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OHAD ZWIGENBERG/AP

Israeli army troops are seen next to a destroyed building during a ground operation in the Gaza Strip on Nov. 8. As the military sets its sights on southern Gaza in its campaign to stamp out Hamas, key challenges loom.

All eyes on southern Gaza

As Israeli military moves in, problems loom in next phase of war

BY JOSEF FEDERMAN
Associated Press

JERUSALEM — After raiding the Gaza Strip's largest hospital, Israel appears close to completing its takeover of the besieged territory's northern sector, which it has described as the headquarters of the ruling Hamas militant group.

But as the military sets its sights on southern Gaza in its campaign to stamp out Hamas, key challenges loom: International patience for a protracted invasion has begun to wear thin, and with nearly 2 million displaced Gaza civilians staying in overcrowded shelters in the south, a broad military offensive there could unleash a new humanitarian disaster during the cold, wet winter.

Here's a closer look at what could lie ahead in the coming weeks:

MIDEAST
Hamas reportedly agrees to tentative hostage deal
Page 7

Two phases

Israel declared war in response to Hamas' unprecedented cross-border incursion on Oct. 7, when the Islamic militant group killed at least 1,200 people and took some 240 others hostage. Israel has set two goals: a return of all hostages and the destruction of Hamas' military and governing capabilities.

In the first phase, Israel carried out weeks of blistering airstrikes across Gaza on what it said were Hamas military installations, many of them in residential neighborhoods. Nearly three weeks ago, it launched a second phase — a ground operation aimed at destroying Hamas' military capabilities in northern Gaza, including an underground tunnel network used to move its supplies and fighters.

The main focus of this phase has been densely populated Gaza City, where Israel says Hamas' most

SEE GAZA ON PAGE 7

Biden, Xi open to restoring some regular military talks

BY LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed Wednesday to restore some military-to-military communications between their armed forces as the two leaders met for hours on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco.

Both sides pledged cooperation that would bring the U.S. and China closer to resuming regular talks under what's known as the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement, which until 2020 had been used to improve safety in the air and on the sea.

"That's been cut off. That's been worrisome," Biden said at a news conference after his meeting with Xi. "So we're back to direct, open, clear, direct communication."

A senior U.S. official said the military communication agreements mean that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin can meet with his Chinese counterpart once that person is named. The official

SEE TALKS ON PAGE 8

DOUG MILLS/AP

President Joe Biden greets China's President Xi Jinping at the Filoli Estate in Woodside, Calif., on Wednesday.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Germany	$3.758	$4.317	$4.671	$4.703
Change in price	-4.7 cents	No change	-5.0 cents	-7.2 cents
Netherlands	..	$4.636	$4.907	$5.149
Change in price	..	-1.0 cents	-0.6 cents	-3.2 cents
U.K.	..	$4.317	$4.671	$4.703
Change in price	..	No change	-5.0 cents	-7.2 cents
Azores	..	..	$4.521	..
Change in price	..	..	-5.0 cents	..
Turkey	..	..	$4.337	$5.018*
Change in price	..	..	-5.0 cents	No change

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

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Japan	..	$4.309	..	$4.349
Change in price	..	-5.0 cents	..	-7.0 cents
Okinawa	$3.399	..	..	$4.349
Change in price	-5.0 cents	..	..	-7.0 cents
South Korea	$3.429	..	$4.349	$4.379
Change in price	-5.0 cents	..	-5.0 cents	-7.0 cents
Guam	$3.459**	$4.019	$4.369	..
Change in price	-5.0 cents	-5.0 cents	-5.0 cents	..

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

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (Nov. 17)	$1.06
British pound (Nov. 17)	$1.21
Japanese yen (Nov. 17)	147.00
South Korean won (Nov. 17)	1273.00

Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3769
Britain (Pound)	1.2434
Canada (Dollar)	1.3742
China (Yuan)	7.2438
Denmark (Krone)	6.8568
Egypt (Pound)	30.9262
Euro	0.9193
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8027
Hungary (Forint)	346.08
Israel (Shekel)	3.7382
Japan (Yen)	150.63
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3084
Norway (Krone)	10.8523
Philippines (Peso)	55.68
Poland (Zloty)	4.01
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7504
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3460
South Korea (Won)	1291.16
Switzerland (Franc)	0.8868
Thailand (Baht)	35.23
Turkey (NewLira)	28.6738

(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	5.42
30-year bond	4.68

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

FRIDAY IN EUROPE

SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

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

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MILITARY

‘Not a surprise’: Pentagon again fails audit

By Doug G. Ware
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has again failed its independent annual audit, mainly because defense officials could not provide auditors with enough information to form a full accounting evaluation, according to the Defense Department’s yearly financial report released Wednesday.

“Auditing the department’s $3.8 trillion in assets and $4 trillion in liabilities is a massive undertaking,” Pentagon Comptroller Michael McCord said. “But the improvements and changes we are making every day as a result of these audits positively affect every soldier, sailor, airman, Marine, guardian and DOD civilian.”

Hundreds of independent auditors examine the Pentagon’s books each year to determine whether it can account for the money it’s given and how effectively the military is spending it. There are three possible audit ratings — an unqualified opinion, a qualified opinion and a disclaimer of opinion.

The consolidated 2023 audit, which is the overall accounting of the Defense Department, gave a disclaimer of opinion, which means the Pentagon couldn’t give auditors enough financial data to allow them to form an opinion. An unqualified, or “clean,” opinion is the highest possible rating and a qualified opinion is an acceptable rating. Both mean that auditors were given enough information to make a complete judgment.

“This was the sixth year of progress toward an unmodified opinion,” the department said in a statement. “Of the 29 component standalone audits, seven received unmodified opinions, one received a qualified opinion and 18 received disclaimers of opinion.”

The Pentagon said the remaining three component opinions are pending.

That includes the 2023 audit for the Marine Corps, which was granted an extension until mid-February to furnish more information to auditors.

McCord told reporters Wednesday during a conference call that the Pentagon expected it would not get a clean opinion.

“If even one large component of DOD, such as a military department, doesn’t have an unmodified opinion, it’s mathematically impossible for the entire department to have one,” he said. “So given where we are, this was not a surprise.”

The Pentagon has never passed the yearly audit. The first audit only became federally required in 2018 and the department has been trying to pass them ever since. The 2022 audit also earned an opinion of disclaimer and McCord said a year ago that he was disappointed that report didn’t show more progress.

He seemed more pleased with the audit progress this time.

“We remain a trusted institution, and we recognize that we have the obligation to do everything to maintain that trust,” he said.

“We have made a lot of progress, and I look forward to our continued improvement.”

The Defense Department continues to be the only Cabinet-level department that’s never earned a clean financial report. Earlier this year, the Government Accountability Office said there are two reasons for that: The Pentagon isn’t managing its financial systems properly and isn’t giving the necessary guidance to make them effective.

“DOD spends billions of dollars each year on its business and financial systems. However, its business systems modernization and financial management efforts have been on GAO’s High Risk List since 1995,” the GAO report concluded in March. “These high-risk areas remain obstacles to DOD’s efforts to achieve [a clean] audit.”

The GAO’s High Risk List, which is updated at the start of every new Congress, identifies federal programs that are especially susceptible to fraud, abuse, mismanagement and waste.

The Pentagon said Wednesday that significant progress was made across five areas in 2023: workforce modernization, business operations, quality decision-making, reliable networks and enhanced public confidence.

McCord

“For example, the Department of the Air Force has deployed a total of 65 [automated systems] saving approximately 429,000 labor hours and improving the auditability of business processes,” the Pentagon report said. “The Department of the Navy reviewed $17 billion of unliquidated obligations, validating that 97% of the balances met audit requirements and uncovering $330 million available for deobligation.”

The Pentagon said it also retired several “audit-relevant legacy systems” and “resolved three high priority improper payment programs” to reduce wasted tax dollars.

Further, it asked for more help from Congress, which has yet to pass full government funding for fiscal 2024, which began Oct. 1.

The House passed a new continuing resolution on Tuesday that would guarantee funding for the military until Feb. 2 and the Senate gave final approval Wednesday night to the package, which provides a funding patch until next year.

Congress has become increasingly critical of the Pentagon’s failed audits — and some lawmakers have even proposed punishment if the trend continues.

In the summer, a bipartisan group of senators raised the Audit the Pentagon Act, which would penalize any military component that fails the annual audits and force it to surrender 1% of its budget. Lawmakers have previously, but unsuccessfully, attempted to pass similar legislation.

“Last year, the DOD … was unable to account for over half of its assets,” the bipartisan group said when they announced the bill in June.

“We have got to end the absurdity of the Pentagon being the only agency in the federal government that has never passed an independent audit,” said Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., one of the bill’s sponsors.

The Defense Department said about 1,600 auditors worked on the 2023 audit, which cost $187 million — a reduction from the $218 million that the Pentagon’s 2022 accounting cost.

McCord did not explain why the new audit cost less, but the report said auditors made fewer on-site visits and more virtual visits than they did a year ago.

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US sending Israel more ammo, missiles, DOD list shows

By Tony Capaccio
Bloomberg News

The Pentagon has quietly ramped up military aid to Israel, delivering on requests that include more laser-guided missiles for its Apache gunship fleet, as well as 155 mm shells, night-vision devices, bunker-buster munitions and new army vehicles, according to an internal Defense Department list.

The weapons pipeline to Israel is extending beyond the well-publicized provision of Iron Dome interceptors and Boeing smart bombs. It continues even as Biden administration officials increasingly caution Israel about trying to avoid civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip.

The arms sought by Israel as it fights Hamas, designated as a terrorist group by the U.S. and European Union, are listed in a document labeled “Israel Senior Leader” requests that’s dated late October and is circulating in the Pentagon.

The arms are already being shipped or the Defense Department is working to make them available from stockpiles in the U.S. and Europe, according to the document reviewed by Bloomberg News. As of late October, for example, all 36,000 rounds of 30 mm cannon ammunition, 1,800 of the requested M141 bunker-buster munitions and at least 3,500 night-vision devices were delivered, the tally shows.

Ohad Zwigenberg/AP

An Israeli mobile artillery unit is seen in a position near the Israel-Gaza border on Oct. 28. The Pentagon has increased military aid to Israel, delivering on requests that include more laser-guided missiles for its Apache gunships, according to an internal Defense Department list.

A Pentagon spokesman declined to discuss specifics, but the Defense Department said in a statement that it’s “leveraging several avenues — from internal stocks to U.S. industry channels — to ensure Israel has the means to defend itself.”

“This security assistance continues to arrive on a near-daily basis,” according to the statement.

It said the U.S. was rapidly providing precision-guided munitions, small-diameter bombs, 155 mm artillery shells and other munitions. That’s along with Iron Dome interceptors and medical support equipment.

The Israeli Embassy in Washington declined to comment on the U.S. arms supplies.

The provision of artillery shells and other munitions has drawn criticism from nongovernmental organizations that say the U.S. supplies have allowed Israel to press ahead with a bombing campaign that Hamas-run health authorities in the Gaza Strip say have killed more than 10,000 people.

The ammunition for AH-64 Apache helicopter gunships includes about 2,000 Hellfire Laser Guided missiles made by Lockheed Martin, some of which Israel has transferred to its forces as U.S. Army teams seek supplies from stocks in Germany and South Korea, according to the tally. It also includes more than 36,000 rounds of 30 mm ammunition to be fired by the Apache’s cannon.

Israel has also requested more than 57,000 155 mm High Explosive artillery shells and 20,000 M4A1 rifles, as many as 5,000 PVS-14 night vision devices, 3,000 M141 hand-held bunker-buster munitions that U.S. Central Command is supplying, 400 120 mm mortars and 75 of the Army and Marine Corps’ new Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, which is replacing the Hummer.

According to the tally, the U.S. has also donated its inventory of 312 Tamir missile interceptors. The Army’s two Iron Dome batteries are traveling to Israel by sealift.

Israel has also requested 200 armor-piercing Switchblade 600 dive-bombing drones made by AeroVironment Inc. Ukraine has bought the drones directly from the company.

The U.S. Army doesn’t have any Switchblade 600s in its inventory. It’s unclear whether AeroVironment has the drones in stock or would need to build them. An AeroVironment spokesperson declined to comment.

MILITARY

Okinawa loses 3rd suit over Marine airfield

By Matthew M. Burke and Mari Higa
Stars and Stripes

NAHA, Okinawa — A Japanese court has denied another legal challenge by Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki to stop construction of a Marine Corps runway on Camp Schwab.

A three-judge panel at Naha District Court dismissed a lawsuit filed by Okinawa prefecture seeking to block changes to construction permits required by Japan's Ministry of Defense to finish the project.

The judges found the prefecture lacked standing to file suit, according to a copy of the decision released after Wednesday's hearing.

"The lawsuit is dismissed," Judge Hideki Fujii told the packed courtroom. The hearing lasted less than a minute.

The district court's decision is the third legal defeat for the prefecture this year. The Japan Supreme Court ruled against Okinawa in similar suits in August and September.

The suit was filed in September 2022, according to the prefectural website. Oral arguments were heard in February, April and July.

Tamaki, who did not appear at the proceedings, is weighing an appeal, a spokesman from the prefecture's Henoko Base Construction Countermeasures Division said by phone Thursday. Some government officials in Japan may speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

"I am extremely disappointed," Tamaki said in a statement on the prefecture's website shortly after the decision. "I was expecting the court to issue a fair and neutral ruling based on the essence of local autonomy guaranteed by the Constitution."

The unfinished airfield being built on reclaimed land in Oura Bay is meant to one day replace Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in urban Ginowan. That base, surrounded by densely packed city neighborhoods, is considered inherently dangerous by some Japanese officials.

The construction zone at Schwab is divided into two main sections — 279 acres on the base's north side and 91 acres in the south, the prefecture's website said. Work on the larger parcel has been on hold since April 21, 2020, when the Okinawa Defense Bureau, which represents the Defense Ministry on the island, asked Tamaki to approve changes to the construction plans.

Tamaki refused, arguing that the soft seabed there poses a hazard and that Tokyo had failed to consider the environmental impact on the endangered dugong, a cousin of the manatee protected by Japanese law.

Two years later, land minister Tetsuo Saito called Tamaki's denial "illegal and unreasonable" and overturned the decision. Tamaki then filed three lawsuits, which have all been dismissed, including the two rejected by the Supreme Court.

Tamaki has refused to honor the Supreme Court's decisions and has been subsequently sued by Saito, who seeks to supplant the governor's approval authority. Oral arguments in that case began in the Fukuoka High Court on Oct. 30; the next court date is not yet set, a court spokeswoman said Thursday.

On Wednesday, about 20 people, mostly elderly Okinawans, filed into the courtroom in anticipation of the verdict. The panel ruled design changes are a government function and are delegated only to local officials for approval.

Tamaki said the decision threatens the autonomy and independence of local governments. A ministry spokesman declined to comment on the ruling when reached by phone Thursday.

Out of 11 lawsuits the prefecture has filed attempting to stop the airfield, it has lost six, three have been withdrawn and one is pending in Fukuoka High Court.

The project, originally slated for completion by 2014, will now take until at least 2032 and cost the Japanese government $6.9 billion.

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Jared Mancuso/U.S. Navy

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland delivers remarks at a ship naming ceremony for the future USS Ernest E. Evans, in Annapolis, Md., on Wednesday.

Destroyer to be named in honor of Native American WWII hero

By Alison Bath
Stars and Stripes

A future Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer will bear the name of a World War II hero who was the first Native American in the Navy to earn a Medal of Honor.

It will be the service's second ship named for Cmdr. Ernest Evans, who was killed on Oct. 25, 1944, during the Battle of Leyte Gulf near the Philippine Islands, the Navy said in a statement Wednesday. The battle is considered one of the largest naval engagements of World War II.

The service didn't say when the destroyer, identified as Arleigh Burke Flight III class DDG-141, officially would be christened. It also wasn't clear if the destroyer already was under construction. The destroyer escort vessel USS Evans, launched in 1955, also was named in his honor, according to the statement. The Navy didn't say when that ship was decommissioned.

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, the first Native American to serve as a Cabinet secretary, will be the ship's sponsor, according to the statement.

"As we honor Cmdr. Evans with this stunning vessel, we also honor the service of Indigenous servicemembers nationwide, past and present," Haaland said in the statement.

Evans, of Cherokee and Creek heritage, enlisted in the Navy in 1926, entering the U.S. Naval Academy a year later and graduating in 1931.

In 1943, he assumed command of the Fletcher-class destroyer USS Johnston. During the ship's commissioning, he reportedly told the crew and audience that the Johnston was a fighting ship and that he intended "to go in harm's way, and anyone who doesn't want to go along had better get off right now."

About a year later, the Johnston was in the lead of an offensive attack against much larger Japanese forces off the coast of the Philippines. Evans is credited with repeatedly putting the Johnston between the enemy and more vulnerable U.S. ships, saving the lives of thousands of sailors, according to the statement.

The Johnston, with Evans aboard, ultimately was lost. He posthumously was awarded the Medal of Honor and earned a Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon, the Navy said.

US military cooks take 3rd at Seoul competition

By Christopher Green
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — A team of culinary specialists with 2nd Infantry Division placed third overall and first among their American competitors at an international military cooking competition in South Korea's capital.

The five team members from the 581st Quartermaster Company, 2nd Sustainment Brigade competed on Nov. 7 against 11 other teams, including two more from the 2nd ID, eight from the South Korean military and one from the Singapore navy.

"With the preparation we had, we didn't expect anything," Sgt. Josiah Agcaoili told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday. "It's a real honor and a good experience for us."

The competition, sponsored by South Korea's Ministry of National Defense, took place in the aT convention center in Seoul.

South Korean air force teams took first and second place in the annual event that promotes friendship and harmony between South Korean and foreign military cooks, according to a Defense Ministry press release.

Each team had to bring their creativity and skill to bear in three categories: personalized burger, mystery basket and special cuisine.

For their burger, the 581st team, led by Staff Sgt. Joshua Hoyt, whipped up a seasoned ground beef patty with spicy mayo, fried egg and Asian-inspired coleslaw.

In its mystery bag, the team found instant noodles and canned tuna with herbs and spices, similar in consistency to a crab cake. They turned their ingredients into a fried tuna cake over ramen noodles.

Finally, their special cuisine found inspiration at home and abroad: stuffed chicken breast, American chicken gravy, Southern-style sweet potatoes, fried cabbage, fried fish and sausage japchae (a South Korean dish with noodles and vegetables). A blueberry cheesecake bite stood for dessert.

Their special cuisine put the 581st over the top among the American teams.

"We kind of felt like we used a little bit of soul food, and then we twisted it with Seoul city — that was kind of our inspiration," Hoyt said by phone Wednesday.

U.S. ARMY

A culinary team prepares their special cuisine during an international military cooking competition in Seoul, South Korea, on Nov. 7.

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MILITARY

Navy warship shoots down drone launched from Yemen

By Matthew Adams
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The guided-missile destroyer USS Thomas Hudner shot down a drone launched from Yemen over the Red Sea early Wednesday, according to two defense officials.

"While transiting the international waters of the Red Sea, the crew of the USS Thomas Hudner engaged a drone that originated from Yemen and was heading in the direction of the ship. There were no U.S. casualties or any damage to the ship," a defense official said in a statement on the condition of anonymity.

It was not clear Wednesday who is responsible for launching the drone. Earlier this week, the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen threatened to attack ships in the Red Sea.

This is the second intercept by a U.S. Navy vessel since Hamas militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7. Last month, the USS Carney shot down several drones and missiles fired by Houthi forces in the direction of Israel.

The latest incident comes after the Houthis shot down a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drone last week over the Red Sea.

The U.S. has sent an additional 1,200 troops to the Middle East in recent weeks along with two aircraft carrier strike groups and more aircraft to support Israel in its fight against Hamas and deter an escalation of the conflict in the region.

The United States has also carried out three airstrikes in Syria at sites tied to Iran-backed militants. Most recently, two strikes occurred in Syria on Sunday. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the strikes targeted a training facility near the city of Albu Kamal and a safe house near the city of Mayadeen. The previous strikes occurred Oct. 26 and Nov. 8.

Stars and Stripes reporter J.P. Lawrence contributed to this report.
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Jacob Vernier/U.S. Navy

A MARTAC T-38 Devil Ray unmanned boat operates in the Persian Gulf on Oct. 26.

Navy looking to add punch to drone boats in Mideast

By J.P. Lawrence
Stars and Stripes

MANAMA, Bahrain — The Navy's use of a drone boat to fire missiles during a recent exercise in the Persian Gulf is a marker of more to come, the commander of America's naval test unit in the Middle East said Wednesday.

Task Force 59, a unit known for using unmanned surface vessels to patrol the waters of the Middle East, is beginning work on arming drones with kinetic weaponry such as missiles, Capt. Colin Corridan, the unit's commander, said in an interview at his headquarters in Manama.

The unit used an unmanned speed boat to fire Switchblade missiles in an exercise Oct. 23, marking the first use of lethal munitions by American drone boats in the region.

"We've made that leap," Corridan said in his first in-person interview since assuming command of the task force in March.

While the unit will continue to build up its fleet of surveillance drones, Task Force 59 has "pivoted to kinetic," Corridan said.

Future exercises will expand the number of combat-capable unmanned systems, statements by the Navy's 5th Fleet have said.

The task force, which has about 30 staff members, is looking into giving its fleet of drone boats "electronic warfare" capabilities, Corridan said, using a term that commonly refers to jammers.

The unit also plans to develop drone boats that can operate if an enemy jams communication or denies access to GPS signals, Corridan said.

Asked if his unit is experimenting with the type of exploding drone boats that Ukraine has used in its conflict with Russia, Corridan did not rule the idea out, and said the command is considering an array of options for testing.

The Navy has not yet deployed armed drone boats on missions, Corridan said.

Tensions in the Middle East between the U.S. and Iran and its proxy groups have flared up since the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas against Israel, with American warships shooting down drones at least twice since then.

Navy officials have said they aim to rely more on unmanned vessels to keep an eye on Middle East waterways, through which much of the world's trade transits.

Task Force 59 unmanned surface vessels have sailed the waters all around the Middle East since the unit was founded in 2021.

Drone boats have been used as part of increased patrols by the Navy in the Strait of Hormuz over the summer, as tensions between the U.S. and Iran flared over accusations that Tehran was harassing civilian shipping.

During the interview, Corridan pointed to a video, taken by a drone boat of an Iranian ship, as an example of the type of surveillance these vessels are engaged in.

On two occasions in 2022, Iran took possession of drone boats before releasing them. But they have not taken any others since then, Corridan said, adding that the drones to be armed with missiles will be fast speedboats that can quickly move out of danger.

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VETERANS

Use of psychedelics to treat PTSD touted

By Linda F. Hersey
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Researchers and veterans testifying Tuesday on the use of psychedelic drugs to relieve post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal thoughts urged House lawmakers to back more studies into the alternative treatments.

Treating serious depression with psychedelics "puts the mind, body and spirit in the place it needs to be so the therapy can work," said Jonathan Lubecky, who served in the Army and Marine Corps.

Joe Gromelski/Special to Stars and Stripes

Jonathan Lubecky speaks at a Capitol Hill news conference in June.

Lubecky told lawmakers that he had suicidal thoughts after returning home from Iraq in 2006. He learned about and enrolled in a four-month clinical trial with MAPS Public Benefit Corp. that involved treatment of PTSD with psychedelic drugs followed by intensive psychotherapy, which he completed in 2015.

MAPS is the Multidisciplinary Association of Psychedelic Studies, a nonprofit research and educational company.

"I not only worked through my trauma from Iraq, but my whole life, and excised those demons for good," Lubecky said, adding he has not used the drugs since his supervised treatment.

He now serves as legislative director of Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions, a nonprofit that advocates for psychedelic-assisted therapies for veterans. The organization provides grants for veterans to receive treatments outside the United States.

At the House Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing conducted by its health oversight subpanel, veterans and clinicians talked about experiences and promising outcomes from "psychedelic-assisted therapies" offered in research settings.

The hearing looked at emerging therapies where testing is underway. Lawmakers sought to collect information from researchers, clinicians and veterans about their views on the effectiveness of psychedelic-assisted therapies and understand the guidelines for administering treatments.

Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, R-Iowa, the subcommittee chairwoman, said she has witnessed the struggles veterans face with PTSD and suicidal symptoms.

"For many veterans this treatment is lifesaving," said Miller-Meeks, who is a physician and Army veteran.

"But we must urge caution," she added. "We are not advocating for the legalization or casual use of psychedelics. What we are discussing is the clinically administered doses of these substances in combination with targeted therapy sessions in a clinical setting."

Miller-Meeks and other lawmakers asked about the progress into the science and research of psychedelic-assisted therapies as well as the challenges ahead.

Witnesses urged support for more studies and testing by the VA, and several noted they hope the Food and Drug Administration will grant regulatory approval for the clinical delivery of certain psychedelic drugs for treatment of PTSD.

"What do you see as the key things for the VA and the committee to focus on, on the very near term?" asked Rep. Julia Brownley of California, the top Democrat on the committee.

Juliana Mercer, a Marine Corps veteran and director of veteran advocacy and public policy for the nonprofit Healing Breakthrough, said the VA needs to plan for challenges in implementing the "novel treatment" if it receives regulatory approval.

"We've worked really closely with VA stakeholders to identify some of these critical logistical challenges and potential solutions. They're going to need to train thousands of clinicians, find the right facilities and have the [capacity] to facilitate this treatment."

The focus is not just on advancing "the best innovative treatments" for veterans but achieving it safely, Dr. Carolyn Clancy, assistant undersecretary for health with the Office of Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"This is especially true for studies that test compounds such as MDMA and psilocybin as part of an intensive psychotherapy program to treat veterans with PTSD, depression and other mental health conditions."

By MDMA, she referred to the clinical use of small doses of a psychedelic drug commonly known as ecstasy in controlled settings. Psilocybin is a mushroom extract that has hallucinogenic properties.

Clancy said current studies are funded largely by outside philanthropic organizations. The substances are listed as Schedule 1 drugs that are federally banned and illegal.

Schedule 1 drugs are not currently accepted as medical treatments.

Funding for psychedelic-assisted research is not restricted by statute but requires oversight and approval by the FDA and Drug Enforcement Agency, which can delay research and testing.

"VA ensures the treatments take place in safe environments and potential participants undergo comprehensive evaluations," Clancy said, adding "potential research participants undergo careful medical and psychiatric screening to make sure it is safe for them to participate.

She said the Veterans Health Administration held a conference last month on the use of psychedelics in improving the mental health of veterans that enabled researchers to discuss and understand the state of scientific evidence.

Clancy said the conference determined the need for more clinical trials for enrolling more veterans. She said trials using MDMA treatment for PTSD have shown significant reductions in PTSD symptoms.

At the same time, Clancy said the VHA is looking at other promising treatments for severe depression that include transcranial magnetic stimulation for PTSD and depression, even with patients who've experienced traumatic brain injuries.

VA's electronic health records system failures scrutinized

By Linda F. Hersey
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The modernized electronic health records system at the Department of Veterans Affairs is designed to provide instant access to digital medical records of patients across the VA and partner health care agencies.

But the federal electronic health care records program, known as EHR, is experiencing partial system failures that are impacting the veterans and clinicians who use it. Problems span from system crashes to errors to delays and downtimes, VA technology leaders told lawmakers.

The hearing held Wednesday by the House Veterans' Affairs Committee subpanel on technology modernization was described as a "deep dive" into ongoing challenges for users of the Oracle Health system and how the problems are being addressed.

Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, D-Fla., said she was disappointed Oracle Health did not have a representative at the hearing, after the employee scheduled to appear had to cancel.

"The fact they did not send a representative raises major concerns for me," she said.

Lawmakers turned to Kurt DelBene, assistant VA secretary for information and technology, and Laura Prietula, the VA's deputy chief information officer overseeing the electronic health record modernization integration office, for answers.

DelBene said the VA is working to hold Oracle Health more accountable for system reliability.

The VA increased financial consequences under contract re-negotiations in May 2023 related to technical performance and the end-user experience. DelBene said the VA has seen improvements as a result.

"We believe that this new contract gives VA the tools we need to hold Oracle accountable to deliver an EHR that will meaningfully improve veterans' health outcomes and benefits," the VA said in a prepared statement when the new contract was announced.

In May 2018, the VA signed a $10 billion contract with Cerner, which later was purchased by Oracle, to overhaul its health records system and make it compatible with the Defense Department records system. The contract later was revised to $16.1 billion.

Rep. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont., the subcommittee chairman, said Wednesday that system functionality continues to be unstable in some areas.

"VA and Oracle have come up with many different words to describe this problem — outages, downtime, incidents, performance degradations, user interruptions, incomplete functionality. They all mean that the EHR is not working, and that staff can't use it," he said.

"Far too often the EHR amounts to a multibillion-dollar frozen screen or a brick on the employee's desk," Rosendale said.

Medical exams are interrupted or delayed when the system goes down. Clinicians are forced to document findings and write medical orders on paper to enter into the computer system later. Procedures sometimes are canceled altogether, Rosendale said.

"In at least a dozen incidents some sort of EHR outage directly contributed to a close call for patient harm," he said.

Though nationwide outages with the system are down, crashes, errors and other incidents at individual facilities continue to be a challenge, Rosendale said.

Online patient registration and scheduling were another area identified as having problems.

Rosendale and other lawmakers said reports from Oracle Health and the VA about improvements and gains contradict problems reported by employees and facilities.

A recent survey of VA employees showed only 26% agreed the EHR was available as they needed it in the last two weeks, Rosendale said. More than half said downtime was a problem.

The high number of requests from users for technical help limits the responsiveness of technicians, with some employees no longer bothering to file tickets for assistance with the help desk.

"The data does not seem to match what we hear from frontline staff," Cherfilus-McCormick said. End-users said the system is frequently slow or nonfunctional.

"We have heard repeatedly about Oracle Health pushing updates that break other functions of the EHR and in many cases pushing the updates in the middle of the day," she added.

DelBene said that VA customizations have resulted in many changes, creating more interruptions until unanticipated defects are addressed.

"Improving system reliability remains a critical focus," he said. "The rate of change is still very high. In some cases, the VA is requesting functionality never deployed in Oracle Health commercially."

Prietula also emphasized the VA "significantly customized its platform," which meant additional work had to be done for the system to run smoothly.

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MIDEAST

ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES/AP

In this image taken from a video released on Monday, an Israeli soldier holds a weapon in Gaza City.

Gaza: Concern rises for Palestinians as Israel pushes south looking for top leaders

FROM PAGE 1

important military assets are located. After seizing sites such as the former parliament building, police headquarters and the urban Shati refugee camp next to Gaza City, troops early Wednesday raided Shifa Hospital.

The hospital is Gaza's largest and most important, and at the time of the Israeli raid was treating hundreds of patients with serious conditions, including some three dozen premature babies. Israel rejected Palestinian claims that the raid endangered the patients. It says that Hamas hides important command centers inside the hospital. On Wednesday, it unveiled what it said was a collection of weapons and military equipment it found, but it offered no proof of underground bunkers or sophisticated command centers.

Israeli leaders have expressed satisfaction with the pace of the operation so far. But it has come at a great cost: Palestinian health officials in the Hamas-run government say that over 11,200 people have been killed, the vast majority women and minors. Thousands of homes have been destroyed, and hundreds of thousands of people have fled to southern Gaza, where they live in dire conditions. The army says 46 soldiers have been killed in the ground offensive.

While Israel says Palestinian civilians are safer in southern Gaza, it has continued to carry out deadly airstrikes there on what it says are Hamas targets but has also killed many civilians. Conditions could become even more difficult as Israel turns its focus to the south.

Why the south?

Israeli leaders have largely dismissed international concerns about the rising death toll and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and have vowed to press ahead until Hamas is destroyed.

That means a push into southern Gaza, where Hamas' military infrastructure — including thousands of fighters and an underground tunnel network — is believed to be intact. Officials also suspect that Hamas' top commanders could be hiding in the area.

"There is no place in Gaza that we will not reach," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Israeli troops along the Gaza border on Wednesday. "There is no hiding, no shelter, no refuge for the murderers of Hamas."

Amir Avivi, a retired general and former deputy commander of the army's Gaza Division, said that calling off the operation now was not an option.

"You cannot really destroy Hamas without taking the whole Gaza Strip," said Avivi, who heads the Israel Defense and Security Forum, a group of hawkish former security commanders. "It's not possible."

Trouble ahead

A push into southern Gaza poses several challenges for Israel.

With most of Gaza's population now crammed into public shelters or private homes and Hamas embedded in residential neighborhoods, heavy street fighting in the south would likely result in high civilian casualties.

Israel says Hamas is responsible for these casualties and accuses it of using civilians as human shields. But the international community — even Israel's closest ally, the United States — has expressed rising concerns about the civilian death toll. The U.S. has not told Israel to wrap up the war, but it has warned the Israelis that international criticism will grow the longer the war lasts.

Avivi said many displaced Palestinians could move to a "humanitarian zone" that Israel is trying to establish in southwest Gaza, or better yet, to neighboring Egypt. "This is the safest place for them," he said.

However, each of these scenarios is problematic. Egypt has repeatedly made clear that it does not want a mass of Palestinian refugees in its territory, and the Biden administration has warned that Palestinians must not be pushed out of Gaza.

The proposed humanitarian area, called Muwasi, is relatively small and underdeveloped, with no infrastructure to support hundreds of thousands of people.

Giora Eiland, a retired Israeli general and head of the country's National Security Council, said international pressure would have little influence.

He said there is such broad support in Israel for the war that it will be hard to stop. He said Israel might reconsider if Hamas surrenders or collapses or can be persuaded through international mediators like Qatar to release all of the hostages — scenarios that seem unlikely.

With Israel expected to take another two or three months to complete the offensive, Eiland said a worsening humanitarian emergency is "inevitable."

"I don't think there is a reasonable way that we can prevent a humanitarian crisis there," he said. "Everybody can expect to see terrible scenes from there. But it is not going to stop Israel."

Reports: Hamas OK with partial hostage release

BY KAREN DEYOUNG
The Washington Post

Hamas has agreed in principle and Israel is now considering a proposal for the release of at least 50 women and children among about 240 foreign and Israeli hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza, according to an Arab diplomat familiar with the negotiations.

In exchange for the hostages, Israel would agree to a three-to-five-day pause "in place" in the fighting, increased humanitarian aid to Gaza, and the release of an unspecified number of women and children held in Israeli prisons.

Amid reports that agreement on at least some components of a deal may be near, U.S. officials and other interested parties spent much of Wednesday awaiting word from Israel, where internal discussions were said to be underway. Senior Biden administration officials have said this week that the United States is engaged in "hour by hour" negotiations over a hostage release with Israel and the government of Qatar, which is serving as a go-between for Hamas.

But the Arab diplomat and others familiar with the talks, all of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity about the sensitive negotiations, cautioned that the arrangement currently under discussion could fall apart, as have others up to now. Previous proposals have outlined some of the same parameters, with different numbers of hostages involved and conditions placed on their release.

"We should be hearing back today," the diplomat said. If the Israelis agree, "it's going to happen quickly. If they reject it, then we're at it again."

The hope is that agreement on a deal for the release of at least some of the captives could lead to further talks on freeing the remainder of those held in Gaza. Hamas has indicated previously that it will keep Israeli military hostages, estimated to number several dozen, apparently for use in separate exchanges for Palestinian militants.

The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other members of his war cabinet refused to comment.

President Joe Biden, after speaking again Tuesday with Netanyahu, told reporters about a potential hostage release that "I've been talking with the people involved every single day. I believe it's going to happen." Asked whether he had a message for families awaiting news of the captives, nine of whom are believed to be American citizens, along with one permanent U.S. resident, Biden said: "Hang in there. We're coming."

Hamas has told negotiators that it does not have control, or know the location, of all of the hostages — some of whom it says are being held by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, another militant group inside Gaza.

Police, Gaza war protesters clash outside Dem HQ in DC

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Police and protesters clashed outside Democratic National Committee headquarters on Wednesday night during a demonstration for a ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hamas, the latest reflection of boiling tensions over the bloody conflict.

Scores of Democratic representatives and candidates, including House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, were inside the building for a campaign reception when it was interrupted by chanting outside.

Protesters said they wanted to block entrances and exits to force politicians to encounter their candlelight vigil and their calls for an end to the fighting. Many of them wore black shirts saying "Cease Fire Now."

However, the situation swiftly devolved. U.S. Capitol Police said about 150 people were "illegally and violently protesting" in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Washington. But protesters blamed police for the violence

Inside the Democratic headquarters, police rushed into the reception and directed lawmakers to the basement, according to Rep. Brad Sherman, D-Calif. Some were later evacuated in police vehicles.

