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STARS AND STRIPES®
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Volume 83 Edition 22 ©SS 2024 FRIDAY, MAY 17, 2024 平成12年4月5日 第三種郵便物認可 日刊（土日除く） 発行所 星条旗新聞社 〒106-0032 東京都港区六本木7丁目23番17号 定価￥100 $1.00

JENNESSA DAVEY/Stars and Stripes

Sailors' family members wave farewell as the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan departs Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on Thursday. The ship, which played a key role in bolstering defense of the Indo-Pacific region, will be replaced by the USS George Washington.

Reagan bids final farewell

US carrier takes leave of Japanese port it has called home since 2015

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Nearly 400 sailors in their dress whites manned the USS Ronald Reagan's rails Thursday morning as the aircraft carrier steamed out of Tokyo Bay on its final deployment from Japan.

The ship's departure from the home of the U.S. 7th Fleet concludes nearly a decade of Navy history in the Indo-Pacific region. The Ronald Reagan is scheduled to make its final patrol before relocating to Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Wash.

During its tenure at Yokosuka, the carrier took part in dozens of multinational exercises, visited more than 15 foreign ports and covered more than 460,000 miles on its annual, six-month deployments, according to U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel.

"As impressive as those numbers are, they miss one critical element: the dedication of our sailors and airmen and women of this ship, the Ronald Reagan," he told reporters from the ship's flight deck ahead of its departure. "That dedication cannot be quantified, but it is measured."

SEE FAREWELL ON PAGE 3

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Incidents down in military for first time in nearly decade

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Thousands fewer active-duty service members experienced sexual assaults or sexual harassment last year than in 2021, according to a Pentagon report released Thursday.

Pentagon officials said they believe some 6,800 fewer active-duty service members experienced unwanted sexual contact in fiscal year 2023 than in 2021 based on confidential surveys that the Defense Department sends active-duty troops every other year. The drop last year to about 29,000 sexual assaults — ranging from unwelcomed groping to rape — was statistically significant, Pentagon officials said.

It was the first recorded drop in unwanted sexual contacts in eight years.

Elizabeth Foster, the executive director of the Pentagon's Office of Force Resiliency, which oversees sexual assault and suicide prevention efforts, said it was not possible to determine precisely what led to the drop in sexual assaults last year. She said she was "cautiously optimistic" the new report showed the Pentagon was finally on the right track in reducing sexual assault cases among troops.

"We have a lot more work to do," Foster told reporters Thursday. "We need to continue to focus on driving down these numbers. We cannot take our eye off the ball. We must continue to focus on this if this change is going to be enduring."

The Pentagon has worked for

SEE INCIDENTS ON PAGE 6

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Germany	$4.017	$4.559	$4.922	$4.257
Change in price	-3.5 cents	-4.4 cents	-3.7 cents	-4.6 cents
Netherlands	..	$4.887	$5.159	$4.887
Change in price	..	-0.8 cents	-0.4 cents	-4 cents
U.K.	..	$4.559	$4.922	$4.257
Change in price	..	-4.4 cents	-3.7 cents	-4.6 cents
Azores	..	..	$4.772	..
Change in price	..	..	-3.7 cents	..
Turkey	..	..	$4.588	$4.721*
Change in price	..	..	-3.7 cents	No change

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective May 17. The change in price is from May 10.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Japan	..	$4.559	..	$3.899
Change in price	..	-4.0 cents	..	-5.0 cents
Okinawa	$3.659	..	..	$3.899
Change in price	-3.0 cents	..	..	-5.0 cents
South Korea	$3.689	..	$4.599	$3.929
Change in price	- 4.0 cents	..	-3.0 cents	-5.0 cents
Guam	$3.719**	$4.259	$4.629	..
Change in price	-4.0 cents	-5.0 cents	-3.0 cents	..

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

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates

Euro costs (May 17)	$1.06
British pound (May 17)	$1.23
Japanese yen (May 17)	152.00
South Korean won (May 17)	1,315.00

Commercial rates

Bahrain (Dinar)	.3769
Britain (Pound)	1.2647
Canada (Dollar)	1.3640
China (Yuan)	7.2191
Denmark (Krone)	6.8723
Egypt (Pound)	46.9010
Euro	.9211
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8044
Hungary (Forint)	356.25
Israel (Shekel)	3.6941
Japan (Yen)	155.47
Kuwait (Dinar)	.3072
Norway (Krone)	10.7299
Philippines (Peso)	57.58
Poland (Zloty)	3.93
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7505
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3469
South Korea (Won)	1,349.53
Switzerland (Franc)	.9057
Thailand (Baht)	36.25
Turkey (New Lira)	32.2040

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

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	8.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00
Federal funds market rate	5.33
3-month bill	5.39
30-year bond	4.51

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

FRIDAY IN EUROPE

SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

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

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Farewell: In 2021, Reagan participated in rare 3-carrier drill

FROM PAGE 1

The Ronald Reagan, commissioned in July 2003, carries a crew of more than 5,000 and better than 60 aircraft, according to the Navy.

Replacing the Ronald Reagan will be the USS George Washington, which is on a deployment that includes scheduled port calls in Brazil, Chile and Peru.

It's expected to arrive later this year, but additional details have not been disclosed. A portion of the two carriers' crews will exchange places at some point, but an exact number was not immediately available, Task Force 70 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Seth Koenig told Stars and Stripes on the pier.

The Ronald Reagan first arrived in Yokosuka in 2015, when it replaced the George Washington, which relocated to Newport News, Va., for mid-life nuclear refueling and maintenance.

"I cannot emphasize enough how much we, and the world, benefit from the incredible strength of our U.S.-Japan alliance."

Rear Adm. Gregory Newkirk
Carrier Strike Group 5 commander

Since then, the Ronald Reagan has led Carrier Strike Group 5 as the Navy's only aircraft carrier homeported overseas.

Its presence in the region served as a "tangible sign of America's commitment to our closest allies here and throughout the region," Rear Adm. Gregory Newkirk, strike group commander, told reporters from the flight deck.

"I cannot emphasize enough how much we, and the world, benefit from the incredible strength of our U.S.-Japan alliance," he said.

In June 2021, the Ronald Reagan and its strike group deployed to the Middle East to join the aircraft carrier Dwight D. Eisenhower in providing cover for U.S. troops withdrawing from Afghanistan. Over 150 days, the ship's F-18 Super Hornets flew missions over Kabul, while sailors provided logistical support and humanitarian aid.

A month later, the Ronald Reagan drilled alongside the British navy's newest aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, during its maiden voyage. Soon after, the two ships joined the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson for a rare, three-carrier drill as part of a 17-ship armada.

Last June, the Ronald Reagan and the guided-missile cruisers USS Antietam and USS Robert Smalls made a historic visit to Da Nang, Vietnam. The stop made the carrier only the third of its class to make a port call in the country since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, and the first since the COVID-19 pandemic subsided.

"For the past nine years, the USS Ronald Reagan and her crew have ensured that millions of people across the Indo-Pacific have been able to live their lives free of coercion, aggression and suppression," Emanuel said.

As sailors lined the carrier shoulder-to-shoulder, more than 100 people gathered pier-side for its departure. At least 100 more gathered elsewhere on base to watch the ship steam away.

For Dominic DeBernardis, the husband of Petty Officer 2nd Class Ashli DeBernardis, the situation was hard to describe.

"I don't know how I feel," he said, adding that his wife would return to Yokosuka with the George Washington. "This is the first time my wife is deploying."

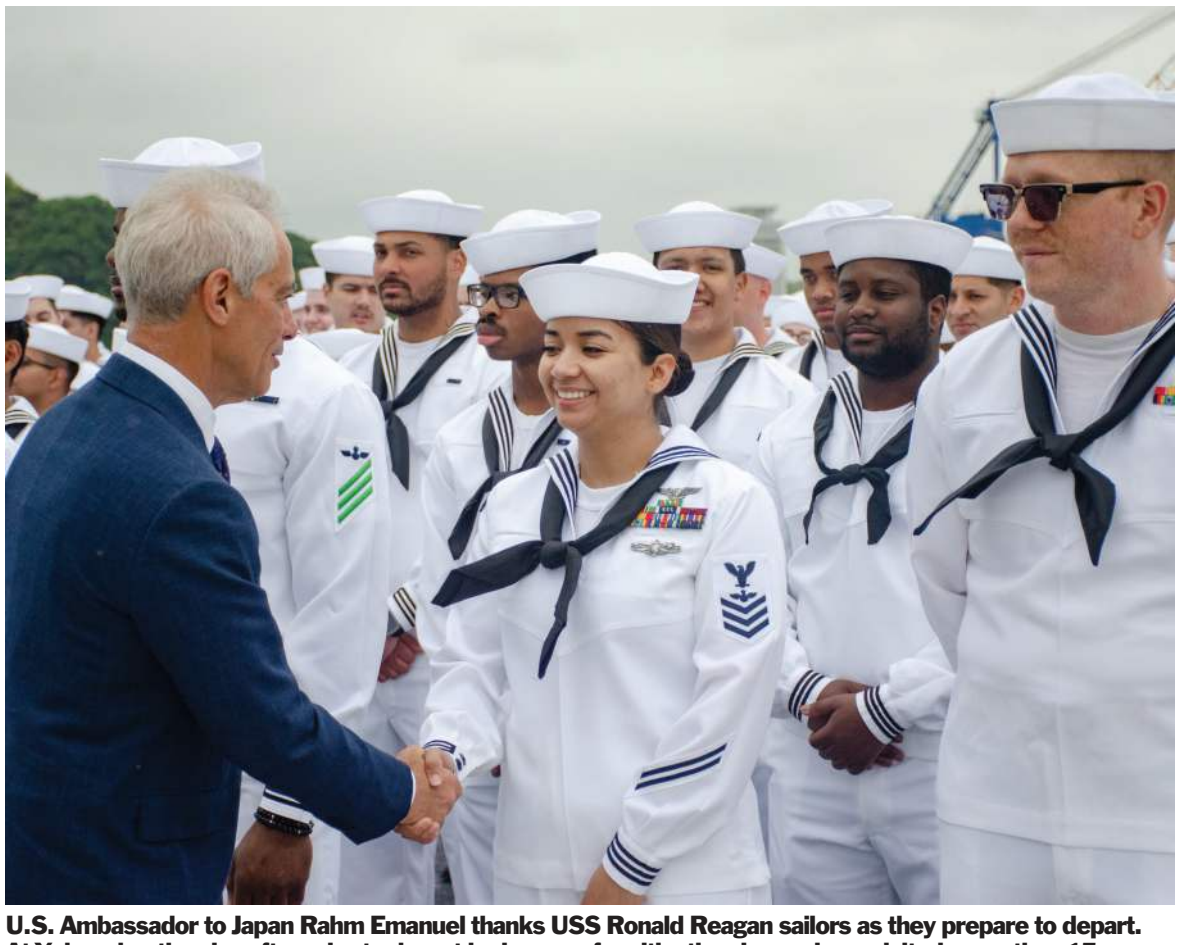
Joanna Baniaga, the spouse of a Defense Department contractor, said watching the ship go is bittersweet — particularly because her brother, Lt. Michael Chai, is aboard. Chai, a public affairs officer, will not return with the George Washington.

"We were really fortunate when he relocated here," Baniaga said as the carrier left the pier. "It's hard to see him go."

PHOTOS BY JENNESSA DAVEY/Stars and Stripes

Sailors man the USS Ronald Reagan's rails as the aircraft carrier prepares to depart Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on Thursday.

The USS Ronald Reagan's skipper, Capt. Daryle Cardone, speaks to reporters ahead of the aircraft carrier's departure.



U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel thanks USS Ronald Reagan sailors as they prepare to depart. At Yokosuka, the aircraft carrier took part in dozens of multinational exercises, visited more than 15 foreign ports and covered more than 460,000 miles on its annual, six-month deployments, Emanuel said.

PACIFIC

US, Japan agree on development of interceptors

PEDRO TENORIO/U.S. Air Force

B-52 Stratofortress crews from North Dakota and Louisiana learn more about hypersonic weapons at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, in February.

BY SETH ROBSON AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The United States and Japan have agreed to develop a defensive weapon to counter the threat from hypersonic missiles, both countries announced this week.

The Department of Defense and Japan's Ministry of Defense signed an agreement Wednesday to jointly develop interceptors to take down the elusive, ultrafast missiles, according to a news release on the DOD website.

The longtime allies had indicated, after high-level meetings in August, that they'd cooperate on the project.

Both China and Russia have fielded hypersonic weapons that can travel five times the speed of sound and maneuver in flight like a cruise missile, making them difficult to detect and shoot down.

North Korea recently reported the successful ground test of a solid-fuel engine for a new type of intermediate hypersonic missile, a test overseen by the country's autocratic leader Kim Jong Un.

In March, the U.S. Air Force conducted its first hypersonic missile test in the Western Pacific.

The Missile Defense Agency is leading development of the interceptors, which will defend against missiles during the glide-phase portion of hypersonic flight, according to the release.

"By pursuing an agreement on [glide-phase interceptor] development, the U.S. and Japan will strengthen regional deterrence while enhancing long-standing missile defense cooperation between the two countries," the DOD release states.

Japan will lead development of rocket motors and propulsion components of the hypersonic missile interceptors, the announcement said.

Japan wants to swiftly bolster interception capabilities, according to a statement posted Wednesday on the Defense Ministry's website.

"Missile-related technologies, such as hypersonic weapons, have improved dramatically around Japan and … have been significantly strengthened both in quality and quantity," the statement said. "Strengthening the ability to intercept these weapons is an urgent issue."

Joint development of the interceptors will start before March with the project scheduled for completion in the 2030s, according to Japan's statement.

A glide-phase interceptor "is an asset that contributes to the improvement of Japan's integrated air-defense missile capabilities and also contributes to the improvement of the deterrence and response capabilities of the Japan-U.S. alliance," the statement said.

Developing a check to hypersonic missiles is a technical challenge, including the design of openings for radar and laser sensors, according to Lance Gatling, an American defense analyst in Tokyo.

"The interceptors themselves must integrate advanced sensors to make final sensing before impact," he wrote in an email Thursday.

Existing technology may be adapted to save time, Gatling said.

"The challenge is adapting everything to work at much higher speeds against a maneuvering target, which is one of the key aspects of offensive hypersonic missiles, unlike ballistic missiles, which follow a more or less predictable, relatively smooth path," he said.

The new interceptors will be integrated with the Aegis missile defense system already in use by the U.S. and Japan and they may have to carry multiple warheads, Gatling added.

The U.S. and Japan collaborating on hypersonic missile defense is a positive step considering potential threats from China, Russia and North Korea, said Ralph Cossa, a retired Air Force officer and former president of the Pacific Forum think tank in Hawaii.

The project could be a bid for Japanese participation in the AUKUS — Australia, United Kingdom and United States — security pact, which includes collaboration across a range of defense capabilities, he said by email Thursday.

"Japan wants to get into more hi-tech cooperation and has apparently been knocking on AUKUS' door," Cossa wrote. "Perhaps this helps open the door a bit."

Mayor responds to Marine's alleged hold-ups on Okinawa

BY KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A mayor on Okinawa complained to the Marine Corps this week about the "burden and fear" created in his city by a Marine accused of robbing and attempting to rob convenience stores last month.

Ginowan Mayor Masanori Matsugawa filed a protest Tuesday with Lt. Gen. Roger Turner, commander of III Marine Expeditionary Force, and Shinya Ito, director of the Okinawa Defense Bureau, asking for "thorough enforcement" of discipline for the Marines in his city. The bureau represents Japan's Ministry of Defense in the island prefecture.

Lance Cpl. Andrew Torres, 20, of the III Marine Logistics Group at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, has been in custody since April 18, when police say they caught him fleeing a Ginowan convenience store with a knife. Prosecutors charged him on May 8 with attempted theft.

Also on May 8, police accused Torres of robbing another Ginowan convenience store at knifepoint on April 3 and taking the equivalent of $840. He has yet to be officially charged in that case.

"This incident is heinous in that the robber went behind the cash register counter and threatened the store clerk with a knife, then wrenched money from the store," the mayor wrote in his petition.

Matsugawa requested "the thorough enforcement of official discipline and education" of the Marines and that the Corps "take every measure to prevent the recurrence of the incidents and accidents," according to his petition.

"I must say that this kind of incident will add to their burden and fear, which should never be allowed," the mayor wrote of his city's residents.

Ito said the defense bureau is "taking this heinous incident very seriously," according to a statement provided Thursday by a spokesman for Ginowan city's Military Base Affairs Division.

Some government spokespeople in Japan are required to speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

The logistics group "is actively cooperating with Japanese law enforcement on this matter," III MEF spokesman 2nd Lt. Owen Hitchcock said by email Thursday. "The alleged behavior does not align with Marine Corps values, and we are committed to upholding our standards."

Okinawa prefecture also complained about the incident to the Marine Corps, Okinawa Defense Bureau and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Okinawa Liaison Office on May 9, a spokeswoman for the prefecture's Military Base Affairs Division said by phone Thursday.

The prefecture also complained that "U.S. service members caused 72 criminal offenses last year, the largest number in the past 10 years."

Marine stationed at Iwakuni dies after being struck by a freight train

BY JONATHAN SNYDER AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — A Marine stationed at this base south of Hiroshima was hit and killed by a freight train over the weekend, according to Marine Corps and police spokesmen.

Cpl. Noah Huff, 22, of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 242's powerline section, died early Saturday in Iwakuni city, Marine Aircraft Group 12 spokesman 1st Lt. Daniel Kim told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday.

Huff was hit on the JR Sanyo mainline south of Kawashimo while crossing between Iwakuni and Minami-iwakuni stations, an Iwakuni city police spokesman said by phone Tuesday.

The city fire department reported the incident to police at 3:03 a.m., he said. Some government officials in Japan may speak to reporters only on condition of anonymity.

"The squadron grieves the loss of an exceptional Marine," Huff's commander, Lt. Col. Alexander Mellman, said by email Wednesday. "Corporal Noah Huff served honorably overseas with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 242 as a motivated powerliner — responsible for safe launches, recoveries, and operations of the F-35B Joint Strike Fighter."

Kim said he could provide no further information due to the ongoing police investigation.

Huff's body was returned to the United States on Tuesday, he said.

"He leaves behind a loving spouse, devoted parents, siblings, and 349 brothers and sisters in arms," Mellman said.

MILITARY

DANIELLE O'DONNELL/U.S. Army

A soldier works on a distance learning course at Fort Bliss, Texas, in 2018. The Army is eliminating approximately 346 hours of online courses it says are no longer needed.

Army pares down online training requirements

By Brian Erickson
Stars and Stripes

The Army has eliminated hundreds of hours of online training courses that service officials say no longer serve a purpose.

Enlisted soldiers are no longer required to take Distributed Learning Courses one through six, which account for 253 hours of mouse clicks and keyboard entries.

On the officer side, the Distance Learning Prerequisite for Commanders Career Course and the Distance Learning Prerequisite for Commanding General Staff Officers Course are no more. The two courses account for a total of 93 hours.

"We are scrubbing everything we are asking our Soldiers to study, because there is only so much time during the day to do your job," Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Weimer said Wednesday in an Army statement.

The Army originally developed the DLC courses in 2010 to improve decision making, communication and leadership skills.

In October of last year, the Army chief of staff directed the Training and Doctrine Command to pare down online training requirements.

After careful consideration, the Army determined that there would be little to no negative impact to the cuts it made, Bill Ogletree, director of training and education at the NCO Leadership Center of Excellence, said Wednesday in a statement.

Weimer said the Army has to do some subtraction to make sure "what we are teaching in all those areas is quality, not quantity."

Trial delayed: Ex-sergeant facing spy charges judged mentally unfit

By Gary Warner
Stars and Stripes

A former Army intelligence sergeant at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., charged with trying to sell secrets to the Chinese has been judged unfit to stand trial, according to federal court documents.

Joseph Daniel Schmidt, 30, was ordered transferred to an unspecified federal psychiatric hospital facility following a May 4 decision by Federal District Judge John C. Coughenour of the U.S. District Court of Western Washington.

"The defendant is presently suffering from a mental disease or defect rendering him mentally incompetent to the extent that he is unable to understand the nature and consequences of the proceedings against him or to assist properly in his defense," Coughenour wrote in his order.

The mental competency and restoration order was included in Schmidt's trial docket. Assistant U.S. Attorney Todd Greenberg and Assistant Federal Public Defender Dennis Carroll jointly submitted the report.

Coughenour's order included an unspecified delay in Schmidt's trial, which was scheduled to begin in early 2025.

Schmidt was a team leader in the human intelligence section of the 109th Military Intelligence Battalion at Lewis-McChord.

A federal grand jury in Seattle indicted Schmidt on Oct. 4, 2023, on two felony counts of attempting to deliver national defense information and retaining national defense information.

The FBI arrested Schmidt on Oct. 6, 2023, when he arrived in San Francisco on a flight from Hong Kong.

An FBI report in support of the indictment alleged after leaving the Army in 2020, Schmidt spent much of the next three years attempting to convince Chinese agents in Istanbul, Hong Kong and Beijing that he could turn over significant materials on American forces and strategy in the region.

Schmidt has pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Lawmaker, a retired general, downplays spouse job woes

READINESS Act passes through committee despite jab

By Rose L. Thayer
Stars and Stripes

A retired Army general now serving as a House lawmaker argued Wednesday that a military spouse's struggle to have a fulfilling career is just part of the sacrifice of a family in the service and doesn't need protection.

"We cannot fashion our decisions on national security based on the individual needs of people that signed up of their own volition for a job that they wanted to pursue," Rep. Scott Perry, R-Pa., said during a hearing of the House Oversight Committee. "We're happy that they want to serve. We're happy that they want to sacrifice, but that's what comes with the territory. If that's not for you, we need insurance salesmen and we need people to clean pools and we need all kinds of things in America."

Perry, whose district includes the Army's Carlisle Barracks, made the comments during the committee's debate about a bill that would offer military spouses working for the federal government flexibility during military-mandated moves. He first enlisted in the Army in 1980 and retired in 2019 as a one-star general in the Pennsylvania National Guard.

Rep. Jasmine Crockett, D-Texas, a committee member who sponsored the bill alongside Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., said she expected the committee would at least agree with the idea of supporting military families.

"We need to do everything that we can for the best military that we have, and that means supporting them in whatever capacity we can, and it starts with this bill," she said.

The Resilient Employment and Authorization Determination to Increase National Employment of Serving Spouses Act, or READINESS Act, allows for spouses preparing to move with their service member to request a determination about whether their job can be completed remotely on a temporary basis, be reassigned to the new duty station or be transferred to a comparable job.

If none of these options fit, the bill allows the employee to go into nonpay status for up to six months. The spouse would retain their nonfinancial benefits while their employer would be allowed to fill the position. The measure would also apply to spouses of foreign service employees.

Other opposition, all of which came from Republicans on the committee, included an argument from Texas Rep. Michael Cloud that this bill only helps "government bureaucrats."

"I think we're going down a dangerous precedent when we begin to say that federal bureaucrats' jobs are guaranteed for life," he said.

Maria Donnelly, an Army spouse who has worked with other spouses to get this bill into Congress, watched the hearing online and said Perry's comments are built upon harmful and outdated stereotypes, while Cloud ignored the hundreds of spouses who work as Defense Department civilians supporting warfighting efforts.

"We marry our spouses because we love them and supporting them should not come at an unmanageable cost," she said. "Most families in the United States need two incomes to survive, and military families are no different. Moreover, employing spouses is a much easier, much cheaper way to help military families — the other option to retain military service members is retention bonuses or increased pay."

The bill now awaits a vote from the full House or possible addition to the NDAA.

Emmalee Gruesen, a Navy spouse also involved with the bill, said they plan to reach out to Perry's office to discuss the importance of financial stability for military families.

"The service chiefs have repeatedly tied service members' familial stability to their military readiness, whether it be spouse employment, child care, housing, health care, etc. The READINESS Act is therefore aptly titled," she said.

Unemployment among military spouses is about 21%, according to the Defense Department. It's hovered at about that mark for more than a decade, despite millions of dollars spent to address the issue. The White House estimated about 16,000 military spouses work for the federal government, though the statistic is not well tracked.

Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, the top Democrat on the committee, said just because a military spouse is not currently a federal employee doesn't mean the benefit would never apply to them.

"Just because you're not using a particular benefit at a particular time, doesn't mean that the benefit is not available to you," he said. "It seems to me that the logic of the legislation is airtight. It's for people who are being suddenly and often involuntarily deployed or redeployed around the world — who make the decision to serve the country in this way — to allow their spouses to continue to pursue their employment, their livelihood and support their families."

The bill passed through the committee Wednesday on a vote of 30-13, with all Democrats in support alongside 10 Republicans, including Committee Chairman James Comer of Kentucky.

However, Cloud and other Republicans were able to add an amendment to exempt any employees working in a diversity, equity and inclusion office from receiving the benefit. Crockett called the amendment a "poison pill."

The bill now awaits a vote from the full House or possible addition to the National Defense Authorization Act, annual legislation to outline defense spending and priorities. A companion bill was introduced in December in the Senate.

"Despite some attempts from the other side to inject politics into an issue with broad bipartisan support, this vote is a victory not just for our military and foreign service spouses, but to our service members, our military readiness and our national security," Crockett said in a statement after the hearing. "In what is perhaps the most dangerous moment in geopolitical history since the Cold War, any issues that lead to poor retention in our armed forces and foreign service should be considered a matter of utmost priority."

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www.stripes.com

MILITARY

JOCELYN FORD/U.S. Air Force

Airman 1st Class Benjamin Soileau, then a 517th Training Group Russian linguist student, attends class at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, Calif., in 2022. Airmen who attend such extended training courses are now eligible for new allowances to support their families while they are away.

Airmen away for training eligible for BAH increase

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Airmen and guardians attending military training away from their families for no more than a year will now qualify for an additional housing allowance to ease the costs of paying for two residences.

The policy provides money equal to the basic allowance for housing rate authorized at the school or training location for those without dependent family members, the Air Force said.

BAH is based on a service member's pay grade, duty location and family size.

Eligible airmen and guardians must have permanent-change-of-station orders for school or training, and they need to return to their prior location when they're finished. They can't collect the extra cash if they're living in free government housing, the Air Force said in a statement Wednesday.

The course or training must last from 140 to 365 days and produce a formal training certificate, the Air Force said.

"This new allowance gives our service members and their families additional resources to weather these times away without the added stress of financial uncertainties," Alex Wagner, Air Force assistant secretary for manpower and reserve affairs, said in a statement.

In some situations, the policy could mean a service member receives a higher allowance while away than the rate at their home station, due to steep fluctuations in housing costs across the United States.

For example, a staff sergeant with a spouse and kids would see an additional $1,524 per month in BAH for a short, temporary move to San Antonio. If that airman is assigned to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where his family stayed while he went away, he would continue to receive $1,455 a month for his household in Dayton, Ohio.

Previously, if service members had unaccompanied orders to another stateside location for training or school lasting more than 20 weeks, they would have to pay rent out of pocket at the temporary site if on-base accommodations weren't available.

The policy was directed by the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act and was published Nov. 1 in the Joint Travel Regulation. It went into effect May 7. Service members can receive retroactive payments if they meet the criteria during a course they attended on or after Dec. 23, 2022, the Air Force said.

US lays out plans for troops' exit from Niger

BY MISSY RYAN AND RACHEL CHASON
The Washington Post

A U.S. delegation will present the government of Niger this week with detailed plans for shuttering two key American bases and withdrawing all troops, officials said, as the Biden administration moves after months of strained negotiations to comply with the African nation's decision to terminate a valued counterterrorism mission.

Senior Defense Department officials, including Chris Maier, assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low-intensity conflict, and Lt. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, who oversees personnel matters on the Pentagon's Joint Staff, arrived Tuesday in Niamey, Niger's capital, and were set to begin talks with Nigerien officials Wednesday, officials said ahead of the meetings.

The discussions represent a significant development in the months-long standoff over the U.S. military presence there and the nature of the two countries' broader relationship. It comes as Niger's prime minister, installed following a 2023 military coup, accuses the U.S. of seeking to dictate his country's foreign dealings and blames Washington for the foundering of what had been an important security partnership.

Several senior officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe sensitive bilateral discussions, discussed the ongoing effort to prepare for the departure from two U.S. bases, which have been the sites of regional drone operations for more than a decade, and the exit of around 1,000 U.S. personnel, which include members of the military, civilians and contractors.

While U.S. officials had held out hope for months that a full withdrawal could be avoided in the wake of the Biden administration's decision to suspend most military aid due to the coup, they are now moving ahead with that plan. Whether cooperation can resume in earnest in the future remains unknown.

"The time for us to address future partnership with the CNSP will be after they see and understand our clear plan to fully withdraw," a senior defense official said, using an acronym for Niger's new government. "The burden of proof is on us."

The official declined to disclose how long it would take the U.S. military to complete its withdrawal once that process begins, saying that the government of Niger must be informed of the timeline first.

He noted that once a withdrawal order is given, it will take several weeks before the first shipments of equipment will be ready to be flown out, but said that the military can begin immediately to rotate out troops who have been stationed in Niger, some of them whose tours have been extended as negotiations have dragged on, and replace them with specialized personnel needed for base closure.

A second U.S. official said remaining troops are focused on assessing what equipment must be transported out of Niger when forces depart and what can be left behind. He said those decisions will depend partly on the value and sensitivity of individual items — weapons, ammunition and communications gear must go, for example, but things like vehicles or construction equipment might stay — and the volume of transport aircraft that will be available to ferry out people and gear.

In the meantime, U.S. forces have had little interaction with a contingent of Russian troops who are occupying the same air base where some U.S. personnel are stationed. Niger's decision to invite in Kremlin troops as military ties with Washington have faltered has been another point of friction with the United States, locked in a major confrontation with Moscow over its war in Ukraine.

"Obviously, there was a little angst with that news in and amongst the troops themselves, but since then, it's settled and I think everybody's resorted to being professional about it," the second official said of the arrival of Russian forces. "No issue from either side."

American officials do plan to ask Nigerien officials to help them ensure that sensitive items or facilities don't fall into Russian hands after the expected U.S. departure.

The officials also said they are working to troubleshoot issues with Niger's government, which had prohibited some inbound flights carrying medical supplies — although a shipment of medicine arrived recently and the pharmacy at the air base is now fully stocked — and made it difficult for new personnel to arrive. Officials have noted the CNSP government has granted all requests to fly out troops requiring medical treatment outside Niger.

"As we encounter these challenges, we're finding the way like everyone else, to be creative and work around it," the second official said. He said it had been a trying situation for troops grappling with months of uncertainty about the future of their mission and deployments, but commanders were trying to provide mental health and other support.

The Biden administration is also working to line up an alternate platform for the U.S. effort to address a growing Islamist extremist movement in the Sahel.

American officials are looking for "willing partners," he said, focusing on Ivory Coast and Benin as potential possibilities. U.S. Africa Command's commander, Marine Gen. Michael Langley, made visits to those countries in the past month.

Incidents: Official says commands that don't tolerate harassment see less assault

FROM PAGE 1

years to drive down the rates of sexual assaults and harassment within its ranks, a scourge that has long drawn the ire of Congress and, top Pentagon officials have conceded, likely had a negative impact on military recruiting.

Foster said new efforts implemented in the military in recent years after Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin commissioned an independent review of the Pentagon's sexual assault prevention efforts in 2021 likely contributed. The Pentagon has invested heavily in implementing dozens of findings from that commission, nearly doubling its sexual assault prevention budget to more than $1 billion in 2023 and 2024.

The Pentagon has used that funding to stand up brand new offices to prosecute sexual assault cases outside of the traditional military chain of command and establish a professionalized prevention workforce. To date, the Defense Department has hired about 1,000 trained prevention specialists to serve at bases around the globe, Foster said. The department intends to employ about 2,500 prevention specialists by 2028, she said.

In addition to the lower number of sexual assaults experienced by service members, a higher percentage of those assaulted reported their cases to authorities, according to the report. The military services received 7,266 sexual assault reports from active-duty troops in 2023, which represented about 25% of those who confidentially reported unwanted sexual contact. That was an improvement from a rate of about 20% of military sexual assault victims reporting their case in 2021, the last year the Pentagon gathered that data before 2023.

The report also found sexual harassment was down for male and female service members. The Pentagon determined about 24.7% of active-duty troops experienced sexual harassment in 2023, down from about 28.6% in 2021.

Foster said sexual harassment and sexual assault are often linked, with fewer cases of sexual assault occurring in commands where sexual harassment is not tolerated.

Sexual assaults at the military academies were also down in 2023, the Pentagon said. Reports of sexual assault fell from 155 in 2022 to 124 in the 2023 school year, Pentagon officials said.

Austin said in a statement Thursday that he was encouraged by the downtick in sexual assaults across the force last year, but encouraged military leaders to keep the issue in the front of their minds.

"The only acceptable number of instances of sexual assault or sexual harassment in the U.S. military is zero," Austin said. "We owe it to all our service members to get this right."

MILITARY

‘A great salute to the Greatest Generation’

D-Day squadron of World War II C-47 planes set to re-create ‘Blue Spruce’ route to Europe

By Linda F. Hersey
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — World War II aircraft that moved troops and cargo across the North Atlantic to Europe are being retooled, fueled and readied to make the same journey the aircraft did 80 years ago for a commemorative flight to pay tribute to the D-Day invasion.

Those C-47s could only carry about 30 people, so when we say they transported troops it must not have been many. Guys sent overseas were mostly sent by ship.

Plans are for five vintage C-47 military transport airplanes that make up the D-Day Squadron Legacy Tour to depart Saturday — weather permitting — from the Oxford-Waterbury Airport in Connecticut and follow the historic “Blue Spruce” path that military aircraft flew in World War II, according to the DC-3 Society, a community of volunteer pilots and aviation enthusiasts organizing the event.

“[I’m going] on behalf of the guys who did not return from the battlefield,” said Max Gurney, a 103-year-old Army veteran from California who served under Gen. George Patton in World War II and is making the journey to attend D-Day air shows in Normandy, France, including flyovers and parachute drops by the D-Day squadron.

Though Gurney will not fly aboard any of the restored aircraft that are being flown to Europe for the celebrations, he and 60 other World War II veterans will watch the D-Day squadron from the ground. They will join thousands of other visitors expected for 80th anniversary ceremonies marking the D-Day landings — the massive land, sea and air invasion of Normandy that led to the liberation of France and was critical to ending the war.

The C-47 planes were viewed by many as heroes in their own right for transporting troops, dropping paratroopers and moving tons of supplies to strategic target sites and battlefields. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme commander of the Allied forces in Europe during World War II who later became a two-term U.S. president, described the C-47 as key to winning the war.

“The C-47 was known to be one of the most vital pieces of equipment that helped win the war,” said Steve Lashley, director of U.S. media for the D-Day Squadron Legacy Tour.

The twin-engine planes will follow a northerly path known as the Blue Spruce route, stopping to refuel at points that include Goose Bay on the Labrador coast of Canada, Narsarsuaq in south Greenland, Reykjavik in Iceland, Prestwick in Scotland, and Duxford in England.

DC-3 Society

“That’s All Brother” was a lead aircraft in the Normandy invasion on June 6, 1944. The plane led a formation of 800 other C-47 aircraft that dropped 13,000 U.S. paratroopers on D-Day.

DC-3 Society

“Ready 4 Duty,” a World War II-era transport plane, will participate in a transcontinental flight and D-Day air shows across Europe on the 80th anniversary of the D-Day invasion of France.

Tim McCully

Max Gurney, a 103-year-old Army veteran from California, is making the journey to attend air shows and other events in Normandy, France.

“The squadron will take six days, logging nearly 3,000 nautical miles on each aircraft and approximately 18 hours of flight time, to make this historic transatlantic crossing,” Lashley said.

The squadron will arrive in England during the last week in May, in advance of activities to commemorate the anniversary of the Normandy invasion by Allied forces on June 6, 1944. Dubbed Operation Overlord, the aerial assault was the largest use of airborne troops up to that time.

For the transcontinental flight, Eric Zipkin will pilot a C-47 named “Placid Lassie,” which was built in 1943. Zipkin is co-founder of the Tunison Foundation, which owns and operates Placid Lassie and other vintage military aircraft.

Zipkin, who serves as director of operations for the D-Day squadron, said he hopes the flight will raise awareness about the role of the aircraft in campaigns across Europe.

“We won the war because of our logistical abilities,” he said.

The flight will highlight the contributions made to the war effort by the unglamorous planes — dubbed “gooney birds” by American GIs, according to Zipkin and other organizers.

Placid Lassie transported troops, dropped paratroopers on Normandy beaches and towed gliders with troops that were released to fly silently behind enemy lines.

The military developed C-47s during World War II using Douglas DC-3 commercial planes as the model. The aircraft were designed to move manpower and materials, according to the DC-3 Society.

“Each plane had an assigned location in the formation and would get a chalk number written on the side to make loading simpler,” according to the D-3 Society, which provides a complete schedule of the 2024 journey and events on the D-Day Squadron Legacy Tour website.

The flight schedule for the D-Day squadron is subject to change depending on the weather and needs for aircraft maintenance.

In addition to Placid Lassie, other vintage C-47 planes making the North Atlantic crossing include “That’s All Brother,” a lead aircraft in the D-Day invasion, “Ready 4 Duty” from the Commemorative Air Force, Dallas-Fort Worth Wing, and the “Spirit of Douglas” and “Western Airlines.”

“This will be our first flight mission with the squadron, a great salute to the Greatest Generation who came before us,” said Chris Volpe, a wing leader with the Commemorative Air Force, a nonprofit that owns “Ready 4 Duty,” which the Navy flew from 1944-46 to transport wounded soldiers and drop supplies.

Gurney and the group of World War II veterans going to the D-Day event in France are scheduled to take a commercial honor flight to Normandy accompanied by a medical team and chaperones.

Gurney, who served as a technical sergeant in cryptographic and signal intelligence, said he joined the military at age 20, with deployments to North Africa and Europe. He enlisted after the Dec. 7, 1941, bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii by Japan and served through the end of the war in 1945.

“This will likely be the last D-Day event I attend,” said Gurney, who previously traveled to Normandy for the 50th anniversary celebration. “At my age, I don’t expect to be returning. This tribute is even more significant to me.”

The D-Day squadron is expected to arrive in England on May 25-May 26 and participate in a United Kingdom tour running through June 2.

Events scheduled include an aerial parade of vintage and modern military aircraft in Duxford, England, on June 1-2.

The D-Day squadron will have its base of operations in Cherbourg, France, from June 2-10. The city was the site of Allied airborne operations during World War II to capture roads and bridges to stop German forces from advancing to the beaches during the Normandy assault.

From June 3-9, the D-Day squadron will participate in air shows over Normandy.

After the 2024 D-Day events, the aircraft will fly to Germany on June 15-16 for ceremonies honoring the 75th Berlin airlift, when U.S. and British planes dropped supplies from June 1948-September 1949 to counter a blockade by the Soviet Union.

The squadron will touch down in Berlin, Germany, and the Wiesbaden Army Airfield.

U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden, together with the German state of Hesse, will host an all-day event commemorating the Berlin Airlift on June 16 at Clay Kaserne Airfield.

The planes then travel to Venice, Italy, on June 22-23 before coming back to the U.S., where they are scheduled to arrive in Presque Isle, Maine, on June 27-28, before returning to their home bases.

MIDEAST

USS Truman prepares for Red Sea mission

By Corey Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

MIAMI — The USS Harry S. Truman will soon lead a Navy strike group into the volatile Red Sea, where U.S. sailors have fought almost daily for months to down drones and missiles launched by Houthi rebels from Yemen.

