members have all the listings at their fingertips.

Outside the Attic, a cheerful



ANDREA SACHS/The Washington Post

Options at Surfside Eatery, one of the ship’s complimentary restaurants. Icon of the Seas has 40-plus restaurants, bars and lounges — split between complimentary venues and specialty ones that charge a cover fee or a la carte prices.

staff member booked me seats for three headliners. (The acts often change week by week.) Though she could not find an opening for “Aqua Action!” or the stand-up comedy, she recommended arriving 30 to 45 minutes before show time and joining the standby line. Ten minutes before the performance, the staff will open up the venue to everyone. (On the flip side, if you have a reservation, don’t arrive late, or a cruiser like me might take your seat.) This strategy worked for both shows, and my seats were a safe distance from the splashing and heckling zones.

Icon tip: Cruisers often bail on late-night performances scheduled on port days and on the last evening of the cruise, so your standby chances improve for these shows.

Cabin options

The Icon offers nearly 30 cabin types. In descending order, the 1,772-square-foot, three-story Ultimate Family Townhouse, which debuted on the Icon, starts at \$100,000. It is sold out through April 2026. The windowless, 157-square-foot Interior Plus starts at \$3,600 per week and also books up.

For the maiden voyage, a member of a private Facebook group for Icon cruisers organized a cabin crawl featuring 13 staterooms. The organizer’s father, who was directing traffic to the panoramic suite, told me that an astounding 80 people showed up for the free tour.

One of the biggest debates among cruisers pitted the traditional balcony against the infinite balcony, a floor-to-ceiling window whose top portion opens halfway. The pro-infinite side, which includes Genung, a father of two, says the convertible window is safer for families with young children, because kids can’t fall out of the open upper portion. Genung said the wall-length window also provides guests with more cabin space.

The anti-infinite camp points

out that when the window is down, the air conditioning turns off. In a balcony room, you can enjoy the sunshine and fresh air outdoors while your travel buddy cools off in the chilled cabin.

I was on Team Balcony. When I wanted a private audience with the ocean, I simply stepped onto my private balcony. The waves usually drowned out my neighbors’ talking and coughing.

My midship cabin was bright, spacious and versatile with a couch, a desk-and-chair combo, and a smattering of art, decorative pillows and outlets. I never stubbed my toe, a rarity for me on cruise ships. I had ample storage, with wire baskets in the closet and abundant drawers and shelves. I actually unpacked, a first.

Icon tip: With the RoyalUp program, you can bid on an upgrade, such as an interior cabin to an ocean-view balcony. The cruise line ranks your offer from weak to strong.

The takeaway

The Icon is massive and caters to the masses. Even so, I could carve out an experience that aligned with my preferences and travel style. The public spaces are large and airy, with views of the sea and sky, so I never felt claustrophobic. The neighborhoods flow together, so I rarely got lost. I could always find a seat around the pool, if not in the pool. I never wanted for anything or waited too long.

However, to squeeze the most out of the ship, I needed to plan better and pay more for extras. I spent a lot of time scanning the daily calendar on the app, plotting my day instead of actually enjoying it.

With a few exceptions — at a 10,000-balloon drop and the Ships Ahoy! parade in the Royal Promenade — I never felt squished. However, once the ship reaches full capacity, I worry that Icon will become a literal sea of humanity, and the sparkle of the early cruises could fade.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Engelhorn's bounty of brand-name buys

Store in Mannheim, Germany, offers plethora of upscale apparel, accessories for whole family but also plenty of bargains

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

I don't know anyone who would fork over 1,300 euros for a designer ski jacket or 700 euros for a pair of Chanel sunglasses.

But apparently others do, as there's enough demand for brand names and high-end fashion to keep Engelhorn, an upscale department store in Mannheim, Germany, in business for more than a century.

For Americans who want the Saks Fifth Avenue experience in Germany, Engelhorn is the place to go, with the likes of Prada, Burberry, JOOP!, Hugo Boss, UGG and Marc O'Polo on its racks and shelves. Meanwhile, there are bargains to be found as well.

Apparel and accessories for the whole family are spread across more than 161,000 square feet on six floors.

On a recent dreary February day, an excursion to Engelhorn, about an hour's drive from Kaiserslautern, was, well, something to do to chase the winter blues.

It was a refreshing change from the old tried-and-true K in Lautern in downtown Kaiserslautern and the Ramstein Air Base exchange, even if just to window-shop.

The ground floor alone has a lot to take in, including a delectable display of French pastries, a Swiss chocolate shop, an in-house florist, a collection of jewelry made in Copenhagen, Denmark, and a huge array of sunglasses.

Kids can ride a wooden slide or pretend to drive a wooden van set up in the children's section while parents contemplate whether they can afford a pair of royal blue Burberry high-tops.

Despite the plethora of sky-high price tags, there were sales to be found, some better than others. An assortment of Christmas-themed Happy Socks for kids was marked down 25% to 7 euros, while men's Ralph Lauren polo shirts were discounted 33%. Using a VAT form would drop the price further.

Worn out from browsing through the endless racks of clothes, I rode the escalator to the seventh floor, where several restaurants offer rooftop views over the city.

The Faces Lounge serves a reasonably priced breakfast and lunch, and the Roof Garden serves street food like burgers starting at 11:30 a.m. Monday to Saturday.

For the fancier evening crowd, Coq au Vin features wines from the Pfalz and Alsace regions, along with French cuisine.

A cappuccino and streusel were enough to fuel a second round of shopping, this time across the street at Engelhorn's sporting goods store. A Tripadvisor review called it heaven for athletic needs, and I'd have to agree.

It was seven floors of gear and garb for just about any sporting endeavor under the sun, from cycling and camping to golf, tennis and weightlifting.

The best part was the bargains, such as an array of Nike and Adidas running shoes discounted 50% to 60% from the original price. I found a pair of LeBron Witness VII Nike basketball shoes for my son marked down from 114.99 euros to 74.99 euros.



PHOTOS BY JENNIFER H. SVAN/Stars and Stripes

Shoppers can kick back on this sofa amid browsing the six floors at Engelhorn, an upscale fashion retailer in Mannheim, Germany.



Clothing at Engelhorn can cost a pretty penny — or, as with this sweater, euro.



A display of French pastries tempts customers as they walk through the front doors of Engelhorn. Several restaurants with skyline views of Mannheim can also be found on the top floor of the department store.

Engelhorn Mode im Quadrat

Address: O5 1, Mannheim, Germany
Hours: Monday to Thursday, 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sunday closed
Information: Phone: +49 621 1670100, Phone: engelhorn.de

Jennifer H. Svan

One could spend the whole day between the two Engelhorn shops, but Mannheim, known as the City of Squares for its grid-like pattern, has lots of other retail offerings, from fashion boutiques, indoor plazas, smaller furniture stores and shoe outlets.

Most shops and department stores are along the "Planken" shopping street between O and P7, the parallel Q7, adjoining side streets and the Marktplatz near the end of the Planken. All locations are within walking distance.

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 @stripesktown



Engelhorn also has a separate sporting goods store which, unlike its main department store, sells name brands at steep discounts. The fashion retailer has been in Mannheim, Germany, since 1890.



You won't find moon boots like this at the base exchange. Engelhorn is loaded with quirky footwear and costly name brands.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Gastronomic risk has juicy reward

Sorbillo in Naples offers traditional favorites, Neapolitan version of maligned pineapple pizza

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Until recently, there have been two unbreakable pizza rules in Naples.

First, it must be eaten immediately after it comes out of the oven. You don't wait for others at the table to get theirs or you risk diminishing the joy that comes with a Neapolitan pie.

The second rule is that pineapple is vietato, or prohibited.

But one of Italy's most famous pizza chefs brazenly cast that tenet aside in a December Instagram post challenging fellow Italians to give pineapple on pizza a chance.

"Surely 99% of the 'Neapolitan Pineapple Pizza' skeptics have never tried it," Gino Sorbillo wrote Dec. 30. "Try asking (them), have you ever eaten it?"

The backlash was swift and certain.

"I have unfollowed you," wrote one of 449 respondents. Many questioned Sorbillo's loyalty to Italian culture, tradition and cuisine. One asked whether he would sell his mother.

With that in mind, I recently visited his shop on Via dei Tribunali, in the heart of Naples' historic Centro Storico. Established in 1935 by Sorbillo's grandparents, the pizzeria has grown into a chain of international restaurants.

There are five more in Naples and 14 others elsewhere, including in Rome, Milan, Miami and Tokyo. Another is planned to open soon on Italy's famed Amalfi coast.

I recommend the historic Tribunali location, with its eye-catching architectural elements and lively street scene.

The interior boasts natural stone and wood finishes with modern lighting and decorative touches. The cozy first floor has tables tightly nested in the main dining area and an adjacent room. Additional seating is upstairs.

We sat at an eating bar situated by a large picture window that looked out onto the street. My dining companion reminded me of another rule: Don't come before 7:30 p.m. or the pizza oven won't be hot enough. We were just in time.

Sorbillo's menu is solely devoted to pizza. Traditional favorites such as Margherita or marinara

accompany more complex offerings with specialty cheeses and meats, such as mortadella, prosciutto and pancetta.

There's even a vegan pizza with "cheese" made from tofu. But pizza con ananas, or pineapple pizza, isn't listed.

I ordered that one. The waiter gave me a knowing chuckle. I smiled and nodded. It was a sort of secret handshake in the spirit of the old speakeasies during Prohibition.

My friend ordered the *Ciro*, which features a sauce made with tomatoes grown on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius, Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese and oregano.

The *Ciro* arrived first, and it didn't disappoint. The traditional paper-thin Neapolitan crust was lightly charred, giving the pizza a slight smokiness.

The absence of the traditional mozzarella topping only enhanced enjoyment of the perfectly seasoned tomato sauce. My dining companion quickly devoured every bite, save one for me.

My pizza arrived a few moments later with a caramelized pineapple ring in the center.

A few other pineapple pieces were scattered on top of the pie, which was blanketed with smoked provolone, a dusting of pecorino cheese and a few basil leaves.

The smoky and salty cheeses balanced the sweetness of the fruit with the basil, offering freshness to each bite. It was flavorful without being cloying.

There was nothing American about it. It was pure Neapolitan genius.

We asked one of our waiters what he thought of the pizza. He shrugged his shoulders before quickly leaving the table, our question unanswered. It's a touchy subject, my friend said.

It should be noted that the pineapple pizza currently is available only at the Via dei Tribunali location.

Later, the cashier told us Sorbillo sells about 50 pineapple pizzas each day.

That's a small portion of the more than 1,000 pies baked daily at the location, but it's still popular, he noted.

As one Instagram commenter said: "Bravo, Gino!"

bath.alison@stripes.com
@alisonbath_



PHOTOS BY ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

The original Sorbillo pizzeria was founded in 1935 on Via dei Tribunali in Naples' Centro Storico neighborhood. The business is an international chain.



Sorbillo

Address: Via dei Tribunali 32, Naples, Italy
Hours: Noon-3:30 p.m.; 7-11:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday.
Prices: 4.50-10 euros for most pizzas; 2-5.50 euros for water, soda and glasses of beer and wine; 9-14 euros for half-liters or full bottles of wine.
Information: Phone: +39 081 446 643; online: sorbillo.it

Alison Bath



The *Ciro* doesn't have the traditional mozzarella topping but does include a sauce made with tomatoes grown on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius.



Gino Sorbillo defied convention by creating a pineapple pizza, which caused an uproar. Yet many patrons have shown a willingness to try the pizza.

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WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY KELLY AGEE/Stars and Stripes

Fujiten Snow Resort at the base of Japan’s most famous mountain is just over an hour’s drive from many U.S. bases in metro Tokyo.

Snow close to Tokyo

Fujiten Snow Resort has a slope for every skier, snowboarder

BY KELLY AGEE
Stars and Stripes

If skiing or snowboarding is your thing, Fujiten Snow Resort at the base of Japan’s most famous mountain is just over an hour’s drive from U.S. bases in metro Tokyo.

Fujiten, at the first station of Mount Fuji in Narusawa village, has multiple slopes perfect for beginners and experts alike. And the view of the renowned mountain is picture-perfect.

The resort has seven separate ski runs, a lodge, cafe, equipment rentals and a children’s area. Three ski lifts are available: a family lift, a quad lift and a romantic lift.

Skiers simply purchase a pass, scan it at the lift gate and away they go. For someone not too fond of heights, the ride up the slope isn’t so bad; soothing music plays on the public address system along the way. An employee is waiting at the top to assist skiers and boarders off their chairs.

The two longest ski runs, suitable for beginner and intermediate skiers, are 1,300 meters long, or just over 1,400 yards. A 500-meter family slope is perfect for beginners.

The resort also features steeper, advanced courses and a terrain park with several large jumps, rails and boxes for advanced skiers and snowboarders.

The slalom course takes skiers and snowboarders 1,330 meters downhill through a forest. As a beginning snowboarder, I really enjoyed this course; the snow was very soft, so falling while practicing was not a painful experience.

The Fuji Mountain View Lift, which costs 1,500 yen, or about \$10.15, is available for those who aren’t skiing or snowboarding. From the observation deck at the summit, visitors can enjoy a panoramic view of Mount Fuji and Lake Kawaguchi.

On the QT

Directions: About two hours or less by car from most U.S. bases near Tokyo. 401-0320 Yamanashi, Minamitsuru District, Narusawa, 8545-1

Times: The reports is typically open from mid-December to early April. Hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday; 8 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. on weekends.

Costs: Prices vary. See www.fujiten.net for a breakdown. Children 3 and under are free; adult day pass, \$27, weekends and holidays, \$37.11, children ages 4 to elementary students, \$16.87 per day and \$27 on weekends and holidays. Four-hour passes on weekdays, \$20.25 and weekends, \$27.

Food: Many options available onsite.

Information: www.fujiten.net

Kelly Agee

At Chibikko Ai Land, families can play away from the boarders and skiers. At the nursery, babysitters will care for children while their parents hit the slopes; reservations are required and can be made online.

When you get hungry, Restaurant Cologne serves ramen dishes and Restaurant Mominoki offers curry, pasta, steak and chicken dishes. Unfortunately, neither has vegetarian options.

There are also food stands. Crepes and Fast Foods serves sugar-and-strawberry on a stick for 200 yen and a popular cheese bread shaped like a 10-yen coin for 500 yen.

Parking at the resort is free on weekdays and 1,000 yen on weekends and holidays.

Coin lockers and changing rooms are available. Rental equipment is available too, but you may find it less expensive at your base recreational services.

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Fujiten Snow Resort, at the first station of Mount Fuji in Narusawa village, has multiple slopes perfect for beginners and experts alike.



Fujiten Snow Resort has seven separate ski runs, three lifts, a lodge, cafe, equipment rentals and a children’s area.



Crepes and Fast Foods at Fujiten Snow Resort serves a popular cheese bread shaped like a 10-yen coin for 500 yen.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY JEREMY STILLWAGNER/Stars and Stripes

Tables double as retro arcade machines at Coffee Zingaro in Tokyo's Nakano Broadway.

Retro games, food, fun

Funky Tokyo cafe Coffee Zingaro has arcade machines, whimsical treats

BY JEREMY STILLWAGNER
Stars and Stripes

Coffee Zingaro is a small cafe at Nakano Broadway in Tokyo, and after hearing about its artsy retro theme and tables that doubled as arcade machines, I had to stop by.

Contemporary artist Takashi Murakami opened the cafe in a reimagined, post-pandemic setting in April 2023.

The pop artist — mentioned with the likes of Yayoi Kusama and Andy Warhol — is best known for “The Hysteria of This Flower Explained” and “My Lonesome Cowboy,” a piece that sold for \$15.2 million in 2008.

Eager to investigate, I hopped a train with friends to Nakano Station. A 10-minute walk brought us to Nakano Broadway and Coffee Zingaro.

The décor is a retro vibe that echoes from the Showa period (1926-1989), including tabletop games from the 1970s to 1990s. Play the games by purchasing tokens for 500 yen. Each token gets you one play, and each table offers a different game.

Examples of Murakami’s art are displayed on large, cathode-ray-style TVs.

My group tried the flower pancake and melon soda float, plus a flower salmon burger and flower pudding.

My flower pancake was about an inch thick and came with butter, whipped cream and syrup. A little on the eggier side, but it was good nonetheless.



Coffee Zingaro’s flower pancake is a bit eggy, but still good.



The melon soda float is topped with flower-shaped ice cream.



Coffee Zingaro

Location: 5-52-15, 2F, Nakano city, Tokyo 64-0001
Directions: On the second floor of Nakano Broadway, just a short walk from Nakano Station’s north exit.
Prices: Most menu items cost between 650 yen and 1,200 yen.
Hours: Open noon to 7 p.m. Thursday to Monday. Check Instagram for updated business hours and holiday closures.
Dress: Casual
Information: 03-5942-8382; @coffee_zingaro on Instagram
Jeremy Stillwagner

The melon soda float is exactly what it sounds like; the only twist is the flower-shaped ice cream on top.



The flower salmon burger comes with a playfully imprinted bun.

I paid 2,050 yen, or about \$13.75, for just the pancake and drink.
The food is exactly what you expect it to be, but more a complement to the cafe’s funky atmosphere than the main attraction.
Coffee Zingaro is a bit overpriced, but it’s still fun to experience.

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Maple Oatmeal Muffins just happen to be vegan

BY BECKY KRYSTAL
The Washington Post

One of the food-writing clichés I try to avoid is “you won’t miss the [whatever ingredient it doesn’t have] in this [whatever the dish is].” After all, any recipe that is gluten-free, dairy-free, egg-free, nut-free, meatless or whatever specific dietary need you want to talk about, should be able to stand on its own merits. It’s good for what it is, not despite what you’re comparing it to or what it’s lacking.

That being said, as I wrote the introduction to my recipe for Maple Oatmeal Muffins, I at first forgot to mention that they are vegan. Whether that says more about how comfortable I’m becoming with vegan baking or how indistinguishable they are from muffins made with dairy and eggs, I’m not sure.

What I am sure about is how much I love these muffins. They’re tall, tender and barely sweet, the kind of treat that feels more like a nourishing breakfast than dessert.

I challenged myself to create a muffin that was whole-wheat, vegan and naturally sweetened. I wanted something that would appeal to as many people as possible without tasting like I was settling for anything less than “wow.”

One key step is to allow oats to soak in boiling water for 15 minutes. This causes them to swell and soften, trapping liquid and ensuring that by the time the oats are added to the muffin batter and baked, they burst, almost completely melting into the crumb and giving up their starch power to bind everything together. Unlike a lot of other baked goods with oats, there are no tough flakes chew through. You would probably not even know they were there.

Even taking into account the applesauce, the muffins were barely sweet. In fact, a few tasters thought they could be a tad sweeter, so I increased the amount of dried cherries — even tart, unsweetened did the trick. Feel free to swap in dried blueberries, cranberries or raisins.

Using whole-wheat pastry flour, which is softer and lower in protein than regular whole-wheat flour, was another way to guarantee a tender muffin. Or, a 50-50 blend of all-purpose and regular whole-wheat flours works just as well and is maybe even slightly less crumbly.

The muffins need no adornment to be satisfying and rich-tasting (without the rich ingredients!), though on subsequent days they’re especially good toasted with a bit of butter or jam.



SCOTT SUCHMAN/For The Washington Post

Maple Oatmeal Muffins are at their spongy best if the oats are soaked in boiling water.

Maple Oatmeal Muffins

Servings: 12 (makes 12 muffins)

Active time: 20 mins. Total time: 1 hour.

Ingredients

- 1 cup old-fashioned rolled oats
- ¾ cup boiling water
- ½ cup unsweetened apple-sauce (from one 4-ounce container)
- ½ cup maple syrup (any grade)
- ½ cup neutral oil, such as canola or grapeseed, plus more for the pan

- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon fine salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cardamom
- 2 cups whole-wheat pastry flour
- 1¼ cups dried tart cherries, preferably unsweetened

Directions

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 375 degrees.

Place the oats in a large, heat-proof bowl and pour in the boiling water. Stir to combine, and cover the bowl with a plate or lid large enough to trap the moisture. Let rest for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, lightly brush the wells of a 12-cup muffin pan with oil.

