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ALEX BRANDON/AP

President Donald Trump applauds on stage during an address to troops at the Al Udeid Air Base on Thursday in Doha, Qatar.

Nuclear accord ambitions

Trump says the US and Iran have 'sort of' agreed on terms for a nuke deal

By ZEKE MILLER
AND AAMER MADHANI
Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar — President Donald Trump said Thursday that the United States and Iran have “sort of” agreed to terms on a nuclear deal, offering a measure of confidence that an accord is coming into sharper focus.

Trump, in an exchange with reporters at a business roundtable

in Doha, Qatar, described the talks between American envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi as “very serious negotiations” for “long-term peace” and were continuing to progress.

Still, throughout his visit with Arab Gulf leaders this week, the president has underscored that military action against Iran’s nuclear facilities remains a possibil-

ity if the talks derail.

“Iran has sort of agreed to the terms: They’re not going to make, I call it, in a friendly way, nuclear dust,” Trump said at the business event. “We’re not going to be making any nuclear dust in Iran.”

Without offering detail, he signaled growing alignment with the terms that he has been seeking.

But a top political, military and nuclear adviser to Iran’s supreme

leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, told NBC News on Wednesday that Tehran stands ready get rid of its stockpiles of highly enriched uranium that can be weaponized, agree to enrich uranium only to the lower levels needed for civilian use and allow international inspectors to supervise the process.

Ali Shamkhani added that in re-

SEE DEAL ON PAGE 9

GAO: DODEA schools see mental health needs surge

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERLAUTERN, Germany — Counselors and psychologists at Defense Department schools say they are overwhelmed by a surge in student mental health concerns—especially suicidal behavior—due to staffing shortages, administrative burdens and unclear guidance, a federal watchdog agency report says.

The Government Accountability Office found that 1 in 50 students at Department of Defense Education Activity schools was assessed for suicide risk in each of the past two school years, according to a report released Wednesday.

Staff at all 27 DODEA schools visited by the GAO said students were experiencing “unprecedented and increasing levels of mental health concerns,” including rising rates of self-harm, depression and anxiety.

GAO auditors conducted the review between January 2024 and May 2025, visiting 11 military installations in the U.S., Europe and the Pacific.

They interviewed school principals, assistant principals, psychologists, counselors, nurses, DOD-sponsored mental health providers, parents and behavioral health professionals.

The review was mandated by the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act in response to reports of worsening mental health among K-12 students nationwide since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Military-connected children face unique stressors, the GAO noted, but “less is known about the effectiveness of DOD’s efforts to

SEE SURGE ON PAGE 6

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	Azores	Change in price	Turkey	Change in price
Germany	\$3.550	\$4.133	\$4.498	\$3.906	..	..	\$4.356	..
Change in price	-2.7 cents	-1.2 cents	-0.3 cents	-2.1 cents	..	..	-0.4 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.543	\$5.107	\$4.653	..	..	\$4.148	\$4.131*
Change in price	..	+4.3 cents	+4.3 cents	+1.2 cents	..	..	-0.4 cents	No change
U.K.	..	\$4.145	\$4.510	\$3.918	..	..	..	..
Change in price	..	-1.2 cents	-0.4 cents	-2.1 cents	..	..	..	..

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective May 16. The change in price is from May 9.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	South Korea	Change in price	Guam	Change in price
Japan	..	\$4.139	..	\$3.539	\$3.219	..	\$4.159	\$3.569
Change in price	..	No change	..	-2.0 cents	-2 cents	..	-1 cent	-2 cents
Okinawa	\$3.199	..	..	\$3.539	\$3.239**	\$3.829	\$4.189	..
Change in price	-1 cent	..	..	-2 cents	-3 cents	-1 cent	-1 cent	..

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
Pacific prices for the week of May 16-22

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (May 16)	0.87	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769
British pound (May 16)	\$1.30	Britain (Pound)	0.7523
Japanese yen (May 16)	139.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.3993
South Korean won (May 16)	1366.00	China (Yuan)	7.2064
		Denmark (Krone)	6.6602
		Egypt (Pound)	50.1593
		Euro	0.8927
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8059
		Hungary (Forint)	359.91
		Israel (Shekel)	3.5481
		Japan (Yen)	145.82
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3074
		Norway (Krone)	10.4086
		Philippines (Peso)	55.70
		Poland (Zloty)	3.79
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7510
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.2976
		South Korea (Won)	1396.65
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8355		
Thailand (Baht)	33.22		
Turkey (NewLira)	38.6847		

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

INTEREST RATES

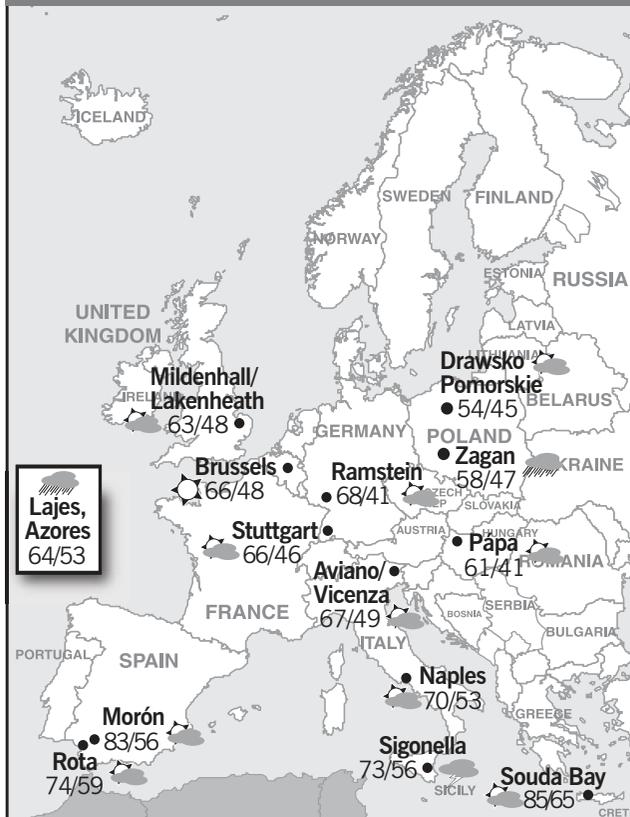
Prime rate	3.25
Interest Rates Discount rate	0.25
Federal funds market rate	0.09
3-month bill	0.10
30-year bond	1.65

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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MILITARY

Rubio to NATO: Boost defense spending

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told NATO allies on Thursday that much more defense spending is needed to reinforce the 32-nation security pact.

Rubio, who is in Turkey for a foreign ministers meeting and high-level peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, said progress on a plan for more robust military investments is needed ahead of a NATO leaders summit in June.

“The alliance is only as strong as its weakest link, and we endeavor to have no weak links in this alliance,” Rubio said as NATO discussions began in Antalya.

The gathering of foreign ministers comes one month before President Donald Trump and other heads of state meet in The Hague, Netherlands, to discuss the future course of the alliance.

Defense spending is expected to be at the top of the agenda. Trump has demanded that allies increase their military investment levels from the current NATO minimum of 2% of gross domestic product to 5%.

Rubio said that Trump’s budget, which calls for \$1 trillion in defense spending, is headed in that direction.

He called that level of American defense expenditure “unheard-of” and “unparalleled.”

“And it’s not just spending mon-



Secretary of State Marco Rubio talks with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte on Thursday at a NATO foreign ministers meeting in Antalya, Turkey.

NATO

ey,” Rubio said. “It’s spending money on the capabilities that are needed for the threats of the 21st century.”

The White House’s focus on major increases means many allies that are already struggling to hit the 2% mark will be under significant pressure to do more.

Germany, which reached 2% in 2024 after years of criticism from Washington for not investing

enough in defense, now said it’s prepared to move toward Trump’s 5% demand.

“We will follow him in this respect,” German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl told reporters on the sidelines of the NATO meeting.

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte said Thursday that eight of the alliance’s 32 members still fall short of the 2% benchmark.

“We need to do much, much more, and that’s exactly what we will focus on today,” Rutte said. “There’s also a clear demand from our biggest ally to make sure that we equalize in terms of spending with what the U.S. is doing and what Europeans and Canada are doing.”

In NATO, there has been significant progress toward the 2% mark over the past decade. The in-

creased threat posed by Russia and pressure from Washington have been driving factors in those increases, NATO officials have said.

However, it’s not clear how many members are prepared to meet Trump’s new spending demand. Also uncertain is what the consequences will be for NATO if members push back on Trump’s spending benchmark.

Over the years, Trump has said the U.S. commitment to NATO and the defense of allies are linked to member states’ fulfillment of their spending obligations.

While some countries, such as Poland, already have plans to get to the 5% level, others are barely at 2%. One plan being circulated calls for 3.5% of GDP spent on defense and an additional 1.5% related to military infrastructure.

Rutte declined to confirm the formula, saying that negotiations are still going on and that a debate on the details will be held at the meeting in Turkey.

Rubio said dramatic increases in defense spending are needed for NATO to carry out its core mission.

“The purpose of NATO is to prevent wars through its strength, and that’s why we want to see it grow stronger,” Rubio said. “Spending levels among all partners that allow everyone to be stronger make the alliance stronger.”

Putin spurns Zelenskyy meeting but lower-level talks still on

By MEHMET GUZEL,
HANNA ARHIROVA
AND SUZAN FRASER
Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey—Russia and Ukraine are set to hold their first direct peace talks in three years, both countries said Thursday, but hopes for a breakthrough remained dim after Russian President Vladimir Putin spurned an offer by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to meet face-to-face in Turkey.

Zelenskyy said he is sending a team headed by his defense minister from the Turkish capital Ankara to Istanbul to meet a Russian delegation, even though Moscow’s side doesn’t include “anyone who actually makes decisions.”

Few had expected Putin to show up in Turkey, and his absence punctured any hope of significant progress in efforts to end the 3-year-old war that was given a push in recent months by the Trump administration and Western European leaders. It also raised the prospect of intensified international sanctions on Russia that have been threatened by the West.

Zelenskyy, speaking to report-



TURKISH PRESIDENCY/AP

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy during their meeting at the Presidential palace in Ankara on Thursday.

ers in Ankara where he flew Thursday after challenging Putin to sit down with him, accused Moscow of not taking efforts to end the war seriously by sending a low-level negotiating team that he described as “a theater prop.”

His proposal to Putin came after a flurry of maneuvering last weekend as each side sought a diplomatic advantage.

The head of the Russian delega-

tion, presidential aide Vladimir Medinsky, said in Istanbul the representatives were ready to meet Ukrainian officials.

It was not clear when they might meet. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio was due in Istanbul in Friday.

Zelenskyy, who is heading Friday to a gathering of European officials in Albania, said that he had decided to send the delegation to

Istanbul to demonstrate to U.S. President Donald Trump that Ukraine wants to end the fighting.

He said the Ukrainian side would be headed by Defense Minister Rustem Umerov and its aim is “to attempt at least the first steps toward de-escalation, the first steps toward ending the war — namely, a ceasefire.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan earlier welcomed Zelenskyy with an honor guard at the presidential palace in Ankara before the two held their own talks.

The war has killed tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides and more than 12,000 Ukrainian civilians, according to the U.N., and continues along the roughly 620-mile front line. Russian forces are preparing a fresh military offensive, Ukrainian government and Western military analysts say.

At least five civilians were killed and 29 injured in the past day, according to authorities in five eastern regions of Ukraine where Russia’s army is trying to advance.

The diplomatic maneuvering began Saturday when European leaders met Zelenskyy in Kyiv and urged the Kremlin to agree to a full,

unconditional 30-day ceasefire as a first step toward peace. Putin responded early Sunday by proposing direct talks with Ukraine in Istanbul. Then came Zelenskyy’s challenge to Putin for face-to-face talks.

After days of silence, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov finally said Thursday that Putin had no plans to travel to Istanbul in the next few days.

Trump said he was not surprised that Putin was a no-show. He had pressed for Putin and Zelenskyy to meet but brushed off the Kremlin leader’s decision not to attend.

“I didn’t think it was possible for Putin to go if I’m not there,” Trump told reporters at a meeting with business executives in Doha, Qatar, on the third day of his visit to the Middle East.

Trump said a meeting between him and Putin was crucial to breaking the deadlock.

“I don’t believe anything’s going to happen whether you like it or not, until (Putin) and I get together,” he said on Air Force One while traveling from Doha to Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates. “

PACIFIC

USAF general on Guam touts US readiness

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force on Guam has never been more ready for a fight — a quality that will prevent one from happening in the first place, the 36th Wing's outgoing commander said this week.

Brig. Gen. Thomas Palenske, interviewed Wednesday on "The Ray Gibson Show," a Guam radio program, said a conflict in the Western Pacific is highly unlikely thanks to Air Force deterrence in the region.

"We are as prepared to fight as we have ever been," he said during the interview livestreamed on KUSG's website. "We know exactly what every single airman is going to do, and we're practicing day in and day out."

Palenske, who is slated to relinquish command on May 22, emphasized that the service's heightened posture at Andersen Air Force Base and across Pacific Air Forces is key to deterring military aggression.

"You know why we're not going to have a war? Because we're so ready for war," he said.

Throughout the hourlong interview, Palenske refrained from mentioning specific adversaries except for a single mention of China and a brief discussion on North Korea.



NATASHA NINETE/U.S. Air Force

Brig. Gen. Thomas Palenske, commander of the 36th Wing, takes part in a shooting competition at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, in November.

Regarding China, Palenske said "everyone would make more money if we just get along." He later compared North Korea's economy to the United States' annual expenditure on Halloween candy and

said any conflict with the U.S. would be "existential for them."

The Department of Defense views Guam as a strategic hub vital for protecting U.S. military power in the region. Palenske said the

"war footing" mentality seen at Andersen has spread throughout PACAF, calling this the most prepared he's ever seen a major command.

In a moment of candor, Palenske

also acknowledged the political and financial forces that help sustain defense spending.

"There are huge political interests that are spring-loaded to make sure that that money keeps getting invested in the military industrial complex across the board," he said. "One, we got to have an enemy. But two, I mean, there are adversaries out there that do pose a threat."

If an adversary is smart, "they won't be anything other than posers of a threat, because if they take action and make a miscalculation, we're going to club them like baby seals," he said. "Make no mistake."

Palenske — known for signing off his frequent social media posts with "Murica!" — took command of the 36th Wing in 2023. He said he plans to retire and pursue a job in a micro-distillery.

His successor is Col. Charles Cooley, a command pilot and former deputy commander at the 618th Air Operations Center at Scott Air Force Base, Ill., according to a May 12 news release from Joint Region Marianas.

Palenske is one of three top-ranking military leaders on Guam set to step down this month. Joint Task Force Micronesia held a ceremony Thursday, and Joint Region Marianas will change leadership May 29.

Navy SEAL takes command of Joint Task Force-Micronesia

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

A Navy SEAL with a distinguished background in special operations has taken command of Joint Task Force-Micronesia, a unit overseeing U.S. military operations across a broad expanse of the southwestern Pacific Ocean.

Rear Adm. Joshua Lasky relieved Rear Adm. Greg Huffman on Thursday during a change-of-command ceremony in the fitness center at Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz.

"This region has long been the linchpin of American presence and partnership in the Pacific," Huffman said at the ceremony, livestreamed on Facebook. "Guam, in particular, holds a unique place in our national defense, known as the 'tip of the spear.' It is a symbol of our enduring commitment to the Indo Pacific security and stability."

Joint Task Force-Micronesia — the Defense Department's first two-star command in the region in over 70 years — was founded last year and is responsible for coordinating defense and humanitarian missions in the region. It answers directly to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

Its primary focus includes the U.S. territories of Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and Wake Island, along with the independent Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau.

Huffman, who left Joint Region Marianas

to become the task force's first commander in June 2024, reflected on his time leading both commands.

"It is one team, and it is one Guam; it is one Marianas and one Micronesia," he said. "It has been the honor of my career to lead Joint Task Force-Micronesia during a time of both challenge and opportunity."

Before relinquishing command, Huffman received several honors, including the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Guam Governor's Award, an exceptional service citation, and a certificate of special congressional recognition.

"This task force represents not just a command, it represents a commitment to the defense of our homeland and to the values of freedom and democracy that we all share," he said, adding that its strategic importance could not be overstated. "Micronesia is a bridge between peoples and a bulwark against coercion."

Huffman is slated to lead Navy Education and Training Command at Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida.

Lasky described the defense of the region as a "living legacy" built on "trust, shared history and common purpose."

"Their legacy is one of courage, commitment and an unshakable belief in our shared values," he said. "We stand at the foundation that they built, and we carry their example forward. We remain steadfast in our obligation under the compacts of



JASMIN AQUINO/U.S. Navy

Rear Adm. Joshua Lasky greets a Navy corpsman in Limon, Costa Rica, in July. Lasky took command of Joint Task Force-Micronesia on Thursday.

free association."

Lasky previously served as commander of Joint Interagency Task Force-South in Key West, Fla. A 1994 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, he began his career as a surface warfare officer before transferring to Naval Special Warfare. He completed Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training with Class 223 in June 1999 according to his Navy bio.

His operational assignments included SEAL Team 4, platoon commander of SEAL

Team 2, task unit commander for SEAL Delivery Vehicle Team 2, executive officer of SEAL Team 1 and commander of SEAL Team 10.

Lasky also served as deputy commander for the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan, commander of Naval Special Warfare Unit 10 and Naval Special Warfare Group 4.

He holds a master's degree in military studies from Marine Corps University in Quantico, Va.

PACIFIC

400K gallons of tainted water stored at US base

By **SETH ROBSON**
AND **HANA KUSUMOTO**
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The U.S. Air Force is storing about 400,000 gallons of contaminated water at this airlift hub in western Tokyo — significantly more than previously disclosed — and plans to treat and release it, Japan's Ministry of Defense said Wednesday.

The water, tainted with PFOS and PFOA — toxic components found in firefighting foam — is being held in a reservoir and at a fire training facility on the base, the ministry said in a news release that summarized information provided by U.S. officials at Yokota.

The U.S. Department of Defense had previously disclosed the presence of much smaller volumes of contaminated water on the base.

In October, Capt. Emma Quirk, spokeswoman for Yokota's 374th Airlift Wing, said a burst of heavy rain on Aug. 30 caused about 12,640 gallons of water to overflow from the fire training area onto an asphalt surface and into a storm-water drainage system.

A recent DOD Inspector General report found another 250 gallons of contaminated water had been



MACHIKO ARITA/U.S. Air Force

U.S. and Japanese military firefighters train together at Yokota Air Base, Japan, in October 2022.

improperly stored behind Yokota's exchange and commissary, following a fire-suppression system malfunction in January 2023.

A July 10 report by the Tokyo Shimbun, citing unnamed sources, said 167 gallons of contaminated water spilled at the shopping center's loading dock on Jan. 25, 2023.

On Wednesday, Japanese national and local officials visited Yokota, where they were briefed by subject matter experts, according to a same-day news release from the wing.

During the visit, U.S. officials told their Japanese counterparts that 300,000 gallons of contaminated water are stored in an on-base reservoir, and another 100,000 gallons at the firefighting training facility, according to the ministry.

The combined PFOS and PFOA concentration in the reservoir water is approximately 1,240 nanograms per liter, the U.S. officials said, according to the ministry.

PFOS and PFOA are part of a class of chemicals known as PFAS, often referred to as "forever chem-

icals" because of their persistence in the environment and human body, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. These compounds were once used in firefighting foam that the U.S. military has since ordered removed from its bases in Japan.

The EPA updated its health advisories in 2021 to state that no level of PFOS or PFOA in drinking water is considered safe. Lab animal studies cited by the American Cancer Society have linked exposure to increased risks of breast, liver, pancreatic and testicular tumors.

Yokota's tainted water will be treated with granular activated carbon filters to reduce contamination levels to below 50 nanograms per liter before it is discharged into a storm drain flowing from the southwest side of the base, U.S. officials said, according to the ministry.

Japanese officials, during the base visit, collected samples of treated water for testing.

"After all water has been removed from the reservoir and fire training facility, the connections between the two areas will be disconnected and plugged and both

areas will then be filled with soil to prevent accumulation of storm water," the U.S. officials told their counterparts, according to the ministry's release.

The 374th Airlift Wing at Yokota confirmed the water survey in its news release.

"This is a huge step in the right direction," wing commander Col. Richard McElhaney said in the release. "We are all One Community here and our mutual trust and friendship is a top priority. I'm thrilled to take another step toward closing this chapter and making Japan a better place for all of us."

Analysis of the water samples is expected to take two to three weeks, a Tokyo Metropolitan Government official handling U.S. military matters said by phone Thursday. Some Japanese officials customarily speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

Local authorities requested the survey after the Air Force informed them last month of its plan to release treated water.

This marks the first time Japanese officials have entered Yokota to collect water samples, the metro government official said.

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MILITARY

Trans troops face medical record reviews

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Troops with a history of gender dysphoria or who show symptoms of the condition will be subject to medical record reviews if they don't self-report, according to a memo issued Thursday by the Pentagon.

Medical screenings will be the Defense Department's primary means of involuntarily booting out transgender troops who do not self-identify for a discharge from military service, according to a senior defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity. The medical screenings will be conducted through the department's individual medical readiness program, which is executed on a rolling basis to assess whether a service member is able to deploy on a mission.

But unit commanders can also initiate medical screenings of service members suspected of having gender dysphoria if they do not

self-identify as the Pentagon works to weed out transgender people. Gender dysphoria is the distress that a person feels because their assigned gender and gender identity don't match. The medical condition has been linked to depression and suicidal thoughts.

"[This] is also consistent with what we expect and require of commanders generally, to ensure that their service members are fit and capable for duty — whether it's under this policy or any other qualification where they may have concern that that service member requires medical intervention or is not able to perform their duties," the official said.

The Pentagon announced a June 6 deadline last week for active-duty transgender troops and a July 7 deadline for Reserve members to identify themselves voluntarily for an honorable discharge from military service. It followed a Supreme Court ruling

on May 2 that allows the Trump administration to enforce a ban on transgender people in the military, while legal challenges to the policy proceed. President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth have taken the stance that transgender troops and those with gender dysphoria are not deployable and are ineligible for military service.

"The implementation requires some steps to ensure that those who go forward in service remain eligible to meet the high standards of the department. The department requires high standards to ensure that the force is ready to fight and win the nation's wars as called upon," the official said.

Approximately 1,000 troops across the services have already self-identified as having been diagnosed with gender dysphoria, Sean Parnell, chief Pentagon spokesman, said last week. The senior defense official on Thursday was unable to provide an up-

date on those numbers.

Roughly 2,000 transgender people serve in the military, representing less than 1% of active-duty service members. There are about 4,200 troops diagnosed with gender dysphoria serving in the active-duty, National Guard and Reserve forces, another senior defense official said in February.

Troops who self-identify by the applicable deadline will begin the separation process within 30 days. Troops who self-identify for voluntary separation will be provided an honorable discharge and voluntary separation pay.

Separation pay will be determined based on rank, time in service and whether the member left service voluntarily or involuntarily. For example, the official said, an enlisted member at the fifth pay grade with 10 years of service would receive approximately \$101,000 if they voluntarily separated versus less than \$51,000 if they were forced out of the mili-

tary. Similarly, an officer at the third pay grade with seven years of service would receive about \$125,000 if they voluntarily separated. For an involuntary separation, it would be about \$62,000.

"The department encourages currently serving service members who are impacted by the policy to elect to do the voluntary identification and voluntary separation process, which may afford certain benefits not available to those who go through the involuntary separation process," the official said.

Those voluntarily separating can also utilize pre-separation counseling, temporary health care coverage, employment assistance, financial counseling and community reintegration services. But troops who voluntarily separate will not be authorized to participate in SkillBridge, which is a program that allows troops to use the last 180 days of their military contract to learn a civilian trade.

Surge: Staff overwhelmed

FROM PAGE 1

meet the mental health needs of the more than 65,000 military-connected children."

"Without ensuring that it has the right mix of resources to address DODEA students' mental health needs, DOD may fall short of meeting service member families' needs, potentially harming mission readiness," the report stated.

DODEA recently launched a program to help schools identify student needs and build resilience, but school leaders haven't evaluated whether they have enough staff to carry out those goals, the GAO found.

School psychologists and counselors said they are significantly understaffed and often unable to support students who aren't in immediate crisis.

One psychologist reported that she couldn't conduct weekly check-ins with a student who had recently attempted suicide.

Staff at 24 of the 27 schools cited DODEA's high student-to-psychologist ratio as a key constraint. DODEA has 1 psychologist per 832 students, the GAO found.

While this surpasses the public school average of 1:1,065, it falls short of the National Association of School Psychologists' recommended 1:500 ratio — a standard DODEA claims to follow, according to the report.

In addition to staffing shortfalls, psychologists and counselors described being burdened by duties like coordinating testing.

Counselors at two schools said they were largely unavailable to

students during April and May due to intensive testing schedules.

DODEA headquarters officials acknowledged that standardized testing duties are not an ideal use of school counselors' expertise.

However, current policy leaves such staffing decisions up to schools and doesn't discourage the practice, the report said.

Parents also told the GAO that counselors and psychologists lacked time to meet need.

DODEA relies on three Pentagon-sponsored programs for student mental health support: Military Family Life Counseling, Adolescent Support and Counseling Services and the School Behavioral Health Program.

But their reach is limited. There are just 206 Military Family Life Counselors and 25 Defense Health Agency clinicians across all DODEA schools.

Pentagon officials have never evaluated the effectiveness of these programs, despite policy requiring such reviews.

Staff at most schools also said they were unclear on how to refer students to Military Family Life Counselors or expressed hesitation in doing so.

At 10 schools, MFLC counselors wouldn't share with staff how they were supporting the students, further complicating coordination.

The GAO recommended that the Defense Department direct DODEA to assess its workforce capacity and develop guidance discouraging the assignment of school counselors to standardized testing duties. It also called on DOD to evaluate its school-based mental health services.

Elevated lead levels in sinks at DOD school

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — Thirteen additional sinks at a Defense Department school in Bavaria have tested above acceptable lead levels, bringing the total to 17, U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach said Tuesday. The elevated lead levels were found at Ansbach Elementary School on Katterbach Kaserne during follow-up testing on May 3.

Results were returned Friday and announced in a Facebook post by the garrison.

While none of the sinks were used for drinking, one from the second round of testing is in a kindergarten food preparation area, garrison spokesman Nathan Van Schaik said Thursday in a joint statement with Department of Defense Education Activity spokeswoman Jessica Tackaberry.

It wasn't immediately clear whether that sink was used specifically to prepare or wash food.

"Your child's safety is our top priority," Van Schaik said, adding that the affected sinks had been taken out of service.

A question-and-answer session with officials and medical experts will be held Friday at 4 p.m. at the Bismarck Kaserne movie theater for the Ansbach community, the Facebook post said.

The fixtures in all 17 sinks are



FACEBOOK

Elevated levels of lead were discovered recently in classroom sinks at Ansbach Elementary School in Germany.

scheduled to be replaced starting May 23, after which they all will be retested, Van Schaik said.

The affected sinks from the second round of tests include six in classrooms, three in rooms mostly used for storage, two classroom bathroom sinks and one each in the secretary office bathroom, bathroom area of the school kitchen and a kindergarten food preparation area.

Initial testing in April revealed elevated lead levels were detected in four sinks at Ansbach Elementary. The results were received April 24 and publicly announced by base commander Col. Aaron Southard five days later.

One of the sinks from the original group also tested positive for elevated lead levels in the second round of testing, Van Schaik said.

Sinks in rooms 16A, 35A, 46A, and 109C registered 0.05, 0.026, 0.017 and 0.026 milligrams per liter of lead, respectively, Van

Schaik said at the time. Figures from the most recent testing were unavailable Thursday.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends action when lead levels exceed 0.01 milligrams per liter, though there is no level considered safe. Lead accumulates in the body over time.

After the initial findings, signs were posted telling students to avoid drinking the water until further testing could be done, Southard wrote in his April 29 memo. The base also changed the aerators on the four faucets and flushed the water system, the garrison said.

The school's drinking fountains and water-filling stations, which are equipped with high-quality filters, have passed inspection thus far, Van Schaik said.

Ansbach Elementary opened in 1986 and accommodates students through fifth grade.

MILITARY

Coast Guard seeks more for border mission

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Coast Guard needs more money and long-term investments in new ships and aircraft to keep up with the Trump administration's crack down on illegal crossings and drug trafficking along the southern border, the acting commandant of the Coast Guard told House lawmakers on Wednesday.

"We are continually hampered by pressure for sustaining and operating our assets — our boats and our ships. We are not able to maintain them at the rate we need to," Adm. Kevin Lunday said as he testified before the homeland security subpanel of the House Appropriations Committee.

Since President Donald Trump's inauguration in January, homeland security and military forces have been surged to the southern border to fend off what Trump has described as an "invasion." This has included deploying two Navy destroyers and about 9,600 service members to the federal border security mission.

Lunday, who previously served as the vice commandant, took command of the Coast Guard on Jan. 21 after Trump fired Adm. Linda Fagan from the position reportedly for failing to address border security.

After Fagan was replaced by Lunday, Coast Guard ships were immediately surged to southern Florida and other areas of the country to deter maritime migration.

Since then, Lunday said the Coast Guard has stopped more than 860 migrants between the U.S. and Mexico in the Pacific Ocean and Gulf of America. The service has also conducted 157 deportation flights to date.

"Despite the mission success and great work of our people, the Coast Guard is in a severe readiness crisis that has been decades in the making. Today, our Coast



U.S. Coast Guard

A Coast Guard C-130 Hercules prepares to transport migrants in San Diego, Calif., on Feb. 2.

Guard is less ready than at any other time since the end of World War II — 80 years ago. This is not sustainable," Lunday said.

While the service's budget for fiscal 2026 has yet to be released, the Coast Guard typically has an annual budget of about \$13.8 billion. Of that, about \$2 billion historically has been allocated for purchasing new ships and aircraft.

The Coast Guard has about 56,000 active-duty and auxiliary personnel who operate 259 cutters, 143 helicopters, 57 fixed-wing aircraft and more than 1,600 smaller boats and launches, according to the service website.

Coast Guard helicopters are often refurbished helicopters from the Navy. While the Navy grounds helicopters after 12,000 flight hours, the Coast Guard runs them for up to 19,000 hours.

"Even though we can operate aircraft to that level, we should not be. We should be investing in new aircraft," Lunday said.

Many of the Coast Guard's cutters — ships that are 65 feet or longer — are approaching 50 years old. Additionally, the service operates only two aging icebreakers — the 27-year-old medium icebreaker USCGC Healy and the 49-year-old heavy icebreaker USCGC Polar Star. The Coast Guard's other heavy icebreaker, the Polar Sea, has been out of service since 2010 due to engine failure. By contrast, Russia operates a fleet of 55 icebreakers and China has four.

Rep. Lauren Underwood of Illinois, the top Democrat on the subcommittee, said she supports large increases to the Coast Guard's budget.

"But I am concerned that this administration's political goals are shifting those limited resources away from strategic theaters where bad actors are aggressively testing American resolve," Un-

derwood said as she asked how the Coast Guard's involvement in the U.S.-Mexico border mission was impacting its other responsibilities.

The expanding worldwide role of the Coast Guard includes helping challenge China, patrol the Arctic region, lead anti-terrorist port safety and train partner countries in drug and illegal shipping interdiction. These efforts are all in addition to maintaining its traditional roles of water emergency rescues, inspecting ship safety and enforcing environmental regulations on waterways.

Two scheduled operational deployments — a patrol in the Pacific and a port visit in Iceland — were temporarily changed to support the U.S.-Mexico border mission, according to Lunday. The Coast Guard continues to maintain a presence in the Indo-Pacific and Arctic regions, he said. Sliding the deployments, Lunday said, is not unprecedented as he pointed back to a lack of resources.

"We make those tough tradeoffs

all the time because there is an increasing demand for Coast Guard resources, and always a limited number of cutters, boats, aircraft crew to provide them," he said.

Lunday's testimony Wednesday echoed that of Vice Adm. Andrew Tiongson, commander of the Coast Guard's Pacific area, who spoke April 7 during a panel at the Sea Air Space Symposium in Washington. Tiongson used the symposium to advocate for the Coast Guard to increase its budget.

The Coast Guard's Pacific area of responsibility stretches from the West Coast of the U.S. to Asia and from the Arctic to Antarctica. It encompasses six of the seven continents, more than 70 countries and approximately 74 million square miles of ocean.

The Coast Guard needs the other services to help fill in gaps at sea, according to Tiongson. The Navy deployed two destroyers — one off the coast of California and Mexico and one in the Gulf of America — to help combat maritime migration, a mission traditionally conducted by Coast Guard ships. Additionally, Navy and Air Force reconnaissance planes have been tasked with surveilling the region as the U.S. ramps up efforts to deter illegal immigration.

"We are pros at stretching as best we can ... Perhaps it's time to do not more with less, but less with less," Tiongson said. "We don't want to be there. We want to go ahead and continue to provide a safe, secure and prosperous America. But we need some help."

Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., chairman of the subcommittee, urged Lunday to communicate with lawmakers while he serves as the acting commandant of the Coast Guard.

"In my view, the Coast Guard has chronically under-asked for resources," Amodei said. "I need you to tell me what you need."



Lunday

Japan to test-fire long-range missiles within its borders

BY KEISHI KOJA

AND BRIAN McELHINEY

Stars and Stripes

Japan's army is planning a long-range missile drill next month — the first within its borders — as the country continues to beef up its military to counter regional rival China.

The Ground Self-Defense Force's 1st Artillery Brigade plans to do a surface-to-ship missile training exercise at a coastal missile range next to Camp Shizunai in Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's main islands, on June 19-30, according to a news release Tuesday.

Soldiers will launch two nonex-

plosive Type 88 surface-to-ship training missiles at a target boat somewhere within a 25-mile radius to the southwest, a spokesman with the Ground Staff Office said by phone Thursday.

The launch dates will depend upon weather conditions and "other factors," he added. Some Japanese government officials may speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

Japan's truck-mounted Type 88 missile, also known as an SSM-1, is more than 16 feet long and weighs 1,455 pounds with a diameter of about 14 inches, according to a Ministry of Defense white paper from 2018.

The missiles have a range of more than 60 miles, Japanese public broadcaster NHK reported Tuesday without citing a source.

Japan conducted a similar exercise in October 2023 at Point Mugu Sea Range, Calif., about 60 miles west of Los Angeles, to allow for more room to fire the missiles, the spokesman said.

Training was moved to Japan to allow more units and troops to participate in the firing exercise, he added.

Approximately 300 personnel will participate in this year's exercise, double the 150 that participated in 2023, he added.

Defense Minister Gen Nakatani

during a news conference April 11 said arrangements were underway to train in Japan "considering the severe security environment in recent years," despite limited space.

Japan is pursuing plans to build missile training ranges for surface-to-ship missile drills on Minamitorishima, an isolated coral atoll and its easternmost territory, to counter China's aggressive moves in the region.

The Ground Self-Defense Force will use nonexplosive training missiles on target vessels in waters 32 to 328 feet west of Minamitorishima, Chief of Staff Gen. Yasunori Morishita said at a news

conference in July.

