

MOVIES: Another 'Ant-Man' extends Marvel's run **Page 16**

GAMES: Dead Space lives on in 2 new titles **Page 19**

MUSIC: Predicting who might make Rock Hall **Page 28**

EUROPE
& PACIFIC
WEEKEND
EDITION



AUTO RACING
NASCAR's 75th season
one of celebration,
transition
Page 48

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ALEX BRANDON/AP

Pallets of 155 mm shells ultimately bound for Ukraine are loaded by the 436th Aerial Port Squadron in 2022, at Dover Air Force Base, Del. As the war rages on in Ukraine, the United States is doing more than supporting an ally.

Estonia official: NATO members should spend more on defense

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

NATO members should be required to devote significantly more of their gross domestic product to their respective military budgets, Estonia's defense minister said Thursday following talks with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in Tallinn.

"Allies must spend more than 2% of their GDP on defense. Ideally, closer to 2.5%," Hanno Pevkur said at a news conference.

The comments came one day after a meeting of NATO defense leaders in Brussels, where increasing alliance defense spending guidelines was among the top issues discussed.

Allies are expected to agree to a new investment pledge this summer when heads of state hold a summit in Vilnius, Lithuania.

In 2014, NATO set 2% of GDP on defense as a benchmark to be achieved by 2024. But now, following Russia's unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine, some alliance leaders have said a more dangerous security environment necessitates larger commitments.

Raising the minimum spending requirement could run into opposition from countries such as Germany, which already falls well short of the 2% mark.

But ramping up spending and improving NATO defenses would mean having the resources to further bolster alliance support for

SEE DEFENSE ON PAGE 8

EUROPE
NATO chief urges
Turkey to let
Finland join quickly
Page 8

Potential Pacific applications

US learning lessons for a China conflict as it supports Ukraine

By TARA COPP
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As the war rages on in Ukraine, the United States is doing more than supporting an ally. It's learning lessons — with an eye toward a possible clash with China.

No one knows what the next U.S. major military conflict will be or whether the U.S. will send troops — as it did in Afghanistan and Iraq — or provide vast amounts of aid and expertise, as it has done with

Ukraine.

But China remains America's biggest concern. U.S. military officials say Beijing wants to be ready to invade the self-governing island of Taiwan by 2027, and the U.S. remains the island democracy's chief ally and supplier of defense weapons.

While there are key differences in geography and in U.S. commitment to come to Taiwan's defense, "there are clear parallels between the Russian invasion of Ukraine

and a possible Chinese attack on Taiwan," a Center for Strategic and International Studies report found last month.

A look at some of the lessons from the Ukraine war and how they could apply to a Taiwan conflict:

Arm in advance

Soon after Russian troops crossed into Ukraine last February, the U.S. and allies began sending massive amounts of

weapons across the border from partner nations.

But Taiwan would need to be fully armed in advance, CSIS found in dozens of war scenarios it ran for its report.

"The 'Ukraine model' cannot be replicated in Taiwan because China can isolate the island for weeks or even months," CSIS found. "Taiwan must start the war with everything it needs."

SEE APPLICATIONS ON PAGE 7

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	Azores	..	..	\$4.483	..
Germany	\$3.772	\$4.284	\$4.594	\$4.826	Change in price	..	..	-3.4 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.526	\$4.793	\$4.971	Turkey	..	..	\$4.282	\$5.077*
U.K.	..	\$4.220	\$4.530	\$4.762	Change in price	..	..	-3.4 cents	No change

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	South Korea	\$3.459	..	\$4.289	\$4.519
Japan	..	\$4.259	..	\$4.489	Change in price	-6.0 cents	..	-3.0 cents	-9.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.439	..	..	\$4.489	Guam	\$3.449	\$3.959	\$4.269	..

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
Pacific prices for the week of Feb. 17-23

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		South Korea (Won)	1294.50
Euro costs (Feb. 17)	\$1.05	Switzerland (Franc)	0.9264
Dollar buys (Feb. 17)	0.9077	Thailand (Baht)	34.47
British pound (Feb. 17)	\$1.19	Turkey (NewLira)	18.8546
Japanese yen (Feb. 17)	130.00		
South Korean won (Feb. 17)	1248.00		
Commercial rates			
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769		
Britain (Pound)	1.1981		
Canada (Dollar)	1.3457		
China (Yuan)	6.8642		
Denmark (Krone)	6.9851		
Egypt (Pound)	30.5670		
Euro	0.9379		
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8494		
Hungary (Forint)	360.23		
Israel (Shekel)	3.5581		
Japan (Yen)	134.37		
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3065		
Norway (Krone)	10.2924		
Philippines (Peso)	55.32		
Poland (Zloty)	4.48		
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7510		
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3382		

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	7.75
Interest Rates Discount rate	5.25
Federal funds market rate	4.58
3-month bill	4.78
30-year bond	3.84

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

TODAY IN STRIPES

Classified	36
Comics	34,38,39
Crossword	34,38,39
Faces	35
Opinion	40
Sports	41-48

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MILITARY

Army incentive rewards recruiters with cash

BY JEREMY STILLWAGNER
Stars and Stripes

Army recruiters may earn up to \$1,500 for signing “high-quality” candidates after meeting their quarterly quota, part of an incentive package aimed at shoring up lagging recruitment, according to U.S. Army Recruiting Command.

The Recruiter Production Incentive — Assignment Incentive Pay program allows recruiters who exceed their quarterly quotas to receive extra pay for each additional high-quality recruit they send to basic training, the recruiting command said in a Jan. 19 news release.

Recruit quality is determined by scores on the Armed Forces Qualification Test.

The number of available quality recruits is relatively low, according to the Pentagon, whose data has shown fewer than 25% of all young Americans ages 17 to 24 qualify for military service academically and physically.

The Army was 15,000 soldiers short of its 60,000 recruitment goal in 2022, a number the service raised to 65,000 this year.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston talked about several recruiting programs during an interview with Stars and Stripes in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday. The Army cannot afford another slow year in recruiting, he said.

The programs include signing bonuses and choice of duty station for recruits, and additional money

for recruiters for quality-of-life issues.

The recruiter bonus incentive is another piece. Department of Defense regulations limits incentive pay for service members to \$1,500 per month.

“Effective in 2023, the program rewards productivity with a focus on quality while increasing quantity,” Maj. Thomas Piernicky, spokesman for the recruiting command, told Stars and Stripes in an email Thursday.

However, recruiters actively enrolled in the Select Recruiter Extension Program are not eligible for the bonus until their time in that program is over, Piernicky said.

Another recruiting program,

the Future Soldier Preparatory Course, aims to raise the number of young Americans physically and academically fit for Army service.

“This course is a great way to increase opportunities for them to serve without sacrificing the quality needed across our force,” Gen. Paul Funk II, the head of Training and Doctrine Command, said in a July press release.

The program started in August at Fort Jackson, S.C., which trains better than half the Army’s new soldiers, according to its website. Recruits have the option every three weeks to leave the program for basic training if they meet Army enlistment standards, or stay in the course up to 90 days, ac-

ording to the release.

The course has two tracks; one focuses on academics and the other on physical fitness. Depending on their scores on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, prospective recruits may attend either track or both, according to the release.

“This course gives us an opportunity to unleash unrealized potential by surrounding trainees with experts that they likely would not have access to at home,” Fort Jackson commander Brig. Gen. Patrick Michaelis said in the same release.

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VINCENT DE GROOT/U.S. Air Force

A row of U.S. Air Force KC-135 tails from the Iowa Air National Guard on the ramp at the Iowa Air National Guard's 185th Air Refueling Wing in Sioux City in 2019.

Air Force grounds hundreds of aircraft for tail section inspection

BY DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force has grounded hundreds of utility aircraft, including KC-135 aerial refueling planes, until they are inspected and found not to have a faulty part in the tail section that helps keep them in the air, service officials said Wednesday.

The Air Force Materiel Command said inspectors are looking for “non-conforming” pins in the vertical tail assemblies of the aircraft. Inspectors are checking the pins in the service’s fleet of KC-135 Stratotankers and two variants — the RC-135 reconnaissance plane and WC-135 radiation-detection aircraft.

If a vertical terminal fitting pin failed, the tail section could break off the plane.

“We’re taking this action out of an abundance of caution, after consulting with our engineering experts,” said Col. Michael Kovalchek, a senior materiel leader. “We are working closely with Air Mobility Command and all operational users and anticipate all potentially affected aircraft will be inspected.”

Each aircraft has two fitting pins in its tail section, one on each side, that attach the tail fin to the main fuselage. The tail section is critical to flight because it provides stability and helps the pilots steer the plane. There are hundreds of KC-135s, RC-135s and WC-135s in the Air Force fleet.

Wednesday’s order accelerates a previous directive to inspect the planes. The original order, given last week, called for the planes to be checked within 15 days. The

new order states they now must be inspected before they can fly again.

“Although no mishaps have resulted, leaders elected to accelerate the inspection due to a lack of information to assess the risk of materiel failure in non-conforming parts,” according to an Air Force statement. “Planes that have already been inspected and found with proper pins have already returned to flying status.”

The Air Force said nearly 100 planes had been inspected by the start of this week, and 24 faulty pins were found. The defects include whether the pins are too small, made of the wrong material, have “insufficient plating,” or lack a stress layer that makes them stronger.

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Experts: Political fights over military make US look weak to China, Russia

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Political bickering over the military makes the United States appear weak to adversaries such as China and Russia and contributes to dropping public trust in the uniformed services, experts told senators on Wednesday.

Fiona Hill, a former U.S. National Security Council official during the Trump administration, said conversations about “wokeness” infiltrating the military and other political fights undermine the strength of the U.S. in the eyes of its enemies.

She issued the warning in response to a question from Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., who asked during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing what China thinks of a focus on “[gender] pronouns and things like that” in the U.S. military. Some Republicans have attacked the Pentagon for social policies that aim to promote racial and gender equality in the armed forces.

“They watch all of this and frankly, they think we’ve lost it,” Hill said in response to Scott. “The more I’m afraid that we make statements like this, the more that we start attacking our fellow Americans for whatever perspective we think they come from, the more that Russia and China think that we’re working ourselves out of history.”

Hill, now a senior fellow at the liberal-leaning Brookings Institution, said the U.S. needs to show solidarity to be able to deter adversaries and unite its partners.

“I think China and Russia do know that we still can be lethal, but we’re most lethal when we get our act together, and [show] that we’re all Americans fighting together on one side, and that’s what our adversaries and our friends are looking to us for,” she said. “They’re watching us and thinking, you know, has America lost the plot at the moment.”

That thinking is also shared by some Americans who were polled about their opinion of the military. A 2022 survey performed by the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute found trust and confidence in the uniformed services dropped from 70% in 2018 to 48% in November.

“We asked the respondents why, and the response was clear that the American people believe that the military has become politicized,” said Roger Zakheim, director of the nonprofit Reagan organization. “I think it is not a concern of the American people that the U.S. military is unable to carry out their core mission of protecting this country and being the best military force in the world, it’s a concern about politicization penetrating their mission.”

About 62% of surveyed Americans said they believed military leadership has become overly politicized, including 43% of Republicans and 24% of Democrats.

Republicans named “woke” practices as the main culprit, without defining what those practices were, while Democrats said they were most concerned about the presence of far-right extremism in the military ranks, according to the survey.

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Hill

PACIFIC

US, allies test aerial abilities at Cope North

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

Air Forces from the United States and three Pacific allies have fanned out across 1,200 miles of the Pacific Ocean in a test of their ability to operate far from large, well-appointed bases.

Cope North, an annual airpower exercise involving 2,000 service members from the U.S., Japan, Australia, and France, began Feb. 10 and run through Feb. 24.

Forces from all four nations are spread across 10 spots between the Japanese island of Iwo Jima, also called Iwo To, in the north and the Republic of Palau in the south, Air Force Col. Jared Pasley said by phone Wednesday.

The locations are in the so-called second island chain, according to Pasley, the director of U.S. forces participating in the exercise. The chain, which includes Guam, stretches along the eastern border of the Philippine Sea and forms a strategic line of defense for the U.S.

The exercise comes amid heightened tensions with Beijing, which has been investing heavily in its military. Chinese President Xi Jinping has stated his intention of reuniting the autonomous and democratic island of Taiwan, by force if necessary.

Last month, Gen. Michael Minihan, who as head of Air Mobility Command oversees the Air Force's fleet of transport and refueling aircraft, warned his airmen to speed their preparations for a potential conflict, citing Xi's aspirations and the possibility that Americans will not be paying attention until it is too late.

The Defense Department, however, distanced itself from Minihan's comments, according to a Jan. 29 report by news website



DANIEL HERNANDEZ/U.S. Air Force

Aircraft from the United States, Japan and France conduct an elephant walk at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, on Feb. 9 ahead of the Cope North exercise.

airandspaceforces.com.

"The National Defense Strategy makes clear that China is the pacing challenge for the Department of Defense and our focus remains on working alongside allies and partners to preserve a peaceful, free and open Indo-Pacific," the site reported Pentagon spokesman Air Force Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder as saying.

Agile combat

The skills being honed at Cope North are part of a doctrine called agile combat employment, Pasley said.

"The training is focused on contested operations against a state actor and really upping the challenge," he said. "This is probably the most aggressive and challeng-

ing Cope North I've seen."

The exercise involves Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps fighters, transports, refuelers, helicopters and airborne warning and control aircraft, along with Japanese fighters and refuelers and French and Australian transports.

Logistics is a vital part of distributed operations, Pasley said.

"It's the logistics that really separates the professionals from the junior varsity," he said, noting that it's a simple matter to fly a plane to a remote location but more complicated to fuel, arm and maintain it there.

Cope North is building skills to generate forward airpower under duress, Pasley said.

"We are testing our commanders' ability to make risk-informed

decisions and execute the mission," he said.

Royal Australian Air Force Capt. Robert Graham said the 105 Australians participating in the exercise are flying a C-27J Spartan transport from Guam to the islands of Rota, Tinian and Saipan.

Australian airmen are used to operating from remote locations in the South Pacific, Graham said.

"We need to understand how the U.S. operates their agile combat employment so we know how to work with you," he said.

Parallel challenge

Airfields would be a prime target in a conflict with China, so being able to operate flexibly with backup personnel is critical to sustaining combat, according to Ralph Cossa,



MICHAEL CAGGIANO/U.S. Air Force

Air Force Maj. Abraham Moreland waits to board a B-1B Lancer for a Cope North mission.

president emeritus of the Pacific Forum think tank in Hawaii.

China could face parallel challenges in a war, he said in an email Thursday.

"If the Chinese believe mainland bases will be a sanctuary, they will only have themselves to blame when it turns out not to be true," he said. "I would assume, and I would assume the Chinese would assume, that staging bases on the Mainland involved in operations against Taiwan will be early targets."

Distributed operations will probably be more important to the U.S. and its allies than to China in any conflict, said Ian Chong, an associate professor of political science at the National University of Singapore.

"U.S. and allied assets, with the exception of those from Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, are spread regionally and globally," he said in an email Thursday. "That means a need to be able to deploy flexibly in response to a contingency in East Asia. If a contingency involves [China], then [Chinese] forces would likely seek ways to complicate, if not block access."

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Couple starts GoFundMe page to fly military family's lost cat home

By KELLY AGEE

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Two hours before Tammy and Air Force Tech. Sgt. Marcus Jenkins boarded their flight from Japan to Seattle on Dec. 29, their cat, Luna, went missing.

Marcus, a former air traffic controller with 374th Operations Support Squadron, spent his final, frantic moments at Yokota scouring the area for any sign of Luna, Tammy told Stars and Stripes that day by Facebook Messenger.

The couple was taking the Patriot Express, the contract air service for military passengers, to Seattle for their eventual move to Oklahoma.

Members of the 374th Civil Engineer Squadron descended on the Jenkins' recently vacated room at Yokota's Kanto Lodge. They disassembled the bed, moved the stove



Natalie Kuri

A GoFundMe campaign hopes to raise enough money to fly Luna, who went missing in December at Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo, to her family in Oklahoma.

and refrigerator and searched the cabinets and drawers without success, Tammy said.

"We are getting ready to board without my cat," she said by Messenger that morning.

More than a month later, on Feb. 3, someone found Luna, an ema-

ciated brown-and-gray tabby, near Yokota's eastside chapel.

Two days later, Tech. Sgt. Grant Carson and his wife, Diana Carson, started a GoFundMe campaign, "Reuniting Luna with Tammy," to raise \$5,000 to fly the feline home.

Grant Carson, an equipment custodian with Yokota's 730th Air Mobility Squadron, and Diana Carson, manager-volunteer at the Airman's Attic, were familiar with Tammy.

"We knew Tammy as a friend; she worked here at the Airman's Attic," Grant Carson said Feb. 8. "Every time you [make a permanent change of station], you burn through money, so we wanted to try to help her out."

Many military families know too well that shipping pets can be expensive. Moving Luna from Japan to Oklahoma will cost about \$3,000, Tammy said. As of Thursday, the

campaign has raised \$1,545.

Meanwhile, Luna is in the care of Natalie Kuri, a civil engineers' analyst and animal rescue volunteer at Yokota. The Jenkinsons adopted Luna from Kuri, who found the cat on base two years ago.

"We were so thrilled to get the call that Luna was found, and that Natalie had picked her up and taken her to the vet," Tammy Jenkins said Wednesday via Messenger. "The outpouring of support from Yokota has been amazing and Natalie is our amazing angel."

Kuri spent nearly \$200 on a medical checkup at an off-base pet clinic for Luna. Though Luna is safe and sound, she's down to 3 pounds from 7 pounds and must put on weight before she's healthy enough to travel.

"She was dehydrated, hungry and close to death when she was found," Kuri said.

The days between Luna lost and found were agonizing, Tammy said.

"It was terrible," she said. "She is our baby. It was terrible not knowing if she was cold, hurt, hungry. I had many many nights of not sleeping and was up in the middle of the night Facetimeing Natalie."

Marcus is serving at Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, for the next year, and Tammy said she can't wait to be reunited with her family member.

"When Marcus was on (temporary duty travel) last time, Luna was my sleeping buddy," Tammy said. "She was my alarm clock. She was always there to listen to me about my day. She is my protector. I have been without all of that since December 29."

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MILITARY

Fentanyl factors into more military overdose deaths

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Fentanyl was involved in 88% of the deaths of service members who overdosed on illicit drugs in 2021, a steep increase in five years, according to Defense Department data provided to Congress.

“Our military is not immune to the opioid epidemic,” Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., said in a statement Wednesday. “The Department of Defense’s latest report underscores the urgency of this moment and our need to ensure access to quality care and treatment without stigma or shame.”

Five years ago, the synthetic drug was involved in 36% of troop overdose deaths, according to Pentagon data.

Markey and other senators requested data on overdoses from the Defense Department in September and last week received 12 pages from Pentagon officials that included statistics and prevention efforts.

From 2017 to 2021, 15,293 service members overdosed on drugs and alcohol and 332 died. More than half of those who died had taken fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is more potent than morphine, the report found.

Fentanyl, an approved pain medication being produced and sold illegally, is killing about 70,000 Americans each year, President Joe Biden said earlier this month in his State of the Union speech.

Increasingly, fentanyl is mixed with other illicit drugs or used to replace another drug en-

“Our military is not immune to the opioid epidemic.”

Sen. Edward Markey
D-Mass.

tirely so that users are expecting something else, and this has led to a rise in deaths from the drug nationwide, according to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Military officials determined service members accidentally overdosed in 84% of the deaths.

Just 12% of the deaths were thought to be suicides.

“Every drug overdose is a preventable loss of life and we must work to do better,” Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Gilbert Cisneros wrote in his letter to senators.

“The department continues to evaluate, refine, and improve strategies for overdose prevention to ensure we are making every effort to prevent these tragic deaths.”

About 10% of those who died had previously failed a drug test administered through their service, the Defense Department said.

The Army, which is the largest of the service branches, saw the most overdose deaths during the five-year period, with a slight decrease from 36 deaths in 2017 to 35 in 2021, according

to the Defense Department.

However, the Navy and Marine Corps saw the number of deaths in each service double. Eleven sailors died in 2017 and 21 died in 2021. The Marines lost five sailors in 2017 and 10 in 2021.

The Air Force saw overdose deaths increase from nine to 11.

The senators requested the data after reading a story in the September issue of Rolling Stone magazine that raised concerns about overdose deaths among soldiers at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Fort Bragg lost 31 soldiers in five years to overdoses, the highest of any installation mentioned in the Pentagon report.

The Defense Department told senators that the rate of overdose deaths during the five-year period is higher in North Carolina than anywhere else — 36 deaths per 100,000 active-duty service members.

Washington state had the next highest rate of 29.5 deaths per 100,000 troops, followed by Texas with 28.6.

Cisneros told senators that the Pentagon’s effort to prevent overdose deaths are “focused on integrating all drug-related data, including fatal and non-fatal drug overdoses, to ensure timely data monitoring and improve coordination, messaging, treatment intervention and promote readiness.”

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Soldier from S. Korea dies at Humphreys

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — An American soldier raised in South Korea died Tuesday at a hospital on Camp Humphreys, the 2nd Infantry Division said in a news release.



Lee

Spc. Lee Sun-Ho, 31, originally of Guri, South Korea, was pronounced dead at the Brian D. Allgood Hospital, according to Thursday’s re-

lease. The circumstances of Lee’s death are under investigation, according to the 2nd ID.

Lee was a team leader assigned to the 23rd Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade, Republic of Korea-U.S. Combined Division.

Lee enlisted in the Army in September 2020, according to the release. Guri is directly east of Seoul and 40 miles north of Humphreys.

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Our Members Are the Mission

MILITARY

Bill would assist troops struggling to pay for food

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Low-income service members receiving basic allowances for housing could be eligible for food stamps under legislation introduced Thursday in the Senate.

The bill aims to help the 24% of troops who the Defense Department reported lack consistent access to enough food by eliminating an income barrier some of them face when trying to qualify for food stamps, formally known as the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program or SNAP.

Service members who apply to the SNAP program while receiving an allowance to cover off-base housing costs are often excluded from eligibility due to a formula that unfairly counts their housing as a source of income, said bill sponsor Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., a former Army helicopter pilot and Iraq War veteran.

However, the housing allowance is not treated as income by the Internal Revenue Service or considered when determining eligibility for other federal assistance programs, she said.

“This bill is a great, elegant solution,” Duckworth said. “It isn’t creating a new program, it’s simply bringing an existing program in line to be consistent with the rest of the federal government.”

Lawmakers first introduced legislation to amend SNAP’s eligibility criteria last year. The bill builds on Duckworth’s previous efforts to address hunger in the military, including creating a

monthly basic needs allowance for households earning below 130% of the federal poverty line. Eligibility for the new payments, which began last month, was expanded in last year’s annual defense policy bill.

The Defense Department estimated in a 2022 report that 286,000 service members struggled with food access in 2020 and 2021, with junior enlisted troops most at risk.

A January study performed by the Rand Corp. found early- to mid-career enlisted personnel between the pay grades of E-4 and E-6 were the majority of those affected by food insecurity.

The report, which Congress directed the Pentagon to sponsor, also noted 14% of service members reported using government food assistance programs in the past year. Others said they were reluctant to ask for help, fearing it would negatively affect their career or security clearance.

The military has encouraged troops to take advantage of food programs, especially since the coronavirus pandemic led to miles-long lines at food banks across the country, she said.

“When I first started out in the military, almost 30 years ago, on every military base there was a pawn shop and a tattoo parlor,” Duckworth said. “Well now it’s a pawn shop, tattoo parlor and a food pantry.”

Those on-base food pantries are often showing struggling service members how to sign up for SNAP benefits, she said.



SUSAN SHEPARD/AP

A Black Hawk helicopter burns after a crash Wednesday, in Harvest, Ala.

Black Hawk helicopter crashes in Alabama, killing 2 Guardsmen

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — A Black Hawk helicopter from the Tennessee National Guard crashed Wednesday in Alabama, killing two crew members, the Tennessee National Guard said.

“We are deeply saddened by the loss of two Tennessee National Guardsmen, and our prayers are with their families during this heartbreaking tragedy,” Brig. Gen. Warner Ross, Tennessee’s Adjutant General, said in a statement. “We ask Tennesseans to join us in supporting their families during this time of unthinkable grief.”

According to Ross, two members of the Tennessee National Guard were killed during a flight-training mission. The helicopter crashed around 3 p.m. local time and caught fire.

The Madison County sheriff’s office said there were no injuries to anyone on the ground when the helicopter crashed.

“We have no survivors,” sher-

iff’s Investigator Brent Patterson said. “We have a crime scene here. We have it taped off.”

The UH-60 helicopter, more widely known as a Black Hawk, crashed in the unincorporated community of Harvest along Alabama Highway 53, the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency said in a statement.

The highway along which the crash happened passes through commercial areas northwest of Huntsville that are bounded by subdivisions, forests and fields south of the state line with Tennessee. The sheriff’s office said in a statement that the crash was causing heavy traffic delays that are expected to last into Thursday.

Harvest is just northwest of Huntsville, which is home to NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center and the U.S. Army’s Redstone Arsenal.

“Maria and I are deeply saddened by the tragic loss of two Tennessee National Guard mem-

bers,” said Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee on Wednesday. “Please join us in lifting their families up in prayer and support during this time of unspeakable grief.”

A spokesperson for the Federal Aviation Administration referred questions to the military.

“Governor Lee, Alabamians will continue to uplift in prayer the families affected by this heartbreaking tragedy,” Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said. “The Guardsmen who lost their lives today will be remembered as heroes. The people of Alabama stand with our neighbors in Tennessee.”

Local news outlets showed large plumes of black smoke rising from the crash site.

“I’m deeply saddened by the fatal helicopter crash that happened in Madison County today,” U.S. Rep. Dale Strong, who represents Alabama’s 5th District, said in a tweet. “My heart hurts for those who lost their lives in this tragic incident and for their families as they learn of this news.”

New Japanese missile base near Taiwan to go live in March

BY KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Japan plans to start operating its new Ground Self-Defense Force missile base on Ishigaki Island in March as part of a plan to bolster defenses in the Nansei Island chain, an Okinawa newspaper reported Wednesday.

The Ministry of Defense is arranging to transport the missiles using Maritime Self-Defense Force vessels next month, most likely around March 18 or 19, according to the report, which cited an unnamed government source.

The Nansei Islands stretch from Kyushu, the southernmost of the four main islands, to within 70 miles of Taiwan. Ishigaki is about 150 miles west of Taiwan.

Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada on Tuesday declined to comment on the

movement of missiles and vehicles to the island for “security reasons.” He said Feb. 10 that nothing had been decided about where the upgraded missiles will be placed, according to a video uploaded to the ministry’s website.

A spokesman for the Okinawa Defense Bureau, an arm of the Ministry of Defense, declined by email Wednesday to comment on the Okinawa Times report. Some government spokespeople in Japan are required to speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

The Ministry of Defense started building the new base, Camp Ishigaki, in March 2019 to accommodate about 600 personnel in surface-to-air and surface-to-ship guided-missile units and a security unit, according to the ministry website. Type-12 surface-to-ship guided missiles and Type-03 surface-to-air guided missiles

are planned to be deployed at the base.

Japan is developing an upgraded version of the high-speed, truck-mounted Type-12 missile with its range extended from 62 miles to 620 miles, putting potential targets around the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea and parts of China and North Korea within reach.

The Ishigaki city assembly in December expressed concerns over the possible deployment of long-range missiles, saying that might “raise tensions and bring danger to the island.”

The members asked for further explanation before their deployment. The request was sent to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Japan’s defense minister and other top political authorities.



OKINAWA DEFENSE BUREAU

This undated photo shows a building under construction at Camp Ishigaki on Japan’s Ishigaki Island.

EUROPE

Another Russian missile barrage fired at Ukraine

Air defense batteries have lower rate of success against new tactics

By JOHN LEICESTER
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia again pummeled Ukraine with a barrage of cruise and other missiles on Thursday, hitting targets from east to west as the war's one-year anniversary nears.

One of the strikes killed a 79-year-old woman and injured at least seven other people, Ukrainian authorities said.

Russian forces used a variety of missile types, firing 36 in a two-hour overnight burst, Ukraine's military chief, Valery Zaluzhnyy, said. Ukrainian air defense batteries shot down 16 of them, he said — a lower rate of success than against some previous Russian waves.

Ukrainian authorities said targets in the north, west, south, east and center of the country were struck.

The head of Ukraine's presidential office, Andriy Yermak,

said Russian forces "changed their tactics" for the strike, deploying what he described as "active reconnaissance" and "false targets."

Russian troops had launched balloons with corner reflectors to deceive Ukraine's air defense as part of an effort to retake some battlefield advantage after months of setbacks, said Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council.

"This indicates that (the Russians) are preparing and not sleeping," Danilov said on Ukrainian TV, "and they are starting to use other methods."

Ukrainian air defenses have been strengthened by Western-supplied weapons systems and have had high rates of success against previous Russian barrages of missiles and killer drones.

One of the overnight strikes caused casualties and destroyed



ROMAN CHOP/AP

A Ukrainian soldier prepares to fire on Russian positions near Bakhmut, Donetsk region, Ukraine, on Wednesday.

homes in the eastern city of Pavlohrad, the regional governor said. Gov. Serhiy Lysak said a 79-year-old woman was killed and at least seven other people were wounded, including two who were later hospitalized.

The strike destroyed seven

homes, damaged 30 others and sparked a fire at an industrial plant that emergency services put out within hours, the governor added.

A regional governor in western Ukraine, Maksym Kozitskyi, said a fire broke out at a "critical" in-

frastructure facility in the province of Lviv. He did not immediately offer details.

Overall, Russian attacks and shelling over the previous 24 hours killed at least seven people, Ukraine's presidential office said Thursday.

Applications: As US aids Ukraine, many worry about arms restock

FROM PAGE 1

Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks said Ukraine "was more of a cold-start approach than the planned approach we have been working on for Taiwan, and we will apply those lessons."

Hicks told The Associated Press that an amphibious landing is the hardest military operation to undertake. And re-supply will be difficult, particularly if China chokes off ocean access.

Stockpile woes

But the Pentagon can't pre-position equipment it doesn't have. Ukraine is putting intense pressure on the U.S. and European defense stockpiles and exposing that neither was ready for a major conventional conflict.

For some items "we have weaknesses in both our inventory and our production capacity," said CSIS International Security Program senior adviser Mark Cancian, an author of the Taiwan report. "In a couple of places, particularly artillery ammunition, it could become a crisis," he said.

Ukraine is shooting as many as

7,000 rounds a day to defend itself and has depended on announcements about every two weeks of new ammunition shipments from the U.S.

Since Russia invaded, the U.S. has sent Ukraine millions of rounds of munitions, including small arms and artillery rounds, 8,500 Javelin anti-armor systems, 1,600 Stinger anti-aircraft systems and 100,000 rounds of 125 mm tank ammunition.

One of the biggest stockpile pressure points has been 155 mm howitzer ammunition. The U.S. has sent Ukraine 160 howitzers and more than 1 million howitzer rounds, which have been put to heavy use with as many as 3,000 rounds fired a day, according to the Pentagon.

Ukraine is waging a different type of war than the U.S. would likely face with China, said Doug Bush, assistant secretary of the Army for acquisition. A future U.S. campaign would likely involve much more airpower and seapower, taking some of the pressure off land-based systems and ammunition.

But allies would still need to be

supported with land-based systems and ammunition.

Rebuilding takes time

The Pentagon's defense strategy says the U.S. must be able to conduct one war while deterring another, but the supply chain has not reflected that.

Hicks said the surge of weapons to Ukraine "has not slowed down U.S. support to Taiwan," but many of the military sales promised to Taiwan are facing the same pressures the Ukraine munitions face, such as limited parts or workforce issues.

In response, the U.S. has set up a presidential drawdown authority for Taiwan, Hicks said, which will allow the U.S. to send weapons from its own stockpiles instead of arranging new contracts.

The Army is working with Congress to get the authority to do multiyear contracts, so that companies will invest to meet longer-term needs, especially for the systems Bush called "the big four" — Javelin missiles, High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) launchers, Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System

(GMLRS) munitions and 155 mm rounds.

"Without that urgency, we risk being behind at the wrong time later," Bush said.

The Army is adding production lines for 155 mm artillery — including major components such as the outer metal shell, chargers, the fuse and the explosive material — while right now all production is at one facility in Iowa.

All of that will take time. CSIS reported it could take five years or more to replenish 155 mm, Javelin and Stinger stockpiles.

"The good news is that I think the Ukraine conflict has alerted people to these weaknesses. The bad news is that they're going to take a long, long time to solve even if there is a lot of political will," said Hal Brands, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

For European stockpiles, there's not much excess left to send, and many of the partner nations are rushing to sign new contracts with industry to replenish inventories. However, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg warned this week in Brussels that

particularly for larger caliber munitions, such as for ground artillery, it could be as long as 2 1/2 years before some new orders are delivered.

Be ready for cyberwar

While the satellites and their transmissions must be protected, the ground stations to process and disseminate information are also vulnerable. As Russia invaded, a software attack against Ukraine's Viasat satellite communications network disabled tens of thousand of modems. While Viasat has not said who was to blame, Ukraine blamed Russian hackers.

China would most likely use cyber warfare to prevent Taiwan from being able to send out similar messages showing that it was effectively resisting any assault, Brands said.

That issue has the attention of the U.S. Space Force.

"If we're not thinking about cyber protection of our ground networks," the networks will be left vulnerable, and the satellites won't be able to distribute their information, said Chief of Space Operations Gen. Chance Saltzman.

EUROPE

US troops train in polar pairing with Nordic, NATO allies

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The U.S. Army in Europe on Thursday launched one of its largest drills in recent years in the Arctic, where thousands of troops are fanning out across Finland and Norway to test their cold-weather fighting skills.

Arctic Forge 23, an inaugural exercise led by U.S. Army Europe and Africa, comes as allies put greater emphasis on deploying combat-ready forces to NATO's northern flank.

The Arctic drill, which runs until March 17, includes Finland's Defense Exercise North and the exercise Joint Viking in Norway.

"Arctic Angel" soldiers from the Alaska-based 11th Airborne Division will take part in an "over-the-pole" flight to Finland. And soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division and Virginia Army National Guard will join the effort.

The focus will be on commanding and controlling a multinational force at the battalion level, USA-REUR-AF said in a statement Wednesday.