The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and its 6,000-some sailors have spent recent months training in the western Atlantic Ocean for that mission — a rare, pre-planned deployment expected to take the ship into a hostile environment. In recent weeks, its sailors have been undergoing flight deck testing, its pilots knowing that later this year they will be tasked with shooting down drones and munitions launched by the Iran-backed Houthis.

"They know that they're most likely going to be entering a weapon engagement zone," said Adm. Daryl Caudle, the leader of U.S. Navy Fleet Forces Command. "I believe, personally, that puts higher stakes on why what we do [in training] is so important. … For this group, this [deployment] is not with the mindset that they're just going to go drill holes in the water somewhere — this is, 'We're going to be employed for combat.' "

But with combat on the minds of the Truman's sailors and preparations being made to deploy to the hostile waters of the Red Sea, the 1,000-foot-long, 104,000-ton aircraft carrier made a rare appearance in Miami to have the ship's sailors participate recently in the city's first Fleet Week.

There was some "pushback" from Navy planners, Caudle admitted. An aircraft carrier had never participated in a U.S. Fleet Week anywhere. But when Fleet Week kicked off May 5, the Truman sat stoic, anchored just a few miles off the coast of Miami Beach — its sailors gathered on the flight deck to wave emphatically at their counterparts aboard the USS Bataan, as the amphibious assault ship entered Miami's port.

MICHAEL SHEN/U.S. Navy

USS Harry S. Truman transits the Atlantic Ocean in April.

"I will admit that bringing a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to a Fleet Week is unique," said Caudle, who is charged with providing trained and ready naval forces to combatant commanders around the world. "And of course ... they're [in the middle of] doing the training … they need to do to ensure that they're certified and qualified and proficient and ready to go fight. Fleet Week is not built into that."

The crew used the voyage from its home base in Norfolk, Va., to Miami and back — the Truman returned Friday to Norfolk — to conduct extra tactical training at sea, Caudle said. The carrier's time in Miami was largely meant to give sailors a fun port call and to interact with the local community.

The admiral said he hoped the Fleet Week stop, wedged into a critical train-up for what would likely be the most dangerous deployment most of the sailors have ever served, would spark memories of their service and bolster their quality of life in the Navy.

"Once they actually come over to the city, and immerse themselves into this incredible town, and get to experience the food, and the people, and the nightlife and all that, that is what builds the memories, and [that is] why people stay in the Navy," Caudle said. "I'm going to be honest; this is what I remember from my almost 40-year career are the places I've pulled into. The operations tend to be a bit of a blur, but you really remember the port calls."

With Fleet Week over, the bulk of the Truman's preparations begin.

Navy officials declined to say precisely when the Truman will embark on its cross-Atlantic voyage toward the Red Sea to replace the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, which deployed from Norfolk in October. Caudle said the deployment was still "several months out." The Eisenhower briefly left the Red Sea last month for the Mediterranean Sea, but it has recently returned to the Red Sea, according to the Navy.

The Navy canceled a planned visit to the Truman for news reporters during the Miami Fleet Week, and the ship's top leaders were not made available for interviews.

Caudle said he was confident in the ship's ongoing preparations. The Navy was already incorporating "lessons learned" in the Truman crew's training from the Eisenhower strike group's fighting with the Houthis.

While the admiral declined to provide specifics about most of those new lessons, he said they are informing the scenarios that the Truman has faced in its training. Ultimately, as the carrier completes its pre-deployment training, the ship will deal with similar issues that the Eisenhower and its escort ships have faced in the Red Sea, Caudle said. Those include lessons on some strategies such as where a strike group's ships should be in relation to one another, how its radar systems should be tuned and the decision-making processes on which weapon should be employed against which incoming munition and when, he said.

The Eisenhower and her strike group have faced nearly six months of fighting in the Red Sea. While the group's destroyers have been credited with taking down many of the drones and missiles fired by Houthi rebels into crowded shipping lanes, the Eisenhower's aircraft have flown near constant missions in the area, Navy officials have said. The carrier's fighter planes have shot down drones and missiles and launched so-called "dynamic strikes," often to take out ballistic missiles that appear ready for launch, Pentagon officials have said in recent months.

Truman will bring some 90 aircraft, including F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jets, E-2D Hawkeye command and control aircraft, E/A18 Growler electronic warfare jets, and MH-60 Seahawk helicopters.

It will likely enter conditions that another top admiral described this week as the most volatile that Navy sailors on deployed ships have faced since World War II.

"They have to be prepared on a moment's notice to conduct engagements," Rear Adm. Fred Pyle, the service's surface warfare director, said Tuesday at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Washington. "And they have to get it right every single time."

Pyle and Caudle said they have been impressed with the Eisenhower strike group's successes in the Red Sea, where the ships are leading a coalition of some 24 nations supporting Operation Prosperity Guardian, the international mission to thwart the Houthi attacks. The rebel group, which receives its arms and other support from Iran, has claimed the attacks are in response to Israel's ongoing war against Hamas in Gaza, which was launched after the surprise attack by Hamas militants on Israeli civilians in October.

U.S. Central Command, which oversees American military operations in the Middle East including the Red Sea, has sent out near daily readouts of engagements between coalition Navy personnel and the Houthis. Pyle said the operations successes have bolstered confidence in the systems that the service has invested in to protect sailors aboard its ships.

"The threats they're engaging [in the Red Sea] are unmanned, they're anti-ship cruise missiles, they're anti-ship ballistic missiles, and in each one of those threat groups we're performing well," Pyle said. "And the systems and the sailors are performing as designed and great."

Caudle said he expected the Truman strike group would seamlessly pick up the mission and perform just as well as the Eisenhower group has to date. Talking to the ship's sailors, the admiral said, he can sense they are ready to get in the fight.

"In the Red Sea right now, we're bringing the full complement of naval combat power to bear. ... But we want to deter conflict. That is the main effort. There is nothing that does that more than 100,000 tons of diplomacy in an aircraft carrier," Caudle said

US military moves temporary pier off Gaza's coast to provide aid

By Matthew Adams
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military has completed installing a floating, temporary pier off Gaza's coast and humanitarian aid will start to move into the war-torn territory in the coming days, defense officials said Thursday.

"This morning, just a few hours ago, the pier was successfully affixed to the beach in Gaza. And in the coming days, we will commence delivery of aid," said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, deputy commander of U.S. Central Command.

At 7:40 a.m. Gaza time, CENTCOM personnel anchored the pier to the beach. No U.S. troops entered Gaza, according to a CENTCOM statement posted on X.

The pier, known as Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore, or JLOTS, is meant to provide another way to deliver needed aid into Gaza. The World Health Organization has warned some 2.3 million Gaza inhabitants face extreme hunger that could become a full-blown famine by next month as Israel continues its war against Hamas militants, who launched a surprise assault in October from the enclave.

Sonali Korde, a U.S. Agency for International Development official, said the assistance is necessary because conditions on the ground have not improved and a vital border crossing closed in the last few weeks. Israel on May 7 seized control of and closed the Rafah crossing, which was relied on by aid organizations.

"We need to just continue to work on getting more aid in through all routes. We're at a point in time when this is all hands on deck," Korde said. "We can't spare any effort."

The Pentagon announced last week that the U.S. military completed construction of the floating pier but weather conditions made it unsafe to dock the pier to begin transporting more aid into the region.

Cooper said the future impact of weather on the pier is situational. The weather is expected to be good for the coming week or so, with the goal being to move as much humanitarian aid as possible and make assessments about the pier along the way.

"As we sit here now, we have about 500 tons of humanitarian assistance loaded on ships. That's about 1 million pounds ready for the delivery in the coming days and … thousands in the pipeline coming behind," Cooper said.

The pier is initially expected to deliver about 90 trucks worth of aid a day and ramp up to 150 per day once it reaches full capacity, defense officials said late last month. The United Nations has said to meet the needs of Palestinians trapped in Gaza about 500 trucks worth of aid per day must enter the territory.

Cooper said 14 ships from the U.S. and partner nations are involved with helping deliver aid. He added three more U.S. ships will join in the coming week.

"We've been working closely with the Israeli Defense Force for six weeks to ensure every aspect of logistics, operations command and control communications, and force protection are in place. With the IDF, we have developed a comprehensive security plan across multiple domains," Cooper said.

NATION

ASHLEE REZIN, CHICAGO SUN-TIMES/AP

A Chicago police officer walks through the quad as crews disassemble the pro-Palestinian protest encampment at DePaul University's Lincoln Park campus in Chicago on Thursday.

Police dismantle pro-Palestinian encampment at DePaul University

BY TERESA CRAWFORD
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Police began dismantling a pro-Palestinian encampment early Thursday at DePaul University in Chicago, hours after the school's president told students to leave the area or face arrest.

Officers and workers in yellow vests cleared out tents and camping equipment at the student encampment, leaving behind yellow squares of dead or dying grass where the tents had stood. Frontloaders were being used to remove the camping equipment.

Just across the street from where the encampment was spread across a grassy expanse of DePaul's campus known as "The Quad," a few dozen protesters stood along a sidewalk in front of a service station, clapping their hands in unison as an apparent protest leader paced back and forth before them, speaking into a bullhorn.

All of the protesters at the encampment "voluntarily left" the area when police arrived early Thursday, said Jon Hein, chief of patrol for the Chicago Police Department.

"There were no confrontations and there was no resistance," he said at a news briefing. "As we approached, all the subjects voluntarily left the area."

Hein said, however, that two people, a male and female in their 20s, were arrested outside the encampment "for obstruction of traffic."

The move to clear the campus comes less than a week after the school's president said public safety was at risk.

The university said Saturday that it had reached an "impasse" with the school's protesters, leaving the future of their encampment on the Chicago campus unclear. Most of DePaul's commencement ceremonies will be held the June 15-16 weekend.

In a statement then, DePaul President Robert Manuel and Provost Salma Ghanem said they believe that students intended to protest peacefully, but "the responses to the encampment have inadvertently created public safety issues that put our community at risk."

Efforts to resolve the differences with DePaul Divestment Coalition over the past 17 days were unsuccessful, Manuel said in a statement sent to students, faculty and staff Thursday morning.

"Our Office of Public Safety and Chicago Police are now disassembling the encampment," he said. "Every person currently in the encampment will be given the opportunity to leave peacefully and without being arrested."

He said that since the encampment began, "the situation has steadily escalated with physical altercations, credible threats of violence from people not associated with our community."

The student-led DePaul Divestment Coalition, who are calling on the university to divest from Israel, set up the encampment April 30. The group alleged university officials walked away from talks and tried to force students into signing an agreement, according to a student statement late Saturday.

"I don't want my tuition money to be invested in my family's suffering," Henna Ayesh, a Palestinian student at DePaul and Coalition member, said in the statement.

Cohen pressured on crimes, lies in hush money trial

Associated Press

NEW YORK — With prosecutors' hush money case against Donald Trump barreling toward its end, defense lawyers pressed former attorney Michael Cohen on his criminal history and past lies Thursday as they worked to convince jurors not to believe the star witness' pivotal testimony.

Cohen was back in the hot seat for a third day of testimony as defense lawyers painted Trump's fixer-turned-foe as a spurned former employee who will say whatever it takes to put the presumptive Republican presidential nominee behind bars.

Cohen is prosecutors' final witness — at least for now — as they try to prove Trump schemed to suppress a damaging story he feared would torpedo his 2016 presidential campaign and then falsified business records to cover it up. Cohen's cross-examination is a crucial moment for Trump's team to try to chip away at Cohen's credibility, which could determine the former president's fate in the case.

Under questioning from defense attorney Todd Blanche, Cohen admitted to lying under oath when he pleaded guilty to federal charges, including tax fraud, in 2018 as well as lying to Congress about work he did on a Trump real estate deal in Russia.

"It was a lie? Correct?" Blanche asked Cohen about whether he lied to the late U.S. District Judge William H. Pauley III at a court hearing about not being pressured into pleading guilty.

"Correct," Cohen said.

Over several days on the witness stand, Cohen placed Trump directly at the center of the alleged scheme to stifle negative stories to fend off damage to his White House bid. Cohen told jurors that Trump promised to reimburse him for the money he fronted and was constantly updated about efforts to silence women who alleged sexual encounters with him. Trump has denied the women's claims.

Trump, who has insisted the prosecution is an effort to damage his campaign to reclaim the White House, has said the payments to Cohen were properly categorized as legal expenses because Cohen was a lawyer. The defense has suggested he was trying to protect his family, not his campaign, by squelching what he has said were false, scurrilous claims.

While questioning Cohen, defense lawyers have not focused on the hush money scheme or the criminal charges at issue. Instead, they have peppered him with questions about his own misdeeds and his new persona as fierce Trump critic to attack Cohen's credibility and motivations.

Blanche confronted Cohen with profane social media posts, a podcast and books he wrote about the former president, getting Cohen to acknowledge that he has made millions of dollars off slamming Trump. In one clip played in court Thursday, Cohen could be heard using an expletive and saying he truly hopes "that this man ends up in prison."

Defense lawyers were expected to question Cohen through the end of Thursday. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office has said it will rest its case once he's done on the stand, though it could have an opportunity to call rebuttal witnesses if Trump's lawyers put on witnesses of their own.

Jobless benefit applications back down after last week's 9-month high

BY MATT OTT
Associated Press

Fewer Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week as layoffs remain at historically low levels even as other signs that the labor market is cooling have surfaced.

Jobless claims for the week ending May 11 fell by 10,000 to 222,000, down from 232,000 the week before, the Labor Department reported Thursday. Last week's applications were the most since the final week of August 2023, though it's still a relatively low number of layoffs.

The four-week average of claims, which evens out some of the week-to-week fluctuations, rose by 2,500 to 217,750.

Weekly unemployment claims are considered a proxy for the number of U.S. layoffs in a given week and a sign of where the job market is headed. They have remained at historically low levels since millions of jobs were lost when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States in the spring of 2020.

In April, U.S. employers added just 175,000 jobs, the fewest in six months and a sign that the labor market may be finally cooling off. The unemployment rate inched back up to 3.9% from 3.8% and has now remained below 4% for 27 straight months, the longest such streak since the 1960s.

The government also recently reported 8.5 million job openings in March, the lowest number of vacancies in three years.

Moderation in the pace of hiring, along with a slowdown in wage growth, could give the Fed the data its been seeking in order to finally issue a cut to interest rates. A cooler reading on consumer inflation in April could also play into the Fed's next rate decision.

The Federal Reserve raised its benchmark borrowing rate 11 times beginning in March of 2022 in a bid to stifle the four-decade high inflation that took hold after the economy rebounded from the COVID-19 recession of 2020. The Fed's intention was to loosen the labor market and cool wage growth, which can fuel inflation.

Many economists thought there was a chance the rapid rate hikes could cause a recession, but jobs remain plentiful and the economy still broadly healthy thanks to strong consumer spending.

Though layoffs remain at low levels, companies have been announcing more job cuts recently, mostly across technology and media. In total, 1.79 million Americans were collecting jobless benefits during the week that ended May 4. That's up 13,000 from the previous week.

NATION

Inflation relaxed last month in first slowdown of 2024

NAM Y. HUH/AP

A customer prepares to purchase gas at a filling station in Chicago on April 22.

BY CHRISTOPHER RUGABER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Led by lower food and auto prices, inflation in the United States cooled slightly last month after three elevated readings, likely offering a tentative sigh of relief for officials at the Federal Reserve as well as President Joe Biden's re-election team.

Consumer prices rose 0.3% from March to April, the Labor Department said Wednesday, down slightly from 0.4% the previous month. Measured year-over-year, inflation ticked down from 3.5% to 3.4%. And a gauge of underlying inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy costs, reached its lowest level in three years.

Inflation had been unexpectedly high in the first three months of this year after having steadily dropped in the second half of 2023. The elevated readings had dimmed hopes that the worst bout of inflation in four decades was being tamed and raised concerns that prices could spike again.

Whether inflation continues its decline could have a significant effect on the presidential race. Republican critics of Biden have sought to pin the blame for high prices on the president and to use it to try to derail his re-election bid. Though hiring remains robust and wage growth, on average, healthy, consumer prices remain generally well above their pre-pandemic levels.

Wednesday's report provides a dose of reassurance that the pace of price increases may be resuming its slowdown. While the latest figures show inflation still well above the Fed's 2% target, it's the first time this year that the year-over-year figure has declined. And price increases cooled in some service industries, such as hotels, health care and auto repairs, that had previously kept inflation elevated.

The report "was a tiny step in the right direction," said Danielle Hale, chief economist at Realtor.com. "The fight against inflation is not yet over, but the worsening trend observed in the first quarter of 2024 may have ended."

Fed Chair Jerome Powell had responded to the high inflation readings earlier this year by dropping his previous suggestions that interest rate cuts were likely in 2024. Instead, he stressed that the Fed's policymakers need "greater confidence" that inflation is falling to their 2% target before they would reduce borrowing rates from high levels.

Some economists suggest that if inflation — and the overall economy — continue to cool, the Fed could still cut rates twice this year, which would reduce costs for mortgages, auto loans and credit cards, among other forms of borrowing.

A separate report on retail sales, also released Wednesday, showed that Americans' spending at stores and restaurants was unchanged in April after a healthy gain in March. A more restrained consumer could reassure the Fed that inflation will keep cooling.

Wednesday's inflation data "keeps alive the prospect of the Fed cutting rates in September," said Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Nationwide Financial. "The weak retail sales data also lends support to that."

Among individual items in April, grocery prices slipped, providing a break to shoppers. Egg prices, which have been volatile after a bout of avian flu, fell 7.3%. New and used car prices also dropped. By contrast, prices for gas and clothing both jumped.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called core prices rose 0.3% from March to April after three straight months of 0.4% increases. Measured with a year earlier, core prices increased 3.6% in April, down from 3.8% in March. The Fed closely tracks core prices, which tend to provide a better read of where inflation is headed.

High court affirms congressional map in Louisiana, sides with CFPB

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court settled two major cases this week, starting Wednesday when it ordered Louisiana to hold congressional elections in 2024 using a House map with a second mostly Black district, despite a lower-court ruling that called the map an illegal racial gerrymander. The next day, justices rejected a conservative-led attack that could have undermined the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

The Louisiana order allows the use of a map that has majority Black populations in two of the state's six congressional districts, potentially boosting Democrats' chances of gaining control of the closely divided House of Representatives in the 2024 elections.

The justices acted on emergency appeals filed by the state's top Republican elected officials and Black voters who said they needed the high court's intervention to avoid confusion as the elections approach. About a third of Louisiana is Black.

The Supreme Court's order does not deal with a lower-court ruling that found the map relied too heavily on race. Instead, it only prevents yet another new map from being drawn for this year's elections.

The Supreme Court could decide at a later date to hear arguments over the decision striking down the Louisiana map.

The court's three liberal justices dissented from Wednesday's order. Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson wrote that the judges who struck down the latest map should have had the chance to produce a new map before the high court intervened.

"There is little risk of voter confusion from a new map being imposed this far out from the November election," Jackson wrote.

Liberal justices have dissented from prior Supreme Court orders that put decisions near elections on hold. Those orders invoked the need to give enough time to voters and election officials to ensure orderly balloting. "When an election is close at hand, the rules of the road must be clear and settled," Justice Brett Kavanaugh wrote two years ago in a similar case from Alabama. The court has never set a firm deadline for how close is too close.

Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill said she was pleased with the order. "The Secretary of State has consistently stated she needed a map by May 15," Murrill said in an emailed statement. "The plaintiffs did not contest it at trial. We will continue to defend the law and are grateful the Supreme Court granted the stay which will ensure we have a stable election season."

A lawyer for the Black voters also praised the court's action. "We are very relieved that SCOTUS agreed with us that it's too close to the election to insert uncertainty. ... We will have a map with 2 majority black districts this fall," Jared Evans, an attorney with the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, wrote in a text using an abbreviation for the Supreme Court.

Edward Greim and Paul Hurd, attorneys for plaintiffs who challenged the new map said Wednesday's order lets the state impose a "brutal racial gerrymander" on 2024 voters who will cast ballots in districts "segregated by race." But they predicted eventual victory in the case.

Meanwhile, the justices Thursday ruled 7-2 that the way the CFPB is funded does not violate the Constitution, reversing a lower court.

The CFPB was created after the 2008 financial crisis to regulate mortgages, car loans and other consumer finance. The case was brought by payday lenders who object to a bureau rule.

The CFPB case is among several major challenges to federal regulatory agencies on the docket this term for a court that has for more than a decade been open to limits on their operations. The CFPB, the brainchild of Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, has long been opposed by Republicans and their financial backers.

Unlike most federal agencies, the consumer bureau does not rely on the annual budget process in Congress. Instead, it is funded directly by the Federal Reserve, with a current annual limit of around $600 million.

The federal appeals court in New Orleans, in a novel ruling, held that the funding violated the Constitution's appropriations clause because it improperly shields the CFPB from congressional supervision.

Justice Clarence Thomas reached back to the earliest days of the Constitution in his majority opinion to note that "the Bureau's funding mechanism fits comfortably with the First Congress' appropriations practice."

Justices Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch, Thomas' colleagues in the court's conservative bloc, dissented. "The Court upholds a novel statutory scheme under which the powerful Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) may bankroll its own agenda without any congressional control or oversight," Alito wrote.

The case was argued more than seven months ago, during the first week of the court's term. Lopsided decisions like Thursday's 7-2 vote typically don't take so long, but Alito's dissent was longer than the majority opinion, and two other justices, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson, wrote separate opinions even though they both were part of the majority.

While the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and some other business interests backed the payday lenders, mortgage bankers and other sectors regulated by the CFPB cautioned the court to avoid a broad ruling that could unsettle the markets.

WAR IN UKRAINE

China, Russia reaffirm ties as offensive advances

Associated Press

BEIJING — Russian President Vladimir Putin thanked Chinese leader Xi Jinping for his effort to resolve the Ukraine conflict at a Beijing summit Thursday, where the two leaders reaffirmed a "no-limits" partnership that has grown deeper as both countries face deepening tensions with the West.

Putin's two-day state visit to one of his strongest allies comes as his country's forces are pressing an offensive in northeastern Ukraine's Kharkiv region in the most significant border incursion since the full-scale invasion began.

The largely symbolic visit stressed partnership between two countries who both face challenges in their relationship with the United States and Europe.

"Both sides want to show that despite what is happening globally, despite the pressure that both sides are facing from the U.S., both sides are not about to turn their backs on each other anytime soon," said Hoo Tiang Boon, a professor who studies Chinese foreign policy at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University.

While both leaders said they were seeking an end to the war in Ukraine, they offered no new specifics in their public remarks Thursday afternoon. China has significant influence as a key supporter of Russia in its invasion.

The country has claimed to take a neutral position in the conflict, but it has backed Moscow's contentions that Russia was provoked into attacking Ukraine by the West, and continues to supply Russia with key components that Moscow needs for its productions of weapons.

China proposed a broadly worded peace plan in 2023, but it was rejected by both Ukraine and the West for failing to call for Russia to leave occupied parts of Ukraine.

"China hopes for the early return of Europe to peace and stability and will continue to play a constructive role toward this," Xi said, speaking alongside Putin.

His words were an echo of what China said last year when it first offered a broad plan for peace outlining general principles for ending the war in Ukraine.

Putin said he will inform the Chinese leader in detail about "the situation in Ukraine," and said "we appreciate the initiative of our Chinese colleagues and friends to regulate the situation." He added that the two planned to engage in further foreign policy discussions at an informal meeting later Thursday.

After Russia's newest offensive in Ukraine last week, the 2-year-old war has entered a critical stage, as Ukraine's depleted military waits for new supplies of anti-aircraft missiles and artillery shells from the U.S. after months of delay.

Before their remarks, the two leaders signed a joint statement on deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership between their two nations on their 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties, after their initial meeting. Xi said China and Russia will continue to uphold a position of non-alliance and non-confrontation.

Thursday's meeting was yet another affirmation of the friendly "no limits" relationship they signed in 2022, just before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Since then, Russia has become increasingly economically dependent on China as Western sanctions cut its access to much of the international trading system. China's increased trade with Russia, totaling $240 billion last year, has helped the country mitigate some of the worst blowback from sanctions.

"I and President Putin agree, we should actively look for convergence points of the interests of both countries, to develop each's advantages, and deepen integration of interests, realizing each others' achievements," Xi said.

Ukraine says it has halted Russian drive in key town, but Moscow to keep pushing

By Illia Novikov
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian units locked in street battles with the Kremlin's forces in a key northeastern Ukraine town have halted the Russian advance, military officials in Kyiv claimed Thursday, though a senior Moscow official said the frontline push had enough resources to keep going.

Russian attempts to establish a foothold in the town of Vovchansk, which is among the largest towns in Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region with a prewar population of 17,000, "have been foiled," Ukraine's general staff said in a midday report.

It was not possible to independently verify the claim.

Six people were injured Thursday in one Russian daylight attack on Vovchansk using cluster munitions, local officials said, as emergency workers and volunteers were rescuing people affected by shelling. Among the injured were two medics, he said.

Ukrainian authorities have evacuated some 8,000 civilians from the town. The Russian army's usual tactic is to reduce towns and villages to ruins with aerial strikes before its units move in.

Vovchansk, located just 3 miles from the Russian border, has been a hotspot in the fighting in recent days. Russia launched an offensive in the Kharkiv area late last week, significantly adding to the pressure on Ukraine's outnumbered and outgunned forces which are waiting for delayed deliveries of crucial weapons and ammunition from Western partners.

Russia has also been testing defenses at other points along the roughly 620-mile front line snaking from north to south through eastern Ukraine. That line has barely changed over the past 18 months in what became a war of attrition. Recent Russian attacks have come in the eastern Donetsk region, as well as the Chernihiv and Sumy regions in the north and in the southern Zaporizhzhia region. The apparent aim is to stretch depleted Ukrainian resources and exploit weaknesses.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with his top military commanders in Kharkiv on Thursday and said the region "is generally under control." He acknowledged on social media, however, that the situation is "extremely difficult" and said Ukraine was again strengthening its units in Kharkiv.

Former Russian defense minister and now the head of the presidential Security Council Sergei Shoigu insisted Russian troops are pushing the offensive in many directions and that "it's going quite well."

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, calculated that Russian forces attacking in Kharkiv have advanced no more than 5 miles from the shared border.

It reckons Moscow's main aim in Kharkiv is to create a "buffer zone" that will prevent Ukrainian cross-border strikes on Russia's neighboring Belgorod region.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in a two-day visit to Kyiv this week, sought to reassure Ukraine of continuing American support. He announced a $2 billion arms deal, with most of the money coming from a package approved last month.

WORLD

‘Lone wolf’ is charged in shooting of Slovakia PM

Associated Press

BANSKA BYSTRICA, Slovakia — The Slovak interior minister said Thursday that a “lone wolf” has been charged in the shooting that seriously wounded Prime Minister Robert Fico and prompted soul-searching among leaders in the deeply divided society.

Fico, 59, was in serious but stable condition Thursday, a hospital official said, after the populist leader was hit multiple times in an attempt on his life that shook the small country and reverberated across the continent weeks before European elections.

The attempted assassination has shocked the small central European nation, with many blaming the attack in part on extreme political polarization that has divided the country.

Interior Minister Matus Sutaj Estok said Wednesday that an initial investigation found “a clear political motivation” behind the attack on Fico while he was attending a government meeting in a former coal mining town. However, he said Thursday that the suspect charged was a lone wolf who “did not belong to any political groups.”

The minister did not specify what the motivation was. Fico has long been a divisive figure in Slovakia and beyond, and his return to power last year on a pro-Russian, anti-American message led to even greater worries among fellow European Union members that he would abandon his country’s pro-Western course.

The attempt on Fico’s life came at a time of high division in Slovakia, as thousands of demonstrators have repeatedly rallied in the capital and around the country to protest his policies. It also comes just ahead of June elections for the European Parliament.

France imposes an emergency in New Caledonia amid deadly unrest

Associated Press

PARIS — France imposed an emergency Wednesday in the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia for at least 12 days, boosting security forces’ powers to quell deadly unrest in the archipelago where indigenous people have long sought independence.

Armed clashes and other violence that erupted Monday following protests over voting reforms have left four people dead, including a gendarme, and injured more than 300, French authorities said.

French military forces were being deployed to protect ports and airports, to free up police and security forces battling looting, arson and other violence, Prime Minister Gabriel Attal announced as the emergency measures kicked in at 8 p.m. Paris time, which was 5 a.m. Thursday in New Caledonia.

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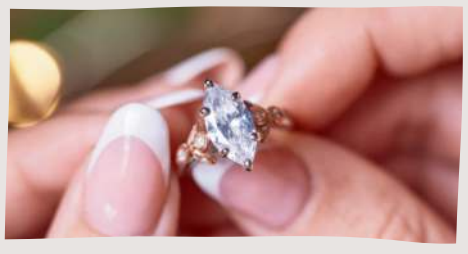
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WEEKEND

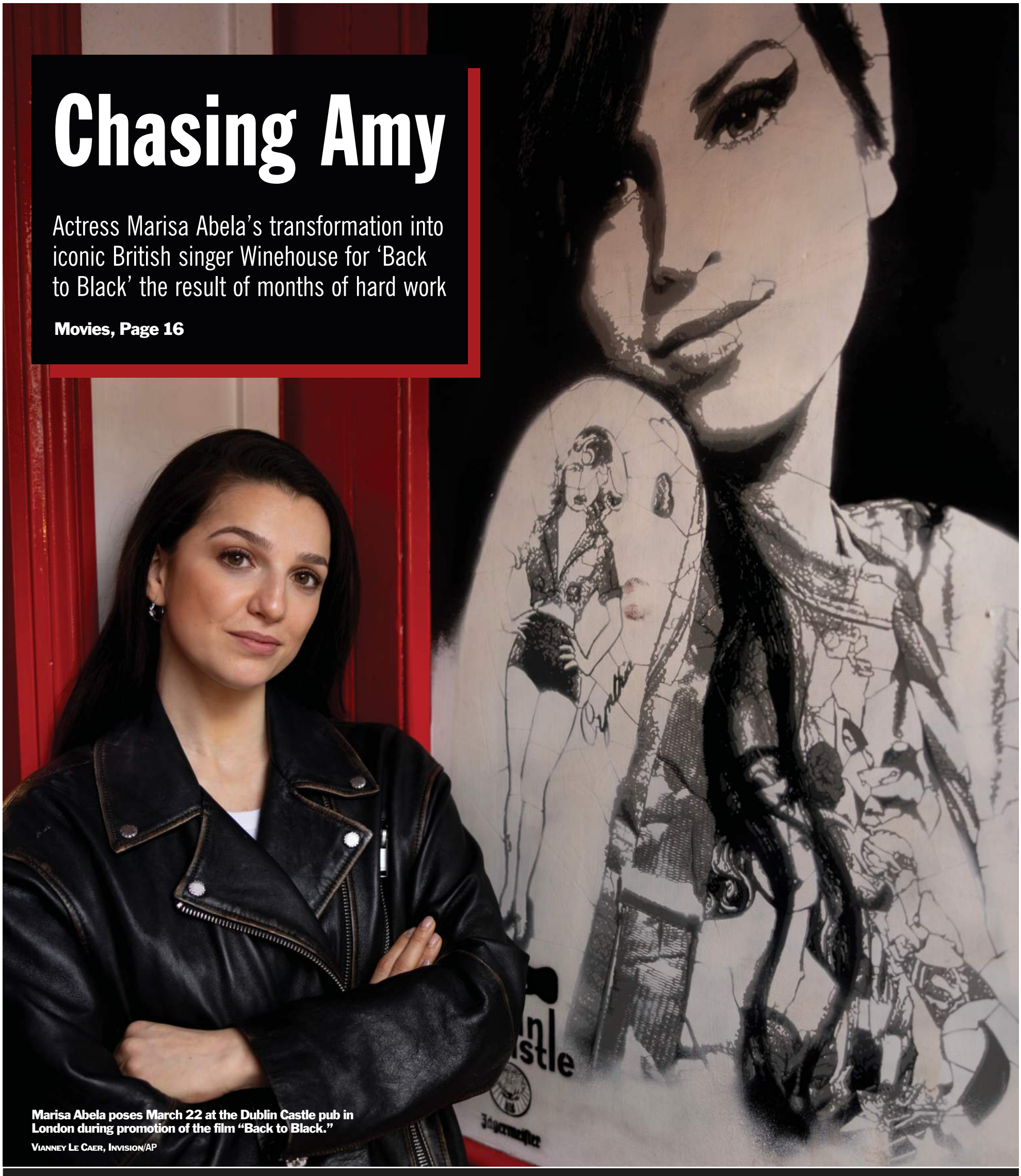
Brian Kelley ready to reintroduce himself

Music, Pages 28-29

Chasing Amy

Actress Marisa Abela's transformation into iconic British singer Winehouse for 'Back to Black' the result of months of hard work

Movies, Page 16



Marisa Abela poses March 22 at the Dublin Castle pub in London during promotion of the film "Back to Black."

VIANNEY LE CAER, INVISION/AP

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WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

NIALL CARSON/AP

People in Dublin view the livestream portal that connects them to New York on Monday.

Portal to bad behavior

Sidewalk video linking New York, Dublin by livestream temporarily paused after lewd shenanigans

PHILIP MARCELO
Associated Press

The video screen "Portal" that lets people in New York and Dublin peer into life on opposite sides of the Atlantic in real time has been a source of whimsical delight for sidewalk crowds in the two cities, but also a magnet for boorish behavior that's prompted officials to hit pause for now.

The livestreaming public art installation known as "The Portal" made its North American debut on May 8, with a circular screen set up below New York City's iconic Flatiron Building and a companion screen on Dublin, Ireland's main thoroughfare, O'Connell Street, with city landmarks including the Spire in the backdrop.

Exhibit organizers touted the interactive display as a unique way to "embrace the beauty of global interconnectedness."

"Portals are an invitation to meet people above borders and differences and to experience our world as it really is — united and one," said Benediktas Gylys, the Lithuanian artist who conceived the installation, when the screens were unveiled to fanfare.

But just days into a run that was to have continued into the fall, the portals were shut down Monday night after videos spread on social media of people behaving badly — from an OnlyFans model in New York baring her breasts to Dubliners holding up swastikas and displaying images of New York's Twin Towers burning on 9/11.

The screens, which only broadcast video with no audio, were back up Tuesday morning but were to be powered down again Tuesday evening, according to officials in New York and Dublin.

Michael Ryan, a spokesperson for the Dublin City Council, said exhibit organizers are looking into "possible technical solutions" to address the inappropriate behavior.

Zac Roy, a spokesperson for the Flatiron NoMad Partnership, a local Manhattan business group, stressed that the "overwhelming majority" of people interacting with the city's portal have behaved appropriately. Roy said there's been around-the-clock security and barriers in place at the New York location since the exhibit launched.

SETH WENIG/AP

A man in New York holds up his dog on Tuesday so that pedestrians in Dublin can see them through a livestream portal as part of an art installation.

On Tuesday morning, crowds on both sides of the portals were mostly behaved. Some gave a friendly wave or made heart signs with their hands. Most took a selfie.

But on the Dublin side, a man stood behind a crowd of school children in uniform and extended two middle fingers.

Killian Sundermann, a 30-year-old from Dublin who was in New York on a visit, held his phone to his ear as he waved and spoke to his girlfriend watching from the Dublin side.

Sundermann said many of his countrymen have taken the kerfuffle over the on-camera antics to heart, even as he questioned the wisdom of placing the Dublin screen in such a busy stretch of that city's downtown.

"I don't think you could have picked a worse spot for late-night drinking crowds," he said. "I don't know what I would have done as a young lad walking past it after I've had a few too many pints."

Joe Perez, a 46-year-old Manhattan resident who held up his sizable pitbull Virgil for the Dublin crowd to see, shrugged off the bad behavior.

"No one is getting hurt. It's fine. It's all peace," he said. "A middle finger doesn't hurt me."

Nearby, Lynn Rakos waved and blew a kiss toward the screen.

"I think it's sweet, as long as we all behave," said the Brooklyn resident, who lived for a time in Dublin. "We have all these connections on our phone and Facebook, but here it's unscripted. You don't know who is there and you're just saying hi."

Carluex Air connects smartphone, car audio

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

The new Carluex Air is an in-car wireless CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity device.

The pocket-sized adapter wirelessly bridges the gap between your smartphone and a vehicle's audio system. There's no need to plug in wires and wait for a connection. With the Carluex Air, after the initial connection, which takes less than a minute, the phone links each time you enter your vehicle. Hands-free calls, GPS and music will be on the dashboard screen, assuming your car is compatible.

The Carluex website has a compatibility link to check if the Carluex Air will work with your vehicle. The company says it's designed for cars with built-in wired CarPlay from 2016-2024 (incompatible with BMW models), and has support for iPhone 5 or higher and Android 6.0 or higher.

Plug the device into the car's USB port; the quick start guide walks you through the setup. Once Bluetooth pairing is done, voice commands and steering wheel functionality ensure your eyes are kept on the road. Preinstalled on the device are Netflix, Youtube, Chrome and Google Maps. It also allows access to any app on the Google Play Store and the APK Store.

It connects directly to the internet for software updates.

Online: carluex.com, on sale for $169, from $199

CARLUEX/TNS

Carluex Air gives certain 2016-2024 cars with wired Carplay the ability to connect without wires.

Kids' tech brand myFirst has launched new digital frames: **myFirst Frame Doodle** and **myFirst Frame Live**.

The 9-inch myFirst Frame Doodle ($129) and 10.1-inch myFirst Frame Live ($149) are designed to keep friends and family connected with digital images and videos. They work with the myFirst Circle app (iOS and Android) allowing whomever you give access to upload images.

The myFirst Frame Doodle digital photo frame is sleek and modern and ideal for families with young children. It's made with a durable, child-friendly design and a range of engaging features to captivate young minds and encourage creativity. One feature allows children to draw and doodle directly on the frame's surface.

The screen is anti-glare and fingerprint-resistant, and easily placed on almost any mantelpiece, bookshelf or desk.

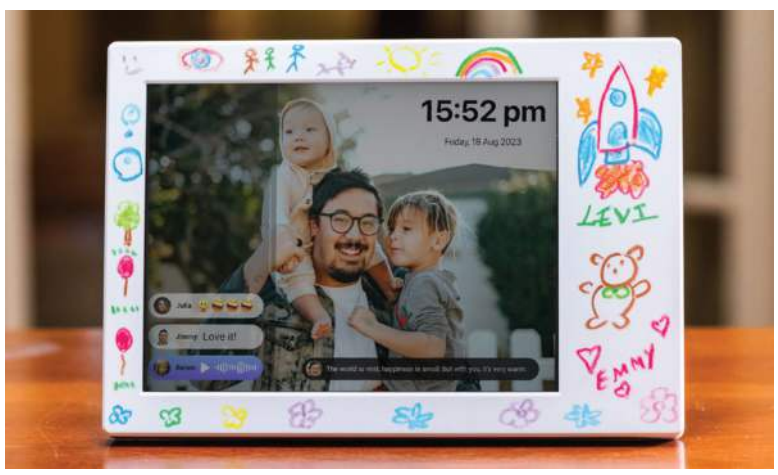
A screen saver can kick on with night mode, ensuring that the screen is turned off until morning. When you wake up, the myFirst Frame Doodle digital photo frame will simulate a natural sunrise using its sunrise alarms.