The firing range, 1,148 miles southeast of Tokyo, is expected to be available after April 2026 for drills involving Japan's Type 12 surface-to-ship missiles, a spokesman for Ogasawara village said in July.

The Type 12 missile, the successor of the Type 88, has a range of about 62 miles, and a planned upgrade under development would increase that to about 620 miles.

The Ministry of Defense by 2026 plans to base the missiles at three Self-Defense Force bases in the Ryukyu island chain, which includes Okinawa and stretches to within sight of Taiwan.

MILITARY

Army, protesters prepare for 250th anniversary in DC

BY OLIVIA GEORGE
The Washington Post

As the U.S. Army plans a parade in Washington with thousands of soldiers, hundreds of vehicles and dozens of aircraft to celebrate the 250th anniversary of its founding on June 14, protesters are making preparations of their own.

“The National Protest Against Trump and the War Machine plans to mobilize thousands from across the country to protest the military parade,” according to a permit application filed with the National Park Service last week. The Army’s celebration coincides with the 79th birthday of President Donald Trump, who has long mused about showcasing the might of America’s armed forces.

“A military parade celebrating Trump and the Army is an outrageous insult to the American people,” reads the permit application. “What really makes America great is its working people — U.S.-born and immigrant alike — not billionaires and the military that enforces their domination of the rest of the world.”

Andy Koch, a Minneapolis-based organizer with the Freedom Road Socialist Organization, said he wanted to help coordinate a protest as soon as he heard about the Army’s plans.

Parade details have yet to be finalized, though the Army antici-

pates 150 vehicles, 50 aircraft and 6,600 soldiers taking part.

“The procession will tell the story of the history of the Army, beginning with the Revolutionary War and concluding with the modern-day Army,” spokesperson Heather Hagan said.

An application submitted earlier this spring by America250.org called for the parade to begin at the Pentagon’s north parking lot at 6 p.m., cross the Arlington Memorial Bridge into D.C. and continue on Constitution Avenue Northwest ending at 15th Street. The Army’s Golden Knights will parachute down to the Ellipse, a flyover will zoom overhead and fireworks will decorate the night sky.

The Army began planning a 250th celebration event in Washington in early 2024, an Army official with knowledge of the event previously told The Post. The celebration will mark the anniversary of the Continental Congress’ vote to officially create the Continental Army.

But the overlap of the Army’s festivities with Trump’s birthday has prompted ire, especially at a time when his overhaul of the federal government includes slashing the Department of Veterans Affairs and curtailing remote work allowances upon which federal workers whose spouses serve in the military had relied.



INSTAGRAM

Army Capt. Reed Patrick Russell stands amid the Swiss Alps in a photo posted to Instagram in March.

Soldiers in Vicenza pay homage to captain who had fatal fall in Bosnia

BY REBECCA HOLLAND
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — Nearly 200 soldiers packed into the chapel at Caserma Ederle on Thursday to remember an officer in the 522nd Military Intelligence Battalion who died while hiking in Bosnia and Herzegovina last month.

Capt. Reed Patrick Russell was an avid hiker and mountain climber who had a goal of summiting the tallest peak in every country.

Russell, 37, lived for the mountains, speakers at the memorial service said. He climbed more than 400 peaks around the world and even had dog tags made that listed his religion as “the mountains.”

He died April 19 while hiking on

Maglic, a 7,800-foot peak in the Dinaric Alps and the highest mountain in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was with his wife, a doctor in the 173rd Airborne Brigade, when he slipped on ice and fell into a deep ravine.

“He will be remembered as someone not afraid of adventure,” said Lt. Col. Richard Smith, commander of the battalion. “He passed doing something he truly loved to do and there is solace in that.”

Smith and others spoke of Russell’s many endearing traits.

“He had an effortless sense of humor,” said Capt. Samantha Rolnick, commander of the 522nd’s Bravo Company. “He could turn an ordinary moment into some-

thing unforgettable.”

In the days after his death, messages poured in from Chad, Ghana, South Korea and other places from people who had worked with Russell.

Originally from Orlando, Fla., Russell graduated from Florida State University before enlisting in the Army as a Korean linguist.

He was stationed at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, and was part of the 2nd Stryker Brigade at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state before coming to Vicenza.

Russell is survived by his wife, Mindy Park; his parents, Terri and Chris Russell; his siblings Grant and Hannah; his niece Alyssa and nephew Owen.

Russian Su-35 fighter plane breaches Estonian airspace amid NATO drill

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

A Russian warplane violated Estonian airspace this week, prompting NATO to scramble its air policing fighters in response, defense officials from the Baltic country said.

The incident involving a Su-35 fighter occurred as U.S. and allied troops carry out large-scale military drills in Estonia.

The incursion happened Tuesday near the Juminda Peninsula in the Gulf of Finland, the Estonian Defense Ministry said Wednesday, adding that the jet was flying with its transponders off and disregarding contact.

Portuguese air force F-16s deployed to Amari Air Base in Estonia scrambled to identify the Russian jet, the ministry said.

Meanwhile, Estonia is hosting Exercise Hedgehog, which runs

through next week and includes U.S. forces. The exercise is focused on defensive multidomain operations, according to NATO.

Estonian officials said the airspace violation coincided with a separate incident Tuesday in the Gulf of Finland with an oil tanker suspected of being part of Russia’s shadow fleet, a network of vessels designed to avoid sanctions.

Estonia’s foreign minister, Margus Tsahkna, elaborated on the situation on the sidelines of a NATO meeting Thursday in Turkey, saying that Russia had sent a fighter to observe as Estonia’s navy attempted to detain an oil tanker headed to Russia.

“The Russian Federation sent a fighter jet to check the situation, and this fighter jet violated NATO territory for close to one minute,” Tsahkna told reporters.

Tsahkna said Thursday that Russia has “clearly tied itself to the shadow fleet” and allies should be motivated to impose tougher sanctions.

While NATO frequently scrambles jets to intercept Russian planes approaching alliance territory, airspace violations are relatively rare by comparison. In 2022, Estonia accused a Russian helicopter of violating its airspace.

Tensions in the Baltics are running high over concerns about acts of suspected Russian sabotage involving the damaging of undersea communication cables and energy pipelines.

NATO has stepped up its presence in the Baltic Sea in response, with more naval surveillance drones, warships, submarines and aircraft monitoring activities.

Army civilian killed in Texas fuel storage site explosion

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — A fuel tank at an Army storage facility exploded on Wednesday morning, killing one employee who worked at the site, the service said in a statement.

The incident occurred at about 10 a.m. as the civilian employee was welding as part of regular maintenance on a free-standing fuel tank housed at Camp Stanley Storage Activity, according to the Army Joint Munitions Command, the headquarters that operates the site.

The facility is located about 19 miles northwest of downtown San Antonio.

The employee was taken to the nearby University Hospital in San Antonio and later died from the injuries they sustained as a result of the the accident, the command

said.

The person’s name has not been released.

The incident is currently under investigation.

Officials said the incident was under control and posed no additional danger to employees or any members of the surrounding community.

“We deeply regret the loss of life that occurred today,” the command said in a statement.

“The safety of employees and the community is important, and we will take steps to ensure an incident like this is prevented in the future,” it added.

Camp Stanley receives, tests, stores, ships, renovates and demilitarizes conventional arms, ammunition and explosives in support of worldwide Army operations, according to the information from the service.

MIDEAST

Deal: Trump urges Qatari officials to entice Iran to reach nuke deal

FROM PAGE 1

turn, Iran wants an immediate lifting of all economic sanctions.

Trump said his demands have been straightforward.

"They can't have a nuclear weapon. That's the only thing. It's very simple," Trump said. "It's not like I have to give you 30 pages worth of details. It is only one sentence. They can't have a nuclear weapon."

But Trump on Wednesday suggested he was looking for Tehran to make other concessions as part of a potential agreement.

Iran "must stop sponsoring terror, halt its bloody proxy wars and permanently and verifiably cease pursuit of nuclear weapons," Trump said in remarks at a meeting in Saudi Arabia of leaders from the Gulf Cooperation Council. "They cannot have a nuclear weapon."

Wrapping up his time in Qatar, Trump stopped at a U.S. installation at the center of American involvement in the Middle East and spoke to U.S. troops. The Republican president has used his four-day visit to Gulf states to reject the "interventionism" of America's past in the region.

Al Udeid Air Base was a major staging ground during the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The base — home to the forward headquarters of U.S. Central Command — houses some 8,000 U.S. troops, down from about 10,000 at the height of those wars.

Trump told the troops that his "priority is to end conflicts, not start them."



ALEX BRANDON/AP

Qatar and U.S. military personnel listen to President Donald Trump speaking at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, on Thursday. Trump told the troops that his "priority is to end conflicts, not start them."

"But I will never hesitate to wield American power if it's necessary to defend the United States of America or our partners," he said.

During his speech, he told the troops that "I have nothing else to do, so let's have a little fun."

He talked about plans for an upcoming military parade in Washington, falsely said that he won three presidential elections, joked about people who want him to run for another term and said France would be "speaking German" if it wasn't for American help during

World War II.

Trump talked about his administration's efforts to thin the military's top ranks, saying "we let a lot of four-stars go."

There's long been friction between Trump and some top generals, and he's been more emboldened to remake the command structure.

He described people who doubted his military instincts as "freaking losers," talking up the campaign against Islamic State in his first term.

Trump ended his speech in his

customary way, dancing to his campaign anthem of "YMCA."

Trump has held up Gulf nations such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar as models for economic development in a region plagued by conflict. He urged Qatari officials to use their influence to entice Iran to come to terms with his administration on a nuclear deal.

Trump later flew to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates for the final leg of his trip. He visited the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, the country's largest mosque. The UAE's founder, Sheikh Zayed, is

buried in the mosque's main courtyard.

Trump took his shoes off, which is customary, as he stepped into the house of worship and marveled at the architecture.

"It's beautiful," Trump said.

He will also be hosted for a state visit in the evening by UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at the Qasr Al Watan palace.

Earlier in the week, Trump met with Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa and announced plans to ease sanctions on the war-torn country. The U.S. has deployed more than 1,000 troops in Syria for years to suppress a return of ISIS.

Trump praised al-Sharaa, who was tied to al-Qaida and joined insurgents battling U.S. forces in Iraq before entering the Syrian civil war, after the two met in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday. He called al-Sharaa a "young, attractive guy. Tough guy. Strong past. Very strong past. Fighter."

It was a stark contrast from earlier years, when al-Sharaa was imprisoned by U.S. troops in Iraq. Until December, there was a \$10 million U.S. bounty for his arrest.

Trump said that the opinions of Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan were big factors in his decision to lift sanctions on Syria.

"President Erdogan called me and said, 'Is there any way you could do that? Because if you don't do that, they don't have a chance,'" Trump said. "So, I did it."

US-Saudi \$142B defense deal sparks questions, few answers

BY COURTNEY MCBRIDE
Bloomberg News

The Trump administration called its \$142 billion defense deal with Saudi Arabia "the largest defense sales agreement in history." Critics aren't so sure.

The deal, announced as part of President Donald Trump's visit to the Middle East this week, appeared ambitious and sweeping, touting purchases linked to the air force and space, missile defense, coastal security and various other upgrades.

But like the broader \$600 billion economic deal that it was a part of, the defense agreement lacked any specifics. And skeptics of the administration immediately pointed to questions around the numbers. One is that Saudi Arabia's entire defense budget this year is \$78 billion, estimated Bruce Riedel, a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

"It's great publicity — makes it look like this trip was spectacularly successful," said Riedel, a for-

mer senior U.S. intelligence and national security official. "But the numbers don't add up."

The White House, Pentagon and Saudi Embassy didn't immediately respond to requests for details of the agreement, such as which systems the kingdom would purchase, terms of the prospective contract and delivery time lines. The State Department referred questions to the White House.

To be sure, Democratic and Republican administrations alike have a long history of re-purposing previous deals into sweeping, headline-grabbing agreements for presidents to sign during trips. Trump did it before, during his first-term trip to Saudi Arabia in 2017, when he announced the Saudis would spend \$110 billion on U.S. weapons to modernize the kingdom's military.

That package included deals negotiated under the Obama administration and others that were in the initial stages of a lengthy process requiring congressional ap-

proval and negotiations between the buyer and defense contractors. To date, the 2017 deal has yielded more than \$30 billion in implemented foreign military sales to Saudi Arabia, according to a State Department fact sheet in January.

While the numbers may be fuzzy, they also may not really matter. What the agreement also does, experts said, is highlight the depth of the U.S.-Saudi partnership. That's something Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman will gladly take after several years of uncertainty. Former President Joe Biden, after all, called him a "pariah" over the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi and suspended weapons sales to the kingdom.

"A lot of this is about the optics, but the optics matter," said Brian Katulis, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute. "It's an attempt to send a message of reassurance after several years of uncertainty in the U.S.-Saudi bilateral relationship on defense cooperation."

Boeing soars in week of wins

BY MATT OTT
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Boeing has secured a pair of major orders in the Middle East during a visit to the region by President Donald Trump.

The American aerospace manufacturer confirmed a \$96 billion order from Qatar, one day after announcing an order from a company in Saudi Arabia for 20 737-8 jets and options for 10 additional aircraft.

The Qatar deal, which includes Boeing's 787 and 777X jets, is the biggest order for 787s and wide body jets in Boeing's history, the company confirmed.

"That's pretty good," Trump said in announcing the order. "Get those planes out there."

It has been a particularly good week for Boeing. According to several media reports, China lifted a ban on its airlines taking deliveries of Boeing planes earlier this week as part of Monday's trade truce with the U.S.

Boeing had already been in the news for its planes in the Middle East, but for different reasons.

Donald Trump said he would accept a luxury Boeing 747-8 jumbo

jet as a gift from the ruling family of Qatar, setting off intense criticism from Democrats, ethicists, and even some unease among Republicans.

There are concerns from security and ethics experts that the plane could be less secure, costly to retrofit and a violation of the U.S. Constitution's prohibition on foreign gifts. Trump offered no national security imperative for a swift upgrade rather than waiting for Boeing to finish new Air Force One jets that have been in the works for years.

Boeing has lost more than \$35 billion since 2019 following the crashes of two then-new Max jets that killed 346 people.

In January 2024, a panel blew off a 737 Max shortly after takeoff from Portland, Ore., and last year, a strike by union machinists halted production at Boeing plants and hampered the company's delivery capability.

Shares of Boeing, which has been mired in legal and regulatory problems since the crashes six years ago, bounced to their highest level in more than a year Wednesday. It was the fifth straight day of gains for the Arlington, Va., company.

NATION

Supreme Court weighs birthright citizenship

By MARK SHERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Thursday weighed whether to allow President Donald Trump's restrictions on birthright citizenship to temporarily take effect in most of the country, even if they might ultimately be found to violate the Constitution.

The justices heard arguments in the Trump administration's emergency appeals over lower court orders that have kept the citizenship restrictions on hold across the country. Nationwide, or universal, injunctions have emerged as an important check on Trump's efforts to remake the government and a mounting frustration to the Republican president and his allies.

Judges have issued 40 nationwide injunctions since Trump began his second term in January, Solicitor General D. John Sauer told the court at the start of more than two hours of arguments.

Birthright citizenship is among several issues, many related to im-

migration, that the administration has asked the court to address on an emergency basis, after lower courts acted to slow the president's agenda.

The justices are also considering the Trump administration's pleas to end humanitarian parole for more than 500,000 people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela and to strip other temporary legal protections from another 350,000 Venezuelans. The administration remains locked in legal battles over its efforts to swiftly deport people accused of being gang members to a prison in El Salvador under an 18th century wartime law called the Alien Enemies Act.

Trump signed an executive order on the first day of his second term that would deny citizenship to children who are born to people who are in the country illegally or temporarily.

The order conflicts with a Supreme Court decision from 1898 that held that the Citizenship Clause of the 14th Amendment made citizens of all children born

on U.S. with narrow exceptions that are not at issue in this case.

States, immigrants and rights group sued almost immediately, and lower courts quickly barred enforcement of the order while the lawsuits proceed.

The current fight is over the rules that apply while the lawsuits go forward.

The court's liberal justices seemed firmly in support of the lower court rulings that found the changes to citizenship that Trump wants to make would upset the settled understanding of birthright citizenship that has existed for more than 125 years.

Birthright citizenship is an odd case to use to scale back nationwide injunctions, Justice Elena Kagan said. "Every court has ruled against you," she told Sauer.

But if the government wins on today's arguments, it could still enforce the order against people who haven't sued, Kagan said. "All of those individuals are going to win. And the ones who can't afford to go to court, they're the ones who are going to lose," she said



JACQUELYN MARTIN/AP

Hannah Liu, 26, of Washington, holds up a sign in support of birthright citizenship, Thursday outside of the Supreme Court.

Several conservative justices who might be open to limiting nationwide injunctions also wanted to know the practical effects of

such a decision as well as how quickly the court could reach a final decision on the Trump executive order.

Missouri GOP lawmakers' referendum repeals abortion measure

By DAVID A. LIEB
Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Six months after Missouri voters approved an abortion-rights amendment, Republican state lawmakers on Wednesday approved a new referendum that would seek the amendment's repeal and instead ban most abortions with exceptions for rape and incest.

The newly proposed constitutional amendment would go back to voters in November 2026, or sooner, if Republican Gov. Mike Kehoe calls a special election.

Republican senators used a series of rare procedural moves to cut off discussion by opposing

Democrats before passing the proposed abortion-rights revision by a 21-11 vote. The measure passed the Republican-led House last month.

The Senate then blocked further Democratic debate and gave final approval to a separate measure repealing provisions of a voter-approved law guaranteeing paid sick leave for workers and cost-of-living increases to the minimum wage. That measure does not go back to the ballot. It will instead become law when signed by Kehoe, who has expressed his support for it.

After taking the sweeping votes, the Senate effectively ended its

annual legislative session — two days ahead of a constitutional deadline to wrap up work.

Democrats were outraged by the legislative actions and vowed to retaliate by slowing down any Senate work next year.

Republicans contend they are simply giving voters a second chance on abortion — and are confident they will change their minds because of the new rape and incest exceptions.

Some GOP lawmakers said they needed to repeal the paid sick leave requirement, which kicked in May 1, because it's adding costs that threaten the financial viability of small businesses. Republi-

cans had been negotiating with Democrats over an alternative to exempt only the smallest businesses before scrapping that and opting for the full repeal.

Missouri lawmakers have a history of altering voter-approved policies. They previously tried to block funding for a voter-approved Medicaid expansion and authored changes to voter-approved measures regulating dog breeders and redistricting.

Missouri's abortion policies have swung dramatically in recent years.

When the U.S. Supreme Court ended a nationwide right to abortion by overturning *Roe v. Wade* in

2022, it triggered a Missouri law to take effect banning most abortions. But abortion-rights activists gathered initiative petition signatures to reverse that.

Last November, Missouri voters narrowly approved a constitutional amendment guaranteeing a right to abortion until fetal viability, generally considered sometime past 21 weeks of pregnancy. The amendment also allows later abortions to protect the life or health of pregnant women and creates a "fundamental right to reproductive freedom" that includes birth control, prenatal and postpartum care and "respectful birthing conditions."

Wisconsin judge pleads not guilty to helping man evade immigration

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — A Wisconsin judge pleaded not guilty Thursday to charges accusing her of helping a man who is illegally in the country evade U.S. immigration authorities seeking to arrest him in her courthouse.

Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Hannah Dugan entered the plea during a brief arraignment in federal court. Magistrate Judge Stephen Dries set a July trial date. Dugan's lead attorney, Steven Biskupic, told the judge that he expects the trial to last a week.

Dugan, her lawyers and prosecutors left the hearing without speaking to reporters.

She is charged with concealing

an individual to prevent arrest and obstruction. Prosecutors say she escorted Eduardo Flores-Ruiz and his lawyer out of her courtroom through a back door on April 18 after learning that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents were in the courthouse seeking to arrest him for being in the country illegally. She could face up to six years in prison if convicted on both counts.

Her attorneys say she's innocent. They filed a motion Wednesday to dismiss the case, saying she was acting in her official capacity as a judge and therefore is immune to prosecution. They also maintain that the federal government violated Wisconsin's sover-

eignty by disrupting a state courtroom and prosecuting a state judge.

Dugan's arrest has inflamed tensions between Trump administration and Democrats over the president's sweeping immigration crackdown.

According to court documents, Flores-Ruiz illegally reentered the U.S. after being deported in 2013. Online court records show he was charged with three counts of misdemeanor domestic abuse in Milwaukee County in March, and he was in Dugan's courtroom on April 18 for a hearing in that case.

According to an FBI affidavit, Dugan was alerted to the agents' presence by her clerk, who was in-

formed by an attorney that the agents appeared to be in the hallway. Dugan was visibly angry and called the situation "absurd" before leaving the bench and retreating to her chambers, the affidavit contends. She and another judge later approached members of the arrest team in the courthouse with what witnesses described as a "confrontational, angry demeanor."

After a back-and-forth with the agents over the warrant for Flores-Ruiz, Dugan demanded they speak with the chief judge and led them from the courtroom, according to the affidavit.

After she returned to the courtroom, witnesses heard her say

something to the effect of "wait, come with me" before ushering Flores-Ruiz and his attorney out through a door typically used only by deputies, jurors, court staff and in-custody defendants, the affidavit alleges. Flores-Ruiz was free on a signature bond in the abuse case, according to online state court records. Federal agents ultimately detained him outside the courthouse after a foot chase.

Her attorneys will likely try to push for a jury trial, John Vaudreuil, a former federal prosecutor in Wisconsin, predicted, because they know that "people feel very strongly about the way the president and administration is conducting immigration policy."

NATION



JOE GROMELSKI/Special to Stars and Stripes

Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. testifies Wednesday at a Capitol Hill hearing on his agency's budget.

Kennedy grilled on Hill over staffing cuts, policy

BY AMANDA SEITZ
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democrats and Republicans alike raised concerns on Wednesday about deep staffing cuts, funding freezes and far-reaching policy changes overseen by U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers questioned Kennedy's approach to the job, some saying that he has jeopardized vaccine uptake, cancer research and dental health in just a few short months.

In combative and at times highly personal rejoinders, Kennedy defended the Trump administration's dramatic effort to reshape the sprawling, \$1.7 trillion-a-year agency, saying it would deliver a more efficient department focused on promoting healthier lifestyles among Americans.

"There's so much chaos and disorganization in this department," Kennedy said on Wednesday during the Senate hearing. "What we're saying is let's organize in a way that we can quickly adopt and deploy all these opportunities we have to really deliver high-quality

health care to the American people."

During tense exchanges, lawmakers — in back to back House and Senate hearings — sometimes questioned whether Kennedy was aware of his actions and the structure of his own department after he struggled to provide more details about staffing cuts.

"I have noted you've been unable, in most instances, to answer any specific questions related to your agency," said Sen. Angela Alsobrooks, a Maryland Democrat.

The secretary, in turn, pushed back — saying he had not had time to answer specific questions — and at points questioning lawmakers' own grasp of health policy.

Kennedy testified to explain his downsizing of the department — from 82,000 to 62,000 staffers — and argue on behalf of the White House's requested budget, which includes a \$500 million boost for Kennedy's "Make America Healthy Again" initiative to promote nutrition and healthier lifestyles while making deep cuts to infectious disease prevention, medical research and maternal health programs.

Airport-Pentagon hotline had been inoperable for 3 years

BY IAN DUNCAN
The Washington Post

A hotline connecting air traffic controllers at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and their counterparts at the Pentagon has been "inoperable" since March 2022, a Federal Aviation Administration official confirmed Wednesday, further evidence of poor safety coordination between federal agencies responsible for the airspace where a midair collision in January killed 67 people.

The line is maintained by the Defense Department, and the aviation agency was not aware of the outage during the three years it was down, Franklin McIntosh, the FAA's deputy head of air traffic control, testified at a Senate hearing Wednesday. Aviation officials discovered the hotline wasn't working after May 1, when controllers at Reagan ordered two passenger jets to abandon landings because an Army helicopter was circling nearby at the Pentagon.

"We're insisting on that line to be fixed before we resume any operations out of the Pentagon," McIntosh said.

Ongoing disputes over how to ensure safety have led to unusual finger-pointing among Cabinet departments. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy has accused the military of violating safety protocols, while military officials have insisted they have followed the FAA's restrictions.

Key senators joined in with their frustrations at Wednesday's hearing of the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

"The administration's lack of a more aggressive, proactive mitigation approach is simply inexcusable," said Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., herself a former Black Hawk pilot. "FAA and DOD must coordi-

nate better. We don't need to wait for the completion of a lengthy investigation to know that."

Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, said he had been unsuccessfully seeking more information about what happened from the military.

"They need to start giving answers to this committee and other committees because what happened was just unacceptable," Sullivan said. "They really haven't been that forthcoming."

Maj. Montrell Russell, a spokesman for the Army, said it was working with the FAA to determine what repairs were needed. McIntosh said that he did not know how long it would take to restore the line but that he expected the military to "expedite that timeline."

This month's incident came just a week after a Virginia-based Army unit resumed flights in the capital region following the Jan. 29 crash, when an Army Black Hawk collided with an American Airlines regional jet arriving from Wichita, Kan.

In another fresh disclosure, McIntosh said that at the time of the May 1 airspace conflicts, responsibility in Reagan's tower for guiding helicopters and other local traffic was combined under one person — a consolidation of tasks also in place the night of the crash. Combining the jobs can increase the workload on controllers, experts say.

After the crash, the FAA closed a helicopter route that passed along the Potomac River to the east of Reagan and restricted helicopter traffic in an area around the airport. But military, police and medical helicopter flights have continued in the region, causing disruptions to passenger traffic. The Washington Post has identified at least two other flights to the Pentagon since the crash using the same looping route.

McIntosh testified that the FAA was continuing to weigh its procedures in hopes of getting the Defense Department to exhibit "better behaviors."

Under questioning from Commerce Committee Chairman Ted Cruz, R-Texas, McIntosh confirmed that after the May 1 incident, officials considered whether to suspend an agreement that allows the military to fly in the Washington area without receiving FAA clearance beforehand. Before the FAA took that step, however, the Army unit in Virginia announced that it would once again suspend helicopter flights to the Pentagon while it carried out a review.

"We were extremely troubled by the incident that occurred, especially in light of DCA and the events that led up to the accident," McIntosh said, referring to Reagan by its airport code. "We were ready to deploy any option that we could use or we felt was necessary."

Yet McIntosh acknowledged the prolonged hotline outage also raised concerns about the FAA's procedures. "I think the next question would be why were we not aware of it and insist on it being fixed?" McIntosh said.

Scott Dunham, a retired National Transportation Safety Board investigator, said it's typical for nearby air traffic control facilities to have direct communications with one another.

McIntosh testified that the two facilities were still able to reach each other by normal phones. But Dunham said that should be a "last resort after the normal stuff breaks."

Applications for jobless benefits steady; layoffs still low

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. applications for jobless benefits held steady last week as layoffs remain low despite uncertainty over how President Donald Trump's tariffs will impact the economy.

The number of Americans applying for unemployment aid was unchanged at 229,000 for the week ending May 10, the Labor Department said Thursday. That's in line with the 230,000 new applications analysts forecast.

Weekly applications for jobless benefits are seen as representative of U.S. layoffs and have mostly bounced around a healthy range between 200,000 and 250,000 since COVID-19 ravaged the economy and wiped out millions of jobs five

years ago.

Even though Trump has paused or rolled back many of his tariff threats, concerns remain about a global economic slowdown that could upend the U.S. labor market, which has been a pillar of the American economy for years.

Last week, the Federal Reserve held its benchmark lending rate at 4.3% for the third straight meeting after cutting it three straight times at the end of last year. Fed chair Jerome Powell said the risks of both higher unemployment and inflation have risen, an unusual combination that complicates the central bank's dual mandate of controlling prices and keeping unemployment low.

Also on Thursday, the government reported that inflation at the

wholesale level fell unexpectedly in April for the first time in more than a year. However, new retail sales data showed that Americans pulled back their spending in April after stocking up on goods the month before to get ahead of expected price increases due to tariffs.

On Monday, the U.S. and China agreed to a 90-day pause in their trade war.

Trump is attempting to reshape the global economy by dramatically increasing import taxes to rejuvenate the U.S. manufacturing sector.

Contraction has already begun in the U.S., where the economy shrank at a 0.3% annual pace from January through March as Trump's trade wars disrupted business. First-quarter growth was slowed by a

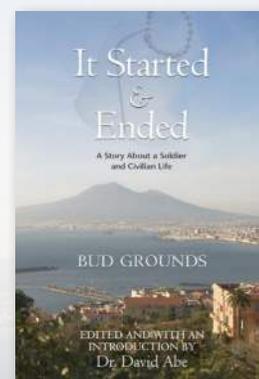
surge in imports as companies in the U.S. tried to bring in foreign goods before Trump's massive tariffs went into effect.

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The Story About a Soldier and Civilian Life

An insightful and informative story of one person's journey through both civilian and military life

by Master Sergeant Bud Grounds (retired)

HARD BOOK TO PUT DOWN

WORLD

EU accuses TikTok of breaching digital rules with lack of transparency on ads

Associated Press

LONDON — European Union regulators accused TikTok on Thursday of breaching digital content rules because it's not being transparent enough about ads shown to users of the video sharing app.

TikTok's ad repository isn't up to the standards required by the bloc's Digital Services Act, known as the DSA, the 27-nation EU's executive Commission said in preliminary findings from its investigation.

The Commission said ad databases are vital for researchers to detect scam ads as well as so-called hybrid threat campaigns, coordinated information operations and fake ads, "including in the context of elections." The DSA is a wide-ranging rulebook that aims to clean up social media platforms and protect users from risks including election-relat-

ed disinformation. Platforms have to be transparent about digital ads, including informing users why they're being shown a specific advertisement and who paid for it.

The Commission said TikTok doesn't provide necessary information about the content of ads, the users targeted, and who pays for them. The database doesn't allow for a comprehensive search for ads based on this information, "thereby limiting the usefulness of the tool," it said.

TikTok said it's reviewing the findings and remains committed to meeting its DSA obligations.

"While we support the goals of the regulation and continue to improve our ad transparency tools, we disagree with some of the Commission's interpretations and note that guidance is being delivered via preliminary findings rather than clear,

public guidelines," the company said in a statement.

The ad database's shortcomings prevent a "full inspection" of the risks posed by its ad targeting systems, said Henna Virkkunen, the commission's executive vice-president for tech sovereignty, security and democracy.

"Transparency in online advertising—who pays and how audiences are targeted—is essential to safeguarding the public interest," Virkkunen said. "Whether we are defending the integrity of our democratic elections, protecting public health, or protecting consumers from scam ads, citizens have a right to know who is behind the messages they see."

TikTok now has a chance to reply before the Commission rules, which could result in a fine of up to 6% of the company's annual global revenue.

Homelessness triggers Madrid airport limits

Associated Press

MADRID — Spain's airport authority will start to limit access to Madrid's airport during some parts of the day as a preventive measure to stop more homeless people from sleeping in its terminals.

Only travelers with boarding passes, airport employees and those accompanying someone with a ticket will be allowed to enter the airport during hours with few departing and arriving flights, Spain's airport authority AENA said late Wednesday night.

AENA said the limits would be implemented sometime in the next few days, but did not specify exactly when or during what hours of the day.

For months, the Spanish capital's

airport has seen homeless encampments in some of its terminals with individuals in sleeping bags occupying space near walls and bathrooms. Local media described the number of homeless people to be in the hundreds.

This week, AENA said it had asked Madrid city officials for help in addressing the problem months ago, but so far has received insufficient help.

"Airports are not places designed for living in, but rather are infrastructure solely for transit, which in no case offers adequate conditions for overnight stays," AENA said in a statement Wednesday.

Spain received a record 94 million international tourists in 2024.

German official: 45% more people rejected at border after checks increased

Associated Press

BERLIN — Germany's interior minister said Thursday that the number of people turned back at the country's borders increased by

nearly half in the new government's first week in office after it stepped up police checks at its frontiers, and that those rejected included asylum-seekers.

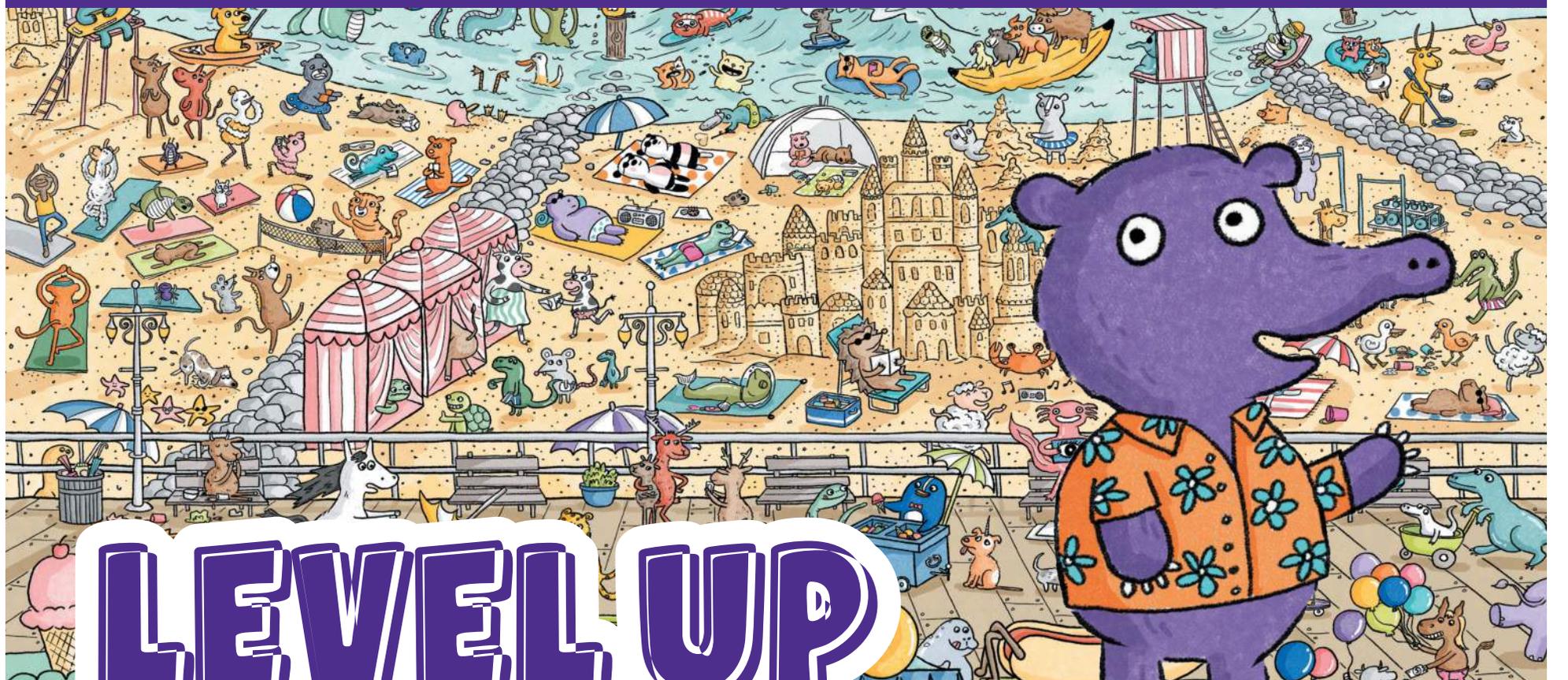
Chancellor Friedrich Merz took office May 6. The following day, Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt said more police would be stationed at the border to curb irregular mi-

gration and some asylum-seekers trying to enter Europe's biggest economy would be turned away.