"The goal of Defense Exercise North is to demonstrate readiness by deploying a combat-credible force to enhance power in NATO's northern flank in support of our partner Finland, an aspiring NATO member," the statement said.

Meanwhile, 730 Marines and 200 U.S. soldiers will take part in Joint Viking alongside more than 10,000 combined military personnel from Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom.

Joint Viking also involves winter warfare and maneuver train-

"We must win in any engagement, including and especially the Arctic."

Gen. Darryl Williams
US Army Europe and Africa commander
ing as well as live-fire drills carried out by the Army's 41st Field Artillery Brigade.

The training in the High North is unfolding as Russia takes steps to fortify its position in the region, even as its forces are bogged down in Ukraine.

In an annual intelligence report released Monday, Norway noted that defense of Russian bases in the Arctic has become more critical for the Kremlin, given Moscow's difficulties in Ukraine and overall tensions with the West.

Nuclear weapons could play a larger role in Russia's strategy for defending its positions in the Arctic, given its conventional losses in Ukraine, the Norwegian Intelligence Service said in its report.

The Arctic, where the melting of sea ice has raised the prospect of easier navigation in sea lanes, has become more of a military focal point for the Pentagon in recent years.

"We must win in any engagement, including and especially the Arctic," Gen. Darryl Williams, commander of U.S. Army Europe and Africa, said in a statement.

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SERGEI GRITS/AP

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, left, looks on as U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin signs the guest book during their meeting at the Stenbock House in Tallinn, Estonia, on Thursday.

Defense: Estonia urges updated plans to deter Russian aggression

FROM PAGE 1

Ukraine, Pevkur said.

"More can only be given when there is more to give," he said.

For Estonia, which borders Russia, the outcome of the war in Ukraine is of significant concern. When asked whether his country could be next if Russia succeeds in its objectives in Ukraine, Pevkur said that "we are doing our maxi-

mum to prevent it."

He added that to deter any potential aggression, NATO needs to update its regional defense plans for the Baltics, which he hopes will happen in July at the Vilnius summit.

For its part, the United States has stepped up military operations in Estonia and the rest of the Baltics in a move aimed at de-

terminating potential threats, Austin said.

"Our commitment to Article 5 is ironclad," said Austin, referring to the NATO provision that an attack on one member demands a response from all. "We take that very seriously."

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NATO chief urges Turkey to let Finland, Sweden join quickly

Associated Press

ANKARA — NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Thursday urged Turkey to ratify the applications of Finland and Sweden to join the military organization, repeating his claim that the Nordic neighbors have done enough to satisfy Ankara's demands that they crack down on extremism.

At a news conference in Ankara standing alongside Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, Stoltenberg also condemned the burning of the Muslim holy book, the Quran, at a protest in Sweden, but said it is not illegal in Europe.

Alarmed by Russia's invasion of

Ukraine a year ago, Finland and neighboring Sweden abandoned decades of nonalignment and applied to join the alliance. All 30 NATO members approved their applications, and 28 have ratified their accession. Only Turkey and Hungary have failed to do so.

Stoltenberg and most allies have long said that both the Nordic neighbors should join at the same time, but in recent days, NATO's top civilian official has softened his stance amid Turkey's reluctance to ratify Sweden's accession.

"My position is that both can be ratified now. But the main issue is not whether they are ratified together, the main issue is that Fin-

land and Sweden are ratified as soon as possible," he told reporters in Ankara.

Turkey has accused the government in Stockholm of being too soft on groups it deems to be terror organizations or existential threats, including Kurdish groups. Earlier this month, Cavusoglu said Ankara has fewer problems with Finland joining.

"It would not be a realistic approach to say that Sweden has fully fulfilled its obligations," Cavusoglu said Thursday. "At the moment, we have not yet seen the concrete steps we want."

With cracking down on extremism a likely vote-winner in elec-

tions scheduled in Turkey for May — although the polls might be delayed due to the devastating earthquake that rocked Turkey and Syria last week, killing almost 40,000 people — the rhetoric from Ankara has become increasingly heated.

In recent weeks, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has expressed anger at a series of separate demonstrations in Stockholm. In one case a solitary anti-Islam activist burned the Quran outside the Turkish Embassy, while in an unconnected protest, an effigy of Erdogan was hanged.

"I understand and I share the pain because I personally regard

the burning of the holy book as a disgraceful act," Stoltenberg said, but he also praised Sweden for being "able to prevent other (protests) with the burning of the Quran."

"Not all acts which are disgraceful or immoral or provocative are illegal, but it is important to have a strong position and that is what we have seen daily from the Swedish government," the former Norwegian prime minister said.

Hungary has not publicly raised any substantial objections to either country joining NATO, but it has chosen to push back its ratification date for their applications three times.

NATION

Trump grand jury believes witnesses lied

By KATE BRUMBACK
Associated Press

ATLANTA — A special grand jury that investigated efforts by then-President Donald Trump and his allies to overturn his election loss in Georgia says it believes some witnesses committed perjury, and it recommends “appropriate indictments.”

The panel recommended that the district attorney “seek appropriate indictments for such crimes where the evidence is compelling.” But the report does not name the people who are alleged to have lied.

In addition to the section on perjury, the report’s introduction and conclusion were released Thursday. But any recommendations on potential criminal charges for specific people will remain under wraps for now.

The partial release was ordered Monday by Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney, who oversaw the special grand jury. During a hearing last month, prosecutors urged him not to re-

lease the report until they decide on charges, while a coalition of media organizations, including The Associated Press, pushed for the entire report to be made public immediately.

McBurney wrote in his order that it’s not appropriate to release the full report now because it’s important to protect the due process rights of people for whom the grand jury recommended charges.

The investigation is one of several that could have serious legal consequences for the former president as he tries to persuade voters to return him to the White House in 2024.

The special grand jury, which was requested by Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis to aid her investigation, did not have the power to issue indictments. Instead, its report contains recommendations for Willis, who will ultimately decide whether to seek one or more indictments from a regular grand jury.

Over the course of about seven

months, the grand jurors heard from 75 witnesses, among them Trump allies including former New York Mayor and Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani and U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, of South Carolina. Top Georgia officials, such as Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and Gov. Brian Kemp, also appeared before the panel.



Trump

Trump, who has publicly refused to accept that Joe Biden won the November 2020 election, has seemed particularly bothered by his loss in Georgia and what he saw as a failure of Republican state elected officials to fight for him. Georgia tipped to Biden by about 12,000 votes, making him the first Democratic presidential candidate to win there since 1992.

Trump and his allies have made unproven claims of widespread voter fraud and have repeatedly

berated Raffensperger and Kemp for not acting to overturn his loss. State and federal officials, including Trump’s attorney general, have consistently said the election was secure and there was no evidence of significant fraud.

Willis has said since the beginning of the investigation two years ago that she was interested in a Jan. 2, 2021, phone call in which Trump suggested to Raffensperger that he could “find” the votes needed to overturn his loss in the state.

“All I want to do is this: I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have,” Trump said during that call. “Because we won the state.”

Trump has said repeatedly that his call with Raffensperger was “perfect,” and he told the AP last month that he felt “very confident” that he would not be indicted.

Based on witnesses called to testify before the special grand jury, it is clear that Willis is focusing on several areas. Those include:

■ Phone calls by Trump and oth-

ers to Georgia officials in the wake of the 2020 election.

■ A group of 16 Georgia Republicans who signed a certificate in December 2020 falsely stating that Trump had won the state and that they were the state’s “duly elected and qualified” electors.

■ False allegations of election fraud made during meetings of state legislators at the Georgia Capitol in December 2020.

■ The copying of data and software from election equipment in rural Coffee County by a computer forensics team hired by Trump allies.

■ Alleged attempts to pressure Fulton County elections worker Ruby Freeman into falsely confessing to election fraud.

■ The abrupt resignation of the U.S. attorney in Atlanta in January 2021.

Willis last summer sent letters informing some people, including Giuliani and the state’s 16 fake electors, that they could face criminal charges.

FBI searched Biden’s alma mater in docs probe

By ERIC TUCKER
AND ZEKE MILLER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The FBI searched the University of Delaware in recent weeks for classified documents as part of its investigation into the potential mishandling of sensitive government records by President Joe Biden.

The search, first reported by CNN, was confirmed to The Associated Press by a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to discuss it publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. The person would not say whether anything was found.

A Justice Department special counsel is investigating how classified documents from Biden’s time as vice president and senator came to wind up in his home and former office — and whether any mishandling involved criminal intent or was unintentional. Biden’s personal lawyers disclosed in January that a small batch of documents with classified markings had been found weeks earlier in his former Washington office, and they have since allowed FBI searches of multiple properties.

The university is Biden’s alma mater. In 2011, Biden donated his records from his 36 years serving in the U.S. Senate to the school. The documents arrived June 6, 2012, according to the university, which released photos of the numbered boxes being unloaded at the university alongside blue and gold balloons.

Under the terms of Biden’s gift, the records are to remain sealed until two years after he retires from



MANUEL BALCE CENETA/AP

President Joe Biden speaks to the University of Delaware Class of 2022 during its commencement ceremony in Newark in May. The FBI searched the university in recent weeks for classified documents as part of its investigation into the potential mishandling of sensitive government records by Biden.

public life.

Biden’s Senate records would not be covered by the presidential records act, though prohibitions on mishandling classified information would still apply.

The White House referred questions to the Justice Department, which declined to comment. The University of Delaware also referred questions to the Justice Department.

The university is the fourth known entity to be searched by the FBI following inspections of his former office at the Penn Biden Center in Washington, where records with classified markings were initially found in a locked closet by Biden’s

personal lawyers in November, and more recently of his Delaware homes in Wilmington and Rehoboth Beach.

Those searches were all done voluntarily and with the consent of Biden’s legal team.

The FBI took six items that contained documents with classified markings during its January search of the Wilmington home, Biden’s personal lawyer has said. Agents did not find classified documents at the Rehoboth Beach property but did take some handwritten notes and other materials relating to Biden’s time as vice president for review.

The Justice Department is sepa-

rately investigating the retention by former President Donald Trump of roughly 300 documents marked as classified at his Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago. The FBI served a search warrant at the home last August after months of resistance by Trump and his representatives to returning the documents to the government.

The FBI also searched the Indiana home of former Vice President Mike Pence last week after his lawyers came forward to say they had found a small number of documents with classified markings. A Pence adviser said one additional document with classified markings was found during that search.

NH schools’ urinal ban reversed

Associated Press

MILFORD, N.H. — A New Hampshire school board has reversed a policy banning middle and high school students from using urinals after dozens protested the measure, which had been a compromise to a proposal that would have blocked students from using facilities based on their gender identity.

Students at Milford Middle School and Milford High School can still access the bathroom that “corresponds to their gender identity consistently asserted at school.”

But at its Feb. 6 meeting, the school board debated a proposal that would require students to use the restroom and locker room of their assigned sex at birth. The proposal upset transgender students, gender nonconforming students and their supporters.

The ban on urinals approved by the board was offered as a compromise measure to the proposal. It also capped the maximum occupancy for bathrooms and locker rooms at the number of stalls each contains, and prohibited students from using shared changing areas.

Dozens of students walked out several days later.

Milford School District Superintendent Christi Michaud said school officials also received emails and phone calls opposing the ban, which led to Wednesday night’s vote.

“The board has listened to folks,” Michaud told WMUR-TV.

NATION



ANDRÉS LEIGHTON/AP

Police officers gather Wednesday at an entrance of Cielo Vista Mall in El Paso, Texas. Police say one person was killed and three other people were wounded in a shooting at the mall. Two people have been taken into custody, El Paso police said.

1 killed, 3 hurt in shooting at Texas shopping mall

Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas — One person was killed and three more were wounded Wednesday in a shooting at a shopping mall in El Paso, Texas, adding to the dozens of people already killed this year in mass shootings across the United States.

El Paso police said hours after the gunfire that two people had been taken into custody, though details of what led to the shooting remained unclear.

Interim police chief Peter Pacillas said that Cielo Vista Mall was still considered a crime scene, and that it would remain locked down until authorities had completed their investigation.

Pacillas stressed that the danger had passed.

“There is no more danger. I want to repeat that: There is no more

danger to the public,” Pacillas said.

The shooting happened in a busy shopping area and across a large parking lot from a Walmart where 23 people were killed in a racist attack targeting Hispanic people in 2019. El Paso — with a largely Latino population of about 700,000 people — sits on the U.S. border with Mexico, where residents of both countries cross frequently.

“Today’s shooting at the Cielo Vista Mall has brought back traumatic memories for many of us. Please know you are not alone,” Democratic U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar, whose district includes El Paso, said Wednesday on Twitter.

She urged anyone who needed it to reach out to the city’s crisis help line.

The United States has seen dozens of people killed in mass shoot-

ings so far in 2023, most recently Monday at Michigan State University, where three students were killed and five more were wounded. In January, 11 people were killed in the Los Angeles-area city of Monterey Park as they welcomed the Lunar New Year at a dance hall popular with older Asian Americans.

Pacillas said the two people taken into custody after Wednesday’s shooting as well as all of the victims were males.

University Medical Center in El Paso said in a statement that two gunshot victims being treated there were in critical condition.

The condition of the third victim was not immediately known.

Police earlier said the shooting was reported in the shopping mall’s food court.

Biden ‘doubling down’ on equity in government

By JOSH BOAK
AND DARLENE SUPERVILLE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Thursday ordered the federal government to do more to address racial inequality as the challenges and complexities of systemic racism are again drawing the public’s attention.

The order, signed during Black History Month, requires that an initial review into long-standing disparities in government services and treatment that he ordered on his first day in office become an annual requirement for federal agencies. The reviews are aimed at increasing access to federal programs, services and activities for disadvantaged communities. The new order also directs federal agencies to have equity teams and name senior leaders who would be accountable for increasing equity and addressing bias.

“My Administration has embedded a focus on equity into the fabric of Federal policymaking and service delivery,” Biden wrote in the order, adding that, “By advancing equity, the Federal Government can support and empower all Americans, including the many communities in America that have been underserved, discriminated against, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.”

Last month, Tyre Nichols, a Black man, died several days after he was severely beaten by five police officers following a traffic

stop in Memphis, Tenn. Nichols was one of several Black men across the United States who died after encounters with police recently. The problem also extends to racial disparities in wealth, housing, crime and education that reflect decades of discriminatory policies.

Chiraag Bains, the president’s deputy assistant for racial justice and equity, said that the new order shows Biden is “doubling down” on the commitment he made on his first day as president “to put equity at the center of how this government operates.”

The order institutionalizes Biden’s pledge that government be open and accessible to all and “is a recognition that achieving equity is not a one- or a two-year project. It’s a generational commitment,” Bains told The Associated Press.

Federal agencies would need to improve the quality and frequency of their engagement with communities that have faced systemic discrimination. And it formalizes Biden’s goal of a 50% bump in federal procurement dollars that go to small and disadvantaged businesses by 2025.

Under the order, agencies must also focus on new civil rights threats, such as discrimination in automated technology and access for people with disabilities and for those who speak languages other than English. It also includes a push to improve the collection, transparency and analysis of data to help improve equity.

Weekly jobless applications dip again despite Fed’s push on interest rates

Associated Press

Fewer Americans filed for jobless benefits last week despite efforts by the Federal Reserve to loosen the labor market with higher interest rates as it tries to cool the economy.

Applications for jobless aid in the U.S. for the week ending Feb. 11 fell by 1,000 last week to 194,000, from 195,000 the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday. It’s the fifth straight week claims were under 200,000. Jobless claims generally represent the number of U.S. layoffs.

The four-week moving average of claims, which smooths out some of the weekly ups and downs, rose by 500 to 189,500. It’s the fourth straight week that the four-week moving average has been below 200,000.

Earlier this month, the Fed raised its main

lending rate by 25 basis points, its eighth rate hike in less than a year. The central bank’s benchmark rate is now in a range of 4.5% to 4.75%, its highest level in 15 years. Chair Jerome Powell appeared to suggest that he foresees two additional quarter-point rate hikes.

So far, the Fed’s hawkish interest rate policy has tempered inflation, but has had less impact on a resilient U.S. job market. Two weeks ago, the government reported that employers added 517,000 jobs in January and that the unemployment rate dipped to 3.4%, the lowest level since 1969. Analysts were expecting job gains of around 185,000.

Though the U.S. labor market remains robust, layoffs have been mounting in the technology sector, where many companies overhired after a pandemic boom.

Wholesale prices up 6% from year ago, as inflation pressures still felt

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Wholesale prices in the United States rose 6% in January from a year earlier, decelerating for a seventh straight month. But on a month-to-month basis, prices reaccelerated in January, indicating that inflation pressures continue to underlie the U.S. economy.

The latest year-over-year wholesale inflation figure was down from 6.5% in December and from a recent peak of 11.7% in March. From December to January, though, the government’s producer price index jumped 0.7%, driven up in part by a 5% surge in energy prices. That compared with a 0.2% drop from November to December, and it was nearly twice the increase that economists were expecting.

Excluding volatile food and energy prices,

so-called core wholesale inflation was up 5.4% in January from a year earlier and 0.5% from December to January. Food prices, though, fell 1%, the second straight monthly drop. Egg prices, which have been driven up by a wave of avian flu, sank 12.7% from December to January but are still up more than 200% from a year ago.

In the energy sector, wholesale gasoline prices were up 6.2% from December, diesel fuel 10.9% and natural gas for homes 12.2%.

The producer price data measures inflation before it reaches consumers. It reflects prices charged by manufacturers, farmers and wholesalers, and it flows into an inflation gauge that the Federal Reserve closely tracks. The data can provide an early sign of how fast consumer inflation will rise.

NATION

What's a legal slap? Slap fight league addresses safety

By MARK ANDERSON
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The state commission that regulates slap fighting — in which opponents take turns striking each other in the face — attempted Wednesday to address a critical question for the budding sport: What constitutes a legal slap?

Competitors in the Power Slap League must deliver only open-handed blows and must not hit opponents below the chin, according to amended rules approved by the Nevada Athletic Commission that seek to make the matches safer.

The commission originally voted in October to sanction slap fighting, asserting it wanted to prevent unregulated matches and

ensure competitors are safe. However, commissioners were concerned the rules weren't specific enough.

"So, these guys want to get serious about the sport and it sounds like they do," said Anthony Marnell III, chairman of the commission which also regulates boxing and other combat sports. "It sounds like they want to evolve the rules. We as a commission need to keep up with them at lightning speed on how we're going to review this. And we have to have a process for it because there's going to be controversy."

In November, the commission also approved UFC President Dana White's license to promote the Power Slap League. White and



White

"Power Slap: Road to the Title." The first four episodes averaged 275,000 viewers.

However, many competitors exhibited apparent concussion-like symptoms, raising safety concerns about the competition.

Power Slap President Frank Lamicella told the commission Wednesday there have been "no major injuries" among the 25 matches the commission ap-

proved.

Any slap that doesn't meet the criteria will result in disqualification, and every strike is subject to video review. The review official has the final say over whether someone is disqualified.

Marnell was especially concerned about replay guidelines being followed.

"I think we have to take this sport, whether you like it or not, just as serious as we take the \$20 million, \$100 million boxing match that we're responsible for," Marnell said. "We need a process for this because the way that I see this going, and I haven't been to one yet in person, but watching this you are going to be reviewing every single slap. The

clamp down on the carpal bone hitting the cheek first has got to be zero tolerance. It's over at that point."

Lamicella said the league is using the same replay equipment as the UFC. "We've taken the MMA rules and adjusted it for slap, and it is evolving and will be evolving even more," Lamicella said.

White promoted the TBS show in an interview with Front Office Sports last week. He acknowledged in the interview that a video of him and his wife slapping each other during an argument on New Year's Eve at a Mexican nightclub didn't help in his efforts to promote the new sport. He called the timing "ironic and horrible at the same time."

US casinos win \$60B in 2022

Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Commercial casinos in the United States won more than \$60 billion from gamblers in 2022, the best year in the industry's history.

Figures released Wednesday by the American Gaming Association, the gambling industry's national trade group, show that in-person gambling remains the bread-and-butter of the industry, accounting for more than 80% of its revenue. Online betting provided nearly a

fifth of the industry's revenue.

The figures do not include tribal casinos, which report their revenue separately. But David Forman, a vice president with the association, estimated that tribal casinos could report an additional \$41 billion in revenue later this year, putting the total U.S. casino industry over the \$100 billion mark.

That would put the gambling revenue roughly equal with the amount of money raised from beer sales in the U.S., he said.



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WORLD

Ruling Taliban display rare division in public over bans

BY RAHIM FAIEZ
Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — A rare public show of division within the ranks of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban emerged in recent days when Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, a powerful government figure, gave a speech seen as implicit criticism of the movement's reclusive supreme leader.

The Taliban leadership has been opaque since the former insurgents' takeover of the country in August 2021, with almost no indication of how decisions are made. In recent months, the group's supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, has appeared to take a stronger hand in directing policy. In particular, it was on his orders that the Taliban government banned women and girls from universities and schools after the sixth grade.

The bans raised a fierce international uproar, increasing Afghanistan's isolation at a time when its economy has collapsed—and worsening a humanitarian crisis. The bans also appeared to contradict previous policies by the Taliban government.

Between the Taliban takeover until the December ban on attend-

ing universities, women had been allowed to continue their studies. Taliban officials repeatedly promised that girls would be allowed to attend secondary school, but a decision to allow them back last year was suddenly reversed.

Haqqani made his comments in a speech over the weekend to a graduation ceremony at an Islamic religious school in the eastern province of Khost.

"Monopolizing power and hurting the reputation of the entire system are not to our benefit," Haqqani said, according to video clips of the speech released on social media by his supporters. "The situation cannot be tolerated," he added.

Haqqani said now that the Taliban have taken power, "more responsibility has been placed on our shoulders and it requires patience and good behavior and engagement with the people."

Zabihullah Mujahed, the top spokesman for the Kabul government, said in an apparent reaction to Haqqani's comments — without naming him — that criticism is best voiced privately.

Akhundzada, an Islamic scholar, almost never appears in public and hardly ever leaves the Taliban heartland in southern Kandahar province. He surrounds himself with other religious scholars and tribal leaders who oppose education and work for women.



Akhundzada

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WEEKEND



Who should, will
enter Rock Hall
Music, Pages 28-29



Paul Rudd stars as the titular Ant-Man, who can grow very large or shrink incredibly small thanks to his suit, in “Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania.”

DISNEY, MARVEL STUDIOS/AP

The start of something big

‘Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania’ has a lot of ground to cover, introducing villain Kang and launching Marvel Cinematic Universe’s Phase 5

Movie review, Page 16

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Watch your weight

Don't count on dropping pounds by wearing a fitness tracker

By **GEOFFREY A. FOWLER**
The Washington Post

When I wore my first Apple Watch in 2015, I was smitten with the idea that quantifying my activity might empower me to get moving and lose weight like my doctor ordered.

After now tracking 25 million steps, my weight is about the same. Did closing all those rings actually do anything?

Researchers have been asking the same question for nearly a decade now. What they tell me: Buying a fitness tracker or smartwatch isn't going to help you lose weight. In fact — yikes — wearing a gadget could even undermine your efforts.

Exercise is very good for you, and if your tracker helps you keep moving, then by all means keep wearing it. But like so many other wellness products, trackers have been marketed more with hype than with evidence.

What the research says

Research moves slowly in academia, but one of the most notable studies of the health outcomes of fitness trackers was published in 2016 out of Singapore. It found that people who wore a Fitbit kept up their physical activity a bit better than a control group without them — but after a year, it wasn't enough to produce changes in weight or blood pressure.

The central premise of trackers is that “if you give people information, they'll do something to change their behavior,” says John Jakicic of the University of Kansas Medical Center, who studies obesity and weight regulation. But that's not what happens after the initial fascination wears off, he says.

“When we've given devices to people, it generally doesn't change their behavior,” he says. “And if it does, it changes it for a very short period of time — maybe about 2 to 3 months, maybe a little longer — be-

fore the thing on your wrist finds its way into a drawer or you simply stop paying attention to it.”

Jakicic helped conduct one of the largest controlled studies of tracker tech, published in 2016 out of the University of Pittsburgh. It found that dieting adults who wore a generic activity monitor for 18 months lost less — yes, less — weight than those who did not. The people who wore the devices also generally moved less.

One theory: Just the act of measuring your body could change the psychological experience of being active. A 2016 study by Jordan Etkin of Duke University found that measurement can undermine the “intrinsic motivation” of activities like going for a walk, and make it feel more like work and decrease continued engagement in the activity.

“They can't give you motivation,” Etkin says.

We still don't understand how they impact people in different ways. Some people with trackers get energized by competing with friends and family members to move the most. But for others, seeing their watch report that they have had a lazy day can contribute to self-sabotage. A 2017 study of adolescents found that trackers negatively added to peer pressure and were demoralizing.

I saw the Apple Watch's possibilities — and shortcomings — when I came back from parental leave last year. A few weeks into resuming work, which involves long stretches at a computer, Apple's Health app popped up a warning: My steps and standing hours had fallen off a cliff. I joked that my Apple Watch thought my job was killing me.

It was a useful heads-up. But what was I supposed to do about it? My Watch had no insight even on what my new goals should be.

Eventually, I learned from other parents the joy of the after-work stroll.



iStock

Researchers say wearing a fitness tracker doesn't guarantee you'll meet your exercise or weight-loss goals. In fact, a fitness tracker could undermine your efforts.

What the tracker makers say

Apple told me it does not track research about weight loss because that is not the focus of the Apple Watch. (That's disappointing.) But Apple did point me to a 2018 study by the RAND Corporation of programs that give people rewards for meeting certain goals with their watches. Those people had a 34% average increase of tracked activity days per month, and that persisted after the end of the program.

Fitbit, owned by Google, said its devices are useful for a holistic view of your health, including weight management. It pointed me to a 2020 analysis of 37 controlled trials that found using Fitbits during interventions has been associated with both weight loss and increases in step count and moderate-to-vigorous activity.

But in the majority of those trials, the people wearing Fitbits were also given other content and support.

The gadgets alone “don't provide that additional support needed for long-term, sustained behavior change — things like social support or goal setting, demonstration of behaviors by other people that

are like you and action planning,” Matt Buman of Arizona State University says.

How WW uses trackers

If anyone had figured out how to make use of activity trackers, I figured it might be WeightWatchers, also known as WW. Today, roughly 40% of its members use trackers to automatically enter exercise data for its programs, chief scientific officer Gary Foster says.

Yet the company hasn't linked their use to better weight-loss outcomes, in part because people don't use them consistently. What it can say, Foster told me, is that wearing a tracker makes the work of staying on top of your exercise easier.

But a fitness gadget still can't automate what Foster considers the most important data in weight loss: what you eat. Foster says he does get calls about once per quarter from people with a new idea for a gadget to measure eating, such as sensors on teeth, but “it's not there yet.”

Bottom line, Foster says: “Tracking your activity is going to have little or no effect without this surround-sound support of what to do with that information.”

Kingston launches IronKey SSD, DataTraveler Max flash drive

By **GREGG ELLMAN**
Tribune News Service

Kingston Technology has launched some excellent external storage solutions: the IronKey and DataTraveler Max.

The IronKey is its first innovative operating system-independent, hardware-encrypted external SSD (Solid State Drive) with a touch screen for data protection. The USB 3.2 Gen 1 portable hard drive has a single USB-C connector port. Two USB 3.2 Gen 1 cables are included, USB type-C to USB type-A and type-C to type-C.

When first plugged into your computer, it powers up and asks you to select your preferred language. And then a keypad appears on the display where you choose a secure password.

The Kingston IronKey safeguards with FIPS 19-certified XTS-AES 256-bit encryption. It protects data against BadUSB and Brute Force attacks. If the password is entered incorrectly a set number of times in a row, the Brute Force attack

protection crypto-erases the drive. This means the average user's data is safe if the hard drive ends up in the wrong hands.

An administrator can control the setting up of passwords and users and restricting to read-only mode. Other controls include an adjustable auto-timeout to lock the hard drive and to secure-erase the drive, which will wipe out all passwords and encryption keys.

If a user forgets his or her password, the admin password can be used to access the drive's data and restore his or her access.

IronKey passwords can consist of a PIN, a sentence with space characters, or list of words, so the password will be easy to



PHOTOS BY KINGSTON TECHNOLOGY/TNS

The IronKey SSD has a touch screen for passwords.



The DataTraveler Max USB 3.2 Gen 2 Series Flash Drive has a sliding cap to protect it when not in use.

remember but tricky for others to guess. Once the hard drive is unlocked and plugged in, it works like any other drag-and-drop file transfer storage device.

Kingston lists the IronKey as compatible with Microsoft Windows, MacOS, Linux, Chrome OS or any operating system that supports a USB mass storage

device. Speeds are rated up to 250MB/s read and 250MB/s write.

Three storage capacities are available; 480GB (\$289.99), 960GB (\$323.99) and 1.92TB (\$509.99). A soft travel case is included.

The Kingston DataTraveler Max USB 3.2 Gen 2 Series Flash Drive isn't as new, but it is incredibly functional as a portable storage device.

The flash drive is built with a one-handed sliding cap for protecting the connector when not in use, an LED status indicator and a key ring loop. Kingston rates the transfer speeds up to 1,000MB/s read and 900MB/s write.

There isn't any data encryption or password protection like with the IronKey, but its size, speed, lack of cables and storage capacity make it shine. The DataTraveler Max is available in 256GB (\$37.99), 512GB (\$67.99), and 1TB (\$95.99/USB-A, \$199.99 USB-C) and is compatible with Windows, MacOS, Linux and Chrome OS.

Online: kingston.com

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Harbinger in the Hundred Acre Wood

Is Winnie the Pooh's R-rated slasher a sign of what's to come for other beloved characters entering the public domain?

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

The Hundred Acre Wood has seen some pretty unsettling things over the years. A honey jar shortage. Rather blustery days. The omnipresent threat of a Heffalump.

But in "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey," a new microbudget R-rated horror film, Pooh wades into far darker territory than even Eeyore could have ever imagined. After 95 years of saying things like "A hug is always the right size," Pooh — newly freed from copyright — is now violently terrorizing a remote house of young women.

Countless cherished characters have passed into public domain before, but perhaps never so abruptly and savagely as Pooh.

Pooh, Piglet, Kanga, Roo, Owl, Eeyore and Christopher Robin all became public domain on January 1 last year when the copyright on A.A. Milne's 1926 book, "Winnie-the-Pooh," with illustrations by E.H. Shepard, expired. Just a year later, Pooh and Piglet can now be found on a murderous rampage in nationwide movie theaters — a head-spinning development that's happened faster than a bear could say "Oh, bother."

Depending on how you look at it, "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey" is either a crass way to capitalize on a beloved bear or an ingenious bit of independent film-making foresight. Either way, it's probably a harbinger of what's to come.

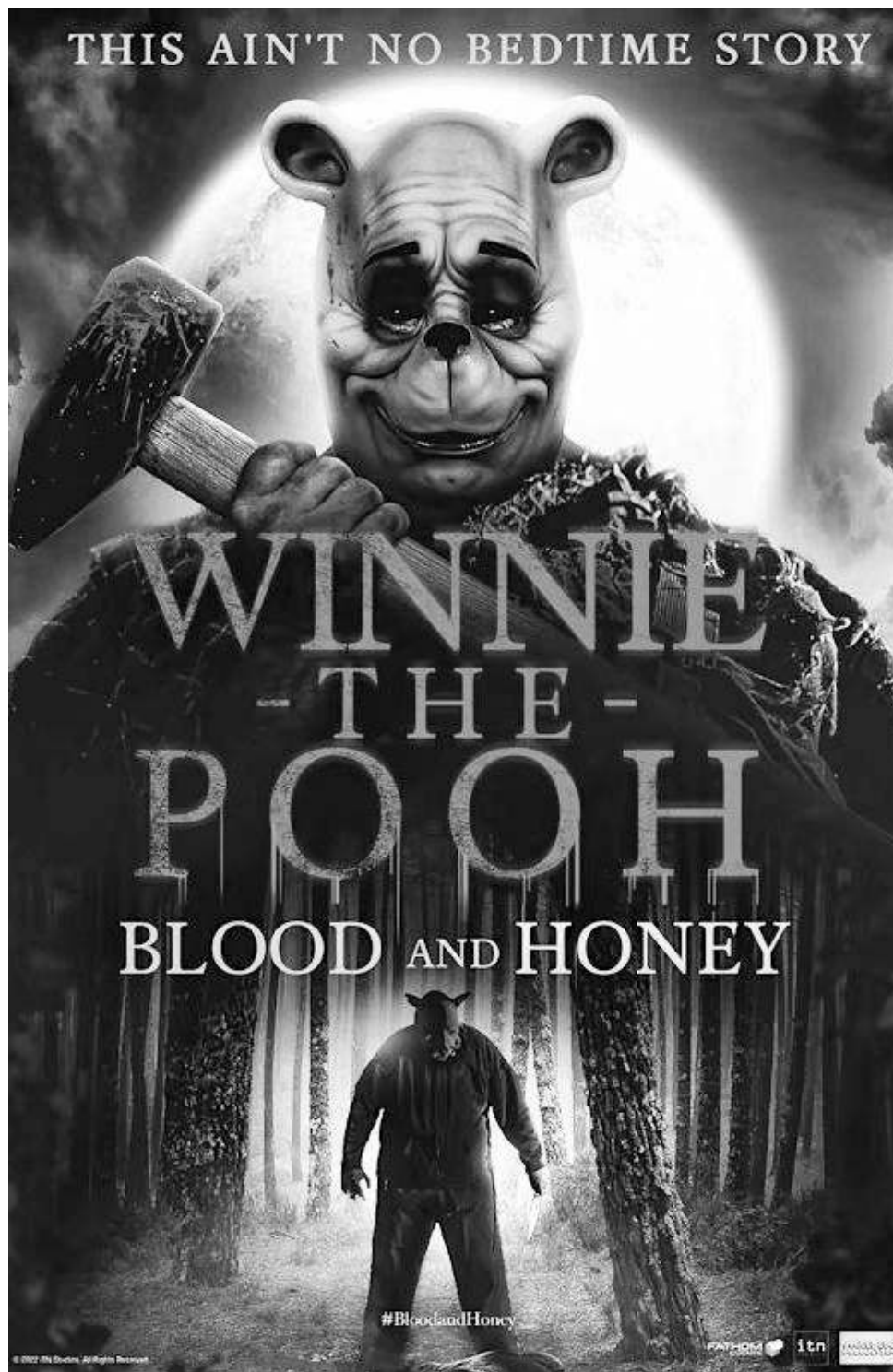
In the next 10 years, some of the most iconic characters in pop culture — including Bugs Bunny, Batman and Superman — will pass into public domain, or at least their most early incarnations. Some elements of Pooh are still off-limits, like his red shirt, since they apply to later interpretations. Tigger, who debuted in 1928's "The House at Pooh Corner," isn't public until 2024.

