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Injuries, COVID taking toll on stars
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PACIFIC



Borrowing from the Green Berets

JOSEPH TOLLIVER / U.S. Army

Staff Sgt. Brandon Williams of the 1st Battalion, 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade leads a team training in small-unit tactics at Mahajan Field Firing Range in Rajasthan, India, on Feb. 9. The brigade aims to strengthen alliances with foreign militaries to counter China and Russia.

Rank-and-file soldiers begin Special Forces-style security missions across Indo-Pacific

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

Small teams of soldiers have been deploying across the Indo-Pacific this year on missions akin to those performed by the Green Berets.

The troops, who have already been sent to places like India, Thailand, the Maldives, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines, are assigned to the 820-soldier strong

5th Security Force Assistance Brigade out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

Activated in May 2020, the unit was established as part of a defense strategy that calls for a shift away from counterinsurgency missions taking place in Iraq and Afghanistan, said brigade spokesman Maj. William Leasure.

China and Russia have ramped up strategic competition with the United States and its allies, making it important for U.S. forces to

build ties to militaries around the world. If a conflict arises, it will be vital for American troops to know how to work with their foreign counterparts.

The brigade's mission, which involves strengthening alliances and finding new military partners, is seen as crucial to that strategic competition, Leasure said in a telephone

SEE BORROWING ON PAGE 5

AFGHANISTAN

Al-Qaida could regroup in 2 years, Austin says

By ROBERT BURNS
AND LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An extremist group like al-Qaida may be able to regenerate in Afghanistan and pose a threat to the U.S. homeland within two years of the American military's withdrawal from the country, the Pentagon's top leaders said Thursday.

It was the most specific public forecast of the prospects for a renewed international terrorist threat from Afghanistan since President Joe Biden announced in April that all U.S. troops would withdraw by Sept. 11.

At a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., asked Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Gen. Mark Milley whether they rated the likelihood of a regeneration of al-Qaida or Islamic State in Afghanistan as small, medium or large.

"I would assess it as medium," Austin replied. "I would also say, senator, that it would take possibly two years for them to develop that capability."

Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, said he agreed.

"I think that if certain other things happen — if there was a

SEE AL-QAIDA ON PAGE 4

■ Biden must order evacuation of Afghan allies, lawmakers say
Page 4

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Germany	\$3.344	\$3.763	\$4.019	\$3.561	Azores	..	..	\$3.919	..
Change in price	+3.4 cents	+2.5 cents	+3.2 cents	+1.2 cents	Change in price	..	..	+3.2 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.236	\$4.538	\$4.203	Belgium	..	\$3.157	\$3.387	\$3.249
Change in price	..	+6.3 cents	+6.1 cents	+9.9 cents	Change in price	..	No change	No change	No change
U.K.	..	\$3.662	\$3.918	\$3.460	Turkey	..	..	\$3.804	\$4.102*
Change in price	..	+2.5 cents	+3.2 cents	+1.2 cents	Change in price	..	..	+3.2 cents	No change

PACIFIC GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Japan	..	\$3.809	..	\$3.349	South Korea	\$3.149	..	\$3.819	\$3.369
Change in price	..	+3.0 cents	..	+1.0 cents	Change in price	+4.0 cents	..	+3.0 cents	+2.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.139	..	..	\$3.349	Guam	\$3.149	\$3.559	\$3.819	..
Change in price	+4.0 cents	..	..	+1.0 cents	Change in price	+4.0 cents	+2.0 cents	+3.0 cents	..

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
For the week of June 18-24

EXCHANGE RATES		
Military rates		
Euro costs (June 18)	\$1.16	
Dollar buys (June 18)	0.8167	
British pound (June 18)	\$1.36	
Japanese yen (June 18)	107.00	
South Korean won (June 18)	1099.00	
Commercial rates		
Bahrain(Dinar)	.3770	
Britain (Pound)	1.3942	
Canada (Dollar)	1.2329	
China(Yuan)	6.4421	
Denmark (Krone)	6.2327	
Egypt (Pound)	15.6491	
Euro	.8281	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7638	
Hungary (Forint)	298.15	
Israel (Shekel)	3.2671	
Japan (Yen)	110.44	
Kuwait(Dinar)	.3012	
Norway (Krone)	8.5138	
Philippines (Peso)	48.41	
Poland (Zloty)	381	
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7503	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3404	
South Korea (Won)	1133.14	
Switzerland (Franc)	.9157	
Thailand (Baht)	31.41	
Turkey (NewLira)	8.6930	
(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)		
INTEREST RATES		
Prime rate	3.25	
Interest Rates Discount rate	0.25	
Federal funds market rate	0.09	
3-month bill	0.04	
30-year bond	1.57	

WEATHER OUTLOOK



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MILITARY

Top US admiral bristles at GOP criticism

By PAULINA VILLEGAS

The Washington Post

Adm. Michael Gilday, chief of Naval Operations, rebuffed pointed interrogations by GOP lawmakers who grilled him over his decision to recommend sailors read a book deemed by some conservatives as anti-American.

The U.S. Navy's top admiral also defended moves to address and root out racism and extremism in the forces as well as its efforts to bolster inclusion and diversity, which have prompted criticism from some conservatives and Republican lawmakers.

"Do you personally consider advocating for the destruction of American capitalism to be extremist?" Rep. Jim Banks, R-Ind., asked Gilday during a House Armed Services Committee hearing Tuesday, referring to a passage from Ibram X. Kendi's book "How to Be an Antiracist," which argues capitalism and racism are interlinked.

Banks continued to interrogate the admiral over specific quotes from Kendi's book, which was a No. 1 New York Times best seller in 2020, and statements he had made elsewhere in the past.

Visibly distraught, Gilday fired back:

"I am not going to sit here and defend cherry-picked quotes from somebody's book," he said. "This is a bigger issue than Kendi's book. What this is really about is trying to paint the United States military, and the United States Navy, as weak, as woke."

He added that sailors had spent 341 days at sea last year with minimal port visits — the longest deployments the Navy has done, he said.

"We are not weak. We are strong," Gilday said.

Rep. Doug Lamborn, R-Colo., also challenged the admiral by citing



MARVIN LYNCHARD/Department of Defense

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday, shown at the Pentagon last year, faced questions from lawmakers Tuesday about moves to address racism and extremism.

specific quotes from the book and asked him how those ideas laid out by Kendi would further advance or improve the Navy's power.

Gilday responded by arguing the importance of transparency and open dialogue about racism.

"There is racism in the Navy just as there is racism in our country, and the way we are going to get out of it is by being honest and not to sweep it under the rug," he expounded, adding that he does not agree with everything the author says in the book.

The key point however, he said, is for sailors "to be able to think critically."

The exchange was the latest in vociferous complaints from some conservative leaders and lawmakers who suggest the armed forces are becoming a pawn for the country's culture wars and "wokeness"

ideology, as the military takes steps to address issues of racial inclusion, extremism, racism and white supremacy.

And only last week, Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., accosted Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin about Kendi's book, which Cotton said promoted "critical race theories" at a different Senate Armed Services Committee hearing where Austin was testifying.

Days earlier, Cotton and Rep. Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas — two combat veterans — launched a "whistleblowers" online platform to report examples of "woke ideology" in the military.

"Enough is enough. We won't let our military fall to woke ideology," Crenshaw, a former Navy SEAL, said in a tweet.

Also in February, Austin instructed a one-day stand-down

across the Defense Department pausing regular activities to address extremism and white nationalism in the ranks — an issue Austin declared as a priority after a number of rioters at the U.S. Capitol in January were found to have military backgrounds.

The stand down completed in April was an effort to better understand the scope of the problem of extremism in the ranks, Pentagon press secretary John F. Kirby said in a briefing then.

Earlier, Austin had revoked a ban on diversity training for the military.

More recently, in May, a U.S. Army animated ad focused on soldier diversity — featuring the real story of a soldier who enlisted after being raised by two mothers in California — drew criticism and political backlash from some conserva-

tive lawmakers.

"Holy crap," Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, said in a tweet. "Perhaps a woke, emasculated military is not the best idea. ..."

Cruz was referring to a TikTok video that compared the U.S. Army ad with a Russia campaign that showed buff soldiers doing push-ups and leaping out of airplanes, adding that the contrast made the American soldiers "into pansies."

The confrontation Tuesday is also the latest in reproaches by Banks, who is a Naval Reserve officer, and other GOP members over Gilday's recommendation to include Kendi's book in the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program.

In February, Banks sent a letter to Gilday arguing that the views promoted in the book are "explicitly anti-American" and demanded Gilday explain the Navy's decision to include it on the reading list or remove it.

Gilday responded to Banks in a letter obtained by Fox News saying that the book was included on the list because "it evokes the author's own personal journey in understanding barriers to true inclusion, the deep nuances of racism and racial inequalities."

Lamborn and Rep. Vicky Hartzler, D-Mo., also wrote a letter to the admiral to convey their concern about the inclusion of Kendi's book as well as Michelle Alexander's "The New Jim Crow" and Jason Pierceson's "Sexual Minorities and Politics."

The GOP lawmakers argued the books "reinforce a view that America is a confederation of identity categories of the oppressed and their oppressors rather than a common homeland of individual citizens who are united by common purposes," Lamborn and Hartzler wrote, according to Fox News.

Bill to offer confidential mental health care is reintroduced

By NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — After a failed attempt last year, lawmakers reintroduced a bill Wednesday that would allow service members to quickly seek mental health care in confidence by using a safe word.

Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Mass., is leading the House bill, and Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., introduced the bill in the Senate. The measure made it into the House's version of the National Defense Authorization Act last year but was taken out in final negotiations.

"We're back here again demanding Congress pass the Brandon Act," Moulton said Wednesday outside the Capitol. "By passing this bill, Congress could em-

power service members to quickly get help in an emergency situation as soon as they confided in someone that they needed it."

Under the bill, all service members would have to tell their supervisor or commanding officer is that they had a "Brandon Act concern" to receive a referral for mental health care, Moulton said.

The Brandon Act was named for Brandon Caserta, a 21-year-old sailor who died by suicide June 25, 2018, at Naval Station Norfolk, Va. A command investigation into Caserta's death determined that belligerent and brash leadership of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 28 contributed to his decision to end his own life. He felt alone, stuck and afraid of retaliation, his parents said.



Caserta

Wednesday afternoon, continuing to advocate for the bill.

"Brandon had a smile that made everyone want to smile," Patrick Caserta said. "He cared about everyone. Please support the Brandon Act. This is truly a matter of life or death."

Caserta was one of 325 active-duty service members who died by suicide in 2018, and one of 68 sailors, according to military data.

Caserta's parents, Patrick and Teri Caserta, have pushed for the change since their son died three years ago. The couple spoke outside the Capitol on

Suicides have increased since then. In 2019, 348 active-duty service members died by suicide, and in 2020 that number rose to 377. The military saw a significant spike in suicides during the end of 2020.

The Brandon Act creates a system modeled off the process available to victims of sexual assault, which would allow service members who experience mental health issues to receive care without notifying their command or opening an official investigation of any allegations. The Casertas believe the change would help reduce the perceived barriers of self-reporting for mental health evaluations and ease service members' path to care.

"While we can't get Brandon

back, we can honor his legacy, honor his service and prevent tragic losses like these from ever happening again," Kelly said.

Correction

A story in Thursday's edition about a Marine who helped save a Japanese man contained incorrect medal criteria. It should have said the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal is awarded to service members who distinguish themselves with "heroic or meritorious achievement or service."

WAR ON TERRORISM

House votes to repeal Iraq War authority

By KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Democratic-led House, with the backing of President Joe Biden, passed legislation Thursday to repeal the 2002 authorization for use of military force in Iraq, a step supporters said was necessary for Congress to reassert its constitutional duty to weigh in on matters of war while detractors worried that it would embolden militia or terror groups operating in the region.

The repeal legislation was passed overwhelmingly by a vote of 268-161.

Supporters said repeal would not affect U.S. military operations around the world, but could prevent current and future presi-

dents from relying on it to conduct unrelated military actions. The White House says there are no ongoing military activities reliant solely upon the 2002 authorization.

The 2002 authorization was directed against the Saddam Hussein regime, authorizing the “necessary and appropriate” use of force to “defend U.S. national security against the continuing threat posed by Iraq” and to “enforce all relevant Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq.”

“Repeal is crucial because the executive branch has a history of stretching the 2002 AUMF’s legal authority,” said Rep. Gregory Meeks, the Democratic chairman of the House Foreign Affairs

Committee. “It has already been used as justification for military actions against entities that had nothing to do with Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist dictatorship simply because such entities were operating in Iraq.”

Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, said he agreed the 2002 authorization was outdated, but he argued that Congress should not repeal it without also approving a replacement.

“We should not encourage any president to go it alone without Article I congressional authorization,” McCaul said.

Action on the repeal measure follows years of debate over whether Congress has ceded too much of its war-making authority

to the White House. Many lawmakers, particularly Democrats, say passage of the 2002 authorization, or AUMF, was a mistake, and some Republicans agree the authority should be taken off the books. Some lawmakers say the 2001 resolution to fight terrorism, passed after the Sept. 11 attacks, should be reexamined as well.