Speaking Thursday as he visited the Kiefersfelden crossing on Ger-

many's southern frontier with Austria, Dobrindt said 739 people were turned back at the borders over the past seven days, a 45% increase over the previous week's figure of 511.

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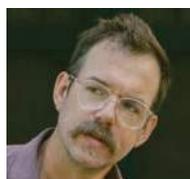


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WEEKEND



Daniel Kimbro takes the lead on 1st solo album

Music, Pages 28-29



Author Mo Willems poses April 22 with The Pigeon, a character in his children's books.

GARY GERARD HAMILTON/AP

The Pigeon wants an interview

Children's author Mo Willems chats with one of his best-known creations about life's transitional stages and their new book, 'Will the Pigeon Graduate?'

Family, Page 33

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

More sweets to squash

AI is used in Candy Crush to create new levels, update older ones

BY SARAH PARVINI

Associated Press

Players swiping their way through more than 18,700 levels of Candy Crush Saga might be surprised to learn they're solving puzzles designed with an assist from artificial intelligence.

The app that helped make gamers out of anyone with a smartphone uses AI to help developers create levels to serve a captive audience constantly looking for more sweets to squash. King, the Swedish video game developer behind Candy Crush, also uses AI to update older levels to help ensure players don't feel bored, stuck or frustrated as they spend time with the game.

Todd Green, general manager of the Candy Crush franchise, said using AI in that way helps free up developers' time to create new puzzle boards. It would be "extremely difficult," he said, for designers to update and reconfigure more than 18,000 levels without AI taking a first pass.

Within the video game industry, discussions around the use of AI in game development run the gamut. Some game makers see AI as a tool that can assist with menial tasks, allowing designers and artists to focus on bigger projects. AI, they say, can help build richer worlds by creating more interactive nonplayer characters, for example. But there are also those who strongly oppose the use of AI, or who see the tech as a threat to their livelihoods — be it as video game actors and performers, or as workers who help make games. Concerns over AI led game performers with the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists to go on strike in late July.

"We're not putting chatbots into the game. We're not putting AI-powered design experiences into the game for players directly to play with," Green said, adding that the tech is not being used to replace game workers. "Instead, we're trying to deploy AI on existing problems that we have in order to make the work of the teams faster or more accurate, and more accurate more quickly."

Candy Crush — first launched on Facebook in 2012 — is constantly updating. King recently released its 300th client version of the game. Gaming giant Activision Blizzard acquired King in 2016 for \$5.9 billion.

The free-to-play game is in a unique position, said Joost Van Dreunen, author of "One Up: Creativity, Competition, and the Global Business of Video Games." Candy Crush is more than a decade old, boasts millions of users and caters to a "ravenous set of players," he said. Demand is so high for new content that it makes sense to use AI to offset the work it takes to create so many levels, Van Dreunen added.

"To supply that at scale, you absolutely can rely on a sort of artificial intelligence or generative AI to create the next set of forms," he said. "The thing about Candy Crush is that every level is technically a single board that you have to solve or clear before you can advance. With AI and the existing library of human-made boards, it makes total sense to then accelerate and expand the efforts to just create more inventory. People play more levels."

King uses AI to target two separate areas: developing new levels and going back to older levels — in some cases, puzzles

that are several years old — and reworking them to ensure they're still worth playing. On new levels designed for people who have played the game for a long time, the company wants to ensure the puzzles are fun "on first contact."

"That's hard for us to do, because we don't get the benefit of having many players test or play through the levels and give us feedback. We have to sort of try and pitch it right at first," he said. "There's a really important group for us in between people who maybe played before and perhaps took a break for a while, and then coming back because they saw or heard of or were curious about what might be new."

Green said King uses AI as a behind-the-scenes assistant in the design "loop" of the game, rather than as a tool that immediately puts something new in front of players.

"Doing that for 1,000 levels all at once is very difficult by hand," he said. "So the most important thing to understand here is that we are using AI as, like, a custom design."

For most players, Green said, the fun in solving the puzzles lies in the "up and down." Levels aren't designed in order of difficulty. An easy level can follow a few difficult levels — or vice versa — to give the game a sense of variety. Leveraging AI means that instead of the team working on several hundred levels each week, they could potentially improve thousands of levels per week because they're able to automate the drafting of the improved levels, he added.

"We talk to players all the time," he said. "We also get the quantitative feedback. We can see how players respond to the



KING.COM LIMITED/AP

The Candy Crush Saga app game has more than 18,000 levels.

levels ... How easy are the levels? Do they get sort of stuck, or are they progressing in the way that we hope?"

To determine whether gamers are playing through the way the designers intended, King looks at several factors, including pass rate — how many times a player passes a level out of every 100

attempts — and how often a board is "reshuffled," or refreshed with all candies rearranged. Some metrics are also intangible, like whether a level is simply fun.

"It's also, to some extent, obviously subjective," Green said. "It's different for different people."

Anker SOLIX EverFrost 2 electric cooler chills without ice

BY GREGG ELLMAN

Tribune News Service

Anker's new SOLIX EverFrost 2 electric cooler redefines "ice-cold beverages." It certainly sets new standards for portable coolers, 100% ditching ice for a portable battery-operated cooling system.

I tested the 42-quart single cooling compartment size (\$799.99, on sale from \$899.99). This is a pretty amazing device, considering its portability. I'd consider it a portable refrigerator-freezer with unique temperature control. Not only are chilled beverages readily available, but I can now have a bowl of ice cream on demand wherever I take the cooler.

On a camping trip, it can even make ice. According to Anker specs, it cools from 77 degrees to 32 degrees in just 15 minutes. My unofficial testing had the SOLIX EverFrost 2 electric cooler go from 64 degrees to 6 degrees in 36 minutes, with water turning to ice in trays just a short time later.

There is also a 58-liter (\$999.99, on sale from \$1,099.99)

dual cooling compartment cooler available, and a smaller 23-liter model is coming later this spring. All are IPX3 waterproof and built for outdoor conditions. They have two durable 6-inch wheels that roll very smoothly. Wheel chocks are included to ensure the cooler doesn't roll away unexpectedly.

With a detachable and rechargeable 288-watt-hour Lithium Iron Phosphate battery, the SOLIX EverFrost 2 electric cooler cools evenly from minus 4 degrees Fahrenheit to 68 degrees Fahrenheit. According to Anker, its proprietary FrostFlow Air-Cooled Refrigeration technology cools up to 30% faster than traditional coolers when fully loaded.

The battery is rated to last up to 52 hours. A second battery (\$249) can be added, giving you 4.3 days of cooling. Each battery has a power button, battery level indicator, one 12W USB-A and a 60W USB-C charging port. The batteries will recharge in 3.6 hours via AC.

You can charge the battery with multiple options: the included AC adapter, a 12-volt car cigarette lighter adap-

ter and USB-C. Another option is portable Anker 100W solar panels, ideal for a camping trip. The batteries slide in and out of a compartment; if you don't use a second battery, the slot can be used for storage.

A free Anker companion app (Android and iOS) shows the battery level, sets the cooler's temperature and shows the cooling mode. A control panel on top has a power button and an LED display to show the actual temperature. Settings include the choice of Fahrenheit or Celsius, screen brightness and the chilling mode. On the top, there is a ruler, and a bottle opener is built into the side.

The charging port has a rubber cover, which needs to be closed when not in use to ensure the waterproof rating. A fold-down tray is on the side, which doubles as a handle to roll it around.

Multiple accessories are available, including Beach Wheels (\$99.99) and a Hook-On Tray (\$79.99). Anker SOLIX PS100 portable solar panels are \$229.00 (on sale from \$299.00).

Online: ankersolix.com

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



Xbox Game Studios

A gun that shoots out skull fragments as bullets is just one of the inventive new weapons in *Doom: The Dark Ages*. The latest installment, which chronicles the ancient history of the series' hero, the Doom Guy, also introduces vehicular combat that changes up the pace and a shield as the foundation of a new battle flow in which defense is the best offense.

Bright spot in Dark Ages: Demon killing

In new installment of the Doom franchise, perfectly balanced action makes up for a lackluster soundtrack and a silly story

By GENE PARK
The Washington Post

Doom is one of the few titles that can stand alongside Mario and Tetris as one of the most important video games ever — first thanks to the classic series that started in 1993, and then to the reboot series (beginning in 2016) that has been heralded as among the finest in the first-person shooting genre.

The long shadow cast by the franchise nearly overwhelms the latest in the series, *Doom: The Dark Ages*, the story of how one man became the bane of hell and its demons. (It's also the name of a track by composer Mick Gordon, whose industrial-metal scores helped define the modern identity of the series. Production company Finishing Move takes over the score from Gordon in this installment.)

But fortunately, *The Dark Ages* stands out when it comes to the important part: ripping and tearing apart demons as a one-man juggernaut. It's easily the best first-person action game since 2016. The action is thoughtfully remixed, a balance between the free-form player expression of games like the *Devil May Cry* series and the swap-and-drop strategy of the 2020 sequel *Doom Eternal*.

This latest installment from id Software chronicles the ancient history of the series' hero, the Doom Guy, although here he's called by his mythical warrior title, Doom Slayer. The modern Doom series

created time travel and multiverse shenanigans to transport the space Marine from the 1993 game to new settings. Plot contrivances in *Doom Eternal* allowed him to become a knighted warrior of an ancient world that was meant to evoke the Christian heaven. This silly premise worked best when it focused on pulling the right emotional triggers (the better to send us off on a demon-killing rampage). *Dark Ages* thankfully remembers this, dotting a largely nonsensical story of angels and demons with the right scenarios to incite the Slayer into feats of fury.

The point is the combat, and *Dark Ages* arms the Slayer with a shield that is the foundation of a new battle flow in which defense is the best offense. Guarding and parrying against the swarms of bullets means reflecting damage back against the demon horde — which feels like it addresses the stop-and-react criticisms *Eternal* faced. Game director Hugo Martin has likened this version of Slayer to an “iron tank,” but I disagree. This Slayer is closer to a bullet out of hell, flying and flailing around like the new and satisfying ball-and-chain weapons introduced to his kit.

Thanks to this system, I was doing three-hit punch combos against enemies in the air before slamming into the ground with my shield to splatter half a dozen demons. I would then parry an attack that splats another creature before tossing my shield through a line of demons and putting a shotgun into the face of another. The

game lacks the signature “glory kills” of the past two games, and as visceral pauses in the action, they're missed. But the new focus on melee combo strings might make up for it. You'll certainly feel that way as your punches rip apart demon bodies.

Dark Ages also introduces vehicular combat that changes up the pace. The titanic robot fights are fun rock-'em, sock-'em diversions, but they move too smoothly in an attempt to re-create the game's ground speed. The dragon levels can also be hit or miss, at least in the early going, but later battles create high-speed chase scenarios with dragons dashing in and out of canyons of dark-fantasy skyscrapers.

While the score from *Finishing Move* stays true to the overall spirit of the series (the thrash metal is appropriately ripping), it's hardly experience-defining stuff, as Gordon's scores were. On tracks like “The Only Thing They Fear is You,” Gordon composed like an industrial Prince, with funky melody lines and an uncanny sense of rhythm set against those caterwauling metal riffs, palm-muted strings and pounding beats. It felt in sync with the violence of the game, whereas *Finishing Move*'s thrash sounds more conventional. Sadly, id Software and Gordon publicly clashed over contracts, payment and creative control, leaving their latest hellscape with a less distinctive soundscape.

At least the game's gothic environments — castles, fiendish forests — stay rich.

And *Dark Ages* pulls back from the platforming sequences that felt ill-advised in *Eternal*. Now, Slayer just clambers up walls automatically.

The scenarios could've been more interesting. The open battlefields of *Dark Ages* are the biggest ever in the series, evoking fond memories of *Halo 3*, when first-person games attempted to re-create realistic large-scale battles. But even with the latest tech, these battles feel small and suggestive. Titans punch each other in the distance, but the Slayer can't interact with any of those fights. These large battlefields suggest armies clashing, but it's really just you against a demon horde. It may sound like I want this to be a different game, but even the 1993 debut had scenes of monster infighting.

So I'm left wishing, in part, that this foundational franchise could finally make good on its earliest aspirations. But all of these concerns melt away when I'm in the thrall of *Dark Ages*' perfectly balanced first-person action system. To be designed as tightly and soundly as the seminal 2016 reboot is still a resounding success. Even without Gordon, *Dark Ages* moves like a groovy, filthy bass line, transporting us to a world where, whatever your frustrations are, at least there are endless faceless demons to hound and pound.

Platforms: PC, PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X/S

Online: doom.bethesda.net/en-US/the-dark-ages

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Q&A

Bringing the joy back into filmmaking

Abel Tesfaye, aka The Weeknd, and director Shults discuss the superstar's latest experimental musical movie

BY KRISTA FAURIA
Associated Press

Abel Tesfaye has always known he wanted to pursue a career in cinema. He sees his meteoric rise to fame as one of today's biggest pop superstars under the moniker The Weeknd as a detour to make that happen. Nearly two years after he made his acting debut with HBO's "The Idol," which he co-created with Sam Levinson, Tesfaye said his latest experimental musical film, which also stars Jenna Ortega and Barry Keoghan, "brought the joy back into filmmaking." "Hurry Up Tomorrow," a Lionsgate release now playing in select on-base theaters, is a kind of companion piece to the final album of the same name released earlier this year in the artist's record-breaking trilogy.

Along with director Trey Edward Shults, Tesfaye, 35, spoke with The Associated Press about retiring The Weeknd, losing his voice onstage in 2022 and lessons learned from making "The Idol." The interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

Associated Press: How has cinema and long-form storytelling through film influenced you as an artist?

Tesfaye: Cinema, for me, it's always been my No. 1 passion. And then I happened to sing and make music and it kind of felt like a little detour, a little cheat code to kind of get into this.

I always wanted to make movies and I always want to make music with movies. You always kind of hear and see the DNA of cinema in my albums and my music videos, my performances and my stage. So it's always just been a part of me.

You come in with this very vulnerable, personal project, and you enlist Trey to make it. How did you guys navigate that and why did you trust him?

Tesfaye: Well, first and foremost, I was a fan of his work. So I knew that he was gonna, whatever I gave him, he's gonna make something incredible. But when we met, we just were kind of inseparable. We became really, really close friends and family.

And the trust just came natural after that. It's like no one else can tell the story but Trey. So it was very easy for me.

Shults: For me too, it was like my first movie I made for \$30,000 with literal family members acting in it and friends in it. It was this beautiful, magical experience and I told myself going forward, doing bigger projects, I only wanna work with humans that I truly feel connected to and you feel that kismet good energy connection and when I met Abel, I felt that. And it was just natural and organic and he was a genuine fan and I could tell his genuine trust and like wanting to embolden me and try to make this my own film. And I just got crazy inspired.

Did you always see this as the third part in the trilogy?

Tesfaye: It was always the third part, yeah. I didn't know what I wanted to say at the time, but I



LIONSGATE/AP

Jenna Ortega, top, stars as Anima in "Hurry Up Tomorrow." The film also stars Barry Keoghan, not shown.

knew I was making some sort of saga. But that was more just for myself. I kind of wanted to establish that I wanted to make something that can end a story. And lo and behold, something actually happened to me that I felt like, whatever I had in store, whatever plans I had prior, threw it out the window and focused 110% on this story.

How did what happened change your understanding of you as an artist? You said cinema has always been the goal. Do you feel like it kind of helped you see your priorities in some ways?

Tesfaye: Absolutely. I mean, I was juggling a million things at the time, you know, and I was on tour, dealing with personal stuff as well. But that's happened before. I was able to still rely on my superpower. You know, I can go on stage and it's this cathartic experience with the fans. I can shut my world off for an hour and a half, two hours, and just lose myself in my performance. And when it got to a point where the lines were blurring, it was affecting my stage performance — people spend a lot of money to come to these shows. They save up for a year, and it got a point where, oh my God, I can't give them what they want; my voice is failing me. And I knew at that moment, I needed to sit down and figure out what was going on up there. Because it wasn't a

physical injury.

Did that influence your decision to retire The Weeknd?

Tesfaye: That kind of helped it. **So now you're bringing yourself? Abel is who you want people to know?**

Tesfaye: It's not even that. I mean, I've always been Abel. The Weeknd's always been a performance. I'm gonna be superhyperbolic here a little bit, but it felt like I had nothing else to say. That's what it kind of felt like to me. I was on stage and it's like I've said everything I can say as this person, and now it's time for me to take that next step. And this film was kind of like that guiding light for me.

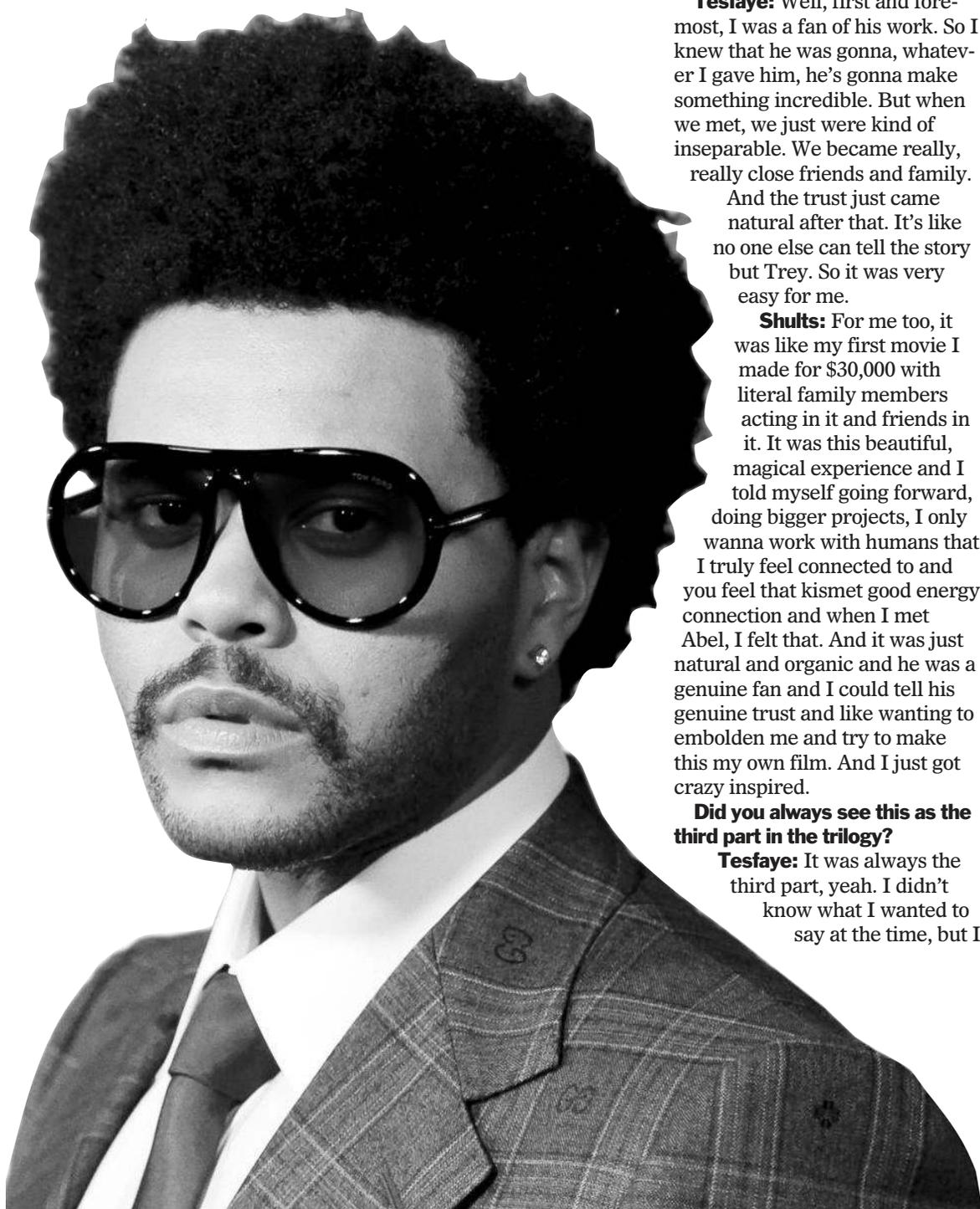
Were there any lessons from "The Idol" that you took into this project?

Tesfaye: Yeah, I mean, naturally you learn. That was the first thing we had ever done. You always learn. You're working with great, great artists at the time and I'm still really close with everyone from the set. But it was a learning experience.

This felt a little bit, had a little more joy making it. Felt a little but more personal. "Idol" didn't really feel like mine at the time. This one felt very much personal and I'm saying this now, that Trey really brought that, and Jenna, of course, brought the joy back into filmmaking. Like, "Yeah, I do want to do this. This is great." (Laughs)

Abel Tesfaye, also known as The Weeknd, shown here in 2019, has created a new experimental musical film, "Hurry Up Tomorrow," a kind of companion piece to the final album of the same name released earlier this year in the artist's record-breaking trilogy.

RICHARD SHOTWELL, INVISION/AP



WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Beware the blender

'Bloodlines,' 6th film in 'Final Destination' franchise, uses everyday objects as fearsome tools of murderous mayhem

By JOCELYN NOVECK
Associated Press

A blender. A lawn mower. A ceiling fan. A garden rake. A vending machine. An MRI scanner. These mundane items are supposed to ease us through life, helping us eat, clean, keep cool, stay healthy. They're not supposed to be evil.

But in "Final Destination: Bloodlines," as in the entire 25-year franchise, ordinary objects become fearsome tools of murderous mayhem. And they do it through intricate sequences akin to Rube Goldberg machines — those contraptions that make simple tasks complex through elaborate chain reactions. We doubt Goldberg intended for a nose ring to interact with a ceiling fan in quite this way, but whatever.

There's some ingenious chaos cooked up here by co-directors Zach Lipovsky and Adam B. Stein, who said at the film's premiere this week that they hope people will be watching this, the franchise's sixth installment (and 14 years after the last), through their fingers — but with smiles on their faces.

To which I must confess I muttered to myself: "No way I'm going to be smiling." I braced to feel jumpy and miserable for two hours.

But sure enough, I was soon smiling, even giggling. Turns out, horror films are a lot easier to handle when they're funny. Even more so when they're witty. A spoonful of wit, as Mary Poppins might say, helps the bloody mayhem go down.

Part of the fun in these movies is that we

all know what we know. The surprise is not whether people will die. Death is not to be cheated. The issue is HOW, and that's where creativity comes in.

The action starts with probably the most impressive sequence in the movie — an opening scene set in 1969 at the so-called Skyview tower, looking very much like the Space Needle (but filmed in Vancouver). It's opening night at the luxurious restaurant up top.

Lovely young Iris (Brec Bassinger) is brought here by her beau for a romantic evening and, though she doesn't know it, a proposal. In the elevator, Iris tries to calm her nerves. It doesn't help when the elevator guy boasts that the project was completed months ahead of schedule.

Once upstairs, Iris' nerves persist, but she tries to quell them. When she nicks her finger and a bit of blood seeps out, she says with a smile, "I'll live." Ha!

Soon enough, rivets are popping and the place is crumbling. Then people start dropping dead on the ground, to the befuddlement of parking valets listening to "Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head" — written in 1969! — one of many musical jokes here.

And then a present-day college student wakes up. It's all been a recurring nightmare of Stefani, who's in danger of flunking out because all she can think of is Skyview. Her sleep-deprived roommate urges her to go figure things out.

Which Stefani (an appealing Kaitlyn Santa Juana) does, determined to learn who Iris is. Turns out, the woman is her grandmother. Uncle Howard tells her to



WARNER BROS. PICTURES/AP

Owen Patrick in a scene from "Final Destination: Bloodlines." In the sixth installment of the franchise, every person who survived a 1969 calamity at the Skyview tower is marked for death, as are their offspring, because they were never supposed to exist.

stay away from the madwoman who years ago lost custody of her children.

Stefani suspects there's more to it. She tracks Iris down in the remote cabin where the reclusive woman has spent decades. She learns that Iris indeed survived a Skyview calamity — but thanks to her premonition, she actually saved many lives.

There's a catch, though. Every person who survived — thanks to Iris — ended up dying later. That's because they cheated Death, and became marked men and women. Their offspring are marked too — hence the movie's title — because they were never supposed to exist. "Death is coming for our family," Iris warns.

What does this mean for Stefani? It means she has to save everyone. And that everyday life becomes very dangerous.

A family barbecue starts off happily, but then we see the spiked rake lodged just under the trampoline, and the huge glass

shard in the blender. Someone will die. But who, and how?

And that's how the movie continues, upping the ante with each kill. A tattoo parlor hosts one of the more creative Goldberg-ian catastrophes. Even wilder is a scene with an MRI scanner. You know that giant magnet? Yeah, that.

Just as important are the nondeaths — the times you're sure something terrible will happen, but it doesn't. I found this silly phrase scrawled later on my notepad: "Actually he doesn't die."

Some people hate horror films of any kind. They're not the intended audience here. But for those who don't, or are mixed, it's true: You may watch "Final Destination: Bloodlines" through fingers covering your face. But chances are high you'll be smiling, too.

"Final Destination: Bloodlines" is rated R for strong violent/grisly accidents, and language. Running time: 110 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

Dark, satirical 'Friendship' explores modern bromances

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Craig Waterman is a suburban dad in middle age who favors extremely puffy jackets, yearns to see the new Marvel movie and is so uncool that he lobbies his town to have speed bumps installed. Naturally, he has no friends.

That changes one day when a misdirected package arrives in the mail and he trots off to hand deliver it to his new neighbor, Austin Carmichael, who has a '70s vibe — a mustache, soul patch and a neckerchief. He's a TV weatherman and fronts a punk band. Naturally, he has a tight group of male friends.

So begins Andrew DeYoung's auspicious debut feature "Friendship," which tackles modern masculinity and male loneliness with biting satire and humor, taking detours into horror and the surreal.

Craig (Tim Robinson, at his awkward best) is instantly smitten — platonically — by Austin (Paul Rudd, at his charismatic best), and why would he not be? The neighbor is everything Craig is not. Craig is like one of those loser characters in the Progressive Insurance commercials about not becoming your parents. "It's a school night for me!" he'll announce as the party is just getting started.

"Might be nice to have a pal, a bud," suggests Craig's wife, a wonderful Kate Mara, who is drifting away from her husband. His teenage son is, too. You would be as well if your dad ended a conversation with "Stay curious!"

Craig soon comes under Austin's spell — the pair smoking, going on an adventure to an aqueduct at night, looking at his collection of early human tools, foraging for



A24/AP

Tim Robinson, left, and Paul Rudd star as neighbors and increasingly closer friends in "Friendship."

mushrooms, some light boxing and singing along with his friends to an impromptu cappella version of "My Boo" by Ghost Town DJ's.

Craig falls hard, fantasizing about joining his neighbor's band and backslapping with his new band of brothers. "You make me feel so free," he confesses to his cool neighbor. But he doesn't have the skills to play it cool. As the kids today say, he has no rizz.

DeYoung is at his best here, exploring the slippery notions of masculinity, both tender and muscular, and the difficulty of joining a circle of guys with their own idiosyncratic and iron laws. "Friendship" shows Craig aping his man-crush and failing terribly — and bringing down

the object of his bromance at the same time. It's as if Larry David remade "Single White Female."

Most impressive is that DeYoung has not created a collection of connected "SNL" skits. Each part cleverly feeds to another, with echoes throughout the script. If a muscle car is mentioned at the top, you know you'll find a muscle car by the end. Same with a lick or sliding doors.

DeYoung also has things to say about our commercial-saturated times, where even Craig's desperate attempt to get super high and escape his disintegrating life ends with a pedestrian hallucination where he just orders from a fast-food joint.

Craig orders his clothes from a catalog bizarrely called "Ocean View Dining" — "The only brand of clothes that fit me just right," he crows — and his adoration of Marvel shows a lowest-common-denominator thinking. (The fact that the object of his love-jealousy is played by the actor who also plays Ant-Man — a member of the Marvel Cinematic Universe — is a remarkable piece of kismet.)

But there's also a feeling in the second half of the movie that DeYoung isn't sure how to end this slide into insanity, and the movie gets unmoored from its satirical look at bromances and just follows Craig as a one-man wrecking machine, like the movie was hijacked by Charlie Kaufman.

Not to take anything away from DeYoung's debut, which is a hoot. Do us all a favor and see it with your buddies. And if you see a guy there all alone, maybe reach out?

"Friendship" is rated R for language and some drug content. Running time: 100 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS



Vertical Entertainment

Josh Hartnett and Charithra Chandran star in *“Fight or Flight,”* a film about a former Secret Service agent (Hartnett) who has to find and arrest an unknown terrorist on a plane full of assassins. Chandran plays his ally, social conscience and impromptu medic.

High-flying violent antics

Ratty, fizzy action comedy *‘Fight or Flight’* is surprisingly enjoyable with its giddy, exhausted overkills and increasingly disoriented hero

BY TY BURR

The Washington Post

Some actors are best left to weather outside until they’ve properly aged, like firewood or a good scotch (Humphrey Bogart being the ideal example). Josh Hartnett was something of an It Boy at the turn of the millennium, with lead roles in *“The Virgin Suicides,”* *“Pearl Harbor,”* *“Black Hawk Down”* and more. Then, like with many It Boys, his career cooled.

Two decades on, Hartnett’s in his mid-40s and popping up again, as a serial-killer dad in M. Night Shyamalan’s *“Trap”* (2024) and now in the ratty, fizzy action comedy *“Fight or Flight.”* An actor who once seemed a passable carbon copy of the young Tommy Lee Jones has apparently decided he has little left to lose, and it’s made him ... interesting. He’s grumpier, wearier, wilier. He’s having FUN.

“Fight or Flight” gives Hartnett ample room to play. An unrepentant B-movie with a Grade A concept — the star plays a former Secret Service agent who has to find and arrest an unknown terrorist on a plane full of assassins — the film takes what could have been grim going in the hands of, say, Steven Seagal and gives it an antic, often hilarious spin. Yes, it’s violent in arcs and spurts of increasing absurdity, but the frenetic pace, slap-happy fight choreography and committed performances keep *“Fight or Flight”* teetering on the edge of farce. If the John Wick movies were played for laughs, they might look something like this.

Hartnett’s Lucas Reyes is bottle-blond, burned out and washed up in Thailand when the movie opens, but he’s the only one on the ground when his higher-ups in America need someone to catch the Ghost, a brilliant international hacker-terrorist who’s boarding a red-eye to San Francisco. The Ghost’s identity is unknown, so he could be anybody on the plane, but Lucas’ job, once he sobers up from his latest bender, is to find the terrorist and bring him in alive.

Unfortunately, the Ghost has a \$10 million bounty on his head and a travel itinerary that just went public on the dark web, which means that some, or most, or all of the agent’s fellow passengers aren’t

tourists on their way to the City by the Bay.

Helmed by James Madigan, a second-unit director moving up to the big chair, from a screenplay by Brooks McLaren and D.J. Cotrona, *“Fight or Flight”* is high-spirited junk, too full of itself at times but mostly content to work out every last variation on a theme: How do you kill someone on an airplane? The assassins come in baroque waves and are dispatched in the same manner, from a pompous actor-hitman (Marko Zaror) to a lady “apex predator” (Nóra Trokán) to Chinese gangsters and Italian mobsters and a lot of hulking guys played by actors named Tibor and Gábor and István. (The movie was filmed in Hungary.)

Not everyone on the plane is out for blood. The flight crew includes an officious prat (Hughie O’Donnell), an newbie with obsessive-compulsive disorder (Danny Ashok) and Isha (Charithra Chandran of TV’s *“Bridgerton”* and *“Alex Rider”*), who becomes Lucas’ ally, social conscience and impromptu medic. The Ghost has a few ringers on the flight, as well, including a trio of lady samurai because — well, just because.

Believable? Not in the least. Enjoyable? Surprisingly so, once you hop on the wavelength of giddy, exhausted overkill along with Hartnett’s increasingly woozy hero. *“Fight or Flight”* juggles not only chain saws but also ice axes, small in-flight butter knives, a clarinet wielded with lethal force and a vial of toad venom that briefly causes Lucas and the movie as a whole to hallucinate pretty fireworks where other characters see geysers of blood.

On its way to an ending that’s both preposterous and the only logical way out, the filmmakers broker the notion that not ALL international hacker-terrorists might be bad people, and that some of the shadowy figures who move between the worlds of national intelligence and Silicon Valley might be measurably worse. But that’s taking *“Fight or Flight”* more seriously than it deserves. “How much more f—ed up can this get before it qualifies as f—ed up?” someone asks here. The answer: a lot.

“Fight or Flight” is rated R for strong bloody violence, language throughout and some drug material. 101 minutes.

Vince Vaughn film ‘Nonnas’ is safe, sweet and schmaltzy

BY LINDSEY BAHR

Associated Press

The new Vince Vaughn movie *“Nonnas”* aspires to be a bit of cinematic comfort food. It’s based on a heartwarming true story, features a lot of shots of simmering Sunday sauces and touts a lovable cast of veteran Italian American actors in Talia Shire, Lorraine Bracco, Brenda Vaccaro and Susan Sarandon. One would hope that those are the kind of ingredients that would be difficult to mess up too badly.

And *“Nonnas,”* now streaming on Netflix, is what it wants to be: A glossy, movie version of the local joint. Nothing’s groundbreaking or particularly unexpected, the story beats are predictable, the music choices and Italian American stereotypes a bit cliché. And yet it’s done with an evident earnestness and kindness that makes it impossible to write off. Is it a sign of the times that a bunch of people just being kind to one another is basically enough?

“Nonnas” was directed by Stephen Chbosky (*“Perks of Being a Wallflower”*) working off of a script by Liz Maccie, whom he is married to, and based on the true story of a New Yorker named Joe Scaravella (Vaughn) who starts a Staten Island restaurant with Italian grandmothers as the chefs.

Joe has no business savvy or restaurant knowledge, just an idea after the loss of his own mother and grandmother. He just wants to pay tribute to the way that they always made him feel with their cooking in the kitchen. There’s a gauzy, sun-soaked flashback to the neighborhood in the 1960s showing a young Joe watching his mother and grandmother make the Sunday sauce that’s so idealized, so full of smiles as a substitute for character, it might as well be a Prego commercial.

There is an obvious reverence for cultural predecessors like *“Moonstruck”* and *“My Cousin*

Vinny” baked into *“Nonnas,”* though it can’t quite find the natural rhythm that might have made it work better. It whiplashes between big comedic swings (including a food fight between the feuding nonnas) and utter sincerity, and it is in no rush to get anywhere fast.

But perhaps the greatest miscalculation is centering the story on Joe instead of the women. The nonnas are met where they are in life — a former nun (Shire), a hair salon owner (Sarandon), a retiree (Bracco) who’s estranged from her kids and a widow (Vaccaro) who needs to get out of the house. It seems like there was a missed opportunity to get to know their stories and recipes more. If food is love, give the audience a chance to fall in love with them through their favorite dishes. Instead, they bond not over food or new appreciation of one another’s heritage, but a makeover.

