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STARS AND STRIPES®

stripes.com

Volume 82 Edition 44 ©SS 2023

FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 2023

平成12年4月5日 第三種郵便物認可 日刊(土日除く)
発行所 星条旗新聞社 〒106-0032 東京都港区六本木7丁目23番17号 定価 ¥100

\$1.00

Chaplains at BALTOPS show need for troops' trauma support

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

TALLINN, Estonia — In times of crisis or combat, a military chaplain can be a grounding force for sailors and Marines, reorienting them to who they are and helping them recognize that they have the training to go on with the mission.

"It's the sense of reconnecting with their identity, of reconnecting with what they know to be certain, know to be true in the situation," said U.S. Navy Capt. Brian Weigelt, the chaplain for U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet. "A traumatic event often will challenge what we think is true."

Weigelt and 18 other NATO chaplains participating in the annual U.S.-led maritime exercise BALTOPS, which ends Friday, have been testing that ability to help service members across the alliance. Officials say the effort is recognition that overall readiness requires spiritual strength.

The U.S. Navy increasingly is relying on chaplains as it seeks to

SEE CHAPLAINS ON PAGE 7



MARIO COTO/U.S. Navy

Belgian navy chaplain Emmanuel Reynaerts speaks to service members aboard USS Mount Whitney earlier this year.



MIKAYLA FRITZ/U.S. Army

A 173rd Infantry Brigade soldier discusses drop zone security with a Moroccan soldier in Ben Guerir, Morocco, on Saturday during Exercise African Lion 23. Approximately 8,000 personnel and 18 nations are participating in U.S. Africa Command's largest annual exercise.

Securing the Sahel

US trains with African nations amid fight against regional terrorism

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Army is wrapping up its capstone series of exercises this week in Africa, where troops have fanned out for drills involving numerous partner nations grappling with expanding insurgencies at home.

African Lion 23, which concludes Friday, has involved 17

countries and more than 8,000 troops, who have been training across northern and western Africa for more than a month.

The effort comes as terrorist-attack numbers soar in places like the Sahel, which has emerged as a global epicenter for terror.

"Our partners are very concerned about the security situation," said Col. Matthew Kopp, di-

rector of the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa's security cooperation directorate.

Kopp said during his conversations with African counterparts at the exercise, there has been a sense of urgency when it comes to dealing with a threat that has proliferated in recent years.

"They are investing a significant amount of time and treasure

into this (counterterrorism fight)," Kopp said of the U.S.'s western Africa partners.

African Lion, U.S. Africa Command's largest exercise on the continent, has operated out of training camps in northern and western Africa, with Morocco as a primary host. Participating coun-

SEE LION ON PAGE 6

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	Azores	..	..	\$4.699	..
Germany	\$3.997	\$4.487	\$4.810	\$4.176	Change in price	..	..	+4.4 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.612	\$4.882	\$4.485	Turkey	..	..	\$4.498	\$4.310*
U.K.	..	\$4.423	\$4.746	\$4.112	Change in price	..	..	+4.4 cents	+19.5 cents

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

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	South Korea	\$3.669	..	\$4.499	\$3.869
Japan	..	\$4.479	..	\$3.839	Change in price	+6.0 cents	..	+4.0 cents	No change
Okinawa	\$3.639	..	..	\$3.839	Guam	\$3.649**	\$4.159	\$4.489	..
Change in price	+5.0 cents	..	..	-1.0 cents	Change in price	+5.0 cents	+5.0 cents	+5.0 cents	..

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

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (June 16)	\$1.06	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
British pound (June 16)	\$1.24	Britain (Pound)	1.2720
Japanese yen (June 16)	136.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.3270
South Korean won (June 16)	1248.00	China (Yuan)	7.1357
		Denmark (Krone)	6.8367
		Egypt (Pound)	30.9014
		Euro	0.9175
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8240
		Hungary (Forint)	343.35
		Israel (Shekel)	3.5577
		Japan (Yen)	140.45
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3070
		Norway (Krone)	10.5211
		Philippines (Peso)	55.85
		Poland (Zloty)	4.10
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7503
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3377
		South Korea (Won)	1274.70

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

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	8.25
Interest Rates Discount rate	5.75
Federal funds market rate	5.08
3-month bill	5.25
30-year bond	3.90

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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MILITARY

Unit set for Kosovo trains in protest drill

By MICHAEL SLAVIN

Stars and Stripes

HOHENFELS, Germany — Texas National Guard soldiers who are spending two weeks at an Army training facility in this Bavarian town have seen their upcoming Kosovo mission magnified by a string of violent flare-ups and renewed political hostility.

The 450 troops from the 143rd Infantry Battalion arrived last week at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center to begin preparing to replace counterparts from the Indiana National Guard on a rotation in the increasingly restive Balkan country.

On Wednesday, a combination of American, Italian and Macedonian forces took part in Operation Bronze Shield, an annual event simulating a peaceful protest that devolves into a riot. The goal is to break up the melee and de-escalate without using deadly force.

“We’re not exactly replicating the environment as a knee-jerk reaction to things we see in the news,” said Maj. Nick Kane, a battalion-level trainer at the facility. “We try and predict and forecast the most likely environment they will encounter.”

The training comes on the heels of an attack two weeks ago in which three Kosovo Force soldiers were shot and injured by a Serb-led mob armed with guns, grenades, pipes and other weap-

ons.

Several civilians also were injured in the violence, which stemmed from Serb anger over the election of ethnically Albanian mayors in several municipalities.

Wednesday, Kosovo officials claimed that Serbs had kidnapped three police officers, and Serbian media outlets countered that the officers had been arrested while operating on Serbian land.

But despite the instability in Kosovo, Hohenfels trainers can look out for predictable events, such as elections, to prepare incoming troops, Kane said.

“We send personnel to Kosovo between rotations,” he said. “They are able to get the latest trends and get a better sense for the environment.”

During the training, joint forces closed in and broke up a simulated riot outside a municipal building. The rioters, played by the in-house 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment opposing force, used rocks, Molotov cocktails and flash-bang grenades to disrupt the troops.

Medical evacuations of injured personnel were another aspect of the incoming group’s training that recent events have brought to the fore.

“It was a whole new experience; it showed me new ways to operate,” said Staff Sgt. Devin Rodriguez, a squad leader from the



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SLAVIN/Stars and Stripes

A riot is simulated during the Operation Bronze Shield training exercise Thursday, at the Joint Multinational Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany.

143rd Infantry Battalion.

However, the training won’t stop once they leave Hohenfels next week. More is in store for the Texas-based unit after the soldiers arrive in Kosovo.

The unit will be heading to the Eastern Region of the Country. Primarily focused on providing a safe and secure environment for the people of Kosovo.

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Civilian actors simulate an escalating protest during the Operation Bronze Shield training exercise.

US F-22s fly to Mideast in response to Russian air actions

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military has deployed F-22 Raptor fighter jets to the Middle East, following months of complaints that Russian aircraft have been buzzing U.S. bases in Syria and violating protocols developed to prevent fighting between American and Russian forces.

The deployment of Raptors flown by the 94th Fighter Squadron out of Langley Air Force Base, Va., comes in response to “increasingly unsafe and unprofessional behavior by Russian aircraft in the region,” a statement Wednesday by U.S. Central Command said.

“Their regular violation of agreed upon airspace deconfliction measures increases the risk of escalation or miscalculation,” Gen. Michael “Erik” Kurilla, the commander of CENTCOM, said in the statement.

Since late February, fighter jets and surveillance drones from Russia have been flying regularly above U.S. positions in Syria and sometimes have attempted to goad American pilots into dogfights, U.S. generals have said.

“They’re not operating like a professional air force anymore,” Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, head of U.S. Air Forces Central, told Stars and Stripes in an interview last week.

Some of the Russian planes were carrying air-to-ground weapons as they flew over U.S. bases and all were equipped with sensors that most likely are used to gather information on U.S. positions, Grynkeiwich said.

Some 900 U.S. troops are deployed to Syria in a mission focused on opposing the Islamic State group.

Russian forces are also in Syria, where they back the government of President Bashar Assad.

While Russian and U.S. forces in Syria have both declared the need to defeat ISIS, their backing of opposing Syrian groups has led to deconfliction protocols meant to avoid a direct conflict that could

lead to a larger war.

“Our No. 1 objective is of course to protect our troops, but close behind it is to avoid escalation,” Grynkeiwich said last week.

A statement in May by U.S. Air Forces Central said the deconfliction protocols include agreements on areas where the U.S. and Russia have agreed to notify each other prior to transiting.

They also include details on standoff distances from aircraft and ground forces, and an agreement not to conduct armed overflights of ground forces.

In May, the U.S. accused Russia of 85 protocol violations since March 1. Of those, 26 were armed overflights.

Russian military leaders, meanwhile, accuse U.S. pilots of violating agreements that separate Syria’s airspace, the Saudi Arabia-based Al Arabiya English reported June 1.

Grynkeiwich said last week that Russian leaders have not been receptive to U.S. complaints recently.

“They’re not reciprocating as they used to, so deconfliction doesn’t work,” Grynkeiwich said. “Then your next best bet is to make sure that you’re in a position to defend yourself.”

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S. Korea says North launched ballistic missile toward sea

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea test-fired a ballistic missile off its east coast on Thursday, hours after South Korean and U.S. troops ended a fifth round of large-scale live-fire drills near the Koreas’ heavily fortified border.

The North Korean launch is its first since it failed in an attempt to

put its first spy satellite into orbit in late May.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said the launch occurred Thursday evening but gave no further details.

Japan’s Defense Ministry also said it detected a possible ballistic missile fired by North Korea.

The launch came after North

Korea’s military vowed an unspecified response to South Korean-U.S. drills at a front-line South Korean firing range earlier Thursday. The exercises were the fifth and last round of South Korean-U.S. firing drills that began last month. This year’s drills were the biggest of their kind since they began in 1977.

“Our response to (the South Korean-U.S. drills) is inevitable,” an unidentified spokesperson of the North Korean Defense Ministry said in a statement carried by state media. “Our armed forces will fully counter any form of demonstrative moves and provocation of the enemies.”

Thursday’s drills were observ-

ed by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and other senior South Korean and U.S. military officials.

Tensions have risen in past months as the pace of both North Korean weapons tests and U.S.-South Korea military exercises has increased in tit-for-tat responses.

PACIFIC

Air Force investigates bomb threat at Yokota

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force is investigating a bomb threat that emptied wing headquarters and the base exchange Thursday morning at Yokota Air Base, the airlift hub in western Tokyo.

The 374th Airlift Wing sent a “bomb threat, all clear” email notice to the base community shortly before 1 p.m., about two hours after ordering evacuations for several buildings on the base, which also serves as headquarters for 5th Air Force and U.S. Forces Japan.

“Security Forces completed sweeps of the affected areas and declared them safe to resume normal operations,” the wing said in a statement Thursday afternoon.

The incident is under investigation, base spokesman 1st Lt. Danny Rangel told Stars and Stripes via text message.

The 374th Security Forces Squadron initially ordered evacuations at wing headquarters, the Enlisted Club, a residential tower and several other buildings. Several dozen people, including service members and American and

Japanese civilian employees, gathered a short distance from the evacuated buildings.

“I was just driving and a friend was walking outside saying everyone in the area I was going to be evacuated due to some sort of threat at the e-club,” Air Force spouse Rylan Matosky told Stars and Stripes via Facebook Messenger on Thursday.

Security forces later ordered an evacuation of the Yokota Community Center, where the Army and Air Force Exchange Service and base commissary are housed,

along with other retailers and a food court. Evacuees there were directed to a rally point near the base flight line.

Yokota’s main gate and a gate used for deliveries and by outside contractors, both along busy Route 16, were closed, along with base streets near the affected sites.

“We have a real world incident and we are asking our base community to follow instructions from security personnel,” Rangel told Stars and Stripes via text message just after 11 a.m.

In their afternoon statement, Yokota officials said all affected gates and roads had reopened for regular traffic.

“No injuries were reported as a result of this incident,” the statement said. “Yokota Air Base members are advised to continue to follow the directions of security personnel and remain vigilant for suspicious activity and to report incidents to [security forces].”

Stars and Stripes reporter KElly Agee contributed to this report.
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SHANNON RENFROE/U.S. Navy

An MQ-9 SeaGuardian unmanned maritime surveillance system flies over the littoral combat ship USS Coronado in the Pacific Ocean in 2021.

US, Japan say there are no plans to share drone data with Taiwan

By **JONATHAN SNYDER**
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department has denied a recent report that it’s planning to help Japan and Taiwan exchange real-time data from reconnaissance drones.

The Financial Times reported June 9 that the United States would tie four MQ-9 drones Taiwan plans to purchase into the same system the Pentagon shares with the Japan Self-Defense Forces. The report cited four unidentified people familiar with the project.

But representatives for the U.S. Department of Defense, the Japanese Ministry of Defense and Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense have denied the claim.

“The DOD is not currently planning to facilitate MQ-9 data sharing between Taiwan and Japan,” DOD spokesman Lt. Col. Martin

Meiners told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday.

Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada made a similar denial when asked at a June 9 news conference in Tokyo about sharing drone data.

“There is no fact that we are considering the plan you pointed out,” he said.

Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense tweeted June 8 that it has no knowledge of the plan.

Taiwan agreed to purchase four MQ-9B SeaGuardian surveillance drones from the U.S. for \$555 million, with the first to be delivered in 2025, Taiwanese media reported in August.

The SeaGuardian is the naval version of General Atomics’ MQ-9A Reaper with a specialized focus on maritime surveillance and increased endurance, while sacrificing maximum speed, alti-

tude and payload capacity.

Any sort of intelligence sharing with Taiwan is a good thing, especially after the U.S. and its allies subjected the Taiwanese military to more than 40 years of near-isolation, according to Grant Newsham, a senior researcher with the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies in Tokyo.

Data-sharing would be a step toward a “common operating picture” important for military operations, he told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday.

“The Japanese have had next to nothing to do with Taiwan on the military front,” Newsham said. “So, for this ‘linkage’ to happen would be unprecedented.”

Stars and Stripes reporter Hana Kusumoto contributed to this report.
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Hawaii fuel leak lawyers look to question admiral

By **JOSEPH DITZLER**
Stars and Stripes

Lawyers for families affected by a Navy fuel spill in Hawaii want to question the admiral in charge of U.S. Pacific Fleet, according to recent federal court filings.

The number of people suing the U.S. government over the November 2021 spill at Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility doubled with this week’s filing, which alleged new details. It’s the fourth updated complaint since the original was filed in September.

Their attorneys also moved to stop the government from shielding Adm. Samuel Paparo, who was nominated Tuesday to become the next chief of naval operations, from being deposed in the case.

The federal lawsuit springs from a leak of aviation fuel into three wells providing water to homes of mostly military families on and near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. About 93,000 people were drawing from contaminated water for bathing, drinking and meal preparation; many of them complained of illness and were evacuated to temporary housing.

Paparo took responsibility publicly as the scope of the spill began to unfold, according to the plaintiff’s motion filed May 30 in federal court in Honolulu. A hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, according to the online court docket.

“All organizations within this response report directly to me and I am accountable for this fix,” the plaintiffs’ filing quotes Paparo as saying Dec. 21, 2021.

The admiral played a “hands-on role” during the jet fuel affair and should be deposed, the plaintiffs’ motion states.

“There is no reason under law or logic to prevent Plaintiffs’ from finding out the essential facts that only Admiral Paparo knows. The Government’s motion must be denied,” the motion states.

The government’s May 22 motion to quash Paparo’s deposition



SHANNON HANEY/U.S. Navy

A tunnel inside of the Red Hill Underground Fuel Storage Facility in Hawaii is shown in October 2019.

cites case law to argue that deposing “a high-ranking official like Admiral Paparo is permissible under only the most extraordinary circumstances.”

The plaintiffs’ amended complaint filed Tuesday adds another 187 names to their suit, doubling the number to more than 350, according to a news release from Erin Powers, a spokesman for Just Well Law of Austin, Texas.

Their lawyers also allege the Navy only recently revealed a PFAS spill in 2019 at Red Hill, adding to another in November when 1,100 gallons of firefighting foam containing PFAS also spilled at the site.

Addressing the 2019 incident, the amended complaint states: “Although the spill of these dangerous ‘forever chemicals’ contaminated the soil, the government did not inform regulators nor warn residents. Even today, it denies any obligation to do so.”

PFAS, a so-called “forever chemical” that persists in the environment, may cause a higher risk of some cancers and lead to higher cholesterol levels and lower vaccine response in children, among other problems, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Trial in the case is scheduled for March.

MILITARY

House lawmakers push bill to address PTSD

BY MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Rep. Dan Crenshaw said Wednesday that effective treatments for active-duty service members suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder have stalled and a new approach is needed to help them.

“The truth is, we have not made much progress in treating it,” the Republican congressman from Texas said. “We need to think outside of the box. We need to do something new.”

He thinks psychedelic drugs might unlock some answers and he’s pushing legislation with 12 other lawmakers, including Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., and Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., that would direct the Pentagon to create a grant program for research into new drug treatments for troops struggling with PTSD.

The bill, which is called the Douglas “Mike” Day Psychedelic Therapies to Save Lives Act of 2023, would create a \$75 million grant program to support research into therapeutic treatment for PTSD, as well as chronic traumatic encephalopathy or traumatic brain injury.

Crenshaw, a former Navy SEAL, introduced the bill in the House on May 25. This is the second year in a row that he has urged Congress to support research into the effects of the drugs such as MDMA, psilocybin, ibogaine and 5-MeO-DMT.

It passed in the House last year but failed in the Senate.



JOE GROMELSKI/Special to Stars and Stripes

Rep. Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas, speaks at a Capitol Hill press conference in Washington on Wednesday.

PTSD affects roughly 16% of troops who served in the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

When an active-duty service member wants to pursue psychedelic treatment now, they must travel abroad, which puts their duty status at risk, Crenshaw said.

“All this does is direct the Department of Defense to begin the research and allow service members to keep their status if they participate in those trials. It is a simple but very positive step in the right direction,” he said.

The bill is named after Navy SEAL Dou-

glas “Mike” Day who died by suicide on March 27, 2023. Day received the Silver Star, the military’s third-highest award, for his actions in Iraq, where he was shot 27 times during a mission in April 2007.

Day served 21 years in the Navy before retiring in 2010. He also received the Navy Cross, two Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart. He spent the next seven years working as a care coalition provider for the U.S. Special Operations Command to give insight into recovery for veterans and connect them with other resources that they might need.

Rep. Morgan Luttrell, R-Texas, who is also a former Navy SEAL, said he knew Day because he was Day’s care provider when he left the service.

“Everyone focused on the physical wounds, how could you walk around with 27 rounds? And I think we missed the mark because no one really focused on the invisible injuries,” said Luttrell, who is a co-sponsor of the legislation.

Luttrell said that when he left the Navy he had a hard time adjusting to civilian life. He did not suffer from PTSD but was aggressive. He researched the use of psychedelics for years before finally going overseas to try ibogaine and 5-MeO-DMT. Luttrell was hesitant to try because he had never taken drugs, but it changed his life.

“I was reborn. It saved my marriage,” he said. “It is one of the greatest things to ever happen to me.”

Research into the use of MDMA to treat PTSD found 88% of trial participants had

significant symptom reduction and 67% were essentially cured, according to the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, or MAPS, a nonprofit research and educational organization on the uses of psychedelics and marijuana.

This was the case for Jonathan Lubecky, a Marine and Army veteran. Lubecky, who attended the news conference, said he medically retired after being diagnosed with PTSD and traumatic brain injury. Within two months after returning home from Iraq in 2006, he made the first of five suicide attempts.

He said the VA tried everything, but nothing worked. Lubecky said he discovered psychedelics for mental health because an intern at the VA slipped him a note that said, “Google MDMA PTSD.”

He managed to get into a clinical trial that MAPS conducted using MDMA treatment.

“That was eight and a half years ago. I haven’t had PTSD or suicidal ideology since,” Lubecky said.

Crenshaw said he wants the legislation to be part of the fiscal 2024 National Defense Authorization Act, the annual Pentagon policy and spending priorities bill. He said based on some conversations with members on the House Appropriations Committee and other lawmakers such as Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Okla., Crenshaw believes they will be successful this time.

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Army reaches retention goal for 2023 amid recruiting woes

BY DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army already has met its goal for 2023 of keeping more than 50,000 troops in its ranks as the military struggles with attracting enough recruits, the service’s top enlisted soldier said.

“Once soldiers join the military, they want to stay,” Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston said Wednesday at a ceremony commemorating the service’s 248th birthday.

Grinston first acknowledged the Army has surpassed this year’s target at a birthday celebration held at Fort Belvoir, Va., on Saturday.

The Army’s retention goal for fiscal 2023, which ends Sept. 30, is 55,100 soldiers, according to congressional testimony in March by Army Undersecretary Gabe Camarillo. Last year, the Army also surpassed its retention goal by keeping more than 58,000 soldiers in the service.

The Army’s success in retaining soldiers supports a message that military recruiters have been trying to spread for years that more people would serve if they only knew how much they would like military life.

“When soldiers decide to join the Army, they actually decide to stay,” Grinston said. “They know

they can be all they can be.”

Gen. James McConville, chief of staff of the Army, reenlisted a group of 30 soldiers during Wednesday’s ceremony.

“We have to put our people first,” Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said. “We can’t take for granted the willingness of young Americans to volunteer to serve, nor can we stop looking for ways to figure out how to improve our recruiting efforts.”

Though the Army has been meeting its retention goals, hitting recruiting targets has been a problem. The Army hopes to enlist 65,000 new soldiers before fiscal 2023 ends, but Wormuth has acknowledged that will be a tough goal to meet.

Recruiting women into the Army is even more difficult. Recruitment is down 29% overall since the start of the coronavirus pandemic and among younger women it’s down 31%, the service told the Defense Advisory Committee for Women in the Services. Fear of sexual assault or harassment is a top concern among young women, while others do not see military service as aligned with their aspirations, according to Army Recruiting Command.

One of the biggest problems is the candidate pool of young recruits is smaller than it used to

be, officials have said. Recent Pentagon data have shown just 23% of Americans between the ages of 17 and 24 meet the academic and physical requirements to serve. To help recrui-

ters, the services are offering many enlistment incentives and attacking the root cause with development programs to help recruits pass basic training fitness and academic tests.

Army officials have said the preparatory courses for recruits have been tremendously successful.

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MILITARY

USAF Task Force 99 activity soon to balloon

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

High-altitude surveillance balloons and new models of U.S. drones soon will be seen in the skies above the Middle East, the Air Force's top general in the region said.

The Air Force's Task Force 99 is set to begin testing this fall on the balloons as part of the unit's rapidly expanding operations in the region, said Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, head of 9th Air Force (Air Forces Central).

The task force is about to hit "an inflection point" where the number of drones and other systems it has will begin to accelerate greatly, Grynkeiwich said in an interview last week.

The unit, based at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, has more than a dozen drones and plans to expand its roster soon, with the hope of developing an aerial network of sensors.

Grynkeiwich said in February that U.S. Central Command would consider high-altitude balloons as a way of closing gaps in its air defenses. Chinese high-altitude balloons have been seen over the Middle East, Grynkeiwich told reporters shortly after the U.S. shot down a high-altitude Chinese surveillance balloon that flew over the United States.

Task Force 99 will test how the region's weather patterns at high altitudes affect the balloons, said Col. Robert Smoker, the unit's commander, in an interview Tuesday.

The task force also will test ultra-long endurance fliers and stratospheric aircraft this fall. Most of the drones the group has now are small, with a range between 30 and 300 miles, Grynkeiwich said.

Some of the new drones will have offensive purposes, Grynkeiwich said.



MICAH COATE/U.S. Air Force

Members of the Air Force's Task Force 99 demonstrate technologies in development at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, in November.

The Air Force started Task Force 99 last fall with the goal of field-testing unmanned systems and artificial intelligence technologies in the

Middle East. Air Force officials have said many of their more traditional surveillance aircraft and drones have gone to other regions.

Grynkeiwich said the group aimed to be the aerial version of the Navy's Task Force 59, which has tested commercially available, relatively inexpensive unmanned surface vessels on missions in Middle East waters since its founding in 2021.

Five partner countries provide the unit's staff with technical experts and more may be coming on board in the next three months, he added.

The task force also in the last month tested a new software system that allowed them to create a 3D virtual reality environment based on mapping data collected by an aerial drone, Smoker said.

This 3D rendering could be used soon by ground troops for training, he said.

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Soldier pleads guilty to trying to contact ISIS to ambush troops

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A U.S. Army soldier duped into thinking he was communicating online with a terrorist when it was really an FBI employee pleaded guilty Wednesday to seeking to tell terrorists how to ambush U.S. soldiers in the Middle East.

Cole Bridges, 22, entered pleas in Manhattan federal court to trying to provide material support to terrorists and trying to murder U.S. military service members. He could face up to 20 years in prison on each of the two charges at a Nov. 2 sentencing.

Bridges, of Stow, Ohio, has been incarcerated since his January 2021 arrest, which occurred while he was

based in Fort Stewart, Ga., with the 3rd Infantry Division, where the private was a cavalry scout. He joined the Army in September 2019.

According to court documents, Bridges was 19 when he began researching and consuming online propaganda promoting jihadis in 2019.

Authorities said he expressed support on social media for the Islamic State militant group and for jihad before he began communicating in October 2020 with an FBI employee posing as an ISIS supporter who was in contact with the group's fighters in the Middle East.

At his plea hearing, Bridges acknowledged that he tried to provide material support to ISIS members.



U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE/TNS

Cole Bridges pleaded guilty to seeking to tell terrorists how to ambush fellow U.S. soldiers.

"The support I provided included tactical advice, hand-drawn diagrams of potential troop maneuvers, pages from the Army Field Manual regarding troop movements and combat tactics, and a propaganda video," he told Judge Lewis J. Liman.

In court papers, investigators said Bridges, also known as Cole Gonzales, expressed frustration with the U.S. military during his online chats.

Lion: Analyst says US should focus on institution building

FROM PAGE 1

tries from western Africa such as Chad, Niger and Nigeria have been at the forefront of the fight against various militant groups, ranging from Islamic State and al-Qaida affiliates to the Nigerian homegrown group Boko Haram.

The Army said the tactics worked on during African Lion are designed to help militaries deal with any number of potential threats, from countering insurgencies to dealing with environmental disasters.

During the exercise, the U.S. brought significant firepower with it. The Vicenza, Italy-based 173rd Airborne Brigade, reconnaissance Marines, and major weapons like High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, Abrams tanks, F-16 fighters and B-52 bombers all factored into events.

The Sahel, which includes countries across Africa's vast Sahara region, accounted for 43% of global terrorism deaths in 2022, according to the Global Terrorism Index. That situation raises thorny questions for the U.S., including whether large-scale training initiatives like African Lion — and smaller ongoing training efforts happening year-round — are making a difference.

Analysts are debating the U.S. approach. Despite two decades of counterterrorism efforts, terrorist groups have expanded in Africa, attacks have increased and some of the militaries the U.S. has partnered with have been involved in coups.

"This recent spike of extremist violence in the region is in line with longer-term trends, as terro-

rism rates increased more than 2,000 percent in the Sahel over the past 15 years," regional expert Alexander Noyes wrote in a recent analysis for the Hoover Institution think tank.

Some critics say the U.S. hasn't found the right balance between lending military support and finding ways to improve the quality of fragile governments that are vulnerable to the kind of insurgencies that have taken root in the Sahel.

Noyes said the United States should shift its security policy away from the delivery of tactical weapons and toward a "governance-first" policy focused more on institution building and strengthening civilian control of the region's militaries.

"Despite some recent first steps in the right direction, the U.S. model of military assistance in the Sahel often continues to default to tactical-level training and equipping of unprofessional and often predatory security forces, which frequently makes things worse," Noyes said.

Kopp, however, says institution building, human rights priorities and a focus on matters such as civilian control of armed forces already are embedded into the training the Army carries out in Africa.

"As we are training with our partners, we bring our values to the table. So, it's not just our professional military, it is our values," Kopp said. "We integrate rule of law and human rights into everything we do."

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Fort Sill commander fired, remains under investigation for undisclosed allegations

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A two-star general was fired as commander of Fort Sill, Okla., due to a "loss of trust and confidence in his ability to command," the Army said Wednesday.

Maj. Gen. Kenneth Kamper had led the Oklahoma post, which includes the Fires Center of Excellence, since March 2020, according to the Army. He was suspended in February by Gen. Gary Brito, who leads the Army Training and Doctrine Command, while the Army inspector general conducted an investigation.



Kamper

But Brito fired Kamper this month as Fort Sill's commander despite the ongoing investigation, the Army said. Cynthia Smith, an Army spokeswoman, declined to disclose any details about what led to the investigation into Kamper or why he is still being investigated. In February, she said the allegations were not related to sexual misconduct.

Kamper remains in the Fort Sill area, pending a reassignment,

Smith said. Prior to commanding Fort Sill, Kamper served as the chief of staff and later deputy commander of III Corps at Fort Hood, now Fort Cavazos, Texas, beginning in May 2017.

Brig. Gen. Shane Morgan, deputy commander of the Fires Center of Excellence, will serve as interim commander until another general officer is selected for the position.

None of the adverse actions will have an impact on operations at the post, Smith said.

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MILITARY

Ex-Navy captain shares no regrets in memoir

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

Three years after the Navy fired him for sounding the alarm on a COVID-19 outbreak aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, Brett Crozier in a new book sheds light on his final weeks in command.

Now a retired captain, Crozier was under a spotlight in March and April 2020, when the carrier, with COVID-19 racing through its decks, was ordered to Guam and its crew confined to the ship.

In "Surf When You Can: Lessons On Life, Loyalty and Leadership from a Maverick Navy Captain," Crozier recounts nearly the entirety of his career, from his first days as a combat helicopter pilot to his last moments aboard the Theodore Roosevelt.

In a letter he emailed to his superiors March 30, 2020, Crozier begged them to permit his crew off the Theodore Roosevelt and into better accommodations and

treatment. When the email was leaked to the San Francisco Chronicle, Crozier soon lost his job.

"The spread of the disease is ongoing and accelerating," he wrote in the letter. "We are not at war. Sailors do not need to die."

About 1,200 sailors eventually tested positive for COVID-19 and one died after the crew was disembarked into hospitals and hotel rooms on Guam.

Crozier's 239-page memoir, published Tuesday by Atria Books, makes clear that he regrets nothing.

"If I had to do it all over again, knowing only what we did at the time I sent it, I'd like to believe I'd do it," he wrote. "It was a privilege to be the commanding officer of one of the greatest vessels in the history of modern warfare. But if I wasn't willing to take a stand for my Sailors even if it meant potentially sacrificing my career, then I wasn't qualified to lead them from

the beginning."

Crozier repeatedly refers to a lesson he learned as a lieutenant at Naval Air Station Barbers Point, Hawaii, where a line division chief, Ruben Garcia, laid out the three rules an officer should know.

"Number one, take care of your sailors. Number two, take care of your sailors. And number three, take care of your sailors," Garcia told him.

That advice constantly informed Crozier's decisions, including his choice to send the email, according to his book.

Four days after Crozier hit "send," Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly relieved him of command, citing a loss of trust and confidence in Crozier's abilities and "exceptionally poor judgment" regarding the email.

Modly, too, was relieved of duty after audio of him disparaging Crozier in an address to the Theodore Roosevelt's crew was leaked



KAYLIANNA GENIER/U.S. Navy

Capt. Brett Crozier speaks to reporters Jan. 17, 2020, outside the USS Theodore Roosevelt at Naval Air Station North Island, San Diego.

to the media.

Although the Navy disagreed with his methods and "fired me for doing what I thought was right," Crozier wrote that at the time he clearly had to act.

Following his removal, the Navy started two investigations into the outbreak aboard the Theodore Roosevelt and ultimately decided that Crozier's actions did not meet

the expectations of command.

In addition to firing Crozier, the Navy withheld promotion for Crozier's immediate superior at the time, Rear Adm. Stuart Baker, commander of the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group. Both men have since retired.

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Chaplains: Training helps build trust across multinational navy ships

FROM PAGE 1

address the mental and emotional toll that the work environment takes on its personnel. In 2021, the service announced it would assign a chaplain to every destroyer in the fleet. It has since started deploying more chaplains on ships as part of suicide prevention efforts.

"Steady-state operations at sea are taxing," Weigelt said. "It's a grueling life even in the best of times."

Over the past two weeks,

priests, pastors and other religious leaders have met with crew members of other ships and nations to become familiar with their needs. The visits create an opportunity to build the trust required to care for service members in crisis or combat, Weigelt said.

They also offer the training needed so chaplains can ensure sailors and Marines receive the support they need across religious and service affiliations, and language and cultural barriers, the Navy said in a statement Tuesday.

For example, chaplains may be

called on to help in a crisis, such as a suicide or man overboard situation. Last year, the training included flying a Belgian chaplain to a British ship in order to tend to sailors during a simulated mass casualty, he said.

Chaplains also planned to gather participants from across the ranks for focus groups designed to start conversations about the trauma associated with the simulated scenarios in the exercise.

Participants will be challenged to think and talk about how they may respond, Weigelt said.

"Realistic training is essential for preparation for what we could possibly be called upon to do," he said. "So injecting as much realism into the scenario as possible is essential."

Chaplains also are building connections with commanding officers, who often rely on their emotional and mental support, said Cmdr. Hans Sundsbo, the chief chaplain for the Norwegian navy.

That care includes advising on "religious and spiritual aspects, in ethical issues and in care for the personnel," Sundsbo said Tues-

day.

He has worked with American, German, Finnish, Belgian and Italian chaplains and jointly conducted services on the USS Mount Whitney and a German ship.

"The ability to be a support in times of crises often lies in the integration at steady state," Sundsbo said. "BALTOPS gives us the ability to practice together and learn from each other's competence."

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Red tape delays reimbursements for pet PCS moves until January



TAYLOR SLATER/U.S. Air Force

Fritzi, a corgi, sits in a dog crate at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, on May 29, 2020.

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

Families moving to their next duty stations this year are unlikely to be reimbursed for the cost of moving their pets, according to a Marine Corps news release.

Money to pay that expense is wending its way through Washington's bureaucratic pipeline.

Buried in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2023 is a provision to permit the military to reimburse service members' pet relocation costs up to \$550 within the U.S. and a maximum of \$4,000 outside the continental United States.

The Marine Corps released a statement June 9 "to manage ex-

pectations" prior to the start of this year's peak moving season. The program won't take effect until January, according to the statement.

"I think it's great that the Marine Corps released something on an official platform," Liz Hensel, founder of Leave No Paws Behind USA, told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday. "Because it just shows that we are moving forward in the right direction."

The group assists families with resources and pet transportation costs to and from overseas.

"I've been advocating for this change for the last four years," Hensel said. "Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) said, 'Yes, let's do some-

thing about this,' and then we were able to make this legislative change."

The Marine Corps release laid out the process for getting the pet entitlement to the Department of Defense Joint Travel Regulations.

"It must first be approved by the Services' Military Advisory Panel members, Service Principals, and then finally by the Chairman of the Per Diem, Travel, and Transportation Allowance Committee," the release said.

The reimbursement is at the final approval level, a Department of Defense spokeswoman said Wednesday. She could not say when the approval process would be completed.

"The item is pending Per Diem Travel and Transportation Allowance Committee Chair approval," Jade Fulce told Stars and Stripes by email.

The Joint Travel Regulations were last updated June 1 but included no information about pet reimbursement.

"We're still waiting on the Joint Travel Regulations to kind of tie up the verbiage and then release it in that publication because none of the rest of the services can do anything with the reimbursement until it's in the Joint Travel Regulations," Hensel said.