After the oats have hydrated, add the applesauce, maple syrup, oil and vanilla and whisk to thoroughly combine. Whisk in the baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon and cardamom until combined. Using a flexible spatula, gently fold in the flour, scraping the bottom and sides of the bowl as you mix. Don’t worry about some dry patches at this point — best not to overmix before the fruit goes in. Add the dried cherries and stir a few more times until they’re evenly distributed.

Scoop the batter into the prepared muffin pan and bake for 18 to 20 minutes, or until the muffins are golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center of one of the muffins comes out clean. Let cool on a wire rack in the pan for 5 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Q&A

A life of adventure

Star Wars actor Billy Dee Williams details career from Broadway to big screen in his new memoir

BY DONALD LIEBENSON
The Washington Post

In a 1976 profile, the New York Times referred to Billy Dee Williams, the dashing leading man opposite Diana Ross in “Lady Sings the Blues” and “Mahogany,” as “the black Clark Gable.” But frankly, my dears, he did not give a damn. In his new memoir, “What Have We Here? Portraits of a Life,” he writes, “I wanted to be known as one of the best actors of my generation, period. But the opportunities weren’t the same for me as they were for Gable.”

Williams wants to be clear, however, that his is not a “victim story.” He writes: “I don’t think exclusively in terms of the Black experience, the white experience, or any other experience, except the human experience.”

“What Have We Here?” (the title taken from the instantly iconic words that Williams’ Star Wars character, Lando Calrissian, said upon meeting Princess Leia in “The Empire Strikes Back”) chronicles a creative journey that started in Harlem and landed Williams on Broadway as well as on screens big and small.

Williams spoke with The Washington Post about the unexpected literary figure who inspired his memoir, why he shunned blaxploitation films and how he dealt with irate Star Wars fans. This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

The Washington Post: Why write your memoir now?

Williams: I’m 87 in April. I’m at that juncture where I’m thinking in terms of legacy. The memoir I originally wanted to do was a coffee-table book that told my life story through my paintings. I’m still working on that.

Did you read other celebrity memoirs for inspiration?

Many years ago, I read “The Catcher in the Rye,” by J.D. Salinger, and I always thought of myself as being very much like that boy. Life always seemed to be a kind of adventure, and I thought if I had to talk about my life, I would talk about my life in that particular way. I’ve lived a very eclectic life. Because I’m a painter, I see myself as the full spectrum of colors. I’m not inclined to embrace this idea of one thing or the other. I see myself as very much a part of a universal truth.

Your first Broadway audition was at the age of 8.

A Broadway musical, “The Firebrand of Florence.” ... My mom worked as the elevator operator at that theater. They were looking for a little boy. She took me to the audition, and I remember walking across

the stage. They had me walk a second time. I was really enamored. I wanted to do it a third time, and they said I didn’t need to do it anymore. I insisted, to the point where I started crying. I always said I cried my way into show business.

A New York Times profile at the time said you came from the ghetto.

Whenever people see success from someone who is a minority, they immediately think this is one of those rags-to-riches ghetto success stories. I remember doing “The Merv Griffin Show” after starring in “Brian’s Song.” He asked where I came from. I wanted to have a little amusement, so I said, “New York.” He asked, “Where in New York?” I said, “New York City.” I tried to avoid the whole Harlem thing. He got really frustrated and stopped asking where I came from.

During that time, blaxploitation films were at their height. With the arguable exception of “Hit!”, you did not appear in these films. What did you think of the genre?

I tried to avoid it. It wasn’t the direction I wanted to take. I wanted to be a romantic lead. The movies I fell in love with when I was growing up

were the romantic comedies. I envisioned myself doing the stuff William Powell and Melvyn Douglas did.

You broke the Star Wars color barrier with Lando Calrissian in “The Empire Strikes Back” and cut quite a dashing figure doing so.

I didn’t play him as Black.

That’s what you told Donald Glover when he reached out to you when he was cast as a young Lando for “Solo: A Star Wars Story.”

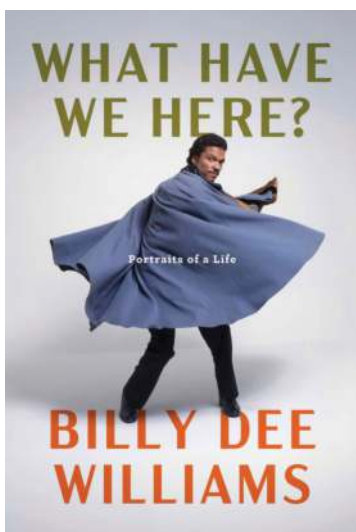
I told him, “Just be charming.”

Bruce Dern used to tell stories about being confronted by John Wayne fans who were irate with him for shooting Wayne in “The Cowboys.” You write about Star Wars fans being angry with you for seemingly betraying Han Solo at the end of “Empire.”

I always found it amusing and sometimes a little scary. Every now and again you run into someone who takes that stuff very seriously. But Lando was up against Darth Vader and had to make some sort of bargain with him. It got to the point where I finally had to say to people, “Did anyone die? Relax.”

You are an icon of cool. Who were your screen role models?

My father was pretty cool, but it’s not anything I spent time thinking about. I look at myself as a walking absurdity. I take my work seriously, but I don’t take myself seriously.



Billy Dee Williams, shown in 2019, has written a memoir, “What Have We Here? Portraits of a Life.” Williams says now, at almost 87, he is thinking in terms of legacy.

TNS

WEEKEND: BOOKS



Romantasy casting spell on bestseller lists

World building and mythology plus a love story make for a winning combination in some of today’s most popular books

By SARAH WENDELL
Special to The Washington Post

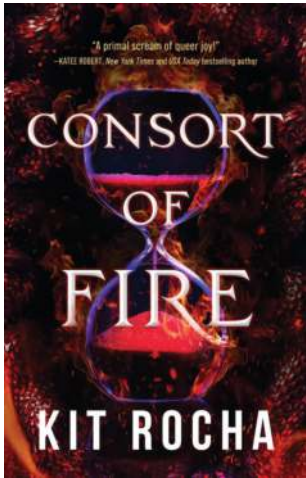
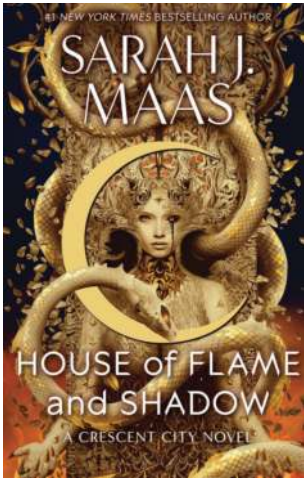
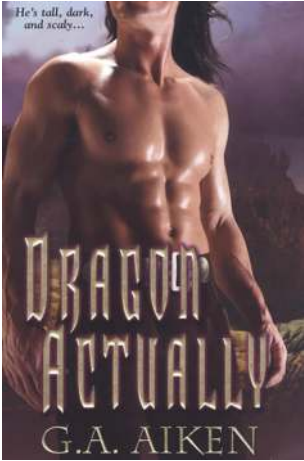
It’s been a while since a single book could summon thousands, but in November and again in January, fans lined up outside bookstores in the cold, awaiting the stroke of midnight. The draw? Romantasy. Rebecca Yarros’ “Iron Flame,” which broke a preorder record, arrived on Nov. 7 and shot to the top of bestseller lists worldwide. Then came Sarah J. Maas’ “House of Flame and Shadow,” the third volume in the Crescent City series. Released on Jan. 30, it sold more than 120,000 copies in the first week and was an instant bestseller too. Maas’ biggest competition may be herself — she has four novels on the New York Times bestseller list and 13 on the USA Today list — and Yarros, whose books are on five bestseller lists.

Romantasy is hot, in more ways than one. It’s one of the fastest growing genres, according to market researcher Circana, with sales increasing by 42% from 2022-23. Maas alone has sold 40 million copies of her books worldwide.

What is romantasy anyway? Like all fun indulgences such as brunch, Botox and Bennifer, romantasy is a portmanteau combining “romance” and “fantasy.” These books feature all the fantasy hallmarks, such as magic systems, mythology, high stakes and abundant world building, but the love story is central to the narrative. Romance gets top billing in part because “fantamance” is a terrible name, and because there’s a difference between a fantasy with romantic elements and a romantasy: In the latter, without the romance, the book falls apart.

The fastest way to tell if you’re looking at a romantasy is to look at the title. Is there a common noun, followed by two that involve something terrestrial and something corporeal? A “House of Earth and Blood”? A “Song of Blood and Stone”? You’ve got romantasy. You may also encounter a verb, followed by disaster and anger nouns (“Fall of Ruin and Wrath”) or authority figure of weather (“Queen of Shadows”). Don’t worry, though: Your friendly neighborhood algorithm can show you many more.

Romantasy may be a new-sounding term, but the genre is not. Among the earliest titles is “War for the Oaks” by Emma Bull (1987), which won the Locus Award for Best First Novel. It follows a young rock singer whose band and relationship fall apart just in time for her to be drafted into a fairy war. In the years since, romantasy has more often been found within other genre headings like “urban fantasy,” “epic fantasy” or “paranormal.”



With the increasing popularity of romantasy as a search term and a genre — the #romantasy tag alone has some 800 million views on TikTok, for example — some of the early, influential books are getting new covers that move away from the classic clinch of two people fervently embracing in favor of more current styles, such as bas-relief illustrations of something on fire, encased in ice or both. C.L. Wilson’s “Lord of the Fading Lands,” originally published in 2007, has a new cover that reflects romantasy’s influence on marketing imagery. Bramble, a new fantasy and romance imprint from Tor, is publishing “The Spellshop” by Sarah Beth Durst in a hardcover edition with purple-tinted edges and a luminous cover

that adds a hefty dose of “cozy” to the romantasy. Long-running romantasy series can fill miles of shelves with books from Jennifer L. Armentrout, Nalini Singh, Kresley Cole, L. Penelope and Jennifer Estep. Indie publishers have their own romantasy titles as well, such as “Daughter of No Worlds” by Carissa Broadbent and “Trial of the Sun Queen” by Nisha J. Tuli. There are on-line reader spaces like StoryGraph and subreddits like r/fantasyromance that are actively swapping book suggestions — and of course BookTok and Instagram. But if you’re new to romantasy and want to see what the fuss is about, here are a few recommendations:

‘House of Flame and Shadow’ by Sarah J. Maas

The latest in the spicy and rich Crescent City series that began with “House of Earth and Blood” in 2020, this story finds the lead characters worlds apart and yearning for home, and may include special surprises for well-read Maas fans as well. And, an added treat for audiobook fans: A new audio version of the first book featuring a full cast of voice actors, with music and sound effects, will release in two parts, beginning Feb. 29.

The Mead Mishaps series by Kimberly Lemming

The titles say it all — “That Time I Got Drunk and Saved a Demon,” “That Time I Got Drunk and Yeeted a Love Potion at a Werewolf.” Kimberly Lemming is having blast playing with the tropes and clichés of romance and fantasy.

‘Consort of Fire’ by Kit Rocha

If you like your romantasy with dragons, look no further. Kit Rocha’s new series features a seductress, a handmaiden/assassin and a dragon who wants to possess them both.

‘Dragon Actually’ by G.A. Aiken

Much of the hot dragon romantasy can trace its lineage to books like “Dragon Actually,” by G.A. Aiken, the first of a series that features a ferocious heroine named Annwyl the Bloody who trains with a mysterious, arrogant knight during the day, and shares her secrets at night with a dragon named Fearghus the Destroyer.

WEEKEND: MUSIC



AP PHOTOS/Stars and Stripes illustration

From left: Olivia Rodrigo, Chris Stapleton, Miley Cyrus, Billie Eilish and Jelly Roll are just a handful of artists capable of bringing a classic hit back to life with a remake.

Searching for 2024’s ‘Fast Car’

Who can follow in Luke Combs’ footsteps and strike gold with a 35-year-old song?

I was on the phone with my dad, predictably dismissing the Grammy Awards ceremony, when he, who had it on his television, said, “Oh, she’s on now.” The “she” he was referring to was Tracy Chapman. Neither one of us was aware that she would be there, let alone performing “Fast Car,” her decades-old hit, alongside Luke Combs, who rejuvenated the song last year, making it a No. 1 single on the country music charts all these years later.

The performance was transfixing. Both of us kind of shut up and just watched/listened. Not

LINER NOTES

By Colin McGuire

only was it touching, but it proved to be my favorite highlight of the night. Chapman

looked great, sounded great and was even received in a respectfully great manner by the live crowd. Combs knew the assignment, too, as he seemed happy to play second fiddle to the performance’s biggest star. I keep going back to watch it because if nothing else, those five-and-a-half minutes felt so wholesome.

And yet, as I keep pulling it up on Al Gore’s internet, I find myself asking myself the same question: What could be 2024’s “Fast Car”? Combs’ version climbed up the charts 35 years after the track’s initial release; what current pop star could reach into the

depths of the 1989 hit list this year and perhaps cook up some magic of their own? I did some research and here are my entirely unqualified suggestions:

Chris Stapleton — “She Drives Me Crazy”: This could have gone to Nathaniel Rateliff, but we’re talking about bigger pop names here, so Stapleton gets the nod. Plus, the “Tennessee Whiskey” singer doesn’t not have the same vocal inflection Fine Young Cannibals’ Roland Gift displayed on this 1989 hit single. Just imagine this thing slowing down, leaving room for an R&B groove and sparse, tortured vocals from one

of country music’s most interesting modern singers.

Lauren Mayberry — “Like A Prayer”: OK, this is only here because she worked it into her solo tour sets last year, and as we all know by now, I’m the biggest Chvrches stan this side of Scotland. Sue me.

Miley Cyrus — “If I Could Turn Back Time”: 2024’s Cher is 1989’s Miley Cyrus. Or something like that. Say what you want about Billy Ray’s daughter, but she had the second-best performance of this year’s Grammys

SEE SEARCHING ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

For album’s 50th anniversary, Wings adds a bare bones ‘Band on the Run’

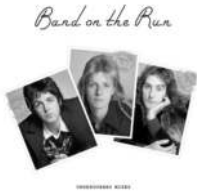
By Scott Bauer
Associated Press

Sometimes less is more.

At least that’s the thought behind Paul McCartney and Wings’ “Band on the Run (Underdubbed).”

Fifty years after its debut, the beloved album gets yet another rerelease, this time with a version that doesn’t include bonus tracks but instead pulls back some of the layers that were added after the original rough mixes. Hence, “underdubbed” in the title.

This isn’t the first time McCartney has revisited an album to strip off some of the bells and whistles to get closer to the original recording. He did it with the unfortunately titled “Let It Be ... Naked” back in 2003.



Wings
Band on the Run: 50th Anniversary Edition (Capitol)



Clockwise from left, Linda McCartney, Denny Laine and Paul McCartney are pictured in an outtake from the “Band on the Run” promo shoot in 1973.

paying to hear the “underdubbed” version. The answer to that depends on your level of McCartney fandom.

If “Band on the Run” is part of your musical DNA, then “Underdubbed” is a fun alternate take that gives a window into what might have been. If that doesn’t interest you, or you’ve somehow never listened to the original, stick with enjoying it the way McCartney first put it out.

Dire Straits

Dire Straits Live 1978-1992 (Rhino)

Dire Straits may be best known for their No. 1 song “Money for Nothing” (think Sting singing “I want my MTV!”) that came from their chart-topping 1985 album, “Brothers in Arms.”

But as their new “Dire Straits Live 1978-1992” box set shows, the band was much more than any one song or album.

The release proves they were also a force live with a deep catalog that goes far beyond the radio-friendly fare that put “Brothers in Arms” at No. 1 for nine weeks in the U.S.

The eight-CD or 12-album box set is a showcase for a wide range of Dire Straits songs: the storytelling of “Romeo and Juliet,” the sonic explorations of “Telegraph Road” and “Private Investigations” and more accessible material like “Walk of Life.”

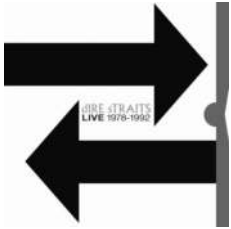
However, only 29 tracks are previously unreleased. And the bulk of those come from “Dire Straits Live from the Rainbow Theatre,” a 1979 show available for the first time. Spread over three vinyl records, the show captures the band after the success of “Sultans of Swing,” but before “Brothers in Arms” sent its global popularity through the stratosphere.

“Live at the BBC,” which had been first released in 1995, shows the band even earlier — in 1978, just as they were starting. It’s fun to hear them working for it with an audience that doesn’t greet the opening riffs of familiar songs with applause. There’s also an expanded version of “Alchemy,” the band’s 1984 live album, presenting the band just before the release of “Brothers in Arms.”

There’s no document of that 1985 tour in this box set and that’s a failure. Instead, the box set jumps ahead to its final 1992 world tour with “On the Night” and “Encores.”

“Dire Straits Live 1978-1992” serves as a fine live snapshot of the band’s evolution. The music is exceptional and presented in beautiful sonic clarity. However, the set could have dug even deeper to offer even more rarities and previously unreleased tracks.

— Scott Bauer
Associated Press



Searching: Songs from 1989 reimagined with today’s stars

FROM PAGE 28

when she dripped herself in spite while performing “Flowers,” and you can’t convince me her rugged, soulful pop vocals wouldn’t do justice to one of Cher’s biggest hits. This almost makes too much sense.

Billie Eilish — “The End of the Innocence”: Speaking of making too much sense, let’s Euro-fit this Don Henley classic, leave all of the room for all of the electronics to breathe in spaces never before heard, and let Billie explore each corner of the eerie atmosphere it would embody. Especially at this transitional point in her career

(she only just turned 22), this thing would be an entire mood.

Jelly Roll — “Love In An Elevator”: Hey. Why not? It’s not like Aerosmith will be hitting the road anytime soon.

Taylor Swift — “Blame It On The Rain”: All right, Taylor. Let’s see if that wry sense of humor you sometimes like to display is all it’s cracked up to be. The biggest frauds in the history of pop music meet the biggest pop star of the past 20 years. Talk about a Tortured Poets Department. This is either the best idea or worst idea here, and there is no in between.

Olivia Rodrigo — “Wicked Game”: First, did you know this year is the 35th anniversary of Chris Isaak’s crowning achievement? Second, with all the angst, spite, anger and passion Rodrigo brings to the pop music landscape these days, I’d pay Real American Dollars to see how she’d interpret this gentle sultry classic. If anyone could find the vinegar in this song in 2024, The Immaculate Cusser ought to be the one.

Justin Timberlake — “Another Day In Paradise”: JT is on the comeback trail with “Selfish,” but it’s going to be awfully in-

triguing to see how the general public responds to him after the whole Britney Spears stuff from last year. Another perpetually intriguing pop star from years past? Phill Collins, who always felt like he was in on the joke as much as Timberlake likes to pretend he is. Imagine Timberlake calling Timbaland to spruce up the drum machine for this song and watch as the Mickey Mouse Club alumnus attempts to pull on our heartstrings.

Doja Cat — “Head Like a Hole”: Utter chaos. That’s what this would be. Utter chaos. And precisely how Trent Reznor

would want it.

Noah Kahan or SZA or Adele — “Yer So Bad”: OK, I’m cheating on this one, but hear me out. Tom Petty’s “Full Moon Fever” is an embarrassment of riches. “Free Fallin’.” “I Won’t Back Down.” “Runnin’ Down A Dream.” But this little ditty has always been my favorite cut of them all. It’s so simple, it’s novel with its charm. Kahan could keep it semi-traditional. SZA could translate it into a murder story. And Adele could ballad-ify it with a wink and nod. Don’t tell me you wouldn’t be curious to hear all three.

WEEKEND: TELEVISION



APPLE TV+/AP

“Peanuts” characters Charlie Brown, left, and Franklin race in a soapbox derby in the animated Apple TV+ special “Snoopy Presents: Welcome Home, Franklin.”

Franklin finally in the spotlight

First Black character in ‘Peanuts’ comic strip gets a military backstory in new animated Apple TV+ special

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

The mild-mannered Franklin — the first Black character in the “Peanuts” comic strip — gets to shine in his own animated Apple TV+ special this month in a story about friendship.