Democratic Rep. Barbara Lee of California, the bill’s sponsor, said that 87% of the current members of the House were not in Congress in 2002 and that the authorization for military force passed at that time bears no correlation to the threats the nation faces today.

“To this day, our endless war continues costing trillions of dollars and thousands of lives in a

war that goes way beyond any scope that Congress conceived or intended,” Lee said.

The vote came one day after Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said he intends to bring repeal legislation to the Senate floor this year.

“The Iraq War has been over for nearly a decade,” Schumer said. “The authorization passed in 2002 is no longer necessary in 2021.”

The White House said Biden is committed to working with Congress to update the authorization with a “narrow and specific framework appropriate to ensure that we can continue to protect Americans from terrorist threats.”

President must order evacuation of Afghan allies, lawmakers say

By SARAH CAMMARATA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Two Army veterans who serve on the House Armed Services Committee delivered a stark message Wednesday to President Joe Biden: Act now to evacuate thousands of Afghan interpreters and their families who worked with U.S. personnel or there will be consequences.

“If [Biden] doesn’t act, and he doesn’t get these people out, blood will be on his hands and on his administration’s hands. And I for one will very publicly and very loudly hold him accountable for that,” Rep. Michael Waltz, R-Fla., said during a news conference outside the Capitol.

Rep. Jason Crow, D-Colo., joined Waltz and members of the American Legion to ramp up calls for Biden to help roughly 18,000 Afghans whose visa applications remain stalled by moving them to Guam or another friendly country.

“People need to know that the American handshake matters. That we will stand by them through thick and thin,” said Crow, a former Army Ranger who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The news conference comes as members of the House and Senate, advocacy groups and veterans

have been mounting pressure on the Biden administration to protect U.S. allies under the threat of death by the Taliban as the Pentagon accelerates the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan after nearly 20 years of war.

Under scrutiny from lawmakers, Defense Department officials have testified at recent Capitol Hill hearings on Afghanistan that they would support helping translators and their families get to the United States.

Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, the commander of U.S. Central Command; Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin have said they are developing “contingency plans” to conduct an evacuation if they are ordered to do so. State Department officials have agreed to that, too, yet the final approval must be made by the White House, Crow said.

And the clock is ticking, said Waltz, a former Green Beret who served combat tours in Afghanistan and other parts of Africa and the Middle East. The withdrawal from Afghanistan is set to be complete sooner than Sept. 11, the deadline that Biden had set in April for the remaining 2,500 U.S. forces



SARAH CAMMARATA/Stars and Stripes

Reps. Michael Waltz, R-Fla., and Jason Crow, D-Colo., Army veterans, stand beside American Legion members, Wednesday in front of the Capitol to urge evacuation Afghan interpreters and their families.

to leave the country.

“We’re closing our only air base in just a few weeks ... we have a moral and national security obligation to get these people out. Evacuate them now,” the lawmaker said.

Guam Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero wrote in a letter this month to Biden that the administration there will assist in carrying out the U.S. government’s evacuation plans.

The State Department-run Special Immigrant Visa program has been plagued by delays since it was created in 2009 to provide a pathway for Afghan interpreters, contractors and other personnel to reach the U.S. safely and eventually gain citizenship.

The lawmakers said they will introduce a package of bills Thurs-

day called the “Allies Act” that would increase the cap on the number of slots and make other fixes to the program to expedite the process.

The legislative package comes after the pair of lawmakers introduced a bill in late May that would allow applicants to the program to forgo a medical examination, which can cost thousands.

When Biden was a senator, he voted against evacuating Vietnamese allies out of their country during the final days of the Vietnam War in 1975, Waltz said.

“Had he had his way, we would not have gotten those people out,” he said.

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Norway plans to operate at Kabul medical facility

The Washington Post

Norway has said it will continue to operate the medical facility used by diplomats and aid personnel in Kabul for the rest of this year, provided its security can be assured after foreign forces complete their withdrawal from Afghanistan.

“Right now, the situation in Afghanistan is fragile,” Prime Minister Erna Solberg said at a NATO summit Monday. “Norway has agreed to extend operation of the field hospital during a transitional period, until a civilian hospital has been established.” She said the offer would not extend beyond the first quarter of 2022.

The withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops from Afghanistan has led to concerns about whether remaining diplomats and aid personnel will be able to continue to operate there amid ongoing security concerns and the lack of a political agreement between warring Taliban and government forces.

A statement from the prime minister’s office in Oslo said that other conditions for it to operate the medical facility include an invitation from the Afghan government, and “that other countries maintain their staffing levels at the hospital or that others participate in carrying out various functions at the hospital.”

Al-Qaida: Milley, Austin warn of ‘medium’ risk of extremists’ resurgence

FROM PAGE 1

collapse of the government or the dissolution of the Afghan security forces — that risk would obviously increase, but right now I would say ‘medium’ and about two years or so,” Milley said.

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks on America, when the Taliban allowed al-Qaida safe haven in the country. The key goal of U.S. and coalition troops in Afghanistan since then has been to prevent a resurgence and

another attack against America or other allies.

Military leaders have consistently said that combat operations in Afghanistan have greatly reduced the number of al-Qaida there. But they say that both al-Qaida

and ISIS continue to aspire to attack America.

The Pentagon has said the U.S. withdrawal after nearly 20 years in Afghanistan is a little more than half completed, and U.S.-led coalition partners also are leaving.

PACIFIC



Capt. LaShaun Smith, a team leader for the 1st Battalion, 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade deployed to Indonesia, teaches a leadership class to an Indonesian army unit on April 1.

U.S. Army

Borrowing: Local capabilities assessed

FROM PAGE 1

interview Thursday.

It's a task that has, in the past, been the preserve of the Green Berets, said Chief Warrant Officer Jason Sosnicki, a maintainer and member of the 5th SFAB who deployed to Papua New Guinea in May for a six-week mission.

"Green Berets work with [partner nations'] special forces," he said by phone Wednesday from Port Moresby. "We partner with normal infantry, engineers, artillery and logistics elements."

Special Forces' elite nature means they can deploy for only a short time, limiting the number of foreign troops that can work with, he said.

So, soldiers assigned to the security force assistance brigade are aiming to build relationships, outside of exercises and combat deployments, with a wider group of foreign soldiers while contin-

uously working overseas, Sosnicki said.

The goal of the 12-soldier team on its first mission to Papua New Guinea is to assess local forces' logistics capabilities, such as their ability to keep their vehicles running, along with a supply of spare parts. Information like that will be passed on to the next U.S. troops who go to the country, Sosnicki said.

"When U.S. personnel come, they will have a better understanding of Papua New Guinea's strengths and challenges," he said.

Those challenges include lack of funding and some aging vehicles kept roadworthy with the sort of ingenuity that has been lost by well-supplied western militaries in recent years, Sosnicki said.

The island nation north of Australia could be a key partner in strategic competition with China,

which has illegally occupied territory to the north in the South China Sea.

The U.S. and Australia plan to establish a presence on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island by refurbishing a World War II-era navy base.

The Papua New Guinea mission coincides with trips by other brigade members to Mongolia, Indonesia and the Philippines, Leasure said. Another group recently arrived in Thailand.

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USFK civilian worker accused of assaulting parking lot attendant

By DAVID CHOI
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — South Korean authorities are investigating a U.S. Forces Korea civilian employee accused of assaulting a Seoul parking lot attendant over the weekend.

Police were called out to a disturbance at the Hongdae Street lot on Saturday evening and witnessed the altercation, a Mapo District Police Station official told Stars and Stripes by phone on Thursday. He spoke on condition of anonymity due to the ongoing investigation.

Video footage obtained by South Korea's MBC News shows a man pushing the uniformed parking attendant while tripping his leg. The attendant was injured and hospitalized, according to police.

The USFK employee, whom South Korean police are not identifying due to privacy laws, was not intoxicated when officers arrived, the police official said.

The man was immediately turned over to U.S. military police for questioning, though Mapo District police asked to question him later.

"The American hasn't yet been questioned by us," the police official said on Thursday. "So, we are currently consulting with USFK about schedules, including when he would be taken to our office for interrogation."

USFK did not respond to emailed and phoned requests for comment and more information



MBC News

Footage shows an altercation between a man thought to be a U.S. Forces Korea civilian employee and a parking attendant in Seoul, South Korea, June 12.

on Thursday.

A small group of South Korean activists protested near the U.S. Embassy in Seoul on Wednesday and demanded the USFK worker be punished, according to local news reports.

Hongdae Street is an entertainment district popular among students and foreigners. It is roughly 40 miles from Camp Humphreys, the largest U.S. military base in South Korea.

USFK personnel have been allowed to travel freely across the peninsula since April 11, after months of limitations due to COVID-19 safety measures. However, they are still banned from bars, clubs, karaoke rooms, saunas, bathhouses, and other adults-only establishments.

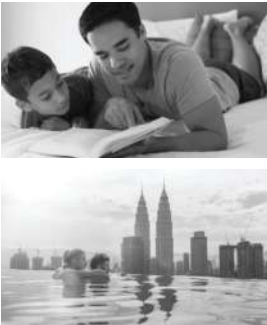
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FRANCOIS KINNEY/U.S. Army

Papua New Guinea Defense Force personnel brief members of the Army's 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade at a supply warehouse on Murray Barracks, Papua New Guinea, on May 24.

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Enough cocaine to send you to moon and back

A wildlife manager checking on nesting turtles finds 30kg at Cape Canaveral

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

A wildlife manager was checking on sea turtle nests at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida when she discovered bundles that turned out to be 30 kilograms of cocaine with a street value of \$1.2 million.

Angy Chambers of the 45th Civil Engineer Squadron was patrolling the beach on Cape Canaveral last month when she came across a package wrapped tightly in plastic and tape.

“I immediately contacted the 45th Security Forces Squadron,” she said in a Space Force statement. “While I was waiting for them to arrive, I drove a little further and noticed another package, and then another.”

She suggested the security

forces bring a utility terrain vehicle, “as I counted at least 18 packages,” the statement said.

Joseph Parker, the squadron’s flight sergeant and on-scene commander, closed all beaches and started search protocols, which eventually turned up a total of 24 packages.

A Brevard County Sheriff’s Office narcotics agent performed a field test to verify that the bundles contained cocaine, Parker said in the statement. The sheriff’s office estimated the value of the drugs at about \$1.2 million.

Drug traffickers will often transport shipments in bales of 25 “bricks,” each weighing about a kilogram, said David Castro, an agent with the Department of Homeland Security’s main investigative arm, Homeland Security



PHOTOS BY U.S. SPACE FORCE

The 45th Security Forces Squadron seized nearly 30 kilograms of cocaine that was found on a beach at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, Fla., on May 19.

Investigations. Sometimes those bales break apart and the bricks are lost at sea until they wash ashore, he said.

Cape Canaveral is located on Florida’s Atlantic coast, near Cocoa Beach and the Kennedy Space Center. The Space Force station is home to the service’s primary space launch site in its eastern range, operated by Space Launch Delta 45, headquartered at nearby Patrick Space Force Base.

Castro collected the drugs after they were transported to a secure location, weighed them, conduct-

ed field tests and examined the packages for unique markings.

Space Launch Delta 45 officials didn’t immediately respond to questions about what distinctive markings the bundles bore, but authorities in Alabama, Puerto Rico, Chile and Honduras this year have reportedly started recovering packages bearing a rare symbol — photos of Medellin Cartel drug lord Pablo Escobar, the “King of Cocaine” who was killed in a 1993 shootout.

Intelligence that Castro gathered from the packages in Cape

Canaveral was provided to the El Paso Intelligence Center, a repository for information about drugs found in the U.S., the Space Force said.

Homeland Security officials were still investigating where the drugs came from, but Parker was thankful for Chambers’ vigilance.

“There is also a higher level of job satisfaction knowing that these drugs will not make it into our community,” he said.

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Ramstein staff sergeant given 30 years for child sexual abuse

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — An Air Force staff sergeant was sentenced to 30 years in prison for a raft of crimes including sexually abusing a child, wrongfully photographing the child, and viewing and possessing child pornography.

Domingo J. Cabuhat Jr., assigned to the 86th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, also received a dishonorable discharge and was reduced in rank to E-1, military judge Lt. Col. Will Babor said as he handed down the punishment Wednesday at the close of a three-day general court-martial. He will have to register as a sex offender when he is released from prison.

Cabuhat, who joined the Air Force in 2011, molested the victim for several years, starting when she was 7 or 8, at Dyess Air Force Base in Texas and at Ramstein.

The abuse grew “more and more intrusive, physically and psychologically” and continued until the victim was old enough to know it was wrong, Air Force Capt. Julia Ziegler said in opening

arguments for the government.

The victim, now 14, said in an impact statement read to the judge on her behalf, that she is unable to sleep alone or with the lights off, and has nightmares about the abuse.

“I can’t even look at my body in the same way, the same body he touched,” she said in the statement. She also testified in court and asked the judge to find Cabuhat guilty so that she could “finally feel relief.”

Government prosecutors sought 45 years’ confinement for Cabuhat — 10 years for each of four offenses involving lewd acts upon a child and five years for possessing child pornography on four different electronic devices.