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WAR IN UKRAINE

Austin: Counteroffensive is no 'easy sprint'

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Ukraine's much-anticipated counteroffensive is shaping up to be a long, bloody fight rather than a sign that victory is on the horizon, the United States' top military officials said Thursday.

"Ukraine's fight is not some easy sprint to the finish line," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said after high-level talks at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

Austin and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley led a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact group, which involves dozens of allies and partners that are part of the effort to arm and equip Ukraine's military.

The meeting coincides with a gathering of NATO defense ministers, who also are in Brussels to finalize new defense plans for the trans-Atlantic defense pact ahead of a July summit of heads of state in Lithuania.

Following discussions, Austin said numerous European allies as well as Canada had pledged more support for Ukraine during the Thursday talks.

The gathering comes during the early stages of Ukraine's counteroffensive against Russia. So far, U.S. and NATO officials have said there are signs of initial gains by Ukraine's military.

But Austin and Milley downplayed any notion that Ukraine was poised for a rapid push



Defense Department

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, left, and Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, address reporters after a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group in Brussels on Thursday.

through Russian defensive lines.

"Ukraine has begun their attack, and they are making steady progress," Milley said. "This is a very difficult fight. It's a very violent fight. And it will likely take a considerable amount of time and (come) at a high cost."

Pictures of U.S. and German armored vehicles destroyed in the fighting since the counteroffensive began have garnered significant attention on social media outlets. Austin described such losses

as inevitable given the scale of fighting but also not all that consequential.

"I think the Russians have shown us that same five vehicles, about a thousand times from 10 different angles," Austin said. "But quite frankly, the Ukrainians still have a lot of combat capability."

Since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war last year, the U.S. has given more than \$40 billion in military aid to Kyiv.

On Tuesday, Washington an-

nounced yet another round, including more Stryker and Bradley armored vehicles, which were fast-tracked for delivery.

The \$325 million package also sends more missile systems, including national advanced surface-to-air missile systems, or NASAMS, and High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, known as HIMARS.

Meanwhile, the Ukraine contact group also discussed plans for an F-16 pilot training initiative

to be led by the Netherlands and Denmark. Still, it's unclear when the fighters would be ready for entry into the war.

Beyond arms deliveries, the effort to bolster Ukrainian forces also has resulted in a large multinational training push on a wide mix of weapons.

Since February 2022, some 60,000 Ukrainian troops have been trained by allies in dozens of countries, Milley said.

Following Thursday's talks on Ukraine, Austin and his NATO counterparts will turn their attention to bolstering the alliance's own defenses against Russia.

Among the initiatives under review is one that would enhance NATO positions on the eastern flank with new regional plans.

The strategy, which calls for some 300,000 troops able to operate at higher levels of combat readiness, is expected to be finalized in time for final approval at NATO's summit in July.

Other initiatives include a push by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg to get stronger defense spending commitments from member states.

While allies are supposed to dedicate 2% of gross domestic product to their respective militaries, most members fall well short of that benchmark.

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AP

Ukrainian soldiers who were taken prisoner during fighting sit inside a glass cage during a hearing in Rostov-on-Don, Russia, on Wednesday.

Captured Ukrainian soldiers face trial

Associated Press

MOSCOW — More than 20 Ukrainian soldiers who were taken prisoner during fighting in Ukraine went on trial in southern Russia on Wednesday.

The captured soldiers were members of the Azov battalion, an elite Ukrainian armed forces unit that fought Russian troops in the Sea of Azov port of Mariupol. Russia captured Mariupol last year after a three-month battle that re-

duced most of the city to smoldering ruins.

The last remaining Ukrainian defenders who holed up at a giant steel mill in Mariupol surrendered to Russian forces in May 2022.

Russian authorities have designated the Azov battalion as a terrorist group. The defendants are facing charges of involvement in a terrorist organization and taking part in action to overthrow the

Russia-backed authorities in the Donetsk region.

They face sentences ranging from 15 years to life in prison if convicted.

Of the 24 people who have faced the charges, two have been swapped for Russian prisoners of war as part of a prisoner exchange. Of the remaining 22 defendants facing the trial, eight are women, who reportedly worked as cooks for the Azov battalion.

UN atomic watchdog chief visits threatened Ukraine nuclear plant

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The head of the United Nations nuclear watchdog visited Europe's largest atomic power plant Thursday in southern Ukraine, where a recent dam burst and the start of a counteroffensive in the war by Kyiv's forces have heightened safety risks.

The visit was announced by Ukraine's national nuclear energy company, Energoatom, in a Telegram post.

Rafael Mariano Grossi, the International Atomic Energy Agency chief, met Tuesday in Kyiv with

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to discuss concerns about the Russia-occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

The IAEA has repeatedly expressed alarm about the facility, which is one of the 10 biggest in the world, amid fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe. The agency has officials stationed at the plant, which is still run by its Ukrainian staff.

The plant has repeatedly been caught in the crossfire since Russia launched its war on Ukraine in February 2022 and seized the facil-

ity shortly after.

Last week, the destruction of the Kakhovka dam in southern Ukraine's partially Russian-occupied Kherson region added a new concern. The dam, further down the Dnieper River, helped keep water in a reservoir that cools the plant's reactors.

The plant's six reactors have been shut down for months, but it still needs power and qualified staff to operate crucial cooling systems and other safety features.

Ukraine recently said it hoped to place the last functioning reactor in

cold shutdown. The process inserts control rods into the reactor core to stop the nuclear fission reaction and the generation of heat and pressure.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Thursday that areas of the 600-mile front line in Ukraine are witnessing "fierce fighting" after Kyiv's long-anticipated launch of its counteroffensive using Western-supplied weapons.

He said Ukrainian forces "are making gains." Even so, Western analysts and military officials have cautioned that a campaign to drive

the Kremlin's forces out of Ukraine could take a long time.

Meanwhile, Russian forces kept up their aerial attacks on Ukraine. They launched four cruise missiles and 20 Iranian Shahed exploding drones overnight, the Ukrainian air force said.

Ukrainian air defenses downed all the drones and one cruise missile, it said.

Russian missiles hit industrial facilities in the latest strike on the southeastern city of Kryvyi Rih, Zelenskyy's hometown, wounding one person, local officials said.

NATION



DAMIAN DOVARGANES/AP

Officials transport new blankets into St. Anthony's Croatian Catholic Church, hosting newly arrived migrants in the Chinatown area of Los Angeles on Wednesday.

Migrants bused from Texas to LA in move mayor calls 'despicable'

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A group of migrants who arrived by bus in downtown Los Angeles on Wednesday were sent from Texas in a move the city's mayor called a "despicable stunt" by a Republican governor.

Forty-two people, including some children, were dropped off at Union Station around 4 p.m. and were being cared for by city agencies and charitable organizations, Los Angeles City Councilmember Kevin de León's office said.

"They left yesterday and it was 23 hours on the bus and they did not have a chance to eat or to have water," said Jorge Mario Cabrera of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, who spoke to sev-

eral migrants.

"They are being fed; they're taking shelters; they're talking to attorneys," he said. "These are migrants that have been allowed by the U.S. to enter because they have credible fears. They have not yet received asylum."

Many were from Latin American countries, including Honduras and Venezuela, and one person had an immigration appointment in New York, he said.

Mayor Karen Bass said she had instructed city departments to prepare to accept migrants from out of state, after GOP governors began sending asylum-seekers to Democratic states in recent months.

"This did not catch us off guard,

nor will it intimidate us," Bass said in a statement. "Los Angeles is not a city motivated by hate or fear and we absolutely will not be swayed or moved by petty politicians playing with human lives."

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said the migrants were sent to Los Angeles because California had declared itself a "sanctuary" for immigrants, extending protections to people living in the country illegally and allowing them to apply for some state benefits.

"Our border communities are on the frontlines of President Biden's border crisis, and Texas will continue providing this much-needed relief until he steps up to do his job and secure the border," Abbott said in a statement.

FDA advisers consider changing COVID vaccine to target latest omicron strain

Associated Press

The COVID-19 vaccines are on track for a big recipe change this fall.

Today's vaccines still contain the original coronavirus strain, the one that started the pandemic — even though that was long ago supplanted by mutated versions as the virus rapidly evolves.

On Thursday, the Food and Drug Administration's scientific advisers reviewed whether the next round of shots in the United States should only include protection against the newest variants that are now dominant worldwide — a branch of the omicron family tree named XBB.

While infections have declined, the virus could be a real concern next winter, FDA's vaccine chief Dr. Peter Marks said as the daylong meeting began.

"We're concerned that we may have another wave of COVID-19 during a time when the virus has further evolved, immunity of the population has waned further and we move indoors for wintertime," he said.

What's in use in the U.S. now are combination shots from Pfizer and Moderna that mix the original strain with protection against last year's most common omicron variants, called BA.4 and BA.5. But just 17% of Americans rolled up their sleeves for a combo booster.

Last year when regulators were struggling to decide how to update the vaccine, a combo shot seemed like the safest bet. Omicron was pretty new, and there was no way to know how long it would stick around or if the next big coronavirus change would more resemble

the original strain.

Now, "there's no reason really to keep the original strain in there," said Dr. Rachel Presti, an infectious disease specialist at Washington University in St. Louis. She is not on the FDA panel.

Doing so actually has a downside called "imprinting." After repeated exposure to the original strain, people's immune systems tended to recognize and respond more strongly to it than to the half of the new booster dose that was brand new.

So the FDA is leaning toward dropping the original strain and picking a fall shot recipe that targets just XBB. The hope is that the XBB variants are different enough to spark the immune system to make more diverse, cross-protective virus-fighting antibodies.

Past cases brought steep penalties for document hoarders

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The FBI investigators who searched Harold Martin's Maryland property in the fall of 2016 found classified documents — including material at the top secret level — strewn about his home, car and storage shed.

Unlike former President Donald Trump, the former National Security Agency contractor didn't contest the allegations, ultimately pleading guilty in 2019 and admitting his actions were "wrong, illegal and highly questionable." But his expressions of contrition and guilty plea to a single count of willful retention of national defense information didn't spare him the harsh punishment of nine years in prison.

The resolution of that case looms as an ominous guidepost for the legal jeopardy Trump could face as he confronts 37 felony counts — 31 under the same century-old Espionage Act statute used to prosecute Martin and other defendants alleged to have illegally kept classified documents. Even many like Martin who pleaded guilty and took responsibility have nonetheless been socked with yearslong prison sentences.

"When they decide to pursue a

willful mishandling case, it's to send a message: that we take these cases very seriously," said defense lawyer and ex-Justice Department prosecutor Michael Zweiback. "They almost always are seeking jail time."

How much prison time the former president could face in the event of a conviction is impossible to say, with such a decision ultimately up to the trial judge — in this case, a Trump appointee who has already demonstrated a willingness to rule in his favor. It's also hard to know the extent to which other factors — including the logistical and political complications of jailing a former president — might play a role.

The Espionage Act offense is punishable by up to 10 years in prison, though it's rare for first-time federal offenders to get close to the maximum. But beyond the retention, prosecutors have also identified other aggravating factors in Trump's alleged conduct, accusing him of seeking to enlist others to hide the records from investigators and showing off some to visitors. Some of the other counts in the indictment, including conspiracy to obstruct justice, call for up to 20 years in prison.

Grand jury indicts Penny in Neely's subway death

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A man charged with manslaughter for putting an agitated New York City subway rider in a fatal chokehold has been indicted by a grand jury, an expected procedural step that will allow the criminal case to continue.

Daniel Penny was charged by Manhattan prosecutors in the May 1 death of Jordan Neely, a former Michael Jackson impersonator who struggled in recent years with homelessness and mental illness.

Grand jury proceedings are secret and spokespeople for Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg declined to comment Wednesday, but the indictment was confirmed by New York City Mayor Eric Adams.

"I appreciate DA Bragg conducting a thorough investigation into the death of Jordan Neely. Like I said when the DA first brought charges, I have the utmost faith in the judicial process, and now that the Grand Jury has indicted Daniel Penny, a trial and justice can move forward," Adams said in a statement.

Neely was shouting at passengers and begging for money when Penny

pinned him to the floor of the moving subway car with the help of two other riders. Penny, a former U.S. Marine, then held Neely in a chokehold that lasted more than three minutes.

Penny has said he was protecting himself and other passengers, claiming Neely shouted "I'm gonna kill you" and that he was "ready to die" or go to jail for life.

A freelance journalist who recorded Neely struggling to free himself, then lapsing into unconsciousness, said he was acting aggressively and frightening people but hadn't assaulted anyone. Neely was Black. Penny is white.

Penny's lawyers, Steven Raiser and Thomas Kenniff, said in a statement that Penny didn't mean to kill Neely, just hold him for police.

"While we respect the decision of the grand jury to move this case forward to trial, it should be noted that the standard of proof in a grand jury is very low and there has been no finding of wrongdoing. We're confident that when a trial jury is tasked with weighing the evidence, they will find Daniel Penny's actions on that train were fully justified," Raiser said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Aid sought for vineyards, orchards hit by late frost

VT SHELBURNE — Vineyards and apple orchards across the Northeast are still gauging damage from a late-season frost in May that wiped out a third to most of the crop for some growers who say it's the worst frost damage they have ever seen.

Some states are seeking federal disaster declarations, which would make low-interest loans and other programs available to affected growers, while agriculture officials across the region are contemplating together asking the U.S. Department of Agriculture for direct aid to farmers.

In southern Vermont, Scott Farm Orchard lost up to 90% of its apple crop when the temperature dipped to 25 degrees Fahrenheit for five hours on May 18. At the northern end of the state, Shelburne Vineyards in Shelburne lost about 50% of its grape crop, which is potentially a half-million dollar revenue loss, according to head wine grower and vineyard manager Ethan Joseph.

Town pays tribe to keep roads open 1 month more

WI MADISON — A northern Wisconsin town has agreed to pay a Chippewa tribe \$22,000 to keep reservation roads open to the public for another month.

The town of Lac Du Flambeau's easements on 1.25 miles of Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa's reservation roads expired about a decade ago and negotiations to renew them have gone nowhere. The tribe finally barricaded the roads in January, preventing non-tribal property owners from accessing or leaving their homes except to buy food and other essential items like prescription drugs.

The property owners sued the tribe in federal court in February seeking an order to open the roads permanently. That case is pending. The U.S. Justice Department has filed its own lawsuit in support of the tribe, arguing that the town has been trespassing on the reservation since the easements expired.

The tribe agreed in March to open the roads for 90 days in exchange for \$60,000 from the town. That deal expired Monday. Wisconsin Public Radio reported that the town agreed to pay the tribe \$22,000 for road access through July 12.

Playground slides doused with pool acid, injuring 2

MA LONGMEADOW — Two children suffered what were described as "burn-like injuries" after playing on slides that had been doused with acid at a Massachusetts park, authorities said.

Police and firefighters responded to Bliss Park in Longmeadow on Sunday morning for a report of a suspicious substance on the playground equipment, the fire department posted on social media. At



KIICHIRO SATO/AP

Night lights at the shore

Visitors walk around with their flashlights on the beach, late Tuesday, in Navarre Beach, Fla.

about the same time, firefighters and emergency medical technicians went to a nearby home for a report of two children with burns who had just left the park.

"I let the kids go play. I didn't notice that there was liquid to collect at the bottom of the slide. I just assumed it was rainwater," their mother, Ashley Thielen, told Western Mass News in Springfield. "I didn't really think much of it, and then, my baby, who is 1, just started crying. That was when I knew this liquid that they were around wasn't water."

The acid left mostly superficial blisters and swelling on her children's skin, Thielen said.

Authorities determined that someone broke into a storage room where chemicals are kept at the park's swimming pool and stole some muriatic acid. The acid, which can be used for cleaning or for maintaining a pool's pH balance, was then poured on three slides, authorities said.

Prisoner faces 2nd life term for arranging killing

SC COLUMBIA — A South Carolina prisoner serving a life sentence for murder orchestrated killing a man he thought robbed a drug runner for a methamphetamine ring the inmate was running from behind bars, federal prosecutors said.

Daniel Allen Shannon was sentenced to life in federal prison earlier this month for the killing, but

the only way he will end up in federal custody is if he is released from his life-without-parole sentence in state court from a 2001 murder.

Shannon ran his drug ring from prison using contraband cell phones.

Shannon, 43, pleaded guilty in federal court earlier this year to conspiring to distribute methamphetamine. A judge linked the 2019 killing of Cletis "Eddie" Baker in Kershaw County to the drug ring and accepted the proposed life sentence, according to a statement from the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Councilman charged with embezzlement, perjury

CA LOS ANGELES — Prosecutors charged a Los Angeles city councilman with 10 counts, including embezzlement and perjury, Tuesday in the latest criminal case to upend the scandal-plagued governing board of the nation's second-largest city.

Curren Price Jr. faces five counts of embezzlement of government funds, three counts of perjury and two counts of conflict of interest, according to the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office.

Price was charged for having a financial interest in projects that he voted on as a council member, and having the city pay nearly \$34,000 in medical benefits for his now-wife while he was still married to another woman, Los Angeles County District Attorney George Gascón said in a statement.

Between 2019 and 2021, Price's wife allegedly received payments totaling more than \$150,000 from developers before Price voted to approve projects, according to Gascón's statement.

In a letter to City Council President Paul Krekorian, Price said he was stepping down from committee assignments and leadership responsibilities "while I navigate through the judicial system to defend my name."

US spends \$26M to find site for spent nuclear fuel

NM SANTA FE — Federal energy regulators have announced that they are spending \$26 million to find communities willing to accept a temporary federal site to store spent nuclear fuel while a permanent repository is completed.

Thirteen groups made up of industry, academic, nonprofit, government and community representatives will each get \$2 million to explore the most equitable approach to picking an interim site to store highly radioactive waste from nuclear power plants, according to a recent news release from the U.S. Energy Department.

This study is being conducted with the aim of creating a federal storage site independent of the two private sites proposed for southern New Mexico and Texas, which are embroiled in heated political and legal battles.

The lack of a permanent disposal

site has created a dilemma for the federal government as it seeks a temporary hub to move the spent fuel piling up at 70 nuclear power plants in three dozen states.

Endowment fund buys stake in iconic building

MI DETROIT — Michigan State University's \$3.9 billion endowment fund has become the majority investor in the Fisher Building, an iconic art deco style tower near downtown Detroit, the school announced Tuesday.

The fund is investing \$21 million in the building, two adjacent surface parking lots and a parking structure for a 79% ownership stake. The other owners are real estate developer and property manager The Platform and the MSU Federal Credit Union.

The 30-story Fisher Building is considered by many to be Detroit's largest work of art for its marble exterior, three-story arcade with hand-painted barrel-vaulted ceiling, spectacular mosaics, and extensive brass detailing. It is noted for the green terra cotta tiles on its tower that typically are illuminated gold at night. It was designed in 1928 by architect Albert Kahn and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Michigan State University's Research Foundation plans to open a startup incubator in the building this year.

FACES

Seacrest reportedly up for 'Wheel of Fortune' gig

"Wheel of Fortune" could be turning to Ryan Seacrest as Pat Sajak's replacement.

The host is under consideration to lead the popular game show once Sajak leaves after his upcoming 41st season, Bloomberg reported. Seacrest has spoken to Sony about the possibility, according to TMZ, which said the discussions are in very early stages.

Other interested candidates have also reached out to Sony, according to Bloomberg, though none of their names have surfaced.



Seacrest

Sajak, 76, announced his exit plans on Monday, tweeting that "the time has come." His final season begins in September.

Seacrest, 48, currently hosts the singing competition show "American Idol" on ABC, as well as the syndicated radio programs "On Air with Ryan Seacrest" and "American Top 40." "Wheel of Fortune" tapes in Los Angeles, where Seacrest is primarily based.

In April, Seacrest left the New York City-set talk show "Live with Kelly and Ryan" after six seasons. Actor Mark Consuelos, husband of host Kelly Ripa, replaced Seacrest on the ABC show.

Seacrest and Sony haven't publicly commented on the "Wheel of Fortune" reports.

"Wheel of Fortune" started in 1975 with Chuck Woolery as its host. Sajak replaced Woolery in 1981, and co-star Vanna White joined the following year.

Colbert gets 3-year extension for 'Late Show'

Stephen Colbert has agreed to a contract extension that will keep him hosting "The Late Show" for three more years.

His original contract was due to expire at the end of this year, but with the new agreement, Colbert will continue as host and executive producer through 2026, reports The Hollywood Reporter.

CBS president and CEO George Cheeks shared the news Tuesday.

Since May 2, Colbert's show has been broadcasting reruns due to the strike initiated by the Writers Guild of America, standing in solidarity with the writers as they fight for an equitable deal.

This new contract guarantees that Colbert will ultimately pass the decade mark hosting "The Late Show," which he took over in 2015, succeeding host David Letterman.

For the past few seasons, Colbert has been the most watched late night talk show host, and was averaging 2.14 million viewers per week before the strike.

Q&A



Apple TV+

Sienna Miller plays a marine biologist in an episode of "Extrapolations," now streaming on Apple TV+.

Planetary smoke signals

Current events already reflecting Apple TV's futuristic 'Extrapolations'

BY TODD WOODY
Bloomberg

When the futuristic climate series "Extrapolations" premiered on Apple TV+ in March, its opening episode depicted a New York City whose skies had turned orange from wildfire smoke — in the year 2037. So when the skies really did turn an apocalyptic orange last week as wildfire smoke from Canada suffocated the city, more than a few of the show's fans had a flashback, or at least a flashback.

Over eight interconnected episodes, Meryl Streep, Kit Harington, Sienna Miller and other members of "Extrapolations" A-list cast confront an increasingly grim future as climate change transforms a 2037 existence not unlike our own into a 2070 hellscape, where exposure to the sun can be fatal and no one leaves their house without an oxygen tank. Scott Z. Burns, the show's creator and executive producer, has said he wanted to set the series far enough in the future for today's worsening climate trends to play out, but not so distant that the impacts would seem implausible to a 2023 audience.

No chance of that these days. In "Extrapolations," one of the characters born in New York City during the 2037 wildfires develops debilitating "summer heart" from smoke exposure in utero. Today, doctors in Australia are treating "bushfire babies," children born during the catastrophic fires of 2019-2020 with chronic pulmonary conditions.

Burns, who largely shot "Extrapolations" in New York, spoke to Bloomberg about telling a future that seems foretold.

Bloomberg: Has climate reality already caught up to the future you depicted?

Burns: Well, I think that climate reality is recurring. When we shot that first season, there were some fires in Canada that affected the air quality in New York. I remember one day driving into our studios taking a photo of the skyline, which sort of served as our template for a lot of what we did in

the pilot. Last week there were a lot of people posting things comparing the imagery from the pilot to the skies above Manhattan. People were thinking that maybe the show was on to something.

Last week's events would seem to answer any critics who say "Extrapolations" was ahead of itself in depicting climate change in the future.

We all spent a lot of time deliberating over what the start date of "Extrapolations" should be. We wanted to push it far enough into the future to answer one big question, which is: Are these events like we're seeing right now anomalies? Or are they part of newly created patterns? Or are there certain climate change issues that are tipping-point issues and these things are not cyclical but are capable of having a major sort of phase shift? "Extrapolations" suggests that there's a period of time where things like this go on and we dismiss it as being an anomaly and that everything will get back to normal next year. But eventually, you have to look at the trendline and go, "Normal is changing."

Suffocating smoke and orange skies are familiar on the U.S. West Coast. Will that reality coming to the Eastern seaboard have an impact on how film and television creatives look at climate change?

I really hope so. One of our greatest hopes with this show is that we would be able to move things like what's happening in the skies above New York into the public consciousness in a different way. So I hope that the more artists who encounter this will create more art in response. But there's also a flipside to that, which is that in a month it's very likely our skies won't be orange and we'll say, "Oh, that was the thing that happened that one crazy week."

Will there be another season of "Extrapolations"?

Part of the reason the episodes were irregularly spaced was because we had contemplated the possibility of more seasons so that we could fill in the timeline. With the writers strike going on, I've had zero contact with Apple. So that remains a big unanswered question until the studios sit down and really work out a deal with us.

Rock musician Malin reportedly paralyzed

Rock musician Jesse Malin suffered a rare spinal stroke earlier this year, causing him to be paralyzed from the waist down, according to a report.

While out to dinner with friends on May 4 in Manhattan's East Village, Malin collapsed, according to Rolling Stone. The group was commemorating the one-year anniversary of the death of Malin's best friend and former D Generation bandmate Howie Pyro.

Malin was hospitalized at Mount Sinai Hospital, where he learned that he suffered a spinal cord infarction — a rare disorder in which arteries supplying the spine with blood close off. He is being treated at a neurological care center in New York, according to a fundraiser set up in his name, adding that the condition is inoperable.

Malin announced his diagnosis with a screenshot of the Rolling Stone story onto his Instagram account Wednesday morning.

"I'm told that they don't really understand it, and they're not sure of the chances," he told Rolling Stone. "The reports from the doctors have been tough, and there's moments in the day where you want to cry, and where you're scared. But I keep saying to myself that I can make this happen. I can recover my body."

Malin is known for his energetic performances, during which he often jumps from the stage to perform in the audience.

Other news

■ As promised, **Johnny Depp** is putting the \$1 million settlement he was awarded from the 2022 Amber Heard defamation case to good use. The former "Pirates of the Caribbean" star has reportedly spread out the payment among five charities: the Make-A-Film Foundation, The Painted Turtle, Red Feather, Tetiaroa Society and Amazonia Fund Alliance.

■ **John Romita Sr.**, the Brooklyn-born comic book artist who co-created Marvel staples such as Wolverine and Punisher, has died at age 93, his son announced. A cause of death was not given. During his time on "Spider-Man," Romita helped introduce characters including Mary Jane Watson, the hulking villain Kingpin and the high-flying bad guy Vulture. Romita became Marvel's art director in 1973 and remained in the role during the 1980s.

■ **Glenda Jackson**, a two-time Academy Award-winning actor who had a second career in British politics before an acclaimed late-life return to stage and screen, has died at age 87. Jackson's agent Lionel Lerner said she died Thursday at her home in London after a short illness. He said she had recently completed filming "The Great Escaper," in which she co-starred with Michael Caine.

From wire services

WORLD

Greece looks for missing migrants from boat

Associated Press

KALAMATA, Greece — Rescue workers transferred the bodies of dead migrants to refrigerated trucks as a major search continued Thursday for possible survivors of a sea disaster in southern Greece. Hundreds of people are still feared missing.

At least 78 bodies have been recovered after a fishing boat crammed with migrants seeking to make it from Libya to Italy capsized and sank a day earlier in deep waters off the Greek coast.

Rescuers saved 104 passengers — including Egyptians, Syrians, Pakistanis, Afghans and Palestinians, mostly men and including eight minors — but authorities fear that hundreds of others may

have been trapped below deck. It confirmed, that would make the tragedy one of the worst ever recorded in the central Mediterranean.

Authorities revised the confirmed death toll from 79 following an overnight count of the bodies.

“The survivors are in a very difficult situation. Right now they are in shock,” Erasmia Roumana, head of a United Nations Refugee Agency delegation, told The Associated Press after meeting the rescued migrants in a storage hangar in the southern port of Kalamata.

“They want to get in touch with their families to tell them they are OK, and they keep asking about

the missing. Many have friends and relatives unaccounted for.”

Greece declared three days of mourning. A Supreme Court prosecutor ordered an investigation.

Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, said she was “deeply saddened” by the tragedy and promised to strengthen cooperation between the European Union and nearby countries to try to further crack down on migrant smugglers.

But human rights groups have argued that the crackdown means migrants and refugees are being forced to take longer and more dangerous routes to reach safe countries.

The search operation south of Greece’s Peloponnese region

failed to locate any more bodies or survivors overnight or early Thursday.

“The chances of finding (more survivors) are minimal,” retired Greek coast guard admiral Nikos Spanos told state-run ERT television.

“We have seen old fishing boats like this before from Libya: They are about 30 meters (100 feet) long and can carry 600-700 people when crammed full. But they are not at all seaworthy. To put it simply, they are floating coffins.”

Coast guard experts believe the boat may have sunk after running out of fuel or suffering engine trouble, with movement of passengers inside the vessel causing it to list and ultimately capsize.

At least 1 dies in attack near German castle

Associated Press

BERLIN — A tourist died after a man attacked her and a companion near Neuschwanstein castle in southern Germany, authorities said Thursday.

The incident near the popular tourist attraction close to the Austrian border happened Wednesday afternoon. Prosecutors in nearby Kempten said the two women, age 21 and 22, had met the 30-year-old suspect — who had also gone to the castle as a tourist — for the first time shortly beforehand.

Authorities said the three apparently took a path to a viewpoint, where the man attacked the younger woman. The 22-year-old rushed to help her companion, and the man allegedly pushed her down a steep slope, they said.

Prosecutors said that after what may have been an attempted sexual assault, the man allegedly also pushed the younger woman down the slope. She was taken by helicopter to a hospital, where she died overnight.

The man initially fled but was arrested, police said.

Germany to give \$1.4B globally to Holocaust survivors

Associated Press

BERLIN — The organization that handles claims on behalf of Jews who suffered under the Nazis said Thursday that Germany has agreed to extend another \$1.4 billion overall for Holocaust survivors around the globe for the coming year.

The compensation was negotiated with Germany’s finance ministry and includes \$888.9 million to provide home care and supportive services for frail and vulnerable Holocaust survivors.

Additionally, increases of \$175 million to symbolic payments of the Hardship Fund Supplemental

program have been achieved, impacting more than 128,000 Holocaust survivors globally, according to the New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, also referred to as the Claims Conference.

The Hardship Fund Supplemental payment was originally es-

tablished to be a one-time payment, negotiated during the COVID-19 lockdowns and eventually resulted in three supplemental payments for eligible Holocaust survivors. This year, Germany again agreed to extend the hardship payment, which was set to end in December 2023, to 2027.

Find Your Voice!

2023
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ila.org/DoDSummerReading

WEEKEND



Isbell not afraid to get personal
Music, Pages 28-29

Back to the multiverse

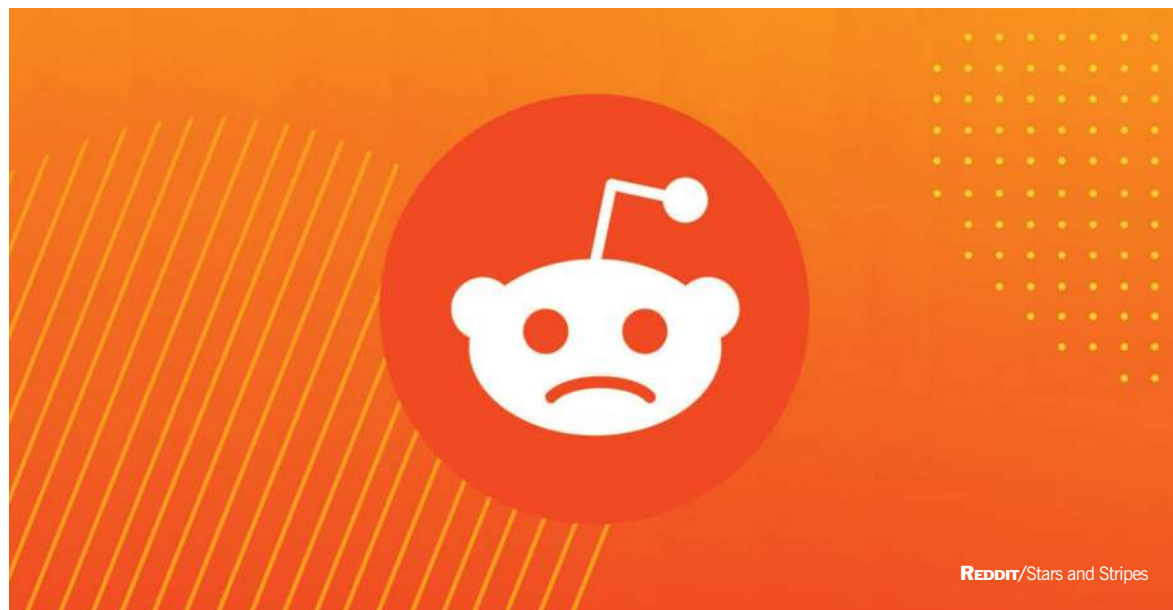
'The Flash' continues recent superhero movie trend of combining several timelines, character iterations

Movies, Pages 15-16



Warner Bros. Pictures

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY



Dark days for Reddit data

Online search results affected as conversations go private for protest

BY CHRIS VELAZCO

The Washington Post

This week, more than 8,000 Reddit communities — called subreddits — went private to protest the company's plans to charge software developers for access to its data.

The price of that access makes maintaining third-party Reddit apps and tools untenable for the people who made them, critics argue. Those developers also had limited time to prepare to pay up (Some popular options, like Apollo and rif is fun, will shut down at the end of June as a result.) Meanwhile, Reddit CEO Steve Huffman said in a Q&A on the site that Reddit is “not profitable” and would “continue to be profit-driven” until it was.

What began for some communities as a two-day show of solidarity, though, has become an indefinite blackout to drive their point home. And the move isn't just affecting people who spend lots of time on Reddit — you may find the proof yourself, the next time you Google something.

Because those subreddits have been made private, the years of content, conversations and camaraderie found in those online enclaves will remain off-limits until further notice. The same goes for the insights locked away in those threads, to the detriment of people searching for information rooted in human experience or expertise.

If you're searching Google for advice on a pernickety tech question, or the finer points of learning Japanese, there is a good chance you will find a helpful conversation on Reddit. (Sticking “Reddit” at the end of online search queries is so common that it's become a meme at this point.)

The catch? You won't be able to read that conversation, because subreddits like r/techsupport and r/learnjapanese are now inaccessible for the long haul.

In Sukrit Venkatagiri's case, the Reddit blackout has at least temporarily made the prospect of buying his first house a little more daunting. A researcher at the University of Washington's Center for an Informed Public, Venkatagiri has spent a lot of time searching the web for interest rates to suss out the right time to buy property. He says Reddit has been invaluable because it contains “a diverse set of opinions on topics that aren't necessarily influenced by commercial interests.”

“I found Reddit really helpful because it just helps me understand other people's thought processes and then come to my own decision,” he said. But because some salient Reddit threads found in Google search results aren't accessible, most of what he has to wade through now are “blogs from large financial organizations that say, ‘Hey, you

should just buy a house.’”

Popular communities like r/aww, r/music, and r/videos, each of which has tens of millions of members, have signaled their intent to remain dark until Reddit changes its stance on data access and pricing for third-party developers. And as of Tuesday evening, more than 300 other subreddits, dedicated to everything from DIY projects to the restaurant chain Applebee's, also committed to staying private indefinitely.

That means if you've been planning to learn a little more about physics, cars, endocrinology, food in Vancouver, model making, Apple, furniture or lamp restoration, among other topics — your list of online resources just got a little shorter.

Reddit declined to comment on the situation.

If you've relied on Reddit in the past to help connect to like-minded groups of people, you still have some options. Many subreddits have their own Discord servers, so as long as you're willing to put up with a generally faster pace of conversation, you can find a similar atmosphere. For those in need of answers for technical questions (and a few general interest ones, too), sites like StackExchange may come in handy.

Other corners of Reddit have also taken to highlighting full-on replacement platforms, like Squabbles.io and Lemmy, a decentralized, open-source alternative.

Those services, which in many cases are relatively new and sparsely populated, may be able to offer the kind of community some displaced Reddit users are searching for. But what they can't do — in the short term, anyway — is fill in for Reddit as a vast, easily accessible pool of knowledge and experience.