Franklin is a newcomer who bonds with Charlie Brown and is welcomed to the Peanuts universe in “Snoopy Presents: Welcome Home, Franklin,” which premieres this weekend.

Co-writer Robb Armstrong, the cartoonist behind the “Jump Start” strip, says he’s building on the blueprints that “Peanuts” creator Charles Schulz left.

“Whenever you start with good ingredients, you have to work hard to make a bad cake out of it,” he says.

Race is never explicitly mentioned, but Armstrong and co-writer Scott Montgomery make a subtle nod when Franklin surveys the kids in his new town and remarks, “One thing was for sure: There was a lack of variety in this place.”

“I never wanted to come off preachy or anything, but it needed to be handled in the same way that I handled it in ‘Jump Start,’” Armstrong says. “I don’t come out and call people anything. I let the characters participate in a problem-solving process.”

The portrait of Franklin that emerges is of a boy who likes baseball and outer space, is good with his hands and listens to Stevie Wonder, Little Richard, James Brown and John Coltrane.

When he arrives in town, he’s tired of a life constantly moving, since his father’s military job takes their family from location to location.

“I have lived in a lot of different places, but none that I can call home,” he says.

But his introduction to the “Peanuts” gang initially goes poorly. He mistakes Lucy’s psychiatric booth for a lemonade stand and he freaks Linus out by picking a pumpkin from his patch.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d swear I was in ‘The Twilight Zone,’” Franklin says.

“Every time he’s moved, he’s had to learn how to make friends quick, and that meant that he didn’t feel he could

ever be his authentic self,” said director and story editor Raymond S. Persi. “So when he comes to this town, his normal tricks don’t work because these are kind of weird kids.”

Franklin made his first appearance in the newspaper strip on July 31, 1968, prompted by a request from a schoolteacher for Schulz to integrate his comic strip world in the wake of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Schulz introduced him by having Franklin return Charlie Brown’s wayward beach ball one day by the sea. It was a historical meeting and a statement: Many public beaches, like other public facilities such as schools, swimming pools, theaters and restaurants, were segregated at the time.

“What I’d like people to get out of it is that you don’t have to be something different for other people. Being yourself is what’s going to bring the right people into your lives.”

Raymond S. Persi

director and story editor, “Welcome Home, Franklin”

The Apple TV+ special re-creates that first meeting, with Franklin returning Charlie Brown’s errant beach ball and then the two building a sandcastle together.

“To have this very simple idea of two children who don’t know about racism, having fun playing at the beach, building something together, I think was just so smart,” Persi said.

Franklin and Charlie Brown soon enter a soapbox derby competition and their friendship is tested before a deep bond is forged.

“They’re not perfect. I’m not perfect. But we can get

through the rough spots together, as friends,” Franklin says.

“What I really like about the special is you’re getting a chance to see this friendship kind of grow in real time, in the way that real friendships do,” says Persi, who has directed animated projects with “The Simpsons,” Mickey Mouse and the Minions.

As usual for a “Peanuts” show, music plays a key role. Original music by Jeff Morrow leans into sophisticated jazz and, in nods to Franklin, Chuck Berry’s “Johnny B. Goode,” “Nothing from Nothing” by Billy Preston and some Coltrane play on a jukebox.

Armstrong has also used the special to correct some misperceptions about the 1973 classic “A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving.” In that special, Franklin sits by himself on one side of the Thanksgiving table, leading some to suggest he’s not been fully embraced. In the new special, Franklin is specifically asked to come sit with his new pals on their side during a pizza party celebration.

Armstrong says he started with that scene and then had to figure out how the gang got there. The writers came up with a soapbox derby.

“We needed something that was very highly action-oriented and packed with great risk. It had to be a competition,” Armstrong says.

The special has plenty of lessons for kids and adults — winning isn’t everything, friendships can be messy but rewarding and be your authentic self.

“What I’d like people to get out of it is that you don’t have to be something different for other people. Being yourself is what’s going to bring the right people into your lives,” Persi says.

Armstrong, who grew up revering Schulz, has a deep connection to Franklin. He became a cartoonist and a friend to Schulz. It was Schulz himself who asked the younger cartoonist if he would lend his last name to the character. So to have him years later spotlight Franklin in a TV special seems almost divine intervention.

“Sometimes a miracle happens,” Armstrong says. “If someone’s got a better answer, I’d love to hear it. I’m just convinced that sometimes God gets involved. And this is that.”

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

A mix of Bear Grylls and Kojak

‘This Is Us’ star Hartley finds his next ‘really great project’ in CBS’ ‘Tracker’ as a lone-wolf survivalist reward seeker

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Justin Hartley is one of those guys who is as comfortable in the rough outdoors as he is safe inside, enjoying creature comforts.

“Don’t get me wrong, I like room service. I like an airport greeter. But I also dig camping and stuff like that,” he says. “I love all of it. I love the idea of outdoors some days, where it’s like I’d rather look out the window. But then there are days where I’d rather be out in it.”

Hartley has lately been practicing his outdoors skills as the star of CBS’ new series “Tracker,” about a savvy, lone-wolf survivalist who makes his living earning rewards posted by police or citizens, like a mix of Bear Grylls and Kojak.

“I had just never seen a character like this before. He’s very unique,” says Hartley, who spent six seasons as Kevin Pearson on the acclaimed NBC series “This Is Us.” “I just love the idea that this guy is smart and he also can physically kick ass. I think that’s just so cool. It’s just what I think maybe every man strives for.”

The show opens with an injured hiker waking up in the Nevada desert after losing consciousness from a leg injury and gazing into the face of Hartley, who stabilizes her leg injury and gives her hope.

“What I think we’re dealing with here is a good, old-fashioned case of mild hypothermia,” he tells her. “You’re going to survive. You’re going to be A-OK.” He gets her out of danger and lands a \$50,000 bounty.

It’s a fine introduction to a rootless, haunted character who lives in an Airstream attached to his pickup, ready to go wherever the next reward takes him. There’s a weekly adventure, but also an ongoing attempt to explain how his dysfunctional childhood led him to this life.

“Tracker” — based on the novel “The Never Game” by Jeffery Deaver — impressed CBS so much that it premiered Sunday right after the Super Bowl, one of the most coveted TV spots all year.

“It probably feels like after a Super Bowl win and you sit in the locker room with your family and all these people that you’ve worked so hard with for so many years developing something and you just say, ‘Wow, we did it. We’re on air and we’re after the Super Bowl,’” he says. “I feel like we should have a trophy or something.”

Hartley’s character is a good man, but not just a good Samaritan. He’s in it for the financial gain.

“Cash is always welcome. I also take checks. Venmo, if that’s easier,” he says to families after locating their loved ones. “A reward becomes a binding contract at the moment of success.”

It doesn’t hurt that Hartley has matinee-idol looks with a lantern jaw and a physique to back that up. Both the first and second episodes have him shirtless within the first five minutes.

Ken Olin, the former “This Is Us” executive producer and director who co-executive produced “Tracker” and directed the pilot, said he and Hartley were itching



PHOTOS BY CBS/AP

Justin Hartley stars as Colter Shaw, a man who lives in an Airstream attached to a pickup and makes his living earning rewards for finding missing people, animals and items, in “Tracker,” which premiered Feb. 11.

“I just love the idea that this guy is smart and he also can physically kick ass. I think that’s just so cool. It’s just what I think maybe every man strives for.”

Justin Hartley
Colter Shaw in “Tracker”



Ken Olin, former “This Is Us” executive producer and director who also co-executive produced “Tracker,” says he and Hartley “were both in the mood to go do something where the guy’s got a job and a gun,” something more physically demanding.

to roam around outside after years of being in kitchens and living rooms for “This Is Us.”

“We were both in the mood to go do something where the guy’s got a job and a gun,” Olin says. “It’s much more demanding physically than, say, ‘This Is Us.’ And also, he’s pretty much in every scene, which is a whole different load for him to carry. But he’s fantastic at it.”

Hartley’s character, Colter Shaw, might be an expert tracker and bounty hunter, but he does share some characteristics with the more domestic Kevin Pearson.

“He certainly is led by his heart in a certain way,” the actor says. “I think those are always the characters that I’ve always been drawn to my entire life, actually. They’re a bit broken.”

Hartley hopes “Tracker” could become another huge network hit like “This Is Us,” but he knows how unlikely that is.

“Those things don’t happen to people like me. They don’t happen to anyone. It’s like winning the lottery,” he says.

The premise — a weekly search from people to animals to lost evidence or sentimental items — means the show has a vast resource. Or, as Hartley’s character says “I find it to be steady work. Everyone’s looking for something.”

Hartley says he wasn’t necessarily looking for more steady TV after “This Is Us” ended — just looking for anything good: “It wasn’t necessarily genre specific — comedy, action, thriller, horror. It wasn’t necessarily TV. The medium didn’t

matter. It didn’t matter to me. Co-star, guest star, lead — none of that mattered. It just had to be a really great project that I knew I was going to pour myself into and was excited about.”

“Tracker” also celebrates America’s outdoors, with visits to places network TV rarely goes — like Springland, Idaho, and Klamath Falls, Ore. — and different stories from those places.

“The physical beauty of America is just something that maybe we haven’t paid attention to for a while, and I wanted to do that,” Olin says. “I don’t want this to be formulaic.”

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS



HOPE ZUCKERBROW/AP

Hope Zuckerbrow, founder of the “cozy cardio” movement, shows her workout setup, including a walking pad, smoothie and TV remote.

A more comfortable form of exercise

‘Cozy cardio’ embraces the most appealing aspects of being a couch potato while keeping you off the couch

By MELISSA RAYWORTH
Associated Press

Political polarization. Economic struggles. Inequity. Climate change. War. In an often-bruising world, you can hardly blame people for seeking out ways to cushion themselves. From weighted blankets to “cozy” murder mystery novels to entire restaurants and cookbooks based on comfort foods, the appetite for comfortable things just keeps growing.

Now some are seeking comfort even in their physical exertion. They are, it seems, entering the era of “cozy cardio,” an activity that lies right at the crossroads of gym workout, self-pampering evening ... and nap time.

This method of (minimal) calorie burning has gained popularity on TikTok and Instagram ever since a woman named Hope Zuckerbrow began posting videos in late 2022. Let’s describe it by what it doesn’t do. It doesn’t require you to:

- squeeze into spandex workout clothes
- head out into the cold to drive to a fluorescently lit gym
- lift heavy things
- get winded to the beat of pulsating music

Cozy cardio simply involves walking in place — in the comfort of your home — using a mini treadmill or “walking pad.” No stress, no membership fees, no preening for other, buffer-than-thou gym rats. And you can even have a cup of hot tea by your side.

“I get so many messages from men and women — so many people — saying something along the lines of ‘thank you so much for kind of flipping my mindset on what I thought exercise is supposed to be,’” Zuckerbrow says. “This feels so doable.”

The self-pampering workout

The key is the setup: Wearing soft sweatpants and your favorite comfy shirt, you light a few scented candles, make a healthy smoothie or pot of tea, dim the lights and put on a favorite TV show or movie. With your drink handy, you walk for an hour while getting lost in whatever

er you’re watching, maybe walking just a bit more vigorously once you’re warmed up.

Forget “no pain, no gain.” Cozy cardio acknowledges that maybe you can’t take much more pain at this particular moment, so just enjoy getting some steps in while binge-watching “The Bear” in your pajamas and call that your workout.

When Zuckerbrow posts on social media, “80% to 90% of the video itself is me romanticizing the exercise that I’m about to do,” she says. “I am setting up my favorite beverage and I’m lighting those candles and my Scentsy and I’m getting my TV show.”

No, walking won’t give you six-pack abs. But could cozy cardio, which embraces the most appealing aspects of being a couch potato while keeping you off the couch, help even hardcore gym-avoiders stick with exercise long after New Year’s resolution season ends?

For people battling the common barriers to exercise, the answer could be yes, says Alex Montoye, assistant professor of clinical exercise physiology at Alma College in Michigan.

Montoye cautions that if you’re downshifting from vigorous daily workouts to something this mellow, the health benefits may plummet. But for someone who would otherwise watch TV from the couch, he says, it’s progress to watch while walking — especially if it becomes a daily habit.

People struggle to make healthy habits stick, which makes cozy exercise “kind of a genius idea,” says Catherine Sanderson, a professor of psychology at Amherst College in Massachusetts and author of “The Positive Shift: Mastering Mindset to Improve Happiness, Health, and Longevity.”

“It fits in with a lot of what we know about how to get people to actually maintain behavior change,” Sanderson says.

Along with removing the barriers to exercise, she says, “it very much relies on what psychologists would call positive reinforcement — the idea of, ‘It’s not just that I’m exercising. I’m getting to watch my favorite show. I’m

tapping into something I want to be doing already.”

Eliminate the competition by staying home

The cozy approach also works for gymgoers who feel burned out at the idea of constant striving.

Ko Im, a mental health advocate who has taught yoga and meditation in New York and other U.S. cities, remembers a phase several years ago when “yoga challenges” were a trend.

“It was the yoga pose of the day — really, really hard yoga poses,” Im says. More recently, she sees people pushing themselves to make the leaderboard in all their Peloton classes or to lose 5 more pounds.

“What I like,” she says, “is the idea of enjoying the journey, not the goal. Does it feel good in my body today?”

As cozy cardio gains traction, Zuckerbrow hears from people who didn’t realize they could enjoy the journey.

Alyssa Royse, owner of Rocket Community Fitness in Seattle, has been alternating between full-on workouts at her gym and cozy exercise at home. Some days she switches off the sound on her Peloton (“I don’t even want those cheery people talking to me”) and just pedals while watching “the trashiest TV I can find, because it just takes my brain somewhere else.”

The hashtag-friendly name “cozy cardio” could sound like an oxymoron. But perhaps, as 2024 takes root, it’s the compromise our culture needs.

Driving across town in icy weather and pushing through an hour of Zumba or lifting 20-pound kettlebells just isn’t possible some days. But lighting a candle in your living room and walking 3 miles in your pajamas while re-watching the final season of “Succession”? That’s within reach.

And it might just serve up enough endorphins and bring enough oxygen into your lungs to cope with whatever global crisis tomorrow could bring.

“Too many people look at exercise as an all-or-nothing thing,” Royse says. “It doesn’t give people room to just be where they are today. And I think that’s incredibly important.”

WEEKEND: FAMILY



iStock

It's natural for couples to have eyes only for each other in the first stages of a relationship.

Got ‘boyfriend sickness’?

The malady is common, and perhaps even healthy, in early relationships

By REBECCA FISHBEIN
Special to The Washington Post

Here's a test of your relationship knowledge. Do you know what boyfriend sickness is?

It happens when:

- A. Your boyfriend gets COVID-19.
- B. You get sick because you caught COVID-19 from your boyfriend.
- C. You feel heartsick over your boyfriend.
- D. You start a new romance and disappear from your friend group.

If you guessed D, then you've probably lost a friend — at least temporarily — to boyfriend sickness. Or perhaps you came down with it yourself.

Here's how it happens. Your friend starts dating someone new, and suddenly they're obsessed — bailing on plans, skipping group events and generally disappearing off the face of the planet in favor of their new beau. Then, a few months later, they're back, with or without the partner in tow.

The TikTok influencer and podcaster Tinx is credited with coining the term “boyfriend sickness” to describe this particular phenomenon, although it affects people of all genders and sexual orientations. “Boyfriend sickness” comes for us all, she notes. “I’ve also been the girl who ditched her friends,” she says in her video.

Chanakya Ramdev, a 32-year-old entrepreneur who lives in Ontario, says he recalls falling victim to “boyfriend sickness” in his 20s, when he started dating his first serious girlfriend.

“I thought she was perfect and amazing and I wanted to spend all my time with her,” he said. Which, he said, he did — until one day, while scrolling through Instagram, he came to the realization that he’d abandoned the rest of his social group.

“When you are in the heat of the moment, you don’t realize it,” he said. “But looking back, you’re like, ‘What the hell are you doing?’”

While “boyfriend sickness” is certainly annoying if you’re the pal losing your buddy, it’s actually a normal, even healthy early relationship stage, experts say. And the good news is, it’s mostly temporary.

Why we neglect previous attachments

When you start a new romantic relationship, you activate the brain’s attachment system, said Amir Levine, an associate professor of psychiatry at Columbia University. Our attachment styles — secure, avoidant or anxious — are formed in childhood. While our friendships are important, when you’re in a romantic

relationship, your brain works overtime to bond with your new partner.

“Humans are nuanced, but most of the time there’s one person at the top of hierarchy,” said Levine, co-author of “Attached.”

“If something bad happens to you, there’s one person you’re going to call. It’s your safety mechanism.”

This means that when you meet a prospective partner, Levine says, you have to take a stranger and bond with them securely enough that they shoot to the top of your attachment system and become your safe haven. “It takes a lot of scrambling and neuro-circuitry rewiring to make this complete stranger someone important,” Levine said.

This process, Levine says, requires two people to spend a lot of alone time together, like going on dates, gazing into each other’s eyes and just generally being around each other. This activates your brain’s reward system, making it incredibly rewarding to be in your new partner’s presence and distressing to be apart.

This process can take a few months. But once you’ve had enough time to bond, securely attach and know your partner isn’t going to disappear if you get drinks with the girls one night, you’ll be able to comfortably explore your other relationships again.

Levine noted that couples tend to want to share their social circles with one another once they’ve attached. “The next stage of bonding is, ‘I want you to meet my friends and my family,’” he said.

Those left behind can struggle

Many people in new relationships fall into what’s known as a “limerence phase,” which is a deep infatuation and “complete preoccupation” with the other person, said Charlotte Fox Weber, a psychotherapist and the author of “Tell Me What You Want.”

“It can pervade a lot of life, especially if you’re an obsessional type and have a mind-set where you think that love conquers all.”

Weber stresses that the experience can be painful for the friends left behind.

“I think it can feel threatening, and it can feel like a loss,” she said. “There can be a lot of social pressure to say how happy you are for the person. Part of you is happy but part of you feels ditched.”

Weber says that though romantic love is wonderful, it’s essential to remember that your friendships are important, too, and to make sure to nurture them even when you’re in the throes of new love. “Friendships are such a huge part of mental health, well-being, identity and purpose,” she said.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Stupid human tricks are a major pet peeve

Our family’s third Labrador retriever, a goofy guy named Gilligan, turned 1 year old last week. Suddenly, everyone’s a dog expert, hell-bent on enriching me with their wealth of canine knowledge. People must see me struggling with rambunctious Gilly, and want to assert dominance, nipping, bossing and taking control.

Thankfully, no one has humped my leg yet.

Just last week, Gilly and I joined a new walking group outside the local recreation center. The congregating women noticed Gilly sniffing the bushes and raised their voices to an excited pitch. Gilly strained at his harness, wanting to flop his big paws onto the women’s expensive coats, deposit yellow hairs all over their Lululemon pants and lick them right in the mouth.

“Gilly! Back!” I repeatedly tried to make him sit.

“Isn’t he sweet!” they squealed, while Gilly wriggled to break free.

“He’s turning 1, and he’s a handful,” I said, apologetically.

“Oh, but he’s a puppy! You just need to be consistent,” they advised.

I smiled and nodded my head with brows raised as if to say, “You’re so wise,” when my inner voice retorted, “Thanks for the expert advice, Captain Obvious.”

“He’ll go to Island Canine Academy for behavior training in a couple months,” I explained. “Gilly’s off to college!” I joked. “We’ve promised him a tiny lava lamp and a ‘Lassie’ poster for his crate at the Academy, isn’t that right, buddy?”

No one laughed.

A short lady with a red hat that made her look like a gnome told me about her Westie named Charlie. “I trained him using treats. You should try that,” Gnome said. My inner voice dripped sarcasm, “Eureka, Einstein! Treats to train dogs? Who knew!”

Our walking group leader arrived, and we began the planned four-mile trek. The gaggle of women naturally settled into packs of two or three, while Gilly tugged, stopped, sniffed and yanked along with me.

I was between two packs when I heard, “Hey!” A thin woman wearing a hat with a humongous mauve pom-pom trotted to catch up with me, blurting breathlessly, “Get a gentle leader. It’s the only thing that works for pulling dogs.” I’ve been told by countless people that this or that collar/leash/harness is the only one that works. I tried to tell Pom-pom about my experiences with gentle leaders, but she just kept yammering.