“The Air Force is committed to the pursuit of justice and has no tolerance for this type of behavior,” 86th Airlift Wing officials said in a statement after the trial.

The abuse stopped only when the victim broke down and confided in some friends during lunch, shortly after starting seventh grade in 2019, according to court testimony. One of the friends took her to a guidance counselor,

where she submitted a written statement, the court was told.

When Cabuhat learned he might be under investigation, he deleted incriminating digital files from several devices. Investigators were able to recover many of the images, including photos Cabuhat took of the victim without her consent, sometimes while she was sleeping, in various stages of undress.

Cabuhat said he had child pornography on a cellphone “for mobile use” to gratify himself.

The victim’s mother, who was also in court, cried as she identified her daughter in the photos. She said she had no idea the abuse was occurring.

Cabuhat will initially be confined at the Army corrections facility on Sembach but will serve most of his sentence at a military prison in the U.S., Air Force officials said.

His family will receive part of his pay and benefits while he’s confined, though it’s not certain for how long, officials said.

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US Embassy in Afghanistan locked down amid virus rise

By MATTHEW LEE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan ordered a near-complete lockdown Thursday because of a massive spike in coronavirus cases among employees.

Already on uncertain footing due to the imminent withdrawal of American forces from the country, the embassy in Kabul ordered remaining staffers into virtual isolation to prevent the spread of COVID-19, which has already killed at least one person, sent 114 into quarantine and forced several people to be medically evacuated.

The embassy said in a notice to employees that almost all group activities, including work meetings and recreational gatherings, are banned because intensive care units at military medical facilities in Afghanistan are at full capacity and the number of cases has forced it to establish temporary COVID-19 wards to care for patients requiring oxygen.

It said the restrictions would remain in place until the chain of transmission is broken. Violators will be removed from the country on the next available flight. The

notice said 95% of the cases involved people who have not been vaccinated or fully vaccinated against the virus and urged all staff to take advantage of available vaccines at the embassy.

“We must break the chain of transmission to protect one another and ensure the mission’s ability to carry out the nation’s business,” the acting U.S. ambassador, Ross Wilson, said in the notice. “Restrictions will continue until the chain of transmission is broken.”

“We are all in this together and rely on your cooperation during this difficult time,” he said. “We can only return to normal operations with the cooperation of everyone.”

The announcement was distributed to journalists and others by the American Foreign Service Association, the union that represents U.S. diplomats.

The restrictions confine all personnel to their living quarters except to get food alone or to exercise or relax outside by themselves. This requirement bans all sports and means personnel must stay at least 20 feet from others unless they are wearing a mask.

MILITARY

General: Europe a 'priority theater' for Army

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Europe remains high on the list of the U.S. Army's priorities, the Army's top general said Thursday after holding in-person talks with allied ground commanders for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic started.

"Europe is a priority theater for the United States Army," Gen. James McConville, the Army's chief of staff, told reporters by phone from U.S. Army Europe and Africa headquarters in Wiesbaden after holding three days of talks with European allies.

The military leaders agreed at three days of discussions — which also marked the first in-person meetings between them since former President Donald Trump ordered sweeping cuts to the number of U.S. troops in Germany — that a "policy of strength" was the best way to deter adversaries like Russia, McConville said.

A focus of the talks had been on



MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville, shown in 2017, this week talked with allied ground commanders in Germany.

ensuring that U.S. and partner military modernization efforts are in sync, he said.

"Our allies are all taking a look at where they need to be in the future. Their priorities are really on command and control, making sure we can all work together," McConville said.

The U.S. Army has embarked on a modernization push focused on improving long-range precision fires

while adding more sophisticated command and control capabilities to counter adversaries like Russia and China. But those upgrades need to be compatible with what allies are doing, since "we are always going to fight with allies and partners," McConville said. "As we build these systems, as we transform our armies and militaries, we want to make sure we can all communicate with each other."

As part of the U.S. effort to enhance military capabilities in Europe, the Army last year reestablished V Corps, which will have a forward operating post in Poznan, Poland, on NATO's eastern flank. V Corps will eventually oversee Army maneuvers all over Europe.

Later this year, the Army will get two new units and an additional 500 soldiers in the Wiesbaden area with the arrival of a Multi-Domain Task Force and Theater Fires Command.

"It's a big expansion of capability," said Gen. Christopher Cavoli, commander of U.S. Army Europe and Africa, who hosted the meeting

of more than 30 European army chiefs at his Wiesbaden headquarters.

"There's been a very significant, very steady transformation of the capability we have over here," Cavoli said.

The force in Europe has been beefed up in a relatively short amount of time, he said, including with the addition of Army artillery units in Germany within the past two years.

But it was unclear what the ramifications could be for the mission in Europe of a \$3.6 billion reduction for the Army in its draft budget, and a gradual shift in the U.S. military's focus toward the Pacific region and what it needs to do there to counter China.

Asked whether he anticipated any cuts or adjustments in troop rotations to Europe, McConville said that the Army remained fully committed on the Continent.

"We are going to continue to support the exercises and rotations," he said.

The Army has been continuously rotating large units to Europe for several years, including tank and combat aviation brigades. How that mission will evolve over time depends in part on how allied militaries develop, Cavoli said.

"The exact mix of U.S. forces here depends on developments of other countries in the alliance. As they modernize, as they make forces available, that changes what is expected or required on the U.S.," he said.

McConville declined to comment on the plan by the Trump administration to sharply draw down the number of soldiers based in Europe. The Biden administration has put that move on indefinite hold and begun adding more forces in Germany.

"We are in full support of the (current) administration's plan that we are executing right now," McConville said.

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Japan to end COVID-19 state of emergency but not on Okinawa

By MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Nine of 10 Japanese prefectures, including Tokyo and Osaka, will come out of a COVID-19 state of emergency on Sunday, more than a month before the start of the Tokyo Olympics.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga finalized that decision during a coronavirus task force meeting on Thursday in Tokyo, Kyodo News reported Thursday evening. Japan reported 1,554 new infections Thursday, 635 fewer than the same day last week, and 47 deaths, according to public broadcaster NHK and the World Health Organization.

But Okinawa, home to most U.S. military personnel stationed in Japan, will remain under a state of emergency until July 11 because hospitals in the island prefecture remain strained by a high number of COVID-19 patients, the Kyodo report said.

The prefecture announced another 97 infections Thursday, 69 fewer than the same day last week, and four deaths, according to



AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

People walking near Tsunashima Station wear masks to prevent coronavirus infection this spring in Yokohama, Japan. Nine of 10 Japanese prefectures will come out of a state of emergency Sunday.

NHK.

Tokyo on Thursday reported another 452 coronavirus infections and seven deaths, according to NHK, which cited metropolitan

government data. That's 13 more cases than the same day last week.

Of the nine prefectures exiting the state of emergency Sunday, all except Okayama and Hiroshima

will enter a quasi-state of emergency until July 11, the Kyodo report said.

Serving alcohol would be allowed under the quasi-emergency, but only until 7 p.m. Restaurants must continue to close by 8 p.m.

Meanwhile, South Korea added 540 new COVID-19 cases and one death at midnight Wednesday, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency's Central Disease Control Headquarters.

Starting July 1, fully vaccinated travelers arriving on the peninsula who received their inoculations overseas will be exempt from a two-week quarantine, according to the country's Ministry of Health and Welfare. Until then, the exemption applies only to those who were inoculated in South Korea.

U.S. Forces Korea currently has a "working quarantine" policy for fully vaccinated individuals who arrive in the country. USFK personnel are allowed to travel only to and from their quarantine and duty locations for work.

USFK spokesman Col. Lee Peters said in a statement Thursday

that the command will "continue to work with the [South Korean] government ... to ensure this policy update applies to the USFK-affiliated community as well."

U.S. military bases in Japan and South Korea reported 14 new COVID-19 cases as of 7 p.m. Thursday.

Kadena Air Base on Okinawa had six people test positive "over the last few days," according to a base Facebook post Wednesday evening.

U.S. Army Japan had three people test positive between June 9 and Wednesday, according to a news release Wednesday.

The Marine Corps on Okinawa had one person test positive at Camp Hansen, according to a Facebook post Thursday by Marine Corps Installations Pacific.

USFK had three troops and one family member test positive after arriving on the peninsula between May 29 and Saturday, the command announced Thursday.

Stars and Stripes reporters David Choi and Yoo Kyong Chang contributed to this report.
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NATION

Juneteenth set as new US holiday

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States is commemorating the end of slavery with a new federal holiday.

President Joe Biden was set to sign legislation into law Thursday afternoon to make Juneteenth, or June 19, the 12th federal holiday. The House voted 415-14 on Wednesday to send the bill to Biden.

Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers brought the news of freedom to enslaved Black people in Galveston, Texas — two months after the Confederacy had surrendered. That was also about 2½ years after the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in the Southern states.

It's the first new federal holiday since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was created in 1983.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management, which is the human resources office for the federal government, tweeted Thursday that most federal employees will observe the new holiday — Juneteenth National Independence Day — on Friday since June 19 falls on a Saturday this year.

“Our federal holidays are purposely few in number and recognize the most important milestones,” said Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y. “I cannot think of a more important milestone to commemorate than the end of slavery in the United States.”

The Senate passed the bill Tuesday under a unanimous consent agreement that expedites the process for considering legislation. It takes just one senator's objection to block such agreements.

The bill was sponsored by Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., and had 60 co-sponsors. Democratic leaders moved quickly to bring the bill to the House floor after the Senate's vote the day before.

Some Republican lawmakers opposed the effort. Rep. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont., said creating the federal holiday was an effort to celebrate “identity politics.”

“Since I believe in treating everyone equally, regardless of race, and that we should be focused on what unites us rather than our differences, I will vote no,” he said in a press release.

Many states recognize Juneteenth as a holiday or have an official observance of the day, and most states hold celebrations.



KEVIN LAMARQUE/AP

President Joe Biden, third from left, and other NATO heads of the states and governments pose for a group photo during the NATO summit at the Alliance's headquarters, in Brussels, on Monday.

Biden pitched US to welcoming if wary allies

BY JONATHAN LEMIRE
AND AAMER MADHANI
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden spent his first trip overseas highlighting a sharp break from his disruptive predecessor, selling that the United States was once more a reliable ally with a steady hand at the wheel. European allies welcomed the pitch — and even a longtime foe acknowledged it.

But while Biden returned Wednesday night to Washington after a week across the Atlantic that was a mix of messaging and deliverables, questions remained as to whether those allies would trust that Biden truly represents a long-lasting reset or whether Russian President Vladimir Putin would curb his nation's misbehaviors.

Biden's mantra, which he uttered in Geneva and Brussels and on the craggy coast of Cornwall, England, was that “America was back.” It was Putin, of all people, on the trip's final moments, who may have best defined Biden's initial voyage overseas.

“President Biden is an experienced statesman,” Putin told reporters. “He is very different from President Trump.”

But the summit with Putin in Geneva, which shadowed the entire trip and brought it to its close, also underscored the fragility of Biden's declarations that the global order had returned.

Though both men declared the talks constructive, Putin's rhetoric did not change, as he refused to accept any responsibility for his nation's election interference, cyberhacking or crackdown on domestic political opponents. At the summit's conclusion, Biden acknowledged that he could not be confident that Putin would change his behavior even with newly threatened consequences.

Biden's multilateral summits with fellow democracies — the Group of Seven wealthy nations and NATO — were largely punctuated by sighs of relief from European leaders who had been rattled by President Donald Trump over four years. Yet there were still closed-door disagreements on just how the Western powers should deal with Russia or Biden's declaration that an economic competition with China would define the 21st century.

“Everyone at the table understood and understands both the seriousness and the challenges that we're up against, and the re-

sponsibility of our proud democracies to step up and deliver for the rest of the world,” Biden said Sunday in England.

As vice president and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Biden had trotted the globe for more than four decades before he stepped off Air Force One and onto foreign soil for the first time as commander in chief. His initial stop, after a speech to thank U.S. troops stationed in England, was for a gathering with the other G-7 leaders.

The leaders staked their claim to bringing the world out of the coronavirus pandemic and crisis, pledging more than 1 billion coronavirus vaccine doses to poorer nations, vowing to help developing countries grow while fighting climate change and backing a minimum tax on multinational firms.

At the group's first face-to-face meeting in two years because of the pandemic, the leaders dangled promises of support for global health, green energy, infrastructure and education — all to demonstrate that international cooperation is back after the upheavals caused by the pandemic and Trump's unpredictability. There were concerns, though, that not enough was done to combat climate change and that 1 billion doses were not nearly sufficient to meet the stated goal of ending the COVID-19 pandemic globally by the end of 2022.

The seven nations met in Cornwall and largely adhered to Biden's hope that they rally together to declare they would be a better friend to poorer nations than authoritarian rivals such as China. A massive infrastructure plan for the developing world, meant to compete with Beijing's efforts, was commissioned, and China was called out for human rights abuses, prompting an angry response from the Asian power.

But even then, there were strains, with Germany, Italy and the representatives for the European Union reluctant to call out China, a valuable trading partner, too harshly. And there was a wariness in some European capitals that it was Biden, rather than Trump, who was the aberration to American foreign policy and that the United States could soon fall back into a transactional, largely inward-looking approach.