And at the end of the day, there really is nothing else quite like Reddit out there. That's at least in part because the site — which is nearly 20 years old — is a social media holdover from an older era of the web, when lengthy discussion threads had yet to be supplanted by, say, short-form videos.

Venkatagiri said other platforms that have lasted as long as Reddit, like Facebook and Twitter, are structurally different in ways that can prevent them from being as immediately helpful.

“You can't do a Google search for something in a Facebook group,” he said. And on Twitter, “you may interact for a short period of time, but you don't have that sort of longevity of interaction that Reddit affords.”

For now, it's not clear who will back down first: Reddit, or the communities taking a stand against it. But in the meantime, be prepared to spend at least a little more time searching for the right information online.

PNY USB-C flash drive worth some excitement

BY GREGG ELLMAN

Tribune News Service

Yes, it's just a flash drive. But PNY's DUO LINK USB 3.2 Type-C dual flash drive will make you get excited again about portable storage solutions.

The transition to USB-C has taken time, especially with external devices. It's slow and frustrating in some cases. No matter what I wanted to do, I needed an adapter or was forced to carry a bulky hub to ensure I had all the necessary ports, which, by the way, were all built into my previous laptop. But I get it. We want the new laptops lighter, smaller and faster, so something has to give.

When the transition to USB-C is complete, we will have more reliable devices with better data transfer and power rates.

This brings me to the PNY Type-C dual flash drives, built for use with computers and Android devices. Fingers crossed that the word on the street is accurate and iPhones might transition to USB-C later this year.

The pocket-sized all-metal flash drive has a USB-C connector, enabling it to plug into any USB-C port adapter-free. It is approximately 1.875-by-0.25-by-0.50 inches. The connector folds inside a metal covering to protect it when not in use. There's also a built-in hook to attach the flash drive to something for safekeeping.

Like any flash drive, it can assist in storing and moving data. PNY rates the flash drive with a read speed up to 200 MB/s and a transfer speed up to 30 times faster than that of standard USB 2.0. It also worked for me in reverse, using a USB-C to USB-A adapter to connect it to a standard USB-A port.

They are available in 64 GB (\$12.99), 128 GB (\$19.99) and 256 GB (\$29.99).

Online: pny.com



PNY/TNS

The new pocket-sized DUO LINK USB 3.2 Type-C dual flash drive has a USB-C connector, enabling it to plug into any USB-C port without an adapter.

Rolling Square, a startup company that wants to be the voice of tech minimalists, has some innovative products for smartphone use.

The 2.32-by-1.77-by-0.47-inch, 1.4-ounce Tau charger (\$29.99) is referred to by Rolling Square as the smallest power bank in the world, with a 1400 mAh battery, which also functions as a keychain. Two integrated 2-inch cables are built into the charger, with a USB-C tip on one end and an Apple Lightning connector on the other.

Charging the Tau is also unique with the included proprietary magnetic charging dock. The dock can hang on the wall with the included bracket and hardware or sit on any flat surface.

A USB-C to USB-A cable is included to send power to the dock.

The inCharge charging cable (\$29.99) is as original as I've seen. When it's opened and expanded, the 5.625-inch magnetic cable has charging and data transfer connections for USB-C, USB-A, Micro-USB and Apple Lightning. This adds up to six different charging combinations for charging up to 100 watts and Apple Fast Charging up to 18 watts.

Online: rollingsquare.com



ROLLING SQUARE/TNS

The 2.32-by-1.77-by-0.47-inch Tau charger (\$29.99) is referred to by Rolling Square as the smallest power bank in the world and also functions as a keychain.



ROLLING SQUARE/TNS

The inCharge charging cable (\$29.99) has charging and data transfer connections for USB-C, USB-A, Micro-USB and Apple Lightning.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

‘Everything came with a little adventure’

‘Flash’ director, sibling producer say challenges of making the film included having to transport Batmobile from LA to UK

By LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

There were many stressful things about making “The Flash” and getting it to theaters. It was shot in the middle of a pandemic. There was isolation from friends and family for the 138-day shoot. There were A-list schedules to coordinate for cameos. There was a star in Ezra Miller who, after it wrapped, made headlines for legal run-ins amid a mental health crisis. And behind it all, a studio undergoing leadership changes and rethinking the whole DC Comics strategy.

But first, they had to figure out how to transport a 2-ton Batmobile from Los Angeles to the U.K. amid a worldwide shortage of shipping containers in 2021.

This was not just any Batmobile, mind you. It was one of the originals from the Tim Burton movies that was needed for the grand return of Michael Keaton’s caped crusader after 30 years — a major production that also involved building, from scratch, a life-size replica of the Batcave.

Director Andy Muschietti and his sister, producer Barbara Muschietti, waiting nervously for its arrival, worried whether it would make it in time or just be stuck in the middle of the ocean. They breathed a sigh of relief when it made it ashore, briefly celebrated and moved on to the next problem: how to get it into the Batcave at Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden. Ultimately it involved loading it onto a modified airport cargo truck that was lifted 20 feet in the air and “gently rolled” onto set.

“Everything came with a little adventure,” Barbara Muschietti said with a laugh in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

It’s an apt if intentionally understated description of getting “The Flash” into theaters this weekend. Movie versions of the lightning-quick comic book character have been in various stages of development since the late 1980s. One scenario had Ryan Reynolds starring and David S. Goyer directing; another had George Miller setting the stage for spinoffs and standalones with Adam Brody.

Then in 2014, things started taking shape as Warner Bros.



PHOTOS BY WARNER BROS. PICTURES/AP

Ezra Miller, center, plays the lightning-quick superhero in “The Flash.” In the film, he gets accidentally tossed into a different timeline in the multiverse and meets a younger, different version of himself.



Michael Keaton makes a cameo as Batman in “The Flash.” He played the character in Tim Burton’s films in 1989 and 1992.

plotted out a shared universe of DC Comics films, including a standalone Flash starring Miller as Barry Allen, who would first appear in “Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice,” “Suicide Squad” and “Justice League.”

But even that wasn’t so straightforward, with disagreements over tone and scheduling conflicts making things complicated. Several writers and directors cycled in and out of developing “The Flash,” including Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, Seth Grahame-Smith, Rick Famuyiwa, Robert Zemeckis and John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein, and release dates were pushed back. Ezra Miller, who uses they/them pronouns, even worked on their own treatment of a script.

The Muschiettis were finishing “It Chapter Two” when the studio approached them about “The

Flash.” The directors didn’t concern themselves with the messy, marathon development history — they just wanted to figure out if this was worth several years of their life.

In the story, Andy Muschietti found a compelling emotional core: The relationship between Barry Allen and his mother, who was killed when he was a child and whom he wants to go back in time to save. “Back to the Future,” which is referenced quite a bit in “The Flash,” was one of their favorite movies, too. They were in.

“Birds of Prey” screenwriter Christina Hobson had taken a crack at the story and come out with something that was both fun and emotional and introduced the multiverse to the DC canon.

In Barry Allen’s quest to save his mother, he accidentally gets tossed into another timeline and

meets a younger, different version of himself who gets swept up in the journey. It allowed for lots of possibilities, including bringing Keaton back in a movie that also had Ben Affleck’s “Zack Snyder Batman.”

“We all got very excited about the prospect of having Michael Keaton come back after 30 years of not knowing what Batman was up to,” Andy Muschietti said. “The multiverse allowed this to happen and combine the existing characters, the existing universe, with something that seemed to have been buried in the past.”

They told Keaton, who jogged to their lunch meeting in Brentwood, Calif., that they wouldn’t be able to do the film without him. They wanted to find his Bruce Wayne in a place people wouldn’t expect. By the end of lunch, Keaton had agreed and jogged off.

“I didn’t want him to be sitting near the fireplace, like, staring out of a glass of whiskey,” Andy Muschietti said. “I knew he was going to transform back into Batman, so I needed him to be in a place that made that transformation possible in the tradition of a reluctant hero.”

Keaton’s Batman was also due to make a return in the standalone “Batgirl” movie, which was ultimately shelved close to completion.

“The Flash” has other nostalgic nods, including an army of cameos best left unspoiled, that

helps set the stage for a “universe reboot.” While making the film, big leadership changes were afoot at Warner Bros. and, specifically, DC Studios, where new co-chairs and CEOs James Gunn and Peter Safran were tasked with plotting the future of the DC Universe characters, from Superman to Batman. That new vision won’t officially begin until Gunn’s new Superman in 2025, but he’s also said that “The Flash,” though technically from a previous regime, “resets the entire DC universe.”

But then during the extensive post-production on “The Flash,” star Ezra Miller also started making headlines for a string of arrests and reports of erratic behavior last year. The actor was arrested twice last year in Hawaii, including for disorderly conduct and harassment at a karaoke bar. In January, they pleaded guilty to a charge stemming from a break-in and theft of alcohol at a neighbor’s home in Vermont. They avoided jail time but paid a \$500 fine and got a year of probation, agreeing to abide by a number of conditions including continued mental health treatment.

Though some questioned whether “The Flash” should be shelved, the studio remained committed to releasing it on June 16 even without their star on the promotional circuit.

“We’re in contact with them. They love the movie. They support the movie. And they’re taking their treatment very seriously,” said Barbara Muschietti of Miller. “We want everybody to see this. It’s great and it’s special. And it has all our hearts and guts.”

While early hyperbole abounded with people like Gunn calling it one of the best superhero movies he’d ever seen, reviews have indeed been mostly very positive with lots of praise for Miller’s dual roles.

“What you get is this delicious odd couple,” Barbara Muschietti. “You forget that they’re the same actor.”

There are even rumors that the Muschiettis’ DC relationship will continue with future films. But right now, the focus is “The Flash.”

“Let’s just wait and see,” Andy Muschietti said.

“We all got very excited about the prospect of having Michael Keaton come back after 30 years of not knowing what Batman was up to. The multiverse allowed this to happen and combine the existing characters, the existing universe, with something that seemed to have been buried in the past.”

Director Andy Muschietti

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Fueled by calories and cameos

Ezra Miller speeds back to the future in overlong 'The Flash,' 1st standalone film based on the fast DC Comics superhero

By JOCELYN NOVECK
Associated Press

According to a famous '70s commercial catchphrase, "It's not nice to fool Mother Nature." But we learn in "The Flash" — the much awaited, long gestated new DC Studios offering — that it's Father Time one mustn't cross. Because trying to change the past can really mess you up when you get back to the future and realize you've inadvertently changed that, too.

But of course, we already knew that. We learned it from Marty McFly, immortalized by Eric Stoltz in "Back to the Future."

Relax! Of course it was Michael J. Fox, though Stoltz was initially cast in the role. But in "The Flash," Barry Allen (Ezra Miller) realizes just how badly he's messed up the space-time continuum when he arrives back from changing the past — just one teensy little thing, really — and learns that in his current world, Fox never replaced Stoltz. "I've destroyed the universe," he frets in a laugh-out-loud moment.

If only the whole film, directed by Andy Muschietti and written by Christina Hodson, felt this breezily clever and entertaining. Alas, the final act bogs down in what feels like an endless, generic CGI battle and a kitchen-sink resolution that leaves one feeling just a little exhausted and somewhat confused.

We first meet Barry — Miller,



Warner Bros. Pictures

Two versions of The Flash (Ezra Miller) join a battle for Earth in "The Flash."

whose naturally jittery energy is an excellent fit here — on the way to his job at a forensics lab, stopping to order breakfast. But then he gets a call from Alfred — yes, you know the one — needing his help in an imminent disaster. Barry turns into his red-suited alter-ego but desperately needs calories for fuel, begging a bystander for her candy bar.

Soon, in a rescue scene that's audacious but also a little absurd, Barry is saving falling newborn babies from a collapsing hospital while desperately eating snacks. He also saves a maternity nurse — then suggests she seek the help of a mental health professional to cope with the trauma,

noting "the Justice League is not very good at that yet."

That line, possibly a subtle plea for empathy with Miller's off-screen troubles, sets a tone for many self-referential quips and sequences in a film that seems to thrive on, well, referring to itself and its roots.

In this, the first standalone "Flash" film, the lineage of past Batmans, Supermans and associated characters is evoked early and often through surprise cameos. At one moment it feels like we're watching an Oscar memorial reel; it garnered reverential applause at the screening I attended.

But back to the plot: Barry

needs food, but what really powers him is the tragic murder of his mother (Maribel Verdu) in their home when he was a boy. Even worse, his father (Ron Livingston) is imprisoned — unjustly — for the crime.

Barry, desperate to prove his father innocent, suddenly discovers a way to go back in time (technical details are sparse, but it partly involves running REAL-LY fast) and comes up with a grander idea still. What if he could go back and prevent the whole sequence of events that led to his mother's death? His friend and current Batman (the Ben Affleck version) tells him what a bad idea this is.

But Barry goes back anyway and makes a change, and what do you know — oops! — a younger Barry shows up. And now, Barry senior is potentially stuck in the wrong universe, with Barry junior.

What's more, villainous General Zod (Michael Shannon) has returned, threatening total destruction. The Barrys need help. That's how we find them with Michael Keaton's Bruce Wayne, analyzing a pack of spaghetti.

It's Keaton, having a fine time in his return as a graying, reluctant superhero, who explains the whole multiverse thing, showing with a deft manipulation of pasta strands how the past can't change without the future changing. It ends up with a gaggle of spaghetti drowning in a shower of tomato sauce: a hot mess.

At one point in this 184-minute drama, I started wondering if I was seeing a bunch of disco balls trying to destroy each other. But maybe this was a moment of sensory overload.

Is a sequel in the offing, if the stars align offscreen as well? They'd have to come up with even more cameos, more surprises.

Speaking of surprises: it's probably never a good idea to leave while the credits are still rolling. But again, we already knew that.

"The Flash" is rated PG-13 for sequences of violence and action, some strong language and partial nudity. Running time: 184 minutes.

'Blackening' a cutting satire of racial horror tropes that's light on scares

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

Horror-comedy "The Blackening" started as a way to skewer a tired trope: the frequency with which Black characters are killed first in horror movies. Though this cliché has been called out frequently by horror fans and Black audiences, here it serves as the entire premise for a feature film, posing a provocative question: If all the characters in the horror movie are Black, who dies first?

A 2018 Comedy Central sketch by the comedy group 3PEAT was the proof of concept for "The Blackening," and the video, in which a group of friends debate "who's the Blackest?" while a psycho killer stalks at the door, went viral. For the feature, the star and writer of the sketch, comedian and Emmy-nominated TV writer Dewayne Perkins, partnered with writer/producer Tracy Oliver ("Girls Trip") and director Tim Story ("Barbershop") to expand the idea to feature length.

A group of tight-knit college friends in a remote location stays in a mysterious old cabin — we can assume what happens next — but "The Blackening" seeks to test our assumptions, using a slasher movie formula as a vehicle for fast, funny and whip-smart cultural commentary.

The gathering crackles with a tension fueled by long interpersonal histories and resentments, amped up by booze, psychedelics and a weird old college chum in their

midst, Clifton (Jermaine Fowler). In a mysterious game room, they stumble upon a board game called The Blackening, and a closed-circuit television that reveals that their host Morgan (Yvonne Orji) has been abducted by a leatherfaced killer. The unsettlingly racist caricature at the center of the game torments them with increasingly challenging trivia questions about Black history and culture, with the goal of saving Morgan, but soon the stakes are heightened — they have to choose "the Blackest" among them to sacrifice.

"The Blackening" fires on all cylinders when the friends are dissecting Black culture. The dialogue feels like the way friends actually talk to each other, laden with movie and TV references, lovingly roasting each other.

The social commentary swings from the pop to the political, all with the same light but incisive tone, which is what makes "The Blackening" both entertaining and trenchant. But the film is lacking in terms of its suspense and horror filmmaking. It's not scary, the villain seems obvious from the jump, and there are a few missed opportunities and loose ends, story-wise. It succeeds as a comedy but not quite as a horror film, the genre merely a setting and style for sending up insidious character stereotypes.

However, a star is indeed born in "The Blackening." Screenwriter Perkins delivers the breakout performance



Lionsgate

Yvonne Orji and Jay Pharoah in "The Blackening." Orji's character, Morgan, gets abducted by a killer in the film.

as the ultra-bothered Dewayne, who is feuding with his best friend Lisa (Antoinette Robertson) over her reunion with the formerly philandering Nnamdi (Sinqua Walls). Though it's an ensemble piece (X Mayo is also a stand-out), your attention never leaves Perkins when he's on-screen. Perhaps because he wrote and performed in the original sketch and wrote the screenplay, he seems more finely attuned to the rhythms and nuances of the material, and the purpose that it is intended to serve.

Consider "The Blackening" not just a sendup, but a send-off to this old cliché. Here's to finally killing "the Black character dies first" trope once and for all, and crossing our fingers that it doesn't pop up again, Michael Myers style.

"The Blackening" is rated R for pervasive language, violence and drug use. Running time: 96 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Opposites attract in charming 'Elemental'

Visually dazzling animated Pixar movie portrays a forbidden romance between anthropomorphized fire, water characters

By **KATIE WALSH**
Tribune News Service

It's fairly rare that beloved animation studio Pixar makes a straightforward romantic movie — the films they produce frequently focus on family love and friendship love, but it's not often we see a swooning love story between two individuals as in Peter Sohn's "Elemental," a kind of "Romeo and Juliet" riff featuring the forbidden love between two elements that never easily mix: fire and water.

"Elemental" is also an immigrant story, about a family forced to leave one homeland to seek a new life in a strange new place. A pre-title sequence follows Bernie (Ronnie del Carmen) and Cinder (Shila Ommi) as they arrive in Elemental City from their home in Fireland. Though the water, earth, air and fire elements share a complicated coexistence in this bustling metropolis, Bernie and Cinder don't find warm hospitality there. As they seek shelter for their burgeoning family (Cinder is pregnant), and are turned away, it harkens to the biblical story of the birth of Jesus.

The couple transform a crumbling old building into The Fireplace, a shop and cafe that serves as the hub of Firish culture in the heart of Firetown. They hope that their daughter Ember (Leah Lewis) will be able to take over the shop when

she's ready, passing on their business to her with the same reverence that they intend to pass on their beloved, ever-burning Firish blue flame.

Sohn and screenwriters John Hoberg, Kat Likkell and Brenda Hsueh are working well-known, much-beloved stories and tropes, transposing these tales into this fantastical world of humanoid elements. These character types — a pair of star-crossed lovers, or a gruff but loving immigrant father, fiercely proud and protective of his only daughter, who is caught in a perfectionism trap — make it easy to slip into their emotional journey, even if they are made of fire, earth, water and air, and possess all the attendant chemical and physical qualities of each element.

Accepting that the story beats are overly familiar is a bargain one makes with the filmmakers in order to enjoy the visually dazzling world of "Elemental." One has to wonder if the concept for the film came about because the Pixar animators wanted a chance to demonstrate their aptitude with animating such challenging substances as fire and water. The character's surfaces are constantly moving: faces of flame flicker and crackle with the grace of a watercolor painting; bubbles float and churn and pop through the bodies of the watery folk, held together with a tenuous viscosity. It's a truly eye-popping and detailed expression of animation tech-



DISNEY, PIXAR/AP

Ember, voiced by Leah Lewis, left, and Wade, voiced by Mamoudou Athie, two very different elements, fall in love in animated film "Elemental."

nology and technique. The environments of Element City are vibrantly rendered, especially Firetown, a vague melange of Asian, Eastern European and Middle Eastern influences, which are reflected in Thomas Newman's score.

But it's the romance that makes "Elemental" worth your time and emotional investment too, thanks to a romantic male lead who isn't made up of the same stuff we've seen in Disney movies of yore. Wade (Mamoudou Athie) is water, and he's an emotional guy. After Ember loses her temper and bursts a pipe in the shop, Wade, a chipper city inspector, comes flowing into her life. They pair up to track down the source of the leak that threatens Firetown and The Fireplace, and along the

way fall in love, much to Ember's chagrin, fearing the disapproval of her parents.

But this modern kind of love proves irresistible. It's a refreshing update to Shakespeare's hormonal teens, and the proud, barrel-chested Disney princes of yore. Voiced with a unique tenderness by Athie, what makes Wade lovable is his kindness, his vulnerability, his willingness to share his emotions and his delight in all of Ember's distinctly fiery qualities. She's spunky and hot-headed; he's sweet and adorable — if they touch, it could be a disaster, but somehow, their chemistry just works, bringing the charming "Elemental" to a lively roiling boil.

"Elemental" is rated PG for some peril, thematic elements and brief language. Running time: 103 minutes.

'Mending the Line' a well-meaning but inert PTSD drama

By **MARK JENKINS**
The Washington Post

The title of the film "Mending the Line" refers to an adjustment to a fly-fishing line to counter the effects of water currents. But there's a lot more than the placement of a filament that needs to be remedied in this well-meaning but inert post-traumatic stress disorder melodrama.

The main character is John Colter (Sinqua Walls), a physically wounded and psychically bruised Marine who's steered toward a Montana trout stream as therapy after a hairy deployment in Afghanistan. Colter's reluctant guide is crusty Vietnam War vet Ike Fletcher (Brian Cox), a fly-fishing expert who's gotten too old to venture to the stream alone. The two are initially connected by a Department of Veterans Affairs doctor (Patricia Heaton) who's treated both of them.

Ike initially rebuffs Colter, in part because the older man is a recovering alcoholic who doesn't want to be around the hard-drinking younger one. Pushed by a fishing buddy (Wes Studi), Ike tentatively agrees to tutor Colter in catch-and-release trout fishing, but only after the Marine first completes some "Karate Kid"-like menial tasks.

Ike also instructs Colter to read literary works about fishing, so the young Marine heads to the local library. There he meets Lucy (Perry Mattfeld), a not-very-welcoming librarian who's also enduring the aftereffects of personal catastrophe. The two soon become pals. "Mending the Line," however, doesn't have time for romance.

Friendship is crucial, since the central trio are short on relatives. Ike is estranged from his son and grandchild-



Blue Fox Entertainment/Meydenbauer Entertainment

Brian Cox, Sinqua Walls and Perry Mattfeld are all dealing with their own traumas in "Mending the Line."

dren, and Colter hopes to return to active duty with the Marines, "the only real family I've ever had." Lucy's only apparent tie is to the emotionally shattered mother (Irene Bedard) of her ex.

Directed by Joshua Caldwell, whose notable previous credits are mostly in TV, "Mending the Line" was made with the cooperation of the Marine Corps and the Depart-

ment of Defense. The movie's wartime prologue and its occasional flashbacks and nightmare scenes were filmed in a mock-up of a Middle Eastern village erected for training purposes at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Unsurprisingly, the film doesn't offer any direct criticism of the military or of U.S. foreign policy. Stephen Camelio's screenplay treats Colter's and Ike's traumas as private matters, not symptoms of any larger issues.

The movie's dialogue tends toward platitudes, often heavily underlined by Bill Brown's syrupy score. But the script is neatly structured, and its emotional payoffs are believably muted. If Colter becomes an able fisherman with exceptional ease, his quest for peace of mind is not depicted so glibly.

The middling material is often elevated by the performances. Walls (who plays the Wesley Snipes role in the remake of "White Men Can't Jump," now on Hulu) only rarely overplays Colter's despair. Cox's performance is more histrionic, yet utterly assured. Studi is a pleasure as always, even in an undersized part.

Principally concerned with three characters, "Mending the Line" is tidy to a fault. Finally, the movie offers a hint of a wider and messier world by ending with glimpses of a real-life Montana veterans group: Warriors & Quiet Waters.

Even viewers who feel satisfied with the therapeutic parable of Colter, Ike and Lucy may find themselves wishing they were watching a documentary about this intriguing organization, and not "Mending the Line."

"Mending the Line" is rated R for coarse language, some violent images and smoking. Running time: 122 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Hemsworth: 'I got sick' of playing Marvel's Thor

Actor tells British GQ that he wants to 'do some other stuff for a while'

BY ALEXANDRA DEL ROSARIO
Los Angeles Times

Chris Hemsworth dedicated more than a quarter of his life to playing Thor for Marvel. Naturally, taking on the Mjöl-nir-wielding Norse god grew stale.

Nearly a year after starring in the critically panned "Thor: Love and Thunder," Hemsworth, 39, opened up in a far-ranging interview with British GQ about his time in the Marvel films, his ambitions and his next steps.

"I really wanna do some other stuff for a while," the "Extraction 2" star said in the interview published June 6.

In 2011, the Australian born-actor launched into superstardom with the first "Thor" film. As a sculpted, caped fish-out-of-water with luscious blond locks, Hemsworth brought "Thor" to a new generation of moviegoers, helping to lay the foundation for Marvel's "Avengers" and several "Thor" sequels.

Within a decade, Hemsworth had portrayed Thor in 13 projects, including video games and the blockbuster movies "Avengers: Endgame" and "Thor: Rag-

narok." He explained to British GQ why he was happy to "do something fairly different" with each film.

"I got sick of the character pretty quick every couple of years," he said.

Hemsworth's Thor has taken a variety of shapes — from a serious god trying to find a way back home to a Lebowsky wannabe providing comic relief amid The Blip — when people were snapped out of existence for five years — in "Avengers."

Large-scale action movies like "Avengers" have been Hemsworth's bread and butter for more than a decade, but the pictures have come under fire from filmmakers the actor says are his "heroes."

In 2019, Martin Scorsese likened the hero flicks to "theme parks." Then in November 2022, director Quentin Tarantino said that actors in Marvel films are "not movie stars. ... Captain America is the star. Or Thor is the star."

Hemsworth told British GQ that those comments were "super-depressing."

"There goes two of my heroes I won't work with. I guess they're not a fan of me," he said, before

clarifying that he would still be open to working with the directors.

Elsewhere in the interview, Hemsworth admitted that the "Thor" films were more "aesthetic body work," as opposed to the "Extraction" movies, which he said required more athleticism.

In a separate interview with the New Yorker published June 5, Anthony Hopkins also weighed in on "Thor" work. He starred as King Odin of Asgard.

"They put me in armor; they shoved a beard on me," the Oscar-winning actor said. "Sit on the throne, shout a bit. If you're sitting in front of a green screen, it's pointless acting it."

Hemsworth, who expressed interest in directing and recently starred in the National Geographic series "Limitless," might be taking a break from "Thor," but he is open to eventually reprising the character.

"If I was going to do something again, it would have to be tonally different. And we'd have to do something very drastic to keep people on their toes," he said.

"Otherwise, it's just the fatigue of those characters and those films, where people are like, 'I've seen it.'"



Netflix

Chris Hemsworth, who stars in "Extraction 2" on Netflix, says he's tired of his Marvel superhero character Thor and ready to play other roles for a while.

Hemsworth rakes in more fighting opportunities in 'Extraction 2'

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Tyler Rake was clinically dead when we last saw him at the end of "Extraction," tumbling over a bridge in Bangladesh with a fatal, burbling bullet wound to his neck. But death is no match for Netflix.

Chris Hemsworth returns as the sad-sack, gun-for-hire Rake in "Extraction 2," and you'll thank the giant streamer for such a nifty bit of resurrection because this franchise is pure cinematic adrenaline.

The new movie comes two years after a surprisingly good first installment, which saw Rake intervene in a feud between two rival drug dealers, survive numerous double-crosses, ask things like "How many hostiles on-site?" and lob an inexhaustible number of grenades.

How he survived it all stuns even his friends. Emerging from a coma in "Extraction 2," he is stashed in a remote chalet in Gmunden, Austria, and told to chill out — learn to knit, go on hikes, try to reach mindfulness. "Enjoy retirement," he is told. If he did, there would be no "Extraction 2."

Inevitably, a new extraction job comes along, so cue the getting-in-shape montage of Hemsworth doing pushups in the snow, splitting firewood, pushing a sled filled with rocks and doing some light ax throwing. The "Extraction" movies lean into all the clichés, but somehow they don't feel old.

Hemsworth is re-joined here by Marvel Comic Universe screenwriter Joe Russo and stunt-specialist-turned-director Sam Hargrave, but their ace-in-the-hole is cinematographer Newton Thomas Sigel. He creates impossibly long single takes of complicated fighting or driving



Netflix

Chris Hemsworth returns as Tyler Rake in "Extraction 2." Also shown: Tinatin Dalakishvili, who plays Ketevan.

scenes that put the viewer directly into the action like few other thrillers.

This time, Sigel stages a breathless rescue from inside the winding tunnels of a brutal Georgian prison, complete with a full riot, a flaming police shield used as a weapon, a car chase with motorcycles and rockets and a race through a factory and then onto a train moving 40 mph,

where helicopters are shot down and there's more hand-to-hand combat aboard. It's a 20-minute tour de force — the kind of sequence that brings you up from your seat to applaud, even if you're on your couch. And there's more than an hour to go.

The strength of these movies is being down in the mud, streets and dirt, with the sound of spent cartridges ping-ing off concrete. These characters sweat and they bruise, even if many look fabulous in sunglasses.

The baddies here are similar to those of the first installment — a pair of powerful, scarred brothers who run heroin and guns in Georgia and are quiet-talking psychopaths, the kind who whisper a metaphor and then plunge a rake into your throat.

We learn a bit more about Rake and even meet members of his extended family, but he remains a one-note emotionally suppressed man. One knock on the franchise is that it hasn't been able to take advantage of Hemsworth's humor, like Marvel has done with his Thor.

Family is at the heart of "Extraction 2" as Rake gets in between this Georgian clan and also seeks to keep alive his trusted handler, Nik Khan (Golshifteh Farahani, seriously good; a franchise spinoff, anyone?) and her cool-as-silk sidekick brother (Adam Bessa).

Death will only free one side and, along the way, a fancy rooftop gym will be turned into a charnel house, a skyscraper will be virtually razed by rocket fire, an airfield will explode in a fiery mess and a church will be wrecked — sorry, God. But death isn't the final word — in this franchise, that's relative.

"Extraction 2" is rated R for strong, bloody violence throughout and language. Running time: 123 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Expanding the Diablo Sanctuary

Even after completing the 4th game's main campaign, players have tons to explore

BY GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

No one ever finishes a video game anymore. The way projects are made and planned out, players can never be really done with an adventure. Games, especially those made by Blizzard, are entities that change and evolve over time. You don't complete Blizzard games, you live with them for however long the content interests you or your wallet allows.

That's what fans will face with *Diablo IV*. It's an enormous game that takes the franchise's signature hack-and-slash dungeon dives and envisions them in an open world. The Sanctuary that players step into is expansive, and explored through the campaign's six chapters.

The story so far ...

In a way, this entry is almost like a reboot. It starts 50 years after the explosive finale of *Diablo III*, and in a way, it serves as a clean slate telling a new chapter, one in which the title villain takes back seat to the new big bad — Lilith, the daughter of Mephisto, the Lord of Hatred. She and the angel Inarius created humans and the world of Sanctuary as a way to escape the Eternal Conflict between angels and demons.

Now after the events of *Diablo III*, humankind has descended into a dark age, and Lilith has somehow returned from her banishment. What follows is a campaign to stop her and her minions from upending the world and harming humanity's survivors. Players take on the role of the Wanderer who is drawn into this conflict.

Players create their own character and choose his or her class from the five available. They can be a necromancer, rogue, sorcerer, barbarian or druid. They each have their distinct playstyles, and Blizzard did a great job at crafting classes that have versatility. When in a group, they each have their own role. Barbarians are great at drawing enemy attacks with their high defense and health while Sorcerers deal massive damage, but they're rather frail.

An addictive gameplay loop

Diablo IV is a game that begs players to explore not only the realm of Sanctuary but also what these characters can do. Part of the fun in the campaign is choosing a class and figuring out how to level it up so that it excels and defeats swarms of enemies.

It's part of the core gameplay loop of the campaign. Players take on missions and



PHOTOS BY BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT/TNS

The world of *Diablo IV* is so large that players will need a mount to help traverse it. However, mounts aren't available until more than halfway through the campaign. Before then, players must open up waypoints to travel.



With the introduction of Lilith in *Diablo IV*, the franchise has a villain who is more intriguing and far more nuanced than any before her.

dive into dungeons and clear them. That gives them gear, and players pick and choose the equipment that makes them more powerful before selling or breaking it down. With a new powered-up hero, they fight Lilith's army again in hopes of getting even better gear.

The franchise has built its reputation on this addictive loop and giving players a masterful campaign with dungeons that are procedurally generated so that no two runs are alike.

A dollop of *World of Warcraft*

Diablo IV expands on that concept by bringing elements of another successful Blizzard title, *World of Warcraft*, into the fold. In *Diablo IV*, players can see and interact with other human-controlled protagonists as they go through their adventure. That makes the game feel more alive as they see they're not alone in fighting the forces of hell. They'll stumble upon dynamic world events that others can participate in. They can liberate Strongholds to create player-friendly waypoints in the enormous world.

To help them traverse it, players will need mounts, which come a little more than halfway through the campaign. Be-

fore then, players must open up waypoints that enable them to fast-travel to areas in Sanctuary's five biomes. Even though the perspective is still overhead and isometric giving players a broad view, the world of *Diablo IV* still seems vast.

With more than 120 dungeons to explore, the game has plenty of content to keep players busy, but the developers also created a reward system that encourages people to venture into the unknown and battle monsters. Yes, the gameplay can be repetitive, but it's the way Blizzard microdoses players with feelings of advancement through gear and leveling that will keep them engaged.

The quest lines have good storytelling, and at times, they cover foreboding subject matter that befits the dark fantasy that Blizzard originally crafted. When *Diablo IV* is at its best, the mission's narrative pushes the action along with the game's real driving force — the rewards, be they gear, experience points or legendary aspects — aka perks — that can be attached to equipment.

Lilith is the real MVP

The main campaign itself is great, but unevenly paced. The driving force of the

narrative is Lilith herself, who is a force of motherly nature. The daughter of Hatred is a remarkable villain and the first one really worth writing about in the franchise. Much of that has to do with her motives.

Although everyone says she's evil and will lead to the Sanctuary's destruction, she's written in a way that raises doubts about who the bad guy really is. Voice actor Caroline Faber backs that up with a performance that's equally menacing and tender in places. She creates an intriguing ambiguity that sets up the franchise for the future.

A campaign that keeps on going

The developers have learned from such missteps as creating a real-money auction house in *Diablo III*. Instead, *Diablo IV* doubles down on the way players can craft their protagonists to make them more powerful in order to take on more difficult challenges.

After beating a campaign that drags on a little too much with the boss fights in the final chapter, players will encounter an endgame that will demand more from them with designated player vs. player zones that's reminiscent of the Dark Zone in Tom Clancy's *The Division*. They'll also encounter Capstone and Nightmare dungeons that will test players' skills. They can also face World Bosses, which offer opportunities to show off their skill and gear to other players.

In addition, Blizzard made *Diablo IV* with an eye toward seasonal content. With battle passes, players make a seasonal character to explore some of the tweaks that the developer creates. They're free to all, but the paid tier will feature cosmetic items, so players who spend the most money won't necessarily be the most powerful.

Again, all of this is to create an experience that lives on after the credits roll. *Diablo IV* isn't necessarily a finished game. It's one that Blizzard expects to live on long after launch, and it probably will.

Platforms: Xbox Series X and Series S, Xbox One, PC, PlayStation 5, PlayStation 4
Online: diablo4.blizzard.com/en-us

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Budapest's ruin pubs are modest marvels

Budapest, the cultural capital of Hungary and much of Central Europe, has no shortage of nightlife. You can go there for grand opera, folk music and dancing, a twilight boat trip or live music in a nightclub.