Capitol Police said six officers were treated for minor injuries and one protester was arrested for assaulting an officer.

NATION

After 1-on-1, Biden and Xi talk to business leaders

By Colleen Long and Aamer Madhani
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Fresh off his meeting with the leader of China, President Joe Biden on Thursday planned to address CEOs grappling with the risks to their businesses from world crises and spend time trying to persuade other Indo-Pacific leaders that the U.S. is committed to nurturing economic ties throughout the region.

"We've got a few busy days ahead of us," Biden said during a welcome reception, ticking off a list of concerns and challenges for the leaders to examine. "Our strongest tools to meet those challenges remain the same ... connection, cooperation, collective action and common purpose."

Biden is courting world leaders at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit and through his administration's Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, a group that includes most of the 21 APEC member economies and a few others, like India, that aren't members of the larger forum.

The Democratic president will also pose for the traditional family photo with APEC leaders and host a working lunch and a fancy dinner.

The U.S. hasn't hosted the annual leaders' summit — started in 1993 by President Bill Clinton — since 2011. The group met virtually in 2020 and 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic. Leaders did gather in Bangkok last year, but Biden skipped the summit because his granddaughter was getting married, and he sent Vice President Kamala Harris in his place.

The annual leaders' conference brings together heads of nations and other top economic and diplomatic leaders. Biden told those who gathered Wednesday evening at a welcome party — including Russia's representative, Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk — that today's challenges were unlike those faced by other APEC leaders.

"How we're going to harness the potential of artificial intelligence to lift up the world, while minimizing the risks and safety concerns of the present?" he asked. "Will we act, with the urgency necessary to dramatically curb carbon emissions and avert a climate catastrophe that threatens us all? Can supply chains be built that are more resilient and secure in the face of threats like natural disasters and pandemics?"

On Thursday, Biden will speak to CEOs who are exploring new technologies and the concept of resilience so that companies can steer through a variety of challenges.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, too, met with American business leaders — at a $2,000-per-plate dinner Wednesday evening. It was a rare opportunity for U.S. business leaders to hear directly from the Chinese leader as they seek clarification on Beijing's expanding security rules that may choke foreign investment.

"China is pursuing high-quality development, and the United States is revitalizing its economy," he said, according to an English language translation. "There is plenty of room for our cooperation, and we are fully able to help each other succeed and achieve win-win outcomes."

Biden and Xi understand that the complicated ties between the two nations have major global impacts. Their meeting Wednesday at a Northern California estate was in part an effort to show the world that while they are global economic competitors, the U.S. and China aren't full-fledged rivals.

Biden sketched a vision of leaders who manage competition "responsibly," adding, "that's what the United States wants and what we intend to do."

Xi, though, was gloomier about the state of the post-pandemic global economy. China's economy remains in the doldrums, with prices falling due to slack demand from consumers and businesses.

"The global economy is recovering, but its momentum remains sluggish," Xi said. "Industrial and supply chains are still under the threat of interruption and protectionism is rising. All these are grave problems."

Astrid Riecken/For The Washington Post

Xiao Qi Ji, shown at the National Zoo in Washington in 2021, was recently returned to China, along with two other pandas.

Xi indicates China will again send pandas to zoos in US

Bloomberg News

President Xi Jinping indicated that China will renew its "Panda Diplomacy" with the U.S. by once again sending the bears to American zoos, signaling his intent to stabilize relations between the world's two largest economies.

"Pandas have long been envoys of friendship between the Chinese and American peoples," Xi said during a dinner with business executives on the sidelines of the APEC summit in San Francisco on Wednesday. "We are ready to continue our cooperation with the United States on panda conservation, and do our best to meet the wishes of the Californians so as to deepen friendly ties between our peoples."

Xi's remarks came hours after he emerged from his first meeting with President Joe Biden in a year.

The potential new cooperation on pandas comes as the U.S. faces the prospect of losing all of its bears by the end of next year as current loan agreements expire.

Most recently, officials at Washington, D.C.'s National Zoo returned its three giant pandas, Tian Tian, Mei Xiang and Xiao Qi Ji, the first time the zoo was left without a single panda since 1972. That year, the zoo received a pair of the creatures as a gift from Beijing marking President Richard Nixon's visit to China, which laid the groundwork for normalizing relations between the countries.

San Diego's last pandas returned to China in 2018 and 2019 after their loan agreements expired. Zoo Atlanta is now the only place in the U.S. that keeps pandas, but those, too, are scheduled to go home next year.

Talks: US views military relations with China as critical to maintaining a peaceful Indo-Pacific

FROM PAGE 1

spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss a private meeting.

This also opens the door for agreements at less-senior levels, including allowing the Hawaii-based commander of U.S. Pacific forces to engage with counterpart theater commanders, the official said. Xi said he and Biden agreed to resume high-level military dialogues on the basis of equity and respect, according to a statement released by China Central Television, the state broadcaster.

The agreement comes after U.S. military leaders had expressed repeated concerns about the lack of communications with China, particularly as the number of unsafe or unprofessional incidents between the two nations' ships and aircraft has spiked.

According to the Pentagon's most recent report on China's military power, Beijing has "denied, canceled or ignored" military-to-military communications and meetings with the Pentagon for much of last year and this year. The report warns that the lack of such talks "raises the risk of an operational incident or miscalculation spiraling into crisis or conflict."

The U.S. views military relations with China as critical to avoiding any missteps and maintaining a peaceful Indo-Pacific region.

More than 15 years ago, the Defense Department was making progress in a growing effort to improve relations with Beijing as both sides stepped up military activities in the Indo-Pacific.

The U.S. was concerned about Beijing's dramatic and rapid military growth. And China was suspicious of America's expanding presence in the region. In an effort to improve transparency and communication, defense leaders from the two countries were meeting regularly. And in a 2008 speech in Singapore, then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates noted that relations with China had improved, and that a long-sought direct telephone link between the U.S. and China had finally been established. He said he had used it to speak with the defense minister.

He and other defense chiefs, Joint Chiefs chairmen and regional high-level U.S. commanders routinely traveled to China over the next decade, and Chinese defense leaders came to the Pentagon. "We don't want miscalculations and misunderstandings and misinterpretations. And the only way you do that is you talk to each other," noted then-Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel in 2013.

The following year Hagel made a historic visit to Yuchi Naval Base and became the first foreign visitor to go aboard China's first aircraft carrier as it was docked at the base.

Even as military leaders were meeting, the Obama administration's widely touted "pivot to the Pacific," which added troops, ships and other U.S. military activity in the region, triggered vehement criticism from Beijing. And China's aggressive campaign to militarize a number of man-made islands in the South China Sea alarmed the U.S. and other allies in the Pacific.

Allies worried that China would seek to limit international transit through the region, and that the islands could be used as bases for military action. In 2018, the Trump administration abruptly withdrew an invitation for Beijing to participate in the military exercise known as Rim of the Pacific, citing what it called strong evidence that China had deployed weapons systems on the islands. China has argued that it is within its rights to build up defenses in the South China Sea on what it believes is its sovereign territory.

The Pentagon routinely complained that there was little tangible progress in the press for greater transparency in China's military ambitions and its burgeoning defense budget. And China bristled at America's continued support for Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing views as its own.

More broadly, the U.S. issued sharp condemnations of China's escalating cyberattacks targeting government agencies and breaches and cyberespionage into sensitive defense programs.

Direct military contacts with Beijing dropped off during the COVID-19 pandemic, due both to travel restrictions and tensions over China's potential responsibility for the deadly virus that began within its borders. And in August 2022, Beijing suspended all military contacts with the U.S., in the wake of former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.

Her visit sparked a surge in military maneuvers by China. Beijing dispatched warships and aircraft across the median line in the Taiwan Strait, and fired missiles into Japan's exclusive economic zone.

Bonnie Lin, director of the China Power project at the Center for Strategic and International Security, a Washington-based think tank, said it was important to restart the talks under the maritime agreement.

Resumption "would be a signal that the two sides can work together more," Lin said at a CSIS forum Tuesday.

NATION

JABIN BOTSFORD/The Washington Post

Rep. George Santos, R-N.Y., returns to his office after defending himself on the House floor before a failed vote to expel him Nov. 1. Santos said Thursday that he would not be seeking reelection to a second term.

Santos won't seek reelection amid scathing ethics report

BY KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House Ethics committee in a scathing report Thursday said it has amassed "overwhelming evidence" of lawbreaking by Republican Rep. George Santos of New York that has been sent to the Justice Department, concluding flatly that he "cannot be trusted" after a monthslong investigation into his conduct.

Shortly after the panel's report was released, Santos blasted it in a tweet on X as a "politicized smear" but said he would not be seeking reelection to a second term. He gave no indication he would step aside before his term ends next year, vowing to pursue his "conservative values in my remaining time in Congress."

But a renewed effort to expel him from the House was quickly launched. The House could vote on his expulsion as soon as it returns from the Thanksgiving holiday later this month.

The panel said that Santos knowingly caused his campaign committee to file false or incomplete reports with the Federal Election Commission; used campaign funds for personal purposes; and engaged in violations of the Ethics in Government Act as it relates to financial disclosure statements filed with the House.

The ethics panel's report also detailed Santos' lack of cooperation with its investigation and how he "evaded" straightforward requests for information.

The report says that an investigative subcommittee decided to forgo taking steps that would have led to a lengthy sanctions hearing by the full Ethics panel, after which the panel could make recommendations to the full House. Instead, it urges House members "to take any action they deem appropriate and necessary" based on the report.

Santos faces a 23-count federal indictment that alleges he stole the identities of campaign donors and then used their credit cards to make tens of thousands of dollars in unauthorized charges. Federal prosecutors say Santos, who has pleaded not guilty, wired some of the money to his personal bank account and used the rest to pad his campaign coffers.

Santos, who represents parts of Queens and Long Island, is also accused of falsely reporting to the Federal Elections Commission that he had loaned his campaign $500,000 when he actually hadn't given anything and had less than $8,000 in the bank. The fake loan was an attempt to convince Republican Party officials that he was a serious candidate, worth their financial support, the indictment says.

Santos easily survived a vote earlier this month to expel him from the House as most Republicans and 31 Democrats opted to withhold punishment while both his criminal trial and the House Ethics Committee investigation continued.

Congress OKs bill that delays final fight on shutdown

BY STEPHEN GROVES
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ending the threat of a government shutdown until after the holidays, Congress gave final approval to a temporary government funding package that pushes a confrontation over the federal budget into the new year.

The Senate met into Wednesday night to pass the bill with an 87-11 tally and send it to President Joe Biden for his signature one day after it passed the House on an overwhelming bipartisan vote. It provides a funding patch into next year, when the House and Senate will be forced to confront — and somehow overcome — their considerable differences over what funding levels should be.

In the meantime, the bill removes the threat of a government shutdown days before funding would have expired.

"This year, there will be no government shutdown," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said at a news conference after the bill's passage.

The spending package keeps government funding at current levels for roughly two more months while a long-term package is negotiated. It splits the deadlines for passing full-year appropriations bills into two dates: Jan. 19 for some federal agencies and Feb. 2 for others, creating two deadlines where there will be a risk of a partial government shutdown.

The two-step approach was not favored by many in the Senate, though all but one Democrat and 10 Republicans supported it because it ensured the government would not shut down for now. Sen. Patty Murray, the Washington Democrat who chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee, voted for the bill but said it would eventually "double the shutdown risk."

The spending bill also does not include the White House's nearly $106 billion request for wartime aid for Israel and Ukraine, as well as humanitarian funding for Palestinians and other supplemental requests. Lawmakers are likely to turn their attention more fully to that request after the Thanksgiving holiday in hopes of negotiating a deal.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, who crafted the plan, has vowed that he will not support any further stopgap funding measures, known as continuing resolutions. He portrayed the temporary funding bill as setting the ground for a spending "fight" with the Senate next year.

The new speaker, who told reporters this week that he counted himself among the "arch-conservatives" of the House, is pushing for deeper spending cuts. He wanted to avoid lawmakers being forced to consider a massive government funding package before the December holidays — a tactic that incenses conservatives in particular.

But Johnson is also facing pushback from other hardline conservatives who wanted to leverage the prospect of a government shutdown to extract steep cuts and policy demands. Many of those conservatives were among a group of 19 Republicans who defied Johnson on Wednesday to prevent floor consideration of an appropriations bill to fund several government agencies.

GOP leaders called off the week's work after the vote, sending lawmakers home early for Thanksgiving. It capped a period of intense bickering among lawmakers.

Trump seeks mistrial in NY fraud case, alleges bias by judge

Bloomberg News

NEW YORK — Donald Trump is seeking a mistrial in New York state's $250 million civil fraud lawsuit against the former president, alleging the judge and his law clerk have tainted the proceedings with rampant political bias.

The long-shot request, filed Wednesday in Manhattan, is the latest clash between Trump's legal team and Justice Arthur Engoron, who ultimately will decide the case. The judge has already issued a gag order against Trump and his lawyers over comments about the law clerk, who has no authority in the case. Trump has been fined a total of $15,000 for twice violating the order.

According to the filing by Trump attorneys Alina Habba and Christopher Kise, the judge has "impermissibly exceeded its discretion in granting his Principal Law Clerk unprecedented status and input into these proceedings and restricted the speech of anyone who seeks to comment on this status."

The motion is the latest twist in the trial of a suit filed last year by New York Attorney General Letitia James, who claims Trump inflated the value of his assets by as much as $3.6 billion a year to get better terms from banks and insurers. It's one of six trials Trump is facing as he seeks to return to the White House in 2024. He denies wrongdoing in all the cases, claiming they're part of a "witch hunt."

Engoron has frequently defended the way he works with his law clerk, telling Trump's lawyers during the trial that he has an absolute right to communicate with her and receive advice, while adding that all final decisions are made by him alone. But that hasn't swayed Trump's lawyers, who call the relationship "improper" in their mistrial request.

"She's a civil servant," the judge said Nov. 2, after Kise complained about the clerk passing him a note while Trump was being questioned under oath on the witness stand. "She's doing what I ask her to do, which is help me process cases and decide them correctly."

The once-obscure judicial aide was first thrust into the spotlight last month when Trump posted an image of her online and falsely accused her of dating Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and "running this case against me." The incident resulted in an Oct. 3 gag order barring him from discussing the clerk publicly.

The judge has "allowed his Principal Law Clerk to preside on the bench with him to his right-hand side," the defense team said in the Wednesday filing. It includes photographs of Engoron and the clerk seated at the bench, which Trump lawyers say shows she "is given unprecedented and inappropriate latitude."

The mistrial motion will ultimately be decided by Engoron, who has already blasted Trump and his lawyers for complaining about his law clerk, at one point saying it smacked of possible misogyny. It's likely the motion is tailored for review by an appeals court.

NATION

High court ethics code lacks enforcement

BY MARK SHERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Monday adopted its first code of ethics, in the face of sustained criticism over undisclosed trips and gifts from wealthy benefactors to some justices, but the code lacks a means of enforcement.

The policy, agreed to by all nine justices, does not appear to impose any significant new requirements and leaves compliance entirely to each justice.

Indeed, the justices said they have long adhered to ethics standards and suggested that criticism of the court over ethics was the product of misunderstanding, rather than any missteps by the justices.

"The absence of a Code, however, has led in recent years to the misunderstanding that the Justices of this Court, unlike all other jurists in this country, regard themselves as unrestricted by any ethics rules," the justices wrote in an unsigned statement that accompanied the code. "To dispel this misunderstanding, we are issuing this Code, which largely represents a codification of principles that we have long regarded as governing our conduct."

The ethics issue has vexed the court for several months, over a series of stories questioning the ethical practices of the justices. Many of those stories focused on Justice Clarence Thomas and his failure to disclose travel, other hospitality and additional financial ties with wealthy conservative donors including Harlan Crow and the Koch brothers. But Justices Samuel Alito and Sonia Sotomayor also have been under scrutiny.

J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

Members of the Supreme Court sit for a group portrait at the Supreme Court building in Washington in October 2022.

In September, Justice Elena Kagan acknowledged that there were disagreements among the justices over the contents of an ethics code, but did not specify what they were. The justices achieved unanimity Monday, but predictably offered no explanation for how they got there.

Liberal critics of the court were not satisfied, with one group saying the code "reads a lot more like a friendly suggestion than a binding, enforceable guideline."

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., one of the loudest voices complaining about the court's ethical shortcomings, was among several leading Democrats who mixed praise for the court with a call to do more.

"This is a long-overdue step by the justices, but a code of ethics is not binding unless there is a mechanism to investigate possible violations and enforce the rules. The honor system has not worked for members of the Roberts Court," Whitehouse said.

A court ethics code proposed by Whitehouse that cleared the Senate Judiciary Committee without any Republican support would allow for complaints and investigation by lower-court judges. Three justices, Amy Coney Barrett, Brett Kavanaugh and Kagan have voiced support for an ethics code in recent months. In May, Chief Justice John Roberts said there was more the court could do to "adhere to the highest ethical standards," without providing any specifics.

Public trust in and approval of the court is hovering near record lows, according to a Gallup Poll released just before the court's new term began on Oct. 2.

As recently as last week, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the justices could quiet some of the criticism and a Democratic push to impose an ethics code on the court by putting in place their own policy.

Durbin said Monday that the code appears to fall short of what is needed.

Durbin's panel, which has been investigating the court's ethics, has been planning to subpoena Crow and conservative activist Leonard Leo about their roles in organizing and paying for justices' luxury travel. The committee had scheduled a vote on the subpoenas for Thursday.

Republicans complained that Democrats were mostly reacting to decisions they didn't like from the conservative-dominated court, including overturning the nationwide right to an abortion.

The Democratic-backed ethics bill also would require that justices provide more information about potential conflicts of interest and written explanations about their decisions not to recuse. It would also seek to improve transparency around gifts received by justices. The Democratic bill had little prospect of becoming law in the Republican-controlled House, much less the closely divided Senate.

The push for an ethics code was jump-started by a series of stories by the investigative news site ProPublica detailing the relationship between Crow and Thomas. Crow has for more than two decades paid for nearly annual vacations, purchased from Thomas and others the Georgia home in which the justice's mother still lives and helped pay for the private schooling for a relative.

Mother of Va. elementary school shooter gets 21-month sentence

BY PETER DUJARDIN
(Newport News, Va.) Daily Press

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — The mother of the first-grader who shot his teacher at Richneck Elementary School in January was sentenced Wednesday to 21 months in federal prison on gun and marijuana charges.

A federal judge sentenced Deja Nicole Taylor, 26, for being an unlawful user of marijuana in possession of a firearm and also lying on a federal background check form when she bought the gun seven months before the shooting.

That's in addition to any prison time she gets on a state felony child neglect charge for which she will be sentenced in December.

On Jan. 6, Taylor's son, then 6 years old, climbed atop his mother's dresser and took the gun out of her purse — then put it in his back pack and took it to school. At about 2 p.m. that day, he removed the gun from his hoodie pocket and fired a single round at his teacher, Abigail Zwerner, as she began a reading lesson. The bullet went through her left hand and ended up in her upper chest, where it remains today.

"This case cries out for imprisonment," U.S. District Judge Mark S. Davis said at the tail end of a 3½-hour sentencing hearing in Newport News Federal Court. "There were too many opportunities, too many off-ramps. This was not a one-off."

Taylor

There was so much "leading up to this moment," he added.

That includes the time Taylor was pulled over in Williamsburg in 2021 with her son and two others in the car, with a bag full of marijuana products next to the boy, who was then 4 year old. It also includes an incident only 10 days before the shooting, on Dec. 27, 2022, that came to light with the sentencing hearing.

In that case, prosecutors said, Taylor used the same handgun to shoot at her boyfriend — the boy's father — when she discovered him and another woman had been driving around in a UHaul that Taylor rented four days earlier. Taylor didn't hit either of them, even as the boyfriend, Malik Ellison, wrote in a text message to Taylor that the bullet was just above his head and she could have killed him.

"U almost shot me deja," Ellison wrote. "The bullet is above my head."

"U kept moving the van," Taylor replied. "I was aiming at the hoe."

In a victim impact statement provided to the court, Zwerner took to the podium and spoke about what happened to her that day, talking of how her student "pointed the gun directly at me and shot." Though Zwerner was able to shuttle students out of her classroom and made it to an administrative office, the wound caused her left lung to rupture and collapse, causing her to lose consciousness.

"When this happened and emergency responders worked to keep me alive, I was not sure whether it would be my final moment on Earth," Zwerner said.

She's been through five hand surgeries, and her mother and sister had to wash her each day. "I was not able to do simple tasks such as putting on and taking off clothes, tying my shoes, opening bags, and cutting my food to eat," Zwerner said.

UAW union members' vote approves contract with GM

Associated Press

DETROIT — United Auto Workers union members have voted to approve a new contract with General Motors, making the company the first Detroit automaker to get a ratified deal that could end a contentious labor dispute and a series of crippling strikes.

A vote-tracking spreadsheet on the union's website shows that with all local union offices reporting, the contract passed by just over 3,400 votes, with 54.7% in favor.

A union spokesman on Thursday confirmed that the spreadsheet had the official totals.

The outcome was closer than expected after the UAW's celebrations of victories last month on many key demands that led to six weeks of targeted walkouts against GM, Ford and Stellantis, the maker of Jeep, Dodge and Ram vehicles.

On Thursday the contract had a big lead in voting at Ford and Stellantis.

Ratification was leading at Ford by more than 10,000 votes, with 66.7% of ballots in favor. At Stellantis, the lead was over 5,700, with 66.5% voting for the deal, according to the UAW website.

Voting continues at Ford through early Saturday with only two large factories in the Detroit area and some smaller facilities left to be counted.

At Stellantis, three Detroit-area factories were the only large plants yet to vote, with tallies expected to be complete by Tuesday.

The three contracts, if approved by 146,000 union members, would dramatically raise pay for autoworkers, with increases and cost-of-living adjustments that would translate into a 33% wage gain. Top assembly plant workers would earn roughly $42 per hour when the contracts expire in April of 2028.

At GM, about 46,000 workers were eligible to vote on the deal, and about 36,000 cast ballots.

Of the four GM plants that went on strike, workers at only a large SUV plant in Arlington, Texas, approved the contract. Workers in Wentzville, Mo.; Lansing Delta Township, Mich.; and Spring Hill, Tenn., voted it down. Workers said that longtime employees at GM were unhappy that they didn't get larger pay raises like newer workers, and they wanted a bigger pension increase.

NATION

Calif. scientists strike over deal talks stalling

PAUL KITAGAKI JR., THE SACRAMENTO BEE/AP

Members of the California Association of Professional Scientists march Wednesday, in Sacramento, Calif.

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Thousands of scientists who work for California began a rolling three-day strike Wednesday — the first walkout by a state civil service union.

Members of the California Association of Professional Scientists marched under cloudy skies in Sacramento to protest lack of progress in contract talks. The walkout will spread to Los Angeles, Oakland and other cities on Thursday and Friday.

The union represents about 5,200 members who work in more than 50 state departments and deal with issues ranging from air pollution and toxic waste control to earthquake hazards and agricultural pests, according to its website.

Members have been without a contract since 2020 despite bargaining and mediation. The membership rejected a tentative agreement earlier this year. Another state mediation session is planned for Nov. 28.

It is the first time that state workers have struck since civil servants won collective bargaining rights in 1977, The Sacramento Bee reported.

"Nobody wants to be on strike, and nobody wants to be the first," the union's president, Jacqueline Tkac, told the Bee. "But it feels really inspiring to know that we have people that are so fired up about our situation that they're willing to go out on strike for the first time and take that risk."

Last week, the California Department of Human Resources filed a complaint of unfair labor practices against the union in an attempt to prevent the strike.

On Wednesday, the department said it was disappointed by the strike and that the state continues to bargain "in good faith."

The state "will continue to work with CAPS to achieve a fair successor agreement as we have with other bargaining units," department spokesperson Camille Travis said in an email.

The union's main concern is higher wages. It says state scientists are paid 40% to 60% less than "comparable positions who have the same level of responsibility and do similar or identical work."

Thousands of Starbucks workers go on one-day strike

BY DEE-ANN DURBIN
Associated Press

Workers at more than 200 U.S. Starbucks locations walked off the job Thursday in what organizers said was the largest strike yet in the two-year-old effort to unionize the company's stores.

The Workers United union chose Starbucks' annual Red Cup Day to stage the walkout since it's usually one of the busiest days of the year.

Starbucks expects to give away thousands of reusable cups Thursday to customers who order holiday drinks.

The union said it was expecting more than 5,000 workers to take part in its "Red Cup Rebellion." Around 30 stores also staged walkouts on Wednesday.

Neha Cremin, a Starbucks barista in Oklahoma City, said she was striking to protest understaffing in stores, especially during promotions like Red Cup Day. Cremin said workers are already overwhelmed filling delivery orders, drive-thru orders, mobile orders and in-store orders; promotions add another layer of stress.

"Understaffing hurts workers and also creates an unpleasant experience for customers," Cremin said. "Starbucks has made it clear that they won't listen to workers, so we're advocating for ourselves by going on strike."

Thursday's strike was the fifth major labor action by Starbucks workers since a store in Buffalo, N.Y., became the first to unionize in late 2021.

Workers at 110 stores walked out last year on Red Cup Day; most recently, a strike in June protested reports that Starbucks had removed Pride displays from its stores.

But the strikes have had little impact on Starbucks' sales. For its 2023 fiscal year, which ended Oct. 1, Starbucks reported its revenue rose 12%, to a record $36.0 billion.

Starbucks downplayed any potential impact of the strike Wednesday, saying it would occur at a "small subset" of the company's 9,600 company-owned U.S. stores.

"We remain committed to working with all partners, side-by-side, to elevate the everyday, and we hope that Workers United's priorities will shift to include the shared success of our partners and negotiating contracts for those they represent," Starbucks said in a statement.

'Thanksgiving Grandma,' Airbnb want to welcome strangers for holiday

TOM TINGLE, THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC/AP

Jamal Hinton, left, and Wanda Dench take a selfie after meeting at Dench's home for Thanksgiving on Nov. 24, 2016, in Mesa, Ariz.

Associated Press

PHOENIX — An Arizona woman who shared her Thanksgiving table seven years ago with a stranger she accidentally texted will be opening up her home again this year to two new strangers.

Wanda Dench is teaming up with Airbnb to expand the festivities, and the company said it will make a donation to the relief organization Feeding America.

Dench's tradition began in 2016 with a mistaken text to then-teen Jamal Hinton. She was trying to invite her grandson but didn't realize he had changed his phone number. Hinton jokingly replied he would like to come and Dench said he was welcome. They forged a relationship that still holds strong.

Hinton had tweeted screenshots of their initial exchange and subsequent meeting. Since then, their continuing joint celebration has turned into a tradition that social media users have come to expect every Thanksgiving. Dench has been dubbed "Thanksgiving Grandma" on the internet.

Airbnb guests can sign up for the chance to eat a catered early holiday dinner on Nov. 20 with Dench, 66, and Hinton, 24. They'll also get an overnight stay at Dench's new home in the north-central Arizona city of Prescott Valley.

"I said from the jump of our first Thanksgiving that I always wanted to have more people join our Thanksgiving and be able to celebrate with us and have the amount of fun that we have together," Hinton told USA Today.

The menu will include classics such as turkey and mashed potatoes, along with Dench's favorite Costco pumpkin pie.

The entertainment will include taking selfies, watching movies and playing board games. The booking charge on Airbnb to sign up for the dinner and overnight stay is $16, corresponding with the year Dench and Hinton met. Guests will have to pay for their own travel.

Airbnb hasn't said how much it plans to donate to Feeding America.

Dench said she hopes others are inspired to be similarly open to new friendships.

"That would be pretty cool to see people wanting to share a good experience and then open it up to other strangers as well," she said.

Meanwhile, a movie about the unlikely friendship between Dench and Hinton is possibly in the works, The Arizona Republic reported.

WORLD

DANIEL BOCKWOLDT/AP

Police officers stand in front of the Imam Ali Mosque (Blue Mosque) on the Outer Alster during a raid on the Islamic Center Hamburg, in Hamburg, northern Germany, on Thursday.

German police raids target Islamic group

Associated Press

BERLIN — German police raided 54 locations across the country on Thursday in an investigation of a Hamburg-based center suspected of promoting Iranian ideology and supporting the activities of Hezbollah, the government said.

The Interior Ministry said the Islamic Center Hamburg, or IZH, has long been under observation by Germany's domestic intelligence agency. It said the activities of the group are aimed at spreading the "revolutionary concept" of Iran's supreme leader.

Authorities are also looking into suspicions that it supports banned activities in Germany by Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group, which has repeatedly traded fire with Israel across the Israel-Lebanon border since Hamas attacked Israel from Gaza last month.

The IZH runs a mosque in Hamburg. The Interior Ministry said German intelligence believes it exerts significant influence or full control over some other mosques and groups, and that they often promote a "clearly antisemitic and anti-Israel attitude." It said authorities are examining whether it can be banned, and material seized during the searches will be evaluated.

Wednesday's raids were carried out in Hamburg and six other German states — Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria in the south, Berlin, and Hesse, North-Rhine Westphalia and Lower Saxony in the west and northwest. In addition to IZH, the investigation is also targeting five other groups suspected of being sub-organizations of it.

"We have the Islamist scene in our sights," Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said in a statement. "Now in particular, at a time when many Jews feel particularly threatened, we tolerate no Islamist propaganda and no antisemitic and anti-Israel agitation."

Haitian gang surrounds hospital in capital, traps people inside

BY EVENS SANON
Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — A heavily armed gang surrounded a hospital in Haiti on Wednesday, trapping women, children and newborns inside until police rescued them, according to the director of the medical center, who pleaded for help via social media.

The Fontaine Hospital Center in the capital of Port-au-Prince is considered an oasis and a lifeline in a community overrun by gangs that have unleashed increasingly violent attacks against each other and residents.

People who live in the capital's sprawling Cite Soleil slum are routinely raped, beaten and killed.

The hospital founder and director, Jose Ulysse, told The Associated Press that gangs were torching homes around the hospital and preventing people inside from leaving.

He initially said that it appeared some gang members had entered the hospital but later said they did not go inside.

Ulysse said members of Haiti's National Police force responded to his call for help and arrived with three armored trucks to evacuate 40 children and 70 patients to a private home in a safer part of the city.

Among those delicately evacuated were children on oxygen, he said.

"Gangs are in total control of the area," he said.

A spokesman for the National Police did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

Ulysse identified those responsible as members of the Brooklyn gang, led by Gabriel Jean-Pierre, best known as "Ti Gabriel." Jean-Pierre also is the leader of a powerful gang alliance known as G-Pep, one of two rival coalitions in Haiti.

The Brooklyn gang has some 200 members and controls certain communities within Cite Soleil, including Brooklyn. They are involved in extortion, hijacking of goods and general violence, according to a recent United Nations report.

"The G-Pep coalition and its allies strongly reinforced cooperation and diversified their revenues, in particular by committing kidnapping for ransom, which has enabled them to strengthen their fighting capacity," the report stated.

When the AP visited the Fontaine Hospital Center earlier this year, Ulysse said in an interview that gangs had targeted him personally twice.

Gangs across Haiti have continued to grow more powerful since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, and the number of kidnappings and killings keeps rising.

Earlier this year, at least 20 armed gang members burst into a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders and snatched a patient from an operating room. The criminals gained access after faking a life-threatening emergency, the organization said.

Ukraine claims foothold on Dnieper River eastern bank

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A top Ukrainian official said its troops have established a beachhead on the eastern bank of the Dnieper River near Kherson, an important advance in overcoming one of Russia's most significant strategic barriers in the war.

Andriy Yermak, head of the president's office, provided no details but confirmed the development that had been widely discussed in military forums over the past month.

Ever since Russian forces left the city of Kherson and the territory around it in November 2022, the only area they controlled on the west bank of the Dnieper, the river became a natural dividing line along the southern battlefront, preventing Ukrainian troops from advancing further toward Russian-annexed Crimea.

The barrier also allowed Russia to concentrate more troops in the heavily mined and fortified Zaporizhzhia region and eastern Ukraine. Crossing the river could allow Ukraine to outflank Russia without having to break through the Zaporizhzhia region and take the most direct route to Crimea.

Yermak said Ukraine's military had moved "step by step" toward Crimea and covered nearly three-quarters of the distance there.

Since the summer, Ukrainian forces have crossed the river in small groups to create a foothold near the Kherson bridge

WEEKEND

Tinsel-worthy holiday tunes

Music, Pages 28-29

Young and hungry

Rising stars Rachel Zegler and Tom Blyth are at the center of the dystopian prequel 'The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes'

Movies, Pages 16-18

Rachel Zegler, left, and Tom Blyth, shown Nov. 12, star in the "Hunger Games" prequel "The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes."

REBECCA CABAGE, INVISION/AP

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WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

New Call of Duty draws harsh reviews

Modern Warfare III's rushed development cited by critics as reason for low ratings

BY JASON SCHREIER
Bloomberg News

The latest entry in Activision Blizzard's popular Call of Duty video game series was made in half the time of previous iterations, a fact that may be contributing to a spate of bad reviews about the game's storyline, according to people familiar with the development process.

Critics have panned the game, the first big release since Microsoft Corp. closed its $69 billion acquisition of Activision last month, saying the storyline feels rushed. Most Call of Duty games are developed in around three years, but the bulk of Call of Duty: Modern Warfare III, released Nov. 10, was made in less than a year and a half, said the people, who asked to not be identified because they weren't authorized to speak publicly. The abridged production schedule proved stressful for the development team, they said.

Call of Duty has generated more than $30 billion in revenue over the past two decades. It's the most important series in Activision's portfolio, with thousands of developers across the world. New Call of Duty games will always top the charts, but some of the makers of Modern Warfare III say they hope their new corporate owners don't judge them too harshly for the negative reception after a shortened development cycle that was beyond the studio's control.

The process was hurried because this year's game was conceived to fill a gap in the release schedule following the delay of another Call of Duty title previously planned for 2023.

Activision Blizzard

Call of Duty games usually take about three years to develop, but Modern Warfare III was made in about 16 months, according to sources familiar with the process.

Modern Warfare III was originally pitched to staff at Foster City, Calif.-based developer Sledgehammer Games as an expansion to last year's title, but it morphed into a full sequel during development, Bloomberg earlier reported.

An Activision spokesman denied that Modern Warfare III was originally an expansion and said it was conceived as a "premium game" from the start. But more than a dozen current and former Call of Duty developers said that conflicts with what they were told at the time. Some of the employees said the plan was left ambiguous during the first few months of development, while others said they were directly told it was an expansion. All said they were under the impression it was an expansion until much later in the process.

Aaron Halon, the studio head of Sledgehammer Games, said in an interview that some team members may have been convinced the new game was an expansion because it is "a new type of direct sequel" to the previous game. Unlike previous Call of Duty titles, Modern Warfare III allows players to transfer their weapons and gear from last year's game.

Some staff at Sledgehammer, who had to work nights and weekends to finish the game, said they felt betrayed by the company because they were promised they wouldn't have to go through another shortened timeline after the release of their previous game, Call of Duty: Vanguard, which was made under a similarly constrained development cycle.

For the first few months of the project, which was code-named Jupiter, the story was conceived as a smaller-scale Modern Warfare spinoff set in Mexico that would be more achievable on a short timeline than the usual globe-trotting escapades of a full new campaign. But in the summer of last year, Activision executives rebooted that story, and told the developers that instead they would be making a direct sequel to Modern Warfare II centering on the villain Vladimir Makarov and featuring missions all across the world.

The reboot ate into the schedule and forced the developers to complete the new campaign in roughly 16 months — the shortest development time for a new Call of Duty game in years.

The game's story has received bleak reviews from the largest gaming outlets. GameSpot critic S.E. Doster offered a "mediocre" 5 out of 10 rating, and a declaration that the story "doesn't do much worth seeing." At IGN, reviewer Simon Cardy gave the game a 4 out of 10, and wrote that the game "feels hastily put together," adding that "if this is the quality we've come to expect from Call of Duty campaigns, maybe it's for the best if a year or two is taken to reset and raise this low bar back to the heights of old."

The early reviews focused exclusively on Modern Warfare III's story missions and didn't cover the game's multiplayer and zombie modes.

Sledgehammer's Halon said in a statement that the game was "a labor of love" and that his team has "worked hard to deliver on this vision, which has been years in the making."

Analysts said that even a critical flop probably won't change much about the series over the next few years.