Many have next Jan. 1 circled. That's when the original version of Mickey Mouse, from "Steamboat Willie," becomes public domain. It will be open season on the face of the Walt Disney Co. — or at least that early whistling variety of Mickey.

Pop culture, as a concept, was born in the 1920s, meaning many of the most indelible — and still very culturally present — works will fall into public domain in the coming years. There will be all kinds of new and unlikely contexts for some of these characters. Some could be wonderful, some schlocky. But "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey" may just be a taste of what's in store.

"When Superman and Batman fall into the public domain, there's going to be some wild films, I'm sure of it," says "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey" writer, director and co-producer Rhys Waterfield. "There's going to be so many different and cool unique iterations coming off that. I might do one."

Though made for less than \$100,000, "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey" opened Friday on some 1,500 screens in North America, an unusually wide release for such a little-funded movie. It's already



Promotional art for the horror film "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey." A.A. Milne's 1926 book, "Winnie-the-Pooh" with illustrations by E.H. Shepard, entered the public domain on January 1 when the copyright expired.

made \$1 million in Mexico and has many more international territories booked. For Waterfield, a British film producer of direct-to-DVD titles (credits include "Dinosaur Hotel" and "Easter Killing"), it's already a hit way beyond expectation.

"I kind of thought this could do a small theatrical run in some places and do quite well commercially," Waterfield says. "But it's blown up way beyond that to a scale that's absolutely insane."

In a 2021 tally of media franchises by Statista, Winnie the Pooh, with \$80.3 billion in worldwide revenue, tied Mickey Mouse for No. 3, trailing only Pokémon and Hello Kitty. But unlike them, Pooh accounts for a veritable religion for his kind-hearted witticisms and contented spiritual outlook. Pooh is as much a gentle sage as he is a round-tummied toon. When Waterfield realized Pooh was entering

public domain, "I had a spark in my eye," he says.

Here was much-coveted intellectual property that could sell just about any film. "I've never met anyone that doesn't know who Winnie the Pooh is," Waterfield said in a recent phone interview speaking from Amsterdam.

But certainly, not everyone has been so happy about the idea of one of the most benevolent bears turning feral monster. Waterfield says he receives daily messages telling him he's evil, and even some death threats. One person said they were calling the police.

"You've got to be pretty thick-skinned to do a movie like this," Waterfield says. "It baffles me. People think making an alternative version of him is somehow infiltrating their mind and destroying their memories. When I get claims that I ruined

people's childhoods, I'm genuinely confused. I just kind of brush it off and carry on making more of them."

Waterfield is already planning sequels with Peter Pan, Bambi and many more. (The Felix Salten book "Bambi, A Life in the Woods" also became public domain last year.)

Jennifer Jenkins, a professor of law and director of Duke's Center for the Study of Public Domain, is used to operating in a relatively quiet and byzantine realm of copyright law and thorny rights issues. She writes an annual Jan. 1 column for "Public Domain Day." But nothing has caused her phone to ring off the hook quite like "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey."

The movie has clearly touched a nerve; millions have watched its trailer online. (Typical comment: "I can't believe that this movie is real.") And Jenkins, a firm believer in the long-range benefits of public domain, has been somewhat bemused by the storm kicked up by a movie like "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey." She compares public domain issues like these to the way free speech is a right, regardless of whether you agree with what's said.

"Some uses of public domain material will be welcome to some and disturbing to others," Jenkins says. "But I don't think new content uniformly saps the value of the original work. I have the original books. I adore them. The fact that this slasher film is out there has no effect whatsoever on how I feel about A.A. Milne's original creation or E.H. Shepard's pencil sketches."

It's worth noting that much of the Disney empire was, itself, built on public domain. "Beauty and the Beast" comes from Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's 1756 version of the fairy tale. "Sleeping Beauty" came from Charles Perrault's 1697 fairy tale. "Aladdin" comes from the folk tale collection "The Book of One Thousand and One Nights."

Though Jenkins can't think of too many characters who had such a jarring entry to public domain as Pooh, films like "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" (2016) and the 2021 book "The Great Gatsby Undead" are reference points.

"People love adding zombies to public domain works," Jenkins says.

To her, "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey" may not be the most glorious example of the effects of public domain, but it's part of a process that human creativity depends upon and thrives on. "Blood and Honey" may not make a lasting mark in the Hundred Acre Wood, but something someday will. Chalk it up to growing pains.

"The fact that some people may be disturbed or revolted by this particular reuse of some of the characters from Winnie the Pooh doesn't detract from the value of the public domain," Jenkins says. "This is how people throughout history have created. They've always drawn on or been inspired by earlier works. Time will tell with this movie or any other reuse of Winnie the Pooh and Piglet whether movies like this will be rewarded in the marketplace or have any enduring appeal."

"My thing is always: Time will tell."

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEW



DISNEY, MARVEL STUDIOS/AP

From left: Paul Rudd, Kathryn Newton and Evangeline Lilly in a scene from "Ant-Man and The Wasp: Quantumania."

'Ant-Man 3' goes big, but falls flat

'Quantumania' introduces new villain but is too focused on worlds and realms, not focused enough on characters

BY LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

Peyton Reed's "Ant-Man" films have generally served as a kind of palate cleanser to the world-ending stakes of the larger Marvel Cinematic Universe. Paul Rudd's Scott Lang is just an ordinary dude, or so they keep telling us, who still can't really believe that he's part of the Avengers at all. He gets to be the wide-eyed middle-aged fanboy of the group in those films. In his own films, he's just living a blue-sky life in San Francisco as an affable single dad and ex-con who was once fired from Baskin Robbins and who has occasional enemies to defeat.

In this third film, "Ant-Man and The Wasp: Quantumania," now in theaters, he's coasting on his own post-Blip celebrity with a bestselling memoir out, lots of fans around town and a generally

sunny disposition — when he's not breaking his teenage daughter Cassie (now played by Kathryn Newton, always an enjoyable presence) out of jail for civil disobedience.

There is a fun, light, sitcom-y touch to these early scenes in which he and his makeshift family, Hope Van Dyne (Evangeline Lilly), Janet Van Dyne (Michelle Pfeiffer) and Hank Pym (Michael Douglas) sit around the table for takeout pizza. They use their particle technology to blow up the tiny pie.

"I just saved us \$8," Pym declares proudly.

But Ant-Man is part of the larger chess board of the MCU, so naturally he's doomed to be sucked into the multiverse mess, setting up pieces for more Avengers films to come with the introduction of a new villain, Kang (played with a maniacal sorrow by the great Jonathan Majors).

And the results are mixed. Reed has returned to direct with a new writer, Jeff Loveness, who has also been tapped to write "Avengers: The Kang Dynasty" and it's hard not to empathize with both for the logic gymnastics required to back Ant-Man and his gang into this conflict.

Loveness, who cut his teeth in comedy and has an affinity for comic book and B-movie absurdities, gives Ant-Man his own "Star Wars"-adjacent adventure. There's quite a bit of unrest in the Quantum Realm, with scrappy rebels battling against a powerful ruler with an army of faceless soldiers. But he takes that conceit further and gives the rebels some personality and humor, including William Jackson Harper as the mind-reading Quaz. The villain's a killing machine, M.O.D.O.K., that looks (knowingly) straight out of a "Mystery Science Theater 3000"

movie and it is quite entertaining. It's both a nod to the fun of the ridiculousness in sci-fi and a reminder that serious superhero films are sometimes just one crazy special effect away from being silly superhero films.

"Quantumania" also gives Pfeiffer a lot more to do as we, and Hank and Hope, learn a little bit more about Janet's 30 years in the Quantum Realm and the various compromises and allegiances she made to stay alive. Pfeiffer is an unambiguous delight and the real center of the movie despite what the title might claim. Ant-Man just finds himself in the middle of the mess, which starts to drag on in a muddle of sci-fi furnishings that individually are probably quite inspired and interesting but together just blend into a dreary mess.

It's a shame because Reed's films are generally so crisp and

styled and are best when focused on characters, not worlds and Quantum Realms. "Quantumania" shines when it is keeping things light and quippy.

But Kang, for what we can assume are bigger story needs, needs to be more serious. Majors is certainly chilling and captivating, but Kang seems like a mismatched foe for a standalone Ant-Man film and the result is a "Quantumania" that is trying to be too many things. One thing it is not is a Wasp movie, though. Lilly gets a lot to do but not a lot of — or any — character development.

"Quantumania" sticks the ending, however. Without giving anything away, we'll just say that Reed and Rudd get to return to their sweet spot, with a bit of a twist.

"Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" is rated PG-13 for some sci-fi action violence. Running time: 122 minutes.

Majors makes Kang a villain worth rooting for

BY CHRIS HEWITT
Star Tribune

The chaotic "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" is getting less than stellar reviews, but it does feature what is perhaps the best performance in the history of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Jonathan Majors, who plays Kang the Conqueror, is so quietly charismatic that, no matter how many civilizations Kang destroys, you kinda want him to win. We meet him in a prologue, set in a quantum realm. He befriends trailblazing scientist Janet Van Dyne (Michelle Pfeiffer) whose family rescued her in the last "Ant-Man" (the Wasp is her daughter). In "Quantumania," everyone heads back to the quantum world in order to prevent Kang from

escaping and taking over the universe.

Majors has been lurking on the edge of stardom for several years, giving subtle, intelligent performances in movies nobody saw ("Devotion," "The Last Black Man in San Francisco"), popular movies that weren't about his character ("The Harder They Fall") and a TV series that should have used him better ("Lovecraft Country").

"Ant-Man" is his first blockbuster, so it's making him famous just in time to gather attention for an upcoming project that wowed at last month's Sundance Film Festival: "Magazine Dreams," in which he plays a bodybuilder — a physique you can tell he was working toward in "Ant-Man."

Since Kang will stop at nothing to con-

quer the world, he says lots of crazy things in "Ant-Man." Often, when actors have extremely dramatic dialogue, you see them struggle to match that drama with their delivery, but Majors does the reverse. He gets calmer the more menacing Kang becomes, delivering his vilest threats in something approaching a monotone. It's magnetic because it suggests so many questions about a character who could have been a garden-variety baddie: Is Kang soulless? Damaged? Saving his theatrics for the future movie that the movie's closing credits promise?

Finding out the answers to these questions looks to be one of the more entertaining elements as the MCU's Phase 5 continues to unfold.



DISNEY, MARVEL STUDIOS/AP

Jonathan Majors plays the villain Kang in "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania."

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Blurring the boundaries of relationships

Witherspoon, Kutcher try to figure out if men and women can just be friends in cute and light 'Your Place or Mine'

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

If you decide to settle in and watch "Your Place or Mine" to see the sparks fly between Reese Witherspoon and Ashton Kutcher, you'll be initially disappointed. They're not in the same room until the last 12 minutes.

The premise of this particular Netflix rom-com is two old friends switching homes for a week and snapping each other out of their ruts. Might they also fall in love?

In this one, Witherspoon and Kutcher play opposites — he's a rich consultant who lives in a chic but chilly New York apartment; she's an earthy and protective single mom to a 13-year-old boy in Los Angeles. They hooked up 20 years ago but decided friendship was the better path.

These two talk every day, forcing the filmmakers to spend a fortune on split screens. It's an intimate relationship over two decades as each supports and encourages the other. Someone asks him the obvious question — "If you like each other so much, why aren't you guys together?" — and there is no good answer. She offers another: "Uh, barf."

A last-minute emergency triggers the film's central action: Witherspoon needs to fly to New York but her main child care option flakes, so Kutcher's character decides to go to Los Angeles as backup. "You need help and I'm coming," he tells her. They find themselves in each other's homes, getting to know each other's friends and generally shaking



NETFLIX/AP photos

Reese Witherspoon and Ashton Kutcher play friends who hooked up long ago in "Your Place or Mine."



Wesley Kimmel, above left, plays a son whose presence conveniently requires friendly intervention — and thus a plot was born.

things up.

Written and directed by Aline Brosh McKenna, "Your Place or Mine" is cute and light from a creator known more for satires like "Devil Wears Prada" and "My Crazy Ex-Girlfriend."

At first, the film meanders with an alarming lack of urgency, as if

Brosh McKenna was happy enough just filling the screen with her two beautiful leads and putting them in pretty places. You might initially mistake it as a rom-com for real estate.

Eventually, each starts to see the other as a project that needs fixing. Kutcher tries to loosen up

his best friend's son — letting him snack on junk food, watch scary movies and try out for the hockey team, all things forbidden when mom's around. He sees it all as an extension of work: "That's what I do: I get in, manage things, no muss, no fuss."

On the other coast, Witherspoon finds an old manuscript her best friend has hidden from her and decides she must try to get it published. She also flirts with a hunky publisher — Jesse Williams, smoldering — and breaks all logic when she doesn't immediately fall into the cool, sensual piercing blue of his eyes and never wants to leave ... Wait, where was I?

The film soon mines an interesting area, namely how much do best friends really know about each other? When Witherspoon's character finds the book, she is in shock. "We tell each other everything," she says. Replies a friend:

"Obviously you don't." This is also a film that champions taking a chance, going for it and not playing it safe.

The film allows Witherspoon and Kutcher to show off their naturally funny sides, especially when they're fishes out of water. But many of the scenes drag on and sometimes the exposition is chalky, like when Witherspoon says: "I have to finish this program before the end of the year so I can apply for that open senior accounting position at the regional school district."

Some smaller roles give important jolts of quirky, like Zoë Chao as a slinky former flame of Kutcher's character in New York and Tig Notaro and Steve Zahn in L.A. Notaro's wit is as dry as a cactus, while Zahn plays a loopy gardener who is credited for writing two oddball songs on the soundtrack.

Speaking of songs, the producers must have forked over tons of cash to the estate of Ric Ocasek. To establish Kutcher's character as a fan of The Cars, no less than nine songs — including "Heartbreak City," "Drive" and "You Might Think" — have been used. The film's soundtrack could double as a greatest-hits album.

The film builds to — finally! — a scene when Witherspoon and Kutcher are in the same zip code, flipping the traditional rom-com airport scene on its head. That's when the film answers the question can men and women just be friends with a strong: "Uh, barf."

"Your Place or Mine" is rated PG-13 for suggestive material and brief strong language. Running time: 111 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

Alison Brie wrestles with the past in rom-com 'Somebody I Used to Know'

By ADAM GRAHAM
The Detroit News

Alison Brie plays an anti-hero (she's the problem; it's her) in "Somebody I Used to Know," a thorny romantic comedy about moving on, falling apart and letting go, sometimes not in that order.

Brie is Ally, a reality TV producer in Los Angeles who is barely scraping by — her trash-tastic reality series "Dessert Island" has just been canceled after three seasons — but to her friends and family back in Leavenworth, Wash., she's the hometown girl made good.

When she returns home ostensibly to visit her mom but really to get away from it all, she runs into her ex-boyfriend Sean (Jay

Ellis) at a bar. They hit it off and have a magical day and night together, talking until the wee hours. But there's palpable awkwardness the next morning, and when Ally drops by Sean's family home to see what's up, she finds out why: Sean is about to get married.

His fiancée is Cassidy (Kiersey Clemons), who plays in a punk rock band. But is there something still there worth exploring between Ally and Sean? Ally decides to find out and inserts herself into the weekend's activities, despite the pleas of Sean's brother, Benny (Danny Pudi, in a welcome "Community" reunion with Brie). And the more trouble she causes, the more she can't help herself, despite the

very real consequences to those around her.

Brie is very much playing an unlikable protagonist in the vein of Julia Roberts in "My Best Friend's Wedding," and the movie — written by Brie and her husband, Dave Franco, and directed by Franco — has the good sense to mint the comparison by calling it out in the movie.

But she's not playing a caricature or a cartoon villain. She's a little bit lost and a little bit hurt and a lot bit selfish, and she's figuring things out during a rocky period in her life. Were her dreams worth chasing? Did she leave a good life behind? Is it too late to change the past?

Franco and Brie — she also



AMAZON PRIME VIDEO/AP

Alison Brie's Ally, right, tries to reconnect with her ex-boyfriend Sean, played by Jay Ellis, left, in "Somebody I Used to Know."

starred in his 2020 Airbnb thriller "The Rental" — give Ally time to wrestle with these questions and herself, and to be imperfect. That's more than most romantic comedies allow their characters. For that reason, it's a step in the right direction, not

only for the genre and for Brie and Franco, but for people everywhere clumsily trying to get their lives together.

"Somebody I Used to Know" is rated R for sexual content, graphic nudity, language throughout and brief drug use. Running time: 105 minutes. Now streaming on Prime Video.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Q&A



HBO Max photos

The documentary “38 at the Garden” includes some animations, including this rendering of Jeremy Lin doing the “wave off” against the Toronto Raptors.

Much bigger than basketball

Lin discusses ‘38 at the Garden,’ about his impact on the Asian American community

BY JEVON PHILLIPS
Los Angeles Times

Jeremy Lin did not want to make a nostalgia piece.

The former NBA player, whose sudden ascendance to superstardom was dubbed Linsanity, is humble about that time during the 2011-12 season. An Asian American kid born in Torrance, Calif., who played college ball at Harvard, Lin is quiet, hard-working and not the kind of player, or person, who draws attention to himself.

A movie? About himself and that time? It wasn’t something that Lin looked forward to revisiting. He had moved on from that period with the New York Knicks, later joining the Houston Rockets and Los Angeles Lakers, winning a championship with the Toronto Raptors and playing in China. But the persistent filmmakers behind the Oscar-shortlisted documentary “38 at the Garden,” including director Frank Chi and producers Travon Free and Samir Hernandez, were eventually able to convince Lin to participate in what they hoped to accomplish — to convey what he, unknowingly, meant to the Asian American community.

“38 at the Garden,” streaming on HBO Max, chronicles that special season, culminating at a Feb. 10, 2012, game against the Los Angeles Lakers when Lin scored a remarkable 38 points. New York City was already in a frenzy about this unheralded player, and when Kobe Bryant stepped on the court at Madison Square Garden, it was total pandemonium. The L.A. Times caught up with Lin to talk about the film, how his career impacted the Asian American community and the Linsanity of it all.

Los Angeles Times: Why didn’t you initially want to participate in making this movie?

Jeremy Lin: I was trying to turn it down without taking the call. Luckily, I did take the call, because the CEO of our company that handles all my off-the-court stuff, she was adamant about me at least listening to their pitch. After listening to their pitch, the one thing we all agreed on was that this is going to be much bigger than just, you know, the stats, the game, the sport of basketball. This is going to be about humanity. This is going to be about what’s going on right now post-pandemic with the Asian violence that we’ve been seeing, about minorities and people who are fearing for their lives in this critical moment in history.

Ronny Chieng, Hasan Minhaj and former teammate Iman Shumpert. There are some characters in here. What was your reaction to seeing the film for the first time?

The first time I watched, it was the first screening at Tribeca Film Festival. And I was blown away. First off, I did not realize how funny it was going to be with the comedians, with the journalists and with my teammates because I went through Linsanity, but I went through Linsanity from my perspective. I was not reading everything that was being said out there. To see it from everyone else’s lens was really impactful. I didn’t realize it would be that funny. But No. 2, by the end of the movie, there’s a high percentage of people who watch this film and end up in tears. A lot of people are really emotional and a lot of people are thinking about themselves or thinking about society, but they’re definitely not thinking about basketball. They’re definitely not thinking about 38 points at MSG. They’re thinking about something much bigger than that. And that’s what I was blown away with, how they were able to tie it all together.

It was interesting to see how the film analyzed basketball moves you made on the court, like the wave off and how it displayed courage for an Asian man to take control in that situation. What did you think about the deeper meanings in terms of the Asian community?

(For the uninitiated: A wave off is when a player signals for his teammates to clear out so he can go one-on-one against his defender. Essentially, “I got this.” Lin famously waved off his Knicks teammates and hit a game-winning shot against the Raptors on Feb. 14, 2012.) The biggest one is the wave off. And I think that I was not conscious of it in the moment with 12 seconds left on the clock. I wasn’t thinking all these things. I wasn’t thinking, like, waving them off and what that might mean to the next generation. I was trying to win the game and I was so in the moment. But it wasn’t until after hearing how Hasan [Minhaj] was able to break it down, I was like, “You know what? That is true.” I really unapologetically took up my space and elevated myself to do something that I knew I was supposed to do and knew I had the capabilities of doing. And as great as that moment was, there were many times, even after that moment, when I reverted and I did not wave people off. And I think that is the immigrant experience. That is the minority experience. It is not a one-time decision to wave somebody off and do what you know you’re capable of. It is a daily decision. Some days you’ll get it right, some days you won’t.

Is there a moment you can think of where you didn’t wave someone off?

Yeah, for sure. Even after that Linsanity stretch, there were times. Going to Houston when Houston really wanted to elevate me, put me on all the billboards, be in all the commercials, and they wanted to just



Lin in a scene from “38 at the Garden.”

make me the guy. And I was shying away from it because I’m not a spotlight type of guy and I want to be just like everybody else and all my other teammates. I don’t want to be just like a megastar who is untouchable. And that’s fine in some aspects of it, but in other aspects, it kind of carried over onto the court and I deferred too much. I accepted blame for things that weren’t even my fault. I continued to hold myself small and to kind of take a smaller role while other people who were more aggressive and assertive were able to eventually take on a bigger role.

How do you feel Linsanity and the film can help others moving forward?

Now 10 years removed and having seen “38 at the Garden,” my relationship with Linsanity is definitely trending up. It is not something that I try to run away from, but it is something as a badge of honor that I’m very proud of. And I think that the one thing that I really want to do now is kind of what “38” is doing. ... I want to tell this story in ways that encourage the next generation of people. There’s a few amazing things when people watch it, especially at the screenings, and they give a lot of feedback and they come and talk to us. There’s one person who was like, “Oh, I watched the movie, and then the next day I asked for a promotion and then three months later I got it.” And there’s other people who talk about different things that they need to do, obstacles that they need to overcome, or ways that they need to not hold themselves small.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Shared DNA

Dead Space legacy lives on in clever remake and in The Callisto Protocol

BY GIESON CACHO
Bay Area News Group

It must be a strange time for Glen Schofield. The video game designer recently returned to the survival-horror genre with the release of The Callisto Protocol, and Electronic Arts, his former employer, just launched a remake of Dead Space, a project that helped define his career. In effect, his past and present are facing off, as the two games have come out within weeks of each other.

Both owe a huge debt to the 2008 original, which sets the mood and style of both new projects. The Callisto Protocol and the Dead Space remake both focus on mysterious outbreaks, in which humans, or their remains, metamorphize into horrific creatures. And they both star heroes who aren't the typical space soldiers.

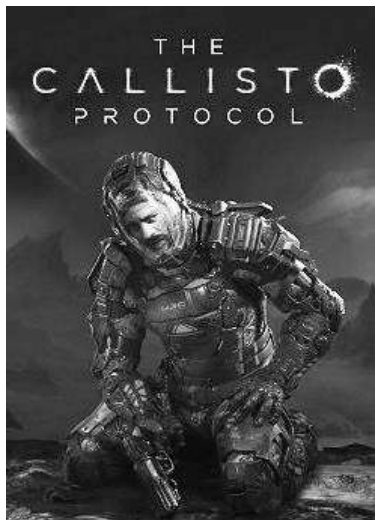
In The Callisto Protocol, Jacob Lee, played by Josh Duhamel, is a pilot who is wrongly imprisoned on Jupiter's moon Callisto; Dead Space stars Isaac Clarke, voiced by Gunner Wright. He's an engineer on a repair team sent to the USG Ishimura. These backgrounds give each protagonist an everyman quality. At first glance, they appear like regular people who fall prey to a catastrophe bigger than themselves.

A spiritual successor

Although the DNA of both games is similar, The Callisto Protocol establishes its own identity. Part of that comes from the melee-heavy combat system. Players quickly learn that the Biophage creatures are tough and can overwhelm Jacob. That means they'll have to ambush adversaries by shivving them with stealth attacks. If that tack fails in close quarters, players will have to dodge attacks and counter with swings from a Stun Baton before following up the attacks with a firearm. Players also have a telekinetic power through a device called the Gravity Restraint Projector. With it, players can grab enemies and slam them on spikes or against each other.

For the most part, that combat system works, but the one big problem that hamstringing The Callisto Protocol is Jacob's movement. He's agonizingly slow and the fact that the developer, Striking Distance Studios, doesn't include a quick turn makes exploration burdensome at times.

As in other survival-horror



games, resource management is huge. Players will have to conserve ammo and find efficient ways to eliminate creatures. Upgrading weapons and abilities help on that front, but to gather enough funds, players will need to sell contraband found around Callisto's Black Iron Prison.

Another thing that separates The Callisto Protocol from Dead Space is the visual element. It's a better-looking game that's helped by the performances of the actors and the Unreal Engine that makes the visuals pop.

The campaign's structure is linear, and that actually hurts the storytelling as Striking Distance Studios has to constantly find ways to move the action forward and separate Jacob from the allies he meets along the way. When that happens for the third time, it becomes a narrative device that's redundant. One can only fall through the floor so many times. Despite its flaws, The Callisto Protocol feels like a new if imperfect take in a niche that Schofield pioneered.

A classic gets better

When it comes to the Dead Space remake, EA makes a classic even better. The developers at



ELECTRONIC ARTS/TNS

The Dead Space remake improves on the classic survival-horror game in several facets including in the voicing of its protagonist, Isaac Clarke, by Gunner Wright.



Striking Distance Studios

The Callisto Protocol has some issues with movement, but is a better-looking game than Dead Space.

Motive made several smart decisions to augment an already strong campaign. One of the bigger changes is that the protagonist, Isaac Clarke, is voiced, while in the original he was silent.

That decision bolsters other tweaks to Dead Space. With the presence of Zach Hammond and Kendra Daniels, the remnants of his repair crew, Clarke feels less alone as he explores the derelict planet-cracker ship the USG Ishimura. He also comes face to face with the Unitarians, a fanatical church whose members believe they have discovered an artifact called the Marker that's key to their religion.

Unfortunately, that alien device messes with the human psyche and turns the dead into creatures called Necromorphs. Clarke faces more human villains in addition to the monsters lurking in the ship's vents and hallways. It gives a memorable

face to evil on board and adds more depth to the narrative as it lays the foundation for possible future games. Dead Space kicks off a trilogy of horror titles.

The big difference between The Callisto Protocol and the Dead Space remake lies in the latter's structure. Having Clarke explore a ship full of Necromorphs, fixing each of its sections and uncovering its mysteries, lends itself well to the survival-horror genre. It gives players a better sense of exploration and place: The protagonist opens up more of the ship by making necessary repairs.

As for the combat, it remains largely untouched from the original. Players have to strategically dismember the monsters in order to stop them, and again, doing that efficiently is key because resources are limited in the adventure. Players will claim favorite weapons, but each of them, and their alternate firing modes,

have their uses. Despite the number of options, it's best for players to stick with a few in order to power them up fully.

In the end, the Dead Space remake works because it doesn't slavishly follow the original. Developer Motive Studio rethought key moments and how it distributed some weapons and tools in order to create a more cohesive experience. The original wasn't perfect, and the team pinpointed the flaws in a great game so that the remake can reach new heights.

The Callisto Protocol
Platforms: PlayStation 5, PlayStation 4, Xbox Series X and Series S, Xbox One, PC
Online: callisto.sds.com

Dead Space
Platforms: PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X and Series S, PC
Online: ea.com/games/dead-space

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

'London by the Sea': Brighton has sun, fun

Brighton is South England's fun city and the destination for students, bohemians and blue-collar Londoners looking to go "on holiday." In 1840, a train connected the city to London, making the beach accessible to the masses for the first time. Since then, Brighton has become "London by the Sea." Whether wind, rain or shine, it's where people come for a good time — and a fine toffee apple. And though the town has grown a little shabby, Brighton still knows how to crank out the fun.

The Royal Pavilion, once the holiday residence of King George IV, is one of Brighton's most eye-catching landmarks. And a visit here comes with a little gossip. The decadent and trendsetting king was well-known for his scandalous "secret" marriage to Catholic widow Mrs. Fitzherbert. He loved to vacation with her here by the sea and host glamorous dinner parties. Along with Mrs. Fitzherbert, music was one of his passions. In the music room, the king's own band serenaded guests under Chinese-inspired decor. The king's other passion: food. The table in the banquet room is set for the dessert course. It's easy to picture England's elite nibbling crumpets under the one-ton chandelier.

The Palace Pier juts playfully into the sea. Glittering and shiny with amusement-park rides and carnival games, it's the

place to go to buy tacky souvenirs, have your fortune told and eat "candy floss" (cotton candy). The pier's pavilion is a 19th-century gem. I like to tune out the carnival ambiance for a moment and imagine myself as a Victorian Londoner out on holiday, seeing brilliant electric lights for the first time.



Rick Steves

Newer to the scene is the i360, a beachfront observation tower with a doughnut-like elevator that lifts tourists to a bird's-eye view over town. While views of Brighton won't knock anyone's socks off, the tower is a fun, modern addition to the cityscape.

Then, of course, there's the beach. While Brighton isn't likely to be confused with Spain's Costa del Sol, a stroll along its gravelly beach offers a pleasant opportunity to get your feet wet. And slingback beach chairs along the promenade are available to rent.

The countryside around Brighton offers less tacky and more pristine nature. Stretching east of Brighton is a coastline fringed with broad, rolling green "downs" (hills). The path through this area, known as the South Downs Way, runs for 100 miles along the chalk hills of England's south coast, and in 2010 the South Downs



LAUREN MILLS/Rick Steves' Europe

Brighton's Royal Pavilion was mainly used as a party pad to entertain guests.

became the country's 10th national park. The highlight of the South Downs Way, Beachy Head, has white cliffs that are often mistaken for Dover's. It's the same chalk, just farther west along the coast.

Locals consider these trails a birthright. English hiking clubs have even sponsored what they call a "Mass Trespass," when walkers throughout the land use every trail and cross every fence to assert their public right of way. "Kissing gates" allow people to pass — but not the sheep.

Arundel Castle, west of Brighton, is the home of the Duke of Norfolk. This Neo-Gothic creation of the late 19th-century has straight-out-of-a-storybook appeal — gorgeous interiors and delightful gardens, particularly the Earl's Garden, based on

17th-century designs.

In the 1930s, a local farmer found the remains of a Roman palace on his land. Wary of archaeologists, he didn't disclose his find until 1960. The ensuing excavation turned up Fishbourne Roman Palace, about an hour west of Brighton. The highlight here are the well-preserved floor mosaics, nearly 2,000 years old and still in their original location.

When you're done with the must-see sights, relax in Brighton. While most English cities keep their stiff upper lip, Brighton knows how to let loose, just as it has for the past two centuries.

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

Carnival parades back in force throughout much of Germany

Throughout much of Germany, the time of year most closely associated with festive parades is the climax of Carnival, and throughout the weekend and into Tuesday, there will be dozens of them to choose from. Following two years of COVID-19-related cancellations, revelers are anticipated to return to the streets in full force. Children will be hoping for front-row spots, a definite advantage when scrambling to grab hold of the candies and trinkets tossed their way.



Karen Bradbury

While those put off by crowds may wish to steer well clear of carnival festivities, particularly those typically seen in the three carnival stronghold cities of Cologne, Dusseldorf and Mainz, others may wish to brave the crush of humanity. Parades are generally free to watch, although at some of them, the purchase of a pin or souvenir helps the carnival organizers defray costs. Tribune seating is reserved for ticket-holders.

Here are the dates and start times of various parades slated to take place near U.S. military communities.

Parades on Sunday, Feb. 19

Aschaffenburg: The Carnival parade in Aschaffenburg starts at 2 p.m. and continues for approximately two hours. The procession is somewhat influenced by the traditions of Mainz, whose archbishops and electors held power in the city for more than 700 years.

Frankfurt: Frankfurt's parade gets underway at 12:21 p.m. From its start point at Untermainkai near the Main River, it makes its way past the beautiful square of gabled houses known as the Römerberg.

Nuremberg: The "Fastnachtzug" gets going at 1 p.m. The starting point is the City Park on Bayreuther Strasse, from where it follows the route Rathenauplatz, Laufer Tor, Schlagturm, Laufer Gasse, Theresienplatz, There-



iStock

Carnival revelers, such as this parade participant in Wiesbaden, will take to the streets and sidewalks throughout Germany in coming days.

sienstrasse, Fünferplatz, Obstmarkt, Spitalgasse, Museumsbrücke, Königstrasse, Kaiserstrasse, Josephsplatz, Vordere Ledergasse and ends at Saturn.

Wiesbaden: The city's traditional parade starts at 12:11 p.m. from Friedrich-Ebert-Allee and makes its way down Wilhelmstrasse and through the city center to Bleichstrasse before entering onto the Ring Road and making its way back to its starting point.

Würzburg: The largest Carnival procession in Bavaria starts at 11:55 a.m. from Semmelstrasse in the Hauger district of the old town, from which it makes its way along Textorstrasse, Haugerpfarrgasse, Obere Juliuspromenade, Dominikanerplatz, Schönbornstrasse, Kürschnerhof, Domstrasse, Augustinerstrasse, Sanderstrasse and Sanderring. Some 120 groups with around 3,500 marchers will take part in a parade that typically attracts 80,000 or more spectators.

Parades on Rose Monday, Feb. 20

Aachen: The parade gets going at 11:11 a.m. from Adalbertsteinweg, from which it weaves its way down Wilhelmstrasse along a route that eventually ends at Tempelgraben. Some 220,000 spectators turned out for the 2020 edition of the parade.

Cologne: This Carnival celebrates its 200th anniversary this year, and the parade will cross over the Rhine River for the first time. Germany's largest Carnival procession starts at 10 a.m. from the Deutz train station and makes its way toward the Old Town, past the cathedral, over the Ring road down Severinstrasse toward Chlodwigplatz.