But there's also an edgy side to Budapest evenings — “ruin pubs” (romkocsma), which are ramshackle, cavern-like bars crammed with revelers having the time of their lives. To find them, you'll have to leave the wide boulevards lined with bright, modern stores and delve into the older, more atmospheric streets of the city's Jewish Quarter. After World War II, this area was deserted, then resettled largely by members of the Hungarian Roma minority. It remained dilapidated under communism and was slow to rejuvenate even after the Iron Curtain fell. Today it's a neighborhood of small shops and modest facades that hide ornate, spacious synagogues used by Budapest's small but vibrant Jewish community.

The unusual combination of a central location and low rents attracted a funky breed of bars. Their low-profile entryways look abandoned, but through a maze of hallways you emerge into large rooms and open-air courtyards filled with people and thrift-shop furniture. It feels like a gang of squatters made a trip to the dump yester-

day and grabbed whatever was usable, moved in today and are open for business tonight. Enjoying a drink here, I'm reminded of creatures that inhabit discarded shells in a tide pool.



Rick Steves

The last time I was in Budapest, I ended up sitting with Peter (who designs ruin pubs), Laura (who works at a hotel) and Sandra (whose father's company introduced adult entertainment to Hungary back in the 1990s). I told them how much I like the shabby lounge atmosphere of a ruin pub, and Laura declared that this one, Szimpla Kert (which means “Simple Garden”), is the mecca of ruin pubs in Budapest.

Peter bought a round of spritzes (rosé with soda water). He was excited about an event at a ruin pub called “Instant-Fogas,” and wanted us to go there. We trekked a few blocks and found a warren of rooms and alcoves in a historic-feeling, but appropriately run-down, building. Each room was decorated differently, but always creatively — I liked the upside-down room with furniture on the ceiling.

I commented on how well the design worked. Peter explained how these clubs are the soul of underground culture here.



iStock

The Szimpla Kert is one of the most attractive and touristic ruin pubs in Budapest.

It's the anti-club club: flea market furniture, no matching chairs, a mishmash of colors. It's pleasantly chaotic, designed to be undesigned. On hot nights, the pubs spill out into unkempt courtyards, creating the feeling of a cozy living room missing its roof ... under the stars.

Ruin pubs encourage a delightful sense of discovery. In one room, dancers thump to an industrial beat. In the next, live jazz enhances an art display. In the next room, you and your partner find yourselves alone — perfect for an intimate conversation.

These bars also come with a bit of communist kitsch. Some who love these lounges were little kids during the last years of

communism. Too young to understand its downside, they have fond memories of the good times, when the pace of life was slower and families were tightly knit. Ruin pubs even sell nostalgic “commie” soft drinks along with the cocktails.

I love this city for its quirks and persistent personality as much as for its Old World elegance. You'd never see a ruin pub on Paris's Champs-Élysées, but that's the point. Thanks to its relaxed atmosphere, Budapest is one of the easiest places in Hungary to make a memorable connection.

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.

Light and music will fill the air at these upcoming festivals

On June 21, the date of the summer solstice, many Europeans will stay out late to enjoy not only a glorious light-filled evening, but also one full of sound.

La Fête de la Musique, or Festival of Music, is an international phenomenon breathed into life by the Ministry of Culture of France in 1982. The festival was intended to welcome the return of the summer sun in a fun way and with music as its centerpiece. While the performing artists involved could be either amateurs and professionals, three things were important from the start: the shows



Karen Bradbury

should encompass all genres, be aimed at all types of audiences and be free of charge. Forty years on, the event continues to be staged all over France, in dozens of other countries and in hundreds of cities throughout the world. European countries staging large-scale events include Belgium, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg and Spain. Those who find themselves in France on the day are apt to find lively, sound-filled scenes in city squares, pedestrian thoroughways, parks or other public gathering spots. The musicians are sharing their talents for free, and no entry fees are charged. Online: fetedelamusique.culture.gouv.fr

Those based in Germany can find Fête de la Musique events too. Cities that typically take part include Aachen, Bamberg, Berlin, Darmstadt, Dresden, Essen, Frankfurt am Main, Hannover, Hanau, Kassel, Landau in der Pfalz, Saarbrücken, Stuttgart and many others. Online: fetedelamusique.info

A number of other summer events shine a spotlight on musicians. Here are some to check out in coming months:

Rothenburg o.d. Tauber, Germany: American high school students have been enlivening this medieval jewel of a town for nearly 50 years. The Ambassadors of Music program, held in June and July each year, brings high school band members representing different states to



iStock

Musicians will soon take to the streets in droves as the Festival of Music gets underway next week in Europe.

Rothenburg, which is just one stop on their tours throughout Europe. In one-hour concerts held at 2 p.m. at the market square and 4 p.m. in the Franciscan Church, the student groups perform popular classical pieces as well as melodies from Hollywood blockbusters. The students travel as winners of competitions held in their respective states. The states represented in 2023 include Oklahoma (June 17); Nebraska (June 23); Illinois (June 26); South Dakota (July 2); North Carolina (July 5); Wisconsin (July 8); Missouri (July 11); Iowa (July 17); and Utah (July 20). Online: ambassadorsofmusic.com

Tallinn, Estonia: Every five years, the cozy Baltic capital city hosts one of the largest choral events in the world. In a highly moving expression of a small country's culture and resilience, more than 30,000 singers join voices in the Estonian Song Festival, whose next edition is slated for July 3-6, 2025. A similar event is the Youth Song and Dance Celebration, set to take place June 30-July 2 in

2023. Attendees can enjoy the sight and sound of 10 choirs and four dance groups made up of performers between the ages of 7 and 27, including a handful groups from abroad. A folk music party takes place at Tallinn's Freedom Square on July 1. Online: 2023.laulupidu.ee/en

Krakow, Poland: The EtnoKrakow/Crossroads music festival, featuring artists from the ethno and world music scene of Poland and far beyond, strives to preserve endangered traditions and support intercultural dialogue and understanding through artistic expression. Open-air concerts are held at the stunning Main Market Square and other venues July 2-9. Performances include a mix of ticketed and free-entry events. Online: etnokrakow.pl

Rudolstadt, Germany: A town by a river in southern Thuringia hosts one of the largest and most prestigious world music festivals in Europe. Twenty stages spread across town serve as the venue for concerts, workshops, talks and other kinds of performances. The festival's friendly atmosphere and the breadth of music performed ensure many repeat visitors. Each year features a guest country of honor, and in 2023, musicians from Cuba will be welcomed. Running concurrently this year is the Euroradio Folk Festival, which promotes the cultural diversity of Europe through musical exchanges. Fiddles, accordions, balalaikas, throat singing, yodeling and other traditional sounds of folk music are not only preserved, but continuously redefined. A weekend ticket for all four of the Rudolstadt Festival dates, July 6-9, goes for 120 euros. Online: rudolstadt-festival.de/en

Frankfurt am Main, Germany: The home stadium of the Frankfurt Eintracht soccer team holds THE GRAND JAM, a concert in which 1,000 musicians from the region and beyond will combine their talents and perform for a vast live audience. Viewers are invited to sing along to a playlist made up of popular radio hits. Tickets to the July 29 performance at the Deutsche Bank Park cost 39 euros. Online: thegrandjam.live/index.php/en

WEEKEND: TRAVEL



SUSAN CUNNINGHAM/AP

Ammonites, top, and belemnites are displayed on a fossil hunt tour with the Lyme Regis Museum in East Lyme, England, on May 8.

4 days along the Jurassic Coast

Fossil finding, cliff walking among the highlights of an England hike from Lyme Regis to Exmouth

BY STEVE WARTENBERG
Associated Press

We were only a mile into our four-day, 32-mile hike from Lyme Regis to Exmouth along the beautiful Jurassic Coast of southern England. Beneath us were the fossilized remains of sea creatures and birds dating back 150 million or more years. We were immersed in forest, with cliffs to the right, the English Channel to the left.

"Where are you headed?" asked a hiker, who came up behind us at a brisk pace and stopped to chat.

"Beer today, eventually Exmouth," I answered. (Beer is an actual town, as well as an end-of-the-day goal.) "You?"

"Minehead," he answered with a hint of pride.

"Minehead!"

I knew enough about the famous 630-mile South West Coast Path, on which we were hiking just a small section, to know that the end of the trail in Minehead was 540 miles away. This was one serious hiker.

"I have 30 days and I plan on going about 20 miles a day, maybe a little more," said the hiker, who had started at the other terminus, in Poole Harbor.

Suddenly, our planned four days and 32 miles along the East Devon Coast didn't seem so daunting.

Then again, hiking is all relative, and our trek seemed just right for our group of four: my wife, Susan, and my sister and her husband, Lauren and Bob Finkle.

"I just love being up at the top of the cliffs, looking out to the sea," Lauren said. Bob added that he enjoyed looking along the coast and seeing the stratifica-

tions in the steep cliffs.

Highlights for travelers along the trail:

Finding fossils

Lyme Regis was the home of Mary Anning (1799-1847), who helped create the science of paleontology. Anning found the first complete plesiosaur (a long-necked marine reptile) and one of the first complete ichthyosaurs (a dolphin-like reptile). She also found hundreds of fossils of ammonites and belemnites (squid-like sea creatures).

According to the Lyme Regis Museum, until she and other pioneering paleontologists unearthed and studied their finds, many people believed fossils were "creatures that had been left out of Noah's Ark, or the remains of animals that were still alive in distant parts of the world."

The museum hosts fossil-hunting tours. With the help of our guides — experts at cracking open the appropriate rocks with their hammers — we found a few ammonites and belemnites.

"For the rest of the hike, I kept thinking about how they were under us," Susan said. "The earth is so old and we're just here for a brief moment of time."

Walking the cliffs

Because we're only here for a brief moment in time, relatively speaking, hiking along part of the South West Coast Path is highly recommended. The section we walked is comprised of stone beaches below, undercliffs and actual cliffs.

The undercliffs are formed by what the Brits call landslips and Americans call landslides. In some sections, the landslips were so immense that forests have formed on them.



STEVE WARTENBERG/AP

Fossil hunters roam the beaches of Lyme Regis on April 23, in southern England. Lyme Regis was the home of Mary Anning (1799-1847), who found the first complete plesiosaur, a long-necked marine reptile, and one of the first complete ichthyosaurs.

Our hike to Beer was mostly through undercliffs and forests.

Day Two was our longest: 10 miles to Sidmouth. Many of the towns along the coast end with "mouth." The "mouth" is where the river empties into the sea, carving away, over millions of years, the stratifications and ravines we climbed up and down. The River Sid runs through Sidmouth; the River Exe through Exmouth.

A hiker's high

We unanimously agreed that walking along the clifftops was our favorite part of the hike. There's something magical, and meditative, as you stand there, a bit out of breath from the climb, taking in the scenery. The cliffs and coast stretch for miles, past where we'd hiked and beyond where we were headed. Then they fade into the fog, clouds and sea.

Getting to the top of one, Lauren said, results in "a hiker's high."

The sea was always to our left, and to our right were often vast fields and pastures. Occasionally, we walked along or through small herds of grazing cows, or a field of bright-yellow rapeseed.

Day Three was 7 miles to Budleigh Salterton, and included some of the best and longest sections atop the cliffs.

Drying off after the rain

Upon every British hike some rain must fall. Luckily for us, it fell only on the last day of our late-April hike.

Our Day Four trek to Exmouth was an all-day rainfest. Once you're wet, you're wet, and there's nothing to do but slog onward with a wet upper lip and enjoy the foggy, wet and slippery climbs up and down the cliffs.

A bit of clothing advice: Wear layers that you can take off as



STEVE WARTENBERG/AP

Susan Cunningham hikes near Salcombe Regis, part of the 630-mile South West Coast Path in southern England on April 25.



STEVE WARTENBERG/AP

People walk between the beach and cliffs leaving Sidmouth, along the South West Coast Path, in southern England on April 26.

you exert yourself.

We trudged on until we reached and crossed the Exe River, and headed into town and our bed and breakfast lodge to dry off and sip a hot cup of tea.

Susan and I were content with our four-day hike along the Jurassic Coast; Lauren and Bob were smitten. They hope to return to do the whole trail.

One practical tip about guides: On our first United Kingdom hike, the 102-mile Cotswold Way back in 2005, Susan and I carried everything on our backs. Never

again, we declared, and ever since, we've hired Contours Hiking. They're one of numerous companies that will move your bags and book your rooms (mostly bed-and-breakfast-type places).

It's worth every pound. I'm not getting any younger, and neither is my back.

Plus, it's hard to reserve rooms on your own in the coastal towns and inland villages along the most popular hiking routes in the U.K.; tour companies gobble up the limited number of rooms.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



A map of the barefoot path, which traverses a meadow, crosses the Nahe River and is lined with activity stations on the other side.

Barefoot bliss in German park

Barfusspfad Bad Sobernheim a safe place to practice mindfulness while walking in the mud

BY HEATHER BENIT
Stars and Stripes

When's the last time you walked barefoot in the mud or skipped through a grassy meadow without wearing shoes?

A Barfusspfad in Germany offers a safe place to reclaim the barefoot bliss of childhood and muck about outside on a summer's day.

Looking for an outdoor adventure, my son and I recently decided to get our feet dirty at one of Germany's oldest barefoot parks, Barfusspfad Bad Sobernheim, open since 1992.

The roughly 2-mile-long footpath is circular and runs along the Nahe River, crossing it twice. On one side of the river, the trail borders an active bike path and traverses a serene meadow with wildflowers. The terrain is mostly packed dirt, making it gentle on bare feet.

On the other side of the river is a cluster of adventure stations with foot gymnastics and sensory experiences.

Scattered throughout the park, the stations challenge hikers with balancing beams and rotating barrels or engage in reflexology, a type of therapy that targets pressure points on the feet, with walks over wine corks, small stones or mulch.

The path kicks off by crossing a trough of knee-high murky mud. I stepped in with minimal trepidation, imagining a relaxing spa treatment with mud squishing between my feet as if I were walking in a lake.

But I was surprised to feel tiny pebbles under my feet and what seemed to be the cement foundation of the pool. It was cold and spooky, yet exhilarating.

My young son, usually a magnet for messes, was not a fan of this part of the trail. "Yuck! So dirty," he kept saying until the thick mud coating our legs was sloughed off as we walked through tall grasses.

Around the corner was a water pool that took off another layer of caked mud. After crossing the trough of water, the path opened up into a field with a view of the river and the rolling hills in the background.

I was moved many times by the simple pleasures of the moment: the smell of dirt under my feet, the softness of the breeze, the hum of a passing train and the brightness of yellow wildflowers.

Walking with the naked ground beneath my feet opened my senses and melted my stress faster than a yoga class ever has.

After crossing the Nahe on a bridge designed for shoeless pedestrians, we encountered more sensory stations and people slowing down to test their balance and the nerve endings in their feet.

At some stations, I stayed on the grass path to avoid the wooden boxes filled with small stones. Walking barefoot in the grass was instantly calming, but for me the rocks were too rough to be relaxing.

The many children on the path, however, raced over the various surfaces and were rewarded with



On the QT

Address: Staudenheimerstrasse 90, Bad Sobernheim, Germany

Hours: June, July and August, 9 a.m.-8 p.m. daily; May and September through Oct. 3, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. daily. Closed Oct. 3-May 1.

Cost: A day ticket is 5 euros for adults and 3 euros for children ages 3 to 17; children under 3 are free.

Info: There are lockers for shoes and towels, as well as a foot washing area.

Website: www.barfusspfad-bad-sobernheim.de/

Heather Benit

PHOTOS BY HEATHER BENIT/Stars and Stripes

Hikers show off their feet after crossing the mud basin at the barefoot park in Bad Sobernheim, Germany. It has been open since 1992 and is one of the oldest barefoot parks in Germany.



The barefoot trail is scattered with balance beams and obstacles for hikers.

two playgrounds toward the end of the route.

My son seemed to lack my foot sensitivity and enjoyed stepping on the stones and braving the tall beams on the playground.

The final obstacle was walking single file across the moving river on a narrow swinging suspension bridge. I tried not to look down as we inched across the shaky bridge, gripping the ropes for balance.

We could have washed our feet under a water spigot at the end of the loop, but feeling giddy and free, we left the mud sticking to our feet as we ate a snack from the riverfront refreshment stand and planned our next barefoot adventure.

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Expansive views line the circular, roughly 2-mile-long barefoot path.



There are also foot rollers at the park as well as a rope bridge and reflexology stations to walk on mulch, rocks and wine bottle corks.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Tasting Korean food for 1st time in Mainz

Restaurant Gautor Korea worth the trip for an enjoyable introduction to traditional dishes like bulgogi, bibimbap

BY MATT WAGNER

Stars and Stripes

Like many folks around the globe, I've been swept up by the Korean wave, aka the Hallyu phenomenon out of South Korea.

Watching K-dramas piqued my interest in a country about which I knew little five years ago. And via the shows, Korean food has grabbed my attention as well, but living in rural northeastern Ohio meant my access to it was limited.

After moving to Germany, though, I searched online and quickly unearthed Restaurant Gautor Korea in Mainz. My first foray into Korean food was booked.

I brought along a colleague whose Korean restaurant experience meant he could assess Gautor's bona fides better than a newbie like me.

The decor was the first thing I noticed. Old Korean artwork, dolls and plants adorned the interior, where multiple walls, a column and the padding on the chairs are all a lime green color that really stands out.

My first culture shock of the evening, though, arrived right after we ordered. The only time I had used chopsticks occurred eight or nine years prior, so I spent the time before the food was served practicing the motions.

I ended up batting .500 during the meal, a great average in baseball but not so great when eating. The 50% of the time I failed resulted in me using the chopsticks like spears and being thankful that traditional Korean cutlery includes a spoon.

We ordered the specials of an asparagus salad in a brown-red



**AFTER
HOURS
GERMANY**

Restaurant Gautor Korea

Address: Kaestrich 13, Mainz, Germany

Hours: Wednesday, 6-10 p.m.; Thursday through Sunday, noon-2 p.m. and 6-10 p.m.

Prices: Dinner entrees cost between 21 and 26 euros, while lunch entrees are between 13 and 15 euros. Sides and desserts cost between 2.50 and 7.90 euros.

Information: Online: gautor-korea.de; Phone: +49 6131-221600

Matt Wagner

sauce and pieces of cod coated in egg batter and served with soy sauce.

The asparagus salad was surprisingly sweet thanks to the sauce and red cabbage leaves, while the cod tasted as expected. I like both components of the dish, so I enjoyed it.

We also were served soups with our main courses. Mine was cold cucumber soup, which was a nice contrast to the warm evening. My colleague got the kimchi soup, which, while billed as being spicy, lacked the punch I'm sure it would have had in South Korea.

I initially was disappointed by the menu offerings for entrees, as watching "Extraordinary Attorney Woo" had created a craving for kimbap, but it wasn't among the choices.

I chose the bulgogi instead, and once it arrived, I forgot all about my kimbap kvetch. My colleague got the bibimbap.



PHOTOS BY MATT WAGNER/Stars and Stripes

Restaurant Gautor Korea in Mainz, Germany, uses lime green extensively in its interior color scheme along with assorted Korean-themed artwork.

Both were delicious. The meat in the bulgogi was marinated perfectly with soy sauce, sesame oil and spices, giving it a sweet taste. With zucchini, mushrooms, red onions and rice mixed in, it was wonderfully satisfying.

The bibimbap also had a vegetable mixture of carrots, mushrooms, zucchini, red onions and other greens along with rice. The sweet and soy sauces really accentuated the flavor.

The only complaint from my colleague was bibimbap normally has an egg with it, but after sampling it, I thought the vegetarian option tasted so good that an egg wasn't needed.

The meals also came with kimchi, which unfortunately left a lot to be desired. However, my



The bulgogi at Restaurant Gautor Korea consists of marinated steak, zucchini, mushrooms and red onions served with rice.



The bibimbap consists of a medley of vegetables but no egg. The dish is served with rice and two sauces on the side.

dining companion told me not to give up on the traditional dish yet, so I will follow that advice.

Overall, while the spicy wasn't spicy enough, the entrees made

Gautor Korea worth a trip. I foresee more Korean food in my future.

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Lahmajoun a family-friendly pizza-like dish

BY CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL

Milk Street/Associated Press

In Turkey, Armenia and the Levant, a flatbread known as lahmajoun comes topped with spiced ground lamb, tomatoes and bell pepper. With the dough stretched paper-thin, diners typically drizzle the popular dish with lemon juice and roll it up to eat.

We were in Istanbul when we came across this tasty, social dish, which fills a similar place in the culture as pizza in many other places, with equally exacting standards for what makes a good lahmajoun. The toppings are chopped coarsely for a rustic texture, the dough is expertly stretched by hand, and the flatbread cooks in minutes in a roaring-hot oven.

In this recipe for our book "Cook What You Have," which draws on pantry staples to assemble easy, weeknight meals, we

swap the usual homemade flatbread dough for store-bought pita breads. Simply combine the meat mixture in a food processor and spread onto the pita, then bake it in a hot oven. Served with lemon wedges on the side, it evokes the real thing while finishing in about half an hour.

When processing the meat mixture, don't overdo it or the meat may become tough. Pulse a few times, just until combined. If you like, finish the dish with a sprinkling of fresh herbs and a drizzle of cooling yogurt to complement the spiced meat.

Weeknight Lahmajoun

Start to finish: 30 minutes

Makes four 8-inch flatbreads

Ingredients

Four 8-inch pita breads

1 small red OR yellow onion, roughly chopped

¼ cup roasted red peppers, drained and patted dry

2 tablespoons tomato paste

2 teaspoons smoked paprika

1½ teaspoons ground cumin

¾ teaspoon red pepper flakes

Kosher salt and ground black pepper

8 ounces ground beef OR ground lamb

Directions

Heat the oven to 500°F with racks in the upper- and lower-middle positions. Arrange the pita breads on 2 rimmed baking sheets; set aside.

In a food processor, pulse the onion until finely chopped, about 5 pulses. Add the roasted peppers, tomato paste, paprika, cumin, pepper flakes, ½ teaspoon salt and 1 teaspoon black pepper. Process until smooth, about 10 seconds, scraping the bowl as needed. Add the beef and pulse just until incorporated, 3 or 4 pulses.

Divide the beef mixture evenly among



MILK STREET/AP

A lahmajoun topped with spiced ground lamb, tomatoes and bell pepper.

the pitas (about a scant ½ cup each) and spread over the rounds, leaving a ½-inch border around the edge. Bake until the pitas are golden brown on the edges and the meat is sizzling, switching and rotating the baking sheets halfway through, 8 to 10 minutes. Cool for a few minutes, then transfer to a cutting board and cut into wedges.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY JONATHAN SNYDER/Stars and Stripes

All Hands Beach, once a swimming area only for military members stationed at Naval Air Station Cubi Point, is situated between Subic Bay International Airport and Subic Container Terminal in the Philippines.

Affordable beach resort for all

All Hands awaits at former US air station in Philippines

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

U.S. troops on temporary duty to Subic Bay in the Philippines can spend their down time at a former liberty zone on what used to be Naval Air Station Cubi Point.

Now a commercial beach resort, All Hands Beach looks like a set from a movie about an exotic tropical paradise. Straw-roofed huts surrounded by palm trees and a large two-story dining area offer an exceptional view of the sandy beach and the ocean. Only day trippers don't need to be hotel guests to enjoy the beach.

All Hands Beach — once a swimming area only for military members stationed at the former base — is situated between Subic Bay International Airport and Subic Container Terminal. It was developed by Brighterday Subic Ltd. Inc. after the U.S. vacated the property.

The resort is within Subic Bay Freeport Zone, allowing visits by U.S. service members who are restricted to that area while on temporary duty.

The water is a picturesque turquoise with several inflatable features to enjoy. The resort provides Jet Ski rentals for \$100 an hour, banana boat rides for \$15 per person for 30 minutes and kayaks for \$4 per 30 minutes for guests looking for something more exciting.

The calm, clear water also offers great snorkeling with a coral reef teeming with tropical fish nearby.

A restaurant and bar has an extensive menu of chicken, beef, pork, seafood, sandwiches, salads and ice cream. Prices range from 90 pesos, or about \$1.62, to 995 pesos, with serving sizes enough to feed four. There are also soft drinks, coffee, smoothies and alcoholic beverages available.



U.S. troops on temporary duty to Subic Bay in the Philippines can spend their down time at a former liberty zone on what used to be Naval Air Station Cubi Point.

On the QT

Directions: San Bernardino Road, Subic Bay Freeport Zone, Olongapo, 2222 Zambales, Philippines

Times: 6 a.m. to midnight

Costs: \$12.62 for entry to swim

Food: Chicken, beef, pork and fish dishes available on site.

Information: Online: allhandsbeach.com

Jonathan Snyder

Entry into the resort to swim is 700 pesos per person, but admission to the restaurant for dining only is free.

The resort hotel has 25 rooms starting at 6,400 pesos per night for a room for four up to 18,000 pesos for 10.

Swimming is open from 6 a.m. to midnight daily and there is free parking next to the resort.

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The turquoise water at All Hands Beach has several inflatable features to enjoy.

Japan's hotel industry sees many guests, but is hurting for workers

Japan News

Occupancy rates at hotels and other accommodations in Japan have been making a steady recovery, reaching 55.6% in April according to the nation's preliminary Tourism Agency statistics, which marks a more than fourfold increase from the lowest point of the coronavirus pandemic.

Labor shortages, however, continue to plague the industry, keeping it from getting the recovery onto solid footing.

April marked the third consecutive month that the occupancy rate has exceeded 50%. In fact, since the government's nationwide travel discount program to stimulate demand began in October, the rate has steadily remained above 50%.

The rate seems on track to returning to the pre-pandemic 60% range.

During the pandemic, the occupancy rate fell to 13.2% in May 2020, when a national state of emergency was declared. In the period from 2020 to 2021, it hovered in the 20%-40% range. In addition to restrictions on movement, the disappearance of foreign visitors to Japan due to the tightened border control measures had a major impact.

With the relaxation of border control measures and other factors, the occupancy rate remained high at 57% in March and 55% in April. The rapid increase in foreign visitors has bolstered underlying demand.

Seibu Holdings, the operator of Prince Hotels and others, has seen occupancies in its domestic hotel business increase more than 20% year on year since September.

While hotels and inns continue to book up, the industry has been dealing with a severe labor shortage.

During the pandemic, many operators were forced to cut their staffs due to the sharp plunge in occupancy rates. With the resumption of economic activity, it's been difficult to secure the necessary workers.

In a Japan Hotel Association survey conducted in January, the majority of hotels responded that "the labor shortage is having an effect on their operation," with about 16% of them putting limits on room availability.

The labor shortage is becoming serious in a wide range of service industries beyond hotels.

"The lack of available labor has kept many hotels from increasing occupancy rates even if they wanted to," said researcher Takuto Yasuda of the NLI Research Institute. "It will take time to return to pre-pandemic levels."



Japan News-Yomiuri

A restaurant in the Shinagawa Prince Hotel in Minato Ward, Tokyo, bustles with hotel guests on a recent Friday.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Burger royalty

Frequently-open spot near Osan Air Base reigns over South Korea's fast-food scene

By CHRISTOPHER GREEN

Stars and Stripes

Life in the military can be unpredictable. Your day is filled with classes, training, inspections. You barely have time for lunch.

However, there is no excuse for skipping meals at Osan Air Base. No matter how busy your day might be, a restaurant right outside the main gate offers amazing, affordable food served quickly. You'll be in and out in less than 15 minutes.

Tucked away on Sinjang-dong, directly across from the Blue Opera restaurant, is the aptly named King Hamburger, for it is a monarch among burger joints.

As you approach, the aroma of burgers and fries beckons you. The friendly staff greets you and the seemingly endless menu items are displayed on video monitors.

King offers everything from cheeseburgers and chicken tenders to kebabs and tacos.

I chose the Mac Attack. No, it isn't meant to throw shade at the golden arches. This burger fea-



AFTER HOURS
SOUTH KOREA

King Hamburger

Location: 316-7 Sinjang-dong, Pyeongtaek-si, Gyeonggi-do

Hours: Open 24 hours, Monday through Saturday; closes at 4 p.m. Sunday and reopens 11 a.m. Monday.

Prices: Appetizers range from 6,500 won to 16,600 won; entrees range from 7,500 won to 24,000 won. Non-alcoholic drinks are 2,200 won to 6,400 won.

Dress: Casual

Directions: About a 5-minute walk from the main gate at Osan Air Base, South Korea

Information: Phone: 031-665-9951; Online: mgfoodfactory.com

Christopher Green

tures a fried ring of mac and cheese. The bun was light and fluffy. Inside was a thick beef patty topped with queso and cheddar cheese.

Price-wise, the Mac Attack



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER GREEN/Stars and Stripes

The aroma of burgers and fries, as well as wings and tacos, beckons from King Hamburger near Osan Air Base, South Korea. Below: The Mac Attack features queso and a fried ring of macaroni and cheese.

ranks high at 20,000 won, or about \$15. Most menu items range from 1,400 to 24,000 won.

King is open for 24 hours, Monday to Saturday, but closes at 4 p.m. Sunday. So, when you're on your break and craving something delicious, pop in and give it a try.

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Peking-style sauce turns pork chops into big-flavored meals

By ANN MALONEY

The Washington Post

Over the years, I've struggled to find a good way to prepare boneless pork chops. They cook quickly, so I'm often tempted to pick them up when I'm browsing in the supermarket for weeknight supper ingredients.

Often, I end up slicing the meat and tossing it into stir-fries, which is great but limiting.

Some months ago, I found a terrific 30-minute recipe for them in Suzie Lee's "Simply Chinese" cookbook, which is a great resource for busy home cooks who love Chinese food, because it is filled with recipes for flavorful dishes that come together quickly.

Her Peking Pork Chops are a notable example. Lee lightly pounds the chops just to tenderize them, cuts them into chunks and briefly marinates them — just five minutes, but you can leave them for up to 12 hours if you like.

She then dusts the pieces in a mixture of cornstarch and flour and fries them before tossing them in a big-flavored Peking-style sauce made with ketchup, chili oil, hoisin sauce, Worcestershire sauce, sugar, salt and five-spice powder.

The result was a dish of tender, big-flavored pork that we've enjoyed again and again.

"The sauce is so tasty that you can use any meat or veg as an alternative to pork," Lee writes in her cookbook. And she's right. I've tried it on fried chicken tenders as well as roasted potatoes. I imagine it



REY LOPEZ/For The Washington Post

Peking Pork Chops make for a quick, delicious Chinese-style meal.

would also be great on crisped tofu cubes.

"Simply Chinese" is the first cookbook from Lee, the 2020 winner of the BBC's "Best Home Cook" competition, who went on to host her own BBC show in Northern Ireland, where she grew up.

Her parents, who hailed from Hong Kong, ran Man Lee, a Chinese takeout restaurant, which her father, Peter, still operates. She credits her family, especially her mother, Celia, who died in 2000 when Lee was 16, with giving her a love for cooking.

As I've cooked my way through the cookbook, I've learned lots of tips and tricks for getting a meal on the table a little more quickly.

Lee understands what it's like to be busy but still want to cook at home: She may offer a recipe for making your own

bao buns, but she also notes that you can buy them ready-made. Her goal is to get people into the kitchen cooking.

As she notes, "food for me is the cornerstone of family life as it brings everyone together."

Peking Pork Chops

4 servings

Active time: 25 minutes

Ingredients

For the pork chops:

1 pound of $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick boneless pork chops, trimmed of fat

2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon cornstarch, divided

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons Shaoxing wine

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons light soy sauce

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon Chinese five-spice powder

1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil

1 large egg

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup vegetable oil, for frying

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

For the sauce:

3 tablespoons ketchup

3 tablespoons hoisin sauce

3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce

3 tablespoons water

2 teaspoons Chinese five-spice powder

1 teaspoon granulated sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon chili oil

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon fine salt

Cooked white or brown rice, for serving (optional)

Sliced scallions, for serving (optional)

Directions

To tenderize the pork chops, place them on a cutting board, uncovered, and, using

the "tooth" side of a meat mallet, pound them 4 or 5 times on each side; then cut them into 3 or 4 pieces.

In a medium bowl, whisk together 1 teaspoon of the cornstarch, the Shaoxing wine, soy sauce, five-spice powder, sesame oil and egg until well combined. Add the pork and toss to coat. Cover and marinate for at least 5 minutes on the counter, or refrigerate overnight.

Line a platter with towels and place it near the stove. In a wok or skillet over high heat, heat the oil. To test if the oil is hot enough, place the end of a wooden spoon into the oil: Bubbles should immediately fizz around it. If the oil is smoking, it is too hot, so reduce the temperature.

Add the remaining 2 tablespoons of cornstarch and the flour to the marinated pork and toss to lightly coat each piece. Working in batches to avoid overcrowding, carefully transfer the pork to the hot oil and fry until crisp, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer to the prepared platter and repeat with the remaining pork.

In a large skillet over medium-high heat, whisk together the ketchup, hoisin sauce, Worcestershire sauce, water, five-spice powder, sugar, chili oil and salt and bring to a vigorous simmer, stirring frequently, until thick and sticky, about 5 minutes.

Reduce the heat to medium, add the fried pork to the sauce and toss until well coated, about 2 minutes.

Transfer the pork to a platter, sprinkle with the scallions and serve family-style, with rice on the side, if desired.

WEEKEND: FOOD



SALT & STRAW/AP

A cone filled with one of Salt & Straw's most unique offerings — a Thanksgiving feast in ice cream form, with turkey bacon, buttery brittle and jammy cranberry sauce flavors folded into a creamy base.



FORTUNES ICE CREAM/AP

Fortunes Ice Cream's "Cara Cara Dreamsicle" with pineapple sauce. Cara cara oranges are sweet, with a hint of strawberry flavor and a distinctive pinkish-orange color.



FORTUNES ICE CREAM/AP

Fortunes Ice Cream makes a cone topped with pineapple avocado and raspberry rose sorbets.

Sweet and savory scoops

Ice cream makers turning to unexpected ingredients to make unique flavors

By **KIM COOK**
Associated Press

Travel anywhere on the planet and you'll find some version of ice cream. Grab a lemon gelato in Italy; a stick of butterscotch kulfi in Nepal; a cinnamon paleta bar in Mexico. If you're in Seoul, try a "J"-shaped puffed corn cone filled with soft ice cream.

North Americans tend to be loyal to chocolate, vanilla and cookies and cream, according to the International Dairy Foods Association. We like our half gallons or waffle cones stuffed with the fondly familiar.

Still, the world of ice cream isn't immune to change, and like any culinary domain, it's evolving. Recent years have seen an explosion of novel flavor combos, unexpected ingredients and new presentations from ice cream makers large and small, food editors say.

On the flavor front, there are floral ingredients like rose, orange blossom, lavender and jasmine, and herbal notes like saffron and tarragon. Unusual combos of savory and sweet are another trend.

"Jeni's Splendid Ice Cream has an 'Everything Bagel' flavor featuring cream cheese ice cream with everything bagel gravel," says Delish.com's Assistant Food Editor Taylor Ann Spencer.

Liz Sgroi, executive director at Food Network Magazine, points to a collaboration this spring between Van Leeuwen and Hidden Valley on a ranch-dressing-flavored ice cream.

Ice cream makers, like a lot of chefs, are embracing an international pantry, says Alana Al-Hatlani, assistant food editor at Southern Living magazine.

"I've noticed a lot of new citrus flavors beyond lemon, orange and lime, like calamansi, kumquat and mandarin," she says. In her city, Birmingham, Ala., the artisan ice cream company Big Spoon Creamery has a Key Lime Yuzu Pie flavor, for instance.

Spencer notes Oregon-based ice creamery Salt & Straw for "combos like Pistachio with Saffron, and Hibiscus and Coconut." Other offerings there sound like a warm hug in gelid form: Jasmine Milk Tea laced with chocolate-coated almond slivers, or Rhubarb Crumble with Toasted Anise.