Still, it’s worth noting that *“Nonnas”* is not nearly as gimmicky as it could have been. Vaughn is good in a more subdued role — the stereotypes-for-comedy’s-sake are left for his friends (Joe Manganiello and Drea de Matteo) to live and die by. A love story with his old prom date (played by Linda Cardellini) feels a little tacked on to everything else, but I suppose is also just another layer to the second chances narrative.

Chbosky and his cinematographer Florian Ballhaus take care to shoot working-class Staten Island beautifully, without gimmicks to overromanticize the reality. Even the “before” images of the restaurant have a glint to them, drawing the audience in to see the potential that Joe sees. Be sure to keep watching through the credits for a little real-life coda.

“Nonnas,” like comfort food, may be a little obvious, a little safe, but that’s the point.

“Nonnas” is rated PG for suggestive material, language and thematic elements. Running time: 111 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.



Netflix

Vince Vaughn as Joe Scaravella, Susan Sarandon as Gia and Lorraine Bracco as Roberta in *“Nonnas.”*

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

How Leipzig helped to halt communism

Once trapped in communist East Germany, bustling Leipzig is now a city of business and of culture. It's also a city of great history — Martin Luther, Goethe, Johann Sebastian Bach, Felix Mendelssohn, Richard Wagner, Angela Merkel and other German VIPs have spent time here.

There are many reasons for visitors to spend time here, too. Music lovers can make a pilgrimage to St. Thomas Church — where Bach was a choirmaster — and to the excellent museum dedicated to him. Art lovers will enjoy the Museum of Fine Arts, history buffs can trek to a Napoleonic battle site at the edge of town, and those turned on by hip hangouts can flock to the “Karli” district just south of downtown.

But there's another compelling reason to visit. The people of Leipzig were at the forefront of the so-called “Peaceful Revolution” that toppled the postwar communist government. The famous scenes of Berliners joyfully partying atop the Wall were made possible by lesser-known protests that began in Leipzig in 1982. These eventually came to a head in a series of civil-disobedience actions that caught the regime completely off guard in 1989. Expecting an armed insurrection, the communist lead-

ers were so flummoxed by the peaceful tone of the protests that they simply allowed them to continue.

The epicenter of these events was St. Nicholas Church — Leipzig's oldest (1165) — located in the compact downtown core called Mitte. In the 1980s, prayer meetings held here gradually became the forum for those deeply dissatisfied with communism.



Rick Steves

As anticommunist sentiment grew, the church was a major staging ground for the Peaceful Revolution. During these protests, people would bravely go inside the church to meet — not knowing what would happen to them when they came back out. To mark those protests, there's now a monumental column outside that echoes the church's Neoclassical interior. Near that column, multicolored panels in the pavement light up after dark, symbolizing the varying opinions about communism.

On the streets of Mitte, you'll see colorful murals commemorating these anti-communist events. The city center also has two museums that document life behind the Iron Curtain. One is



CAMERON HEWITT/Rick Steves' Europe

Leipzig's St. Nicholas Church, where anticommunist protesters met, has a bright, Neoclassical interior.

the Stasi Museum in the “Runde Ecke” — the notorious so-called “Round Corner” building — where the East German secret police (Stasi) detained and interrogated those suspected of being traitors. That same building now houses an intriguing exhibit about those harrowing times. A citizens' committee created the museum in 1990 as a temporary exhibit to document Stasi atrocities, with the goal of preventing such things from

happening again. Decades later, the museum and its committee are still going strong.

The other East Germany museum — the Contemporary History Forum — is funded by the German government. This center examines life in a divided Germany (1945-1990), focusing mainly on the East but dipping into the West to provide contrast. The exhibit is modern and well-presented, but a helpful audioguide gives it more meaning.

Located on the way between the former East Germany (Berlin and Dresden) and the former West (Frankfurt and Nürnberg), Leipzig is a bridge between two worlds. It may lack the charm of half-timbered buildings and lederhosen, but Leipzig's fascinating history earns it a place on your European bucket list.

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

Beautiful, extensive flower carpets beckon at these Italian cities

The term Infiorata, which translates from the Italian language as “decorated with flowers,” refers to an ephemeral artistic creation of flower petals laid down in an eye-catching design on a city street or paved surface. These floral carpets seen throughout Italy are traditionally assembled by teams of volunteers, who work with flower petals and other plant matter gathered locally. First a design is sketched upon the pavement; then begins the painstaking process of filling it in with petals and other organic material. The end effect is often likened to a colorful mosaic. Many of these floral carpets are created on the occasion of the Catholic holiday of Corpus Christi, which falls 60 days after Easter and celebrates the belief that the bread and wine consumed during the Holy Communion represents Jesus in the flesh.

In some cities, these floral carpets can consist of more than a dozen separate “panels” and stretch over hundreds of yards. The beauty of the urban environment surrounding them only adds to their appeal. What's common to all floral carpets is their fleeting nature — those that aren't trampled underfoot by religious processions or local children are soon carried off by gentle breezes or other forces of nature.

The Baroque town of Noto, in southeastern Sicily, is the site of one of Italy's most famous flower carpets. This one is always assembled not on Ascension Day but the third weekend of May. In 2025, the carpet can be viewed from Saturday through May 20 stretching across the steep Via Nicolaci. This year's carpet will be formed from 16 separate sketches reflecting the current year's theme, “art makes peace.” A built-in irrigation system will keep the petals in tip-top form for the duration of the event.

Entry to the viewing area costs 5.80 euros for adults



Karen Bradbury



iStock

The famous flower festival held in the town of Noto in southwestern Sicily will be held May 17-20.

and 3 euros for children. Online: infioratadinoto.it

Pietra Ligure is a municipality in the Province of Savona in the region of Liguria, some 40 miles southwest of Genoa. Once every three years, it hosts a unique floral carpet-laying event. The next edition of “Pietra Ligure in Fiore” is set to take place May 24-25. Billed as the largest event of its kind in Europe, more than 800 floral artists representing some 40 cities in Italy and beyond will take part. Visitors are welcome to lend the artists a hand by working under their supervision. The works remain on display through Sunday evening. Online: tinyurl.com/bdfad9vy

The town of Spello assembles its annual “Le Infiorate di Spello” from June 21-22, when visitors to this town in the province of Perugia in eastern-central Umbria can see a true community effort. The nearby Umbrian-Marche

Apennines mountains serve as the source of the millions of petals and herbs gathered throughout the spring for use in the creation of this carpet. Throughout Saturday, volunteers work feverishly to sketch out and lay down the petals needed to create masterpieces reminiscent of paintings. The subjects rendered are inspired by both religious tradition and current events. By 9 a.m. on the Sunday, the carpet has been completed and can be admired until such time as a procession led by a bishop passes over it. From this point onward, any member of the public can step upon it, bringing the cycle of build-up and destruction to its natural end. Online: infioratespello.it

Genzano di Roma, a town outside Rome, has a long and proud Infiorata tradition, and from June 21-23, the 247th edition of this event is set to unfold. The theme chosen for this year's edition is “give hope” and ties in with the year 2025's status as a Jubilee year for the Catholic church. As happens every year, Via Italo Belardi will be turned into a sea of flowers, covered by 15 sweeping works of art. At 7 p.m. on the event's final day, the children of the town will run across the carpet, sweeping the petals into the wind. Online: infioratadigenzano.it

While the above-mentioned Infiorate are among Italy's best-known and most highly regarded, floral carpets are built up in dozens of smaller towns too. In northern Italy, the municipality of Noale, in Veneto, creates its carpet June 21-22. Along the Ligurian coastline, towns taking part in the tradition include Diano Marina and Brugnato (June 22). In central Italy, the lakeside town of Bolsena in the province of Viterbo is known for its annual Infiorata (June 22). San Pier Niceto, a municipality in Messina in Sicily, is the site of what's billed as the longest floral carpet in the world, stretching for more than a mile (June 22). Online: tinyurl.com/22u6w7us

WEEKEND: TRAVEL



ILLUSTRATION BY NOGA AMI-RAV/Stars and Stripes

A 'ruthless' guide to flying without bag fees

Travel experts offer their best tips for packing light and fitting everything you need for short trips into your personal item

BY ANDREA SACHS
The Washington Post

Travelers who fly with only a carry-on: You're packing way too much.

In the age of piecemeal pricing and limited overhead bin space, superlight fliers are cutting their carry-on luggage allowance by half. They are packing all of their belongings in a personal item, a carrier traditionally used for short hauls, such as office commutes, gym workouts or day hikes.

By downsizing, travelers can dodge the carry-on fee exacted by ultralow-budget carriers and the basic economy tickets. (Prices vary by airline and route, but they can often cost more than a checked bag.) They can avoid a mandatory gate check on full flights. And they can be liberated from the weight of stuff.

"You have so much freedom," said Janice Moskoff, founder and editor of Gather and Go Travel, a travel blog. "You can stash it wherever you want or just carry it with you."

Shoving everything into a small satchel is no easy feat, even for people who typically avoid the checked baggage counter like a sticky trap. As I learned on a recent trip to Phoenix in United's Basic Economy (from \$35 for a carry-on), traveling with a personal item takes serious discipline, sartorial ingenuity and a certain degree of asceticism.

"You have to be ruthless," said Matt Kepnes, a budget travel expert who goes by Nomadic Matt.

If you pack thoughtfully and economically, you might never go back to such excesses as two pairs of pants.

Trips made for personal items

Personal-item packing is best for certain types of trips. Shorter ones, for example.

My getaway to Arizona was three days. Sally French, a lead writer at NerdWallet, traveled with a single small bag for a recent four-night vacation in Palm Springs, Calif. She could have stretched it for another day.

"You could definitely do five days," French said. "Two weeks would be incredibly impressive."

The itinerary and weather also matter. You can squeeze more into your bag if you are planning low-impact activities in warm temperatures, such as walking tours of Athens or sunbathing in St. Kitts. Gear-heavy outings in cold weather require more luggage space, even if you wear your thickest layers on the plane.

The more similar the outings, the better. If casual is the primary dress code, you can live off the same capsule collection. Fancier affairs might be harder to pull off, unless your party dress folds up like origami.

Choosing the right bag

The airline industry's personal-item dimensions are not uniform. On JetBlue, purses, laptop cases, backpacks, etc., can't exceed 17-by-13-by-8 inches; Spirit passengers must adhere to 18-by-14-by-8 inches. Ryanair is even more compact, at 15.7-by-7.9-by-9.8 inches.

Despite the slight variations, the airlines are unanimous on the fit. The carrier must be snug under the seat. No part of the bag should spill into the aisle or the narrow passage in your row.

For optimal capacity within the legal limits, consider the bag's shape and material.

Rectangular bags have similar geometry to the under-seat space, so they can slide right in. A soft-sided carrier like a duffel or backpack is squishable. If you carry fragile electronics, a computer sleeve is important. To stay organized, you can use packing cubes, but with so few items, they might be unnecessary.

Most packing experts gravitate toward a backpack. French uses the 35-liter Allpa from Cotopaxi. Kepnes totes an Osprey day pack. Moskoff straps on the North-Face Borealis that, when she's not traveling, accompanies her on day treks.

Gillian Morris, a tech founder and co-author of Super-nuclear, a blog about living near friends, has stayed true to the Cote & Ciel Moselle backpack that she purchased on eBay 13 years ago. Emma Topp, a social media producer at EF Ultimate Break, a tour operator that caters to 18- to-35-year-olds, relies on a medium-size duffel.

"It's so moldable," Topp said. "I fill every little nook because you only have so much space."

In a packing video, Topp demonstrates one of her space-saving techniques. She tucks smaller items, such as socks, belts and bathing suits, into an extra pair of shoes.

Though your personal item can easily transition to a sightseeing bag, you might not want to dump out all of the items at your destination. Instead, stash a smaller sac in your pack. Morris will throw in a Baby Baggu, which can slip into your back pocket like a handkerchief. Moskoff is

SEE PACK ON PAGE 21

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Gear up with some packing hacks

Travelers toting snowboards, bikes and other sports equipment have additional concerns

By CHRIS DONG
The Washington Post

Jay Clue coughed up a \$280 overweight-bag fee because of a single mistake that he will never make again.

As a globe-trotting photographer and diving instructor, Clue finds himself on the road often. In 2024, he logged more than 160,000 air miles. His preflight packing routine has become almost second nature: carefully “Tetris-ing” camera and scuba equipment into two checked suitcases and a carry-on.

His one misstep?

“I forgot that my diving wetsuit was still damp, along with some other items in my kit,” Clue said. “Those few pounds made all the difference.”

Because his carry-on and second checked bag were filled to the brim, he wasn’t able to move any items to decrease the weight.

“I learned the hard way to blow-dry your scuba gear if it doesn’t dry outside,” he said.

Clue and other outdoorsy travelers share their best ideas for optimizing flying with their gear, whether it’s ski boots or mountain bikes.

Multiple bags can be cheaper

Although it might be counterintuitive, said travel writer Gunnar Olson, you can sometimes save by having more luggage.

“Two checked bags, with the weight equally distributed, can often be cheaper than one overweight bag,” said Olson, a

winter sports fanatic and a host of “The Thrifty Traveler Podcast.”

It pays to do the math and dig into the airline’s policies before booking a flight. For instance, on a domestic American Airlines itinerary, a single bag weighing 80 pounds would incur a \$200 overweight fee. However, two checked items weighing 40 pounds each would cost about \$90.

Many airlines also consider a ski bag and a boot bag to be a single checked item.

Olson recommended having the rules available on your phone.

“That way, if you get an agent unfamiliar with the policy, you can show them,” he said.

Pack smarter, not harder

Choose the right suitcase for your gear from the get-go, said Alisha McDarris, co-founder of Terradrift, an online source for outdoor adventure tips and gear reviews.

For bikes and other fragile items, you can fly with hard- or soft-sided gear bags. Hard-sided bags are more protective but are generally heavier.

“If purchasing a dedicated case, pay attention to how much it weighs, especially in combination with your bike,” said McDarris, an avid mountain biker. “You can pack heavy assembly tools in a separate bag, like your carry-on, in case those extra pounds are what put you over the airline’s limit.”

Most major carriers treat bike dimensions differently than traditional luggage,

usually working in travelers’ favor. However, if a bike is heavier than 50 pounds, expect a fee, just as you would with a checked bag.

Flex your status

Don’t want to pay for a checked bag? American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Jet-Blue and United Airlines waive the cost of at least the first checked bag, which includes most sports gear, on flights within the United States for some travelers.

Those who hold elite status, carry co-branded credit cards, travel in premium cabins or are active-duty military members are typically off the hook. However, overweight- and oversize-bag fees still apply.

Several airlines, including Turkish Airlines and Air Tahiti, allow travelers to bring scuba equipment free or at a discount (with restrictions).

Go incognito

Consider suitcases that don’t scream, “There’s expensive gear in here!”

Some softer-sided rollerboards are protective and can still shield what’s inside without looking like true gear bags.

“I try to go with suitcases like the Pelican Aegis duffel, where I can be somewhat incognito in the airport, so people don’t know I have thousands of dollars’ [worth] of stuff,” Clue said.

This can be helpful when you get to your destination, too.

“If I’m walking around a new city, I



iStock

Thoroughly drying a wetsuit before packing it can pay off.

want to be as low-profile as possible,” he said.

Don’t forget about insurance

Check whether your insurance policy can cover lost or damaged belongings. Sport-specific policies, such as dive insurance or ski insurance, often include the cost of rentals if an airline loses your gear.

Even general travel policies cover lost or damaged equipment as part of your baggage and personal effects.

Pack: Save space by focusing on bare essentials, bringing multipurpose items**FROM PAGE 20**

a fan of Ori London’s canteen-round Paddington bag.

“I really like that cross-body bag for the security and the material,” Moskoff said. “I can put it in the washing machine.”

French will dip into her stockpile of reusable shopping totes. She often picks the grottiest ones and leaves them behind.

“We all have a canvas bag that has permanent stains on it,” she said. “Take it as your beach bag, and then throw it away.”

Assembling your wardrobe

Packing savants often profess strategies that involve a series of digits that equate to a quantity of clothing items, such as 5-4-3-2-1 or 3-3-3. But superlight packers don’t need multiples.

Keppes focuses on the bare essentials, such as T-shirts, underwear and socks. He brings a pair of pants — the ones he wears on the plane.

Moskoff follows a 3:1 ratio: three (or sometimes two) tops to one pair of bottoms.

They will have a “cross purpose and go together,” she said. Comfort comes before style. “They are not my favorite clothes,” she said, “but they can all be mixed and matched.”

Morris seeks clothes that have multiple uses, such as a sports bra that can stand in for a bikini top or more intimate apparel.

Topp also incorporates versatile garments. She’ll bring a maxi skirt that can double as a dress and a cardigan that can she wear as an outer layer, buttoned-up shirt or cape.

French sticks with the same color palette and one pair of shoes.

If two are necessary, she’ll wear the chunkier or bulkier style on the plane and squish a pair of flats into her



NOGA AMI-RAV/Stars and Stripes

bag. She also brings clothes that are on their “last leg,” such as “workout clothes that permanently smell like sweat.”

At the end of the trip, she’ll toss them.

With such a tightly edited wardrobe, you’ll be wearing the same clothes repeatedly and often on consecutive days.

Choose breathable fabrics that don’t absorb scents. Morris favors natural fabrics, such as silk, linen and wool, and sweat-wicking athletic wear.

“You can hang them up at night, and they’re usually aired out and fresh by morning,” Morris said.

The 10-\$10 rule

Don’t waste space on “what-if” items, French said.

If you do not know whether you’ll need a certain incidental, such as a bathing suit, book or umbrella, she recommends leaving them behind and purchasing them at your destination — as long as they are covered by the 10-\$10 rule.

“If you can acquire it in less than 10 minutes and can get it for around \$10,” she said, “then just buy it on location.”

She said the strategy has some wiggle room. You can spend more than 10 minutes to locate the right store and pay whatever your budget allows. Just don’t waste an entire morning on a scavenger hunt or sink a large sum of money into it.

One way to supplement your travel wardrobe is to buy wearable souvenirs. French bought a sundress in Thailand. Morris drops into vintage and thrift stores, mindful of not spending too much.

“I might not have enough space to travel home with the clothes,” Morris said.

Be sparing with extras

Electronics and toiletries can be space hogs.

Each gadget doesn’t need its own charger. Consolidate with a product that includes different USB ports. Topp uses one cord to charge several devices, such as her iPhone, laptop, noise-canceling headphones and camera.

“I can just charge every single thing with one piece,” she said.

For toiletries, use the hotel’s freebies and refill from the shower pumps. Topp is partial to certain beauty brands, and she transfers the products into Cadence capsules, which snap together like Legos.

True to the minimalist ethos, the packing gurus will usually forgo souvenirs. French’s big splurge is a disposable camera. If Topp buys gifts, she will roll them in her clothes.

If you are bursting at the seams, remember that duty-free purchases are exempt from carry-on limits. Or try airport gift shops and accept the offer for a bag.

“The airlines don’t really count those,” she said, “but that’s a last-minute measure.”

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY JENNIFER H. SVAN/Stars and Stripes

Visitors to the German-French Garden in Saarbrücken, Germany, enjoy some sunshine by a water fountain and a bed of tulips. The park is about a 45-minute drive from Kaiserslautern, close to the French border. The garden is a symbol of friendship between the two countries.

Flowers of friendship

The German-French Garden, a sprawling public park in Saarbrücken, a symbol of cooperation between the 2 countries who were once foes

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Hitting 10,000 daily steps should be an easy feat at the German-French Garden, a sprawling public park on the outskirts of Saarbrücken with a bounty of trails, trees and geese.

The 123-acre site is near the French border, about 45 minutes away from Kaiserslautern. It's best seen by foot, allowing one to meander through a grassy meadow, rest on a lakeside bench or stop and smell the roses in the park's smaller terraced gardens.

If you have a few hours to spend and a good pair of shoes, you can learn a lot about the site's different sections, such as the "Silver Maple" garden with its various flower beds, by walking around and reading the park signs, which are in German, English and French.

The creation of the garden in 1960 was an attempt to reconcile the troubled history between the two European powers that played out on the border.

It became a symbol of cooperation and friendship with both French and German gardeners contributing to the landscape design.

One joint project was to bury concrete antitank barriers under the "Valley of Flowers," a meadow that blooms in early spring with daffodils, tulips and bluebells, before giving way to summer's daylilies, irises and asters.

The largest green space in the

On the QT

Address: Deutschmühlental 4, Saarbrücken, Germany

Hours: Open 24 hours a day year-round

Cost: Free except for special events. Riding the small train that circles the park costs 3.50 euros round trip per person; pedal boats cost 3.50 euros per person for 30 minutes and 5.50 euros for one hour. A round of miniature golf costs 2.50 euros for children up to 12 years old and 3.50 euros for adults. Free parking is available outside the park's north entrance.

Information: +49 681-905-2159; saarbruecken.de/dfg

Jennifer H. Svan

Saarland capital wasn't always such a peaceful oasis, as illustrated by a war memorial cemetery laid out under a shady grove of cypress and oak trees.

The garden land was the site of a fierce battle during the 19th century Franco-Prussian War and part of the Third Reich's 391-mile Westwall fortification of bunkers and antitank barriers during World War II.

Some of the dead from the 1870 Spichern Heights campaign by Prussia in its war against France are laid to rest here in one of Germany's oldest military cemeteries.

The towering trees framing the many paths throughout the park look old enough to have provided shade to 19th century soldiers.

But some of the facilities looked abandoned or run-down. Weeds grew on the brick patio of

a ramshackle, empty restaurant that must have seen better days.

A cable car that transports riders above the treetops looked closed. German news reports said it was supposed to open this spring, but calls to a number listed on the park's website for the cable car operator went unanswered.

The station for the park's light rail system was also shuttered, but the park website notes that a small trackless train runs throughout the park on Wednesdays, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, from 1 to 6 p.m.

Despite the dilapidated appearance in places, the garden was buzzing with hikers, cyclists, couples and families on a recent spring day. A playground with a water station and a shallow creek to wade in seemed especially popular with kids.

For walkers and runners, there are three sign-posted routes, including an asphalt trail with a bicycle lane that connects the park's main and north entrances.

Several of the lakes and ponds have fountains, including one that puts on a rhythmic water show every hour in the summer timed to music.

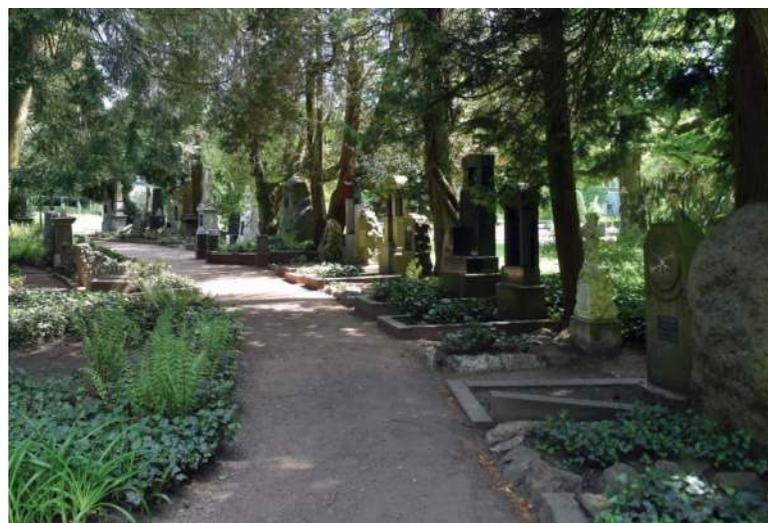
Pedal boats in the shape of geese and flamingos can be rented on certain days.

A few small restaurants and snack shops offer a place to replenish spent vigor and rest tired feet.

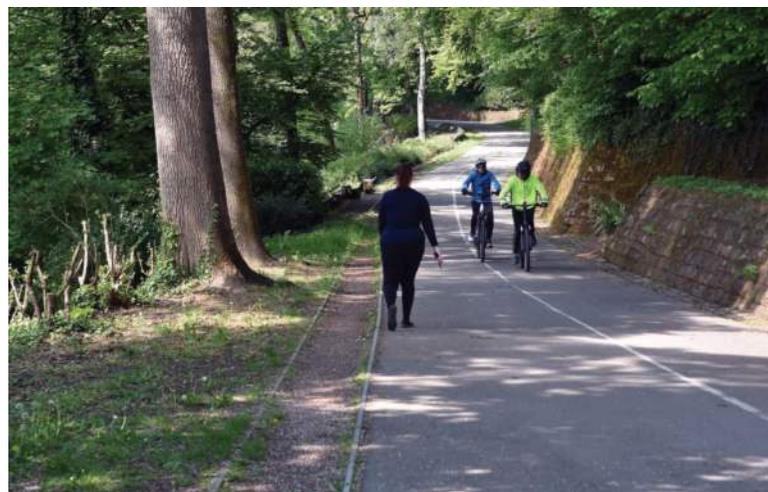
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Pedal boats resembling waterfowl can be taken out on the largest lake at the German-French Garden in Saarbrücken.



German and French military personnel and civilians who died on Aug. 6, 1870, in the Battle of Spichern are buried side by side in a cemetery at the German-French Garden in Saarbrücken. The burial ground there is one of Germany's oldest military cemeteries.



Designated paths for pedestrians and cyclists crisscross the German-French Garden in Saarbrücken. There are three main marked walking paths on varied terrain, while an asphalt cycling path connects the main and north entrances.



Remnants of the Westwall bunker, built during the late 1930s, can be seen at the German-French Garden in Saarbrücken.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Satisfying a craving for sushi in Bayreuth

Wagaya Japanese Kitchen affordable, has a broad menu

BY LYDIA GORDON
Stars and Stripes

Sushi is probably the last dish I expected to find done well in a landlocked corner of Germany hundreds of miles from the nearest ocean.

But after residing in Germany for nearly a year, I set aside my bias — shaped by a few years spent in Japan — and gave Bayreuth's Wagaya Japanese Kitchen a shot.

People who have lived a long time in both Japan and Germany say there is a scale of sorts for weighing sushi quality here, particularly outside the largest cities. First and foremost is the preparation of the rice, which can elevate or ruin a piece of sushi the same way bread quality affects a sandwich, if not more so.

Secondarily, it's Westernized, and that's OK. The fish variety won't be the same as along the Pacific Ocean, but items like tuna, salmon and octopus all unfreeze very nicely. There will be all manner of sauces and likely a few fried rolls never seen before in Tokyo.

I'll admit, I was skeptical. A quick glance at the restaurant's website listed multiple five-star reviews, with one calling it "the best sushi in town."

The menu surprised me, though, not just with its size but also with its variety. Joined by my friend, a committed vegetarian, we were especially impressed by the number of sushi options that aligned with her diet.

The interior of the restaurant was warm and inviting, blending traditional and modern Japanese aesthetics. Small cherry blossom accents and soft pink neon lighting added charm without feeling overdone.

We started off the evening stressed with a few appetizers: miso soup for her, fried gyoza for me and edamame to share.

It was a comforting return to the staples of Japanese cuisine — small dishes meant for sharing rather than the massive displays on oversized plates in traditional German fare.

As we worked our way through the appetizers, we found ourselves torn and tempted by the other dishes on the menu, yet committed to the sushi.

In the end, we decided the sushi would be the determining factor. If it delivered, Wagaya would be worth a return trip to



PHOTOS BY LYDIA GORDON/Stars and Stripes

The small but mighty Inari Roll has a simple filling of pickled tofu and is a great vegetarian option. The menu at Wagaya Japanese Kitchen Bayreuth will surprise not only with its size but also its variety. Even vegetarians will find a number of sushi options aligned with their diet.



The White Roll at Wagaya Japanese Kitchen has a base of tempura shrimp coupled with cucumber, mango and cream cheese, then is drizzled with Japanese mayonnaise and eel sauce.

explore the rest of the menu.

For our main courses, I ordered the White Roll, which included a flavorful combination of tempura shrimp, cucumber, mango and cream cheese, finished with a drizzle of eel sauce and Japanese mayo.

Are you likely to find something like this anywhere in Japan? No. But it was a balance of sweet, savory and salty, so I was more than happy with my choice.

My friend opted for the Inari

Roll, a simple yet satisfying maki made with pickled tofu. Inari is common in Japan, though rarely as maki.

Although I'm not typically a fan of most pickled foods, I stole a bite of her roll and was surprised by how much I liked it.

By that point, we'd already splurged on appetizers, main courses and an oddly green mochi highball, so we figured a little dessert couldn't hurt.

The mochi mix caught my eye,



The chicken gyoza at Wagaya Japanese Kitchen is a pleasant, moderately filling appetizer, featuring a crispy exterior and a soft, savory filling. Vegetarian gyoza are also available.

while my friend opted for the fried hot bananas, another staple of the Westernized Japanese menu.

When both desserts arrived, they were accompanied by sliced apples and oranges. Mine was served with a whipped cream center, and hers was paired with vanilla ice cream drizzled in honey.

The mochi mix was delicious but tiny. The hot bananas, while enjoyable when combined with



Wagaya Japanese Kitchen in Bayreuth, Germany, is warm and inviting. Its artful aesthetics include cherry blossom accents and soft pink neon lighting.



Wagaya Japanese Kitchen Bayreuth

Address: Richard-Wagner-Strasse 31, Bayreuth, Germany

Hours: Sunday and Tuesday-Thursday, 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. and 5-10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. and 5-10:30 p.m.; closed Monday.

Cost: Appetizers, 5-7 euros; sushi/nigiri/maki, 3-15 euros; entrees, 13-18 euros; dessert, 3-7 euros.

Information: Online: wagaya-restaurant.de; Phone: +49 921-7931-5111

Lydia Gordon

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the ice cream and honey, didn't quite stand out. Still, both desserts felt pleasantly light.

While I still miss the convenience and quality of Japanese sushi in its home country, I'm looking forward to returning to Wagaya soon. With such a broad menu and a decent bang for the buck, it gives me hope that I've found a reliable go-to for satisfying my Japanese food cravings.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



JUAN KING/Stars and Stripes

Godzilla the Art showcases work from 29 Japanese and international artists in Tokyo. The exhibit runs through June 29.

Exhibit brings Godzilla to life through art

Mori Arts Center in Tokyo inspired by iconic movie monster's 70th anniversary

BY JUAN KING
Stars and Stripes

Godzilla's iconic roar has rumbled across the big screen since the monster's debut in 1954. More than 70 years later, artists from around the world are paying tribute to the legendary creature in a new exhibit at the Mori Arts Center in Tokyo.

Godzilla the Art, produced by Takeshi Yoro, showcases work from 29 Japanese and international artists on the 52nd floor of Roppongi Hills' Mori Tower. The exhibit runs through June 29.

The entrance corridor simulates the aftermath of a Godzilla attack and includes information about the monster's origins and creator. Inside the gallery, murals, sculptures, photographs and videos — ranging from quirky to eerie — line the walls and floor spaces. Placards accompany each piece with details.

Among the highlights is a diorama by TokyoBuild artist Christopher Robin Nordstrom, depicting buildings devastated by the towering titan.

Another highlight is "The One — Godzilla," a large wooden statue of a human-shaped Godzilla by sculptor Odani Motohiko, which casts an ominous shadow across a wall.



AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

Elaborate dioramas occupy a room at Godzilla the Art, an exhibit commemorating the 70th anniversary of the movie monster's origin.

Near the end of the exhibit, a large-screen video installation set to music by Toho Visual Arts presents a montage of Godzilla designs from across the decades.

Visitors can expect to spend about 40 minutes inside the exhibit.

A gift shop outside the gallery offers Godzilla-themed merchandise, including figurines, T-shirts, cookies and more. A model of Shin Godzilla from the 2016 film proved especially popular and sold out quickly.

Timed-entry tickets can be purchased online — after creating an account — or in person at the third-floor ticket counter.

Visitors must check in on the third floor, where staff verify tickets. QR codes are scanned for access to elevators and again before entering the exhibit.

Certain works are off limits to photography, and video and museum staff stand by to enforce the rules.

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JUAN KING/Stars and Stripes

Murals, sculptures, photographs and videos ranging from quirky to eerie line the walls and floor spaces for Godzilla the Art.

On the QT

Directions: Mori Arts Center is a short walk from Roppongi Station, which services multiple train lines; take Exit 1C.

Times: "Godzilla the Art" is open daily, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., until June 29.

Costs: Adult admission is 2,200 yen on weekdays and 2,500 yen on weekends. University and high school students pay 1,600 yen and 1,500 yen, respectively, on weekdays and weekends. Children ages 4 through junior high school pay 500 yen on weekdays and 600 yen on weekends. Free for 3 and younger.

Food: The Sun and The Moon cafe and restaurant is available on the same floor.

Information: Online: tinyurl.com/mwa9k329

Juan King

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Savor French flavors at this bayside bistro

Rali's Restaurant has great food, views along Subic Bay, Philippines

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

A sea breeze and a shady patio make Rali's Restaurant the perfect place for some ship spotting along Subic Bay, a former U.S. naval base in the Philippines.

This French bistro has breakfast, lunch and dinner as well as fancy coffee and alcohol at a prime location on the road from the naval base to Cubi Point, the former naval air station. From the patio you can watch massive oil tankers offload, or American and Philippine naval ships pull into port.

Rali's bills its food as French bistro classics with a few Italian and Spanish dishes here and there. This family-run restaurant features a double R sign reminiscent of the Rolls Royce logo.

The restaurant is inside the Subic Freeport Zone, which encompasses the old naval base. That means U.S. service members with limited liberty can eat there. Staff say American troops

are regulars.

The bistro's coffee is superior to what you can buy at a nearby Starbucks. The beans are roasted by the restaurant's sister company — Source Coffee — that's also inside the Freeport Zone and popular with U.S. troops, according to staff.

A 180 pesos, or \$3.24, cappuccino on the patio was the perfect pick-me-up before a recent drive to observe military training at San Antonio, just west of Subic.

Rali's bills its food as French bistro classics with a few Italian and Spanish dishes added in.

The blackened tuna at 595 pesos was on par with the best seafood you'll find in Japan. The spice-encrusted fish was served with tomato rice, aioli, arugula mayo, pickled fennel and onions that left me full but eager for more.

There's also a bakery that serves breakfast with items such as eggs Benedict and French toast until 3 p.m. Wine and cocktails are also available.

Once your food has digested,



Rali's Restaurant

Location: At the Malawaan Fishing Park, along Argonaut Highway, in Subic Bay Freeport Zone in the Philippines.

Hours: Open daily, 8 a.m.-9 p.m.

Prices: Around 500 pesos for breakfast to 3,285 pesos for ribeye steak.

Dress: Casual

Directions: Take the Argonaut Highway to Cubi Point, and the restaurant is on the right overlooking the water.

Online: ralisrestaurant.com/hello

Seth Robson

you might consider a swim at the nearby All Hands Beach — once a swimming area only for military members — that's open to visitors. It's a few minutes down the road from Rali's in the direction of Cubi Point.