POM-POM: “The gentle leader goes around the dog’s —”

ME: “Yes, I know how it —”

POM-POM: “— snout, and it keeps them from —”

ME: “— works, because I used gentle leaders for our first —”

POM-POM: “— pulling. You need to get one, seriously.”

ME: “— dog to stop his pulling.”

Mercifully, Gilly dragged me toward a fat squirrel ahead, leaving Pom-pom behind. Another woman in an ice-blue beanie chirped, “My sister has Golden retrievers, and she swears, ‘If you can teach dogs to retrieve balls, you can teach them anything.’” My inner voice couldn’t stay silent any longer.

“Your sister says that teaching a RETRIEVER to RETRIEVE is the key to dog training? She’s a real genius, that one,” I sassed Beanie.

As we approached the end of our trek, Gilly stopped abruptly, circled three times, then crouched to make “a deposit” on the grass in front of the bank. The women walked on, without noticing that I’d fallen behind the pack.

“Forget behavior school; I’ll train you myself,” I announced to Gilly while he concentrated. “Don’t worry,” I assured him, “we’ll still get you that lava lamp.”

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

PUNCH LINES

BY DANIEL GRINBERG / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Daniel Grinberg, of Philadelphia, researches user experience for a utility company. This is his fifth crossword for The Times. It was inspired at a party when he heard someone with a new haircut cry out [the answer to 47-Across]. To which he thought [the clue to 47-Across] — which became the seed of this puzzle. Apart from the theme, Daniel tried to include new vocabulary in the grid. 1A, 116A, 10D, 15D, 36D and 74D are all appearing in a Times crossword for the first time. — W. S.

- ACROSS

1 Pink, purple and blue Pride display, familiarly

7 Hound

10 Kind of opening

13 Frontwoman for the Pussycats

18 Nipple rings

20 Target of an inventory scan

22 Acting like

23 Fault line?

25 Qualifier for a date

26 Olaf’s creator in “Frozen”

27 Nickname that drops “An-”

28 A gig has a thousand of these

29 Permitted

30 Permitted

31 Fine line?

35 Atomic number of neon

36 Preserves things?

37 Shaped like a kiwifruit

38 Processes

41 ____ attachment

44 Anatomical stabilizer

45 The Green Hornet’s assistant

46 Not down, in a way

47 Fishing line?

53 Mediterranean morsel

55 Get just right

56 Long-running police procedural, for short

57 Catalan artist Joan

58 Thought the world of

59 “To Kill a Mockingbird” setting

61 Match well with

62 First color-TV manufacturer

63 Subway line?

68 Tittle

69 1970s-’80s Supreme Court justice ____ F. Powell Jr.

70 Scams

73 With an eager spirit

76 Landed

77 Flying formations

79 March ____

80 South American grassland

81 Assembly line?

84 Variety

85 Boxing stats

88 Celestial shape

89 British bottoms

90 Ladybugs and fireflies

92 Some sports-car features

95 Currency replaced by the euro

97 North American fish with toxic roe

98 Power line?

101 Simple card game

104 Groundskeeping equipment

106 It’s signed after a break

107 Otherworldly creatures, for short

108 Z, to Zeno

109 Illegal offering

110 Subject line?

114 Passage of rite?

115 Two outs left, in baseball

116 Performed really badly

117 Timetable: Abbr.

118 “There’s more to the story, right?”

119 “The Shining” prop

120 Quakes

14 Post-surgery prescription

15 Private line?

16 Motivator

17 “Crikey!”

19 Brings in

21 Moved like a cat burglar

24 Word after dead or data

29 Volunteer’s declaration

31 Soothe

32 Communal housing arrangements

33 /, in math

34 Director Lupino

36 Co-founder of the Joining Forces initiative, with Michelle Obama

39 One role in a classic interrogation trope

40 Zoomed

41 World Heritage Site in Sicily

42 Ground grain

43 Dame Edna, for Barry Humphries

44 “Enough! I get the picture already!”

45 Capital of Japan until 1868

48 Hostile state

49 Volunteer’s declaration

50 Like many retired professors

51 Petty arguments

52 TLC or Run-D.M.C.

54 Person of interest?

58 HBO comedy about a sports agent

60 Salamander named after an Aztec deity

61 ____ knife

64 Gives a hand?

65 Hot spot

66 Genealogist’s chart

67 Kids and nannies

71 Liberated

72 N.S.A. agents, e.g.

73 Superficial, in a way

74 Rich with metaphor

75 Party line?

77 What might lead to a bridge

78 Subside

82 Second-year: Abbr.

83 Bunny ____ (photo prank)

86 Janitor’s ringful

87 Spanish “bear”

91 Kind of cleft

92 Switched

93 Actress Thompson of “Westworld”

94 Canadian Tulip Festival location

95 Light-headed sorts?

96 Selling points

99 School name that sounds like a Canadian territory

100 Hip Hop Awards channel

101 Gestational metric

102 First-stringers

103 Posts in a rage, perhaps

104 Degrees for C.F.O.s

105 Bog plant

108 New Mexican tribe

110 ____-courtin’

111 Shot in the arm, slangily

112 Word after stink or pink

113 What’s what in Oaxaca

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GUNSTON STREET



“Gunston Street” is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE

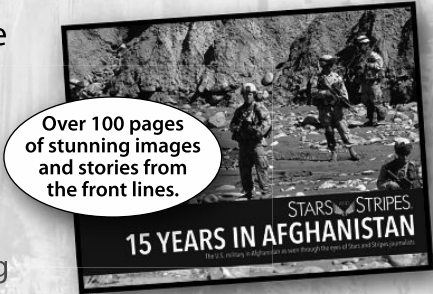
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An audio snack from Ben Affleck

Actor's Dunkin's crew from Super Bowl ad drop boy band-inspired song

BY NARDINE SAAD
Los Angeles Times

Don't dunk away at our hearts, Ben Affleck. The two-time Oscar-winner — embracing his meme-able glory as a Dunkin'-branded pop star in the donut seller's ad campaign — took a page out of Beyoncé's Super Bowl strategy playbook and dropped the new music. Or in this case, the DunKings' full boy band-inspired song.

Dunkin' on Wednesday dropped the lyric video to "Don't Dunk Away at My Heart (The DunKings)" on streaming services, including YouTube and Spotify. If you liked the "Argo" and "Air" filmmaker's persona as an aspirational recording artist, the repetitive three-minute audio confection does not disappoint.

"The DunKings supply a sonic solution to soothe your hearts, minds and ears," the song description reads. "They're gonna sing about love. They're gonna sing about Dunkin'. And they're gonna do it in a way that will have you putting their tracks on repeat for back to back to back listens while you sip and snack on Dunkin'."

Affleck, 51, a longtime fan of the quick-service restaurant chain, appeared in a campaign last year in which he went through a drive-thru. This time around, he combined his "sad-fleck" memes and love of iced coffee for the brand. The self-aware (and apparently shameless) actor reteamed with wife Jennifer Lopez



Business Wire

Ben Affleck and his Dunkin's "band," which includes Matt Damon and Tom Brady, have released a song on streaming services called "Don't Dunk Away at My Heart (The DunKings)."

for the spot, as well as collaborator Matt Damon, NFL star and Boston legend Tom Brady, rappers Jack Harlow and Fat Joe, TikTok Charli D'Amelio and several others on this year's viral campaign.

The campaign was produced by Artists Equity, the creative studio co-founded by Affleck, Damon and Gerry Cardinale of RedBird Capital Partners. The artist-led studio served as the brand's creative, production and post-production agency for the campaign.

The commercials are the latest installment in the "Dunkin' Cinematic Universe," which launched last year when Dunkin's No. 1 fan (Affleck) realized his potential working a drive-thru and serving his wife during the brand's first Super Bowl spot. That "universe" has continued its expansion: Another ad in April featured Affleck being mistaken for Damon while making a Dunkin' run, and another last fall featured a collaboration with Ice Spice.

Damon, Affleck's best friend of many years, told Stephen Colbert on Tuesday that the DunKings were "clearly not my idea" and elaborated on where his friendship with Af-

fleck stood following his inclusion in the ad.

"I like at the end you say [to Affleck], 'Remember how I said I would do anything for you? This is anything.' That's what you say at the end of the ad," the "Late Show" host said.

"And I actually said that to him when we were filming," Damon said, laughing. "And he just left it in."

"In other words, when I said I gave you a chip that means I would do anything for you, you just burned it on an ad," Colbert quipped.

"For you know, however much time we have [left] on this beautiful planet, he's got no more chip with me," Damon joked.

Former New England Patriots quarterback Brady, who was the only Dunkin' that Lopez approved of in the ad, also addressed his involvement in the promotional spot.

"It was fun," the seven-time Super Bowl champ said on Monday's season finale of the "Let's Go! with Tom Brady, Larry Fitzgerald and Jim Gray on SiriusXM" podcast.

"Never did you guys think in my second career I'd be a Donut DJ, did you? I'm continuing to surprise you guys!" he added.

Pedro Pascal among Marvel's new 'Fantastic Four'

BY ALEXANDRA DEL ROSARIO
Los Angeles Times

Marvel treated its fans to a Valentine's Day surprise Wednesday, unveiling on social media that Pedro Pascal ("The Last of Us"), Vanessa Kirby ("Napoleon"), Joseph Quinn ("Stranger Things") and Ebon Moss-Bachrach ("The Bear") will suit up for "The Fantastic Four," the latest take on the superhero quartet.

The studio, owned by Disney, shared an illustration by artist Wes Burt of its newly cast stars celebrating Valentine's Day in the group's signature blue suits.

"Happy Valentine's Day from Marvel's First Family!" the studio captioned its post, before adding that the film will premiere on July 25, 2025.

Pascal, already a mainstay in the Disney family with "The Mandalorian," will flex his acting chops as Dr. Reed Richards, also



Pascal



Kirby



Quinn



Moss-Bachrach

known as Mr. Fantastic. The super-stretchy hero was previously portrayed by Alex Hyde-White, Ioan Gruffudd and Miles Teller. "The Office" star John Krasinski most recently brought Mr. Fantastic to life in 2022's "Dr. Strange in the Multiverse of Madness."

Kirby will make her MCU debut as Sue Storm, the Invisible Woman, after appearances in the "Fast & Furious" spinoff "Hobbs & Shaw" and the most recent installments of the "Mission: Impossible" franchise. Rebecca Staab, Jessica Alba and Kate Mara also previously played the Invisible Woman.

"Stranger Things" breakout Quinn (who played metal-head Eddie Munson) will star as Jonathan Storm, aka the Human Torch. Jay Underwood and MCU alumni Chris Evans and Michael B. Jordan previously brought life to the fiery hero.

With "Fantastic Four," Emmy winner Moss-Bachrach will stay in business with Disney. He will play Ben Grimm, a former astronaut turned rock monster known as the Thing. Moss-Bachrach, also known for Disney+'s "Andor," follows former Thing actors Michael Bailey Smith, Michael Chiklis and Jamie Bell.

Marvel's "The Fantastic Four" will be the third attempt at bringing Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's heroes to the big screen. In 1994, Oley Sassone directed "The Fantastic Four," an unreleased film that touted filmmaker Roger Corman among its producers. Corman recounted the shelved film's rocky production in the 2015 documentary "Doomed!: The Untold Story of Roger Corman's The Fantastic Four."

A little more than a decade later, Tim Story delivered his 2005 film "Fantastic 4," which spawned the sequel "Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer."

The most recent attempt was Josh Trank's 2015 entry, "Fantastic Four." Franchise hopes quickly fizzled out as the film was a bust with critics and at the box office.

Now, director Matt Shakman has the "Fantastic Four" in his hands, helping bring the MCU to its newest phase.

Pearl Jam drops single, announces world tour

Pearl Jam's forthcoming album is called "Dark Matter," its first single of the same title has been released, and the band will start a world tour in May.

The Rock and Roll Hall of Famers revealed the new details on the project and their 2024 plans on Tuesday.

"Dark Matter," their 12th studio album and first since 2020's "Gigaton," will be released April 19 on Monkeywrench and Republic records. The tour, scheduled to begin May 4 in Vancouver, British Columbia, will include stops in Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

Singer Eddie Vedder, 59, lead guitarist Mike McCready, 57, and bassist Jeff Ament, 60, played the record for the first time on Jan. 31 for invited guests at the Troubadour club in West Hollywood. "No hyperbole, I think this is our best work," Vedder said from the stage as he introduced the album.

The band spawned from the Seattle scene of three decades ago shows no signs of softening with age on the album, which leans toward their rocking side even more than "Megaton" did.

The record, produced by Andrew Watt at Rick Rubin's Shangri-La studio in Malibu, has been ready and awaiting release for about a year.

Colbert, wife collaborate on 'Funny' cookbook

Stephen Colbert's next book is very much about stirring the pot.

Celadon Books announced Thursday that "The Late Show" host and his wife, Evie McGee Colbert, have collaborated on the cookbook "Does This Taste Funny: Recipes Our Family Loves," to be published on Sept. 17.



"We are so excited to announce our new cookbook, which we have been working on together for two years," the Colberts said in a statement released through Celadon. "We hope everyone enjoys the recipes and stories. We made it with love ... and an enormous amount of butter."

The book includes more than 100 recipes, from "Stephen's Kindergarten Soup" to "The Colbert Bump Cocktail," with an emphasis on the Lowcountry cuisine of the Colberts' South Carolina.

"Readers will also enjoy the banter, reminiscences and stories, and the gorgeous food photos and informal at-home pictures that fill the book, making readers feel like they are right there in the kitchen with Evie, Stephen, their children (and dog, Benny) and the extended family who are at the heart of the Colberts' lives," Celadon's announcement says.

From The Associated Press

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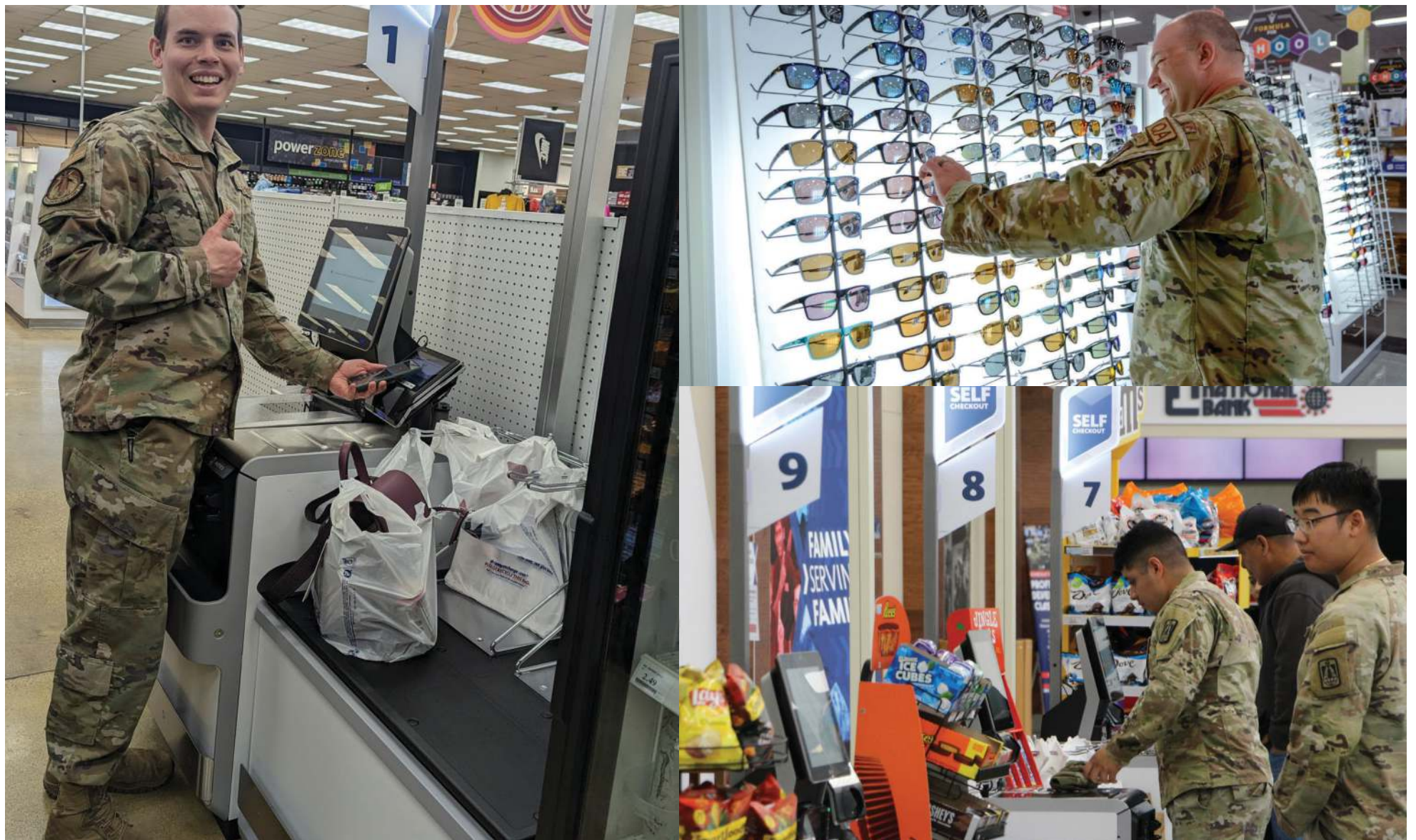
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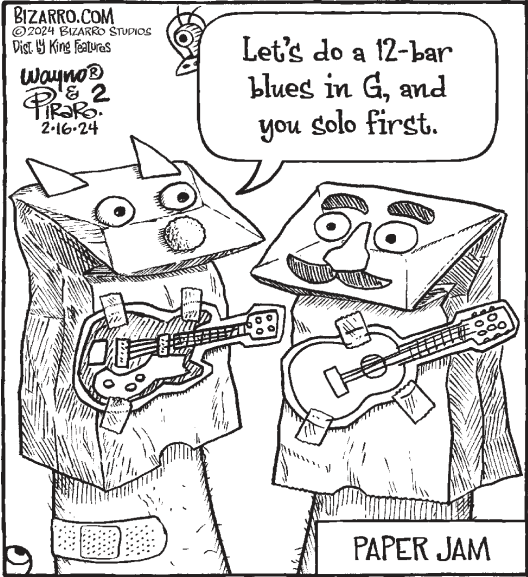
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Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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- ACROSS
- 1 Sweetie

4 Invitation letters

8 Book after Joel

12 “Mad Men” network

13 Lamb alias

14 X-ray doses

15 Discover anew

17 Former mates

18 Shoe part

19 Actress Lupino

21 Stir-fry pan

22 Resurrection Sunday

26 Senate broadcaster

29 Whatever

30 Egg (Pref.)

31 Depend (on)

32 HIV-treating drug

33 Tech news website

34 Year in Spain

35 Dynamic —

36 Dijon darling

37 Tony-winning “M. Butterfly” actor

39 Bikini top

40 Felon’s flight

41 Down Under denizen

45 Tater

48 Right of passage

50 Russell of “Waitress”
- 51 Russian refusal

52 Green prefix

53 Harvard rival

54 Turner and Danson

55 Skillet
- DOWN
- 1 Mata —

2 Warning sign

3 Mark Harmon TV series

4 Cosmetics giant

5 Streamlined

6 Coq au —

7 Extra on “Grey’s Anatomy”

8 Locales

9 Upper limit

10 Lyric poem

11 Hot wok sound

16 “Dream on!”
- 20 24 hours

23 Vocal quality

24 Always

25 Indian flatbread

26 Grouch

27 Transmit

28 Turn the soil

29 Dye type

32 Enlarge

33 Deep gorge

35 “CSI” evidence

36 Vinegar bottles

38 “Golden” song

39 Founded (on)

42 Ooze

43 Bygone Peruvian

44 Thames town

45 Cloud setting

46 Soup legume

47 Internet address

49 Nay undoer

Answer to Previous Puzzle

T	A	N	S		F	A	R	R		P	A	W		
A	L	A	I		O	D	E	A		A	D	O		
P	A	P	E	R	B	A	C	K		P	E	W		
E	R	A	S	E	S				E	D	E	N	S	
			T	O		C	O	D	E	R				
P	A	P	A			M	I	X		N	C	A	A	
A	V	A				O	D	E			U	R	N	
D	E	P	P		P	E	N			S	T	A	T	
			E	A	T	E	R		M	A				
S	U	R	L	Y					K	A	R	A	T	E
E	S	C			P	A	P	E	R	T	H	I	N	
E	D	U			E	L	A	N			R	A	N	D
D	A	P			D	E	N	T			E	T	A	S

2-16 CRYPTOQUIP

YFLA BMIFA KCV HLZZ L

TCXAK-RCBDAFMEI YFC LRRMRAR

YCBDE GVXMEI HFMZGJMXAF?