Tyler Malek, who co-founded Salt & Straw with his cousin Kim Malek, says they enjoy partnering with chefs and makers to tell cultural stories through ice cream. In a regional collaboration, they worked with Florida-based Panther Coffee on a Coffee Chocolate Tres Leches ice cream that launched at Panther's Miami shop. It's now available nationwide through Salt & Straw's website.

One of Tyler Malek's favorites is Strawberry Honey Balsamic with Black Pepper ice cream. To showcase flavorful Oregon strawberries, he worked with a local beekeeper who'd developed a honey balsamic vinegar.

"Adding a splash of that allowed the strawberry flavor to really shine through," Malek says.

Salt & Straw's Thanksgiving lineup features turkey bacon, buttery brittle and jammy cranberry sauce flavors folded into a five-course feast of ice creams.

In Tivoli, N.Y., in their Fortunes Ice Cream shop, Brian Ackley and his wife, Lisa, offer Halva Honeycomb, based on Middle Eastern sesame candy, and citrus-y Olive Oil Satsuma. Both are non-dairy, born of Brian's wish to create creamy texture without using typical coconut cream or neutral oils. Tahini and oat milk are the keys to the halva flavor, while almond milk is blended with extra virgin olive oil in the satsuma ice cream.

Lisa is Persian, so the couple were delighted to find orchards in the Hudson Valley that could source perfect black cherries for a Labne Sour Cherry ice cream. The labne is similar to tangy Greek yogurt.

Texture also plays a role in the modern ice cream experience.

"Our Cider Donut flavor has whole donuts blended into the base," Ackley says. "And we've got a green apple sorbet made from whole fresh apples — chunks or not chunks, depending on what I feel delivers the best flavor and texture combo that day."

Jeni's recently launched a Ted Lasso ice cream, called Biscuits with the Boss, with shortbread cookies inside.

Sgroi has seen some fun hacks on TikTok, like blended, frozen, sweetened cottage cheese ice cream.

"Another popular one (though slightly less healthy!) is ice cream wrapped in a fruit roll-up. It's gimmicky, messy and a bit hard to eat, but no one seems to mind — the original recipe video has millions of views," she says.

Non-dairy ice creams are evolving to meet modern demand, Al-Hatlani says: "Vegan or plant-based options aren't new, but they're getting better and creamier."

Soft serve is no exception. The New York City ice cream shop Morgenstern's recently opened a dairy-free, soft-service outlet, Morgenstern's Bananas. And in Seattle, the plant-based ice cream shop Frankie & Jo's also offers the treat.

"Coconut milk ice cream has been popular for the last five years," Spencer says, "but with the rise of oat milk as an alternative, oat milk ice cream is now trending. We're also seeing brands play with new alt-milks in their ice creams, like macadamia nut milk."

Grocery store shoppers are encountering new ice cream flavors and formats from familiar brands. To name just a few: Baskin Robbins has pints of Triple Mango Ice Cream, swirled with real mango, mango sorbet and mango ribbons; Ben and Jerry's has introduced chocolate-coated ice cream bars called pint slices; and Entenmann's has launched an ice cream sandwich line based on some of their baked goods, like chocolate chip cookies and glazed donuts.



SALT & STRAW/AP

A variety of Salt & Straw's unique flavors. The company offers interesting combos like Pistachio with Saffron, Hibiscus and Coconut, Jasmine Milk Tea laced with chocolate-coated almond slivers and Rhubarb Crumble with Toasted Anise.

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE



Luke Reich is suited head to toe in armor, which can weigh up to 100 pounds. Players train so they'll have the stamina to go multiple rounds during a match. Rounds last a few minutes with one minute to rest.

Modernization of medieval combat

Men, women with swords, heavy armor say sport that's growing globally is transformative

BY KRISTEN HARTKE
The Washington Post

Even in New York, a city where pretty much anything goes, the sight and sound of knights in shining armor swinging swords at each other still draws a crowd.

"Are you ready for a medieval rumble?" shouts an announcer in a black kilt and leather boots. Spectators scream back and play begins, steel striking steel hard, combatants hitting the ground with loud thuds.

The scene is no scripted historical reenactment, though it takes place just outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the centuries of metal suits on display there. These knights are real rivals, clad head to toe for contests that have adapted ancient rules of engagement for modern-day action.

Today's sport began a few decades ago in Eastern Europe, and now medieval armored combat is spreading globally — including in the United States. There are training regimens for endurance. Teams and leagues for men and women. National federations as well as international competitions with prize money. Even two different world championships, recently held in Spain and the Czech Republic.

"It's like full-contact MMA with steel weapons," says 42-year-old Damion DiGrazia, who runs the team known as Gladiators NYC. "It's also this sport that is surprisingly transformative for a lot of people."

Participants describe finding emotional strength they never knew they possessed. They also

stress the physical stamina required when donning 50 to 100 pounds of metal and then moving nimbly yet aggressively for matches that take place in every kind of weather.

"Putting yourself in a tin can doesn't seem like it would be the epitome of the human condition," says Megan Ganley, 26, captain of the women's team for Iron Lions United in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. "But it becomes a Zen comfort as you begin pushing your limits and

"Putting yourself in a tin can doesn't seem like it would be the epitome of the human condition. But it becomes a Zen comfort as you begin pushing your limits and embracing the intensity."

Megan Ganley

captain, women's team for Iron Lions United, National Capital Region

embracing the intensity."

Medieval armored combat — or buhurt, from the Old French word *béhourd*, meaning "to wallop" — traces its history back more than a thousand years to feudal Europe, where knights would take part in peacetime clashes to stay in shape and test their skills. Today's contests may showcase one-on-one sword fighting, with points awarded based on where blows land, or no-holds-barred melees between two teams — sometimes involving 30 or more players — in which the last person left standing is the winner.

Rounds typically last just a few



PHOTOS BY BRIAN BRANCH-PRICE/For The Washington Post

Two knights search for the advantage during a tough round at the Gladiators NYC event this spring. One-on-one sword fighting is just one type of contest in the sport of medieval armored combat.

minutes, with one minute of rest in between, so that players don't run out of steam.

As the sport has taken root in the United States, it has attracted a range of fans, from self-described medieval history nerds to martial arts enthusiasts.

"The people who tend to stick with the sport are the high school athletes who played Dungeons & Dragons with their friends," says Brennon Meiners, 41, captain of the Dallas Warlords and a 2019 national gold medalist in sword

Players say they barely feel the impact of the blunted weapons against their armor because they're focused on simply staying upright.

"The fatigue level in armor is a ratio of one-to-five," says Zorikh Lequidre, 54, one of the sport's first American competitors and now a trainer, coach and announcer for Gladiators NYC events. "Take an athlete who wears themselves out in five minutes, mostly naked because they are just wearing shorts, then put them in armor. They won't last more than one minute."

Yet the allure of armor has attracted an increasingly diverse group of participants across race, gender and sexual identity lines.

"The sport is historically white and male," says D'Ondre Cyrus, the 36-year-old president of the American Medieval Combat Federation, "but we understand that representation matters."

Cyrus is a member of the Dallas Warlords as well as the Knights of Wakanda, an African American team of about 20 that pulls from across the country and comes together for events.

"When you're out there fighting," he says, "no one can tell who is inside that armor. Then you take off your helmet, and you've got little Black kids asking if they can be knights, too."

More women are suiting up, too. "It's a classically masculine space," Ganley says, "but it's also a sport still in its infancy, so it allows women and nonbinary people a place to discover the kind of person you want to be within it. I had a queer reckoning of my own that was just really fulfilled by the sport."

Brooke Sileikis, 28, found a passion and a profession when she got involved with a local New Jersey team during the pandemic. She then started the New Jersey Steel Fighting Academy this year with her husband as a positive and safe place for people to train. They have about 22 members in practice twice a week.

"I like to be a girly girl, but I also like to roll around in the mud and hit people with weapons," Sileikis says. "I experienced a lot of sexism when I first started in the sport, so I wanted to reframe that negative experience. Medieval armored combat is an escape for a lot of people, a way to heal from past traumas."

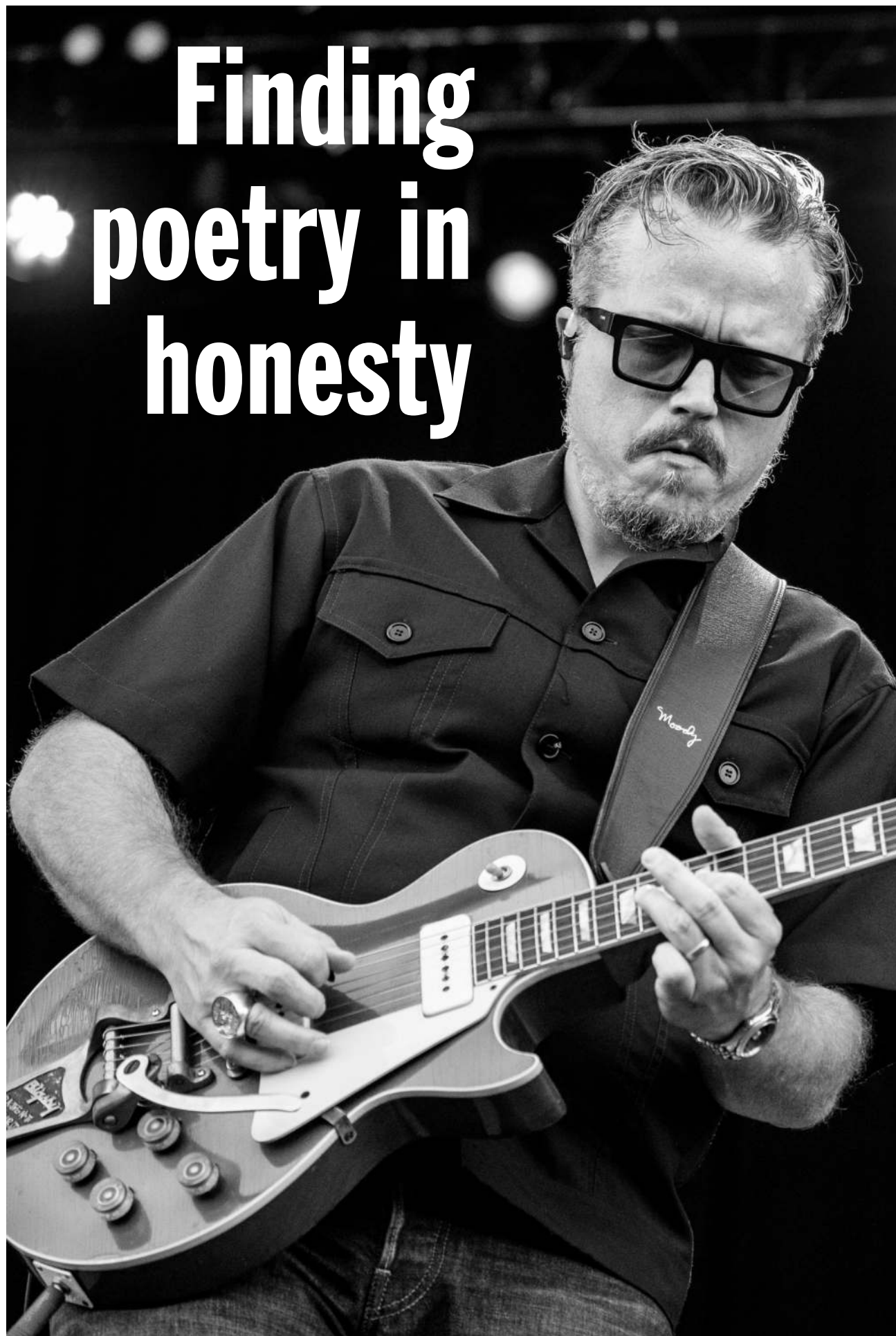
It's a common story, one that resonates with 35-year-old Orlando Mendez. He was reeling from a bad breakup a decade ago when he decided to visit a Renaissance fair.

"I always wanted to be a knight and play with swords and wear armor," he says, "and I see this one knight run across the field so fast and throw down this guy twice his size, and I was fascinated by it. A year later, I was one of the fighters on the field, not a spectator, and I won every fight. My family was there screaming, and I thought, 'This is what I want.' And I never looked back."

Now you'll find Mendez with Gladiators NYC in Central Park and at matches across the country, intent on outwitting his opponents while still cheering them on if they get the best of him.

"We're getting people into armor and building a community," he says. "It's really incredibly cool."

WEEKEND: MUSIC



Finding poetry in honesty

Singer Isbell believes opening life to fans builds stronger bond

BY DAVID BAUDER
Associated Press

If Jason Isbell is keeping many more secrets, it's hard to imagine what they might be.

The singer-songwriter and his wife, fellow musician Amanda Shires, open their lives for public consumption in a manner unusual even to artists who mine their own world for material. Through interviews and a film out this spring, they have documented a rough patch in their marriage and how Isbell's drinking almost destroyed his career before recovery redeemed it.

The sharing gets so raw that when Shires reveals that she made Isbell take a test for sexually transmitted diseases before she slept with him, you're tempted to shout, "too much information!"

To Isbell, it's a necessary part of the job. "If I'm holding back part of myself from the audience, I'd be within my right to do that," he said. "But I don't think the connection would be as strong. For me, it's more important to connect with people on an honest level than it is for me to control my image."

Isbell, 44, has been one of rock's top songwriters since his first post-drinking album, "Southeastern," came out in 2013. His latest disc, "Weathervanes," will only cement that status.

Shires, a formidable talent in her own right and founding member of The Highwomen, also plays violin in Isbell's band, the 400 Unit. Director Sam Jones' film "Running with Our Eyes Closed" shows tension building in the marriage largely through Isbell unsuccessfully dealing with the pressure of making his 2020 disc, "Reunions." Shires briefly moved out of their home.

The storm gathers through furtive glances, eye rolls and the uncomfortable expressions of other musicians.

In one excruciating scene, Shires reads an email she sent to her husband about the

SEE ISBELL ON PAGE 29

Jason Isbell performs at Bourbon and Beyond Music Festival in 2022 in Louisville, Ky.

Amy HARRIS/AP

Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit

Weathervanes (Southeastern/Thirty Tigers)

Further cementing his credentials as a songwriting force, Jason Isbell and his band have created another Alabama-accented earworm of an album that flaunts the power of his voice, guitar and lyrics.

"Weathervanes," Isbell's eighth record with the 400 Unit, is a familiar and predictable amble within the wide expanse of Americana with this 13-track canvas painted by country, folk, gospel and hard southern rock. While this album stays inside his usual musical guardrails without much adventure into new sounds, it has its twists and turns.



In "Cast Iron Skillet," a soft and wistful warning against bigotry veiled behind old-fashioned views, Isbell strums a sweet tune thickened by the hum of an accordion and his wife, Amanda Shires, on the fiddle. Then comes "When We Were Close," electric from start to finish with angry chords and all-

star rhymes: "Got a picture of us playing in a bar, and your shirt cost more than your guitar."

Sober for 11-plus years, Isbell continues to tell stories beyond his own trying-to-stay-clean lens. "Weathervanes" further reflects the forever process of learning oneself and how to live and love complex people in a broken world.

The opener, "Death Wish," tries to care for a loved one with mental illness. In "Save the World," his voice as a father of a 7-year-old daughter resonates clearly as he sings of being spooked by school shootings, "Can we keep her here at home instead?"

Shires joins her husband on five songs, including backup vocals on "Volunteer" and "This Ain't It." The couple laid bare their life, love and struggle in a recent documentary film. In "Middle of the Morning," Isbell explores the dark corners of relationships in what sounds like post-pandemic wincing about all that extra time stuck at home. He wails, "I'm tired of stepping on your shadow and feeling in the way." The angst is brilliantly masked by a soulfully bright melody.

— Dave Campbell
The Associated Press

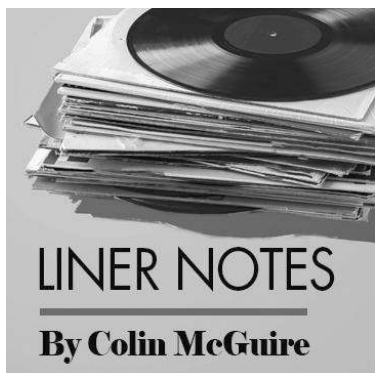
WEEKEND: MUSIC

Falling in love with falling in love with music

Something curious happened at the end of last month: I was excited. I don't mean excited in the sense that we all kind of say we're excited when we're really not — the type of meaningless “yes” you utter to someone close to you after they flippantly ask about it. The excited I mean was the type of excited that recalls the best moments of your youth — the ignorant, non-jaded excited that comes so easy before the world gets in the way and life makes sure the wins never feel as prevalent as the losses. It's an excited that doesn't know any better, it's an excited that appears only in the rarest of instances.

And to think: It was all because of Matchbox Twenty.

I know. If there was any credibility to be lost in the first place, I just watched it dissipate into the smoggy air (thanks, Canada). But hey: I'm nothing if not honest. As uncool and absurd and vulnerable as that seems, I kind of/sort of accidentally began building up the band's latest record, “Where The Light Goes,”



in my head months ago. And I can't even explain why. For some reason, at some point, I found myself on the World Wide Internet during the beginning of 2023 and saw that Matchbox Twenty was set to put out an album in May. I didn't think much of it — so much so that I remember actively wondering if I'd remember it was slated to come out by the time it came out.

Turns out, I did. First, there was the release of the initial single, “Wild Dogs (Running in a Slow Dream).” It was fine. Pretty Matchbox Twenty-ish. The sort of up-tempo jingle that felt vaguely inspired by band leader

Rob Thomas' hero, Tom Petty. It was harmless, really. I didn't love it. I didn't hate it. But, again, for reasons I can't explain, I cared about it. Then, it was ditto for “Don't Get Me Wrong,” the decidedly more generic second single to come from the album. At first glance, I wasn't even sure I liked it at all. But again, I cared about it.

Fast-forward to May 26 and, stuck at home battling COVID-19 (even though I was told it was over!), the CD — yes, a CD and not even the decidedly cooler vinyl copy — showed up in my mailbox. For the first time in years, I ran out of where I was living when I heard my mailbox close, opened it to find a brown envelope, blew my nose 19 times, and tore that thing open. I felt like I was 9 years old again and Phil Collins' “Both Sides” appeared in cassette form on Christmas morning.

I ripped off the plastic, imported the disc into my desktop (yes, this datedness is cringe-worthy), put those songs onto my iPod (still cringe) and gave it a listen. I texted people. I smiled. I

coughed. I smiled again.

Though it was a feeling I hadn't experienced in decades — and a feeling I still can't quite articulate when it comes to an origin story this time around — it was a feeling that felt so normal, and a feeling I've long known is imperative to falling in love with music. At this point in my life, such a feeling comes and goes, and for a very long time, it had been so consistently gone. That doesn't mean I don't have my favorite records, artists or concerts; it just means that for the first time in a long time, I allowed myself to tap into a very specific enthusiasm that I knew had been so missing for years, but never quite understood how to inspire it again. In perhaps the least-assuming manner possible, Matchbox Twenty, of all bands, was the one to crack the code.

I explain this now, why? Because I can't be more thankful. Reconnecting with your first love — which, in truth, for me, will probably always be music — is a feat never promised to anyone, but wildly moving if it ever decides to pop back into a con-

sciousness. It reminds you why the love existed in the first place, and it serves as inspiration for why we all hope to engulf ourselves in it again. We should all be so lucky to experience it as fabric within our lives, but the truth is, it's the kind of love that can be both elusive and ruthless. It can mock and taunt and give you pieces of a puzzle designed to manufacture specific feelings, but never quite come through with a completed piece.

Matchbox Twenty, somehow, managed to put all those pieces together last month. For that, I'll forever be in debt to them — the same band that glamorized both being lonely at 3 a.m. and pushing people around. It taught me that sometimes, this type of stuff can come from the least-expected places. Never did I think that in the year 2023 that I'd be so into Matchbox Twenty — let alone feel so inspired by a new album from them. But as sure as those wild dogs are running in that slow dream, I am.

So here's to you, Rob and the boys. And, for the first time in ages, here's to being excited.

Isbell: With new album, documentary, singer exudes the truth

FROM PAGE 28

possibility of marriage counseling, her lower lip trembling as she fights back tears.

Her 2022 song, “Fault Lines,” deals bluntly with marital troubles. “You could say it's all my fault we just couldn't get along,” she sings. “And if anyone asks, I'll say what's true, and really, it's ‘I don't know.’”

Honesty is equally important to both of them, although societal pressures make going public with it tougher on Shires, Isbell said.

“We could sell millions of records and have all the fans in the world, but it wouldn't be enough if we didn't feel like we were telling people the truth, and that's not easy,” he said. “That's why most people don't aim for that... That's the difference between art and entertainment, and I think it's very important to us to feel like we're making art and not just distracting people.”

Filmmaker Jones said Isbell agreed to make the documentary with no pre-conditions — and held to it. They became part of the process through the pandemic, when the couple filmed scenes at home with their daughter themselves.

Jones is convinced that “the artists that we love the most are the ones that we feel like we know the most,” something his experience making a documentary with Jeff Tweedy and Wilco taught him.

“I firmly believe that people want to see other people being human and vulnerable and weak and making mistakes, and it makes them feel more connected and bonded to the art,” he said.

The film deals in some detail with Isbell



HBO

Jason Isbell is pictured in the documentary “Running with Our Eyes Closed.”

being fired from the band Drive-By Truckers because of his drinking. Thanks to Isbell's manager, who squirreled away footage in case her client had a relapse, it includes clips from Isbell's last, unhinged performance before going to rehab.

“It wasn't easy to watch,” Isbell said. “But at the same time, I knew. I remembered. There was a reason why I quit. There was a reason why I can't sit down with my wife and have a wine over dinner. I would love to do that, but I can't.”

Having such a document out in public, coupled with how he has dealt with the experience in song (“It gets easier but it

never gets easy,” he sang on the “Reunions” disc), adds layers of accountability.

“If I did ever go back to drinking right now I would feel I let a lot of people down,” he said.

Going back further, Jones shows how Isbell dealt with the unhappiness of a home life with fighting parents by retreating to his room and loudly playing guitar. The story also illuminates the lyrics to his song “Dreamsicle.”

A consequence of the forthrightness is that one of the first things a listener wonders upon hearing his new song, “Death

Wish,” is whether he's writing about Shires.

The song deals with loving someone who has mental illness. “Did you ever catch her climbing on the rooftop, higher than a kite, dead of winter in a tank top?” he sings.

Partly it is, he said. And it's also about other people he's known. He takes a songwriter's liberties to develop a character.

Several of the new songs deal with people fighting through adversity — a working man who becomes addicted to painkillers, the fear brought on by a school shooting, the scourge of loneliness and miscommunication with someone “raised to be a strong and silent Southern man.” In the deeply personal “White Beretta,” Isbell sings of accompanying a former girlfriend as she gets an abortion.

The album is not without hope, though. “There's hope in telling people, ‘I have felt this way, too,’ even if the way you feel is isolated or sad or afraid,” he said. “If you're able to do it in a way that makes people think, ‘I'm not alone in this feeling,’ I think that in itself offers hope.”

The process of songwriting isn't getting any easier for him. Isbell relates to the famous description of writing by late sportswriter Red Smith, who said, “all you have to do is sit down at the typewriter, cut open a vein, and bleed.”

Isbell adds a songwriter's requirement: “your blood better rhyme.”

“I think my standards have changed over time,” he said. “The more I write and the more I listen, the more I try to avoid things I've heard before, and that takes me a little more time every time I sit down to do it.”

WEEKEND: BOOKS



ANDRI TAMBUNAN/For The Washington Post

Cartoonist Darrin Bell, seen in his Sacramento, Calif., studio, has published “The Talk,” an autobiographical book about his experience as a Black man.

Preparing parents to have ‘The Talk’

Pulitzer Prize-winning Black cartoonist Bell publishes graphic memoir as testimony of, guide for discussing racism

BY MICHAEL CAVNA
The Washington Post

Darrin Bell plays with three of his young children as the family heads to the dinner table. As they sit to eat, though, Bell’s 6-year-old son looks up and asks out of curiosity: “Who’s George Floyd?”

It is 2020, and Bell and his wife, Makeda, have wondered for several years when to have “the talk” with son Zazu. It is the conversation about how, as Bell writes in addressing his son, “The world is different for George Floyd, for your mama and papa, for you. And for everyone who’s Black ... because of something called ‘racism.’”

Zazu soon hears that his youth provides no sure protection, either. In Bell’s words: “When police see little white boys with toy guns, they see innocence, but they would look upon Zazu as a menace. As a thing. As a threat to be dealt with. They might even shoot him. I know this makes no sense to him ... because it shouldn’t.”

That passage propels a poignant scene from Bell’s first graphic memoir, “The Talk,” arriving this month as a riveting and intimate journey from innocence to experience, as we see the author mature from kindergarten to being a Los Angeles-area teenager in the Rodney King era and then to a parent of four Black offspring younger than 10 in the Black Lives Matter era.

That 2020 conversation is similar to “the talk” that Bell listened to in the ’80s, when he himself was 6. The author knows: It connects generations.

Bell, 48, is best known to some readers as an artfully unflinching satirist and the first Black cartoonist ever to win the Pulitzer Prize, in 2019. To others, he’s known for his syndicated comic strips “Candorville” and “Rudy Park.” Yet in “The Talk,” Bell combines the overtly personal and the sociopolitical in a textured autobiography

that blends raw honesty, moving memories and powerful insights on race and police relations — including when squad cars unnervingly trailed his white mother and Black father toward a county line in California a half-century ago.

Bell says he did not begin writing “The Talk” for a mass audience, but rather to share with his son, now 9. Yet today, Bell says by Zoom interview recently from his

“You look at your sweet, innocent little baby and you don’t want to. And you don’t want to take away any of their innocence. But you have to. I knew it and it takes a lot of courage to do it.”

Sacramento, Calif.-area home, he views the book as more than simply his story. It’s also a guide for people who might be uncomfortable having “the talk” — a catchall term for how Black parents first discuss with their children the realities of American racism.

One of those people was Bell’s own father, who left the family on Bell’s 10th birthday.

When Bell was 6, he had a traumatizing encounter with a police officer. He was gleefully playing with a neon-green toy water gun — pretending he was a Star Wars character — when an officer suddenly commanded him, “Drop the weapon.” The officer began barking orders

Bell did not understand before saying the words “warning” and “go home.” He then took Bell’s water gun.

Before that encounter, Bell had asked his mom why the brightly tinted toy didn’t look like a real gun. Her reply: “Because, son ... that’s what’s going to keep you alive.”

Bell calls his mother brave for how she parented him with truth and protected him when he was a victim. The author, however, could not understand why his dad never had “the talk” with him. In the book, Bell imagines a scene in which he confronts his father: “Why couldn’t you have just told me the truth, like Mom did? Why did you have to make me doubt that she knew what she was talking about?”

In that climactic chapter that cuts between Bell as child and parent, he wonders whether his father was trying to spare him from a glimpse into the child’s future as a Black man in America.

“My dad didn’t have the power and neither do I,” he writes. “My son’s world is his to create. All I can do is prepare him.”

Bell hopes some readers might see themselves in his father and then summon the strength to have “the talk.”

“You look at your sweet, innocent little baby and you don’t want to,” he says. “And you don’t want to take away any of their innocence. But you have to. I knew it, and it takes a lot of courage to do it.”

“The Talk” is punctuated by dramatically formative moments in Bell’s life. His first traumatizing event happens even before the toy gun incident, when he feels terrorized by neighborhood Dobermans. Other kids learn to put their palms up to signal submissiveness to the dogs; young Darrin runs away instead, but he remembers that lesson when dealing with the police. In a “Maus”-like

SEE RACISM ON PAGE 31

WEEKEND: BOOK REVIEWS

Lack of plot, logic not the point in 'Harold'

BY MARK ATHITAKIS

Special to *The Washington Post*

The 1980s comedy scene might be best remembered for flashy provocateurs like Eddie Murphy and Andrew Dice Clay. But there was also Steven Wright, an overthinking weirdo who looked and acted like he'd rolled out of bed five minutes before hitting the stage and populated his sets with non sequiturs and drowsily delivered one-liners: "I spilled spot remover on my dog. He's gone now."

Wright's debut novel, "Harold," is largely an effort to transpose his stand-up sensibility to fiction. Plotwise, very little happens. Its title hero is a 7-year-old boy attending his third grade class in suburban Massachusetts. It's 1965, and Harold's teacher is reminding him to remember his upcoming assignments. But he's the kind of kid who isn't going to get boxed in by assignments, or reminding, or remembering.

He's smart, but psychically entirely off the grid. "He did more thinking than someone his age," Wright explains. "Or any age."



Though Wright, now 67, doesn't dwell on diagnoses, Harold's busy brain is almost certainly a case of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. And the background details that flicker into the story suggest he's processing a trauma or two: His mother has been briefly institutionalized, so he's recently spent a summer living with his crusty grandfather. If there's a father around, Harold is stubbornly determined to think about anything but.

Instead, his cranium becomes a vaudeville revue of curious

musings, which he imagines as birds fluttering in a "rectangle in his head." Many thoughts are tart and aphoristic in a very Wrightian way. For instance:

"Wouldn't it be great if he had a pair of glass bottom shoes that he could wear on the glass bottom boat with no socks on so that if the fish looked up they could for the first time in their lives see bare feet that weren't in the water."

Or: "Harold wondered if bird angels would have four wings."

Or: "How different it would be if, when boats pulled huge nets out of the ocean full of thousands of fish, the fish were screaming in horror."

Or: "Being in love was like being on a seesaw where one side contained nitroglycerin."

And so on. The subjects of Wright's riffing are all over the place, accommodating black-and-white vs. color film, internal bleeding, Lakota folklore, space exploration. The daydream-

scapes are far-flung too: Harold imagines himself visiting a cemetery with a classmate, then kicking back at a coffee shop on the moon, where he discusses the state of the universe with astronomer Carl Sagan. The oddness of the settings hardly matters, though; just about every element of "Harold" is subordinate to its job as a delivery system for Wright's observations. (Unsurprisingly, he initially conceived the book as a novel-in-tweets.)

"Harold" is often funny, and its refusal to stay in one place means it never feels labored. But: Is it a novel? Though there are characters, there's little in the way of character development. Harold returns to the matter of his institutionalized mother only intermittently, and as little more than an object of fear or fury. (Understandably: She once accidentally put wine in his thermos.)

Why is Harold chatting up Sagan in 1965, years before he became a household name? Why

is the story contemplating the schoolteacher's sex life? Why are we on the moon, again? To which Wright can only respond: Who cares and so what? Riffing on a photo taken by a space probe in 1990, he notes: "If you're wondering how Harold would know of this photograph ... mind your own business."

Harold is at once compelling and frustrating because he's so unshaped: His mind is a stew of schoolbook facts, alertness to adult hypocrisy, family dysfunction and miscellaneous psychic damage. Which is to say, a solid formula for a stand-up comic.

But a manic kid whose brain refuses to stay in one place isn't quite the same thing as a story about a manic kid. To be charitable, "In life lots of times there is no logic," Wright writes. "Lots and lots of times. Lots of times." For better and for worse, lots and lots of those times are between the covers of this book.

'The Talk'

Darrin Bell

Seeing the other children at the park playing with water guns, Darrin asks his mom for one. Her immediate response: No.

Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist Darrin Bell's graphic memoir "The Talk" begins around age 6, when his mom first has "the talk" with him — the one about racism, fear and police brutality and the reason he can't have a realistic water gun like the other kids. It follows him into adulthood, when he is confronted with having "the talk" with his own son.

The result is a thought-provoking memoir beautifully rendered in expressive artwork for a powerful piece that's easy to devour but harder to digest.

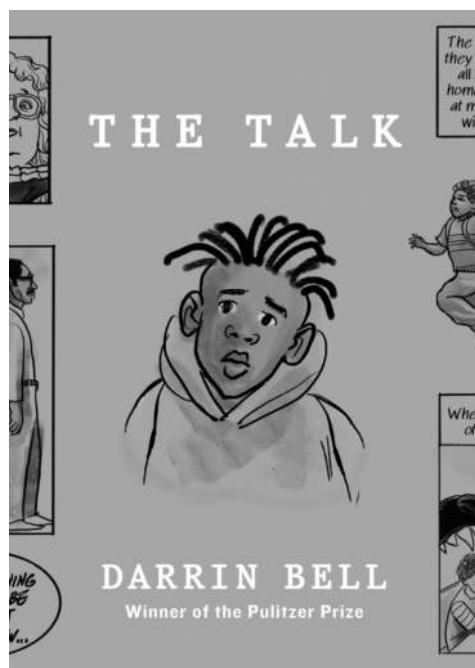
From anxiety-inducing encounters with the police to the space shuttle Challenger's failed mission and explosion, Bell presents his childhood with a graphic vulnerability. Jumping into young Darrin's mind, showing him as Luke Skywalker training with Yoda, Bell captures the imagination of a child so thoroughly that the heavy, adult topic of police brutality stands in even starker contrast.

Both metaphorical and artistic contrast are well-used in "The Talk."

Cool blue and black tones illustrate each page. Sparks of vibrant color serve to highlight and intensify. The line work is fairly simple but the shading is complex. Faces are expressive but rarely cross the line into cartoonish.

A chapter set in 2015 with a hopeful end is immediately contrasted when the next chapter, set a few months later, begins with a hateful, racist quote in red against a black background that readers will recognize as Donald Trump's words.

There's a series of close-ups on Trump's eyes that reflect scenes of nationalism and violence. The depictions' broader color palette adds emphasis, undercutting the next, mostly monochrome scene, depicting



Bell reflecting on his Pulitzer win for editorial cartoons calling out the Trump administration.

Rather than an exuberant, brightly colored celebration, Bell depicts the scene as dull, depressing, drained of life.

But not all the stories are so heavy. The chapter "All The Way Down" is about Bell making friends who become his core crowd. It captures the uneasiness of injecting yourself into a friend group, as well as the joy of being accepted and appreciated as part of that group.

In his acknowledgments, Bell says penning the book made him feel those feelings anew. And it shows. The images and words practically vibrate with feeling: palpably hot anger and cold isolation and warm affection. Seeing him make the choice after George Floyd was murdered to preserve his then-6-year-old son's innocence for one more day, one more month, during the already tenuous early pandemic, is enough to draw tears.

— Donna Edwards/AP

Racism: Book also includes some of Bell's most memorable cartoons

FROM PAGE 30

visual touch, he even imagines police officers as vicious snarling dogs.

"I felt the same exact same way when that cop confronted me," he says, "as I did when those dogs were chasing me."

Bell also endures an incident with authority in a store — what he calls a terrifying "nightmare" — when a friend of Korean descent decides to shoplift. Darrin refuses to participate, but as he dramatizes in the book, Bell is the only one who is paraded through the store and put in handcuffs for the crime. As if to add insult to injury, the guard even says to Bell: "How did a boy like HIM get MIXED UP with a BOY like you?" (Bell is in grade school at the time, and when a police officer soon visits his class and needs a child to portray a dope dealer in a D.A.R.E. skit, he averts his eyes; fortunately, he says, classmate Mayim Bialik volunteers.)

Other "Talk" scenes centering on race and identity unfold in high school, after Bell's family has relocated from East LA to the San Fernando Valley. He depicts the images that flash through his mind as a teenage driver shortly after the 1992 video of police beating Rodney King made the news, heightening Bell's sense of potential peril. The author also confronts racism while attending the University of California, Berkeley, when a professor accuses him of plagiarism, doubting the perceptive depth of his written insight; and when a police officer during a traffic stop questions how Bell even gained admission to the school.