It can be placed vertically or horizontally, and the auto-rotate feature will ensure the proper image orientation for viewing.

The myFirst Frame Live has many of the same features, but it has a larger display and a 16:10 aspect ratio. It has a modern look and a detachable wooden frame.

Both frames have a power-saving and motion-detection feature. They turn on when anyone walks near them and off when they walk away. Customizable timers and white noise sleep aid features are also included. The frames can be synced to other myFirst devices for a common feed of images and videos.

Online: us.myfirst.tech



MYFIRST/TNS

Kids can draw directly on the myFirst Frame Doodle digital frame.

Playing with fresh ideas

Video games are in, comic books are out as Hollywood looks for its next audience draw

BY JASON SCHREIER
Bloomberg News

When she first saw the email, Nadia Thorne thought it was a prank, or maybe a student project. A Hollywood production company wanted to turn her video game into a movie?

Thorne was one of the four people behind Dredge, an independently produced game that blends serene fishing with cosmic horror. Although Dredge received rave reviews when it came out in March 2023, it wasn't the type of high-profile property that might typically draw audiences to cinemas.

But the requests kept coming, not from clueless amateurs but from the companies behind blockbusters like "Harry Potter" and "Star Trek." A few months later, Thorne and her team struck a deal with Story Kitchen, founded by the producers of "Sonic the Hedgehog," to make a feature film based on Dredge.

"They seem to think it's going to go ahead," Thorne said. "Apparently all the major studios are excited."

Moviegoers have begun to tire of superheroes after a deluge of comic book films. Walt Disney Co. Chief Executive Officer Bob Iger said in mid-May that the company would cut the number of Marvel films and TV shows it releases a year in half, to about two of each. Hollywood, meanwhile, is looking to the video game industry as the next fertile ground for story ideas. Spurred by hits such as "The Super Mario Bros. Movie," dozens of video game franchises have been optioned or produced for film and television over the past two years, from God of War to Grounded.

Many of these adaptations are still in development, but the ones released have found success. Amazon.com Inc.'s recent "Fallout" series, based on the post-apocalyptic games, has reached 65 million viewers, while the first two "Sonic the Hedgehog" films have grossed more than $700 million, with a third entry slated for later this year. It's a two-way street: Sarah Bond, president of Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox division, said at the Bloomberg Technology Summit on May 9 that the "Fallout" TV show is leading viewers to engage with the games.

Hungry producers have gobbled up the options to both mega-franchises and hit indie games, such as Dredge and the detective role-playing game Disco Elysium. Even games with little to no name recognition have tantalized Hollywood, such as the ancient Sega action series Golden Axe and El Paso, Elsewhere, a low-budget shooter that has been optioned by the actor LaKeith Stanfield.

David A. Gross, author of the FranchiseRe movie newsletter, said that even lesser-known video games are appealing to film and television producers because they have a narrative already established.

"Hollywood looks for new stories wherever they can be found," Gross said. "Those games might not have as much (intellectual property) asset value, but they still have potential."

Video game adaptations were once a laughingstock thanks to campy 1990s films based on Super Mario Bros., Double Dragon and Street Fighter. More recent movies such as 2010's "Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time" and 2016's "Warcraft" were commercially successful, largely due to overseas markets, but critically panned. Jake Gyllenhaal, who starred in "Prince of Persia," later expressed regret about the experience.

But the curse has been broken in recent years thanks to critical darlings such as Netflix Inc.'s "The Witcher," based on a series of Polish novels and video games, which recently began filming a fourth season. Last year, HBO's "The Last of Us" became the first video game adaptation to rack up awards, receiving 24 Emmy nominations and winning eight.

"For many years, there was a belief — supported by poor results — that video games could not be successfully transformed into audience-satisfying and profitable films," said Adam Fogelson, chair of the film studio at Lionsgate Entertainment Corp., which will release a movie based on the video game series Borderlands this August.

Recent hits, Fogelson said, "proved that with the right creative, a new generation was more than ready to embrace those characters and worlds in feature films."

Prestige television in particular is fertile ground for video game adaptations because it allows for the type of side quests and exploration that make games appealing. While it might have been disastrous to cram the 15-hour story of "The Last of Us" into a two-hour feature film, HBO's nine-hour series gave it room to breathe — and allowed for diversions like "Long, Long Time," an episode that wasn't closely related to the overall story but was critically acclaimed.

The historic failure of video game adaptations may have been largely due to a lack of respect for the source material, which has changed in recent years as filmmaking attracted new generations of people who grew up playing games rather than scoffing at them.

Todd Howard, director of multiple Fallout games and an executive producer on the television series, said in a recent interview that the show's production team was so "meticulous about translating every little thing" that the set designers even used 3D printers to reproduce art from the games.

That appreciation was one of the biggest considerations for Thorne and her colleagues as they weighed multiple offers for turning Dredge into a film or television series. They found themselves impressed with Story Kitchen when one of its producers identified themes they had explored early in the development of Dredge.

"We're going to be handing off our world, our story," Thorne said, adding she hoped they were partnering with a studio "that really gets it."

Prime Video

Amazon's recent "Fallout" series, based on the post-apocalyptic games, has reached 65 million viewers. Sarah Bond, president of Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox division, said at the Bloomberg Technology Summit on May 9 that the "Fallout" TV show is even leading viewers to engage with the games.

Paramount Pictures

"Sonic the Hedgehog" has been such a successful movie adaptation that a third film is due out in December.

"Hollywood looks for new stories wherever they can be found. Those games might not have as much (intellectual property) asset value, but they still have potential."

David A. Gross
author of FranchiseRe movie newsletter

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Blood, sweat, tears

How Marisa Abela immersed herself in Amy Winehouse's life, music for 'Back to Black' biopic about the British singer

BY HILARY FOX
Associated Press

There's no point asking Marisa Abela to sing Amy Winehouse songs at karaoke. Her friends have already tried and failed.

But you can see her sing — and become — Winehouse in the new film "Back to Black," arriving in theaters this weekend.

Abela, best known for the sex, drugs and banking TV series "Industry," did not want her performance to feel like a mere impersonation of the iconic British singer. She spent four months learning to sing in Winehouse's specific vocal style (two hours a day, five days a week), play guitar (one hour a day, three times a week) and move like her through "intense" physical training.

Abela immersed herself in Winehouse's life and music until, she says, it was "annoying." Deciding to give her flatmates a break from the sound of her guitar practice ("at the beginning, everything sounded terrible") or watching performances on a loop ("over and over and over again"), she relocated to Camden.

It's the area in north London where Winehouse lived and died and where she is still much loved and remembered. Her image and music are everywhere.

"She was out and she was at pubs and at restaurants and, you know, singing when she shouldn't have been sometimes. And also when she should have been," Abela says.

"Back to Black," directed by Sam Taylor-Johnson, follows the experiences that led Winehouse to write the album of the same title. It shows her rise to fame from her debut album "Frank" to her triumph at the 2008 Grammys.

Away from music, we see her Friday night family dinners and the heartbreak of her relationship with Blake Fielder-Civil (played by Jack O'Connell).

Abela is now 27, the same age Winehouse was when she died in 2011. The actor met The Associated Press recently at Camden's traditional pub and music venue The Dublin Castle, a well-known Winehouse hangout and a filming location for "Back to Black."

"It was important to her to be in Camden always," Abela says. "Everyone has stories and that's really helpful."

Winehouse played gigs at the pub and would pop behind the bar to pull pints. There are signed photos to landlady Peggy Conlon proudly displayed behind the bar (they had to be removed for filming).

Abela describes how the tabletops and sticky floors that Winehouse once trod upon infused realism into the scenes.

"There's just an amazing history to these venues, especially the music venues that she was a part of and then became a part of her legacy," Abela says.

The only problem with making a movie about Winehouse in Camden: It's impossible to hide behind the closed doors of a movie set.

So Abela was caught by the paparazzi, as Winehouse was, walking around in the rain, sporting red lipstick, backcombed black hair and ballet slippers, "basically barefoot." But when the time came, she embraced the towering stilettos the singer would wear onstage.

AP

British singer Amy Winehouse in 2007.

"Those heels are just insane," Abela says. "She did an incredible job staying upright in those heels, especially with that hair; I mean, it's not light. It's a heavy piece on your head."

It was even suggested that the actor wear sneakers, when her feet were out of shot during a scene re-creating Winehouse's 2008 Glastonbury performance, for safety reasons.

"But it changes your physicality so much to be in trainers running. So, no, I'll stay in the heels, thanks very much," Abela decided.

Taylor-Johnson met with Winehouse's family but says it had no artistic control over the film. It was written by Matt Greenhalgh, who also wrote biopics of Joy Division's Ian Curtis (2007's "Control") and John Lennon (2009's "Nowhere Boy"). A big Winehouse fan, Taylor-Johnson says she knew early on in the audition process that Abela could channel and bring "forth the feeling of Amy."

Abela says she poured "blood, sweat and tears" into the role is because she knew firsthand how much Winehouse meant to people.

Growing up in a Jewish family, living in small village outside Brighton on England's south coast, Abela didn't know other Jewish people.

"I didn't see any cool women out there rocking the Star of David. And then, like, Amy Winehouse is out and about. And that was just so cool to me," Abela recalls.

Abela admits the thought of what Winehouse would think of her kept her awake at night. Eventually, she concluded that the singer would at least respect the amount of work she put in.

She insisted on singing for real, if they decided she was good enough. But, for now, Abela has no plans to capitalize on her singing lessons.

"It's not how I choose to express myself artistically," she says. "I don't think we're going to see an album from me any time soon."

TOP: VIANNEY LE CAER, INVISION/AP
ABOVE: FOCUS FEATURES/AP

Top, Marisa Abela poses for a portrait at the Dublin Castle pub, a well-known Amy Winehouse hangout, during promotion of her film "Back to Black" on March 22 in London. The pub was also a filming location. Above, Abela spent four months learning to sing in Winehouse's specific vocal style for "Back to Black."

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Find your inner child

Krasinski's 'IF' about imaginary friends will appeal to both kids, adults but struggles with fuzzy storytelling

BY JOCELYN NOVECK
Associated Press

How do you make a kids' movie that appeals not only to kids but also to the adults sitting next to them? Most films try to do this by throwing in a layer of wink-wink pop culture references that'll earn a few knowing laughs from parents but fly nicely over the heads of the young ones.

So let's credit John Krasinski for not taking the easy way out. Writing and directing (and acting in, and producing) his new kids' movie, "IF," Krasinski is doing his darndest to craft a story that works organically no matter the age, with universal themes — imagination, fear, memory — that just hit different depending on who you are.

Or maybe sometimes, they hit the same — because Krasinski, who wanted to make a movie his kids could watch (unlike his "Quiet Place" thrillers), is also telling us that sometimes, we adults are more connected to our childhood minds than we think.

There's only one conundrum: "IF," a story about imaginary friends that blends live action with digital creatures and some wonderful visual effects and cinematography, has almost too many riches at its disposal. And we're not even talking about the Who's Who of Hollywood figures voicing whimsical creatures: Steve Carell, Matt Damon, Bradley Cooper, Jon Stewart, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Maya Rudolph, Emily Blunt, Sam Rockwell and the late Louis Gossett Jr. are just a few who join live stars Ryan Reynolds and Cailey Fleming. Imagining a table read makes the head spin.

The issue is simply that with all the artistic resources and refreshing ideas here, there's a fuzziness to the storytelling itself. Just who is actually doing what and why they're doing it — what are the actual mechanics of this half-human, half-digital world? — occasionally gets lost in the razzle-dazzle.

But, still, everything looks so darned lovely, starting with the pretty, brownstone-lined streets of Brooklyn Heights in New York City, where our story is chiefly set. We begin in flashback, with happy scenes of main character Bea (Fleming) as a little girl, playing with her fun-loving parents (Krasinski and Catharine Daddario). But soon we're sensing Mom may be sick — she's wearing telltale headscarves and hats — and it becomes clear what's happening.

Bea is 12 when she arrives with a suitcase at her grandmother's Brooklyn apartment, filled with her old paint sets and toys. Grandma (Fiona Shaw, in a deeply warm performance) offers the art supplies, but Bea tells her: "I don't really do that anymore."

Visiting Dad in the hospital (it takes a few minutes to figure out that they've come to New York, from wherever they live, so he can have some sort of heart surgery), he tells Bea he's not sick, just broken, and needs to be fixed. Hoping to keep her sense of fun alive, he jokes around, but she says sternly: "Life doesn't always have to be fun."

And then the creatures start appearing, visible only to Bea. We first meet a huge roly-poly bundle of purple fur called "Blue" (Carell): The kid who named him was color-blind. These, we soon understand, are IFs — imaginary friends — who've been cut loose, no longer needed. There's also a graceful butterfly called Blossom who resembles Betty Boop (Waller-Bridge). A smooth-voiced elderly teddy bear (Gossett Jr., in a sweet turn.) We'll meet many more.

PARAMOUNT PICTURES/AP

From left, Ryan Reynolds, Cailey Fleming, the character Blue (voiced by Steve Carell) and Blossom (voiced by Phoebe Waller-Bridge) in a scene from "IF."

Supervising all of them is Cal (Reynolds). An ornery type, at least to begin with, he's feeling rather overworked, trying to find new kids for these IFs. But now that Bea has found Cal living atop her grandmother's apartment building, she's the chosen helper.

The pair — Reynolds and the sweetly serious Fleming have a winning chemistry — head to Coney Island, where Cal shows Bea the IF "retirement home." This is, hands down, the most delightful part of the movie. Filmed at an actual former retirement residence, the scene has the look down pat. And then the nonagenarian teddy bear gives Bea a key bit of advice: All she need do is use her imagination to transform the place.

The movie moves on to Bea's matchmaking efforts. A tough nut to crack is Benjamin (Alan Kim), an adorable boy in the hospital who favors screens and seems to have trouble charging his own imagination (spoiler alert: that'll get fixed).

There are segments here that feel like they go on far too long, particularly when Bea, Cal and Blue track down Blue's now-adult "kid" (Bobby Moynihan).

Still, the idea that adults could still make use of their old "IFs" at difficult times — and summon their dormant sense of whimsy, as a closing scene captures nicely — is a worthwhile one. And by movie's end, one can imagine more than one adult in the multiplex running home, checking under the bed, hoping to find a trusted old friend.

"IF" is rated PG for thematic elements and mild language. Running time: 104 minutes.

Winehouse story flattened in frustrating biopic 'Back to Black'

BY LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

"Back to Black" as a movie is a tame and mediocre affair. A conventionally told biopic about a talented artist who became famous, struggled with drugs, depression and bulimia, and died early. There are nice performances from gifted actors like Marisa Abela, Jack O'Connell, Eddie Marsan and Lesley Manville, and a soundtrack of hits that helps fill the space. But as a portrait of Amy Winehouse? It is simply dreadful.

The main problem with any movie about Winehouse is that a defining one already exists: Asif Kapadia's Oscar-winning documentary "Amy," released four years after her death from alcohol poisoning at 27. Told through archival material, home videos and observations from those around her, it felt intimate and unfiltered.

But "Amy" was a movie that didn't sit well with her grieving family. Her father, Mitch, said it was misleading and contained "basic untruths." After it won the Oscar, he doubled down saying that it had no bearing on her life and was manipulative. Kapadia, he said, was more exploitative of his daughter than anyone.

Her mother, Janis, narrated a documentary, "Reclaiming Amy," released in 2011. And after years of declining to participate in a narrative biopic, the estate decided to allow one with full use of the songs. Like many musical biopics made alongside an estate, it's hard not to look at "Back to Black" skeptically, wondering whose interests the film is serving.

Sam Taylor-Johnson, who directed, has said that she wanted to take the idea of "blame" out of the equation, that the family had zero input on her cut and would not benefit financially. And yet it also seems like a direct response to Kapadia's film, depicting more than a few key moments wildly differently.

FOCUS FEATURES/AP

Marisa Abela as Amy Winehouse in "Back to Black," a film about the artist who died of alcohol poisoning at 27.

The screenplay is empathetic to the ex-husband Blake Fielder-Civil (O'Connell) and her father Mitch (Marsan), both of whom have been villainized over the years. In the film, most are just caught up in a whirl of inevitability and the retrospective blur of grief.

There seems to be an excessive amount of rationalizing in the way everyone involved talks about "Back to Black." But just because everyone keeps telling us that it's a celebration doesn't mean that we have to get on board. I'm not sure what is celebratory about dramatizing this tragedy, or helpful, or artful, or particularly revelatory about it either. The media, for example, is reduced mainly to the paparazzi camped outside her place as though that's where the problem stopped. Taylor-Johnson has said she didn't want to glamorize depression, addiction or bulimia either, but the latter, which she struggled with before she was famous, is barely even acknowledged.

Though linear, the story is also oddly confusing, assuming that the audience knows many details of her life and the people in it. The film rushes through major career moments in montage, seeming to slow down only for a few things. Was it attempting a freewheeling jazz form, or is it just messy?

In some ways, this portrait of Amy Winehouse makes her immense talent the sideshow and her obsession/romance/heartache over Blake the defining story of her adult life. This is at least somewhat redeemed by the chemistry between Abela and O'Connell, who look far too glowing and healthy to be believable as heroin addicts.

But the greatest failing is how shockingly cliché the ending is. For all of "Back to Black's" tiptoeing around delicate subjects, its romantically photographed send-off to Amy is perhaps the most dangerously glamorized shot in the film. It doesn't even fade to black after a title card announces her death. Before anyone can feel anything, it cuts to Amy telling the audience all she wants is for her songs to make people forget about their troubles for a bit.

By this point, it reads more like a closing statement for a film that never wanted to challenge, offend or move anyone. Mission accomplished.

"Back to Black" is rated R for drug use, language throughout, sexual content and nudity. Running time: 122 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

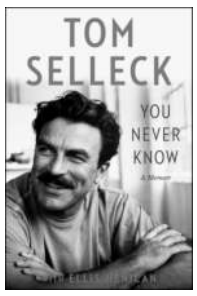
Selling himself

In his new memoir, Selleck reflects on hard years that made him a star

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Tom Selleck starts his memoir in the middle of a car crash. He is 17 and in the passenger seat when he and two friends go airborne in his mom's red Chevy Corvair, tumbling off Mulholland Drive in Los Angeles. Everyone would be eventually fine, but it's a harrowing moment and a unique way to kick off a look-back.

"That's an unusual way to start," the "Magnum, P.I." and "Blue Bloods" star admits in an interview. "It seemed like the perfect way to go back a little bit and talk about my upbringing through the bad accident and the ramifications."



"You Never Know" takes readers through Selleck's years at the University of Southern California, in the Army, being bachelor No. 2 on "The Dating Game" and small roles and commercials before earning an Emmy and lasting fame as Thomas Magnum.

"I didn't have one of those headline-grabbing lives," the 79-year-old actor tells The Associated Press. "The only way I could make the book entertaining — and I think my primary job and goal in this book is to entertain — was to get into these stories in a way that the reader got inside my head."

Selleck spent four years writing the book in longhand on yellow legal pads, quoting from George Will and Raymond Chandler along the way. He would write in the afternoon and read what he'd written to his wife at dinner.

The self-portrait that emerges is of an actor who put his head down and worked at his craft — he did six unsold pilots and his first big movie role was in the unfortunate "Daughters of Satan" — until hitting the big time in his mid-30s.

"If Selleck has one thing to sell, it's authenticity," says Ellis Henican, Selleck's co-writer. "He is a guy who knows who he is. He has managed to make a very successful career in a rough business over many decades by finding a way to be himself."

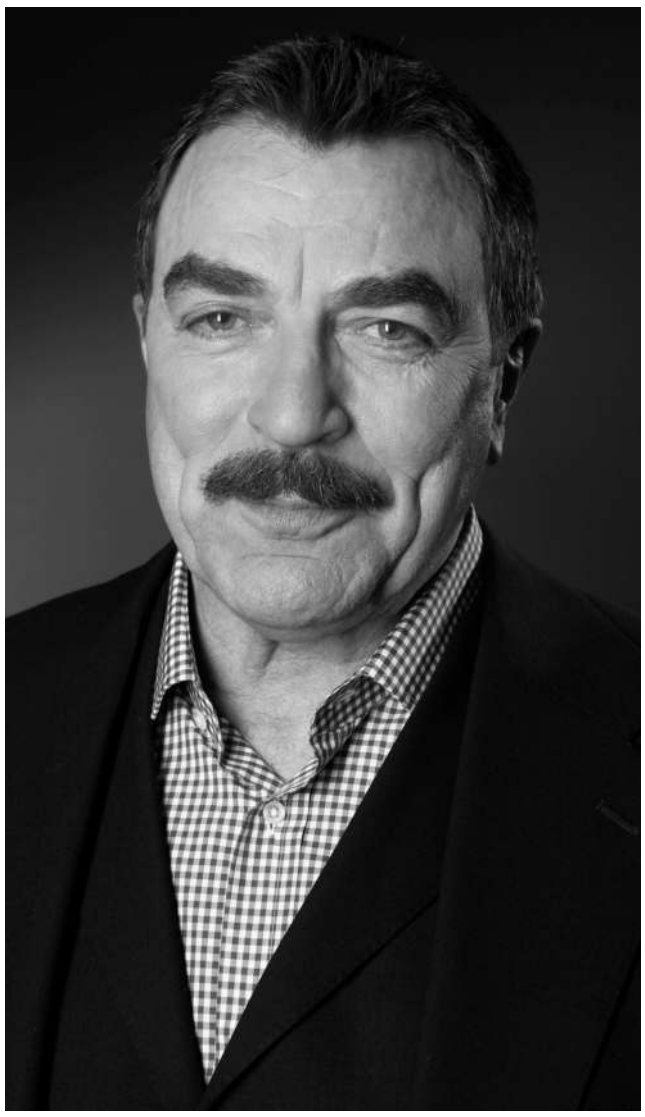
Selleck says he had no intentions of writing a tell-all or sharing salacious details of his life, though he does reveal details about his secret marriage to his second wife, Jillie Mack, whom he first spotted onstage in "Cats." (Yes, he fell in love with Rumpleteazer.)

"There's plenty of stuff I have not talked about, and there's plenty of stuff that everybody else has talked about and it isn't really accurate," he says.

Readers will learn that Selleck — known for his 6-foot-4 matinee-idol looks and build, sense of humor and effortless style — was often racked by insecurity and doubts, writing, "That critic on your shoulder is a formidable opponent."

"I wanted to speak the language of our business to young actors," he says. "It's not an easy road. The product you're selling — when somebody says no, which is 99% of the time — is you."

Famously, his shooting schedule for "Magnum, P.I." forced him to decline an offer to play Indiana Jones in "Raiders of the Lost Ark," a part which went to Harrison Ford. A Hollywood strike actually made it possible to do both, but Selleck is at peace, writing "my only regret was that the what-if was there from time to time."



AP

Actor Tom Selleck, shown in 2012, has a new memoir, "You Never Know," that was released May 7.

The role of Magnum — a Vietnam war veteran-turned-easygoing-detective who zipped around Hawaii in a red Ferrari — aired from 1980-1988.

Selleck earned an Emmy in 1984 for the episode "Home from the Sea," in which Magnum treads water alone in the Pacific Ocean until he is rescued, talking to figures in his past. "I made it, Dad. Why didn't you?" the character deliriously asks his father, who was shot down over Korea in 1951. He was thrust into hosting the Emmys on the year he won one.

"A part of me was still in host mode. I grabbed my Emmy and ran across the stage to my host podium. I put down my Emmy and looked out at the applauding audience for the first time. When I did, I gotta say, the applause grew louder and stayed that way for quite a bit longer than I expected," he writes.

Selleck bet on himself throughout his career, turning down a steady gig on "The Young and the Restless" and showing up for work on the 1979 TV miniseries "The Sacketts" even though the director made a point of saying he didn't want him.

"I'm most proud that I, as a person, was willing to take risks. They didn't always pay off, but many times they did," he says. "Risk is the price you pay for opportunity itself."

Portraits of other stars also make appearances, like Carol Burnett, Princess Diana and Frank Sinatra, whose last acting job was on "Magnum, P.I." and who showed off his temper as well as his acting chops while navigating a colostomy bag.

Fans of "Blue Bloods" have to wait for the last few pages to discover that Selleck initially fought for it to be a character-driven show and not a procedural, as the pilot had been. He won, and the show is in its 14th season. He writes, "I can't be that lucky twice."

Selleck writes that he approached his career as a bricklayer, making sure each role was done with the highest quality and then moving on to the next. If that meant pushing back on scripts or budgets, so be it.

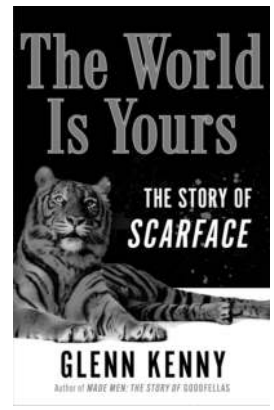
"Just showing up and getting a paycheck wasn't my idea of the work," he says. "I tried to always do it in a businesslike way. You know, not throw tantrums and throw scripts against the wall."

Glenn Kenny takes authoritative look at 'Scarface' in new book

BY PHILIP BOOTH
Special to The Washington Post

Tony Montana, an uncouth, narcissistic, swaggering outsider, fought his way to the inside, rose to the top and then burned everything down in a violent, paranoia-driven attempt to retain power. The fictitious Miami drug lord played by Al Pacino in Brian De Palma's controversial crime thriller "Scarface" (1983) suffered a bloody execution in the film's over-the-top, practically balletic concluding gun battle.

A similar fate nearly befell the movie itself, an ambitious, nearly three-hour remake of the Howard Hawks noir classic from 1932. De Palma's version, made for between $25 million and $37 million (depending on whom you ask), took in less than $5 million at the box office on opening weekend. It elicited some snarling reviews — Pauline Kael of the New Yorker called it a "crude, ritualized melodrama" — and was assailed by charges of racial stereotyping.



But unlike its Cuban-born protagonist, the film lived to see another day and subsequently became a bestseller on video, inspiring generations of hip-hop artists, spawning popular video games and enjoying a theatrical rerelease on its 35th anniversary. Its best-known catch phrase — "Say hello to my little friend," uttered by Montana while brandishing his AR-15 with a jury-rigged grenade launcher attached during that cataclysmic final shootout — will apparently live on forever. Even in today's Little Havana, posters, T-shirts and wall clocks emblazoned with Montana's face or the "Scarface" movie poster are ubiquitous.

The genesis, creation and afterlife of "Scarface" make for a fascinating, surprisingly complex tale, engagingly told by Glenn Kenny in "The World Is Yours: The Story of Scarface." Kenny, a New York-based critic who has also written a making-of book about another notable crime film, Martin Scorsese's "Goodfellas" and a study of one of that movie's stars, Robert De Niro, offers what amounts to a hybrid full-length biography of a movie. Drawing from new and old interviews, he offers extensive stage-setting and pop-culture context, along with thoughtful film analysis, sections that feel like oral history and a few extended detours.

"Prohibition invented the American gangster movie," Kenny writes. Similarly, President Ronald Reagan's war on drugs paved the way for the likes of the "Scarface" remake. The cocaine cowboys from the land of "Miami Vice," an international crossroads for drug distributors, replaced the Chicago-based Italian American bootleggers and gun runners of the Hawks movie.

Kenny spikes his entertaining narrative with plenty of amusing, frequently insightful observations and anecdotes about the world that made "Scarface" and the world that "Scarface" made:

That notorious death-by-chainsaw scene, which caused novelists Kurt Vonnegut and John Irving to walk out of preview screenings? It was inspired by Stone's discussions in the Bahamas with real-life Gangland types.

The Pacino-fueled rumor that De Palma's pal Steven Spielberg "had a crack" at shooting a portion of the final symphony of gunfire? Never happened, De Palma says.

The movie's continuing hold on hip-hop artists? Montana "makes things happen. Things don't just happen to him, and he really is a self-made man," music critic Harry Allen explains.

"The World Is Yours" isn't the first book-length examination of "Scarface"; Nat Segaloff's "Say Hello to My Little Friend" was published last year, following Ken Tucker's "Scarface Nation" in 2008. But Kenny's book comes off as authoritative, the final word on the subject. At least for now.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Beautiful sites just a bit past Barcelona

It's hard to top Barcelona, Spain's most cosmopolitan and fun city. But it's still worth considering at least one of several tempting, scene-changer day trips from Barcelona: the mountaintop monastery of Montserrat, the Salvador Dalí museum at Figueres and the seaside towns of Cadaqués (with Dalí's home) and Sitges (great beaches).

For almost a thousand years, Benedictine monks have lived atop Montserrat — the "serrated mountain" — which dramatically rockets up from the valley floor northwest of Barcelona. With its unique rock formations and dramatic cliff-clinging monastery, Montserrat is an inviting excursion for pilgrims with (or without) hiking boots. A one-hour train ride from Barcelona links up with a rack railway or a cable car to get you to the lofty site. Serious pilgrims walk up.

For hikers and nature lovers, a funicular climbs nearly a thousand feet above the monastery. Up top, the air is fresh and the views are spectacular, sweeping — on the clearest days — from the Mediterranean to the Pyrenees. From the trailhead here, well-signposted hikes radiate out.

If you're a Dalí devotee, head to Figueres (two hours north of Barcelona) and the strange, fanciful Dalí Theater-Museum. From the Figueres train station, it's an easy 15-minute walk to the museum. You can't miss it: It's painted pink, studded with golden loaves of bread and topped with monumental eggs and a geodesic dome. For fans of Surrealism and Dalí, it's one of Europe's most enjoyable museums.

Rick Steves

Wandering around the building (a former theater), I can't help but wonder: Am I crazy, or is it Dalí? Pop a coin into Dalí's personal 1941 Cadillac, and it rains inside the car; peek into the Mae West room to see that the sofa lips, fireplace nostrils, painting eyes and drapery hair come together to make the face of the sultry actress. And Dalí himself is entombed in a crypt below center stage.

Nearby Cadaqués is a seaside gem at the easternmost tip of Spain. With whitewashed buildings and dreamy bay views, Cadaqués is idyllic and remote-feeling. (It has no train service; buses and taxis connect it to Figueres along a tiny access road.)

Most travelers in Cadaqués are here to see the home that Dalí shared with his wife (and muse) Gala. Together they converted a fisherman's home — about a 20-minute walk from the city center — into their semipermanent residence. It was here that Dalí did his best work, and I consider it the most interesting home of a deceased personality in all of Europe. Though Dalí was raised in Figueres, he spent childhood summers in a family cabin here in Cadaqués, where he was fascinated by the rocky landscape that would later be the backdrop for many Surrealist canvases.

CAMERON HEWITT/Rick Steves' Europe

The Dalí Theater-Museum is a treasure trove for fans of Surrealism.

Though Cadaqués otherwise offers little in the way of sights, the old town is remarkably characteristic. I love to stroll along the waterfront or climb to the Church of Santa Maria for commanding views from the top of town. Uphill, Cadaqués' Jewish Quarter is still rich with vestiges of the strong Sephardic community that thrived in Spain until 1492.

If you simply want to kick back without an agenda, take the frequent 30-minute train service from Barcelona to welcoming Sitges. With a much slower pulse than Barcelona, this resort town southwest of the city is a perfect break from sightseeing.

There are Modernista-style mansions here and a few worthy little museums, but I recommend just poking around the old town's whitewashed streets, crammed with cafés and boutiques. Then head for the water to soak up the sun, sea and sand on one of nine beaches that extend southward. Along the seaside promenade, you have your choice of restaurants and chiringuitos (beachfront bars) for tapas, paella and drinks.

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

Active European days require well-planned overnight stays

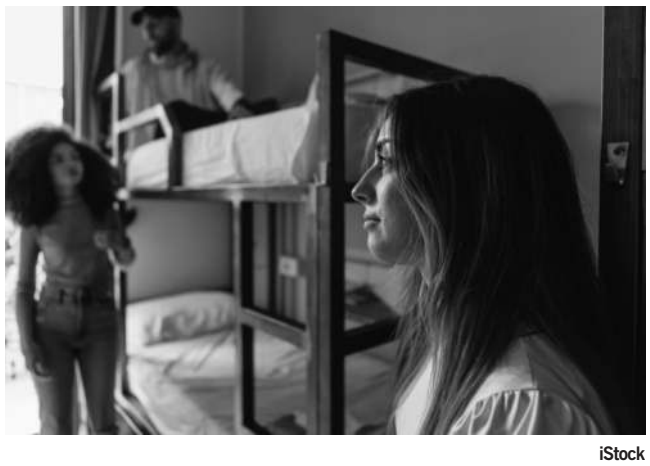
Traveling near or traveling far, there will always be a need for a roof over one's head. And when there's a specific need, or a wish for a certain vibe, hotels and other properties within a network can help narrow down a list of seemingly infinite choices. Here are some networks worth checking out before booking your next room:

Travelers on a budget: Hostelling International, the world's largest network of youth hostels worldwide, was founded in 1932 with the aim of promoting a newly-conceived concept. Today, HI is made up of 60 Member Associations operating more than 2,650 hostels. Properties within the network can be considered safe, clean, sustainably operated and family-friendly, as opposed to some independent hostels in large cities that tend to cater more to the young and party-hungry. In many countries, membership is a prerequisite to a stay; in any event, membership can be purchased while checking in. Despite the name, membership is open to all, with no age limits, and enduringly popular with families. Online: hihostels.com

Karen Bradbury

Cyclists: Those cycling along some of Germany's estimated 4,280 miles of bike paths are undoubtedly happy to see a ADFC Bett+Bike sticker on the door of any prospective place to spend the night. The designation, awarded by a subdivision of the German Cyclist's Association that operates within the tourism sector, can apply to a variety of guest establishments, from five-star hotels to simple campsites. More than 5,900 properties not only in Germany but also in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg and Switzerland can be found on the organization's website. Online: bettundbike.de

Those with property of their own to share can benefit from membership in Dachgeber, or Roof Giver. Members offer to provide space to bikers and other active travelers in exchange for the chance to take advantage of the same form of hospitality. Online: dachgeber.de



iStock

Hostels can be great places to meet people as well as an inexpensive sleeping option.

Child-friendly: Kinderhotel.info is not a network per se, but rather a booking portal with more than 700 hotels offering childcare and/or a comprehensive program of activities for young guests. Once an attractive offer is located through its search filters, website users are led to the property in question. The properties listed are located in Austria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and other countries. Online: kinderhotel.info

Eco-friendly: Those after both sustainability and an upscale ambiance might wish to check out BIO HOTELS, a group of some 190 hotels whose member properties strive to use clean and renewable energy, have low CO2 emissions, offer natural cosmetics and serve regionally sourced, organic foods. Guests are encouraged to experience the surrounding countryside in a climate-neutral way, such as on a guided hike or a mountain bike tour organized by the hotel. Many such hotels also offer their own bike rental services. Hotels within the network are located in 11 European countries including Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy and Slovenia. Online: biohotels.de

Luxurious: The Leading Hotels of the World is a network of more than 400 independent, high-end hotels found in more than 80 countries. These hotels are properties known for a combination of distinct features and luxurious appointments. Among its Euro-pean offerings are a mixture of spas, golf clubs, beach resorts, urban, boutique and other properties. The posh places include, for example, the Palais Coburg, a converted palace in Vienna, Austria, or The Reserve, a property in Funchal, on the island of Madeira, Portugal, where services and amenities include unlimited spa access, a private pool and terrace and luxury experiences such as a guided fishing outing or private yacht tour. Online: lhw.com

Barrier-free: AccessiblEurope is an organization based in Italy dealing with the concept of accessible tourism. Since the mid-1990s, AccessiblEurope has tasked itself with evaluating guest facilities including hotels, spa resorts, guest houses, campgrounds and other properties. Accessibility features such as wide doorways, spacious elevators, roll-in showers or bars affixed to the walls are noted. Some properties will also offer accessible swimming pools or beaches, or even rehabilitation and a therapy center. Online: accessibleurope.com

Holiday rentals in France: Gîtes de France is a label assuring vacationers of a consistent standard of quality. Some 42,000 owners of hotels, bed and breakfasts, campgrounds, group lodgings and other properties throughout France can boast of being part of the brand. Online: gites-de-france.com

Farm stays in Italy: The Italian word "agriturismo" refers to a real, working farmhouse or winery. Accommodation ranges from rustic and simple to ultra-luxurious, and often include high-quality food produced and prepared on-site. Online: agriturismo.it

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

PHOTOS BY MARVIN JOSEPH/The Washington Post

Carl and Tonya Morris receive IVs at their home in Aldie, Va. Ron Kapp, a Santa Barbara-based physician, says taking IVs "out of the hospital environment" was a "brilliant move."

The new cure-all

IV therapy has moved from hospitals to luxury spas and hotels — and it's not just for hangovers anymore

BY ANDREA SACHS
The Washington Post

On a sunny Saturday afternoon, Noreen Tofel sat cross-legged on her couch in Alexandria, Va., with her left arm stretched out on a pillow. A vein rose like a riverlet on a relief map. As nutrients trickled into her bloodstream, she talked about how IV drips fit into her travel regimen.

Before a work trip, Tofel, who works in human resources risk management, will schedule a drip to boost her energy and immunity levels. If she is planning an indulgent vacation, she will reverse the order. The healthy intravenous cocktail, she said, will make amends for the boozy imbibed ones.

"I want to drink my margaritas and have my piña coladas and kind of take my body for granted," said Tofel, 39. "If I did the IV drip before, then I would feel bad drinking over it."

Once just in hospitals, IV drips have become a crossover sensation in the health, wellness and travel sphere. Travelers previously had to rely on pain killers and sunglasses (for hangovers), melatonin (for jet lag) or copious amounts of caffeine or sleep (for exhaustion) to recover from travel-related afflictions. Now, they are hooking up to IVs to erase the excesses that could derail their vacation. And you don't have to venture far to find them. IV drips are popping up in hotel spas, resorts, casinos and shopping districts. You can even order one from the cushiness of your rental property or hotel room.

"People get really dehydrated when they travel. They get hangovers and sun exposure. They're at high altitudes when they're flying," said Sarah Muniz, director of clinical operations at PureDropIV, which serves the Washington area and counts Tofel as a client. "Having the ability to get the hydration and B12 vitamins and vitamin C really helps people bounce back."

Ron Kapp, a Santa Barbara-based physician and antiaging research clinician, said the therapy's evolution from medical procedure to self-care treatment started in the 1960s, when John Myers, an internist at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore,

Nurse Kari Quimpo of PureDropIV in the Washington area confirms treatments before setting up an IV drip. IVs can purportedly alleviate a wide range of symptoms, such as dehydration, brain fog, nausea and lethargy.

discovered that injecting nutrients is more efficient than ingesting them. He created a rejuvenating concoction called the Myers' cocktail. It's now a staple on IV drip menus today.

In 2010, Jason Burke, a board-certified anesthesiologist and pioneer in the field, created an IV hydration remedy for folks who partied a little too hard. He cruised the Las Vegas Strip in a 45-foot-long Hangover Heaven bus, administering IV drips. The clinic-on-wheels is undergoing repairs and a refurbishment, but visitors can book an office appointment or schedule a rental house — or hotel — call.

"Taking it out of the hospital environment was his brilliant move," Kapp said. "Everyone jumped on the bandwagon."

According to the Global Wellness Institute, there were 7,000 medical-spas worldwide and thousands of IV drip centers and facilities last year, including hotel spas, wellness retreats and mobile clinics. Restore Hyper Wellness, for instance, has

SEE IV ON PAGE 21

IV: Treatments dependent on clients' health and preferences

FROM PAGE 20

more than 225 locations. Reviv boasts clinics in nearly 50 countries.