L BMGZMTD BMGYMTD.

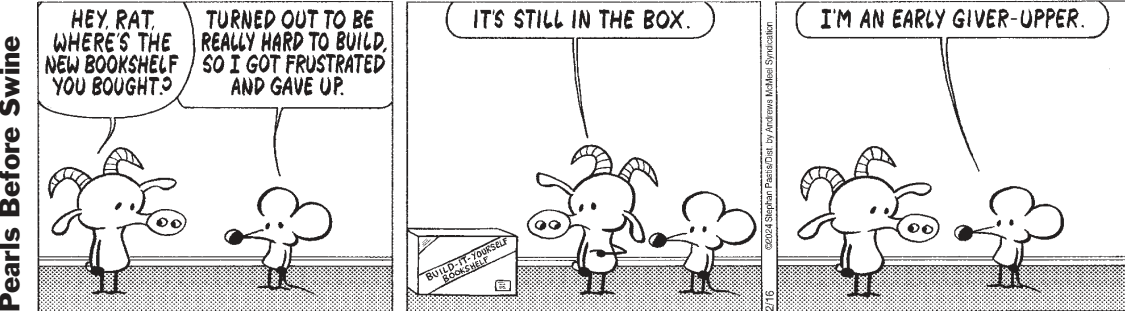
Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: WHEN THE TERM “TSUNAMI” IS PART OF THE NAME OF A FILM OR NOVEL, I SUPPOSE IT’S A TITLE WAVE.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: Y equals W

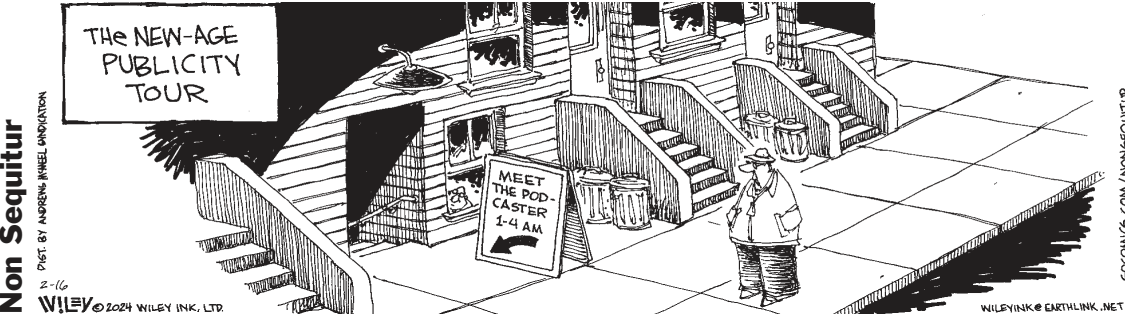
Frazz



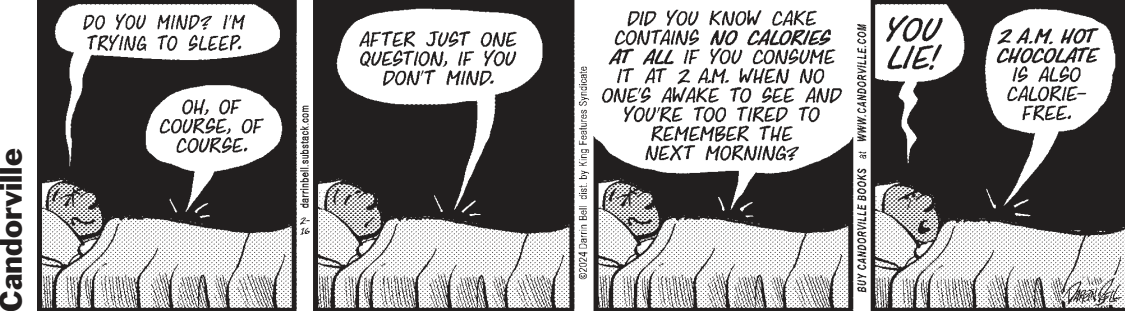
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



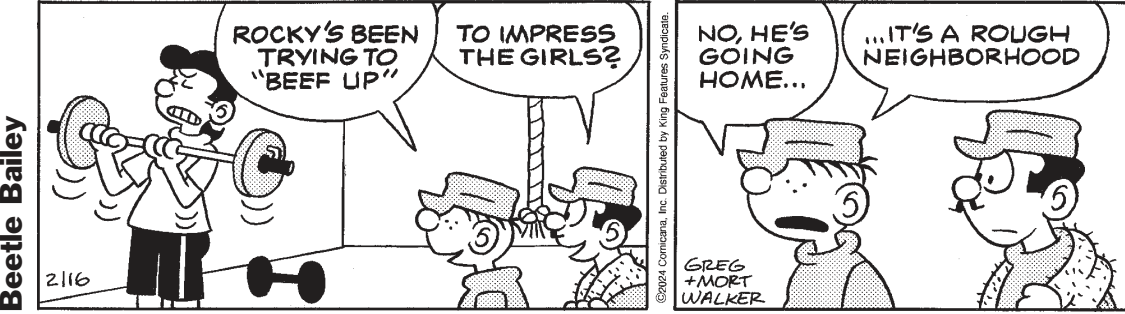
Candorville



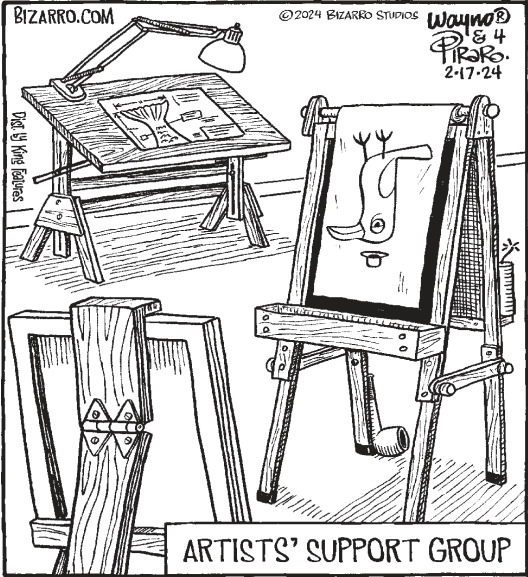
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

	1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10	11
12							13					
14							15					
16					17	18				19		
			20	21			22	23				
24	25	26		27			28		29		30	31
32			33				34					
35					36					37		
		38		39		40			41			
42	43			44	45				46	47	48	49
50			51				52	53				
54							55					
56							57					

- ACROSS
- 55 Arrid place?
- 23 Request
- 1 Pogo stick sound
- 56 Dido's lover
- 24 Rx overseer
- 6 Rollerbladed
- 57 Egg holders
- 25 Charged bit
- 12 Large vulture
- 26 Wolfram
- 13 Unorthodox
- doctrin
- 28 Like some fables
- 14 Lampoon
- 30 Celestial altar
- 15 Sheathe
- 31 Mao — -tung
- 16 Langston
- 33 "Kapow!"
- Hughes poem
- 34 Anti
- 17 Online
- 39 Old marketplace
- auction site
- 41 Mushroom parts
- 19 Club —
- 42 — Major
- 20 Bistro handout
- 43 Sneaky laughs
- 22 Small batteries
- 45 Legendary
- 24 In shape
- boxing family
- 27 Sicilian spouter
- 47 Engrossed
- 29 Doc's "Now!"
- 48 Yale students
- 32 Two-level buses
- 49 "Guinness
- 35 Journalist
- Book" suffix
- Wintour
- 51 Tramcar contents
- 36 To boot
- 18 Cable packages
- 53 Dad on
- 37 Singer Carly
- "Black-ish"
- Jepsen
- 38 "Today" rival,
- briefly
- 40 Billions of years
- 42 Speech fillers
- 44 React in horror
- 46 Fir or yew
- 50 Update, as
- machinery
- 52 Paragons
- 54 Actress/
- podcaster
- Shepherd

Answer to Previous Puzzle

H	O	N		R	S	V	P		A	M	O	S
A	M	C		E	L	I	A		R	A	D	S
R	E	I	N	V	E	N	T		E	X	E	S
I	N	S	O	L	E			I	D	A		
			W	O	K			E	A	S	T	E
C	S	P	A	N		A	N		O	V	O	
R	E	L	Y		A	Z	T		C	N	E	T
A	N	O		D	U	O		C	H	E	R	I
B	D	W	O	N	G			B	R	A		
			L	A	M			A	U	S	S	I
S	P	U	D			E	A	S	E	M	E	N
K	E	R	I			N	Y	E	T		E	C
Y	A	L	E			T	E	D	S		P	A

2-17

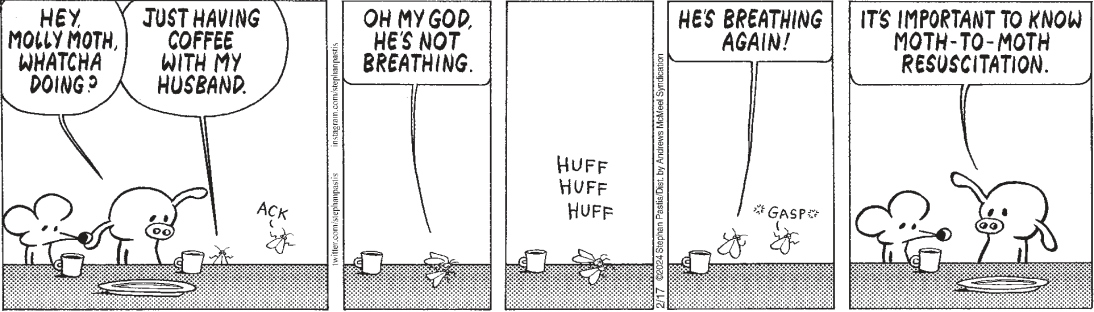
CRYPTOQUIP

ALKD WLK DCZQRK RESGKDWKS
PEQNKX EW YKWWQDY WLK
ACCX UVSPERK NKZKN, LK
ULCVWKX, "Q RED'W KZKD!"
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT MIGHT YOU CALL
A FORTY-SOMETHING WHO ASSISTS WOMEN
DURING CHILDBIRTH? A MIDLIFE MIDWIFE.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Z equals V

Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



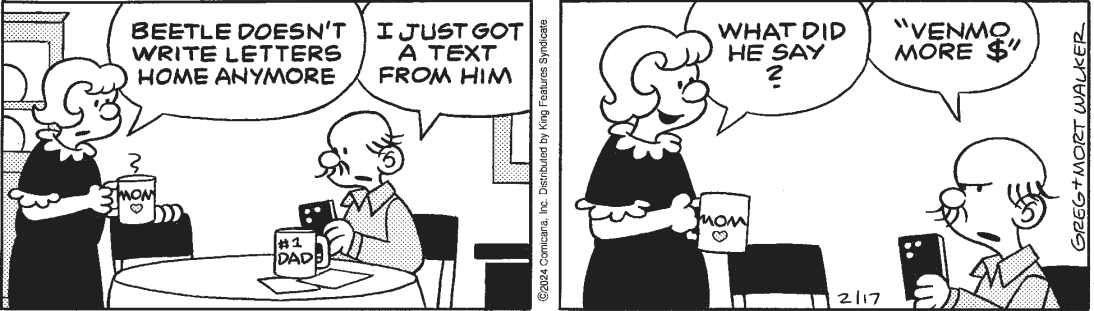
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey





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OPINION

In a world of threats, this is my biggest worry

By PAUL M. NAKASONE
Special to The Washington Post

Approaching the end of my five-plus years as director of the National Security Agency, I have heard the same question again and again: What’s your greatest worry as you conclude decades of service to your nation?

People expect me to name a particular country or challenge threatening the United States — maybe China or Russia, or even criminal hackers targeting our critical infrastructure. I have plenty of worries about each of those. What worries me most, though, isn’t an external threat, but the possibility that we are on the verge of making a grave mistake.

I worry that we could make ourselves blind to external threats such as the ones I’ve named and more if Congress allows a critical intelligence collection authority—Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act—to expire in April, or renews it with crippling restrictions. Either move would be a self-inflicted wound that our nation cannot afford.

Let me go back in time to explain. I was at the Pentagon when terrorists crashed Flight 77 into the building on Sept. 11, 2001, killing many of my colleagues at the Department of Defense. As the 9/11 Commission examined how our country could have suffered such a devastating attack, it became clear that our government had been unable to connect the dots between terrorist plotters abroad and terrorist operatives on our soil. We needed to tear down the wall between the FBI and the intelligence community that was blocking access to foreign intelligence information that these agencies had already lawfully collected and stored in government databases, so that we could use it to better protect Americans.

We also needed a sensible way to work with U.S. technology companies whose services were increasingly being exploited by terrorists and other hostile actors abroad to plot against us. Congress provided just that in 2008

with the creation of Section 702.

This law strikes an elegant balance in allowing intelligence collection that targets only non-Americans located abroad while imposing stringent protections for Americans’ privacy anywhere in the world. Applying it requires the approval of a federal court as well as oversight by the executive branch and four separate congressional committees — meaning that every branch of government has a say in how we can use it.

Fast-forward to 2018, when I became commander of U.S. Cyber Command and director of the National Security Agency. Congress and the president had just reauthorized Section 702—and for good reason. It works. Indeed, it has become more important than ever given its contributions to thwarting a wide array of national security threats.

Some examples: Section 702 has disrupted planned terrorist attacks at home and abroad, and contributed to the successful operation that killed al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri in 2022. Information acquired through Section 702 has provided insights into the Chinese origins of a chemical used to synthesize the deadly drug fentanyl and into drug-smuggling techniques. Section 702 has even resulted in the identification and disruption of hostile foreign actors’ attempts to recruit spies in the United States.

Perhaps most strikingly, as the undersecretary of defense for intelligence and security wrote in December: “Today, our warfighters depend on intelligence reporting using collection obtained pursuant to Section 702 to provide critical insights on the battlefield, including the current crises in Europe and the Middle East.”

Section 702, in short, is essential and irreplaceable. But it is set to expire in April, unless Congress acts to renew it.

Failure to do so would be a self-inflicted wound of the highest order. At this moment, as the United States faces escalating threats

posed by China, Russia, Iran, foreign cartels, sophisticated hackers, WMD proliferators, spies, terrorists and more, allowing Section 702 to expire would be an act of willful self-blinding.

The same is true of sweeping proposals to cripple this important authority, including requiring the executive branch to seek approval from a federal court to conduct U.S. person queries, which involves organizing and utilizing information that the government has already lawfully collected. That would be precisely the opposite of what the 9/11 Commission urged: It would erect a new wall blocking our access to intelligence already legally in the government’s holdings that could be used to protect Americans, effectively making it inaccessible to our intelligence professionals. That would be a huge step backward.

Instead, we should take a step forward by reauthorizing Section 702—and improving it. That means enshrining in statute the extensive reforms the intelligence community has already made to prevent noncompliant queries of 702 databases. We are only human, and mistakes happen, but the key is to learn from our mistakes and be transparent about them so they can’t happen again. These are the boldest reforms to Section 702 the executive branch has ever proposed in a reauthorization cycle, and they’ll better protect both our security and Americans’ privacy.

Serving the public in uniform for more than 37 years has been the honor of a lifetime. As head of Cyber Command and the NSA, I urge Congress to reauthorize Section 702, and to do so without imposing new restrictions on how the government can use the vital information it provides. As I saw all too clearly at the Pentagon that morning on 9/11, American lives are at stake.

Gen. Paul M. Nakasone was commander of the U.S. Cyber Command, director of the National Security Agency and chief of the Central Security Service until Feb. 2. This column was written in his official capacity while still in office.

Time for Biden, Trump to hang up further ambitions

By JAY AMBROSE
Tribune News Service

Lately in this year of 2024, things have gone kaboom for super-ambitious Joe Biden even though it was just a few years ago in his virtual half century in politics that he was elected president. It was at least partly because he and his multiple faults hid out in a basement by way of quiet campaigning, just as his trouble now is that some of those faults are out in the open.

Yes, it’s true that the COVID outbreak could have made open-air hustle and bustle dangerous to Biden’s health as well as to his reputation through more action in tune with his character. After all, he had to drop out of one of his two previous presidential campaigns because of plagiarism attempting to convey exceptionalism. Having him stay relatively quiet and pretty much out of sight, on the other hand, seemed to actually further the impression of a moderate, thoughtful, calm, cool guy.

It also helped that he was running against Donald Trump. Here, after all, was a love-him-or-hate-him demagogue who was loved by enough voters to break voting records in all past presidential races and hated by enough contrary voters for Biden to get even more votes, winning the race. The fear lately has been that the choice of either one of these men as president this year could be a national di-

saster.

As president, Biden has been hiding out a lot in the Oval Office and his home in Delaware instead of a basement, holding fewer press conferences than any president in years, for instance, even though the relatively few public glances at him have revealed a lot.

When he goes on the road, he sometimes doesn’t know where he is. He can’t remember names of people in his administration. Far more important, he has been ideologically captured by leftist, incompetent politicians and advisers as shown in his role in current Afghanistan misery, southern border mayhem, Iran’s terrorist adventures and Israel’s current plight. He has challenged the Constitution. His spending trillions to help in COVID recovery after sufficient trillions had already been spent in the Trump years gave us inflation now slowing down even though prices will not fall and debt threatens the future.

What’s unfortunate for him lately is an ABC News poll showing almost 86% of Americans saying that his being 81 is too old for a second term. On top of that, a political bomb has lately exploded, a special counsel’s report on his having had classified materials in his house. He said they were all kept in a safe filing cabinet, that none were highly classified and that he didn’t share any of the information, provably false claims.

In a five-hour interview, he also told the

special counsel, Robert Hur, that he could not remember when he served as vice president or when his beloved son Beau had died. Hur wrote that he was not going to file charges against Biden partly because any jury would likely let him go as he came across as “a well-meaning elderly man with a poor memory.”

Outraged by the assessment, Biden called a press conference, shouted back and forth with a big bunch of reporters and referred to the president of Egypt as the president of Mexico. This flub quickly bought to mind that, in the previous week, he had talked about conversations with two people who had been dead for years. Soon enough Democrats were discussing other possible presidential candidates.

The good news for those Democrats is that they have surrounded Trump with 91 criminal charges and that he spoke of Nikki Haley as if she were Nancy Pelosi. Another jolt? He encouraged Russia to attack those European NATO allies who don’t pay their fair share for self-defense, meaning it partly as a joke maybe but also sending a message that he did not feel wedded to an alliance overly dependent on us.

A consequence could be NATO saying goodbye and leaving us in more danger when it is really both Biden and Trump who should say goodbye.