While at Berkeley, Bell also begins to cultivate a thriving career as a political cartoonist, eventually landing artwork in major publications. As Bell's exposure and audience grow, so does his self-belief in

commenting on national stories and controversies.

"The Talk" occasionally intersperses neighborhood anecdotes with such news events as the 1986 space shuttle Challenger disaster and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, deepening the memoir's narrative weight. ("I want them to feel like a rude interruption, just like the police officers," he says.) The book also incorporates some of Bell's most memorable cartoons, including work from his 2018 President Donald Trump-mocking Pulitzer portfolio, as well as a panel from his heartfelt "Candorville" weeklong story arc in 2012 that imagined the possible lives for Trayvon Martin and sought to remind "America that he was a human being."

Bell says "The Talk" let him cathartically relive his childhood through adult eyes, even the traumatic chapters: "It made me appreciate on a visceral level how important our stories are, even when they're sad."

The author also recollects a trip to the National Museum of African American History and Culture shortly after its 2016 opening. During the visit, Bell and his wife asked themselves when they should have "the talk" with Zazu, deciding that perhaps age 7 or 8 was best. Yet several years later, when 6-year-old Zazu asked the George Floyd question, Bell says he knew the right answer was "whenever they asked." He had told himself even before he had kids: "I would never lie to them."

Perhaps that's because of the influence of his mother. Today, Bell thinks back to when she gave him "the talk."

"I must've been as small as my son was when I told him," the author says. "I realize now that must've been heartbreaking for her to have to tell me that."

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

Are you eating enough protein?

Experts explain 5 things everyone should know about the popular macronutrient, debunk some of the social media hype

By GRETCHEN REYNOLDS
The Washington Post

Protein is the macronutrient of the moment. On TikTok, videos with the hashtag #protein have been viewed more than 9.1 billion times, with influencers swearing the nutrient builds strong, bulging physiques, trims away body fat and supercharges metabolisms.

The nearly ubiquitous social media message is, whoever we are, we need more protein.

But the hype doesn't match reality. Most of us are probably getting enough protein, although highly active people may need a little more.

"The devil is in the details," said Stuart Phillips, a professor of kinesiology at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, and an expert on protein, physical activity and health. Here are the five things you really need to know about protein:

Active people need more protein than couch potatoes

If you're sedentary, you officially need about 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight, according to the recommended daily allowance set by the government's Food and Nutrition Board. This translates to somewhere between 45 to 60 grams of daily protein for most people who rarely exercise — or approximately two chicken breasts (about 30 grams of protein each) or a 6-ounce can of tuna (about 40 grams) and a quarter-cup of almonds (about 8 grams).

But this amount is almost certainly too low for many of us. The recommendation for protein "might be enough to keep us alive, but it is too low for physically active people," said Eric Rawson, a professor of nutrition and exercise at Messiah University in Mechanicsburg, Pa.

For active people, a better recommendation would be 1 to 1.2 grams per kilogram of body weight each day, Phillips said, or higher, "up to a level of 1.6 grams per kilogram" of body weight daily if you're physically active. In simple terms, if you weigh 160 pounds, or 72.5 kilograms, then 1 gram per kilogram of your weight is 72.5 grams of daily protein, which you could get by eating, over the course of your day, a 6-ounce steak (about 42 grams), a cup of Greek yogurt (about 17 grams) and a half-cup of tofu (about 20 grams).

Some researchers advocate for more, though, especially for athletes in the middle of heavy training, when their muscles are under constant strain. For them, the optimal amount of protein may be as high as 2.2 grams per kilogram of body weight every day, or approximately a gram of protein for every pound of body weight, said Shawn Arent, the chairman of the department of exercise science at the University of South Carolina and a longtime sports nutrition researcher.

You can overdo the protein thing

Our muscles can only take in and use so much of this stuff.

"I don't see data to suggest that our bodies can use protein beyond about 0.4 to 0.5 grams of protein per kilogram" of body weight at a single meal, Phillips said, which, for most of us, would equate to a large chicken breast.

Swallow more protein than that and the excess is stored as fat, used as metabolic fuel or transformed into urea, which is protein stripped of its nitrogen and excreted through the kidneys.

Extra-large portions of protein, in other words, produce expensive pee.

Thankfully, they won't damage your kidneys, unless you already have kidney disease. That widespread belief is a myth, Phillips said.

But perhaps the most important thing to know about protein is that you're probably getting enough.

"Most Americans are eating close to 1.0 to 1.2 grams



iStock

Most people, including athletes, can get sufficient protein without needing powdered whey, even if they don't eat meat.

per kilogram of their body weight" in protein most days, said Nicholas Burd, the director of the Nutrition and Exercise Performance Research Group at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, which seems to be close to the nutritional sweet spot for most of us, assuming we're active but not Olympians.

You don't need that whey shake

Still concerned about getting enough protein? Supplements, like shakes and bars "are convenient," Phillips said. But so is a hard-boiled egg, which contains about 6 grams of protein, or a chicken breast. "I eat a lot of Greek yogurt and chicken," he said.

There's little evidence that certain proteins are more nutritious than others, although some people swear by whey powder. Derived from milk, whey is a good source of leucine, an amino acid that helps jump-start muscle building. "But so is Greek-style yogurt," Phillips said, or salmon, which is packed with leucine.

"Whey protein has falsely been put on a pedestal as superior due to aggressive sports marketing campaigns," Burd said.

Most people, including athletes, can get sufficient protein without needing powdered whey, even if they don't eat meat.

"Vegetarian and vegan athletes can easily meet protein needs on a plant-based diet," said Enette Larson-Meyer, the director of the Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism Laboratory at Virginia Tech and co-author of Plant-Based Sports Nutrition.

Plant proteins may not be complete, she said, meaning they don't contain all the amino acids we need, but "consuming a combination of different plant-based protein sources, such as beans and grain, will provide a balanced protein profile." If your diet is plant forward, but not fully vegetarian, add an egg or some cheese to improve a mostly vegetarian dish's "amino-acid profile," she said.

Extra protein probably won't help you lose weight

Because protein fills you up, it helps you eat less, and your body has to work harder to break it down. As a result, you expend more calories digesting protein com-

pared to carbs or fatty foods.

But the actual amount of that extra calorie burn is tiny, Phillips said, and unlikely to have a meaningful effect on body weight.

In effect, despite many social media claims to the contrary, mainlining protein won't incinerate body fat. To drop pounds, you must consume fewer calories, from any nutrients, than you burn.

But protein does play a role in keeping you healthy during weight loss, Arent said. It helps your body hang onto muscle tissue while you shed fat.

"Muscle is your health currency," he said. "Don't lose it!"

Protein after a workout and before bed may have benefits

"I'm an advocate of spreading protein throughout the day, especially making sure you consume enough at breakfast," Burd said.

Protein is the most satiating of macronutrients, he pointed out, taking longer to digest than carbohydrates or fat, its fellow macronutrients, and leaving you feeling fuller. So, having protein at every meal helps control appetite and ensures a steady supply of amino acids for working muscles.

"Protein is a good foundation to each feeding," Arent said.

Some people advocate eating protein after a workout and right before bed.

Protein after a hard workout, for instance, in conjunction with carbohydrates, might replenish lost fuel stores and speed recovery better than carbohydrates alone, Arent said, although that idea is controversial. "But the reality is that there is no upside to not having protein after a workout," Arent said.

Likewise, a small portion of pre-bedtime protein, such as yogurt or a handful of nuts, has been shown in some studies to amplify muscle building overnight.

"Nighttime protein ingestion is an excellent opportunity to increase muscle protein synthesis," Rawson said, but the process "doesn't have to be complicated." If you have dinner at 6 p.m., "add a Greek yogurt at 9 p.m.," he said.

WEEKEND: FAMILY



ELIZABETH ROBERTSON, THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER/AP

Umpire Brian Kennedy makes a call while officiating a game at the Deptford Little League complex in Deptford, N.J., on May 10. In Deptford, fans could become the umpires if they don't follow league rules on sportsmanship.

Holding fans accountable

Youth baseball league rule requires parents who mistreat umpires to fill in

By DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

The April Facebook post hardly seemed like national news at the time for Deptford Little League president Don Bozzuffi. He'd lost patience when two umpires resigned in the wake of persistent spectator abuse. So he wrote an updated code of conduct.

It specified: Any spectator deemed in violation would be banned from the complex until three umpiring assignments were completed. If not, the person would be barred from any Deptford youth sports facilities for a year.

In G-rated terms (unlike the ones that will get you tossed), the mandate just wants helicopter parents to calm the heck down. No 9-year-old will remember, as an adult, being safe or out on a bang-bang play at first. But how deep would be the cut of watching dad get tossed out of the game and banished for bad behavior?

The league doesn't want to find out. "So far, it's working like I'd hoped and just been a deterrent," the 68-year-old Bozzuffi said.

The problem, though, isn't limited to Deptford, N.J., and its handful of unruly parents. Outbursts of bad behavior at sporting events for young people have had frightening consequences for officials at all youth levels. Pick a town, any town, and there are adults assaulting referees or chasing umpires into parking lots looking for a fight, all available on the social feed of your choice.

The videos pop up almost weekly: inane instances of aggressive behavior toward officials. Like in January, when a Florida basketball referee was punched in the face after one game. Or last month, when an enraged youth baseball coach stormed a baseball field in Alabama and wrestled an umpire to the ground. Other adults and kids tried to break up the melee that took place in a game — at an 11-and-under tournament.

Jim McDevitt has worked as a volunteer Deptford umpire for 20 years. But he turns 66 this month and won't call games much longer. He wonders where the next generation of officials will come from, especially when the job description includes little pay and lots of crap.

Youth officiating is in crisis. According to a 2017 survey by the National Association of Sports Officials, nearly 17,500 referees surveyed said parents caused the most problems with sportsmanship at 39%. Coach-

es came in at 29% and fans at 18%.

Barry Mano founded the association four decades ago to advocate for youth officials. Mano, whose brother Mark was an NBA referee, has watched fan conduct become "far worse" than he could have imagined.

"Sports is simply life with the volume turned up," Mano says. "We've become louder and brasher. We always want a second opinion on things. That's where the culture has gone. I don't think we're as civil as we used to be toward each other, and it plays out in the sporting venues."

In Deptford, things seem to be working — at least in attracting non-mandatory umps. Bozzuffi says that since his rule grabbed national headlines, three umpires have joined the league and more volunteers want to be trained.

And those who might get sentenced to umping? McDevitt puts it less delicately. "We'll see how their sphincter feels when they have to make a tight call and the parents are all screaming and hollering at them."

Bozzuffi, who has served as league president for 14 years and been connected to the league for 40, doesn't want any fan to get ejected. He just wants to get them thinking.

Each offender must complete a three-hour safety certification class before receiving an umpire assignment. Rookie umps must also pass a background check and complete an online concussion course. After all that, a real, qualified umpire would be stationed next to the replacement ump to ensure accuracy and fairness. It hasn't happened — yet.

"The first person that we have to do this to, nobody is else is going to challenge this," Bozzuffi said. "Nobody wants to go through all this."

So for now, at least on a recent weeknight in Deptford, fans were on their best behavior.

Parent Dawn Nacke found it unfair that the town was labeled as "obnoxious parents when we're just caring about our kids": "We know that they ump for free, but sometimes bad calls are made and they cost us the game," she said.

Has she ever been guilty of popping off too much? "Mouthy, yes. But we all have to bite our tongues over here because of the new rule," she said. "I just have to keep my mouth shut more. Scared me straight. I'm more angry that they call us obnoxious parents. That really upset me when I read it in the news. But this is their rule and I'm going to follow it."

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Lessons learned amid yet another PCS purge

All over the globe, nearly a million military families are on the cusp of or in the midst of permanent change of station summer moves. They are sorting, wrapping, packing, flying, driving and exhausting themselves while eating greasy take-out and sleeping fitfully in temporary lodging.

Having experienced many PCS moves during my husband's years of active-duty Navy service, I've learned countless lessons from my own moving mistakes.

For example, I learned to "Purge unnecessary belongings before and after every move," because one's definition of "unnecessary" changes with each tour of duty. My old swimming trophy was a cherished treasure during our first tour, but was old junk by tour No. 2. For years, my husband refused to part with the bachelor couch upon which he'd made out with his old girlfriend, but he eventually carried it to the curb on bulk trash day during move No. 10.

Purging is an important part of the moving process — just don't go overboard like we did during one particularly complicated move from Germany to Florida ...

"Who did it this time?!" I bellowed from the doorway of our new base house bathroom. Clogged toilets were a frequent occurrence ever since we'd moved into the Balfour Beatty house with newfangled water-saving plumbing.

Normally, I would've tracked down each of our kids until I found the one who'd used too much paper again. Then, on principle, I would've instructed the offending child to take the plunger from its designated place (a bracket that we'd affixed to the wall in our garage) and plunge the toilet, knowing I'd probably have to finish the gruesome job myself.

But that day, I didn't have the time. I was sorting through moving boxes in our garage, so I posted an "Out of Order" sign on the bathroom door and resolved to deal with it later.

We'd moved in two weeks prior, and after putting all the necessary things inside the house, we'd realized that we still had a garage full of boxes and no place to put them. They were mostly items that had been in storage during our three-year tour in Germany. Countless neglected books. Thirteen teacups from my dead grandmother. One dried-up bouquet from our wedding. Scores of photo negatives from before photography went digital. A dozen underused power tools. Seven coolers. A mind-boggling array of knickknacks.

I grimaced at my husband's 1976 skateboard with disintegrating rubber wheels, and baseball caps from every bar, firehouse, vacation spot, Navy ship, college, band and sports team my husband ever knew. A tub filled with golf balls. Dozens of ancient cassette tapes. All items that couldn't be tossed for fear of discarding my husband's youth and virility.

In a weak attempt to defend himself, my husband pointed out my useless collection of vintage aprons, jars of seashells compulsively collected during beach vacations, our unused wedding china, cherished baby clothes preserved in mothballs, Fisher-Price toys waiting for grandchildren and all the other memorabilia that couldn't be thrown away for fear of discarding my maternal womanhood.

Looking around our packed garage, we knew what had to be done. For hours, we tackled the mountain of boxes, severing our emotional attachments and ridding ourselves of burdensome clutter. Each time we designated something for charity, we felt the weight of it lifted from our life. With each relinquished item, our motivation increased until we were tossing things out gleefully, without much of a thought.

At the end of the day, we proudly watched the Salvation Army truck driver loading up our massive donation. It hadn't been easy, but with less clutter clogging up our life, we felt more free to navigate the twists and turns of our new home.

Just as the Salvation Army truck disappeared over the distant horizon, we remembered the toilet. "Uh oh," my husband mumbled as he noticed the empty bracket on the garage wall, "What happened to the plunger?"

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

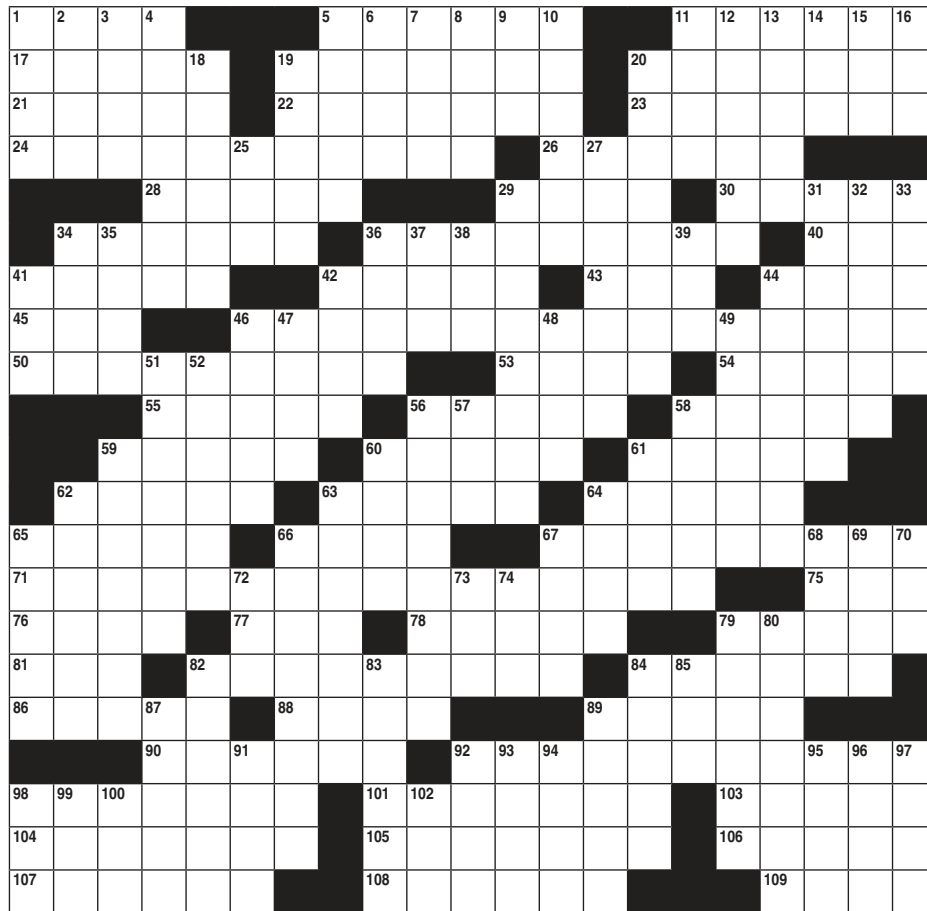
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

NUMBER THEORY

BY SAM EZERSKY / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Sam Ezersky is the digital puzzles editor at The Times. A "puzzlehead" since childhood, he sold his first crossword to the paper, a Saturday, when he was 17. His job at The Times includes testing/fact-checking the daily Mini crossword and curating the daily digital Spelling Bee. This puzzle started when he noticed a curious property of 26-Across. — W.S.

- ACROSS**
- 1 "Consum it!"
- 5 Kind of case in grammar
- 11 Shed some pounds
- 17 Edited, in a way
- 19 Sister channel of HBO
- 20 What the answer at 26-Across is written in
- 21 Low-level, as a class
- 22 Question that might be asked when hurrying into a meeting
- 23 Duty for a property owner
- 24 Relative of marmalade
- 26 FIFTEEN
- 28 Oval Office V.I.P.
- 29 Transition point
- 30 Period preceding a school break
- 34 What the answer at 45-Across is written in
- 36 "Yes, captain"
- 40 Gaping opening
- 41 Willem of "John Wick"
- 42 Toward the stern
- 43 Howe'er
- 44 Chicago mayor Lightfoot
- 45 ELEVEN
- 46 Whom Harry Potter frees from serving Draco Malfoy's family
- 50 Spicy, crunchy snack tidbit
- 53 "Ars Amatoria" writer
- 54 Area the Chinese call Xizang
- 55 "Make sense?"
- 56 Hell
- 58 Square up with
- 59 & 60 Take control after a coup
- 61 SIXTEEN
- 62 "Just ___ boy, born and raised in South Detroit" (lyric from "Don't Stop Believin'")
- 63 Specks
- 64 Sleep: Prefix
- 65 Not quite right
- 66 Full of tension
- 67 "Hallelujah, praise the Lord!"
- 71 Because
- 75 TWO
- 76 Cozy spots to stop
- 77 Miss in the future, maybe
- 78 Buzz source
- 79 Cocktail specification
- 81 Fictional creature made from slime
- 82 Restaurant handouts for calorie counters
- 84 What the answer at 61-Across is written in
- 86 Final authority
- 88 Rainbows, e.g.
- 89 Flour filter
- 90 & 92 Alternative title for this puzzle
- 98 On-the-go sort
- 101 It's SW of Erie, Pa.
- 103 See 106-Across
- 104 What the answer at 75-Across is written in
- 105 Life lessons?
- 106 With 103-Across, character in Episodes I through IX of "Star Wars"
- 107 Millennial, informally
- 108 Things passed between the legs?
- 109 "Butt out!"
- DOWN**
- 1 Title host of radio's first major quiz show
- 2 Contact-lens-care brand
- 3 Broadway opening
- 4 Declare for the draft, say
- 5 Items that, ironically, contain nickel
- 6 "Slumdog Millionaire" co-star ___ Kapoor
- 7 Be a snitch
- 8 Wishy-washy R.S.V.P.
- 9 Plant holder?
- 10 Funeral ceremony
- 11 Go across
- 12 Soldier on horseback
- 13 Word before card or fund
- 14 Sloan School of Management sch.
- 15 Team ___
- 16 Major Southwest hub, for short
- 18 In store
- 19 Like some New Orleans cooking
- 20 Sloppy
- 25 Letter in the classical spelling of "Athena"
- 27 "Here's something that'll help"
- 29 Some battery ends
- 31 Amorphous creatures
- 32 Dreaded musician of the 1960s-'70s
- 33 Brisk
- 34 Luxurious affair
- 35 Symbols of failure
- 36 1974 Eurovision winner that went on to international stardom
- 37 "Wahoo!"
- 38 Immature stage of a salamander
- 39 Letters of credit?
- 41 Drops on the ground?
- 42 "Not on ___!"
- 44 Where Wagner was born and Bach died
- 46 Scatterbrained
- 47 Man's name that sounds like two consecutive letters of the alphabet
- 48 At any time
- 49 Oktoberfest vessels
- 51 Some unfair hiring managers
- 52 "Go ahead," in Shakespeare
- 56 Openly controversial opinions
- 57 Knock out
- 58 Invoice directive
- 59 Like most medical-journal articles
- 60 High hairstyle
- 61 Club ___
- 62 Egypt's "king of the gods"
- 63 Excellent conductors
- 64 N.Y.C. neighborhood near NoLiTa
- 65 "Ciao"
- 66 Put in jeopardy
- 67 Muscle cars of the '60s
- 68 Lyrical, as poetry
- 69 Facetious response to a verbal jab
- 70 "E.T." actress Wallace
- 72 "Ugh, stop talking already!"
- 73 Sack
- 74 Sun ____, "The Art of War" philosopher
- 79 Where most of America's gold is mined
- 80 Like the presidency of John Adams
- 82 Joint
- 83 Longtime Eagles QB Donovan
- 84 Suspect
- 85 Bible study: Abbr.
- 87 With a wink
- 89 Kisses, in Cambridge
- 91 Brown
- 92 Bring (out) for display
- 93 Candy wrapped in a tube
- 94 "I'll come to you ___": Macbeth
- 95 Eensy-weensy
- 96 New pedometer reading
- 97 Beginner, in modern lingo
- 98 Mammoth
- 99 Western tribe
- 100 ___ Salvador
- 102 What will happily sell its Soul?



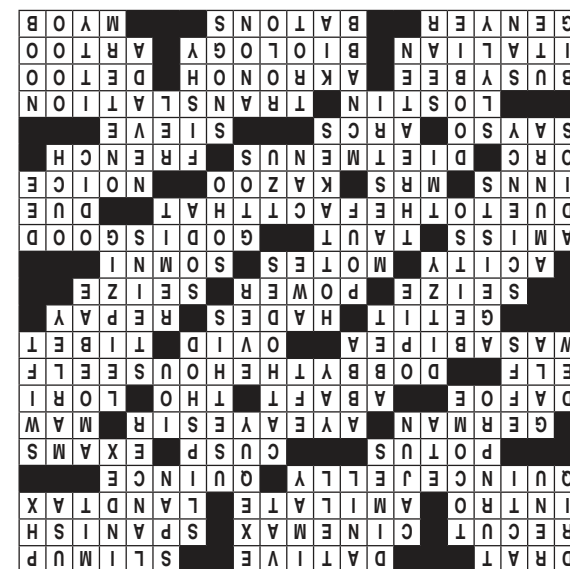
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- 84 Suspect
- 85 Bible study: Abbr.
- 87 With a wink
- 89 Kisses, in Cambridge
- 91 Brown
- 92 Bring (out) for display
- 93 Candy wrapped in a tube
- 94 "I'll come to you ___": Macbeth
- 95 Eensy-weensy
- 96 New pedometer reading
- 97 Beginner, in modern lingo
- 98 Mammoth
- 99 Western tribe
- 100 ___ Salvador
- 102 What will happily sell its Soul?

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RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

Grid for Eugene Sheffer Crossword with numbered squares from 1 to 51.

ACROSS

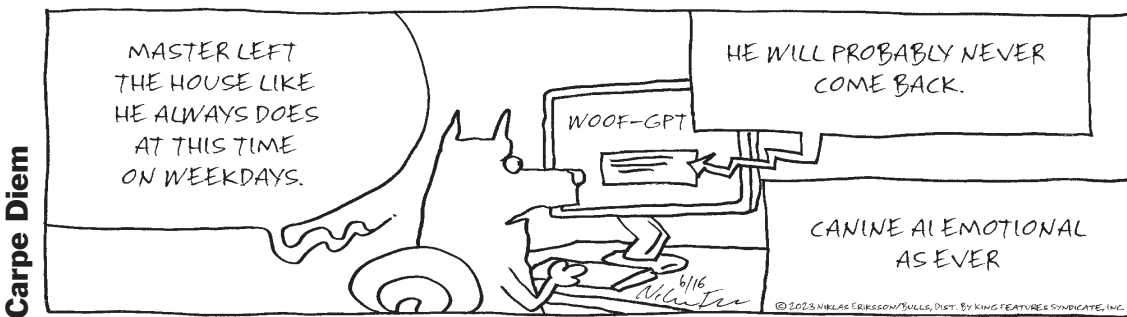
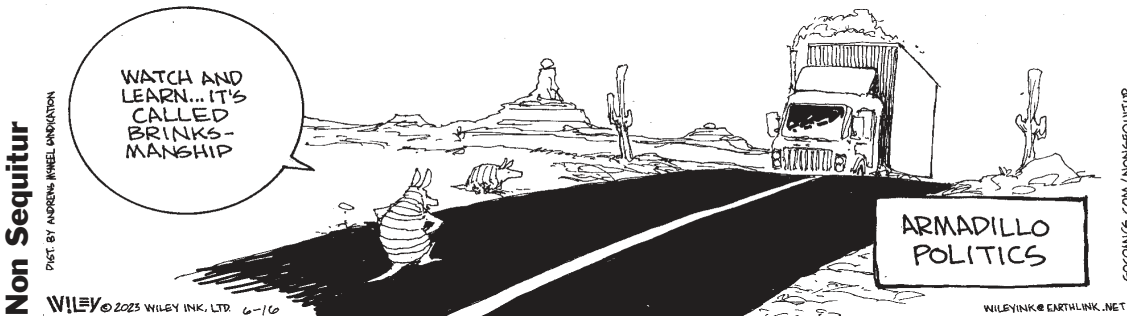
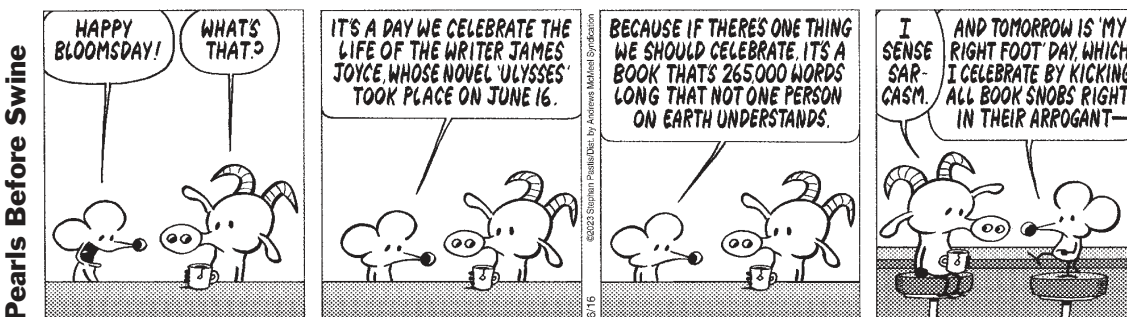
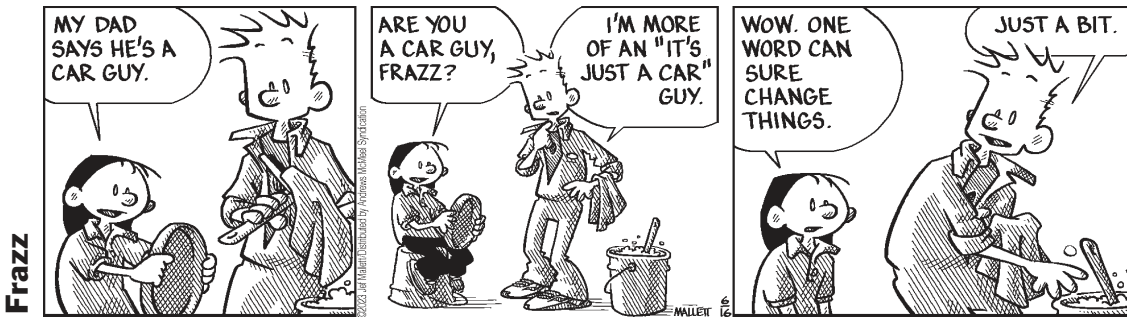
- 1 Do sums
4 Apple variety
8 Check
12 Shad product
13 401(k) relatives
14 Jazzy James
15 Movie excerpt
17 Manitoba tribe
18 Debtors' notes
19 Works by Angelou
20 Bivouacs
22 Roman 902
24 Iowa city
25 Groupie groups
29 - Manuel Miranda
30 Aegean island
31 - Paulo
32 Healthy dessert
34 Lugosi of film
35 Felines
36 Church leader
37 Choose to participate
40 Elitist
41 Platter
42 Community grocery store
46 List-ending abbr.
47 Pakistani language
48 Buckeyes' sch.
49 Rhine feeder

DOWN

- 21 Actor El-Masry
22 'The Stranger' author
23 L-Q bridge
25 Datum
26 Secondhand volume
27 Hay bundle
28 Fly like a hawk
30 Jazz legend Getz
33 Frozen spike
34 Voting group
36 Result
37 Classic theaters
38 Pocket bread
39 Russian ruler
40 Pop
42 Gaiety
43 Tram load
44 Sugar suffix
45 Boxer

Answer to Previous Puzzle

Cryptoquip grid with letters: S T E P B R R I R M A, T O D O L E E Q U A D, E R A T E M P U S E S, M I M O S A A L I T, M A K E S I T B I G, R E L A X R T E E R A, E R I C T I S S L O G, U S S A R C A E T N A, P E T U N I A P I G, I D O L E R O T I C, F E N D O R S V I A L, L O G E G A T I N G A, U S S R Y E S A T O M



6-16

CRYPTOQUIP

P W M G B Z W L T W L Q N G H X C N X L
C G L X N S Z Q W X W C B P O H M O F
Z B D D N S W J L N E W L T W X, L T W F
Q W X W N S L T W Z G D W C G E W.
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I HAD SUCH A WONDERFUL PERIOD OF QUIET, DEEP REFLECTION THIS MORNING. IT WAS QUITE A MUSING.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: T equals H

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

Grid for Eugene Sheffer Crossword with numbers 1-56 indicating starting positions for clues.

ACROSS

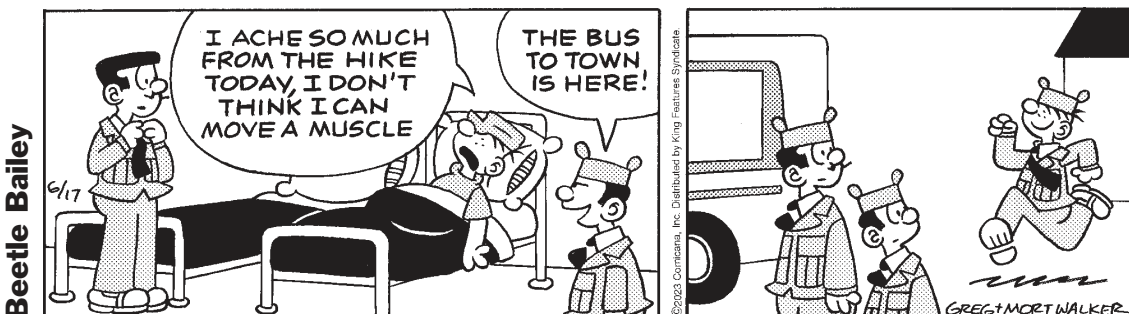
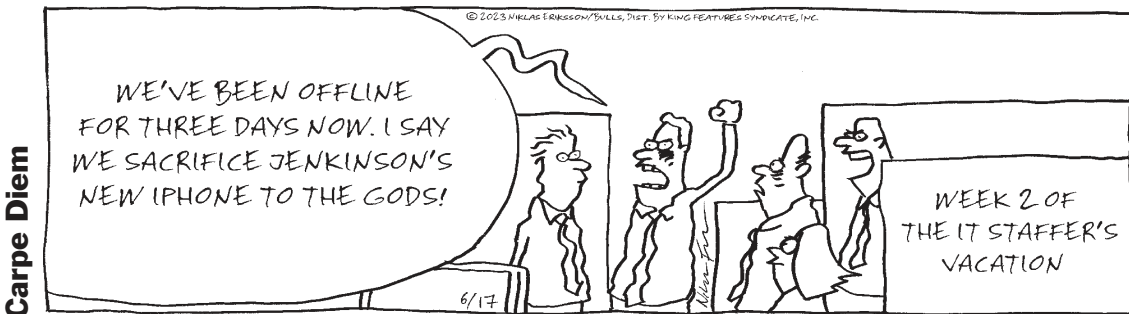
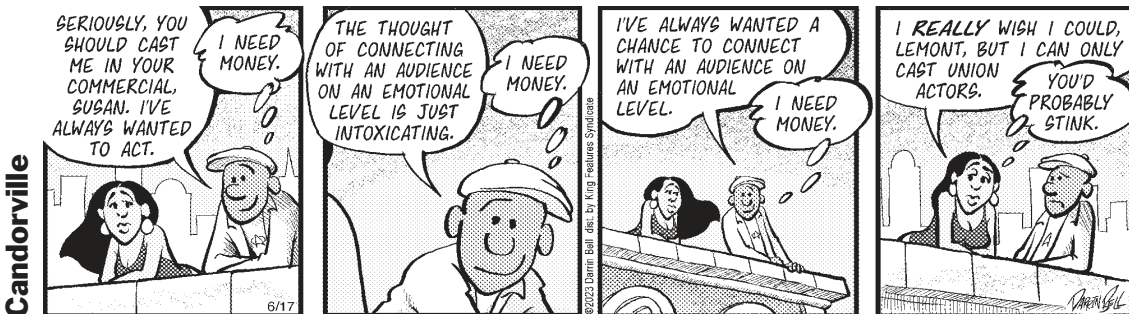
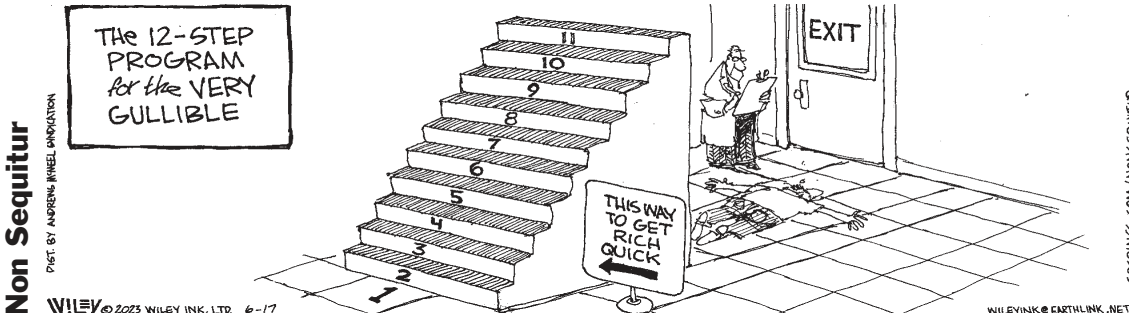
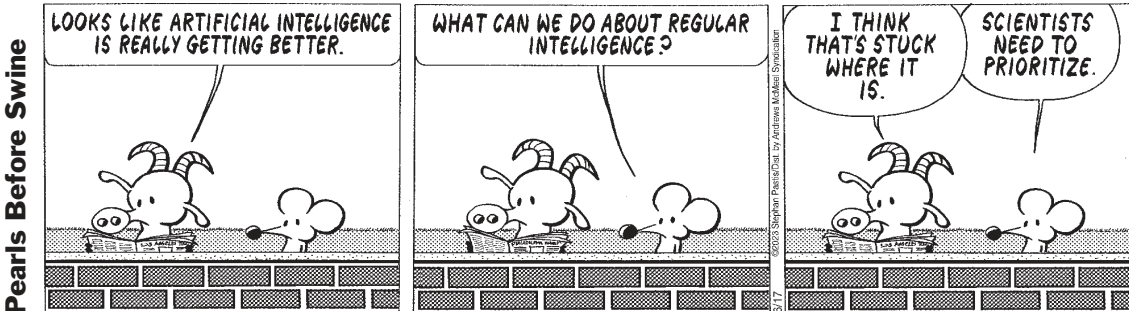
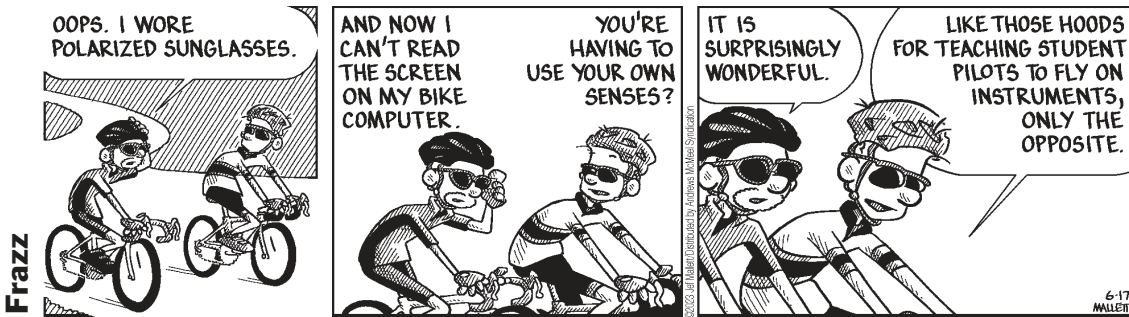
- 1 Wild canine
5 'Coffee Cantata' composer
9 Dog doc
12 Vicinity
13 Entice
14 Summer on the Seine
15 Ella's style
16 Beehive State
17 Scooted
18 Corned beef recipe
19 Nonsense
20 Knucklehead
21 D.C. summer hrs.
23 Ecol. watchdog
25 Extras
28 'Alien' director Scott
32 Lesley of '60 Minutes'
33 Worship
34 Chevy trucks
36 Whoever
37 Praise in verse
38 Coifs
39 Lawn party site
42 - Paulo
44 Swine
48 Recede
49 Rain delay cover
50 They give a hoot
51 'Love Story' actress MacGraw

DOWN

- 22 Edited out
24 Steinway product
25 Bygone jet
26 School book fair org.
27 Hot tub reaction
29 Privy
30 East ender?
31 '-haw!' (cowgirl's cry)
35 Bagel choice
36 Takes in as one's own
39 'Amen!'
40 Competent
41 Baseball stats
43 La Scala solo
45 Clive of 'Closer'
46 Pleased
47 Taxpayer IDs
49 Nanny's charge

Answer to Previous Puzzle

Answer grid for the previous crossword puzzle with words like ADD, FUJI, REIN, ROE, IRAS, ETTA, FILM, CLIP, CREE, IOUS, POEMS, CAMPS, CMII, AMES, FANCLUBS, LIN, SAMOS, SAO, FRUITCUP, BELA, CATS, ELDER, OPTIN, SNOB, DISC, FOODCOOP, ETAL, URDU, OSU, AARE, NEAP, KEG.