When Air Force One touched back down in Washington, Biden again faced an uncertain future for his legislative agenda, the

clock ticking on a deadline to land a bipartisan infrastructure deal as the president was confronted with growing intransigence from Republicans and mounting impatience from fellow Democrats. But Biden and his aides believe he accomplished what he set out to do in Europe.

The most tactile of politicians, Biden revealed in the face-to-face diplomacy, having grown frustrated with trying to negotiate with world leaders over Zoom. Even amid some disagreements, he was greeted warmly by most of his peers, other presidents and prime ministers eager to exchange awkward elbow bumps and adopt his “build back better” catchphrase.

Aides padded his schedule with some down time to pace the 78-year-old president, though there were still a few missteps, including some verbal flubs and when he simply neglected to announce a Boeing-Airbus deal in front of the European Council.

His summit with Putin, coming three years after Trump sided with the Russian leader over U.S. intelligence agencies when those two men met in Helsinki, loomed over the trip, with the cable networks giving it Super Bowl levels of hype. Aides wanted to confront Putin early in the presidency, with some hope of reining in Moscow and reaching some stability so the administration could more squarely focus on China.

There were no fireworks in their summit near the Swiss Alps, and the nations agreed to return ambassadors to each other's capitals and took some small steps toward strategic stability.

But while Biden was able to deliver stern warnings to Putin behind closed doors, he also extracted few promises. In the Russian president's post-summit remarks, he engaged in classic Putin misdirection and what-about-ism to undermine any of the United States' moral high ground.

In his own Geneva news conference, Biden once more declared that America was back, but he also soberly made clear that it was impossible to immediately know if any progress with Russia had, in fact, been made.

“What will change their behavior is if the rest of world reacts to them and it diminishes their standing in the world,” Biden said. “I'm not confident of anything; I'm just stating a fact.”



JOHN MINCHILLO/AP

Protesters chant as they march after a Juneteenth rally at the Brooklyn Museum, in New York, on June 19, 2020.

NATION



PAULA BRONSTEIN/AP

A man walks out of the Nike store in downtown Portland, Ore., on June 5. The store has wooden panels on its windows to protect them from being broken by ongoing protests.

Portland tries to come back after nightly protests, violent clashes

BY SARA CLINE
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — The smell of fresh empanadas wafted through the stands at Portland's Saturday Market. People talked through their masks with artists as others sifted through fork wind-chimes, crystal necklaces, tie dye dresses and clay mugs.

The weekly event was smaller than in years past, but longtime attendees say it was a sign of life being breathed back into downtown.

Nine blocks away, past businesses still shuttered with plywood boards — the names of Black people killed by police painted onto them — a panhandler leaned against a fence outside the federal courthouse in an area that was choked with tear gas last summer as thousands of protesters seized the streets. It's now overwhelmed by a makeshift homeless camp.

The scenes are from a city trying to emerge from one of its most

wrenching periods, one that saw its reputation go from quirky "Portlandia" to violent dystopia in the minds of many on the outside looking in.

The Pacific Northwest city had best been known nationally for its ambrosial food scene, craft breweries and nature-loving hipsters.

But last year, as a portion of its downtown was consumed by nightly protests that often turned violent and resulted in clashes with federal agents, former President Donald Trump and his administration labeled Portland an "anarchist jurisdiction."

"It does feel kind of like someone dropped a bomb in some areas (of Portland), but I think they're very contained areas," said Ocean Howell, a professor at the University of Portland who teaches urban history and planning. "I think there's likely some businesses that are gone and aren't coming back. And there are just some people, generally, who are kind of

spooked from everything."

City officials insist Portland is resilient as they launch a revitalization plan — in the form of city-wide cleanups of protest damage, aggressive encampment removals, increased homeless services and police reform — to repair its reputation.

Based on a survey conducted by the city last month, 68% of people said their top reason for not visiting was due to riots and protests.

In recent months, Portland officials have committed millions of dollars to cleaning up downtown — removing graffiti, clearing large homeless encampments and restoring damaged buildings.

In addition, the mayor's office has launched a reputation and rebranding effort.

"We're doggedly determined to recover," Mayor Ted Wheeler said in his State of the City address this year. "Our community has what it takes to move forward to a much greater future."

Jobless claims climb to 412K after slow fall

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose last week for the first time since April despite widespread evidence that the economy and the job market are rebounding steadily from the pandemic recession.

The Labor Department said Thursday that jobless claims rose 37,000 from the week before. As the job market has strengthened, the number of weekly applications for unemployment aid has fallen for most of the year. The number of jobless claims generally reflects the pace of layoffs.

With vaccinations up and more consumers venturing out to spend — on restaurant meals, airline fares, movie tickets and store purchases — the economy is rapidly recovering from the recession. All that renewed spending has fueled customer demand and led many companies to seek new workers, often at higher wages, and avoid layoffs.

In fact, the speed of the rebound from the recession has caught many businesses off guard and touched off a scramble to hire. In May, employers added a less-than-expected 559,000 jobs, evidence that many companies are struggling to find enough workers as the economy recovers faster than expected.

But many economists expect hiring to catch up with demand in the coming months, especially as federal unemployment aid programs end and more people pursue jobs. They note that the economy still has 7.6 million fewer

jobs than it did before the pandemic struck.

And employers are posting job openings faster than applicants can fill them. In April, they advertised a record 9.3 million job openings, up a sharp 12% from the number in March.

The rapid rollout of vaccines has brought the number of new confirmed COVID-19 cases down to an average of just over 12,000, from around 250,000 a day in early January.

Though jobless claims have tumbled since the start of 2021, when they exceeded 900,000, they remain high by historical standards. Before the pandemic paralyzed the economy in March 2020, unemployment applications were running at about 220,000 a week.

In Thursday's report, the government said a total of 3.5 million Americans were continuing to collect traditional state unemployment benefits in the week ending June 5, up by just 1,000 from the week before.

Many Americans are contending with health and child care issues related to COVID-19 and with career uncertainty after the recession wiped out many jobs for good. Some who have lost work during the pandemic have decided to retire. Others are taking their time looking for work because, in some cases, supplemental federal jobless benefits, on top of regular state unemployment aid, pay them more than their old jobs did.

Many states, though, are set to begin dropping the supplemental federal jobless aid this month.

VA defends request for 15% increase in medical funding

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Department of Veterans Affairs officials went to the Senate on Wednesday and defended President Joe Biden's request for a 10% increase for the agency, including a 15% boost in funding for medical care.

Biden proposed a total budget of \$296.9 billion for the VA in fiscal year 2022. Of that amount, \$97.5 billion would go toward veterans' medical care. Congress ultimately determines the VA's budget, and some Republicans have quizzed VA Secretary Denis McDonough about the need for the increase. Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., questioned him Wednesday dur-

ing a hearing of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

"The VA is seeking another record budget," Moran said. "Here is where I mostly need answers: The VA is asking for a 15% increase in medical spending this year. How does this marry up with actual patient care?"

McDonough insisted that the department has experienced high demand for care during the last few months, and he believes the trend will continue.

From March to May this year, veterans scheduled 16.55 million appointments at the VA and an additional 1.23 million appointments through the agency's community care program. That's an increase

of 80% from the same time period last year, when the VA canceled and postponed many appointments in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

McDonough predicted that the demand for care would remain high, at least through the end of the year.

"The actuarial numbers suggest we should anticipate this level of care for some period," he told reporters during a news briefing Tuesday.

The surge in care is the reason for about 8% of the proposed 15% boost in medical funding for the VA, said Jon Rychalski, the VA's chief financial officer.

The VA also requested the boost because more veterans are beginning to re-

ly on the VA for a greater amount of their health care. Historically, veterans have used the VA for about 30% of their health care. That number is on the rise, Rychalski said.

The department is seeing a significant increase in emergency room visits, which tend to be more expensive. Rychalski said the number of visits is "off the charts," but it's uncertain why.

"People are accessing emergency rooms at rates we've just not seen before," he said. "It's increased dramatically."

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NATION

Bipartisan group on infrastructure up to 21 senators

BY LISA MASCARO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan senators' group working on a \$1 trillion infrastructure compromise more than doubled in size to 21 members Wednesday, a key threshold that gives momentum to their effort as President Joe Biden returns from overseas at a pivotal time for his big legislative priority.

Biden told reporters he had yet to see the emerging proposal from the group but remained hopeful a bipartisan agreement could be reached, despite weeks of on-again, off-again talks over his more robust \$1.7 billion American Jobs Plan.

"I'm still hoping we can put together the two bookends here," Biden said as he prepared to depart Geneva after attending a summit of European leaders.

The administration dispatched top White House advisers for back-to-back meetings on Capitol Hill while the president was away. Biden and his Democratic allies in Congress are proceeding on a two-track strategy — seeking a bipartisan bill while preparing to go it alone if Republicans try to block the investments with a filibuster in the Senate.

The administration officials huddled late Wednesday in the Capitol basement with the Democratic senators in the bipartisan group, grinding through details of the proposal. On Tuesday, the White House team shored up restless House Democrats eager for momentum on a shared domestic priority with the presi-

dent.

Ahead of Wednesday's late afternoon session, the 20 senators issued a joint statement backing the emerging bipartisan proposal, doubling their ranks in a show of momentum as Biden is expected to re-engage at home. The list was later updated to 21.

The number is significant: With 11 Republicans and 10 Democrats, the group for the first time shows the potential for a bipartisan accord that could theoretically reach the 60-vote threshold in the Senate, which is now evenly split 50-50, that's needed to advance bills by bypassing the filibuster.

"We support this bipartisan framework that provides a historic investment in our nation's core infrastructure needs without raising taxes," the senators said. "We look forward to working with our Republican and Democratic colleagues to develop legislation based on this framework to address America's critical infrastructure challenges."

At the same time, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer convened a private meeting of the Democratic senators on the Budget Committee to set the groundwork for a process that would allow majority passage of the package, without the need for Republican votes. Initial votes could start in July.

"There was universal agreement we have a lot of things we have to do to help the American people and we have to have unity to do it," Schumer told reporters afterward. "Good first meeting."



CARRIE ANTLEFINGER/AP

Melanie Paige closes her eyes as she gets her first COVID-19 vaccination at her church, St. Matthew Christian Methodist Episcopal, in Milwaukee in May.

Black community now has a new option for health care: The church

BY CARRIE ANTLEFINGER
Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Every Sunday at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, the Rev. Joseph Jackson Jr. praises the Lord before his congregation. But since last fall, he's been praising something else his Black community needs: the COVID-19 vaccine.

"We want to continue to encourage our people to get out, get your shots. I got both of mine," Jackson said to applause at the church in Milwaukee on a recent Sunday.

Members of Black communities across the United States have disproportionately fallen sick or died from the virus, so some church leaders are using their influence and trusted reputations to fight back by preaching from the pulpit, phoning people to encourage vaccinations and hosting testing clinics and vaccination events in church buildings.

Some want to extend their ef-

forts beyond the fight against COVID-19 and give their flocks a place to seek health care for other ailments at a place they trust — the church.

"We can't go back to normal because we died in our normal," Debra Fraser-Howze, the founder of Choose Healthy Life, told The Associated Press. "We have health disparities that were so serious that one pandemic virtually wiped us out more than anybody else. We can't allow for that to happen again."

Choose Healthy Life, a national initiative involving Black clergy, United Way of New York City and others, has been awarded a \$9.9 million U.S. Department of Health and Human Services grant to expand vaccinations and make permanent the "health navigators" who are already doing coronavirus testing and vaccinations in churches.

The navigators will eventually

bring in experts for vaccinations, such as the flu, and to screen for ailments that are common in Black communities, including heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, AIDS and asthma. The effort aims to reduce discomfort within Black communities about seeking health care, either due to concerns about racism or a historical distrust of science and government.

The initiative has so far been responsible for over 30,000 vaccinations in the first three months in 50 churches in New York, Newark, N.J., Detroit, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta.

The federal funding will expand the group's effort to 100 churches, including in rural areas, in 13 states and the District of Columbia, and will help establish an infrastructure for the health navigators to start screenings. Quest Diagnostics and its foundation has already provided funding and testing help.

2 South Carolina executions halted until firing squad is formed

Associated Press

COLUMBIA — The South Carolina Supreme Court on Wednesday blocked the planned executions of two inmates by electrocution, saying they cannot be put to death until they truly have the choice of a firing squad option set out in the state's newly revised capital punishment law.

The high court halted this month's scheduled executions of Brad Sigmon and Freddie Owens, writing that corrections officials need to put together a firing squad so that inmates can really choose between that or the electric chair. The state's plans, the court wrote in an unanimous or-

der, are on hold "due to the statutory right of inmates to elect the manner of their execution."

The executions were scheduled less than a month after the passage of a new law compelling the condemned to choose between electrocution or a firing squad if lethal injection drugs aren't available. The statute is aimed at restarting executions after an involuntary 10-year pause that the state attributes to an inability to procure the drugs.

Prison officials previously said they still can't get hold of lethal injection drugs and have yet to put together a firing squad, leaving the 109-year-old electric chair

as the only option.