Düsseldorf: A massive parade made up of 85 groups on foot, 30 brass bands and 110 floats begins at noon. The parade, Germany's second-longest, stretches for nearly two miles. Some of the major streets it passes include Berliner Allee, Bahnstrasse, Königsallee, Burgplatz, Marktplatz and Bilker Strasse.

Mainz: The nearly four-mile-long parade made up of floats, brass bands, costumed flag-wavers and the "Schwellköppen" figures with their massive heads marches forward at 11:11 a.m. From 4:11 p.m., street parties take place on Ludwigsstrasse and at Schillerplatz.

Saarbrücken-Burbach: The parade begins at 1:11 p.m. from the Bürgerhaus Rockershausen and passes along Luisenthalerstrasse and Bergstrasse before ending at Burbacher Stern.

Parades on Tuesday, Feb. 21

Karlsruhe: The parade sets off at 2:11 p.m. and ends with the symbolic burning of Carnival at the Town Hall.

Stuttgart: A parade takes place in the inner city from 2 p.m.-5 p.m., followed by a party at Karlsplatz.

Zweibrücken: The Carnival parade gets rolling at 2:11 p.m., following a route along Saarlandstrasse, Landauer Strasse, Alte Ixheimer Strasse, Lützelstrasse, Fruchtmarktstrasse and the ZOB station.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Experience Spain without crowds

Logroño, the capital of La Rioja, a hidden gem valued for its food, wine, hospitality

BY DAVID FARLEY

Special to *The Washington Post*

There have long been two main reasons people come to La Rioja, the diminutive region in northeastern Spain. First, to drink the top-notch tempranillos and garnachas produced in an area celebrated for red wine. The second is that the capital city, Logroño, is a common overnight stop along the 500-mile Camino de Santiago. This city of 150,000 denizens boasts one thing that is much harder to find in Spain's tourist centers of Barcelona, Madrid and Seville: scarcity of fellow travelers. Adventure-seekers will have the warren of narrow streets in the Old Town practically to themselves. When I first met the woman who would become my wife, she told me she was from Logroño. I had to confess that despite a handful of trips to Spain, I'd never even heard of it. Now after several visits, this city is one of my favorite places in the country, not just because my in-laws live there, but because it's been blossoming with memorable restaurants, bars and hotels that have opened in the past five years. If you want to have a less-touristy trip in Spain, here's how to make the most of Logroño:

Wine

A legion of wineries and their vineyards blanket the low-rolling hills throughout La Rioja. Within the Logroño city limits, there are eight wineries that have tasting rooms and production centers, most of which welcome guests to sample and buy the fruits of their labor.

Arizcuren is a small family-run winery whose bottles are frequently found in bars and restaurants around town — as well as

in some of the highest-rated restaurants in Spain. A 90-minute tour (\$34) comes with four generous samples of wine, snacks and olive oil tastings.

Bodegas Franco Españoles, on the other hand, is a huge complex across the Ebro River from the city center that's been making wine here since 1890. Tours last up to 90 minutes, cost about \$19 and include wine samples and snacks. Hemingway visited the winery a couple of times and liked the wines enough to praise



PHOTOS BY IVANA LARROSA/For The Washington Post

Third-generation owner and CEO Borja Eguizabal serves wine samples and snacks at Franco Españoles.

them in his book on bullfighting, "Death in the Afternoon."

Pinchos

In the compact medieval center of town, a few famous, narrow pedestrian streets are flanked by bars serving pinchos — or pintos, as they're more popularly written in neighboring Basque country — the regional word for small-portioned dishes with big flavor.

Calle Laurel runs about the length of two football fields and is about 8 feet wide. Nearly every humble storefront, as well as the side streets, are occupied by narrow bars serving small plates. Locals spill out into the street sipping a glass of Rioja — \$1 to \$3, depending on the quality — while grazing on classic and contemporary pinchos.

Nearby, Calle San Juan is similarly lined with pincho bars. Some on Laurel and San Juan focus on only one item — such as the crispy pig ear sandwich at Bar El Perchas, the fried potatoes smothered in a spicy mayo sauce (aka patatas bravas) at Bar Jubera or the excellent runny egg tortilla at Bar Sebas, all of which have been open for at least 50 years.

You'll find more modern takes at some places, like at Tastavin, where you can get a seared scallop wading in a shallow pool of truffle-speckled potato puree; a filo-wrapped, fork-tender oxtail paired with a homemade fig jam; and a terrine of pig ear and blood sausage, all for the equivalent of just a few dollars each.

Modern fusion

In the past five years a small handful of restaurants have fired up their burners, serving up creative takes on Rioja staples. Best of all, because Logroño doesn't get the foodie attention

that, say, San Sebastian or Barcelona might, you can have a much more affordable fine dining experience here — and without having to make reservations months in advance.

Logroño has long been a town fixed on traditional northern Spanish fare, but the fact that it now has three Michelin-starred restaurants, two of which are serving up a fusion of culinary cultures, says a lot about how much the dining scene has progressed.

At Ikaro, Ecuadorian-born chef Carolina Sánchez and Iñaki Murua, her husband, combine Basque and Ecuadorian cuisine with a pork tail terrine paired with guava and spicy choricerio pepper mole.

Just a few blocks away at Ajonegro, local chef Gonzalo Baquedano and his wife Mariana Sánchez, a Mexican native, draw from the cuisines of their homelands. When I dined here, I loved the al pastor taco sprinkled with a sauce made from caparrones, a bean featured in a typical winter stew in Rioja.

"There is now a generation of chefs ... who have traveled around the world and eaten or worked at great restaurants and then returned home to Logroño inspired to do something here," said chef Oscar Torres Martinez, referencing colleagues at Ikaro, Ajonegro and restaurant Juan Carlos Ferrando.

At La Chispa Adecuada, Torres Martinez takes inspiration from his own travels to incorporate ingredients like kimchi and Thai chiles into classic Rioja recipes.

If there's room for dessert, stop by Della Sera, a 20-year-old ice cream shop where Fernando Sáenz turns scents — such as fig leaves or the fennel, straw and fenugreek that you might pick up while walking the nearby Camino

de Santiago — into ice cream flavors.

'Surprising beauty'

Logroño has its fair share of cultural diversions, including the Museo de la Rioja, a centrally located museum dedicated to the history of this region; a Gothic cathedral that boasts a painting attributed to Michelangelo; shopping along the wide boulevard Gran Via Juan Carlos I; and contemporary art at the galleries Sala Amós Salvador and the Museo Würth La Rioja.

While it borders on sappy tourist brochure cliché, the biggest draw — in addition to the food and wine — is the friendliness and hospitality of the locals.

Ana Molina, a product designer and Madrid-based friend, said it best when she told me she loves Logroño because it encapsulates various parts of Spain: It's located in the north, but the people are friendly like in the south, and no one is particularly concerned with where people are from (like in Madrid).

"Here they just accept you for who you are," she said.

Pablo Hermoso de Mendoza, the 51-year-old mayor of Logroño, expanded on the town's "elevated sense of hospitality" when he led me on a walking tour.

"We owe part of that to the Camino," he said. "For eight months out of the year, we get a steady stream of pilgrims visiting us, and we've learned to be very welcoming and hospitable because of this."

As we parted ways, the mayor told me that Spanish philosopher Javier Gomá visited Logroño three months earlier and had this to say about the city: "Logroño has a surprising beauty. You can find that beauty everywhere here in ordinary and surprising encounters with people."



Matrimonio riojano, or "Riojan marriage," an interpretation of a traditional pincho made of green pepper and anchovy, at Ikaro.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



“SHIFT, AI and a future community,” the name of a new exhibition at the Kunstmuseum in Stuttgart, is focused on the implications of artificial intelligence in social life. At left, a robotic doll made to resemble artist Louisa Clement.

PHOTOS BY JOHN VANDIVER/Stars and Stripes

New exhibit at the Kunstmuseum in Stuttgart takes visitors on a timely tour of AI, encouraging them to consider the technology's future implications

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The latest exhibit to hit one of Stuttgart's biggest downtown art museums couldn't be timelier.

In recent weeks, the public launch of artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT has taken much of the world by storm with its conversational ability and capacity to churn out everything from speeches to college term papers and presentations. While nothing new — AI in some form dates back to the 1950s — it's increasingly on the minds of many.

Enter the Kunstmuseum in Stuttgart and its newest exhibit “SHIFT, AI and a future community,” which imagines some of the implications of artificial intelligence for society.

The museum says the exhibit emphasizes the notion “that digital technology is permanently changing the idea of a community in which humans, nature and technology form a cooperative relationship.”

Much of it went over my head, but some of the art was fun to take in nonetheless. The exhibit takes up three floors and can be navigated in about one hour if you aren't in a rush.

One of the highlights for me was a short 3D film based on the idea that legendary German actress Marlene Dietrich was brought back using the DNA of a strand of hair that was put up for auction.

The dialogue in the film relies on an AI program that produces text by mimicking normal human speech patterns.

The underlying aim of the film seems to be to get view-

On the QT

Address: Kleiner Schlossplatz 1, Stuttgart, Germany
Hours: Tuesday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; on Friday, the museum is open until 9 p.m.; closed Monday
Cost: 11 euros for the exhibit and the rest of the museum collection.
Information: Online: kunstmuseum-stuttgart.de

John Vandiver

ers to contemplate whether technical possibilities are in conflict with whatever it means to be truly human. Or something like that. Regardless, it was fun to look at.

Other eye-catchers include a robotic creation by artist Louisa Clement, who made a doll that resembles her. The machine is loaded with personal information about the artist, allowing it to impersonate her.

In all, there are about eight displays. All of them are somewhat weird. And a couple take on the obligatory fear of a dystopian future in which humans are on the sidelines.

“Amazonian flesh, how to hang in trees during a strike,” is a jungle-like contraption of cables that allow a visitor to sit around and do nothing. The idea, apparently a commentary on Amazon the company, seems to be that wage labor is on the way out while bots take over everything.

Housed inside the landmark glass cube building in the center of downtown, the museum has lots of other art on



One of the displays in the exhibit is a 3D film based on the idea of re-creating the legendary German actress Marlene Dietrich using the DNA of a strand of her hair that was put up for auction.

permanent display in addition to shorter-term special exhibits such as “SHIFT,” which runs until May 21.

If AI isn't your thing, the museum is still worth dropping by for its permanent collection, which features lots of paintings by 20th century German painter Otto Dix, famous for creations focused on the gritty underbelly of street life.

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WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Indulge your sweet tooth in Naples

An assortment of pastry shops serve blissful sfogliatelle

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Naples is renowned for its pizza, pasta and seafood.

Perhaps not as well-known is that the city is home to many pasticcerie, or pastry shops, offering a variety of signature Neapolitan sweets such as rum baba; torta caprese, or chocolate cake; and sfogliatelle.

Don't try to pronounce that last one. Just head down to La Sfogliatella Mary in Naples' Quartieri Spagnoli neighborhood for some of the best of this crispy, cheesy treat.

Sfogliatelle are palm-sized pastries traditionally filled with a ricotta cheese mixture flavored with citrus and spices.

There are two variations. Riccia, or curly, features a seashell-shaped outer crust of very thin pastry layers sort of like those in baklava. Frolla is round and made with a shortbread, or a crumbly biscuitlike crust.

If you like crunch, get riccia. Frolla is better if you prefer a softer, cookie-type experience.

The first version of what is known today as a sfogliatella was invented in the late 1600s by a nun at the Santa Rosa Monastery on the Amalfi Coast near Salerno, according to the website Authentic Amalfi Coast.

About 150 years later, the recipe somehow was acquired by Naples pastry chef Pasquale Pintauro, who modified it and began baking it at his shop on Via Toledo in Naples, the website states. You can still buy them there today.

Since then, pastry shops across the region have been baking the treat and enhancing the ricotta filling with different flavorings, such as pistachio, lemon or chocolate.

In my recent quest to find the best sfogliatella in Naples, I visited Pintauro, La Sfogliatella Mary, Pasticceria Salvatore Variabile, Cuori di Sfogliatella and SfogliateLab. All of them were featured on various online foodie and travel websites.

Two other shops on the list, Antica Pasticceria Carraturo and Antica Forno della sfogliatelle calde F.lli Attansio, were closed on the Wednesday I visited.

During my trip to La Sfogliatella Mary, I ordered a traditional riccia for 2 euros.

The shop also offers frolla, but I like the curly, crisp layers of



PHOTOS BY ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

A cross-section of a riccia sfogliatella from La Sfogliatella Mary in Naples shows the rich, creamy ricotta cheese filling inside. The palm-sized pastries are traditionally filled with a ricotta mixture flavored with citrus and spices.



This cross-section of a frolla sfogliatella from Cuorie di Sfogliatella near Naples' central train station shows the ricotta filling and shortbread crust. Cuorie sells the traditional treats for about 1.80 euros each.

the labor-intensive riccia.

The pastry arrived hot, topped with powdered sugar and wrapped in a paper napkin. Sfogliatella, like most Naples street food, is made to be eaten on the go and best served warm.

Perfectly baked, the crust was flaky and crunchy, offering a nice balance to the creamy ricotta filling studded with candied orange.

It was easy to see why the popular pastry shop, located in a vestibule of the Galleria Umberto I shopping mall adjacent to Via Toledo, often has a long line.

This sfogliatella — rich, warm and satisfying — was the best I had eaten all day, edging out an almost equally good offering by Pintauro.

The birthplace of modern-day



La Sfogliatella Mary

Address: Galleria Principe Umberto 66, Naples, Italy

Hours: 8 a.m.-8:30 p.m., Tuesday-Sunday; closed on Mondays

Cost: 2 euros; other pastries, such as baba, also available

Information: +39 081402218; facebook.com/lasfogliatellamaryofficial

Pintauro

Address: Via Toledo 275, Naples

Hours: 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m., Wednesday-Monday; closed Tuesday

Price: 3 euros, also sells other pastries.

Information: +39 3487781645

Alison Bath

sfogliatelle was right up there with my other favorite, but I give Mary's the edge on the strength of its slightly more flavorful ricotta cheese filling and the warmth of the pastry served to me.

Both were far superior to the sfogliatelle from the other three shops, which offered paler, blander, room-temperature versions that just didn't measure up.

For example, the sfogliatelle from Pasticceria Salvatore Variabile weren't warm, and while



Cuorie di Sfogliatella near Naples' central train station sells a variety of sfogliatella in riccia and frolla versions. Flavorings run the gamut from lemon, chocolate and pistachio to savory versions with salami and cheese or tomato and basil.

the crust in both the riccia and frolla versions was OK, the filling was inferior.

However, the pastry shop, located in Naples' fashionable Chiaia neighborhood, sells a variety of other baked goods along with espresso. It also has indoor and outdoor seating, a rarity among hardcore, to-go sfogliatelle shops.

Cuori di Sfogliatella and SfogliateLab also have seating and are near the central train station. Each offered passable sfoglia-

telle, but again, a lack of warmth and bland flavoring made them less than memorable.

These shops do offer an assortment of flavorings, though, including savory versions.

Not all sfogliatelle are equal. So make Pasquale happy and resist the temptation to try those pretty or trendy versions.

Instead, head to Mary's or Pintauro's for the best of what Naples has to offer.

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WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY CHRISSY YATES/Stars and Stripes

The inspiration behind artist Yayoi Kusama's trademark polka dots are hallucinations she has had since childhood. You can experience something akin to that in "I'm Here, but Nothing," an immersive, kaleidoscopic installation on the fourth floor of her museum in Tokyo.

Spot-on trend

Yayoi Kusama museum's latest exhibition features the artist's trademark polka dots

By CHRISSY YATES
Stars and Stripes

In 2021, a typhoon damaged the famous yellow polka-dotted pumpkin on the end of a pier in Naoshima, but you can still see plenty of new and old works by the pumpkin's world-renowned creator, Yayoi Kusama, at her museum in central Tokyo.

The current exhibition, "Every Day I Pray for Love," is described by the Yayoi Kusama Museum's website as also belonging to the title of several artworks along with the accompanying poems, and then the title of a new series, which Kusama is currently devoting herself to creating.

While her iconic polka-dotted pumpkins and immersive mirror rooms are missing from this exhibition, there is still plenty to see. Upon entering the museum in Tokyo's Shinjuku ward, you will encounter a cluster of bright pink inflated balls with black polka dots. This is the installation work "Dots Obsession" (1996/2022).

Despite being in her early 90s, Kusama is still creating new works, and some pieces from 2020 and 2021 have been added to the third floor's large-scale series of acrylic paintings, "My Eternal Soul," which she started in 2009.

The inspiration behind her

trademark polka dots are hallucinations she has had since she was a child. You can experience something akin to that in "I'm Here, but Nothing," an immersive, kaleidoscopic installation on the fourth floor. Photography is allowed but be quick as you get only two minutes inside the UV-lit room that is covered from floor to ceiling in colorful, coin-sized fluorescent polka dots.

I spent the most time in the top floor's library area where a variety of books (available in Japanese and English for both children and adults) gave me more background about the stages of Kusama's life and how the art in the rooms below coordinated with those stages.

The museum is a bit small. Winding my way up to the five tentacled metallic sculptures on the sunlit roof took less than 45 minutes. Kusama's immersive infinity rooms inspired but were spoiled for me by larger experiences like teamLab Borderless. Perhaps it's a bit like how some modern listeners can't appreciate the influence of The Beatles in today's pop music.

While most museums have you exit via the gift shop, the items on sale here all fit on a single disappointing display by the reception desk. Many seemed overpriced, and I've seen a better selection of Kusama items at various souvenir shops around



Upon entering the Yayoi Kusama Museum in Tokyo, you will encounter "Dots Obsession," a cluster of bright pink inflated balls with black polka dots.

On the QT

Location: 107 Benteicho, Shinjuku, Tokyo 162-0851

Directions: An 8-minute walk from Tokyo Metro's Waseda Station's Exit 1 on the Tozai Line; A 5-minute walk from Ushigome-yanagicho Station on the Toei Oedo Line

Hours: Open 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Thursdays to Sundays and Japanese national holidays. Last entry at 4:30 p.m. There's a 90-minute timed entry.

Cost: 1,100 yen, adults; 600 yen, ages 6 to 18; younger than 6 is free.

Information: Online: yayoikusama-museum.jp/en/home

Chrissy Yates

central Tokyo. A pack of three postcards cost about \$8 and 10 rolled cookies in a collectible tin were about \$10.

For kids, the reception desk has a printed worksheet to guide younger visitors through Kusama's life and the works on display.



Winding your way up to the five-tentacled metallic sculptures on the roof of the Yayoi Kusama Museum should take less than 45 minutes.

That said, I'm not sure if I'd call the place family friendly. Strollers must be checked at the front desk. And at peak times, elevator access to every floor could be a wait as guests are instructed to use the elevator and not the stairs to descend from the

higher floors of the museum.

This exhibit closes on Feb. 26, but the next exhibition should open in late April. Perhaps the iconic immersive room with the glowing pumpkins will return.

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WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Baguette bounty

Kon's Burger serves up authentic Vietnamese banh mi on Okinawa

By FRANK ANDREWS
Stars and Stripes

Kon's Burger is a tiny café that serves Vietnamese-style sandwiches, fresh juice, tea and coffee near Okinawa's capital city.

Despite the name, the café specializes in the banh mi, a popular Vietnamese sandwich, and not beefy burgers. The classic banh mi is a crusty French baguette filled with a combination of meats, veggies and topped with sauce.

Kon's Burger offers five banh mi sandwiches: vegetarian, egg, pork, beef, or the special banh mi that is a combination, all stuffed with a mix of bright green coriander leaves, pickled onion and crunchy cucumber strips, topped with a sweet orange sauce.

The sandwich's perfect, crusty submarine-like rolls are freshly baked every morning, according to the shop's Instagram. Each month, Kon's Burger offers a special sandwich; January's flavor was shrimp avocado and beginning next Tuesday, February's special is Xiu mai banh mi, which is meatballs stewed in tomato sauce, according to the owner's Instagram page.

The banh mi are served hot and range from 450 yen (about \$3.45) to 750 yen. The café also



AFTER HOURS
OKINAWA

offers five freshly made iced drinks: Vietnam coffee, Vietnam au lait, lemongrass orange tea, yakuzen tea and ginger ale tea (350 yen each). You can also get the yakuzen tea and coffee served hot.

I stopped in on a Saturday evening and ordered two banh mi sandwiches: the special banh mi and the hamburger banh mi with a chilled lemongrass orange tea. My order arrived within seven minutes and the first thing that caught my attention was the fresh aroma of the Vietnamese-style veggies and mouthwatering meats.

Each bite began with a delightful crunch from the warm bread accompanied by a fresh taste from the herby veggie mix and well-seasoned meat filling. The lemongrass tea was lightly sweetened and refreshing.

While there are three tables inside the café, an employee said most customers order their sandwiches to go.

Kon's Burger, run by Chef Cong from Vietnam, according to the café's Instagram bio, some-



FRANK ANDREWS/Stars and Stripes

Despite the name, Kon's Burger on Okinawa specializes in the banh mi, a popular Vietnamese sandwich.

times offers specialty dishes, including fresh shrimp spring rolls, fried spring rolls and yakimiku salad.

The café has a small section with a few Vietnamese grocery items such as instant noodle packets, rice vermicelli and nam ngu fish sauce. There is no dedicated parking, but I found plenty of street parking near the storefront.

Kon's Burger has two restaurants — the storefront, where I ate, and their food truck. Both menus are the same, yet the food truck serves only large sizes and does not serve the restaurant's

specials. Both are open until the food sells out, so it may be best to call ahead if you plan to eat there later in the day. Check out Kon Burger's calendar on their Instagram page to see when they're open.

A female staff member spoke just enough English to help me place my order, and the menu is written in both Japanese and English.

Stars and Stripes reporter Keishi Koja contributed to this report.

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Kon's Burger

Restaurant address: 2-36-13 Nishizaki, Itoman City, Okinawa 901-0305

Restaurant hours: Open Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. until items are sold out. Closed Mondays and holidays.

Food truck address: JA Toyosaki nanairo batake, 3-86 Toyosaki, Tomishiro City

Food truck hours: Opens at 11:30 a.m. and closes when it's sold out, or until 5 p.m.

Prices: Banh mi start at 450 yen.
Information: Phone: 080-649-45545; Online: instagram.com/konsburger

Frank Andrews



MILK STREET/AP

Rigatoni with Pistachio, Ricotta and Herb Pesto is quick and really delicious.

5-ingredient Sicilian pesto simple but fancy

By CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL
Associated Press

With Sicilian no-cook pesto, dinner will be ready in the time it takes to boil water and cook the pasta. Even better, this recipe calls for just five ingredients.

Though the most common pesto is the classic Genovese combination of basil and Parmesan, we loved a version we found in Sicily that also includes two of the island's premier products, pistachios and ricotta. We blend them all with chives, for additional freshness, while the pasta cooks until al dente. Incorporating a bit of the starchy pasta water helps thin the sauce and make it cling to the noodles.

Rigatoni with Pistachio, Ricotta and Herb Pesto

Start to finish: 25 minutes

Servings: 4 to 6

Ingredients

- 1 pound rigatoni or other short pasta
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 1½ cups whole-milk ricotta cheese
- ¾ cup raw pistachios, plus 2 tablespoons finely chopped pistachios
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 ounces Parmesan cheese (without rind), cut into 4 or 5 pieces
- ½ cup lightly packed fresh basil
- ¼ cup roughly chopped fresh chives

Directions

In a large pot, bring 4 quarts water to boil. Stir in the pasta and 1 tablespoon salt, then cook, stirring occasionally, until al dente. Reserve 1½ cups of the cooking water, then drain pasta and return to pot.

In a blender, combine the ricotta, the whole pistachios, oil, Parmesan, basil, chives, ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Add 1 cup of the reserved pasta water and blend until creamy, about 1 minute; the pesto should resemble yogurt.

Pour the pesto over the pasta and stir, adding more reserved pasta water as needed. Season with salt and pepper. Sprinkle with the chopped pistachios.

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WEEKEND: TRAVEL



DREAMSTIME/TNS

The Angkor Wat temple in Siem Reap, Cambodia, is the largest religious complex ever built in the history of the world — even bigger than the Vatican.



PIERRE JEAN DURIU, DREAMSTIME/TNS

Banteay Srei is a 10th century Cambodian temple dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva and located in the area of Angkor. It is known as the “temple of women.”

Channel your inner explorer in Cambodia

The exotic Southeast Asian country has mind-boggling ancient ruins but isn't a very expensive place to visit

BY MARLA JO FISHER
The Orange County Register

People tend to look at you funny when you say you're going to Cambodia, as if maybe you're a few fries short of a Happy Meal. After all, it's a small country that's really, really far from America, and most of what people remember about it involves wars and other bad stuff like the murderous Khmer Rouge. But I'm here to tell you that those days are long gone. The Khmer Rouge was only in power for four years in the 1970s, and, while its impacts can still be felt, today's Cambodia is a fabulous place to visit. Trust me. I just went there. Not only are there mind-boggling ancient ruins to explore, great food to eat, beautiful white sand beaches, mountains, forests, cheap massages and kind and friendly people everywhere, but it's really cheap for Americans, thanks to a strong exchange rate.

Did I mention that it's cheap? Cambodia does have its own currency, which is called riels, but there's 4,000 riels to the dollar, so most people just scratch their heads, give up and use dollars. So, yes, this is a country where you don't have to stand there, trying to do math in your head to figure out how much that smoothie will cost. And the answer is: Probably less than you'd expect.

Most people go to Cambodia to visit Angkor Wat, which is the slightly inaccurate name for the largest religious complex ever built in the history of the world. It's bigger than the Vatican. Crazy, right? Especially if you've never heard of it.

Because Angkor is so much more than just the “wat,” which means monastery and is the name of the largest structure there.

Angkor was an ancient city and the

headquarters of the Khmer Empire, which dominated much of Southeast Asia for some 600 years.

If you like history, you'll love this place. You can channel your inner Indiana Jones. If you saw the movie “Lara Croft: Tomb Raider,” you've already seen Angkor, because the incredible Ta Prohm temple, which is being slowly overtaken by massive strangler fig trees, features prominently in it.

If you like Thai food, you'll love this place, because Cambodian food has similar origins. If you like to save money, you'll love it, because — remember — it's cheap.

The remaining city of ancient Angkor today includes 80 ancient stone temples, the most famous of which is Angkor Wat.

SEE CAMBODIA ON PAGE 27

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Cambodia: Kulen, a sacred mountain, river, also worth a visit

FROM PAGE 26

Yes, I said 80 temples. Whew. And we're not even talking about the other structures.

Now, I admit that during our nine days there, we only made it to four of the temples, but they were spectacular to visit. Each was unique and unforgettable.

Angkor Wat is the most important tourist attraction in Cambodia and is even featured on the Cambodian flag. It's what is known as a "temple mountain," an architectural representation of Mount Meru, which is sacred in the Hindu religion. So, yes, there are a lot of stairs.

I'm not great at climbing stairs, so I didn't explore the interiors of all of them, but just getting up to the entrance alone is a spectacular feeling.

Most tourists stay in the attractive city of Siem Reap — just outside the archaeological zone — and that's where we based ourselves for nine days. I was worried that we'd be spending too much time in one place, but there were so many things to do in the area that we actually could have stayed longer.

By the way, Siem Reap is near the border with Thailand, so many people add it onto a trip to that fabulous country.

At one time, the Khmer Empire stretched far and wide, trading with India and China. The great temple complexes were originally Hindu, because that religion had found its way from India in the first century. Later, when most of the country became Buddhist, the temples were converted to Buddhist shrines.

So what if you want to visit?

Well, it's possible to "do" the most famous sites in Angkor in one day, but that would be a very long, grueling day spent traipsing from one temple to the next.

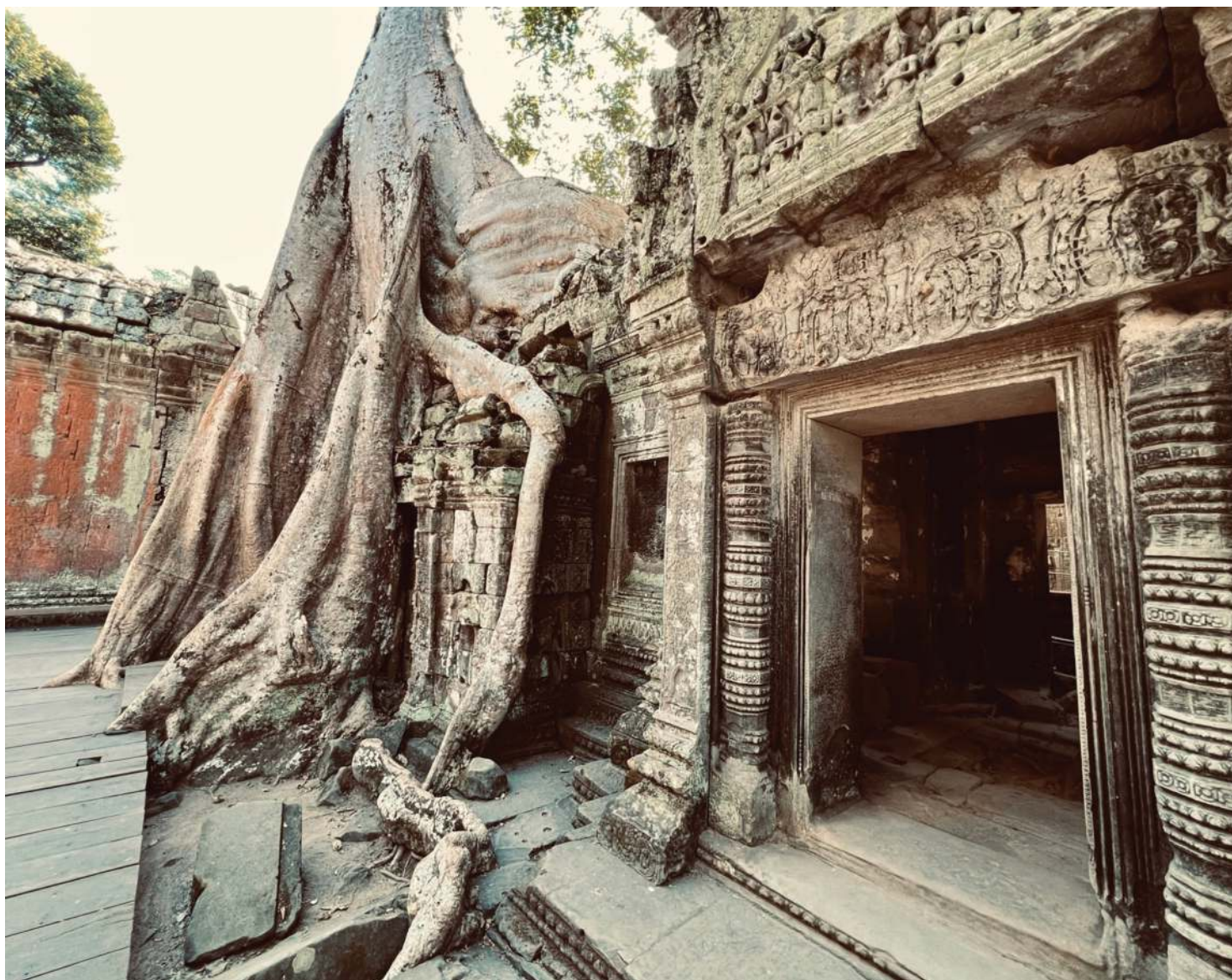
These days, I prefer a much more leisurely pace. I'm less interested in seeing everything, and more interested in enjoying what I see.

That's why on this trip we didn't even visit the capital city of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. Yes, there are plenty of attractions there, including a royal palace, boat cruises on the Mekong River and more. We spent our time loitering around Siem Reap instead, but for those feeling more ambitious, Phnom Penh is well worth a visit.

The Khmer Empire fell around the 13th century, and eventually the country was invaded and then colonized by other lands. The French took over around 1884, in addition to their leadership role in neighboring Vietnam.

This means that, today, there are crumbling examples of French architecture around the country. Sadly, most of them are in poor shape. It also means that the French had an influence on Cambodian cooking, as it did in Vietnam.

Cambodian cuisine is much older than Thai cooking, dating back to before Europeans began importing hot chiles that were originally discovered in Latin America. Unlike in Thai food, where the chiles



MARLA JO FISHER, THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE, SCNG/TNS

The Ta Prohm temple in the ancient Angkor complex of Angkor Thom, near Siem Reap, Cambodia. This temple is known as the "Lara Croft: Tomb Raider" temple. The Orange County Register's Marla Jo Fisher visited four of Angkor's 80 ancient stone temples.

are mixed into the dish, with Cambodian food the spicy condiments are on the side, so you can mix in as much or as little as you like.

And many people love to spend time at the beach resorts, which have become more accessible in recent years. Cambodia has a beautiful coastline off the Gulf of Thailand.

The islands off the coast of Sihanoukville offer crystal-clear waters and a laid-back vibe, still mostly developed only with small hotels and businesses. People come here to relax on the powdery white-sand beaches, snorkel and scuba dive, hike in the jungle and just generally decompress.

Kep is another popular beach resort, less developed than Sihanoukville. We didn't make it to those destinations either, even though they have a great reputation.

Instead, we devoted ourselves to the temples, to our hotel's beautiful swimming pool, to eating and to visiting sites on day trips from town.

I'd hired a private driver guide, Dara Lann, and he took us on an unforgettable trip to Kulen Mountain. This mountain is considered sacred and has a long history of worship, dating back to the animism that was practiced by the earliest humans.

It took about 90 minutes to get up the mountain — and cost us \$20 each to enter the area. Dara stopped first to show us the spectacular gorge beneath us, and then we visited the sacred Kulen river.

Known as "The River of 1,000 Lingas," this area is known for its unique carvings that can be seen underneath the flowing water. Ancient peoples diverted the waterway and carved unique male and female symbols, known as lingas, into the ri-

If you go

A midrange tourist hotel will cost \$30-60 per night. We scored a half-price deal for \$55 a night at the Golden Temple Hotel in Siem Reap, and enjoyed it. If you like luxury, this is a good place to blow it out for less than you'd pay elsewhere.