"I don't see it having a lasting impact on the franchise or on any of Microsoft's plans with the franchise even if it is universally panned," said Kevin Tsao, an analyst with Bloomberg Intelligence. But a consistent drop in quality starting with this game, he said, might drive Microsoft to shift its strategy or cut back on the annual release schedule that Call of Duty has followed since 2005.

Dreo PolyFan 513S Air Circulator Fan is cool in multiple ways

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

If it's possible to consider a fan a piece of art, then the Dreo PolyFan 513S Air Circulator Fan wins the prize, at least in my living room. The fan looks great — more on that below.

What's most important is how the fan works, and without being a fan expert — but knowing what's comfortable — I can report that the PolyFan's performance shines. According to Dreo, the PolyFan provides "air circulation like never before." Dreo says its natural breeze comes from an impressive five-blade design, which produces winds that go farther but feel gentle on your skin even when you're close to it.

My wife and I tested the fan during a night of television watching, when many other fans have annoyed us and ended up being turned off quickly. We ended up using Dreo PolyFan 513S during many more nights of TV.

The easy-to-assemble AC (alternating current)-powered pedestal fan measures 12.76-by-14.13-by-37.96 inches with an adjustable pedestal. The height is adjustable from 37.96 to 43.5 inches.

It's rated to reach a maximum distance of 100 feet. If any fan tech heads are out there, this one produces 882CFM (cubic feet per minute) of air volume. The ultra-quiet brushless DC (direct current) motor is rated by Dreo as 25-51; when set at an almost silent 25dB (decibals), it won't disturb your sleep.

It provides 120-degree horizontal omnidirectional oscillation and 105 degrees vertically, with six speed modes including auto, custom, natural, normal, sleep and turbo. There are eight built-in speeds and a 12-hour on/off timer. Assembling it took a few minutes; Dreo even supplied the few tools needed.

Both the app and the included wireless remote control worked great. Alexa and Google Assistant can also control the fan. A digital display is built into the pole to show the active settings. There is a row of touch controls on top of the fan, which I didn't use much at all, preferring the app.

The customizable positions and speed make the Dreo PolyFan 513S Air Circulator Fan perfect for any room. With a weight of 16 pounds, it's easily portable. Its grill blades are removable and can be easily disassembled for cleaning by removing the front grille and rotating it counterclockwise. Reverse the process for reassembly.

After experiencing how great the Dreo PolyFan 513S Air Circulator Fan works, it does take some thought and family debating to decide where to keep the fan. It's easily portable as long as you have an AC power outlet close by. When deciding where to put it, customize a program in the app for the unique setups in each room where it will be used.

The Dreo PolyFan 513S Air Circulator Fan, which has a brown and charcoal gray appearance, looks like a modern piece of art. My first impression was that it resembled a studio light on a production set. But its slick looks and portable design lets it fit into any room. It even generated a few positive comments from guests about what a cool-looking fan it is.

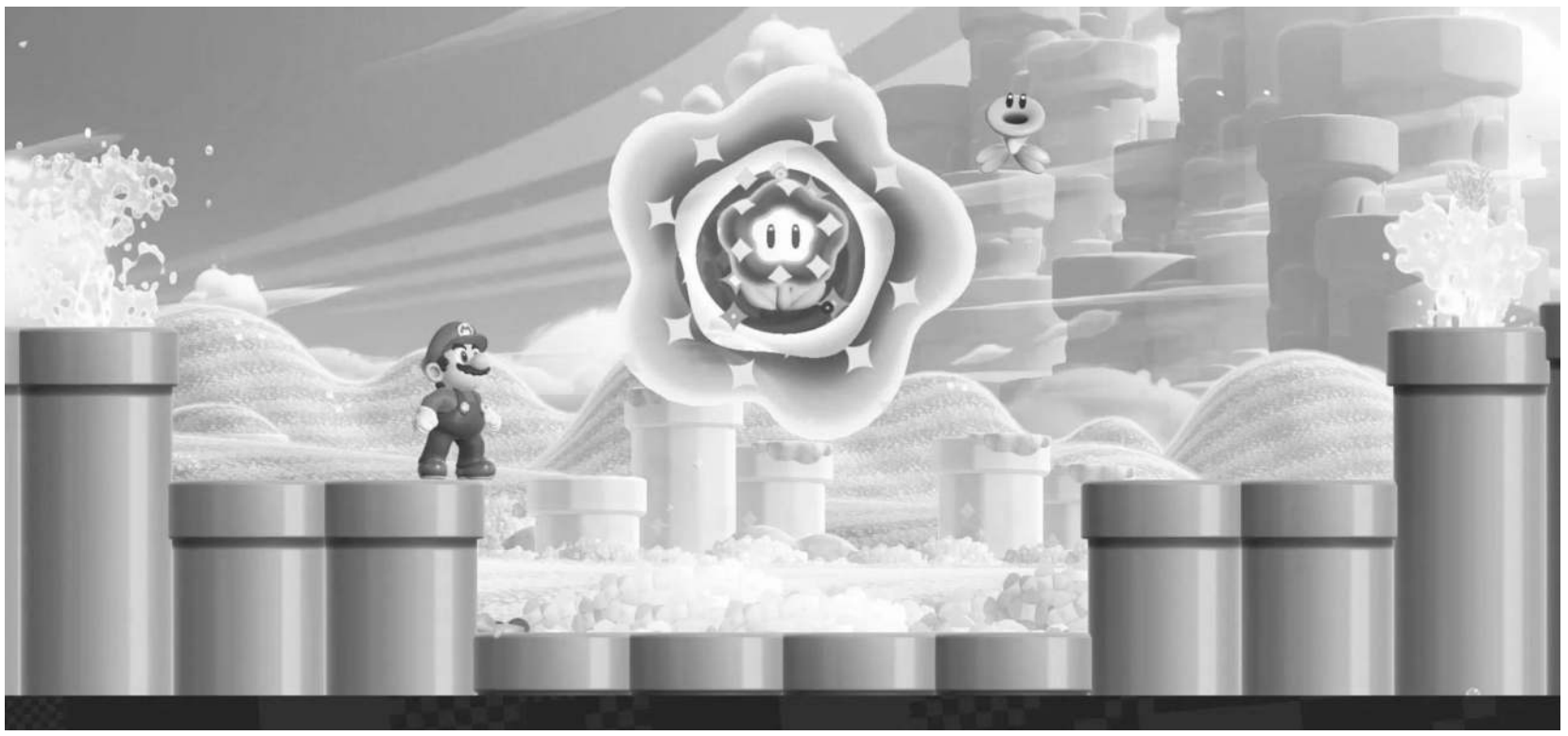
Dreo also has a tabletop version, the DR-HAF004S fan ($89.99), with many of the same features as the pedestal PolyFan 513S ($139.99).

Online: dreo.com

DREO/TNS

The Dreo PolyFan 513S Air Circulator Fan provides 120-degree horizontal omnidirectional oscillation and 105 degrees vertically.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



Nintendo photos

Super Mario Bros. Wonder is a celebration of the healing power of play. Throughout the game, flowers cheer players on and comment existentially on the scenery. The game stimulates reflection about why we explore, how we stay optimistic and how we can find awe in unexpected places.

Practice self-care by playing Super Mario

Wonder, the franchise's 1st traditional side-scroller in years, encourages us to see our world as the plumber sees his

By Todd Martens
Los Angeles Times

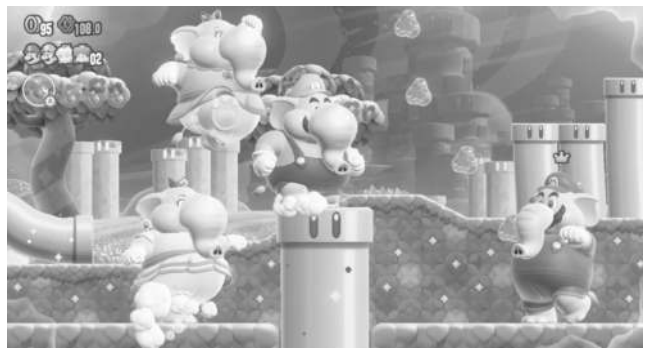
Early on in Super Mario Bros. Wonder, nemesis Bowser, up to no good in a new kingdom, transforms himself into a heavy metal-loving sentient castle. Mario and Co. need to come to the rescue. But before the run-and-jump platforming action begins, a little yellow flower has a message for Team Mario: "I believe in youuu!" it says in a chirpy, sing-songy voice. The statement arrives like a hug. And there will be more.

Throughout the game, flowers cheer us on, sometimes commenting existentially on the scenery, and sometimes just saying, "Way to go!" before the screen erupts in a giant fireworks display. You can turn the flowers off, but I don't know why anyone would want to. Their sense of constant amazement at what is happening is really what the best Super Mario Bros. games are all about, and Wonder doesn't disappoint.

Super Mario Bros. Wonder arrived last month at a time of renewed interest in the Nintendo mascot, thanks in part to the success of "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" and the U.S. opening of Super Nintendo World at Universal Studios Hollywood. It could be seen as a return to tradition, as it's the first traditional side-scrolling Super Mario Bros. game in 11 years, but despite familiar foes and save-the-kingdom objectives, it is a game full of surprises — not to mention magical fruits and flowers that play with our expectations of what a Mario game can be.

Super Mario Bros. games are often seen as lighthearted fare, interactive works about play for play's sake. But Super Mario Bros. Wonder was a reminder to me that they're much deeper than that. With revelations like the emotional support flowers appearing throughout the surreal world, the game is a treatise on the healing power of play.

This is a game less about challenges and more about life — why we explore, how we stay optimistic and, most importantly, how we can find awe in unexpected places. Playing it has been akin to injecting pure serotonin, and I'd argue it's done more to boost my mood than any of the self-help audio books I've devoured over the past 11 months.



A signature feature of Wonder is Mario's ability to turn into an elephant — a reminder that the bizarre surrounds us every day, as long as we don't shut off our imagination.

I won't go as far as to compare it to any of those texts, but Super Mario Bros. Wonder is the video game of self-care. It is at once a love letter to the unexpected — a signature feature of the game is Mario's ability to turn into an elephant, water-slinging trunk and all, after devouring a piece of fruit — and a reminder that the bizarre surrounds us every day, as long as we don't shut off our imagination.

I've returned, for instance, throughout my playthrough to an early level featuring a bounty of Piranha Plants, those chomping, polka-dotted, Mario-biting flora that have long been a staple of the series. Only here, they walk, and at one point in the level can break into song. "They're singing!" exclaims our flower pal, and indeed they are, with a high-pitched, childlike voice. They string together nonsense syllables into a melody that could be heard as a twisted Christmas song.

It's an easy, early level, but I revisit it because it never fails to make me smile, and it serves as a reminder that the so-called ordinary is often extraordinary if we're willing to pay attention. My instinct here is to stop, watch and listen, despite the fact that they still want to eat Mario.

There are so many of these whimsical moments that the game has made me rethink how and where we can find awe. We can, I believe, find it in a video game, at least one that is full of constant ideas, never-ending surrealness and inviting, approachable play.

A key component of Super Mario Bros. Wonder is the so-called "Wonder Flowers," which, when collected, essentially turn the world on its head. Piranha Plants, for instance, start singing, or we're suddenly gliding through a cosmic downpour trying to avoid lightning strikes ("What a rush!" shouts a flower friend).

Everything we've come to know about a Super Mario Bros. game is momentarily twisted and turned — at once Mario is zooming on a track, transformed into a spike-enhanced slug. They've been described as something akin to an acid trip, but I'd argue they're more like a wake-up call, a gentle knock on the head that says we should work out our imaginations as much as we do our bodies.

Video games, as interactive texts requiring active participation, are uniquely positioned to make that argument, and the Super Mario Bros series has been riding that thesis for nearly four decades. Mario is often seen as a cipher, someone who's only as interesting as his transformations, be it in the past into a feline-like prowler or a spinning top of an avatar with a raccoon-like tail. But he's really someone who's guided by his curiosity, essentially saying in Wonder, "Yes, I will eat that fruit that turns me into an elephant," or, "Absolutely, I will devour that flower that allows bubbles to shoot from my hands."

It's a zest for life that's more familiar than psychedelic simply because it's so childlike; we can, in other words, all relate, or remember a time when we could see ourselves as anything and anyone, a worldview in which it makes sense that we can shape-shift into an elephant or a castle. Sprung from the mind of game design master Shigeru Miyamoto — Wonder was overseen by longtime Miyamoto collaborator Takashi Tezuka — it's often been said that the initial Super Mario Bros. title was inspired by childhood playgrounds. But as Mario has evolved and his worlds have gotten bigger, brighter and more colorful, they've also become about something bolder.

As I steered Mario to stand on a cloud, one of fluffy whiteness and welcoming eyes, a turtle with angelic wings flew toward him while an island designed to mimic an oceanic wave stood in the background. A storm cloud, one Mario could essentially swim through, stood before our hero in his trademark red suspenders. Then a talking flower chimed in. "They say the ocean tastes like tears," it said, and I directed Mario to jump in place and then stop and stand still.

A flood of memories from the last two years of my life came rushing through — some positive, some melancholic and most in-between. The interactive digital world I was looking at had evoked joy, nostalgia and a little heartbreak, and its outlandish weirdness suddenly felt familiar, an extraordinary world that was as ordinary yet magnificent as our own.

Platform: Nintendo Switch
Online: supermariobroswonder.nintendo.com

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Lionsgate photos

The production department of "The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes" looked to reconstruction-era Berlin for aesthetic and thematic inspiration for the post-war setting of Panem.

Starting fresh, without Katniss

Prequel 'Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes' is set 64 years before original 'Hunger Games' series

By Lindsey Bahr
Associated Press

Everyone had resigned themselves to the fact that "The Hunger Games" ended in 2015. The four-film blockbuster franchise had made nearly $3 billion at the global box office and helped Jennifer Lawrence skyrocket to superstardom. But Suzanne Collins' Katniss Everdeen saga was over. And, frankly, everyone, including Collins, director Francis Lawrence and producer Nina Jacobson, was eager to take a break and do something else.

For several years after "Mockingjay — Part 2," "Hunger Games"-related text conversations between Lawrence and Collins rarely went past sending one another screenshots of their films on Jeopardy categories. Then, in 2019, Jacobson and Lawrence got a call: Collins was putting the finishing touches on something new, a prequel set 64 years before Katniss volunteered as tribute. It would be focused on a young Coriolanus Snow, and there would be a big musical element.

"The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes" arrives in theaters at another transitional moment in Hollywood, where Marvel movies are no longer sure things and, for the first time in a long time, the biggest movies of the year aren't already franchises.

And while the team was excited about the possibility of working together again, there were some nerves about whether or not there was an appetite for Hunger Games movies "without Katniss," Lawrence told The Associated Press in a recent interview. But this was all before they'd laid eyes on the book.

Lawrence

Both Lawrence and Jacobson were soon brought into Collins' agent's office, seated in a locked room and given the book to read. To their relief, suddenly the Katniss problem didn't seem so important anymore, and soon they were off to Lionsgate to get it off the ground.

"We were excited to be able to dive into something that didn't feel like a rehash," Jacobson said. "It didn't feel like we were trying to imitate the previous movies."

Tom Blyth plays young Snow and Rachel Zegler, his mentee, District 12 tribute Lucy Gray Baird, in "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes."

For Lawrence, it "felt like a 'Hunger Games' story" but also something unique, "with new thematic foundations."

"Instead of a girl's survival story, it was a young man's descent into darkness," Lawrence said. "It's an origin story about a major character and also the series itself."

As with the first film, Lawrence and Jacobson wanted to find fresh young talents to lead the franchise — not a TikTok star or someone already famous in another part of the world — and surround them with veteran actors. In this case, those established names would include Viola Davis, Peter Dinklage and Jason Schwartzman.

They found their young Snow, played in the original films by Donald Sutherland, via taped submission. The English actor Tom Blyth entered the running rather late and quickly became the front-runner, beating out hundreds for the role.

"He just blew everybody out of the water," Lawrence said. "He has a charisma; he has the right physical attributes. He's Juilliard trained. He really knows his craft. He was going to be able to give us all the emotional values we need for the character's journey. And he felt like a star."

For Lucy Gray Baird, the District 12 tribute Snow is assigned to mentor for the 10th Hunger Games, Lawrence already had someone in mind. Like many film fans, he was transfixed by Rachel Zegler's film debut as Maria in Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" and persuaded her to co-star. It wasn't a hard sell: "The Hunger Games" were already a big part of Zegler's life having grown up with the books and the movies, which she and her mom and sister made events out of.

"As somebody who loves to

SEE BALLAD ON PAGE 17

WEEKEND: MOVIES

When dystopian teen films ruled screens

Revisit these YA favorite adaptations in preparation for the new 'Hunger Games'

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

This weekend's release of "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes," a prequel to the massive hit book and movie series "The Hunger Games," is a reminder of the not-too-distant past, when adaptations of young adult novels ruled the blockbuster landscape. They're still a rich territory for adaptation, even if the dystopian teen movies seem to have run their course, but perhaps "The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes" will usher in a new appetite for that subgenre, which ruled the 2010s. So in preparation for the prequel, here's a list of some of the other YA movie adaptations of the recent past and where to stream them:

We have to start with "The Hunger Games," the 2012 film adapted from the Suzanne Collins book, which ushered Jennifer Lawrence into true movie stardom over the course of four films. Set in the distant future, Lawrence plays Katniss Everdeen, a young woman who competes in the nationally televised event in which teenagers fight to the death. Stream the whole series of films, which includes "The Hunger Games," "The Hunger Games: Catching Fire," and "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Parts 1 and 2" on Peacock, or rent them on all digital platforms.

But before "The Hunger Games" took over, there were, of course, vampires.

SUMMIT ENTERTAINMENT/AP

Kristen Stewart's Bella Swan and Robert Pattinson's vampire Edward Cullen fall in love in "The Twilight Saga." Shown above, a scene from second film "New Moon."

Stephenie Meyer's book "Twilight" transported readers to the Pacific Northwest, where a vampire falls in love with a human girl. The movie adaptation in 2008 made Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson instant movie stars (they've since proven to be fascinatingly arty character actors). It is the 15th anniversary of the movie's release date next week, so ring in the occasion with a rewatch or reread of the book. Stream "Twilight" on Prime Video, Tubi, or rent it elsewhere.

We can't forget the other dystopian teen movies that "The Hunger Games" begot, including 2014's "Divergent," starring Shailene Woodley and Theo James. Based on the book series by Veronica Roth, the story takes place in post-apocalyptic Chicago, where people are strictly divided into factions. While the series fizzled out, the first film did show promise. Stream it on Tubi or rent it elsewhere.

There was also the lively "Maze Runner" series based on the series of books by James Dashner and starring the appealing Dylan O'Brien. These movies are a bit more muscular and action-packed as the post-apocalyptic teens have to escape from a maze while also trying to establish a functioning society. The whole series is quite entertaining, especially the sequel "The Scorch Trials." Stream "The Maze Runner" (2014) on Max, and rent "The Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials" on all digital platforms. Completists can stream the third film "Maze Runner: The Death Cure" (2018) on Hulu.

But it's not all dystopia and monsters in young adult literature. There's also romance, like in the enormously charming "To All the Boys I've Loved Before," the 2018 adaptation of Jenny Han's book, starring Lana Condor and Noah Centineo, and streaming on Netflix. There's also romance among sick teens, a whole subgenre that was kicked off by the success of "The Fault in Our Stars" (2014) starring Woodley and Ansel Elgort, based on the book by John Green. Stream it on Disney+, Hulu or Prime Video. There are social issue films, like "The Hate U Give," about a young girl growing up in Los Angeles, grappling with the death of her friend in a racially motivated police shooting. Adapted from the YA novel by Angie Thomas, the film stars Amandla Stenberg. Stream it on Tubi or rent it elsewhere. There are also films about sexuality, including the 2018 movie "Love, Simon," starring Nick Robinson, about a queer teen coming out to his family and friends, based on the book "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda" by Becky Albertalli, and streaming on Hulu.

Finally, for a bit of stylized period fantasy adventure, check out "Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children" (2016) adapted from the book by Ransom Riggs, directed by Tim Burton and starring Eva Green. Stream it on Disney+ or rent it elsewhere.

Ballad: New film still subversive, takes risks

FROM PAGE 16

call herself a fan first before anything else, the greatest gift you can get is more to the story," Zegler said. "Rather than seeing it as a pressure cooker just waiting to explode, I see it as a really big blessing."

Blyth, in his first starring role in Hollywood, felt some pressure. But he found comfort in the material they were working with.

"We're lucky to be adapting a book that's really good," Blyth said. "Suzanne writes these big thinking pieces that are approachable for teenagers and younger people, which I think is a genuinely honorable feat — someone who wants to try and bring bigger ideas to young people while also entertaining them."

Filming took place largely in Germany. The production looked to reconstruction-era Berlin for aesthetic and thematic inspiration for this post-war capitol that's rebuilding and on tenuous political ground. And Trish Summerville was also brought back to design the ornate costumes, which include some Easter eggs for fans hidden in Lucy's hand-painted corset.

"There's this spectacle to the whole world," Blyth said. "The whole thing is about spectacle. It's about being distracted by beautiful things while everything else is going on."

But even while creating a new world, the filmmakers were disciplined about the budget. Instead of resting on laurels and precedent — "Mockingjay Part 2" had a $160 million price tag — they kept theirs to a reported $100 million.

"We were very mindful that this was not a sequel but a prequel with a new cast," Jacobson said. "We wanted to make sure that we were making this movie at a price that made sense."

It's easy to forget that not everyone in Hollywood thought that they had a blockbuster in their hands at the beginning. Back in 2009, when Jacobson and her production company ColorForce acquired the rights to adapt Collins' YA series, there was widespread skepticism about young adult material and about the appeal of female-fronted action movies that weren't primarily romances.

"In the original series, we were able to take a lot of risks and really challenge a lot of industry assumptions," Jacobson said. "The most important thing in this go-around was to still take those risks and not be playing it safe — to still feel like we're making something that's a bit on the subversive side."

With its moral ambiguity and complicated characters, Jacobson thinks it might even be the kind of movie that audiences want to discuss and debate afterward. In the past year, she added, a lot of young people have discovered the franchise on streaming who will hopefully join established fans at the theater for "The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes."

"I'm hopeful that it will be a shared cultural experience and a communal experience at a time when we don't have too many of those," Jacobson said. "When they do happen, as they have this year with movies as different as 'Barbie' and 'Oppenheimer,' it certainly shows that if you give people a worthwhile and original story with some bold storytelling and a filmmaker with a voice, that they will show up. And we hope to be part of that showing up."

REBECCA CABAGE, INVISION/AP

Rachel Zegler and Tom Blyth pose for a portrait to promote "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes" on Nov. 12 in West Hollywood, Calif. It is Blyth's first lead Hollywood role; Zegler starred in the Steven Spielberg-directed "West Side Story" in 2021.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

‘Hunger Games’ back with odds in its favor

Propelled by Blyth, ‘Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes’ the deepest expression yet of the series’ melodrama of adolescence

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

Two hours and 37 minutes is pretty long for a “ballad,” but you can’t call it “The Hunger Games: The Three-Cycle Opera of Songbirds & Snakes” now, can you?

Concision was never much in favor in the four “Hunger Games” films, which reached a seeming finale with 2015’s “The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2.” The intervening years have done nothing to shrink the ambitions of this unapologetically gaudy dystopian series where the brutal deaths of kids are watched over by outrageously styled Capitol denizens with names like Effie Trinket.

That clash of young adult allegory and color palette is just as pronounced, if not more so, in “The Hunger Games: Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes,” a prequel set 64 years before the original books, adapted from Suzanne Collins’ 2020 book of the same name.

“The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes” is an origin story of the Hunger Games, themselves, as well as numerous characters — primarily the devious President Coriolanus Snow, played by Donald Sutherland in the first four films. Here, Snow is an impoverished but opportunistic 18-year-old student played by Tom Blyth.

Just as in the “Hunger Games” films led by Jennifer Lawrence’s Katniss Everdeen, the new one proves how much you can sacrifice in story when you’ve got a thrilling young performer commanding the screen.

Francis Lawrence’s prequel often wobbles, especially in the early going. And yet, in the end, “The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes,” propelled by Blyth’s performance, manages to be the deepest expression yet of the series’ melodrama of adolescence. In Panem, the only thing more tragic than the suffering inflicted by adults on the young may be a bright kid warping wickedly into one of those elders, too.

That generational divide was always at the heart of the appeal of “The Hunger Games,” a fantasy where no adult or institution can be trusted, and the normal pressures of teendom are amplified in a modern, televised Roman coliseum — an “American Idol” with murder — concocted by elders. It’s madness shrugged off as, “That’s just the way it is.”

In “The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes,” we see how it got to be that way. The 10th annual Hunger Games are approaching, but it feels more like pre-Super Bowl times when the NFL and the AFL played in separate leagues.

LIONSGATE/AP

Tom Blyth and Rachel Zegler in a scene from “The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes.” The relationship between their characters Coriolanus and Lucy Gray is compellingly complex.

The broadcast is low-rent, the ratings are poor and the games themselves are staged in a dilapidated stadium.

With little food in the fridge, Coriolanus is living with his cousin Tigris (Hunter Schafer) and grandmother (Fionnula Flanagan). Their family has fallen on hard times, in part because of a family rivalry with Casca Highbottom (Peter Dinklage), the dean of the academy who harbors hatred for the Snows.

As the students gather amid Third Reich architectures (the production design by Uli Hanisch is stellar) and the games’ founder Volumnia Gaul (Viola Davis, with a turquoise eye) gazes on, Coriolanus is assigned his tribute, Lucy Gray Baird, a bold young woman from District 12 (also the home of Katniss) who wears a rainbow skirt and sports a dubious Southern accent. During the reaping ceremony, she makes an immediate impression, putting a snake down the back of a rival and bursting into song for the cameras. See, now there’s concision, I thought. You get your songbird and snake, straight off.

Lawrence’s Katniss was a thrilling female warrior whose seizing of center stage had reverberations off screen, paving the way for blockbuster female protagonists. Rachel Zegler’s Lucy Gray is inevitably a disappointment by comparison. Lawrence’s film, scripted by Michael Arndt and Michael Lesslie, for a while has the stale feeling of an unneeded retread. The tonal fluctuations, always a tricky balance in Panem, can be ridiculous. The stadium is abruptly bombed by unseen rebels. Once the games begin, one tribute concocts rabies.

The main thing holding our attention at this point is Jason Schwartzman’s Lucretius Flickerman, a TV host with a Salvador Dali mustache who wants the games wrapped up just so he can make his dinner reservations.

But “Songbirds & Snakes” sneakily begins making a case for itself. The relationship between Coriolanus and Lucy Gray is compellingly complex. He works desperately to help her survive the games because he believes in her, and maybe loves her, but also because her success benefits him, too. Whether Lucy Gray is as purehearted as her songs, too, is up for debate. Both, we sense, are cunningly playing the hands they’ve been dealt, seeking an advantage where they can. When Coriolanus begins making suggestions for the games to Volumnia, he proves himself a natural-born marketer.

That there’s tension in Coriolanus’ character, considering we know how he ultimately ends up, is a tribute to just how good Blyth is. We’ve by now seen plenty of prequels that show us how some famous villain broke bad, but there’s nothing in Blyth’s performance that telegraphs his future. He’s a sincere striver — we root for him because of his poverty and his pluck. He’s a villain created entirely of circumstance.

“The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes” extends the saga for a third act that takes place in District 12, an addition that another franchise might have saved for the next installment. But it’s also where that tragedy of “The Hunger Games,” and Coriolanus’ fate, earns some of the Shakespearean touches that have liberally been sprinkled throughout. (Shakespeare’s “Coriolanus” is likewise about an ambiguous warrior set amid times of famine and class struggle.)

“The Hunger Games” kicked off a YA craze in film that had its ups and downs, but petered out several years ago. Whether “The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes” is enough to relight those embers remains to be seen, but it is a reminder how good a platform they offered young actors. It’s a ritual worth returning to.

“The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes” is rated PG-13 for strong violent content and disturbing material. Running time: 157 minutes. Now playing in select AAFES movie theaters.

‘Trolls Band Together,’ starring Timberlake, is light, frivolous fun

BY ADAM GRAHAM
The Detroit News

The third “Trolls” film, “Trolls Band Together,” seems to have been reverse engineered to get *NSYNC back together and really, there are worse ways to spend studio capital and animators’ talents.

This is a frothy, frivolous and just fine film for kiddos, and a decent enough introduction point into the world of boy bands and their inner workings. It also features interpolations of songs by Sister Sledge, Weezer, Shaggy, New Edition, New Kids on the Block, Boyz II Men, the Bee Gees and yes, *NSYNC, who contribute “Better Place,” their first new song in 20 years, to the soundtrack. It could be worse, and oftentimes these types of things are.

Justin Timberlake returns as Branch, who suddenly has a backstory as the fifth member of BroZone, a wildly popular troll boy band he was in 20 years ago with his brothers. (He was “Bitty B,” the baby of the group, literally in diapers when they were all the rage.) The group split up for the usual reasons — ego, fame, etc. — and the brothers have since gone their separate ways. (Honest question: Was there any mention of Branch’s four brothers in the previous two “Trolls”?)

But now one of Branch’s brothers has been kidnapped, his talent mined by a pair of soulless, vapid pop star wannabes, Velvet and Veneer (voiced by Amy Schumer and Andrew Rannells). It’s up to BroZone to put aside their differences and come together to rescue their brother, who is trapped inside a diamond (?!) and can only be freed by the singing of the perfect family harmony? Sure, whatever, sounds good.

Anna Kendrick is back as the voice of Poppy, Branch’s sidekick, but she doesn’t have as much to do this time around as Timberlake’s character takes center stage. “Trolls Band Together” has some fun with JT’s past (references to frosted tips and denim tuxedos) and contains a decent joke about modern pop fame (Velvet and Veneer are set to be honored for a lifetime achievement award after being a group for two months), and the whole thing zips by in a whoosh of colors and pop hooks.

UNIVERSAL PICTURES/TNS

From left, John Dory (voice of Eric André), Poppy (Anna Kendrick) and Branch (Justin Timberlake) in “Trolls Band Together.”

It’s not rocket science, but neither is pop music, and “Trolls Band Together” goes down like an airy radio hit. It’s catchy, it’s cute enough, and if you forget it 10 seconds after it’s over, that’s all by design.

“Trolls Band Together” is rated PG for some mild rude and suggestive humor. Running time: 91 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Silly but sweet

‘Next Goal Wins’ carries true underdog tale of American Samoan soccer team to victory

BY MICHAEL O’SULLIVAN
The Washington Post

Let’s face it: “Next Goal Wins” is a walking, talking cliché of a fact-based, come-from-behind, underdog sports movie. In every way but one: The team in question (the American Samoan national soccer team, which ignominiously lost to Australia 31-0 in the 2001 World Cup, the worst defeat in the history of international soccer) pretty much starts behind and stays behind. If you’re looking for a stirring story of untapped grit that involves a championship game and a nail-biter victory, look somewhere else. (Say, “The Boys in the Boat,” George Clooney’s film about the 1936 Olympic crew team, opening Christmas Day.)

That’s not a flaw. That’s precisely what’s so good about this oddball little charmer, a welcome return to silly-sweet form for director Taika Waititi, after graduating from such small indie comedies, shot in his native New Zealand, as “Eagle vs Shark, “Boy” and “Hunt for the Wilderpeople” to Marvel’s “Thor: Ragnarok” and the Oscar-winning “Jojo Rabbit.” Both of those big Hollywood movies are excellent films, mind you, but it’s nice to see the filmmaker work on a small canvas again.

Based on a 2014 nonfiction film, also called “Next Goal Wins,” the movie sets out to tell what it calls its “tale of whoa” (terrible pun intended), not by denying its formulaic contours but by embracing them. When Michael Fassbender’s Thomas Rongen first shows up on American Samoa — an island whose two biggest exports are tuna and football players, as Waititi’s narrator tells us — the team’s new coach casts himself as a Mr. Miyagi to their “bunch of Daniel LaRussos.” As Fassbender’s disgraced sports professional, who’s been relegated to career purgatory for anger management and alcohol issues, begins to whip the misfit players into shape, they run drills chanting, “Wax on! Wax off!”

There’s even a visual reference to “The Karate’s Kid’s” crane kick pose, and a halftime speech lifted verbatim from “Any Given Sunday.”

The formulaic parameters are all there: Thomas was not sent to American Samoa to help the team, he’s told by a soccer official played by Will Arnett. Rather, Arnett’s character tells him, “We sent you there to help you.” (Yes, we’ve all heard that line before, even if it’s not normally said out loud.)

One thing that is new: The team’s best player — and ultimately its captain — is a trans woman (Kaimana). That’s not one of the “embellishments” that Waititi’s narrator admits have been added to the story. Kaimana’s character, Jaiyah Saelua — a fa’afafine athlete whose gender identity is an accepted part of Samoan culture — was the first openly nonbinary and trans athlete to compete in a FIFA World Cup qualifier.

Jaiyah isn’t the focus of “Next Goals Wins,” but it’s her character who opens the door to Thomas’ redemption, beginning the healing of his buried grief. It’s her story arc, not his, that drives home the film’s message.

Ultimately, “Next Goal Wins” isn’t really a sports movie at all, but one whose deceptively simple mantras — “Be happy” and “There’s more to life than soccer” — are the most subversive (and winning) things about it.

“Next Goal Wins” is rated PG-13 for strong language and crude humor. Running time: 103 minutes. Now playing at select AAFES movie theaters.

SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES/AP photos

Michael Fassbender, right, tries to whip the American Samoan national soccer team into shape in the Taika Waititi-directed “Next Goal Wins.” Also shown: David Fane.

Kaimana, foreground, plays the ragtag team’s best athlete.

Slasher flick ‘Thanksgiving’ an undercooked holiday dish

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

Gather ’round the table, horror fans, because Eli Roth is finally serving up his long-gestating holiday feast: the seasonal slasher movie “Thanksgiving.” The idea for this film got rolling some 16 years ago with the 2007 Quentin Tarantino/Robert Rodriguez double feature “Grindhouse,” in which Roth and his longtime friend Jeff Rendell cooked up a joke trailer inspired by their love of themed horror movies and a Massachusetts childhood spent just down the road from Plymouth, the site of the first Thanksgiving.

When horror fans first got their eyes on the “Thanksgiving” trailer, it sparked a fervent appetite for the whole meal, but with the full film finally hitting theaters, after 16 years of discussion and development, it proves the adage — also true for Thanksgiving meals — that there can be too much of a good thing.

“Thanksgiving” is an enthusiastic slasher romp in which Roth is clearly having a ball making his childhood dreams come true. But the problem here is the underbaked script, co-written with Rendell. The film has been reverse-engineered around the holiday-themed kills (Black Friday mob, electric carving knife, turkey roasting) and references to the original trailer and other classic horror movies. The script takes the shape of a loose take on “Scream” or “I Know What You Did Last Summer,” with our killer, known as John Carver, stalking a group of teens in a revenge plot. “Thanksgiving” doesn’t try to deconstruct the genre — its only self-reflection are the requisite references — but the characters are thinly written, lacking motivation, and the central mystery is hopelessly muddled.

SONY PICTURES/TNS

A mysterious Thanksgiving-inspired killer terrorizes Plymouth, Mass., in “Thanksgiving.”

Our heroine is Nell Verlaque as Jessica. The plot starts on Thanksgiving when Jessica’s father (Rick Hoffman), the owner of the Right Mart big-box store, starts his Black Friday sale a day early. A mob, frothing for free waffle irons, starts a stampede after they’re taunted by Jessica’s snotty group of friends, who sneaked into the store early.

Mayhem ensues, lives are lost, etc. All that’s left is a haunting social media video and a sense of collective trauma. A year later, a John Carver character — outfitted in Pilgrim finery — has been hunting down everyone involved in the melee. It’s up to Jessica to track down the killer’s identity since the bumbling Sheriff Newlon (Patrick Dempsey) proves to be utterly useless.

Roth, a horror fan and dedicated student of the genre, can stage and shoot an innovative suspense sequence. The violence is sadistic and gory; the setups are inventive and engaging. But he rushes through them, and doesn’t let anything breathe. It’s only the prior knowledge of horror tropes and a curiosity about who’s under the Carver mask that keeps this moving forward.

Overall, “Thanksgiving” feels incredibly juvenile, which is perhaps due to its genesis so long ago.