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PHOTOS BY SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

Spice-encrusted blackened tuna served with tomato rice, aioli, arugula mayo, pickled fennel and onions is a delight at Rali's Restaurant, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.



Rali's Restaurant is the perfect place for ship spotting at Subic Bay, a former U.S. naval base in the Philippines.

Fish taco salad stirs up beach vibes for weeknights at home

By **ELLIE KRIEGER**
The Washington Post

Joy is a nutrient, according to my friend and fellow dietitian Dawn Jackson Blatner, who champions it as one of the "pillars of positive nutrition."

I couldn't agree more. Vitamin Joy is essential to our well-being: The pure pleasure of eating is one reason even the most precisely formulated meal-replacement drink could never provide the full nourishment of an actual plate of food.

One way food brings joy is by evoking memories — taking us back to some of the happiest moments in our lives. For me, those are often the dishes that remind me of relaxed days at the beach — whether it's the steamed clams and chowder that reflect my childhood summers on Long Island or meals such as this salad, which shuttle me back to precious family vacations on the Pacific Coast. It's the kind of meal I can imagine myself enjoying under a beach umbrella, feet in the sand, listening to the sounds of the ocean.

It brings the flavors of fish tacos, with chili-lime seasoned fish atop a romaine and cabbage salad in an avocado dressing, with radishes, and pickled onions and jalapeño on the side. The pickled onions as well as the dressing can be made in advance, and the fish needs to marinate for only about 20 minutes, all of which makes this recipe especially weeknight friendly.



Tom McCorkle/For The Washington Post

Fish Taco Salad blends chili-lime flavors with avocado dressing and salad fixings.

Fish Taco Salad

4 servings

Total time: 35 minutes

Ingredients

½ cup red wine vinegar

2 teaspoons honey

½ medium red onion (4 ounces total), thinly sliced (1 cup)

¼ cup water, plus more as needed

4 (5-ounce) skinless fillets mahi mahi, cod or other firm white fish

3 tablespoons neutral oil, such as avocado, divided

3 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon fresh lime juice, divided, plus more as needed

½ teaspoon ground ancho chile or chili powder

½ teaspoon garlic powder

¼ teaspoon ground cumin

⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper

¼ teaspoon plus ⅛ teaspoon fine salt, divided, plus more as needed

Flesh of 1 large, ripe avocado

2 scallions, coarsely chopped

½ cup plus 2 tablespoons fresh cilantro leaves, divided

6 cups (8 ounces) chopped romaine lettuce hearts

3 cups (7½ ounces) shredded green cabbage

5 red radishes, sliced (about 1 cup)

½ cup pickled jalapeños, drained

Corn chips or warm corn tortillas

Directions

In a small bowl or jar, stir together the vinegar and honey until the honey dissolves. Add the onion and enough water to submerge it completely, and let sit at room temperature for 30 to 40 minutes, or cover and refrigerate for up to 2 weeks.

Place the fish onto a rimmed dish or plate. In a small bowl, whisk 1 tablespoon of the oil, 1 tablespoon of the lime juice, the ground ancho chile, garlic powder, cumin, cayenne pepper and ⅛ teaspoon of the salt. Drizzle the spice mixture over the fish and rub it all over each piece. Set aside while you prepare the remaining ingredients, about 20 minutes.

In a small blender, or using a narrow container with tall sides and an immersion blender, combine the avocado, scallions, the remaining 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon of lime juice, 2 tablespoons of the cilantro, the remaining ¼ teaspoon of salt and ¼ cup of water, and puree until smooth, stopping to scrape down the sides with a spatula as needed. You should have about 1 cup. (If you only have a large blender, you can double the recipe so it will efficiently blend; refrigerate leftovers.)

In a large (12-inch) nonstick skillet over medium heat, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil until shimmering. Add the fish, and cook until nicely browned on each side and flakes easily under the tines of a fork, about 8 minutes per inch of thickness, flipping halfway through. Transfer the fish to a plate. (Alternatively, you can roast the fish in a parchment-lined dish in a 400-degree oven for 8 minutes per inch of thickness. You do not need the 2 tablespoons of oil or to flip the fillets, if roasting.)

In a large bowl, toss together the lettuce and cabbage with the avocado dressing until coated. Taste, and season with more lime juice and salt, if desired.

To serve, divide the dressed lettuce mixture among individual shallow bowls. Top each with a fish fillet, some pickled onion, radishes, pickled jalapeños and cilantro.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

A delicious swirl of secrets and recipes

Innovative ice-cream makers at Salt & Straw producing a cookbook for their legions of fans

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

If you're intimidated by the idea of making ice cream at home, just think of it as making soup. That's advice from Tyler Malek of Salt & Straw, the innovative gourmet ice cream maker known for its ever-changing lickable treats.

"Making a pint of ice cream is very similar to making a pot of soup where if you have a good stock recipe — like chicken stock, vegetable stock — then you start just adding to it until it tastes good," he says from his kitchen in Portland, Ore.

"If you have a really good stock base recipe, you could blend strawberries into it and make strawberry ice cream. You can drizzle chocolate into it and make chocolate ice cream. You can do really anything."

The base is the base

That ice cream base is also at the heart of Malek's latest cookbook, "America's Most Iconic Ice Creams: A Salt & Straw Cookbook." Just as another summer beckons, he and co-author JJ Goode teach the fundamentals, which then can be built on to make all kinds of delicious treats.

That means learning the bases for gelato, custard, sorbet, coconut and ice cream. Only down the road can you confidently turn them into awesome flavors like Strawberry Honey Balsamic with Black Pepper, or Banana Parsnip Sherbet.

"My dream, at its heart, is that someone can take this book and they just pore through it and have so much fun and then it ignites this Pandora's box of imagination," Malek says.

The cookbook focuses on 10 iconic flavors: vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, coffee, green tea, pistachio, cookie dough, salted caramel, cereal and rum raisin. Once you've mastered their "core principles in flavor, in technique," Malek says, "you can just go wild."

And it does get wild in the cookbook, with flavors like Toasted Sourdough, Chocolate and EVOO, and Lemon Earl Grey Shortbread.

"We wanted it to feel like you were imported into our R&D test kitchen and you could feel like you're writing recipes beside us and understanding why we're testing this and adding more salt or adding more sweetness," he says.

Take salted caramel, which most people think is salty and sweet.

"They're completely wrong," Malek says, laughing. "It's salty, sweet and bitter. Once you get that flavor trinity, you start understanding that the combination of salty, sweet and bitter can completely open your eyes to different combinations."

New flavors every month

Malek and his cousin, Kim, became ice cream entrepreneurs in 2011 when they opened a small food cart in Portland. Since then, they've expanded to more than 40 stores in seven states, becoming known for their refreshing and offbeat approach and rotating menu, with new flavors added every month.

Other flavors have included Malted Potato Chip Cupcake and Black Olive Brittle and Goat Cheese. For Thanksgiving, they once offered Caramelized Turkey & Cranberry Sauce. "I've written 2,500 recipes and maybe 20,000 fails," says Malek.

Salt & Straw leans on xanthan gum, which Malek uses to combat "heat shock," when ice cream melts and freezes again into bigger crystals. ("It's as innocuous as cornstarch or baking soda," he writes.) He also harnesses the power of acids, like citric, malic and tartaric, calling them "an ice cream maker's secret weapon."

"I think he is part scientist — maybe a mad scientist — and part artist," says Clarkson Potter editor Francis Lam, who with Susan Roxborough helped craft the book. Lam first encountered Salt & Straw when he ate their prosciutto ice cream at an event in Portland. At another event, he had their sea urchin flavor and felt compelled to meet Malek.

"He's one of these people who doesn't shut down an idea before he runs with it for a little bit," Lam said.

'My passion is in learning'

Salt & Straw is part of an artisanal ice cream boom in recent years that includes companies like Van Leeuwen, Gelato Fiasco, Lick Honest Ice Creams, Morgenstern's and Wanderlust Creamery.

Malek has leaned on partners for innovations; he and a doughnut maker in Florida, for instance, created a cream cheese ice cream with glazed brioche doughnut chunks and guava curd. He has interned at breweries to learn the ins and outs of beer making to incorporate it into his desserts.

"My passion is in learning and storytelling. If I weren't making



HAVEN DALEY/AP photos

Salt & Straw Ice Cream co-founder Tyler Malek scoops "Day-Old Bread Pudding" upcycled ice cream, above and at left, in Los Gatos, Calif. Malek and partner JJ Goode have published "America's Most Iconic Ice Creams: A Salt & Straw Cookbook."



Salt & Straw's 17% Butterfat Base

Makes about 3 cups
Ingredients
½ cup granulated sugar
2 tablespoons nonfat dry milk powder
¼ teaspoon xanthan gum
1⅛ cups whole milk
2 tablespoons light corn syrup
1⅛ cups heavy cream, very cold

Directions
In a small bowl, stir together the sugar, milk powder and xanthan gum.

In a medium pot, stir together the whole milk and corn syrup. Add the sugar mixture and immediately whisk vigorously until smooth. Set the pot over medium heat and cook, stirring often and reducing the heat if necessary to prevent a simmer, just until the sugar has fully dissolved, about 3 minutes.

Remove the pot from the heat. Add the cold cream and stir until fully combined.

Transfer the mixture to an airtight container and refrigerate until well chilled, at least 6 hours, or for even better texture and flavor, 24 hours. Stir well before using.

The base can be further stored in the fridge for up to 1 week or in the freezer for up to 3 months. Thaw completely and stir well before using.

SEE RECIPES ON PAGE 27

ice cream, my dream job was always to be a travel writer," says Malek. "I had no idea when we first started the company that ice cream is the coolest medium to channel that through because it really is like writing a story through every single ice cream."

He learned that different regions of the country have their blind spots; when Salt & Straw opened in Los Angeles, few knew what rhubarb was. At the same time, he didn't know there were different types of avocados.

Another tip borrowed from soup: As with soup bases, Malek says, home cooks should make big batches of different ice cream bases, separate them into containers and freeze them.

"Then when you're ready to make ice cream, defrost it in your microwave real quick and blend in your strawberries that you got fresh from the farmer's market and make strawberry ice cream," he says. "That's the trick: to make ice cream within a day or literally within hours of finding a really special ingredient."

Salted Malted Chocolate Chip Dough

Makes about 2½ pints
Ingredients
3 cups 17% Butterfat Base (see separate recipe below)
1½ teaspoons molasses (not blackstrap)
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
½ teaspoon kosher salt
1 cup packed Malted Cookie Dough (recipe follows), frozen
¾ cup Malted Fudge (recipe follows)

Directions
In a medium bowl, combine the ice cream base, molasses, vanilla and salt, and whisk until smooth. Pour the mixture into an ice cream maker and turn on the machine. Churn just until the mixture has the texture of soft serve, 30 to 40 minutes, depending on the machine.

Alternate spooning layers of the ice cream and large dollops of the cookie dough and fudge into freezer-safe containers.

Freeze until firm, at least 6 hours or for up to 3 months.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Recipes: Base can be used later

FROM PAGE 26

Malted Cookie Dough

Makes about 1½ cups

Ingredients

4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

¼ cup lightly packed light brown sugar

1 teaspoon flaky sea salt

2 tablespoons heavy cream

1 tablespoon light corn syrup

1 teaspoon molasses (not blackstrap)

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

½ cup all-purpose flour, toasted

2 tablespoons malt powder

¼ cup finely chopped (chip-size pieces) dark chocolate

Directions

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle, cream the butter, both sugars and the salt on medium high speed, scraping down the sides as necessary, until the butter takes on a lighter color, about 2 minutes. Stop the mixer and add the cream, corn syrup, molasses and vanilla, then mix on medium-low speed until the mixture is just combined, about 1 minute more.

In a medium bowl, sift together the flour and malt powder. Add the flour mixture to the stand mixer and mix on medium speed, scraping down the bowl once, until there are no more clumps of flour (specks of malt are just fine!), about 1 minute. Add the chopped chocolate to the stand mixer and mix on low speed until it's well distributed.

Pack tightly into an airtight container and store in the freezer until ready to use, or for up to 2 months.

Toasting flour note: Consuming raw flour, just like consuming raw eggs, carries a minor but real risk of salmonella. Consider playing it extra safe and cooking the flour for this recipe: Spread it on a sheet pan and bake in a 350°F oven for 15 minutes.

Malted Fudge

Makes about 2 cups

Ingredients

½ cup malt powder

½ cup light corn syrup

½ cup heavy cream

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

2 teaspoons cocoa powder

⅛ teaspoon xanthan gum

¼ teaspoon kosher salt

¾ cup chopped (chip-size pieces) good dark chocolate

Directions

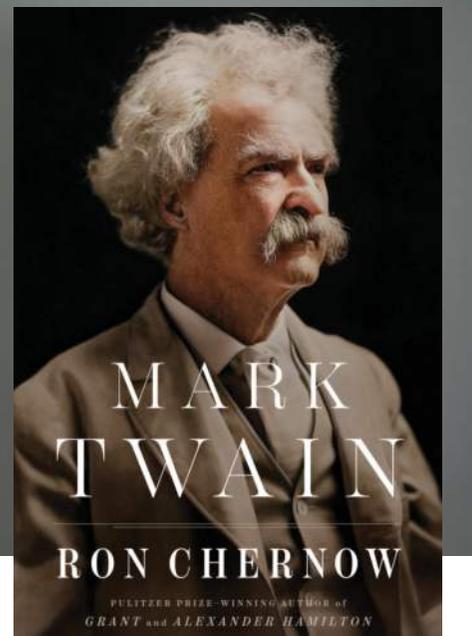
In a small saucepan, combine the malt powder and ¼ cup cold water and whisk until most of the lumps are broken up. Add the corn syrup, cream and butter and cook over medium-low heat, whisking constantly, until the mixture comes to a simmer. Reduce the heat to low, add the cocoa powder, xanthan gum and salt and continue to whisk until the cocoa powder is dissolved and the mixture looks glossy, about 3 minutes.

Turn off the heat, add the chocolate pieces and let them sit for a minute. Whisk until the chocolate is completely melted and combined. Let cool to room temperature and use immediately or store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 2 weeks.



ANDY KROPA, INVISION/AP

Author Ron Chernow, photographed May 8, has just released the 1,200-page "Mark Twain," his first release since his biography on Ulysses S. Grant came out in 2017.



Chernow takes on Mark Twain

Author says he has considered writing about the American novelist and pundit for decades

BY HILLEL ITALIE
Associated Press

Historian Ron Chernow's latest work may surprise readers who know him best for the book that inspired the musical "Hamilton" and for his biographies of George Washington and Ulysses S. Grant.

The 1,200-page "Mark Twain" came out this week. It's Chernow's first release since his Grant biography came out in 2017, and the first time he has taken on a literary writer after a career defined by celebrated books about business leaders (John D. Rockefeller, the Morgan dynasty), presidents (Grant and Washington) and, most of all, Alexander Hamilton. His many honors include the Pulitzer Prize for "Washington: A Life," the National Book Award for "The House of Morgan" and the National Book Critics Circle prize for "Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr."

But a book on Twain had been in his thoughts for decades, dating back to when he saw Hal Holbrook play him on stage in Philadelphia in the mid-1970s.

"And there he was, with the white suit and cigar and mustache and he was tossing out one hilarious line after another," the 76-year-old Chernow says, remembering such Twain quips as "There's no distinctly Native American criminal class, except Congress." Chernow became fascinated by Twain as a prototype of the modern celebrity and found himself drawn less to "Mark Twain the novelist than the pundit, the personality and the platform artist."

Chernow admittedly is more comfortable with the researchable world of facts than with the more intangible qualities of the imagination. But he found much to identify with in Twain, relating to him as a fellow widower (Twain outlived his wife, Olivia, by six years; Chernow's wife, Vale-

rie Stearn, died in 2006), as a public speaker and as an author fortunate enough to write full time.

Chernow also looks closely into subjects familiar to him — politics and finance, notably the various failed business ventures that left Twain short of money despite his author royalties and the inherited wealth of his wife. Toward the end of the book, the historian addresses the friendships an elderly Twain cultivated with teen and preteen girls, whom Twain called his "angelfish."

"At the time, Twain's behavior was regarded as the charming eccentricity of a beloved humorist with a soft spot for children. We look at that same behavior today and find it odd and disturbing. It's important to get both perspectives," Chernow says.

"Twain's behavior was chaste and none of the angelfish or their parents ever accused him of improper or predatory behavior. At the same time, there was such an obsessive quality about Twain's attention to these teenage girls — he devoted more time to them than to his own daughters."

During a recent interview, Chernow also reflected on Twain's family, his politics and the sadness in his soul. Chernow's comments have been condensed for clarity and brevity.

Political egos

"I really don't know what he would say about Donald Trump. I could, yes, but I don't want to guess. But we do know what he said about political figures of his own day. And he hated Teddy Roosevelt. He saw that Teddy Roosevelt had a very large ego, very self-absorbed and a Mr. Bombastic personality. But he (Twain) has a wonderful quote where he says that Teddy Roosevelt is the Tom Sawyer of the political world of the early 20th century. He

said that he was always hunting for attention. And then he has this great line. He said that in his (Roosevelt's) frenzied imagination, the great republic is one vast Barnum's circus, and he is the clown, and the whole world is his audience."

Marrying up

"There's that time when he goes to the Sandwich Islands and he meets the American diplomat Anson Burlingame, who advises him to 'cultivate your betters,' which Twain really takes to heart. I think that with Twain, if someone asks me, you know, did he marry Olivia for her money? I would say definitely not. It was a true love match. And as Twain said late in life, there was not a single day of his marriage that she didn't say, 'I worship you,' 'I idolize you.' This was just kind of pouring out of her and her letters. On the other hand, the more you know about Mark Twain, the more you know that he could never have married a poor woman.

"And the irony of Twain's life is that he spends his entire life attacking the plutocrats on the one hand, and on the other, he's doing everything in his power to become one. This man embodies in his person every tendency of the time."

Laughing through the tears

"There's a tremendous amount of self-loathing in him. I have a quote later in the book — he says that (poet Lord) Byron detested life because he detested himself. Twain said, 'I'm the same way.' You know, that's a really harsh, harsh thing to say. But I think that he saw all these impulses within himself that he was really powerless to stop. And then he realized he hurt other people. I think that Mark Twain did fit the stereotype of the funny man who's sad and depressed under the surface and is kind of releasing that through the humor."

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Ignoring the inner doubts

Ace accompanist Daniel Kimbro puts his fears behind him with his first solo album

By SEAN MOORES
Stars and Stripes

Grammy-nominated musician Daniel Kimbro has forged an impressive career as an accompanist. His prowess on the double bass pays the bills with copious gigging and session work. If you prefer to measure success by the company he keeps, that company is elite. Kimbro has shared stages and studios with John Hiatt, Jerry Douglas, Alison Krauss and Eric Clapton, to name four luminaries among dozens.

Up until April 15, though, a career goal lingered. Kimbro had yet to officially release a solo album. The reason was simple; the psychology more complex.

“Well, I wish it were a better answer than (I put it out) because I’m not scared to put it out anymore,” said Kimbro, 42, during the first of two calls from home in Knoxville, Tenn.

Kimbro doesn’t look like he scares easily. It’s the formidable mustache, which makes him look like he just walked off the set of “Tombstone.” But he wasn’t besieged by gunslinging bad guys. Kimbro was tortured by mental gremlins, the inner voices wondering if the album was good enough. The voices naggingly pointing out tiny flaws in tuning and intonation that average listeners would never notice.

After years of mental gymnastics, Kimbro stuck the landing. Despite any doubts, he now believes that “it just seems less important to be impressive and more important to be authentic.”

That quieting of his inner dissonance led to “Carpet in the Kitchen,” and its U.S. release represents years of Kimbro’s writing, recording and convincing himself that it’s good enough for you to hear it as it is.

Getting to that point took prodding. Some came from his father, Shawn, a musician and writer who has authored three books about fishing on Chesapeake Bay. His dad reminded him from his own experience that “it’s just a snapshot; it’s like a Polaroid picture, where you are at a moment in time,” Kimbro said. “Put it out there and move on to the next thing.”

A big push came from fellow



Grammy-nominated musician Daniel Kimbro released “Carpet in the Kitchen,” his first solo album, on April 15.

musicians, people who surely would have heard any small imperfections. The greatest encouragement, Kimbro said, came from Douglas, Nashville singer-songwriter Sam Lewis and British roots musician Martin Harley; the latter two being his bandmates in the trio Harley Kimbro Lewis. Harley assured him that he’d feel rewarded for taking the leap of faith.

“Martin said a thing to me that was like, ‘I think you’re gonna be really, really surprised, when you put your thing out into the world, at how many people come back to you with affirmations,’” Kimbro said. “(By) how many of your peers do so. And he’s been correct about that. I have gotten a lot of praise from my musical peers and heroes and people saying to me, ‘Where the hell have you been, writing these songs like this?’ and that’s been really, really, really affirming. At the same time, every single time I send the SoundCloud link to a friend in the music biz, I just (think), ‘Oh my God, here we go. They’re gonna see it all,’ and it’s just like standing in front of the mirror naked before the first day of school.”

A smack in the face

Kimbro’s musical foundation formed back in his school days. The taste at home ranged from Van Halen (whom his parents saw on their first date) to Townes Van Zandt, and in multiple directions from both points. He started playing in his family’s bluegrass band at 10, although he didn’t at that time view it as a

SEE KIMBRO ON PAGE 29



Rachel Woods

Daniel Kimbro, a member of the Jerry Douglas Band since 2013, has also backed musical luminaries such as John Hiatt, Alison Krauss and Eric Clapton, among many others.

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Kimbro: Webb, Newman among main songwriting influences**FROM PAGE 28**

career. He was interested in military service, something of a family tradition. That changed in high school. Kimbro and his father saw Americana royalty — Gillian Welch and David Rawlings, playing with Guy Clark — at the roots-music event MerleFest, and it broke down the mental barriers he had erected around folk music.

“I don’t know what happened, but somehow the heavier and the lighter subject matter, which are often juxtaposed against one another within the same song, just really started smacking me in the face,” he said. “I loved it. And so, all that stuff combined with the myriad genres that were always heard in the household really informed the imagery and sonic landscape.”

Kimbro studied music at the University of Tennessee. After graduation, he set out to make it his career. While on tour with the Lovell Sisters, he performed in front of Douglas, which became another life-changing event.

Douglas, a legendary player of the dobro, or resonophonic guitar, knows more than a little about juggling genres. He has made a career out of sonic exploration, and his success is reflected in the accolades and work that have come his way. He is a 16-time Grammy Award winner as a recording artist, bandleader, producer and composer. His commanding, lyrical style has led to roughly 2,000 credits as a studio musician and honors that include the Americana Music Association’s Lifetime Achievement Award and membership in the Bluegrass Hall of Fame.

In 2013, Douglas asked Kimbro to join his band. That opportunity expanded as Douglas invited him into two other ventures: the international Transatlantic Sessions concert series and his Flatt and Scruggs tribute band, The Earls of Leicester. In 2021, the Jerry Douglas Band backed Hiatt on the singer-songwriter’s Grammy-nominated album “Left-over Feelings.” All the projects have boosted Kimbro’s growth. And they gave him the best seat in the house, standing downstage with his double bass, to observe the dynamic between artist and audience.

“It has given me more comfort in different sized venue settings. Indoor, outdoor, large, small; we play all kinds of stuff with Jerry and with Transatlantic Sessions and with all the people (he plays with). By being Jerry’s right-hand, low-end accompanist person,

I have found myself playing with a lot of different folks. And in a lot of different spaces. That has allowed me to watch how John Hiatt communicates with an audience in a large venue, how John Hiatt communicates with an audience in a smaller, more intimate venue. I could go on, and drop more names, but you can extrapolate just how valuable that experience is for a person who is about to go stand with a guitar or a banjo or a double bass in front of people by himself and try to communicate his artistic intentions through lyrics and pitches. That has been invaluable,” Kimbro said.

Storyteller

He’s getting to put that experience into practice with the official release of “Carpet in the Kitchen,” which came together over several years. Kimbro wrote and recorded as time allowed around his work as an accompanist, which feeds his family. He completed a version of the album in 2019. Jordan Perlson and Mike Baggetta, who play drums and electric guitar, respectively, on the album, added tracks to the final version in 2023. He tested the waters that winter, selling CDs of the album at the merch table on a tour with Douglas and Tommy Emmanuel. This spring, he went all in with

CDs, streaming and even vinyl (still in the pre-order stage at daniel-kimbro.com/shop).

“Carpet in the Kitchen” reflects an affinity for story songs and writers who work in that medium.

“If I had to list people who I really am drawn to in the songwrit-

er realm, the first two that come to mind would be Jimmy Webb and Randy Newman,” said Kimbro, who also listed RB Morris, Sarah Jarosz, Hiatt and even Douglas’ lyrical dobro style, among many others, as writing influences. “There’s a beginning, a middle and end, a time and a place, and just a theater of the mind thing that happens when you listen to one of those writers.”

Kimbro’s affection for storytellers shows up in his songs. “Loyston,” which leads off his album, tells the story of the Tennessee Valley Authority, which brought infrastructure and electricity to the southeastern United States, while also vividly describing what was lost in the process and weighing the price of progress. “Keep on Livin,” inspired in part by his parents, is a look into the obstacle course of domesticity from young love to empty-nesting.

The beating heart of the human condition ties the album together, though it often is probed from the dark side. “A Killin Song” is a historical who’s who of killing machines, from flint arrowheads to remote-controlled drones. “Where I Lay You” is a lilting take on “if I can’t have her, nobody can.” And one is unlikely to hear a gentler murder ballad than “Chesapeake.” In it, a Maryland tugboat captain kills his unfaithful wife and her lover — also the man’s best friend and preacher — and then wrestles with the aftermath and the engineering of his own demise.

“One of the concerns I’ve gotten is a little bit of pushback on how much death and destruction there is,” the East Tennessee said. “But you know what, man, I’m an Appalachian, and we got it from the Scotch-Irish, and this is what we do: singing happy melodies with terrible lyrics. It’s what I know. It’s where I’m from.”

Murder and all, Kimbro said “Carpet in the Kitchen” has been well-received by the audiences that have heard it live and by those musical peers and heroes. Douglas, who plays on “Chesapeake” and “Loyston,” recorded a version of the latter with his own band on his 2024 album, “The Set.”

“(Jerry) loves my songwriting, and I’m thrilled by that because that dude has recorded with Ray f—ing Charles,” Kimbro said. “I’ve taught myself that when certain folks tell you positive affirmation things, you need to put them in your mental bank account and just believe them. And it doesn’t matter if they’re just being nice or if you perceive that they’re just being nice. ... Just leave the doubt and take (the compliment). When someone of his musical stature says something like that, I’ve just decided that life is short and it’s time to say, ‘thank you very much,’ and just leave that deposited in my mental CV.”

Since he was in the United Kingdom for the Transatlantic Sessions in January this year, and since he had a booking agent there, Kimbro decided to release “Carpet in the Kitchen” overseas in January and play supporting shows into February before returning to the States. He’s back in the UK on May 22 for a second leg of his album release tour, kicking off that night in Edinburgh, Scotland, before heading to England for shows in Blackpool, Sheffield, Hereford, Brighton and London before closing out in Glastonbury on May 31.

Kimbro hopes to grow his solo career and said that he has close to two albums’ worth of new material. He should have time to practice his own stagecraft in the U.S. and Canada, too. Douglas is booked through September on tour with Alison Krauss and Union Station, with whom he has been the featured instrumentalist since 1998.

Even if it takes time to reach his next milestones, Kimbro can take comfort in conquering his fears about his first album — although he walked that back just a bit during our second conversation.

“That was a lie. I’m still scared. But I’m here for the fear,” Kimbro said. “It’s just a reminder that I’m alive, and it’s, like, OK, fine. I hear those fearful, negative voices, and I hear the comparative analysis, and I hear the mistakes and the intonations or lack thereof, in a literal musical analytical sense I hear the bad and I hear the good and it doesn’t matter. It’s the process.

It’s worth being alive for. Sometimes you throw the fly into a tree and you gotta go get it, and you catch an awesome fish the next cast. You never know what’s around the corner, so you gotta put the thing out there.”

“One of the concerns I’ve gotten is a little bit of pushback on how much death and destruction there is (on ‘Carpet in the Kitchen’). But you know what, man, I’m an Appalachian, and we got it from the Scotch-Irish, and this is what we do: singing happy melodies with terrible lyrics. It’s what I know. It’s where I’m from.”

Daniel Kimbro

Rachel Woods



WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Intentional and unconventional

'Poker Face' actor Natasha Lyonne discusses defying Hollywood's expectations for women

BY LORRAINE ALI
Los Angeles Times

Her hair is red, voluminous and wild. She walks with a swagger. Her voice is raspy, and not in a sexy kind of Lauren Bacall way, but more like Peter Falk.

Long before finding her groove with unconventional roles in "Orange Is the New Black," "Russian Doll" and now "Poker Face," there weren't many options for a free spirit like Natasha Lyonne, especially when she aged from a pliable child actor into a self-aware adult.

"It's weird that all of a sudden, one day, everybody looks at you differently and you're aware of it," says Lyonne, 46. "I remember the 'Lolita' audition, and it was like, 'Will you slowly eat this apple?' And I was like, 'I know what you're asking of me. I can eat it for you comedically.' But no, I will not simulate sex with an apple on camera. I mean, I'd studied the history of film. These were not revelations."

The real surprise? Lyonne forged a career by finding and later creating projects that capitalized on her undeniably intrepid personality, wrapping the roles around her eccentricities rather than conforming to what was expected of a female performer in Hollywood. Lyonne's latest act of defiance is Season 2 of the Peacock series "Poker Face," a murder-of-the-week mystery created by Rian Johnson ("Knives Out," "Glass Onion") that she stars in and executive-produces. This season, in addition to writing, she's also directing two episodes.

The series, which returned May 8, continues to follow Charlie Cale (Lyonne), a scrappy Vegas casino employee who is blessed and cursed with the ability to accurately discern when someone is lying. Following the murder of her best friend, she's forced to outrun the mob in her 1969 Plymouth Barracuda, traversing the byways of America while solving murders along the way.

The hourlong series takes its cues from personality-driven, '70s-era detective dramas including "The Rockford Files" and "McCloud." But it's "Columbo," starring the wonderfully rumpled Peter Falk, that's most heavily influenced "Poker Face."

Lyonne recalls the 1971 pilot episode of the vintage TV series, which was directed by a 24-year-old newcomer named Steven Spielberg.

"I ripped from it directorially," Lyonne says. "I like the one long, slow [Robert] Altman-like zoom shot through the office window down to the car. And I hear Spielberg went on to do great things. It's like, 'You like that long shot? You're never gonna believe what this guy does next! Holy smokes. Are you in for a ride!'"

But Charlie Cale is not Columbo. She carries a vape pen instead of a cigar and prefers cut-off shorts to a trench coat. She does, however, share the uncanny knack for arriving just as a murder's taking place, be it on an alligator farm in Florida or a sprawling East Coast mansion. She's confronted with a new cast of characters at every stop, and the roster of talent who inhabit those roles is impressive. The lineup includes Cynthia Erivo, Giancarlo Esposito, Katie Holmes, Justin Theroux, Alia



Shawkat, John Mulaney, Kumail Nanjiani, Lili Taylor, Margo Martindale, Melanie Lynskey and Rhea Perlman.

"Charlie is a great lover of people," Lyonne says. "[My former character] Nadia in 'Russian Doll,' which I co-created with Amy Poehler and Leslye Headland, it's almost like she was on her own case. But Charlie's already been on the journey where we lose interest in ourselves and gain interest in our fellows. The mob is after her. She can't have a phone. She can't have roots. She can't really fall in love. It's lonely."

Lyonne's own journey into the world of acting turned her into a seasoned veteran before she was



PEACOCK/TNS

Natasha Lyonne as Charlie Cale, a skilled lie detector and Vegas casino employee, in Season 2 of Rian Johnson's murder-of-the-week mystery series "Poker Face," which returned to Peacock on May 8.

even old enough to vote. The New York native worked in commercials before kindergarten, and as a grade school student landed the TV role of Opal in "Pee-wee's Playhouse." She also appeared in films such as "Heartburn," "A Man Called Sarge" and "Dennis the Menace." By her late teens, she landed her breakthrough role as the daughter of a broke single dad (played by Alan Arkin) in the

quite fit the mold of precocious yet accessible girl next door: "I was trying to carve out this weird lane while discovering the heartbreak of not getting the role in 'Curly Sue.' I was like, 'I'm perfect for this thing. What's wrong? Oh, I see. You've got to be Shirley Temple or you can't really hang out.'"

Lyonne pivoted to another passion: film and television histo-

on for the character, who was a recovering drug addict. Nicky became a fan favorite.

By 2019, Lyonne co-created her own Netflix series, the existential dark comedy "Russian Doll," where she played Nadia, a New York City-based video game developer who gets caught in a time loop at her 36th birthday party. She's on a quest to solve the mystery of why she dies, repeatedly.

"There were techniques [I had to learn], like actual filmmaking, actual writing, actual producing," Lyonne says. "The parts weren't there, and the parts are still not there. It's like nobody's writing them."

But she credits collaborators like Johnson for creating parts for actors such as herself.

"Rian really is some kind of genius because he took this self-referential gig that I was doing [and turned it] into a kind of character piece. I'm self-made, I suppose," she says. "This is the way the hair grows out of my head. I'll commit to it. So he took that and made it into something."

"Poker Face" is a colorful, entertaining ride through a retro murder-mystery genre, present-day pockets of quirky American culture and Lyonne's own personal journey as seen through Charlie.

"The show is about losing this nihilistic, self-destructive streak and finding connection with another human," Lyonne says. "You try to build a life and not kill yourself over and over again. It's like a marathon man or a long-distance runner. But she's been through that dark and stormy night of the soul, and come out on the other side with the sun at her back."

"Rian really is some kind of genius because he took this self-referential gig that I was doing [and turned it] into a kind of character piece. I'm self-made, I suppose. This is the way the hair grows out of my head. I'll commit to it. So he took that and made it into something."

1998 indie comedy "Slums of Beverly Hills."

"I've been doing this since I was 4 years old, dear reader," jokes Lyonne, whose acting career now spans four decades. "As a child character actor, there is this kind of inner knowingness. We were completely alert, little businesspeople. If you start at 4, by 6, you kind of get the idea [of what's going on], like 'Don't mumble. The Minute Maid people don't like that in their commercial.' By 8, you know where the bodies are buried. You know how to read a room, to perform on command. I can still smell the Pine-Sol from that Pine-Sol commercial in 1986."

Even as a child, Lyonne didn't

ry. She is a walking encyclopedia of great performances and buried, esoteric moments in both media. For a short time, she studied film and philosophy at NYU.

"I was already thinking that I've got to transition this into filmmaking from the inside out, rather than just being an actor for hire. It took 20 years for that to materialize into a reality," she says.

She disappeared from the public eye for over a decade as she battled drug addiction. Her comeback included a recurring role as Nicky Nichols in "Orange Is the New Black," Netflix's breakout streaming hit. Lyonne has said she had plenty to draw

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

A relatable marriage, for better or worse

Fey, Forte depict a realistic couple in Netflix TV series 'The Four Seasons'

BY YVONNE VILLARREAL
Los Angeles Times

Tina Fey and Will Forte are fuzzy on the details, but somewhere inside NBC Studios at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City is where, in 2002, they first crossed paths.