Adam Nadelson founded the I.V. Doc in New York City in 2013 after he suffered a bout of food poisoning during his medical residency and rebounded with the help of an IV drip. His company has expanded to 33 U.S. cities, plus London and Ibiza, Spain. He said his team serves guests at many luxury hotel brands, such as the Ritz, Aman and Four Seasons.

"You name the hotel," he said, "we've certainly been there."

Shortly after Nadelson spoke those words, the I.V. Doc received a text from the Plaza New York. The concierge requested an appointment for a guest that day — emphasis on "soon."

From hangover treatment to hotel amenity

Recreational IV drips may be most famously associated with hangovers, but they can purportedly alleviate a wide range of symptoms, such as dehydration, brain fog, nausea and lethargy. Prices vary by city and type of IV cocktail, but basic drips start at about $150 and can rise fivefold or more.

IV drip clinics have been proliferating around the world. A number of Four Seasons spas — Orlando, Washington, Maui and New York City — offer the amenity. At the Ranch, a wellness retreat in Malibu and New York's Hudson Valley, guests can receive a drip poolside or in the privacy of their room. Shoppers can indulge in a different kind of retail therapy at Harrod's in London and the Dubai Mall. Even cruise ships are getting in on the trend.

"This is global," Kapp said. "I was in Honduras for a convention and they were doing IVs."

But like with pizza and barbecue, there are regional IV preferences.

In Type-A cities like Washington and New York City, travelers often book drips with the hopes of building their immunity and energy reserves. In avant-garde wellness destinations such as Los Angeles and Miami, the treatment is part of the broader longevity movement. In party towns with gaggles of bachelor and bachelorette parties, IV drips are fire hoses pumping out hangover cures.

Rose Salo, founder of San Diego IV, said she became aware of IV drips as a wedding activity through actress Sofia Vergara, who provided the amenity at her 2015 nuptials. Since then, Salo said the "bougie luxury service" has gone mainstream. She said some groups book the treatment in advance, as part of their travel itinerary. Others call her in desperation, as if she were running an urgent care clinic.

"A lot of times we get bookings on the day of," she said. "They'll wake up feeling like complete garbage and they have another day of shenanigans ahead of them. They'll call us and say, "Can you have someone here ASAP?'"

At Reviv in the Cosmopolitan resort in Las Vegas, Jesse Schwartz, a registered nurse, recommends a reactive strategy: Do the damage first, then come in for a reboot. The IV bag will have the greatest effect when you are at your lowest point — dehydrated, exhausted, nauseous. After the IV flushes out the toxins, you can jump right back into the Vegas game.

"Once you get the hangover bag or the vitamin boost bag, you can go out and do what you want," he said.

Los Angeles resident Chris Harmon first tried an IV treatment not to tackle a hangover but to battle a virus. His doctor, who works at Cure Medical in the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village, prescribed a Myers' cocktail. The drip did the trick, and he now averages 20 to 30 IVs a year.

The chief operating officer of a drug and alcohol treatment program in Malibu incorporates them into his travels. On a trip to the Sacramento area, he booked an appointment with a well-reviewed physician he found online. During the 45-minute session, he read his Kindle and relaxed while the IV worked its magic. He has also juiced up in his Austin hotel room during a visit with friends.

"It gave me more energy," Harmon said. "I remember feeling the benefit immediately."

The mechanics of the drip

Depending on state requirements, you might have to meet with a licensed medical practitioner for a consultation and vitals check before a drip. The treatment is usually administered by a registered nurse or a professional with comparable training. Some conditions could preclude you from treatment, such as pregnancy or certain heart, liver or kidney diseases.

"The reason that we rely very heavily on our medical team is that we sometimes have to turn people away who aren't great candidates," said Derek Hofmann, senior spa director at the Four Seasons Resort Orlando. "We err on the side of caution."

People suffering from trypanophobia will be relieved to know that the nurse uses a needle only briefly, to insert the catheter. The treatment can last from 30 minutes to several hours.

Despite IV drips' popularity outside of hospitals, many experts in the medical and wellness fields are wary. Beth McGroarty, vice president of research at the Global Wellness Institute, said the injection can lead to serious infections caused by improperly sterilized equipment or unclean skin. A reaction might occur during the treatment or hours to a day later.

In addition, flooding your body with unnecessary vitamins, minerals and other substances can cause toxicity and overwhelm your kidneys. To underscore her point, she cited a Texas woman who died of cardiac arrest last year after an electrolyte injection.

McGroarty also takes issue with the lack of federal oversight. The states regulate the practitioners, though governmental agencies occasionally step in with warnings.

In 2021, the Food and Drug Administration alerted consumers about unsanitary conditions at medical offices and clinics that administer treatments involving compounded drug products such as IV drips.

"Contaminated, or otherwise poor quality, compounded drug products can lead to serious patient illnesses, including death," the agency stated.

SEAN SCHEIDT/For The Washington Post

Sophie Nolan receives an IV on April 29 at The Four Seasons in West Lake Village, Calif. A number of Four Seasons spas offer the amenity.

For Tofel's drip, Madison Gnan, a registered nurse, removed the sterile items from their packaging, pulled nine vials of her travel case and made the cocktail to order.

"I would not go to a place that doesn't open it in front of you," Tofel said.

Las Vegas, ground zero for luxury IVs

Though the treatment is commonplace, Las Vegas still feels like the epicenter of IV drips. Like Elvis impersonators, they are inescapable. During a recent stay on the Strip, I would pass clinics on my morning coffee run and during my aimless wanderings in the black hole of casinos. On a search for my hotel's fitness center, I ended up inside an IV drip lounge.

I get a little wigged out by foreign objects embedded in my skin, but I mustered up the courage to stop by several places and ask my inner elbow: Do we dare?

I started at Ageless Las Vegas in Caesars Palace, which evoked the mysterious and moody atmosphere of a speak-easy. Co-founder Rio Alabastro showed me a red pinprick in her inner elbow. She said she had felt a little sluggish that morning and gave herself a little Get-Up-and-Go, one of the options she recommended to a virgin dripper. On my way out, she handed me a QR code with a discount.

Regenerate Me has three locations on the Strip. The outpost in the Linq Hotel sits across from a Dunkin', so you can put your drip to work with a doughnut and chemically flavored coffee. The attendant told me most people order a hangover cure. I showed up at lunchtime, so I was either too late or too early for the rush.

The company's clinic in Planet Hollywood was also empty. I peered through a gap in the treatment room and saw a row of reclining massage chairs arranged around a TV set. It felt like a den in Middle America.

Reviv has more than 80 locations, including the United Kingdom, Dubai and the Cosmopolitan in Vegas. The facility was predominantly furnished in white and emitted a vibe that was more Scandinavian lounge than sanitized hospital. Schwartz, whose arm displayed the mark of an IV, said about two dozen people had dropped in for IV treatments that day. Unless I drank more, I wouldn't be the next.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

A cuisine potpourri

Mi Peru restaurant in Darmstadt brings the taste of South America to southwest Germany

BY MICHAEL ABRAMS
Stars and Stripes

We recently took a culinary journey to South America via a restaurant in Darmstadt, Germany.

For some reason, an advertisement for Mi Peru kept popping up in one of my social media feeds. Looking for a new place to eat out at and unfamiliar with Peruvian cuisine, we decided to give it a try.

The restaurant has about 18 tables in two rooms and outdoor seating when the weather is nice. The tables and chairs are made of wood, some photos of Peru hang on the wall and back room, and a big blackboard lists some of the menu highlights.

Our server brought us our menus and asked if we would like a cocktail or aperitif to start. Luckily, we had peeked at the menu at home on the web and had an idea what to order. I chose the pisco sour and my wife went with the virgin morada.

The pisco sour is like a whiskey sour but made with Peruvian pisco, a grape marc that is similar to grappa. The morada is made with chicha morada, a Peruvian beverage made from purple corn, and mixed with juices from passion fruit, orange, elderberry and lime, with a dash of cinnamon. We found them both delicious and quite refreshing as we studied the menu.

While it is a Peruvian restaurant, Mi Peru also serves Spanish tapas and paella. We contemplated trying a few of the tapas but decided to stick with starters on the menu.

My wife ordered the causa rellena, a layered potato salad with a chicken-mayonnaise center and garnished with a small salad. I selected the ceviche de pescado, a traditional Peruvian dish.

Made with fresh fish marinated in lime juice and refined with coriander, fresh garlic, red onion and peppers, it was served alongside kernels of roasted corn and sweet potatoes.

Other starter choices included vegetarian versions of both dishes, deep-fried yucca or another Peruvian specialty, anticucho, which is grilled spicy marinated beef heart steaks served with potatoes and Peruvian corn. Maybe next time.

There are many variations of ceviche across Central and South America, and the Peruvian version served here was delicious. The right mix of tangy lime, spicy peppers and firm fish was perfect for my inaugural taste.

My dining companion also found the causa rellena, with its chicken salad-like core, delicious and quite filling.

The indigenous peoples, the conquering Spanish and immigrants from Asia and Africa have all added their ingredients to the Peruvian culinary melting pot. Mi Peru has only 10 entrees on the menu, but these reflect the potpourri of the country's cuisine.

Take the arroz chaufa, for instance, a Cantonese-influenced rice dish prepared in a wok with vegetables and a homemade ginger-based soy sauce. It can be ordered with vegetables, chicken, beef or seafood.

Or tacu tacu, a traditionally prepared, crispy fried tortilla of rice and beans, with the same choices as above. We chose seco de carne and sudado de pescado as our main courses.

Sudado de pescado, which translates to sweaty fish, is a tangy Peruvian fish stew. The Mi Peru version is a tenderly cooked hake fillet in an onion-and-tomato sauce accompanied by mussels, squid and prawns and served with rice.

The sauce had a silky texture and was exceptionally light and tasty, while the fish and seafood were firm and tender.

Seco de carne is a beef roast braised in a spicy, aromatic beer sauce, flavored with garlic, pepper, cumin and coriander. It came with sides of rice and beans. The meat was tender and tasty, the sauce subtle but full of flavor. We both thought the dishes were delicious.

Mi Peru has Spanish and local Darmstädter beer on tap, but I had a bottle of Cusquena, a Peruvian lager. Although a fan of the local brew, I didn't regret my choice. It was refreshing and went well with the beef. The restaurant also offers Chilean and Spanish wines.

So far, our meal had been satisfying and filling, but we felt that we couldn't leave without having dessert. Among the choices were alfajores — homemade Peruvian biscuits with a milk cream filling — and tres leches cake, a classic Peruvian milk cake with a cream topping.

We split that, and both of us agreed that it was mouth-wateringly delicious.

Others evidently did, too. A trio of Spanish-speaking people came in, just for the cake.

abrams.mike@stripes.com

AFTER HOURS GERMANY

Mi Peru

Address: Heidelberger Strasse 40, Darmstadt, Germany
Hours: 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday; 6 p.m. to 12 a.m. Saturday and Sunday; 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. to midnight on Sundays.
Prices: Starters from 2.90 euros to 19.90 euros; entrees 14.90 euros to 26.90 euros; tapas 6 euros and paella 15.90 euros to 17.90 euros; desserts 6.50 euros to 9.50 euros. Cocktails and aperitifs start at 7.50 euros, beers at 3.90 euros, wines at 4 euros and soft drinks at 3.90 euros.
Information: Online: miperu.de

Michael Abrams

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

A large blackboard at Mi Peru, a restaurant in Darmstadt, Germany, shows the tapas it serves. As the name indicates, it is a Peruvian restaurant with Spanish additions of tapas and paella. It is quite popular, so reservations are advised. The restaurant has about 18 tables inside and outdoor seating.

Mi Peru, a restaurant in Darmstadt, Germany, serves Peruvian specialties along with Spanish tapas and paella.

Ceviche de pescado: Fresh fish marinated in lime juice, refined with coriander, fresh garlic and peppers and served with roasted corn and sweet potatoes.

Causa rellena, a layered potato salad with a chicken-mayonnaise center. Garnished with a small salad, it makes for a delicious and filling starter.

Seco de carne, a beef roast braised in a spicy, aromatic beer sauce, refined with garlic, pepper, cumin and coriander, and served with rice and beans.

Mi Peru's Sudado de Pescado is tenderly cooked hake fillet in an onion and tomato sauce, accompanied by mussels, squid and prawns and served with rice.

For dessert at Mi Peru, you can't go wrong with the Peruvian version of tres leches cake, a favorite all over Latin America. It's mouth-wateringly delicious.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

A freshwater haven for frogs, humans

Das Bärenloch natural lake in Kindsbach, near Ramstein, Germany, a popular spot for sunbathers, swimmers and tadpoles

BY HEATHER BENIT
Stars and Stripes

Although its name means "the bear hole," das Bärenloch in the German village of Kindsbach gets a new population of tadpoles in the spring, not cubs.

The 8,000-square-foot natural lake was named after the brown bears that once roamed the Palatinate Forest. The bears are long gone, and today the freshwater "frog lake" is a popular spot for sunbathers and swimmers.

Each part of the idyllic setting that surrounds Bärenloch offers its own draw for visitors. The forest playground has zipline swings for kids, the extensive trail system includes hikes past castles, and the lake itself is ideal for swimming in the summer and skating in the winter.

In the spring and early summer, another attraction is the tadpoles and frogs that make the park home.

Dipping my feet in the cool water and watching tadpoles is how I spent most of a sunny German Labor Day afternoon at Bärenloch with a friend and our kids.

We had to drag the kids away from the park's playground, with its hillside slide and sand toys. The outdoor play area is next to the parking lot, making it impossible to miss — or sneak past.

When we walked over to the lake, there were a few swimmers who thought an air temperature of 75 degrees was warm enough to take a dip in its serene, spring-fed waters. The lake is touted by the city as safe for swimmers and is drained and cleaned in the winter months.

We followed the circular path around the lake. There are changing rooms and toilets on the hillside. On the waterfront is the Kahnhaus restaurant, which has outdoor seating and serves hot meals and drinks. At the south end of the lake along the forest, sunbathers gathered on the grass.

Just beyond the restaurant, at a pond entry point with stairs and railings, is where we had our first tadpole sightings of the day. They formed a dark mass squirming just beneath the surface and clinging to the turquoise barrier wall.

The kids were mesmerized. They would submerge their feet and watch the tadpoles swim away. Some kids used buckets to get a closer look at them before letting them go.

For a more adventurous experience, there are mountain bike and hiking trails that continue into the forest. One circular path passes the Bärenloch, the Heidenfelsen Roman spring sanctuary and Nanstein Castle. Another path leads to scenic sights in Landstuhl.

As we headed to the car, we made another long stop at the playground. The park is easy to get to from Kindsbach and worth a visit for the playground alone.

But Bärenloch — with its scenic hikes, soon-to-be baby frogs and summer swimming season — is already calling me back.

benit.heather@stripes.com

On the QT

Address: Bärenlochweiher, Kindsbach, Germany 66862
Hours: Open all day, year round
Cost: Free
Information: Kahnhaus restaurant, Online: facebook.com/kahnhaus , Phone: 0172 6820076; mountain bike trails, online: tinyurl.com/5wrmb236

Heather Benit

PHOTOS BY HEATHER BENIT/Stars and Stripes

Parkgoers dip their feet in the lake and look at tadpoles at Bärenloch in Kindsbach, Germany, on May 1. Bärenloch means "bear hole," but bears have long since disappeared from the surrounding forest.

The playground at Bärenloch in Kindsbach, Germany, is impossible to miss thanks to its location next to the parking lot. Its attractions for youngsters include sand, ziplines and a hillside slide.

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WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

A bastion of tradition and honor

Fortress near Seoul built to house the remains of South Korean prince

BY CHRISTOPHER GREEN
Stars and Stripes

The amazing thing about South Korea is that no matter where you go on the peninsula, the country's rich history is all around you, and no more so than in Suwon.

This city is a beautiful mix of modernization and history, symbolized by Suwon Hwaseong Fortress and the imposing wall that surrounds it.

King Jeongjo built the complex in 1796 to honor and house the remains of his father, Prince Sado. The walls stretch for 3½ miles and incorporate Paldalsan Mountain at the center.

The northwestern watchtower of Suwon Hwaseong Fortress.

There is much to see on a visit to the fortress: four gates and 48 buildings and other structures. The south gate, through which vehicles pass, seems enormous and almost monolithic. The fortress walls are nearly 23 feet tall.

Within those walls are several points of interest worth checking out. I started with the Temporary Palace, mainly used as a government office or for King Jeongjo to stay in when he visited his father's tomb. The palace is beautifully decorated and painted in vibrant colors.

Next is Daeseungwon, a giant, gold statue of Buddha that is visible from the palace courtyard, followed by Hyowon's Bell, which local tradition encourages striking three times for good fortune and gratitude, and the Seonamammun, or secret gate.

PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER GREEN/Stars and Stripes

The main gate of Suwon Hwaseong Fortress in Suwon, South Korea. The complex contains 48 buildings and other structures, and the activities for visitors include traditional archery and bell-ringing.

On the QT

Location: Yeonghwa-dong, Jangan-gu, Suwon-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea.
Directions: A 45-minute drive from Osan Air Base and about an hour from Camp Humphreys.
Times: Open daily, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Night tours are available from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesday to Sunday.
Costs: Free admission
Food: You'll find many options, mostly cafes and restaurants, around the fortress.
Information: Phone: 031-290-3600; Online: swcf.or.kr/english

Christopher Green

The view of the city from the path along the wall is amazing.

The Suwon Cultural Foundation offers tours of the fortress for about 1,000 won, or less than $1, for military members, 1,500 won for other adults and 700 won for children. You can pay more for traditional archery and bell-ringing experiences.

Hwaseong fortress should be on everyone's list of places to see in South Korea.

green.christopher@stripes.com
@ChrisJGreen8

The path leading to the west gate of Suwon Hwaseong Fortress in Suwon, South Korea.

Visitors hunt Japan's version of 'Bigfoot' at annual festival

The Yomiuri Shimbun

A festival in which people search for a legendary snake-like creature called the tsuchinoko was held in Higashi-Shirakawa, a Japanese village in Gifu Prefecture, this month. Many participants brought their families along, seeking adventure as they hunted for the mysterious beast.

Tomoki Imai, a village resident who directed a feature-length documentary on the tsuchinoko, also attended the festival to promote his film.

The festival, which was held for the 32nd time this year, features a variety of events centered around the search for the tsuchinoko, sightings of which have been reported in the village since long ago. Participants were limited to 2,200 people.

A reward is offered to anyone who catches a tsuchinoko, but no one has succeeded yet.

Imai, who made his film after researching and verifying tsuchinoko legends and eyewitness accounts, said, "The film helps viewers understand why the village puts so much effort into searching for the tsuchinoko." He added, "The appeal of the tsuchinoko lies in the fact that its true nature is shrouded in mystery, even though there have been many eyewitnesses."

The film will premiere on Saturday in Tokyo.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Summer vibes alive at Nagisa Bashi Cafe

Eatery's seasonal menu, refreshing treats hit the spot en route to fun at Zushi Beach

BY JENNESSA DAVEY
Stars and Stripes

Just steps from the shoreline, Nagisa Bashi Cafe provides the perfect pit stop for beachgoers seeking sustenance and relaxation before a day at Zushi Beach on Sagami Bay, west of Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

You'll have a choice of indoor or outdoor seating. There may be a short wait during peak hours, but the attentive staff will promptly call your number.

The cafe has standard and seasonal menus. Standard offerings include coffees, teas, soft drinks and frappes as starters, with ice cream floats and alcoholic beverages also available.

The main menu has breakfast options from fluffy French toasts and hearty egg dishes for breakfast to savory burgers, sandwiches, pastas and soul-warming soups. There's something to satiate every craving.

AFTER HOURS JAPAN

Nagisa Bashi Cafe

Location: 9-1-10 Sakurayama, Zushi, Kanagawa 249-0005
Hours: Open daily, 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Prices: Most dishes cost between 780 yen and 1,680 yen, or under $11. Kids' meals are 980 yen.
Dress: Casual
Directions: Pay parking is available near the cafe, which is a 20-minute walk from Zushi and Keikyu Zushi-Hayama stations.
Information: Phone: 046-870-6117

Jennessa Davey

For a taste of Japanese comfort food, try the flavorful curries, fluffy omelets and gratins.

Little ones are not forgotten. The kids' menu offers a choice between a classic burger or pasta, accompanied by a side salad and crispy fries.

PHOTOS BY JENNESSA DAVEY/Stars and Stripes

Seasonal strawberry cake from Nagisa Bashi Cafe along Zushi Beach in Japan is light, fruity and delicious.

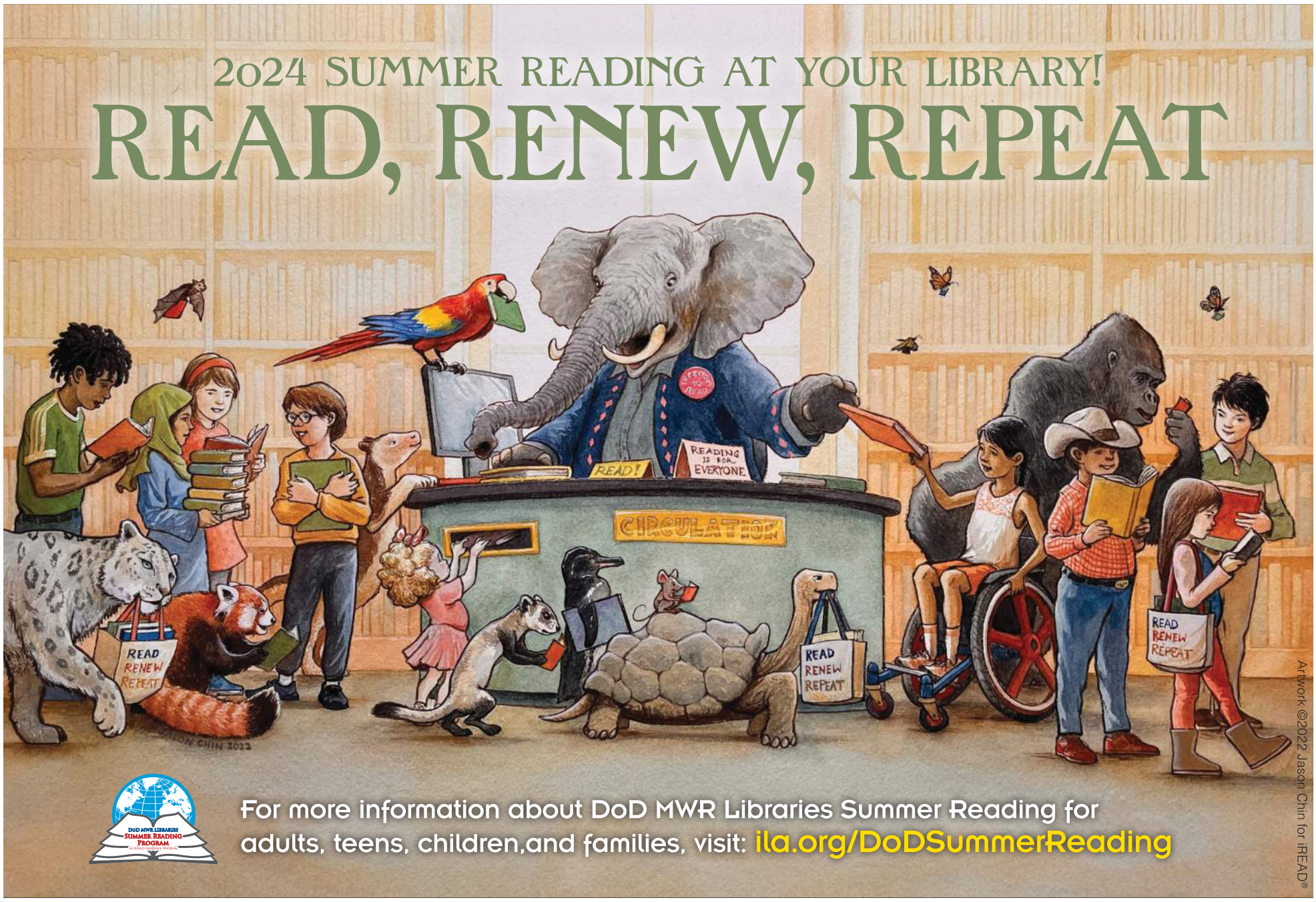
The seasonal menu right now has two options: Mont Blanc strawberry chiffon cake and Japanese-style sweet soup of strawberry and red bean.

I ordered the strawberry cake, which arrived at my table fluffy and with the perfect amount of sweetness. The fruit slices and fruit sauce on the side complemented it well.

As the temperature rises and beach season approaches, many are gearing up for seaside getaways. Nagisa Bashi Cafe is the ultimate destination for a pre-beach coffee, snack or meal.

davey.jennessa@stripes.com
@JenDav_Stripes

Above and below, Nagisa Bashi Cafe is an ideal place for beachgoers to fuel up before a day at Zushi Beach in Japan.



Getting a peek at the process

Open restoration of Kumamoto Castle becomes a tourist attraction of its own

BY TOMONORI ARIMA
Yomiuri Shimbun

Kumamoto Castle, which was heavily damaged in an earthquake in 2016, has been getting more and more visitors thanks to its "observable restoration," which is expected to last decades.

In fiscal 2023, the number of visitors reached 1.35 million people, about 350,000 more than the previous year and recovering to nearly 80% of the pre-quake level. Eight years after the earthquake that devastated the prefecture, an official involved in the restoration said, "We hope people will keep being interested in the region."

The Kumamoto municipal government has begun special openings of the castle's Uto-Yagura tower, which is still under restoration work, about once a month starting in April.

Uto-Yagura is designated as a national important cultural property. It is said to have been built in the Keicho era (1596-1615) when Kumamoto Castle was originally constructed. The tower is also called the third keep of the castle after the main keep and its attached smaller keep. Uto-Yagura is a five-story building above ground with a basement level. In the earthquake, it suffered damage in more than 40 locations, including broken pillars and damaged outer walls. While the tower escaped total destruction, the entire structure was tilted.

In January, dismantling work of the tower began, and it is completely covered with scaffolding. Restoration work is scheduled to be completed in fiscal 2032. The municipal government has begun to allow visitors inside the scaffolding on the second Sunday of every month.

"We hope that visitors will look closely at things like the collapsed walls, cracked kawara tiles and the current state of the tower, which you can see only now," said Yasuhiro Iwasa, the chief official responsible for restoration at the municipal Kumamoto Castle General Office. "We will continue efforts to deepen people's understanding of the restoration process while passing along records of the damage done."

Thirteen of Kumamoto Castle's structures are national important cultural properties, and all were either damaged or destroyed by the earthquake. Twenty structures, including the main keep, were reconstructed in later periods and were also affected by the earthquake. The castle's stone walls are known for their "Mushagaeshi" (warrior-repelling) structure that gradually grows steeper higher up the walls. Nearly 10% of the walls, about 8,200 square meters, collapsed.

The Japan News photos

Visitors can see areas of Kumamoto Castle being restored from a special observation path.

The main keep's repair work was done first and completed in 2021. However, the entire castle is not expected to be fully restored until 2052, and just over 20% of the scheduled work had been completed by March 2022.

As entry to the castle is restricted due to the restoration work, a special observation path was built and has played a major part in the tourism revival. The 5- to 7-meter-high elevated path was built in 2020, allowing visitors to observe the conditions up close without interrupting restoration work or blocking construction vehicles.

The construction of such a path to allow tourism while continuing restoration was unprecedented in Japan and was a difficult project, according to Yuzuru Tsukagawa of the Kyushu branch of Nihon Sekkei Inc. in Fukuoka, who was involved in the path's design.

Since valuable underground foundations remained at the castle, the ordinary piling construction method could not be used. Laying wire mesh on the ground and paving the ground with stones, Tsukagawa's team built a concrete foundation on top of that. He adopted a special structure in which the path was supported by columns and designated a 350-meter observation route that would require as few trees to be cut down as possible. According to Tsukagawa, the process was like threading a needle.

The Uto-Yagura tower in 2021, before being covered with scaffolding.

Town to block view of Mount Fuji at popular tourist photo spot

BY MAKOTO KIMURA
The Japan News

The massive popularity of Mount Fuji as a tourist attraction has brought benefits to the nearby area but also trouble to the lives of the residents there. The situation has prompted local governments and companies to implement, however reluctantly, such extreme measures as installing a large black curtain to block the view of the mountain from outside a local convenience store.

Crowds of tourists flocked to Mount Fuji during the Golden Week holidays from the end of April to early May to catch a glimpse of the iconic mountain that is famous among Japanese and non-Japanese alike.

"Don't cross the street!" a guard yelled April 29 from the front of the Kawaguchiko-ekimae Lawson convenience store in the town of Fuji-Kawaguchiko, Yamanashi prefecture.

The sidewalk across the street provides a unique view of Mount Fuji: It looks as if the mountain is perched atop the roof of the convenience store. Groups of non-Japanese tourists were seen weaving between cars to cross the street before holding their smartphones up toward the store and the mountain. There were dozens of them.

The Japan News

Mount Fuji looks as if it is sitting on top of a convenience store at a popular photo spot in Fuji-Kawaguchiko, Yamanashi prefecture. The site has had an uptick in tourists since an influencer posted a photo in 2022.

"I make a detour to avoid this place because it'd be horrible if I caused an accident," said a worried-looking resident of the town, 83, who often drives through the area. "It's scary. I don't want to drive here."

According to the town, the area became a popular tourist spot when an overseas influencer introduced it to the world on social media around the autumn in 2022. The town was happy at first to be home to another tourist attraction. However, the number of people who rushed to the place was so high that the town has decided to hide the view of Mount Fuji behind an 8-foot-tall blackout net, which it will hang along a 65-foot stretch of the pavement. The town's tourist department called the decision "a reluctant decision aimed at ensuring the safety of tourists." Work on setting up the curtain started on April 30 and is expected to be completed in late May.

A Polish man in his 20s came to the spot after seeing pictures of it on social media. He said the view of Mount Fuji atop the building was amazing, but setting up the curtain might have been inevitable, seeing how the place got so overcrowded.

On May 4, Lawson, Inc. put up a sign in Chinese, Thai and other languages in front of the Kawaguchiko-ekimae store, notifying visitors not to cross the street in front of the store.

WEEKEND: FOOD

Give these egg-cellent strategies a crack

The best way to get that shell open based on personality type

BY BECKY KRYSTAL
The Washington Post

I've written about some pretty niche cooking topics over the years. But often the articles that are the most discussed and the most fun to debate focus on those mundane, everyday tasks in the kitchen.

One of the most recent topics du jour, thanks to the weekly live chat I host with my colleague Aaron Hutcherson: how to crack an egg. Here's what one reader sent in:

"Is it really better to crack an egg on a flat surface? Every time I try this, it caves in the shell. I find it is much less likely to break the yolk if an egg is cracked on the side of a bowl. Has anyone done a scientific study?"

As commenter Cajaza later summed up: "This is one of the great mysteries of life." (Right up there with which came first, the chicken or the egg, as fellow reader Lily Rowan pointed out.)

I don't believe there's a right or wrong way to crack an egg, only what feels right to you. Are you curious about what other readers do, or looking for a new method to try? Step right up to find the strategy best suited to your personality!

SCOTT SUCHMAN/For The Washington Post

Do you crack an egg on the edge of a bowl, the counter or neither?

Traditionalist: counter

The chosen technique of Jacques Pépin, as mentioned by several readers. "Case closed," commenter Theo23rd said. You, too, can look like a seasoned French chef! Or follow the lead of these impressive readers: "My husband taught me to break eggs one-handed back when we were dating in college," Faithful Reader posted in our chat. "I use a flat surface so I can crack two in each hand at the same time," Open_the_Pod_Bay_Door_HAL shared. What?!

Pros: Everyone has a counter, right? As the theory goes, cracking on a flat surface spreads the impact out over a greater area, which yields fewer, larger shards, says Lan Lam at Cook's Illustrated. Good news for those who hate fishing out bits of shell once the egg ends up in the bowl. Not one, but two, readers said they crack their eggs on the edge of the counter, sort of a cross between the counter and bowl rim, to which I say, you're much braver than I am.

Cons: Cross-contamination central! Hand-washing and kitchen hygiene is always important, but that's especially true with eggs (and chicken), which do carry a risk of salmonella. So, yes, cracking an egg on my counter gives me the heebie-jeebies. As to cleaning the counter — well, a lot of people aren't as good about sanitizing as they think they are. Crack onto a paper towel or flat plate if you must, but honestly, I've messily smashed more eggs this way than I care to admit. As the original poster in our chat said, you may get more of a caved-in shell than a cleanly broken one, meaning you have to pry through the exterior and the membrane to finish the job.

Risk-averse: edge of bowl

If you're worried about getting raw egg on your countertop or you want to limit the number of surfaces the egg comes in contact with, this is your method. People will tell you that all the pros do otherwise, but it's OK to embrace the bowl instinct.

Pros: Predictability. The egg will crack exactly where you rap it against the bowl, typically along the equator and often with enough force to split the membrane just under the shell, meaning you need merely to separate the halves to release the egg. You'll also bypass any mess on the counter — should anything dribble down the outside of the bowl, you can quickly catch it before it makes contact with the counter (or set your bowl on a dish towel you can toss in the laundry, as I do).

Cons: Tiny shards of shell, thanks to the more concentrated point of impact, as Lam explains. It doesn't happen every time, but be prepared to scoop pieces of shell out of the bowl. Not all bowls are created equal either, so depending on the thickness or shape of the rim, your mileage may vary.

Adventurer: pair of eggs

So you enjoy a little danger? Grab a pair of eggs and tap them against each other in a survival-of-the-strongest contest. "To do it, hold the eggs upright and gently, but with intention, tap one against the other," while avoiding smashing them to smithereens, Eric Haessler at Cook's Illustrated explains. "Inevitably, only one of them will crack because there will always be one egg whose shell is slightly stronger or weaker than the other."

Pros: It's fun! Plus, as reader Muniack said, "it's much neater and I never get egg shells in with the egg." As Haessler writes, "The break will be a clean divot right in the center of the egg, making it easy for you to work your thumbs into the opening, and the interior membrane should keep the shell fragments in place," meaning fewer, if any, pieces to extract.

Cons: If you're too aggressive, you'll end up cracking both eggs — which is fine if you need two, but not if you're only using one of them. (Ask me how I know.) And if you're using all your eggs, you'll have to crack the last one on something else.

Self-confident: with tools

Attention all you swift and decisive home cooks out there: If you're confident in your ability to whack an egg with just the right amount of force in just the right spot, this one's for you.

As reader gotnoneck astutely observed, "The real art of cracking eggs is knowing how hard to knock them and when to pull your punches."

Among the preferred implements: sharp knife (reader mickrick), side of a fork (Candylandy), blade of a dinner knife (LadyBlakeney), edge of a spatula (a chat participant).

Pros: Avoids the question of bowl or counter. Whatever implement you use can go straight into the dishwasher. You also get to pick the point of impact.

Cons: Strike too hard and you may crack the egg all over your hand. Also I'm not sure if it was because I hit too hard or not hard enough, but my experiments with this led to shards of eggs flying all over my kitchen.

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WEEKEND: MUSIC

GEORGE WALKER IV/AP

Brian Kelley poses for a portrait outside his cabin April 17 in Nashville. Kelley released "Tennessee Truth," which he considers his first true solo album, on May 10.

Ready to reintroduce himself

Brian Kelley shows there's life after Florida Georgia Line with new solo album

BY MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

Allow Brian Kelley to reintroduce himself.

Best known as half of the country super-duo Florida Georgia Line, Kelley releasd a solo album, "Tennessee Truth," on May 10. It is a collection of 12 anthemic country songs ripe for a road trip and tailgate in equal measure.

For "Tennessee Truth," produced by Dann Huff, Kelley says he aimed to "dive into the music I grew up on — obviously the music I love and themes of just country living, rural living, hard work, good times, outdoors, love," he told The Associated Press from his home in Nashville.

Good songwriting, Kelley says, is a lot like fishing — you need patience. "I wrote probably over 100 songs for this record."

Eight of the 12 songs on the album were written by Kelley, and he worked with whomever he could on others, trying to get outside his comfort zone. "Every song gets you to the next song," he says.

"I think it's a fun record," he says, adding that the creative process was dependent on these tracks translating live.

Geography still plays a prominent role in the music Kelley makes. Throughout "Tennessee Truth" are beaches in Florida, farms in Nashville, his wife's family farm in Georgia. Hunting, sitting on the porch drinking sweet tea and eating peanuts,

Kelley kisses a fish he caught from a pond outside his cabin on April 17.

Good songwriting, Kelley says, is a lot like fishing — you need patience. "I wrote probably over 100 songs for this record."

conversations with loved ones — that's the kind of life he hopes comes across on the album. "Just being free," he says.

Fans looking for more coastal country from Kelley — like what was found on his pandemic album, "Sunshine State of Mind," released in 2020 — will want to skip over to "10 O'Clock On The Dock."

"It was a passion project," he says of "Sunshine State of Mind." "It was supposed to just be its own little thing."

Kelley says he also made that record with the thought that he would record solo and with Florida Georgia Line. "I made it with a sonic respect to what we were, what we had done and what we had built. So, I didn't want to tread on anything even close to that, out of respect, you know?"

He says he considers "Tennessee Truth" his true solo debut.

In 2022, Florida Georgia Line embarked on an indefinite hiatus. At that point, the duo of Kelley and Tyler Hubbard had been together for more than a decade, and whether you were a fan of their bro country sound or not, their music ("Cruise," "Meant to Be," "Round Here") set the tone for a generation of country fans. The following year, Hubbard released a self-titled debut solo record.

"I'm thankful that (Brian) had the courage to step into this new space and to make that decision that ultimately kind of pushed me to make the same decision and lead me to where I'm at now," Hubbard told AP at the time. "I had quite a few people tell me that it couldn't be done and that I should definitely continue with FGL, and it sort of lit a spark in me, a fire."

The closing song on "Tennessee Truth" is the feisty "Kiss My Boots," which features Kelley delivering vinegary lyrics like: "Want the world to know that you did me wrong / I don't know how you act sweet, after how you did me / Here's a middle finger to you through a song." Some fans theorize it is a direct message to Hubbard.

"I've read some of that, too," Kelley says, adding that he understands people might make associations in order to find meaning in the song.

"But at the end of the day," he says, the song means a lot of different things for his collaborators, "And it really means a lot of different things for me.

"I really put that song out because I wanted people to know that I'm a real human, and I'm not just some face on social media or some somebody that's had some success," he adds. "You know, I've been through hard times in my life."

But could there be a reunion on the horizon?

"The old saying is, 'Tell God your plans and he'll laugh,'" he says. "So, I have no idea. I really don't know what the future holds. I know that I'm really focused on what I'm doing now, and I'm really proud of ... the work that I put in."

WEEKEND: MUSIC

REVIEWS

Kings of Leon

Can We Please Have Fun (Capitol)

Kings of Leon pose an existential question to listeners on the first single from their new album: Are you a mustang or are you a kitty? Well, turning that around: Which Kings of Leon are we getting now? The purring arena-rockers or an edgy, untamed stallion?

Judging from the 12 tracks on "Can We Please Have Fun," it's time to pull out a saddle. There's a raw unpredictability to the band's ninth album, a welcome return to the Kings' early sawdust-and-spilled-beer days. Yes, we can definitely have fun here.