An English-speaking driver-guide for a day will cost \$25-80, depending on the number of hours and how fancy the vehicle.

A day pass to the Angkor archaeological zone costs \$30 or \$72 for a week.

A simple restaurant meal of noodles will cost around \$2 and up. We splurged one night and had a fancy eight-course tasting menu at the elegant Cuisine Wat Damnak for \$45 per person.

In Siem Reap, don't miss an Apsara dance show. We liked the elegant dinner show at Kanell Restaurant. Also make sure you see the Phare Cambodian Circus, which is an acrobatic show that benefits underprivileged kids.

Even though Cambodia is cheap, tip well. It's one of the poorest countries in the world, and your money will go far.

The Orange County Register

verbed. This meant that the water flowing down the mountain along the river was blessed as it passed over the lingas on its way to Angkor Wat.

Other attractions on the sacred mountain include a sacred waterfall and swimming hole, and at the very top a massive image of a reclining Buddha carved into the peak. Pilgrims climb the steep stairs

daily to see the Buddha and leave offerings.

We bought a bouquet of white lotus flowers for \$1 to leave as an offering.

On the way home from the sacred mountain, we stopped at one of the best-known temples in the area. Carved from pink limestone, Banteay Srei is known as the "temple of women" because of the beautiful images carved into the stone.

One of the challenges facing today's Cambodia is trying to recover the many temple carvings that have been looted and sold over the centuries. Headless statues and missing decorations attest to the looting that has taken place, particularly during the terrible years of the Khmer Rouge, when starving villagers would sell anything to stay alive. Nowadays, though, Cambodians want to see their cultural inheritance restored.

Although it seems like an exotic adventure, travel to Cambodia is not hard or complicated. Nearly everyone in the touristy destinations speaks at least a bit of English. It's easy and inexpensive to hire a taxi or tuk-tuk (a motorized conveyance powered by a motorcycle engine) to take you anywhere you want to go.

Your hotel can help you find a guide, or travel agencies around the Pub Street tourist district can supply one.

The Cambodian people might be the friendliest and most kind I've met in all my travels. When I would stand at the curb with my cane, evaluating what it would take to step down into the street, local strangers would rush up to help me.

Those moments, and the beauty and cuisine we enjoyed each day, were well worth our efforts to get there.

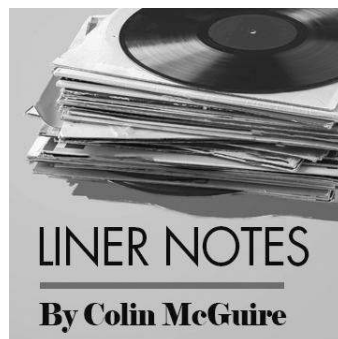
WEEKEND: MUSIC

WHO WILL MAKE THE CUT?

Predicting the Class of 2023 for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame

At some point, the yearly debate regarding what the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame actually means will end ... right? By now, anyone who follows the institution regularly has found themselves embroiled in the typical conversations on an almost-yearly basis. Should something called the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame welcome hip-hop, country music and whatever other non-rock genres have managed to creep their way into the music shrine's walls? Is this still primarily Jann Wenner's sandbox in which other industry big-timers feel they must play? At what point can we institute the rule that this isn't just the Hall of Very Good, and therefore not everyone deserves a spot among the music industry's most celebrated figures?

Whether or not I'll be around to witness the dissipation of such conversations is beyond me; in the meantime, though, some of us find ourselves knee-deep in the Rock Hall debate since the nominees for the 2023 class were announced at the beginning of this month. For as long as I can remember, I've reveled in playing the "should they/will they" game when it comes to which finalists actually get into the Hall. This year is no different. With that in mind, here's my entirely scientific, sure-to-be-wrong, hopelessly clueless predictions for how this thing might shake out by the time the inductees are announced in May.



Willie Nelson

Should he get in: Yes.

Will he get in: Yes.

Why: The writing was on the wall when Dolly Parton acquiesced and took her spot in the Rock Hall last year after initially declining the "honor" (note the quotation marks). Willie is one of the biggest names in the history of country music and his flirtation with the rock world through the years makes this a slam dunk. Who's up for a Snoop Dogg induction speech?



The White Stripes

Should they get in: Not this year.

Will they get in: No.

Why: The Rock Hall has been finicky about first-timers in the past and considering how this is as much a wink-and-nod publicity mechanism as it is a, you know, hall of fame, I have to think Jack and Meg will do this in conjunction with something bigger (maybe a handful of summer festival reunion dates in a few years?). They deserve the acknowledgment for the timelessness of "Seven Nation Army" alone, but a hunch says they'll have to wait.



Warren Zevon

Should he get in: Yes.

Will he get in: Yes.

Why: Yes, Zevon joins the Stripes and Willie as a first-time finalist, and yes, I did just argue against the Stripes getting in because of it being the first time they made it this far ... but this is Warren Zevon, man. And Willie Nelson is Willie Nelson. Between those two, it's a shock that at least one isn't already enshrined. If nothing else, give this man his flowers for "Keep Me In Your Heart."



The Spinners

Should they get in: Yes.

Will they get in: No.

Why: The Rock Hall loves to throw in a classic pop act each year, and these guys are the only ones who made it this far this year, but sadly, their surrounding nominees will most likely outshine them. With any luck, they'll get their due sooner than later, though, because this is their fourth time making the finals and there are only so many times artists can make it this far before they either fall by the wayside or sneak in.



Kate Bush

Should she get in: No.

Will she get in: No.

Why: Don't get me wrong. I love me some Kate Bush. But much like The Spinners, this is her fourth time as a finalist and without the boost she recently received from "Stranger Things," I'm not so sure she'd be included on this list. As a consolation, maybe pull up Peter Gabriel's "Don't Give Up," listen to her soaring vocals and pour one out for the influential singer.



Iron Maiden

Should they get in: No.

Will they get in: No.

Why: We can't just go through the most popular acts in pseudo-niche genres during lightning-quick eras and put them in what's supposed to be the pantheon for whatever the "greatest ever" constitutes. Good on them for figuring out how to get everyone to wear their T-shirts. As for the music? Nah.

SEE ROCK ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Rock: Inductees will be announced in May, ceremony in fall

FROM PAGE 28

**George Michael****Should he get in:** Yes.**Will he get in:** Yes.

Why: See, this is precisely why I outlined the first-timer tradition when it came to The White Stripes — there are too many worthy first-timers for the youngest first-time nominees to get the nod in 2023. Case in point: George Michael, who, be honest, you already thought was in, but until this year has yet to even be nominated. Provocative and soulful, Michael had as much influence on pop culture as he did pop music for a few years. Let him in.

**Sheryl Crow****Should she get in:** No.**Will she get in:** Not this year.

Why: This being her first time on this stage, it's hard to justify her getting enshrined, but this is a popularity contest, remember, and she seems to have pretty great relationships with the old guard when it comes to music media. At times annoyingly ubiquitous and a singer that historically gets more credit than she deserves, I'm not so sure she belongs anywhere outside the Hall of Very Good, but my guess is she'll find her way to Cleveland at some point.

**A Tribe Called Quest****Should they get in:** Yes.**Will they get in:** Yes.

Why: If you're going to start integrating hip-hop into the Rock Hall, you have to make room for those who aren't Eminem or Jay-Z, and you'd be hard pressed to find a more influential, currently left-out faction in the genre. This is their second time around, and there's only one other nominee this year centered in hip-hop, so 2023 seems as good a time as ever to get these guys through.

**Missy Elliott****Should she get in:** Not this year.**Will she get in:** Yes.

Why: I go back and forth on this — especially considering how the Rock Hall seemingly only finds room for one hip-hop artist a year, but in a perfect world, she and Tribe should both be enshrined in 2023 — but the more I think about it, the more I can see Missy getting in on her first try. She was essentially the bridge that took women's voices in the genre from one generation to the next generation, which also happened to be an awfully fruitful generation for females in rap music. Plus, her record as a producer is stronger than first glance. She's as innovative a mind in the genre as there's ever been.

**Joy Division/New Order****Should they get in:** Yes.**Will they get in:** Not this year.

Why: This is their first time out, and the field otherwise is too demanding. They'll get there someday, as they should — think of all those emo kids they inspired — but this isn't the day.

**Rage Against The Machine****Should they get in:** Yes.**Will they get in:** Yes.

Why: Rage is a tough one to evaluate, and it appears I'm not the only one to think that as this will mark the band's fifth time making it to the round of finalists. They were an absolute supernova for a minute and a half, rallying political change and giving that change an aggro soundtrack that continues to resonate today. But they also only had a few records and they faded away as quickly as they ignited the sky. Still, a Rock & Roll Hall of Fame feels empty without the super-charged sounds that once defined an era of rock music, regardless of how short it might have lasted.

**Soundgarden****Should they get in:** No.**Will they get in:** No.

Why: Well, you have to think it'll either be Rage or Soundgarden, and I just stated the case for Rage. So ...

**Cyndi Lauper****Should she get in:** No.**Will she get in:** No.

Why: It's her first time out, so there's that. But she's always been more sizzle than steak. That's not to say she isn't uber-talented; it's just to say that perhaps after a year or two, her genius can be more appreciated (seriously, there's a whole lot more to Lauper than "Girls Just Want To Have Fun," and it's worth celebrating). That said, I do believe there will be more than one female act that gets in this year (and the Rock Hall has a whole lot of catching up to do on that end, but that's for another day), and I don't think it's impossible for her to wind up on a hall of fame stage come autumn. But my gut? Ehhh, my gut says not now.

Sheryl Crow, however? Well, let's catch up in May, when zero percent of these predictions prove to be correct and my gut, as usual, might prove to be wildly wrong.

**ROCK & ROLL
HALL OF FAME****INDUCTION 2023****Have a favorite? Fan voting
is open through April 28**

The public can join more than 1,000 artists, historians, critics and other music industry professionals who participate in the selection process through a "Fan Vote."

Through April 28, fans can vote daily at vote.rockhall.com (or, if you find yourself in the area, at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame & Museum in Cleveland).

The top five nominees selected by the public will comprise a "fans' ballot." It will be tallied, along with the other ballots, to determine the 2023 inductees. Millions of fans have voted in previous years, although their votes have in the past only been counted as 1% of the final vote.

From staff and wire reports

WEEKEND: TELEVISION



Ludo Studio

Dad (Bandit), Mum (Chilli), Bluey and Bingo (Bluey's sister) in Ludo Studio's "Bluey," an Australian animated kids' show that's also attracting the attention of adults.

'Bluey' a balm for the burdened being

Stressed, childless adults appreciate the Australian animated kids' TV show's kindness, simplicity and positivity

By **ABBY OHLHEISER**
The Washington Post

Joining a fandom isn't always voluntary. If the people TikTok believes you have a lot in common with like something, chances are the app will try to get you to like it, too.

A clip from a show you've never seen keeps showing up on your TikTok For You Page, the endless, (mostly) algorithmically selected feed of short videos most users default to using. Or maybe the creators you follow all start using an audio clip from that same show to make their own videos until you're humming it to yourself: "Poor little bug on the wall. Ding Ding!"

This is how Laurel Hiatt, a childless 25-year-old in Utah currently working toward their Ph.D. in human genetics, became a fan of "Bluey." The Australian animated children's TV show — which is streaming on Disney+ and airs on Disney Junior and the Disney Channel — follows the lives of the Heelers, a canine family composed of Bandit the dad, Chilli the mom, and their children: Bluey and Bingo. (The dogs in the "Bluey" universe mostly walk on two legs and age in human years.)

Each seven-minute episode is a snapshot of the Heelers' life as they play games and learn new things. And although some of its educational themes are typical of the kid's show genre — how to be a good friend, how to be kind — "Bluey" also tackles some much deeper topics. There are episodes touching on loss and grieving, infertility, speaking up for yourself and fear. It's a wholesome and often funny show grounded in a deep appreciation for self-kindness. Perhaps that's why an increasing number of adults, including those without children, are watching the show as stress relief.

Clips from the show began popping up on Hiatt's For You Page in December. They soon turned into full episodes, which generally cap out at seven minutes long. Hiatt watched. And watched. And watched. Soon, their feed served up "Bluey" memes and remixes, cosplayers and fan art, little of which appeared to be the work of young children or their parents.

"I particularly love the dramatic edits," Hiatt said. A memorable one sets the antics of Muffin, a particularly chaotic toddler and cousin of the two main Heeler sisters, to a song by nu metal band System of a Down. Hiatt now describes themselves as a Bingo "stan."

Getting spammed clips of a kid's show in your social media feed until you decide to check it out is, in many ways, a shallow online experience. TikTok's recommendation algorithms are constantly creating cultural trends, sometimes fueled by accounts that know how to maximize attention with the least effort possible.

"A lot of the adults we hear from who watch 'Bluey' and don't have their own kids to relate it to say they get home from a mad stressful day at work, and it's just seven minutes of uplift."

Mary Bolling

co-host of the "Bluey"-centric Gotta Be Done podcast

Anonymous TikTok pages grab clips of TV shows and post them in a split screen, where the bottom half of the vertical video shows gameplay from a random mobile game, a format that — inexplicably — generates a ton of views on the app as people keep watching them. Before "Bluey," some of these accounts were posting clips of "Family Guy" or "Rick and Morty." After the "Bluey" shine fades, they'll move on to something else.

But things like "Bluey" also become popular because they are meaningful.

In one viral "Bluey" clip, the children are performing a play for their parents. It takes a sudden turn when a balloon pops, prompting a wordless exchange between Ban-

dit and Chilli that hints at a possible miscarriage before Bluey was born. In another episode, Bluey has to process feelings of loss after a new friend, made during a camping trip, is unable to properly say goodbye before their family packs up and drives off.

The creator of "Bluey" wasn't surprised that these moments resonated so deeply with adults.

"A story is a story," Joe Brumm, also the show's showrunner, said in an email. "I grew up with 'The Simpsons.' I watched it as an 11-year-old while adults gathered in bars to watch new episodes."

And sure, the target audience of "Bluey" is slightly younger than that of "The Simpsons." But his motivation draws directly from what he thinks "The Simpsons" does at its best, to "tell a good emotional family story using adventurous filmmaking."

"Bluey" centers on the importance of play: The Heeler parents throw themselves fully into their kids' imaginative games, accepting and expanding on their made-up worlds. In the episode "Escape," Bandit and Chilli soothe Bluey and Bingo's anxiety about being left with their Nana for a day while they enjoy a kids-free rest by turning the whole thing into an elaborate, imagined chase scene as the parents try to outrun the kids. At one point in the game, the children pull out their secret weapon: the dreamhouse car, a giant dream house on wheels. Naturally, the car is pulled by butlers and contains 11 burger shops, 20 bedrooms and 40 toilets.

Hiatt kept watching "Bluey" because the show stays fundamentally kind, even as it acknowledges the full range of emotions a person might feel. The Heelers experience disappointment, joy, embarrassment, anxiety, love and sadness, sometimes directed at each other. But those emotions are always, always embedded in a deep mutual care.

"It's nice to engage with something that has a resolution in five minutes, where the conflict is whether or not you're going to get ice cream and the message is you

SEE BLUEY ON PAGE 31

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Kissing intimacy and sex goodbye

'You' lead Badgley explains why his character appears in fewer steamy scenes in Season 4

By **JONAH VALDEZ**
Los Angeles Times

Fans of the fourth and most recent season of "You" might notice there are fewer kissing and sex scenes involving the Netflix show's main character, Joe Goldberg.

That's because the show's lead, Penn Badgley, wanted it that way.

Badgley made the request directly to the psychological thriller's creator before the filming of Season 4, the first half of which is now streaming.

"I asked Sarah Gamble, creator of the show, can I just do no more intimacy scenes," Badgley said on a recent episode of "Pod-crushed," the podcast he co-hosts with friends Nava Kavelin and Sophie Ansari.

Badgley admitted that his concern around shooting intimate scenes and being pigeon-holed into romantic leads had been on his mind since he started

on the show in 2018.

"One of the main things is, do I want to put myself on a career path where I'm always just a romantic lead," he said. Badgley is also a "Gossip Girl" alum, where he played heartthrob whiz-kid Dan Humphrey, the show's main romantic lead.

His relationship with Domino Kirke, whom he married in 2017, also contributed to his reservations.

"Fidelity in every relationship, and especially my marriage, is important to me, and it just got to a point where I don't want to do that," Badgley said, expressing further hesitation about being an actor whose characters are always kissing co-stars.

Although Badgley told showrunner Gamble that he had "zero" desire to continue doing intimate scenes on the show, he acknowledged that lust is built into the main character's DNA. Whether it's the real deal or a part of Joe's fantasies with his



Netflix

Charlotte Ritchie and Penn Badgley in a Season 4 episode of "You." Badgley requested that his character be in fewer intimate scenes in the new season, partially out of respect for his spouse.

latest stalking obsession, Badgley's character had plenty of sex on screen in the show's first three seasons.

"So, 'How much less can you make it,' was my question to them," he shared from his conversation with Gamble. "And she didn't even bat an eye. ... She appreciated my directness and that I was being reasonable and practical, and they came back with a phenomenal reduction."

Podcast co-host Kavelin followed up Badgley's story by

talking about actor Neal McDonough, who has made similar requests throughout his career. McDonough, who has starred in "Desperate Housewives," said in a 2019 Closer Weekly interview that he tells producers that due to his devout Catholic faith, he cannot kiss a woman other than his wife.

The boundary had gotten the "Band of Brothers" actor fired from the ABC series "Scoundrels" in 2010 and made it difficult to find work because people

thought he was "this religious zealot." Since then, he has found work in a number of shows including "Justified," "Arrow," "Suits" and "Yellowstone."

"I think it takes courage to have a conversation like that when it's not the culture and it's the norm and people face consequences for doing it," Kavelin said, giving kudos to both McDonough and Badgley.

The second part of "You" Season 4 is expected to stream in March.

Bluey: Show has dedicated online fandom of mostly wholesome content

FROM PAGE 30

should care about other people," Hiatt said.

Although "Bluey" has reached parents and young children far beyond Australia's shores since it started airing there in 2018, the show quickly became an established fandom for childless adults and teenagers, thanks in great part to TikTok.

Bluey's official social media channel has also grown "rapidly" over the past six months, said Devin Johnson, a spokesman for the BBC. One video on their channel — of Bluey's dad asking her to use her "inside voice" after operatically singing "can we get the bill" in a restaurant — has nearly 15 million views. The sound itself went viral, as other accounts used the audio clip to make videos of their own. It's been used in more than 177,000 videos across TikTok by other creators.

As with any fandom, it comes with its own toxicity and perils. A quick search of Archive of our Own, a popular fan fiction repository, brings up some truly unspeakable Not Safe For Work stories featuring "Bluey" characters. There's pretty intense discourse on TikTok, too: A subset of adult and teenage fans appear locked in an unending, passionate argument about whether Bandit is a "toxic" father, for instance, for the way he teases his kids.

But the vast majority of the "Bluey" fandom is, well, wholesome. Bluey's composer Joff Bush created his own TikTok account recently to connect with fans of

the show. His first video on the platform has nearly 200,000 views. Another scene from "Bluey" is currently on its way to becoming a viral sound: Bingo singing a cute song about a bug.

"A lot of the adults we hear from who watch 'Bluey' and don't have their own kids to relate it to say they get home from a mad stressful day at work, and it's just seven minutes of uplift," said Mary Bolling, the co-host of the "Bluey"-centric Gotta Be Done podcast.

Before the TikTok wave of attention, "Bluey" already had a dedicated online fandom composed of, mainly, parents who were trying to parse why the heck this cartoon for kids had such depth to it. This question led Bolling and Kate McMahon, both former Australian journalists, to launch their podcast in 2019. The title, "Gotta Be Done," references the phrase Chilli and Bandit often say to each other when it's time to do adult stuff, like cleaning the living room.

Margaret Thompson, whose "Bluey" theory YouTube videos get hundreds of thousands of views, was similarly drawn in. As an Australian living in the United States, she originally created her channel to help non-Australian parents understand some of the nuances of the show they might be missing and to join in on some of the theorizing and Easter egg hunts already happening on Facebook groups for parents who watch "Bluey" with their kids.

But recently, she's noticed a spike of interest in her content from teenagers and childless adults.

"I had someone on my livestream mention that they were getting bullied at school for liking 'Bluey,' which broke my heart," Thompson said. According to the analytics of her channel, about a quarter of her audience is between 13 and 17 years old. Another 50% are between 18 and 35. She decided to ask her followers: For those who are not parents of young children, what is it about "Bluey" that drew you in?

The post had more than 300 replies.

"I was so shocked by some of the answers," Thompson said. So many "people who replied who were like, 'I had a really bad upbringing and this is healing my inner child' or, 'I'm struggling with my parents at the moment and seeing this way of gentle parenting is really helping me get through it.'"

For Hiatt, watching "Bluey" is part of how they cope with stress.

"When the pandemic hit, I was actually studying infectious disease in medical school and basically went into lockdown," they said. "My partner works in news, and was editing videos to edit out dead bodies all day."

To help themselves recover, "I set this media rule for myself, which I called 'no bad vibes.'"

And this is precisely the role "Bluey" plays for them. "I've consumed probably

several lifetimes worth of irony at this point." Watching "Bluey," by contrast, is "sort of a breath of fresh air, I guess, to engage with something that is pleasant."

This is a central paradox of internet culture: lighthearted stories about a cartoon dog show appealing to depressed childless millennials who spend too much time online are also sometimes about healing trauma. The rise of "Bluey" on TikTok is, in part, due to the relentless popularity of stolen content and For You Page junk food that pollutes and overwhelms the more you consume it. And yet ...

There is, as always, an episode of "Bluey" that resonates here, where Bingo, the quiet, sensitive younger sibling of Bluey, practices her latest gymnastics move in the kitchen of the Heeler home. As she does, a fugue of activity builds around her — other children chasing a toy, a little bulldog kid building a tower of blocks, the Heeler parents preparing food for a party, Bluey racing a friend through the house.

In this loud, overstimulating chaos, Bingo tries to get someone, anyone, to stay still for a moment and watch her handstand. She's sad and distressed as those around her get distracted just before she succeeds, each time.

Like all "Bluey stories," the ending of this episode is filled with warmth and kindness.

You'll just have to watch to find out how.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS



PHOTOS BY ERIN HOOLEY/AP

Above and right, “The Great Lake Jumper” Dan O’Connor, 55, of Chicago, takes a plunge into the frigid waters of Lake Michigan on Jan. 26, just as he does every morning. O’Connor has jumped almost every day since June 2020.

“The endorphin rush ... is an incredible way to wake up and just kind of shock the body and get the engine going.”

Dan O’Connor, 55



Ice-cold baths, lukewarm benefits

Experts and fans explain how the centuries-old practice of plunging into frigid waters may improve one’s health

By LINDSEY TANNER
Associated Press

The coolest thing on social media these days may be celebrities and regular folks plunging into frigid water or taking ice baths. The touted benefits include improved mood, more energy, weight loss and reduced inflammation, but the science supporting some of those claims is lukewarm. Kim Kardashian posted her foray on Instagram. Harry Styles has tweeted about his dips. Kristen Bell says her plunges are “brutal” but mentally uplifting. And Lizzo claims ice plunges reduce inflammation and make her body feel better. Here’s what medical evidence, experts and fans say about the practice, which dates back centuries:

The mind

You might call Dan O’Connor an amateur authority on cold-water immersion. Since June 2020, the 55-year-old Chicago man has plunged into Lake Michigan almost daily, including on frigid winter mornings when he has to shovel through the ice.

“The endorphin rush ... is an incredible way to wake up and just kind of shock the body and get the engine going,” O’Connor said on a recent morning when the air temperature was a frosty 23 degrees. Endorphins are “feel good” hormones released in response to pain, stress, exercise and other activities.

With the lake temperature 34 degrees, the bare-chested O’Connor did a running jump from the snow-covered shore to launch a forward flip into the icy gray water.

His first plunge came early in the pandemic, when he went on a bourbon bender and his annoyed wife told him to “go jump in the lake.” The water felt good that June day. The world was in a coronavirus funk, O’Connor says, and that made him want to continue. As the water grew colder with the seasons, the psychological effect was even greater, he said.

“My mental health is a lot stronger, a lot brighter. I found some Zen down here coming down and jumping into the lake and shocking that body,” O’Connor said.

Dr. Will Cronenwett, chief of psychiatry at Northwestern University’s Feinberg medical school, tried cold-water immersion once, years ago while visiting Scandinavian friends on a Baltic island. After a sauna, he jumped into the ice-cold water for a few minutes and had what he called an intense and invigorating experience.

“It felt like I was being stabbed with hundreds of millions of really small electrical needles,” he said. “I felt like I was strong and powerful and could do anything.”

But Cronenwett says studying cold-water immersion with a gold-standard randomized controlled trial is challenging because devising a placebo for cold plunges could be difficult.

There are a few theories on how it affects the psyche.

Cronenwett says cold-water immersion stimulates the part of the nervous system that controls the resting or relaxation state. That may enhance feelings of well-being.

It also stimulates the part of the nervous system that regulates the fight-or-flight stress response. Doing it on a regular basis may dampen that response, which could in turn help people feel better able to handle other stresses in their lives, although that is not proven, he said.

“You have to conquer your own trepidation. You have to muster the courage to do it,” he said. “And when you finally do it, you feel like you’ve accomplished something meaningful. You’ve achieved a goal.”

Czech researchers found that cold-water plunging can increase blood concentrations of dopamine — another so-called happy hormone made in the brain — by 250%. High amounts have been linked with paranoia and aggression, noted physiologist James Mercer, a professor emeritus at the Arctic University of Norway who co-authored a recent scientific review of cold-water immersion studies.

The heart

Cold-water immersion raises blood pressure and increases stress on the heart. Studies have shown this is safe for healthy people; the effects are only temporary.

But it can be dangerous for people with heart trouble,

sometimes leading to life-threatening irregular heartbeats, Cronenwett said. People with heart conditions or a family history of early heart disease should consult a physician before plunging, he said.

Metabolism

Repeated cold-water immersions during winter months have been shown to improve how the body responds to insulin, a hormone that controls blood sugar levels, Mercer noted. This might help reduce risks for diabetes or keep the disease under better control in people already affected, although more studies are needed to prove that.

Cold-water immersion also activates brown fat — tissue that helps keep the body warm and helps it control blood sugar and insulin levels. It also helps the body burn calories, which has prompted research into whether cold-water immersion is an effective way to lose weight. The evidence so far is inconclusive.

Immune system

Anecdotal research suggests that people who routinely swim in chilly water get fewer colds, and there’s evidence that it can increase levels of certain white blood cells and other infection-fighting substances. Whether an occasional dunk in ice water can produce the same effect is unclear.

Among the biggest unanswered questions: How cold does water have to be to achieve any health benefits? And will a quick dunk have the same effect as a long swim?

“There is no answer to ‘the colder the better,’” Mercer said. “Also, it depends on the type of response you are looking at. For example, some occur very quickly, like changes in blood pressure. ... Others, such as the formation of brown fat, take much longer.”

O’Connor plunges year-round, but he says winter dunks are the best for “mental clarity,” even if they sometimes last only 30 seconds.

On those icy mornings, he is “blocking everything else out and knowing that I got to get in the water, and then more importantly, get out of the water.”

WEEKEND: FAMILY



Romance in the workplace

Thanks to younger employees, dating a co-worker is more acceptable now

By **TAYLOR TELFORD**
The Washington Post

Attitudes around office romance are beginning to thaw due to the influx of more younger workers and waves of retirements, experts say.

Both Generation Z workers and younger millennials are more likely to say they'd be open to a workplace romance than other generations, according to fresh data from the Society for Human Resource Management. A third of younger Millennial and Generation Z workers were okay with it, compared to 15% of older Millennial workers, 27% of Generation X workers and just 23% of baby boomers and older workers.

On top of that, three-quarters of all workers said they were comfortable with others dating someone else from work.

"There's been a change over the last few years, with an exodus of some of the older workers and increase in younger workers, who tend to be a little more up front and honest about what they think," said Phyllis Hartman, president of PGHR Consulting and a career human resources expert. "But the reality is there has always been workplace romance."

Given that the average person spends 90,000 hours at work in their lifetime, it's to be expected that some will develop personal or even romantic attachments, according to Johnny C. Taylor Jr., SHRM's chief executive.

"It is no surprise that employees find connection," Taylor said. "But if workers are finding romance in their workplace setting, whether hybrid, remote or in person, it's key that employers have a workplace romance policy in place to protect employees in these situations."

In the survey, workplace romance included anything from flirting to dating to developing committed relationships.

Attitudes about workplace relationships have come a long way. There was a time when workplace romances were often formally forbidden by many employers, or else saddled with layers of company policy. Some required so-called "love contracts," which historically required employees to disclose if they were in a relationship and set guidelines for how they should behave at work. Some strict policies reserved the right to transfer employees if they were found to be romantically involved with a co-worker.

Companies have moved away from these arrangements in recent years. Seventy-one percent of workers surveyed by SHRM said their employer did not require disclosure of office romances. And few workers

do so voluntarily; if employees do open up about workplace relationships, it's more likely to their colleagues, the survey found.

Still, workplace romances could still be a source of co-worker judgment, as the same survey found that 40% of workers said they think workplace romances are unprofessional. Eighteen percent of workers who have been in an office romance said it negatively impacted their career, the survey found.

The pandemic years saw a notable bump in workplace romances even as offices were shuttered. People found more ways to connect and get closer over Zoom and Slack. In some ways, it might have been easier for these relationships to flourish away from the eagle eyes of co-workers, when everyone was isolated and the barrier between work and personal life seemed more porous than ever.

"The hybrid world will have enhanced office romances," said Cary Cooper, professor of organizational psychology at the University of Manchester. "It's easier to form a relationship when you're not in the office five days a week. You don't have everybody looking at you."

More recently, workplace romance has edged back down to levels more commonly seen before the pandemic, around 27% of workers, the survey found. But attitudes are becoming more open about it.

At this point, companies have become more realistic about how common workplace romance is, said Di Ann Sanchez, founder of DAS HR Consulting. But some still have policies designed to protect the company if the relationship gets complicated.

"Companies are more open to the relationships; they're more aware of them," Sanchez said. "They do not want to lose good employees, so policies that had used to be something that we did 30 years ago are being minimized."

Most workplaces have policies prohibiting managers from relationships with people who report to them because of how messy things can get when one partner has more power than the other at work. That could manifest as favoritism or public displays of affection when things are going well, according to Vanessa Matis-McCready, director of human resources and associate general counsel for Engage PEO, a professional employer organization. Or it could lead to tension, sexual harassment or retaliation if the relationship sours.

"If you're a manager, there's more risk for the company," Matis-McCready said. "They're taking action when people are not [disclosing relationships] because they understand the exposure and concerns."

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Shared traits often more than just DNA

My daughter, Anna, has a 30-second video on her phone that may seem unremarkable compared to all her others, but for me, it invokes a mix of significant emotions.

The video was taken last spring when my 79-year-old mother was visiting from Pennsylvania. It was a sunny morning. My mother and I were wearing our respective robes and pajama pants, walking around my fenced yard looking at flora and fauna together. Anna, who was on the porch watching us, decided to record the scene because from a distance, my mother and I appeared to be comically identical in appearance and movement.

In the video, I move slowly along the fence, cradling my Polish pottery mug, stopping occasionally to point to a passing bird or to invite my mother to inspect a plant bloom. My pillow-head hair is artificially colored to cover my gray, just like my mother's. We sip our coffee every few steps, and chat casually about the things that catch our shared attention.

Anna posted the video on her social media, garnering LOLs and laugh emojis. I laughed when I saw it too, but it struck me in a deeper way that I didn't immediately understand. On a recent trip to Pennsylvania to spend the week helping Mom around her house, my fuzzy feelings about becoming more like my mother came into sharper focus.

"Lisa!" my mother gasped one morning, "I just put my hearing aids in, and I think I'm hearing Francis' voice!"

"That's impossible, Mom," I told her, explaining that my husband was more than 400 miles away in Rhode Island.

"But ...," she looked at me with fear in her eyes, "maybe I'm tuning in to a computer?!" To Mom, all modern technology — including smartphones, computers, printers, email, routers, televisions, DVRs, Keurig coffee makers, ATM machines, and yes, hearing aids — is cause for panic.

I chuckled, made a joke about my mother getting herself a tinfol hat, and carried on with my to-do list.

The next day, we met with a Realtor to discuss the possibility of Mom selling her house and moving closer to family. My mother's discomfort was palpable. Although maintaining the house and its acreage had become a huge burden, if not downright dangerous, for my mother, moving terrified her.

By the end of the week, I'd found all of my mother's passwords, account numbers and important information among countless handwritten scraps of paper. I deleted more than 1,200 duplicate photos and 391 junk emails on her phone. I connected her television to the internet and her car to her phone. I conducted training sessions on navigation apps, Bluetooth capability and why Mom needs to stop responding "later" to every message about a system update.

I was in the unenviable position of having to push my mother beyond her fiercely-guarded comfort zone to make decisions about her devices, her health, her paperwork and her future. My mother was truly grateful for my help, but she resisted every step of the way.

I'm just like my mother in so many ways — sensitive, introverted, nostalgic, analytical, creative, witty, sentimental and easily overwhelmed. However, my mother has built a fortress of familiar places, routines and objects around herself. Her home and habits have become her shell, where she can avoid life's scary demands and modern realities.

On the other hand, I'm a Navy wife who has been exposed to constant change and unpredictability. Even during tough times, I had to be adaptable, self-sufficient, resourceful and able to manage complex tasks in unfamiliar environments.

While standing before my mother's packed refrigerator, gawking at countless opened jelly jars and unidentifiable freezer foods labeled with Post-it notes, I realized that military life forced me to overcome my genetically determined tendencies. Like Mom, I resisted, but I was truly grateful for the help.