Fey was a few seasons into her stint on "Saturday Night Live" as a head writer and performer. And Forte was just beginning his eight-season run on the sketch comedy series.

Now, two decades after they entered each other's orbit, the duo is back together, this time in "The Four Seasons," a TV adaptation of Alan Alda's 1981 big-screen romantic comedy of the same name. It explores the dynamics of longtime relationships — both romantic and platonic — over a year. They've worked together previously post-"SNL" — Forte had a recurring role in Fey's "30 Rock" and appeared in the 2008 feature "Baby Mama," which was headlined by Fey and Amy Poehler.

The new series, which launched May 1 on Netflix, follows three couples who are decades-long friends — Kate (Fey) and Jack (Forte), Nick (Steve Carell) and Anne (Kerri Kenney-Silver), and Danny (Colman Domingo) and Claude (Marco Calvani) — who, as they've settled into their lives, stay connected by vacationing together. But the dynamic shifts when Nick decides to leave Anne and begins a relationship with a younger woman, testing loyalties and aggravating weaknesses or conflicts within the other marriages. Though it's a comedy at its heart, the story has the bittersweet candor and moments of earnestness that one might expect from characters confronting their lives at middle age.

In addition to her starring role, Fey created and wrote this reimagined version of "Four Seasons" with fellow "30 Rock" writers-producers Lang Fisher and Tracey Wigfield. Fey was a fan of the original, recalling her introduction to it during the early days of cable television when it was in heavy rotation: "There was something so aspirational and cozy about it," she says. "One of the things I love most was it had people I loved from other things in it — Alan Alda from 'M*A*S*H,' Carol Burnett from 'The Carol Burnett Show,' Rita Moreno from 'The Electric Company.' My mind was blown. It was like my 'Avengers' universe then." (Alda makes a cameo in the new series.)

More fundamentally, the trio of creators were invigorated by the idea of looking at the ebbs and flows of significant relationships in adulthood and how they can bloom, bend or break across different life stages.

"We wanted this to be a love letter to long marriages, to long friendships, to relationships that you've had for a really long time that are easy to take for granted, but are — when you look at it — the most precious thing in your life," Wigfield says.

Kate and Jack quickly emerge as the anchor couple. They are a realistic portrayal of what it means to love someone for better and for worse ... and the many annoying moments in between. There's tenderness and frustration, playfulness and sarcasm, respect and fatigue. They seem to like each other and love each other and, just as crucially, deal with the muck of life by each other's side.

"They hold it together," Fey says. "They think they have got it all figured out more so than the other couples."



Netflix

Will Forte as Jack and Tina Fey as Kate in "The Four Seasons," a TV adaptation of the 1981 film that followed three couples who are decades-long friends and stay connected by vacationing together. Jack and Kate anchor the series.

"And I think that's a lot of couples in the world," Forte adds. "It takes very little to turn you off the path and spin you out and you have to course-correct right away or else you can spin out even further. And then it gets really tough."

There's a moment late in the season — during a trip to visit their daughter at college — when Kate, in an attempt to do a nice gesture after an off night, makes a two-hour drive to get Jack his favorite sandwich. Only it's not his favorite sandwich — she ordered the No. 17; he prefers the No. 7. But he rolls with it, tenderly taking out the ingredients he doesn't like, painstakingly wiping off the condiments spread across the bread and then, after reassembling what's left, biting into the sub sideways like a maniac as Kate watches on with disapproving marvel just as the room service he ordered, as his act of kindness, arrives. She can't help but notice he ordered two full pitchers of juice.

It's a moment, which happens so often in marriage, where you have good intentions, but you don't quite get it right.

"Kate and Jack were my favorite to write," Wigfield says. "They were also the hardest to write a little bit because we really wanted it to be a relatable story about marriage. When you're married, it is so high stakes. It can always end in divorce. Your life could explode. But living in the day to day, it doesn't feel like that. It's not always people screaming all the time."

Rather, she says it's about patterns that play out over and over again that get bigger when they're not addressed.

"We didn't just want this to be, like, everyone should do what Nick did," Wigfield adds. "We wanted this to also be about marriage, [which] is often worth fighting for, but it's never going to be easy."

It's also a decidedly less intense portrayal of a weathered marriage compared with depictions in "A Marriage

Story" or "Scenes From a Marriage."

"We wanted it to be subtle and we were trying to find the right levels," Fisher says. "Married couples get in real big fights, but a lot of times, you get in that fight and then you have to go to a kid's play afterwards or you have to do something else; then the next day, you're having fun together. It was about calibrating the levels of passive aggressiveness versus anger versus love."

Fey and Forte are in different stages of their respective marriages — Fey has been married to composer and producer Jeff Richmond since 2001; Forte has been married to his wife, Olivia Modling, since 2021 — but both understand how a union can be challenged by life's big turns and its everyday irritations.

"Through making this show, I kept saying to Lang and Tracey and the writers, 'My character is such a bitch,' Fey says. "It did make me think, 'Am I this much of a bitch all the time? I don't think I am. Not at home, anyway. But I do think the microaggressions between a couple, that kind of constant rebooting and being like, 'sorry, let's start over,' that is relatable because I think there's a real thing of just constantly making tiny mistakes that, if you don't address in the moment, can build up to be something bad."

"I just got married four or five years ago," Forte adds. "It doesn't matter how new the relationship is; everything that people go through who have been in it for 20 years, you're going through it at year four or five. What I've learned is just, at every step of the way, you always have to work on it. You always have to make the decision to course-correct as early as possible. Don't stew on things."

That's often easier said than done, of course. It leads Forte to acknowledge there are elements of Jack that felt like himself: "I always think I am doing the right thing, and you see how that can be annoying and problematic," he says. "I'm probably the annoying version of Jack —"

"I don't think so," Fey says. "We'll have to ask Olivia."

"Kate and Jack were my favorite to write. They were also the hardest to write a little bit because we really wanted it to be a relatable story about marriage. When you're married, it is so high stakes. It can always end in divorce. Your life could explode. But living in the day to day, it doesn't feel like that. It's not always people screaming all the time."

Tracey Wigfield
co-creator/writer

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS



FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

Executive mentor and exercise coach Charles Scott works out with people via Zoom, May 1 in New York. He coaches about 70 business executives and other busy people to improve their physical and professional well-being.

Think you're too busy to get fit?

Exercise coach says you don't need a gym, suggests blending 'intentional movement' into your daily schedule

BY STEPHEN WADE
Associated Press

You're too busy to exercise, right? Your job consumes all your time. You're strapped by professional and family demands. As you get more and more responsibility, your free time shrinks.

Well, these blockers don't have to be an excuse. Making time simply calls for creativity and a broader understanding of how to get in daily exercise.

"The trap is thinking that exercise must be an hour in the gym," said Charles Scott, who describes himself as an executive mentor and an exercise coach.

His message is simple: If you have a very demanding job, you need to find a work-life blend.

"An hour in the gym is exercise," Scott told The Associated Press. "But it's just one form of exercise."

Scott coaches about 70 business executives — online and otherwise — and other busy people to improve their physical and professional well-being. He's based in New York and is relatively hardcore about his own exercise but realizes not everyone can be — or wants to be.

He's planning to run across the Grand Canyon in June — the out-and-back version — that covers about 46 miles. He also has guided his blind friend Dan Berlin on several endurance events including a speed ascent up Mount Kilimanjaro and tandem cycling across the United States with a team of blind cyclists.

The ambitious person's trap

Rather than terming it exercise, Scott talks about teaching "intentional movement" to his goal-driven clients.

"The ambitious person's trap is when you undermine your physical and emotional health in pursuit of your professional goals," he said. "It's common in this culture among the executives I mentor."

Scott asks busy people to focus on something other than making money or chasing fame inside the profession. He said he tries to emphasize a holistic approach that includes the emotional, the professional and the physical.

"Our bodies need to move," he said. "No matter what age you are, our bodies must move to stay healthy. So if you're not exercising, you're out of alignment."

Alternative exercise for busy people

Scott has a list of ways to blend movement into your day without needing a gym. Of course, if you can hit the gym, that's great, too.

He suggests doing one-on-one meetings while you're walking instead of sitting behind the office desk or laptop. Or, he suggests standing rather than sitting when you hold meetings.

"If you want a meeting to be short and efficient, choose the standing conference room," he said.

Or do isometric exercises during a meeting to tone, for instance, your stomach muscles.

"Tighten up your stomach muscles. Hold for 20 seconds and don't hold your breath," he said. "Don't make it obvious. Release. Do it again. You'll be sore tomorrow. It burns calories. It tones muscles. And it takes precisely zero seconds out of your I-am-too-busy-to-exercise day."

Ways to blend work and exercise

Here are a few more ideas about blending exercise into your work schedule:

- If your flight is delayed, go for a walk around the airport and add to your daily step count.

- Link workouts to daily events. For example, when you wake up, always go for a walk. Or, when you get home from work, do a certain number of pushups after you walk through the door.

- Make a workout a social event and do it with a friend or a group.

- Give yourself the title "athlete" and build habits around that identity. Scott is an advocate of experiencing "meaningful discomfort," which he calls the "birthplace of resilience."

- Take a quick break from answering emails and do 10 squats or pushups or whatever to add movement.

"In business, many people show up to work and they crank it out all day," which he termed a "rookie mistake," like a newcomer going out too fast at the start of a marathon. "Then they go home exhausted and they are fussy with the people they love."

The partitioning approach

One of Scott's clients is Harrison (Harry) Kahn, the general manager of the Vermont Creamery, an artisanal dairy.

Rather than blend, Kahn uses the partition method and awakens at 5 a.m. to get in his exercise, typically running, biking, or popping on skis in the winter in largely rural Vermont.

"I kind of get in the 'me stuff' before the rest of the house wakes up," he said.

He said his wife, Elisabeth, teaches French. She sets off early as they both combine to get their two children ready for school — 11-year-old Iris and 8-year-old Asher.

"Charles has reminded me that life isn't a game of comparison with other people," he said. "You have to figure out your own stuff."

Kahn describes himself as a routine-oriented person who is comfortable dividing his day into chapters. Once he's in the office, his attention is the job and 120 employees: "I'm very focused when I'm at work, so I can get it all in as opposed to going in and out and having the day go on really long."

WEEKEND: FAMILY



GARY GERARD HAMILTON/AP

Author Mo Willems poses April 22 with The Pigeon, a character in his children's books, in New York.

Staring down the future

Kids author Mo Willems, The Pigeon have a new book about graduation

BY BROOKE LEFFERTS
Associated Press

Author Mo Willems has sold millions of books and won many awards, but the accolade that means most to him is when a parent says their child read aloud for the first time from one of his books.

The author, illustrator and animator, 57, is best known for his bestselling picture books like the Caldecott Award-winning “Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!” and “Knuffle Bunny.” His latest book, “Will the Pigeon Graduate?” may look like it’s aimed at children, but the titular Pigeon’s fear of failure and an uncertain future are sure to resonate with people of all ages.

Willems and his trusty friend The Pigeon (charmingly represented by puppeteer Bradley Freeman Jr.) recently sat down with The Associated Press for an interview about graduating and the purpose of life. Answers have been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: How did graduation come to mind for a book topic?

Willems: As I am getting older, which I am, I’m getting into a new part of my life. And I’m wondering, am I equipped to be living in this part of life? And as I ask that question and I don’t have the answers, then I think, well, what is that metaphor that kids are going through? And graduation seemed like the perfect thing. I’m graduating to a new stage in my life, and kids do this all the time. You graduate to tying your shoe. You graduate the first time you read.

The Pigeon: Like driving a bus.

Willems: Yeah, well, except for driving a bus. That is something you cannot graduate to, if you’re a pigeon, but thank you for contributing to the conversation.

The Pigeon: Of course.

People may think this is just for graduates, but could it be about any transition?

Willems: I think it’s about asking yourself, “Am I equipped for something that scares me?” The real world is scary. We’re always asking ourselves those questions. And often the answer is ... I don’t know. And that’s something that might feel uncomfortable to sit with, but it’s also something that’s very, very exciting. So like right now, I’m doing an interview with you and a giant pigeon. Is this gonna work out? If I’m going to get a little bit philosophical, I would say often we’re

trying to give the answers, and I think kids get exhausted from it. I want to give them the questions. I want them to have a chance to live with these questions themselves and work their way into an answer rather than telling them, “Oh, you’ll be fine.”

Mr. Pigeon, what is your favorite part about collaborating on this book?

The Pigeon: I really like how all of the books are about me. I like how I’m on, like, almost every page. You know, all of these books go through an approval process ... I get to look at them. And if I’m not on the first page and the last page, it does not get approved.

Can you (Willems) reflect on your nine seasons as a writer and animator on “Sesame Street,” winning six Emmys and helping to develop “Elmo’s World”?

Willems: My love of puppets, my love of sketch comedy, my love of counting to 40 — all these things that I really, really love — came from “Sesame Street”! And when it came time for me to make books, one of the things that I got to do that we didn’t get to do on “Sesame Street” at the time was write about failure. Write about not driving the bus rather than driving the bus. So on one level, it was like going to grad school. I loved it. I learned so much. I met all of these great puppets and puppeteers. On the other, the restrictions of the show allowed me to find my own voice.

Obviously, one of the book’s messages is you have to believe in yourself.

Willems: I don’t know. I’m glad that you think that that’s one of the messages because you brought something to that book. I only write 49% of the book. You put the meaning in the book; if the book is meaningful, that is because you are putting yourself within it. I try not to have messages as much as I can. I really try to live in the question.

Mr. Pigeon, do you think your participation in this makes you a little bit of a philosopher?

The Pigeon: Yeah. There’s a lot of really deep questions, like, I don’t know, can I drive the bus, maybe? You know, wondering maybe if I can stay up late? That would be really great.

Willems: These are all fundamental Greek philosophical questions. ... What is the purpose of life? Why are we here? Why are people mean? Why are people nice? Can I drive the bus?

The Pigeon: Can I have a hot dog?

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Military spouses should adopt deployment mindset

Have you ever had one of those days when everything just falls into place? When nothing unexpected happens? When you get everything done on time? When you end the day with a satisfying sense of accomplishment?

Yeah, me neither.

I often feel like an accidental passenger on a runaway train, careening toward some unknown destination, with me dangling precariously from the caboose, frantically grasping at the countless things that flash by — home repairs, work tasks, volunteer responsibilities, neglected relatives, social obligations, house cleaning, bills, holidays, family drama, daily minutia — desperately trying to avoid a crash.

Other times it’s as if I’m being buried deeper and deeper by an avalanche of the never-ending items on my to-do list, overwhelmed and unable to catch my breath. Or, I envision myself as an old, washed-up Raggedy Ann doll sinking into a pile of flashy new toys in an arcade machine, longing for some kid to come along and use that metal claw to save me from drowning in my endless responsibilities.

Dramatic, I know.

I’ll admit that my mind concocts exaggerated visuals when my schedule gets hectic and I fall behind, but I can’t help but wonder, why does life always seem so busy?

Many years ago, my Navy husband deployed for more than a year with a Joint Task Force in Africa, leaving me alone with our three young children, a house and yard to maintain, bills to pay, needy relatives, a broken computer, our sloppy labradoodle, Scout meetings, carpools, gutters to clean, flag football games, doctors’ appointments and a myriad of other responsibilities. Although I’d experienced shorter deployments as a Navy spouse, I wasn’t sure how I’d react to managing everything alone for an entire year.

My military spouse friends who had endured many long deployments had told me that I needed to get used to serving cereal for dinner, wearing pajama pants all day and drinking wine in the afternoon, because life as I knew it was over. They said I’d have a mental breakdown by the fourth month if I didn’t lower my standards, let the grass grow a foot high and allow the kids to watch PG-13 movies and go to bed without brushing their teeth.

According to them, a military spouse’s main task during deployment was survival. Everything else was optional.

Despite the overwhelming responsibility I took on that year, I surprised myself by managing just fine. Nothing was perfect by any means, but for the most part, I kept our household and family life running smoothly. I suffered a few mini-breakdowns, but they were nothing that couldn’t be rectified with a good cry and a pint of Cherry Garcia.

Why, then, do I become so overwhelmed now that the kids are adults and my husband doesn’t deploy anymore?

In retrospect, I now understand that I’d heard so many awful deployment stories that I was mentally prepared to handle just about anything that might happen. The deployment was such a significant life event, my subconscious had thoroughly prepared itself for combat. Without realizing it, I’d built a strong fortification that protected me from the barrage of incoming stressors and unexpected events.

Without a significant life event like deployment to trigger my natural defenses, my subconscious remains open and vulnerable. I take on too much. I fall behind. I lose sight of what’s really important. I become overwhelmed by minutia.

Cue the dramatic visualizations.

Perhaps the key to handling the many responsibilities in our modern busy lives is to always maintain a “deployment mindset.” Whether our active-duty spouses are home or away, military spouses should remember that our main task is survival; everything else is optional. And never forget, in the event of a breakdown, just have good cry and a pint of Cherry Garcia.

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

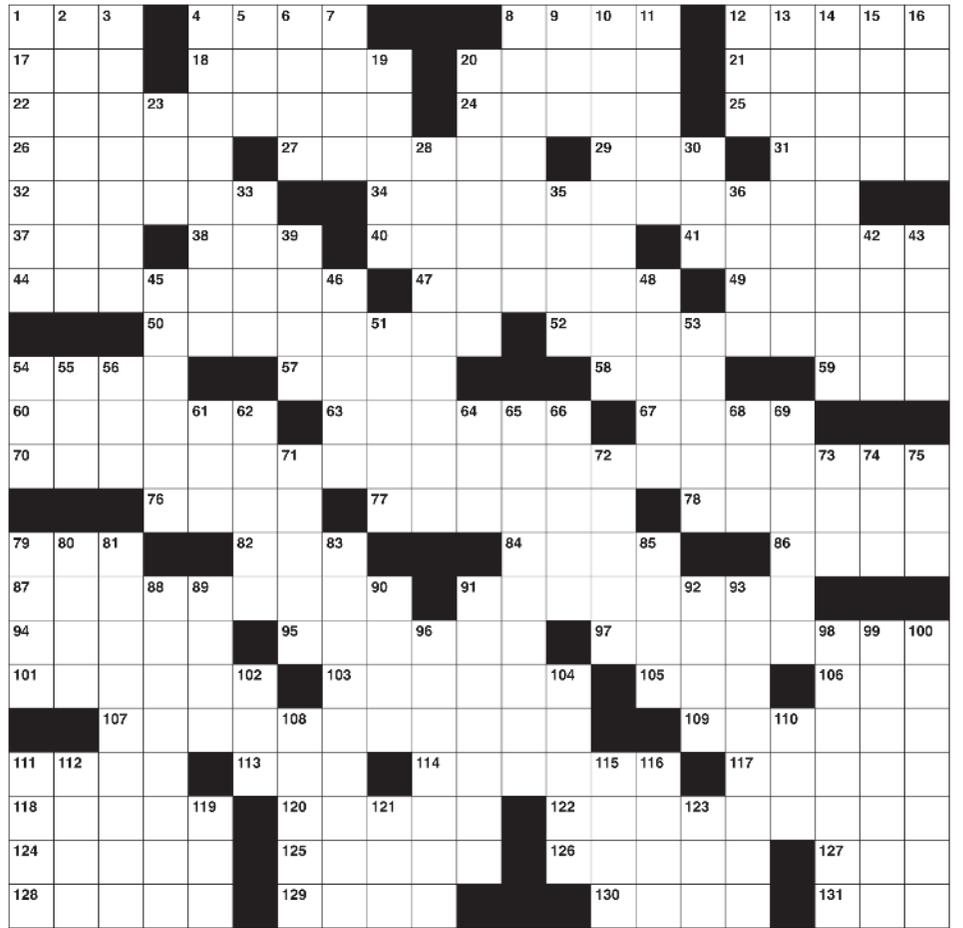
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

FORCE PLAY

BY BRANDON KOPPY / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Brandon Koppy, of Dripping Springs, Texas, is a performance director for an ad agency. This is his 21st crossword for The Times. He thought of its time-sensitive theme in late January, constructed the puzzle on a Sunday, wrote the clues on Monday and Tuesday and quickly submitted the result — just in time for us to say yes and schedule it for today. — W. S.

- ACROSS**
- 1 Things hidden after purchasing a premium account, maybe
 - 4 Follower of a bit?
 - 8 Bank robber's accessory
 - 12 "The Wild Duck" playwright
 - 17 Egg ____ yung
 - 18 Big name in deodorant
 - 20 Contents of a blog
 - 21 Handle
 - 22 Product that "can cut a slice of bread so thin you can almost see through it!" in old ads
 - 24 Try to open, as a gift
 - 25 Toon fighter of Skeletor
 - 26 French name that's an anagram of a mostly German river
 - 27 Features of jalapeños and piña coladas
 - 29 Coach Lasso on TV
 - 31 Confirmation, e.g.
 - 32 Brand with a line of "Calm + Restore" products
 - 34 Bunless cookout entrees
 - 37 Land
 - 38 Natl. economic stat
 - 40 Spirit for a spritz
 - 41 Moves one's butt (over)
 - 44 Book reviews of sorts?
 - 47 Reason to take iron supplements
 - 49 Concave umbilicus
 - 50 Gives one's all
 - 52 Given reluctantly
 - 54 The Aztecs of the N.C.A.A.
 - 57 Daming info
 - 58 Some hosp. workers
 - 59 Texter's "Bye!"
 - 60 It squirts on a squid
 - 63 Royal house of Mary, Queen of Scots
 - 67 Many air travelers' texts, for short
 - 70 Sci-fi-inspired greeting that's a hint to eight squares in this puzzle
 - 76 Gives a hand
 - 77 "Au ____ les Enfants" (1987 film)
 - 78 Apparel for wizards and thieves
 - 79 Bad spot for a tear, in brief
 - 82 Saison avant l'automne
 - 84 Possible cause of insomnia
 - 86 2017 Pixar film inspired by el Día de los Muertos
 - 87 Companion who might take your breath away?
 - 91 Camp inspection after lights out
 - 94 Ballet handrail
 - 95 "Grand" things
 - 97 Over and over
 - 101 All mixed up
 - 103 They contain brains
 - 105 Sorority member, endearingly
 - 106 Org. with a tip line
 - 107 Famous Leonardo da Vinci drawing with four arms and four legs
 - 109 Turns down
 - 111 Little feud
 - 113 Contracted
 - 114 Like organic food products, for short
 - 117 Droops
 - 118 Invasive Japanese vine
 - 120 Alphanumeric component
 - 122 Steaminess
 - 124 Drinks that get slushy over time
 - 125 Places for some braces
 - 126 Senator Baldwin or Duckworth
 - 127 Prefix with -lithic
 - 128 Alternative name for our planet
 - 129 Goes from 0 to 60?
 - 130 Some summer babies
 - 131 "Despicable Me" character voiced by Steve Carell
 - 11 Lead actress in the "Twilight" movies, in tabloids
 - 12 "More or less"
 - 13 Game you likely get worse at the longer you play
 - 14 Band with the 1998 hit "Closing Time"
 - 15 Coup d' ____
 - 16 Zip
 - 19 Gospel/jazz singer Reese
 - 20 Make believe
 - 23 "Well, OK"
 - 28 Exodus
 - 30 Practice group?: Abbr.
 - 33 Drooling pooch of the comics
 - 35 Tool for grooming
 - 36 What vinegar or lemon juice adds to a dressing
 - 39 Focus of some psychotherapy, for short
 - 42 Lilliputian
 - 43 Company behind the Saturn and Dreamcast consoles
 - 45 The Masters host city
 - 46 Minty herb used in Japanese cuisine
 - 48 Veep from 1969 to 1973
 - 51 Boxer Beterbiev
 - 53 Countrylike
 - 54 ____ card
 - 55 Kendrick Lamar title that completes the lyric "I got power, poison, pain and joy inside my . . ."
 - 56 Where to see contrails
 - 61 Tuna type
 - 62 Handed over
 - 64 Dune buggy, e.g., in brief
 - 65 ____ Ridgeback, dog breed originally from Zimbabwe
 - 66 Classic sports car, familiarly
 - 68 Hub code for Delta
 - 69 Necessity for off-roading
 - 71 Photog's setting
 - 72 ____ Kane, longtime role on "All My Children"
 - 73 Chairman ____ (old N.B.A. nickname)
 - 74 The N.B.A.'s Thunder, on scoreboards
 - 75 Grp. with so-called "camp shows"
 - 79 "Money, Money, Money" group
 - 80 Attired
 - 81 Term of address aboard the Death Star
 - 83 Bringing forth
 - 85 Third degrees?
 - 88 Big name in organs
 - 89 Amanda of film
 - 90 "____ Croft: Tomb Raider"
 - 91 Witticisms
 - 92 Wednesday Addams's werewolf roommate on TV's "Wednesday"
 - 93 Routes across low waters
 - 96 Baby monitors
 - 98 TurboTax activity
 - 99 Getaway driver, for instance
 - 100 Sentiment in a letter from home
 - 102 Just what the doctor ordered?
 - 104 Perturbation
 - 108 Screwdriver component
 - 110 Zip
 - 111 Piece of improv
 - 112 Hue of a dry bloodstain, maybe
 - 115 Cafeteria offering
 - 116 "I've got this one"
 - 119 Women's soccer powerhouse
 - 121 "Who knew?!"
 - 123 Sport that takes place in a dohyo
- DOWN**
- 1 Currency unit of Kabul
 - 2 Enthusiastic reply to "Want to?"
 - 3 Poems also fancily known as quatorzains
 - 4 Barely managing
 - 5 Coffee holder
 - 6 Lit ____ (rhyming class nickname)
 - 7 Antique purchase for an audiophile
 - 8 Dew, for example
 - 9 A nemesi ssssss to Indiana Jones?
 - 10 More dignified



- 65 ____ Ridgeback, dog breed originally from Zimbabwe
- 66 Classic sports car, familiarly
- 68 Hub code for Delta
- 69 Necessity for off-roading
- 71 Photog's setting
- 72 ____ Kane, longtime role on "All My Children"
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- 116 "I've got this one"
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- 123 Sport that takes place in a dohyo

GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

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FACES

'Beyond the Gates' opening new doors

Actors, audience cheering series' renewal, influence

By ALICIA RANCILIO
Associated Press

When CBS' soap opera "Beyond the Gates" premiered in February, soap opera fans and veterans alike hailed it as a win for Black history and culture.

On Monday, the first soap to feature a majority Black cast was renewed for a second season. Its creation was both a savvy business move and an acknowledgment of Black viewers' passion for the genre as broadcast ratings have declined.

George Cheeks, the CBS chief, told *Vulture* last year the show was born out of crunching numbers: "One of the things that the data made very clear is that daytime soap operas over index with Black women."

"I think there's kind of a renewed appreciation for the audiences that do still engage in broadcast programming, and a recognition that one of those audiences are Black women, and this was a way to serve that audience," says Elana Levine, a University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, professor and author of "Her Stories: Daytime Soap Opera and US Television History."

Black characters have had a rocky soap opera history. Victoria Rowell's "The Young and the Restless" character, Drucilla Barber Winters, was introduced in 1990 as "an illiterate thief," she says. Rowell worked with co-creator and writer William J. Bell to give the character dimension.

Drucilla became a ballet dancer, like Rowell herself, a storyline that showed "it is possible to be in a lower socioeconomic environment and be aspirational."

She still receives letters from fans who cite Drucilla as inspiration.

Rowell says she always understood her role as "so much bigger" than an acting job. She recalls meeting with the then-editor of *Soap Opera Digest* to advocate for a cover featuring the Black cast members — and it ended up happening.

Rowell's tenure with the show, though, has been up and down. She has only glowing things to say about Bell, who died in 2005. But she sued CBS and producers in 2015 after she says she pushed for the casting of more Black actors and wasn't hired back on the soap as a result. They later settled.

Darnell Williams was cast as teen Jesse Hubbard on ABC's "All My Children" in 1981 to capitalize on younger fans who fell in love with Luke and Laura on "General Hospital." His fan base exploded after Debbi Morgan was cast as Angie Baxter. Jesse and Angie are regarded as daytime's first Black supercouple.

"Before that, we didn't see Black love, and what message does that send? It said that it did not exist because it was not reflected," said Sherri Williams, an assistant professor at American University who studies Black representation in media.



CBS/AP

Tamara Tunie and Clifton Davis play Anita and Vernon Dupree in "Beyond the Gates."

If "Beyond the Gates" can prompt new conversation, that's a good thing, says Kimberly McGhee, a Tennessee viewer.

McGhee appreciates how one of the main characters is a psychiatrist. Mental health can be viewed as taboo within the Black community, and McGhee believes incorporating it into storylines could help beat the stigma.

The soap also addresses Black history: Clifton Davis plays the Dupree family patriarch, a civil rights activist whose advocacy efforts are often mentioned. Bringing in the civil rights generation is significant, said Sherri Williams, but "not surprising" given the NAACP's producing credit.

"Beyond the Gates" may have been created with a Black audience in mind, but a

diverse one is tuning in.

Charlene Polite Corley, Nielsen's vice president of diverse insights and partnerships, says 52% of the total audience is Black.

"It's bringing folks along for this really unique story being told in a lot of ways for the first time," she said.

A varied audience is "good for everyone," says Elle Murasaki, a Black viewer from New Jersey who hosts weekly live chats on Instagram to discuss the show.

"There is this misconception that being for the culture is exclusive. That it's Black-only and that we don't want to include any other demographic into it," she said. "While there is a majority Black cast telling this story, I think everybody can identify."

Sesame Workshop gets award

By GLENN GAMBOA
Associated Press

Elmo, Abby Cadabby and the rest of the "Sesame Street" gang will get some high-profile help as they travel down a new road.

The Sesame Workshop — founded in 1969 and currently working on its 56th season, but its first not distributed by recent partner HBO — received the Elevate Prize Catalyst Award on Wednesday, which will provide the nonprofit a \$250,000 grant as well as support from the Elevate Prize Foundation in promoting its work. Previous winners of the award include Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai, actor Michael J. Fox and the NBA's Dwyane Wade.

"They haven't just entertained generations — they've educated, advocated and inspired real change," Elevate Prize Foundation CEO Carolina Garcia Jayaram, said as she presented the award to The Sesame Workshop at



MICHAEL LAUGHLIN/AP

"Sesame Street" characters Bert and Ernie speak with "Sesame Street" executive producer Sal Perez May 14 in Miami Beach, Fla.

the foundation's Make Good Famous Summit in Miami Beach, Fla. "And their work hasn't just been confined to the screen. Through their nonprofit, they've expanded their mission globally. They've created real-world programs that bring education, health and hope to millions of children in over 150 countries."

Sal Perez, the show's executive producer and a Sesame Workshop vice president, said the organization planned to use the award to let more people know that its non-

profit work extends beyond the TV show. "We do a lot of work around the world with direct services, trying to provide content for families that talks about some of those harder to talk about subjects, whether it's trauma, whether it's homelessness and things of that nature," Perez said.

Famed roommates Bert and Ernie were also on hand to receive the award. "We are so proud to make the Catalyst," Ernie joked. "One day we'd also like to make the Dog-alist."

Alligator in 'Happy Gilmore' dies of old age in Colorado

Associated Press

An alligator that appeared in numerous TV shows and films over three decades, most notably the 1996 Adam Sandler comedy "Happy Gilmore," has died at a gator farm in southern Colorado.

Based on his growth rate and tooth loss, Morris the alligator was at least 80 years old when he died, the Colorado Gator Farm said in a Facebook post Sunday. He was nearly 11 feet long and weighed 640 pounds.

Morris, who was found in the backyard of a Los Angeles home as an illegal pet, started his Hollywood career in 1975 and retired in 2006, when he was sent to the Colorado Gator Farm in the tiny town of Mosca. He appeared in several films, including "Interview with the Vampire," "Dr. Dolittle 2" and "Blues Brothers 2000."

But his most famous role was in "Happy Gilmore," a film about a failed hockey player who discovers a talent for golf. The title character played by Sandler confronts Morris after hitting a golf ball that ends up in the gator's mouth.



AP

Morris the alligator, shown June 9, appeared in numerous TV shows and films.

Sandler posted a tribute to Morris on Instagram on Wednesday.

"We are all gonna miss you. You could be hard on directors, makeup artists, costumers — really anyone with arms or legs — but I know you did it for the ultimate good of the film," Sandler wrote. "The day you wouldn't come out of your trailer unless we sent in 40 heads of lettuce taught me a powerful lesson: Never compromise your art."

The Colorado Gator Farm said it plans to preserve Morris' body.