"The department is moving ahead with creating policies and procedures for a firing squad," Chrysti Shain, a spokeswoman for the South Carolina Department of Corrections, said in a statement Wednesday. "We are looking to other states for guidance through this process. We will notify the court when a firing squad becomes an option for executions."

State prison officials have not indicated when a firing squad would be up and running.

Attorneys for the two men have argued in legal filings that death by electrocution is cruel and un-

usual, saying the new law moves the state toward less humane execution methods. They have also said the men have the right to die by lethal injection — the method both of them chose — and that the state hasn't exhausted all methods to procure lethal injection drugs.

Lawyers for the state have maintained that prison officials are simply carrying out the law, and that the U.S. Supreme Court has never found electrocution to be unconstitutional.

State prisons officials had planned on Friday to electrocute Sigmon, a 63-year-old inmate who has spent nearly two dec-

ades on death row after he was convicted in 2002 of killing his ex-girlfriend's parents with a baseball bat. The state Supreme Court also had previously scheduled the June 25 execution of Owens, a 43-year-old man who has been on and off death row since 1999 for the slaying of a convenience store clerk.

Both Sigmon and Owens have run out of traditional appeals in recent months, leaving the state Supreme Court to set and then stay their executions earlier this year after the corrections agency said it still didn't have lethal injection drugs — and before the passage of the new law.

NATION

Catholic agency wins foster care Supreme Court case

By JESSICA GRESKO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Thursday unanimously sided with a Catholic foster care agency that says its religious views prevent it from working with same-sex couples as foster parents. The justices said the city of Philadelphia wrongly limited its relationship with the group as a result of the agency’s policy. Philadelphia violated the Constitution in limiting its

work with the agency, Catholic Social Services, the court said. “The refusal of Philadelphia to contract with CSS for the provision of foster care services unless it agrees to certify same-sex couples as foster parents cannot survive strict scrutiny, and violates the First Amendment,” Chief Justice John Roberts wrote. Roberts said that the group “seeks only an accommodation that will allow it to continue serving the children of Phila-

delphia in a manner consistent with its religious beliefs; it does not seek to impose those beliefs on anyone else.” Catholic Social Services is affiliated with the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Philadelphia learned in 2018 from a newspaper reporter that the agency would not certify same-sex couples to become foster parents. The city has said it requires that the two dozen-plus foster care agencies it works with not to discriminate

as part of their contracts. The city asked the Catholic agency to change its policy, but the group declined. As a result, Philadelphia stopped referring additional children to the agency. Catholic Social Services sued, but lower courts sided with Philadelphia. There is no record that any same-sex couple has ever asked to work with the agency. In such a case, the couple would be referred to a different group,

Catholic Social Services has said. Because of its beliefs, the Catholic agency also does not certify unmarried couples. A lawyer with The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty who argued on behalf of Catholic Social Services cheered the ruling. “It’s a beautiful day when the highest court in the land protects foster moms and the 200-year-old religious ministry that supports them,” Lori Windham said in a statement.

High court dismisses Obamacare challenge

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court has dismissed a challenge to the Obama era health care law, preserving insurance coverage for millions of Americans. The justices, by a 7-2 vote, left the entire law intact Thursday in ruling that Texas, other Republican-led states and two individuals had no right to bring their lawsuit in federal court. The Biden administration says 31 million people have health insurance because of the law popularly known as “Obamacare.” The law’s major provisions include protections for people with pre-existing health conditions, a range of no-cost preventive services and the expansion of the Medicaid program that insures lower-income people, including those who work in jobs that don’t pay much or provide health insurance. Also left in place is the law’s now-toothless requirement that people have health insurance or pay a penalty. Congress rendered that provision irrelevant in 2017 when it reduced the penalty to zero. Trump’s three appointees to the Supreme Court — Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh — split their votes. Kavanaugh and Barrett joined the majority. Gorsuch was in dissent, signing on to an opinion from Justice Samuel Alito. Justice Stephen Breyer wrote for the court that the states and people who filed a federal lawsuit “have failed to show that they have standing to attack as unconstitutional the Act’s minimum essential coverage provision.” Because it dismissed the case for the plaintiff’s lack of legal standing — the ability to sue — the court didn’t actually rule on whether the individual mandate is unconstitutional now that there is no penalty for forgoing insurance.



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WORLD

Chinese ship docks in new space station

BY SAM McNEIL
Associated Press

JIUQUAN — A Chinese space-ship carrying a three-person crew docked with China's new space station at the start of a three-month mission Thursday, marking a milestone in the country's ambitious space program.

The Shenzhou-12 craft connected with the Tianhe space station module about six hours after take-off from the Jiuquan launch center on the edge of the Gobi Desert.

The three astronauts are the first to take up residency in the main living module and will carry out experiments, test equipment, conduct maintenance and prepare the station for receiving two laboratory modules next year.

The mission brings to 14 the number of astronauts China has launched into space since 2003, becoming only the third country after the former Soviet Union and the United States to do so on its own.

The astronauts were seen off by

space officials, other uniformed military personnel and a crowd of children waving flowers and flags and singing patriotic songs.

The rocket dropped its boosters about two minutes into the flight followed by the cowlings surrounding Shenzhou-12 at the top of the rocket. After about 10 minutes, it separated from the rocket's upper section, extended its solar panels and shortly afterward entered orbit.

About a half-dozen adjustments took place over the following six hours to line up the spaceship for docking with the Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, module at about 4 p.m.

The travel time is down from the two days it took to reach China's earlier experimental space stations, a result of a "great many breakthroughs and innovations," the mission's deputy chief designer, Gao Xu, told state broadcaster CCTV.

"So the astronauts can have a



CCTV/AP

In this image taken from video footage run by China's CCTV, Chinese astronauts are seen aboard a Shenzhou-12 spaceship in space Thursday.

good rest in space, which should make them less tired," Gao said.

Other improvements include an increase in the number of automated and remote-controlled systems that should "significantly lessen the pressure on the astronauts," Gao said.

Two astronauts on those past missions were women, and while this first station crew is all male, women are expected to be part of future station crews.

The mission is the third of 11 planned through next year to add the additional sections to the sta-

tion and send up crews and supplies. A fresh three-member crew and a cargo ship with supplies will be sent in three months.

China is not a participant in the International Space Station, largely as a result of U.S. objections to the Chinese programs secrecy and close military ties. The country, however, has been stepping up cooperation with Russia and a host of other countries, and its station may continue operating beyond the International Space Station, which is reaching the end of its functional life.

Hong Kong police arrest editors of newspaper

Associated Press

HONG KONG — Hong Kong police used a sweeping national security law Thursday to arrest five editors and executives of a pro-democracy newspaper on charges of colluding with foreign powers.

Police said they had evidence that more than 30 articles published by Apple Daily played a "crucial part" in what they called a conspiracy with foreign countries to impose sanctions against China and Hong Kong.

Apple Daily said in a statement that the move left it "speechless," but vowed to continue its reporting.

Police also froze \$2.3 million in assets belonging to three companies linked to Apple Daily, according to Hong Kong's National Security Department. More than 200 police officers were involved in the search of Apple Daily's offices.

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The Daily Guide to Navigating the European Business Market

Transportation

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WEEKEND



Danny Elfman's
'Big Mess'
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Insomniac Games photos

Expanding universe

PlayStation 5 title Rift Apart brings a new character, interdimensional plot to Ratchet and Clank franchise

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WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY



Drone pilot Doug Thron uses his drones and infrared photography to unearth wildlife and pets that are victims of natural disasters. His exploits are chronicled on CuriosityStream’s series “Doug to the Rescue.”

High-flying rescues

TV series subject uses drones with infrared cameras to save animals

By **LUAINE LEE**
Tribune News Service

The new high flying drones are utilized for all kinds of missions from surveillance to backyard play. But Doug Thron uses them to save the lives of animals.

Thron is an aerial cinematographer who has adopted drone photography for his art. But he elevated that art when he discovered infrared drones that could pierce the devastation left by wildfires and hurricanes, revealing wildlife trapped in their wake.

“I’m a pioneer of using infrared drones with spotlights and zoom lenses to rescue animals,” he says.

“I’ve been somewhat, for lack of a better word, on a crusade, not only to rescue the animals from natural disasters that just keep getting bigger and bigger, but also to get this incredible technology known by the world. Because my hope is that one day these infrared drones rescuing animals will be as popular and as common as say, helicopters are for rescuing people.”

Thron’s exploits are the subject of CuriosityStream’s new series, “Doug to the Rescue.” Thron travels all over the world where disaster strikes, illuminating lost pets, stranded koalas and terrified wildlife.

He first got the idea when a filmmaker united Thron with a man who was using an infrared scope to rescue cats after the Santa Rosa, Calif., fires.

“We were both chatting about it, and we were like, ‘God, if we could put one of these infrared scopes on a drone, it would be unbelievable.’ Fast-forward, about a year later, I was just volunteering with the Sea Shepherd boat out in the Bahamas, and I was using a drone to rescue animals out there. And I found it exceedingly hard to find the animals because of debris piles,” he says.

“Imagine hundreds of houses all being smashed up and debris piles 30 feet tall, and boards and nails and everything. I found it super hard to find the animals. So then I thought back about an infrared scope and thankfully, one had been invented for public use that would potentially work on this drone.

“So I mounted it on the drone, and it worked incredibly well, and from there I started putting spotlights on drones and putting 180 times zoom lens cameras as well. That’s basically how I got

started with it was from those events in my past,” he says.

Thron’s first rescue was a dog, a Royal Bahamian Potcake. “He was right in the middle of Hurricane Dorian, a 40-hour-long hurricane with winds up to 180 miles per hour and 30-foot-deep water and hundreds of houses smashed; hundreds of people passed away. And he was literally smack dab in the middle of this ... with a snapped leg and banged-up face,” Thron recalls.

He not only saved the dog, he kept him, crowning him ‘Duke.’ “He was super sentimental to me, being the first one,” says Thron.

“For the first six or eight months he wouldn’t bark. He wouldn’t wag his tail. He was just, I think, pretty shell-shocked — probably had all sorts of muscles torn. He had a super bad case of heartworm. And now when you see him, he’s like the most loving dog. Jumps all around, licks, barks and yeah, you would never even know that he had ever been through a hurricane. And it’s pretty miraculous to see.”

Sometimes animals are unable to flee, and Thron finds them alone and abandoned. “In Louisiana when we were doing the rescues, I was uncovering dogs that were chained and left for dead, chained to a car,” he says.

“And through this series, we get to see animals months later that were chained to cars and left for dead and starved, pretty much just about ready to die. And then you see them months later and they’re jumping around licking you and super happy in their new adopted home. So, it blows me away how these dogs can recover and turn out to be everyday normal dogs in a short period of time.”

It’s not only dogs he salvages, but an array of wildlife, including cats. Thron recalls one special rescue of a badly burned black cat. “I had to grab him underneath some burned stuff. And he bit and clawed and everything like that, but he was so burned up that if I didn’t grab him, he was likely to die and run off to the woods.

“And a couple of months later it was interesting because the vets were putting honey on these wounds that were almost burned down to the bone. A couple of months later the wounds are just about healed, and the cat’s the most loving, purring cat. And I was kind of like, ‘I wish I had adopted this little black cat because it’s just like my little Mittens when I was a kid.’”

GADGETS

Power washer has 10 times the pressure of garden hose

By **GREGG ELLMAN**
Tribune News Service

What was supposed to be an hour or two of testing turned into a successful 12-hour cleaning project with the Dewalt 20 V MAX 550 PSI power cleaner kit.

I’ve been a power washing fan for a year, so now adding the portable outdoor cleaner gives me a full arsenal. The 20V MAX 550 PSI power cleaner is an addition this spring to Dewalt’s 20V MAX system, which includes more than 200 other products in the rechargeable battery system.

The MAX 550 connects to your garden hose with a quick connect adapter and delivers 10 times the water pressure you’ll get from the average garden hose alone. The connection is standard, straight from the hose to the power washer; just make sure the connection is tight and secure.

Four quick-release connect nozzles, each producing a different degree of spraying, are included. They spray at 15, 25 and 40 degrees along with a turbo nozzle. An attachable soap bottle is included. The wider nozzles produce a gentler wash, while the narrower nozzles have greater and more focused pressure.

For power, a rechargeable 20V MAX XR DCB205 battery is included with a charger. Like any gadget that runs on portable batteries, it’s a good idea to get a second one. The battery connects to the power washer in a plastic watertight compartment.

Initially, with the 550 PSI power cleaner, my thinking was that this would be good for minor cleaning, but it can also handle the jobs of a more typical power washer. It’s great for the small things but with the portability, there’s so much more you can do without having to pull anything around besides the attached garden hose.

Online: dewalt.com; \$199 for

the kit or \$149 for just the power washer

Just one hour with Proscenic’s new **P10 Pro cordless 4-in-1 vacuum cleaner** shows how impressive and efficient vacuuming can be.

What makes it so versatile, along with its ultra-strong suction power of 25,000pa, is the multifunctionality. In a second it switches from an upright vacuum cleaner to a handheld vacuum cleaner for floor-to-ceiling cleaning with the included attachments.