SCOREBOARD/GOLF

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Wednesday's men's scores

EAST

American 59, Navy 42
Army 65, Boston U. 50
Colgate 85, Holy Cross 55
Loyola (Md.) 79, Lafayette 64
Maryland 78, Iowa 66
Michigan St. 80, Penn St. 72
Seton Hall 88, Xavier 70
St. Bonaventure 85, Fordham 67

SOUTH

Auburn 101, South Carolina 61
Belmont 82, S. Illinois 68
Chattanooga 84, ETSU 71
Clemson 77, Miami 60
E. Kentucky 86, Chicago St. 73
Furman 75, VMI 62
Gardner-Webb 85, Charleston Southern 77

Kennesaw St. 66, Jacksonville 61
Murray St. 82, Missouri St. 72
North Florida 93, Queens (NC) 79
SC-Upstate 86, High Point 81, OT
Samford 88, W. Carolina 62
South Florida 69, Tulsa 50
UMass 69, Richmond 59
UNC-Asheville 71, Presbyterian 69
UNC-Greensboro 76, The Citadel 61
Wofford 73, Mercer 60

MIDWEST

Bradley 85, Ill.-Chicago 73
Detroit 81, IUPUI 66
Loyola Chicago 64, Saint Joseph's 59
Milwaukee 71, Cleveland St. 68
N. Iowa 86, Valparaiso 67
N. Kentucky 58, Green Bay 57
Notre Dame 58, Georgia Tech 55
Oakland 71, Fort Wayne 63
UConn 101, DePaul 65
Youngstown St. 87, Robert Morris 77

SOUTHWEST

Tennessee 92, Arkansas 63

FAIR WEST

Arizona St. 79, Oregon St. 61
UNLV 67, Fresno St. 65
Utah St. 84, Wyoming 76

Men's AP Top 25 schedule

Saturday's games

No. 1 UConn (22-2) vs. No. 4 Marquette (18-5)
No. 3 Houston (21-3) vs. Texas (16-8)
No. 5 Arizona (19-5) vs. Arizona St. (12-12)
No. 6 Kansas (19-5) at No. 25 Oklahoma (18-6)
No. 7 North Carolina (19-5) vs. Virginia Tech (13-10)
No. 8 Tennessee (17-6) vs. Vanderbilt (6-17)
No. 9 Duke (18-5) at Florida St. (13-10)
No. 10 Iowa St. (18-5) vs. Texas Tech (17-6)
No. 11 South Carolina (21-3) vs. LSU (12-11)
No. 12 Baylor (17-6) at West Virginia (8-15)
No. 13 Auburn (19-5) vs. No. 22 Kentucky (16-7)
No. 14 Illinois (17-6) at Maryland (13-11)
No. 15 Alabama (17-7) vs. Texas A&M (15-8)
No. 16 Dayton (19-4) vs. Fordham (10-13)
No. 17 Creighton (17-7) at Butler (16-8)
No. 19 BYU (17-6) at Oklahoma St. (10-14)
No. 20 Wisconsin (16-8) at Iowa (14-10)
No. 21 Virginia (19-5) vs. Wake Forest (16-7)
No. 23 Indiana St. (22-3) at S. Illinois (16-9)

Wednesday's women's scores

EAST

Boston U. 72, Army 64
Bucknell 54, Lehigh 49
Butler 55, Providence 48
Colgate 60, Holy Cross 43
Duquesne 66, St. Bonaventure 50
George Washington 71, La Salle 49
Loyola (Md.) 76, Lafayette 51
Navy 69, American 55
Rhode Island 86, UMass 64
Saint Joseph's 73, Dayton 47

SOUTH

Charleston Southern 76, Gardner-Webb 69
Charlotte 65, Memphis 56
Davidson 75, George Mason 67
High Point 53, SC-Upstate 50
N. Kentucky 100, IUPUI 88
North Texas 67, FAU 57
Old Dominion 65, Coastal Carolina 58
Presbyterian 59, UNC-Asheville 42
Richmond 65, VCU 58
SMU 63, Tulane 53
Temple 86, UAB 72
Winthrop 54, Radford 51, OT

MIDWEST

Indiana 68, Wisconsin 54
Iowa St. 96, Kansas St. 93, 2OT
Kansas 75, Cincinnati 60
Ohio St. 80, Nebraska 47
Purdue 74, Northwestern 48
Saint Louis 77, Loyola Chicago 68
UConn 86, Xavier 40
W. Michigan 65, N. Illinois 47
Youngstown St. 72, Wright St. 52

SOUTHWEST

Oklahoma 84, Baylor 73
Oklahoma St. 60, Texas Tech 50
Rice 75, East Carolina 57
Texas 82, Houston 66
Tulsa 74, UTSA 70

FAIR WEST

Boise St. 73, Utah St. 57
Fresno St. 74, Air Force 68
Nevada 72, San Diego St. 71
New Mexico 72, San Jose St. 51
UNLV 67, Colorado St. 64

Women's AP Top 25

Friday's games

No. 3 Stanford (22-3) vs. California (15-10)
No. 8 Colorado (20-4) at No. 22 Utah (18-7)
No. 9 UCLA (19-4) at No. 11 Oregon St. (20-3)
No. 10 Southern Cal (17-4) at Oregon (11-14)
No. 15 UConn (20-5) vs. Georgetown (16-8)
No. 20 Creighton (20-3) at St. John's (14-11)
No. 25 Princeton (18-3) at Brown (13-8)

TENNIS

Delray Beach Open

Wednesday

At Delray Beach Stadium & Tennis Center
Delray Beach, Fla.
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor

Men's Singles

Round of 16

Patrick Kypson, United States, def. Con-
stant Lestienne, France, 6-4, 6-4.
Rinky Hijikata, Australia, def. Matteo Ar-
naldi (6), Italy, 6-2, 3-6, 6-4.
Marcos Giron, United States, def. Adrian
Mannarino (4), France, 6-0, 6-7 (5), 6-1.
Taylor Fritz (1), United States, def. Nuno
Borges, Portugal, 7-6 (5), 6-4.

Argentina Open

Wednesday

At Buenos Aires Lawn Tennis Club
Buenos Aires

Purse: \$642,615

Surface: Red clay

Men's Singles

Round of 16

Tomas Martin Etcheverry (6), Argentina,
def. Daniel Elahi Galan, Colombia, 6-3, 6-0.
Dusan Lajovic, Serbia, def. Alejandro Ta-
bilo, Chile, 6-4, 1-6, 6-1.
Facundo Diaz Acosta, Argentina, def.
Francisco Cerundolo (4), Argentina, 7-6
(3), 6-0.
Nicolas Jarry (3), Chile, def. Stan Waw-
rinka, Switzerland, 6-7 (3), 6-2, 7-6 (5).

ABN AMRO Open

Wednesday

At Ahoy Rotterdam
Rotterdam, Netherlands

Purse: Euro 2,134,985

Surface: Hardcourt indoor

Men's Singles

Round of 32

Gael Monfils, France, def. Denis Shapo-
valov, Canada, 7-6 (4), 7-6 (5).
Emil Ruusuvuori, Finland, def. Ugo Hum-
bert (7), France, 7-6 (5), 4-6, 6-3.
Grigor Dimitrov (6), Bulgaria, def. Loren-
zo Sonego, Italy, 7-6 (4), 6-3.
Holger Rune (3), Denmark, def. Roman
Safiullin, Russia, 6-4, 2-6, 6-1.
Jannik Sinner (1), Italy, def. Botic Van de
Zandschulp, Netherlands, 6-3, 6-3.

Qatar Total Open

Wednesday

At Khalifa International Tennis and
Squash Complex
Doha, Qatar

Purse: \$3,211,715

Surface: Hardcourt outdoor

Women's Singles

Round of 16

Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, Russia, def.
Marketa Vondrousova (6), Czech Repu-
blic, 7-5, 6-3.
Danielle Collins, United States, def. Ka-
terina Siniakova, Czech Republic, 6-4, 6-3.
Naomi Osaka, Japan, def. Lesia Tsuren-
ko, Ukraine, walkover.
Leylah Annie Fernandez, Canada, def.
Zheng Qinwen (5), China, 7-5, 6-3.
Karolina Pliskova, Czech Republic, def.
Linda Noskova, Czech Republic, 3-6, 7-5,
6-1.
Elena Rybakina (3), Kazakhstan, def.
Emma Navarro (16), United States, 6-1, 6-7
(6), 6-4.
Iga Swiatek (1), Poland, def. Ekaterina
Alexandrova (14), Russia, 6-1, 6-4.
Victoria Azarenka, Belarus, def. Jelena
Ostapenko (8), Latvia, 6-0, 6-3.

PRO HOCKEY

PWHL

	W	L	OW	OL	Pts	GF	GA
Montreal	3	1	3	1	17	22	19
Minnesota	4	2	2	2	15	23	20
Boston	2	3	2	1	11	20	23
Toronto	4	5	0	0	11	23	27
New York	2	4	2	1	11	22	21
Ottawa	2	2	0	4	10	19	19

Teams awarded three (3) points for a regulation win, two (2) points for an over-
time or shootout win, one (1) point for an
overtime or shootout loss, and zero (0)
points for a regulation time loss.

Sunday, Feb. 4

New York 4, Ottawa 3, OT
Montreal 2, Boston 1, OT

Wednesday's games

Toronto 5, Boston 3
Minnesota 2, Ottawa 1

Friday's game

Montreal at Toronto

Saturday's games

Minnesota at Ottawa
New York at Boston

GOLF

World rankings

Through Feb. 12

1.	Scottie Scheffler	9.28
2.	Rory McIlroy	8.39
3.	Jon Rahm	7.29
4.	Viktor Hovland	6.08
5.	Xander Schauffele	5.34
6.	Wyndham Clark	5.22
7.	Patrick Cantlay	5.03
8.	Max Homa	4.12
9.	Matt Fitzpatrick	4.06
10.	Brian Harman	3.99
11.	Ludvig Aberg	3.81

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball
American League

BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Agreed to terms
with INF/OF Ryan O'Hearn on a one-year
contract. Acquired OF Peyton Burdick
from Miami in exchange for cash consid-
erations. Placed RHP Felix Bautista on the
60-day IL.
CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Agreed to terms
with INF Mike Moustakas on minor-league
deal.
OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Agreed to terms
with LHP Scott Alexander on a one-year
contract. Placed LHP Ken Waldichuk on
the 60-day IL.
NEW YORK YANKEES — Placed RHP Scott
Effross and OF Jasson Dominguez on the
60-day IL. Agreed to terms with RHP Lou
Trivino on a one-year contract.
TAMPA BAY RAYS — Agreed to terms
with P Phil Maton to a one-year contract.
Placed LHP Shane McClellan on the 60-
day IL.

National League

MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Acquired RHP
Joshua Quezada from New York Yankees
in exchange for LHP Clayton Andrews.
NEW YORK METS — Placed UT Ronny
Mauricio on the 60-day IL. Agreed to terms
with RHP Shintaro Fujinami on a one-year
contract.
PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES — Agreed to
terms with RHP Spencer Turnbull on a one-
year contract. Designate RHP McKinley
Moore for assignment.
PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Agreed to
terms with C Yasmani Grandal and LHP
Josh Fleming on one-year contracts.
Placed C Endy Rodriguez and RHP Johan
Oviedo on the 60-day IL.
WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Agreed to
terms with RHP Luis Perdomo and OF/DH
Jesse Winker on minor league contracts.

BASKETBALL

National Basketball Association

NBA — Fined Atlanta G Trae Young
\$35,000 for directing an inappropriate and
unprofessional gesture toward a game of-
ficial on Feb. 12 in a game against Chicago.
CHARLOTTE HORNETS — Recalled G Nick
Smith, Jr. from the Greensboro Swarm of
the G League
CLEVELAND CAVALIERS — Signed G
Craig Porter Jr. to a rest-of-season con-
tract.
INDIANA PACERS — Recalled G Jarace
Walker from the Indiana Mad Ants of the G
League.
LOS ANGELES LAKERS — Assigned G Ja-
len Hood-Schifino and F Maxwell Lewis to
the South Bay Lakers of the G League.
MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES — Re-
called F Leonard Mille from the Iowa
Wolves of the G League.
PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS — Recalled G
Nick Smith, Jr. rom the Greensboro Swarm
of the G League.
TORONTO RAPTORS — Recalled Fs Mou-
hamadou Gueye and Justise Winslow
from the Raptors 905 of the G League.

FOOTBALL

National Football League

CINCINNATI BENGALS — Released QB
A.J. McCarron.
DENVER BRONCOS — Named Pete Car-
michael senior offensive assistant and
Jim Leonhard defensive pas game coordi-
nator/defensive backs coach.
KANSAS CITY CHIEFS — Signed defen-
sive coordinator Steve Spagnuolo to a
contract extension. Signed DTs Isaiah
Buggs and Matt Dickerson, DBs Trey Dean
and Keith Taylor, DE Truman Jones, RBs
Keaontay Ingram and Deneric Prince and
WR Montrell Washington to reserve/fu-
tures contracts.
LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Named Marc
Trestman senior offensive assistant, San-
jay Lal wide receivers coach, Rick Minter
senior defensive assistant, Steve Clinck-
scale defensive back coach, Chris O'Leary
safeties coach, Dylan Roney defensive as-
sistant, Mike Elston defensive line coach,
Navorro Bowman linebacker coach, Shane
Day quarterback coach, Andy Bis-
choff run game coordinator/tight end
coach and Mike Devlin offensive line
coach.
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Signed OLB Ju-
lian Okwara.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Fired defen-
sive coach Steve Wilks. Signed DEs Alex
Barrett and Austin Bryant, C Corey Lucia-
no and DT T.Y. McGill to reserve/futures
contracts.
WASHINGTON COMMANDERS — Named
Anthony Lynn run game coordinator. Re-
tained Martin Mayhew as senior person-
nel executive and named Lance Newmark
assistant general manager.

HOCKEY

National Hockey League

ARIZONA COYOTES — Signed David Lud-
wig to a contract extension and named
him assistant general manager.
CALGARY FLAME — Recalled C Cole
Schwindt from Calgary (AHL) loan.
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS — Placed C Rem
Pitlick on waivers.
NEW YORK RANGERS — Loaned F Tyler
Pitlick to Hartford (AHL).

SOCCER

Major League Soccer

AUSTIN FC — Signed D Brendan Hines-
like to a one-year guaranteed contract
through the end of 2024, with an option for
2025.
D.C. UNITED — Signed D Conner Antley to
a two-year contract with an option for
2026.
ORLANDO CITY SC — Promoted Martin
Perelman to second assistant coach.
SAN ANTONIO FC — Signed G Kendall
McIntosh pending league and federation
approval.
National Women's Soccer League

NJ/NY GOTHAM FC — Signed D Maycee
Bell to a multiyear contract through 2026.



RYAN KANG/AP

Tiger Woods has never won at Riviera Country Club despite playing there 12 times as a pro. He'll try again in the Genesis Invitational.

Woods hits Riviera wearing many hats

By DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Tiger Woods is wearing a lot of hats at the Genesis Invitational — one of them featuring a new logo — without a lot of clarity on the state of his game or the future of the PGA Tour.

Woods joined the PGA Tour board last summer and has been involved in negotiations that led to Strategic Sports Group becoming a minority investor in a deal worth as much as \$3 billion. Still unclear is where that leaves the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia, the financial backer of LIV Golf.

“Ultimately we would like to have PIF be a part of our tour and a part of our product,” Woods said Wednesday at Riviera. “Financially, we don’t right now. And the monies that they have come to the table with, and what we initially had agreed to in the framework agreement, those are all the same numbers. Anything beyond this is going to be obviously over and above.”

As for his game, Woods said his speed is not the same with a 48-year-old body that includes a fused lower spine and a fused right ankle.

“I built this golf swing the last few years ... based on my hands and what that feels like,” he said. “What that looks like, sometimes it doesn’t look pretty, but I can still hit the ball flush.”

That hasn’t translated at Riviera, the course he has played the most times as a pro (12) without winning. The short answer on why is that he’s never putted well here.

But he was clear when it came to launching his new “Sun Day Red” brand with TaylorMade Golf after 27 years with Nike. Asked what would become of his “TW” logo from Nike that he often wore on the front of his cap and back of his shirt, Woods said he doesn’t get that back.

“I don’t want it back. I’ve moved on,” he said. “This is a transition in my life. I’ve moved on to ‘Sun Day Red’ and we’re looking forward to building a brand that elicits excitement.”

The other hat — host of the Genesis Invitational — requires little commentary.

Riviera has been one of the premier stops on the PGA Tour for 60 years, and now it is a signature event that offers a \$20 million purse.

The player-hosted events — Riviera, the Arnold Palmer Invitational and Memorial — award \$4 million to the winner (compared with \$3.6 million for other signature events), though it also comes with a 36-hole cut to the top 50 and ties, and anyone within 10 shots of the lead.

The field is as strong as any this side of a major. The course has held up remarkably well despite two “atmospheric rivers” that dumped heavy rain on Los Angeles.

The course, a rectangular piece of property between the tony Brentwood neighborhood and Sunset Boulevard, is a haven for pure iron players and Woods has long been among the best.

But he has only three top 10s at Riviera, and only one serious chance at winning, finishing two shots behind Ernie Els in 1999. Most telling about Woods and Riviera was the end of 1999 and early 2000. Woods had 10 out of 11 starts on the PGA Tour when he either won or finished second. The exception was Riviera. He tied for 18th.

“I have traditionally not putted well here,” he said. “I’ve driven it well here. There are small greens and traditionally throughout my entire career my iron game has been pretty good, but I have never really gotten hot with the putter at this course.”

NHL

Surging Canucks not celebrating yet

By **STEPHEN WHYNO**
Associated Press

Rick Tocchet does not want a lot of wandering minds around the Vancouver Canucks’ locker room. He would rather his players simply focus on the next game.

“We can’t think of the big picture,” Tocchet said. “The only thing you can tell your players is short-term goals. You can’t think long term.”

The Canucks are so in sync with their coach that after winning in overtime Feb. 11, Conor Garland noted it was still a good effort he and his teammates would have been proud of even had they lost.

There hasn’t been a lot of losing at all for Vancouver since the puck dropped in October. The Canucks are atop the NHL standings this late in a season for the first time since 2012 — five coaches and countless players removed from the franchise’s last era of winning.

“We’ve obviously had a lot more success this year than we have in the past,” said Thatcher Demko, whose play in net is one of the big reasons for that. “It’s obviously something that we’ve wanted to do, and we just haven’t been able to up to this point. And we know there’s a lot of hockey left, so we’re staying focused on the task at hand. Obviously, we’ve got to make sure that we’re winning when it counts.”

Demko and the Canucks know they haven’t accomplished anything yet, with the playoffs still two months away. Still, with captain Quinn Hughes leading the way and Elias Pettersson and J.T. Miller producing at career-year



Chicago Blackhawks right wing Taylor Raddysh, right, chases after Vancouver Canucks defenseman Quinn Hughes. The Canucks sit atop the NHL standings this late in the season for the first time since 2012.

levels, they’ve positioned themselves as one of the leading contenders for the Stanley Cup.

They also just added the best center available in the trade market, acquiring Elias Lindholm from Calgary just before the All-Star break.

“With that trade, they’re telling us and everyone that we may have a chance,” said Hughes, whose 65 points through 53 games are the most by a defenseman this season. “I think that we have a really good team. It’s been a great 50 games or

whatever that we’ve played. Now we just need to put our foot on the gas and try to dial in our game.”

The Canucks’ game is a little bit of everything, starting with controlling the puck. They lead the league with 3.69 goals per game and are fourth in goals allowed at 2.61. Vancouver has not lost more than two games in a row all season.

“We’re pretty aware of when we play well and when we don’t,” Garland said. “That’s the best thing about us: When we have a bad effort, we’ll follow it up with a

good one.”

Beating the Capitals on Feb. 11 on Miller’s goal with 4.8 seconds left in 3-on-3 OT was the perfect example of that. Playing on back-to-back afternoons, Tocchet noticed some fatigue in a “mucky” game and was glad to see his team adjust to that and limit mistakes when it mattered.

“That means you have to play smart,” Tocchet said. “Some games you’ve got to play when you don’t have your legs, and you’ve got to play smart.”

Toronto’s Rielly suspended for cross-checking

By **STEPHEN WHYNO**
Associated Press

Toronto Maple Leafs defenseman Morgan Rielly was suspended five games for cross-checking Ottawa Senators forward Ridly Greig in the final seconds of the teams’ game over the weekend.

The NHL Players’ Association announced Wednesday that it was filing an appeal on Rielly’s behalf, less than 24 hours since the league’s department of player safety handed down its ruling.

An in-person hearing, which was actually held virtually Tuesday because of snow in New York, allowed the league to suspend Rielly for six or more games. Because the suspension is under that mark, the only appeal is to Commissioner Gary Bettman.

Anything longer would have gone to Bettman and then, if requested, to a neutral arbitrator.

Rielly took exception to Greig firing a slap shot into an empty net with 5.1 seconds left Saturday night to make it 5-3 Senators. He



The Toronto Maple Leafs are bracing to play several games without top defenseman Morgan Rielly, who has appealed a suspension of five games for cross-checking Ottawa Senators forward Ridly Greig.

cross-checked Greig in the head and left shoulder but did not injure the 21-year-old playing his first

full professional season.