“Thanksgiving” is rated R for strong bloody horror violence and gore, pervasive language and some sexual material. Running time: 107 minutes. Now playing in select AAFES movie theaters.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Packing a timely punch

Mitch Albom spins moving Holocaust tale in 'The Little Liar'

By Rob Merrill
Associated Press

Mitch Albom's books often capture the zeitgeist, but his new novel about the fate of Greek Jews during World War II packs a particular punch in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Israel on Oct. 7.

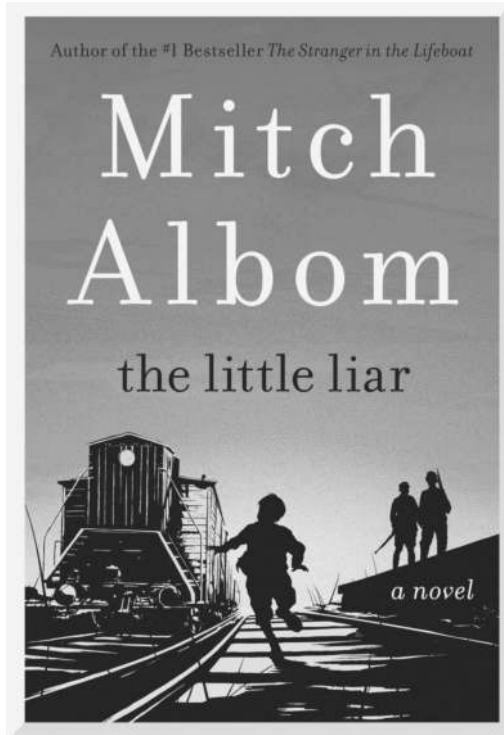
"The Little Liar" tells the story of four interconnected characters. Three of them are Jews living in Salonika, Greece, at the onset of Germany's invasion, and the other is a Third Reich devotee carrying out Hitler's orders on the Mediterranean island.

Nico Krispis is the title character, and it's his journey from a beautiful boy who has never told a lie to a Nazi pawn that drives the novel. Nico and his brother, Sebastian, are just boys when the story begins and by the end they're middle-aged men who have lived lives defined by the choices they made during the war. Between them is their childhood friend Fannie, whom both boys crushed on when they were growing up, and whom Sebastian throws off a train bound for Auschwitz at the start of the novel.

The book's narrator presents as the definition of reliable: "I am Truth. And this is a story about a boy who tried to break me." Truth often breaks the fourth wall and "speaks" directly to the reader and sometimes the plot is broken up by parables, as in the one where Parable himself urges Truth to don colorful clothes instead of walking about naked and scaring the populace. That story precedes a chapter called "The Lie of Resettlement" — which explains the myth that Germans told Jews about their destination in the east where they would live and work with their families as they boarded cattle cars bound for concentration camps.

Revealing more plot details is counterproductive for a story whose full scope, like a distant image coming into focus through a lens, sharpens with each turn of the page. As with all Albom books, the pages turn quickly. For most, this is a book that will be read in just one or two sittings. But no matter how long it takes, it will stay with you.

Inspired by what really happened to 50,000 Jewish people living in Greece during the Holocaust, Albom has created art that can be added to the long list of movies, music, theater and books that are humanity's best hope to deliver on the words inscribed on memorials around the world: "Never Forget."

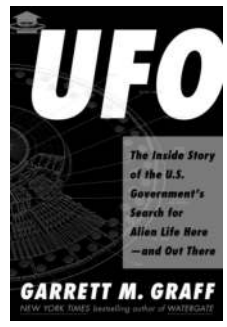


'UFO' looks at the search for the truth

By Andrew DeMillo
Associated Press

The truth may be out there, but making sense out of it isn't easy.

Discussion about unidentified flying objects has moved over the years from fodder for science fiction movies or jokes to the subject of congressional hearings. Garrett M. Graff's "UFO: The Inside Story of the U.S. Government's Search for Alien Life Here — and Out There" is the perfect guide for readers interested in learning how that discussion has evolved.



Graff offers an authoritative and objective look at the history of UFO sightings and research into the possibility of extraterrestrial life over the past 75 years.

It's a narrative as compelling as Graff's other works, including his history of Watergate, and requires the same skill that he's demonstrated in navigating government documents.

The deeply researched history traces the ways the government has struggled to wrap its arms around the questions raised by UFOs — or, as they're now known, "unidentified aerial phenomena" — sightings going back to the 1940s.

"It's not that the government knows something it doesn't want to tell us," Graff writes at the outset of the book. "It's that the government is uncomfortable telling us it doesn't know anything at all."

Graff profiles a sprawling cast of characters who have played a role in the search for UFOs and alien life over the years, from amateur ufologists to famed astronomer Carl Sagan to Blink-182 frontman Tom DeLonge.

They're all battling hoaxes and public skepticism and trying to overcome the lingering question first posed by physicist Enrico Fermi: if extraterrestrial life is prevalent, why don't we see more of it?

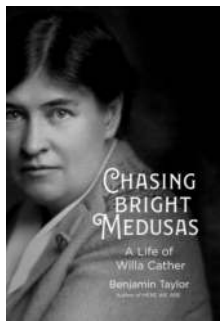
Graff highlights scientific advances made over the years in trying to answer that question, but also in showing just how vast and unknown the universe is.

The book shows how attitudes toward UFOs have changed, not just by scientists and the government but also in popular culture. Those shifting attitudes have led to more openness about discussing sightings, and the national security implications of not knowing what they could be.

Biography of Willa Cather displays a fan's devotion

By Ann Levin
Associated Press

Benjamin Taylor has a thing for Willa Cather. This year, the 150th anniversary of her birth, he has written a passionate love letter to her in the form of a brief but illuminating biography. "Chasing Bright Medusas" clocks in at just over 150 pages, but it offers a fine introduction to one of the leading novelists of the American frontier.



Taylor, a prize-winning author who also penned short books about Philip Roth and Marcel Proust, argues that Cather's move at age 9 from Virginia's Shenandoah Valley to Red Cloud, Neb., where for the first time she encountered Jews, Norwegians, Mexicans and immigrants of all kinds, was a foundational event that "made her a cosmopolitan while she was still a provincial."

He also demonstrates how, as she matured as a writer, she differed sharply from her younger contemporaries in the literary world, including Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald and Dos Passos, in her "unironic" idealism about America's possibility.

His other major themes include her complicated relationship to both gender and religion. About the former, he agrees with other critics who have simply taken her strong preference for women as a given. But he adds another layer of complexity by asserting that she preferred "to talk about love at its most exalted, above the reach of mere carnality ... sexual nature is what she intends to rise above."

As for religion, he explains how it was closely bound up with her profound reverence for nature, especially the "harsh beauty of the Southwest," which "seemed to her the landscape of an inner life."

It was also part and parcel of her desire for literary immortality. "There is no God but one God, and Art is his revealer," Cather wrote to a friend when she was still in her early 20s. "That's my creed, and I'll follow it to the end."

Portraying her as a relatively late bloomer — she had a lengthy stint in journalism before she began writing fiction — Taylor repeatedly marvels at both her physical courage and stamina and her iron discipline as a writer.

He cites with admiration what she once wrote to a friend: "If only I could nail up the front door and live in a mess, I could simply become a fountain pen and have done with it — a conduit for ink to run through."

By marshaling judicious quotes from her letters as well as her short stories and novels, including such classics as "My Antonia" and "Death Comes for the Archbishop," Taylor makes a case for Cather's enduring place in the American literary canon.

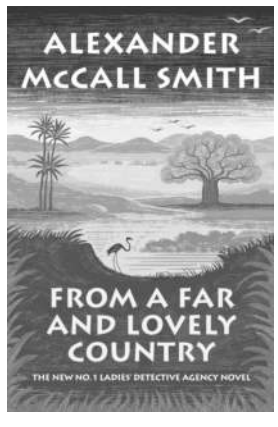
More detective comfort food in 'Far and Lovely Country'

By Chris Hewitt
Star Tribune

"I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got" is the name of an album by the late Sinéad O'Connor but also an idea expressed in several ways by characters in "From a Far and Lovely Country."

O'Connor's appreciate-your-life sentiment could work as the title for almost all 24 of Alexander McCall Smith's books about the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, featuring Precious Ramotswe, a contented Botswanan whose neighbors hire her to help solve everyday problems from errant spouses to troublesome employees.

There are no murders in Smith's books, which are less about crime-solving than figuring out how to be a happy, decent person. In "Far and Lovely Country," that involves a dress that doesn't fit, a vice principal who loses his job and Violet Sephoto, the amoral nemesis of Ramotswe's brash assistant, Grace Makutsi.



The comfy-coziness of this series is a huge part of its appeal; Ramotswe, who taught herself to be a detective using a manual, wouldn't know what to do with a major crime and neither would we. Still, Smith consistently finds ways to move the books forward and keep them fresh. Here, that means an increased role for Ramotswe's apprentice Charlie and some huge errors on the part of the agency.

One trademark of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency books is that they amble along, filled with descriptions of the beauty of Africa and its creatures, until everything wraps up happily.

Toward the end of "Far and Lovely Country," fans may wonder if Smith is going to be able to pull that off.

With a dozen pages left, none of the three major dilemmas in the book has been satisfactorily resolved.

No worries, though. Smith gets there in a sweetly sentimental finale that, like every one of its 23 predecessors, races toward a reminder to appreciate the people and places we love.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Saints, seafood in Santiago de Compostela

Whenever I'm in Santiago de Compostela, in the northwest corner of Spain, I have a three-part agenda: See pilgrims reach their goal in front of the cathedral, explore the market and buy some barnacles in its seafood section — then have them cooked for me, on the spot, in a café.

I make a point to be on the town square facing the towering Cathedral of St. James at around 11 a.m. That's when scores of well-worn pilgrims begin gathering for the daily Pilgrim's Mass, a triumphant celebration marking their completion of the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James) — a 500-mile hike from the French border.

Since the Middle Ages, humble hikers have walked these miles to pay homage to the remains of St. James in his namesake city. Their traditional gear included a cloak; a pointy, floppy hat; a walking stick; and a gourd (for drinking from wells). The way is marked with yellow arrows or scallop shells (a symbol of the saint) at every intersection. Doing the entire route from the border to Santiago takes about four to six weeks. I've never met a pilgrim who didn't think the trek was a life-changing experience and well worth the sweat.

At journey's end, hikers complete their pilgrimage by stepping on the metal scallop shell embedded in the pavement at the foot of the cathedral. I just love watching how different pilgrims handle the jubilation.

Rick Steves

To stand in front of the cathedral's stately facade is the hiker's dream. Routinely, pilgrims ask me to take their photo and email it to them. Then they say, "I've got to go meet with St. James," and as has been the routine for centuries, they head into the cathedral.

Santiago is a city built of its local granite. Most people picture Spain as a hot, arid land, but the Atlantic northwest of Spain enjoys far more precipitation than the interior (Spain's northwest corner is home to a temperate rainforest, an hour north of Santiago). Rain off the Atlantic has colored Santiago's granite green with moss.

Two blocks away from the cathedral, Santiago's public market is thriving, oblivious to the personal triumphs going on at St. James' tomb. There's something basic about wandering through a farmers market early in the morning anywhere in the world: Salt-of-the-earth people pull food out of the ground, cart it into the city and sell their harvest to people who don't have gardens.

Rick Steves

Hikers celebrate the end of their pilgrimage in front of the Cathedral of St. James in Santiago, Spain.

From one vendor I buy percebes (barnacles) at a third the price I'd pay in a bar. I get a little less than a half pound and hustle my bag over to the market café. There, Ramón and Julia boil them for a small fee. Feeling quite like a local — sipping my beer so early in the morning — I eagerly wait for my barnacles to cook.

Then comes the climax of my morning: Julia brings my stack of steaming barnacles, as well as bread and another beer. I'm set. Twist, rip, bite. It's the bounty of the sea condensed into every little morsel ... edible jubilation in Santiago.

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

Film festivals aren't exclusively for the rich and famous

Anyone who's ever been transfixed by a certain film has likely felt the urge to ask its director what the inspiration was for certain scenes. And sometimes an actor's portrayal of a character seems so spot-on you can't help wondering if he or she has gone through something similar in real life.

Attending a film festival can serve as a vital link between the on-screen world and the spectator's experience. And it's not just industry players and film nerds who can benefit. Even the best-known and glitziest of film festivals generally offer the public access to selected screenings and special events.

Karen Bradbury

Beyond the screening of films, festivals often give the viewers the chance to engage with directors, film crews, actors and others in Q&A sessions. Other festival sections might be made up of retrospectives, competitions or homages to certain actors or directors. Special events such as parties, live music, exhibitions and late-night shows also pump up a festival's fun factor.

The colder months of the year are perfectly suited to an indoor pursuit such as watching movies back to back at your nearest film festival. Here are three places to step into the world of cinematic wonder in the weeks to come:

Wiesbaden, Germany: The exground filmfest, which began in 1990, continues to wear a name that reflects its original focus: "ex" for experimental and "ground" for underground films. Through Nov. 26, Hessen's capital will attract tens of thousands of cinemagoers with a program consisting of 200 films from 57 countries. There's always a focus country, and in 2023, Chile's film landscape will bask in the spotlight. Other sections include Made in Germany, European Cinema, World Cinema and Youth Days.

Likely to be of particular interest to U.S. audiences is the festival's American Independents section: this year's selection of seven feature films includes the comedy "Drugstore June," in which a young woman tries to solve the mystery of who robbed the town's pharmacy; "Fancy Dance," in which a member of an indigenous community seeks to find her missing sister; and "A Great Place to Call Home," in which a senior's life is turned upside down after he reports seeing a UFO in his garden.

iStock

Film festivals often allow attendees access to actors, directors and parties as well as the films themselves.

Movies are shown at the Caligari Cinema and other venues in Wiesbaden and Frankfurt. It's usually possible to get tickets right at the box office before the show; most screenings cost 8 euros. A pass for viewing 10 films goes for 60 euros. Online: exground.com/en

Mannheim, Germany: The International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg (IFFMH) sets its focus on the discovery and nurturing of the next generation of filmmakers. Most of the films shown here represent the first or second works of young and upcoming directors. The festival, which runs through Nov. 26, counts among Germany's most important film events.

In 2023, 72 films from 51 countries will make up the IFFMH's main program. Sections include "On the Rise," in which 16 feature-length films made by exceptional directors compete for the official festival awards. "Pushing the Boundaries" is a showing of films taking on the most critical issues of today's society. The "Filmscapes" section provides a space for documentaries and essay films. "Facing new Challenges" explores the possibilities of the moving image outside of classical narrative cinema; this year's focus is on video art and club music.

Special events this year include American-Dominican media artist and DJ Kelman Duran's video installation challenging persistent colonial structures in the atrium of Mannheim's Kunsthall; a concert and the showing of a biker gang film at the Alte Feuerwache Mannheim on Nov. 18; and assorted works by an artists' collective from Nairobi to be displayed and performed at the IFFMH's new festival lounge in the Karlstorbahnhof Heidelberg.

Tickets to individual screenings generally cost 12 euros for adults and 8 euros for youth and students, while a festival pass goes for 80 euros. Tickets are sold at the tourist information points located next to the central train stations of Mannheim and Heidelberg. Online: iffmh.de

Naples, Italy: The 15th edition of the Naples Human Rights Film Festival, titled "The Rights of Minors – Children at War" looks at an issue that grows more urgent with each passing day. As outbreaks of conflicts slide into long-term wars, children and young people become both actors and spectators in a world of heartbreak, violence and acute need. This year, the festival surveys these grim scenarios from the little ones' point of view. The festival takes place online and in person through Nov. 25.

Films will be screened in the Sala delle Mura Greche of the Oriental University (Palazzo Corigliano - Piazza San Domenico Maggiore) nightly from 7 p.m.-11 p.m. through Nov. 24. Entry is free. Online: cinenapolidiritti.it/web

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

PHOTOS BY ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

The reliquary bust of San Gennaro, the patron saint of Naples, on the altar of the Chapel of the Treasure of San Gennaro, holds the skull bones of the saint. Several of his relics, including vials of blood, are safeguarded at the Italian city's cathedral.

Some of the frescoes adorning the dome of the chapel were painted by renowned Bologna artist Domenico Zampieri, who died before completing his work.

The Museum of the Treasure of San Gennaro is adjacent to the Naples Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta.

Preparing for San Gennaro's miracle

Naples museum, chapel offer insight into city's love of the patron saint

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

Three times a year, Naples citizens gather in anticipation of witnessing the city's patron saint, San Gennaro, perform a miracle.

Hundreds gather outside the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta in the city's historic district to see if the martyr will liquefy his dried blood, a relic kept since his beheading in 305. If the blood runs, the city is blessed. If it doesn't, catastrophe looms.

Amazingly, the hoped-for result occurs with few exceptions. You can learn about the ritual, the history of the saint and his connection to Naples at the Museum of the Treasure of San Gennaro.

Adjacent to the cathedral, the museum holds the Treasure of San Gennaro, a trove of relics and religious items made from bronze, silver and gold and decorated with diamonds, emeralds, rubies and other jewels.

You also can visit the Chapel of the Treasure of San Gennaro, where the ritual takes place, and view its Baroque architecture, frescoes and other artwork created by 17th-century craftsmen from Naples and throughout Italy.

San Gennaro, known in English as St. Januarius, is thought to protect Naples from fires, earthquakes, droughts, plagues, volcanic eruptions and other disasters. In addition, he is said to bestow help, healing and special favors.

In return, Neapolitans venerate the saint, who refused to renounce his faith and was tortured and executed on order of the Roman emperor Diocletian, according to the museum.

Visitors enter the museum to the right of the ticket office and head into the chapel, which was completed in 1646.

The altar includes a reliquary bust of San Gennaro that holds the bones of the saint's skull, the audio guide states. The rest of his relics, including vials of blood gathered by an old woman after his death, are kept at the cathedral.

This necklace in the museum features diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphires donated by kings, queens, popes and others in Europe over the centuries. It adorns a bust of San Gennaro during processions.

Of special note is the dome, which like those of Florence's Cathedral and St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, has a double shell.

Its under arches were frescoed by renowned Bologna artist Domenico Zampieri, who also completed frescoes on the main altar and five of six paintings on copper that decorate the side altars.

He died unexpectedly before finishing his work, and the dome was completed by another artist whose fresco depicts paradise.

Backtracking through the chapel takes visitors to a flight of stairs leading down to the museum's display of paintings, sculpture and religious items dedicated to San Gennaro.

Among the stunning pieces is a miter, a headdress worn by bishops, decorated with 3,026 diamonds, 198 emeralds and 168 rubies and weighing nearly 40 pounds.

Designed by Neapolitan goldsmith Matteo Treglia in 1713, it is used to decorate the head of San Gennaro's bust. The website Religion Unplugged estimates its worth at $7 million.

There's also a jeweled collar for the bust that features diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphires, many of which were donated by kings, queens, popes and others over the centuries.

Several chalices and other religious items also are displayed, a small portion of the heavily guarded treasure.

Visiting the chapel and museum offers not only a better understanding of Naples' love for San Gennaro but also preparation for taking in the fervor and spectacle of upcoming miracles.

The next celebration is scheduled for Dec. 16, the anniversary of the day he is credited with saving Naples from an eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 1631.

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@alisonbath_

Museum of the Treasure of San Gennaro

Address: Via Duomo 149, Naples, Italy (closest metro stop is Piazza Cavour)
Cost: 12 euros (includes an audio guide); 8.50 euros for seniors 65 and older; free for children under 12. There also are reduced prices for families and groups, such as schools, and an option to include the Filangieri Museum for an additional 3 euros. Guided tours are offered for 20 euros.
Hours: 9:30 a.m.-6 p.m. daily for the museum treasures; for the chapel, 9:30 a.m.-1 p.m. and 3-6 p.m. Monday and Saturday; 9:30 a.m.-1 p.m. and 2:30-6 p.m., Tuesday-Friday; and 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and 4:30-6 p.m. Sunday .
Information: Phone: +39 081-294980; online: tesorosangennaro.it/en/home-en

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL/Stars and Stripes

This stylish office building in Ruesselsheim, Germany, houses Freeway Restaurant, but hides the bright neon of its interior.

As evening descends in Ruesselsheim, Freeway Restaurant's booths are bathed in a welcoming glow. The diner's lighting and ambiance create a cozy haven. Its decor is a patchwork of the past: a vibrant collection of memorabilia from gas station signs to vintage car parts.

Get your kicks on Route B42

Take a nostalgic detour to Freeway Restaurant in Ruesselsheim for neon lights, American bites

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

Stumbling upon Freeway Restaurant on a rainy evening while my wife and I were driving back from Frankfurt Airport, the two of us found an unexpected slice of America on the outskirts of Ruesselsheim, Germany.

The eatery is perched inconspicuously on the top floor of an office building. It offers a respite for those caught in the autobahn's relentless traffic.

The place, located 15 minutes from Clay Kaserne in Wiesbaden, is a canvas of classic Americana, brushed with the broad strokes of a diner along a highway — not the interstate, mind you, but its less hurried cousin of yesteryear.

The decor is a patchwork of the past: a vibrant collection of memorabilia from gas station signs to vintage car parts, all basking in the warm glow of wall-to-wall neon lights.

A life-sized statue of a University of Texas linebacker stands sentinel among the dining booths, with a curiously pint-sized Michael Jordan nearby, while a crocodile head clutches Budweiser bottles in its teeth, providing an odd yet endearing backdrop.

Our booth welcomed us with the promise of comfort and space. Some of them are large enough to accommodate eight or more.

The menu read like a road map of classic meals, punctuated by photos of rusted relics and roadside scenes of the American West.

From burgers to barbecue, the menu playfully toed the line between two worlds, its language blending from line to line. One item described the classic hamburger in a local German dialect, ending with the assertion "simple but good" in English.

Looking for familiar favorites, we went with mozzarella sticks and nachos for starters. The portions challenged our appetite and were nearly meals in themselves.

While the flavors differed from those stateside, they had their own charm. The nachos were blanketed in tomato sauce and cheese, more Italian than Tex-Mex. Missing was the gooey yellow cheese I was expecting.

Dip choices for the mozzarella sticks didn't include classic marinara. I chose guacamole instead, a surprisingly pleasant detour.

The menu features a full Mexican section of tortilla soft rolls, Freeway's version of burritos. Given the somewhat questionable nachos, we chose to bypass another visit south of the border.

Having firmly broken food traditions at this point, I indulged in a milkshake while making my final selection. Freeway's Nutella variant was a creamy delight, a sweet start to the savory adventure ahead.

My wife went with the Forrest Gump Steak, an homage not just in name but in spirit. The dish is a surf-and-turf served with a side of shrimp and a creamy sauce.

Continuing the theme of ample portions, Freeway gave us a huge side salad and a generous helping of potato wedges.

Freeway also pulls no punches with its burger selection, which includes hot chili burgers, a Tex-Mex cheeseburger and even its signature Monster burger, a 1.5-pound patty stacked high with toppings.

My customizable veggie burger was a pleasant patchwork of vegetables, potato and cheese, though Freeway swapped the expected pickle for a fresh cucumber, which made a surprising difference in flavor.

Likewise, the side of coleslaw was tasty but decidedly German in flavor and lacked the sweetness of its American counterpart.

Our drinks, homemade lemonades infused with berries and mint, were the perfect foil to the hearty fare: refreshing and light.

And though we hardly had room for more, the airy yet satisfying pancake dessert closed the meal with a nod to the classic American breakfast.

The restaurant's allure didn't wane as night set in, but our visit was too late in the year to test the full charm of the rooftop area, with its 360-degree views and alfresco dining under the stars.

Freeway might not be a complete culinary homecoming, but this bright neon oasis stands as a fun and heartfelt hat tip to American culture and cuisine. If you are feeling nostalgic for the USA and can't get your kicks on Route 66, a stop along Route B42 surely will do.

riedel.alexander@stripes.com
Twitter: @lexRiedel

AFTER HOURS GERMANY

Freeway Restaurant

Address: Lise-Meitner-Strasse 6, Ruesselsheim am Main, Germany
Hours: Monday through Thursday, 4:30-10:30 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, 4:30-11:30 p.m.; Sundays, noon to 11 p.m.
Prices: Appetizers start at 6.90 euros for the nacho bowl. Steak selection begins at 29.90 euros for the rump-steak and tops out with an Irish tomahawk steak for 55.90 euros. Burgers start at 12.50 for the classic. Soft drinks start at 2.80 euros; homemade lemonades are 4.80 euros.
Info: Online: freewayb42.com

Alexander Riedel

The signature vegetable burger at Freeway Restaurant surprises patrons with a fresh cucumber in place of the traditional pickle.

The Forrest Gump Steak at Freeway Restaurant is a generous nod to the iconic hit film. This surf-and-turf dish, with its accompanying shrimp and creamy sauce, is a hearty take on American cuisine.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER GREEN/Stars and Stripes

Sododuk is an all-you-can-eat barbecue restaurant near Camp Humphreys that's a great place to start your Korean cuisine journey.

Korean cuisine awaits near Camp Humphreys

Sododuk offers authentic all-you-can-eat barbecue

BY CHRISTOPHER GREEN
Stars and Stripes

Arriving in South Korea, I brought many goals, including trips to the country's museums, art galleries and festivals. But I was most excited about the food.

A visit to an authentic Korean barbecue restaurant was atop the to-do list. Luckily, there is one not far from Camp Humphreys called Sododuk.

Sododuk is a two-story brick building just beyond the Humphreys' Yoon gate. It's an all-you-can-eat buffet and a great place to start your Korean cuisine journey.

The restaurant's parking lot is a bit tricky to access; I drove past it, then turned around and backtracked to reach it.

Inside the restaurant, I received an enthusiastic greeting from the staff, who showed me to a table and explained the ordering process. A Korean buffet differs from those in the States.

They brought me three kinds of meat: marinated steak, beef flank and pork shoulder. Everything else you get on your own. I chose rice, kimchi, pickled jalapenos, marinated onions, lettuce and fresh garlic. It all looked delicious.

After I had all my side items, the staff delivered hot coals, placed them in the grill and covered them with a disposable, tin cover.

Everything was perfect. The marinated steak was both sweet and savory. The kimchi was spicy but not overwhelming.

The best part is that all of this was 27,800 won, or about $21. My only gripe is that if you don't finish your meat, you'll be charged an extra 10,000 won.

Sododuk is a great place for newcomers to immerse themselves for the first time into South Korean culture and cuisine.

AFTER HOURS S. KOREA

Sododuk

Location: 142, Paengseongdaegyo-gil, Paengseong-eup, Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi-do 17974
Hours: 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday; 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday.
Prices: Flat price of 27,800 won per person.
Dress: Casual
Directions: A short drive from Camp Humphreys' Yoon gate.
Information: Phone: 031-658-9300; Online: facebook.com/pages/Sododuk/1855494127865377

Christopher Green

You can fill yourself with food and not break the bank.

green.christopher@stripes
@ChrisJGreen8

Marinated steak sizzles on the grill at Sododuk.

You can't go wrong with the kimchi on the all-you-can-eat buffet.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

‘Drones are the next thing’

New element of Disneyland Paris nighttime spectaculars could spread to the other parks

BY BRADY MACDONALD
The Mercury News

Drone shows deploying hundreds of unmanned aerial aircraft over the skies of Disneyland and Disney California Adventure could soon be joining the lineup of nighttime spectaculars at the Anaheim theme parks.

“Drones are the next thing,” said Disney Live Entertainment Parades and Spectaculars Executive Steven Davison.

Davison was part of a panel discussion featuring the creative team from “Behind the Attraction” hosted by Walt Disney Imagineering during a media preview for the returning documentary series.

The second season of “Behind the Attraction” debuted Nov. 1 on the Disney+ streaming service with episodes dedicated to Disney nighttime spectaculars, Pirates of the Caribbean, Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, Indiana Jones Adventure and Disneyland food.

“They’re very cool,” Davison said of drones during the “Behind the Attraction” panel discussion. “They’re kind of a new thing. We’re doing a lot of work in that. So all I’m going to say is, there’s more to come.”

Davison is the creative director for parades, fireworks shows and nighttime spectaculars at Disney theme parks worldwide. He got his start at Disneyland and has worked on most of the nighttime spectaculars at Disneyland and Disney California Adventure during the past 25 years — including the “Remember ... Dreams Come True” fireworks show, Paint the Night parade and “World of Color” water show.

Disney Live Entertainment appears poised to introduce more nightly drone shows at theme parks around the world after rolling out a pair of drone light shows at Disneyland Paris over the past two years.

The “Disney D-Light” drone pre-show that debuted in 2022 at Disneyland Paris served as a prelude to the “Disney Illuminations” fireworks show — marking the first time a Disney theme park has utilized autonomous aerial technology as part of a daily outdoor show.

In early 2023, Disneyland Paris rolled out a Marvel drone show at Walt Disney Studios Park that combined the unmanned aerial aircraft with music, lights, pyrotechnics and video projections on the Tower of Terror.

Where could Disneyland or DCA add a drone show?

Adding drones could “plus up” — Walt Disney’s phrase for upgrading or improving an existing attraction — the nightly fireworks shows, “Fantasmic” or “World of Color.”

DISNEY/TNS

This concept art shows the Marvel drone and light show on the Tower of Terror attraction in Walt Disney Studios Park at the Disneyland Paris resort.

Importing the Marvel drone show from Disneyland Paris to DCA would be a natural fit for Avengers Campus and Guardians of the Galaxy - Mission: Breakout — the former Tower of Terror drop tower ride before undergoing a Marvel makeover.

Disney has been working with Intel drones since 2016 when Walt Disney World deployed a holiday aerial light show at the Disney Springs outdoor shopping mall.

“Everyone’s like, ‘What are you doing with drones?’” Davison said during the “Behind the Attraction” panel discussion. “I was working with Intel a long time ago when we first started it.”

X-Wing fighter drones hovered over Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge during the Rise of the Resistance dedication ceremony at Disney’s Hollywood Studios in December 2019.

Disney has filed patents for cutting-edge drone concepts — including drone-controlled puppets and 3D drone displays that mimic fireworks shows.

Disneyland Paris developed “Disney D-Light” with Dronisos, a France-based drone entertainment company that opened offices in Orlando, Fla., in late 2019 just before the pandemic struck.

Dronisos has created more than 40,000 drone shows for major worldwide events like the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics and partnered with the Puy du Fou and Futuroscope theme parks in France on drone shows of their own.

Dronisos bills its drones as a cost-saving alternative to fireworks — which can easily run into five figures per show.

Outdoor shows with up to 1,000 drones cost $100,000 to $300,000 to develop, according to Dronisos. That’s pocket change for Disneyland, which can spend six figures on a week’s worth of fireworks.

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WEEKEND: FOOD

Tired of eating dry turkey on Thanksgiving?

PHOTOS BY SCOTT SUCHMAN/For The Washington Post

Lemon and Herb Turkey in a bag. Cooking a turkey in a bag can reduce its cook time and help keep the meat moist and juicy. Aromatics can infuse the meat and juices with flavor.

Roasting in a bag saves time, adds flavor, keeps meat juicy

BY BECKY KRYSTAL
The Washington Post

The first time I saw an oven bag in action was well more than a decade ago when I arrived at my husband's childhood home to find my sister-in-law prepping our Thanksgiving turkey breast, packing in lemon, apples and onions along with the meat. It sort of blew my mind.

We continued to use the bags on and off throughout the years, but it wasn't until I volunteered to develop the whole turkey recipe for our package on breaking the mold of traditional holiday recipes that I put pen to paper to create specific instructions.

Using a bag has quite a few advantages, but the biggest are how much it can reduce the cook time and how it keeps the meat moist and juicy. In my testing, the bag shaved off almost half the expected per-pound cook time, though manufacturer Reynolds said its testing showed closer to a 30% reduction.

We know how much oven space is at a premium on Thanksgiving, though, so anything in that range is a plus in my book. And if dry, stringy turkey has been the bane of your existence, the moist heat of roasting in the bag — more like steaming, really — is a game-changer.

If you're not familiar with oven bags or find the whole concept just weird, you're not alone. While Reynolds debuted the bags in 1971, plenty of people I talked to had no idea they existed.

"They were developed to speed up the cooking time and as a way for home cooks to get a perfect turkey every time," says Charry E. Brown, test kitchen expert at Reynolds Consumer Products. The bags are made of heat-resistant nylon that is FDA (Food and Drug Administration) -compliant for cooking. They are also BPA- (bisphenol A) and phthalate-free, Brown says.

Part of the joy of cooking in a bag is how simple it is: Fill it, drop it in a roasting pan and cook. I didn't want to complicate things (no brining, please!), but I wondered whether I could put a small twist on the method that would make it a little more special. So I followed my sister-in-law's lead, stuffing the turkey cavity and bag with lemon, chunks of apple, wedges of onion, a whole head's worth of garlic and a bouquet of my backyard sage and rosemary. Much as you accomplish in packet cooking — or en papillote, as the French say — these aromatics gently infused the meat, but especially the juices, with their flavor.

Ready to give the turkey in a bag a whirl? Here are some keys to success.

Using a bag can still allow the skin to brown, especially if you oil the turkey, but it will not be as crispy as with other cooking methods.

■ I highly recommend using a leave-in probe thermometer, if you have one or are willing to purchase it, particularly if it's a model you can set an alarm on to alert you when it hits the target temperature. (The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends 165 degrees for food safety, and in my tests with the bag, this was perfect.) Because the turkey finishes much faster than you may be used to, it's helpful to monitor the internal temperature as you cook it. At the very least, start checking the temperature with a digital thermometer 20 to 30 minutes before the end of the recommended cook time. My recipe specifies that a 10- to 14-pound turkey will be done in 1 ½ to 2 hours, though, of course, ovens vary, which is why you need to pay attention. Even if you happen to overshoot the mark, as I did on my first test or two, the meat will probably still be moister than that of birds overcooked in bag-free roasting.

■ Be sure to shake at least 1 tablespoon of flour into the bag. "This step protects against superheating liquids and helps any water boil off and vaporize in the bag," Brown says. Any type of flour is fine, and you can also choose from such gluten-free alternatives as cornmeal, almond flour, rice flour, potato flour or cornstarch. Making gravy with the juices? Feel free to use

SEE TURKEY ON PAGE 27

WEEKEND: FOOD

Non-traditional flavors boost side dishes

Mashed potatoes, kale get makeovers

By Christopher Kimball
Milk Street

It's tricky to mess with tradition on Thanksgiving, but with a few tweaks, some typically one-note side dishes can become boldly flavored, exciting dishes.

To enliven sautéed greens, we skip the spinach and turn to kale instead. Charring the hardy green gives it a bittersweet flavor and a nutty edge, reminiscent of oven-roasted kale chips. It then gets a bright squeeze of lime and a bit of heat from sliced chilies.

And for a unique take on mashed potatoes, we got inspiration from stoemp (pronounced STOOMP), a hearty Belgian dish that mixes the spuds with finely cut winter vegetables. Our version includes leeks, carrots and cabbage, with bay and garlic for fragrance and flavor.

Charred Kale with Garlic, Chilies and Lime

Start to finish: 35 minutes
Servings: 4

Ingredients

2 large bunches lacinato kale (about 1½ pounds total), stemmed, leaves torn into 2- to 3-inch pieces
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon grapeseed or other neutral oil
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
5 medium garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 Fresno OR jalapeño chili, stemmed, seeded and thinly sliced
4 scallions, thinly sliced on the diagonal, white and green parts reserved separately
1 teaspoon grated lime zest, plus 1 tablespoon lime juice
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

MILK STREET/AP

Left: Charred kale with garlic, chilies and lime. Right: Belgian mashed potatoes with winter vegetables.

Directions

In a large bowl, toss the kale with 1 tablespoon of neutral oil and ½ teaspoon salt, rubbing with your hands to coat each leaf. In a large Dutch oven over high, heat the remaining 1 teaspoon neutral oil until barely smoking. Add the kale, cover and cook, occasionally turning the kale with tongs, until wilted and charred, about 10 minutes.

Push the kale to the sides of the pot and add the garlic, chili and scallion whites. Cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds, then stir the mixture into the kale. Quickly add ½ cup water to the pot and immediately cover. Cook, without stirring, until the kale is tender and the water has evaporated, about 2 minutes.

Off heat, stir in the scallion greens and lime zest and juice. Taste and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a serving dish and drizzle with the olive oil.