Brothers Caleb, Jared and Nathan Followill, and cousin Matthew Followill, have put out the new album 21 years after their debut, "Youth & Young Manhood," and it's more like their first recordings and easily their best in years.

A punky, garage feel flows through many of the tracks, with the bass and drums cranking and Caleb Followill's voice cracking on tracks like "Hesitation Generation" and "Nothing to Do." "Actual Daydream" has a country-infused indie vibe, and first single "Mustang" is angular and strutting, while "Don't Stop the Bleeding" is a sultry arena banger and "Nowhere to Run" makes your heart pump faster.

But it's "Split Screen" that is the album's brightest track, a slow burn built around a guitar noodle and with enigmatic lyrics that nod to a mid-life crisis and parental angst ("hyperventilation," "set it down before your break it" and "big plan. Let's cancel"). It's hypnotic, and easily one of the band's best, the perfect mix of minimalist mixed with coiled power.

The album is produced by Kid Harpoon, who has sharpened albums by Harry Styles, Florence + The Machine and Miley Cyrus. It's the first time Harpoon has worked with the Kings. The combo has somehow lanced the inflated, mighty Kings and brought them closer to the jagged sound they started with.

Lyric-wise, sex on fire has been replaced by crying babies on airplanes and hair extensions. But this is a band that even in midlife is embracing their inner mustangs, not kitties. "If I could be so bold all the time," go the lyrics to "Split Screen" — perhaps a prayer for them, and for us.

— Mark Kennedy
Associated Press

Sia

Reasonable Woman (Atlantic)

A whole album of Sia singing alone is great — great, don't get us wrong — but Sia paired with the icon Chaka Khan? Fire. Their new duet "Immortal Queen" is everything you'd want in a combo of Sia and Khan — dueling soaring voices, preening egos and insane lyrics about time travel and robot servants.

"In one thousand million years / I'mma still be everywhere," they sing. "Before planet Earth was here / I was riding a lightyear." To which we bow and say: Yas, queens.

"Immortal Queen" is just one of the highlights of the super 15-track "Reasonable Woman," Sia's first solo album since 2016.

Sia hasn't lost a step, apparently able to write three bangers before breakfast. The new solo album is packed with the Australian's trademark mix of tropical pop, hip-hop, house and a hint of ska, combed with her distinctive, sky-high voice and ear for the bombastic.

It also contains her songwriter's ability to switch from hurt and broken ("I Forgive You") to ecstatic lover ("Towards the Sun") to vengeful, hell-releasing angel, like on "I Had a Heart."

On this outing, though, the ever-masked, forever catchy Sia is most interesting with others. Aside from the Khan duet, the best songs are "Dance Alone" with Kylie Minogue, "Incredible" with Labrinth and "Fame Won't Love You" with Paris Hilton, two famous women complaining that "fame won't love you like a mother, like a father should."

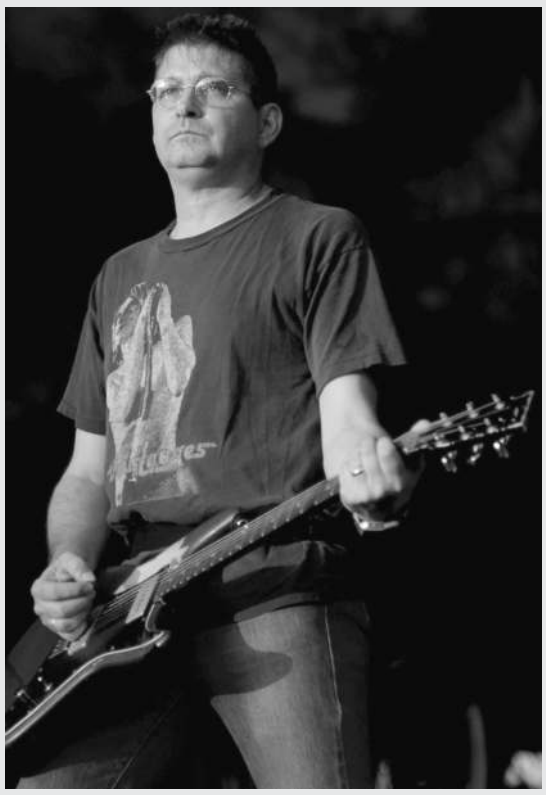
Sia leans on a frequent collaborator, songwriter-producer Jesse Shatkin, who together made the megahit "Chandelier," and the albums "Music" and "This Is Acting." They flirt with Bollywood in "One Night" and hip-hop with "Champion" alongside vocal guests Tierra Whack, Kaliii and Jimmy Jolliff. Greg Kurstin, co-wrote and produced four tracks, while Benny Blanco helps produce the burst of sunshine that is "Go On."

It's not unreasonable to say "Reasonable Woman" is the sound of a comfortable Sia rarely shifting out of third gear, but note: Her third gear is way higher than most artists ever dream about.

— Mark Kennedy
Associated Press

How Steve Albini changed rock music, in 12 essential songs

By Mikael Wood
Los Angeles Times



MATT WINKELMEYER, GETTY/TNS

Steve Albini, of the band Shellac, performs during FYF Fest 2016, at Los Angeles Sports Arena, on Aug. 27, 2016. The legendary producer (who preferred to be called an engineer) died May 7. He was 61.

Steve Albini stood for a sound. But he also stood for an ethos.

Famous among rock fans for his work in the recording studio with the likes of Nirvana and the Pixies — and for his own bands Shellac and Big Black — Albini was known for harsh guitars and booming drums presented with none of the sweetening that can make a rock record sound like a candyland. As a producer (although he preferred to be called an engineer), he took a "documentary approach to recording music," he told The Times in 1993, not long after he oversaw the making of Nirvana's final studio album, "In Utero."

Yet Albini, who died May 7 at age 61, was almost equally revered for his straightforward criticisms of the record industry and its propensity to corrupt the purity of creative expression. To him, stardom was a trap, which is one reason he was known for years to record virtually any band that asked him to at his studio in Chicago. What he offered musicians was wisdom, honesty and technical know-how; what he got out of his clients more often than not was some of their best work. Here, in the order they were released, are 12 of Albini's essential recordings.

1. Big Black, "Kerosene" (1986)
A would-be arsonist explains himself — his motive: boredom — as slashing guitars scrape against the mechanized thump of a Roland drum machine. No Big Black, no Nine Inch Nails.

2. Pixies, "Where Is My Mind?" (1988)
"Never have I seen four cows more anxious to be led around by their nose rings," Albini famously wrote after recording the debut album by this seminal alt-rock quartet. Yet even now nothing sounds quite like the Pixies' most enduring tune: a haunted psychedelic-soul jam in which the ultra-reverbed backing vocals conjure the terrifying underwater expanse that singer Black Francis describes in his lyric. Thanks in part to a prominent placement in 1999's "Fight Club," "Where Is My Mind?" has been streamed more than 850 million times on Spotify.

3. The Breeders, "Iris" (1990)
Clearly unbothered by the nose-ring comment, the Pixies' Kim Deal drafted Albini to oversee the first record by her other band, and it's not hard to see why: No one ever showcased the feral beauty of Deal's singing like he did.

4. Helmet, "In the Meantime" (1992)
Albini recorded only one tune for the major-label debut by this New York noise-rock outfit, but it's a scorcher. "Earth tone suits you, so give it a smile," Page Hamilton barks over a groove so rigid it's almost funky.

5. PJ Harvey, "Rid of Me" (1993)
"Lick my legs, I'm on fire / Lick my legs of desire," Harvey shrieks without accompaniment to end this pile-driving blues-punk come-on — perhaps her most unflinching vocal performance in a career overflowing with them.

6. Nirvana, "Serve the Servants" (1993)
Nirvana's follow-up to its epochal "Nevermind" opens like a grunge version of "A Hard Day's Night," with a blast of unruly guitar noise that quickly gives way to a catchy complaint about having worked like a dog only to end up — surprise! — bored and old. Dave Grohl's drums have never hit harder.

7. Jawbreaker, "Do You Still Hate Me?" (1994)
Working under the name of his cat, Fluss, Albini helped give this Bay Area punk trio a muscular bottom end that perfectly balanced singer Blake Schwarzenbach's desperate rasp.

8. Shellac, "Pull the Cup" (1994)
After years of putting riffs together, Albini tried taking one apart.

9. Bush, "Swallowed" (1996)
For all his disgust with the mainstream record biz, Albini was more than willing to take a major label check, as when Gavin Rossdale's band came to him in what seemed like an obvious attempt to fill the vacuum left behind when Kurt Cobain died. But Albini never took easy money as an opportunity to coast: Listen to how carefully he gets the sound of fingers on guitar strings into this beefcake power ballad.

10. Jimmy Page and Robert Plant, "Please Read the Letter" (1998)
A decade before Plant and Alison Krauss won a Grammy for record of the year with it, Albini captured the former Led Zeppelin bandmates' original take on this plaintive folk-rock tune. It stomps, it crunches, it jangles.

11. Songs: Ohia, "Farewell Transmission" (2003)
Cut, as the story goes, in a single take with no rehearsal, this seven-minute epic by the group led by songwriter Jason Molina (who died in 2013) sounds like Neil Young fronting the Allman Brothers Band. A testament to Albini's knack for recognizing a moment when it arrived.

12. Joanna Newsom, "Monkey & Bear" (2006)
Not a serrated guitar in sight — just Newsom's voice, her harp and Van Dyke Parks' pinprick orchestral arrangements, each recorded with such precision and intimacy that listening feels like being let in on a secret.

Out of the shadows and into the spotlight

Nicola Coughlan's Penelope a key character in Season 3 of 'Bridgerton' in a romantic friends-to-lovers narrative

BY MEREDITH BLAKE
Los Angeles Times

There it was, on the table in Nicola Coughlan's apartment — a microscopic undergarment that loomed large in the actor's mind.

The "Bridgerton" costume department had sent Coughlan home with a piece of intimacy wear that was essentially a strapless thong that would cover the bare essentials of her body during an upcoming love scene.

It would be her first time ever acting in such a scene, in a series known globally for its sexy yet empowering bedroom romps, and it would require her to be almost totally naked in front of people she'd worked with for years. Coughlan was understandably terrified. One night, she poured herself a margarita and summoned the liquid courage to try on the tiny sliver of fabric.

"I went to the bathroom and looked in the full-length mirror. I was like, 'Absolutely not.' I hid it down the bottom of the laundry basket," Coughlan recalled on a cold morning in January at Netflix's offices in Manhattan. "I was like, 'How am I going to do this?'"

Coughlan eventually got over her nerves. Much to her surprise, she found the process of filming the scenes with her co-star Luke Newton creatively satisfying — liberating, even.

"By the end of the day, we were both lying under a blanket, not clothed, just chillin'. We were like, 'This is why nudists do it,'" said Coughlan, who speaks in a rapid, melodious accent that only adds to her natural exuberance.

She is nothing if not enthusiastic, and she brings this level of passion to Season 3 of "Bridgerton," the first half of which returned to Netflix on Thursday. Until now, her character, Penelope Featherington, has been content to be a wallflower in the ballrooms of Regency London, allowing her to observe and secretly write a society scandal sheet under the pseudonym Lady Whistledown.

But this season will focus on Penelope as she — spoiler alert — consummates her long-simmering crush on Colin Bridgerton (Newton) in a friends-to-lovers storyline with distinct rom-com overtones. Penelope's move into the center of the narrative also meant that Coughlan faced new pressures as the lead in one of the most watched and dissected shows on Netflix.

"With Penelope this season, it felt like there were so many things that were reflected in real life. The whole theme of her stepping out of the shadows and into the light, and not feeling quite ready — I felt like I had to do that," Coughlan said.

"It was really challenging. It was terrifying. It was cathartic. It was a million and one things," she added. "I loved it."

She juggled "Bridgerton" with an edgy turn in "Big Mood," a "Fleabag"-esque dark comedy released last month on Tubi. On top of that, she also had a small role in the biggest box-office hit of 2023, "Barbie" — she wanted to do more but, alas, her schedule was too packed — and filmed a guest appearance in the "Doctor Who" Christmas special to be released later this year.

It amounts to a long-simmering breakout moment for Coughlan, who is 37 but thanks to a preternaturally dewy complexion often plays characters who are much younger than she is, like a Catholic high school student in the Troubles-themed sitcom "Derry Girls."

"It was very exciting to play grown women. But I was like, 'Can I do that?' Even in drama school, they would always cast me as the random kid, like, there was an Ibsen play called 'Little Eyolf,' and I had to play Eyolf. I was like, 'This is gonna be me forever.'"

Raised in County Galway on the western coast of Ireland, she grew up liking whatever her older siblings were into — whether it was Nirvana or "Wayne's World." When her sister starred in the school play, Coughlan showed up in a sequined vest, looking like a little Liza Minnelli — as if she knew she also wanted to be onstage.

At age 9, she scored her first professional gig, a movie called "My Brother's War" starring James Brolin. As a teenager, she did regular voice work in cartoons. Her father, who was in the Irish army, and mother, a stay-at-home parent, were supportive but also baffled by their youngest child's dramatic streak.

"It's really not in my family at all," Coughlan said.

After graduating from the National University of Ireland Galway, Coughlan enrolled in a foundational course at the Oxford School of Drama in England, where she quickly bonded with fellow student Camilla Whitehill.

"We were the only people there that really cared about things being funny," said Whitehill, a playwright who would go on to create "Big Mood" as a vehicle for her old drama school friend. "Everyone else just wanted to do plays where their family had died, or whatever."

They both eventually landed in London, where "neither of us was successful at all for our whole 20s," said Whitehill, who would often cast Coughlan in "my bad unpaid short plays at pubs," including one where Coughlan played a cat.

"You leave drama school, which is a lovely, cozy bosom where you get to do the thing you love every day. Then you go, 'Hang on. Thousands of people leave drama school every year, and they want to do the exact job I do.' It seems so improbable that you'll make a living doing it," Coughlan said. "I felt like a loser at so many points."

By the time she was in her late 20s, she'd moved back home and was working for an optician in Galway. Then she saw a listing for an open casting call for a festival of plays being put on by the Old Vic Theatre. Even though she was broke, she flew back to London for the audition and landed a part in a play called "Jess and Joe Forever."

It marked a turning point for Coughlan, who was soon cast as studious teen Clare Devlin in "Derry Girls," a project she was drawn to because of its vividly drawn female characters.

"They were all really distinct — young women who were ballsy and foul-mouthed," she said. She convinced herself that the show would flop because "people hate women trying to be funny." Instead, the show was a massive hit in the U.K. and earned a devoted following in the U.S. when it was picked up by Netflix.

Then, Shonda Rhimes came calling about "Bridgerton." After a single audition, Coughlan was cast as Penelope, a thoughtful, sharp-witted young woman with an overbearing mother and tacky, dim-witted sisters. Season 1 was released in late 2020, and it became a sensation.

"It's such a weird, un-put-into-words-able experience to watch someone you know for such a long time become globally famous," she said. The fact that Coughlan didn't find success straight out of school "has grounded her significantly, which means that she doesn't let it go to her head."

Success has not come without complications, however, like the relentless media scrutiny around Coughlan's physical appearance. "It's really hard and feels [like] s—," she said.

In 2018, she wrote an essay for the Guardian responding to a theater critic who described her character in a London production of "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" as "an overweight little girl." Coughlan is determined to push back against this kind of casual body-shaming because, she said, "I grew up at a time where it was so overt. There was the circle of shame for cellulite [in magazines] — just horrific, horrific messaging."

It's also why this season of "Bridgerton," which celebrates the allure of a character often overlooked as a wallflower, is so meaningful to Coughlan — and why she suspects it will resonate with so many viewers. Rhimes and showrunner Jess Brownell decided Season 3 should deviate from the timeline in Julia Quinn's novels and focus on Penelope and Colin — a couple known to fans as "Polin."

"We've watched Colin not quite understand that Penelope has a crush on him for two seasons. You can only play that dynamic out for so long before it gets frustrating," Brownell said.

Stepping into the lead meant Coughlan would need to be on set nearly every day for eight months straight. But if she was overwhelmed at first, she didn't let on.

"She just seemed so game and ready for anything on set," Brownell said. "If anything, I just noticed how seriously she was

SEE PENELOPE ON PAGE 31

Netflix

Nicola Coughlan's Penelope Featherington comes out of the shadows and into the main narrative in Season 3 of "Bridgerton," which returned to Netflix on Thursday.

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Penelope: Actor 'left it all on the pitch' for turn as lead

FROM PAGE 30

taking her preparation."

Coughlan was insightful and collaborative, Brownell said, sharing an endless stream of ideas about her character in a WhatsApp group chat with Newton and Brownell. She had suggestions for specific music cues and for Penelope's makeover, which sees her ditching her tight red poodle curls and garish citrus-hued gowns for loose waves and cool blues and greens. Coughlan is also very plugged into the fandom, and she advocated for a scene, important to novel readers, in which Penelope calls Colin "Mr. Bridgerton."

This season is "a lot lighter and more playful than we've been able to be in the past," Brownell added. The writing leans into Coughlan's strengths as a comedic performer, particularly her knack for awkward banter, a skill she deploys as Penelope throws herself into the London social season in a bid to find a husband.

Coughlan, who enjoyed being, as she put it, "the weirdo in the background" for the first two seasons of "Bridgerton" and who idolizes women like Tina Fey, Amy Poehler and Kristen Wiig, said it was a thrill "to play Penelope as goofy and terrible with men."

Coughlan recently said she'd finally watched the episode in which Colin and Penelope sleep together, nervously, by herself. Once again, the anticipation was worse than the thing itself.

"I laughed and cried and I was like, 'Oh, my God, it's amazing,'" she said. "They're not titillating just to be titillating, even though we hope they are sexy. There's so much about female pleasure and positive sexual experiences, and we don't get enough of that on screen."

Coughlan has reached a bittersweet crossroads on "Bridgerton," now that her character's big season has wrapped and she will soon return to being "the weirdo in the background." But she has no regrets.

"We left it all on the pitch. There's nothing I wanted to do this season that I didn't get to do," she said. "And that's a rare thing."

Netflix

Luke Newton and Nicola Coughlan's characters go from friends to lovers on Season 3 of "Bridgerton."

Q&A

PHOTOS BY E! ENTERTAINMENT/AP

A model wears a design by Theodore Banzon in a scene from the fashion competition series "OMG Fashun." In each episode, contestants — or "disrupters," as they're called — are challenged to reuse materials and upcycle fashion for unique looks.

'Don't just make a pretty outfit'

'OMG Fashun' judges discuss the E! competition show, their personal fashion philosophies

BY ALICIA RANCILIO
Associated Press

For Julia Fox, life is a catwalk. The looks she puts together — cutting off the belt loops of her jeans or creating a top made from tartan ties sewed together — are almost always guaranteed to turn heads and be photographed.

Alongside Law Roach, Fox is a host and judge of the new E! fashion competition show "OMG Fashun," which premiered May 6. Roach stepped back from styling celebrity clients last year but still works with select people like Zendaya, who co-hosted the most recent Met Gala and recently turned heads with her looks for both the "Challengers" and "Dune: Part Two" press tours.

In each episode, contestants — or "disrupters," as they're called — are challenged to reuse materials and upcycle fashion for unique looks meant to impress Roach, Fox and a guest judge. The winner walks away with $10,000 and Fox models their design.

Executives at Scout Productions, which produces "OMG Fashun," say the show works because it fits with both hosts' fashion philosophies. Roach likes to buy archival pieces from designers to give clothing a second life. Fox is against environmentally unfriendly fast fashion, instead stressing working with what you have. That extends to production meetings.

"Julia wore a dress to one of our pitches that was all expired condoms," recalled Rob Eric, the production company's chief creative officer.

David Collins, the company's co-founder and executive producer, said the show is an opportunity to put a spotlight on emerging designers: "It's hard to stand out. And this is an opportunity, whether you win or lose, to stand out and have people follow you."

Fox and Roach also spoke with The Associated Press about advising the "OMG Fashun" contestants, disruptive fashion and honest feedback. The conversations have been edited for clarity and brevity:

Associated Press: How do you describe disruptive fashion?

Fox: Anything that undermines the current norms. Not wearing mass-produced garbage. Supporting local emerging designers in your own community. Not falling for clever marketing ploys. Not wearing something just because everyone else is. But more importantly, using clothes as a political statement. A lot of what I wear is in response to the current policing of the female body. They are taking our rights away more and more every day, and I feel really f——— mad. I wear my clothes aggressively and angrily.

What advice did you have for the contestants?

Fox: Make what you like. Make what you think is cool. If you believe in what you do, others will, too. If you think it's cool, I will, too. Tell a story through your work. Don't just make a pretty outfit. That's just boring to me. Anyone can do that. But can you make me feel something? That's harder to do.

Roach: I didn't have as much time to interact with the contestants as Julia, but any emerging designer that wants to reach out to me and ask for advice or about whatever information I can give them to help them make a sale — I'm always open to do that.

How do you decide if something fits your personal style?

Fox: I used to put so many boundaries on what I wore because I was insecure about my body. I was catering to the male gaze and just wanting to be sexy and desirable, but I've since broken free from that jail I built in my head and now I just wear whatever inspires me. If I think it's cool, I'm wearing it. Life's too short to not be the baddest bitch in the room. Period.

Roach: Someone had to tell me that I was a disrupter. I didn't come in like, 'Hey, I'm going to disrupt the industry.' It's just things that I have been doing organically and authentically for many years.

Do you feel like a show like this can go a long way for an emerging designer's career?

Roach: I do. We got a chance to see some real talent on the show. If our industry really wants to become more sustainable, I think they could look at some of the work that some of these contestants were able to produce with the fabrics that they created and the materials that they used.

Law, you have some really funny lines on the show when you're critiquing something — especially if you don't like it. Was it hard to give your honest opinion like that?

Roach: No, I have no problem at all. I think I'm really quick-witted and say the first thing that kind of comes to my mind. I really don't have a filter. If I did, it would be a disservice to the contestants.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

AP

Research shows that smartphones are particularly disruptive to the circadian clock that regulates sleep and other hormones.

Less screen time, better sleep

Why doomscrolling on electronic devices at night causes problems with the circadian clock and how to break the habit

BY ALBERT STUMM
Associated Press

Like many of us, Jessica Peoples has heard the warnings about excessive screen time at night. Still, she estimates spending 30 to 60 minutes on her phone before going to sleep, mostly scrolling through social media.

"Recently, I've been trying to limit the amount," says Peoples, a discrimination investigator with the state of New Jersey. "I do notice that how much time I spend affects how long it takes to fall asleep."

Over half of Americans spend time on their phones within an hour of going to sleep, according to a survey by the National Sleep Foundation. That's the very latest we should shut off devices, experts say.

The brain needs to wind down long before bedtime to get the restorative deep sleep that helps the body function, said Melissa Milanak, an associate professor at Medical University of South Carolina specializing in sleep health.

"You wouldn't take a casserole out of the oven and stick it right in the fridge. It needs to cool down," Milanak said. "Our brains need to do that too."

Upending your bedtime routine may not be easy, but insufficient sleep has long been linked to anxiety, obesity and other negative outcomes. Research shows smartphones are particularly disruptive to the circadian clock that regulates sleep and other hormones.

"There are a million and one ways screens create problems with sleep," said Lisa Strauss, a licensed psychologist specializing in cognitive behavioral treatment of sleep disorders.

The brain, she said, processes electric light — not just a smartphone's much-maligned blue light — as sunshine. That suppresses melatonin production, delaying deep sleep. Even very little bright-light exposure in bed has an impact.

The problem is more than light

Of course, doomscrolling through the news, checking emails or being tempted by ever more tailored videos on social media has its own consequences.

So-called "technostress" amps you up — possibly triggering the brain's flight or flight response. And algorithms designed to be engaging compel many social media users to scroll longer than they intended.

"Now it's 30 minutes later, when you wanted to watch a couple videos and fall asleep," Milanak said.

Though much of the scientific research on online media focuses on adolescents and young adults, Strauss said most of her clients struggling with insomnia are middle-aged.

"People go down these rabbit holes of videos, and more and more people are getting hooked," she said.

How to break the habit

The issue is not just curtailing phone use in bed, but phone use at night. That means redesigning your routine, particularly if you use your phone as a way to decompress.

It helps to create replacement behaviors that are rewarding. An obvious contender is reading a physical book (e-readers are better than phones but still cast artificial light). Milanak also suggests using that hour before bed to take a warm bath, listen to a podcast, make school lunches for the next day, spend time with family or call a relative in another time zone.

"Make a list of things you like that never get done. That's a great time to do stuff that doesn't involve screens," she said. Using a notepad to write down your to-do list for the next day helps keep you from ruminating in bed.

Do those activities in another room to train yourself to associate the bed with falling asleep. If there's no other private refuge at home, "establish a distinct microenvironment for wakefulness and sleep," Strauss said. That could mean sitting on the other side of the bed to read, or even just turning the other way around with your feet at the headboard.

Finally, sequester the phone in another room, or at least across the room.

"Environmental control can work better than willpower, especially when we're tired," she said.

Rethinking why we scroll

There are ways to reduce the harm. Setting the phone on night mode at a scheduled time every day is better than nothing, as is reducing screen brightness every night. Hold the phone far from your face and at an oblique angle to minimize the strength of the light.

Minimize tempting notifications by putting the phone on do not disturb, which can be adjusted to allow calls and messages from certain people — say, an ailing parent or a kid off at university — to go through. But none of these measures give you carte blanche to look at whatever you want at night, Strauss said.

She also recommended asking yourself why checking social media has become your late-night reward.

"Think about the larger structure of the day," she said. Everyone deserves solitary moments to relax, but "maybe be more self-indulgent earlier so you have what you need."

WEEKEND: FAMILY

ELÍAS VALVERDE II, THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS/TNS

Caregiver Aline Assis plays with children outside at Little Mustangs Child Learning Academy, one of two Richardson, Texas, independent school district-run day cares for teachers and staff.

Be both a mom, teacher

Idaho, Texas schools tackle child care needs to keep parents in classrooms

BY VALERIA OLIVARES
The Dallas Morning News

When Christina Zimmerman returned to teaching last year after maternity leave, she grappled with postpartum depression that she says could have led to quitting her job.

But her school's onsite day care made all the difference as she knew her daughter was just a few classrooms away.

"I can be mom and teacher in the same breath," said Zimmerman, who teaches fourth grade at Endeavor Elementary in Nampa, Idaho. "I've dreamed of teaching since second grade. Truthfully, it's all I've wanted to do, but I also want to be there for my child. Picking between the two is not something that I wanted to do."

In states such as Idaho and Texas, where funding for early childhood education is limited, some schools are spearheading initiatives to provide quality, affordable child care. It's a retention tool as much as it is a way to ensure youngsters are prepared when they enter kindergarten.

Some districts are transforming donated spaces — a former recycling center or house — into day cares for staff and, in some cases, for first responders in the area as well. Others are incorporating child care on their campuses.

The schools offer such programs from infancy on so that parenting teachers don't have to make the choice between career and motherhood as that workforce remains predominantly female.

Women are more likely than men to leave their careers to care for children, data shows. On top of that, teachers' salaries aren't keeping up with inflation, according to the National Education Association, even as child care costs have become more untenable.

Dropping out of the workforce can be an attractive option for educators with young children, which adds to retention challenges already facing schools.

"If we're going to support our community ... we need the very best teachers in the classroom," Richardson Schools Superintendent Tabitha Branum said. Her Texas district runs two day cares with goals of opening more.

"This is one of the strategies that we have in place to attract and retain the very best of the best," Branum said.

In 2022, district leaders nationwide reported increased staff vacancies; most administrators — 63% — cited the pandemic as a cause. Last school year, nearly one in four teachers said they were likely to quit their job due to stress, disillusionment, low salaries and heavy workloads, according to a RAND survey.

Texas school officials, frustrated with failed legislative attempts to fund teachers' raises, began in recent years unfolding strategies to recruit and retain teachers amid high turnover that was aggravated by the pandemic and other stressors.

Large districts with bigger budgets offered higher pay while others experimented with four-day school weeks or other benefits to sweeten the job.

Richardson was among the latter.

The district's turnover rate last school year was 21.4%, up nearly six percentage points from what it was about five years prior, according to state data. That closely mirrors Texas' increased turnover rate in that time.

Branum recognized the teaching workforce is often made up of young people, some of whom are "starting a family or hope to start a family soon."

"We may not be able to pay every teacher what we should be able to ... but what if we could create a compensation package that took a little stress off of them?" Branum said.

Since 2016, more than 75% of teachers in the state have been female, according to the Texas Education Agency. A little more than one third of Texas teachers are early in their careers with experience levels of five years or less, state data shows.

The average starting salary for Texas' teachers sits at about $53,300, according to state data. The state's average teacher salary is $60,717.

Richardson has a starting salary of $60,000 but is also in the highly competitive Dallas-area market. So now Richardson offers employees a health clinic for acute care with a $10 copay, no insurance required; free counseling; and subsidized child care for only $350 a month.

The district runs two child learning academies that serve more than 120 children starting at 6 weeks old until age 3, when they become eligible for the district's pre-K program. A portion of the cost to operate the centers is funded through monthly tuition while Richardson pays the balance.

With more than 134 children on the district's wait list as of the end of April, Branum said they're considering at least one more center that could open as soon as next year.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari

An approach to prom that's fit for royalty

"Oh, Mom," my daughter Anna crooned after her Junior Prom. "It was so romantic!" She floated off to her room, her head swimming with fresh memories. During my teen years, I'd learned that whether prom was romantic, silly, boring or awkward, it always leaves an indelible mark.

My Junior Prom was in the spring of 1983. A disappointing first kiss the year before hadn't quelled my optimistic teenage belief that I'd soon meet the boy of my dreams.

But three weeks before Junior Prom, I was still dateless. In desperation, I threw a note with my address on it out the team bus window during an away track meet, in hopes that an athletic stud would write to me. A few days later I received a letter from a pitiful geek who'd fished my note out of a mud puddle on his way to the library.

The following week, a boy in my science class with a seemingly perpetual sinus infection followed me to my locker. Speaking nasally through a chapped red nose and a full set of metal braces, he asked, "Woodyu go wid me do da prom?"

Caught off guard, I stuttered, "Uh, I might be going with someone else, I'm not sure … I'll let you know…."

I'd lied. Unless I wanted photos of me and Mr. Crusty-Nose under the balloon arch, I needed a plan, and fast.

I thought of my football player friend — well, actually, he was the water boy who played lineman if the team was hopelessly losing during the fourth quarter. A likable, husky kid with a jolly disposition, the team had nicknamed him "The Duke." He seemed the perfect candidate to be my date — not popular enough to reject me, and free of excess nasal mucus.

I cornered The Duke after school and proposed that we go to the prom "as friends."

"Excellent!" he responded with a smile.

The next day, I broke the news to Mr. Crusty-Nose. I felt like a schmuck lying to him, but good thing I did, because the next girl he asked became his wife and they're still married to this day. I guess you could say he owes me.

My cousin and I swapped dresses — I gave her the violet taffeta monstrosity I'd worn the previous year, and she gave me her pink lace number that wasn't much better.

The Duke showed up in a thoughtfully coordinated rental tux — a mauve poly blend with matching velour cuffs and collar, a ruffled shirt and an enormous mauve bow tie. He offered me a substantial wrist corsage with pink carnations and baby's breath, and I adorned his wide lapel with a white rose. Although there was no romance in our arrangement, we felt like a million bucks and were ready for fun.

We sat with The Duke's intimidating football player friends at dinner. I was glad to have the Duke as my buffer. Halfway through the cordon bleu, one rowdy boy pointed and shouted, "Hey, it's The Duke and The Duchess!" Laughter erupted. I swallowed my chicken and faked a smile, unsure if I was being accepted or mocked.

When the DJ began playing and electric lights flashed on taffeta gowns, I shook off the joke's sting and hit the dance floor. The Duke requested his favorite song, "You Dropped the Bomb On Me" by The Gap Band, and we danced a mauve streak.

Later, our group crashed for the night in the basement rumpus room of our friend's house. We changed into sweats, and stuffed those itchy corsages into our duffle bags. Her parents took our car keys and let us drink a little beer. We talked and horsed around into the wee hours of the night.

The Duke and I didn't go on any starlit walks or hold hands. He remained a gentleman, and I was grateful to him for making it a fun night.

I might have sacrificed the romance that all teenage girls dream about, but not everyone gets to be The Prom King and Queen. Some of us have to settle for being The Duke and Duchess.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

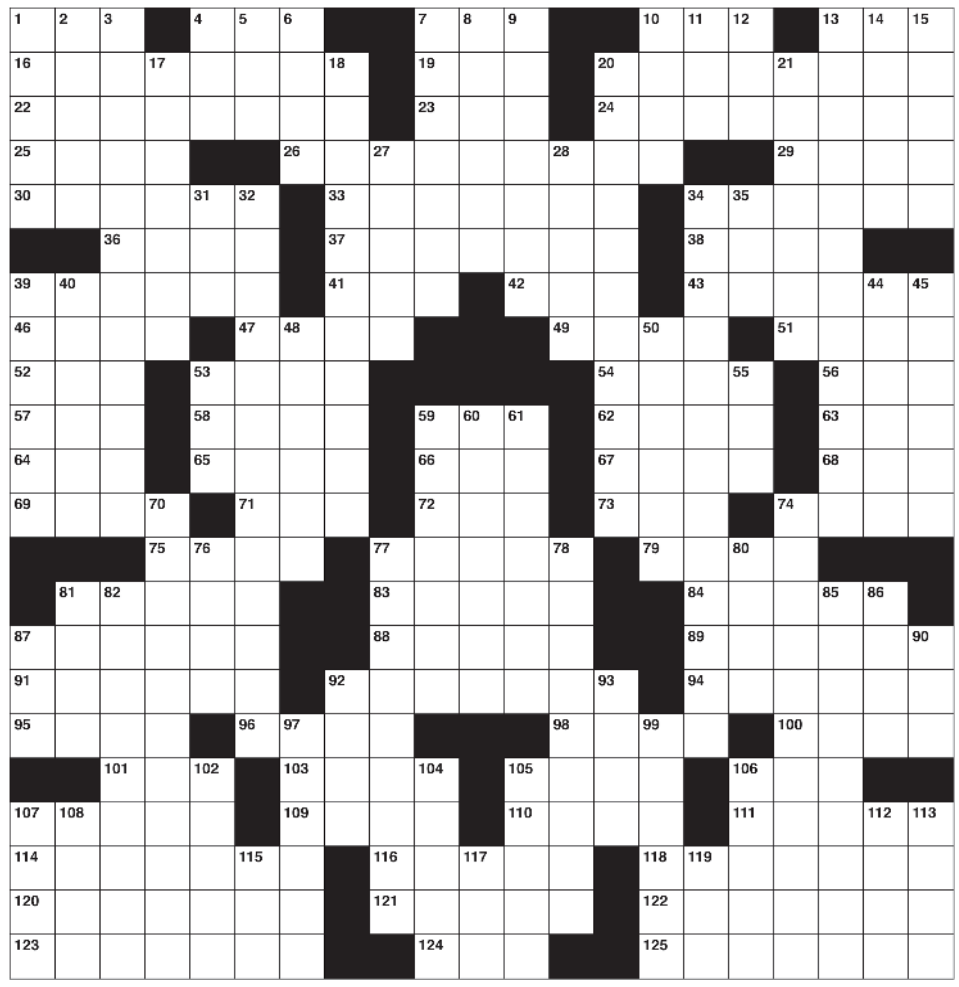
WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

FROM THE ASTRONAUT'S LOGBOOK

BY DANIEL BODILY/ EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

Daniel Bodily, of Woodbury, Minn., is a robotics research engineer. His crosswords often include a visual element, as seen in the middle of the grid here. A self-described "left-brained person," he notes that crosswords are "the closest I'll come to being an artist myself."



ACROSS

1 Language suffix
4 "Do or do not. There is no ____" (6-Down quote)
7 Call me!
10 Sources of vitamin C, for short
13 Enroll, with "in"
16 Bit of well-wishing on a hot day
19 Sixth word in the Gettysburg Address
20 "Fine by me"
22 1962 Beatles hit
23 London's ____ Gardens
24 Wavering vocal effects
25 Friends, to Hercule Poirot
26 Quaker in the woods
29 Spoils
30 Murse, by another name
33 Best of the best
34 Like some clouds and kittens
36 Francisco with frescoes
37 "Sounds to me like . . ."
38 Former senator Trent
39 Quaint double contraction
41 She's a believer
42 C.S.U. or U.S.C.: Abbr.
43 Like some wonders
46 They're used to catch bugs
47 Steam-engine sound
49 Juno : Roman :: ____ : Greek
51 Company aptly hidden in "Japanese games"
52 Coconut extraction
53 Cop's catch
54 Zoom button
56 Beach ____
57 Playtex product
58 Vegas casino with a musical name
59 Lea low?
62 "Aye, aye, captain!"
63 Where a spill might end up
64 Freudian constructs
65 ____ golf
66 Mo. when the Titanic sank
67 Dominates, slangily
68 "One card left!"
69 Kids . . . or, informally, a snack for kids
71 "Born" in France
72 Gymnast Suni
73 Keep reminding, say
74 Temple official
75 Empty nester's lack?
77 Domain's partner in math
79 "Seize the day" of today
81 Risk a ticket
83 Kind of number system in which 7 is the highest digit
84 Terrarium animals
87 Setting
88 "We will, we will ROCK YOU!" e.g.
89 Make malleable using heat
91 Pirate-ship features
92 Shoe secured with a click
94 Things checked at baggage checks
95 Crash before dinner?
96 Rummikub piece
98 Close
100 Greenlit
101 "____ modus in rebus" ("Moderation in all things")
103 Creatures mummified in ancient Egypt
105 Close to closed
106 Go steady with
107 Green trattoria topping
109 Ventriloquist Shirley Dinsdale was the first person to win one (1949)
110 Indian flatbread
111 One getting fired after a strike?
114 Really, really big
116 Cause to blush
118 Cause to jump
120 "M-m-m-my ____" (1970s song lyric)
121 He placed a call to Armstrong and Aldrin minutes after their landing
122 Basis for some civil cases
123 Replacement of a computer part without powering down
124 Novelist Deighton
125 Olympic tracks?