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DR ALBAN

IT'S MY LIFE

C&C MUSIC FACTORY

GONNA MAKE YOU SWEAT

TURBO B FT. SNAP

I GOT THE POWER

TECHNOTRONIC

FT. ERIC MARTIN PUMP UP THE JAM

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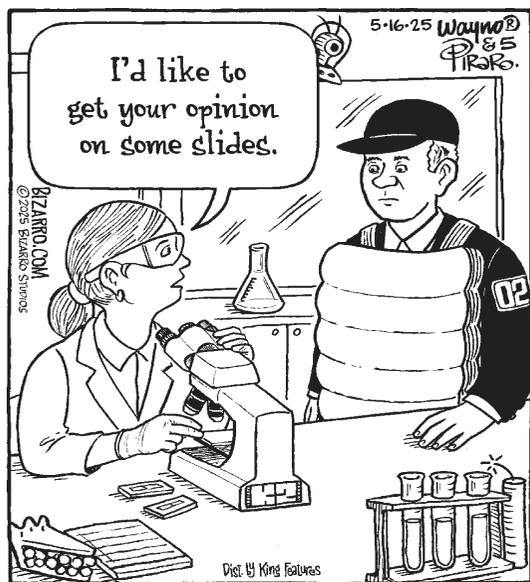


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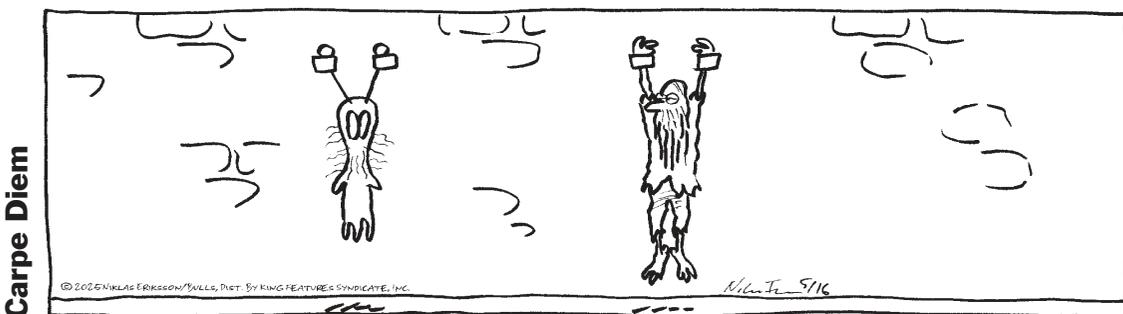
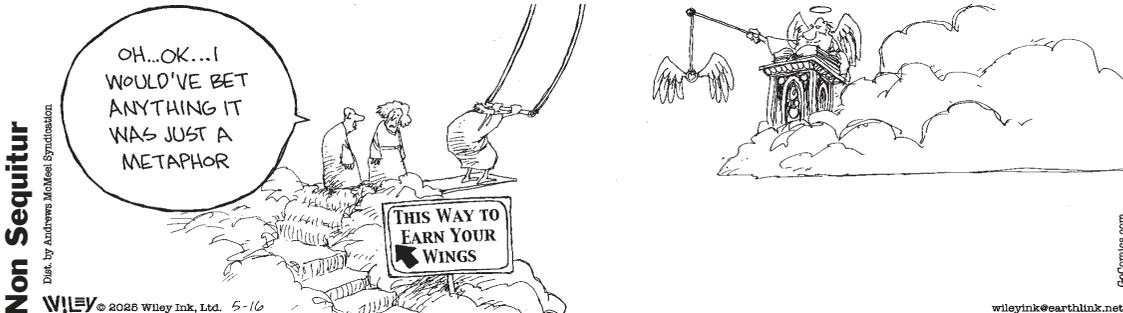
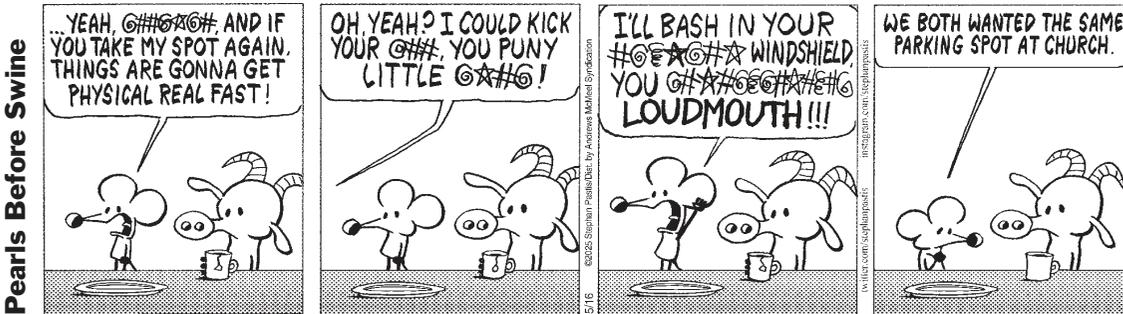
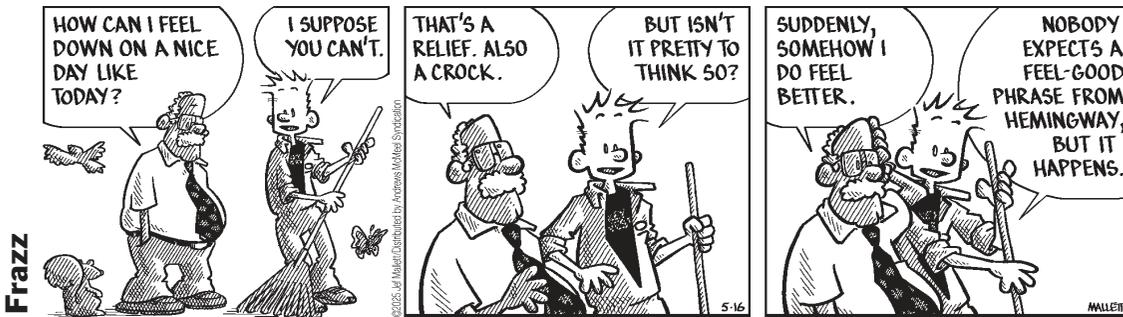


Scan to learn more about how 100% of Exchange earnings support Warfighters and their families

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

Grid for Eugene Sheffer Crossword with numbered squares.

ACROSS

- 1 Astronaut Grissom
4 Virtuoso violinist Hilary
8 Some WWII vets
12 Mimic
13 "Mamma Mia" group
14 Hollywood's Kazan
15 Schedule opening
17 Despot
18 Skin care brand
19 Small stream
20 Took off
22 Poet Teasdale
24 Eye part
25 Multilingual
29 Stiller or Stein
30 "The Thinker" sculptor
31 A Gershwin brother
32 Tony-winning musical of 2005
34 Lovers' quarrel
35 Physics bit
36 Suspension bridge support
37 Goopy treat
40 Mystique
41 Thames town
42 Modern aviator
46 Miami- County
47 Play opener

- 48 X-ray's cousin
49 Attempt
50 Incite
51 Soak (up)

- 21 Ready, as for surgery
22 Sin city
23 Landed
25 Casual shirt
26 Anti-chapping sticks
27 Spoken
28 London gallery
30 Assess
33 Lodestone
34 Rani's dress
36 Cherub on a Valentine
37 Govt. agents
38 Nevada neighbor
39 Nitwit
40 "— girl!"
42 Binge
43 Green prefix
44 Spanish gold
45 Gratuity

DOWN

- 1 Gangster's gun
2 AP rival
3 Pasta wheat
4 Tears into
5 With skill
6 "Girls" aier
7 Rebellion leader Turner
8 Damp cleaner
9 To boot
10 Pisa farewell
11 Cutty — (Scotch brand)
16 Yale students
19 — Mawr
20 Bloodline sharers

Answer to Previous Puzzle

Answer grid for previous puzzle with words like USSR, SAP, ATOP, PELE, ALA, BILE, OLAF, LIP, OMEN, NABORS, AIDE, CRAMP, IAM, ORA, LAWS, GES, AGAR, AGA, LEG, PRODS, PAYAS, YUGO, WADS, LAUREN, BEER, EON, SILO, IAGO, RNA, ECHO, TRON, SEE, SKIN.

5-16

CRYPTOQUIP

QY FMS YIUUK JFQHCQHC
QHJDXFJ CSF QHFS E JAQUOQJG,
MGEF XSIZW FGD UDJIZF VD?
VZEXA-DKDW VDDJ.

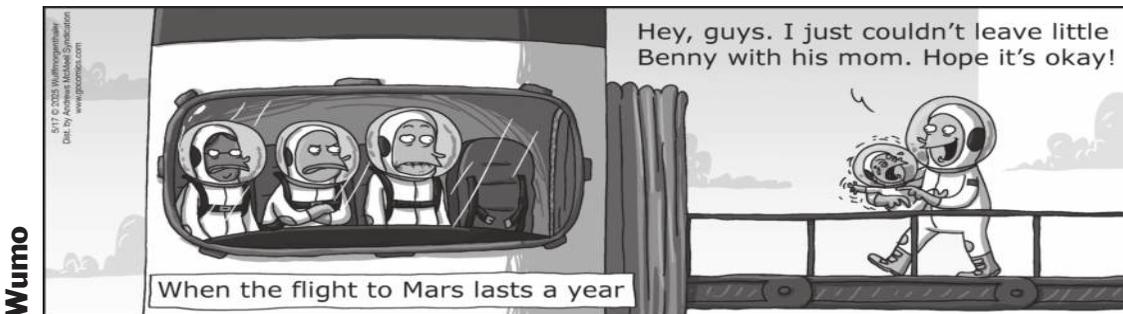
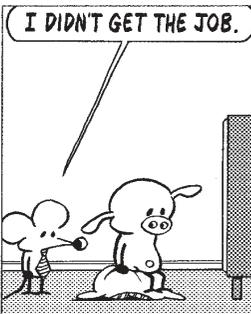
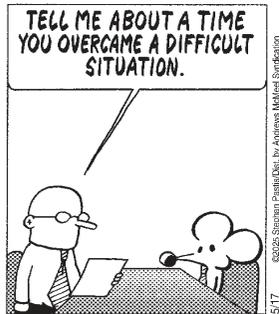
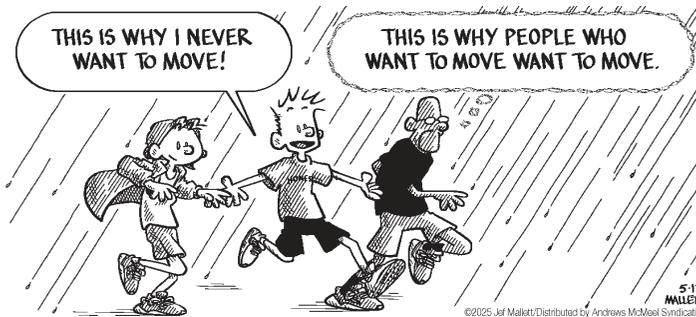
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: DEVICE WHICH CAN SENSE HOW MUCH COURAGE AND RESILIENCE PEOPLE HAVE: A METTLE DETECTOR.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: G equals H

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			

ACROSS

- 1 Big slice
- 5 Venus de —
- 9 Microwave
- 12 Caesar's "Behold!"
- 13 Friendly leader?
- 14 — -de-France
- 15 Landed
- 16 Taxpayer IDs
- 17 Make lace
- 18 Bygone days
- 19 Long. crosser
- 20 Galileo's birthplace
- 21 Luau garland
- 23 — Jima
- 25 Rill
- 28 Wee
- 32 Flinch, say
- 33 Exams for future attys.
- 34 Not outside
- 36 Changes
- 37 Genetic letters
- 38 Memo shorthand
- 39 "Finlandia" composer Sibelius
- 42 Guffaw syllable
- 44 Spiced tea
- 48 Rowing need
- 49 Killer whale
- 50 Japanese instrument
- 51 Roman 56
- 52 Coconut provider

- 53 McGregor of "Star Wars"
- 54 TV's Danson
- 55 Actress Elisabeth
- 56 Cincinnati team

- 22 Stationery brand
- 24 Chocolatier Wonka
- 25 Lanka lead-in
- 26 Sawbuck
- 27 "Awesome, dude!"

DOWN

- 1 Pile
- 2 Bruins' sch.
- 3 "JAG" spinoff
- 4 Crunchy sweet-and-salty snack
- 5 Ramadan observer
- 6 "Hair Love" actress Rae
- 7 Soup legume
- 8 Hosp. areas
- 9 Tubular pasta
- 10 "Sad to say ..."
- 11 Anti-fur org.
- 20 Dumpling
- 22 Inventor's monogram
- 30 USPS delivery
- 31 Twisty turn
- 35 Gung-ho
- 36 Steep-roofed home
- 39 Shock
- 40 Roof edge
- 41 Saharan
- 43 Rights gp.
- 45 Hockey's Gordie
- 46 Slightly
- 47 Charged bits
- 49 Chances, for short

Answer to Previous Puzzle

G	U	S		H	A	H	N		W	A	C	S
A	P	E		A	B	B	A		E	L	I	A
T	I	M	E	S	L	O	T		T	S	A	R
				O	L	A	Y		B	R	O	O
S	P	L	I	T		S	A	R	A			
I	R	I	S		P	O	L	Y	G	L	O	T
B	E	N		R	O	D	I	N		I	R	A
S	P	A	M	A	L	O	T		S	P	A	T
				A	T	O	M		C	A	B	L
F	U	D	G	E					A	U	R	A
E	T	O	N		J	E	T	P	I	L	O	T
D	A	D	E		A	C	T	I		M	R	I
S	H	O	T		G	O	A	D		S	O	P

5-17

CRYPTOQUIP

ANMRAZGH VFQ Z VZGFCT
 YHQTFA UWF'T KWH UFQJE'T
 LHTK YJZDHQ FV WZAE-LHZKHA
 EQCGT: "RNAO MFAOZ."

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF TWO FURRY STINGING INSECTS GOT INTO A SKIRMISH, WHAT COULD THE RESULT BE? BLACK-EYED BEES.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals W

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OPINION

Europe's accelerated military buildup still too slow

By LEE HOCKSTADER

The Washington Post

STOCKHOLM

Europe's race to rearm is accelerating at warp speed — and not nearly fast enough.

For a closer look at that paradox, I spent time recently in Sweden, which scrapped 200 years of neutrality — and decades of unilateral disarmament — when it became NATO's newest member last year.

Faced with fraying trans-Atlantic ties and mounting Russian belligerence, Swedes should no longer think of their nation as a “blue-eyed idealist on the sidelines” but rather “a realist in the center of events,” Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said in January. The country, he added, is not at war — but nor is at peace.

As in much of northern and Eastern Europe, Stockholm's new realism has inspired a swift pivot from post-Cold War complaisance during which its armed forces and defense spending withered. In 2013, Sweden's defense chief said the country could resist an armed attack for no longer than a week, despite a home-grown arms industry that produces some of the world's most advanced fighter jets, tanks and submarines.

In just the past four years, Sweden's defense budget has doubled, and steep new outlays are planned through 2030. Spurred by government borrowing, military spending — just 1% of Swedish economic output in 2017 — is set to reach 3.5% by 2030, the most since the 1960s.

“The speed of transformation in Sweden is proof that societies can change quickly,” said Gerald Knaus, a social scientist who leads the European Stability Initiative think tank.

That's a reasonable view. But Europe's buildup is also badly lagging Russia's breakneck transition to a war footing. A third of Moscow's spending, equal to roughly 7% of gross

domestic product, is now devoted to the military. No European member of NATO comes close.

The Kremlin, European intelligence services warn, could attack a small NATO member — possibly one of the Baltic states on the alliance's eastern flank — just months after combat winds down in Ukraine. A major assault would be possible within five years.

That forecast has shaken Sweden. In 2022, after Russian troops swept across Ukraine, nearly 30,000 Swedes applied to join the Home Guard, a part-time force tasked with territorial defense; that was a sixfold increase from previous years. The same year, the government resurrected a Cabinet position to oversee civil defense, a job abolished after World War II. Sweden's armed forces are rapidly expanding their ranks, including with conscripts.

Last year, a pamphlet pointedly titled “In case of crisis or war” was mailed to every Swedish household, outlining best practices in an emergency. Those include setting aside cash, a scarce commodity in a country wedded to digital payments. The point, Kristersson told me in an interview, is that famously individualistic Swedes should prepare for sacrifice. They “simply cannot expect the U.S. to continue being the main provider of security for European countries,” he said.

Just outside Stockholm, I spent part of a recent Saturday afternoon with two dozen Swedes who have taken that message to heart. They had gathered for a voluntary crash course on what to do in the event of crises, which all present understood were likely to originate from Russia. More than 200,000 Swedes are expected to take similar classes this year, officials told me.

“In Sweden, we have been so spoiled. We are so rich and always well taken care of,” Anna Nuback, who leads the Lotta Corps, a wom-

en's group that organizes the classes, told me. “Our message is: You have to prepare to make sacrifices.”

The question now is how to match the mounting sense of urgency with the resources required to meet the Russian threat. That's all the more pressing as Washington considers drawing down the more than 85,000 U.S. troops stationed in Europe.

Seven or eight years ago, Sweden “had lots of time but very little money” to prepare its defenses, Pal Jonson, Sweden's defense minister, told me. “Now, we have a lot more money but very little time.”

Elsewhere in Europe, a similar surge is underway as other countries race to bulk up their own armed forces. But they are constrained by the need to resupply Ukraine as U.S. weapons shipments dwindle. And across the Continent, defense industrial capacity is inadequate; European arms manufacturers can't match U.S.-made air defenses and other critical systems Kyiv needs.

Seen in that light, there is cold logic to President Donald Trump's demand that European NATO members, whose defense outlays average about 2% of GDP, increase their spending to 5%. Europeans were aghast when Trump made that ask; NATO itself is weighing a new spending target of just 3.5% of economic output. But if Europe's own assessments of the threat posed by Russia are correct, then Trump's demand should be taken seriously.

When I asked Kristersson about it, he didn't flinch. Sweden's overall military spending could reach that level in five years or so, including arms for Ukraine and cyber and other hybrid defense programs, he said: “There is a very good reason to do it.”

Lee Hockstader has been The Washington Post's European Affairs columnist, based in Paris, since 2023. Previously he was a member of the Post editorial board; a national correspondent, a foreign correspondent, and a local reporter.

The Iberian blackout wasn't a fluke. It was the future

By KELLY R. MCKINNEY

Chicago Tribune

At 12:33 p.m. local time on a crystal blue Monday, the system that provides the power essential to the daily lives of 50 million-plus people collapsed. The lights went out from Lisbon to Barcelona; trains stopped, air traffic controllers went offline and hospital workers scrambled to keep patients alive. Two highly modern, eminently civilized nations were plunged into chaos.

While understandable, the immediate obsessive search for the cause — whether cyber-attack, software error or rare atmospheric phenomenon — missed the point. In tightly coupled, highly complex systems like the European energy grid, the next catastrophe is not caused. It is triggered.

Over the past 2½ decades in the disaster business in New York City, I've watched weather systems, electrical grids, transit systems and terrorist networks overwhelm the best-laid plans. And I've come to understand what physicists and systems theorists have known for years: In complex systems, disaster is not the exception; it's the destination.

Back in the 1990s, Danish physicist Per Bak proposed a theory he called self-organized criticality. His insight was that complex systems — whether electrical power systems, cities, economies or even ecosystems — inevitably organize themselves into fragile states. As connections grow and efficiency increases,

the margin for error disappears. One small, almost trivial fault can suddenly cascade into a continent-wide collapse. Not because the fault is catastrophic — but because the system itself evolves into the crosshairs of catastrophe.

This is what happened in Spain and Portugal. And it will happen again.

In his landmark work “Normal Accidents,” sociologist Charles Perrow explained why. Systems like telecommunications networks or national power grids aren't just complicated — they're “tightly coupled,” meaning that one failure rapidly affects the next. The result is failure that is not only probable — but normal. Trying to find and eliminate every possible fault is a fool's errand. You can't debug your way out of systemic risk.

This concept might seem abstract unless you happen to be on the hook to solve the issues and unmet needs of the millions trapped in the blackout. We are used to thinking of disasters as external shocks — terrorist attacks, hurricanes, pandemics. But more and more, the disasters we face are emergent properties of the systems we've built. Lean, efficient, interconnected infrastructures may work beautifully on a good day. But they break spectacularly on a bad one.

Statistician Nassim Nicholas Taleb, in his influential work “The Black Swan,” calls the world where low-probability, high-impact events dominate “Extremistan.” In Extremistan, what seems improbable happens regularly. What seems stable collapses without warn-

ing. And what seems isolated is deeply, dangerously connected. I hate to break it to you, but we live in Extremistan now. So what should we be doing about it?

First, we must stop debating probabilities. Catastrophic failures are not rare. They are built in. The question is not if another system will collapse — but when and how many others will collapse with it.

Second, we must shift from an optimization to a resilience mindset. The critical infrastructure that sustains daily life — transportation, communications, water and wastewater, energy, food, health care — must be rendered able to absorb shocks and keep functioning, not just on paper but in practice. That means slack in the system. Redundancy. Cross-training. Manual overrides. And a professional emergency management class empowered to plan, rehearse and lead.

And finally, we must prepare for the moment of truth — that first hour when the system breaks, and the response begins. That hour is not a drill. And if we are not ready, it will be too late.

The Iberian blackout was not a one-off. It was not a fluke. It was a signal from the future, sent in the language of darkness. Our job is to listen — and act — before the next black swan comes.

Kelly R. McKinney is the vice president of emergency management and enterprise resilience at NYU Langone Health and a former deputy commissioner at the New York City Office of Emergency Management in New York City.

SCOREBOARD/WNBA

PRO SOCCER

MLS Eastern Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Cincinnati	9	3	1	28	18	14
Philadelphia	8	3	2	26	26	14
Columbus	7	1	5	26	21	13
Nashville	7	4	2	23	24	16
Inter Miami CF	6	2	4	22	24	18
Orlando City	5	2	6	21	24	16
Charlotte FC	6	6	1	19	20	17
New York	5	5	3	18	20	15
NYC FC	5	5	3	18	13	14
New England	5	4	2	17	12	10
Chicago	4	4	4	16	20	23
D.C. United	3	6	4	13	13	25
Atlanta	2	6	5	11	14	23
Toronto FC	2	7	4	10	10	17
CF Montréal	1	8	4	7	7	17

Western Conference

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Vancouver	8	1	3	27	24	10
San Diego FC	7	4	2	23	25	16
Minn, United	6	3	4	22	19	13
Portland	6	3	4	22	22	19
LAFC	6	4	3	21	23	18
Seattle	5	4	4	19	20	18
San Jose	5	6	2	17	29	23
Austin FC	5	6	2	17	9	16
Colorado	4	5	4	16	15	20
FC Dallas	4	4	4	16	15	20
Real Salt Lake	4	7	2	14	13	18
Houston	3	6	4	13	13	19
Sporting KC	3	8	2	11	19	24
St Louis City	2	6	5	11	11	16
LA Galaxy	0	10	3	3	10	31

Wednesday's games

New York City FC 0, D.C. United 0, tie
 Columbus 1, CF Montréal 1, tie
 Orlando City 3, Charlotte FC 1
 Philadelphia 3, LA Galaxy 2
 Cincinnati 1, Toronto FC 0
 Houston 2, Minnesota 0
 Nashville 2, New York 1
 Sporting Kansas City 2, St Louis City 2, tie
 Atlanta 1, Austin FC 1, tie
 Portland 0, Real Salt Lake 0, tie
 Los Angeles FC 4, Seattle 0
 San Diego FC 2, Colorado 0
 Miami 3, San Jose 3, tie

Saturday's games

Toronto FC at CF Montréal
 New York at New York City FC
 Cincinnati at Columbus
 Philadelphia at Atlanta
 Chicago at Charlotte FC
 San Jose at New England
 Vancouver at Austin FC
 Houston at FC Dallas
 St Louis City at Minnesota
 D.C. United at Nashville
 Real Salt Lake at Colorado
 Seattle at Portland
 Sporting Kansas City at San Diego FC

Sunday's games

Orlando City at Miami
 Los Angeles FC at LA Galaxy

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Kansas City	6	2	0	18	18	6
Orlando	5	2	1	16	15	6
Washington	5	3	0	15	13	12
San Diego	4	2	2	14	15	10
Angel City	4	2	2	14	15	14
Portland	3	2	4	13	12	10
Gotham FC	3	3	3	12	12	9
Seattle	3	3	2	11	7	7
Louisville	3	3	2	11	9	13
Houston	3	4	1	10	7	10
North Carolina	2	3	3	9	9	10
Bay FC	2	4	2	8	8	12
Utah Royals FC	1	6	1	4	4	13
Chicago	1	6	1	4	5	17

Friday's games

San Diego at Gotham FC
 Seattle at Louisville
 Portland at Houston
 Kansas City at Orlando

Saturday's games

Chicago at North Carolina
 Utah Royals FC at Washington
 Angel City at Bay FC

Friday, May 23

Orlando at Utah Royals FC
 Washington at Seattle

TENNIS

Italian Open

Wednesday At Rome
Purse: Euro 6,009,593
Surface: Red clay
Seedings in parentheses
Women's Singles Quarterfinals
 Coco Gauff (4), United States, def. Mirra Andreeva (7), Russia, 6-4, 7-6 (5).
 Zheng Qinwen (8), China, def. Aryna Sa-

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL Major League Baseball American League

ATHLETICS — Sent RHP J.T. Ginn on a rehab assignment to Las Vegas (PCL).
BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Reinstated INF Ramón Urias from the 10-day IL. Optioned OF Dylan Carlson to Norfolk (IL). Recalled RHP Chayce McDermott from Norfolk. Returned RHP Chayce McDermott to Norfolk.
BOSTON RED SOX — Placed RHP Tanner Houck on the 15-Day IL, retroactive to May 13. Recalled RHP Cooper Criswell from Worcester (IL).
DETROIT TIGERS — Optioned 3B Jace Jung to Toledo (IL). Selected the contract of LF Akil Baddoo from Toledo.
HOUSTON ASTROS — Designated RHP Tayler Scott for assignment. Recalled LHP Colton Gordon from Sugar Land (PCL).
MINNESOTA TWINS — Recalled LHP Kody Funderburk from St. Paul (IL).
SEATTLE MARINERS — Recalled LHP Jhonathan Diaz from Tacoma (IL). Placed RHP Bryce Miller on the 15-day IL, retroactive to May 12.

TEXAS RANGERS — Sent CF Kevin Pillar on a rehab assignment to Frisco (TL).
TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Sent RHP Ryan Burr on a rehab assignment to Buffalo (IL). Sent RHP Erik Swanson on a rehab assignment to Buffalo.

National League

LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Selected the contract of F Dalton Rushing from Oklahoma City (PCL). Designated C Austin Barnes for assignment.
MIAMI MARLINS — Reinstated LHP Ryan Weathers from the 15-day IL. Optioned LHP Anthony Veneziano to Jacksonville (IL).
MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Recalled RHP Logan Henderson from Nashville (IL). Optioned LHP Bryan Hudson to Nashville. Sent LHP DL Hall on a rehab assignment to Nashville. Placed LHP Jose Quintana on the 15-day IL, retroactive to May 11. Recalled RHP Tobias Myers from Nashville.
PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES — Recalled RHP Daniel Robert from Lehigh Valley (IL).
PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Claimed UTL Michael Helman off waivers from the St. Louis Cardinals. Transferred INF Emmanuel Valdez from the 10-day IL to the 60-day IL. Sent UTL Endy Rodriguez on a rehab assignment to Indianapolis (IL).
ST. LOUIS CARDINALS — Recalled RHP Matt Swanson from Memphis (IL).
WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Sent 1B Andrés Chaparro on a rehab assignment to FCL Nationals.

BASKETBALL National Basketball Association

NBA — Fined Golden State Warriors F Draymond Green \$50,000 for making an inappropriate comment that questions the integrity of game officials.

Women's National Basketball Association

ATLANTA DREAM — Waived G Haley Jones.
CONNECTICUT SUN — Waived F Amy Okonkwo and G Madison Hayes.
DALLAS WINGS — Waived F Joyner Holmes.
GOLDEN STATE VALKYRIES — Waived F Laeticia Amihere, F Chloe Bibby, G Kaitlyn Chen, C Elissa Cunane and F Maignan Toure.
MINNESOTA LYNX — Waived G Grace Berger.
NEW YORK LIBERTY — Announced G Benajah Laney-Hamilton is out for the 2025 season due to a non-WNBA injury.
WASHINGTON MYSTICS — Waived C Ashton Prechtel, G Zaay Green, G Lauren Jensen and F Khadijah Cave.

FOOTBALL National Football League

BALTIMORE RAVENS — Signed RB Derrick Henry to a two-year contract extension.
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Signed WR Jaden Janke to a contract.
JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Signed TE Quintin Morris to a one-year contract.
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Signed RB Trayveon Williams. Released DT Eric Johnson II.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Signed QB Jalen Milroe to a rookie contract.
TENNESSEE TITANS — Claimed LB Anfernee Orji off waivers from the New Orleans Saints. Waived RB Jabari Small.

HOCKEY National Hockey League

VANCOUVER CANUCKS — Signed D Tom Willander to a three-year, entry-level contract.

SOCCER Major League Soccer

MINNESOTA UNITED — Signed D Kieran Chandler to a short-term contract agreement.

Men's Singles Round of 16

balenka (1), Belarus, 6-4, 6-3.
 Casper Ruud (6), Norway, def. Jaume Munar, Spain, 6-3, 6-4.
Quarterfinals
 Carlos Alcaraz (3), Spain, def. Jack Draper (5), Britain, 6-4, 6-4.
 Lorenzo Musetti (8), Italy, def. Alexander Zverev (2), Germany, 7-6 (1), 6-4.

MVP Wilson fueled by Aces falling short last season

By MARK ANDERSON
Associated Press

HENDERSON, Nev. — A'ja Wilson went into last season trying to prove she was indeed the WNBA's best player, even if MVP voters thought otherwise in 2023.

She then went out and put together one of the best performances in league history.

The problem is her teammates didn't all come along, and the two-time defending champion Aces never quite found their game and were eliminated by eventual winner New York in the semifinals. As satisfying as last season was individually for Wilson, failing to meet Las Vegas' high standards as a team sticks with her.

And that same drive that fueled her last season remains.

"I want to be the best," Wilson said. "Normally, you're classified the best when you win games and you win championships, so that was my whole mentality coming into this offseason. It was a long offseason. It was a long, dull offseason because we lost. Sometimes you need that 'L' to wake you up."

The offseason, however, wasn't a complete disappointment.

Wilson's A'One signature Nike shoe was released earlier this month and became a big seller.

"I am overwhelmed a little bit because it means a lot to me," Wilson said. "The love, the joy, the positivity behind it, seeing so many people want to buy it, it definitely has my heart full. So I'm grateful. I'm so excited to see what's more to come."

That includes what to come with the Aces this season.

Wilson and Las Vegas return with most of the core intact but with some notable changes. The Aces helped orchestrate a three-team trade in January that sent Kelsey Plum to Los Angeles and landed Jewell Loyd from Seattle. Las Vegas also has what is essentially a new player in Liz Kitley, a post player who was drafted 24th a year ago but didn't play because of a torn ACL.

Plus, returning All-Star guards Chelsea Gray and Jackie Young should be healthy after playing through injuries last season.

"Me being healthy is a game changer, just getting everybody organized and being a leader and knowing the flows and ins and outs of the game," Gray said. "A'ja, I think it only helps her as well. We can get into some actions and stuff. It's hard when you look at it defensively. You have A'ja and you want to come double, who do you come off of? Who do you rotate to?"



JOHN LOCHER/AP

Aces center A'ja Wilson was a unanimous choice as the WNBA MVP last season, but Las Vegas didn't win a third straight title.

That was part of why the Aces had their dominant two-year stretch. They could make opponents pay for placing too much attention on Wilson in the frontcourt, and she could take advantage when defenses backed off her to try to take away Las Vegas' perimeter shooting.

It almost didn't matter what kind of defense Wilson faced last season. She was on a mission from the beginning and averaged 26.9 points and 11.8 rebounds, joining the Houston Comets' Cynthia Cooper in 1997 as the league's only unanimous choices for MVP.

"She put together the single

most greatest individual season in WNBA history," Aces coach Becky Hammon said. "Not only was it historical numbers-wise in the W, it would be the same in the NBA. It was just unprecedented.

"However, she was very upset with not winning a championship. So, to her, that was like, 'How do I get more out of my teammates?' We talked about it. We've got to get greatness out of everybody else. One person being great isn't enough, and she recognizes that."

Wilson doesn't want to experience another long, dull offseason again, but she also knows the competition is fierce.

Defending champion New York and Breanna Stewart figure to be in the conversation again, Caitlin Clark-led Indiana upgraded in the offseason and became one of the favorites, and Minnesota and Napeesa Collier came oh-so-close, losing in overtime to the Liberty in Game 5 of the finals.

But Wilson senses a different vibe in the Las Vegas locker room compared with last year at this time.

"It kind of sucks when the mindset (with other players) wasn't where it is," Wilson said. "But it's also human nature. When you come in after winning back to back, you have this feeling of, 'What else do we have to do?' We've already executed and done more than people may have expected us to do."

"I think this year we've come in with a different mindset, understanding how hard it is to get there."

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
Connecticut	0	0	.000	—
Atlanta	0	0	.000	—
Indiana	0	0	.000	—
Chicago	0	0	.000	—
New York	0	0	.000	—
Washington	0	0	.000	—

Western Conference

	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	0	0	.000	—
Phoenix	0	0	.000	—
Dallas	0	0	.000	—
Golden State	0	0	.000	—
Minnesota	0	0	.000	—
Seattle	0	0	.000	—
Las Vegas	0	0	.000	—

Friday's games

Atlanta at Washington
 Minnesota at Dallas
 Los Angeles at Golden State

Saturday's games

Las Vegas at New York
 Chicago at Indiana
 Seattle at Phoenix

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

DeChambeau puts Masters meltdown in past

BY STEVE REED
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Bryson DeChambeau left Augusta National last month frustrated over his final-round meltdown at the Masters and perplexed by his poor iron play.

The burly 6-foot-1, 220-pound DeChambeau has put that disappointing loss behind him and feels he's fixed the iron issue — or at least put a Band-Aid on it — for this week's PGA Championship. He enters Quail Hollow confident after following up a second-place finish at the LIV Tour's Mexico City event with a win two weeks ago in South Korea.

Now he looks to continue his recent run of success at major championships, where he has replaced Brooks Koepka and Jon Rahm as LIV's best chance to win. In 2024, DeChambeau finished tied for sixth at the Masters, then second at the PGA Championship at Valhalla before winning his second U.S. Open at Pinehurst. Despite shooting a final-round 75 at this year's Masters, he still finished tied for fifth, giving him six top-10 finishes in his past 10 majors.

"I feel like I've always had the capacity to play well in major championships and contend consistently," DeChambeau said. "A lot of things have to go right in majors for you to play well. Your whole game has to be on. So I felt



GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

Bryson DeChambeau watches a shot on the second hole during a practice round for the PGA Championship on Tuesday, in Charlotte, N.C. Recent successes have DeChambeau confident this week.

like at Valhalla, especially after Augusta last year, that was the second time (in a row) that I played well in a major, and it kind of gave me that confidence that I could just keep moving forward with that at every major and keep hammering down on majors."

The second-place finish at Valhalla last year proved huge for his confidence.

"It was more of an assurance of saying, hey, I can do this, and I can do this for a long time, God willing," DeChambeau said. "Valhalla definitely gave me some confidence for the rest of the majors, last year and even this year."

Now comes another test at Quail Hollow, a course where DeChambeau has limited experience compared to many PGA Tour players.

He's only played here once in the past six years, finishing tied for eighth at the 2021 Wells Fargo Championship before leaving for the LIV Tour. His best finish at Wells Fargo was fourth in 2018. When Justin Thomas won the 2017 PGA Championship at Quail Hollow, DeChambeau finished tied for 33rd.

The long course certainly plays

to DeChambeau's strength off the tee.

"I feel like I'm moving in the right direction with giving myself a lot of multiple chances to win these major championships," he said.

Despite his success this past month on the LIV Tour, which included shooting 30 on the back nine of the final round at South Korea to win the tournament, DeChambeau still plans to switch irons once they have been produced and delivered. As of Tuesday, he had not received them.

"My irons weren't that great, but I played better in Mexico. My irons were really good in Korea. I feel like it's moving in the right direction," DeChambeau said. "Let's hopefully keep it more of the same. If I can do that, I'll give myself a good chance this week."

And maybe, just maybe, have a chance to beat Rory McIlroy, who got the best of him in the final pairing at the Masters en route to winning the career Grand Slam.

Early on in the final round, it looked as if it might be DeChambeau's day at Augusta National. But after grabbing sole possession of the lead after two holes, DeChambeau faded fast and shot 75, leaving him four shots behind McIlroy and Justin Rose.

"Hopefully we can have another go at it again like the Masters," DeChambeau said of McIlroy.

Thomas back at site of first major, looking ready to contend

BY STEVE REED
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Justin Thomas has positioned himself to turn back the clock at the PGA Championship.

The resurgent Thomas returns to Quail Hollow this week looking to recapture some of the magic from his first major victory at the 2017 PGA Championship when he posted a two-shot win over Francesco Molinari, Louis Oosthuizen and Patrick Reed.

The 32-year-old Thomas finally appears to have his game back on track following a years-long slump.

He's finished tied for second or better in three of his last four tournaments with a combined score of 41-under par, including a playoff win last month over Andrew Novak at the RBC Heritage that snapped a three-year winless drought on the PGA Tour.