Belgian Mashed Potatoes with Vegetables

Start to finish: 1 hour
Servings: 8

Ingredients

4 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes
1½ cups low-sodium chicken broth
1¼ cups half-and-half
3 medium leeks, white and light green parts thinly sliced, rinsed and dried
5 bay leaves
4 medium garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
10 tablespoons (1¼ sticks) salted butter, divided
Kosher salt
½ medium head savoy cabbage, cored and finely chopped (3 to 4 cups)
2 medium carrots, peeled and finely grated
1 tablespoon white balsamic vinegar
¼ cup finely chopped fresh chives

Directions

In a large pot over high, stir together the potatoes, broth, half-and-half, leeks, bay, garlic, 4 tablespoons of butter and 1 tablespoon salt. Bring to a boil, then reduce to low, cover and cook, adjusting the heat as needed to maintain a rapid simmer, until a skewer inserted into the potatoes meets just a little resistance, 15 to 20 minutes.

Remove and discard the bay, then stir in the cabbage. Cover and cook 10 minutes. Stir in the carrots, cover and cook another 5 minutes.

Off heat, add 4 tablespoons of butter and mash with a potato masher until almost smooth. Stir in the vinegar, then taste and season with salt. Transfer to a serving bowl. Cut the remaining 2 tablespoons butter into 2 or 3 pieces and press into surface at top. Sprinkle with chives.

Turkey: No-fuss bag technique requires no advance preparation

FROM PAGE 26

more flour to help with thickening later.

■ Don't forget to create slits in the bag, or else you risk it bursting! Reynolds recommends six ½-inch slits.

■ The maximum oven temperature for the Reynolds bags is 400 degrees. Don't go higher than that or use the broiler, and don't let the bag touch the heating elements, lowering the oven rack as needed.

■ The bag will still allow the skin to brown, especially if you oil the turkey, as my recipe suggests. But it will not be as crispy as with other cooking methods. If desired, you can cut open the bag in the last 30 minutes to get better browning, Brown says. Just make sure the drippings don't spill out and burn.

■ Pay attention to what kind of turkey you buy. If the label says it's been prebrined, use less salt than called for. In my recipe, that's dropping it from 2 tablespoons to 1 tablespoon fine salt.

■ Don't toss those juices! They're delectable enough to serve on their own alongside the turkey, after straining. Or use them as the base for your gravy or the broth for an amazing leftovers soup.

Turkey cooked in a bag may not have that spent-too-much-time-in-the-sun, allover bronzed look of the birds you see in, say, a Norman Rockwell painting. But it still comes out looking prettier than I even expected. The flourish of bringing the whole bird to the table is overrated in my opinion anyway. Carve up the bird in the kitchen, arrange it prettily on a platter (or chuck it onto a sheet pan) and wait for the oohs and ahs to come in about it being your juiciest turkey yet.

Turkey in a Bag with Lemon and Herbs

Makes 10 to 14 servings
Active time: 30 mins; Total time: 2 hours

Ingredients

1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
1 lemon, halved, divided
2 medium apples (about 12 ounces total), cored and quartered, divided
1 medium onion (8 ounces), peeled and cut into 8 pieces, divided
1 head garlic, cloves separated and peeled
12 sprigs woody herbs, such as rosemary, sage and/or thyme, divided
2 tablespoons fine salt (use 1 tablespoon in pre-brined turkeys), divided
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, divided
1 (10- to 14-pound) whole turkey, giblets removed
2 tablespoons olive oil

Directions

Position a rack in the lower third of the oven and preheat to 350 degrees. Have ready a large roasting pan.

Add the flour to the oven bag, gently shaking to distribute. Squeeze the juice of one lemon half into the bag, then toss it into the bag. Add half of each of the apples, onion, garlic and herbs. Set the bag inside the roasting pan. (A sheet pan will work if that's all you have.)

SCOTT SUCHMAN/For The Washington Post

Let the turkey rest 20 to 30 minutes before discarding the bag, then carve and enjoy.

Place the turkey on a sheet pan and thoroughly pat it dry inside and out. Squeeze the juice from the remaining lemon half into the cavity. Season the inside of the cavity with about a third of the salt and pepper. Nestle the juiced lemon half and the remaining apples, onion, garlic and herbs inside the cavity.

Starting with the breast side down, rub some of the oil into the skin, then sprinkle with some of the salt and pepper (don't worry about precise amounts, just leave more of it for the top). Flip the turkey so it's breast side up, and repeat oiling and seasoning with salt and pepper.

Carefully transfer the turkey to the oven bag inside the roasting pan, breast side up, setting the bird as best you can on top of the apples, onion, garlic and herbs. Close the bag with the included tie and cut six ½-inch slits into the bag. Transfer the roasting pan to the oven. If you have one, insert a leave-in thermometer into the thickest part of the breast, avoiding the bone.

Roast the turkey for 1 ½ to 2 hours. The turkey is done when the internal temperature of the thickest part of the breast meat registers 165 degrees on an instant-read thermometer, and the thigh meat registers 165 to 175 degrees (taken away from the bone).

Carefully cut open the bag and pull it away from the turkey — there will be a lot of steam. If you can remove the bag, great; otherwise, it can stay under the turkey until you're ready to serve. Let the turkey rest 20 to 30 minutes before discarding the bag and vegetables, and then carve. If desired, strain the juices to serve on the side or use to make gravy.

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Snubs & surprises

AMY HARRIS/AP

Jon Batiste performs during the Bourbon and Beyond Music Festival on Sept. 17 at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville, Ky.

Batiste leads Grammy nods while rap, country artists mostly left out

BY AUGUST BROWN AND KENAN DRAUGHORNE
Los Angeles Times

While the Grammys are famous for out-of-nowhere choices for top prizes, this year's nominations are largely down-the-middle consensus picks. Other than one former talk-show bandleader, all the contenders for the top three Grammy Awards — album, song and record of the year — come bearing Billboard Hot 100 mega-hits and/or critically acclaimed LPs that had a broad impact.

There's very little to argue with in the nominations for the 66th Grammy Awards, scheduled for Feb. 4 at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles; you think Taylor Swift, Olivia Rodrigo and SZA weren't going to be locks?

But a few glaring absences suggest some blind spots, or at least a lack of enthusiasm for certain tastemaking sounds this year.

Here are the notable snubs and surprises.

Surprise: All those Jon Batiste nominations

Two years ago, Batiste left his gig on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" and dove head-first into the Grammy spotlight, leading the field in nominations (11) and wins (five), including a head-turning victory for album of the year.

This year, he's back with a vengeance, collecting an album of the year nomination for the expansive "World Music Radio" and nods for both record of the year ("Worship") and song of the year ("Butterfly"), neither of which had any commercial impact. In total, Batiste sits near the top of the leaderboard with six nominations, dead even with the likes of Swift, Rodrigo and Billie Eilish.

Snub: Country music

The Grammys had many paths to acknowledge country music's outstanding year. Luke Combs had a massive crossover hit with a cover of Tracy Chapman's beloved "Fast Car." Zach Bryan topped the streaming and Billboard charts with a thoughtful, ferocious album that featured a hit duet with Grammy fave Kacey Musgraves. Lainey Wilson just cleaned up at the CMA Awards, a victory lap after a decade in the Nashville trenches. And Morgan Wallen sold out stadiums and easily outstreamed Swift and SZA, to name two powerhouses.

And yet country came up almost totally empty. Jelly Roll and the War and Treaty got nods for best new artist, but otherwise, the genre was shut out in the four general field categories. Overall, Combs has one nomination, Wilson has two, Bryan has three and Brandy Clark has six — almost all in country and adjacent genre categories.

Voters might still be ignoring Wallen for his N-word indiscretion, but it's now clear they don't seem to care much for country as a whole, even in a banner year.

Surprise: Victoria Monét and Janelle Monáe

Monét recently told the L.A. Times she wants to win 16 Grammys in her career; with seven nominations this year, including for best new artist, she's on her way to that lofty goal.

It's a welcome surprise to see her song of the year nomination for "On My Mama," a slick ode to stepping out and looking right that peaked at No. 58 on the Hot 100. Formerly a songwriter for Ariana Grande, Fifth Harmony, et al., Monét has seized the spotlight with her solo debut, aided by her accomplished producer D'Mile, who helped power Silk Sonic's "Leave the Door Open" to wins in 2022.

And, kudos to the similarly surnamed Janelle Monáe, who earned her second straight album of the year nomination for "The Age of Pleasure."

Snub: Regional Mexican

One heartening trend this year was the rise of regional Mexican music as a TikTok and streaming sensation. Acts like Peso Pluma, Natanael Cano, Eslabon Armado and Fuerza Regida rocketed to arena stardom with a tradition-steeped yet insouciantly modern sound that resonates with the success of Anglo county music this year.

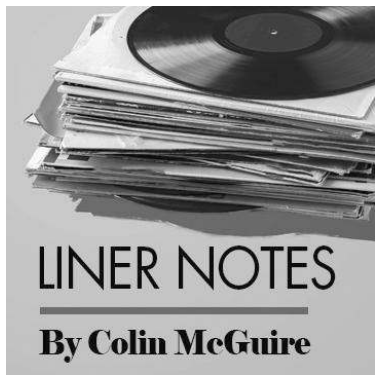
Voters not immersed in contemporary Mexican music would have at least heard Pluma and Eslabon Armado on the No. 4 Hot 100 hit "Ella Baila Sola," or seen Bad Bunny and Kendall Jenner singing Cano, Pluma and Gabito Ballesteros' "AMG" on Instagram.

Yet the 24-year-old Pluma got just one nod, for Música Mex-

SEE GRAMMYS ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC

10 Christmas songs to get your holiday started



It's Christmastime. Or, well, kind of.

Next week is Thanksgiving, which forever and always reminds us that for those of us in North America, The Holidays are here (an aside: How is it that "The Holidays" are always Christmas and Thanksgiving? Why couldn't "The Holidays" be Memorial Day and Cinco de Mayo? They're closer in proximity, but I digress). Anyway, this time of year means only one thing in Music Land: Get ready to hear "All I Want For Christmas Is You" any and everywhere that has two speakers and working electricity.

Still, Christmas doesn't have to be reserved for only Mariah Carey and her merry band of believers. Contrary to what all the scrooges out there might want to say, good Christmas music does exist. In fact, it exists so much that I thought I'd share 10 of my favorite holiday songs, if only to jump-start that Christmas playlist of yours that you put off making until after the leftover turkey has vacated the refrigerator for good.

These are in no particular order, of course — because even Santa doesn't pick favorites (even though we all know, ole Rudy seems to be his most beloved reindeer, but that's neither here nor there). If anything, here's hoping you check out a song or two and it helps you get in the feels about the time of year where feels seem to be on high alert. So, enjoy. And adjust your Amazon wish list accordingly.

Fats Domino: 'I'll Be Home For Christmas'

It's so simple, it's charming. Plus, you can't put together a list of your favorite Christmas songs and leave Fats off the thing, if only because it's Fats Domino!

Is the production cheesy? Sure. Does it truly highlight the genius of the piano icon? Not really. But does it make you smile at the thought of watching the guy's fingers run up and down the black and white keys while singing "I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams?" You bet. And sometimes, smiling can cure even the harshest holiday cold.

Joss Stone: 'What Christmas Means To Me'

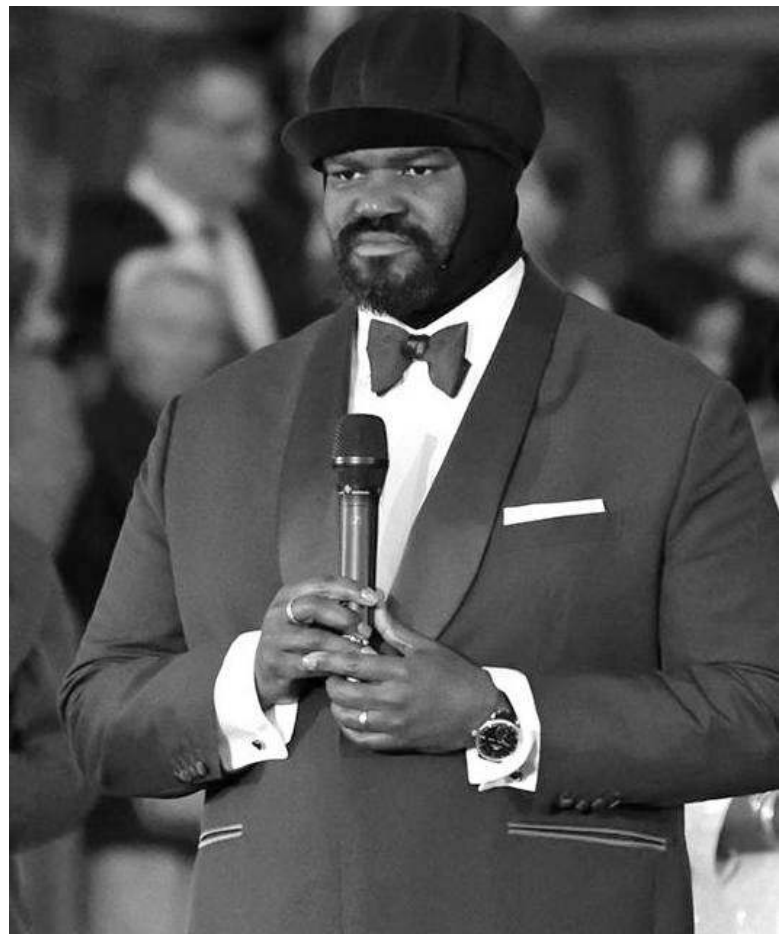
The song has been covered to death, and you might even say this isn't the best version out there (here's looking at you, Stevie Wonder), but Stone's version from last year's "Merry Christmas, Love" is both faithful and fun. Plus, she doesn't lose an inch of the track's soul all the while funking things up in the most expected-but-imperative ways. God bless her for keeping this song alive in the 2020s.

Zebrahead: 'Deck The Halls (I Hate Christmas)'

What's that you say? A SoCal blend of hard rock and hip-hop from more than 20 years ago? A band that is barely a footnote in the pantheon of all the pop-metal that came out of the West Coast in the late '90s? A song with a hook that endearingly proclaims "I Hate Christmas" before launching into a second-half verse that is rapped with a hip-hop flow that changes midway through it? You got it. Listen, laugh and love.

Norah Jones: 'Christmas Calling (Jolly Jones)'

I'm still not sure why Jones' excellent 2021 "I Dream Of Christmas" has never received the love it deserves, but if you're looking for a hidden treasure, this is it. "Christmas Calling (Jolly Jones)" is the perfect lead-off track, complete with a brooding atmosphere and one of the best subtle grooves Brian Blade has ever laid down on a record. It was so good, she rereleased the set last year. There's no excuse not to check it out.



CHRIS JACKSON/AP

Gregory Porter performs during the beacon lighting at Buckingham Palace in London during the Platinum Jubilee celebrations in 2022. Porter recently released his first holiday album, "Christmas Wish."

Bill Nighy: 'Christmas Is All Around'

Because "Love Actually" needs to be represented somehow, 20 years after its release, and there was no way we were going to go with That Other Song from the movie. Nighy's Billy Mack is three stockings' worth of fun, and his performance of this silly little ditty made for the film is worth noting — and celebrating — all these years later.

R. Alex Anderson: 'Mele Kalikimaka'

Speaking of movies, you would be forgiven if you most associate this song with the classic "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" scene, but even if you've never seen that movie, (has anyone not?), chances are you've heard this somewhere. A breezy, soft way to celebrate the holidays, this can warm up the cold months if only due to the presence of the ukulele.

I've heard that some people hate this song, and it's to those people, I say ... huh?

Gregory Porter: 'Christmas Wish'

The title track to the jazz singer's brand new Christmas album is one of the best songs he's ever written. Soulful and heartfelt, it recalls his "Liquid Spirit" days by creating a festive tone that invites listeners into what sounds like the most communal moment at a can't-miss Christmas party. He's said the track is a tribute to his mom, and I'll be damned if this isn't enough to make her one of the proudest ladies to ever bring someone into this cruel world.

Train: 'Shake Up Christmas'

All right. Giggle all you want. If this list had any credibility, it's now gone with the inclusion of this song, but the thing is such a plain, radio-ready pop tune that I can't help but pull it out each year around this time to smile. It's got all the things you hate about Train songs: Goofiness, cheesiness and yes, some cringey moments. But the line about grandma? Gets me every time.

Darlene Love: 'Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)'

One of those fancy late-night TV hosts ought to bring Darlene Love back once a year to sing this like David Letterman did for those few decades.

Some say it's played out; to that, I say, "Quit being a Grinch and keep your Grinchy thoughts to yourself!" And to all a good night.

John Lennon: 'Happy Xmas (War Is Over)'

The best Christmas pop song of all time, if you ask me. It's sad yet hopeful, catchy yet complex. The true sign of a great song is its ability to never diminish its power, no matter who covers it in whatever genre they choose. This track fits those criteria. John Lennon was a master at his craft, and never was he more complete than what he accomplished through this hauntingly gorgeous tribute to reflection, peace and, of course, The Holidays.

Grammys: Most 2024 nominees enjoyed spots on top charts

FROM PAGE 28

icana album. Like the subject of his big hit, Pluma will be dancing more or less alone on Grammy night.

Surprise: Phoebe Bridgers

Phoebe Bridgers is the new Dave Grohl: that is, the one rocker everyone can agree on. With seven nominations this year, mostly with her supergroup Boygenius, she adds to her lifetime total of 11.

Nods in the record and album categories confirm what the cool kids already knew: She and her bandmates Julien Baker and Lucy Dacus made an era-defining guitar LP. Bridgers also was recognized in pop duo/group performance, for a feature on SZA's "Ghost in the Machine."

Snub: Rap

It's an annual tradition to point fingers at the Grammys for dropping the ball when it comes to hip-hop. Ice Spice is a deserved best new artist nominee after a breakthrough year that included three Top 10 hits and a Taylor Swift collaboration, but the Brooklyn rapper is the genre's only representation in the big four categories.

Meanwhile, would-be contenders such as Lil Durk's "All My Life," Lil Uzi Vert's "Just Wanna Rock" and Killer Mike's "Scientists & Engineers" (which features André 3000, Future and Eryn Allen Kane) were relegated to the rap-specific categories.

Surprise/Snub: Men

Fun fact: There are more members of Boygenius than there are dudes nominated for album and record of the year (just one, Batiste). This year, women artists or groups make up an overwhelming majority of the top nominees, including SZA, who leads all artists with nine nods.

Speaking of women surpassing men: Should Taylor Swift take home album of the year on Feb. 4 for "Midnights," she'd surpass Frank Sinatra, Paul Simon and Stevie Wonder and become the first four-time winner of the Grammys' most prestigious award.

WEEKEND: TELEVISION REVIEW

FX photos

In "A Murder at the End of the World," guests are lured to an exotic, remote location to discuss a looming apocalypse. The show is now airing on FX and streaming on Hulu.

New FX series takes whodunits to task

In 'A Murder at the End of the World,' a brain trust's retreat to prepare for the apocalypse becomes apocalyptic

By Lili Loofbourow
The Washington Post

The premise of "A Murder at the End of the World," Brit Marling and Zal Batmanglij's limited series for FX, is familiar to the point of cliché: A group of guests are lured to a remote location after accepting conditions that make escape almost impossible. This is of course the setup Agatha Christie made famous in her 1939 novel "And Then There Were None" — the bestselling mystery of all time — and the formula Rian Johnson riffs on in his 2022 film "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery," which added an obnoxious billionaire to the mix.

"A Murder at the End of the World" courts these comparisons with an eye toward frustrating them. (It even includes the billionaire, played by Clive Owen.) The seven-episode series, two episodes of which dropped Tuesday, is a chilly, melancholic spin on a genre that can sometimes make death downright cozy and detection a game.

Owen plays Andy Ronson, a mash-up of Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, who is plagued with an unspecified illness. It's at his behest — or rather, at the behest of his artificial intelligence creation, a helpful assistant-type named Ray (Edoardo Ballerini) — that our sleuth, a reclusive young hacker named Darby Hart (Emma Corrin), travels to the high-tech compound he's been building in Iceland. Ronson's reasons for wanting Darby there are unclear: She's only 24, and her biggest achievement is writing a memoir. Darby's reasons are simpler: Ronson is married to her hero, a brilliant hacker named Lee Andersen (Brit Marling) who disappeared years earlier after getting doxed and harassed. She reappeared as Ronson's wife, but appears to do little more than tend to their son Zoomer (Kellan Tetlow).

Clive Owen plays billionaire Andy Ronson, a mash-up of Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, in "A Murder at the End of the World." Ronson is plagued with an unspecified illness.

Joan Chen plays Lu Mei and Emma Corrin plays Darby Hart, two of the guests invited to Ronson's high-tech Iceland compound in "A Murder at the End of the World."

There's an old theory that whodunits are pleasurable because they mend a rip in the social fabric by restoring the world to order through logic. "A Murder at the End of the World" shreds that idea. Set in the snowy, unforgiving beauty of Iceland during winter, this show has a narrative background that is no less bleak: Ronson's guests have been summoned to discuss the end of the world, and to be shown how the rich are preparing. An unexpected death upsets Ronson's smooth operation, and as conditions devolve, the apocalypse they've been discussing in mostly abstract terms starts to creep closer.

Darby, our lens into this rarefied world, learned a lot about dead bodies from her father (Neal Huff), a forensic pathologist, and spent her youth collaborating with like-minded detectives on Reddit and other forums trying to identify Jane Does that seemed like homicide victims. Fans of the form will note that this is a little bit backward: Whereas murder mysteries tend to feature detectives working the cases people bring them, Darby started with nameless bodies and tried to turn their mute unwitnessed suffering into cases.

She's not perfect, however. As crises mount in Ronson's compound, we learn through flashbacks that Darby started to get a little too charmed by incongruous details about certain cadavers that suggested a serial killer at work. She met a fellow hacker and sleuth named Bill Farrah (Harris Dickinson) in the course of these online investigations, and Bill — whose suspicion of technology eventually leads him to abandon it and become an artist — becomes the conscience of the series, in effect. He recoils when Darby's passion to understand the killer starts to

SEE MURDER ON PAGE 31

Streaming package model looks familiar

As apps become available in discounted bundles, they start to resemble cable TV

BY SHIRA OVIDE
The Washington Post

Watch your wallet. Streaming is starting to turn into cable TV.

Verizon is planning to offer its mobile phone customers a dual subscription to Netflix and Max, previously called HBO Max, for about $10 a month, the Wall Street Journal reported last week. If you bought both subscriptions with commercials separately, you'd pay about $17.

Disney, your mobile phone provider and other companies are increasingly offering "free" or discounted combinations of streaming subscriptions.

You need to take a hard look at whether these offers are really a bargain, or if this is the slippery slope to paying for entertainment you don't really want.

You know from cable TV how this can turn out. Eventually we pay more and more money for stuff we don't want to watch.

Make no mistake, powerful players in streaming are openly talking about recreating aspects of cable TV. Your best tactic to save money is to be ruthless about what you will watch and how much it's worth it to you.

How to save money on streaming

Streaming companies now realize that digital entertainment may never be as popular as they hoped, and they're antsy to make it more profitable.

As a result, the big-name streaming services have been raising prices. And prices will keep going up.

If you're willing to sit through commercials, many of the bigger streaming services, including Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Peacock and Max, now sell lower-priced subscriptions with ads.

For example, Netflix with ads costs $6.99 a month in the United States, while the cheapest subscription without commercials is $15.49.

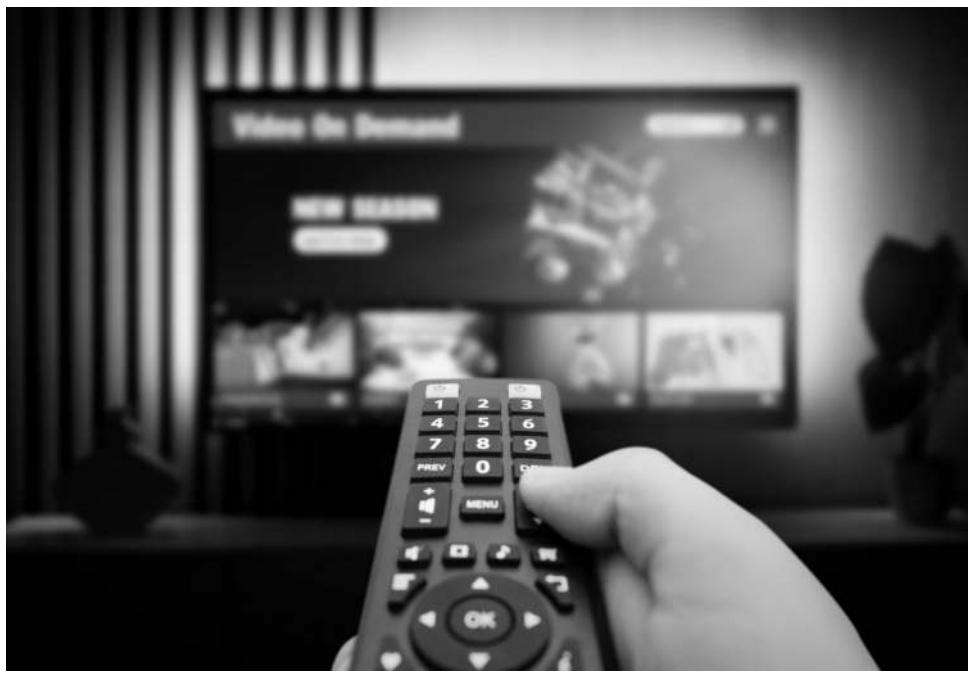
In a twist on that pattern, Amazon will soon put commercials into your Prime Video programming, unless you pay $2.99 extra a month to turn them off.

You should also check whether your mobile phone provider throws in free or discounted subscriptions to streaming services. Vulture has a list of phone companies that offer access to streaming subscriptions at no added cost.

(You don't have to stream on your phone, but if you switch phone providers, you might lose access to the subscription.)

Be aware that those deals on streaming subscriptions may be available only if you have a higher-cost phone plan with unlimited data. Those unlimited data plans aren't worth it for everyone.

And when you see twinned subscriptions like Verizon's reported combo of Netflix and Max or the company's $25 monthly subscription combo to Netflix and the NFL Plus sports streaming service, ask yourself whether you really want both — or if you're pulled in by a promise of savings.



iStock

Bundles, or discounted combinations of streaming subscriptions, are only a good deal if you'll use them. If you haven't used an app in a while, it's easy to drop, and you should.

Evaluate the 'deal'

The powerful CEO of the company that owns the Max streaming service has been professing his love of "bundles."

That's the industry term for what cable TV does in selling you a bunch of companies' entertainment programming for less than what you'd pay for all of it separately.

Streaming bundles are popping up everywhere.

When a mobile phone plan throws in a "free" streaming subscription, that's a bundle.

So, too, are discounted combo subscriptions like those from Verizon and Disney's twin subscription to Disney+ and Hulu. The combination costs $19.99 a month without commercials. That's $12 a month less than buying both separately.

But again, we saw the downsides of bundles with cable TV. We started to pay for a bunch of TV we didn't watch to get a few things we did.

A discounted combination subscription to Disney+ and Hulu or Netflix and Max is only a bargain if you watch both enough to justify even a discounted price.

Let's try a cable TV red flag rule for streaming services. Ask yourself, do I really need this streaming service? How easy is it to quit? And is it a good deal for you — or more for the bosses trying to turn streaming into cable?

Finally, think of your streaming subscriptions like you do a gym membership.

If you haven't used it in a while, drop it. Streaming is getting too expensive to keep paying for Max because maybe you'll eventually watch "the Gilded Age."

Unlike many gym memberships, it is easy to quit most monthly streaming subscriptions. You can always subscribe again later if there's something new you're desperate to watch.

Murder: While some characters, parts of story are thin, show holds own as whodunit

FROM PAGE 30

seem laced with giddiness and something like respect.

The series toggles between past and present, often through the somewhat clumsy device of Hart's memoir about tracking down the killer with Bill. This two-timeline structure is — I want to be clear, without spoiling anything — a total bummer. It's also, despite some gimmickry, interesting: The high-tech sterility of Ronson's luxe hotel contrasts weirdly with that of the motels Bill and Darby stay in, which look and feel the opposite of sterile (you can practically smell them).

The road trip the broke couple goes on serves as an analog counterweight to the present-day story, where everything is digitized, and where characters with considerable power, including a Chinese "smart city" architect (Joan Chen) and a famous astronaut (Alice Braga), are stuck. That sense of paralysis is as conceptual as it is concrete; it is clear, as Ronson and his hand-selected guests talk, that no "solution" to climate change will emerge from these elitist conclaves. (And that many of those present don't even understand that to be the assignment.)

Corrin, who played Princess Diana in "The Crown," is very good here. Darby's intelligence is believable but not infallible, her mistakes are interesting and she has enough gravitas to nail a young person's exasperated understanding of the ways she is being condescended to. Dickinson is a revelation. Bill is, at least on paper, a type. But the actor plays him with a kind, tortured inarticulacy (as he struggles through layers of conscience) that renders him wildly specific.

Parts of the present-day story are thin. There are too many characters to adequately define and develop, and so many competing themes that the series starts to reproduce some of the same shallow, wheel-spinning discourse Ronson's "luminaries" regale him with at dinner.

As a whodunit, however, "A Murder at the End of the World" holds its own — all while enacting some heart-rending correctives to the genre's bloodthirsty tendencies.

It takes guts to couch your jeremiad against the gamification of death in a murder mystery. All I can say, having seen the full season, is that Marling and Batmanglij had their reasons. And they work.

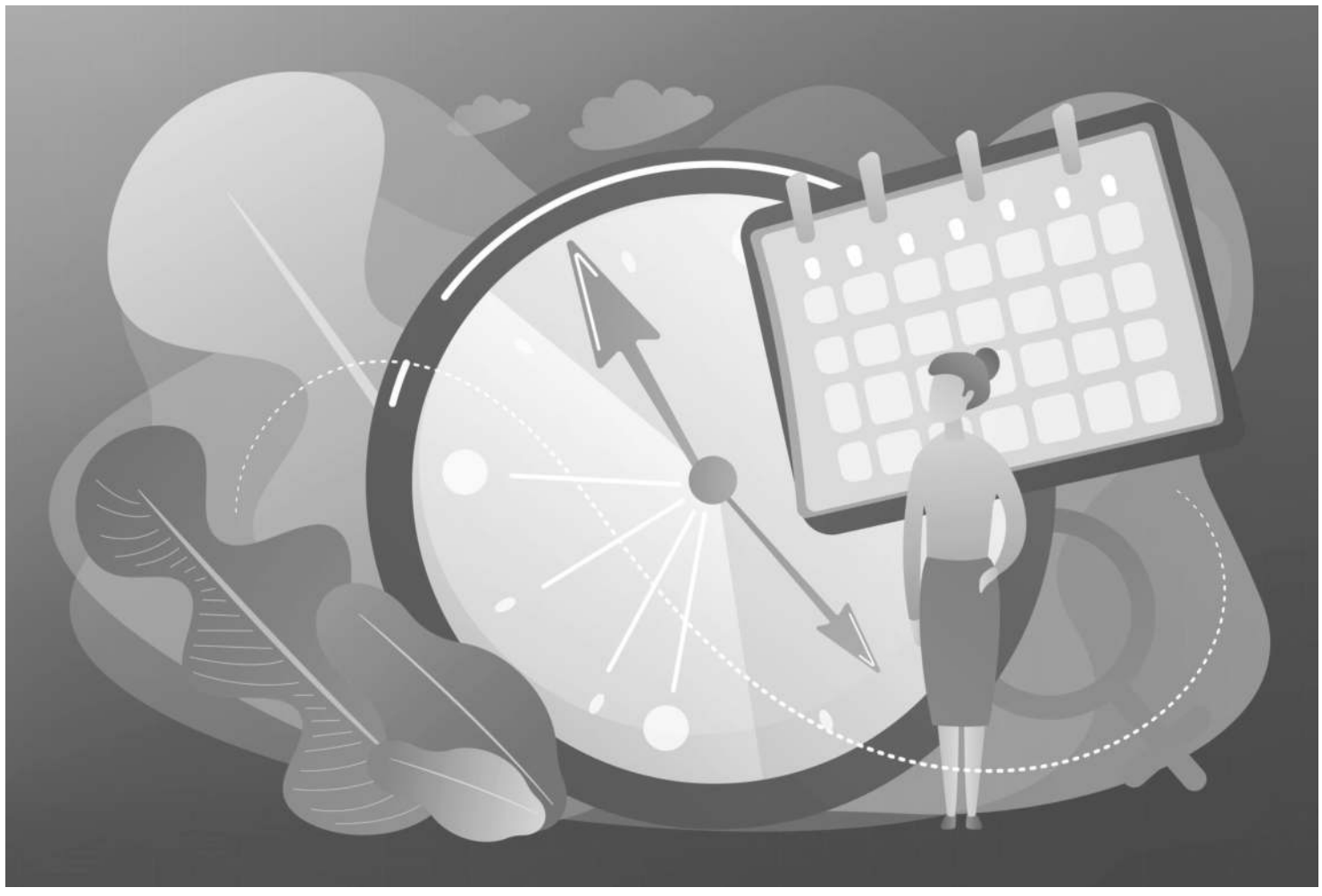
"A Murder at the End of the World" (seven episodes) is now airing on FX and streaming on Hulu. New episodes air weekly.

FX

When Emma Corrin's Darby Hart was young, she used to collaborate with detectives trying to identify Jane Does that seemed like homicide victims. It's through this work that she first meets fellow sleuth and hacker Bill Farrah (Harris Dickinson), who later becomes an artist.

Menopause in the mainstream

Discussions about reverse puberty becoming more public, with celebs' help



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Women often don't know how to navigate the myriad symptoms commonly encountered during perimenopause and menopause. But when women talk about their experiences, the conversations can lead to comfort, treatment and acceptance.

BY COLLEEN NEWVINE
Associated Press

Pop culture depictions of puberty are common. TV, movies, books and music all frequently showcase the tumult of tweens coming of age.

Until recently, the same could not be said of the reverse puberty many women experience as their hormones shift approaching the end of their periods in middle age.

Then along comes former first lady Michelle Obama talking with People magazine about taking hormone replacement therapy and giving up on her toned "Michelle Obama arms." Drew Barrymore has her first hot flash during an interview on her talk show. Oprah Winfrey hosts a panel of celebrities and doctors to discuss menopause.

Doctors stress that women should carefully consider where they get their medical advice, and note that some celebrities are also selling products or services. But they welcome more open conversations about menopause, which can inform women about treatments and change stereotypes of what menopause looks like.

Many women remain unsure how to navigate the myriad symptoms — which commonly include hot flashes, insomnia and mood changes — that begin in perimenopause, the years of transition leading up to menopause. Menopause itself is defined as the one-year mark after a woman's final period.

Jen Gunter, a gynecologist and author of "The Menopause Manifesto: Own Your Health with Facts and Feminism," notes that menopause is complicated, and the desire to make it simple might be part of the appeal of celebrity advocates.

"Who doesn't want a magic wand?" Gunter said, warning about medical advice from people without the training to dispense it, or who might have a conflict of interest. "It comes down to, 'Who is the expert?'"

Barrymore is among a group of celebrities investing in menopause telemedicine company Evernow. Actor Judy Greer is a founder of Wile, which sells supplements. Actor Naomi Watts is a founder of menopause products site Stripes.

Celebrities can help, however, by introducing issues long considered shameful, Gunter said.

Julie Holland, a psychiatrist and author of the book "Moody Bitches," about how hormonal fluctuations affect women's lives, sees a growing willingness over the past decade to talk about menopause, and also about women's hormones and reproductive health more broadly.

Barrymore

Obama

Winfrey

"This is a zeitgeist tipping point," she said.

She noted with delight that the blockbuster "Barbie" movie concludes with Barbie excitedly going to see a gynecologist. And Holland is encouraged by the way her daughter talks with her Generation Z friends.

"My daughter's generation is giving each other a lot of body positivity messages," she said. "Women are getting messages to destigmatize a lot of things."

One common complaint from her patients is difficulty sleeping, Holland said. They often don't realize the root cause is hot flashes because they aren't waking up sweaty, and they feel transformed when they're able to get good sleep again.

It's also common for women to enter psychiatric care for the first time during the menopausal transition, Holland said, and they frequently do so feeling like something is wrong with them, rather than understanding it's a season of life.

"Nobody makes that same space for women like they do for puberty," Holland said, noting that could be changing. "There's a growing body of people aging who aren't shamed."

Because women's menopause concerns are frequently ignored, that leaves them open to quick-fix miracle cures, according to Mary Claire Haver, an OB-GYN and author of "The New Menopause," coming in 2024. On her website, she lists four red flags to watch for on snake oil products: claims with no supporting medical evidence, lack of peer review on scientific data, manipulation of emotions and celebrity endorsements.