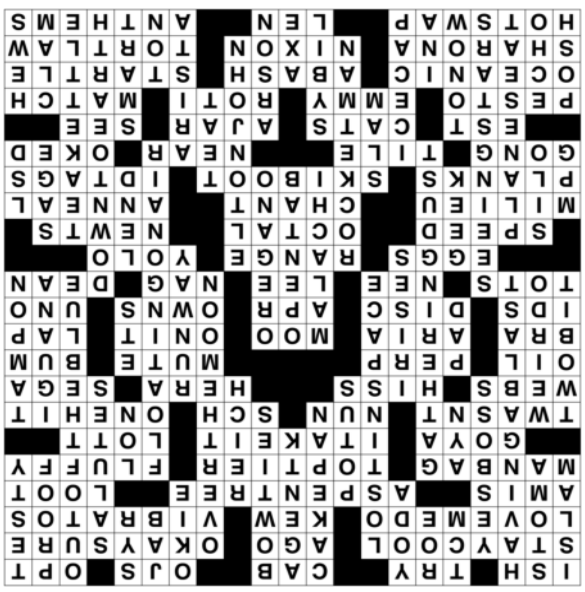
DOWN

1 Religion in which zakat is practiced
2 Leaf pore
3 Woo-hoo! The engines are firing, all systems are go, and we are feeling good!
4 Channel with "Silent Sunday Nights" programming
5 Orange sushi topper
6 See 4-Across
7 Where a batter goes for a Bundt?
8 Tommy Lee Jones's role in "Men in Black"
9 Farfalle shapes
10 Dust Bowl-era migrant
11 Quick left, say
12 The Euphrates bisects it: Abbr.
13 And just like that, sky and clouds are behind us!
14 Mathematician's creation
15 Snappish
17 "I'll have it on your desk tomorrow"
18 Oops, zoned out for a sec. Houston, can you retransmit our coordinates?
20 Thrilled to report that we've made it to lunar orbit!
21 General acknowledgments?
27 D.C. V.I.P.
28 Former labor secretary Robert
31 Writer Rand
32 Our lunar rover is collecting samples at long last. It's been sitting in storage for months!
34 Moving in zero-G is just blissful!
35 Chaney of horror
39 Cheap and trivial
40 Oddball
44 Exotic pet
45 Feminine-hygiene product
48 "Bearded" blooms
50 Where to walk the walk?
53 Feminine-hygiene product
55 The Monstars in "Space Jam," e.g., for short
59 Last book of the Old Testament
60 It's run up, then rung up
61 Green trattoria topping
70 Ouch! Drifted too far and bonked my head on that darn window . . .but wow, would you look at the view!
74 Re-entry time — let's make sure we do this simply and practically!
76 Be nerdy, with "out"
77 Who's on a mission in today's puzzle?
78 Musician who sang about a 77-Down
80 Let borrow
81 Storage facility
82 Window, e.g.
85 Hot pot
86 Like some advice
87 Stat that doesn't apply to E.V.s
90 Microdosing drug
92 Insult
93 Part of an udder
97 Large white sheet
99 Label for Whitney Houston
102 So far
104 Strong-willed daughter on "Downton Abbey"
105 Burning bridges, e.g.
106 Really hurt
107 Swanky
108 Bouncer in an alleyway?
112 Go silent, with "up"
113 Chops
115 ____ mood
117 Chopper
119 Unit often used exaggeratively

GUNSTON STREET

"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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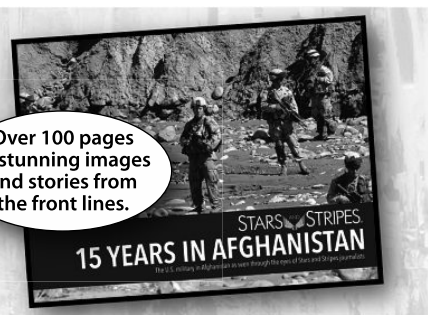

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FACES

Legacy of Bob Ross lives on in new show

Instructor takes over, using Ross' methods and a few of his creations, on PBS' 'The Joy of Painting'

By Alicia Rancilio
Associated Press

A new generation can learn how to paint happy trees and to make happy accidents with a TV series teaching the Bob Ross method of painting using some of the prolific artist's works that have never been seen before.

Before Ross died in 1995 from cancer, he had completed seven paintings to use in season 32 of "The Joy of Painting."

"He was so sick, but he was still working on his next series because he wanted to be able to keep going," said Joan Kowalski, president of Bob Ross Inc. Her parents, Annette and Walt Kowalski, co-founded the company with Ross.

Those works were stored for almost three decades. Certified Bob Ross instructor Nicholas Hankins has studied those paintings and paints them from scratch on camera in "The Joy of Painting with Nicholas Hankins: Bob Ross' Unfinished Season," which started airing this spring in some markets on American Public Television. Some episodes are available on PBS' website.

The opportunity to "take these paintings and do what Bob ultimately wanted done with them, (to) have them out in the world making people happy is gratifying," said Hankins recently over Zoom. He teaches at the Bob Ross Art Workshop and Gallery about 15 miles from Daytona Beach, Fla., and oversees instructor certification. Hankins also uses six of his own paintings in this new "Joy of Painting," which was filmed and produced at WDSC-TV Daytona State College.

"I think that Bob would be incredibly proud of how we're doing this," said Kowalski. "There aren't really many things that come our way where we have to wonder, what should we do? Bob was very specific in how he wanted this whole thing to go into the future."

Hankins is a familiar face to Ross devotees. His own teaching videos posted to the Bob Ross YouTube channel drew upwards of 300,000 views before the idea of TV was ever mentioned.

Kowalski is fascinated by the online response to Hankins' videos. "People notice that Nick is not at all trying to be Bob, and he's delivering naturally as himself and yet there's still that same sort of feeling you get watching Bob."

Derek Sanford/AP

Nicholas Hankins appears during a taping of "The Joy of Painting with Nicholas Hankins: Bob Ross' Unfinished Season." Hankins repaints seven Ross works and six of his own.

A surge of interest in all things Bob Ross came out of the pandemic, when people were staying home and looking for ways to pass time. Now, with so many distractions, it can seem like there aren't enough hours in a day to unwind and rest.

If viewers don't tune in for a painting lesson, Hankins hopes his 30-minute "Joy of Painting" episodes helps people to relax in the same spirit as the originals.

"I hope I can carry that part of the legacy on," he said. "I want to genuinely create an environment where people are going to come in, take half an hour and just turn off the world. Right now is a time we need it."

Kowalski says people used to sheepishly tell Ross "all the time" that they would fall asleep to his episodes, but he didn't mind. "He said, 'I love hearing that you've never watched a full episode of me.'"

Anya Taylor-Joy gets her movie-star moment at Cannes

Associated Press

"Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga" rolled into the Cannes Film Festival on Wednesday, returning George Miller's dystopia-on-wheels to the French Riviera festival and lending Anya Taylor-Joy a fairy tale moment on the Cannes red carpet.

Taylor-Joy, with her first film in Cannes, brought classical movie-star glamour to one of the festival's most anticipated premieres. Wearing a cream-colored custom Dior gown, Taylor-Joy playfully posed for photographers while walking into the Palais des Festivals and offering mock salutes to her director.

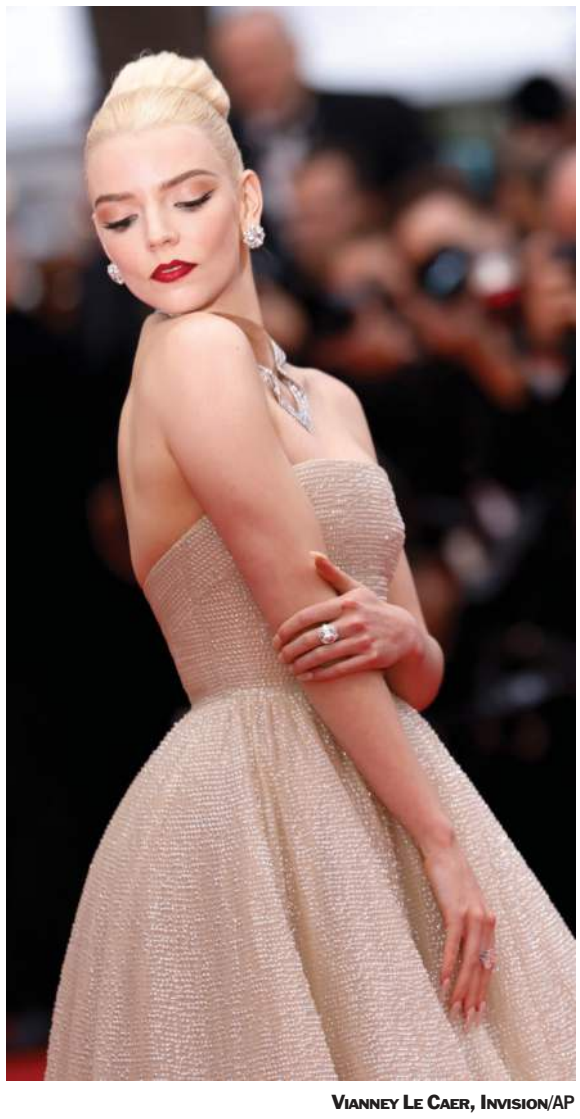
The latest "Mad Max" film, starring Chris Hemsworth and Taylor-Joy as a young Furiosa, premiered in Cannes almost exactly nine years after "Mad Max: Fury Road" debuted at the French festival.

"To show it in that cinema with about 2,000 people with impeccable sound and screening is a big thing. It's kind of optimal cinema, really," Miller said before the premiere. "The moment that they said, 'OK, we're happy to show this film here,' I jumped at it."

For the 28-year-old Taylor-Joy, "Furiosa" in Cannes was a full circle moment. The first time she came to the festival was to receive a Chopard trophy as an emerging actor in 2017. It was presented by the original Furiosa, Charlize Theron, the star of "Fury Road."

While this year's Cannes boasts many prominent upcoming premieres, the "Furiosa" debut was easily the biggest megawatt Hollywood event of the festival. Among the attendees were jury head Greta Gerwig, Eva Green, Naomi Campbell and Baz Luhrmann.

"Furiosa" opens in broad release on May 24.



Vianney Le Caer, Invision/AP

Anya Taylor-Joy poses for photographers Wednesday upon arrival at the premiere of the film "Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga" in Cannes, France.

Drake leads the 2024 BET Awards nominations with 7

From wire reports

Drake is the leading nominee for next month's BET Awards, followed closely by Nicki Minaj.

The Canadian rapper received seven nominations Thursday, including an album of the year nod for his eighth studio album, "For All the Dogs." One category he's up for is the music video for "First Person Shooter," his collaboration with J. Cole that may have been the catalyst for his recent beef with rapper Kendrick Lamar.

Minaj received six nominations, including for album of the year for her highly anticipated "Pink Friday 2" release. Two of her nominations were for her song with Ice Spice, "Barbie World," part of the blockbuster "Barbie" soundtrack.

Victoria Monét, one of several artists to receive five nominations, is scheduled to perform at the show, which will be held June 30 in Los Angeles.

Beyoncé received four nominations, including for best female R&B/pop artist as well as recognition for two "Cowboy Carter" tracks, "Texas Hold 'Em" and "16 Carriages."

Her collaboration with Lamar, "America Has a Problem (Remix)," is up against songs by Minaj, Usher, Cardi B and Drake.

The BET Awards extend beyond music with honors for film, acting and sports figures.

"Renaissance," the Beyoncé tour film that was released in theaters late last year, is also nominated for best movie.

Super Bowl headliner Usher is among the artists vying for four awards, along with 21 Savage, Megan Thee Stallion, Doja Cat and Tyla.

CNN to adapt popular British comedy quiz show

CNN is producing a U.S. edition of "Have I Got News for You," a long-running British comedic panel show that riffs on current affairs.

The network announced Wednesday at parent company Warner Bros. Discovery's advertiser presentation in New York that the series will go into production this fall and air Saturdays in prime time.

"Have I Got News for You" premiered in 1990 on the BBC, where it continues to air. The program uses a quiz show-style format as a forum for comics, pundits and media personalities to satirize the issues of the day.

No host or panelists have been announced for the remake.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

3 charged in Bulger's killing have plea deals

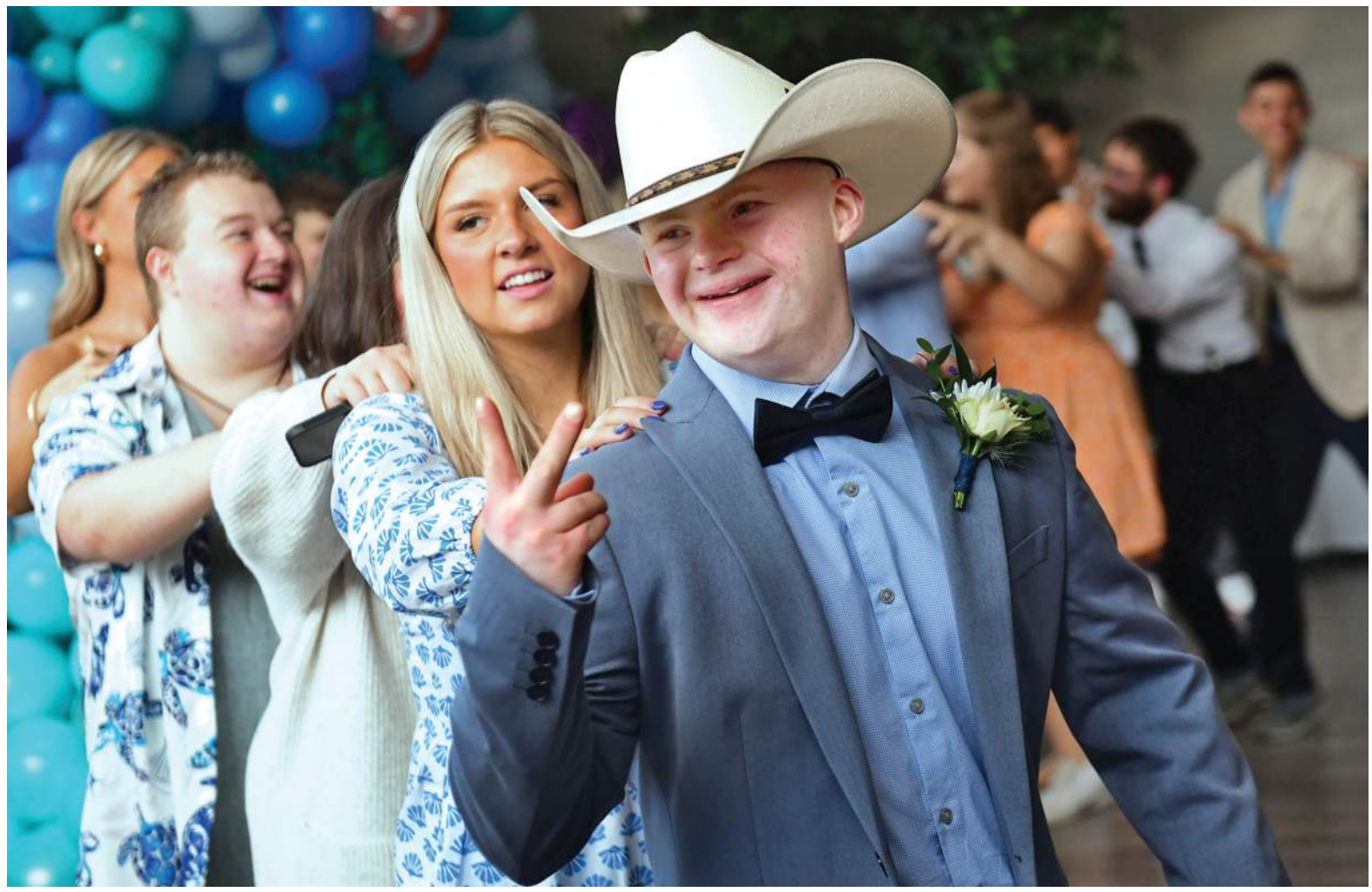
DC WASHINGTON — Three men charged in the 2018 prison killing of notorious Boston gangster James "Whitey" Bulger have reached plea deals with prosecutors, according to court papers filed Monday.

The plea deals for Fotios "Freddy" Geas, Paul J. DeCologero and Sean McKinnon were disclosed nearly six years after the 89-year-old gangster was beaten to death in his cell at a troubled West Virginia prison.

Geas, a onetime Mafia hitman, and DeCologero, a Massachusetts gangster, were accused of repeatedly hitting Bulger in the head while McKinnon served as a lookout.

Bulger, who ran the largely Irish mob in Boston in the 1970s and '80s, served as an FBI informant who ratted on the main rival to his gang. He became one of the nation's most-wanted fugitives after fleeing Boston in 1994 thanks to a tip from his FBI handler that he was about to be indicted. He was captured at age 81 after more than 16 years on the run.

In 2013, he was convicted in a string of 11 killings and dozens of other gangland crimes, many of them committed while he was said to be an FBI informant.



THOMAS SLUSSER, THE (JOHNSTOWN, PA.) TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT/AP

Thrill ride at prom

Sam Thomas, 18, of Conemaugh Township High School, leads the train for "The Loco-motion" during the recent Life Skills prom hosted by Westmont Hilltop High School at Community Arts Center of Cambria County in Johnstown, Pa.

Man gets 3 years for post of school shooting threat

NH CONCORD — A man who posted a Snapchat video last year threatening to shoot up a New Hampshire high school was sentenced to a little over three years in prison on Tuesday.

Kyle Hendrickson, 26, had pleaded guilty to charges of interstate threatening communications and possessing a firearm in a school zone.

In a video posted in April 2023, Hendrickson was in a vehicle with a gun outside of Portsmouth High School, saying, "Imma gonna shoot up the school." The incident, police said, was caught by Snapchat, which relayed it to the FBI who then contacted local police. The school district was closed for the day as a precaution.

In a brief statement before he was sentenced in federal court in Concord, Hendrickson offered his "deepest apologies" to the school district, students and parents.

"It was never my intention to hurt anyone," he said.

"This was a bad joke," his attorney, Murdoch Walker said. "It certainly has severe repercussions."

Sheriff faces questions over series filmed at jail

AR LITTLE ROCK — Arkansas lawmakers on Tuesday raised questions about a sheriff's decision to allow a Netflix documentary series to be filmed at the county jail, with one critic saying the move exploited inmates.

Pulaski County Sheriff Eric Higgins defended the decision to allow the series, "Unlocked: A Jail Experiment" to be filmed at the county jail. The eight-episode series, which premiered last month, highlights a program giving some inmates more freedom at the Little Rock facility.

The decision has prompted scrutiny from local and state officials, who said they weren't aware of the series until shortly before its premiere. The series focuses on a six-week experiment that gave inmates in one cellblock more freedom by unlocking their cell doors.

Higgins said he did not approach Netflix or Lucky 8, the production company that filmed it, about the series.

"I took action to ensure that we have a reentry program to help those who are booked into our facility to come out and be better individuals," Higgins told members of the Joint Performance Review Committee.

Republican Sen. Jonathan Dismang said he doesn't have a problem with the sheriff's reentry program or trying something new to address recidivism. But he questioned how it could be considered an experiment if it was being filmed.

Woman pleads guilty in plot to attack power grid

MD BALTIMORE — A Maryland woman pleaded guilty on Tuesday to conspiring with a neo-Nazi leader from Florida to plan an attack on the power grid in the Baltimore area.

Sarah Beth Clendaniel, 36, of Catonsville, and her alleged co-conspirator, Brandon Russell, believed that sniper attacks on five electrical substations in greater Baltimore "would serve to break down society," according to a court filing accompanying her guilty plea.

Clendaniel was charged last year with Russell, an Orlando, Fla., resident who co-founded a neo-Nazi group called Atomwaffen Division. Russell, formerly a Florida National Guard member, served five years in prison after pleading guilty to explosives charges that stemmed from a deadly shooting at an apartment that he shared with Atomwaffen's other founder.

Clendaniel and Russell began exchanging letters around 2018 while they were serving prison sentences in different facilities. They developed a romantic relationship, the court filing says.

Clendaniel pleaded guilty to two counts: conspiracy to damage electrical facilities and being a felon in possession of a firearm.

Ex-official gets probation in COVID payment probe

WV CHARLESTON — A former West Virginia state health official was sentenced Monday to one year of probation for lying about whether or not he verified vendor invoices from a company claiming to have conducted COVID-19 tests for the state.

Timothy Priddy, of Buffalo, W.Va., was sentenced in federal court for his guilty plea to making a false statement to investigators.

An indictment filed in October charged Priddy, 49, with lying to federal agents in August 2022 when he said he verified a vendor's invoices for performing COVID-19 tests as part of a back-to-school program before approving them. Priddy knew his statements were false because he made no such verification efforts, according to prosecutors.

Priddy, who held various managerial positions with the state Bureau for Public Health's Center for Threat Preparedness, left his job the day the indictment was announced.

DNA shows suspected wolves were coyotes

NV RENO — The verdict is in. The latest wildlife mystery in Nevada has been solved.

Scientists who set out on a trail through the snow near the Idaho line to gather evidence like detectives relied on the scat and fur samples they collected to determine a trio of animals spotted during a helicopter survey in March were not wolves after all, but rather a group of wily coyotes.

DNA testing confirmed the results with 99.9% certainty, the Nevada Department of Wildlife announced this week.

The sighting in northeast Nevada near Merritt Mountain about 90 miles north of Elko initially spurred a great deal of excitement as it would have marked only the second time in a century that wolves were spotted in the state.

The department went to great lengths to set the record straight with extensive DNA testing partly because the department has spent the past two years trying to figure out why a growing number of moose have been migrating in recent years from Idaho into Nevada.

Some had speculated the wolves might be pursuing the moose.

State closer to requiring gas stove pollutant labels

CA SACRAMENTO — California could require all new gas stoves sold in the state to carry a label warning users about pollutants they can release that have been linked to respiratory illnesses.

The state Assembly approved a proposal Monday that would require the label on gas stoves or ranges made or sold online after 2024, or sold in a store after 2025. The bill now heads to the state Senate.

Gas stoves have been at the center of hot political debates in recent years over climate policy, childhood health and consumer choice. In 2019, Berkeley, Calif., became the first city in the country to adopt a ban on natural gas in new homes and buildings, but courts blocked that law upon a challenge from the California Restaurant Association.

The city recently halted enforcement of its policy after a federal court refused to hear an appeal.

From The Associated Press

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The Daily Guide to Navigating The Military Business Market

Transportation 944

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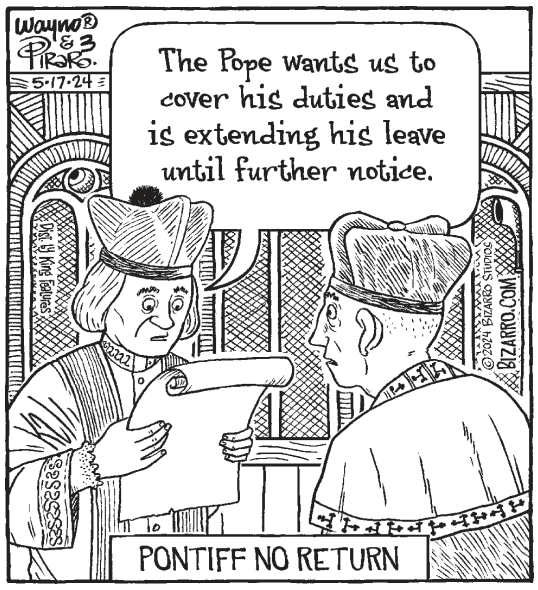
STARS AND STRIPES

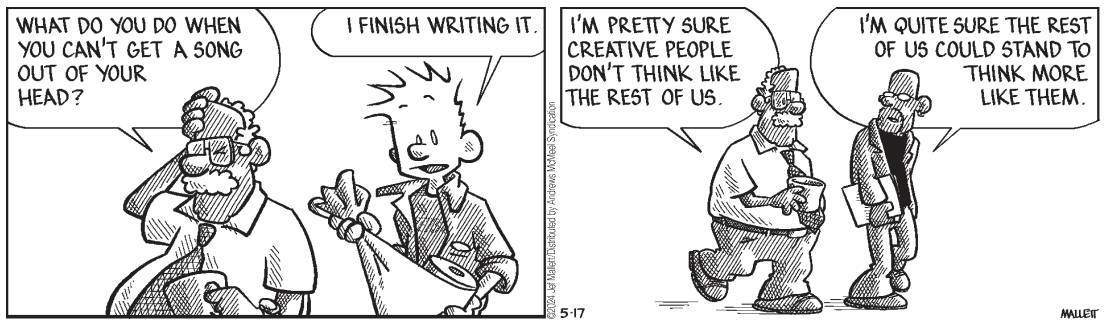
UNBIASED NEWS WHATEVER WAY YOU WANT IT.

Bizarro

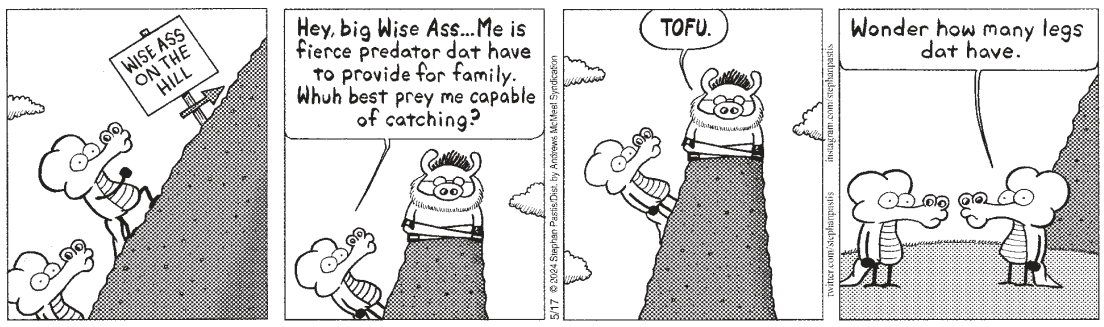


Loose Parts

Frazz



Pearls Before Swine



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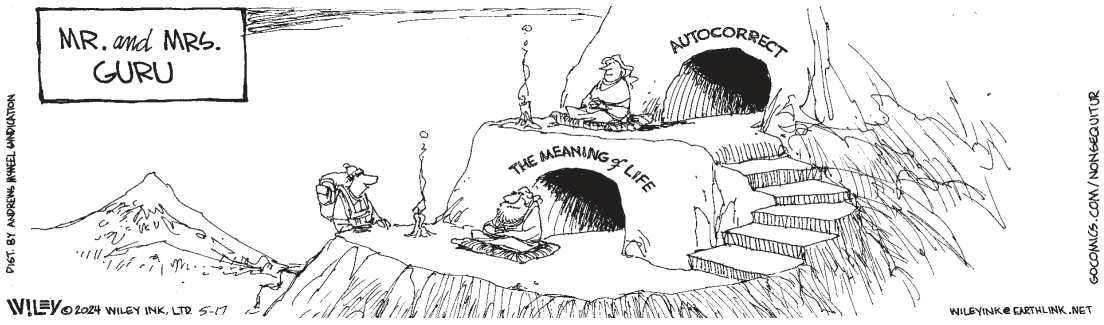
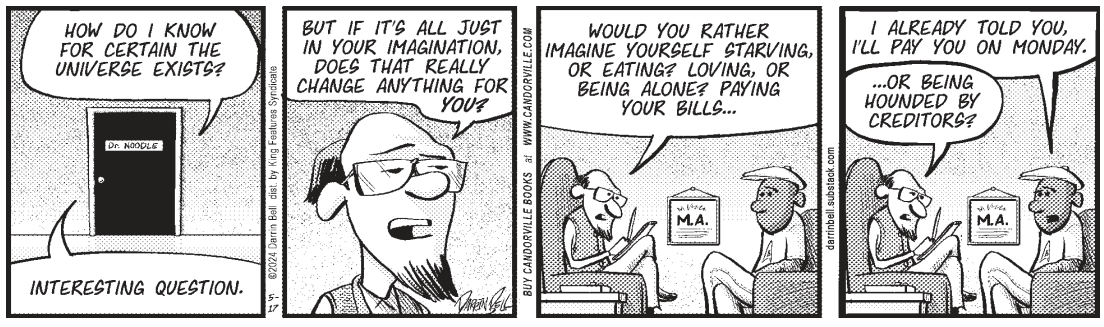
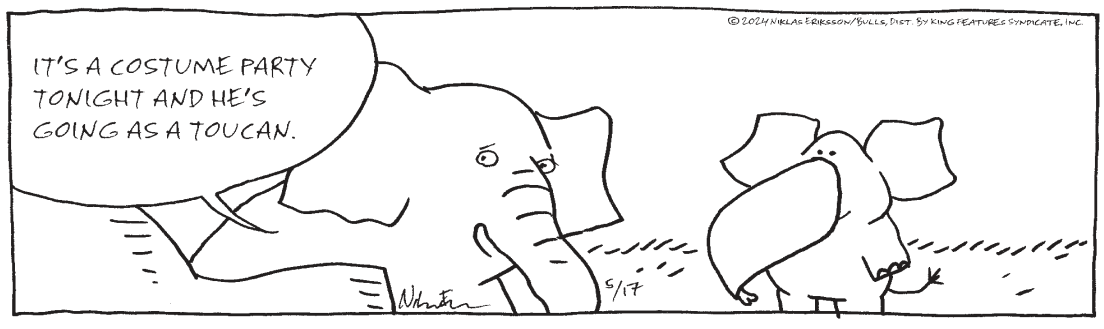


Candorville

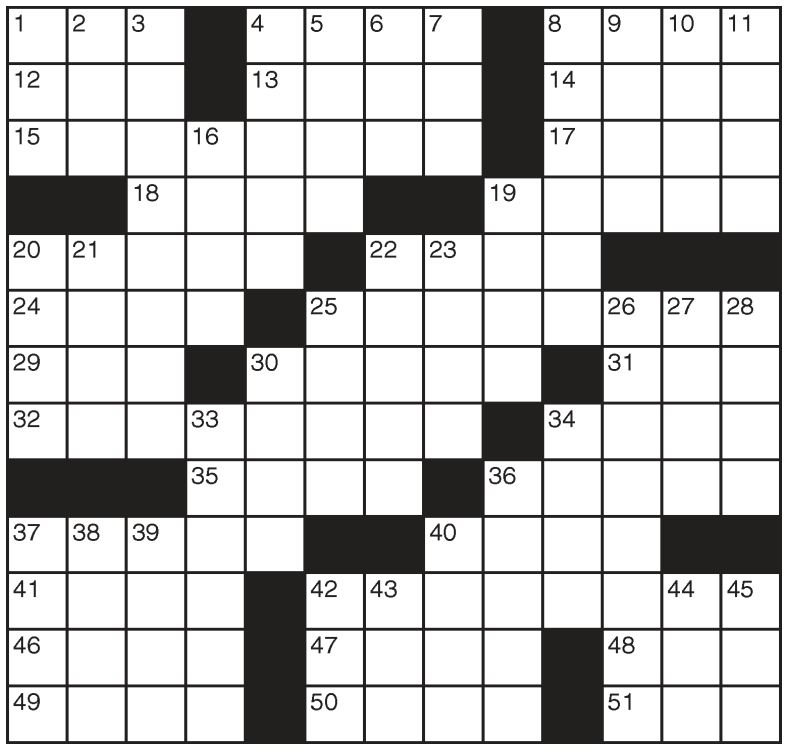


Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey

Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Tummy muscles
4 Like dried mud
8 Streetcar
12 Louvre collection
13 Balm ingredient
14 Spanish greeting
15 Unequivocal "no"
17 Cavort
18 Partially mine
19 Cougars
20 Coup group
22 Tournament passes
24 Wild revelry
25 Windbag
29 Away from NNW
30 Skyrockets
31 Debtor's letters
32 Strenuous labor
34 Singer Franklin
35 Bar mitzvah, e.g.
36 Taj —
37 Coffee enhancer
40 Chantilly, e.g.
41 Petty of "Tank Girl"
42 Solid, as abs
46 Spelling-out phrase
47 Shoppe descriptor
48 Conk out
49 PC alternatives
50 First lady Truman
51 Sean, to Yoko

DOWN

1 "Feels so good!"
2 Bikini half
3 More intense
4 "It's a Wonderful Life" director
5 Regrettably
6 Decks in the ring
7 "Indeed!"
8 Songbird
9 Leeway
10 — mater
11 Atlas pages
16 Obligation
19 Church seating
20 Kid around
21 — Minor (bear constellation)
22 Trumpet noise
23 Part of NYC
25 Italy's silhouette
26 Fools
27 "Arrivederci —"
28 Two-way
30 Do laps
33 Exhausts
34 Apiece
36 "This — no sense!"
37 Chowder morsel
38 Historic Parks
39 Idle or Bana
40 Some TV screens
42 Filch
43 Yucatan "Bravo!"
44 Brazilian city
45 Lair

Answer to Previous Puzzle

A	L	E	C	■	B	A	T	■	R	B	I	S
H	U	L	U	■	A	M	O	■	A	U	D	I
A	G	A	R	■	S	A	O	■	N	T	S	B
B	E	L	A	S	T	■	L	S	A	T	■	■
■	■	■	C	H	E	C	K	I	T	O	U	T
T	O	D	A	Y	■	O	I	L	■	N	N	E
O	R	E	O	■	O	A	T	■	D	U	D	S
I	S	T	■	H	P	S	■	D	E	P	O	T
L	O	O	K	A	T	T	H	A	T	■	■	■
■	■	X	I	I	I	■	I	S	R	A	E	L
A	B	I	T	■	M	E	L	■	O	R	C	A
P	U	N	T	■	U	R	L	■	I	C	O	N
E	G	G	Y	■	M	A	Y	■	T	O	N	E

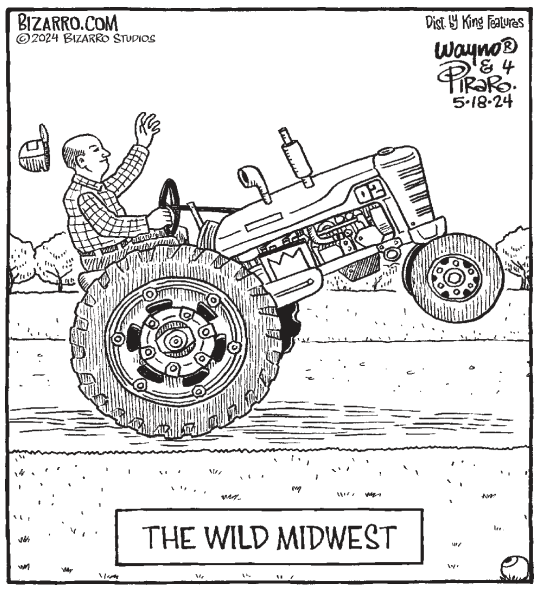
5-17 **CRYPTOQUIP**

VEQ KEUL QLHKER X HU NGL NTIL EV ILQKER FGE LRAETK NLQQXMZL IPRK. NGHN'K APKN GEF LTL QEZZ.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT WOULD YOU CALL LETTERS OF ADMIRATION SENT TO "THE NANNY" ACTRESS DRESCHER? FRAN MAIL.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals R

Bizarro



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Frazz

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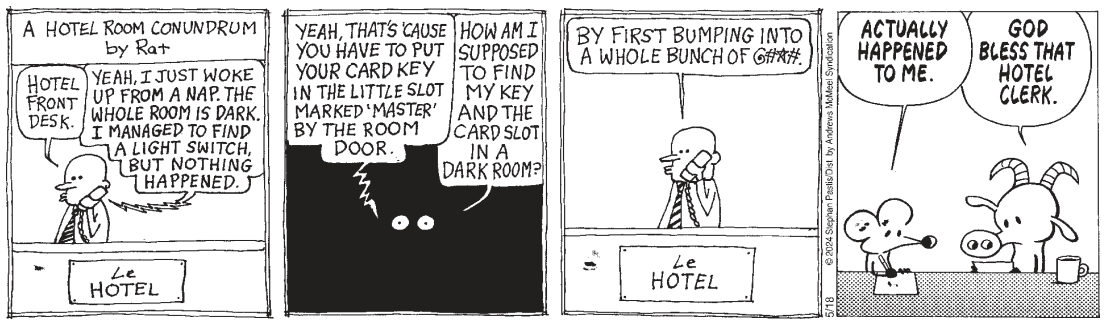

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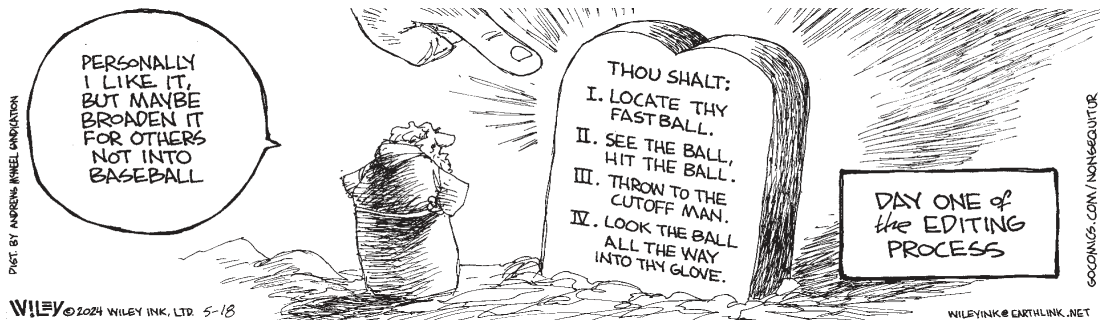
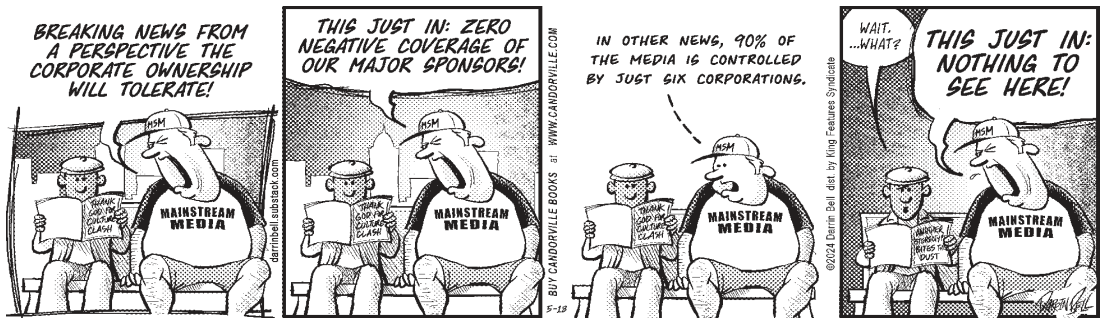


Candorville



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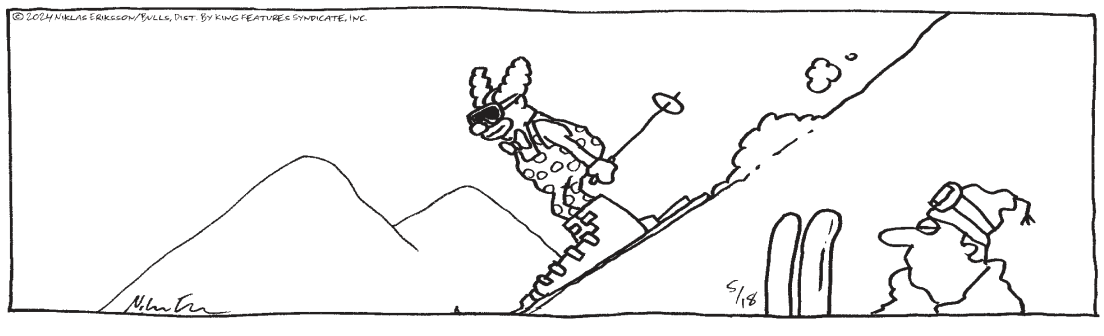

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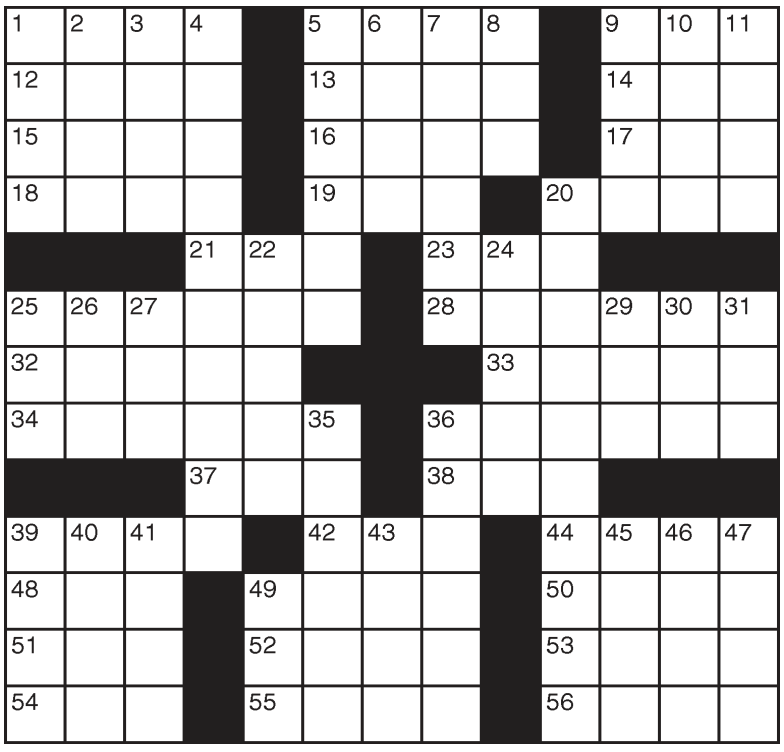

ACROSS

1 Canadian flag emblem
5 Short cuts
9 Pugilist's punch
12 K thru 12
13 Length times width
14 — creek (in trouble)
15 "Frozen" character
16 Dweeb
17 Cotillion attendee
18 Tree house
19 Slow run
20 Squarish
21 "Westworld" airer
23 Actress Longoria
25 Moves slowly
28 Pieces for nine
32 "Tiny Bubbles" singer
33 Star's bit part
34 Lean and muscular
36 Sounded off
37 Rock's Brian
38 Carte lead-in
39 Fourth person
42 Choose
44 Nudge with an elbow
48 TV guide abbr.
49 Spiced tea
50 Part of Q.E.D.
51 Mensa stats
52 Hairdo
53 Scat queen Fitzgerald
54 Mao — -tung
55 Electronics giant
56 Caustic cleaners

DOWN

1 "Exodus" author Uris
2 Vogue rival
3 Cries of discovery
4 Double-date tagalong
5 Bluegrass instruments
6 Twistable treat
7 "Murphy Brown" star Candice
8 Feeling down
9 Martial art
10 Pinnacle
11 Crib occupant
20 Cause of a slip, in cartoons
22 Squandered
24 Outspoken
25 LPs' successors
26 King, in Cannes
27 Raggedy doll
29 Ambulance VIP
30 Golf peg
31 Lawn material
35 Attention-getting call
36 Formally approve
39 Bickering
40 Cookouts, briefly
41 Lighten
43 Ache
45 Paris airport
46 Green smoothie veggie
47 Greek vowels
49 Includes in an email

Answer to Previous Puzzle

A	B	S		C	A	K	Y		T	R	A	M
A	R	T		A	L	O	E		H	O	L	A
H	A	R	D	P	A	S	S		R	O	M	P
		O	U	R	S			P	U	M	A	S
J	U	N	T	A		B	Y	E	S			
O	R	G	Y		B	L	O	W	H	A	R	D
S	S	E		S	O	A	R	S		I	O	U
H	A	R	D	W	O	R	K		E	R	M	A
			R	I	T	E		M	A	H	A	L
C	R	E	A	M			L	A	C	E		
L	O	R	I		R	O	C	K	H	A	R	D
A	S	I	N		O	L	D	E		D	I	E
M	A	C	S		B	E	S	S		S	O	N

5-18 CRYPTOQUIP

EXV ZVSS-PBIZB KSVFEX ZXI ZGK G CGKEVY GE FBLVYKEGBLHBD VSVTEYHTGS YVKHKEGBTV: KXVYSITP IXCK.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: FOR SOME REASON I AM THE TYPE OF PERSON WHO ENJOYS TERRIBLE PUNS. THAT'S JUST HOW EYE ROLL.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals N

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Laura Law, Chief Operating Officer
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EDITORIAL

Robert H. Reid, Editor in Chief
reid.robert@stripes.com

Sean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation
moores.sean@stripes.com

Ann Pinson, Digital Managing Editor
pinson.ann@stripes.com

BUREAU STAFF

Europe/Mideast
Erik Slavin, Europe & Mideast Bureau Chief
slavin.erik@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9350; DSN (314)583.9350

Pacific
Aaron Kidd, Pacific Bureau Chief
kidd.aaron@stripes.com
+81.42.552.2511 ext. 88380; DSN (315)227.7380

Washington
Joseph Cacchioli, Washington Bureau Chief
cacchioli.joseph@stripes.com
(+1)(202)886-0033

Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News
bowers.brian@stripes.com

CIRCULATION

Mideast
David Schultz, District Manager
schultz.david@stripes.com
xsscirculation@stripes.com
+49(0)152.5672.5036; DSN (314)583-9111

Europe
Carlo Aquino, Circulation Manager
aquino.carlo@stripes.com
memberservices@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9136; DSN (314)583.9136

Pacific
Mari Mori, customerhelp@stripes.com
+81-3 6385.3171; DSN (315)227.7333

CONTACT US

Washington
tel: (+1)202.886.0003
633 3rd St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001-3050

Reader letters
letters@stripes.com

Additional contacts
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OPINION

The government's latest national security dance

By George F. Will
The Washington Post

Metastasizing government, seeping into every crevice of life, cannot get out of its own way. It justifies punitive action against Chinese-owned video-sharing app TikTok as crucial to "national security." Simultaneously, however, the government claims that a Japanese steel corporation's purchase of U.S. Steel would threaten "national security": Federal officials feign alarm (this is too risible to be other than political theater) about a corporation from an allied nation purchasing the third-largest U.S. steelmaker, from which the Defense Department currently buys none of the merely 3% of domestic steel production it needs.