6-17

CRYPTOQUIP

HW TGHNTNM HV DNWDHENDZRNL
UNWQDN SNZR HV RZONM
WDQS RGN VONPNRQM, HV
HR TGHPPNL RQ LNUQMN?
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: BECAUSE THE TWO AIRPORT PATRONS WERE PUBLICLY SUMMONED TOGETHER, THEY WERE ON THE SAME PAGE.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: T equals C

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OPINION

Kenya is poised to become the 'Singapore of Africa'

BY TYLER COWEN

Bloomberg Opinion

Of all the countries in sub-Saharan Africa to be optimistic about, the most promising is Kenya. Economic and political forces are converging to put the continent's seventh-largest nation in a relatively favorable position.

Africa is the fastest-growing continent and is expected to account for one-quarter of the world's population by 2050. That means more multinational corporations see a need to have a direct presence somewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. Many such companies already realize they need a presence in Asia, with Singapore proving increasingly popular as the hub, especially as Hong Kong has been absorbed into communist China.

Where in Africa might such a comparable cluster of companies evolve? Unfortunately, some of Africa's leading nations have experienced major troubles lately. Economic growth has slowed in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, and the country has only begun to make much-needed reforms; Ethiopia, the second-most populous country, just went through a civil war; political problems and power shortages continue to plague South Africa. For the time being, those places are not in the running to be a dominant sub-Saharan economic hub, if only because expats will be reluctant to move there.

In contrast, a locale with a reasonable level of English fluency and an attractive year-round climate will get a lot of attention — and that nicely describes Kenya. Kenya also had a growth rate of about 5.5% last year, despite negative shocks to the prices of imported

food and energy. Since 2004, growth rates have been in the range of 4% to 5%.

Kenya also has some geographic advantages. It has an extensive coastline on the Indian Ocean, and research suggests that landlocked countries have worse economic performance. Countries with a coast also find it easier to stay in touch with the rest of the world, and Kenya has relatively easy access to China and India, large markets and sources of capital. In the current geopolitical climate, East Africa is attracting more interest from more sources than is most of West Africa.

In terms of scale, Kenya's population of about 57 million cannot compete with Nigeria's 222 million. But East Africa, with almost 500 million people, has a larger population than West Africa.

Tanzania, just to the south of Kenya, has a larger population than Kenya. But Kenya is much wealthier and has a superior infrastructure — and that includes the digital infrastructure, as internet access in Kenya is ranked among the most reliable in Africa.

To the extent the world focuses more on green energy, Kenya also has a positive story to tell. The country already has more than 80% renewable energy, and the climate is ideal for an ongoing expansion of solar power. Foreign companies looking to boost their green reputations might find Kenya an attractive destination. That said, expensive energy — due in part to taxes and poor regulation — has been a growth drawback.

There are other elements of the case against Kenya. It has had difficulty attracting foreign direct investment, even compared to other African nations. Corruption,

regulatory barriers to entry and political instability remain concerns and cannot be dismissed lightly.

That said, Kenyan governance has been stable as of late, and the 2022 election went relatively well. The government is proving more adept at preventing major terror attacks, often coming from groups in Somalia. As Kenya becomes wealthier, there is a good chance those problems will diminish further.

It is also possible that sub-Saharan Africa will not develop a single dominant corporate hub at all. The United Arab Emirates will continue to evolve into Africa's financial center, Lagos will have the most startup activity, South Africa will remain the dominant business center in the South — and London, Beijing and India will play more important roles in Africa's economic future.

Still, African distances are great and its population is growing, two simple facts that argue for Kenyan growth no matter what. The idea of putting a manufacturing plant or service center near Nairobi or Mombasa makes sense even if it serves only East Africa. Kenya's immediate neighbors to the west and south, Tanzania and Uganda, also have an English-language background, and Tanzania may become one of the world's most populous countries.

Not only is Africa rising, but East Africa is too. And Kenya is likely to be the easiest and most predictable way to bet on it.

Bloomberg Opinion columnist Tyler Cowen is a professor of economics at George Mason University and co-author of "Talent: How to Identify Energizers, Creatives, and Winners Around the World." This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

As more schools target 'Maus,' author's fears deepening

BY GREG SARGENT

The Washington Post

Right-wing culture warriors pushing restrictions on classroom instruction sometimes defend these measures by insisting that they avoid targeting historically or intellectually significant material. In their telling, these laws restrict genuinely objectionable matter — such as pornography or “woke indoctrination” — while sparing material that kids truly need to learn, even if it's controversial.

A new fracas involving a school board in Missouri will test this premise. The controversy revolves around Art Spiegelman's graphic novel about the Holocaust, and it indicates that those seeking to censor books seem oddly unconstrained by the principle that they are supposed to avoid restricting important, challenging historical material.

“It's one more book — just throw it on the bonfire,” Spiegelman told me ruefully, suggesting the impulse to target books seems to have a built-in tendency to expand, sweeping in even his Pulitzer-winning “Maus” under absurd pretenses.

“It's a real warning sign of a country that's yearning for a return of authoritarianism,” Spiegelman said.

The board in Nixa, a small city south of Springfield, will debate the fate of “Maus” later this month. The Springfield News-Leader reports that board employees flagged it in a review in keeping with a Missouri law making it illegal to provide minors with sexually explicit material.

It's not yet clear what the employees found objectionable. But “Maus” — which illus-

trates Spiegelman's parents' experience of the Holocaust and features Nazis as cats and Jews as mice — graphically depicts his mother naked in a bathtub after taking her own life.

“She was sitting in a pool of blood when my father found her,” Spiegelman said of his mother. It is a “rather unsexy image seen from above,” he noted, and “not something I think anybody could describe as a nude woman. She's a naked corpse.”

That imagery is partially what led a school board in Tennessee to ban “Maus” in January 2022. The story made global news before dropping out of our raging national arguments over book removals.

Last fall, however, a handful of other school boards in Missouri pulled “Maus” from schools (one board subsequently restored it after PEN America sounded the alarm). Yet that drew little media attention, and now that the Nixa board is also mulling the fate of “Maus,” Spiegelman decided to speak out once again.

The repeated targeting of “Maus” over alleged sexual content, Spiegelman lamented, is a mere pretext. “It was the other things making them uncomfortable, like genocide,” he said. “I just tried to make them clean and understandable, which is the purpose of storytelling with pictures.”

The Missouri efforts appear prompted by the state's law, passed last summer, that makes the provision of “explicit sexual material” to a student a Class A misdemeanor. The law defines such material as visual depictions of sex acts or genitalia and exempts works with “serious” artistic or anthropologi-

cal “significance.”

But that doesn't seem to have stopped the targeting of “Maus.” When I asked Nixa School Board President Josh Roberts why the book had been flagged, he told me it has been identified as “potentially violative” of school policy and state and federal law, without providing detail on which provisions might have been violated, or how.

What alarms Spiegelman about the targeting of “Maus” on specious grounds, he told me, is that its “fable” form was able to reach a broad audience with a story “about dehumanizing people” and “othering.” Spiegelman suggested those looking to restrict books are seeking to limit school curriculums with their own acts of othering.

“Those others can include Asians, Indigenous Americans, Black people, Muslims — not to mention LGBTQ and beyond,” Spiegelman said. The book-removal frenzy, he noted, is “about squelching what's supposed to happen in school, which is an education that allows people to become one country that can talk to each other with a base of knowledge.”

All this highlights an ugly feature of this craze: Even if those targeting books are genuinely motivated by narrow objections to supposedly sexual content, they often seem undisturbed when those objections result in the removal of material with profound historical significance.

Spiegelman is right: To them, “it's one more book — just throw it on the bonfire.”

Greg Sargent is a columnist. He joined The Washington Post in 2010, after stints at Talking Points Memo, New York Magazine and the New York Observer.

SCOREBOARD/WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

PRO SOCCER

MLS EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Cincinnati	12	1	4	40	27	16
Nashville	9	3	5	32	25	12
Philadelphia	9	5	3	30	28	17
New England	8	3	6	30	28	21
Atlanta	7	4	7	28	35	29
Columbus	8	6	3	27	35	25
Orlando City	7	4	5	26	22	17
D.C. United	6	7	5	23	25	24
CF Montréal	7	9	1	22	19	27
Charlotte FC	6	8	4	22	25	33
New York	4	6	7	19	11	16
Toronto FC	3	5	10	19	17	21
NYCFC	4	7	6	18	17	22
Chicago	3	6	8	17	22	27
Inter Miami CF	5	12	0	15	16	24

MLS WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Saint Louis SC	9	5	2	29	33	17
Seattle	8	6	4	28	24	17
LAFC	7	3	5	26	23	15
FC Dallas	7	6	5	26	21	19
San Jose	7	5	5	26	21	20
Houston	7	7	3	24	20	21
Vancouver	5	5	7	22	27	21
Portland	5	7	5	20	20	24
Sporting KC	5	8	5	20	20	25
Minnesota	5	7	5	20	15	22
Real Salt Lake	5	7	5	20	18	27
Austin FC	5	8	4	19	18	27
LA Galaxy	3	9	4	13	14	27
Colorado	2	9	7	13	14	27

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Wednesday's game

Houston 1, Los Angeles FC 0

Saturday's games

Columbus at New York City FC
Real Salt Lake at D.C. United
Orlando City at New England
Los Angeles FC at Sporting Kansas City
Saint Louis City SC at Nashville
Portland at San Jose

Wednesday, June 21

New York City FC at Atlanta
Toronto FC at Cincinnati
Nashville at CF Montréal
Charlotte FC at New York
Philadelphia at Orlando City
FC Dallas at Austin FC
San Jose at Houston

Thursday, June 22

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Friday, June 23

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Saturday, June 24

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Sunday, June 25

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Monday, June 26

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Tuesday, June 27

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Wednesday, June 28

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Thursday, June 29

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Friday, June 30

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Saturday, July 1

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Sunday, July 2

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Monday, July 3

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Tuesday, July 4

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Wednesday, July 5

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Thursday, July 6

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

Friday, July 7

CF Montréal at Charlotte FC
Nashville at Columbus
Cincinnati at D.C. United
Toronto FC at New England
Atlanta at New York
Miami at Philadelphia
Houston at Austin FC
Chicago at Sporting Kansas City
LA Galaxy at Colorado
Minnesota at Real Salt Lake
Vancouver at Los Angeles FC
New York City FC at Portland
Saint Louis City SC at San Jose
Orlando City at Seattle

COLLEGE BASEBALL

World Series

At Omaha, Neb.
(Double Elimination; x-if necessary)

Bracket 1

Friday, June 16
Game 1: TCU (42-22) vs. Oral Roberts (51-12)

Game 2: Florida (50-15) vs. Virginia (50-13)

Sunday, June 18

Game 3: Game 1 loser vs. Game 2 loser
Game 4: Game 1 winner vs. Game 2 winner

Tuesday, June 20

Game 5: Game 3 winner vs. Game 4 loser (loser eliminated)

Wednesday, June 21

Game 6: Game 4 winner vs. Game 5 winner (winner advances unless Game 7 needed)

Thursday, June 22

x-Game 7: Game 3 vs. Game 4 winner (winner advances)

Bracket 2

Saturday, June 17
Game 1: Wake Forest (52-10) vs. Stanford (42-18)

Game 2: LSU (48-15) vs. Tennessee (42-20)

Monday, June 19

Game 3: Game 1 loser vs. Game 2 loser
Game 4: Game 1 winner vs. Game 2 winner

Tuesday, June 20

Game 5: Game 3 winner vs. Game 4 loser (loser eliminated)

Wednesday, June 21

Game 6: Game 4 winner vs. Game 5 winner (winner advances unless Game 7 needed)

Thursday, June 22

x-Game 7: Game 3 vs. Game 4 winner (winner advances)

Championship Series (Best-of-three)

Sunday, June 24: Bracket 1 winner vs. Bracket 2 winner

Saturday, June 25: Bracket 1 winner vs. Bracket 2 winner

x-Monday, June 26: Bracket 1 winner vs. Bracket 2 winner

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Connecticut	8	2	.800	—
New York	6	3	.667	1½
Washington	5	4	.556	2½
Chicago	5	5	.500	3
Atlanta	3	5	.375	4
Indiana	3	6	.333	4½

WNBA WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Las Vegas	8	1	.889	—
Los Angeles	5	4	.556	3
Dallas	5	5	.500	3½
Seattle	2	6	.250	5½
Phoenix	2	6	.250	5½
Minnesota	2	7	.222	6

Tuesday's games

Indiana 87, Washington 66
Atlanta 86, New York 79
Seattle 83, Phoenix 69

Wednesday's games

Los Angeles 79, Dallas 61

Thursday's games

Atlanta at Connecticut
Indiana at Chicago
Seattle at Las Vegas

Friday's games

Phoenix at Washington
Minnesota at Los Angeles

Saturday's games

Seattle at Dallas

AUTO RACING

NASCAR Cup Series points leaders

Through June 12

1. Martin Truex Jr	525
2. William Byron	512
3. Ryan Blaney	501
4. Ross Chastain	501
5. Kevin Harvick	500
6. Kyle Busch	496
7. Christopher Bell	493
8. Denny Hamlin	462
9. Joey Logano	444
10. Kyle Larson	440
11. Chris Buescher	430
12. Brad Keselowski	424
13. Tyler Reddick	420
14. Ricky Stenhouse Jr	400
15. Bubba Wallace	354
16. Alex Bowman	331
17. Daniel Suárez	328
18. Ty Gibbs	320
19. Michael McDowell	317
20. AJ Allmendinger	298
21. Austin Cindric	292
22. Corey LaJoie	291

TENNIS

Valencia Open

Wednesday
At Club de Tennis Sporting Club de Tennis

Valencia, Spain
Purse: Euro 100,000
Surface: Red clay
Women's Singles
Round of 32

Mayar Sherif (1), Egypt, def. Daniela Seguel, Chile, 6-0, 6-1.

Round of 16

Ann Li, United States, def. Panna Udvardy (6), Hungary, 6-3, 6-2.

Marina Bassols Ribera, Spain, def. Guiomar Maristany Zuleta de Reales, Spain, 6-4, 6-4.

Tamara Korpatsch, Germany, def. Caroline Dolehide (7), United States, 6-1, 6-3.

Mirjam Bjorklund, Sweden, def. Darya Astakhova, Russia, 6-4, 6-3.

Libema Open

Wednesday
At Autotron Rosmalen

Den Bosch, Netherlands
Purse: Euro 673,630
Surface: Grass
Men's Singles
Round of 16

Emil Ruusuvuori, Finland, def. Ugo Humbert (7), France, 6-2, 6-7 (6), 6-4.

Jannik Sinner (2), Italy, def. Alexander Bublik, Kazakhstan, 6-4, 6-2.

Rinky Hijikata, Australia, def. Marc-Andrea Huesler, Switzerland, 2-6, 7-5, 6-3.

Mackenzie McDonald, United States, def. Borna Coric (3), Croatia, 6-4, 6-4.

Women's Singles

Round of 16

Ashlyn Krueger, United States, def. Victoria Azarenka (3), Belarus, 6-3, 6-2.

Veronika Kudermetova (1), Russia, def. Carol Zhao, Canada, 6-1, 6-3.

Aliaksandra Sasnovich (7), Belarus, def. Greet Minnen, Belgium, 6-2, 4-6, 6-3.

Liudmila Samsonova (2), Russia, def. Polina Kudermetova, Russia, 6-4, 6-1.

Men's Doubles

Round of 16

Gonzalo Escobar, Ecuador, and Aleksandr Nedovyesov, Kazakhstan, def. Jean-Julien Rojer, Netherlands, and Marcelo Arevalo-Gonzalez (2), El Salvador, 6-4, 3-6, 10-6.

Wesley Koolhof, Netherlands, and Neal Skupski (1), Britain, def. Matwe Middelkoop and Bart Stevens, Netherlands, 4-6, 7-6 (4), 10-7.

Quarterfinals

Jordan Thompson and Alex de Minaur, Australia, def. Emil Ruusuvuori, Finland, and Brandon Nakashima, United States, 6-2, 6-4.

Women's Doubles

Round of 16

Viktoria Hrucakova and Tereza Mihalikova, Slovakia, def. Aldila Sutjiadi, Indonesia, and Miyu Kato, Japan, 7-5, 6-2.

Zhaoxuan Yang, China, and Ekaterina Alexandrova, Russia, def. Renata Voracovic, Czech Republic, 7-6 (2), 6-4.

Men's Doubles

Round of 16

Kevin Krawietz and Tim Puetz (4), Germany, def. Fabien Reboul and Sadio Doumbia, France, 6-4, 7-5.

Marcelo Demoliner, Brazil, and Andreas Mies, Germany, def. Albano Olivetti, France, and David Vega Hernandez, Spain, 7-6 (3), 6-3.

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball

MLB Disciplinary — Suspended New York Mets RHP Drew Smith 10-games and fined him an undisclosed amount for violating the foreign substance prohibitions in a game on June 13 against the New York Yankees.

American League

BALTIMORE ORIOLES — Recalled INF Joey Ortiz from Norfolk (IL). Selected the contract of RHP Reed Garrett from Norfolk. Placed RHP Austin Voth on the 15-day IL. Optioned C Mark Kolozsvary to Norfolk. Sent RHP Mychal Givens to Bowie (EL) on a rehab assignment.

CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Sent OF Billy Hamilton outright to Charlotte (IL).

DETROIT TIGERS — Recalled RHP Braden Bristo from Toledo (IL).

MINNESOTA TWINS — Optioned OF Trevor Larnach to St. Paul (IL).

NEW YORK YANKEES — Assigned OF Harrison Bader to Somerset (EL) on a rehab assignment.

OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Assigned LHP Kirby Sneed to Las Vegas (PCL) on a rehab assignment.

TAMPA BAY RAYS — Optioned LHP Jalen Beeks to Durham (IL). Reinstated RHP Zack Littell from the 15-day IL.

TEXAS RANGERS — Reinstated RHP Joe Barlow from the 15-day IL. Recalled C Sam Huff from Round Rock (PCL). Optioned RHP Owen White to Frisco (TL). Designated C Sandy Leon for assignment.

National League

ATLANTA BRAVES — Recalled LHP Dylan Dodd from Gwinnett (IL).

CHICAGO CUBS — Assigned 3B Edwin Rios to Iowa (IL) on a rehab assignment.

LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Reinstated RHP Shelby Miller from the bereavement list. Designated LHP Adam Kolarek for assignment.

MIAMI MARLINS — Placed LHP Trevor Rogers to the 60-day IL.

MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Agreed to terms with OF Raimel Tapia on a one-year contract. Optioned INF Abraham Toro to Nashville (IL). Designated RHP Cam Robinson for assignment. Reinstated LHP Eric Lauer from the 15-day IL and optioned him to Nashville. Traded RHP Taylor Floyd to Minnesota Twins.

COLLEGE WORLD SERIES

TCU in 6th CWS after winning 11 in a row

By **STEPHEN HAWKINS**
Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — As freshman Karson Bowen bounced toward home plate and then into the TCU dugout after his go-ahead grand slam, head coach Kirk Saarloos saw something the Horned Frogs really needed at that time.

“Relief is the thing I saw,” Saarloos said.

Only a couple of days after being swept in a three-game series at West Virginia in late April to extend their season-long losing streak to five games — “Definitely a pretty low point,” record-setting slugger Brayden Taylor said — the Frogs trailed in the eighth inning at home against Dallas Baptist before Bowen’s big blast.

“He came running off the field with a huge smile on his face, and the excitement of the dugout, it was kind of like almost relief and kind of just the joy,” Saarloos said. “I think, honestly, that’s kind of where it flipped, a grand slam on a Tuesday night in the eighth inning against DBU.”

The Frogs (42-22) are now going to the College World Series for the sixth time, their first since four consecutive trips to Omaha from 2014-17. They have won 19 of 21 games since the start of May, with an 11-game winning streak that includes sweeping through the Big 12 Tournament, the Fayetteville Regional and an unexpected home super regional against Indiana State.

“We needed all the pieces to connect. And once they did, we knew we would start rolling like we are,” junior center fielder Elijah Nunez said. “We never lost confidence. We knew what team we were ... And now we’re here.”

TCU plays the opening game in this year’s CWS on Friday against Oral Roberts (51-12), which has

won 23 of its last 24 games.

“All the credit goes to our players, because they got into a position of ‘Man, it’s not fun losing.’ They kind of looked at one another and held each other accountable, but stayed together,” Saarloos said. “It’s very easy to fracture and go different ways when things aren’t going great.”

Saarloos, a former MLB pitcher, went to the College World Series twice while playing at Cal State Fullerton (1999 and 2001). He was part of the Frogs’ four consecutive trips after becoming their pitching coach in 2013, and now goes in only his second season as head coach since succeeding Jim Schlossnagle, who left for Texas A&M.

Nunez and third baseman Taylor, who has 23 homers this season and is TCU’s career leader with 48, are third-year starters in an everyday lineup bolstered by freshmen like catcher Bowen (team-best .355 batting average, six homers, 46 RBIs) and shortstop Anthony Silva (.340-7-47), and key transfers first baseman Cole Fontenelle (.347-13-52), second baseman Tre Richardson (.315-6-59) and right fielder Austin Davis (.280-9-55).

Freshman right-hander Kole Klecker (10-4, 3.84 ERA) leads the Big 12 in wins, and freshman lefty Ben Abeldt (3-3, 3.72 ERA) has a team-high 29 appearances.

Right after beating Dallas Baptist, the Frogs lost the first two games in a home series against Texas to fall to 23-20. But they have been on a roll since a 15-7 win in the finale against the Longhorns on May 1.

“I think that we were just sick and tired of playing the way that we were,” Taylor said. “We just decided to go out there, start having more fun, start playing baseball the way we know how.”



TCU baseball coach Kirk Saarloos, left, congratulates Tre Richardson after a super regional win against Indiana State in Fort Worth, Texas, on June 10. TCU swept Indiana State to advance to the CWS.

LM OTERO/AP



MATTHEW HINTON/AP

LSU pitcher Paul Skenes unwinds after a pitch in a game against Kentucky on June 10 in Baton Rouge, La.

LSU’s Skenes closing in on K record as Tigers advance

By **BRETT MARTEL**
Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — When LSU clinched its first trip to the College World Series in six years, it gave 6-foot-6, 247-pound right-hander Paul Skenes a chance to break a major strikeout record that has stood for more than three decades.

Skenes — who’ll likely make his next start Saturday night against Tennessee in Omaha, Neb. — is 15 strikeouts from eclipsing former LSU star Ben McDonald’s 1989 SEC mark of 202.

“Obviously, that’s in the back of my mind,” said Skenes, who has averaged just more than 11 strikeouts per appearance this season. “But the fact that I get to pitch again with this team, with these boys on the biggest stage, that’s the coolest opportunity that I could have asked for.”

The NCAA record is 234, set by Hawaii’s Derek Tatsuno in 1979, when he pitched 174⅓ innings — 22 innings more than McDonald’s 152⅓ and 67⅓ more than Skenes’ current count of 107 innings.

If LSU wins at least twice in the CWS’s eight-team, double-elimination format, Skenes should get at least two starts.

“I’m hoping for three,” Skenes said with a smile, referring to the maximum number of appearances he could make if LSU advances to the best-of-three championship series.

“Things are pretty good if he pitches three more times,” LSU

coach Jay Johnson said. “And because of him, we’ll have a chance to do that.”

Then again, it’s not beyond Skenes’ ability to strike out 15 in one game. With a fastball that routinely clocks 101 mph, complemented by a sharp-breaking slider and deceptive changeup, Skenes has averaged a nation-leading 15.8 strikeouts per nine innings this season, giving him a current total of 188.

Skenes struck out nine in 7⅓ innings last Saturday night in a 14-0 victory over Kentucky in Game 1 of the Baton Rouge super regional. Afterward, Wildcats coach Nick Mingione summed up the LSU fireballer’s performance this way: “No. 1, he was up to 102 miles an hour, and No. 2, he threw more off-speed pitches than he did fastballs. Let that sink in.”

Even if Skenes falls short, he’s turned in one of the most dominant seasons in NCAA history, given the stricter pitch-count limits imposed upon star pitchers now, particularly those with the potential for a lucrative MLB future.

“It would be nice for him to have an opportunity to go two more times,” said former LSU coach Skip Bertman, who coached McDonald and also won five national titles as Tigers coach. “He’s a once-in-a-generation pitcher — like McDonald.”

Skenes’ earned-run average this season is 1.77 and he’s walked just 18 batters.

“The 12 to 13 strikeouts a game,

three to four hits, zero or one run up on the board, and being able to count on that at the level we play at and the schedule that we play — maybe somebody’s done it before. I haven’t really seen that,” LSU coach Jay Johnson said. “Stephen Strasburg is the only competitor as far as just execution and talent and domination that I’ve seen” that compares.

Strasburg averaged 16.1 strikeouts per 9 innings over 109 innings — 195 strikeouts total — in 2009 at San Diego State. That summer, the Washington Nationals picked Strasburg first overall in the Major League Baseball draft.

Skenes is projected to be taken in the top two picks, perhaps behind only his LSU teammate center fielder Dylan Crews, who is hitting .434 this season (.579 in the NCAA tournament).

Unlike Crews, who was a bona fide MLB prospect since high school, Skenes wasn’t sure pro baseball was in his future when he began college at Air Force. He was a two-way player before he transferred to LSU after last season, looking to specialize in pitching and elevate his draft status.

In the process, Johnson said, he’s elevated LSU’s season with more than just his physical attributes.

“He is the most special human being on the planet,” Johnson said. “He’s going to be an ace, a Cy Young winner some day, potential Hall-of-Famer. The character piece matches that talent, and you never see that.”

COLLEGE WORLD SERIES/MLB



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Florida pitcher Brandon Sproat pitches against South Carolina during the first inning of a super regional game June 9 in Gainesville, Fla. Sproat (8-3) is considered the ace of the Gators' pitching staff.

Florida heads to CWS with deep pitching staff

BY MARK LONG
Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Florida coach Kevin O'Sullivan sifted through his desk this week in search of decade-old notebooks from previous trips to the College World Series.

The pages contain countless reminders about how to handle days, maybe even weeks, in Omaha, Neb. Build in downtime. Make sure everyone has fun. Gather the team together at the end of each night.

Solid tips, for sure. But the most important pointer didn't need to be jotted down anywhere: bring pitching, lots of pitching. It shouldn't be an issue for Sully and the Gators this time around.

Second-seeded Florida (50-15) has its most talented collection of arms since winning the program's lone national title in 2017, a staff so deep that O'Sullivan could face daunting decisions about when to use standout sophomore Jac Caglianone and highly touted freshman Cade Fisher.

"There's no perfect or complete team. Everybody's got strengths, everybody's got weaknesses," O'Sullivan said. "We had to work awfully hard to figure out our bullpen and get our starting pitching going."

"Certainly, we're pitching at a high level at the right time."

It's been nearly flawless the last two weeks, raising outside expect-

tations and making the Gators one of the favorites to reach the best-of-three championship series. Florida opens bracket play against No. 7 seed Virginia (50-13) on Friday night.

Fourth-year junior and ace Brandon Sproat (8-3, 4.69 ERA) will get the ball to start against the Cavaliers. He's pitched at least six innings in four of his last five starts, giving the Gators a chance almost every time out.

No. 2 starter Hurston Waldrep (9-3, 4.15 ERA) might be even better. Florida has won Waldrep's last five starts, including consecutive gems against Connecticut and South Carolina in NCAA play. The Southern Miss transfer, a junior expected to be a first-round pick in next month's MLB draft, struck out 12 in seven innings against the Huskies and fanned a career-high 13 in eight innings against the Gamecocks.

"That was the best stuff he's had all year," catcher BT Riopelle said. "He put his complete arsenal on display from pitch one. That kid is going to make a lot of money, but hopefully he can make himself some more money in Omaha."

Sproat and Waldrep give Florida as good a 1-2 tandem as anyone remaining in NCAA play. But what makes this team better than most during O'Sullivan's 16 seasons in Gainesville is its depth on the mound.

Caglianone (7-3), one of the best

two-way players in the country, threw six shutout innings in regional play. Brandon Neely, a weekend starter last season who reluctantly agreed to take on the closer role this year, was a first-team All-Southeastern Conference selection thanks to 13 saves and 64 strikeouts in 46⅓ innings.

"When I first approached him about closing, he really wanted no part of it," O'Sullivan said. "But I promised him one thing. I said, 'You came in as a starter and you're going to leave this program as a starter.' So I'm going to move him back to the starting rotation next year."

Left-hander Philip Abner (3-0) and righty Ryan Slater (10-1) have become dependable relievers, and Fisher (6-0) has been as good as anyone down the stretch. He's allowed one earned run since the end of April, and O'Sullivan is confident he can seamlessly slide into the rotation if Caglianone is needed in relief.

"From a pure ability standpoint, I've got three starters that have mid-90s stuff or better with good secondary pitches," he said. "That's why I never panicked. We did not have one weekend really until the SEC Tournament that all three starters pitched up to their capability. ... That the most encouraging thing about the whole thing."

"I knew at some point we were going to get it all figured out."

A's stadium deal wins legislative approval

Associated Press

CARSON CITY, Nev. — The Oakland Athletics cleared a major hurdle for their planned relocation to Las Vegas after the Nevada Legislature gave final approval on Wednesday to public funding for a portion of a proposed \$1.5 billion stadium with a retractable roof.

The deal that backers said will help further establish Las Vegas as the new "entertainment and sports capital of the world" still needs the governor's signature, and MLB must also approve the A's move to the Las Vegas Strip, but both are anticipated.

The Assembly approved the final version of the bill with \$380 million in taxpayer money on a 25-15 vote after making minor changes to the measure the Senate approved on a 13-8 vote Tuesday just hours before the Vegas Golden Knights won the Stanley Cup.

The Senate accepted the changes with no debate on a voice vote Wednesday night and sent it to the governor's desk as an "emergency measure" adopted during the special legislative session that convened with Democratic majorities in both houses June 7. Republican Gov. Joe Lombardo had proposed the stadium spending plan.

The A's said in a statement released by the team they look forward to "Lombardo's signature as our next step" as they "work to bring the Athletics to Las Vegas."

The \$380 million in public funding would mainly come from \$180 million in transferable tax credits and \$120 million in county bonds. Backers have pledged that the creation of a special tax district around the proposed stadium — that would be the smallest in Major League Baseball — would generate enough money to pay off those bonds and interest. The plan would not directly raise taxes.

The Nevada plan had revived the national debate over public funding for private sports clubs. A's representatives and some Nevada tourism officials have said the measure could add to Las Vegas' growing sports scene and act

as an economic engine. But a growing chorus of economists and some lawmakers have warned that such a project would bring minimal benefits when compared to the hefty public price tag.

Assemblywoman Selena La Rue Hatch, D-Reno, said Wednesday night that she couldn't support the public financing given a lack of funding for Nevada's overcrowded classrooms, inadequate child care services and "people sleeping on the streets."

"No amount of amendments are going to change the fact we are giving millions of public dollars to a billionaire," she said.

Under the deal approved Wednesday, the A's would not owe property taxes for the publicly owned stadium. Clark County, which includes Las Vegas, would also contribute \$25 million in credit toward infrastructure costs. The final version of the bill shifted some money that had been targeted for homeless programs to funds for low-income housing.

Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao said after the vote that California's Legislature had passed three pieces of legislation to support construction of a new A's ballpark at Howard Terminal.

"The A's have been part of Oakland for more than half a century, and they belong in this city," she said in a statement. "There is no city that has worked harder to meet the needs of a team than Oakland."