Once women start talking about their experiences, they are often relieved to learn more about the treatments available, said Joanna Strober, an entrepreneur who co-founded Midi Health, a virtual health care clinic specializing in menopause.

As she prepared to speak at the recent Fortune Most Powerful Women conference, she wore a "Menopause is hot" T-shirt. Strober said powerful, educated women in attendance kept asking similar questions: I'm confused about whether I should take hormone replacement therapy. My doctor prescribed anxiety medicine and therapy, but it's not helping. Can you tell me what to do?

Participants in Midi's menopause webinars for companies say they love seeing women they work with asking questions about the same symptoms they're experiencing, she said. Women at the peak of their careers might be loath to admit they're having brain fog or difficulty focusing, or to talk about anything that could call into question their ability to perform.

"Having these conversations at work can help normalize it," Gunter agreed.

"We culturally think of older women as grandmothers, not as CEOs," Gunter said. "When your periods go away, you are invisible to society."

Winfrey is decidedly not invisible. Earlier this year, the media powerhouse convened "The Menopause Talk," a panel discussion featuring Barrymore and journalist/activist Maria Shriver, along with physicians. The group, including Winfrey herself, shared personal experiences that once would have been too personal for public discourse.

"This is a sea change," Shriver said on the panel. "I have no idea what my mother's health journey was. Nobody talked about these things at all."

"This is a sea change. I have no idea what my mother's health journey was. Nobody talked about these things at all."

journalist/activist Maria Shriver
panelist on Oprah Winfrey's "The Menopause Talk"

WEEKEND: FAMILY

Photos from Peggy Winckowski

Peggy Winckowski, center, with many of the regular attendees of her weekly Wednesday Breakfast Club. Every Wednesday, Winckowski cooks breakfast for about 30 of her late grandson's friends.

Grandma's breakfast club

Teen's friends, family honor his memory through weekly tradition

By Sydney Page
The Washington Post

Peggy Winckowski's alarm goes off at 5 a.m. every Wednesday. It's time for her to make her famed pancake batter, fry up bacon and eggs and chop fresh fruit.

By 7 a.m., about 30 hungry teenagers arrive at her home in St. Louis, ready for breakfast. They have showed up every Wednesday of the school year since October 2021.

"They all give me a hug as they come in," said Winckowski, 66. "They call me 'Grandma Peggy.'"

The "Wednesday Breakfast Club" tradition came about after Sam Crowe — Winckowski's grandson, then a freshman at Bishop DuBourg High School — floated the idea to his friends. The school has a later start on Wednesday mornings, and Crowe and his classmates typically went to a diner to have breakfast before class.

One Wednesday morning at the diner, Sam told his friends that his Grandma Peggy makes a better breakfast than the restaurant. So, after checking with his grandmother — who eagerly offered to host her grandson's friends for breakfast — a small group of high school students showed up at Winckowski's house the following Wednesday morning. And then every Wednesday since.

"Wednesday is my most favorite day of the week," said Winckowski. "I will feed them as long as they will come. They're going to be protected, they're going to be loved and they're definitely going to be fed."

The gathering took on a much bigger, and sadder, meaning in July 2022, when Sam was killed in a car crash at age 15.

"It was horrific," said Winckowski, who has 16 grandchildren, including Sam. "It was a phone call you never want to get."

On the day of Sam's death, a group of his closest friends — the same teens who always attended the weekly Wednesday breakfasts — congregated at Winckowski's house.

"We were all grieving with grandma," said Jeremy Roeder, 17, a junior, who became close friends with Sam during their freshman year. "She's basically family to all of us, and Sam was, too."

"They came here every day for the whole week," said Winckowski. "They just wanted to make sure that I was OK."

As the summer came to an end and the first Wednesday of the school year approached, Winckowski told the teens they were still welcome for breakfast. More students than ever showed up.

The breakfast club started with a few teenage boys, and has expanded to about 30 regular attendees.

"He would want us to continue, so we're going to continue it," said Roeder. "We're all there for each other."

"To be 15 years old and to lose your best friend, it's got to be so hard for them to understand," said Winckowski. "There's not a day that goes by that we don't talk about Sam."

The tradition started with a few teenage boys and has expanded to include about 30 regular attendees — including sophomores, juniors and seniors. Sometimes, Sam's parents show up, as well as other members of the community.

Winckowski's home can get crowded, she said, but they make it work. "It's just a tiny house, but it's got a lot of love in the walls," she said.

For the first year, Winckowski covered all the costs associated with the breakfasts, but local businesses, families and parents of students have recently started pitching in for groceries.

"Some of the kids' grandparents have been trying to make donations so that we could keep it going," Winckowski said, adding that she and her husband — who has dementia and Parkinson's disease, and requires constant care — are on a fixed income.

Still, Winckowski is determined to carry on the breakfast club tradition.

"I have to keep moving because I have many more grandkids to take care of," said Winckowski, referring to the teens who attend her weekly breakfasts. "We'll never get over Sam's passing, but we can get through it together."

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari

Would you be your own best friend?

As our car negotiated the tangle of ramps and roadways leading onto the bridge over the East Passage of the Narragansett Bay, I stared out the passenger side window, lost in my own melancholy thoughts. Thinking out loud, I said without looking at my husband, "I wish I was easier to please."

Francis shot a glance in my direction, and I realized what he might be thinking. So, I clarified, "I mean socially, if I wasn't so picky, I could've made a lot more friends over the years." We were on our way home from a weekend in Boston, where we had visited Francis' roommate from college and his wife. The bridge signified that we were almost home, and I found myself wishing I had more friends close by.

During Francis' 28 years on active duty, I'd worked hard to make friends at each duty station, often wondering if something was wrong with me. I'd hoped that, once Francis retired from the Navy, we'd become part of a local community, and friendships would come easier. But it had been nearly seven years since Francis' terminal leave ended in 2016. At 57 years old, I still felt like the new girl in middle school, struggling to make a best friend.

"I wish I could meet someone more like me," I continued. "You know, someone with a decent sense of humor and no competitive agenda, someone who can tell good stories, someone direct to the point of being blunt, someone who loves mafia movies, someone whose definition of fun includes garage sales, someone who enjoys chunky peanut butter," I rambled on, chuckling at my various traits.

"But then again," I joked, "I'm not sure I'd even like me if I met myself on the street."

This time, Francis chuckled with me.

I'd always been my own worst critic, cutting myself no slack, unable to accept compliments, doubting myself constantly. These were not admirable traits, I'd fully admit. As hippy-dippy as it seemed, I knew that "self-love" was important for happiness, but it had eluded me.

However, this line of thinking was something new. I'd never really thought, "What would I think of a separate and distinct me?" The prospect of a new method of self-critique piqued my interest in harping about my own faults.

As our car reached the bridge's apex, I looked down at the gray-blue bay 200 feet below and sank deeper into thought, imagining sitting on one side of a diner booth, chatting with myself seated on the other side over fries and Diet Cokes.

"Would I think she talked too much about herself? Would she think I lacked spontaneity?" I wondered. "She'd be irked that I didn't call enough," I thought. "I'd wish she didn't worry so much about everything. But she'd definitely get a kick out of my wisecracks, and I'd love her detailed, expressive stories. She'd let me brag about my kids as long as she could do the same. She'd tell me her deepest, darkest fears and insecurities, and I'd make her feel better," I imagined.

"Actually, I think I'd like me if I met me on the street," I concluded, quite pleased that I'd assessed myself positively for once. "What about you?"

"I'd definitely have a blast with myself," Francis said without a split-second's hesitation. I could tell that his visions on the bridge had been of raucous frat parties, football game nights and pub crawls.

"You certainly would have fun with yourself," I conceded with a knowing grin. But as he pulled into our driveway, I couldn't resist bursting my husband's self-love bubble with a prick of undeniable truth. "Nevertheless, Honey, you know the relationship with yourself would eventually sour, because you'd end up resenting him for always trying to be the center of attention."

"Good point," he said, and we laughed at ourselves, and them, too.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

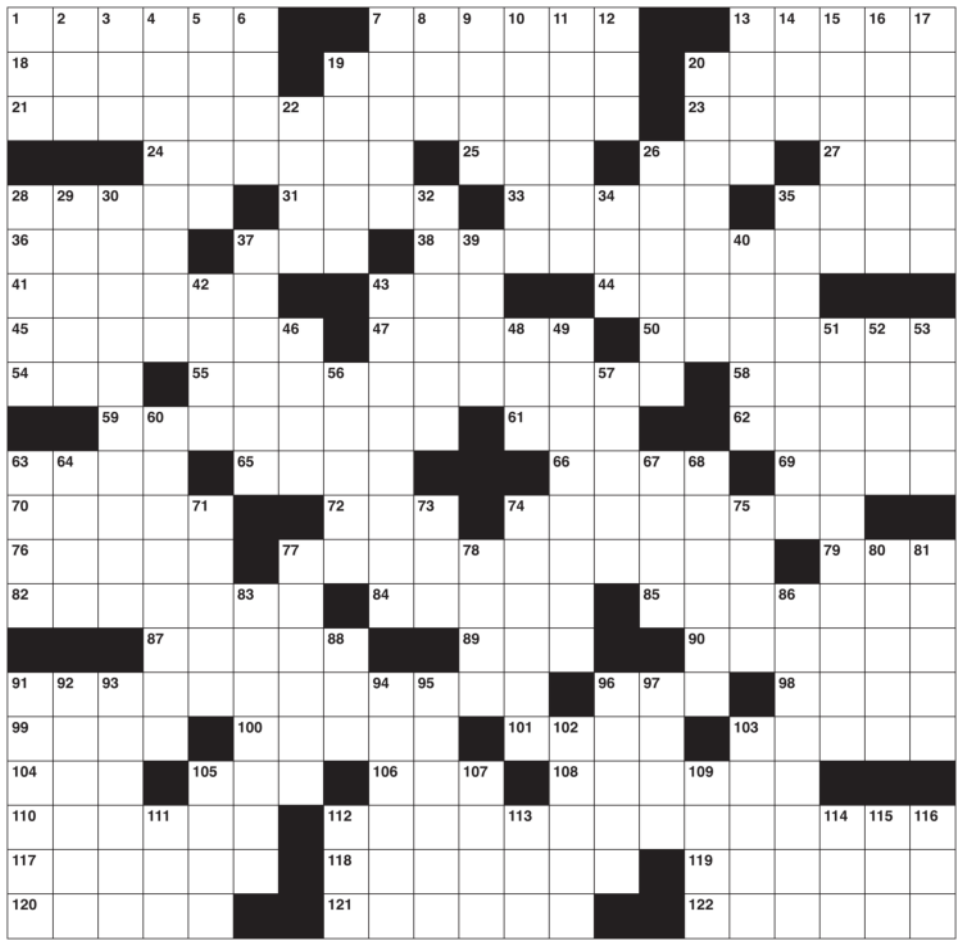
WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

DOUBLE TALK

BY RICH KATZ / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Rich Katz, of Park City, Utah, does freelance work in corporate restructuring. This is his third crossword for The Times — all Sundays. The puzzle started when Rich was ruminating on the expression ''two wrongs don't make a right.'' One thing led to another, then another. This punny puzzle was the result. Rich does all his constructing at home on a table overlooking a gorgeous Rocky Mountain vista. — W. S.



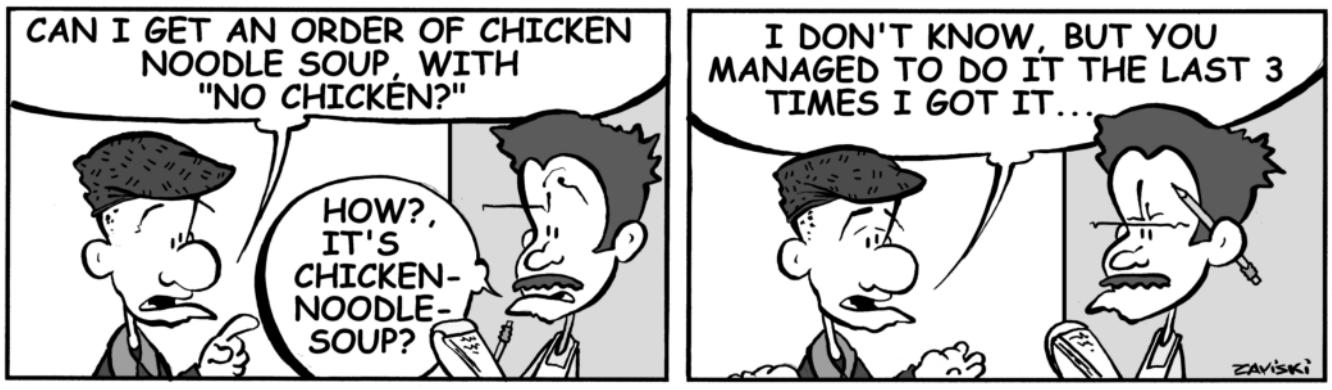
ACROSS

1 Pulled one's pants up?
7 Group of mimes, maybe
13 Neither crushed it nor got crushed
18 Revenue source for a website
19 Excitement
20 Really bad
21 But wait!
23 One of the Wayans brothers
24 Output of Michel de Montaigne
25 Asian honorific
26 Bone insert following an accident
27 In the past
28 She shares a home with Homer
31 Small plateau
33 Broad key
35 Pig
36 Potato, in Indian cooking
37 Buffoon
38 To peace!
41 Totally phat
43 Nail-polish brand
44 Queen's accessory
45 ''Star Wars'' queen
47 Go ____
50 Classic Greek archetype?
54 Word for word, in Paris?
55 Holy Week
58 Get ready
59 Place to drop off a package
61 With 2-Down, end of the Gettysburg address?
62 Wipe clean
63 Lhasa ____
65 Pointer
66 ''E pluribus unum'' appears on one
69 Crushed (it)
70 ''The Glass Bead Game'' author
72 Lipa who sang ''Levitating''
74 Martini ingredient
76 Text tweaks
77 Air rights
79 ''Cool'' that's no longer cool
82 Mind-numbing detail
84 Skip a party, in a way
85 French cosmetics chain
87 Coming 'round again
89 Padre's hermana
90 Psychedelic dose
91 Bare feet
96 Snoop
98 Ones who get setters better?
99 Surface alternative
100 One praised at the Kaaba
101 Actress Rowlands
103 One winging it?
104 ''And so on''
105 Professional connections
106 Guacamole or tahini
108 Air-____ (extra-secure, as a computer)
110 ''How considerate!''
112 We won!
117 Goes ''bottoms up''?
118 Brainstorms
119 Beethoven work once called the ''Bonaparte'' Symphony
120 Impatiently agitated
121 Volkswagen model
122 One of eight in a V8

DOWN

1 Visit to the Kaaba
2 See 61-Across
3 Certain web portal
4 Deliver (on), as a promise
5 Beethoven wrote a piece ''für'' her
6 Relaxation spots
7 Lock
8 Spoil
9 Yours and mine
10 Loan shark
11 Grilled sandwich on Italian bread
12 Part of a Western herd
13 You might get it for a lot
14 ''____ been thinking . . .''
15 Peak once known as Mount McKinley
16 First state to legalize psychedelic mushrooms
17 ''Star Wars'' Jedi
19 ''Mmm, I see what you're saying''
20 Hershey toffee confection
22 Scottish toppers
26 Commit a holiday-etiquette no-no
28 Term of address that becomes less formal when its middle letter is removed
29 Enterprise alternative
30 Flew by
32 Have ambitions
34 One of its uses is boring
35 One doing kickflips and ollies, in slang
37 Red-faced
39 Exhaust . . . or something found near the exhaust
40 Wrathful
42 Yoga equipment
43 Memorable part of Rossini's ''William Tell''
46 First of five at the Globe Theater
48 Toss in
49 Infuser contents
51 See in
52 Trick
53 Column that might lead to a row?
56 Home-organizing guru Marie
57 Focuses of some sonograms
60 Put on airs
63 [purposeful cough]
64 Salon treatment, for short
67 Book before Obadiah
68 Like those at the top, it's said
71 Ingredient in perfumes
73 Early ISP
74 Using an e-cigarette
75 Delivery org.
77 Sources of winter strains
78 ''You've got the wrong guy''
80 Muse of love poetry
81 Blue Ribbon beer
83 Connective tissues in the legs, informally
86 Some YouTube content, in short
88 Real head-turner
91 Midday nap
92 ''____ Girl'' (Billy Joel hit)
93 Ketchup container, maybe
94 ''Well, aren't you the cat's meow!''
95 Complains, complains, complains
96 Manages to acquire, as a table at a popular restaurant
97 Bear whose porridge was too hot
102 Everglades bird
103 ____ dish
105 Like a leaky pen
107 Smartphone predecessors, for short
109 Word with school or cook
111 1040 collector
112 Currency unit in Laos
113 Flight spec
114 Small problem
115 Lead-in to sphere or system
116 Sought office

GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

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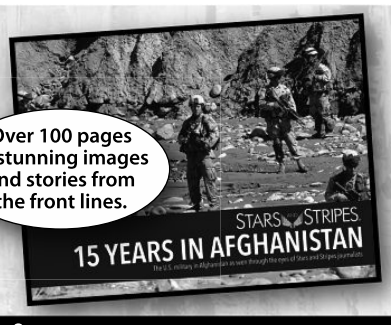

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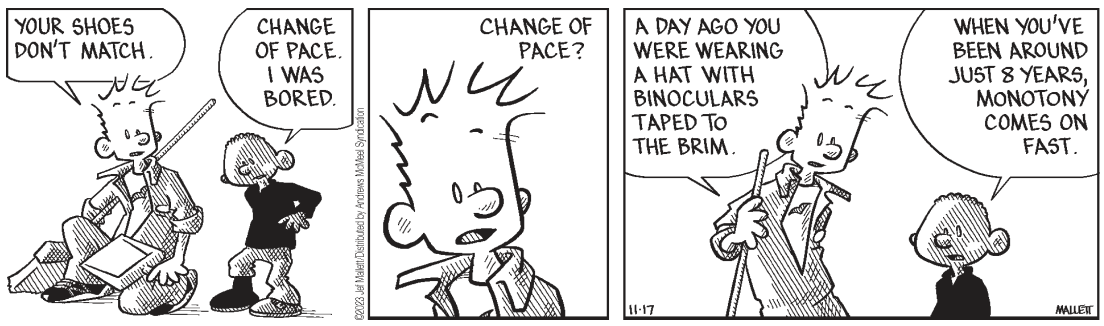
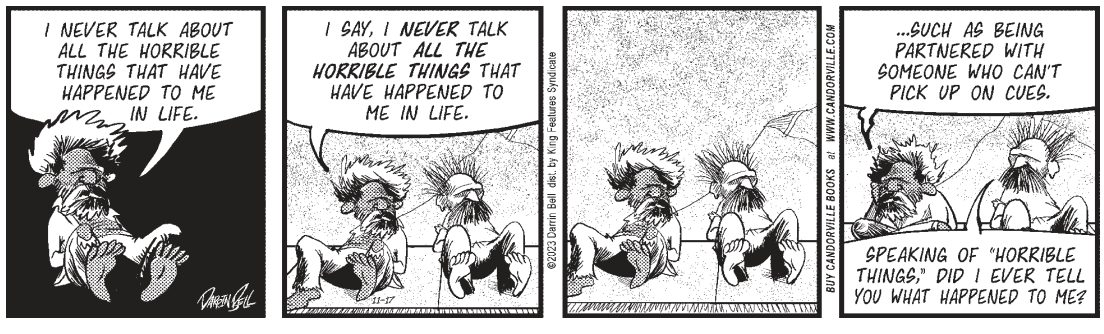


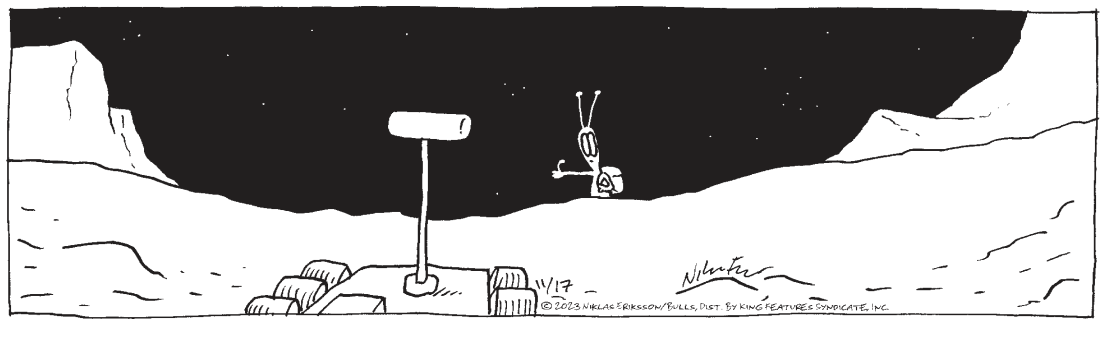
Pearls Before Swine

Non Sequitur

Candorville

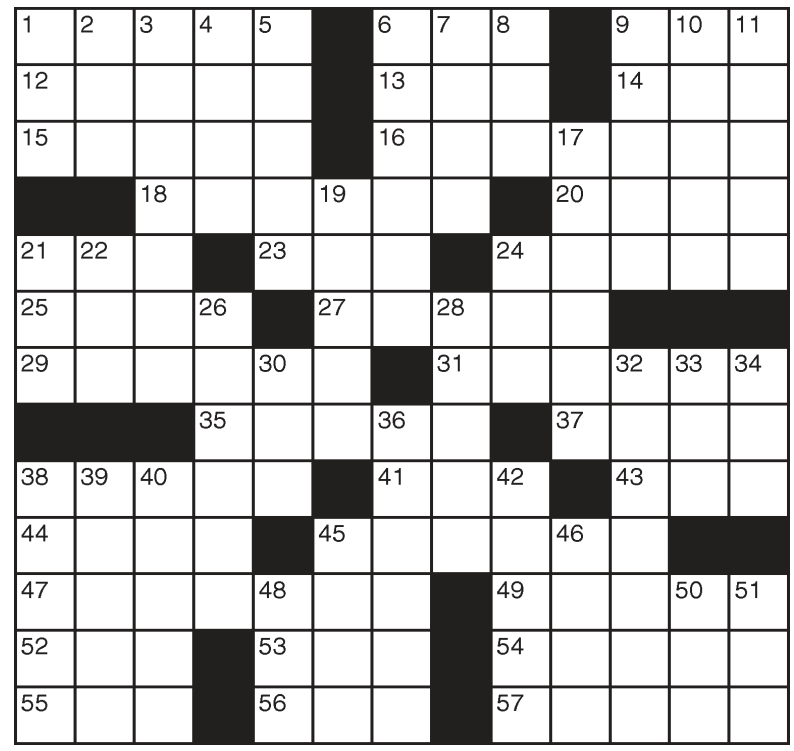


Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey

Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 "It's a Wonderful Life" director
6 Play part
9 Pantheon member
12 Implore
13 Slangy denial
14 "So that's it!"
15 Earth Day month
16 Pertaining to the tongue
18 Global org.
20 Father (Fr.)
21 Hosp. workers
23 — canto
24 Livestock lineage
25 Optimist's credo
27 — Lama
29 Royal home
31 Bothers
35 Malia's sibling
37 "House" actor Omar
38 Wimp
41 Branch
43 "Alley —"
44 Met solo
45 Alaskan capital
47 Thumbs-down
49 Ninnies
52 Picnic crasher
53 Verse by Pablo Neruda
54 Faucet woes
55 "— a Rebel"
56 Marry
57 Red-tag events

DOWN

1 IRS employee
2 Jungfrau, for one
3 Reading
4 Umbrella weather
5 Extemporize
6 Actress Lansbury for kids
7 Young whale
8 Duo
9 Visit
10 Chicago airport
11 Parceled (out)
17 Elf
19 Surrenders
21 Quick swim
22 — Victor
24 Sheepish "Hello!"
26 Bahamas capital
28 Discover
30 Archipelago part
32 Partner-related
33 Mil. address
34 Recipe abbr.
36 Carried with effort
38 Jazzy Vaughan
39 Cara or Castle
40 Prepares flour
42 Daily trio
45 Green gem
46 On the briny
48 Plant seeds
50 — out a living
51 Radiator sound

Answer to Previous Puzzle

V	E	R	B		T	U	B		P	A	P	A
A	L	E	E		E	V	E		O	N	U	S
N	E	A	R		N	A	E		M	D	C	I
S	C	R	E	E	N		R	U	P	E	E	S
			F	R	Y			M	E	R		
D	U	C	T		S	U	P	P	O	S	E	D
O	R	L			O	S	E			O	L	E
C	L	A	R	I	N	E	T		S	N	O	W
		R	E	D			E	R	A			
C	A	K	I	E	R		R	A	T	I	O	S
A	S	S	N		I	V	S		O	N	I	T
S	H	O	E		M	I	O		U	G	L	Y
S	E	N	D		S	A	N		T	A	Y	E

11-17 CRYPTOQUIP

QEAIS ADI WTJVBSNAIS BQW QOOCWIU TE WAIQXNJV WTYITJI'W YIXTUR, WDI KSTYKAXR ODQJVIU DIS ACJI.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT COULD A PERSON CALL A POEM WRITTEN ABOUT IMMORAL HABITS AND BEHAVIORS? VICE VERSE.

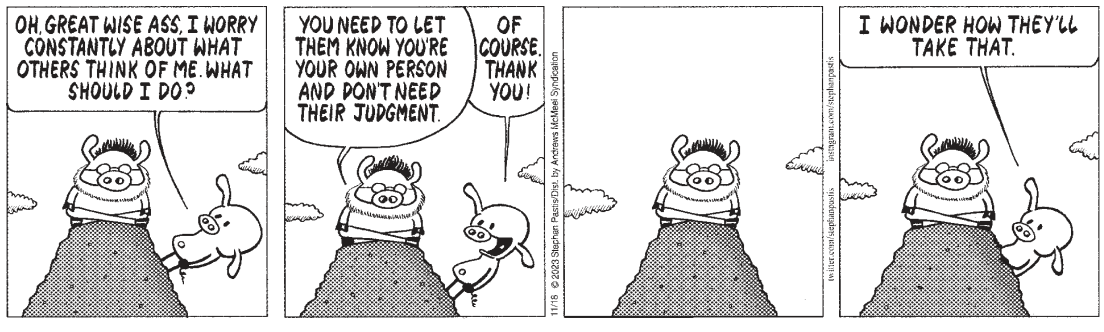
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: W equals S

Bizarro

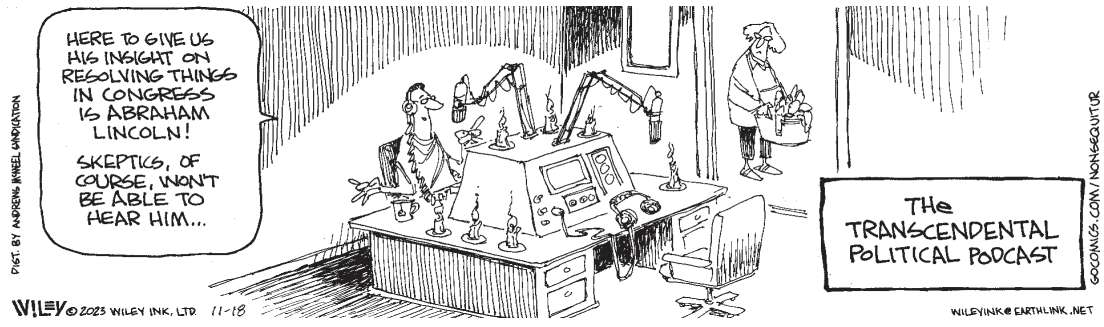
Loose Parts

Frazz

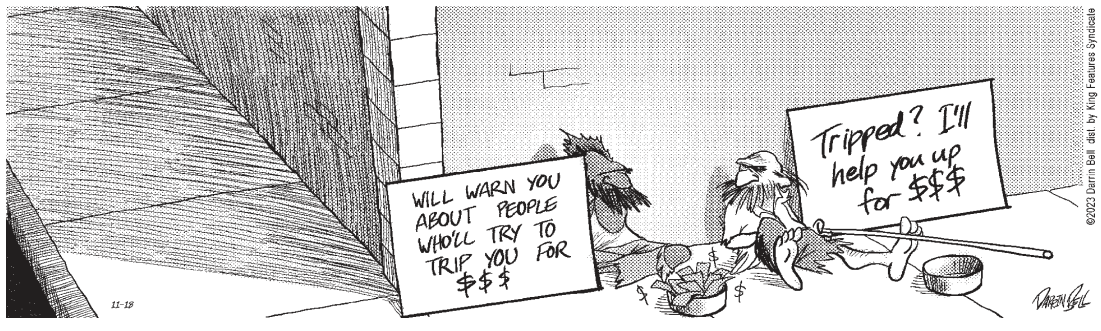
Pearls Before Swine



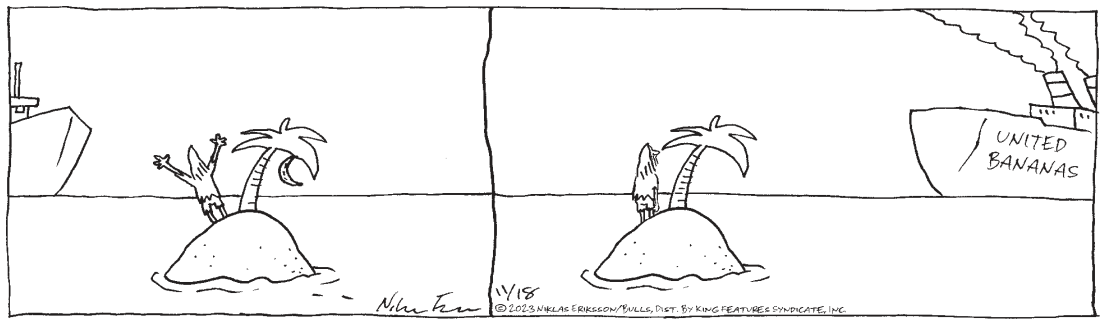
Non Sequitur



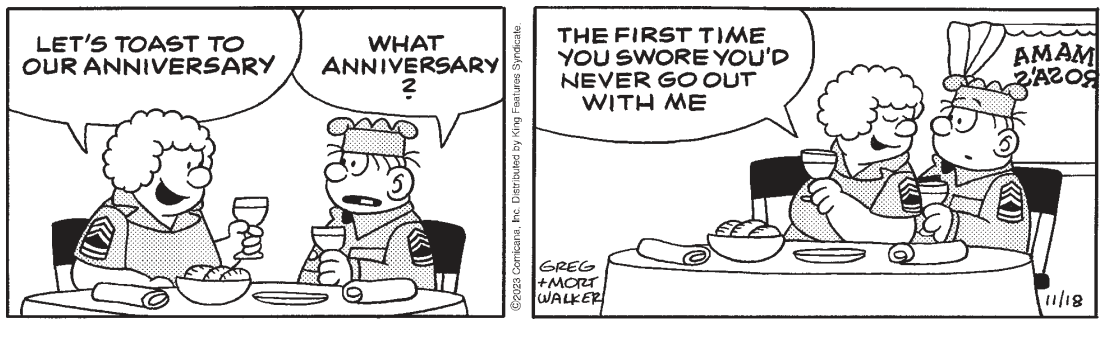
Candorville



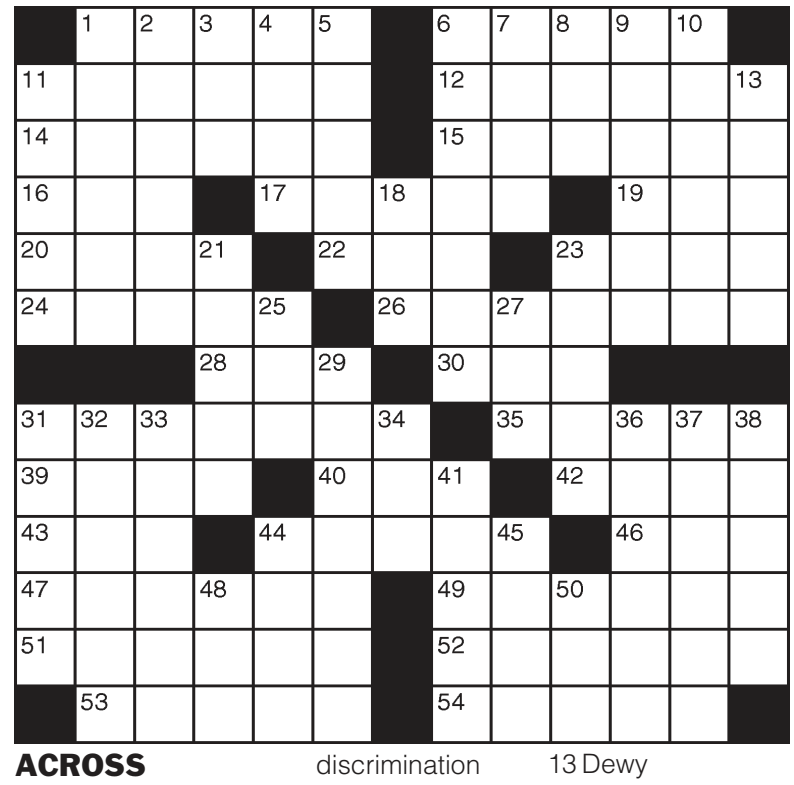
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Elitists
6 Kirsten in "Wimbledon"
11 In a crabby way
12 Element #68
14 Acela operator
15 Roman orator
16 The Cowboys, on a scoreboard
17 Test versions
19 Slugger's stat
20 Sheltered
22 Tree fluid
23 Cupid's alias
24 Bestseller list entry
26 Audio download
28 MSN, for one
30 — Pickles (one of the Rugrats)
31 Bean container
35 Georgia team, to fans
39 Concerning
40 Speck
42 Actress Reid
43 Epoch
44 Pergola climbers
46 Seminary subj.
47 Bahamas capital
49 Clerics' homes
51 Workplace discrimination
52 Target at a fiesta
53 Road twists
54 Oodles

DOWN

1 Mogadishu resident
2 Squirrel's snack
3 Hockey's Bobby
4 Spill the beans
5 Comedian Wanda
6 Crab or lobster
7 "Topaz" author
8 "The Voice" network
9 Mountain chain
10 Powerful engines
11 Egypt's Anwar
13 Dewy
18 Light touch
21 Skip a sound
23 Brilliance
25 Mentalist's claim
27 Carried out
29 Debate platforms
31 Tuscan city
32 Anger
33 Obliterates
34 Mafia boss
36 Polish city on the Vistula
37 Welcomes
38 Zesty dip
41 Office part-timers
44 Bud holder
45 Go yachting
48 Bro's kin
50 Away from SSW

Answer to Previous Puzzle

C	A	P	R	A		A	C	T		G	O	D
P	L	E	A	D		N	A	W		O	H	O
A	P	R	I	L		G	L	O	S	S	A	L
		U	N	I	C	E	F		P	E	R	E
D	R	S		B	E	L		B	R	E	E	D
I	C	A	N		D	A	L	A	I			
P	A	L	A	C	E		E	A	T	S	A	T
			S	A	S	H	A		E	P	P	S
S	I	S	S	Y		A	R	M		O	O	P
A	R	I	A		J	U	N	E	A	U		
R	E	F	U	S	A	L		A	S	S	E	S
A	N	T		O	D	E		L	E	A	K	S
H	E	S		W	E	D		S	A	L	E	S

11-18 CRYPTOQUIP

MU VQO KQ KQZUMIK, XHFC LOJC RQ SJMIK HZQIK H RNMJP LQBF, SCBHOLC VQO XMKNR KCR H NQZC MI QIC.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: AFTER THE SONGWRITER WAS ACCUSED OF STEALING SOMEONE'S MELODY, SHE PROMPTLY CHANGED HER TUNE.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals O

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OPINION

High court's new code of ethics has a fatal flaw

By Erwin Chemerinsky
Los Angeles Times

Although it is welcome and overdue that the Supreme Court finally adopted an ethics code for its justices on Monday, the approach is seriously flawed in that it includes no enforcement mechanism. Instead it continues to leave it to each justice to decide whether to be recused in a particular case.

Until Monday, every judge in the country — state and federal — was bound by an ethics code, except for the most important jurists: U.S. Supreme Court justices. Recent revelations of serious ethical lapses by several justices, most notably Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, highlighted this absence.

The court has its lowest public approval ratings in history, and while there are certainly many causes for this, the absence of an ethics code surely has contributed to the loss of legitimacy. This was a self-inflicted wound. There was no reason the justices could not adopt the same code of ethics that all other judges have been bound to follow.