The attachments go on and off instantly for any surface, from hardwood, to carpet, furniture, walls and even ceilings. And since it’s cordless, moving from room to room isn’t hampered by an electrical cord.

The flexible vacuum reaches everywhere at any angle with the ability to rotate 90 degrees upwards and downwards, and 180 degrees to left and right.

The long crevice nozzle is perfect for corners of furniture, in corners, under pillows and other normally hard-to-reach areas. And when vacuuming is completed inside, it turns into a handy mini-vacuum for cleaning the inside of a vehicle.

The P10 Pro is built with three adjustable suction modes and cyclonic technology with an advanced Turbo 3.0 motor rotating with a high speed of 110,000rpm, 260w power rating. With anti-tangle technology, longer pieces of hair won’t tangle within the roller brush to ensure optimum performance at all times.

Inside the P10 Pro is a long-life rechargeable battery, good for up to 55 minutes of run time in min mode. Charging with the included AC cord is done with the removable battery in or out of the unit and is completed in 2.5 hours.

Online: proscenic.com; \$178



The Dewalt 20 V MAX 550 PSI power cleaner comes with a rechargeable 20V MAX XR DCB205 battery and a charger.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Long hauler

At 88, Ellen Burstyn is starring in the film ‘Queen Bees’ and has no plans to retire

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

That Ellen Burstyn plays a woman who recoils at the very mention of a retirement community in the upcoming film “Queen Bees” is extremely appropriate.

Rarely has an actor been as good for as long as Burstyn has. She is still, at 88, tireless, her vitality almost preternaturally undiminished.

As intense as her early career was — Lee Strasberg’s The Actors Studio in the late 1960s followed by ’70s classics like “The Last Picture Show,” “The Exorcist” and “Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore” — her later years have been no less probing or challenging — “Requiem for a Dream,” “Interstellar,” last year’s “Pieces of a Woman.”

She has the awards to show for it. A six-time Oscar nominee and one-time winner (for “Alice,” a movie she might have directed until she picked a young filmmaker, Martin Scorsese, to do so instead), she has a Tony and two Emmys, too. And while “Queen Bees,” now in theaters, is more of a fun diversion, Burstyn remains a magnificent and fierce screen presence.

She plays a proudly independent senior temporarily staying at a retirement community that turns out to be as rife with comical cliques and romantic possibility as “Mean Girls.” The cast includes James Caan, Ann-Margret, Jane Curtin, Loretta Devine and Christopher Lloyd.

Burstyn’s own retirement plans aren’t just unmade. They’re unfathomable. When she turned 80, she decided to move from Rockland County, up the Hudson, into New York City. “Time for a little action,” she explained in a recent interview by phone.

She has since lived in an apartment overlooking Central Park, which she strolls daily. “It’s my garden,” she says. During the pandemic, Burstyn has mostly laid low, spending time with friends in the Catskills and at a condo on the Connecticut waterfront.

“Otherwise, I’ve been in the city. I’ve been in my apartment,” says Burstyn. “I am absolutely a cooped-up person ready to hit the road again.”

Remarks have been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: What do you attribute your longevity to?

Burstyn: I must have some good genes. I was sort of wild in

my 20s and 30s. When I got into my 40s, I started dropping bad habits slowly. First hard liquor went, then wine went, exercise began, changing my diet and giving up meat. Marijuana was also part of the mix. I just gave it all up. I think it really paid off.

Has acting evolved for you over time?

I’m not sure I know how to answer that. It must have. You know, I’m very well trained. I had the great, great fortune of studying with one of the master teachers of all time — Lee Strasberg — and he influenced me so much. I found as I went on in my career that the things I had to work hard for early on became easier and easier to access. I became more relaxed in my efforts. But I never lost interest.

You had a somewhat tumultuous early life. Was acting initially an escape for you?

No, I think it was something that I discovered pretty young that I could do. From the first time I went on stage, I felt at home there. Not that it wasn’t scary — it was. But it felt right to me. It’s a gift that I came in with.

You must meet a lot of young actors through the Actor’s Studio, where you’re co-president with Al Pacino and Alec Baldwin. What do you tell them?

It’s a process. It’s one of those things that the more you do it, if you’re really approaching it from the point of view of wanting to get better and better, then you’re always learning. I tell actors that where you start out from is just the beginning.

Did any advice you received have a dramatic influence on you?

The most important thing was connecting the character and myself emotionally so that I could understand on an emotional level what was happening to her — that I wasn’t just saying words.

Do you still immerse yourself so much in a character?

It’s just that some characters



CHARLES SYKES/AP

Ellen Burstyn, photographed in 2019, plays a woman forced into a retirement home in “Queen Bees.”

are more available than others. I don’t have to go very far to understand them. And then some of them are strangers to me and I have to go deeper to find a place where I align with them.

Your character in “Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore” was one close to you. What’s one that was a stranger?

Well, I did a film in Greece with Melina Mercouri (“A Dream of Passion”) where I played a character who was in jail for killing her children. It was a Medea theme. That really took a lot of work for me to be able to go there. I don’t mean that I wanted myself to be able to kill my children. (laughs) But I had to find the thing in her that allowed that. I did get to that point where there was a maniacal fury. I found that what she was doing was hurting her husband in the best way she possibly could. It wasn’t about the children. It was about her fury with him.

With quite a few of your characters — “The Exorcist,” “Requiem for a Dream” — that meant going to quite dark places. Did that ever wear on you?

The act of doing a good job is thrilling and pleasurable. If the act is to play a horrible person, the result is that you feel afterward that you did the job well. It has its own strange reward.

I imagine your “Queen Bees” character wasn’t a far journey since her attitude about retirement aligns with yours.

I can’t picture my retirement. (laughs) I can’t picture wanting to retire. The only thing I can picture is if some day I’m being

retired because I don’t get work. But volunteering to retire? I can’t picture that.

What drew you to the movie?

I love it when the movie industry shows women past 60 still having interest in life and not retiring. I read so many scripts from the time I was 50 that were all about: Should we put grandma in the nursing home? And how do we tell her? It was always like putting her out to pasture. This is quite different. It happens in a retirement home, but there’s lots of life going on in there, a lot of mating. So I liked it. It’s a story about, let’s say, elderly lusty people.

You’ve lived through a patriarchal era in Hollywood. Do you ever wonder how your career and life might have been different without those roadblocks?

I’ve done a lot of studying about the patriarchy, which has been in effect for thousands of years. Only now is it really being challenged. I think that’s what’s so scary to a lot of fellas, that they’re not going to know how to function if they’re sharing the catbird seat with a woman. I think it affects our politics. I think what the country is going through right now is a fear, for some people, that if the white man is not in power that that would be a bad thing. I don’t share in that opinion. I think we have been slowly in my lifetime opening up the throne to the other sex and the other color and the other religion — the other. I don’t think about how my life had been different. I’m just glad I was able to make some films like

“Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore” that’s really about that, and affected it in some way.

In your memoir, “Lessons in Becoming,” you wrote about how your third husband, after separating, broke into your home and raped you. It’s his name you have. Do you wish you didn’t?

(Laughs) Well, I try not to spend time on wishing for anything that I can’t change. That’s my name, however I came to it. It surprised me, but that’s what I got. But I know I was very honest as I wrote that book. Every time I came to a new chapter in my life, I’d go, “Well, I can’t write about that.” Finally, I said: Honey, if you’re going to tell the story, tell the story.

You could tell in that book that you view your life as an ever-ongoing spiritual journey. Where would you put yourself on that journey now?

The way I understand life is that you come on Earth to learn something spiritually, and everything that happens is a spiritual lesson if you view it that way. I’m still on the path of trying to be as honest and sensitive and open and kind as I can possibly be. So I hope I’m growing that way.

You’ve also talked about how memory is the reservoir of all your acting. For someone who draws so much on the past, you seem very forward-looking.

I use my memory all the time in my work. Memory, it forms us. Our stories form us. Being totally present is essential. I’m in the past and I’m in the future and I’m in the now all at the same time.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

All the feels

Kevin Hart shows he is more than a comedian in tearjerker ‘Fatherhood’

By LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

Kevin Hart can make us laugh and cry, it seems, even if the vehicle was practically engineered to bring on the waterworks. In “Fatherhood,” now on Netflix, he plays a new dad whose wife dies shortly after childbirth and he’s left raising their daughter on his own.

To be fair, there’s been many built-in tearjerkers that have failed (remember “Life Itself”?). But something has to go very, very wrong for a film to mess up that kind of premise. “Fatherhood” doesn’t just succeed on that emotional level, though — it’s also a cut above the rest, thanks to a smart and funny and basically authentic script (director Paul Weitz and Dana Stevens) and Hart’s inspired casting.

The story is based on Matthew Logelin’s memoir, “Two Kisses for Maddy: A Memoir of Loss and Love,” about losing his wife after she gave birth to their daughter. Since its publication 10 years ago, it’s had a few different lives, first as a Lifetime movie, then as a Channing Tatum vehicle, before finally landing Weitz (“About a Boy”) as a director and Hart as his star.

Hart plays Matt, a Boston

professional with a beautiful wife. The film introduces him at her funeral, before cutting back to how it happened. The script does a good job at introducing you to Matt and Liz (Deborah Ayorinde) and making her more than just a bland stand-in for “wife” while you brace for what’s coming. And of course, it’s not about them but Matt and his baby daughter, Maddy. He doesn’t even have time to grieve. He’s got a little human to keep alive.

“Fatherhood” smooths out many of the edges of real life. Money does not seem to be a worry for Matt — he has parents and in-laws (Alfre Woodard is terrific as his mother-in-law) who are more than willing to take him and Maddy back to Minnesota — and his early parenting trials are all presented in palatable, bite-sized doses. One day is crib set-up. One day she screams a lot. There’s even a “babies are hard but funny” montage set to Salt-N-Pepa’s “Push It,” where we breeze through installing a car seat and almost leaving it (with a baby inside) at the grocery store. This is not a “Tully”-style representation of the exhaustion of caring for an infant.

The film does a good job balancing the drama with the come-



NETFLIX/AP

Kevin Hart, right, is Matt, a grieving father left to raise his daughter, Maddy, played by Melody Hurd, alone after the death of his wife in “Fatherhood,” streaming now on Netflix.

dy however, and is helped by a strong supporting cast, including Lil Rel Howery and Anthony Carrigan as Matt’s best friends.

And within the sitcom dramedy aesthetic, there are moments of truth and grace, from Matt panic-vacuuming to simulate white noise so the colicky baby can sleep to him pleading with his mother-in-law that he’ll never know if he’s a good parent if he doesn’t get the chance to try. It’s

never entirely clear why he doesn’t want their help or needs to move back to their hometown.

“Fatherhood” skips forward to kindergarten, which is a little jarring, but it’s nice to see Maddy (Melody Hurd) with a personality and point of view and to give Hart someone other than a baby to connect with. It also allows the film to introduce a love interest (played by DeWanda Wise). You may never be surprised by

where “Fatherhood” is going, but you forgive it, too.

It’s all done with a good heart. Even the cliché moments are understandable. Sometimes brutal realism is overrated when it comes to newborns in movies. And, let’s be honest, you’re much more likely to re-watch “Fatherhood” than “Tully.”

“Fatherhood” is rated PG-13 for some strong language and suggestive material. Running time: 109 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

‘Queen Bees’ isn’t the ‘Mean Girls’ of the retirement community

By LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

I tend to approach retirement home comedies with extra caution. It can be hard to stomach seeing a great group of actors reduced to incontinence jokes.

The latest retirement home comedy is “Queen Bees,” about Helen (played by the majestic Ellen Burstyn), who reluctantly moves into a senior community while her beautiful suburban house is being fixed up after an accidental kitchen fire. Helen is still sharp and active and capable of living alone, but her real estate agent daughter (Elizabeth Mitchell) just seems to want to get the inevitable transition out of the way. Helen, for her part, suspects her daughter just wants to sell her home, and she may not be wrong.

For as lovely as Helen’s house is, the retirement community is pretty nice and full of active and social seniors. It’s also stacked with talented actors: Alongside Burstyn in this senior home is James Caan, Ann-Margret, Jane Curtin, Loretta Devine and Christopher Lloyd, all of whom it’s a delight to simply see on screen and none of whom are subjected to tasteless gags (although some are borderline).

“Queen Bees,” directed by Michael Lembeck and written by Donald Martin, isn’t exactly a bad movie, but it’s not exactly good, either. It has a decent heart and some lovely moments, but it also has many of the clichés that we’ve come to expect: An incontinence joke, a marijuana scene, stroke gags, a truly horrendous score and an appalling lack of curiosity about the characters we’re asked to spend a couple of hours with.



GRAVITAS VENTURES/AP

From left, Jane Curtin, Loretta Devine and Ann-Margret are retirement home Mean Girls in “Queen Bees.”

Even the title seems carelessly thrown at the movie as an attempt to peg it as a senior citizen “Mean Girls,” which it only sort of is. Curtin’s Janet is the Regina George of the home and keeps her bridge and walking group small (just Ann-Margret’s Margot and Devine’s Sally are members). But aside from that and a slow-motion walk into the lunchroom to claim their designated table, they don’t seem to yield much power or envy among the other residents. And it’s not too long before Helen, who is apathetic to their exclusivity, is invited to the bridge table. If you’re looking for a comedic, anthropological study of cliques in a retirement home, “Queen Bees” isn’t it.