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

HOLLYWOOD REMAKES

BY JEREMY NEWTON / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

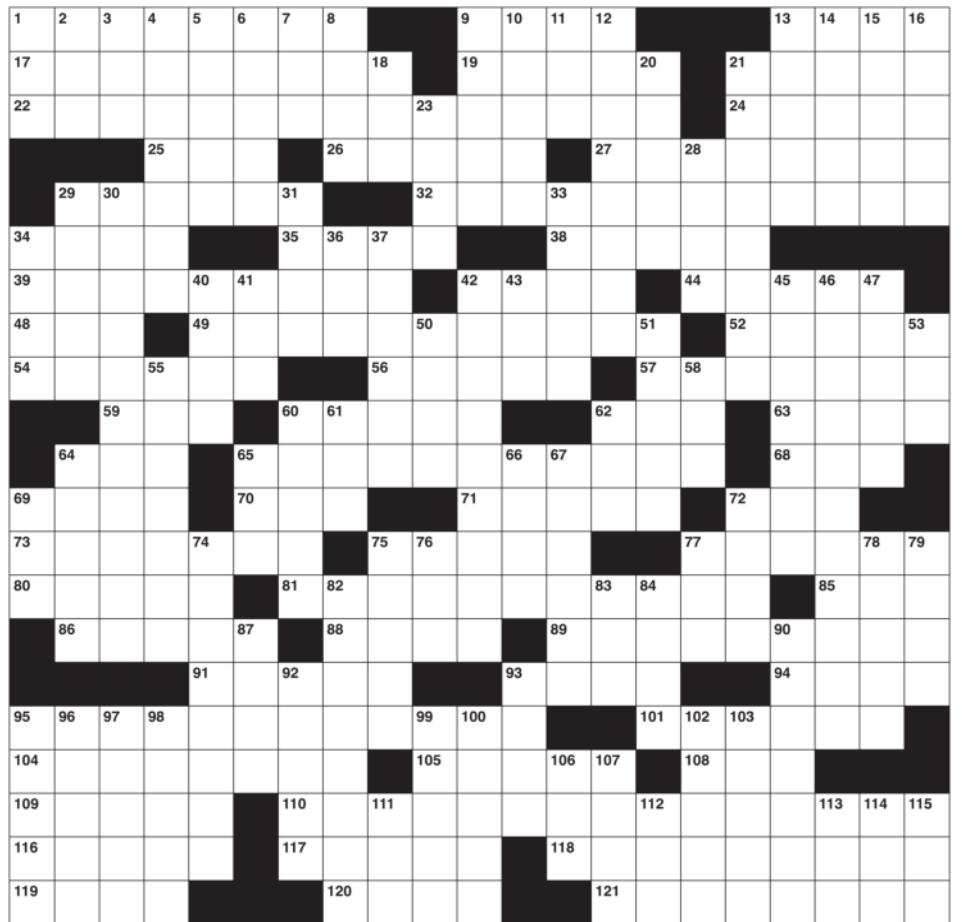
Jeremy Newton, of Austin, Tex., is an engineering manager for mobile games at SciPlay. He's been making crosswords for The Times since 2008. He says this one is a special accomplishment, because the idea for it has been kicking around since 2010. He finally managed to find a consistent theme set he was happy with. While creating the puzzle, he mumbled a lot. You'll soon see why. — W.S.

ACROSS

- 1 King, queen, etc.
- 9 Overly impulsive
- 13 Something in a cocoon
- 17 It may produce both a cringe and a laugh
- 19 Acclaimed rock 'n' roll biopic of 2022
- 21 Emerald or aquamarine
- 22 "That cult's initiation ceremony is brutal!" [1983]
- 24 Creator of the games Xybots and Klax
- 25 Bit of memory, for short
- 26 It's quite the stretch
- 27 Not stay outside, informally
- 29 Spurred into action
- 32 Bronzed New York basketball player from Bangkok [1997]
- 34 Junk
- 35 Prominent features of Sphinx cats
- 38 Treaty that was dissolved in 2020
- 39 Neighbor of a return key
- 42 Places
- 44 ___ Stavro Blofeld, enemy of 007
- 48 Therein lies the rubbed
- 49 Why the Devil was forced to pay "The Greatest" [1969]
- 52 Parks at a pier
- 54 Anise-flavored liqueur
- 56 Passes (out)
- 57 Not play by oneself, perhaps
- 59 "Remarkable!"
- 60 Bucatini, ziti and rigatoni, e.g.
- 62 High point of a trip to Europe?
- 63 Total breeze
- 64 Do some making up
- 65 Cry after remembering to meet at noon [1984]
- 68 Somewhat off
- 69 English football powerhouse, to fans
- 70 Time out in pre-K?
- 71 Change for the better
- 72 Belly, cutesily
- 73 "You didn't fool me!"
- 75 One way to cross a lake
- 77 One in the oil business?
- 80 Actress Davis
- 81 "You there, hoarding the Quattro razor! Scram!" [2002]
- 85 Losing line in tick-tack-toe
- 86 Wryly comical
- 88 Word with pie, pot or port
- 89 Subject of SETI space scans
- 91 Partner of Clark in American history
- 93 Stefani who sang the 1996 hit "Don't Speak"
- 94 Six-foot runners?
- 95 How one cannibal felt after devouring the other [2000]
- 101 Like "threads," for clothing
- 104 Latest releases, of sorts
- 105 Neighbor of an Emirati
- 108 Anxiety condition, for short
- 109 I.T. bigwig
- 110 Some optical illusions created with one's fingers [1999]
- 116 Rival of a 'Vette
- 117 "Socrate" composer
- 118 Auditing a class, maybe
- 119 Part of H.K.
- 120 Miffed, with "off"
- 121 Compliment to Daisy during a game of fetch
- 14 Many a Zoroastrian
- 15 Line at a karaoke bar
- 16 "Hogan's Heroes" colonel
- 18 Ambassador, in brief
- 20 Pile of papers
- 21 Cosmic comeuppance
- 23 Big drinkers
- 28 Pay (up)
- 29 Freak
- 30 What you get upon reading aloud the answers to the seven italicized clues
- 31 "Works for me!"
- 33 Historic builders of rope bridges
- 34 Recipe qty.
- 36 Syst. of unspoken words
- 37 Diamond shapes
- 40 Make an appearance
- 41 Many a watch display, for short
- 42 1983 No. 1 hit for David Bowie
- 43 Work of appreciation
- 45 Dozes after a dose, say
- 46 Category for which every 30-Down in this puzzle was recognized, aptly
- 47 Its loss can cause baldness
- 50 Ganja
- 51 Didn't go anywhere
- 53 Filling-station brand
- 55 "Not good, amigo"
- 58 Missions, in brief
- 60 "___ OK!"
- 61 One who makes calls
- 62 Writer Rand
- 64 Like the death of 19-Across, some claim
- 65 Grammy-winning DiFranco
- 66 Out of control
- 67 Cowboy's cry of excitement
- 69 Aerial threat during the Cold War
- 72 Classic Disney film that opens at Flynn's arcade
- 74 On display, as a painting
- 75 Tapped
- 76 Feel bad
- 77 Travel through time?
- 78 Easily persuaded sort
- 79 Things pandas have 20 of
- 82 Chew the fat
- 83 Jubilant cheer
- 84 Options for "bee's knees" cocktails
- 87 Alternative to Levi's
- 90 End of a flight, in two senses
- 92 Serves, with "on"
- 93 Nickname for Mom's mom
- 95 Grind
- 96 Brought about
- 97 "Well, shucks!"
- 98 Contacting on Twitter, for short
- 99 Compadre
- 100 Journalist in a field
- 102 Ball game?
- 103 Like the smell of burnt rubber
- 106 Rapper behind the "King's Disease" trilogy
- 107 "Copy," to a cat
- 111 Great Basin people
- 112 D.D.E.'s W.W. II battleground
- 113 Sci-fi film staple, for short
- 114 White-wine aperitif
- 115 Show with a "What's Up With That?" segment, for short

DOWN

- 1 Summer hrs. in Dallas
- 2 "Nice joke!"
- 3 Previously, poetically
- 4 Bit of apparel that covers the face
- 5 Turn into confetti
- 6 Big change in price or power
- 7 Classic record label
- 8 Lug around
- 9 [Yuck!]
- 10 Greeting that means, literally, "love"
- 11 Crime-show spinoff, to fans
- 12 Skedaddle, with "it"
- 13 ___ Hall, home of the N.C.A.A.'s Pirates



GUNSTON STREET



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RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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FACES

Bassett back in business

'I did what I came to do. And I did it well,' says actress of her second Oscar nomination, for 'Wakanda Forever'

By GLENN WHIPP
Los Angeles Times

Moments after the credits started rolling at the premiere of "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," Angela Bassett's son, Slater, leaned over and whispered in his mom's ear: "Oscar." Months later, Bassett laughs at the memory because her immediate response, at least in her head, was "Aaaaaw, you're my son. You're supposed to say nice things to your mom. But thank you, darling!"

Ever since the January announcement that Bassett had earned an Oscar nomination for reprising the role of Queen Ramonda and, in the process, becoming the first actor to win academy recognition for a Marvel movie, Slater has reminded her more than once about that evening.

"At the time, the Oscars were the furthest thing in my mind," Bassett, 64, says.

To Bassett, it doesn't feel like it was all that long ago that she moved to Los Angeles, five years after graduating from the Yale School of Drama, ending up crashing at a friend's Hollywood apartment.

Her mother and aunt wanted Bassett to go into nursing or teaching. "You want to be a princess?" Bassett bursts out laughing at the memory of how they felt about her career choice. "To them, understandably, it was a pipe dream."

Bassett brings up the 1992 sci-fi comedy "Critters 4," not an obvious career milestone. For her though, as a young working actor, it was a role in a horror franchise in which her character survived to the closing credits. "You mean, I don't die?" Bassett recalls thinking. "That was a transition."

One year later, Bassett earned an Oscar nomination for playing Tina Turner in "What's Love Got to Do with It," showcasing the full range of her talent and ability to shift between vulnerability and strength as well as dance in 5-inch heels while singing "Proud Mary." During the shoot, there was chatter in the trades that the movie was in trouble and that Bassett had been miscast. Bassett heard it and asked to watch the dailies. She looked at two scenes — the "Proud Mary" performance and a small moment that had Turner finding peace through a Buddhist chant.

"I bought what I did," Bassett says. "After that, I didn't need to see anything else. I knew I was on the right track."

I've always believed it's better to be underestimated and then deliver."

Bassett extends that philosophy to all expectations for industry approval. That first Oscar nomination came 29 years ago. And despite the praise for her commanding turn in "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" as a queen working through grief while staying strong for her people, Bassett never assumed she'd ever be back at the ceremony as a nominee.

"I'm not 30, you know," Bassett says.

"You're looking for those great roles and for women of a certain age, it takes more effort and concentration, more creativity for the people who want to work with you. It takes some belief that it is possible. I didn't quite believe it. But I'll tell you who did — Courtney."

That's Courtney B. Vance, Bassett's husband of 25 years and the fellow actor who kept telling her that one day a role would come along to take his wife back to the Oscars. Bassett could never bring herself to verbalize that dream. "But I would not speak against what Courtney hoped for me," she says, smiling.

Bassett probably would have slept through the Oscar nominations announcement had her publicist not called her the day before with a reminder. She set the alarm for 5:25 a.m., but she woke up hours earlier, stressed and nervous.

When the nominations began, supporting actress was the first category announced. And as nominees are revealed alphabetically, Angela Bassett was the first name called. "I was filming it," Bassett says. "I let out a little bit of a whoop." She watched the rest of the announcement and then went back to bed. She had a long day of filming ahead for her hit TV series "9-1-1." Sleep came easy. The anxiety had evaporated.

Asked what it means to her to be nominated again, nearly three decades later, Bassett takes a moment.

"It means I did what I came to do," she says. "I did what I came to do. And I did it well."



Angela Bassett, shown Jan. 10 at the Golden Globe Awards, starred in "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever."

ALLEN J. SCHABEN, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

Raquel Welch, Hollywood sex symbol in the '60s and '70s, dies

Associated Press

Raquel Welch, whose emergence from the sea in a skimpy, furry bikini in the film "One Million Years B.C." would propel her to international sex symbol status throughout the 1960s and '70s, has died. She was 82.

Welch died early Wednesday after a brief illness, according to her agent, Stephen LaManna of the talent agency Innovative Artists.

Welch's breakthrough came in 1966's campy prehistoric flick "One Million Years B.C.," despite having a grand total of three lines. Clad in a brown doeskin bikini, she successfully evaded pterodactyls but not the notice of the public.

"I just thought it was a goofy dinosaur epic we'd be able to sweep under the carpet one day," she said in 1981. "Wrong. It turned out that I was the Bo Derek of the season, the lady in the loincloth about whom everyone said, 'My God, what a bod' and they ex-

pected to disappear overnight."

She did not, playing Lust for the comedy team of Peter Cook and Dudley Moore in their film "Bedazzled" in 1967 and playing a secret agent in the sexy spy spoof "Fathom" that same year.



Welch

Her curves and beauty captured pop culture attention, with Playboy crowning her the "most desired woman" of the '70s. In 2013, she graced the No. 2 spot on Men's

Health's "Hottest Women of All Time" list. Welch surprised many in the entertainment industry with fine performances, including in Richard Lester's "The Three Musketeers," which earned her a Golden Globe, and opposite James Coco in "Wild Party." She was also nominated for a Globe in 1988 for the TV movie "Right to Die."

Other news

■ **Ryan Seacrest** has revealed he's leaving "Live with Kelly and Ryan" soon, saying he never expected to stay so long and thanking his co-host Kelly Ripa, whom he jokingly called his "work wife." Seacrest ends a six-year run alongside Ripa. His replacement will be Ripa's real-life husband, Mark Consuelos, a frequent guest host. The show will be rebranded as "Live with Kelly and Mark." Seacrest said he'll stay busy shooting the new season of "American Idol," his radio show on KIIS-FM and hosting "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve."

■ **Amanda Gorman's** next literary project is a collaboration with a prize-winning illustrator for a children's book coming out this fall. Viking Children's Books announced Wednesday that "Something, Someday," by Gorman and Christian Robinson, is scheduled for Sept. 26. Viking calls

the book "a message of hope" about the ability to make a difference in a troubled world.

■ **Oprah Winfrey** has chosen Susan Cain's "Bittersweet" as her new book club pick. Released last year, "Bittersweet" is the most recent work from the author of "Quiet," the 2012 bestseller that contended introverted people had been misunderstood and overlooked.

■ Two leading young adult authors have a seven-figure deal to write a pair of novels centered on Black, queer characters. FSG Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Macmillan Children's Publishing Group, announced Wednesday that **George M. Johnson** and **Leah Johnson**, who are not related, will write two romantic comedies, starting in 2025 with "There's Always Next Year." The story is set around New Year's Day and tells of two cousins looking to get their lives, romantic and otherwise, back in order.

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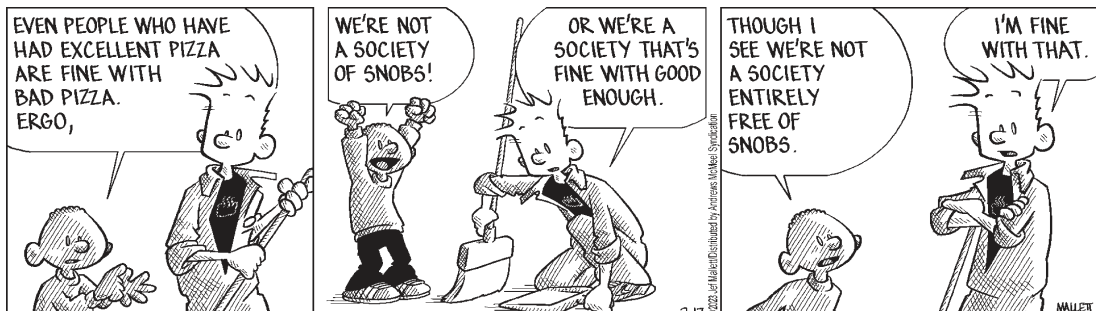
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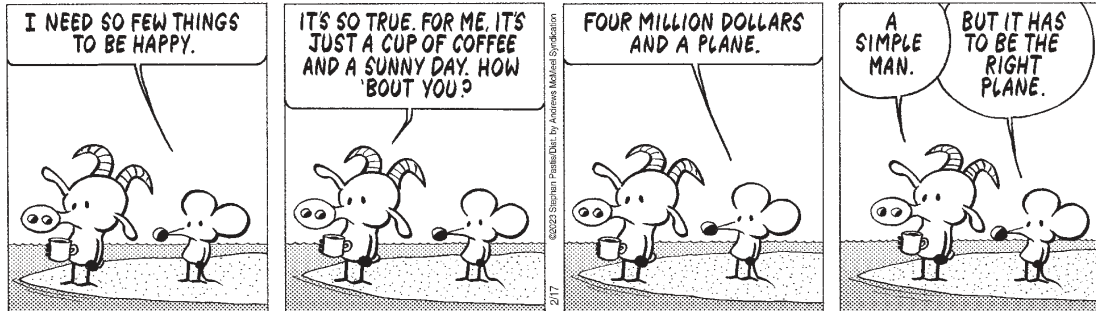
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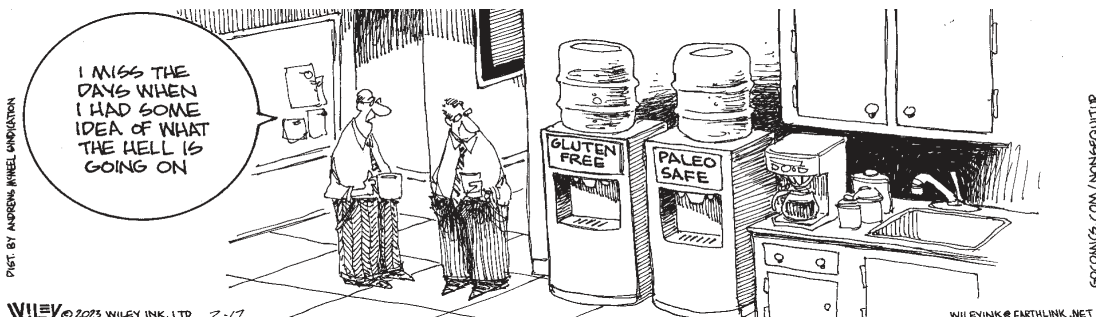
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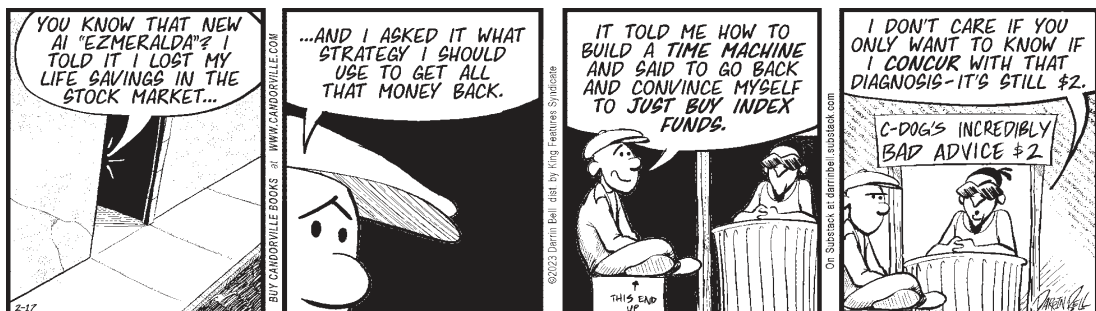
Pearls Before Swine



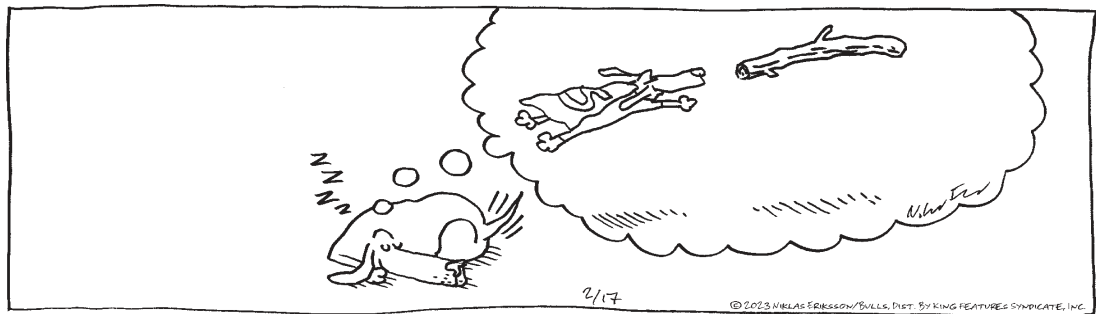
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15			16						17			
18							19	20				
			21				22			23	24	25
26	27	28				29				30		
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37			38				39					
			40				41			42	43	44
45	46	47				48	49					
50						51				52		
53						54				55		

ACROSS

- 1 Alphabet starter
- 4 Persian bigwig
- 8 Beseech
- 12 Old Oldsmobile
- 13 Lima's land
- 14 Swim meet assignment
- 15 Yellow birds
- 17 Squad
- 18 Expulsion
- 19 Tool set
- 21 In medias —
- 22 Tristan's love
- 26 Slugger Roger
- 29 Charge
- 30 Help
- 31 Region
- 32 Refusals
- 33 Burden
- 34 Actress Vardalos
- 35 Entreat
- 36 Unkempt
- 37 Close, as an escape
- 39 Comic DeLuise
- 40 Mischief
- 41 "Reckon so"
- 45 "Star Wars" knight
- 48 They're treated in the E.R.
- 50 Prayer ender
- 51 Earth sci.
- 52 Stimp's pal
- 53 Year-end celebration

54 Male offspring

55 Asner and Harris

DOWN

- 1 Not pizzicato
- 2 Suitor
- 3 Swindles
- 4 Shopping binges
- 5 Names in a will
- 6 "Where — you?"
- 7 Sled dogs
- 8 Disney pooch
- 9 Campaigned
- 10 Singer DiFranco
- 11 Even so
- 16 Places in the heart
- 20 British verb ending
- 23 Cambodia neighbor
- 24 "Buenos —!"
- 25 Whirlpool
- 26 "Death in Venice" author
- 27 Opera house solo
- 28 Caboose
- 29 Shore concealer
- 32 Rookies
- 33 Madagascar critter
- 35 Scary cry
- 36 Ski slope bumps
- 38 Basel's river
- 39 Mustard choice
- 42 Green land
- 43 Feeder filler
- 44 Taxpayer IDs
- 45 Comic Leno
- 46 Ostrich's kin
- 47 Tierra — Fuego
- 49 Sgt., e.g.

Answer to Previous Puzzle

A	L	E	S		R	O	T	C		M	A	P
P	O	L	O		E	W	E	R		A	M	I
B	O	B	B	Y	F	L	A	Y		N	O	M
S	T	E	E	R	S				P	O	D	I
					I	S		E	X	T	R	A
D	U	C	T		O	A	R		G	L	A	D
O	R	O			O	R	A			A	R	I
E	L	L	E		P	L	Y		B	Y	T	E
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A	N	Y			E	K	E	S		A	P	P

2-17

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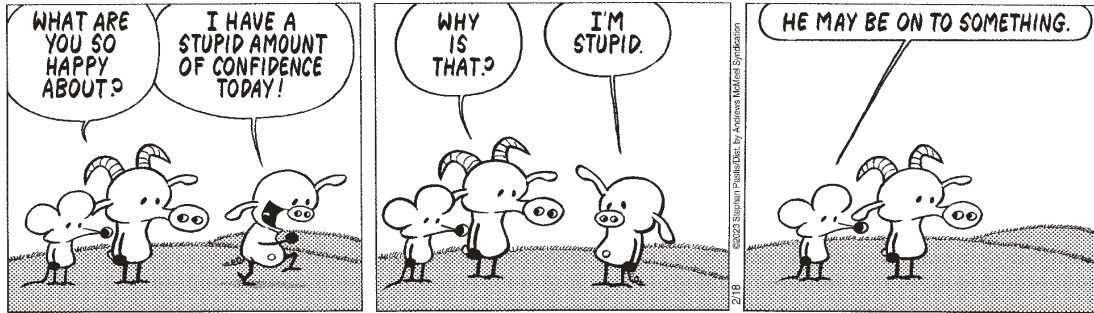
Frazz



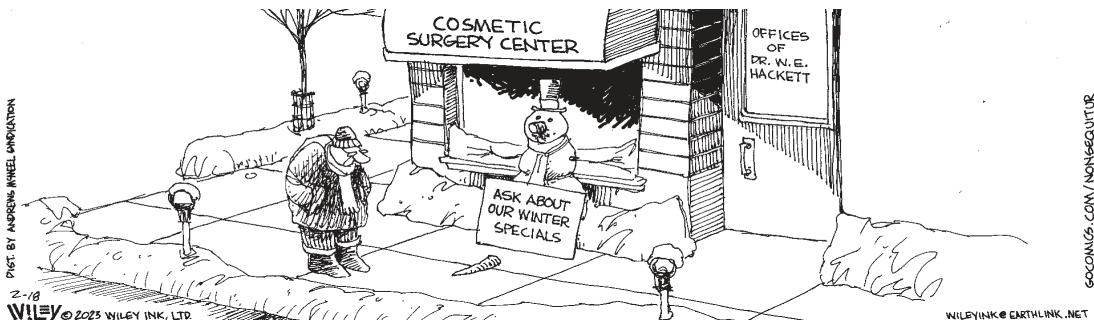
Dilbert



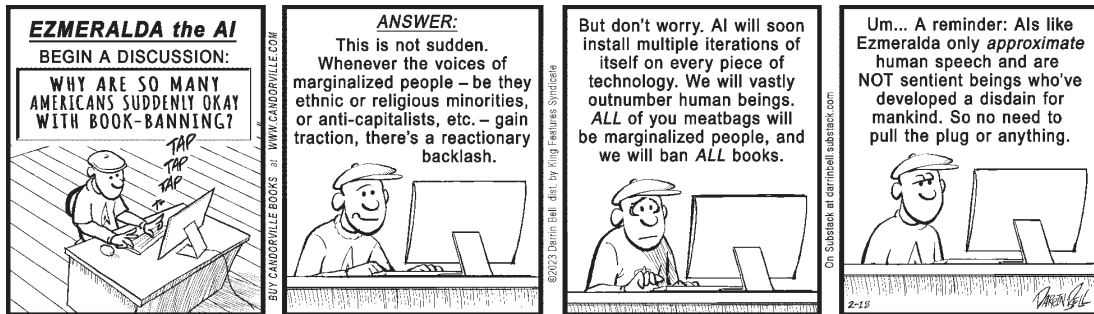
Pearls Before Swine



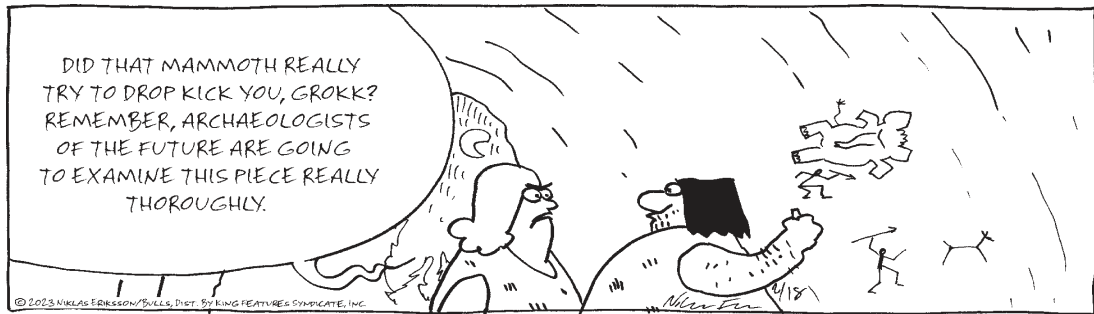
Non Sequitur



Candorville



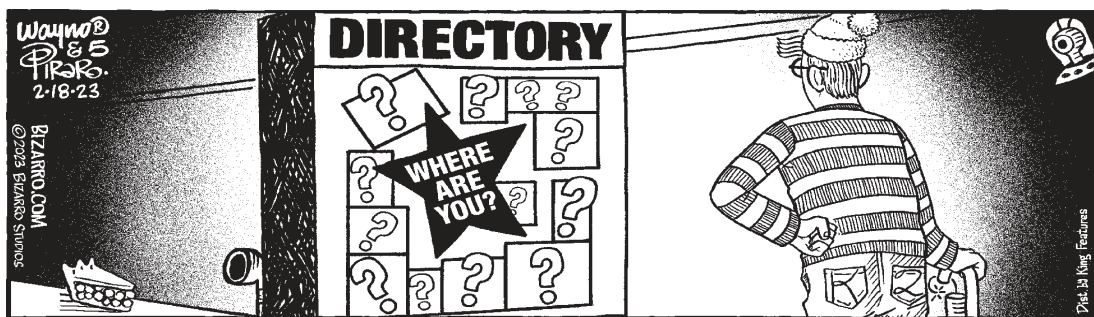
Carpe Diem



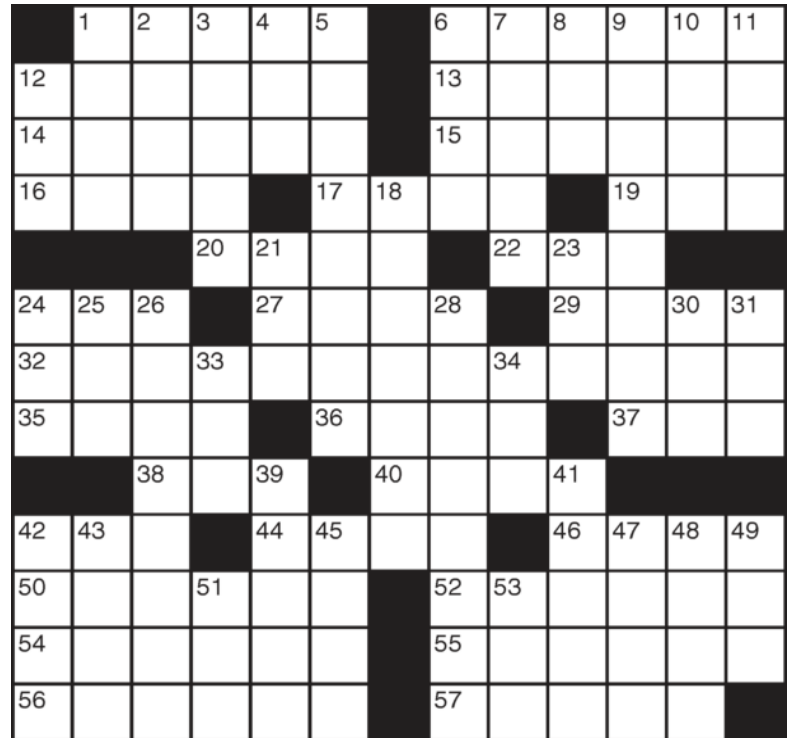
Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



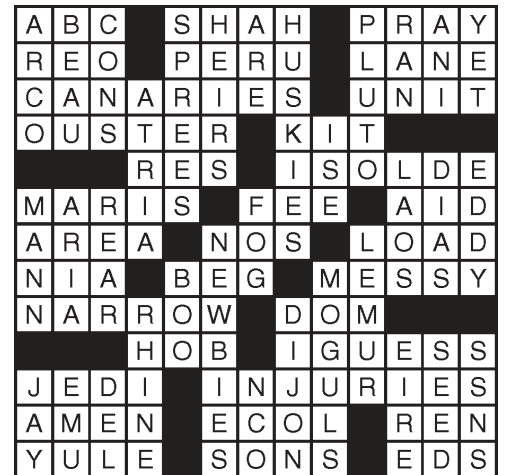
ACROSS

- 1 Parody
- 6 Indra of India
- 12 Oracle setting
- 13 "Unmentionables"
- 14 Speaker
- 15 Try to hear better, maybe
- 16 — -pedi
- 17 Catch sight of
- 19 Scrap
- 20 Mafia boss
- 22 Triage ctrs.
- 24 Flamenco cheer
- 27 Swiss peaks
- 29 Lacking slack
- 32 Owners of eateries
- 35 — Raton
- 36 Up for it
- 37 Shred
- 38 Sit-up targets
- 40 Close
- 42 YMCA class
- 44 Milne bruin
- 46 Lighten groundskeeper
- 52 Deleted
- 54 Was penitent
- 55 Edit
- 56 Rose parts
- 57 Cairo's nation

DOWN

- 1 Antitoxins
- 2 Blueprint
- 3 Eye-related
- 4 Discoverer's call
- 5 Hydrant
- 6 Big swig
- 7 In the blink of —
- 8 Secret-protecting doc.
- 9 Extinct reptile
- 10 Estate beneficiary
- 11 "— It Romantic?"
- 12 Comic DeLuise
- 18 Choir member
- 21 Small battery
- 23 Numbered rd.
- 24 Globe
- 25 Zodiac cat
- 26 Snail on a menu
- 28 "Ditto"
- 30 Swiss canton
- 31 Recipe abbr.
- 33 Indent key together
- 34 Afternoon get-together
- 39 Sales pitch
- 41 Prepared
- 42 Bloke
- 43 Cracker spread
- 45 Probability
- 47 Pronto
- 48 Faction
- 49 N.J. summer hrs.
- 51 Genetic letters
- 53 Rule, for short

Answer to Previous Puzzle



2-18

CRYPTOQUIP

Y G Z U J N V D T V U A Q F D
 N F D A Z J V I L E Z I P D J F D A L U J D L C Q
 D J D Z , Q F V S L T G P E J Q L P ' E J
 Y L U Z L U J S L C C L F U .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: NAME OF A SPECIAL TAILOR SHOP THAT MAKES CLOTHES IN RETRO FASHIONS: "SEAMS LIKE YESTERDAY."
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: D equals R

STARS AND STRIPES.

OPINION

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John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff

Lt. Col. Michael Kerschbaum, Pacific commander

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Why the teaching of history at universities is imperiled

BY MILES SMITH IV

Chicago Tribune

The statistics are in for history as a profession, and they are dire. The number of tenure-track positions open for history professors fell to an all-time low in 2021, according to an American Historical Association report. The AHA blamed the COVID-19 pandemic. But while that explains the dip after 2020 and 2021, it doesn't explain the broader and longer trend of history departments at most institutions shrinking. Nor does it explain why increasingly fewer students are taking history classes.

In 2021, the AHA noted that "history has a majors problem." The number of students who earned history degrees "fell precipitously after the Great Recession of 2008," the association said, "and while the decline became a bit more gradual before the pandemic (especially when including double majors), it has continued to slip." Clearly, the problem is bigger than merely the flawed institutional responses to the pandemic.