And on Monday, the Supreme Court finally set that same bar for its members. With little fanfare, it released a "Code of Conduct for Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States," signed by all nine justices. This was accompanied by a brief statement of the court explaining that the absence of a code "has led in recent years to a misunderstanding that the Justices of this Court, unlike all other jurists in this country, regard themselves as unrestricted by any ethics rules." The court said that to "dispel this misunderstanding, we are issuing this Code."

The code itself is unremarkable. It is based on the American Bar Association's Model Code of Judicial Conduct, which is used throughout the country. In structure and in content it is largely the same. Indeed, all that's remarkable is how long the court delayed taking this easy and obvious step — and how much pressure was required before the court acquiesced.

But there is a crucial problem with what was released on Monday. It continues to defer to each justice about whether he or she should be disqualified from hearing a particular case. There is no indication of any change in this disturbing practice.

A commentary from the court that accompanies the new code even stresses the harms when a justice recuses, because no other judge can substitute for the absent member. But this wrongly assumes that having nine justices is more important than avoiding a bench tainted by ethical improprieties.

There are already many instances when the court functions without all nine justices, such as when one is ill or when there is a vacancy that has not been filled. After Justice Antonin Scalia died in February 2016, there were only eight justices for the next 15 months because of the Senate's refusal to consider President Barack Obama's nomination of Merrick Garland. Having eight justices is not ideal, because of the danger of ties and leaving issues unresolved. But avoiding ethical clouds is more important.

No person should be a judge of himself or herself. There must be a mechanism to determine when a justice should be recused that does not leave it entirely up to that individual. The documented ethical lapses in recent years certainly provide a basis for questioning whether justices are sufficiently sensitive to these issues.

There are many different approaches to this that could work. My colleague Jeremy Fogel, a former federal judge, proposed to the Senate Judiciary Committee in May that the chief justice appoint three retired federal court of appeals judges to decide recusal issues. There are many superb retired judges who could be appointed to perform this function. An alternative would be to have recusal issues for a justice decided by the other eight justices. The danger with this approach is that the justices might develop a norm of deferring to one another and refusing to meaningfully enforce the code of conduct.

However it is structured, there must be an enforcement mechanism for the ethical code to have meaning. "Trust us" is never an adequate answer, especially when dealing with matters of ethics. The court's legitimacy, and the very foundation of the rule of law, demand that the court take the next step and provide a way of enforcing the rules that it has adopted.

Erwin Chemerinsky is a contributing commentary writer to the Los Angeles Times and the dean of the University of California, Berkeley School of Law. His latest book is "Worse Than Nothing: The Dangerous Fallacy of Originalism."

If Hamas cared about Palestinians, it would surrender

By Charles Lane
The Washington Post

Some questions are naive. But some naive questions are clarifying in their naivete. As an example of the latter: Why doesn't Hamas surrender?

And, relatedly, why aren't more people demanding that Hamas surrender?

Hamas, a terrorist organization, lacks political and legal substance. It won an election in Gaza after Israel left in 2005 and subsequently established a dictatorship over the territory's 2.3 million people through violence. Its war aim is not democracy or civil rights for Palestinians but to destroy Israel and establish an Islamist state — an objective as patently illegitimate as Russian President Vladimir Putin's bid to erase and Russify Ukraine, another recognized member of the United Nations.

At this point, Hamas' war is not only unjust but also pretty clearly doomed. Down in their subterranean headquarters, the organization's leaders must be aware their forces are being hit hard by an Israeli military waging what it considers a fight for survival.

There has been no full-scale revolt among Palestinian citizens of Israel or West Bank Palestinians, which Hamas leaders called for on Oct. 7, nor a regional rebellion — beyond admittedly large anti-Israel demonstrations in Jordan, Lebanon and elsewhere. Iran and Hezbollah do not seem inclined to ride to Hamas' rescue, as per the group's other war aim: to trigger conflict throughout the Middle East.

Even if Hamas now intends to settle for a limited goal — dramatizing the Palestinian cause and thereby derailing an Israeli-Saudi rapprochement it sees as selling out Palestinian interests — it long ago reached a point of diminishing returns. Recent Saudi diplomacy strongly implies the kingdom will pursue relations with Israel after the war, albeit possibly with heightened demands regarding concessions for Palestinians.

Hamas' war is not only futile but also waged by unlawful means. It began with the massacre of 859 civilians (at last count) from the Jewish state and around the world, along with about 300 Israeli soldiers, some killed while defenseless. That slaughter was accompanied by a rocket fusillade fired indiscriminately from Gaza at civilian targets in Israel.

Indeed, Palestinians killed by Hamas' own errant rockets (or those of another group, Palestinian Islamic Jihad) likely account for some of the 11,000-plus Palestinian deaths recorded by the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry since Israel began to fight back. Clearly, though, the vast bulk of those deaths resulted from Israeli fire, and a very large portion, tragically, were noncombatants.

However, Israel does not intentionally target civilians, whereas Hamas not only did so on Oct. 7 but also intentionally put Gazan civilians at risk by embedding its armed militia in homes, schools and hospitals. Equally clear is that Hamas uses these human shields for protection against Israeli fire — and consciously reaps propaganda benefit from their deaths.

In short, the quickest, most appropriate way to save Palestinian lives, including those of Hamas fighters — many of whom are numbered, albeit unacknowledged, among the Gaza Health Ministry body count — would be for Hamas to surrender. After all, it has no prospect of meaningful victory.

Nevertheless, many people in the United States and around the world, invoking the need to save Palestinian lives, are instead demanding a cease-fire whose terms are vaguely described but apparently involve an end to Israel's operations without requiring Hamas to leave power or renounce armed struggle.

This demand seems at least as unrealistic as asking Hamas to surrender — with the important difference that it is also much less just. Israel has a right to defend itself militarily.

There is legitimate debate, of course, regarding the lawfulness and proportionality of Israel's military operation, notwithstanding the dilemmas that Hamas' use of human shields imposes on Israeli forces. Constrained by law, public opinion and the consciences of its troops, Israel tries to minimize harm to civilians. Even those who deny the sincerity or efficacy of those efforts must acknowledge that Hamas doesn't try at all.

To put the burden on Israel to end the war is to forget that there was an agreed-upon cease-fire between the Jewish state and Hamas before Oct. 7. The party that violated the cease-fire — in the most flagrant, provocative way possible — was Hamas. Having started this war, Hamas should end it.

A Hamas surrender raises all sorts of what-ifs, including how to handle what would be thousands of prisoners of war, where to try terrorist leaders on charges of war crimes, and how to rebuild Gaza. These are important practical questions but, morally, nonessential.

The essence of the matter is: Hamas does not surrender because it believes, fervently, that Israel has no right to exist and that armed "resistance" to it, even at the terrible human cost currently being paid by both Israelis and Palestinians, is justified. That belief is accepted, or at least not fundamentally challenged, by many on college campuses, social media and elsewhere who are demanding, in effect, that Israel surrender. Talk about naive.

Charles Lane is a Washington Post deputy opinion editor and columnist.

SCOREBOARD

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Scores

Wednesday
MIDWEST

Ohio 34, Central Michigan 20
Miami (Ohio) 23, Buffalo 10

Schedule

Friday
SOUTHWEST

South Florida (5-5) at UTSA (7-3)

FAR WEST

Colorado (4-6) at Washington St. (4-6)

Saturday
EAST

Sacred Heart (2-8) at UConn (1-9)
Dartmouth (5-4) at Brown (5-4)
Harvard (8-1) at Yale (6-3)
E. Illinois (7-3) at Robert Morris (4-6)
Lafayette (8-2) at Lehigh (2-8)
St. Francis (Pa.) (3-6) at CCSU (3-7)
Coastal Carolina (7-3) at Army (4-6)
Duquesne (6-4) at Merrimack (5-5)
Post (0-0) at Wagner (3-7)
Michigan (10-0) at Maryland (6-4)
Bucknell (3-7) at Marist (4-6)
Rutgers (6-4) at Penn St. (8-2)
East Carolina (2-8) at Navy (4-5)
Georgetown (5-5) at Holy Cross (6-4)
Monmouth (NJ) (4-6) at Albany (NY) (8-3)
LIU Brooklyn (4-6) at Stonehill (4-5)
Maine (2-8) at New Hampshire (5-5)
Columbia (2-7) at Cornell (3-6)
Morgan St. (4-5) at Howard (5-5)
SE Missouri (4-6) at Bryant (5-5)
Fordham (6-4) at Colgate (5-5)
Princeton (4-5) at Penn (6-3)
Villanova (8-2) at Delaware (8-2)
Rhode Island (6-4) at Towson (4-6)
Cincinnati (3-7) at West Virginia (6-4)

SOUTH

Southern Miss. (3-7) at Miss. St. (4-6)
San Diego (3-7) at Stetson (3-7)
Louisville (9-1) at Miami (6-4)
Tulane (9-1) at FAU (4-6)
Chattanooga (7-3) at Alabama (9-1)
Furman (9-1) at Wofford (1-9)
W. Carolina (7-3) at VMI (4-6)
La.-Monroe (2-8) at Mississippi (8-2)
SMU (8-2) at Memphis (8-2)
UT Martin (8-2) at Samford (5-5)
Morehead St. (4-6) at Presbyterian (3-7)
Umass (3-7) at Liberty (10-0)
The Citadel (0-10) at ETSU (2-8)
Hampton (5-5) at Elon (5-5)
Charleston Southern (4-6) at Gardner-Webb (6-4)
Campbell (4-6) at NC A&T (1-9)
Richmond (7-3) at William & Mary (6-4)
Stephen F. Austin (3-7) at E. Kent. (4-6)
Rice (4-6) at Charlotte (3-7)
Delaware St. (1-9) at NC Central (8-2)
Cent. Arkansas (7-3) at Austin Peay (8-2)
Appalachian St. (6-4) at James Madison (10-0)
UTEP (3-7) at Middle Tennessee (3-7)
Youngstown St. (6-4) at Murray St. (2-8)
SC State (4-6) at Norfolk St. (3-7)
La. Tech (3-8) at Jacksonville St. (7-3)
Temple (3-7) at UAB (3-7)
Tenn. Tech (3-7) at Tenn. St. (6-4)
Alcorn St. (6-4) at Jackson St. (7-3)
Duke (6-4) at Virginia (2-8)
Texas A&M Comm. (1-9) at NW St. (0-6)
Louisiana-Lafayette (5-5) at Troy (8-2)
North Carolina (8-2) at Clemson (6-4)
NC State (7-3) at Virginia Tech (5-5)
Florida A&M (9-1) vs. Bethune-Cookman (3-7) at Orlando, Fla.
Sam Houston St. (2-8) at W. Kent. (5-5)
Georgia (10-0) at Tennessee (7-3)
New Mexico St. (8-3) at Auburn (6-4)
Marshall (5-5) at South Alabama (5-5)
Old Dominion (4-6) at Georgia Southern (6-4)
North Alabama (3-7) at Florida St. (10-0)
Dayton (3-7) at Davidson (7-3)
Kentucky (6-4) at South Carolina (4-6)
Georgia St. (6-4) at LSU (7-3)
Syracuse (5-5) at Georgia Tech (5-5)

MIDWEST

Purdue (3-7) at Northwestern (5-5)
Michigan St. (3-7) at Indiana (3-7)
Drake (7-3) at Butler (7-3)
Valparaiso (3-7) at St. Thomas (7-3)
Illinois St. (6-4) at North Dakota (6-4)
Kent St. (1-9) at Ball St. (3-7)
South Dakota (8-2) at W. Illinois (0-10)
Indiana St. (1-9) at S. Illinois (6-4)
Missouri St. (4-6) at S. Dakota St. (10-0)
Illinois (5-5) at Iowa (8-2)
Wake Forest (4-6) at Notre Dame (7-3)
Minnesota (5-5) at Ohio St. (10-0)
N. Dakota St. (7-3) at N. Iowa (6-4)
Kansas St. (7-3) at Kansas (7-3)
Nebraska (5-5) at Wisconsin (5-5)
Florida (5-5) at Missouri (8-2)
Texas (9-1) at Iowa St. (6-4)

SOUTHWEST

Abil. Christian (5-5) at Texas A&M (6-4)
Incarnate Word (7-2) at Houston Christian (5-4)
Texas State (6-4) at Arkansas St. (5-5)
Ark.-Pine Bluff (1-9) at Texas Southern (3-7)
Alabama St. (6-3) at Prairie View (5-5)
North Texas (3-7) at Tulsa (3-7)
Baylor (3-7) at TCU (4-6)
McNeese St. (0-9) at Lamar (5-5)
Oklahoma St. (7-3) at Houston (4-6)
UCF (5-5) at Texas Tech (5-5)
FIU (4-6) at Arkansas (3-7)

FAR WEST

Oklahoma (8-2) at BYU (5-5)
Montana St. (8-2) at Montana (9-1)
Portland St. (4-6) at N. Colorado (0-10)
Hawaii (4-7) at Wyoming (6-4)
Utah (7-3) at Arizona (7-3)
Nevada (2-8) at Colorado St. (4-6)
Sacramento St. (7-3) at UC Davis (6-4)
UCLA (6-4) at Southern Cal (7-4)
UNLV (8-2) at Air Force (8-2)
N. Arizona (4-6) at E. Washington (4-6)
Oregon (9-1) at Arizona St. (3-7)
California (4-6) at Stanford (3-7)
Idaho St. (3-7) at Idaho (7-3)
Boise St. (5-5) at Utah St. (5-5)
S. Utah (5-5) at Utah Tech (2-8)
Washington (10-0) at Oregon St. (8-2)
Weber St. (5-5) at Cal Poly (3-7)
New Mexico (3-7) at Fresno St. (8-2)
San Diego St. (3-7) at San Jose St. (5-5)

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
National League

MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Acquired RHP Chad Patrick from Oakland in exchange for INF Abraham Toro.
SAN DIEGO PADRES — Claimed RHP Logan Gillaspie off waivers from Boston.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association

NBA — Suspended Golden State F Draymond Green five games without pay for escalating an on-court altercation during Tuesday night's game. Fined Golden State G Klay Thompson and Minnesota F Jaden McDaniels and C Rudy Gobert $25,000 for their roles in the altercation.
INDIANA PACERS — Waived F Daniel Theis.
LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS — Re-signed G Joshua Primo to a rest-of-season contract.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS — Claimed RB Michael Carter off waivers from the New York Jets. Released OF Doug Kramer Jr.
CAROLINA PANTHERS — Signed TE Jordan Matthews to the practice squad.
CLEVELAND BROWNS — Designated G Michael Dunn to return from injured reserve to practice. Placed QB Deshaun Watson on injured reserve.
DALLAS COWBOYS — Designated TE Payton Hendershot to return from injured reserve to practice. Placed C Billy Price on the practice squad injured reserve.
DETROIT LIONS — Signed DE Bruce Irvin to the practice squad. Promoted LS Jake McQuaide from the practice squad to the active roster.
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Claimed CB Kyu Blu Kelly off waivers from Seattle.
HOUSTON TEXANS — Released CB Jason Verrett from the practice squad.
JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Designated WR Parker Washington to return from injured reserve to practice.
LAS VEGAS RAIDERS — Designated S Roderic Teamer to return from injured reserve to practice.
LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Signed OLB Justin Hollins from the New York Giants practice squad. Placed OLB Chris Rumph II on injured reserve. Signed TE Stephen Anderson to the practice squad. Released DB Mark Webb Jr. from the practice squad.
MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Designated QB Nick Mullens to return from injured reserve to practice.
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Designated OT Riley Reiff to return from injured reserve to practice.
NEW YORK JETS — Designated TE Kenny Yeboah to return from injured reserve to practice. Re-signed DT Tanzel Smart to the practice squad. Released CB Craig James from the practice squad.
PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Designated TE Pat Freiermuth to return from injured reserve to practice.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS — Signed DL Spencer Waege to the practice squad. Released DL Austin Bryant from the practice squad. Placed G Nick Zakelj on injured reserve.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Designated RT Abraham Lucas to return from injured reserve to practice. Signed NT Breiden Fehoko and LB Tyler Murray to the practice quad.
TENNESSEE TITANS — Signed DL Ross Blacklock to the practice squad. Claimed G Calvin Throckmartin off waivers from Carolina. Placed LB Chance Campbell on injured reserve.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

COLORADO AVALANCHE — Recalled Ds Caleb Jones and Sam Malinski from Colorado (AHL).
COLUMBIA BLUE JACKETS — Waived F Emil Bemstrom.
EDMONTON OILERS —Recalled D Philip Broberg, C Raphael Lavoie and LW Adam Erne from Bakersfield (AHL).
FLORIDA PANTHERS — Returned G Evan Cormier to Charlotte (AHL).
PITTSBURGH PENGUINS — Returned C Jonathan Gruden to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (AHL).
SAN JOSE SHARKS — Reassigned G Eetu Makiniemi from San Jose (AHL) to Wichita (ECHL).
TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING — Reassigned D Philippe Myers to Syracuse (AHL).
VANCOUVER CANUCKS — Reassigned C Ty Glover from Abbotsford (AHL) to Kalamazoo (ECHL).
WINNIPEG JETS — Recalled F Axel Jonsson-Fjallby from Manitoba (AHL).

SOCCER
National Women's Soccer League

ORLANDO PRIDE — Acquired $90,000 in general allocation money (GAM) from Utah Royals FC in exchange for M Mikayla Cluff and the No. 26 2024 draft pick.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Wednesday's men's scores

EAST

Binghamton 63, Loyola (Md.) 57
Boston College 68, Richmond 61
Buffalo 89, Roberts Wesleyan 83
Columbia 105, SUNY-Delhi 60
Dartmouth 79, Westfield St. 61
Delaware 78, Delaware St. 67
Fairleigh Dickinson 71, St. Peter's 70
Longwood 80, Md.-Eastern Shore 61
Princeton 70, Duquesne 67
Rutgers 71, Georgetown 60
Seton Hall 96, Albany (NY) 71

SOUTH

Bethune-Cookman 104, Trinity Baptist 63
Cent. Michigan 68, South Florida 63
Charlotte 62, Utah Valley St. 45
Denver 91, Nicholls 85
George Mason 90, Cornell 83
Kennesaw St. 101, Keiser 55
Louisiana-Lafayette 107, Louisiana College 56
Louisville 61, Coppin St. 41
SC-Upstate 83, East Carolina 81
Southern Miss. 76, Xavier (NO) 45
VCU 73, Radford 50
Virginia Tech 60, Campbell 44

MIDWEST

Cleveland St. 71, Canisius 61
Evansville 76, SE Missouri 57
Illinois St. 69, E. Illinois 61
Nebraska 84, Stony Brook 63
Ohio St. 76, Merrimack 52

SOUTHWEST

FIU 83, Houston Christian 74
Texas 80, Rice 64
Texas A&M Commerce 113, Science and Arts 63

FAR WEST

BYU 105, SE Louisiana 48
Fresno St. 87, Morgan St. 68
Hawaii 82, Hawaii Hilo 66
N. Arizona 62, Seattle 60
Nevada 88, Pacific 41
Tennessee St. 75, Portland 65
UCLA 78, LIU 58

Men's Top 25 schedule

Friday's games

No. 3 Arizona vs. Belmont,
No. 9 Duke vs. Bucknell
No. 12 Miami vs. Georgia, Semifinals Game 1 at Nassau, Bahamas
No. 13 Texas A&M vs. Oral Roberts
No. 14 Arkansas vs. UNC-Greensboro
No. 17 Kentucky vs. Stonehill
No. 18 Michigan St. vs. Butler
No. 20 North Carolina vs. UC Riverside
No. 21 Villanova vs. Maryland
No. 22 Alabama vs. Mercer
No. 23 Illinois vs. Valparaiso
No. 24 James Madison vs. Radford

Saturday's games

No. 8 Creighton vs. Texas Southern
No. 10 FAU vs. Bryant

Sunday's games

No. 3 Arizona vs. Texas-Arlington
No. 5 UConn vs. Indiana, Semifinals Game 1 at New York
No. 16 Southern Cal vs. Brown
No. 18 Michigan St. vs. Alcorn St.
No. 19 Texas vs. Louisville, Semifinals Game 2 at New York
No. 23 Illinois vs. Southern U.

Women's Top 25 fared

Wednesday

No. 1 South Carolina (2-0) did not play. Next: vs. Clemson, Thursday.
No. 2 Iowa (3-0) did not play. Next: vs. Kansas St., Thursday.
No. 3 UCLA (3-0) did not play. Next: vs. Princeton, Friday.
No. 4 Utah (2-1) did not play. Next: at Alaska-Anchorage, Saturday.
No. 5 Colorado (3-0) did not play. Next: at SMU, Saturday.
No. 6 Stanford (2-0) did not play. Next: vs. Cal Poly, Thursday.
No. 7 LSU (3-1) did not play. Next: at SE Louisiana, Friday.
No. 8 UConn (1-1) did not play. Next: vs. No. 20 Maryland, Thursday.
No. 9 Virginia Tech (1-1) did not play. Next: vs. Houston Christian, Thursday.
No. 10 Southern Cal (3-0) did not play. Next: vs. Penn St., Wednesday.
No. 11 Texas (3-0) did not play. Next: vs. Louisiana Tech, Sunday.
No. 12 Florida St. (2-0) did not play. Next: at Florida, Friday.
No. 13 Ohio St. (1-1) did not play. Next: vs. Boston College, Thursday.
No. 14 NC State (3-0) beat Elon 90-35. Next: vs. Rhode Island, Sunday.
No. 15 Tennessee (2-1) did not play. Next: vs. Troy, Sunday.
No. 16 Notre Dame (2-1) beat Northwestern 110-52. Next: vs. Illinois, Saturday.
No. 17 North Carolina (3-0) beat Hampton 62-32. Next: vs. Elon, Saturday.
No. 18 Indiana (1-1) did not play. Next: vs. Murray St., Friday.
No. 19 Louisville (2-0) did not play. Next: vs. Bellarmine, Thursday.
No. 20 Maryland (1-1) did not play. Next: at No. 8 UConn, Thursday.
No. 21 Baylor (2-0) did not play. Next: vs. Harvard, Sunday.
No. 22 Creighton (2-0) did not play. Next: vs. Green Bay, Thursday.
No. 23 Mississippi (2-1) beat Temple 80-63. Next: at Howard, Saturday.
No. 24 Washington St. (4-0) did not play. Next: at Prairie View, Sunday.
No. 25 Oklahoma (4-0) beat Alabama St. 92-46. Next: at Virginia, Sunday.

PRO FOOTBALL

NFL

American Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Miami	6	3	0	.667	285	225
Buffalo	5	5	0	.500	262	184
N.Y. Jets	4	5	0	.444	144	172
New England	2	8	0	.200	141	238

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Jacksonville	6	3	0	.667	196	190
Houston	5	4	0	.556	217	192
Indianapolis	5	5	0	.500	242	248
Tennessee	3	6	0	.333	154	180

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Baltimore	7	3	0	.700	270	157
Cleveland	6	3	0	.667	214	170
Pittsburgh	6	3	0	.667	156	182
Cincinnati	5	4	0	.556	182	192

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Kansas City	7	2	0	.778	208	143
Las Vegas	5	5	0	.500	172	205
Denver	4	5	0	.444	196	248
L.A. Chargers	4	5	0	.444	239	215

National Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	8	1	0	.889	252	195
Dallas	6	3	0	.667	269	165
Washington	4	6	0	.400	217	274
N.Y. Giants	2	8	0	.200	118	266

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
New Orleans	5	5	0	.500	214	198
Tampa Bay	4	5	0	.444	178	173
Atlanta	4	6	0	.400	189	217
Carolina	1	8	0	.111	153	242

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Detroit	7	2	0	.778	241	203
Minnesota	6	4	0	.600	233	209
Green Bay	3	6	0	.333	179	182
Chicago	3	7	0	.300	204	255

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
San Francisco	6	3	0	.667	252	143
Seattle	6	3	0	.667	200	201
L.A. Rams	3	6	0	.333	178	204
Arizona	2	8	0	.200	176	263

Thursday's game

Cincinnati at Baltimore

Sunday's games

Arizona at Houston
Chicago at Detroit
Dallas at Carolina
L.A. Chargers at Green Bay
Las Vegas at Miami
N.Y. Giants at Washington
Pittsburgh at Cleveland
Tennessee at Jacksonville
Tampa Bay at San Francisco
N.Y. Jets at Buffalo
Seattle at L.A. Rams
Minnesota at Denver
Open: Indianapolis, New England, Atlanta, New Orleans

Monday's game

Philadelphia at Kansas City

Thursday, Nov. 23

Green Bay at Detroit
Washington at Dallas
San Francisco at Seattle

Friday, Nov. 24

Miami at N.Y. Jets

Sunday, Nov. 26

Carolina at Tennessee
Jacksonville at Houston
New England at N.Y. Giants
New Orleans at Atlanta
Pittsburgh at Cincinnati
Tampa Bay at Indianapolis
Cleveland at Denver
L. A. Rams at Arizona
Buffalo at Philadelphia
Kansas City at Las Vegas
Baltimore at L.A. Chargers

Monday, Nov. 27

Chicago at Minnesota

Thursday, Nov. 30

Seattle at Dallas

PRO HOCKEY

NHL

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Boston	15	12	1	2	26	51	30
Florida	15	10	4	1	21	49	43
Detroit	15	8	5	2	18	55	49
Toronto	15	8	5	2	18	55	54
Tampa Bay	16	6	6	4	16	53	59
Montreal	16	7	7	2	16	45	55
Buffalo	16	7	8	1	15	46	52
Ottawa	13	6	7	0	12	50	44

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
N.Y. Rangers	14	11	2	1	23	47	31
Washington	14	8	4	2	18	35	37
Carolina	16	9	7	0	18	52	52
Philadelphia	16	8	7	1	17	51	47
Pittsburgh	14	8	6	0	16	51	37
New Jersey	14	7	6	1	15	51	55
N.Y. Islanders	15	5	6	4	14	39	51
Columbus	16	4	8	4	12	44	58

Western Conference

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Dallas	15	11	3	1	23	52	39
Colorado	15	10	5	0	20	56	46
Winnipeg	15	8	5	2	18	55	50
St. Louis	14	8	5	1	17	42	36
Arizona	15	7	6	2	16	52	46
Minnesota	15	5	8	2	12	50	64
Chicago	13	5	8	0	10	34	45
Nashville	15	5	10	0	10	44	52

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vancouver	16	12	3	1	25	73	39
Vegas	16	12	3	1	25	58	35
Los Angeles	14	8	3	3	19	56	42
Anaheim	16	9	7	0	18	49	51
Seattle	17	5	8	4	14	43	62
Calgary	15	5	8	2	12	39	53
Edmonton	15	5	9	1	11	43	55
San Jose	16	2	13	1	5	21	72

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

Tuesday's games

Pittsburgh 5, Columbus 3
Boston 5, Buffalo 2
Calgary 2, Montreal 1
Washington 3, Vegas 0
St. Louis 5, Tampa Bay 0
Winnipeg 6, New Jersey 3
Anaheim 3, Nashville 2
Dallas 4, Arizona 3, OT
Florida 5, San Jose 3

Wednesday's games

Philadelphia 3, Carolina 1
Edmonton 4, Seattle 3, OT
Colorado 8, Anaheim 2
Vancouver 4, N.Y. Islanders 3, OT

Thursday's games

Detroit vs. Ottawa at Avicii Arena
Arizona at Columbus
New Jersey at Pittsburgh
Vegas at Montreal
Tampa Bay at Chicago
Vancouver at Calgary
N.Y. Islanders at Seattle
Florida at Los Angeles
St. Louis at San Jose

Friday's games

Toronto vs. Detroit at Avicii Arena
Buffalo at Winnipeg
Florida at Anaheim

Saturday's games

Minnesota vs. Ottawa at Avicii Arena
Vegas at Philadelphia
Chicago at Nashville
Edmonton at Tampa Bay
Arizona at Winnipeg
Montreal at Boston
N.Y. Islanders at Calgary
N.Y. Rangers at New Jersey
Pittsburgh at Carolina
Columbus at Washington
Colorado at Dallas
Seattle at Vancouver
St. Louis at Los Angeles

PRO SOCCER

MLS playoffs

Semifinals
Saturday, Nov. 25
Eastern Conference

Orlando vs. Columbus
Cincinnati vs. Philadelphia

Sunday, Nov. 26
Western Conference

Houston vs. Sporting Kansas City
Seattle vs. Los Angeles FC

Conference Final
Dec. 2-3

Semifinals winners

Championship
Saturday, Dec. 9

Conference Final winners

NBA

ON BASKETBALL

Green hurt Warriors more than Gobert

BY TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

Golden State's Draymond Green is probably going to be enshrined in the Basketball Hall of Fame one day, even with career averages of around 9 points, 7 rebounds and 6 assists per game. He'll have, at minimum, four NBA championships and two Olympic gold medals when he's all done.

He'll also have baggage. So much baggage.

The latest addition to that pile came Wednesday when the NBA handed Green a five-game suspension, one that'll cost him about $770,000 in missed salary and won't help a Warriors team that is already without an injured Stephen Curry and not off to the hottest of starts at just 6-6.

Green earned every bit of that suspension after putting Rudy Gobert in a headlock during the Warriors-Minnesota game on Tuesday night. It was his second ejection in a span of five days and the 19th — including playoffs — of his career, which is nearly twice as many as any other two currently active players in the league combined.

"Not much to say," Gobert said after the game. "It was clown behavior."

Some say clown, some say Draymond being Draymond. Among Green's other famous incidents: He punched then-teammate Jordan Poole last season, plus earned suspensions for stomping on Domantas Sabonis' chest in last season's playoffs and another after a "retaliatory swipe of his hand to the groin" of LeBron James to go over the flagrant-foul-point limit in the 2016 NBA Finals, having to sit down with the Warriors up 3-1 in a series they would give away.

Add up all his technicals and fines and the money he's lost for games missed by suspension, and Green's behavior has cost him somewhere around $2 million. He's made probably close to 100 times that amount, so it's not exactly hurting the bottom line.

JEFF CHIU/AP

Warriors forward Draymond Green argues with referee Marc Davis on Sunday against the Timberwolves. Green was given a five-game suspension for putting Minnesota's Rudy Gobert in a headlock.

But it will hurt the Warriors, who'll have to play — again — without Green and amid more distractions that he's caused. It speaks volumes that the team still defends Green, even after most onlookers would have said he was clearly in the wrong for putting Gobert in the headlock as part of a mess that started with Golden State's Klay Thompson and Minnesota's Jaden McDaniels getting tangled up.

"The Draymond piece of it, if you watched the replay, Rudy had his hands on Klay's neck and that's why Draymond went after Rudy," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said after Tuesday's game. "I saw one replay right after it happened. Guys on the back of the bench were telling us that Rudy had Klay, and that's why Draymond went at Rudy. So that's all I know."

True, Gobert probably didn't need to get involved in the Thompson-McDaniels mess, and if he did want to play peacemaker, he could have grabbed his teammate to pull him out of the fray instead of putting his hands on an opponent. It certainly stands to reason that Green would have been irate over the visual of Gobert grabbing Thompson, though it's not a well-kept secret that Green and Gobert don't like each other very much.

First off, they've battled for defensive player of the year honors a few times and neither has been too happy when the other prevailed. Green has also openly mocked Gobert for breaking into tears when the then-Utah center missed out on being an All-Star in 2019.

And, after Minnesota beat the Warriors on Sunday, Green might have raised a few eyebrows with this assessment: "I don't necessarily view it as a tough matchup."

It got tough Tuesday night without an injured Curry and an ejected Thompson and Green. Minnesota won 104-101, finishing off a two-game sweep on the Warriors' home court. The Warriors are 1-4 at home, that lone win coming by a single point, and now are further short-handed.

This suspension won't change anyone's opinion of Green. His fans will stand by him while his critics will be further empowered to rip him. It also won't change the way he plays; he'll still be a lightning rod by choice, will probably post on Instagram — just as he did a few days ago — about how he doesn't care what most people think.

Maybe Green should, or at least realize the antics just aren't worth it anymore. It's up for debate if he was truly trying to hurt Gobert. There's no argument that he hurt the Warriors.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	9	2	.818	—
Philadelphia	8	3	.727	1
Brooklyn	6	5	.545	3
New York	6	5	.545	3
Toronto	5	6	.455	4

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	7	4	.636	—
Atlanta	6	5	.545	1
Orlando	6	5	.545	1
Charlotte	3	7	.300	3½
Washington	2	9	.182	5

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Indiana	7	4	.636	—
Milwaukee	7	4	.636	—
Cleveland	5	6	.455	2
Chicago	4	8	.333	3½
Detroit	2	10	.167	5½

Western Conference

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Dallas	9	3	.750	—
Houston	6	3	.667	1½
New Orleans	5	6	.455	3½
San Antonio	3	8	.273	5½
Memphis	2	9	.182	6½

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Denver	9	2	.818	—
Minnesota	8	3	.727	1
Oklahoma City	7	4	.636	2
Utah	4	7	.364	5
Portland	3	8	.273	6

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Sacramento	6	4	.600	—
Golden State	6	6	.500	1
L.A. Lakers	6	6	.500	1
Phoenix	5	6	.455	1½
L.A. Clippers	3	7	.300	3

Wednesday's games

Dallas 130, Washington 117
Boston 117, Philadelphia 107
Milwaukee 128, Toronto 112
New York 116, Atlanta 114
Orlando 96, Chicago 94
Phoenix 133, Minnesota 115
Cleveland 109, Portland 95
Sacramento 125, L.A. Lakers 110

Thursday's games

Brooklyn at Miami
Oklahoma City at Golden State

Friday's games

Milwaukee at Charlotte
New York at Washington
Boston at Toronto
Detroit at Cleveland
Philadelphia at Atlanta
Sacramento at San Antonio
Denver at New Orleans
Orlando at Chicago
L.A. Lakers at Portland
Phoenix at Utah
Houston at L.A. Clippers

Saturday's games

New York at Charlotte
Minnesota at New Orleans
Dallas at Milwaukee
Memphis at San Antonio
Miami at Chicago
Oklahoma City at Golden State

No video found of hit-and run accident with 76ers' Oubre

BY KEVIN COONEY
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Philadelphia police said Wednesday that they have yet to find any videotape evidence of an alleged hit-and-run accident involving 76ers guard Kelly Oubre, and coach Nick Nurse is standing by his player.

In an email to The Associated Press, Officer Miguel Torres said there was no update and an investigation is ongoing into the report that the 27-year-old Oubre was struck by a car while crossing a street on Saturday night in downtown Philadelphia, leaving the player with a broken rib, cuts and lacerations.

"No video has been recovered," Torres said in his email.

Oubre

The Philadelphia Inquirer reported police department spokesman Sgt. Eric Gripp said Wednesday that surveillance footage recovered so far showed "no evidence that a crash occurred at the Center City intersection where Oubre reported being hit on Saturday night."

Asked about the report and the validity of Oubre's story before Wednesday night's game against the Boston Celtics, Nurse said that Oubre was at the team's practice facility in Camden, N.J., both Tuesday and Wednesday and he backed his player.

"I don't think it's very fair to him to say that he made up some story," Nurse said. "I just don't. I'm going to believe him at his word. He's one of our players and we're going to stand behind him. And so am I."

When asked why he believed Oubre's story, Nurse said, "I don't have any reason not to believe him."

A team spokesman said that Oubre "continues to progress from his injuries and has resumed light physical activity with hopes of returning to play in the coming weeks."

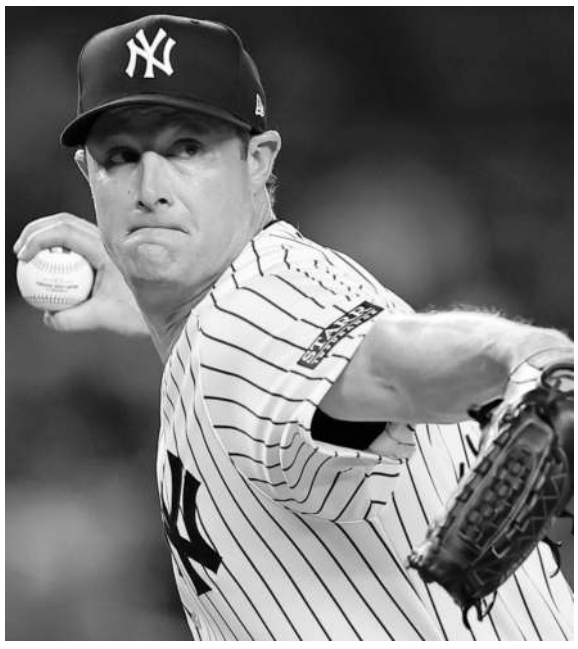
The spokesman said the team and police have been in touch regarding the status of the investigation and details and added that the organization appreciated the efforts of police for investigating the situation and the support Oubre has received from the Philadelphia community.