“Queen Bees” also has the bones of a much better movie and is frustrating because of it. There is a sitcom

blandness to the whole endeavor — any edge or personality has been flattened out. Characters get at most a single bit of background: One had five husbands, one had cancer, one sleeps around. In one jaw-dropping scene, Helen tells Sally about her days protesting with Dr. King and has zero follow-up questions for her Black peer about HER experience during that time. Instead, they pivot to talking about hair extensions, which Helen is just learning about.

And for all the comedic talent in the film, from Curtin to Lloyd, who seem game for anything, there are precious few genuine laughs to be had. Perhaps the script should have allowed for more improvisation.

Yet mercifully, everyone emerges with their dignity intact. Burstyn even finds ways to make her character deeper than what’s on the page, and there’s a moving tenderness to her little flirtation with Caan’s Dan, who is blandly sweet and charming.

Helen’s most meaningful relationship in the film is with her very kind and attentive grandson (Matthew Barnes), who, when attempting to explain all the nuances of his 80-something grandmother to her potential suitor, reduces her to a Twitter bio: Likes famous quotes, ballroom dancing and neatness. Surely there must be more to her than that, you think.

“Queen Bees” has the same problem: It’s a film that seems to have been dreamed up by a reverent grandchild who assumed they knew everything there was to know, and never thought to ask the grandparent themselves.

“Queen Bees” is rated PG-13 for drug use, suggestive material and some language. Running time: 100 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Missing the mark

‘Hitman’s Wife’s Bodyguard’ has guns and puns, but not much fun

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Toward the end of “The Hitman’s Wife’s Bodyguard,” there’s a scene where Ryan Reynolds is repeatedly smashing a man’s head into a jukebox aboard a yacht, as sometimes happens. Each time the bloodied head goes in the machine, it triggers a new song. Until it lands on “The Sign” by Ace of Base.

“You’re lucky,” Reynolds says to his unconscious rival before walking away to commit more mayhem. “I love this song.”

That single scene beautifully captures the essence of the sequel to 2017’s “The Hitman’s Bodyguard” — overly violent, disarmingly cute and overly self-referencing.

Fans of the original will get the in-joke about “The Sign” but the sequel itself will not likely make new fans. It suffers from what many sophomore films fall prey to: Same basic idea, but just make it bigger.

So if the first’s plot was getting a witness to the Netherlands to testify about an European war criminal, the second is about saving the very existence of Europe itself. If the first had a star like Salma Hayek tucked in, the sequel is her elevation to co-star and the massive additions of Antonio Banderas and Morgan Freeman.

Director Patrick Hughes returns for the overstuffed sequel, but this time has trouble balancing the violence with the heart. Too many characters — a Boston Interpol agent and a rival bodyguard, among them — are blended into an unhinged 007-style plot with a tendency to veer uncomfortably personal.

Reynolds and Samuel L. Jackson again play frenemies, and their exchanges still crackle with electricity (and lots of potty language.) Reynolds is bodyguard Michael Bryce,



LIONSGATE/AP

Ryan Reynolds, left, and Samuel L. Jackson return for a sequel in “The Hitman’s Wife’s Bodyguard.”

a careful, safe professional (“Boring is always best,” is his motto) who has found himself on hard times. Jackson is Darius Kincaid, a shoot-first, reckless hitman.

If “The Hitman’s Bodyguard” was a bromance between these two, “The Hitman’s Wife’s Bodyguard” is a three-some, thanks to the scene-stealing role of Kincaid’s wife, played with insane energy by Hayek. She’s as lethal and profane and impulsive as her husband. (“Your mouth needs an exorcism,” a shocked Bryce tells her). But the effect is that this talented trio are unbalanced and awkward; three is definitely a crowd.

If there was a stylish chic in the first film, it’s gone in the second, which sometimes seems cloying in its attempt to re-create the first. In addition to Ace of Base, returning this time are repeat references to: “Hello” by Lionel Richie, a gaggle of nuns, the deadly use of a penknife, a Richard E. Grant cameo, someone ejected from a car for not wearing a seatbelt and the leads getting kidnapped by having their heads put in a bag. “This feels familiar,” cracks Bryce. We know the feeling.

The plot puts Reynolds, Jackson and Hayek speeding across Italy to stop a madman from crippling Europe by

destroying its electrical and data infrastructure, or something like that. The madman is played by Banderas who has forgone chewing the scenery in favor of swallowing whole chunks of it noisily while dressed like Liberace mated with “a set of curtains.” (Actual dialogue more colorful.)

For some reason, the writers — Tom O’Connor and Phillip Murphy and Brandon Murphy — have added an amnesia twist, a digression into fertility, a weird drug trip on a mood stabilizer and an ill-conceived exploration of parenthood and family legacy. Plus, they wasted the skills of Freeman in a nebulous, confusing role, which is inexcusable.

The film is best when it winks at the viewer — Reynolds at one point gets into a vehicle and says “here’s the car chase” — or goes silly over-the-top, as when both our heroes and the villain kindly reference the 1987 Goldie Hawn film “Overboard,” which Banderas calls “a minor classic.” But no one — not even fans of the first film — will find this second one to be any sort of classic at all.

“The Hitman’s Wife’s Bodyguard” is rated R for strong bloody violence throughout, pervasive language and some sexual content. Running time: 118 minutes.

Documentary shows a frank, funny and occasionally foulmouthed Rita Moreno

By MICHAEL O’SULLIVAN
The Washington Post

It’s all baloney.

So says Rita Moreno about the hoopla surrounding an upcoming birthday, in the opening seconds of a new documentary about the Puerto Rican-born actress, dancer and singer (except she uses a less printable, more colorful synonym for baloney). Her comment sets the tone for what turns out to be a funny, occasionally foulmouthed and almost startlingly frank portrait of the 89-year-old performer, who anchors “Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It” with excerpts from a long, sit-down interview in which she discusses, with refreshing candor, a laundry list of topics.

These include: being typecast as what she calls the “dusky,” heavily accented exotic in such early movie roles as Ula in “Seven Cities of Gold” and Tuptim in

“The King and I.” Moreno also talks about her yearslong relationship with actor Marlon Brando; a subsequent pregnancy, abortion and suicide attempt; a rape by her agent; and the rampant sexism and sexual harassment she endured in the Hollywood studio system.

Intercut with these interview segments — which include extensive discussion of her breakthrough role, Anita in “West Side Story,” and the challenge of bucking ethnic stereotypes — are copious film clips, sound bites from speaking engagements, cute paper-doll animations, backstage scenes during the filming of the “One Day at a Time” sitcom remake she starred in for several seasons on Netflix, and the de rigueur talking heads singing her praises. (Lin-Manuel Miranda, Hector Elizondo, Norman Lear and film historian Annette Insdorf are among those delivering

encomiums, along with family members and friends.)

Her career follows a fascinating trajectory: According to Insdorf, it didn’t just take off and rise after “West Side Story,” but “widened.” The first Latina actress to win an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar and a Tony — the “EGOT” superfecta — Moreno doesn’t just seem to keep getting better and better, but more and more interesting. Who of a certain age cannot recall her catchphrase from the PBS kids show “The Electric Company,” shouted out with a musical bellow: Hey, you guuuuys! (Moreno obliges with a throaty rendition.)

Lear, who produced “One Day at a Time,” makes a comment about Moreno that pretty much sums up the appeal of this charming film and its subject: “One gets lost in her personality, happily, and feels better for being with her.”



ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

Rita Moreno talks about her life from her breakout role in “West Side Story” to dealing with the sexism and sexual harassment in Hollywood in “Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It.”

Lear delivered that comment at some awards ceremony. (Perhaps the Kennedy Center Honors, which celebrated Moreno’s achievements in 2015? There are so many accolades in this film, it’s hard to keep track.) As film scholar Frances Negrón-Muntaner puts it, Moreno isn’t defined by the obstacles she’s overcome, but there is a nagging question

left hanging and unanswered in her tantalizing life story: Who might the little girl born Rosita Moreno — a pint-size diva who dreamed of being famous — have become, if those obstacles hadn’t been there?

“Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It” is rated PG-13 for mature thematic elements, some strong language, including a sexual reference, and suggestive material. Running time: 89 minutes.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS



DISNEY/Pixar

“Luca” is a coming-of-age story about two boys experiencing an unforgettable summer along the Italian Riviera. The fun is threatened by a deeply-held secret: They are sea monsters in disguise.

Free to be a sea monster

New Pixar film like ‘The Little Mermaid,’ but with boys and a slightly different message: tolerance for those who are different

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

Stop me if you’ve heard this one before: A young, magical sea creature, heard of only in fairy tales and sailor’s legends, dreams of life beyond the surface, on land, and takes a leap to explore the world beyond the safety of his or her brightly jewel-toned underwater world. You may be thinking that this sounds a lot like “The Little Mermaid,” and indeed, Pixar’s new film, “Luca,” is very much like that iconic animated Disney film. It’s like “The Little Mermaid” with boys, but Prince Eric has been replaced with a Vespa scooter.

“Luca,” which arrived Friday on Disney+, is another one of Pixar’s wondrous and warm creations, a fantastical tale that’s deeply rooted in human emotion and quandary. Though it would have been delightful on the big screen, at home, kids and parents alike will enjoy this fishy tale of tolerance. Directed by Enrico Casarosa and written by Jesse Andrews and Mike Jones, the film is set in and around a picturesque coastal Italian fishing village called Portorosso and reflects the kind of idyllic life one dreams of in a place like this: pasta, gelato and quaint town

squares. But people who make their living from the sea are ruled by legend and superstition, and the townspeople have a healthy fear of sea monsters from the deep, depicted frequently in their local artwork.

Fear comes from what we don’t understand, what we don’t know, and these townspeople have never met a sea monster until the friendly, curious and determined Luca (Jacob Tremblay) comes along. Young Luca dreams of exploring beyond his watery kingdom, having heard that the sea monsters can shape-shift into human form on dry land. He befriends another young sea monster, Alberto (Jack Dylan Grazer), living the land-lubber’s life, and soon the two best friends are dreaming of exploring the world via Vespa, living a life of freedom (as long as it doesn’t rain).

Posing as visitors from another village, the boys befriend a young girl, Giulia (Emma Berman), who takes them under her wing, and the trio begin training for a local race, in order to win the cash to purchase a rusty old Vespa. Thanks to their secret identity, mischief and misunderstandings arise. Luca and Alberto represent two different approaches to their outsider status:

Luca wants to reveal and assimilate, while Alberto believes he’ll never be accepted and chooses the rebellious life instead.

It’s the tried-and-true story of what it means to be different, and what it means to be afraid because others fear you for being different. Sea monsters, nationality, race, sexuality, gender, it could be anything, but what matters is who you stand with and who you stand up for.

Designed in gloriously rich oceanic hues, the animation of “Luca” is a visual delight. The character design, in particular the mustaches on the fathers, are especially characteristic and expressive. Interspersed with midcentury Italian pop tunes is a truly special score by Dan Romer. The composer of the film scores for “Beasts of the Southern Wild” and “Wendy,” Romer brings his signature propulsive rhythm and plaintive strings, offering a sense of poignancy to Luca’s plight. What Luca wants is the freedom, not to hit the open road on a Vespa, but to live honestly, to pursue all of his interests, to learn and grow. Everyone, even sea monsters, deserves that.

Rated PG for rude humor, language, some thematic elements and brief violence. Running time: 99 minutes. Now streaming on Disney+.

‘Peter Rabbit 2’ only true to books in its visuals, not plot

BY MICHAEL ORDOÑA
Los Angeles Times

In the books and the first film based on them, “Peter Rabbit” and friends take on farmers and sometimes other animals. The sequel, “Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway,” takes on ... itself?

Books and films are, of course, different animals. The second live-action/computer-animation hybrid movie in the series continues that evolution away from the gentle English countryside feel of Beatrix Potter’s writings in a meta way, winking all the while. Interestingly, it admits up front what it’s doing — updating beloved material for modern, commercial purposes — announcing it from the mouth of a pseudo-antagonist.

The sequel finds Peter’s humans (Rose Byrne as Bea, the modern stand-in for Potter, and Domhnall Gleeson as Thomas, formerly the critters’ foe) married and living mostly in harmony with the animals. There’s tension between Thomas and Peter (voiced by James Corden), however, as the uptight novice farmer can’t bring himself to trust the rascalion rabbit. Super-successful London publisher Nigel Basic-Jones (David Oyelowo) wants to take Bea’s charming writings about Peter and company to the next level, causing some friction between Bea and Thomas. Meanwhile, Peter falls in with a bad crowd: a gang of city animals led by bad bunny Barnabus (voiced by Lennie James of the “Walking Dead” franchise) planning an audacious heist ... of a farmers market.

“The Runaway” is very much the sequel it warns you about; it is the bigger-and-bolder follow-up that Nigel (standing in for Hollywood studio types) says the first entry needs. Nigel pitches notions — T-shirts, surfboards, Peter-as-Bad Seed — that would seem absurd to lovers of the books, whose gentility is perhaps their most memorable characteristic.