“This is not a hockey play,” the league said in a video explaining

the suspension. “This is an intentional, forceful strike to an opponent’s head using the stick as a weapon to exact retribution on an opponent well after a goal has been scored.”

As a result of the suspension, Rielly — who has no disciplinary history of fines or suspension in his 11-year NHL career — will forfeit \$195,313 in salary.

Losing Rielly, one of their All-Stars and most valuable players this season, for this stretch is a major blow to the Maple Leafs as they try to hold on to a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. The 29-year-old skates over 24 minutes a game for Toronto, and his contributions in all facets are difficult to replace.

“He’s been on fire, obviously an incredible season,” Leafs forward William Nylander told reporters after practice Monday. “We have a pretty resilient group, I feel like, so when guys have been out, other guys have stepped up and played, took over that role.”

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Boston	53	32	11	10	74	180	138
Florida	53	34	15	4	72	172	133
Tampa Bay	54	29	20	5	63	185	177
Toronto	51	27	16	8	62	180	163
Detroit	52	27	19	6	60	184	172
Montreal	53	22	23	8	52	150	187
Buffalo	52	23	25	4	50	155	160
Ottawa	49	22	25	2	46	169	176

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
N.Y. Rangers	53	34	16	3	71	172	147
Carolina	52	30	17	5	65	173	153
Philadelphia	54	29	19	6	64	161	155
New Jersey	52	27	21	4	58	176	180
N.Y. Islanders	53	22	18	13	57	155	177
Washington	52	23	21	8	54	127	164
Pittsburgh	50	23	20	7	53	146	136
Columbus	52	16	26	10	42	153	194

Western Conference

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Dallas	53	33	14	6	72	196	161
Colorado	54	33	17	4	70	202	172
Winnipeg	51	32	14	5	69	152	117
St. Louis	52	28	22	2	58	152	160
Nashville	53	27	24	2	56	160	168
Minnesota	53	25	23	5	55	162	173
Arizona	52	23	25	4	50	153	163
Chicago	53	14	36	3	31	111	187

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vancouver	54	36	12	6	78	199	141
Vegas	53	31	16	6	68	172	146
Edmonton	49	31	17	1	63	174	138
Los Angeles	50	24	16	10	58	156	139
Calgary	53	25	23	5	55	163	163
Seattle	53	22	21	10	54	145	154
Anaheim	52	18	32	2	38	132	180
San Jose	52	14	33	5	33	107	200

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

Wednesday's games

Winnipeg 1, San Jose 0
Florida 5, Pittsburgh 2
Minnesota 3, Arizona 1

Thursday's games

Anaheim at Ottawa
Colorado at Tampa Bay
Florida at Buffalo
Los Angeles at New Jersey
Montreal at N.Y. Rangers
Philadelphia at Toronto
Seattle at Boston
Dallas at Nashville
Edmonton at St. Louis
Pittsburgh at Chicago
San Jose at Calgary
Detroit at Vancouver

Friday's games

Carolina at Arizona

Saturday's games

Los Angeles at Boston
Edmonton at Dallas
Ottawa at Chicago
Detroit at Calgary
Buffalo at Minnesota
Florida at Tampa Bay
Nashville at St. Louis
Anaheim at Toronto
Washington at Montreal
Philadelphia vs. New Jersey at MetLife Stadium
Winnipeg at Vancouver
Carolina at Vegas
Columbus at San Jose

Sunday's games

N.Y. Rangers vs. N.Y. Islanders at MetLife Stadium
Arizona at Colorado
Los Angeles at Pittsburgh

Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday

	GP	G	A	PTS
Nikita Kucherov, TB	53	34	56	90
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	54	32	55	87
Connor McDavid, EDM	47	21	56	77
David Pastrnak, BOS	53	33	44	77
J.T. Miller, VAN	54	23	46	69
Elias Pettersson, VAN	54	28	41	69
Mikko Rantanen, COL	54	29	40	69
Artemi Panarin, NYR	53	31	37	68
Quinn Hughes, VAN	54	12	54	66
William Nylander, TOR	51	26	40	66
Sam Reinhart, FLA	53	39	25	64
Auston Matthews, TOR	50	42	21	63
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	49	25	37	62
Cale Makar, COL	49	13	47	60
Matthew Tkachuk, FLA	53	18	41	59

WINTER SPORTS/COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Olympics star Diggins' wish is granted

Cross country skiing World Cup event coming to her hometown of Minneapolis

By Dave Campbell
Associated Press
MINNEAPOLIS — After Jessie Diggins secured the first American Olympic gold medal in cross country skiing six years ago, her agent urged her to pursue her most ambitious desires in that moment of cultural adulation.

She shrugged off the trip to Disney World or a new car.

"I want a World Cup in Minneapolis," Diggins declared after she and Kikkan Randall won the team sprint in South Korea at the 2018 Winter Games. "He said, 'Ooh, that's a big ask!' But I was like, 'That's the one thing I want to have happen out of this.'"

After a false start in 2020 due to the pandemic, the World Cup is coming to the United States in the fulfillment of that dream Diggins has long had and worked hard to help make happen.

The Feb. 17-18 races at Theodore Wirth Park overlooking downtown Minneapolis will mark the first American stop on the annual cross country skiing tour in 23 years. More than 35,000 tickets have been sold for the Stifel Loppet Cup, a figure organizers believe would spike much higher if space allowed.

"You can only safely service so many people, but that level of response has triggered what we know is a national level of interest in the sport," said Claire Wilson, executive director of the Loppet Foundation.

Long accustomed to living the hotel life and lugging oversized duffel bags all over Europe, Diggins and her teammates finally

have the opportunity to perform in front of the red-white-and-blue-clad fans.

"Imagine you were Joe Mauer and you just never played in Minneapolis," said Wilson, referencing the Minnesota native recently elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame. "That's what these athletes face every year. The U.S. ski team is so excited to be here, like over-the-moon excited."

Diggins grew up in Afton, a mere 30 or so miles east of the course. She was 19 the last time she lined up for a competitive race in the U.S. Now she's 32. Teammate Rosie Brennan is 35.

"I'm really excited to get to share this with all these people who have only ever seen me on TV," Brennan said. "It's really mysterious to a lot of people: 'Like, what is she actually doing all winter?'"

Skiing fast, for one. Diggins won the 15-kilometer race last week in Canmore, Alberta, and leads the World Cup standings on the women's side. Brennan is fourth. Sophia Laukli is 20th. Ben Ogden (19th) is the highest-ranked man.

The U.S. team already has 18 top-three finishes this season, including 10 by Diggins, with five stops left on the tour schedule. Laukli recorded her first career World Cup victory in the final stage of the Tour de Ski in Italy last month, becoming at age 23 the youngest American to win an individual World Cup race.

Last year, the U.S. season podium total was 11. When Diggins

"The U.S. ski team is so excited to be here, like over-the-moon excited."

Claire Wilson
executive director of the organization running the event



JEFF MCINTOSH, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

Jessie Diggins celebrates her win in the women's 15km Mass Start freestyle World Cup cross country skiing event in Canmore, Alberta, last week. This week she gets to compete near her hometown.

launched her international career 13 years ago, the Americans totaled only four top-three finishes — all by Randall.

"We're starting to burst into that next tier, and on every level, too, not only at the top," Ogden said. "We're getting podiums, we're getting wins, but also the people who come over for their first World Cup are putting down really solid races. In previous years or generations, coming over to the World Cup was an experience. You were there for the experience. You weren't there to put down results."

The impact of the Diggins-Randall gold medal in 2018 on the sport can't be overstated. The Minnesota Youth Ski League, the club in which Diggins first found her love for the sport, has added eight new chapters since then. But the steady rise of the Americans can be traced back more than a decade earlier to a philosophy shift in team development.

"For the last four Olympic cycles, instead of focusing our re-

sources on those one or two stars currently in the pipeline at any given moment, we focus on building a men's and a women's team," head coach Matt Whitcomb said. "Because nobody sees a superhuman athlete and says, 'Wow, I could become that person.' It just seems too distant. The hurdle's too high. But when you see a tribe, a group of people effervescing in this high-performing environment, this positive team energy you can just feel by reading about it and by watching it on TV, that's the ethos that does our recruiting for us."

The U.S. is the only team among the top 10 nations in the sport that doesn't get government funding. The Americans have a dime-on-the-dollar budget compared to powerhouses Norway and Sweden.

"I had a lot of years where it took a leap of faith to believe I was going to come out the year with still something to live on and being able to pay rent and not beg my parents to take me back," Brennan said. "I'm immensely proud I

stuck it out long enough to get to this point and be able to just live there for a little bit. Now I feel like I just get to enjoy racing for the sake of racing."

Diggins has been feeling similar emotions, for different reasons. She publicly acknowledged last year a relapse of her teenage-diagnosed eating disorder and has been trying to prioritize mental health over physical training this season, after realizing the unhealthy dose of self-applied performance pressure she'd been living with since the historic win in South Korea.

The results on the 2023-24 World Cup circuit speak for themselves. She can't wait to come back to her home state to maintain that momentum.

"When I'm happy and I'm myself, that's when I'm the most dangerous on the course because that's when I can really push myself," Diggins said recently. "When you see extra glitter and extra smiles, that's usually a good thing."

No. 1 UConn faces biggest test yet vs. Marquette

By John Marshall
Associated Press
Top-ranked Connecticut has looked like a legitimate contender to become the first team to repeat as national champion since Florida 17 years ago.

The Huskies have a dominating big man in Donovan Clingan, players who know what it takes to win big games and have passed nearly every test in front of them.

The next one may be UConn's biggest of the season so far:

against No. 4 Marquette.

"These are pressure-packed games, so the best way to win them is to have no weaknesses on your team," UConn coach Danny Hurley said last week.

The Huskies (23-2, 13-1 Big East) haven't had many since winning their fifth national championship last April.

UConn has spent the past five weeks at No. 1 in the AP Top 25 and is on a 13-game winning streak heading into Saturday's game.

Marquette (19-5, 10-3) also has been playing well lately, winning eight straight. The Golden Eagles also have one of the nation's best players in AP preseason All-American Tyler Kolek, who scored 27 points in a 78-72 victory over Butler on Tuesday.

"He's motivated. He's always motivated, but even more so (now) to be his best," coach Shaka Smart said.

They're going to need him to do it again in what could be one of the

best games of the college basketball season.

Tigers and Wildcats

Kentucky managed to remain in the AP Top 25 this week despite setting an unwanted mark.

With two losses last week, the Wildcats have lost three straight at Rupp Arena for the first time since it opened in 1976.

Kentucky beat Mississippi at home on Tuesday and plays at No. 13 Auburn on Saturday.

The Tigers beat No. 11 South Carolina on Wednesday.

Jumbled Jayhawks

Kansas started the season as the preseason No. 1 and has been in the top 10 all season.

The Jayhawks dropped to No. 6 after losing to Kansas State, but rebounded to beat No. 12 Baylor.

The Jayhawks have another tough test — as most games are in the Big 12 — at No. 25 Oklahoma on Saturday.

AROUND THE NBA

Hornets hoping for returns on trades

By TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

Oklahoma City got Gordon Hayward, Dallas got PJ Washington, Miami got Terry Rozier and Philadelphia wound up getting city native and Villanova alum Kyle Lowry following a buyout after he was traded.

The Thunder, Mavericks, Heat and 76ers must feel good about that.

The Charlotte Hornets should feel good as well — even though they were the team on the other end of all those transactions.

It’s a natural inclination when the trade season in the NBA passes: Everyone feels compelled to decide which teams won and which teams lost. New York made some smart moves and surely believes it can now make a serious run in the Eastern Conference. Phoenix added depth and versatility. Boston found a way to perhaps upgrade its bench a bit.

Thing is, the winner of the trade deadline might not be decided until someone hoists the Larry O’Brien in June. Or maybe, teams like the Hornets hope, it won’t be decided until 2026 or 2027. The only place they’re going when this season ends is the draft lottery. So they did the prudent thing — they blew it up, as those in the roster-building business say, and started starting over once again. Time will tell if it works out, but seeds have clearly been planted.

“It’s a different dynamic,” Hornets coach Steve Clifford said. “Look, not that they’re not meaningful games — they’re always meaningful — but it’s not like we’re two games out of the playoffs.”

Credit to Clifford for saying that. Credit to the Hornets for evidently agreeing and looking to change it.

Nobody knows how this will end in Charlotte; Michael Jordan just sold the team and when teams sell, new ownership tends to want to bring in its own people to run things. One of those dominoes fell



Hornets guard Seth Curry shoots between Pacers Beneditct Mathurin, left, and Doug McDermott during a game in Charlotte, N.C., on Feb. 12. Curry is among the players Charlotte got in deals at the deadline.

Monday, when general manager Mitch Kupchak transitioned to an advisory role. Clifford might go next. But it’s clear: new owners Rick Schnall and Gabe Plotkin aren’t waiting for the summer to start changing the roster — they did it now.

Here’s basically what Charlotte ended up with after trade season: Seth Curry (wearing the No. 30 jersey that his father Dell did in Charlotte; think a few Hornets fans might buy that now?), Grant Williams, Davis Bertans, Tre Mann, Vasilije Micic (a rookie who only had career-bests of 18 points and nine assists in his Charlotte debut), two first-round picks, two second-round picks and salary cap space.

That’s almost as many assets as they have wins this season. An added bonus: Not only is Curry, Steph Curry’s brother, a native of Charlotte from his father’s playing time there — “it’s a dream come true as a dad,” said Dell Curry, now one of the team’s broadcasters — but Wil-

liams is as well.

Curry said all the right things. He’s thrilled to be back, thrilled to be around Duke again, thrilled to have a chance to eat a little bit of Bojangles food (if you’ve been to Charlotte, you understand). Same goes for Williams.

“It’s kind of funny that it happened this way, because it allows you to be a part of something that can be built from the ground up,” Williams said. “New ownership, new team, a bunch of guys who are young and talented, a chance to build something special here in the city. ... Coming home is a really unique opportunity and I’ve got to take full advantage of it.”

The Hornets have 29 games left in this season, which will be their seventh in the last eight years without a winning record and could finish as the second-worst in the city’s NBA history — only the unspeakably bad 2011-12 team that finished 7-59 was worse.

But this season no longer mat-

ters from a won-lost perspective. Charlotte had high hopes entering the season and won on opening night with this lineup: LaMelo Ball, Mark Williams, Hayward, Washington and Rozier. Ball and Williams have been hurt for most of the season. Hayward, Washington and Rozier are gone.

So these last 29 games are a building block to the summer and to figure out what could be next season, and the seasons after that. The Hornets think Brandon Miller — the No. 2 pick behind Victor Wembanyama in next year’s draft — will be a star. They have Ball; he’s already been an All-Star.

There are good pieces on the roster, most of whom are under contract for at least next season and in many cases beyond. There will be cap space. Miles Bridges will be a free agent this summer and he and Charlotte have decisions to make.

What they did at the trade deadline won’t matter much this year. But down the road, it sure might.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	43	12	.782	—
New York	33	22	.600	10
Philadelphia	32	22	.593	10½
Brooklyn	21	33	.389	21½
Toronto	19	36	.345	24
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	30	25	.545	—
Orlando	30	25	.545	—
Atlanta	24	31	.436	6
Charlotte	13	41	.241	16½
Washington	9	45	.167	20½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	36	17	.679	—
Milwaukee	35	20	.636	2
Indiana	31	25	.554	6½
Chicago	26	29	.473	11
Detroit	8	46	.148	28½
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New Orleans	33	22	.600	—
Dallas	32	23	.582	1
Houston	24	30	.444	8½
Memphis	19	36	.345	14
San Antonio	11	44	.200	22
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	38	16	.704	—
Oklahoma City	37	17	.685	1
Denver	36	19	.655	2½
Utah	26	29	.473	12½
Portland	15	38	.283	22½
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Clippers	36	17	.679	—
Phoenix	33	22	.600	4
Sacramento	31	23	.574	5½
L.A. Lakers	30	26	.536	7½
Golden State	26	26	.500	9½
Tuesday's games				
Boston 118, Brooklyn 110 Oklahoma City 127, Orlando 113 Miami 123, Milwaukee 97 Minnesota 121, Portland 109 Phoenix 130, Sacramento 125 L.A. Lakers 125, Detroit 111				
Wednesday's games				
Charlotte 122, Atlanta 99 Orlando 118, New York 100 Miami 109, Philadelphia 104 Boston 136, Brooklyn 86 Indiana 127, Toronto 125 Cleveland 108, Chicago 105 Memphis 121, Houston 113 Dallas 116, San Antonio 93 New Orleans 133, Washington 126 L.A. Lakers 138, Utah 122 Sacramento 102, Denver 98 Phoenix 116, Detroit 100 L.A. Clippers 130, Golden State 125				
Thursday's games				
Milwaukee at Memphis Golden State at Utah Minnesota at Portland				
Sunday's game				
NBA All-Star Game: East vs. West at Indianapolis				

Pistons' Stewart arrested for punching Suns' Eubanks

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Detroit Pistons center Isaiah Stewart was arrested for assault Wednesday for punching Phoenix Suns center Drew Eubanks at the arena hours before the teams played.

Phoenix police said Stewart was issued a citation and released. He was already listed as out for the game because of a sprained left ankle. Eubanks had six points and eight rebounds in 18 minutes in the Suns’ 116-100 victory.

Eubanks said before the game



Stewart **Eubanks**

that the altercation happened as he was coming into the arena. He said an argument started and they were chest-to-chest before Stewart threw the punch. Security intervened and Eubanks said he was fine for the game, though po-

lice said he sustained a minor injury.

“The attack on Drew Eubanks was unprovoked, and acts of violence such as this are unacceptable,” the Suns said in a statement. “We unequivocally support Drew, and will continue to work with local law enforcement and the NBA.”

The Pistons said they were aware of the incident.

“We are in the process of gathering information about what happened and what provoked it, and responding to the NBA and lo-

cal authorities,” the team said.

Pistons coach Monty Williams, fired by Phoenix after last season, said he thought the Suns should not have weighed in with their statement.

“The thing is to get all of the information. The NBA will do an investigation,” Williams said. “For me to come here and make a statement would be a bit irresponsible. I know the Suns said it was unprovoked; I think that is irresponsible for sure. You really don’t know.”

“That did not need to happen. There is a time for the informa-

tion to be gathered and then you can make a statement.”

Stewart was also involved in an on-court altercation with the Lakers’ LeBron James in 2021 that saw Stewart suspended for two games and James for one.

“Keep the game first. There’s a lot of noise,” Suns star Kevin Durant said. “It’s unfortunate what happened before the game, it’s supposed to be a brotherhood. But I also understand, dudes get into stuff. We try to avoid that in this league, hopefully we can move on from it. We all support Drew.”

MLB

Dodgers optimistic after huge offseason

By DAVID BRANDT

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Money can buy lots of things, including Shohei Ohtani and Yoshinobu Yamamoto, a pair of Japanese superstars that set the Los Angeles Dodgers back more than \$1 billion.

Now the journey begins to see if it'll buy them a championship.

Major League Baseball's spring training opened for 28 of 30 teams this past week, with pitchers and catchers reporting to sites in Arizona and Florida. The Dodgers and San Diego Padres were already in camp, getting a head start because they'll open the regular season on March 20 in Seoul, South Korea.

"There's a lot more eyeballs on the Dodgers," LA manager Dave Roberts said. "I expect our players and organization to elevate our game. The responsibility with more eyeballs is greater expectations. That's good for all of us."

The New York Yankees took a big swing this winter by trading for Juan Soto and signing Marcus Stroman. The Philadelphia Phillies reloaded by bringing back Aaron Nola on a \$172 million, seven-year deal. The San Francisco Giants took a \$113 million gamble on Korean outfielder Jung Hoo Lee, while the Chicago Cubs gave lefty Shota Imanaga \$54 million to leave Japan.

But there's no doubt the Dodgers won the winter — not that it's any guarantee Los Angeles will hoist the Commissioner's Trophy after a World Series win this fall. Just ask the New York Mets, who splurged with a \$374 million payroll last year that was the highest in MLB history.

All that bought was a 75-87 record, a fourth-place finish in the National League East.