Under a new law, TikTok, which says it has 170 million U.S. users (2 billion worldwide), would be banned from U.S. app stores unless its Chinese ownership is terminated within 270 days, with a possible 90-day extension. Perhaps this ownership has serious national security implications. Recently retired congressman Mike Gallagher, R-Wis., an exemplary legislator who chaired the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, was a prime mover of the anti-TikTok legislation. He rightly regards the CCP as TikTok's ultimate master in China's Leninist party-state, and he correctly considers the CCP evil and dangerous. But those judgments do not suffice to dispel doubts about the national security facts, and the wisdom and constitutionality of the law.

Mark Warner, D-Va., the temperate senator who chairs the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence, voted for the law and says of people who doubt the necessity and fear the precedent of the forced-divestiture-or-ban: "They've not seen what Congress has seen." Well.

Nowadays, a "trust us" response from government intensifies rather than allays suspicions. So, Congress should share much of what it has seen that supposedly justifies forcing divestiture or the banning of TikTok. And it should explain what intelligence sources and methods would be compromised by sharing everything.

Regarding the postulated danger from TikTok siphoning up users' data: What data? How is this dangerous? How is it different from what Facebook and others do? And cannot China get oceans of such data from private sellers of data?

Another question: In Cold War 1965, the Supreme Court *unanimously* overturned a federal law burdening citizens' "right to receive" mailed communist propaganda from a foreign adversary. Do not Americans therefore have a fundamental First Amendment right to access social media platforms of their choice, even ones delivering, inter alia, a wicked regime's content?

Although the obvious target is TikTok, the new law also applies to other social media platforms "controlled by a foreign adversary." This provision might suffice to protect the law from violating the Constitution's prohibition of bills of attainder: laws punishing a person or entity without a trial. But the provision seems merely cosmetic.

TikTok successfully incited its U.S. users, who an independent monitor says spend much more time on it than people do on Instagram or Snapchat, to inundate Congress with pleas on the app's behalf. Legislators considered this evidence of how manipulable Americans (especially but not only young ones) are, and why they need protection from TikTok. So, the argument for the ban-or-divest law rests on the idea that people should trust their government, which does not trust them to furnish their own minds.

Some Americans, oblivious of their cognitive dissonance, are warning about the imminent arrival of domestic authoritarianism, while hoping for the incarceration of the incumbent president's principal opponent. One way our nation could minimize the self-inflicted damage to its reputation would be to not retreat from its defense of an open internet.

Today's TikTok panic — the legislation against it sped through the House in 47 days — is occurring in an America whose commitment to free speech has withered in recent decades. Many progressives, especially, believe free speech is often harmful, so the First Amendment is, to use the mincing adjective progressives adore, "problematic." Progressivism is inherently paternalistic — government knows best; eat your spinach — and hence infantilizing. Many conservatives are making this a bipartisan temptation.

But respect for the First Amendment has collapsed, and government has a propensity for claiming that every novel exercise of power legitimates the next extension of its pretensions. It is prudent to assume this: TikTok will not be the last target of government's desire to control the internet and the rest of society's information and opinion ecosystem.

Government will, as usual, say that its steadily enlarged control of our lives is for our own good. Regarding TikTok, the government says its control is to protect us from influences we cannot be trusted to properly assess. And, of course, to enhance "national security."

Why is US not squeezing Hamas to free its citizens?

By Roger Zakheim
Special to The Washington Post

On Oct. 7, Hamas murdered more than 40 Americans, and five Americans are still being held captive more than 200 days later. Since then, the Biden administration has tried to get the hostages home by playing the role of mediator. This approach fundamentally misunderstands the parties involved in the conflict, as well as the tools required to free captive Americans. The mediator mindset is wrong in principle and has now failed in practice. It is time to jettison this approach and deploy U.S. might instead.

For more than seven months the secretary of state and director of central intelligence, along with other senior officials, have treated the Gaza war as if it were a conflict between state actors, employing shuttle diplomacy and negotiating with both sides. They have indulged in the conceit that you can negotiate with a terrorist organization by treating it as an equal party. The Biden administration has continued to allow Qatar to give Hamas' political leadership sanctuary in its five-star headquarters in Doha, on the theory that if they can talk with Hamas leaders, a resolution is more likely.

Yet the mediator approach has applied equal, if not more, pressure on U.S. ally Israel to make concessions than it has on Hamas, the original aggressors, and its principal backer, Iran. This has hardened Hamas' negotiating stance and imperiled American hostages.

Other than the weeklong pause in fighting at the end of 2023, during which 105 hostages (only two Americans) were released, U.S. mediation has achieved little. Hamas' recent video of American hostage Hersh Goldberg-Polin is a harrowing reminder of how badly we have failed our citizens.

It is long overdue for the United States to shift the paradigm. Over the past 20 years, the U.S. has developed an array of intelligence, economic, and military tools and techniques that can pressure and destroy terrorist networks. They should be deployed against Hamas.

For starters, the Treasury Department should aggressively target sanctions on entities that fund and fuel Hamas. At the top of the list should be the Central Bank of Iran, which facilitates capital flows into Hamas' coffers. The same should be done for Qatari and Turkish entities that support and aid the terrorist organization. This should be paired with flexing our diplomatic muscle and formally demanding that Qatar oust Hamas' leadership from Doha.

We should also unleash our military and intelligence community's world-class targeting and strike capability that killed Osama bin Laden and Qassem Soleimani, and has rescued hundreds of hostages held by terrorists. The rescue of American citizens certainly warrants the employment of unparalleled U.S. intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets, as well as elite special operations forces. Yet, since Oct. 7 the U.S. military is nowhere to be found. Instead of fully utilizing this exquisite capability, only a handful of military advisers are whispering advice to Israeli counterparts in Tel Aviv.

Skeptics may argue that the chances of any U.S. intelligence and military success in Gaza are low. If the Israel Defense Forces have been unable to find the hostages, how could the U.S. military expect a different result?

Such skeptics underestimate our formidable capabilities. At an operational level, having a modest but lethal U.S. intelligence and military footprint dedicated to targeting Hamas and rescuing Americans will help an Israeli war effort that is exhausted from seven months of fighting. As one IDF special operator told me, "Your Delta forces would be a game changer."

And shifting away from mediation to a more aggressive stance would also send a powerful signal to Hamas' leadership: that the United States will hold Hamas directly responsible for how it treats American citizens. That is a message best delivered by the barrel of a gun, not through intermediaries in Cairo and Doha. It could change the negotiation incentives for Hamas' leadership.

Oct. 7 was one of the deadliest days for Americans since 9/11. And yet President Joe Biden has found it more expedient to treat Hamas as Israel's enemy — not the United States'. At this point in the war, we are doing a disservice to our citizens by relying solely on Israel to handle what should be the primary U.S. interest in Gaza: saving American lives. It is time to demonstrate that the U.S. does not leave its citizens behind. There is no higher calling or priority in U.S. foreign policy.

Roger Zakheim is director of the Ronald Reagan Institute, a former general counsel for the House Armed Services Committee and a member of the National Defense Strategy Commission.

SCOREBOARD/COLLEGE SOFTBALL

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	1	0	1.000	—
New York	1	0	1.000	—
Connecticut	1	0	1.000	—
Washington	0	1	.000	1
Chicago	0	1	.000	1
Indiana	0	1	.000	1

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Las Vegas	1	0	1.000	—
Minnesota	1	0	1.000	—
Dallas	1	0	1.000	—
Phoenix	0	1	.000	1
Los Angeles	0	1	.000	1
Seattle	0	1	.000	1

Tuesday's games

New York 85, Washington 80
Connecticut 92, Indiana 71
Minnesota 83, Seattle 70
Las Vegas 89, Phoenix 80

Wednesday's games

Dallas 87, Chicago 79
Atlanta 92, Los Angeles 81

Thursday's games

New York at Indiana

Friday's games

Washington at Connecticut
Seattle at Minnesota

Saturday's games

Indiana at New York
Los Angeles at Las Vegas
Chicago at Dallas
Atlanta at Phoenix

TENNIS

Italian Open

Wednesday
At Foro Italico
Rome
Purse: Euro 7,877,020
Surface: Red clay
Men's Singles
Quarterfinals

Alejandro Tabilo (29), Chile, def. Zhang Zhizhen, China, 6-3, 6-4.

Alexander Zverev (3), Germany, def. Taylor Fritz (11), United States, 6-4, 6-3.

Women's Singles
Quarterfinals

Aryna Sabalenka (2), Belarus, def. Jelena Ostapenko (9), Latvia, 6-2, 6-4.

Danielle Collins (13), United States, def. Victoria Azarenka (24), Belarus, 6-4, 6-3.

Parma Ladies Open

Wednesday
At Tennis Club President
Parma, Italy
Purse: Euro 100,000
Surface: Red clay
Women's Singles
Round of 16

Jesika Maleckova, Czech Republic, def. Emiliana Arango, Colombia, 7-5, ret.

Anna-Karolina Schmiedlova (4), Slovakia, def. Giorgia Pedone, Italy, 6-3, 6-0.

Zeynep Sonmez, Turkiye, def. Anastasiya Soboleva, Ukraine, 6-1, 4-6, 7-5.

Renata Zarazua, Mexico, def. Ajla Tomljanovic, Australia, 3-0, ret.

Jule Niemeier, Germany, def. Ankita Raina, India, 6-1, 6-3.

Kamilla Rakhimova, Russia, def. Daria Saville, Australia, 6-4, 7-5.

Peyton Stearns, United States, def. Petra Martic, Croatia, 6-3, 0-6, 6-2.

Mayar Sherif (8), Egypt, def. Susan Bandecchi, Switzerland, 6-3, 7-5.

PRO HOCKEY

PWHL playoffs

Semifinals
(Best-of-five; x-if necessary)
At Coca-Cola Coliseum, Toronto
Toronto 2, Minnesota 2

Toronto 4, Minnesota 0
Friday, May 10: Toronto 2, Minnesota 0
Minnesota 2, Toronto 0
Wednesday: Minnesota 1, Toronto 0, 2OT
Friday: Game 5

At Place Bell, Montreal
Boston 3, Montreal 0

Boston 2, Montreal 1, OT
Boston 2, Montreal 1, 3OT
Boston 3, Montreal 2, OT

PRO SOCCER

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Inter Miami CF	8	2	4	28	35	20
Cincinnati	8	2	3	27	16	10
New York	6	2	5	23	24	19
NYCFC	6	5	2	20	16	15
Charlotte FC	6	5	2	20	14	13
Toronto FC	6	6	1	19	16	19
Columbus	4	2	6	18	16	12
D.C. United	4	4	5	17	20	23
Philadelphia	3	4	5	14	22	21
Nashville	3	4	5	14	16	19
Orlando City	3	5	4	13	14	20
Atlanta	3	6	3	12	16	15
CF Montréal	3	6	3	12	16	26
Chicago	2	7	4	10	12	23
New England	2	8	1	7	9	22

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Real Salt Lake	7	2	4	25	22	11
Minnesota	6	2	3	21	19	13
LAFC	6	4	3	21	24	19
Colorado	6	4	3	21	21	18
LA Galaxy	5	2	6	21	25	21
Austin FC	5	4	4	19	16	15
Vancouver	5	4	3	18	18	14
Houston	5	5	2	17	11	12
St Louis City	3	2	7	16	18	17
Seattle	3	6	4	13	15	16
Portland	3	6	4	13	25	27
FC Dallas	3	6	2	11	12	16
Sporting KC	2	5	5	11	19	21
San Jose	3	9	1	10	22	32

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Wednesday's games

Cincinnati 1, Atlanta 0
New York 4, D.C. United 1
Columbus 3, CF Montréal 1
Miami 0, Orlando City 0, tie
New York City FC 2, Philadelphia 1
Austin FC 1, Houston 0
Charlotte FC 1, Chicago 0
LA Galaxy 2, Minnesota 2, tie
Nashville 2, Toronto FC 0
Los Angeles FC 2, St Louis City 0
Colorado 1, Vancouver 0
Real Salt Lake 2, Seattle 0
Portland 4, San Jose 2

Saturday's games

Atlanta at Nashville
LA Galaxy at Charlotte FC
St Louis City at Cincinnati
D.C. United at Miami
New York at New York City FC
Philadelphia at New England
CF Montréal at Toronto FC
Sporting Kansas City at Austin FC
Columbus at Chicago
FC Dallas at Houston
Portland at Minnesota
Colorado at Real Salt Lake
Orlando City at San Jose
Vancouver at Seattle

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Kansas City	6	0	3	21	22	12
Orlando	6	0	3	21	15	7
Washington	6	3	0	18	18	12
Portland	5	3	1	16	21	14
Chicago	5	3	1	16	14	12
North Carolina	4	5	0	12	12	11
Gotham FC	3	2	3	12	6	6
San Diego	3	3	2	11	8	7
Angel City	3	4	1	10	9	12
Houston	2	4	3	9	8	16
Louisville	1	2	5	8	11	9
Seattle	2	6	1	7	7	14
Bay FC	2	7	0	6	13	20
Utah Royals FC	1	7	1	4	6	18

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Friday's games

Portland at Houston
Utah Royals FC at North Carolina
San Diego at Bay FC

Saturday's games

Angel City at Washington
Louisville at Kansas City

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball

MLB — Announced Houston Astros RHP Ronel Blanco has received a 10-game suspension and an undisclosed fine for violating the prohibitions of foreign substances in a game on May 14 against Oakland.

American League

BOSTON RED SOX — Sent RHP Garrett Whitlock to Worcester (IL) on a rehab assignment.

CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Optioned RHP Justin Anderson to Charlotte (IL). Recalled OF Dominic Fletcher from Charlotte. Designated OF Rafael Ortega for assignment. Acquired OF Corey Julks from Houston in exchange for RHP Luis Rodriguez and optioned him to Charlotte.

LOS ANGELES ANGELS — Designated LHP Amir Garrett for assignment. Recalled RHP Davis Daniel from Salt Lake (PCL).

MINNESOTA TWINS — Sent CB Byron Buxton to St. Paul (IL) on a rehab assignment.

OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Selected the contract of RHP Aaron Brooks from Las Vegas (PCL). Optioned LHP Brady Basso to Las Vegas. Recalled LHP Hogan Harris from Las Vegas. Placed LHP Alex Wood on the 15-day IL, retroactive to May 13. Sent RHP Luis Medina to Arizona Complex League (ACL) on a rehab assignment. Transferred SS Darell Hernaiz from the 10-day IL to the 60-day IL.

SEATTLE MARINERS — Reinstated OF Dominic Canzone from the 10-day IL. Optioned INF/OF Sam Haggerty to Tacoma (PCL).

TEXAS RANGERS — Placed RHP Max Scherzer on the 60-day IL. Selected the contract of RHP Shaun Anderson from Round Rock (PCL). Optioned RHP Jack Leiter to Round Rock.

National League

CHICAGO CUBS — Placed RHP Keegan Thompson on the 15-day IL. Recalled LHP Luke Little from Iowa (IL).

CINCINNATI REDS — Recalled LHP Sam Moll from Louisville (IL). Placed LHP Nick Lodolo on the 15-day IL, retroactive to May 12.

COLORADO ROCKIES — Sent 3B Nolan Jones to Alburquerque (PCL) on a rehab assignment.

LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Selected the contract of RHP Elieser Hernandez from Oklahoma City (PCL). Recalled RHP Eduardo Salazar from Oklahoma City. Optioned RHP Gus Varland to Oklahoma City. Designated RHP Nabil Crismatt for assignment.

MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Recalled CF Chris Roller from Nashville (IL). Optioned 2B Oliver Dunn to Nashville. Reinstated RHP Taylor Clarke from the 15-day IL.

NEW YORK METS — Designated 2B Joey Wendle and RHP Yohan Ramirez for assignment. Recalled RHP Grant Hartwig, 3B Mark Vientos and LHP Joey Lucchesi from Syracuse (IL). Optioned RHP Jose Butto to Syracuse.

PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Optioned RHP Quinn Priester to Indianapolis (IL). Recalled RHP Carmen Mlodzinski from Indianapolis.

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Transferred C Tom Murphy from the 10-day IL to the 60-day IL. Signed C Curt Casali. Optioned C Jakson Reetz to Sacramento (PCL). Sent RF Jorge Soler to Sacramento on a rehab assignment. Agreed to terms with 2B Brady Whalen on a minor league contract.

WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Optioned RHP Jackson Rutledge to Rochester (IL).

BASKETBALL
Women's National Basketball Association

CONNECTICUT SUN — Exercised their option with C Olivia Nelson-Odoba

FOOTBALL
National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS — Signed draft pick CB Elijah Jones.

ATLANTA FALCONS — Signed CB Anthony Johnson.

CAROLINA PANTHERS — Waived RB Spencer Brown with and injury settlement.

CHICAGO BEARS — Signed draft pick OT Kiran Amegdjie.

CLEVELAND BROWNS — Released K Lucas Havrisk

DENVER BRONCOS — Signed P Trenton Gill. Waived DB Cam Allen.

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Signed LB Ty Summers. Waived WR Wayne Ruby with an injury designation.

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS — Signed draft picks TE Jared Wiley, S Jaden Hicks, C Hunter Nourzad, CB Kamal Hadden and G C.J. Hanson.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Released LB Brevin Allen.

LOS ANGELES RAMS — Announced DL Michael Brockers to retire.

MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Signed draft pick OT Walter Rouse.

NEW YORK GIANTS — Signed draft pick LB Darius Muasau and DB Andru Phillips.

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Signed draft picks LB Jeremiah Trotter Jr. and C Dylan McMahon.

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Signed draft pick OL Jarret Kingston. Released DE Earnest Brown IV and C Corey Luciano.

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS — Released QB Jake Fromm.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

DALLAS STARS — Recalled Ds Lian Bichsel and Alex Petrovic and F Mavrik Pourque from Texas (AHL).

LOS ANGELES KINGS — Signed G David Rittich to a one-year contract.

MINNESOTA WILD — Promoted Mat Sells, Michael Murray and Chris Kelleher to assistant general managers and Matt Hendricks to general manager of the Iowa Wild of the American Hockey League (AHL).

VANCOUVER CANUCKS — Reinstated D Carson Soucy from his one-game suspension.

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

MLS — Fined Orlando SC F Luis Muriel an undisclosed amount for violating the simulation-embellishment policy in a match on May 11 against Philadelphia Union. Fined San Jose D Carlos Akapo an undisclosed amount for failing to leave the field in a timely manner in a match on May 11 against Colorado. Fined Portland Timber F Jonathan Rodriguez an undisclosed amount for violating the simulation-embellishment policy in a match on May 11 against Philadelphia Union. Found Orlando City SC in violation of the mass confrontation policy in a match on May 11 against Philadelphia and fined the club and head coach Oscar Pareja for violating this policy for the second time. Fined G Pedro Gallese, Ms Nicolas Lodeiro and Ivan Angulo and F Duncan McGuire an undisclosed amount for inciting and/or escalating a mass confrontation. Suspended Toronto FC head coach John Herdman, D Richie Laryea and G Sean Johnson one game for a post-match incident on May 11 against New York City FC. Toronto FC F Prince Owusu and NYFC D Strahinja Tanasijevic each received a red card one-game suspension for their involvement in the post-match incident.

PORTLAND TIMBERS — Signed D Sawyer Jura to a short-term agreement.

NATE BILLINGS/AP

Oklahoma coach Patty Gasso, front left, and players pose for a photo after winning their third straight national championship last June.

Sooners chase 4th straight NCAA title

By CLIFF BRUNT
Associated Press

Oklahoma begins its quest for an unprecedented fourth consecutive national softball title on Friday.

Coach Patty Gasso's Sooners appear to have a shot. They have claimed the No. 2 overall seed and beat No. 1 seed Texas for the Big 12 Tournament title. The Sooners (49-6) open regional play Friday night against Cleveland State at Love's Field in Norman, Okla. All regionals are double elimination.

Last season, the Sooners became the first team since UCLA from 1988 to 1990 to win three straight national championships. Shortly after winning their most recent championship, ace pitcher Jordy Bahl transferred back home to Nebraska. Bahl was Most Outstanding Player of last year's World Series after not allowing a run.

Oklahoma picked up Oklahoma State's Kelly Maxwell, and she has come through. The All-Big 12 selection has an 18-2 record with a 1.96 earned run average.

She has plenty of support. Tiare Jennings, a Top 10 finalist for USA Softball Collegiate Player of the Year, leads the Sooners with 19 home runs, 57 RBIs and 13 doubles. Jayda Coleman, Alyssa Brito and Kinzie Hansen are All-Big 12 picks. Hansen, a catcher, is the conference's Defensive Player of the Year.

The regional winners advance to the best-of-three Super Regionals. Those winners advance to the Women's College World Series, which starts May 30 in Oklahoma City.

Here are a few things to know heading into regional play:

Hook 'em?

Texas (47-7) won the Big 12 regular-season title and claimed the No. 1 seed for the first time.

Reese Atwood was Big 12 Player of the Year after racking up a nation's best 83 RBIs. The Top 10 player of the year finalist headlines a Texas squad that leads the nation with a .379 batting average.

Other Texas players on the All-Big 12 first team are pitchers Citlaly Gutierrez and Teagan Kavan, outfielder Ashton Maloney and utility player Mia Scott.

The Longhorns open regional play Friday at home against Siena.

Kilfoyl shines

Once Maxwell left for Oklahoma, Lexi Kilfoyl became Oklahoma State's undisputed ace, and she delivered. She was named Big 12 Pitcher of the Year and is a Top 10 player of the year finalist. She led the Big 12 in ERA (1.13), wins (21) and shutouts (six). She has two complete-game shutouts against Texas.

Kilfoyl showed she was capable with a strong finish to last season. She threw a three-hitter in an elimination game against Utah at last year's World Series.

The fifth-seeded Cowgirls open at home Friday against Northern Colorado.

Home run chase

Miami (Ohio) senior Karli Spaid leads the nation with 36 homers, one short of the Division I record of 37 home runs set by Arizona's Laura Espinoza in 1995.

The Top 10 player of the year finalist ranks second in Division I history with 103 career blasts, only trailing Oklahoma's Jocelyn Alo. This season, the Top 10 player of the year finalist is hitting .426 with 77 RBIs.

Miami will open Friday against Virginia in the Knoxville Regional.

Another great Brady

UCLA's Maya Brady has proven to be much more than just Tom Brady's niece.

She is a Top 10 player of the year finalist who repeated as Pac-12 Player of the Year after hitting .403 with 15 home runs and 61 RBIs.

The Bruins open Friday at home against Grand Canyon, a team that took a game from them in last year's regional when UCLA was seeded No. 2 overall.

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

Speith's lackluster game makes career Slam an afterthought

By Doug Ferguson
Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — The attention starts building weeks, if not months, ahead of the one major keeping Rory McIlroy from the career Grand Slam, the most elite club in golf. It's like that every year, and it doesn't make it any easier when he gets to the Masters.

Jordan Spieth should be able to appreciate the feeling. Except that he really doesn't.

Now that McIlroy missed again at the Masters — his 10th straight attempt at getting the final leg — Spieth is next up with an opportunity to become only the sixth player in history to capture all four professional majors.

It feels like an afterthought going into the PGA Championship.

Scottie Scheffler tries to extend his dominance with a second straight major. Brooks Koepka is the defending champion and coming off a LIV Golf win in Singapore. Jon Rahm turned in a dud at the Masters and curious eyes will want to see at Valhalla if that was an aberration.

Oh yes, and Spieth goes for the career Grand Slam, a feat achieved only by Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Ben Hogan and Gene Sarazen.

"These things, like winning a career Grand Slam, they happen kind of when I think there's less focus and less of a spotlight on him," said Jim Nantz of CBS, who has covered every PGA Championship since 1991. "And I think Jordan goes into this week without a whole lot of discussion about that possibility coming up at Valhalla.

"So maybe it is favorable in that sense mentally."

Spieth isn't surprised the attention is not that high, certainly not at the level McIlroy has faced the last decade each time he heads to Augusta National.

One reason is his game, which has not been great. Spieth has gone just over two years since he last won a tournament and has had only a few close calls since then. He comes into the PGA Championship having missed the cut in four of his last five tournaments that had a 36-hole cut.

"He's got more accolades," Spieth said about the Slam hype between him and McIlroy. "He's been a better player over his career. Maybe that creates a little noise. He's been a bit more vocal about it himself, so maybe that makes a little bit more difference."

The other reason is the Masters, the only major held on the same course every year.

Sarazen is the only player with the career Grand Slam who completed it at Augusta National. But that was in 1935, long before the Masters was considered a major and 25 years before Arnold Palmer first brought a professional slam into the golf conversation.

McIlroy threw away a chance in 2011 when he lost a four-shot lead in the final round at the Masters. He played in the final group with Patrick Reed in 2018 and didn't get it done. Reminders are everywhere when he returns.

That isn't the case for Spieth. He goes to Quail Hollow one year, Bellerive the next. He has had seven cracks at getting the missing piece of the Grand Slam on seven courses.

"For me, it's like the PGA Championship feels decently similar to a number of tournaments we play," Spieth said. "I don't mean that in a bad way. It's played on some of the biggest, best golf courses. But the identity is not the same as the other three. In my mind, you don't need to find a different way to win, versus guys who don't have some of the other ones.

"We play a few tournaments a year that could be PGA Championships if you change the branding and the grandstands."

Only two other players lacked only the PGA Championship for the career slam — Arnold Palmer and Tom Watson.

Jack Nicklaus referenced them last month when speaking of McIlroy's chances at Augusta.

"Is Tom Watson good enough to win the Grand Slam? Absolutely. Was Arnold Palmer good enough to win the Grand Slam? Absolutely," Nicklaus said.

He felt the same way about McIlroy before adding, "But they have got to do it."

Spieth is 30 and would seem to have time on his side — but not history. Sarazen, Hogan and Woods won the final leg in their first attempt. Woods did it in the most spectacular fashion, winning the U.S. Open by 15 shots and a month later the British Open by eight. He was 24.

Player (1965 U.S. Open) and Nicklaus (1966 British Open) completed the Grand Slam on their third attempt after they had captured the third leg.

McIlroy already has had 10 cracks at the Masters since he picked up the third leg. Spieth has had seven tries at the PGA Championship since winning the third leg at Royal Birkdale in 2017.

He said it doesn't weigh on him, at least not lately.

"I remember thinking about it in '17 because it was right after the Open and I was playing so well," Spieth said. He tied for 28th at Quail Hollow.

He also said he gave the Grand Slam some thought in 2019 at Bethpage Black when he was in the final group going into the weekend with Brooks Koepka. That wasn't really a fair fight. Koepka set the 36-hole record for majors (128), a record seven shots ahead of Spieth.

"But I don't feel like it will build up over time, not like people talk about Rory's building up over time," Spieth said.

More focus is on a nagging injury to his left wrist that first surfaced right before the PGA Championship last year at Oak Hill. Spieth is trying to manage it. He also is spending more time than he imagined on the phone as part of the PGA Tour Enterprises board trying to figure out the best way forward with the Saudis.

Justin Thomas has two PGA titles — what Spieth wouldn't do for one — and is surprised why his longtime friend doesn't get much attention as he pursues the final leg.

"It should be the same amount of attention — you could say more because he's younger than Rory," Thomas said. "But that also could be a good thing. Going in under the radar is never bad."

> **"I remember thinking about it in '17 because it was right after the Open and I was playing so well."**
>
> Jordan Spieth

One leg short

Three active players who won three majors, the one they are lacking and how many attempts they've had to win the final major.

Phil Mickelson
US Open: Nine attempts
2014: Tie for 28th at Pinehurst No. 2
2015: Tie for 64th at Chambers Bay
2016: Missed the cut at Oakmont
2017: Did not play at Erin Hills
2018: Tie for 48th at Shinnecock Hills
2019:Tie for 52nd at Pebble Beach
2020: Missed the cut at Winged Foot
2021: Tie for 62nd at Torrey Pines
2022: Missed the cut at The Country Club
2023: Missed the cut at LA Country Club

Rory McIlroy
Masters: 10 attempts
2015: 4th
2016: Tie for 10th
2017: Tie for 7th
2018: Tie for 5th
2019: Tie for 21st
2020: Tie for 33rd
2021: Missed the cut
2022: Runner-up
2023: Missed the cut
2024: Tie for 22nd

Jordan Spieth
PGA Championship: Seven attempts
2017: Tied for 28th at Quail Hollow
2018: Tied for 12th at Bellerive
2019: Tied for 3rd at Bethpage Black
2020: Tied for 71st at Harding Park
2021: Tied for 30th at Kiawah Island
2022: Tied for 34th at Southern Hills
2023: Tied for 29th at Oak Hill

SOURCE: Associated Press

Eric Gay/AP

Jordan Spieth has gone more than two years since winning a tournament so there hasn't been much focus on his quest to win the PGA Championship to complete the career Grand Slam. He hasn't finished better than 29th in his past four tries.

AUTO RACING

Expect the familiar and unexpected

Surprise contenders likely to join logical picks in second half of Cup Series season

BY PETE IACOBELLI
Associated Press

DARLINGTON, S.C. — The first half of NASCAR's regular season wrapped with a satisfying, drought-busting victory by past champion Brad Keselowski at Darlington Raceway.

Keselowski, in his third full season competing as a driver-owner at Roush Fenway Keselowski Racing, locked himself into the playoffs and marked himself as a title contender for the fall.

There are several other usual suspects to watch, including 2021 Cup Series winner Kyle Larson, his Hendrick Motorsports teammate William Byron and Joe Gibbs Racing leader Denny Hamlin, who is tied with Byron for the series lead with three victories this season.

Not so fast, said former driver and current NASCAR TV analyst Jeff Burton. Just look at the past two champions in Penske racers Joey Logano and Ryan Blaney.

"Raise your hand if you had them winning the championships this time of year these past two years," Burton said. "It's very hard to know what's going to happen."

But it's not difficult to make a few logically informed predictions as the circuit heads into its All-Star Weekend at North Wilkesboro.

Hendrick, JGR strong

JGR's Hamlin has been on a championship quest since coming up short last season and has had one of the strongest cars each week. Along with his three wins, Hamlin has led laps at each race this season and finished fourth at the Goodyear 400 last Sunday at Darlington. Christopher Bell, who won at Phoenix, gives JGR two playoff participants so far.

Byron and Larson are leading the Hendrick charge, combining for five wins this season including Byron's success at the Daytona 500 to start Hendrick's 40th anniversary season. Chase Elliott's victory at Texas gives Rick Hendrick three spots in the playoffs with Alex Bowman, who was eighth at Darlington, the only team driver without a win. Bowman sits ninth in the standings.

Byron said at Darlington he needed to be more consistent in this upcoming summer stretch to prepare for the playoffs.

"We have the pace," Byron said. "I feel like that's what you're really striving for, to have pace to win races. We have that, it's just that we're not consistently putting the weekends together, in terms of balance and execution."

From left: William Byron and Denny Hamlin lead the series with three victories apiece.

Ford charging forward

Keselowski's victory at Darlington was the first for a Ford this season, but likely won't be the last. Keselowski's RFK Racing driver Chris Buescher, who has won four times since Keselowski became a co-owner in 2022, has come agonizingly close to winning again the past two races.

Buescher lost a photo finish to Larson at Kansas two weeks ago by 0.001 second, the closest finish in NASCAR history. At Darlington, Buescher got knocked into the wall by Tyler Reddick while leading with nine laps to go.

Neither Buescher nor Reddick, 1-2 at the time, were contending after their tangle and Buescher angrily confronted Reddick after both got out of their cars.

Those were tough for Buescher to deal with, but it's likely he won't disappear in the season's second half. In fact, there were four Ford drivers among the top seven finishers at Darlington.

Who else?

Neither of the past two series champs in Logano and Blaney have won a race to assure themselves the postseason, although Blaney is in better position at eighth in the standings while Logano is 17th, first out of the 16-driver field.

Neither one had a strong showing at Darlington. Blaney got squeezed when Byron clipped Martin Truex Jr., who then pushed Blaney into the wall and out of the race.

Logano got a speeding penalty entering the pits late in the race and was sent to the back of the field. He finished 21st.

Josh Berry, who replaced NASCAR champion Kevin Harvick in the No. 4 at Stewart-Haas Racing, had his best placing this season in third.

Other winless drivers among the top 16 on points include Truex in second, Ty Gibbs in seventh and Kyle Busch in 13th.

All will be sorted out when the series returns to Darlington for the final regular-season race, the Southern 500, on Sept. 1.

COLIN E. BRALEY/AP

Kyle Larson visits with his crew along pit road before a NASCAR Cup Series race at Kansas Speedway in Kansas City, Kan., on May 5. Larson has two Cup victories and six top-five finishes this season.

Ahead of attempt at Indianapolis 500, 'The Double,' Larson has lots to learn

BY JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Kyle Larson's parents took a swing by the Arrow McLaren merchandise truck at Indianapolis Motor Speedway and alerted their superstar son to a potential problem.

"They were like, 'Man, if I was your teammates I'd be pretty pissed because it's basically all you,'" Larson said Wednesday as he waited out a second day of rain at the speedway.

Larson is the star of the upcoming Indianapolis 500 as he becomes the fifth driver in history to attempt both "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing" and NASCAR's crown jewel Coca-Cola 600 on the same day. John Andretti, Tony Stewart, Robby Gordon and Kurt Busch have attempted "The Double," with Stewart in 2001 the only one to complete 1,100 miles.

"If Tony can do it, I can do it," Larson said, smiling, when talking about the physical demands of the grueling races. Stewart did "The Double" twice but only completed all the laps in his second attempt; he was ninth, four laps down, at Indy in 1999 but completed the 600 and finished fourth.

He worked with a personal trainer to better prepare himself for his 2001 effort.

Larson has not talked to Stewart about his attempts, but he had one conversation with Busch, who was the last driver to attempt "The Double," in 2014. Busch finished sixth at Indy but his engine failed at Charlotte with roughly 200 miles to go.

Larson doesn't really want to pick the brains of those who have tried this stunt before him. NASCAR's 2021 season champion races so many different styles of cars that he prefers to figure out what he's doing on his own.