Oubre has not attended any of the team's three games since the incident took place.

Oubre signed with the Sixers on Sept. 26 and had just moved into the neighborhood where the incident allegedly took place.

He is scheduled to be re-examined at the end of the week for injuries related to the incident before a possible return to play timeline is set.

MLB



PHOTOS BY ADAM HUNGER, LEFT, AND GREGORY BULL/AP

New York Yankees pitcher Gerrit Cole, left, and Blake Snell, currently a free agent, won the AL and NL Cy Young Awards, respectively, on Wednesday night. It was Cole's first Cy Young and Snell's second.

Cole, Snell win Cy Young

1st award for Cole is unanimous; Snell 7th to win in both leagues

BY MIKE FITZPATRICK
Associated Press

NEW YORK — After several close calls, Gerrit Cole finally won his first American League Cy Young Award on the strength of consistent excellence all season.

Blake Snell joined a short list of pitching royalty by turning around a terrible start.

Cole was a unanimous AL winner Wednesday and Snell took home Cy Young honors in the National League — becoming the seventh hurler to claim the prize in both circuits.

Runner-up twice before, Cole easily finished on top this time following an outstanding season for the New York Yankees. The ace right-hander received all 30 first-place votes in balloting by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

"I'm very proud of this season. I'm very proud of some of the other seasons where I've made a pretty strong run at this award as well," Cole said on a conference call. "But it's hard to say it wasn't a little different. I mean, there was just a lot of momentum going into this."

Cole allowed no more than two runs in 26 of his 33 starts — best in the majors. He went 15-4 with 222 strikeouts while leading the AL in ERA (2.63) and innings (209). He finished with a flourish, too, throwing a two-hit shutout at Toronto in his final outing.

He became the sixth Yankees pitcher to win a Cy Young and first since Roger Clemens in 2001. Cole and Ron Guidry (1978) were the only unanimous choices.

"It makes me tremendously proud that I feel that I'm holding up my end of the bargain in terms of those great players and those great legacies," said the 33-year-old Cole, who signed a $324 million contract with New York in December 2019. "I'm contributing to the overall brand of what we do."

Snell was the NL winner after going 14-9 and leading the majors with a 2.25 ERA for the San Diego Padres.

The free-agent lefty was picked first on 28 of 30 ballots. San Francisco Giants right-hander Logan Webb finished second and Zac Gallen of the NL champion Arizona Diamondbacks was third.

Snell, the AL Cy Young Award recipient in 2018 with Tampa Bay, joined Gaylord Perry, Pedro Martinez, Randy Johnson, Clemens, Roy Halladay and Max Scherzer as pitchers to win in both leagues.

"It feels amazing. I'm not really good at understanding how to accept awards and not look forward," Snell said. "I'm trying to enjoy this more than the first one I won. It's really special.

"In 2018, I was a kid. I thought I was going to win 40 of 'em. I thought I was invincible. I thought winning the Cy Young was just what I was going to do every year. That's just — you're young and that's how you think."

Drafted first overall by Pittsburgh in 2011 out of UCLA, Cole started the All-Star Game this year after earning his sixth selection to the Midsummer Classic. He came in second in Cy Young voting in 2019 and '21, and finished among the top five on three other occasions.

Minnesota Twins right-hander Sonny Gray was the AL runner-up with 20 second-place votes, and Kevin Gausman of the Toronto Blue Jays finished third.

Cole and Snell shined for disappointing teams. Both the Yankees and Padres finished 82-80 despite having two of baseball's three highest payrolls, and neither made the playoffs.

Shaking off a dreadful start to the season, Snell had 234 strikeouts in 180 innings over 32 outings. He was 1-6 with a 5.40 ERA after losing to Boston on May 19, then dominated the rest of the way despite topping the majors with 99 walks this year.

"I just kept telling myself how good I was," Snell explained.

Harnessing his 95-96 mph heater and overpowering curve, he won eight of his last nine decisions and did not allow a run in five of his final six starts — including the last three.

"I understand myself way more. I don't get mad at things that I shouldn't get mad at anymore," said Snell, who has never pitched a complete game in 191 major league starts. "I don't try to be perfect. I just try to be the best version of me. And in doing so, I feel like this year came together pretty magically."

Snell gave up only 5.75 hits per nine innings, by far the best mark in the big leagues. All those stingy numbers while he was on the mound were more than enough to beat out Webb (11-13, 3.25 ERA) and Gallen (17-9, 3.47), who each logged at least 210 innings. Both got one first-place vote.

Snell, a Seattle native who turns 31 next month, became a free agent after the World Series. He rejected a $20,325,000 qualifying offer from the Padres on Tuesday to pursue a more lucrative contract.

"I'm excited to be a free agent," he said. "I don't really know what to expect."

The four previous San Diego pitchers to win the Cy Young were Randy Jones (1976), Perry (1978), reliever Mark Davis (1989) and Jake Peavy (2007).

Sources: Athletics' move to Las Vegas approved by owners

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — The Oakland Athletics' move to Las Vegas was unanimously approved Thursday by Major League Baseball team owners, cementing the sport's first relocation since 2005, according to two people familiar with the vote.

The people spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the league had not yet announced the results. A 75% vote of the 30 teams was necessary to make the move, which was endorsed by baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred.

After years of complaints about the Oakland Coliseum and an inability to gain government assistance for a new ballpark in the Bay area, the A's plan to move to a stadium to be built on the Las Vegas Strip with $380 million in public financing approved by the Nevada government.

The A's lease at the Coliseum expires after the 2024 season and it remains unclear where the team will play before a new ballpark opens, in 2027 at the earliest.

Las Vegas will become the fourth city for a franchise that played in Philadelphia from 1901-54, moved to Kansas City for 13 seasons and arrived in Oakland for 1968. The new stadium will be the team's fifth after Columbia Park (1901-08), Shibe Park (1909-54), Memorial Stadium (1955-67) and the Coliseum.

Since the Washington Senators became the Texas Rangers for 1972, the only other team to relocate was the Montreal Expos, who became the Washington Nationals in 2005.

The A's in 2006 proposed a ballpark in Fremont, about 25 miles south in the East Bay, but abandoned the plan three years later. San Jose, 40 miles south of Oakland, was proposed in 2012, but the San Francisco Giants blocked the site because it was part of that team's territory. The A's chose a site in the Oakland area near Laney College only to have it rejected by the college and neighbors, then focused on the Howard Terminal area of Oakland. While some approvals were gained, a financing plan was never reached.

The team announced April 19 it had purchased land in Las Vegas, then a month later replaced that location with a deal with Bally's and Gaming & Leisure Properties to build a stadium on the Tropicana hotel site along the Las Vegas Strip.

Nevada's Legislature and governor approved public financing for a $1.5 billion, 30,000-seat ballpark with a retractable roof that will be close to Allegiant Stadium, where the NFL's Oakland Raiders moved to in 2020, and T-Mobile Arena, where the current Stanley Cup champion Vegas Golden Knights started play in 2017 as an expansion team.

While San Francisco/Oakland/San Jose is the 10th-largest television market in the United States, Las Vegas is the 40th. Baseball players' association head Tony Clark last month questioned whether the shift to a smaller city would put the team on a path of needed perpetual assistance under MLB's revenue-sharing plan.

MLB is able to control city changes because of the sport's antitrust exemption, granted by a 1922 U.S. Supreme Court decision. In the last half-century, the NFL has seen moves by the Raiders (Oakland to Los Angeles, back to Oakland and then Las Vegas), the Colts (Baltimore to Indianapolis), the Cardinals (St. Louis to Phoenix), the Rams (Los Angeles to St. Louis and back to LA), the Oilers (Houston to Nashville, changing to the Titans in 1999) and the Chargers (San Diego to Los Angeles).

JEFF CHIU/AP

Oakland Athletics fans hold up signs protesting the team's potential move to Las Vegas and to call for management to sell the team in the fifth inning against the San Francisco Giants in Oakland, Calif., on Aug. 5.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

LINDSEY WASSON/AP

Washington quarterback Michael Penix Jr., right, celebrates his touchdown against Utah with teammates Parker Brailsford, left, and Nate Kalepo. The Huskies have the inside track to the Pac-12 title game.

4 teams remain in hunt for Pac-12 championship

BY JOHN MARSHALL
Associated Press

The Pac-12 is winding down to the finish of what may be its final football season before most of its members leave for other conferences next season.

With two weeks left, the race for spots in the conference title game in Las Vegas on Dec. 1 is down to four teams.

A look at the contenders:

Washington

The fifth-ranked Huskies (10-0, 7-0 Pac-12) have not only been the class of the league, they're still in the mix for a spot in the College Football Playoff.

Washington, fifth in the CFP rankings, has passed every test so far with one of the nation's best offenses.

The Huskies survived an early showdown with No. 6 Oregon, pulling out a 36-33 win on Oct. 14, and have won consecutive games against ranked opponents the past two weeks. Washington beat then-No. 24 Southern California and knocked off No. 16 Utah last week. Both were preseason contenders.

Led by Heisman Trophy candidate Michael Penix Jr., the Huskies have the nation's top passing offense at 378 yards per game and are sixth in total offense, averaging 503.9 yards.

Beat No. 10 Oregon State this week or rival Washington State in the regular season finale, and Washington will be in the Pac-12 title game.

Oregon

Despite the loss to Washington, the Ducks are also still in the mix for a CFP spot.

No. 6 Oregon (9-1, 6-1) has won four straight since its only loss, including victories over Utah and USC.

Bo Nix has been superb for the Ducks, throwing for 3,135 yards and 29 touchdowns with two interceptions while completing 78% of his passes. Oregon is averaging 540 yards per game, second nationally, and has a strong defense to go with it, allowing 309.4 yards per game, 18th in the FBS.

The Ducks, sixth in the CFP rankings, can clinch a spot in the Pac-12 championship game by beating Arizona State and rival Oregon State the next two weeks.

Oregon State

The No. 10 Beavers (8-2, 5-2, No. 15 CFP) face huge games against Washington and Oregon to close out the season.

Oregon State's title game chances took a hit with a 27-24 loss to No. 19 Arizona on Oct. 28, but the Beavers can still get into the title game by winning their last two games.

The Beavers bounced back from the Arizona loss with a win over Colorado and blew out Stanford 62-17 last week.

Oregon State is tied for the nation's sixth-best turnover margin at 1.0 per game and has 19 sacks the past four games, its best stretch since 2007.

DJ Uiagalelei has been excellent since transferring from Clemson, throwing for 2,254 yards and 20 touchdowns, and Damien Martinez has rushed for 1,024 yards and seven touchdowns.

Arizona

That's right, the Wildcats are in the mix for a spot in the conference title game.

They'll need some help, but it's a massive leap for a program that went 1-11 two years ago.

No. 19 Arizona (7-3, 5-2, No. 21 CFP) is ranked and bowl eligible for the first time since 2017 in Jedd Fisch's third season as coach.

The Wildcats lost quarterback Jayden de Laura to an ankle injury early in the season, but Noah Fifita played so well in his absence he kept the starting job when de Laura was healthy again.

Fifita has thrown for 1,735 yards and 16 touchdowns with four interceptions in nine games, and the Wildcats have one of the nation's best pass catching duos in Tetairoa McMillan and Jacob Cowing.

Arizona has also made huge strides defensively.

The Wildcats need multiple scenarios to fall into place, starting with winning their final two games against Utah and Arizona State.

Louisville can earn ACC title game slot with win at Miami

BY TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — There were 176 ballots cast in the Atlantic Coast Conference's preseason football poll this summer. Of those voters, zero picked Louisville as league champion.

The Cardinals might prove everyone wrong.

No. 9 Louisville (9-1, 6-1 ACC, No. 10 CFP) can clinch a spot in the ACC championship game against Florida State by beating Miami (6-4, 2-4) on Saturday. The Cardinals are back in the top 10 of the AP Top 25 for the first time since reaching No. 3 in November 2016.

And make no mistake: The Cardinals are a juggernaut this season, ranked in the top 20 nationally in a slew of categories — among them, red zone defense (3rd), third-down defense (6th), rushing defense (9th), scoring defense (12th) and total defense (16th).

"I think the most important scenario is if we win, then we definitely help our cause," said Louisville coach Jeff Brohm, who would seem to be one of the top contenders for national coach of the year. "I think at this point in the season, you always treat it as if you want to advance, you've got to win. … You need to play your best football at the end of the year."

The math is simple: Win, and Louisville locks up second place in the ACC and a spot in the title game against the Seminoles. A loss could bring a whole slew of tiebreakers into play, depending on what other teams do over the final two weeks of the regular season.

No. 9 Louisville (9-1)
at Miami (6-4)
AFN-Atlantic
6 p.m. Saturday CET
2 a.m. Sunday JKT

"Louisville, very explosive on offense, very disruptive on defense … a very complete team," Miami coach Mario Cristobal said. "A lot of good football players, and a very good opportunity for us."

Miami is coming off a 27-20 loss to Florida State, a game where the Hurricanes saw freshman quarterback Emory Williams depart with a season-ending injury to his left arm. Williams had taken over for Tyler Van Dyke as the starter; now, it's Van Dyke back in the first-string spot.

Van Dyke was very open this week about his struggles, how he's sought help — talking to friends and family — to get through the slump and emerging from those conversations determined to not let his happiness be consumed by the game.

"Just got to be smarter with the football," said Van Dyke, who has thrown 12 interceptions this season, one more than he had in his first three years at Miami combined. "I know that. Definitely learned a lot from the last five weeks, six weeks and I've got to be better from it."

Louisville is 0-6-1 all-time at Miami, and defensive back Devin Neal said it's up to the Cardinals to bring enough energy into a road stadium to change that.

"Having energy, and the execution will take care of itself," Neal said.

TIMOTHY D. EASLEY/AP

Louisville tight end Nate Kurisky pats running back Jawhar Jordan on the helmet after scoring a touchdown against Virginia Tech.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Big 12 QBs have been roughed up this season

BY JIM VERTUNO
Associated Press

Starting quarterback has been a precarious position in the Big 12.

Whether due to injuries or coaching decisions, staying on the field has been a challenge for many of the league's quarterbacks who started the season No. 1 for their programs.

Injuries have knocked out starters at some point in the season for Texas, Kansas, BYU, Baylor, Texas Tech, TCU, West Virginia and Central Florida — more than half the league.

Oklahoma State's quarterback carousel lasted through the first few games before coach Mike Gundy settled on Alan Bowman. Even Kansas State, which won last season's Big 12 championship game behind veteran Will Howard, put in freshman Avery Johnson when Howard struggled. The senior responded with his best play of the season.

The position has been as jumbled as the league standings. Seven teams are within two games of conference leader Texas.

Oklahoma and Iowa State have been injury- and rotation-free and the Sooners and Cyclones are still in the mix for the league championship. Dillon Gabriel has been exceptional at times for the Sooners, leading a win over Texas and setting school records last week against West Virginia.

Iowa State's Rocco Becht was thrust into the starting role because Hunter Dekkers was snagged by the state investigation into Iowa and Iowa State athletes engaging in sports wagering. Dekkers pleading guilty to underage gambling and paid a fine, and hasn't played while serving an NCAA suspension.

COLIN E. BRALEY/AP

Texas Tech linebackers Ben Roberts and Myles Cole tackle Kansas quarterback Jason Bean on Nov. 11 in Lawrence, Kan. Kansas has used three quarterbacks this season due to various injuries.

League front-runner Texas won two games with backup Maalik Murphy in for injured starter Quinn Ewers. Ewers returned last week for the 29-26 win over TCU.

Texas has Ewers back on the field for two critical games, against Iowa State and Texas Tech. Texas is pursuing its first Big 12 title since 2009 in what will be the program's last season in the league before heading to the Southeastern Conference along with Oklahoma next summer.

"I think he was a little sore" after the TCU game, Sarkisian said. "But as the weeks go on, if we can continue to protect like we did the other night, he's going to continue to get healthy."

BYU's first season in the Big 12 included a plan to redshirt junior college transfer Jake Retzlaff as an understudy to Kedon Slovis. That plan blew up with an injury to Slovis' throwing arm, and Retzlaff struggled in losses to West Virginia and Iowa State.

UCF's Big 12 debut saw starter John Rhys Plumlee knocked off the field for a month with a knee injury.

TCU has lost three in a row behind freshman Josh Hoover, who took over for Chandler Morris (knee sprain). Morris was the starter in 2022 when he was injured in the first game. Max Duggan took over and led the Horned Frogs to the national championship game.

No team has had more hard luck at quarterback than Kansas.

The Jayhawks had the preseason offensive player of the year in Jalon Daniels in Lance Leipold's emerging program. But he has played only three games because of back problems and was a pre-game scratch before a 40-14 loss to Texas. He hasn't returned.

Jason Bean has started in his place and led the program's historic win over Oklahoma. Bean sustained a head injury last week against Texas Tech. That left the Jayhawks with walk-on Cole Ballard, the son of Indianapolis Colts general manager Chris Ballard, playing for most of a 16-13 loss.

Leipold said he is "very optimistic" Bean will return this week.

Texas Tech, one of nine schools to start at least three quarterbacks this season, can almost match that misery and musical chairs.

Starter Tyler Shough broke his left leg at the end of September. It was the third consecutive season the sixth-year transfer has missed significant time due to injury. Since then, Behren Morton took over, then had a shoulder sprain and freshman Jake Strong had to start a game.

Kansas State (7-3)
at Kansas (7-3)
AFN-Atlantic
1 a.m. Sunday CET
9 a.m. Sunday JKT

Washington (10-0)
at Oregon State (8-2)
AFN-Sports
1:30 a.m. Sunday CET
9:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

Texas (9-1)
at Iowa State (6-4)
AFN-Sports2
2 a.m. Sunday CET
10 a.m. Sunday JKT

Moment: Not all were in favor of Madison moving up to FBS

FROM PAGE 48

streak, and beat Howard 107-86 when they returned to Harrisonburg. Terrence Edwards Jr. was The Associated Press player of the week.

The football Dukes host Appalachian State (6-4, 4-2) on Saturday, and have already broken the record Georgia Southern set in 2014 for most wins (eight) over Bowl Subdivision teams by a program in its second year of FBS competition. James Madison has nine such wins this season with two games remaining.

"This has been a special year," coach Curt Cignetti said after a 44-6 victory over Connecticut.

The move to FBS was one many Dukes fans weren't sure about. They'd won FCS national championships in 2004 and 2016, made deep playoff runs almost annually and that seemed to some a good place to be.

Tom Dulaney Slonaker, former voice of the Dukes, was on the committee considering the change.

"I was one of those who didn't feel they should do that," he said while tailgating before JMU beat Old Dominion 30-27. "I wanted them to be (one of) a handful of teams in the nation that actually could recruit, saying, 'Where else can you go that you're going to compete for a national championship every year?'"

A national title may be out of reach for a while and the Dukes also won't be playing for their second Sun Belt football championship in as many years. NCAA rules requires teams moving up from FCS to wait two years to qualify for a bowl game, and the conference has aligned its bylaws to conform to the NCAA's.

The school had requested the waiver of the two-year rule in a letter.

"We're obviously disappointed in the outcome of the NCAA's review of our request for bowl relief," the school, which knew of the rule, said in a release announcing the decision. "We're saddened for our university community and, in particular, we're devastated for our football program, the coaches and student-athletes who have orchestrated an amazing season and earned the opportunity."

Cignetti has made no secret of his feeling that James Madison should be eligible for the postseason, and Dukes defensive lineman Mikail Kamara said after the win against UConn "there is a little bit of bitterness because we feel like we deserve a bowl game. But at the end of the day, we just want to go out there and win as many games as possible and show that we're a dominant team."

They've left no doubt about that on the field, and not just on offense. The Dukes' defense leads the country in rushing (61.6 yards per game allowed), sacks and tackles for loss.

Even after a 5-0 start, though, Cignetti knew his team had more to give, and he asked for it at halftime of a game at Georgia Southern with his team leading 20-6.

We "really challenged them about as much as you can challenge somebody, just, 'Are we a bunch of chokers?' That's what Georgia Southern was saying, we choke. And we went out and dominated that second half," Cignetti said.

Message received. The Dukes won the third quarter 21-0 and the game 41-13.

"Good teams play well in the second half," Cignetti said.

In retrospect, despite initial misgivings, the success is no surprise to Slonaker.

"This team, what has happened is the culture of the leadership of this school has built up an idea of winning that has carried on from way back in 1975 to its current day," he said, noting that when he became the school's play-by-play voice, "I did 15 games for them before I saw them lose."

For the past 25 years, much of the leadership has come from athletic director Jeff Bourne, who said the coaches all know the administration's expectation is that they win at least one conference championship every four years.

"We feel like an important element of the collegiate experience for a student-athlete is to go to postseason play and participate in an event," Bourne said. "That's going to create a memory for that young person that's going to last a lifetime, something that they're going to draw on for years to come that made that experience extraordinary for them."

Bourne plans to retire in the spring. Among the highlights under his watch, the school expanded the football stadium to nearly 25,000 seats, though they have frequently drawn more; built the $139.5 million, 8,500-seat Atlantic Union Bank Center as the new arena for basketball; and renovated and converted its Convocation Center into training, competition and academic space for other sports.

Oh, and Bourne also oversaw the move from FCS to the FBS.

"I just I want to be able to look back on it and say we accomplished some really, really special things that created memories for people that'll last lifetimes," Bourne said.

"And that's about all you can ask for when you're in the world of sport."

NFL

Allen blames himself for Dorsey's firing, vows return to form

BY JOHN WAWROW
Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — A subdued-looking Josh Allen blamed himself Wednesday for overseeing a stagnating and turnover-prone offense that cost Buffalo Bills coordinator Ken Dorsey his job.

Jolting as it was for the quarterback to learn of Dorsey's firing a day earlier, Allen turned his attention forward. Unable to change the past, Allen stressed "the offense is not broken," saying the unit can perform to playoff-caliber expectations over the final stretch of a season in which the Bills (5-5) have little margin left for error.

"I take that very personally. It hurts a lot to see someone you care about go through a situation like that, and to know that if I could have done more, if this offense could have done more, we wouldn't have to do something like that," Allen said as Buffalo prepared to host the division rival New York Jets (4-5) on Sunday.

"Our backs are against the wall. The clock's ticking on what we can do this season and it starts this Sunday to try to turn this thing around," he added. "I think it takes a lot to look at yourself in the mirror and say, 'What can I do that's been good and what can I do to fix what's been bad?' That's what we've all got to do."

Reducing turnovers would be a start for Allen, who has thrown an NFL-leading 11 interceptions to go with losing three fumbles.

Establishing a rhythm and reclaiming a long-lost swagger would help, too. Buffalo has combined to score 123 points during a three-game run spanning Weeks 2 to 4. That's the same amount of points the Bills have scored in dropping four of their past six.

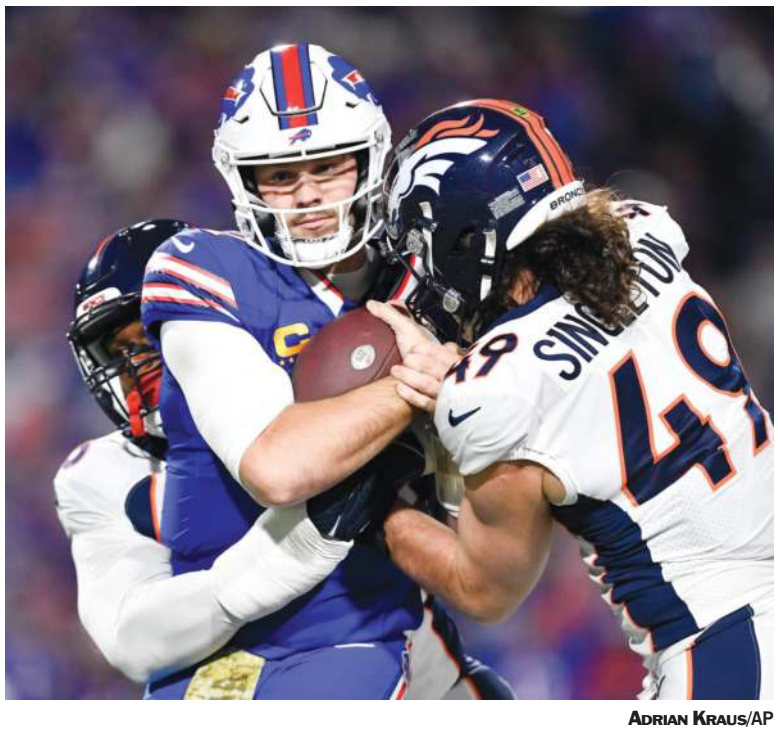
New York Jets (4-5)
at Buffalo Bills (5-5)
AFN-Sports
10:25 p.m. Sunday CET
6:25 a.m. Monday JKT

The coordinator duties now fall to Joe Brady, who has spent the past two seasons as Buffalo's quarterbacks coach, and spent the two previous seasons as the Carolina Panthers offensive coordinator.

"He's got a lot of juice to him," Allen said of Brady, who was scheduled to address reporters on Thursday. "I'll give him as much input as I can. My phone line is 24-7. ... If he calls me, I'm going to pick up and make sure we can get on the same page as quickly as possible."

With only five days to prepare for the Jets, coach Sean McDermott acknowledged it may take weeks for Brady to place his stamp on the offensive scheme. What he'd like to see immediately is Brady re-instill a sense of confidence and energy into the unit.

"Mistakes are going to happen. You're going to have good plays and bad plays," McDermott said. "At the end of the day, it's about the mental toughness, the grit, the resiliency of the unit to continue through all that."



ADRIAN KRAUS/AP

The Denver Broncos' Baron Browning, left, and Alex Singleton tackle Buffalo Bills quarterback Josh Allen on Monday in Orchard Park, N.Y.

DAVID BECKER/AP

Las Vegas Raiders cornerback Tyler Hall (37) celebrates an interception by teammate Robert Spillane (41) during the second half against the New York Jets on Nov. 12 in Las Vegas.

Interim coach Pierce brings go-for-it outlook to Raiders

BY MARK ANDERSON
Associated Press

HENDERSON, Nev. — Antonio Pierce exudes a go-for-it attitude that had been missing before he took over as Las Vegas' interim coach two weeks ago.

Pierce

The Raiders aren't playing not to lose like they often did under Josh McDaniels, and that was clear on two plays in Sunday night's 16-12 victory over the New York Jets.

The first occurred on the first drive of the third quarter. Jets quarterback Zach Wilson had just completed a 17-yard pass to New York's 31, setting up a fourth-and-4 and almost certain punt. Holding was called on the Jets, and most opposing teams in that situation would've declined the penalty and sent out its punt return unit.

But Raiders defensive players wanted to stay on the field — and they convinced Pierce to accept the penalty. That moved the Jets back to their 13, and after a 6-yard gain on the next play, New York did indeed punt.

"When they have that kind of conviction, you go with your players," Pierce said. "That's all I did right there, and then kind of played the field-position game thinking that we will have a positive play. It was plus-12 on that series for us after taking that penalty, so that was a plus."

It was also a tone-setter.

Las Vegas Raiders (5-5)
at Miami Dolphins (6-3)
AFN-Sports2
7 p.m. Sunday CET
3 a.m. Monday JKT

Though the Raiders didn't go far with their next drive, the field position remained in their favor. That meant the Jets were again deep in their territory on their following series. After they again punted, the Raiders took advantage of getting the ball in New York territory to set up the tying field goal.

"We trust our defense," defensive end Malcolm Koonce said. "It's always a great feeling when the coaches back you."

The other play occurred in the fourth quarter as the Raiders — who visit the Miami Dolphins on Sunday — were trying to put away the game while leading 16-12.

They scored the game's lone touchdown on their previous drive and again were moving down the field as the Jets defense appeared to be tiring. Facing fourth-and-1 at the Raiders' 44, Las Vegas decided to go for it, even if failing to pick up the first down would mean the Jets would have outstanding field position.

"I felt we had the momentum," Pierce said. "I felt that we were leaning on them a little bit more and we had a good play designed for that situation."

It definitely worked out that way.

Wide receiver DeAndre Carter lined up close behind quarterback Aidan O'Connell, as if the Raiders were going to use the tush push. O'Connell instead handed the ball to Carter, who ran around the left end for a 15-yard gain.

If not for a Josh Jacobs fumble four plays later that New York recovered, that first down would've been critical to the Raiders likely either extending their lead to a touchdown or making it a two-possession game.

"It shows that (Pierce) has good belief in us as an offense in our ability to execute in those short-yardage situations," wide receiver Davante Adams said. "Obviously, that's not something we want to do every time we're down there, but ... sometimes it's a good way to establish our line of scrimmage and just kind of establish the style of play we're coming with for the game."

Pierce, a former nine-year veteran for Washington and the New York Giants, often still comes off as a linebacker the way he approaches coaching.

But Pierce pushed back by saying those two plays — the decision to back up the Jets rather than take the punt and to go for the first down in his territory — are indicative of an aggressive mindset.

"It's kind of a gut," Pierce said. "I was going off the feel of the game."

Either way, he wasn't playing not to lose.

NFL

PHELAN M. EBENHACK/AP

Jaguars quarterback Trevor Lawrence, center, is sacked by 49ers defensive end Nick Bosa (97) on Nov. 12 in Jacksonville, Fla. San Francisco had five sacks and four turnovers in a 34-3 victory over Jacksonville.

49ers defense back to early season form after bye week

BY JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Whether it was the rest from a week off, the addition of Chase Young, coordinator Steve Wilks' move from the booth to the sideline or a combination of all of the above, the problems on San Francisco's defense seemed to get fixed during the bye week.

After scuffling during a three-game losing streak when the 49ers struggled to stop the run, didn't generate enough pressure and had breakdowns in coverage, San Francisco's defense got back to its early season dominant form against Jacksonville.

"It felt like it. It looked like it. I was confident coming into the game," linebacker Fred Warner said. "Just kind of the self reflection through the bye week of what we need to be in terms of play styles, I think Coach Wilks called the perfect game. We made Trevor Lawrence's life hard the whole game. When we're playing hard, that's what it looks like."

San Francisco finished with five sacks thanks in part to a few strategic tweaks and the addition of Young, a bookend pass rusher across from Nick Bosa. They generated four takeaways and allowed only one field goal in the 34-3 win over the Jaguars last week that the Niners hope will carry over to the second half of the season.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers (4-5)
at San Francisco 49ers (6-3)
AFN-Atlantic
10 p.m. Sunday CET
6 a.m. Monday JKT

It was a far cry from the previous three games when the defense was a major culprit in a three-game losing streak. The Niners had 32 missed tackles in those games, according to Pro Football Focus, compared to just nine the previous three games. San Francisco allowed 15 plays of 20 or more yards during the skid compared to 10 in the first five games.

"I wish I had an answer for it," Warner said about the struggles. "It's kind of hard to put my finger on it as well, because it just wasn't us. It wasn't that everybody wasn't trying hard. It's just that it wasn't up to our standard at all three levels. A lot of things get covered up when you play hard in terms of tackling. Even if a guy misses a assignment, if you're playing fast, you're playing violent, some things you can cover up that way. I felt like play style more than anything is something that we needed to get back to."

Bosa said the front seven did a much better job against the run, setting edges and creating negative plays that led to more obvious passing situations.

Then the addition of Young, acquired from Washington at the trade deadline, gave San Francisco another feared pass rusher that created more chances for everyone when the tight coverage prevented quick throws.

"Whenever you looked at our sack opportunities and when we were there, you looked in the back and nobody was open," Bosa said. "Then if maybe there was a guy open, we had a quick win on the line. It was very complementary."

But the Niners know it was just one game and they need to maintain that level of play down the stretch if they want to achieve their goals of winning the division, possibly earning the No. 1 seed in the NFC and eventually make it to the Super Bowl after losing in the conference title game the past two seasons.

That means they can't let up as they might have done a bit after dominating Dallas to improve to 5-0. San Francisco lost the next three games after that win.

"I think we learned our lesson," Bosa said. "I don't think we got complacent or anything, but it is human nature to think about your opponent and what opportunities you might have, what strengths and weaknesses they have. We just need to not so much look at our opponent, but look at ourselves and make sure that we're playing as good as we can."

Vikings thriving on Dobbs-Hockenson's summer connection

BY DAVE CAMPBELL
Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — T.J. Hockenson has found a summer home in Tennessee, where a small group of NFL players spearheaded by his close friend tight end George Kittle train together between seasons.

The sessions take place at Kittle's 75-acre property outside of Nashville, where there's a workout facility in a remodeled barn and a football field in the San Francisco 49ers star's yard. The group brings in their own physical therapists and speed and strength specialists, too.

Sometimes, Joshua Dobbs joins them.

"There's not a ton of quarterbacks down there, so whenever we could throw with Josh we were all hyped and excited," Hockenson said. "It was one of those days we weren't going to miss, because he's got a great ball and he's a great quarterback and he's a great dude."

Little did he know this casual connection made in recent summers would form the foundation for one of the NFL's most productive passing duos.

Over two games with the Minnesota Vikings, Dobbs has targeted Hockenson 27 times. Dallas Cowboys wide receiver CeeDee Lamb (30) is the only player in the league with more over that span, according to Sportradar data. More than 40% of Minnesota's passes went to Hockenson in Weeks 9-10, the third-highest rate in the NFL.

"It's not like we planned on doing that in a game," said Dobbs, who played in college at Tennessee and also has an off-season home in the state. "But it was cool to have banked reps and banked communication with somebody, right? Especially one of your best playmakers on offense. Have reps with him, have

Minnesota Vikings (6-4)
at Denver Broncos (4-5)
AFN-Sports
2:20 a.m. Monday CET
10:20 a.m. Monday JKT

a feel for how he gets in and out of routes. Obviously, there's a matchup issue, and it shows."

Hockenson outgained New Orleans by himself with 128 receiving yards in the first half last week, when the Vikings beat the Saints 27-19 for their fifth straight victory.

"The ball keeps coming to you, and I was reading the defenses real well and just feeling it a little bit. So that was a blast," said Hockenson, who played through two injured ribs.

There was no better example of their synergy than the third-and-5 play early in the second quarter against the Saints. Dobbs outran two pass rushers to his right to avoid a sack before firing an off-balance throw to Hockenson.

The two-time Pro Bowl tight end freelanced to find open space once Dobbs left the pocket, made a leaping catch and plowed forward rugby-style through the defense for a 24-yard gain. The Vikings scored the tiebreaking touchdown two plays later.

"With him in the backfield, you can't think the play's over," said Hockenson, who leads all NFL tight ends with 681 receiving yards. "If he doesn't get you on the first time or the second time, he's going to move around. You just try to find an open area and beat your guy. It's a little like street ball."

PHOTOS BY ABBIE PARR, LEFT, AND MATT KROHN/AP

Minnesota Vikings quarterback Joshua Dobbs, left, and tight end T.J. Hockenson formed a connection over the summer that's now paying off.

SPORTS

A pair of aces

Yankees' Cole, Padres' Snell win Cy Young Awards ›› MLB, Page 43

James Madison celebrates after defeating Connecticut on Nov. 11 in Harrisonburg, Va.

DANIEL LIN, DAILY NEWS-RECORD/AP

James Madison's moment

Dukes riding 13-game winning streak and making the transition from FCS look almost easy

BY HANK KURZ JR.
Associated Press

HARRISONBURG, Va.

James Madison must be making fellow Sun Belt Conference programs wonder "who invited these guys?"

The 18th-ranked Dukes have been the dominant football team in the league since they joined last season, winning 12 of 14 games. That includes a 47-7 demolition of Coastal Carolina last season when the teams tied for the best record in the East Division but James Madison was ineligible for the championship game.

James Madison (10-0, 6-0 Sun Belt) is making the transition from the Championship Subdivision to the Bowl Subdivision look easy. The only win they can't claim is one from the NCAA, which on Wednesday night denied their request for a waiver of a rule that could keep them from a bowl game without extenuating circumstances this year, as it did last year.

In competition, they are solid. Besides their football prowess, the Dukes won the league's volleyball and women's basketball championships last year and have their men's basketball team (3-0) in the AP Top 25 for the first time in program history. They stunned then-No. 4 Michigan State 79-76 in overtime open the season, won 113-108 in double overtime at Kent State, ending the Golden Flash's 23-game home winning

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