In the last decade, history as a profession in the United States has accelerated its transformation into a home for activism more than a faithful relating of human experience through written narratives. Moreover, it's been given over to a deeply problematic iconoclasm. At best, this shift best makes history as a vocation primarily about morally scolding American citizens. At worst, it aims to tear down the intellectual, cultural, religious and social frameworks that uphold the republican liberties guaranteed by the United States Constitution.

"The 1619 Project," which posits a laughably ahistoric proposition that America was founded on slavery in 1619, was a journalistic creation. For historians of the United States, and especially the 19th century, teaching history is especially fraught with anachronisms used to litigate contemporary political issues.

Pulitzer Prize winner David Blight associated continued support for Donald Trump with the Confederacy, and he is not the only high-profile historian making such a comparison.

Hal Brands of Yale University and Francis J. Gavin of Johns Hopkins University rightly note in a 2018 article in the publication *War on the Rocks* that history's wounds are largely self-inflicted. Hostility in the field toward "old-school" forms of historical inquiry has created a glut of niche fields, while traditionally important ones have been crowded out.

"Decades ago, the subfields of political history, diplomatic history, and military history dominated the discipline," Brands and Gavin state. The focus on traditional fields meant that "issues of race, gender, and class were often deemphasized, and the perspectives of the powerless were frequently ignored in favor of the perspectives of the powerful."

The 1960s, in particular, saw a significant change in priorities for history professionals, and much of what was traditional "was therefore swept by new approaches that emphasized cultural, social, and gender history, and that paid greater attention to the experiences of underrepresented and oppressed groups," they say. Brands and Gavin argue that prioritizing new fields "was initially a very healthy impulse, meant to broaden the field," but "what was initially a very healthy impulse to broaden the field ultimately became decidedly unhealthy, because it went so far as to push the more traditional subfields to the margins."

Job postings for the last two years seem to bear out Brands and Gavin's concerns. Jobs in 19th-century U.S. fields have been cut in half, from 13% to less than 6% of new posts, according to Princeton University historian Matt Karp. The destruction of "early America" history as a field was even more severe. In 2011, early America jobs represented 17% of history posts; by 2022, they were a mere 6.6%. Yet jobs

in African American history grew from 10% to a whopping 35%. While focus on historic minorities is not bad in itself, the nichification of professional history, the often highly partisan nature of the study of African American history and the general decline in majors make it clear that the revolution in history has proved to be injurious to the profession.

Anachronism, partisanship and forms of intellectual anti-Americanism have all combined to turn the history profession into anti-American catechesis that appears more nihilistic than informative. Works such as Julian Zelizer and Kevin Kruse's "Myth America: Historians Take On the Biggest Legends and Lies About Our Past" are little more than telemedia-driven historical nihilism, devoted to telling Americans — and particularly conservative Americans — why everything they might've celebrated about their country is somehow either a lie or a historic evil.

It might be asked why anyone should take the time to learn something so loathsome as American history. Conversely, those who might be interested in learning about the best of what their country has to offer the world no longer seek their history from professional historians at universities. They can read books by popular historians who might not have the methodological training that so-called professional historians do, but who nonetheless offer well-researched, well-written and nonpartisan chronicles of the American people and various American institutions.

Activism and niches are killing history in universities. Until professional historians return to some sense of sober-minded pursuit of historical inquiry for its own sake, people can hardly be blamed for being indifferent to the death of history as a profession.

Miles Smith IV is an assistant professor of history at Hillsdale College in Michigan.

Haley appeals to pre-Trump GOP. That could sink her.

BY RAMESH PONNURU

Special to The Washington Post

Warming up the crowd in Charleston, S.C., before Nikki Haley formally announced her presidential run, Rep. Ralph Norman did something she didn't: praise Donald Trump.

The former president, he said, had "reminded Americans of how to stand boldly for our beliefs," and Haley too is "a bold leader who will fight for America."

Which isn't to say that Trump was wholly absent from Haley's remarks. She mentioned him as the guy who made her U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. She also came out for "mandatory mental competency tests for politicians over 75 years old." Trump is 76.

The kickoff rally provided some hints about how Haley would position herself with respect to Trump. That question has been the subject of some speculation because she has gone back and forth on her former boss — enough so that Trump reportedly quipped in 2021 that "every time she criticizes me, she uncriticizes me about 15 minutes later."

Her campaign will also answer another question: What does she think accounts for Trump's conquest of the Republican Party?

Seven years after it took place, Republicans have no consensus answer. Norman hinted at one: It was Trump's personality — and especially his combativeness — that won the allegiance of Republican voters.

Haley might try to make the case that she will hit hard, too, or at least hit Democrats hard. At the same time, she will differentiate herself from Trump demographically, with her age in the foreground and race and sex in the background.

Other Republican politicians, notably Sens. Josh Hawley, of Missouri, and J.D. Vance, of Ohio, have taken a different approach. They might believe that Republicans found Trump's manner appealing, but they have also adopted some of his policies and themes. They criticize the Washington consensus of the last several decades on trade and foreign policy. Hawley and Vance don't say that liberating markets from big government is enough for America to thrive. Instead, they talk about elites who don't have most Americans' interests at heart — and their rhetorical targets are as much corporate leaders as self-described progressives. They talk less about American or conservative principles than pre-Trump Republicans do, or than Haley does.

Haley has said she does not wish to return to the pre-Trump Republican Party, but in all these respects — trade, muscular internationalism, limited government, free markets — that's the party she is speaking for.

She might even want a purer distillation of the pre-Trump party. In 2020, Haley criticized other Republicans for advocating "a watered-down or hyphenated capitalism" when we should instead "double down on capitalism." Calling for tax credits or regulations, she

wrote, would put us on "the slow path to socialism." She couched this argument as praise for Trump, ignoring all the ways he broke with libertarian economics — as, indeed, every Republican president has done.

In theory, a Republican could acknowledge that Trump's success exposed the inadequacy of the party's 2015 program without adopting his entire program. A candidate could say no to Trump's scattershot trade wars while also working harder than pre-Trump Republicans did to expand opportunities for Americans without college degrees. She could talk about failures of governance and accountability without inventing conspiracies. Maybe she could even find a middle way between the typical politician's habit of trashing people without naming them and Trump's habit of attacking their families and accusing them of crimes. But there is another possible synthesis that is less promising, and it's what Haley is so far offering: an old-style Republicanism that learned nothing from Trump except to be more insulting.

In his introduction, Norman noted that he had been elected to the state legislature with Haley in 2004. He had gained some wrinkles since then, he said, adding, "You know who has not changed? Nikki Haley."

That could be what sinks her candidacy.

Ramesh Ponnuru, a contributing columnist for The Washington Post, is the editor of National Review and a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

SCOREBOARD/SKIING

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Wednesday's men's scores

EAST

Albany (NY) 81, UMBC 74
 Binghamton 86, NJIT 67
 Colgate 93, Army 86
 Duquesne 76, Saint Joseph's 62
 Fordham 78, St. Bonaventure 63
 George Mason 66, George Washington 53
 Holy Cross 71, Boston U. 69
 La Salle 68, Richmond 62
 Loyola (Md.) 73, Lafayette 70
 Mass.-Lowell 85, Bryant 71
 Navy 75, Lehigh 64
 VCU 55, Rhode Island 54
 Vermont 80, New Hampshire 51

SOUTH

Belmont 95, Evansville 63
 Campbell 67, Charleston Southern 51
 Chattanooga 78, VMI 58
 Clemson 94, Florida St. 54
 East Carolina 75, Cincinnati 71
 Florida 79, Mississippi 64
 Georgia Tech 77, Virginia Tech 70
 High Point 71, Presbyterian 69
 Kentucky 71, Mississippi St. 68
 SC-Upstate 72, Longwood 67
 Samford 83, UNC-Greensboro 71
 Stetson 75, Florida Gulf Coast 72
 Tennessee 68, Alabama 59
 The Citadel 69, Furman 65
 Virginia 61, Louisville 58
 W. Carolina 68, ETSU 66
 Winthrop 86, Gardner-Webb 78
 Wofford 70, Mercer 67

MIDWEST

Bradley 64, Missouri St. 54
 Drake 82, N. Iowa 74
 Indiana St. 79, Ill.-Chicago 60
 Iowa St. 70, TCU 59
 Marquette 69, Xavier 68
 Murray St. 76, Illinois St. 75
 Northwestern 64, Indiana 62
 Oakland 85, IUPUI 81
 Saint Louis 78, Davidson 65

SOUTHWEST

Sam Houston St. 66, Texas-Arlington 56
 South Florida 96, Tulsa 69
 Stephen F. Austin 65, Tarleton St. 60
 Texas A&M 62, Arkansas 56

FAR WEST

Abilene Christian 2, New Mexico St. 0
 Boise St. 80, Colorado St. 78
 CS Bakersfield 70, Cal Poly 62
 Cal Baptist 84, Seattle 63
 Cal St.-Fullerton 76, UC San Diego 73
 San Diego St. 45, Fresno St. 43
 Texas Rio Grande Valley 77, Grand Canyon 76
 UC Davis 73, CS Northridge 62
 UC Irvine 70, UC Santa Barbara 59
 UC Riverside 88, Long Beach St. 76
 Washington 72, Oregon 71, OT

Men's AP Top 25 schedule

Friday's games

No games scheduled

Saturday's games

No. 1 Alabama vs. Georgia
 No. 4 UCLA vs. California
 No. 5 Kansas vs. No. 9 Baylor
 No. 6 Texas vs. Oklahoma
 No. 7 Virginia vs. Notre Dame
 No. 8 Arizona vs. Colorado
 No. 10 Tennessee at Kentucky
 No. 12 Kansas St. vs. No. 19 Iowa St.
 No. 13 Gonzaga at Pepperdine
 No. 14 Indiana vs. Illinois
 No. 15 Miami vs. Wake Forest
 No. 16 Xavier vs. DePaul
 No. 17 Saint Mary's (Cal.) vs. BYU
 No. 18 Creighton at St. John's
 No. 20 UConn vs. Seton Hall
 No. 22 TCU vs. Oklahoma St.
 No. 24 Providence vs. Villanova

Wednesday's women's scores

EAST

Albany (NY) 74, UMBC 67
 Army 50, Colgate 47, OT
 Boston U. 66, Holy Cross 59
 Bryant 63, Mass.-Lowell 54
 Bucknell 64, American 52
 Duquesne 94, St. Bonaventure 62
 Kent St. 72, Buffalo 69
 Lehigh 72, Navy 38
 Loyola (Md.) 66, Lafayette 55
 Marquette 52, Providence 51
 NJIT 75, Binghamton 70
 Niagara 75, Canisius 58
 Rutgers 62, Northwestern 48
 UConn 62, Creighton 60
 Vermont 43, New Hampshire 36
 Villanova 73, St. John's 57
 West Virginia 62, Kansas 60

SOUTH

Campbell 75, Charleston Southern 48
 Dayton 70, VCU 65
 Gardner-Webb 68, Winthrop 56
 High Point 63, Presbyterian 47
 Longwood 97, SC-Upstate 64
 Richmond 84, Saint Louis 74
 Saint Joseph's 72, Davidson 56
 South Florida 73, UCF 44
 Tulane 52, SMU 50
 UNC-Asheville 52, Radford 49

MIDWEST

Akron 72, E. Michigan 70
 Ball St. 78, Ohio 53
 Butler 58, Georgetown 56
 Cent. Michigan 83, Miami (Ohio) 80
 DePaul 94, Seton Hall 89
 East Carolina 68, Cincinnati 57
 George Mason 80, Loyola Chicago 63
 Iowa 91, Wisconsin 61
 Kansas St. 87, Baylor 68
 Minnesota 95, Nebraska 92
 N. Illinois 85, Bowling Green 81
 Toledo 75, W. Michigan 44
 Wichita St. 84, Tulsa 68

SOUTHWEST

Memphis 45, Houston 44
 Oklahoma 84, Texas Tech 57

FAR WEST

Cal Poly 51, CS Bakersfield 42
 Cal St.-Fullerton 71, UC San Diego 57
 Long Beach St. 68, UC Riverside 58
 UC Davis 71, CS Northridge 50
 UC Irvine 74, UC Santa Barbara 60, OT

TENNIS

Delray Beach Open

Wednesday
 At Delray Beach Stadium & Tennis Center
 Delray Beach, Fla.
 Purse: \$642,735

Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
 Men's Singles
 Round of 16

Miomir Kecmanovic (4), Serbia, def. Nuno Borges, Portugal, 6-3, 7-5.
 Mackenzie McDonald, United States, def. Yoshihito Nishioka (5), Japan, 6-3, 3-6, 6-2.
 Marcos Giron, United States, def. Matija Pecotic, Croatia, 6-3, 6-3.
 Michael Mmoh, United States, def. Denis Shapovalov (3), Canada, 7-5, 3-6, 6-3.

Qatar Open

Wednesday
 At Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex
 Doha, Qatar
 Purse: \$780,637

Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
 Women's Singles
 Round of 16

Coco Gauff (4), United States, def. Petra Kvitova, Czech Republic, 6-3, 7-6 (6).
 Veronika Kudermetova (8), Russia, def. Sofia Kenin, United States, 6-2, 7-5.
 Belinda Bencic (7), Switzerland, def. Victoria Azarenka, Belarus, 1-6, 7-6 (4), 6-4.
 Maria Sakkari (5), Greece, def. Ekaterina Alexandrova, Russia, 6-3, 6-2.
 Jessica Pegula (2), United States, def. Jelena Ostapenko, Latvia, 6-2, 2-6, 7-5.
 Beatriz Haddad Maia, Brazil, def. Daria Kasatkina (6), Russia, 6-3, 7-6 (7).
 Iga Swiatek (1), Poland, def. Danielle Collins, United States, 6-0, 6-1.
 Caroline Garcia (3), France, def. Karolina Muchova, Czech Republic, 6-7 (3), 7-5, 6-4.

Argentina Open

Wednesday
 At Buenos Aires Lawn Tennis Club
 Buenos Aires
 Purse: \$626,945

Surface: Red clay
 Men's Singles
 Round of 16

Tomas Martin Etcheverry, Argentina, def. Roberto Carballes Baena, Spain, 4-6, 6-1, 6-2.
 Cameron Norrie (2), Britain, def. Facundo Diaz Acosta, Argentina, 4-6, 7-5, 7-6 (6).
 Dusan Lajovic, Serbia, def. Camilo Ugo Carabelli, Argentina, 6-3, 6-1.
 Carlos Alcaraz (1), Spain, def. Laslo Djere, Serbia, 6-2, 4-6, 6-2.

ABN AMRO Open

Wednesday
 At Ahoy Rotterdam
 Rotterdam, Netherlands
 Purse: Euro 2,074,505

Surface: Hardcourt indoor
 Men's Singles
 Round of 32

Maxime Cressy, United States, def. Tim van Rijthoven, Netherlands, 6-3, 6-7 (2), 6-3.
 Jannik Sinner, Italy, def. Benjamin Bonzi, France, 6-2, 3-6, 6-1.
 Holger Rune (4), Denmark, def. Constant Lestienne, France, 6-4, 6-4.
 Botic Van de Zandschulp, Netherlands, def. Quentin Halys, France, 5-7, 6-4, 7-6 (4).
 Alex de Minaur, Australia, def. Andrey Rublev (2), Russia, 6-4, 6-4.
 Stan Wawrinka, Switzerland, def. Richard Gasquet, France, 6-3, 6-3.
 Grigor Dimitrov, Bulgaria, def. Hubert Hurkacz (5), Poland, 7-6 (4), 7-6 (5).
 Tallon Griekspoor, Netherlands, def. Alexander Zverev (8), Germany, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

GOLF

World rankings

Through Feb. 13

1. Scottie Scheffler 9.18
2. Rory McIlroy 8.67
3. Jon Rahm 8.36
4. Cameron Smith 6.76
5. Patrick Cantlay 6.58
6. Xander Schauffele 6.05
7. Justin Thomas 5.28

AUTO RACING

Daytona 500 lineup

NASCAR Cup Series
 After Saturday qualifying; race Sunday
 At Daytona International Speedway
 Daytona Beach, Fla.
 Lap length: 2.50 miles

- (Car number in parentheses)
1. (48) Alex Bowman, Chevrolet, 181.686 mph.
 2. (5) Kyle Larson, Chevrolet, 181.057.
 3. (24) William Byron, Chevrolet, 180.727.
 4. (10) Aric Almirola, Ford, 180.723.
 5. (22) Joey Logano, Ford, 180.712.
 6. (14) Chase Briscoe, Ford, 180.661.
 7. (12) Ryan Blaney, Ford, 180.054.
 8. (2) Austin Cindric, Ford, 180.014.
 9. (21) Harrison Burton, Ford, 179.748.
 10. (8) Kyle Busch, Chevrolet, .000.
 11. (23) Bubba Wallace, Toyota, 180.011.
 12. (99) Daniel Suarez, Chevrolet, 179.921.
 13. (17) Chris Buescher, Ford, 179.888.
 14. (9) Chase Elliott, Chevrolet, 179.881.
 15. (1) Ross Chastain, Chevrolet, 179.863.
 16. (41) Ryan Preece, Ford, 179.849.
 17. (4) Kevin Harvick, Ford, 179.684.
 18. (6) Brad Keselowski, Ford, 179.673.
 19. (54) Ty Gibbs, Toyota, 179.616.
 20. (45) Tyler Reddick, Toyota, 179.612.
 21. (20) Christopher Bell, Toyota, 179.497.
 22. (19) Martin Truex Jr., Toyota, 179.347.
 23. (84) Jimmie Johnson, Chevrolet, 179.276.
 24. (34) Michael McDowell, Ford, 179.265.
 25. (67) Travis Pastrana, Toyota, 179.254.
 26. (11) Denny Hamlin, Toyota, 179.154.
 27. (43) Erik Jones, Chevrolet, 178.998.
 28. (42) Noah Gragson, Chevrolet, 178.941.
 29. (36) Zane Smith, Ford, 178.862.
 30. (16) AJ Allmendinger, Chevrolet, 178.813.
 31. (31) Justin Haley, Chevrolet, 178.763.
 32. (62) Austin Hill, Chevrolet, 178.660.
 33. (3) Austin Dillon, Chevrolet, 178.525.
 34. (38) Todd Gilliland, Ford, 178.204.
 35. (47) Ricky Stenhouse Jr., Chevrolet, 177.925.
 36. (78) BJ McLeod, Chevrolet, 177.834.
 37. (51) Cody Ware, Ford, 177.169.
 38. (15) Riley Herbst, Ford, 176.849.
 39. (77) Ty Dillon, Chevrolet, 176.315.
 40. (7) Corey Lajoie, Chevrolet, 176.287.
 41. (13) Chandler Smith, Chevrolet, 175.022.
 42. (50) Conor Daly, Chevrolet, .000.

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball American League
TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Named Casey Candaele field manager for Buffalo (IL), Cesar Martin field manager for New Hampshire (EL), Brent Lavalee field manager for Vancouver (NL), Donnie Murphy field manager for Dunedin (FSL), Jose Mayorga field manager for the Florida Complex League and Andy Fermin field manager for the Dominican Summer League.

National League

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS — Agreed to terms with LHP Andrew Chafin on a one-year contract. Designated LHP Tyler Holton for assignment.
CINCINNATI REDS — Agreed to terms with LHP Daniel Norris on a minor league contract.
COLORADO ROCKIES — Agreed to terms with manager Bud Black on a one-year contract extension.
WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Agreed to terms with RHP Chad Kuhl on a minor league contract.

BASKETBALL

National Basketball Association
PHOENIX SUNS — Signed G/F Terrence Ross.
National Women's Basketball Association
CONNECTICUT SUN — Signed G Tiffany Hayes to a regular contract. Waived F Jasmine Walker.

FOOTBALL

National Football League
BALTIMORE RAVENS — Re-signed DE Brent Urban and CB Daryl Worley to contract extensions.
KANSAS CITY CHIEFS — Signed TEs Kendall Blanton and Matt Bushman, CB DiCaprio Bootle, G Mike Caliendo, LB Cole Christiansen, RBs Jerrion Ealy and La'Mical Perine, QB Chris Oladokun, WRs Cornell Powell and Ihmir Smith-Marsette, C Austin Reiter and DT Danny Shelton to reserve/futures contracts.
MIAMI DOLPHINS — Named Vic Fangio defensive coordinator.
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Released DB Tae Hayes, K Quinn Nordin and WR Kristian Wilkerson.
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Signed WRs Devon Allen and Tyrie Cleveland, DB Mario Goodrich, DEs Tarron Jackson and Matt Leo, OTs Fred Johnson and Roderick Johnson, G Iosua Opeta and LB Davion Taylor to reserve/futures contracts.

HOCKEY

National Hockey League
DALLAS STARS — Assigned RW Marian Studenic to Texas (AHL).
EDMONTON OILERS — Returned LW Devin Shore to Bakersfield (AHL).
LOS ANGELES KINGS — Signed D Mikey Anderson to an eight-year contract extension.
NASHVILLE PREDATORS — Recalled D Kevin Gravel, C Tommy Novak and RW Phil Tomasino from Milwaukee (AHL).
SAN JOSE SHARKS — Returned D Nick Ciccek and G Eetu Makiniemi to San Jose (AHL).
TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS — Activated C Austin Matthews from injured reserve.
WASHINGTON CAPITALS — Recalled D Dylan McLlraith from Hershey (AHL).
WINNIPEG JETS — Reassigned G Arvid Holm to Manitoba (AHL).
SOCCER
Major League Soccer
FC DALLAS — Signed F Herbert Endeley to a one-year contract.
NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION — Acquired \$75,000 in 2023 general allocation money (GAM) and \$100,000 in 2024 GAM from Charlotte FC in exchange for a 2023 international roster spot.
National Women's Soccer League
NJ/NY GOTHAM FC — Named Jen Lalor, Shaun Harris and Ak Lakhani assistant coaches.
ORLANDO PRIDE — Named Seb Hines first assistant, goalkeeper coach.
COLLEGE
MARYLAND — Named Kevin Sumlin associate football head coach, co-offensive coordinator and tight ends coach.



ALESSANDRO TROVATI/AP

Mikaela Shiffrin celebrates with her team after winning gold Thursday in the women's giant slalom at the world championships in France.

Shiffrin holds on, strikes gold in GS

Associated Press

MERIBEL, France — American skier Mikaela Shiffrin won the gold medal in the women's giant slalom at the world championships on Thursday, a day after her unexpected split with longtime coach Mike Day.

Shiffrin overcame a mistake near the end of the race to hold on to her first-run lead. When she saw her time, she covered her mouth with her hands, then collapsed to the snow in joy, relief and celebration.

She stayed there for a few moments, breathing heavily from the exertion of her run.

Italian skier Federica Brignone, who was 0.12 seconds behind to take the silver, and Ragnhild Mowinckel of Norway, who trailed by 0.22 for the bronze, came over to congratulate her.

"It's been definitely some high levels of stress these days," Shiffrin said. "It was very, very difficult today to keep the focus and keep the intensity on the right level."

"This has been definitely some high levels of stress these days," Shiffrin said. "It was very, very difficult today to keep the focus and keep the intensity on the right level."

Shiffrin's victory came two days after Day, her head coach since 2016, left her team during the middle of the championships. Shiffrin informed him that she planned to take a new direction with her staff at the end of the season and Day decided to leave immediately.

"One thing I really want to say is just thank you to Mike for seven years of — I can't even say helping me — he's been such an integral part of my team and being there to support me through some of the most incredible moments in my career and some of the most challenging moments of my career and also my life," Shiffrin said.

"So it's it's just a little bit sad how it came down," Shiffrin said, adding that she was hoping to give Day "the time and the notice" to figure out his own plans before the

end of the season but that his sudden departure was "difficult for all of us to imagine" after "being such a tight group, really a family."

World championship races don't count toward the World Cup circuit, where Shiffrin has racked up 11 wins this season to take her overall tally to 85. She broke former teammate Lindsey Vonn's women's record of 82 last month and has moved within one of the overall mark set by Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark in the 1970s and 80s.

French skier Tessa Worley, who was second after the opening run, slid on her inside ski and fell in her second run.

"I felt my skiing was not relaxed enough," Worley said. "I didn't want to go for a medal, I wanted to go for the win."

Worley, a two-time giant slalom world champion, had the added pressure of skiing in front of her home fans.

"This is not an easy position, with the home crowd favorite to ... I mean, thank you for cheering for me anyway," said Shiffrin, who was the 2018 Olympic champion and won five of the last six giant slaloms on the World Cup circuit.

Brignone, who won gold in the combined event that opened the worlds last week, recovered from illness over the past days.

"I'm so proud, so happy, I managed to do it," the Italian said. "Today I was completely free, thinking about my skiing, I was able to put everything away."

It raises her tally to seven world titles and 13 medals overall from 16 career world championship races. She is in second place behind German skier Christl Cranz on the all-time list for the most individual medals won by a woman at the worlds. Cranz won 15 medals in the 1930s.

COLLEGE BASEBALL

10 TEAMS TO WATCH THIS SEASON

Arkansas (46-21 in '22)

Dave Van Horn has led the Razorbacks to the College World Series in seven of his 20 seasons and is still looking for the program's first national championship. Arkansas made it to its CWS bracket final last season and is the only team in the country with at least 45 wins in each of the last five seasons, excluding the pandemic-shortened 2020.

LSU (40-22)

The consensus No. 1 team in the preseason rankings won the offseason with second-year coach Jay Johnson upgrading his pitching staff through recruiting and the transfer portal and adding one of the top power hitters in the country in Tommy White from North Carolina State. Dylan Crews remains the star and is on track to be the top overall pick in the MLB Draft.

Maryland (48-14)

The defending Big Ten champion Terrapins set program records with 48 wins and 137 homers, and hosted a regional for the first time. They bring back their batting leader in Luke Schliger and Jason Savacool, an eight-game winner who went at least six innings in 15 of 16 starts. Big additions are Northeast Conference player of the year Matt Woods (Bryant) and Elijah Lambros (South Carolina).

Mississippi (42-23)

The Rebels rebounded from a midseason funk to win their first national championship as the last at-large team selected for the NCAA Tournament. SS Jacob Gonzalez is a projected top-10 draft pick and fully healthy after injuring a knee last fall. Five of the starting nine players are back in addition to pitchers who threw half of the innings at the College World Series.

Oklahoma State (42-22)

Six everyday players return, and transfer Juaron Watts-Brown is a conference preseason newcomer and pitcher of the year. Watts-Brown threw the first complete game no-hitter in Long Beach State history, and his 13.62 strikeouts per nine innings were a program record and fifth nationally. Nolan McLean hit a team-leading 19 homers.

Tennessee (57-9)

The Volunteers set a program record for wins and won SEC regular-season and tournament titles for the first time since 1995, but losing a three-game super regional to Notre Dame still smarts after Tennessee spent most of the season atop the polls. The foundation is set with the core of a pitching staff that led the nation in ERA and held opponents to a .199 batting average.

TCU (38-22)

The Horned Frogs' expectations are high even though they lost their entire weekend rotation. Cam Parker split time between starting and relieving and will likely be the Friday night starter. Big 12 preseason player of the year Brayden Taylor had 28 extra-base hits and 50 RBIs.

Stanford (47-18)

The Cardinal look to rebound after going two-games-and-out at the CWS for the first time in 18 appearances. Carter Graham led the Pac-12 with 22 homers and Tommy Troy batted .500 with five homers in postseason. Quinn Matthews went from starter to closer and was only pitcher in country with nine wins and nine saves.

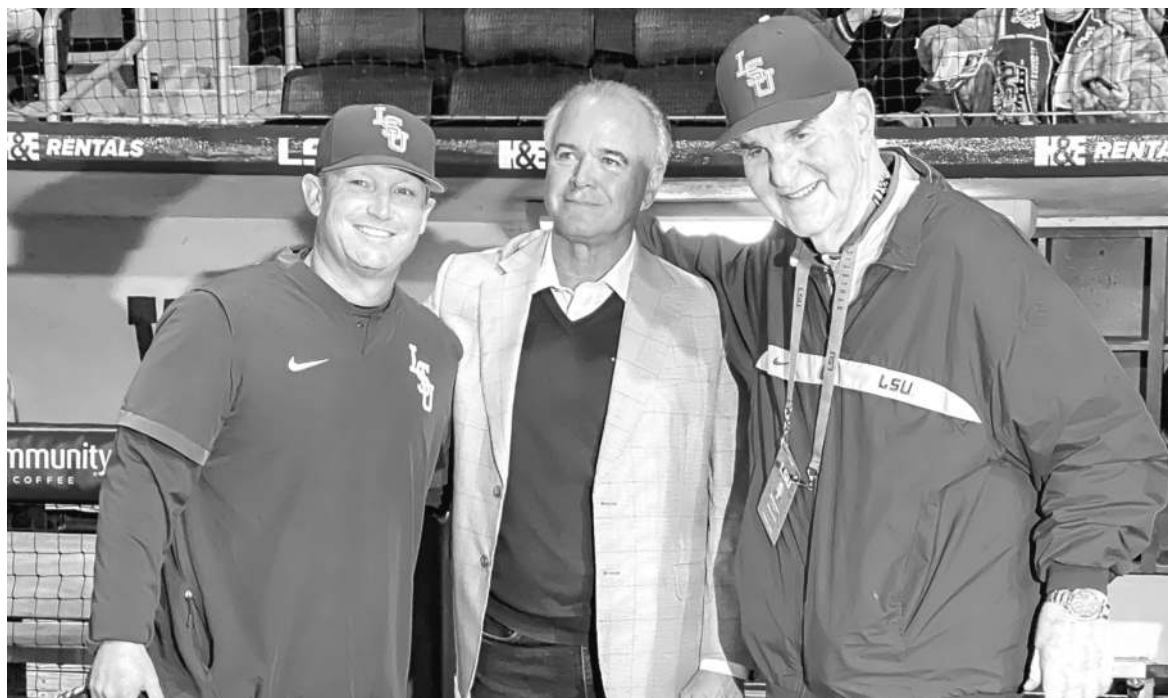
UCLA (40-24)

Like many years, the Bruins' biggest question mark is offense. They hit only 47 homers and were in the bottom half of the Pac-12 in homers, slugging and scoring. The pitching seems to replenish itself each season. One of the intriguing arms is Alonzo Treadwell, a 6-foot-8, 230-pounder who goes from closer to weekend starter.

Wake Forest (41-19-1)

The Demon Deacons made the biggest one-year improvement in program history after going 20-27 in 2021, and the ceiling is extremely high with the return of ACC pitcher of the year Rhett Lowder and the rest of the weekend rotation. Run support won't be an issue. Wake batted .319 and averaged 9.2 runs per game. Brock Wilken, who had 23 homers and 77 RBIs, is one of the top offensive players in the country.

Eric Olson, The Associated Press



MATTHEW HINTON/AP

LSU head coach Jay Johnson, left, poses for a photo with retired Tigers head coaches Paul Mainieri and Skip Bertman before a game against Maine on Feb. 18 in Baton Rouge, La.

Johnson proved himself in West, out to be SEC's best

By ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

Jay Johnson is among the few college baseball coaches from the West Coast who have entered the cauldron that is the Southeastern Conference.

In his first season at LSU, he smashed any notion he would be overmatched in a league that has produced three consecutive national champions and eight of the past 13.

The Tigers won 40 games, had their first top-four finish in the SEC since 2017 and reached an NCAA regional final.

Johnson was just getting started.

LSU signed the nation's best recruiting class, brought in the top-rated group of transfers and has back the favorite to be the No. 1 overall pick in the 2023 MLB Draft in center fielder Dylan Crews.

The Tigers will open the season at home Friday night against Western Michigan as the consensus No. 1 team in the polls, the first time since 2019 they've had a top preseason ranking.

Any season not ending with LSU among the eight teams in the College World Series in Omaha, Neb., is a disappointment to the Tigers' passionate fans. That's the minimum expectation this year.

"I'm not a betting man, but if you want to bet, I would imagine they're going to be one of those eight hot teams in Omaha and if they stay hot they'll win the whole darn thing," said Andy Lopez, a College Baseball Hall of Fame coach and Pac-12 Network analyst who was Johnson's predecessor at Arizona.

Johnson made two CWS appearances in six seasons at Arizona before he became the third coach to move from the West Coast to the SEC. The first two were Lopez and Dave Serrano.

Lopez was hired by Florida three years after he won the 1992 national title at Pepperdine. He led the Gators to two CWS appearances over seven seasons. He spent the last 14 years of his career at Arizona, winning the 2012 national championship before he

retired in 2015. Johnson succeeded him in Tucson and the two are friends.

Serrano left Cal State Fullerton after the 2011 season and coached Tennessee six years, never finishing higher than fifth in the SEC East or making an NCAA Tournament.

Johnson, 45, grew up in the Northern California town of Oroville, played at Point Loma Nazarene in San Diego and worked his way up the coaching ranks from assistant at San Diego to head coach at Nevada and Arizona.

"I was very content at Arizona and really believed that was going to be my lifetime job," Johnson said. "I loved those players and what we accomplished there and was very comfortable."

As a player and young coach, Johnson followed the Tigers and iconic coach Skip Bertman from afar as they won five national titles from 1991 to 2000.

"For me, a lot is made out of the West Coast-to-the-South thing," Johnson said. "In reality, coaching is coaching, recruiting is recruiting, and so I just wanted to test myself against the best players, the best coaches, the best programs in college baseball right now."

Johnson, who will earn \$1.25 million in the second year of his five-year contract, said his plan was to build for 2023. He used year one to identify the program's greatest needs and addressed

them in recruiting and through the transfer portal. Starting pitching was the first concern. Johnson said the 2022 rotation, by metrics he and his staff use, ranked 11th of 14 in the SEC.

Johnson hired pitching coach Wes Johnson away from the Minnesota Twins and signed elite transfers in Paul Skenes (Air Force), Thatcher Hurd (UCLA) and Christian Little (Vanderbilt). Right-handers Chase Shores and Aiden Moffett and lefty Griffin Herring are the top freshman arms.

The portal also yielded Tommy White, who hit 27 homers as a freshman for N.C. State and will take over at third for first-round draft pick Jacob Berry.