Nevada Assemblywoman Shea Backus, D-Las Vegas, said in addition to creating 14,000 construction jobs and permanent jobs subject to collective bargaining, MLB will build on the excitement surrounding the Raiders, the Golden Knights and the WNBA's Aces in a city that had no major professional sports before 2016.

"With the Aces winning a national championship last year and the Golden Knights securing the Stanley Cup just last night, it is clear Las Vegas is clearly becoming the entertainment and sports capital of the world," she said.



OAKLAND ATHLETICS/AP

A rendering provided May 26 shows a view of the Athletics' proposed new ballpark at the Tropicana site in Las Vegas.

MLB

De La Cruz soaring after big debut

BY DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — There may have been 30 people inside Kauffman Stadium on Tuesday with a view of the field, including a couple of workers who were busy hosing off seats hours before the game, yet all would occasionally turn to see where the ball landed when they heard the crack of the bat.

Inside the cage, hat flipped backward a la Ken Griffey Jr. and with a left-handed swing nearly as sweet, was the hottest thing to hit baseball in quite some time. Elly De La Cruz pounded ropes into the stadium's massive alleys and soared shots that rattled around in the outfield seats or splashed into the stadium fountains.

An hour later, De La Cruz finally walked toward the visiting dugout with a few of his Cincinnati Reds teammates.

It was 2:58 p.m. First pitch was still more than four hours away.

Rarely do players widely considered baseball's top prospect exceed expectations from Day 1. But even rarer is a talent like De La Cruz, the 21-year-old switch-hitting infielder whose first week in the majors was the stuff of legend.

In his first big league series, De La Cruz annihilated a 92 mph fastball from Noah Syndergaard, the ball landing some 458 feet away and one row from leaving Great American Ball Park entirely. In the same game against the Dodgers, the 6-foot-5 phenom went from home to third on a triple faster than anyone this season. He's even thrown a 96.6 mph laser to first base for an out.

De La Cruz is only the second player since at least 1900 to have a single, double, triple, homer and stolen base within their first three games, according to Elias Sports Bureau. The other was Bill Bruton of the Milwaukee Braves in 1953.

"Yeah, there's things that he's done on the field that are extremely impressive. There's no question



PHOTOS BY JEFF DEAN/AP

The Reds' Elly De La Cruz dives into third base after hitting a triple against the Los Angeles Dodgers during the third inning in Cincinnati on June 7. It was De La Cruz's first career triple in just his second game.

about that," Reds manager David Bell acknowledged. "The fun part has been a lot of what he's been able to do so far had led to helping us be able to win."

That's something that hasn't happened around Cincinnati lately.

The Big Red Machine rusted away decades ago, and while there have been moments of unexpected joy — that 1990 World Series title bookended by losing seasons — heartbreak has been the norm. The Reds lost 100 games last season, their most since 1982, and have had losing records seven of the past eight full seasons; their only playoff trip during that span came during the COVID-19-shortened 2020 season, when they went 31-29 and were swept in the wild-card round.

There have been talents over the years that have had Cincinnati

buzzing, and Joey Votto and Johnny Cueto are among those that panned out. Just as many never lived up to the hype: Brandon Larson, Christopher Gruler and Ryan Wagner among them.

Perhaps that fine line between success and failure is why De La Cruz was back at the ballpark so early Tuesday.

He had gone 0-for-5 in a series opener against the Kansas City Royals, striking out twice and looking lost and confused, but he was already building his confidence back. With shades riding high on his ball cap, yet never wiggling his head was so still, he continually pounded balls to all parts of the field as a handful of teammates watched.

"There's definitely adjustment. There's a transition," Bell said. "He wants to make sure he's doing the right thing around the clubhouse. This is all very new. Again, I keep going back to the ease of the transition. A lot of that has to do with how well he was prepared by people throughout our organization, and just in general, not being afraid to ask questions."

De La Cruz has been with the Reds since 2018, when he signed as an international free agent at 16 years old. He made his pro debut the following year in the Dominican Summer League, but he didn't play at all in 2020 when the minor league season was canceled by the pandemic. He was still playing rookie ball two years ago before finally graduating to the Class-A level.

By that point, though, his ability had become apparent.

De La Cruz split time last year between Class-A Dayton and Double-A Chattanooga, where he im-

pressed enough to represent the Reds in the All-Star Futures Game. When autumn rolled around, the club put him on their 40-man roster to protect him from the Rule 5 draft, then watched him impress again this past spring training before sending him to Triple-A Louisville.

He hit .298 with 12 homers, 36 RBIs and 11 stolen bases there before an injury to Nick Senzel opened a spot in Cincinnati.

"I've had a lot of Dominican guys reach out to me, congratulate me, tell me to keep going — 'This is just the start,'" said De La Cruz, whose large family of five brothers and three sisters has been following his journey in the Dominican Republic.

The Diamondbacks' Ketel Marte and the Pirates' Oneil Cruz are among those that have reached out to him.

"They both congratulated me and told me to keep going," De La Cruz said.

Unlike so many Reds prospects over the years, who had weighty expectations placed entirely on their shoulders, De La Cruz doesn't have to go it alone. Matt McLain is in the top five in All-Star voting, fellow infielder Spencer Steer gets regular playing time and another rookie, Andrew Abbott, has barged his way into the starting rotation.

They form a young core that is fun to watch. It's versatile, dynamic and portends big things for the future.

Kind of like De La Cruz, who is at the center of it all.

"What can I say? I'm just here trying to give my team a chance to win," he said, "and put in my best effort out there."

Scoreboard

American League

East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Tampa Bay	49	22	.690	—
Baltimore	42	25	.627	5
New York	39	30	.565	9
Toronto	38	31	.551	10
Boston	34	35	.493	14

Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	35	33	.515	—
Cleveland	31	36	.463	3½
Chicago	30	39	.435	5½
Detroit	27	39	.409	7
Kansas City	18	50	.265	17

West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Texas	42	25	.627	—
Houston	39	29	.574	3½
Los Angeles	38	32	.543	5½
Seattle	33	34	.493	9
Oakland	19	51	.271	24½

National League

East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	42	26	.618	—
Miami	38	31	.551	4½
Philadelphia	34	34	.500	8
New York	32	36	.471	10
Washington	26	40	.394	15

Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Pittsburgh	34	32	.515	—
Milwaukee	34	34	.500	1
Cincinnati	34	35	.493	1½
Chicago	30	37	.448	4½
St. Louis	27	42	.391	8½

West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Arizona	41	27	.603	—
Los Angeles	38	30	.559	3
San Francisco	36	32	.529	5
San Diego	33	34	.493	7½
Colorado	29	41	.414	13

Wednesday's games

Minnesota 4, Milwaukee 2
Atlanta 10-6, Detroit 7-5
Toronto 3, Baltimore 1
Boston 6, Colorado 3
N.Y. Mets 4, N.Y. Yankees 3, 10 innings
Houston 5, Washington 4
Texas 6, L.A. Angels 3
Cincinnati 7, Kansas City 4
San Diego 5, Cleveland 0
Miami 4, Seattle 1
Tampa Bay 6, Oakland 3
Chicago White Sox 8, L.A. Dodgers 4
San Francisco 8, St. Louis 5, 10 innings
Chicago Cubs 10, Pittsburgh 6
Philadelphia 4, Arizona 3, 10 innings

Thursday's games

Toronto at Baltimore
Tampa Bay at Oakland
Philadelphia at Arizona
Detroit at Minnesota
Colorado at Atlanta
Pittsburgh at Chicago Cubs
L.A. Angels at Texas
Washington at Houston
Cleveland at San Diego
Chicago White Sox at L.A. Dodgers

Friday's games

Baltimore (Irvin 1-2) at Chicago Cubs (TBD)
Miami (Alcantara 2-5) at Washington (TBD)
St. Louis (Mikolas 4-3) at N.Y. Mets (Megill 5-4)
N.Y. Yankees (Germán 4-3) at Boston (Houck 3-6)
Colorado (Lamet 1-3) at Atlanta (Shuster 3-2)
Toronto (TBD) at Texas (TBD)
Cincinnati (Abbott 2-0) at Houston (TBD)
Detroit (TBD) at Minnesota (Ryan 7-3)
L.A. Angels (Sandoval 3-6) at Kansas City (Singer 4-5)
Pittsburgh (TBD) at Milwaukee (Houser 2-2)
Cleveland (McKenzie 0-1) at Arizona (TBD)
Philadelphia (Walker 6-3) at Oakland (TBD)
Tampa Bay (TBD) at San Diego (Darvish 5-4)
San Francisco (TBD) at L.A. Dodgers (TBD)
Chicago White Sox (Kopech 3-5) at Seattle (Woo 0-1)

Today in baseball

June 16

1993 — Ken Griffey Jr. hits his 100th career home run in Seattle.
1995 — Marlins outfielder Andre Dawson hits his 400th NL career home run.



De La Cruz, who plays shortstop for the Reds, throws to first base.

MLB

Strive for inclusivity remains hampered

Dueling expressions of support, opposition recall wait for first openly gay active player

By JAY COHEN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — When it comes to baseball and LGBTQ+ inclusivity, Billy Bean often flashes back to his playing days.

Ending his career without telling his parents about his life as a closeted gay ballplayer. Shielding his secret from teammates like Brad Ausmus and Torey Lovullo. The regret of not sharing his “full self,” he says.

It’s a message Bean has delivered in clubhouses, and it resonates with today’s ballplayers — hyper-focused on staying in the majors, and being a good teammate. It’s also the lens through which Bean views baseball’s ongoing LGBTQ+ issues.

“There’s some parts of my job where I feel like some days I just, you know, I’m floating,” said Bean, a senior vice president for diversity, equity and inclusion with Major League Baseball. “Then there’s other days when I see some push-back, I’m reminded that we have 8,000 human beings connected to the sport as an athlete in one way or another, and you’re not going to always have 100% of those people agree on the same thing.”

That friction has been on display in recent seasons as MLB teams court the LGBTQ+ community during Pride Month, simultaneously showing how much has changed and how much remains the same within the National Pastime — a sport with a strong connection to segments of the United States and Latin America where many view homosexuality as a sin.

Almost 80 years after Jackie Robinson broke the majors’ color barrier in a landmark moment for the American Civil Rights Movement, the dueling expressions of LGBTQ+ support and pop-up opposition recalled the question of when MLB might welcome its first active openly gay player — a barrier already cleared by the NBA and NFL.

“If somebody in here called a meeting and came out as gay, I think everybody would embrace that, have their back and literally just move on and focus on winning the games, which is really the important thing and what matters,” Milwaukee Brewers outfielder Christian Yelich said. “It doesn’t matter what somebody’s sexuality is.”

While Seattle slugger Julio Rodríguez, Chicago Cubs pitcher Marcus Stroman and Toronto pitcher Kevin Gausman are among a group of players who have publicly celebrated Pride Month, the Los Angeles Dodgers have faced criticism for including

the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in the team’s upcoming 10th annual Pride Night on Friday.

Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw disagreed with the decision but said his objection was based on the Sisters’ satirical portrayal of religious figures and had nothing to do with LGBTQ+ support. Washington pitcher Trevor Williams said he was deeply troubled by the team’s move, decrying what he felt was the group’s mockery of his Catholic religion.

The objection to the Sisters, a group of mainly men who dress as nuns, comes a year after some Tampa Bay players cited their Christian faith in refusing to wear Pride jerseys.

Last month, veteran reliever Anthony Bass expressed support on social media for anti-LGBTQ+ boycotts of Target and Bud Light, and then apologized for sharing the post on his Instagram stories.

Asked if MLB’s inclusivity efforts with the LGBTQ+ community had stalled, Bass referenced baseball’s “many different beliefs” and “many different walks of life.”

“I wouldn’t say it’s causing a barrier,” Bass said before he was cut by the Blue Jays last week. “Everyone should be able to express their feelings and views, so I think that’s what we’re seeing and I don’t think it’s causing a barrier to the acceptance of the Pride community.”

Bass was booed loudly by Toronto fans after his social media post.

Texas is the only big league team that isn’t holding a Pride Night this month.

For Mason Dunn, who grew up in a die-hard Dodgers family in Southern California, it has been an emotional couple of weeks. Dunn wrote an anguished post on Facebook after the Dodgers rescinded



MARK HUNDLEY/AP

Former player Glenn Burke’s sexual orientation was known within baseball. Burke felt he was blackballed by the sport.



ELAINE THOMPSON/AP

Billy Bean, Major League Baseball vice president of Social Responsibility & Inclusion, throws out the first pitch before a game in 2016 in Seattle. Bean said he doesn’t think the absence of an openly gay player is the right way to evaluate inclusivity in the major leagues. Bean came out after his playing career.

their invitation to the Sisters, and then expressed relief when the team changed its mind.

“I really truly hope the Dodgers are using this experience to learn more about allyship,” said Dunn, who identifies as nonbinary and works for the Massachusetts LGBTQ Chamber of Commerce. “It isn’t just about rainbow logos. It’s about showing up when things are difficult and scary.”

Asked about not holding a Pride Night, the Rangers said they are committed to making everyone feel welcome and included.

“That means in our ballpark, at every game, and in all we do — for both our fans and our employees,” the team said in a statement.

For Pittsburgh Pirates general manager Ben Cherington, access to the best possible employees — on the field, in the front office, everywhere in the organization — is a major reason why LGBTQ+ inclusivity is important.

“It is our belief that to win at the level we want to win at, at the major league level, means that we simply can’t discriminate,” Cherington said. “If you’re around really good teams, World Series teams, teams in other sports that achieve at the highest possible level, you will see that the only way to build a team like that is to have zero bias as it relates to where people are coming from, what they look like, what their beliefs are, how they choose to spend their time away from the field.”

Anderson Comás, a minor league pitcher in the White Sox organization, announced that he was gay in an Instagram post in February. Phillies pitcher Taijuan Walker, Mets outfielder Mark Canha and Royals first baseman Vinnie Pasquantino responded with supportive messages on Twitter.

Bean came out after his playing

career. Glenn Burke’s sexual orientation was known within baseball, but the former big league outfielder did not come out publicly until 1982.

Burke, who died in 1995 at age 42, felt he was blackballed by the sport. “A gay man in baseball? Uh, uh. No way,” he told the AP.

Bean, 59, said he doesn’t think the absence of an openly gay player is the right way to evaluate inclusivity in the major leagues, just like he doesn’t think the sport should be evaluated by a comment that might not be supportive.

When it comes to the timing for the majors’ first active openly gay

competitor, Bean said he understands why a player would want to focus on his career instead of dealing with the challenges that go along with breaking that barrier.

“It’s really hard to play in the big leagues and you don’t get into the big leagues in 2023 unless you are front and center a baseball player first,” Bean told the AP. “And that is how an athlete would be defined.”

“Baseball is a really hard game,” he continued. “And I think that it’s more about a business decision than a cultural one at the moment. And I have respect for their personal choice there.”

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AUTO RACING/US OPEN

For top Cup teams, break in schedule is mixed blessing

BY GREG BECHAM
Associated Press

SONOMA, Calif. — The relentless grind of the NASCAR Cup Series pauses this week, and just about everybody involved with the cars is looking to take advantage.

Martin Truex Jr. plans to go fishing after claiming his second victory of the season on Sunday at Sonoma Raceway. Aric Almirola's wife and children were in wine country to watch his surprising Xfinity Series victory at Sonoma on Saturday because they're all spending the next 10 days in California, surfing and hiking and going to a Dodgers game on Father's Day.

NASCAR's schedule in its top flight is famously busy: This is the teams' sole weekend without a race between the Daytona 500 on Feb. 19 and the Cup Series championship at Phoenix on Nov. 5.

But for the teams and drivers doing their best work now, it's natural to wonder whether the break could slow their momentum right before the start of the 10-race sprint to the 10-race Cup playoffs.

Kyle Busch is the hottest driver on the grid, with four straight top-10 finishes, culminating in a victory outside St. Louis and a second-place finish behind Truex in Sonoma.

"I mean, I don't know if I want an off week," Busch said Sunday, wearing the closest facial expression he ever makes to a smile. "Let's go, right? We're rolling right now."

"It'll be a good break for everybody to regroup and refocus and set in," Busch added. "All in all,

"I don't know that an off week will change anything."

Martin Truex Jr.
NASCAR Cup Series driver

just real proud of the guys and the communication and the way they're able to go to work and kind of work through some of our issues and try to improve on what I need to be able to feel in a race car to be able to put out finishes like that. If we can keep doing those things, we'll be a force."

In truth, Busch and his Richard Childress Racing Chevrolet team are already a force.

He won at Fontana last February in only his second race for his new team after a 15-year tenure at Joe Gibbs Racing. After a few early season bumps, he has surged up to sixth in the driver standings with a playoff spot secure through his three victories — tied with William Byron for the Cup wins lead.

Truex and his team also are on a roll, with two victories and four top-five finishes in the last six races. His only finish outside the top 10 in this stretch was last month at Darlington, where he won the pole and had a dominant car that led the most laps before collisions with Ross Chastain and Joey Logano knocked him out of the race.

"I don't know that it really matters," Truex said of the one-week break. "We've got a great team.

We know what we are capable of now. We have a lot of confidence back that we lacked last year in our decision-making, whether it was strategy or whatever. It seems like things are clicking right now. I don't know that an off week will change anything. We could probably use a few more off weeks before the playoffs, if I'm being honest with you, but we don't get those, so I'm ready whenever."

The improvements by Truex's JGR team and Toyota were the talk of the paddock after his dominant victory at Sonoma, with Gibbs and crew chief James Small praising their ability to learn from a disappointing 2022. They're a clear championship contender after Truex went to the top of the overall driver standings in Sonoma.

So while Truex said he will enjoy his time away with that fishing trip or "just hanging out," he expects to be right back in front when racing resumes at Nashville Superspeedway next weekend.

"I try to get away from racing a couple of days a week no matter what, just to keep my sanity," the 42-year-old Truex said. "I've been doing this a long time. I'll talk to James on Monday. I'll talk to James usually on Wednesday or Thursday again. So I'll have a few days in between there to kind of regroup and keep my sanity."

Just don't call too soon this week: After raising a victorious wine glass in Sonoma, Small said he was headed to Colorado for a short break to clear his own head before NASCAR's sprint to the finish.



DARREN YAMASHITA/AP

Martin Truex Jr. drinks wine after winning a NASCAR Cup Series race at Sonoma Raceway on Sunday.



DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

Scottie Scheffler is the No. 1 player and leads the PGA Tour in several categories, but he is only 148th overall in putting.

No. 1 Scheffler hoping to solve putting woes

BY EDDIE PELLIS
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Scottie Scheffler took one long, smooth stroke, then looked down the line and watched the ball roll toward the hole on the practice green.

He was using his wedge.

That was a drill. The state of his game on the greens — more of an emergency.

The player listed No. 1 in the latest world golf ranking is sitting at No. 148 in the PGA Tour in putting this year. With the U.S. Open this week, Scheffler finds himself experimenting with different putters and also trying to give himself a little more credit for putts he hits well that just don't go in.

There have been a lot of them lately.

"If I hit a really good 6-iron, sometimes it's going to go to 2 feet and sometimes it's going to go to 15 feet, and it's like, 'well, ... it doesn't make a huge difference,'" said Scheffler, who is trying to become the only No. 1 to win the U.S. Open other than Tiger Woods, who last accomplished that in 2008. "But if I have a 6-footer and I hit a really good putt and one time it goes in and one time it doesn't, everyone is like 'Oh, why did he miss that putt?'"

But missing those putts comes at a price. Analytics, to say nothing of leaderboards, spell it out.

Scheffler leads the PGA Tour in scoring average and strokes gained on approach shots. Numbers from one analytics guru showed that through May, he was the only player to gain 15 or more strokes from tee to green this year; he's done it four times.

He leads the tour in hitting greens in regulation, a stat that, by itself, can hamper putting statistics because players normally get closer when they're scrambling and chipping from mere feet away than flying wedges in from 100 yards.

Still, he is 90 notches worse on the putting list than he was last year, and Scheffler isn't hiding

from reality. In an interview in late May, when he tied for third at the Charles Schwab Challenge, he said his struggles started at the Masters, where he was trying to defend his title but never got comfortable on the greens. He finished 10th.

It kept on going like that, to the point where he said "I felt like I was putting toward a moving cup." At the Memorial earlier this month, he missed a playoff by a single shot despite gaining an unheard-of 20 shots against the field from tee to green. He lost 8.5 strokes putting.

"Obviously, had an off week there, or I probably would've won that one," he said in his pre-Open interview Tuesday.

Golf's equipment junkies have been watching his practice sessions intently. Scheffler has been testing a putter not that different from what he regularly uses. It's just wider and has some different weighting options.

"Sometimes you've just got to bring another putter around there to make the original one scared," Scheffler said.

He was only half joking.

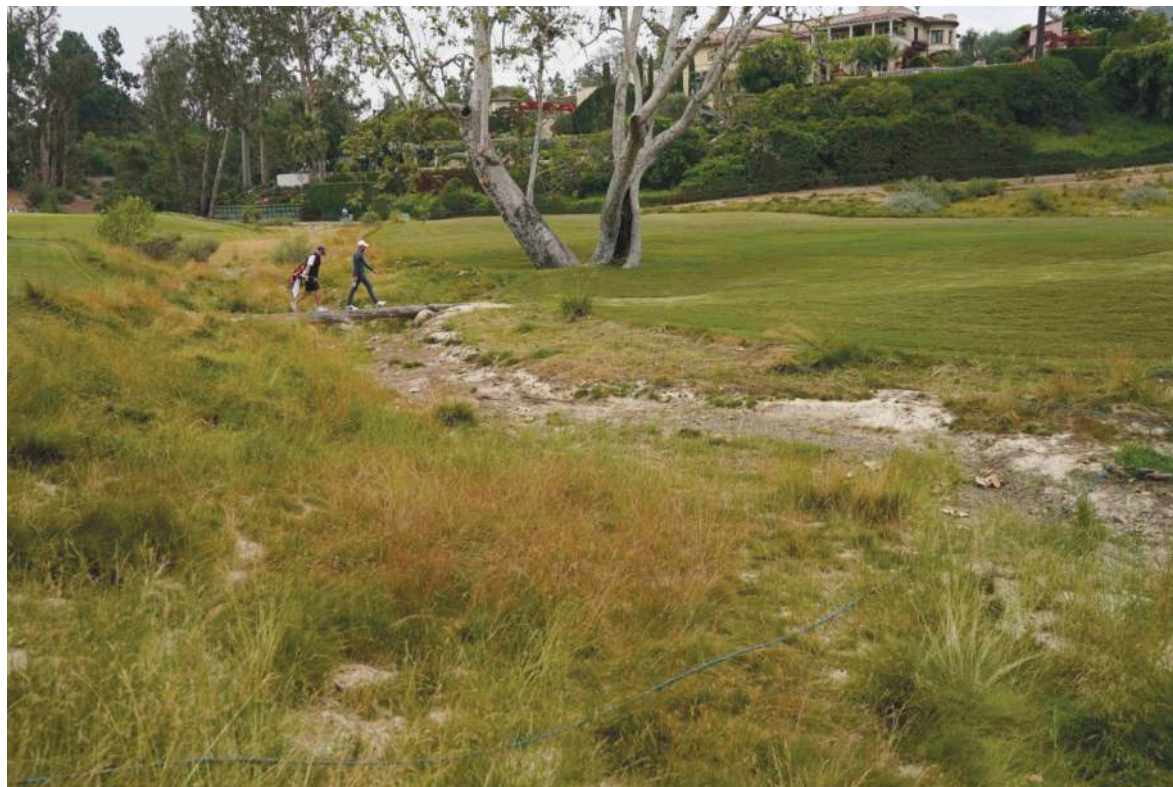
Throughout history, players have been known to change putters on a whim, sometimes with great results. When Jack Nicklaus first saw the prototype of the putter he would use to win the 1986 Masters, he asked the designer if it was a joke. Sergio Garcia, who often struggles on the greens, made his 12-foot winner in a playoff at Augusta National in 2017 with a flat stick he'd been using for less than a month.

Scheffler, who has two wins, a runner-up and 12 top-10 finishes this season despite his trouble on the greens, concedes he would never be so cavalier in switching out a driver or an iron.

"Putting is just so different than the rest of the game, so when it comes to putters, it's all personal," Scheffler said.

Still, he is searching and testing and not really showing his cards.

US OPEN



MATT YORK/AP

Patrick Rodgers crosses the barranca on the seventh hole Wednesday during a practice round for the U.S. Open at The Los Angeles Country Club. The barranca will be a potential hazard for all the golfers.

Barranca offers beauty, lurking danger at LACC

By EDDIE PELLIS
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — It will be everywhere the players look at this year's U.S. Open. Chances are, if they're in it, they really don't want to be.

The word of the week at Los Angeles Country Club: barranca.

Lined with sand and dotted with native grasses and ball-entangling plants, the barranca at LACC winds through most of the first nine holes and part of the back nine, as well.

Much like the seawall cliffs at Pebble Beach or the church pew bunker at Oakmont, it's the barranca that stands out as the most feared and talked-about feature for the U.S. Open's first return to LA since 1948.

The word itself stems from the Spanish word meaning cliff, precipice, gully or ravine. Merriam-Webster defines it as "a deep gully or arroyo with steep sides."

Use it in a sentence: "The barranca down below where the bunker is, it is very bad," Collin Morikawa said when asked how he might approach the short par-4 sixth, a hole with options.

One of those options is driving over trees right of the fairway and going for the green. But that brings the risk of spraying it into barranca that forms a 180-degree semicircle around the left side of the putting surface. Land in the wrong spot there, and a potential eagle 2 could morph into any number.

A quick glance

LOS ANGELES — Facts and figures for the 123rd U.S. Open, which started Thursday:

Site: The Los Angeles Country Club (North).

Length: 7,421 yards.

Par: 70.

Cut: Top 60 and ties.

Playoff (if necessary): Two-hole aggregate immediately after 72 holes are completed.

Field: 156 players (19 amateurs).

Purse: \$20 million. Winner's share: \$3.6 million.

Defending champion: Matt Fitzpatrick.

Open debut: Los Angeles Country Club is the third course in the last nine years to host a U.S. Open for the first time. Unlike Erin Hills (2017) and Chambers Bay (2015), LACC has been promised another U.S. Open before hosting its first one.

Last U.S. Open in Los Angeles: Ben Hogan won in 1948 at Riviera.

The long: The last three holes are all par 4s and are a combined 1,554 yards.

The short: The 15th hole can play as short as 80 yards.

The home crowd: Max Homa, Collin Morikawa and Patrick Cantlay all grew up within 30 miles of Los Angeles Country Club. Morikawa is one of only four California natives to win a major in his home state.

— Associated Press

"It's the risk-reward part of this golf course," USGA chief championships officer John Bodenhamer said.

Walking through this natural-looking, brown-greenish landscape hardly feels like being in the heart of modern-day LA. But it's

the contrast of the course's features set against the skyscrapers and Beverly Hills glitz on the horizon that makes LACC one-of-a-kind.

The barranca first comes into play on the par-4 second hole, which is listed at 497 yards. It runs in front of the green, meaning any player who misses the fairway will have to decide whether to try to carry the expanse or lay up behind it.

That choice, like so many others involving barranca on this course, isn't necessarily an all-or-nothing proposition.

"You can get a very bad lie, but you can also get a lie that's all right to where you can hack it out to the middle of the green," Morikawa said.

During a practice round this week, after hitting a drive into a clump in the barranca to the right of the 17th fairway, Justin Thomas took time to assess the situation, took a stance in the slippery silt and, with his foot sliding, nailed a low liner back into play.

That was a good result. Other shots, as USGA agronomist Darin Bevard noted in a story on the association website, lead to situations "where, if you hit it in there, you get what you deserve."

Some areas inside the barrancas are marked as red-lined hazards, but others aren't, meaning a drop from an unplayable lie is still only a one-shot penalty, but with no guarantee the lie that results from a drop will be pure.

Stirrer: Koepka on top of his game at right time

FROM PAGE 48

Nor does he particularly care.

Koepka cares about the majors, and no one is playing them better at the moment.

He had the 54-hole lead at the Masters until Jon Rahm tracked him down, and Koepka won his fifth major, the PGA Championship, at Oak Hill. That was his favorite, mainly because of injuries to his knee that made him wonder if his best golf already was behind him.

Koepka has said if healthy, that might have made his decision to defect to LIV Golf last year more difficult.

He's happy with where he is, no matter the format or how often he plays. Everything is geared around the majors.

The record is astounding. Along with his five majors, he has four runner-up finishes. Dating to 2015, when Koepka first became eligible for all of them, he has finished in the top 10 in 18 of his last 30 majors.

He has spent one round over two days on the North course at LACC, the front nine on Monday and the back on Tuesday, and then there were nine holes on the final day of practice.

In the midst of these preparations is chatter about where the PGA Tour and LIV Golf is headed under the agreement. Some believe it's a distraction, others figure it all went away once numbers started to fill scorecards on Thursday.

Koepka doesn't mind either way.

"The more chaotic things get, the easier it gets for me," he said. "Everything starts to slow down and I am able to focus on whatever I need to focus on while everybody

else is dealing with distractions, worried about other things."

He believes that's one reason he thrives in the biggest events.

"I enjoy the chaos," he said.

His definition of chaos is not just what happens off the course. Koepka thinks back to Shinnecock Hills for the 2018 U.S. Open, when the course got away from the USGA (again) and no one from the final 22 groups broke par in the third round. That's the year Phil Mickelson swatted a moving ball on the 13th green out of frustration.

Koepka wound up winning, making him the first back-to-back U.S. Open champion since Curtis Strange in 1989.

"Everybody was ... complaining," he said. "They were all so focused on the golf course they kind of forgot about what was going on, that they were there to play a major championship. OK, the greens are pretty fast. But if you leave yourself with an uphill putt, it's not too bad."

He smiled as if everyone should know this.

Koepka clearly has a winning formula, and that starts with good health. A year ago, having not given his left knee time to heal, he tied for 55th in two majors and missed the cut in the other two. It was during that stretch he wondered if he could compete with the best every week.

And then LIV came calling and paying, he had a full offseason to recover, and he looks like the Koepka of old.

He's back to being "Big Game Brooks."

That's where it all starts with Koepka, who looks to be in fine form on so many levels with another major beginning.



ABBIE PARR/AP

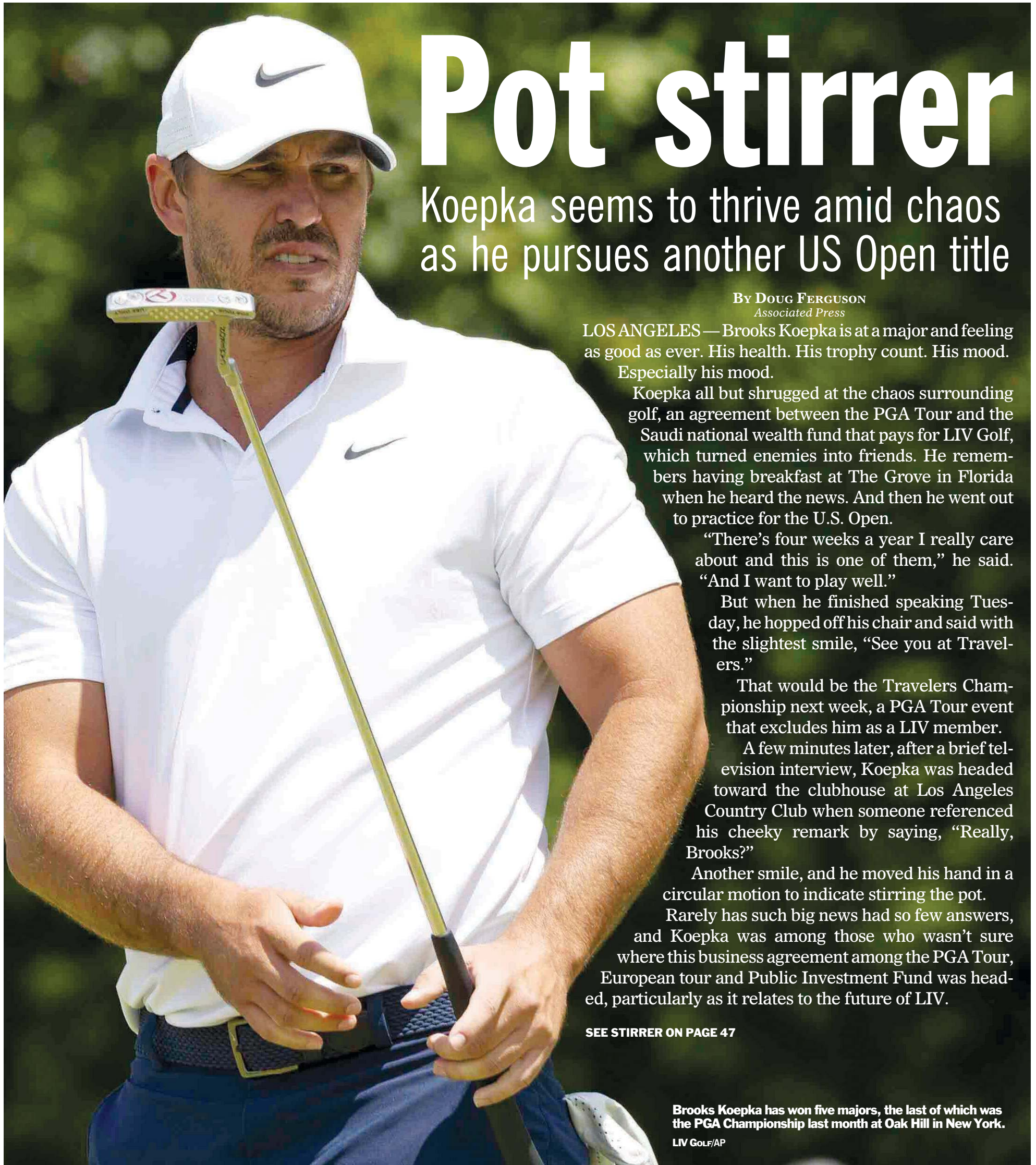
Brooks Koepka holds the Wanamaker Trophy after winning the PGA Championship on May 21 at Oak Hill Country Club, in Pittsford, N.Y.

SPORTS



Making a big splash

Top prospect De La Cruz living up to hype after debut with Reds » **MLB, Page 44**



Pot stirrer

Koepka seems to thrive amid chaos as he pursues another US Open title

By DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES—Brooks Koepka is at a major and feeling as good as ever. His health. His trophy count. His mood. Especially his mood.

Koepka all but shrugged at the chaos surrounding golf, an agreement between the PGA Tour and the Saudi national wealth fund that pays for LIV Golf, which turned enemies into friends. He remembers having breakfast at The Grove in Florida when he heard the news. And then he went out to practice for the U.S. Open.

“There’s four weeks a year I really care about and this is one of them,” he said. “And I want to play well.”

But when he finished speaking Tuesday, he hopped off his chair and said with the slightest smile, “See you at Travelers.”

That would be the Travelers Championship next week, a PGA Tour event that excludes him as a LIV member.

A few minutes later, after a brief television interview, Koepka was headed toward the clubhouse at Los Angeles Country Club when someone referenced his cheeky remark by saying, “Really, Brooks?”

Another smile, and he moved his hand in a circular motion to indicate stirring the pot.

Rarely has such big news had so few answers, and Koepka was among those who wasn’t sure where this business agreement among the PGA Tour, European tour and Public Investment Fund was headed, particularly as it relates to the future of LIV.

SEE STIRRER ON PAGE 47

Brooks Koepka has won five majors, the last of which was the PGA Championship last month at Oak Hill in New York.

LIV Golf/AP

Gators go to Omaha with deep rotation » College World Series, Page 43