"I've never been that type of driver to get info from other drivers. I just try to figure it out, and then as I'm doing it, and I have questions, then I ask," Larson said. "But when I don't know what to expect, I don't know what to ask. So I haven't talked to too many people."

The problem for Larson is the rain that soaked the speedway Tuesday and Wednesday. He got in two laps on opening day before all of Tuesday was washed out. The Wednesday schedule was revised to add two hours of track time for a total of eight hours, but it was raining long after lunch.

Larson got in 47 laps and hit a top speed of 225.245 mph as he struggled with learning the nuances of running in traffic around Indy.

Scott McLaughlin paced the first session of Indy prep at 229.493 mph for Team Penske and Tom Blomqvist of Meyer Shank Racing made a driver-high 105 laps.

Arrow McLaren has given Larson seat time over the past year, but he's yet to get two consecutive days in the car and was limited by rain to 47 laps during last month's open test at Indy.

Larson was growing anxious to get on the track, but at the same time he was weirdly at ease with the idea of running his first Indy 500 with very little track time. Asked if the Indy 500 was today could he run it, Larson laughed and noted only if he'd qualified for the 33-car field.

But then he added he wouldn't back down from the challenge.

"I would," Larson said. "But I don't think that I would do very good. There's still a lot of things I want to get done over the course of this week to prepare myself."

Which brings Larson to the betting odds.

Alex Palou is the favorite at 4-1, according to BetMGM Sportsbook, and Larson was the second betting choice at 13-2.

Larson couldn't believe he was listed ahead of six-time series champion Scott Dixon, who has one Indy 500 win. Larson urged gamblers to avoid the temptation to bet on him, even though many believe he's got a shot to win the race.

"That's crazy, that doesn't make any sense to me," Larson said. "I think people are wasting their money. But, maybe not? I guess I hope to add people wasting their money on me."

NFL/WNBA

Playoff rematches sprinkled throughout season

BY JOE REEDY
Associated Press

Even though the Super Bowl rematch between the Kansas City Chiefs and San Francisco 49ers will not occur until almost the midpoint of the season, NFL fans will be treated to a pair of playoff rematches on the opening weekend.

Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs begin their quest for an unprecedented third straight Super Bowl title when they host the Baltimore Ravens on Sept. 5 in the Kickoff Game while the Los Angeles Rams are at the Detroit Lions in the Sunday night game on Sept. 8.

The two playoff rematches on Week 1 are among nine on this year's regular schedule, which was released by the league Wednesday night.

ADRIAN KRAUS/AP

Buffalo and Kansas City will meet for the fifth straight regular season on Nov. 17. The Bills have won three straight in the rgular season while the Chiefs have taken three in a row in the playoffs.

The Ravens-Chiefs matchup is a rematch of last season's AFC championship game, won by Kansas City 17-10. Kansas City heads to San Francisco on Oct. 20, after it defeated the 49ers 25-22 in the second overtime game in Super Bowl history. It also marks the second straight season the Chiefs will have a Super Bowl rematch after they lost to the Philadelphia Eagles in a Monday night game last season.

Kansas City will then travel to Buffalo on Nov. 17 in what is becoming a yearly matchup. This will be the fifth straight year the two teams have faced off in the regular season. The Bills have won three straight in the regular season but the Chiefs have won all three in the playoffs.

The Rams' Matthew Stafford and Detroit's Jared Goff will face their former teams for the third time, including the playoffs. The Lions won their first playoff game in 32 years when they defeated the Rams 24-23 in an NFC wild-card round game.

Goff recently agreed to a four-year, $212 million contract extension.

The rematch of the NFC championship game between the 49ers and Lions won't happen until Dec. 30 in San Francisco, which is the last Monday night game of the season.

After the Rams game, the Lions host Tampa Bay on Sept. 15 in a rematch of a divisional round game won by Detroit.

The other playoff rematches are Baltimore at Houston on Christmas Day, Philadelphia at Tampa Bay on Sept. 29 and San Francisco at Green Bay on Nov. 24.

The schedule has been released the past couple of years on the second Thursday in May, but was slightly delayed this year.

Even though a memo was sent to teams late last week saying the schedule would be released Wednesday night, it wasn't until Monday morning that it was finalized.

Hans Schroeder, the executive vice president of NFL Media, said there were meetings over the weekend to tweak things.

Five quarterbacks going in the first round of the draft impacted some of the final decisions.

Among other highlights:

Notable debuts

Kirk Cousins' first game with the Atlanta Falcons will be at home on Sept. 8 when they host Russell Wilson and the Pittsburgh Steelers. Cousins signed a four-year, $180 million deal with the Falcons during the offseason.

Wilson is making his Steelers' debut after being released by Denver. It will also mark the return of Arthur Smith, who is the Steelers offensive coordinator after being fired as Falcons coach.

Caleb Williams, the top overall pick by Chicago in last month's draft, will make his Bears debut against Tennessee. Chicago then goes to Houston for a Sunday night game on Sept. 15 against the Texans and reigning AP Offensive Rookie of the Year C.J. Stroud.

"That's the beauty of where this league is right now. Here they are. That's the way this league turns quickly if you get the right pieces in place," NBC's Mike Tirico said on the NFL Network schedule release show about Houston.

The top two picks in the draft could meet on Oct. 27 in Washington when the Bears face the Commanders and Jayden Daniels.

Multiple short weeks

Including the Kickoff Game, "Thursday Night Football" and Thanksgiving, 12 teams will be playing multiple Thursday games.

The league amended its policy last season where teams could make more than one appearance on Thursday nights.

Six teams — the Jaguars, Titans, Colts, Cardinals, Panthers and Chargers — will not have the short Sunday to Thursday turnaround.

Christmas Day games

Netflix has reached a three-year deal with the league to carry games on Christmas Day.

The streaming giant will carry two games this year and at least one game in 2025 and '26. Kansas City travels to Pittsburgh in the first game before the Ravens and Texans meet in the late afternoon.

League must turn Clark hype into sustained growth

BY TERESA M. WALKER
Associated Press

The stars seemingly have aligned for the WNBA with Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese joining the ranks of A'ja Wilson, Breanna Stewart, Diana Taurasi and others.

The league is getting unparalleled attention. Now the challenge for the WNBA after opening its 28th season Tuesday night is turning the hype and hoopla into a movement and not just a moment in its history.

It's a puzzle with various pieces: marketing strategies, fan engagement, corporate sponsors and TV deals built around intriguing basketball storylines and outsized personalities.

Minnesota coach Cheryl Reeve said everyone involved needs to be more innovative in how players and games are marketed and promoted to take advantage of the potential tsunami for both the league and women's sports.

"If you are business as usual, if you think that the status quo is going to work, you're going to miss out on opportunities to capitalize from a business standpoint," Reeve said.

Taurasi agrees.

"The one thing we've always done as players is brought that competitive spirit and fight," said the 19-year Phoenix guard who has seen plenty of moments where the WNBA had momentum slip through the cracks. "And now it's their job to carry it."

Taurasi said it feels different this time with all the attention accompanying the rookie class.

But Len Elmore, a 10-year NBA veteran who spent 31 years as a TV broadcaster, said the rookies will have to do more than just show up.

"It's not going to help if Caitlin Clark or Angel Reese and Kamilla Cardoso don't make the playoffs," said Elmore, now a senior lecturer in sports management at Columbia University.

Clark debuted Tuesday night, missing her first four shots before finishing with 20 points. She also turned it over 10 times before a sellout crowd in Connecticut.

The NBA took off in the 1980s following the arrival of Magic Johnson and Larry Bird a couple of years ahead of a new TV deal took that league's playoff games from being tape-delayed broadcasts to live prime-time telecasts. Both Bird and Magic went on to win multiple championships.

The WNBA's joint deal with the NBA with ESPN is up after 2025. Ratings for women's basketball just keep growing. Fans are so eager that they looked for — and watched — a livestream of Reese's exhibition debut on social media.

Another key for the WNBA to emulate the success of the NBA in the 1980s is its franchises must energize local fan bases.

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That's where first-year stars like Clark and Reese could help build traction.

The rookies have built-in social media bases that should also help. Reese, the self-dubbed Bayou Barbie now with the Chicago Sky, has more than 476,000 followers on X alone and 3.1 million on Instagram. Clark has 2.2 million on IG.

BRANDON WADE/AP

Chicago rookie Angel Reese, left, the self-dubbed Bayou Barbie, has more than 476,000 followers on X and 3.1 million on Instagram.

"They've got a lot in front of them that potentially can be the market that they covet," Elmore said of the WNBA's potential reach.

Demand already has WNBA teams moving games against Clark's Indiana Fever to bigger arenas. The two-time defending champion Las Vegas Aces became the first team in the league to sell out its allotted season tickets before a season started — back in March.

"We've used that tool to really expand our audience, our fans across the world," Taurasi said of social media. "And it's been amazing to see this rookie class really latch on to that and take it to new levels. And, you know, it's helped ... the WNBA. It's helped college basketball. It's really been a treat to watch."

Corporate America also seems to sense that a WNBA movement is looming, jumping on board with endorsement deals for players.

Clark had a Nike deal announced late last month for her own signature shoe. Two-time MVP and Aces star A'ja Wilson just followed her new Gatorade deal by announcing her own Nike shoe A'One within the past week.

Ticket sales and viewership are up across the WNBA, and the league is expanding with new teams in California and Canada. WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said more companies are working with the league.

With all the buzz around the WNBA, Jack Silverstein, a Chicago sports historian and author of "Why We Root: Mad Obsessions of a Chicago Sports Fan," said that new leagues and teams evolve as entertainment with their own identity, which needs momentum to keep moving.

He believes the WNBA is enjoying momentum it can build on.

"I think that when this WNBA season is over," Silverstein said, "you could be looking at, whatever anyone thinks growth is going to look like this year, it could end up exceeding that wildly."

MLB

Scoreboard

American League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	29	15	.659	—
Baltimore	27	14	.659	½
Boston	22	21	.512	6½
Tampa Bay	22	22	.500	7
Toronto	19	23	.452	9

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	27	17	.614	—
Kansas City	26	19	.578	1½
Minnesota	24	18	.571	2
Detroit	21	22	.488	5½
Chicago	14	30	.318	13

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Seattle	24	20	.545	—
Texas	23	22	.511	1½
Oakland	19	26	.422	5½
Houston	18	25	.419	5½
Los Angeles	16	28	.364	8

National League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	31	13	.705	—
Atlanta	26	14	.650	3
Washington	20	22	.476	10
New York	19	23	.452	11
Miami	13	32	.289	18½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	26	17	.605	—
Chicago	25	19	.568	1½
Pittsburgh	19	25	.432	7½
Cincinnati	18	25	.419	8
St. Louis	18	25	.419	8

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	29	16	.644	—
San Diego	22	24	.478	7½
Arizona	21	23	.477	7½
San Francisco	20	25	.444	9
Colorado	15	28	.349	13

Wednesday's games

Baltimore 3, Toronto 2
Miami 2, Detroit 0
Milwaukee 10, Pittsburgh 2
Chicago White Sox 2, Washington 0
Arizona 2, Cincinnati 1
Colorado 8, San Diego 0
Seattle 4, Kansas City 2
Philadelphia 10, N.Y. Mets 5
Tampa Bay 4, Boston 3
Chicago Cubs 7, Atlanta 1
N.Y. Yankees 4, Minnesota 0
Texas 4, Cleveland 0
Houston 3, Oakland 0
L.A. Angels 7, St. Louis 2
San Francisco 4, L.A. Dodgers 1

Thursday's games

N.Y. Yankees at Minnesota
N.Y. Mets at Philadelphia
Tampa Bay at Boston
Pittsburgh at Chicago Cubs
Oakland at Houston
Cincinnati at L.A. Dodgers

Friday's games

Pittsburgh (Skenes 0-0) at Chicago Cubs (Hendricks 0-3)
Washington (Irvin 2-3) at Philadelphia (Wheeler 4-3)
Seattle (Miller 3-3) at Baltimore (Irvin 4-1)
Chicago White Sox (Clevinger 0-1) at N.Y. Yankees (Cortes 1-4)
Tampa Bay (TBD) at Toronto (Bassitt 3-5)
Minnesota (Woods Richardson 1-0) at Cleveland (McKenzie 2-3)
N.Y. Mets (Scott 0-1) at Miami (Luzardo 0-3)
San Diego (Waldron 1-5) at Atlanta (Fried 3-1)
Oakland (Wood 1-3) at Kansas City (Ragans 2-3)
L.A. Angels (Anderson 3-4) at Texas (Heaney 0-4)
Milwaukee (Peralta 3-1) at Houston (Brown 0-4)
Boston (Bello 4-1) at St. Louis (Gibson 2-2)
Detroit (Skubal 5-0) at Arizona (Nelson 2-2)
Cincinnati (Montas 2-3) at L.A. Dodgers (Paxton 5-0)
Colorado (Feltner 1-3) at San Francisco (TBD)

Saturday's games

Chicago White Sox at N.Y. Yankees
Pittsburgh at Chicago Cubs
Tampa Bay at Toronto
Seattle at Baltimore
Colorado at San Francisco
N.Y. Mets at Miami
Washington at Philadelphia
Minnesota at Cleveland
Oakland at Kansas City
Milwaukee at Houston
Boston at St. Louis
L.A. Angels at Texas
San Diego at Atlanta
Detroit at Arizona
Cincinnati at L.A. Dodgers

Bright: Rookies have less time to adjust

FROM PAGE 48

placement on record according to FanGraphs, trailing only 2015. Corbin Carroll of Arizona, the National League's Rookie of the Year in 2023, also finished fifth in the MVP vote.

There were a number of theories on why rookie hitters seemed so ready so fast: They'd had experience in the minors with new rules like the pitch clock. The development process is more advanced than ever. Teams invite more prospects to spring training, where they can face better pitching. And so on.

So when the Orioles brought up Holliday on April 10 — it was actually something of a surprise when they left him off the opening day roster — the expectation was that he could contend for Rookie of the Year honors right away. When he started slowly, fans at Camden Yards kept giving him big ovations when he came to the plate — a warm gesture but one that may have only added to the pressure.

Holliday was the No. 1 pick in the 2022 draft out of high school, and he was already in the majors less than two years later. Langford was actually drafted last year at No. 4, and he made the opening day roster for the Rangers this year after playing only 44 games in the minors — an example that underscored how aggressive teams had become with their top prospects following rule changes that created incentives to bring players up instead of delaying the start of their service time.

Keith had a great 2023 season in the minors, and Detroit signed him to a six-year contract worth over $28 million before he'd ever played a big league game. Chourio's deal was even bigger: eight years, $82 million.

"Jackson's going to be fine. He's going to be a good player," said Brewers manager Pat Murphy, who gave Chourio the day off May 9-11. "This little breather we're giving him here is I think an indication of like perspective and things like that. It's about the Brewers first, not about Jackson Chourio. But Jackson's a big part of this. This little period of not playing in the front end will be beneficial to him."

So some patience is in order. As good as Carroll was last year, he'd actually made his debut in late August the previous season, so he had some games under his belt before his 2024 breakout. The same was true for Gunnar Henderson of the Orioles, who was called up in 2022 and actually struggled early in 2023 before surging in the second half to win Rookie of the Year in the American League.

"The spotlight has never been brighter on the youngest of players at this level because we spotlight them at the youngest of development in A ball and Double-A, so their arrival is met with a lot more notoriety, popularity and expectation," Detroit manager A.J. Hinch said. "No one loves back-in-the-day stories, but we used to be 100 or 200 at-bats before anyone was noticed, but now you're expected to contribute the minute you step in the building.

"So the adjustment period from level to level we never talk about in the minor leagues and let happen, but the one into the big leagues is getting shorter and shorter for our tolerance as an industry."

Players in rookie seasons produced an OPS of .701 last year. Going into Monday's games it was down to .641, which would be the lowest mark since 1992. It's fair to expect that number to rise as the season progresses and new players gain experience — but the April-only OPS for rookies also dropped from .677 in 2023 to .648 this year.

Orioles general manager Mike Elias had a theory of his own last month — that the gap between pitching in Triple-A and the majors was actually growing, because injuries were causing top minor league pitchers to be called up.

"I doubt there's a lot of teams leaving a lot of really good pitchers in Triple-A right now. There's a lot of really good pitchers up here in the majors because you need it," Elias said. "It's really tough making that jump."

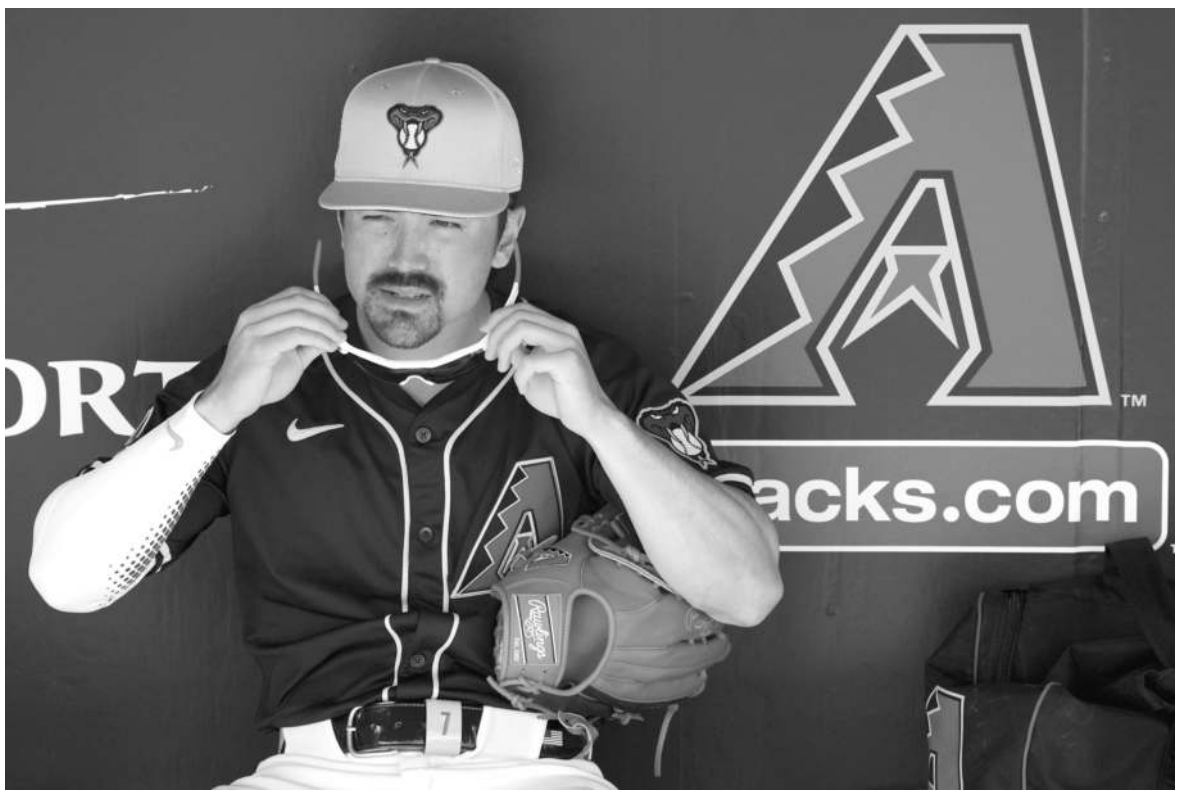
It's not clear whether teams will scale back their aggressiveness with top prospects — or how the adjustment will go for a pitcher like Paul Skenes — but a little patience from fans and the players themselves can't hurt. The best Baltimore rookie so far this year has been outfielder Colton Cowser — who hit .115 in his 26 games with the Orioles after he was called up in 2023.

Cleveland manager Stephen Vogt went hitless in 32 at-bats after starting his playing career in 2012. He was 0-for-25 that year with Tampa Bay, then was traded to Oakland and ended up playing 10 big league seasons.

Now he's managing top Guardians prospect Kyle Manzardo, who is 3-for-17 with seven strikeouts in his first seven major league games.

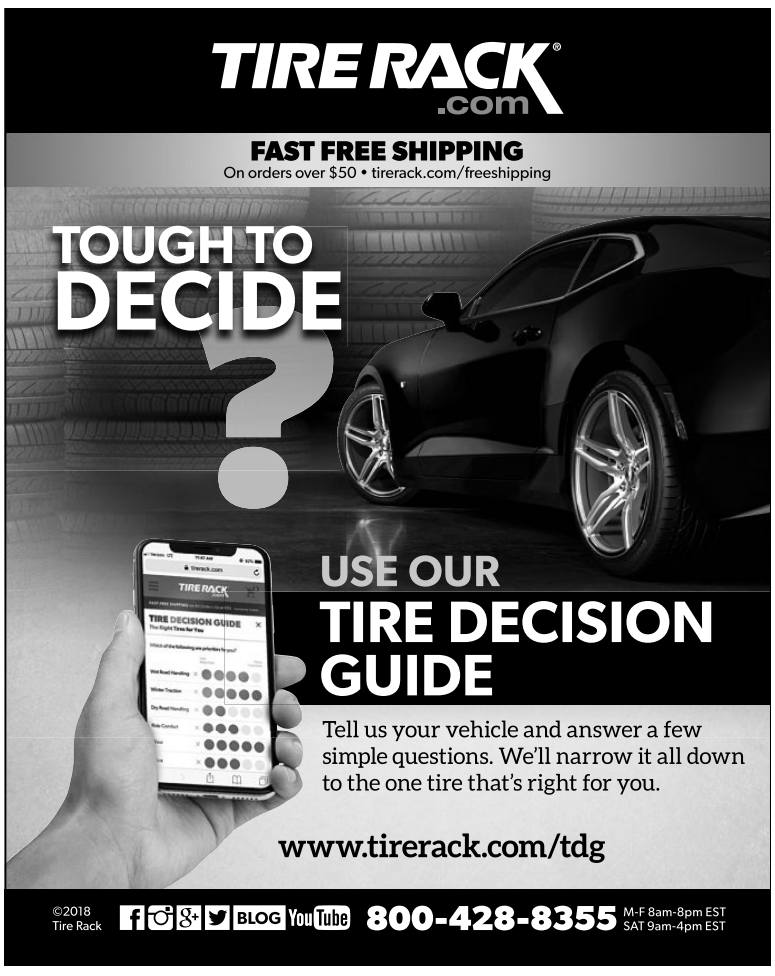
"It's the biggest jump in any sport," Vogt said. "You're going from a place where there's a few guys that have played in the big leagues, some people who might one day, to every single person is a big leaguer. There's no breaks, there's no easy at-bats. You got the best defenders in the world trying to catch the ball and now all of a sudden you're seeing pitches in situations that you've never seen before. A lot of people misrepresent that. They don't understand how big of a jump it truly is."

AP sports writers Tom Withers in Cleveland and Steve Megargee in Milwaukee contributed to this report.



ROSS D. FRANKLIN/AP

Arizona's Corbin Carroll won NL Rookie of the Year last season and finished fifth in MVP voting.



Pimlico's prestige at an all-time low

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

BALTIMORE — D. Wayne Lukas sat in his corner of the stakes barn at Pimlico Race Course earlier this week and pointed several stalls down.

"Thank God the Derby horse came," Lukas said, referring to Kentucky Derby winner Mystik Dan running in the Preakness. "It isn't always a cinch."

It used to be automatic, something that until recent years made the Preakness a must-see event with a Triple Crown chance nearly always on the line. That was not the case from 2019-22 for various reasons, and the mere possibility of Mystik Dan skipping the Preakness has led to debate over whether the race should be moved back a week or more and what can be done to restore the prestige it has had for the better part of 150 years.

Lukas, the 88-year-old Hall of Fame trainer whose next two Preakness runners will be his record-extending 47th and 48th over more than four decades coming to Baltimore, said the thought of it becoming the "stepchild" of the Triple Crown doesn't sit well with horsemen who love showing up.

But he does worry about younger colleagues being reluctant to send their top 3-year-olds back from the Derby on the first Saturday in May to the Preakness on the third Saturday in May, comparing the loss of big-name horses to having an NFL game without Patrick Mahomes.

"With the mindset of the younger trainers, that the two weeks, I don't know where they got that, but a lot of the younger trainers don't want to come back in two weeks," Lukas said. "If they extend that, I've been preaching this for 25 years though, you would get a bigger field. Most of the Derby horses would come."

Three Derby horses are set to take part in the Preakness on Saturday, up from one last year, two in 2022 and one in 2019. Except for 2020, when the Triple Crown was run out of order because of the pandemic, the traditional spacing has been two weeks between the Kentucky Derby and Preakness and then another three to the Belmont since 1969.

Top thoroughbreds nowadays rarely run every 14 days or so, a development two-time Triple Crown-winning trainer Bob Baffert compared to pitch counts in baseball and analytics alterations in other sports.

Last summer, 1/ST Racing, which operates the Preakness, floated the concept of moving it back — possibly as far as four weeks after the Derby. The New York Racing Association said at the time it had no plans to change the date of the Belmont from its spot in early June, with the idea of it pushing back to potentially conflict with Fourth of July celebrations a nonstarter.

Trainers often name the Belmont as a target destination for horses who run in but don't win the Derby. The third jewel of the Triple Crown also has no concerns about prestige each of the next two years because of the novelty of the Belmont being run at historic Saratoga Race Course, already a sellout and a festivity many in the industry and area have been salivating over since reconstruction plans for the track on Long Island first emerged.

A similar project is coming to Pimlico, but a one-year shift to Laurel Park down the road halfway to Washington in 2026 is a Band-Aid, not something anyone is looking forward to. Even in Baltimore something has to give to bring people back after the Preakness has drawn 47,000 people in 2023 and 42,000 in '22 — low numbers, even if weather-related, compared to crowds of 100,000-plus each year from 2011-19.

JULIA NIKHINSON/AP

Attendance at the Preakness dropped to 47,000 people in 2023 and 42,000 in '22 — low numbers, even if weather-related, compared to crowds of 100,000-plus each year from 2011-19.

TONY GUTIERREZ/AP

Avalanche left wing Artturi Lehkonen, left, reacts after teammate Cale Makar, right, scored during the third period of Game 5 of their second-round playoff series Wednesday against the Stars in Dallas.

Makar's 2 goals help Avs down Stars, remain alive

BY STEPHEN HAWKINS
Associated Press

DALLAS — Colorado finally got to play with the lead against the Dallas Stars, though the Avalanche are still behind in the series.

Avalanche defenseman Cale Makar scored two goals, the second after Casey Mittelstadt's go-ahead tally in the third period, and they beat top-seeded Dallas 5-3 in Game 5 on Wednesday night. The Avs snapped their three-game losing streak and extended the second-round Western Conference series.

"Obviously a do-or-die game from here on out in the series," Makar said. "Each of us, we feed off each other. ... And I felt like we were back to kind of like forcing their hand tonight."

When Mittelstadt scored just 1:12 into the third period to make it 3-2, it was the first time Colorado had led in the series except for when Miles Wood scored 11 minutes into overtime to win the series opener.

"It was great," league MVP finalist Nathan MacKinnon said about playing with a lead. "They didn't do that much, but anytime we can get a lead it's important so we're not chasing all series."

Makar made it 4-2 with an unassisted goal just over three minutes later. His shot from the middle of the right circle went through the legs of goalie Jake Oettinger and proved to be the deciding goal, and MacKinnon scored on a lone assist from Artturi Lehkonen with 3:10 left.

MacKinnon also had the only assist on Lehkonen's power-play goal in the very last second of the first period.

"We knew we were going to get their best game in the series, and they did," Stars coach Pete DeBoer said. "Their big guys all are on the scoresheet tonight, which we've probably anticipated would happen."

Avalanche goalie Alexandar Georgiev had 23 saves. Oettinger stopped 22 shots.

Joe Pavelski had his first goal of these playoffs for the Stars, and his second assist this postseason. Miro Heiskanen and rookie Logan Stankoven also scored for Dallas, and Jason Robertson had two assists.

Game 6 is Friday night in Colorado, where the Stars outscored the Avs 9-2 while winning Games 3 and 4. Dallas is 4-1 on the road this postseason — and 3-4 at home.

This was the sixth time in franchise history that the Avs won Game 5 after falling behind 3-1 in a best-of-seven series. They have never come back to win the series.

After going 0-for-8 on power plays while losing the previous three games, Colorado scored tying goals on both of its opportunities with a man advantage in the first two periods.

"I felt like once we were getting pucks, it was right on and off the stick, and trying to avoid a little bit of the pressure," Makar said, when asked what changed in Game 5. "Having that different mentality, an attack mentality, and not trying to back down or trying to look for the perfect play."

Makar got his power-play goal on a 50-foot wrister through a bunch of traffic in front of the net with 3½ minutes left in the second period to tie the game at 2-2.

"Tough-go for a handful of games ... it's a huge response after goal one, after goal two," Colorado coach Jared Bednar said.

Scoreboard

Second round

(Best-of-seven; x-if necessary)

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Florida 3, Boston 2

Boston 5, Florida 1
Florida 6, Boston 1
Florida 6, Boston 2
Florida 3, Boston 2
Boston 2, Florida 1
Friday: at Boston, **AFN-Sports2, 1 a.m. Saturday CET; 8 a.m. Saturday JKT**
x-Sunday: at Florida

N.Y. Rangers 3, Carolina 2

N.Y. Rangers 4, Carolina 3
N.Y. Rangers 4, Carolina 3, 2OT
N.Y. Rangers 3, Carolina 2, OT
Carolina 4, N.Y. Rangers 3
Carolina 4, N.Y. Rangers 1
Thursday: at Carolina
x-Saturday: at N.Y. Rangers

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Dallas 3, Colorado 2

Colorado 4, Dallas 3, OT
Dallas 5, Colorado 3
Dallas 4, Colorado 1
Dallas 5, Colorado 1
Wednesday: Colorado 5, Dallas 3
Friday: at Colorado, **AFN-Sports2, 4 a.m. Saturday CET; 11 a.m. Saturday JKT**
x-Sunday: at Dallas

Vancouver 2, Edmonton 2

Vancouver 5, Edmonton 4
Edmonton 4, Vancouver 3, OT
Vancouver 4, Edmonton 3
Edmonton 3, Vancouver 2
Thursday: at Vancouver
Saturday: at Edmonton
x-Monday: at Vancouver

NBA PLAYOFFS

Celtics reach third straight East finals

CHARLES KRUPA/AP

Celtics forward Jayson Tatum dunks against Cavaliers Dean Wade, left, and Max Strus during Game 5 of their second-round playoff series on Wednesday. Boston advanced with a 113-98 victory.

Tatum, Horford, 19 3s too much for short-handed Cavs to overcome

BY KYLE HIGHTOWER
Associated Press

BOSTON — Al Horford wanted to savor the moment.

With play stopped and the Celtics' victory no longer in doubt, Horford turned in the direction of the sideline, walked a few paces, stopped and extended his hands overhead, bringing an already raucous TD Garden crowd to its feet in applause.

The task was done.

Jayson Tatum had 25 points and 10 rebounds, and Boston beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 113-98 on Wednesday night to advance to the Eastern Conference finals for the third straight season.

Horford added 22 points, 15 rebounds, five assists and six of Boston's 19 3-pointers to help the Celtics post their third consecutive win and wrap up the series in five games.

"We had a great opportunity at home to handle this, and I knew it was going to take a lot more than handling it normally," said Horford, who joined LeBron James and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as the only players 37 years or older to record a 20-point, 15-rebound, five-assist playoff game in NBA history. "It's special. It's something that's hard to do. ... This is another positive step of where we want to get to."

The Celtics will now await the winner of the matchup between the New York Knicks and Indiana Pacers. New York leads that series 3-2.

This will be Jaylen Brown's sixth conference finals appearance and the fifth for Tatum. Tatum said it's proof that the team culture is strong.

"It just shows the character of the team, the organization. People might think it's a given we're supposed to be here," Tatum said. "We're all in this together. ... We're doing something right.

The Cavaliers played extremely short-handed without All-Star Donovan Mitchell, center Jarrett Allen and key reserve Caris LeVert.

Cleveland stayed close through the first three quarters and pulled within 88-85 early in the fourth. Boston then went on a 13-2 run to take a 101-87 lead with 6:44 to play.

Evan Mobley scored a playoff career-high 33 points and had seven rebounds. Marcus Morris Sr. had five 3-pointers and finished with 25 points.

"I was proud of their effort," Cavaliers coach J.B. Bickerstaff said. "This has been a difficult year for us, for a bunch of different reasons. They never found the time to fold on each other. All they did was find ways to compete."

Cleveland now enters a summer of uncertainty with the futures of Mitchell and Bickerstaff squarely in the spotlight.

Mitchell did everything for the Cavs in his second postseason for Cleveland. He averaged 29.6 points but didn't play in either of the final two games.

Mitchell is eligible to sign a contract extension but has not given any indication he's eager to stay or leave Cleveland.

Much like they did in Game 4 without Mitchell, the Cavs used the 3-point line to keep pace with the Celtics, making eight of 19 in the opening 24 minutes.

Cleveland nudged ahead 46-40 in the second quarter, but Boston rallied and closed with an 18-6 run to take a 58-52 lead into halftime.

"It made us answer the bell," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. "Guard your yard. The guys did it. It's a credit to them."

Horford said he's most proud of how Tatum and Brown have grown following last season's conference finals loss to Miami.

"I'm very proud of our guys continue to put work in. JT, JB, how they've continued to get better," Horford said. "Our guys continue to work and they continue to think what's best for our group."

Doncic's triple-double helps Mavs take 3-2 series lead

BY CLIFF BRUNT
Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Luka Doncic stopped worrying about calls and just played.

It worked. He scored 31 points in a triple-double, and the Dallas Mavericks beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 104-92 on Wednesday night to take a 3-2 lead in the Western Conference semifinal series.

Doncic didn't voice his displeasure with the officials nearly as much as usual, though he had words with fans a few times.

"I'm just trying to play basketball, just focus on basketball," he said. "Sometimes I forget this is the thing I love, the thing I do. My mental focus was just go out there and play basketball with a smile on my face and just go."

Doncic, the league's leading scorer in the regular season, had struggled some in the series against Oklahoma City. Playing through a sprained right knee and a sore left ankle, he had averaged just 22 points on 39% shooting through the first four games. He made 12 of 22 field goals in Game 5 and had 11 assists and 10 rebounds for his sixth career playoff triple-double.

"He was aggressive," Mavericks coach Jason Kidd said. "He was making shots, taking shots. The deep 3, being able to get to the basket, playmaking for his bigs and also for the wings."

Dallas regained the lead in the series after blowing a 14-point advantage and losing 100-96 at home in Game 4.

"We know the last game we played against them at home, we let it go," Doncic said. "It was our mistakes and they hit shots."

Derrick Jones Jr. scored a playoff career-high 19 points and P.J. Washington Jr. added 10 points and 10 rebounds for Dallas, which shot 52.6% from the floor. The No. 5-seeded Mavericks can advance to the Western Conference finals with a win Saturday at home.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 30 points for the top-seeded Thunder, but no other Oklahoma City player scored more than 13.

The Mavericks won Game 5 on the road, just like they did in the first round against the Los Angeles Clippers. Dallas held Oklahoma City to 42.5% shooting.

Coach Mark Daigneault said the Thunder simply didn't shoot well, but they found some cracks in Dallas' defense late in the game.

"I thought we were kind of there tonight and maybe missed a couple plays," Daigneault said.

Oklahoma City tried to jump-start its struggling offense by replacing Josh Giddey with Isaiah Joe in the starting lineup.

NATE BILLINGS/AP

Mavericks guard Luka Doncic, right, drives against the Thunder's Jalen Williams, left, and Lu Dort during Game 5 on Wednesday.

Dallas led by 15 in the second quarter and took a 54-44 edge into halftime. Jones scored 15 points before the break.

Gilgeous-Alexander scored 14 points in the third quarter, but Dallas still led 79-67.

Dallas pushed its lead out to 18 early in the fourth quarter before the Thunder surged. A 3-pointer by Gilgeous-Alexander cut the deficit to 89-79 with just under seven minutes remaining, but the Thunder never got closer than seven points.

Now, the Mavericks are close to advancing.

"We've got one more to win out of two games," Doncic said. "That's it. We're up 3-2, but that's still nothing. We've got to finish it and go with the same mentality at home."

"Our mood won't change, our mentality won't change," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "It's one game at a time. We wanted to win this game tonight as badly as we're going to want to win the next game."

Scoreboard

Second round

(Best-of-seven; x-if necessary)
Eastern Conference
New York 3, Indiana 2

New York 121, Indiana 117
New York 130, Indiana 121
Indiana 111, New York 106
Indiana 121, New York 89
New York 121, Indiana 91
Friday: at Indiana, **AFN-Sports, 2:30 a.m. Saturday CET, 9:30 a.m. Saturday JKT**
x-Sunday: at New York

Boston 4, Cleveland 1

Boston 120, Cleveland 95
Cleveland 118, Boston 94
Boston 106, Cleveland 93
Boston 109, Cleveland 102
Wednesday: Boston 113, Cleveland 98

Western Conference
Dallas 3, Oklahoma City 2

Oklahoma City 117, Dallas 95
Dallas 119, Oklahoma City 110
Dallas 105, Oklahoma City 101
Oklahoma City 100, Dallas 96
Wednesday: Dallas 104, Oklahoma City 92
Saturday: at Dallas, **AFN-Sports, 2 a.m. Sunday CET, 9 a.m. Sunday JKT**
x-Monday: at Oklahoma City

Denver 3, Minnesota 2

Minnesota 106, Denver 99
Minnesota 106, Denver 80
Denver 117, Minnesota 90
Denver 115, Minnesota 107
Denver 112, Minnesota 97
Thursday: at Minnesota
x-Sunday: at Denver

SPORTS

On to the next round

Celtics earn berth in East finals for third consecutive season ›› NBA playoffs, Page 47

MLB

CHARLES KRUPA/AP

Top Orioles prospect Jackson Holliday lasted just 34 at-bats in the big leagues, striking out in more than half of them. He was sent back to the minors after hitting just .059.

Are lights too bright?

After rookie renaissance, top prospects off to rocky start

BY NOAH TRISTER
Associated Press

Jackson Holliday's debut with the Baltimore Orioles went south in a hurry when the 20-year-old infielder managed only two hits in 34 at-bats, striking out in more than half his plate appearances.

If it's any consolation, there are a few other top prospects who can probably relate.

Colt Keith in Detroit? He's hitting .171. Wyatt Langford of the Texas Rangers? He batted .224 before landing on the injured list. Milwaukee's Jackson Chourio has been a little better, with five home runs to his credit, but the highly touted outfielder is hitting .219 with an on-base percentage of just .263.

None of those three were sent back to the minor leagues like Holliday — not yet, at least — but their struggles are indicative of a trend through the first month and a half of the season. Just when it appeared baseball's young standouts had mastered the transition from Triple-A to the majors, a few of the game's prized prospects showed up and went through a humbling experience.

"I think this game is so hard already. Pitching is incredibly hard to hit, harder than ever before. The world we're living in right now, and the microscope these guys are under, makes it way more difficult," Orioles manager Brandon Hyde said. "It's just how it is right now. With social media, pressure, and all these things, it's challenging."

What makes this season a surprise is that it comes on the heels of a couple of great years for rookies. Last year's class of rookie hitters produced the second-most wins above re-

SEE BRIGHT ON PAGE 45

Highly touted Brewers outfielder Jackson Chourio has hit five home runs, but is hitting .219 with an on-base percentage of just .263.

NICK WASS/AP

Avs stay alive, force Game 6 with Stars

›› NHL playoffs, Page 46

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