The only tournament he hasn't been competitive in over the last month was the Masters. He finished tied for 36th.

Still, it is one of Thomas' best stretches of golf since 2016-17 when he became the fourth player behind Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods and Jordan Spieth to win five times in the same season, in-



PHELAN M. EBENHACK/AP

Justin Thomas won his first major at Quail Hollow, and he is back there for the PGA Championship playing his golf in recent years.

cluding a major, before his 25th birthday.

"I'm just more patient, I'd say," Thomas said of his recent improved play. "I don't feel like I'm forcing the issue as much. Just trying to trust my game and myself quite a bit more. I feel like some of the events maybe earlier this year or last year where I had a chance to win, I just felt like maybe I pressed a little too much."

While the memory of celebrating his first major on the 18th green at Quail Hollow eight years ago with his father Mike, then a PGA Tour professional at Harmony Landing in Louisville, Kentucky, and a former member of the PGA's board of directors, will forever be etched in his memory, Thomas admitted there's probably not much carryover from that to help him this week.

That tournament was played during the summer on what he called a "completely different golf course" with Bermuda grass versus overseed.

This one comes in the spring, with a course that will have absorbed several inches of rain by the time golfers tee off on Thursday, likely meaning that an already long course will play even longer.

"As much as I'd like to say (it matters), I think that's a bit of a stretch," Thomas said.

However, Thomas said his knowledge of the course and the confidence of knowing he can handle Quail Hollow's difficult three closing holes known as the "Green Mile" could pay dividends if he's near the top of the leaderboard on Sunday.

"If I'm coming down the stretch and trying to win the tournament, I can tell myself I've literally done this before here," Thomas said. "I've hit the shots. I've made the putts. I've handled all of that mentally on this exact golf course in this exact tournament."

It's helpful, too, that the weight of a losing streak has been lifted from his shoulders.

The win at Harbour Town last month — his first since the 2022

PGA Championship at Southern Hills — was something he called "the last thing I needed to do for my own well-being" and helped jettison him back into the top 10 in the world, while proving he's capable of making big shots to close out a win.

He nearly pulled off another last week at the Truist Championship, but wound up tied for second after a late run at the leaders.

He's in the right "head space," and he appears set on reaching bigger goals ahead.

Thomas said watching Rory McIlroy clinch the career Grand Slam last month with a win at the Masters has ignited some competitive jealousy within him. Although he's never won a major other than the PGA Championship, Thomas feels like it's something he's capable of accomplishing in his career.

"I have a lot of faith and a lot of ability — or trust in my ability," Thomas said. "I have confidence in, I feel like, what I can do. Obviously I knew I always wanted to win the Grand Slam, wanted to win all the majors. For some reason watching somebody do it firsthand, it reminded me almost of, damn, I forgot, I really do want to do that."

MLB

Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	25	18	.581	—
Toronto	21	21	.500	3½
Boston	22	23	.489	4
Tampa Bay	19	23	.452	5½
Baltimore	15	26	.366	9
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	29	15	.659	—
Cleveland	25	18	.581	3½
Kansas City	25	20	.556	4½
Minnesota	23	20	.535	5½
Chicago	14	29	.326	14½
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Seattle	23	19	.548	—
Houston	22	20	.524	1
Texas	23	21	.523	1
Athletics	22	21	.512	1½
Los Angeles	17	25	.405	6
National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	28	16	.636	—
Philadelphia	25	18	.581	2½
Atlanta	21	22	.488	6½
Washington	18	26	.409	10
Miami	16	26	.381	11
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	25	19	.568	—
St. Louis	24	20	.545	1
Milwaukee	21	23	.477	4
Cincinnati	20	24	.455	5
Pittsburgh	15	29	.341	10
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	28	15	.651	—
San Diego	27	15	.643	½
San Francisco	25	19	.568	3½
Arizona	23	21	.523	5½
Colorado	7	36	.163	21
Wednesday's games				
Minnesota 6-8, Baltimore 3-6				
Philadelphia 2-7, St. Louis 1-14				
Milwaukee 9, Cleveland 5				
Arizona 8, San Francisco 7				
N.Y. Yankees 3, Seattle 2				
Detroit 6, Boston 5				
Toronto 3, Tampa Bay 1				
Pittsburgh 4, N.Y. Mets 0				
Chicago White Sox 4, Cincinnati 2				
Washington 5, Atlanta 4				
Miami 3, Chicago Cubs 1				
Texas 8, Colorado 3				
Houston 4, Kansas City 3				
San Diego 5, L.A. Angels 1				
L.A. Dodgers 9, Athletics 3				
Thursday's games				
Washington at Atlanta				
Minnesota at Baltimore				
Chicago White Sox at Cincinnati				
Tampa Bay at Toronto				
Houston at Texas				
Athletics at L.A. Dodgers				
Friday's games				
Chicago White Sox (Smith 1-2) at Chicago Cubs (Horton 1-0)				
Cleveland (Bibee 3-3) at Cincinnati (Singer 4-2)				
Pittsburgh (Heaney 2-3) at Philadelphia (Suárez 1-0)				
N.Y. Mets (Megill 3-3) at N.Y. Yankees (Rodón 4-3)				
Washington (Gore 2-4) at Baltimore (Gibson 0-2)				
Detroit (Flaherty 1-5) at Toronto (Francis 2-5)				
Atlanta (Sale 1-3) at Boston (Crochet 4-2)				
Tampa Bay (Bradley 3-2) at Miami (Meyer 2-4)				
St. Louis (Pallante 3-2) at Kansas City (Ragans 2-2)				
Houston (McCullers 0-1) at Texas (Eovaldi 4-2)				
Minnesota (Ryan 3-2) at Milwaukee (Patrick 2-3)				
Colorado (TBD) at Arizona (Burnes 2-1)				
Seattle (Evans 1-1) at San Diego (Kolek 2-0)				
L.A. Angels (Kochanowicz 2-5) at L.A. Dodgers (Gonsolin 2-0)				
Athletics (Sears 4-2) at San Francisco (Webb 4-3)				
Saturday's games				
N.Y. Mets at N.Y. Yankees				
Chicago White Sox at Chicago Cubs				
Detroit at Toronto				
Washington at Baltimore				
Tampa Bay at Miami				
Pittsburgh at Philadelphia				
Cleveland at Cincinnati				
Houston at Texas				
St. Louis at Kansas City				
Atlanta at Boston				
Minnesota at Milwaukee				
Colorado at Arizona				
Seattle at San Diego				
Athletics at San Francisco				
L.A. Angels at L.A. Dodgers				

Giants fans help Lee feel at home

BY MICHAEL WAGAMAN
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Jung Hoo Lee has sparked something special with San Francisco Giants fans — we're talking hair-on-fire levels of excitement.

A group of them are going above and beyond to make the Korean center fielder feel welcome in the Bay Area.

Meet the Hoo Lee Gans.

Lee has built an almost cult-like following at Oracle Park since joining San Francisco before the 2024 season on a \$113 million, six-year deal. A standout player in South Korea, Lee's rookie MLB season was dashed by injury, but he's emerged as perhaps the team's best player this year. The speedy 26-year-old is starting to look like a star, and Giants fans have responded in kind.

That's most apparent in the third deck at Oracle Park, where the Hoo Lee Gans fan group is growing by the homestead. Members are given T-shirts with "Hoo Lee Gans" on the front, along with a fiery red and orange spiked wig. What originally began as a discussion between friends has developed into a movement that has attracted nearly 200 members and is still growing. The group even has a recruiting website.

"I brought this thing to life a month ago and it's taken off," said Kyle Smeallie, who described himself as the lead organizer. "It's been incredible the reception it's gotten, not just in San Francisco but around the world."

It's easy to spot the group at the Giants' waterfront ballpark. It tries to organize trips to San Francisco games together, and once inside the ballpark, it routinely breaks out in chants in support of Lee whenever he steps on the field.

"I know of them," Lee said through interpreter Joe Han. "I knew that they were going to come to the game (Tuesday). They're a big motivation for me to play every day and put my best effort out there on the field."

Tuesday's game was Korean Night at Oracle Park, and the Hoo Lee Gans came prepared with a scripted Korean fight song. Lee signed autographs before the game and posed for pictures with fans behind the batting cage, flashing a smile that's become familiar to Giants fans.

In the ninth inning, Lee brought the Hoo Lee Gans and rest of the crowd to their feet with a towering two-run home run.

The buzz around Lee harkens to a golden era of San Francisco baseball that included three World Series titles from 2010-14. Panda hats — an ode to fan favorite Pablo "Kung Fu Panda" Sandoval — were the hot item then, along with jerseys for stars like



HAVEN DALEY/AP

Fans of the Giants' Jung Hoo Lee, who call themselves Hoo Lee Gans, pose before a game at Oracle Park in San Francisco on Tuesday. The fan group has grown in popularity as Lee has been a standout for the Giants.

Tim Lincecum, Buster Posey, Madison Bumgarner and others.

"The Hoo Lee Gans are a group of die-hard Giants fans who love the city, they love the Giants and they love their favorite player, Jung Hoo Lee," Smeallie said. "It reminds us of the dynasty era. We had so many characters on (those teams), it was so much fun to watch. They had a great club-

house spirit.

"We think Jung Hoo Lee is a big part of that this season. It's why we've been playing so well. He really brings people together."

San Francisco plays in baseball's toughest division, led by the reigning champion Dodgers, but they're off to a surprising 25-19 start, just 3½ games behind first-place Los Angeles, in part because

of Lee's emergence. In 43 games, he's hitting .286 with six home runs and 29 RBIs, and leads the team with 30 runs scored.

"I saw it some in San Diego with (Korean player) Ha-seong Kim, too, so he's being embraced the same way," said Giants manager Bob Melvin, who previously managed the Padres. "On top of that, he's a premier player. It's really cool to see each and every day the support that he gets here."

Smeallie initially wanted to put the fan club together during the 2024 season, but Lee suffered a season-ending injury early in the year, before the Hoo Lee Gans got off the ground. There is another section in the outfield bleachers reserved for the San Francisco-sponsored Jung Hoo Crew. Fans can purchase tickets to the section during weekend home games and receive an orange shirt with Lee's likeness on the front.

"He plays with a joy and excitement that I think we all resonate with," Smeallie said. "He loves the game, he loves the Giants and so do we."

Some of Lee's fans in Korea have reached out to the Hoo Lee Gans to voice their support. The fan group frequently refers to Lee as "Grandson of the Wind," a nickname that's carried over from Korea. Lee's father, Jong Beom Lee, was a speedy star in the Korean Baseball Organization known as "Son of the Wind."

"He has a lineage of baseball greatness in Korea," Smeallie said. "The way that his father played and the way that he plays, so many people have been fans for many, many years. They've reached out to us to say how much it means that we've embraced him as one of our own."



JEFF CHIU/AP

The Giants' Jung Hoo Lee celebrates after hitting a three-run home run against the Arizona Diamondbacks in San Francisco on Tuesday.

NHL PLAYOFFS



JOHN LOCHER/AP

The Oilers' Kasper Kapanen, upper right, celebrates after scoring the game-winning goal against the Vegas Golden Knights in overtime during Game 5 of a second-round playoff series Wednesday.

Oilers beat Knights in OT to reach conference final

By MARK ANDERSON
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS—The Oilers are about a lot more than Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, something the Golden Knights learned the hard way.

For Edmonton to get through to the Western Conference final for the second year in a row, it took a goalie who was benched earlier in these NHL playoffs and a forward who wasn't in the lineup until Monday.

Kasper Kapanen scored on a scramble in front of the net at 7:14 of overtime, and the Oilers beat Vegas 1-0 in Game 5 on Wednesday night to advance out of the second round.

"Obviously, we win games with Leon and Connor leading the way," Edmonton coach Kris Knoblauch said. "That's an absolute given. We won some games where our goalie outperformed their goalie. Then there's games where our depth guys came through and scored big goals. Hopefully we're only halfway through this, but we're going to need contributions from everybody."

The Oilers, who last season made it all the way to the Stanley Cup Final before losing in seven games to Florida, will play Dallas or Winnipeg in the next round. The Stars led 3-1 going into Game 5 on Thursday night.

Kapanen's goal backed up another shutout performance from goalie Stuart Skinner, who made 24 saves and drew several chants of "Stu! Stu!" from Edmonton fans in the crowd. Skinner, who was benched two games into the playoffs, also blanked the Golden Knights in Game 4. This was his third start in a row in replacing the injured Calvin Pickard.

And Kapanen was a spectator the first nine games of the playoffs before finally getting his chance in Game 4. Given the other players on the roster, Kapanen said he understood why he was initially left out.

"The team was playing really well, so we weren't changing with the lineup, which is understandable,"

Kapanen said. "The most important thing is the team winning and now us advancing. I knew eventually I'd probably get a chance. Just being patient and being ready."

Adin Hill made 29 saves for Vegas, which is out of the playoffs by the midway point for the second year in a row. The Golden Knights, who won the Stanley Cup two seasons ago, came into the playoffs as the Pacific Division champion and with the second-best record in the Western Conference.

"Any time you have a good team, you feel like you didn't finish what you set out to do," Vegas defenseman Alex Pietrangolo said. "We've got a hell of a team. It's disappointing. It's a hard league to win. We knew that going in."

Both teams were also involved in the two most recent scoreless playoff games to reach overtime. The Oilers lost to Winnipeg on May 21, 2021, five days after Vegas was defeated by Minnesota.

Edmonton's only 1-0 overtime playoff victory occurred in 1997 over Dallas. The Golden Knights have yet to win a postseason game by that score in OT.

Vegas played without captain Mark Stone because of an upper-body injury that caused him to miss most of Game 3 on Saturday. Stone played in Game 4 on Monday, but was far from at full health.

Neither team scored through the first two periods, and prime scoring chances were at a premium. There were only five high-danger chances, according to Natural Stat Trick, and the Golden Knights had four of them.

But each team had a grade-A chance early in the third period. Vegas' Brett Howden whiffed on a tap-in after taking a fantastic pass from Jack Eichel, and shortly after Draisaitl failed to convert on a breakaway. McDavid had a chance on a 2-on-1 to end the game in regulation but was denied by Hill with 1:06 left.

Panthers rout Leafs for 3-2 series lead

Associated Press

TORONTO — Sergei Bobrovsky made 31 saves, three Panthers defensemen scored and Florida routed the Toronto Maple Leafs 6-1 on Wednesday night to take a 3-2 lead in the Eastern Conference semifinal series.

The defending champion Panthers scored three times in a 7:53 span of the second period to pull away for their third straight victory.

"I wasn't thinking about it too much," Bobrovsky said when asked about opening the series with two losses. "I was just focusing on the next game."

Game 6 is Friday night in Sunrise, Fla.

"I'm not a big believer in momentum," Panthers coach Paul Maurice said. "The series is closer than you think."

Jesper Boqvist returned to score his first career playoff goal and also had an assist, and defensemen Aaron Ekblad, Dmitry Kulikov and Niko Mikkola also scored in the first two periods. In the third, A.J. Greer had his first career playoff goal and Sam Bennett added his sixth of the playoffs.

Bobrovsky missed a chance for his second straight shutout when Nicholas Robertson swept the puck in with 1:06 left for Toronto's first goal in 143 minutes 25 seconds. After a 5-4 overtime victory in Game 3, Bobrovsky made 23 saves Sunday night in a 2-0 win.

"We have trust in Bob that you wouldn't believe," Ekblad said. "It is unwavering."

Joseph Woll stopped 20 of 25 shots for the Maple Leafs before giving way to Matt Murray after Greer's goal at 6:23 of the third.

"I don't think there's really any excuse or explanation," Toronto captain Auston Matthews said. "We've got to win a game to keep our season alive."

Ekblad opened the scoring with

Scoreboard

Second Round

**Best-of-seven
x-if necessary
EASTERN CONFERENCE**
Carolina 3, Washington 1

Carolina 2, Washington 1, OT
Washington 3, Carolina 1
Carolina 4, Washington 0
Carolina 5, Washington 2

Thursday: at Washington
x-Saturday: at Carolina
x-Monday: at Washington

Florida 3, Toronto 2

Toronto 5, Florida 4
Toronto 4, Florida 3
Florida 5, Toronto 4, OT
Florida 2, Toronto 0

Wednesday: Florida 6, Toronto 1
Friday: at Florida, **AFN-Sports2, 1 a.m.**
Saturday CET, 9 a.m. Saturday JKT
x-Sunday: at Toronto

WESTERN CONFERENCE
Edmonton 4, Vegas 1

Edmonton 4, Vegas 2
Edmonton 5, Vegas 4, OT
Vegas 4, Edmonton 3
Edmonton 3, Vegas 0

Wednesday: Edmonton 1, Vegas 0, OT

Dallas 3, Winnipeg 1

Dallas 3, Winnipeg 2
Winnipeg 4, Dallas 0
Dallas 5, Winnipeg 2
Dallas 3, Winnipeg 1
Thursday: at Winnipeg
x-Saturday: at Dallas
x-Monday: at Winnipeg

5:22 left in the first period, firing a wrist shot past Woll.

Kulikov began the second-period spree at 6:08 with a slap shot from the right point that the Leafs' Scott Laughton inadvertently deflected past Woll.

Boqvist, back in the lineup in place of the injured Evan Rodrigues after being a healthy scratch for two games, scored with 9:55 remaining. Boqvist finished at the left post off San Reinhardt's cross-ice feed. Mikkola made it 4-0 with 5:59 left with a slapper from the left side.

Rodrigues was hurt on a hit from Oliver Ekman-Larsson in Game 4. With Rodrigues out, Boqvist slotted into a spot alongside Reinhart and Aleksander Barkov.

"It was a good opportunity for me," Boqvist said. "I enjoyed it, and it probably helped I was playing with two of the best players in the world."



FRANK GUNN, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

The Florida Panthers' Jesper Boqvist scores on Toronto Maple Leafs goaltender Joseph Woll during the second period on Wednesday.

NBA DRAFT/INDY 500

Rutgers duo asked about losing in lone season

By ANDREW SELIGMAN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Ace Bailey and Dylan Harper have some explaining to do.

Though the dynamic duo from Rutgers could be the next two players selected assuming the lottery-winning Dallas Mavericks grab Duke star Cooper Flagg with the No. 1 overall pick in the NBA draft, their lone college season didn't go the way they envisioned. Despite having two of the top prospects, the Scarlet Knights missed the NCAA Tournament. As Bailey and Harper prepare to take their games to the next level, two big questions hanging over them are: What happened? And why?

"We went through a lot of ups and downs, I feel like," Harper, the son of former NBA star Ron Harper and the brother of former Scarlet Knight Ron Harper Jr., said at the NBA Draft Combine on Wednesday.

"But ultimately, it was just like life ain't gonna be perfect, but every day, you've got to go out there and do your job. Obviously, we didn't have the Cinderella story that everyone thought we were gonna have, but I wouldn't change it for the world. I would do it all over again."

Rutgers came into last season with its sights set high after coach Steve Pikiell transformed a roster that produced a losing record. Bailey and Harper highlighted the



NAM Y. HUH/AP

Ace Bailey talks to media at the 2025 NBA Draft Combine in Chicago, Wednesday

greatest recruiting class in the program's history. Instead of a Cinderella story, a nightmare unfolded. The Scarlet Knights went 15-17 for the second straight season. They finished 11th in the Big Ten at 8-12 and missed the NCAA Tournament for the third year in a row.

Again, that's despite having two players who could be drafted in the top five. Bailey said it's come up "a couple times" in his meetings with teams.

"It's life. Life happens," Bailey said. "We didn't expect that. We wanted to go farther, but I guess life wanted us (to go) the other way. That happens for a reason." He said experiencing a season like that could help him adjust to the NBA.

"Adversity, it's gonna happen," Bailey said. "You can't think about

that game. You lost, you've got to go to the next game because it's 82 games in a season. It's way more than it was in college, so you're not gonna have much time to sit back and be like 'I lost.' You got to move on, keep playing."

Bailey and Harper can sell teams on their physical skills and ability to make shots.

The 6-foot-10 Bailey can make shots from all over whether they're open or contested, though he has some raw edges as a creator and defender. He averaged 17.6 points and 7.2 rebounds.

The 6-6 Harper has the play-making instincts, not to mention the NBA pedigree. His dad was a high-scoring guard for the Cleveland Cavaliers and Los Angeles Clippers before becoming a five-time champion as a role player with the Chicago Bulls and Los Angeles Lakers. Harper averaged 19.4 points, 4.6 rebounds and 4 assists for Rutgers.

The trip to Chicago for the Combine was his first since All-Star weekend in 2020. He said his parents recommended he try Harold's Chicken, a local chain, while he's in town. But he's more focused on getting a taste of the NBA.

Harper could wind up teaming with Victor Wembanyama if San Antonio drafts him at No. 2. "It'd be great to play with them," Harper said. "Victor's just a freak of nature. Everything he does is crazy."



NAM Y. HUH/AP

Dylan Harper goes through a drill at the NBA draft combine on Tuesday. Harper has play-making instincts and an NBA pedigree.

Castroneves chasing record 5th Indy 500 win at 50

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Helio Castroneves, at age 50, is still chasing history at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

A win in this year's Indianapolis 500 would give him five in his brilliant IndyCar career and break a tie with A.J. Foyt, Al Unser and Rick Mears for most wins in a race that will be run May 25 for the 109th time.

He's been unsuccessful in his last three tries to win a fifth but hopes this year, his 25th Indy 500, will be the one where he breaks history. Not even his age has discouraged the Brazilian.

"I feel I have a brand new engine," Castroneves said. "I feel that I'm like ready to go. They say life starts at 50, so I'm ready to start again."

Castroneves won his fourth Indy 500 driving for Meyer Shank Racing, where he's now part of team management and will drive for them again this year. If he wins, he doesn't plan to walk away from "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing."

"I'm going to come back and try for six," Castroneves said. "I want



MICHAEL CONROY/AP

Helio Castroneves celebrates his fourth Indy 500 win at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 2021, tying him with A.J. Foyt, Al Unser, and Rick Mears with the most Brickyard victories.

a statue."

For the record, MSR has not confirmed any races for Castroneves beyond this year's Indy 500. But, the team values his contributions on and off the track, particularly his 500 victory in 2021.

Castroneves had spent 20 years driving for Team Penske, where he won the Indy 500 in 2001, 2002

and 2009. After a move to Penske's sports car program, Castroneves landed a partial ride back in IndyCar with Meyer Shank Racing, and the 500 win grew into two full seasons.

The team fields two full-time cars now for Felix Rosenqvist and Marcus Armstrong, with Castroneves as a third entry at Indiana-

polis.

"Basically winning that fourth, putting the team on the map and they know that they can do it again, whether it's me or my two other teammates. They know they can do it," Castroneves said. "And that's probably why we keep on pushing. We feel that we're going to another level as a team."

Rosenqvist is currently eighth in the IndyCar standings, while Armstrong is 14th. Qualifying has been dramatically improved this year, and the team created a technical alliance with Chip Ganassi Racing that has provided tremendous benefit to MSR. The drivers all debrief together — although Ganassi driver Scott Dixon noted Wednesday that Castroneves, who has a super-sized personality, is atypically quiet in the meetings.

Ganassi drivers have five Indy 500 wins, although Dixon is the only active driver with a victory in the big race. But Alex Palou, his teammate, has opened this season with four wins in five races including last Saturday on the road course at Indy. Palou has won the last two IndyCar titles and three of the last four, and Ganassi has 16 total IndyCar championships.

That alliance has been a massive boost for MSR.

"We have a different partnership now, which really, really helps," Castroneves said. "I'm noticing the difference and I'm happy we were able to do that. They don't win races or championships because they're lucky."

NBA PLAYOFFS

Protection: Injuries hitting all teams to varying degrees

FROM PAGE 48

guard Jalen Brunson said after seeing Tatum's injury on Monday night. "So that's why I just gave my thoughts and prayers — because you never want to see something like that, ever."

Injuries are a constant, and the regular season saw some big-name players forced to shut down much earlier than they wanted. Philadelphia's Joel Embiid wasn't right for basically the entire season because of knee issues, Dallas' Kyrie Irving tore his ACL in March, San Antonio's Victor Wembanyama developed a blood clot that forced his season to end in February, New Orleans' Dejeune Murray tore his Achilles in January, Orlando's Moritz Wagner tore his ACL in December and two stars with long injury histories —

the Los Angeles Clippers' Kawhi Leonard and New Orleans' Zion Williamson — were both inactive for more than half the season.

Overcoming injuries is just part of NBA life, Bucks coach Doc Rivers said.

"The human spirit is amazing," Rivers said. "It really is."

And in the playoffs, the hits keep coming. Stars are hurting, most of the Cavaliers' starting lineup was banged-up in these playoffs, Denver's Michael Porter Jr. has played through a shoulder issue that typically needs weeks to deal with and Memphis' Ja Morant had a hip problem that kept him from being on the floor at the end of the Grizzlies' season. Even teams that are winning aren't doing so at anywhere near 100% — case in point, Brunson has been



FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

The Boston Celtics' Jayson Tatum struggles to get up after being injured during the second half of Game 4 in the Eastern Conference semifinals against the Knicks on Monday in New York.

dealing with an ankle issue and it somehow isn't slowing him down.

"Every year, playoffs are about adapting, whether it's a game plan, or an injury, or a lineup," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said shortly after Curry got hurt in Golden State's second-round series against Minnesota. "So we just have to adapt."

Before Game 5, the Warriors said Curry was "making good progress" in his recovery from the injury suffered in the opener of the second-round series. With a three-day break before the scheduled Game 6, Curry would've had extra time to heal, but his fourth consecutive absence was simply too much to overcome for a Golden State team that was already thin on consistent scoring.

James got hurt in a collision with the Timberwolves' Donte DiVincenzo late in what became the Lakers' final game of the season, a

loss in Game 5 of an opening-round matchup. James later revealed that he probably couldn't have continued even if the Lakers won that game because of a knee sprain that won't need surgery but will need weeks to heal.

"Even if we would have won Game 5 at home, I probably would have missed 6 and 7 and even further," James said on his "Mind the Game" podcast with Steve Nash. "I have some time, though. I have some time to get it right."

Tatum was having an absolutely monster game for the Celtics on Monday: 42 points, eight rebounds, four assists, four steals and two blocked shots — numbers that nobody in Boston history, at least since each of those stats started being charted, had ever finished a game with.

Those stats were largely forgotten by night's end, given the gravity of the injury and what it now

means for the Celtics — a team that is in the process of being sold for a record figure exceeding \$6 billion, is on track to face a potential record salary and luxury tax bill that could exceed \$500 million next season and now has a franchise cornerstone in Tatum facing a long road back to the court.

Tatum has logged nearly 25,000 minutes in his eight seasons with Boston, more than any other player in the NBA over that span when counting both regular-season and playoff games. He's been an All-Star in six consecutive seasons, won two Olympic gold medals and will likely be All-NBA for a fourth consecutive season when that team is revealed in the coming weeks.

And in the blink of an eye Monday, his story drastically changed.

"He's been a great player," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. "And he's a great guy, too."



ABBIE PARR/AP

Out with a hamstring injury, Golden State star Stephen Curry had to watch from the bench as his Warriors dropped four straight games to be eliminated from the playoffs by the Minnesota Timberwolves.

STARS AND STRIPES

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NBA PLAYOFFS

Wolves back in West Finals with new look

By DAVE CAMPBELL
Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The staff had a simple question for the players who helped the Minnesota Timberwolves make their deep run last year.

“Were you a Western Conference finals team, or were you a team that just happened to make the Western Conference finals?” coach Chris Finch said, recalling the preseason conversation. “And there’s only one way to prove that: Go out and do it again. And that was our mission all year.”

The Timberwolves filled in that blank by beating the Los Angeles Lakers and the Golden State Warriors in five games in each of their first two series in these NBA playoffs, finalizing their return to the penultimate round where they lost last season to the Dallas Mavericks.

The roster from that five-game defeat underwent a surprisingly significant change, layering the challenge of new-player adjustment on top of an already difficult task of matching or bettering such a strong postseason run.

Right before training camp began, Minnesota traded franchise cornerstone Karl-Anthony Towns to the New York Knicks for Julius Randle to take his place at power forward and in the sidekick role to Anthony Edwards. It got Donte DiVincenzo in the deal for defense and shooting off the bench, too.

Randle looked out of sorts at times during the first couple of months, and coinciding midseason injuries for him, DiVincenzo and Rudy Gobert further hampered progress on the court and in the standings. Losing 117-116 on



ABBIE PARR/AP

Minnesota Timberwolves guard Anthony Edwards celebrates a win against the Golden State Warriors in Game 5 of a second-round playoff series Wednesday in Minneapolis to advance to the Western Conference finals.

Feb. 28 to a Utah team that finished last in the league left the Timberwolves at 32-29, starting the play-in games straight in the face with the West stacked again with more competitive teams than there were spots in the playoffs.

But the three of them got healthy again, and Minnesota took off in March.

“Having the mental toughness and determination to say we’re going to figure this thing out, because all of us, as a whole, believed

how good we could be as a team,” said Randle, who had 29 points in the Game 5 win over Golden State on Wednesday night. “I’m extremely proud of everybody.”

The Wolves will play the Denver-Oklahoma City winner. They could get five days off if the Nuggets beat the Thunder on Thursday to force a Game 7 in the other West semifinal series. If OKC wins, it’ll host Game 1 on Sunday, still a three-day break for Minnesota.

White scores 34 to help Celtics stave off elimination vs. Knicks

By KYLE HIGHTOWER
Associated Press

BOSTON — Before the Boston Celtics took the floor without their biggest star on a night they had to win, Joe Mazzulla implored his players to just pour everything they had into winning one game.

They did, and the defending NBA champions earned another chance to extend their season.

Derrick White had 34 points, including seven 3-pointers, to lead the Celtics to a 127-102 Game 5 win over the New York Knicks on Wednesday night that kept them alive in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

“We did what was necessary to do what we needed to do to get it back to New York,” Mazzulla said. “You don’t get to pick the test that you have, you pick how you respond to them.”

Boston connected on 22 3-point-

ers to post its first home victory of the series and first without Jayson Tatum following his season-ending Achilles tendon injury.

“Losing JT is tough,” White said. “But we’ve got a lot of guys that are highly competitive, and we didn’t want the season to end tonight.”

The Knicks will try again to win the series Friday in New York. If the Celtics win, Game 7 would be in Boston on Monday.

Jaylen Brown added 26 points and 12 assists. Payton Pritchard had 17 points and five 3-pointers. Luke Kornet finished with 10 points, nine rebounds and seven blocks. He started the second half for Kristaps Porzingis, who played just 12 minutes. Mazzulla said Porzingis was having trouble breathing as he continues to deal with a lingering viral illness.

The Celtics are looking to be-

come just the 14th team in NBA history to come back from a 3-1 deficit in 294 attempts.

Josh Hart led the Knicks with 24 points despite briefly leaving the game late in the first quarter to close a bloody gash over his eye after he took an inadvertent elbow.

Jalen Brunson added 22 points before fouling out with 7:19 to play in the game.

Boston closed the third quarter on a 23-9 run and took a 91-76 lead to the fourth. Brunson spent the final 2:45 of the third on the bench after picking up his fifth foul.

“They came out with a sense of urgency that we need,” Brunson said.

The Celtics kept it going in the final period, pushing their lead as high as 28 points.

The game was highly physical throughout and included a brief

“It’ll be good to get a chance to take a breath and regroup and figure out where we’re going,” said Finch, whose team is 10-3 on the road over the 2024 and 2025 playoffs.

Finch is by far the most successful coach in the history of these star-crossed Timberwolves, who’ve had only three of their 14 coaches even make the playoffs. They’ve made it in each of his four full seasons and now reached back-to-back conference finals



CHARLES KRUPA/AP

Celtics guard Derrick White makes a drive against New York Knicks guard Cameron Payne during the first half of Game 5 of a second-round playoff series Wednesday in Boston. The Celtics won 127-102.

face-to-face skirmish between Hart and Brown.

That energy carried over offensively. Boston came out hot, getting five 3s from White and 12 total in the opening 24 minutes.

“We’ve got to play desperate. I don’t think we did that,” New York guard Mikal Bridges said.

Scoreboard

Second Round

Best-of-seven
x-if necessary
Eastern Conference
Indiana 4, Cleveland 1

Indiana 121, Cleveland 112
Indiana 120, Cleveland 119
Cleveland 126, Indiana 104
Indiana 129, Cleveland 109
Indiana 114, Cleveland 105

New York 3, Boston 2

New York 108, Boston 105, OT
New York 91, Boston 90
Boston 115, New York 93
New York 121, Boston 113
Wednesday: Boston 127, New York 102
Friday: at New York, AFN-Sports 2:10 a.m. Saturday CET, 10:10 a.m. Saturday JKT
x-Monday: at Boston

Western Conference
Oklahoma City 3, Denver 2

Denver 121, Oklahoma City 119
Oklahoma City 149, Denver 106
Denver 113, Oklahoma City 104, OT
Oklahoma City 92, Denver 87
Oklahoma City 112, Denver 105

Thursday: at Denver
x-Sunday: at Oklahoma City
Minnesota 4, Golden State 1
Golden State 99, Minnesota 88
Minnesota 117, Golden State 93
Minnesota 102, Golden State 97
Minnesota 117, Golden State 110
Wednesday: Minnesota 121, Golden State 110

for the first time in franchise history.

Who knows where this run will finish? But with No. 1 seed Cleveland out and No. 2 seed Boston on the brink of elimination in the East with star Jayson Tatum sidelined by injury, plus the No. 2 and No. 3 seeds long gone from the West bracket, Minnesota has given itself as good of a chance as anyone to win its first title.

“Every team goes through a lot. Everyone wants to rush the process. Everybody wants everything to be great, compared to what you’ve done in the past. All that’s kind of irrelevant really when you have a new team coming in to the season,” Finch said.

SPORTS

Patience and confidence

Edwards, new core lead Timberwolves to West Finals again » **NBA playoffs, Page 47**



NBA PLAYOFFS



JEFFREY PHELPS/AP

The Bucks' Damian Lillard is helped from the floor against the Indiana Pacers during the first half of Game 4 of a first-round playoff series April 27 in Milwaukee.

No star power protection

Injuries becoming story of postseason, as not even biggest names are safe

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
Associated Press

These are the NBA playoffs of survival, where not even the stars are safe.

The latest blow to this postseason: Jayson Tatum was wheeled off Monday night, his season with defending champion Boston over because of a right Achilles

tendon tear that surely will mean he misses at least some of next season as well.

Golden State and Cleveland might have had a better chance at avoiding elimination had star players Stephen Curry and Donovan Mitchell not been dealing with a hamstring and ankle injury, respectively. If the Los Angeles Lakers' season had gone any deeper, LeBron James would have

been sidelined with a knee sprain. And Milwaukee's Damian Lillard also tore his Achilles, putting next season in some doubt and raising questions about Giannis Antetokounmpo's future as well.

The star power is gone in some cases, aching in others, and there's no question that injuries are becoming the story of this postseason. For Lillard — and now Tatum,

too — the issues will linger into next season and possibly rob of them of the chance to play in 2025-26 entirely.

"Obviously we want to go out there and compete, but when a player of his caliber goes down and he's rolling in pain like that, you know something's wrong," New York

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