The Dodgers dominated much of the offseason conversation, but there are several other teams who have realistic championship aspirations. Among them are the defending champion Texas Rangers, who beat the Arizona Diamondbacks in five games during last year's World Series to win a title for the first time.

Ronald Acuña Jr. and the Atlanta Braves will try to finish the job after another disappointing early exit in last year's playoffs. The Houston Astros — who have been to the World Series four times over the past seven seasons, including two titles — are another formidable team with a deep lineup led by Jose Altuve, Alex Bregman, Yordan Alvarez and Kyle Tucker.

Here are some more things to watch as spring training begins:

Free agents

It may be mid-February, but



ASHLEY LANDIS/AP

Los Angeles Dodgers designated hitter Shohei Ohtani signs autographs for fans. Ohtani was the top free agent in baseball during the offseason.



LINDSEY WASSON/AP

Bruce Bochy and the Texas Rangers are the reigning World Series champions and the team everyone aims to dethrone this year.

they are still several big-name free agents available for teams who need help, including two-time Cy Young winner Blake Snell, third baseman Matt Chapman, left-hander Jordan Montgomery, outfielder/first baseman Cody Bellinger and veteran slugger J.D. Martinez.

Outfielder Jorge Soler had been part of that group as well, but several sources reported Tuesday that he was signing with the San Francisco Giants on a 3-year, \$42 million deal. Soler was the American League home run leader in 2019 and popped 36 long balls for the Marlins last season, making his first All-Star team.

Snell is a top-of-the-rotation op-

tion, while Montgomery had a breakout 2023 for the Cardinals and Rangers. Chapman has some power and a reputation as one of the game's elite defensive third baseman.

Bellinger is a former MVP who had a stellar bounce-back season for the Cubs. Martinez is a six-time All-Star.

Defending champs

Texas goes to spring training with World Series MVP Corey Seager recovering from surgery Jan. 30 for a left sports hernia repair. The Rangers are hopeful the shortstop will be ready for the start of the regular season and don't seem concerned about any

lingering issues.

The Rangers won their first World Series title in their first season with manager Bruce Bochy, who won his fourth. They had six consecutive losing seasons before that.

Including Seager, in the third season of his \$325 million, 10-year contract, the Rangers return all six of their All-Stars from last season. Second baseman Marcus Semien, third baseman Josh Jung, catcher Jonah Heim, AL Championship Series MVP slugger Adolis García and right-hander Nathaniel Eovaldi are also back.

Cy Young Award winners Jacob deGrom (elbow) and Max Scherzer (herniated disk in lower back) could return to the rotation around the trade deadline. The Rangers won all six of deGrom's starts early last season before he had surgery, and he should resume throwing this spring. The 39-year-old Scherzer, their deadline acquisition last summer, had surgery in December.

Not so new rules

MLB's new rules package rocked the sport in 2023 — mostly in a good way.

The changes included a pitch clock, bigger bases and a limit on the number of times a pitcher could step off the rubber. There was scattered grouching by players, but it's hard to argue that the changes weren't a huge success.

The sport drew 70 million fans

to stadiums for the first since 2017, game length fell to its lowest since 1984 and there was widespread agreement that the changes made the game much more watchable.

Last year's spring training was the testing ground for those rule changes. This year, everyone will be used to them.

Snakes and Birds

Two of the most exciting teams in baseball last year were the Diamondbacks and Baltimore Orioles.

Arizona made a stunning run to the World Series, led by unanimous NL Rookie of the Year Corbin Carroll, who was an all-around threat with 30 doubles, 10 triples, 25 homers and 54 stolen bases, all while playing stellar outfield defense.

The D-backs made some moves during the offseason to try to prove their team success wasn't a fluke, adding third baseman Eugenio Suarez, left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez and veteran slugger Joc Pederson.

The Orioles won 101 games before getting swept out of the playoffs by the eventual champion Rangers. AL Rookie of the Year Gunnar Henderson — also a unanimous selection — returns after blasting 28 homers and playing great defense at both shortstop and third.

Baltimore made a recent splash when it traded for Milwaukee ace Corbin Burnes, a three-time All-Star who won the 2021 Cy Young.

NASCAR

Season: Blaney could be new face of series

FROM PAGE 48

While a deal will likely be reached — NASCAR, after all, controls most of the major racing facilities in the United States — the discontent could make for a strained season.

Blaney a dream champion

Ryan Blaney is the reigning Cup champion after a late-season surge helped him follow Penske teammate Joey Logano with back-to-back NASCAR championships for Roger Penske. Blaney's title



Blaney

was somewhat surprising largely because Ford teams struggled last year with just eight wins in 36 races. But Blaney held off Hendrick Motorsports drivers Kyle Larson and William Byron, as well as Christopher Bell of Joe Gibbs Racing, to win his first career championship.

Blaney is NASCAR's dream champion, a blue-collar racer from a family of racers rooted in the mill country of northeastern Ohio. He seems soft spoken but showed he's got the internal fire to be a champion and delivered down the stretch last year.

He was beaten by good buddy Chase Elliott in the fan-voted NASCAR most popular driver contest, but Blaney is the one guy many believe — if marketed correctly — is NASCAR's next star.

Ford, meanwhile, introduced a remodeled Mustang for Cup competition this season. Ford will use the Dark Horse model as it attempts to pick up its performance with top teams Penske, Stewart-Haas Racing and RFK Racing.

Toyota expansion

Toyota has been looking to add more teams to its stable and does so this year with Legacy Motor Club, the team co-owned by Jimmie Johnson. The move keeps Toyota development drivers Erik Jones and John Hunter Nemechek with the automaker, as well as nine races for Hall of Famer Johnson, who starts his season with the Daytona 500.

Toyota always expects all four of its Gibbs entries to make the playoffs and 23XI saw both Tyler Reddick and Bubba Wallace make the playoff field last season.

Like Ford, Toyota also rolled out a new design for its Camry and the XSE will race in 2024.

Larson plans the double

Kyle Larson fell short of a second Cup title last year but is poised to have another magical season. His year is centered on the Indianapolis 500-Coca-Cola 600 double, the longest day in motorsports over the Memorial Day weekend.

He will drive a Hendrick Motorsports entry fielded by McLaren Racing, which has been impressed so far with Larson's car. He's just the fifth driver to attempt to run the Indy 500 and the Coke 600, the longest race on the NASCAR schedule, and only Tony Stewart in one of his two attempts completed all 1,100 miles.

Larson started this year with a win in the Wild West Shootout, a slight recovery after his wreck that same week of January at the Chili Bowl. When boss Rick Hendrick checked in with Larson following his sprint car win last month, he said Larson "forgot to tell me" about his flip at the Chili Bowl.

"I found out about it later and asked him about it," said Hendrick. "He said, 'I was hoping you wouldn't find out about that.'"

New faces

Kevin Harvick is the latest veteran to retire and made his debut as NASCAR on Fox's new full-time analyst with the exhibition Clash. He was been replaced at Stewart-Haas Racing by Josh Berry, a journeyman who finally gets his shot with a Cup team and joins Noah Gragson as SHR newcomers.

Shane van Gisbergen, winner of the street race in Chicago in his NASCAR debut last season, has now moved from Australia and embarks on a multi-series season that begins with ARCA and Xfinity races this week in Daytona.

Zane Smith and Carson Hocevar are both moving from the Truck Series to Cup with Spire Motorsports, Smith under a development deal with Trackhouse Racing.

RFK Racing has introduced a program that will allow the team to field a third Cup entry at select races. First up? David Ragan will attempt to make the Daytona 500 this week.

Schedule tweaks

NASCAR last year brought North Wilkesboro in North Carolina back to the schedule and successfully held its first street race in downtown Chicago.

This year, NASCAR takes the Cup Series to Iowa Speedway for the first time. Atlanta Motor Speedway and the road course at Watkins Glen in upstate New York were added to the playoffs. Bristol Motor Speedway is removing the dirt for its spring race and Indianapolis Motor Speedway is returning NASCAR to its historic oval.

The season ends once again at Phoenix Raceway, where the Cup champion will be crowned on Nov. 10.



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Chase Elliott missed six races last season after breaking his leg in a snowboarding accident and never contended for the title. He missed the playoffs for the first time in his eight full NASCAR Cup seasons.

Elliott out to bounce back from his worst season yet

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Chase Elliott wants to race cars. Fast cars that he can drive to a second NASCAR championship.

The rest of the stuff? The crowds, the commercials, the showcasing his every move on social media? That's just never going to be part of the job that Elliott finds enjoyable.

"I like the private life, outside of racing, what I like to do, I like it private," Elliott told The Associated Press ahead of this Sunday's season-opening Daytona 500. "I like the fact that no one knows what I like to do."

The topic came up as part of a growing narrative around the second-generation racer voted NASCAR's most popular driver the last six years. Elliott is coming off a winless season marred by injury and a one-race suspension in the worst statistical year among his eight full Cup Series seasons driving for Hendrick Motorsports.

Does Elliott only race because it's all he has ever known? His father is Hall of Famer Bill Elliott, his uncle a pioneer engine builder and the entire Elliott family has accomplished everything from their home base in Dawsonville, Ga., more than 200 miles away from most everyone else in NASCAR in and around Charlotte, N.C.

If Elliott could just stop racing and slide into a life of snowboarding in Colorado, does team owner Rick Hendrick think the 28-year-old would slip into obscurity?

"No, because I don't know what

Daytona 500
AFN-Sports
8:30 p.m. Sunday CET
4:30 a.m. Monday JKT

other stuff he does," Hendrick told AP. "He's not a party guy. He's not a world traveler. I think he enjoys living in Dawsonville. Chase, he has not given up. In no way is he racing because he's Chase Elliott. He's racing because he knows he's a champion."

Elliott would argue his public persona is the opposite of a driver who would rather be on the slopes than at the track. Elliott missed six races last year after breaking his leg in a snowboarding accident.

His mood, Elliott said, is reflective of whatever he did that day in the No. 9 Chevrolet and not his overall approach to his profession.

"I still enjoy racing very much. I enjoy the competition aspect of it more than anything, and I think for me, it's probably misunderstood, I guess, or it sounds like it is, but I just want to be good at it," Elliott said. "I want to be competitive. I want to feel like I'm holding up my end of the bargain and I just don't feel like I have done a very good job."

"Over the last number of months and throughout the course of last season — and no excuse at all — I want to be better and I want to do better. I would argue it's the exact opposite, that a lot of the times when you see my frustration, it is because I want I be better, not because I don't want to be there. So

I'd be careful coming to those conclusions without knowing the full understanding."

And since we're talking about understanding the entire picture, Elliott believes the No. 9 team's struggles last season were carried over from 2022, when he won five races but slumped his way into the championship finale and finished last in the four-driver title field.

Hendrick and Jeff Gordon, the vice chairman of the race team, believe Elliott's season was doomed in March when he broke his leg. Even one week out of NASCAR's newish race car can be a tremendous setback to a driver, Hendrick and Gordon believe.

Elliott missed six but is convinced otherwise.

"I certainly don't blame the injury. I don't think my knee had anything to do with our performance," Elliott said. "It would be really easy for me to take that excuse but I just don't think it is valid. I think the things we struggled with last year were the things we were struggling with at the end of '22 and they rolled over into last season."

Elliott is an annual expectant to make the 16-driver playoff field, and he's equally expected to make the championship four. Last year was the first time he had missed the playoffs, and the first time since 2019, the year before his 2020 Cup title, that he wasn't among the final four title contenders.

Elliott hasn't locked himself in on winning the Daytona 500. He's got a long way to go to overcome last season.

DAYTONA 500

Logano, McDowell give Ford front row

BY JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Ford swept the front row in qualifying for the Daytona 500 with former race winners Joey Logano and Michael McDowell shocking powerhouse Hendrick Motorsports.

“This is all about the team. I’d like to take credit, but I can’t. Superspeedway qualifying is 100 percent the car,” said Logano, who won the first Daytona 500 pole for Team Penske. “Finally, someone else wins the pole.”

Hendrick drivers had won the pole at Daytona in eight of the last nine years, but the team’s highest qualifier Wednesday night was Kyle Larson in third.



McDowell

The entire night, in which only the front row for Sunday’s season-opening race was set, belonged to Ford. Four drivers in the manufacturer’s new Dark Horse advanced to the final round-of-10 qualifying portion with Logano and McDowell sweeping the front row.

Logano turned a lap of 181.947 mph as the 2015 Daytona 500 winner earned his first pole since Atlanta last year. It was also Logano’s first pole on a superspeedway.

McDowell, the 2021 winner, qualified second at 181.686 for Front Row Motorsports.

Larson was third in a Chevrolet after Hendrick drivers had won three straight Daytona 500 poles heading into Wednesday night. Austin Cindric in a Ford for Penske



CHRIS O’MEARA/AP

Joey Logano smiles as he pushes his car Wednesday after qualifying for the Daytona 500. Logano took the pole position for Sunday’s race ahead of Michael McDowell.

was fourth and followed by Hendrick teammates Chase Elliott and William Byron.

Richard Childress Racing teammates Austin Dillon and Kyle Busch qualified seventh and eighth in Chevrolets, followed by Ross Chastain in a Chevy for Trackhouse Racing and Harrison Burton in a Ford for Wood Brothers Racing. Dillon won the Day-

tona 500 in 2018.

Anthony Alfredo of Beard Motorsports and David Ragan in a special third car for RFK Racing took two of the four open spots in the field based on speed. Jimmie Johnson, a two-time Daytona 500 winner driving for his own Legacy Motor Club, did not make it into the field and will have to race

his way in through one of the two Thursday night qualifying races.

Alfredo was never in danger after posting the fastest speed of all the cars not already locked into the 40-car field. But he was so fast — he was in the top five at one point — that making the Daytona 500 was a lock.

“This is insane, we were just talking about every (qualifying) scenario we may face,” Alfredo said. “We have clearly a fast Chevrolet Camaro and to know we are in ... and remove ourselves from some of the sketchy circumstances and focus on Sunday is amazing.”

Ragan is the first driver being used by RFK Racing this year as a third Ford in select races.

“It’s always big to be in the Daytona 500 and the whole week, I’ve just been trying not to make mistakes,” said Ragan, who is 0-for-16 in “The Great American Race.”

“I didn’t have a chance to beat Jimmie Johnson day in and day out during my career, so I’ll take the small victories when I can get them.”

Johnson’s showing was a product of Toyota’s overall effort. The highest-qualifying Toyota was Erik Jones — who drives for Johnson at Legacy — at 22nd.

“I had higher expectations for sure, but we are lumped right there with the other Toyotas. It is what it is,” Johnson said. “I’ve never been in this position, so I don’t know. I came down here mentally prepared to race my way in if that was required. I’m well studied. I spent a lot of time working on the environment of the Duels and the way the race will unfold. Just get out there and race hard and see how it unfolds.”

Larson among NASCAR champs in frustrating 0-for-Daytona club

BY MARK LONG
Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — No one needs to remind Kyle Larson about his record at Daytona International Speedway.

He’s frustratingly winless at the famed track, which is the only NASCAR venue at which he doesn’t even have a top-five finish.

“I do believe that we are much, much better than what we show on paper,” Larson said. “I feel like 90% of the time we’re in the top six to eight at the end of the race, the final 10 laps, then we get caught up in a crash and end up finishing 28th or worse.”

Larson is one of six drivers — and one of four former Cup Series champions — who will try to end double-digit skids in the Daytona 500 on Sunday. Larson fell to 0-for-10 in “The Great American Race” last year after getting caught up in a final-lap melee.

“It’s tougher today than it’s ever been,” three-time Daytona 500 winner and current Hendrick Motorsports vice chairman Jeff Gordon said. “You’ve just got to get yourself in position and be patient.”

Larson, who has started the last two Daytona 500s from the front row, was alongside leader and eventual winner Ricky Stenhouse Jr. on the second restart in overtime before coming home 18th. He’s finished 18th or worse in half of his Daytona 500 starts.

“Eventually it’s got to work out,” Larson said. “We keep putting ourselves in position. I’m confident that we can go out there and win or at least get a good finish and get off to a good start for the year.

“There’s a lot of factors that come into play at those superspeedway races. You have to cross your fingers that you can be in front of the pack and then you execute at the finish.”

Larson, the 2021 Cup Series champion, has plenty of company in the 0-for-Daytona 500 club.

Martin Truex Jr. is winless in 19 starts in the 500, none more agonizing than losing to Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Denny Hamlin by inches in 2016. Truex doesn’t have a top-10 finish in the 500 since, but he did win the series championship the following year.

Kyle Busch is 0-for-18 in the

500, a skid that’s more of a head-scratcher than a heartbreaker considering the two-time series champ has won at just about every track on the circuit. Busch has started having fun with it. He peered at a handful of Powerball tickets last year and quipped, “Better chances of winning that than the Daytona 500.”

Brad Keselowski’s winless streak spans 14 Daytona 500s, also baffling considering the 2012 series champ has six wins at NASCAR’s other superspeedway, Talladega.

Keselowski had his best shot in 2021 before then-Team Penske teammate Joey Logano blocked him on the final lap, causing both to crash and allowing Michael McDowell to drive by for one of the more shocking finishes in race history.

“You just feel like you’re in position and it doesn’t happen and, yeah, it’s super painful,” said Keselowski, who listed winning the Daytona 500 atop his list of goals for 2024. “The closer you are to winning the race, the more painful it is.”

David Ragan (0-for-16) and A.J.



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Kyle Larson stands by his car on pit road after qualifying for the Daytona 500 last year. Daytona International Speedway is the only NASCAR venue at which Larson doesn’t have a top-five finish.

Allmendinger (0-for-10) also are on the double-digit list.

Hall of Famers Tony Stewart, Rusty Wallace and Mark Martin are the most notable drivers to never win the Daytona 500.

Fellow Hall of Famer David Pearson needed 15 tries to win NASCAR’s signature event. Kyle Busch’s older brother Kurt needed 16. And NASCAR great Dale Earnhardt won in his 20th try — an iconic moment in series history.

Larson hopes to avoid that lengthy a wait and should have as good

a chance as anyone Sunday.

“I’ve told him and all of our guys, ‘Look, we’ve led the race. We ran second last year. We have been in position to win it so many times and we get taken out,’” said Hendrick Motorsports owner Rick Hendrick, whose last Daytona 500 victory came with Dale Earnhardt Jr. in 2014.

“We just got to go be competitive and our turn will come. That race is so unpredictable. We just got to go run the race, but our cars are fast enough, and I think our time is coming.”

SPORTS



Sitting atop the league
Canucks lead all teams this late
for first time since 2012 » **NHL, Page 42**



DAVID GRAHAM/AP

A sold-out crowd watches the start of last year's Daytona 500. A new NASCAR season begins Sunday with the Grea American Race at Daytona International Speedway in Florida.

Kicking off another season

NASCAR starts with new champ, teams wanting bigger share of revenue

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press
DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — NASCAR launches its new season with rivals attempting to dethrone Team Penske after two years atop the Cup Series while an off-track battle over revenue sharing threatens to overshadow the competition.
Teams reported to Daytona International Speedway this week for Sunday's season-opening Day-

tona 500 without a new agreement that has been a sore spot for months. Talks on extending the charter agreement — which essentially is a franchise system in the top racing series in the U.S. — took a backseat to NASCAR's negotiations on the new, \$7.7 billion television deal that begins next year.
The current charter agreement expires at the end of this season. The teams declined to extend ex-



Penske



Hamlin

clusive talks with NASCAR into February. They could theoretically race for another series if the situation deteriorates, though the

challenges there would be immense.
Members of the negotiating council for the teams say they want a fair share of NASCAR revenue, do not believe the TV deal was as lucrative as NASCAR expected and believe teams are getting shut out of licensing agreements that should be shared.
Denny Hamlin, the three-time Daytona 500 winner for Joe Gibbs Racing and co-owner with Mi-

chael Jordan of 23XI Racing, used his podcast to accuse NASCAR of using the TV package negotiations as a stalling tactic.
“We tried to start these conversations two years ago and it's just been delay, delay, delay. So now here we are at the end of the rope,” Hamlin said. “Do I believe we are closer to a deal now than 12 months ago? I don't think so.”
SEE SEASON ON PAGE 46

Cross country skiing event returns to US » Winter sports, Page 43