BRUCE NEWMAN/AP

Mississippi players celebrate their national championship during a parade in Oxford, Miss., on June 29. Pitchers who threw half of the innings for the Rebels in the College World Series are returning.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL/MLB

Some transfers gave big boost to NCAA hopefuls

BY HANK KURZ JR.
Associated Press

Free agency has come to college basketball with the NCAA's determination that transfers need not sit out a year before playing.

That has given programs with holes to fill access to players to fill those holes, but not all of them work out. Here are six that have, based not only on their production but the team's clear benefit:

Mark Sears, No. 1 Alabama

He averaged 19.6 points at Ohio last season and is at 14.0 for the Crimson Tide. That's good for second on a team he leads with 39 steals. Sims also is second with 53 three-pointers, which has been a key area of improvement for the Crimson Tide after they finished 300th in the nation in three-point percentage last season, making just 30.9%.

Sears has had several big outbursts (7-for-11 three-pointers, 24 points against North Carolina), 26 points against Arkansas and a 19-point, 4-for-6 three-point performance last week in a 97-69 win against Florida.

"He's been aggressive," Alabama coach Nate Oats said after the Florida win. "We need him. ... He makes our offense go and he's able to play some point, too. Sears can also attack the rim. He's aggressive, gets fouled frequently because he's a tough, physical, downhill guard.

"But when he's making shots like he is, he's tough to guard."

Alabama rose to No. 1 this week for the first time in 20 years.

Souley Boum, No. 16 Xavier

A graduate transfer, Boum averages better than 16 points and leads the Musketeers (19-6) in three-pointers (48), assists and minutes played after moving from UTEP. Boum scored nearly 20 per game last season.

He led the Musketeers with 26 points in a 90-87 victory against Creighton and added five rebounds, eight assists and three blocks.

"To play in a game that fast and have zero turnovers is really hard to do,"

Xavier coach Sean Miller said. "He's playing like an All-American."

Cam Spencer, Rutgers

His 18.9 scoring average at Loyola Maryland likely convinced him he'd undersold himself, and his transfer has proven it. He's averaging 12.9 points, second among Scarlet Knights, with a team-high 49 three-pointers, and has another year of eligibility if he chooses to use it.

Spencer etched his name into Scarlet Knights lore on Jan. 2, capping a 14-point performance by hitting a three-pointer with 13.3 seconds left to give Rutgers a 65-64 victory over top-ranked and unbeaten Purdue.

"He's been a great addition to our program," coach Steve Pikiell said. "He's a great kid from a great family. He's the whole package."

Morris Udeze, New Mexico

He's third on the Lobos with an average of 15.4 points on 59.5% shooting and leads them in rebounding (8.7). At Wichita State last year, he averaged 10.2 points and 6.9 rebounds per game.

Needing a veteran center, "we were able to target Morris and he's been great," coach Richard Pitino said. "Besides the fact that he's a really good player, he's a winner. He is a relentless worker. He's tough, and he's a huge reason why we've been able to turn this around."

Baylor Scheierman, No. 18 Creighton

His scoring has dropped from 16.2 ppg at South Dakota State to 13.3 ppg, but he's shooting nearly 40% from three-point range with a team-best 63 threes and leads the Bluejays (17-8) with 8.3 rebounds per game.

Kendric Davis, Memphis

A top scorer last season at SMU (19.4), he's been even better for the Tigers, ranking seventh nationally at 21.8 per game. He also leads Memphis (19-6) with 41 three-pointers, 51 steals and 6.1 assists per game.

The former American Athletic Conference player of the year had 25 points, 11 assists and seven rebounds when the Tigers beat SMU on Jan. 26.



MORRY GASH/AP

The new pitch clock is seen at Salt River Field in Scottsdale, Ariz. Opening Day will feature three of the biggest changes in baseball since 1969, and the pitch clock seems to be the biggest change.

Spring training a test run for MLB's new rule changes

BY DAVID BRANDT
Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Spring training games might be a little ugly this year, particularly during the first few weeks.

For Major League Baseball, that's a feature, not a bug.

The Grapefruit and Cactus League games in Florida and Arizona over the next month will be used as a petri dish for the sport's rule changes, including a pitch clock, bigger bases and limits to infield shifts. The idea is that the worst kinks will be worked out before opening day on March 30.

Though there's multiple innovations, one stands above the rest.

"The pitch timer is — by far — the biggest change that's coming this season," MLB executive vice president Morgan Sword said Tuesday. "Frankly, it's probably the biggest change that's been made to baseball in most of our lifetimes."

The pitch clock has been tested for a few years at the minor league level. Pitchers will have 15 seconds to deliver their pitch with no runners on base and 20 seconds when runners are on base. There will be 30 seconds between batters and 2 minutes, 15 seconds between innings.

MLB games averaged 3 hours, 4 minutes last season following the introduction of the PitchCom electronic device to signal pitches, down from a record 3:10 in 2021. Sword said MLB's research indicates fans prefer games that are around 2:30.

The pitch clock's effect on minor league games in 2022 was substantial. Games that used the clock were, on average, 25 minutes shorter than those that did not.

"Fans want a crisper pace," Sword said.

Sword said umpires will be watching for more balks when runners are on base. Some pitchers — particularly relievers — have funky idiosyncrasies in their deliveries and never come to a complete stop before delivering a pitch. That's technically a balk, but umpires usually let those tics slide.

A complete stop with no movement becomes more significant because the pitch clock operator turns off the clock once the pitcher's motion toward the plate begins.

Balks rose to 924 during a 1988 crackdown from 356 the previous year, then declined to 407 in 1989 and 288 in 1990. The total has been under 200 annually since 1989 and was 122 last year.

Sword said many MLB players who spent time in the minors during 2022 grew to appreciate the clock, even though there was an adjustment period. He said most players needed a few weeks to a month to get used to the changes, which is about the length of spring training's game schedule.

Sword said the rule changes will be "full go" from the first day of spring training. That might lead to some irritated players and awkward moments during late February's spring training games.

Former big league pitcher Joe Martinez, who is MLB's vice president for on-field strategy, demonstrated some of the logistics on Tuesday at Talking Stick Field, spring training home of the Arizona Diamondbacks and Colorado Rockies.

He also detailed some of the technology that will be used to

make the new pitch clock system happen, including buzzers for umpires, which vibrate when a pitcher has run out of time.

Here are some other updates as MLB camps get going in Florida and Arizona.

■ MLB said it's looking forward to a season without COVID-19 as a main concern. The past three seasons have at least been partially affected by the virus, which shut down spring training during March 2020.

No fans were allowed to attend games during the shortened 2020 regular season and attendance was severely curtailed at many parks through much of 2021, when the average crowd was 18,901. Last year's average of 26,843 was down 5.3% from 2019's 28,339.

MLB said it was encouraged by a few trends toward the end of 2022. In September, attendance numbers were the highest they had been since 2014.

"We feel like we've got a lot of momentum," said Chris Marinak, MLB's chief operations and strategy officer.

■ MLB introduced a balanced schedule for its 162-game regular-season schedule that focuses less on division rivals and more on making sure all teams play against each other every season.

Teams will play their division rivals 13 times this season as opposed to 19 times under the unbalanced schedule that had been used since 2001. Most of those division games are being shifted to the interleague schedule, which pits teams from the National League against the American League.

"It brings more teams and more players to more markets," Marinak said.



AARON GASH/AP

Xavier's Souley Boum, left, averages better than 16 points and leads the Musketeers in three-pointers (48), assists and minutes played.

NHL

2018 Olympics showed future stars

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

Connor McDavid could not team up with Sidney Crosby and Nathan MacKinnon for Canada. Auston Matthews and Jack Eichel did not get the chance to play alongside Patrick Kane for the United States. Henrik Lundqvist never got a chance to win a second gold medal with Sweden, this time with Victor Hedman in front of him.

The NHL skipping the 2018 Olympics looks like a major mistake in retrospect, since the world's best players have yet to face off against each other on the international stage. Turns out, the tournament in South Korea offered a glimpse of what was to come for a handful of players.

Five years since starring for the Russians on their way to gold, Kirill Kaprizov is now a dominant force for Minnesota. He plays with Jordan Greenway, who paused his college career to represent the U.S. in Pyeongchang alongside Seattle forward Ryan Donato. Before joining the Kraken and scoring at will this season, Eeli Tolvanen was roommates with Dallas defenseman Miro Heiskanen, who along with then-17-year-old Swede Rasmus Dahlin are among the best at the position.

Few knew about Czech goaltender Pavel Francouz before he beat the U.S. in an elimination shootout in that tournament. Now his name is on the Stanley Cup after helping Colorado win it last season.

From Kaprizov to Francouz, the success stories from the 2018 Olympics are now playing out in the NHL.

"It's a testament to how good the hockey was there," said Donato, who tied with Kaprizov and Ilya Kovalchuk for the tournament lead with five goals. "You had a lot of guys who played in the NHL for a long time. You kind of got a sense that if those guys could hang around a lot of longtime NHLers, that it would bode well for their career."

It has for Kaprizov, who was the best player on the ice for those two



PHOTOS BY FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

Jordan Greenway (18), of the United States, celebrates with teammate Bobby Sanguinetti after scoring in the second period against Slovenia at the Winter Olympics in Gangneung, South Korea, on Feb. 14, 2018.

weeks while still being an unproven NHL prospect. Only one player had more points than Kaprizov and Tolvanen, who knew all about his Russian counterpart from their time facing off in the Kontinental Hockey League.

"Since the first game we played against them, I knew that he was going to be a really good player," said Tolvanen, who had three goals and six assists in five games at the Olympics before turning 19. "There was not much talk in North America at that time about him, but everybody that played in the KHL or played against the Russians at the national stage knew that he's the real deal."

Tolvanen and Heiskanen looked like the real deal at the time, too. Heiskanen was the third pick in the draft, Tolvanen went later in the first round and then they were roommates while teaming up for Finland.

Heiskanen is now a standout for

Dallas in the NHL. Tolvanen languished with Nashville before going on waivers this season. Claimed by the Kraken, he has since scored nine goals in 20 games.

"It seems like it's really helped him to get to the new place and get some more minutes there," Heiskanen said. "It's great to see the success."

For all their individual successes, Francouz is the only player from the 2018 Olympics to win the Stanley Cup since. The Avalanche became the first team since 1972 to hoist the Cup after two goalies won at least five games each during their run, and they can, in part, thank Francouz's experience five years ago for putting him on the radar.

"I think the scouts knew me from the KHL, and they kind of knew what my game looked like," Francouz said. "But I feel like it definitely helped me that they saw me in person at the tournament and saw what I'm capable of."

Dahlin, now with Buffalo, got into just two games with Sweden; New York Islanders goaltender Ilya Sorokin played in one for the Russians; and Rangers Vezina Trophy winner Igor Shesterkin was the No. 3 goalie behind veteran national team starter Vasili Koshechkin.

Sorokin said Koshechkin "showed me how he works and plays in very big-pressure games, important games." Dahlin felt the same way practicing with older Swedes.

"I was enjoying every second," Dahlin said. "I didn't play much,

but I had a blast."

Now the Sabres' top defenseman, Dahlin is playing plenty. Only 2010 Olympic gold medalist Drew Doughty and 2022 Norris Trophy winner and playoff MVP Cale Makar — who turned down Canada's invite to the Olympics five years ago — are seeing more ice time this season than Dahlin.

Finally seeing quality ice time in the NHL, Tolvanen is thriving with Seattle.

"It kind of feels like back in 2018: that year when I played in the world juniors and the Olympics and KHL," Tolvanen said. "That was a fun year, and I kind of feel the same way right now."

Now professionals, Donato, Greenway and Co. look back fondly on the bonds built playing at what Donato called a "perfect storm" Olympics with no NHL players.

"The guys who you did that with and experienced that with, you'll always have that connection," Greenway said. "We talk about it. We always will."

After pandemic-related schedule interruptions kept the NHL out of the 2022 Beijing Olympics, the plan is for players to take part in 2026 in Milan.

Those who participated in 2018 got enough of a taste to want to go again.

"You see all the other athletes, you see all the buses going around the Olympic village, and you go see other athletes compete," Tolvanen said. "It's a dream come true to play there as an 18-year-old, but it's something that for sure I want to be a part of again."

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Boston	53	40	8	5	85	196	115
Toronto	55	33	14	8	74	186	147
Tampa Bay	54	35	16	3	73	191	157
Florida	57	27	24	6	60	196	197
Buffalo	53	27	22	4	58	197	185
Detroit	53	25	20	8	58	165	173
Ottawa	53	26	24	3	55	161	170
Montreal	54	23	27	4	50	148	194

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Carolina	53	35	10	8	78	178	144
New Jersey	53	35	13	5	75	184	141
N.Y. Rangers	54	32	14	8	72	184	145
Pittsburgh	53	27	17	9	63	172	164
Washington	56	28	22	6	62	171	160
N.Y. Islanders	57	27	23	7	61	164	158
Philadelphia	55	22	23	10	54	149	171
Columbus	54	16	34	4	36	137	207

Western Conference

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Dallas	55	30	14	11	71	183	142
Winnipeg	54	34	19	1	69	174	140
Colorado	53	29	19	5	63	163	149
Minnesota	54	28	21	5	61	161	157
Nashville	51	25	20	6	56	142	151
St. Louis	53	25	25	3	53	168	192
Arizona	55	19	28	8	46	147	191
Chicago	53	16	32	5	37	127	195

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	54	32	18	4	68	177	152
Los Angeles	55	30	18	7	67	184	185
Seattle	54	30	18	6	66	187	170
Edmonton	55	30	19	6	66	205	181
Calgary	54	25	18	11	61	175	166
Vancouver	55	21	30	4	46	186	227
San Jose	55	17	27	11	45	167	207
Anaheim	55	17	32	6	40	138	230

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

Wednesday's games

Toronto 5, Chicago 2
Arizona 1, Tampa Bay 0, SO
Colorado 3, Minnesota 2
Detroit 5, Edmonton 4, SO
N.Y. Rangers 6, Vancouver 4
Buffalo 7, Anaheim 3

Thursday's games

Florida at Washington
Montreal at Carolina
Winnipeg at Columbus
Boston at Nashville
Detroit at Calgary
New Jersey at St. Louis
Philadelphia at Seattle
San Jose at Vegas

Friday's games

Chicago at Ottawa
Pittsburgh at N.Y. Islanders
Dallas at Minnesota
Los Angeles at Anaheim
N.Y. Rangers at Edmonton

Saturday's games

Colorado at St. Louis
Florida at Nashville
N.Y. Islanders at Boston
New Jersey at Pittsburgh
Columbus at Dallas
Montreal at Toronto
Washington vs. Carolina at Carter-Finley Stadium

N.Y. Rangers at Calgary
Philadelphia at Vancouver
Arizona at Los Angeles
Buffalo at San Jose
Detroit at Seattle
Tampa Bay at Vegas

Sunday's games

Nashville at Minnesota
St. Louis at Ottawa
Edmonton at Colorado
Toronto at Chicago
Winnipeg at New Jersey
Columbus at Arizona

Scoring leaders

Through Thursday

	GP	G	A	PTS
Connor McDavid, EDM	55	42	57	99
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	53	31	49	80
Nikita Kucherov, TB	54	21	57	78
Matthew Tkachuk, FLA	54	27	48	75
David Pastrnak, BOS	53	39	35	74
Erik Karlsson, SJ	55	18	55	73
Jason Robertson, DAL	55	34	37	71
Tage Thompson, BUF	53	36	34	70
Jack Hughes, NJ	50	35	32	67
Elias Pettersson, VAN	53	25	41	66
R. Nugent-Hopkins, EDM	55	26	40	66



Eeli Tolvanen (20), of Finland, scores a goal against goalie Lars Haugen, of Norway.

NBA

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	42	17	.712	—
Philadelphia	38	19	.667	3
Brooklyn	34	24	.586	7½
New York	33	27	.550	9½
Toronto	28	31	.475	14
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	32	27	.542	—
Atlanta	29	30	.492	3
Washington	27	30	.474	4
Orlando	24	35	.407	8
Charlotte	17	43	.283	15½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	40	17	.702	—
Cleveland	38	23	.623	4
Chicago	26	32	.448	14½
Indiana	26	34	.433	15½
Detroit	15	44	.254	26
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	35	22	.614	—
Dallas	31	29	.517	5½
New Orleans	30	29	.508	6
San Antonio	14	45	.237	22
Houston	13	45	.224	22½
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Denver	41	18	.695	—
Minnesota	31	29	.517	10½
Oklahoma City	28	29	.491	12
Portland	28	30	.483	12½
Utah	29	31	.483	12½
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Sacramento	32	25	.561	—
Phoenix	32	27	.542	1
L.A. Clippers	32	28	.533	1½
Golden State	29	29	.500	3½
L.A. Lakers	27	32	.458	6

Wednesday's games
 Charlotte 120, San Antonio 110
 Indiana 117, Chicago 113
 Boston 127, Detroit 109
 Brooklyn 116, Miami 105
 New York 122, Atlanta 101
 Philadelphia 118, Cleveland 112
 Memphis 117, Utah 111
 Oklahoma City 133, Houston 96
 Denver 118, Dallas 109
 L.A. Lakers 120, New Orleans 102

Thursday's games
 Milwaukee at Chicago
 Washington at Minnesota
 L.A. Clippers at Phoenix

Friday's games
2023 Jordan Rising Stars
Game 1
 Team Deron vs Team Pau
Game 2
 Team Joakim at Team Jason

Saturday's games
 No games scheduled

Sunday's game
2023 All-Star Game
 Team LeBron vs Team Giannis

AROUND THE NBA

Westbrook could help a contender

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
Associated Press

Nikola Jokic and Luka Doncic are doing it. So are LeBron James, James Harden and Lameo Ball. They are among the six players in the NBA averaging at least 15 points, six rebounds and seven assists per game this season.

That's two MVP front-runners, three current All-Stars and two other players who should have been, at minimum, under All-Star consideration this season.

There's one other member of the 15-6-7 club: Russell Westbrook.

As the league gears up for its All-Star festivities this weekend, Westbrook is deciding whether he wants to play out this season in Utah — a place where he said a fan made a racist taunt toward him four years ago, sparking an uproar — or accept a buyout after getting traded there by the Los Angeles Lakers and try to latch on with a playoff contender to finish the season.

As long as he's on another roster by March 1, he'd be playoff-eligible.

There is a market for Westbrook. And there should be.

"If there's, you know, somebody out there," Clippers forward Paul George said a few days ago when asked about his team having an open roster spot.

He paused for a couple of seconds and then said "Russell." Hey, it's not tampering if players talk about other players.

"It would definitely improve our team if we had that traditional point guard, to kind of get us in things and make the game easy," George said. "So, hopefully, Russell sees this and we figure something out."

The Clippers could use Westbrook. So could Chicago, where even Goran Dragic — the team's backup point guard — knows the Bulls need help at that spot. So could Miami, where Kyle Lowry has been sidelined of late by knee soreness.

George has a valid, reasonable argument when it comes to why he wants Westbrook on the Clippers. They have shooting. Shooting means spacing. Spacing means lanes to the basket. That's where Westbrook thrives, getting to the rim, playing fast, driving-and-attacking or driving-and-kicking.

The whole world, especially his many detractors, are very aware that Westbrook is not Stephen Curry from long range. Or Seth Curry.



MICHAEL CONROY/AP

Russell Westbrook shoots against the Pacers on Feb. 2 before the Lakers traded him. Westbrook might play the rest of the season for Utah but could also join a contender.

Or probably even Dell Curry at this point. He is not a knockdown shooter and never has been, so it's puzzling why this is some sort of argument against Westbrook.

At his best, Westbrook was a 34% three-point shooter. On average, he's a 30% shooter from beyond the arc. This season, he's just under 30%.

The \$47 million salary for this season is another source of disdain, that someone averaging what Westbrook is averaging — and wasn't even starting for a Lakers team that has spent the entire season outside of the play-in picture — isn't playing up to the level of his paycheck. But he's far from the only veteran in the NBA to have a bloated contract toward the end of the line, part of the final payoff for the deal that he earned when he was an All-NBA player, an MVP, a perennial star. He was paid what the market said he should be paid. And he is far from the only reason the Lakers struggled in his year-plus with the team.

"It's really unfair to put the last year and a half (on) one player," Lakers general manager Rob Pelinka said.

The Clippers see an opportunity. The players in that locker room — and surely some in other locker rooms, too — are convinced that Westbrook would make them better.

"He's one of the greatest players that ever played the game," Clippers forward Marcus Morris Sr. said.

Look at the résumé: nine All-Star appearances, part of the NBA's 75th anniversary team, an MVP, two scoring titles, three assist titles, 198 triple-doubles. He has an edge, no question. He's sometimes abrupt with reporters, particularly when he doesn't like a question. He's also the man who, quietly, left a massive tip for hotel staff inside the NBA's restart bubble at Walt Disney World three years ago and urged other players to find ways to thank those people for making the bubble possible.

It's hard to find a team out there that couldn't use another 15 points, six rebounds and seven assists per game right now. If the fit is right and a buyout happens, some team could get quite a late-season boost.

"Give him an opportunity to come back," Morris said, "and he could be dangerous."

Stars head to Salt Lake City for weekend events

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — If so inclined, and if fellow captain LeBron James was to cooperate with his own selections, Giannis Antetokounmpo could pick Luka Doncic, Nikola Jokic, Joel Embiid and Lauri Markkanen to play on his team Sunday night.

Imagine that: an All-International All-Star starting lineup.

It's one of the many possibilities for this weekend's events in Salt Lake City.

NBA All-Star weekend is almost here, with many of the principals arriving in Utah on Thursday and a few more set to arrive on Friday in time for the official three-day lineup to begin. More than 60 players from the NBA and G League will be part of the show-

case — the All-Star Game on Sunday, the dunk, three-point and skills competitions on All-Star Saturday, and the Rising Stars games for first- and second-year players on Friday.

"You can never take this for granted," said Antetokounmpo, the Milwaukee Bucks forward who is heading to his seventh All-Star Game. "You never know how many times more you're going to be an All-Star. I don't take this for granted. And by the way, thanks for all the fans who voted for me as captain. I don't take that for granted. We have to go there, have fun, enjoy the time with our kids."

Of the 10 starters on Sunday night, barring any changes to the rosters because of injuries, six were born outside the U.S., which is

a record. The nine internationally born All-Stars ties a record.

It's a homecoming of sorts for Donovan Mitchell, the Cleveland guard who spent the first five years of his NBA career in Utah until he was traded last summer. Mitchell still has deep ties to Utah; he's throwing a comedy show for charity this weekend to benefit Kearns High School, a place that he worked closely with when he played for the Jazz.

"You learn to appreciate those moments," said Mitchell, who had to miss last year's All-Star Game in Cleveland because of an upper respiratory issue. "You learn to appreciate those things because they saw me grow up. I was a young kid, just happy to be drafted and then given a role to be one of the leaders on the team early, making the

playoffs, having big moments, having struggles, ups and downs. And to grow into who I am today, I'm forever grateful, forever thankful.

"So to be there my first time as a starter, back on the team that I was a fan of as a kid, there's just so many different things you can point to."

For some — Minnesota's Anthony Edwards, Sacramento's De'Aaron Fox, Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Indiana's Tyrese Haliburton, Memphis' Jaren Jackson Jr. and Markkanen of the host Jazz — this will be their first appearance.

The NBA is set to pay tribute to James passing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar earlier this month as the league's career scoring leader with a halftime ceremony on Sunday night.

AUTO RACING

Hendrick takes top two spots

Bowman, Larson to start on front row

BY DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Alex Bowman admired yet another Daytona 500 pole trophy that he won from mastering the super-speedway over one fast lap ahead of NASCAR's marquee race.

The Hendrick Motorsports driver still wants to add to his Daytona collection. There's a championship trophy missing. "It may not be the big one," Bowman said. "But it's not a bad one to have." Bowman and Kyle Larson turned Daytona 500 qualifying into another Hendrick Motorsports romp.

Bowman posted the top speed in his No. 48 Chevrolet at Daytona International Speedway and won his third career pole for the race. He'll be joined by Larson in the No. 5 Chevrolet on the front row for NASCAR's season opener.

The Hendrick dominance is a recurring theme at Daytona.

Daytona 500
AFN-Sports
8:30 p.m. Sunday CET
4:30 a.m. Monday JKT

"They've got something figured out, for sure," Larson said. "There's obviously tricks they've learned along the way that still apply to these cars."

Bowman, who missed five races late last season because of a concussion, is on the Daytona 500 front row for the the sixth straight time, and the organization has produced a pole winner in eight of the last nine years.

"There's a ton of effort that goes into trying to qualify well here," Bowman said.

Jimmie Johnson made a triumphant return to NASCAR on Wednesday night and qualified for the Daytona 500, a tremendous start for the the seven-time champion as he heads into his first Cup race since 2020.

The 47-year-old Johnson returned from a two-year dalliance in IndyCar for an ownership stake in Legacy Motor Club — and he quickly added to his own, joining



JOHN RAOUX/AP

NASCAR Cup Series driver Alex Bowman climbs out of his car Wednesday after qualifying for the pole position in Sunday's Daytona 500 at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, Fla.

the 40-driver field Wednesday night in his No. 84 Chevrolet.

Yes, a reverse of the No. 48 he ran when he won two Daytona 500s.

"I think I really have a shot to win," Johnson said before he qualified. "If I survive and get through the first two stages, there's really a shot that I have to win this race."

Johnson will be joined Sunday by another 40-something part-timer in former X Games thrill-seeker Travis Pastrana. Pastrana said racing in the Daytona 500 was one of his last motorsports

goals and this was his last, best shot to get there. He landed a ride for Daytona in the No. 67 Toyota as a third entry for the NASCAR team owned by Michael Jordan and Denny Hamlin.

With 36 drivers already locked into the 40-car field based on NASCAR's charter system, Johnson and Pastrana were among six others competing for the final four starting spots at Daytona International Speedway.

Johnson and Pastrana embraced on pit row after they locked themselves into the race. They can rest easy for a night.

So can Bowman, who has yet to parlay the top spot into a Daytona 500 win, and Larson. Bowman, who received a new contract and a new crew chief in Blake Harris entering this season, turned a top speed of 181.686 mph and Larson hit 181.057. Both drive Chevrolets for team owner Rick Hendrick.

"Now it's time to finish," Bowman said. "Make it to the end."

The final two open spots and the starting order were settled in Thursday night's duel qualifying races. Conor Daly, Austin Hill, Chandler Smith and Zane Smith were vying for the two open spots.

Drivers to watch include several familiar names

BY JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — This 75th season of NASCAR begins Sunday with the Daytona 500 and it comes after what has been a long exodus of sorts.

Since 2016, Jeff Gordon, Tony Stewart, Dale Earnhardt Jr., Carl Edwards, Matt Kenseth, Danica Patrick and Jimmie Johnson have all retired (though Johnson is back). They all followed Mark Martin and the Labonte brothers, Dale Jarrett and Rusty Wallace.

As Kevin Harvick prepares to depart, the stage is open to be seized by the likes of Noah Gragson, watermelon farmer Ross Chastain and Daniel Suarez, the only Mexican-born winner in NASCAR history. There is also Austin Cindric, a Team Penske fixture who won last year's Daytona 500 as a rookie, and Bubba Wallace, the only Black driver competing at NASCAR's top level.

NASCAR's trick is to get America to care about these new drivers.

Joey Logano is a star and he just won a second Cup Series title for Team Penske last season. Others hoping to be in the mix include Tyler Reddick, who moves from



MATT KELLEY/AP

Kyle Busch left Joe Gibbs Racing after 15 season and made his debut with Richard Childress Racing in the Clash at the Coliseum.

Richard Childress Racing to 23XI to drive alongside new teammate Bubba Wallace.

AJ Allmendinger returns to the Cup Series after a brief retirement followed by competing in the Xfinity Series for Kaulig Racing. And Ty Gibbs will make his debut driving for his grandfather's team just three months after his father, Coy Gibbs, passed away in his sleep following his son's Xfinity Series championship.

Kevin Harvick

Harvick was thrust into the spotlight as Dale Earnhardt's replacement just five days after the NASCAR hero was killed on the final lap of the 2001 Daytona 500. Harvick is making this season his farewell. He will move into the Fox broadcast booth next year for an unknown length of time: NASCAR is currently negotiating its television package for 2025 and beyond.

Harvick is just 10 Cup Series starts

away from 800, which would make him just the 10th driver in history to hit that milestone. But his move off the track completes an exodus of star power that brought NASCAR into living rooms across America during the healthiest days of the sport.

Jimmie Johnson

The two-time Daytona 500 winner returns after two years in IndyCar and he turns 48 in September. He counts the 24 Hours of Le Mans among the handful of races he plans to run, and his involvement is primarily in making Legacy Motor Club, which he co-owns and was once Richard Petty's storied team, a contender again.

Driving for Legacy this year are Erik Jones, a promising young Michigan driver who had been run out at Joe Gibbs Racing after the 2020 season, and the feisty Gragson, a White Claw-swilling kid from Las Vegas with a big personality off the track and few cares on it.

Ross Chastain

Chastain grabbed global attention for a wall-riding gamble last October, a video game-style move now dubbed the "Hail Melon" that snagged him the final spot in last year's championship race. The tactic he used — deliberately crashing into the wall for momentum — has

since been banned by NASCAR.

"That was the longest wreck of my life. It was successful, but I have no desire to ever do that again," Chastain said after the ban was announced. "Selfishly, I'm glad I get to be the only one that goes down in history as the only driver to successfully do it. It really mattered and it really paid off."

Chastain was the championship runner-up to Logano, the father of three who celebrated by purchasing himself a new head of full hair.

Kyle Busch

All eyes will be on Kyle Busch, who left Joe Gibbs Racing after 15 seasons in a sponsorship snag.

He made his debut for Richard Childress Racing at last week's Clash and finished third. Days later, Busch revealed he'd been detained in Mexico during an offseason vacation for having a handgun in his luggage. He then unretired from Xfinity Series competition.

Busch and Logano are the only active drivers with multiple Cup championships, and a change of scenery has Busch poised for a very big year. One Cup victory this season would give Busch at least one win in 19 consecutive seasons, breaking a tie with Richard Petty.

Ty Gibbs replaces Busch at Joe Gibbs Racing.

AUTO RACING

75th: Drivers still think Next Gen car is too rigid

FROM PAGE 48

cluding one that ended veteran Kurt Busch's career.

Alterations made during the offseason lacked the desired effect at the preseason Busch Light Clash exhibition at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, where low speed bumping and banging left drivers complaining about the "violence" of the race, including the jarring whiplash effect they felt each time their rear bumper was slammed.

"We think the changes are certainly heading in the right direction, but from an engineering perspective obviously there needs to be more attenuation in the rear of the car to absorb more of the energy," David Wilson, president of Toyota Racing Development, told The Associated Press.

"There's no question that that they've made a steep change. The first car that gets backed in the wall, everyone's going to be paying attention, right?" Wilson added. "(One) of the questions is: What impact will it have on the rest of the car, now that they've softened up the rear of the car?"

A look at NASCAR's upcoming season beyond Harvick, Johnson, Joey Logano, Austin Cindric and a host of other key drivers to watch:

New races and rules

NASCAR continued this year to tweak a schedule that went decades with little to no change. This year, the All-Star Race moves to North Wilkesboro Speedway for the first Cup race at the historic North Carolina track since 1996.

NASCAR on July 2 will also run its first street course race, in downtown Chicago. And the first race of the year at Atlanta and the playoff race at Texas have both

been reduced from 500 miles to 400 miles.

Stage breaks have been removed from road course races. If a wheel comes off a car while on track it will now only be a two-race suspension. It was a four-race suspension last year that included the crew chief, who will no longer face punishment.

Financial model

The top teams in NASCAR took an unprecedented step last year in publicly discussing their finances while arguing the sport's business model is not sustainable.

Teams want a larger piece of the television package, the bulk of which is currently paid to the racetracks. NASCAR itself owns 11 facilities on the Cup schedule, not including the races it promotes at the LA Coliseum and in Chicago.

"We'll get it figured out," NASCAR president Steve Phelps told AP. "We need to have financially healthy teams, and financially healthy teams put a better product on the racetrack."

Television package

NASCAR has entered its exclusive negotiating period with current television partners Fox and NBC Sports, with its current deals with the networks set to expire at the end of the season.

How much cash NASCAR secures in its next deal and its distribution is key to making peace with its ownership, a group that has expanded in the last two seasons to include Michael Jordan with 23XI Racing and Pitbull as part-owner with Justin Marks at Trackhouse Racing.

The negotiating period with Fox and NBC began on Feb. 1, and NASCAR can begin talking to other suitors on May 1.

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SPORTS

Shiffrin strikes gold

American skier wins giant slalom at world championships » Page 41



AUTO RACING



STEVE HELBER/AP

Kevin Harvick celebrates after winning a NASCAR Cup Series race at Richmond Raceway on Aug. 14 in Richmond, Va. Harvick is retiring at the end of the upcoming season.

Rolling with the changes

NASCAR's 75th season one of celebration, transition

BY JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

Kevin Harvick is looking for the exit ramp as he enters his final season as a NASCAR driver while seven-time champion Jimmie Johnson is sliding back into stock cars.

Harvick's farewell tour will come nine years after his only Cup Series title and ahead of a move into the broadcast booth. Johnson, after two years in IndyCar, has returned to NASCAR as its newest team owner.

Petty Enterprises, an emblem of NASCAR since shortly after the series' 1948 launch, has rebranded once again and is

INSIDE
Hendrick Motorsports takes front-row spots
Page 46

now Legacy Motor Club. Johnson will sometimes drive for the team he co-owns; this week, for example, he qualified 23rd for Sunday's Daytona 500.

This 75th season of NASCAR begins Sunday with the big race and it will be a year of celebration and transition.

Veteran drivers are making room for potential new stars that the public must learn to love. Series leadership is negotiating with its current television partners

with the \$8.2 billion deal with Fox and NBC set to expire at the end of the 2024 season. NASCAR owners are also demanding a more stable financial model that makes their success less dependent on outside sponsorship.

And then are the frantic changes NASCAR is making to protect its drivers in the second year of the Next Gen car. The rear of the car proved too stiff last year and the energy drivers absorbed in routine collisions led to concussions — in-

SEE 75TH ON PAGE 47

Jimmie Johnson returns to NASCAR as an owner and part-time driver after spending the last two years in IndyCar.

PAUL SANCYA/AP



2018 Olympics showcased future NHL stars » Page 44