It’s largely a slapstick affair

(words also not likely to be music to fans of the books) with only a handful of behavioral gags — one with a rooster contemplating his life’s purpose is particularly memorable. There aren’t that many actual jokes in the film, for better or worse. The dialogue isn’t exactly clever, though the self-aware musings are often amusing, such as Peter noting his own leanings toward “cartoon violence.”

The humans’ moments, however, leave a bitter taste of bickering behind. The always watchable Byrne doesn’t have much to work with, but makes hay with what she can (such as when she reveals her master plan for her writings). Unfortunately, for most of the film, Gleeson’s Thomas is played on the brittle side. Rather than being an insecure bumbler with whom we sympathize, Thomas comes across as a shrill, jealous whiner. Oyelowo is supposed to be a mesmerizing, silver-tongued devil; they didn’t quite get there either.

With its human relations a bit dicey, the movie lives or dies by the cuteness of its computer-generated animals. The creatures are photoreal, and the filmmakers make the wise choice of not anthropomorphizing too much — these are bunny, pig and cat faces with subtle tweaks to increase expression (no “Cats” disaster here). In that, ironically, they are perhaps truest to the books. But with the varying textures of fur, the shadows and light play, the moisture in the eyes, the Animal Logic animation/visual effects team outdid itself.

There you have it — the meta stuff for adults; the cuteness and slapstick for the kids. The filmmakers’ bet that audiences will forgive the modernizations and forget the original is bolstered by the fact that the first “Peter Rabbit” film grossed about seven times its reported budget.

“Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway” is rated PG for some rude humor and action. Running time: 93 minutes.



SONY PICTURES/TNS

Barnabus (left), Whiskers, Peter Rabbit, Mittens and Tom Kitten have trouble in mind in “Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway.”

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



Insomniac Games photos

Ratchet and Clank: Rift Apart is a conventional, well-balanced adventure game that includes shooting, platforming and puzzle sections.

A zany visual showcase for PS5

Colorful, adventurous Ratchet and Clank: Rift Apart shows what the console is capable of

BY CHRISTOPHER BYRD
The Washington Post

Ratchet and Clank: Rift Apart is like a 20-plus-hour fireworks display. It is pure spectacle — cascades of riotous colors wrapped around polished gameplay tropes. The 17th game in the long-running series, about an adventurous tinkerer and his robot companion, is another lighthearted adventure that coasts on lame jokes and madcap action sequences.

Following a brief cinematic opening that shows Rivet, Ratchet’s female counterpart, steal some information and save a fellow rebel, the game cuts to the Festival of Heroes where Ratchet and Clank (Ratchet’s robot sidekick) are to be honored for their space-faring heroism. For Clank, the festival is an opportunity to show his appreciation toward his friend. At the climax of the ceremony he presents Ratchet with a Dimensionator, a tool capable of opening portals to different dimensions. Clank’s gift is intended to help Ratchet find the rest of his fellow Lombax, a feline-like race renowned for their technical prowess, whose whereabouts are a mystery.

The plan goes awry after their old antagonist, Dr. Nefarious, ambushes the ceremony and tries to make off with the Dimensionator, which is damaged in the scuffle, causing several rifts between dimensions to open up. Ratchet and Clank get separated during the incident and end up in a dimension where Nefarious is a supreme ruler.

Like many other works of pop culture these days, Rift Apart is enamored with parallel dimensions. Rivet, for example, lives in that dimension where Dr. Nefarious is a despot known as Emperor Nefarious. The game plays up the similar but different angle by

giving Rivet a mechanical arm and making her distrustful of robots for reasons that become clear later.

Soon after the calamity at the festival, Clank meets Rivet, who is slow to believe his story until she finds time to independently verify it. Elsewhere, while Ratchet is searching for Clank, he comes across a melancholic robot who is reluctant to enter his company. Spoiler alert: Over time, Ratchet befriends the robot, who calls herself Kit, and the two work together to try to rebuild the Dimensionator.

Ratchet and Clank: Rift Apart is a conventional, particularly well-balanced adventure game sporting shooting, platforming and puzzle sections. With the generously doled out in-game currency, there are loads of weapons players can buy for Ratchet and Rivet. Aside from your run-of-the-mill laser pistol or rocket launcher, there are guns that pop out different types of minions that will attack your enemies for you: One that turns enemies into ice cubes, another that grants you a reflective shield and many more — all of which have big upgrade trees. Switching between weapons is like cycling through different special effects, which make the game’s abundantly detailed environments that much more vibrant. A new game plus feature allows you to carry over your arsenal to a new save file and acquire previously unavailable weapons.

From time to time, Clank and Kit are called upon to repair dimensional anomalies. These puzzle sections require them to help a series of their ghostly copies or “possibilities” find a route from one end of a grid-like structure to the other. Left to their own devices, the possibilities charge headlong in one direction until an external force redirects their movements. Except for the last section of the last puzzle, I found these sections fairly easy to get through. (I could say the same for the adventures in the game.)



Rift Apart introduces a female counterpart to Ratchet named Rivet.



Rift Apart provides a plethora of weapons that Ratchet and Rivet can use.

For those looking for a blockbuster, family-friendly experience, Ratchet and Clank: Rift Apart checks the boxes. It is hyperkinetic and full of cutesy-looking characters that wear their emotions on their sleeves. If you’ve seen one of the trailers, then you basically know what you’re in for: something totally familiar but with next-gen graphics. In other words, from a marketing perspective, it’s a safe bet.

Platform: PlayStation 5
Online: insomniac.games/game/ratchet-clank-rift-apart

Microsoft mulls ‘cloud gaming’ without console

BY DINA BASS
Bloomberg

No console? No problem. Microsoft said its Xbox gaming unit is working on new hardware and deals with TV makers that will let people play games and experience the Xbox without needing to buy a gaming machine.

The idea would be to embed the Xbox experience directly into an internet-connected TV with nothing else needed except for a video game controller, Microsoft said. Meanwhile Xbox is also building streaming devices to enable cloud gaming services on any TV or monitor. Microsoft’s latest Xbox consoles, released last fall, remain in short supply amid a chip shortage that’s constraining industries from tech to autos, and Microsoft has said it expects to continue to feel the squeeze in the coming months.

“Cloud gaming is truly a breakthrough experience,” said Chief Executive Officer Satya Nadella in a video released June 10 by Microsoft. “It’s a really fast, easy way to get into gaming.” Microsoft declined to provide more details on the hardware or the planned partnerships.

As the company tries to smooth and boost revenue flow by getting more customers on to video-game subscriptions that offer access to hundreds of titles and cloud gaming, Microsoft said subscribers to these services are buying even more content besides their monthly fee. In August, Xbox Vice President Sarah Bond said subscribers to Xbox’s Game Pass service spend 20% more on extra games and downloadable content. Now that number is up to 50%, Microsoft said this month.

In an interview, Bond said the increase is probably due to improved quality of the offering and customers getting more familiar with it.

“If you look at the evolution of the catalog over time, the quality of the games, the sophistication of the games, the percentage of games that have a really well-built, in-game monetization mechanic, people’s understanding of the catalogue and the benefit that comes with Game Pass, I think all that’s been advancing and contributes,” she said.



iStock

A controller might soon be the only hardware needed for Xbox.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Bacharach: Legends, sagas on the Rhine

Until European travel becomes fully open to Americans, here's a reminder of the fun that awaits us in Europe.

Cruising down the romantic Rhine River, we dodge the treacherous reefs that spelled disaster for ancient sailors distracted by the fabled Lorelei siren. We dock at the half-timbered town of Bacharach, where I jump out. Bacharach, wearing a castle helmet and a vineyard cape, is a typical Rhine village. It lines the river and fills its tiny tributary valley with a history you can hook arms with in a noisy Weinstube.

"Bacharach" means "altar to Bacchus." The town and its wine date from Celtic and Roman times. Local vintners brag that the medieval Pope Pius II preferred Bacharach's wine and had it shipped to Rome by the cartload. Today, tourists drink it on the spot. Bacharach's annual wine fest is the first weekend of October, just before the harvest. Its purpose is to empty the barrels and make room for the new wine, a chore locals take seriously.

On a recent visit, I drop my bag at Hotel Kranenturm and meet my guide. As with every visit to my favorite town on the Rhine, I've arranged a private walk through town with Herr Jung, Bacharach's retired schoolmaster.

Herr Jung and I climb through the vineyards to a bluff overlooking a six-mile stretch of Rhine. "I came here often as a boy to count the ships," he says. "I once

saw 30 in the river in front of Bacharach."

We look out over the town's slate rooftops. Picking up a stone, he carves the letters "Rick" into a slate step and tells me, "Now you are here, carved in stone ... until the next rain."



Rick Steves

Ever a teacher, he explains, "Slate is very soft. The Rhine River found this and carved out this gorge. Soil made from slate absorbs the heat of the sun. So, our vines stay warm at night. We grow a fine wine here on the Rhine.

"Today the vineyards are going back to the wild.

Germans won't work for the small pay. The Polish come to do the work. During the Solidarity time I housed a guest worker. After 11 weeks in the fields, he drove home in a used Mercedes."

We pass under the fortified gate and walk back into town, cradled safely in half-timbered cuteness. Herr Jung pulls out a sketch of Bacharach with fortifications intact and busy with trade to show how in its heyday, from 1300 to 1600, the town was rich and politically important.

"Medieval Bacharach had 6,000 people. That was big in the 15th century," he says. "But the plagues, fires and religious wars of the 17th century ended our powerful days. Bacharach became empty. It was called 'the cuckoo town.' Other people moved in the way a cuckoo takes over an empty nest. For 200 years now, our town



DOMINIC ARIZONA BONUCELLI/Ricksteves.com

Bacharach, a German village along the Rhine, is serious about its annual wine festival.

has been only a village of a thousand."

In the mid-19th century, painters and poets like Victor Hugo were charmed by the Rhineland's romantic mix of past glory, present poverty and rich legend. They put this part of the Rhine on the Grand Tour map. And the "Romantic Rhine" was born.

A ruined 15th-century chapel hangs like a locket under the castle and over the town. In 1842, Victor Hugo stood where Herr Jung and I now stand. Looking at the

chapel, he wrote, "No doors, no roof or windows, a magnificent skeleton puts its silhouette against the sky. Above it, the ivy-covered castle ruins provide a fitting crown. This is Bacharach, land of fairy tales, covered with legends and sagas." And, I think to myself, travelers happy to have stopped in.

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

Twist and shout through Europe's most scenic drives

In times when flights are complicated and the distance between us is not exactly a bad thing, those based in Europe might be thinking a road trip is the way to go. Along many mountainous or coastal highways, the scenery and driving experience can be a vacation highlight in and of itself. Of course, zipping across borders can get complicated quickly nowadays, so inform yourself thoroughly about any COVID-19 restrictions presently in place in any country you plan to traverse, however briefly. Here are just a few stretches where the sights come fast and drivers will have to work extra hard not to become distracted.



Karen Bradbury

Austria: The Grossglockner High Alpine Road is a 30-mile mountain pass between the towns of Fusch-Ferleiten in Salzburg and Carinthia's Heiligenblut. The hugely popular scenic route cuts through the heart of the High Tauern National Park. During the summer months, the driver and passengers will delight over blooming meadows, green pastures, hills, waterfalls and the Grossglockner, the country's highest peak. A highlight of the journey is a stop at the Kaiser-Franz-Josefs-Höhe, which offers a visitors center, observation tower and dining options. The road is open to traffic from early May through late October only. Online: tinyurl.com/kd77ywnb

Crete: This rugged Greek island offers no end of fabulous driving itineraries, many leading to unspoiled beaches, particularly on the island's southern coast. For those up to a true driving challenge, the website dangerousroads.org characterizes the road between Kallikratis and Kapsodasos as "scary, bumpy, small and empty." This twisting, turning road is only seven miles long, yet manages to deliver 27 hairpin turns between sea level and Kalikratis, a small village at the foot of the White Mountains. The road is only accessible during the warm months of the year. Online: tinyurl.com/9k7r9few



iStock

Norway's Trollstigen Mountain Road offers unmatched scenery, and each of its 11 hairpin turns has a name.

Germany: For superlative Alpine views, head toward the Berchtesgadener Land in the southeastern tip of the country, where the Rossfeld Panorama Road runs across a high plateau and cuts across Austrian territory for a mile or so. The road, located at a height of 5,250 feet, offers breathtaking views of mountain peaks and the depths of the Salzach Valley more than 3,000 feet below. There are two routes to choose from. The southern variant leads from Klaushöhe to Obersalzberg and passes the starting point to a hike to the Eagle's Nest and one of Germany's oldest distilleries. The northern route begins in Berchtesgaden-Oberau and leads past Pechhäusl to the north toll station. The road's apex connects the two routes across a high plateau. Those traveling on public transportation can take bus RVO 848 from Berchtesgaden to the north toll station. The toll is 8.50 euros per car, passengers included. The route is passable throughout the year. Online: rossfeldpanoramastrasse.de/en

Italy: The 35-mile Amalfi Coast Road clings precariously to the cliffs above the Tyrrhenian Sea as it winds its way between Sorrento and Amalfi. The route passes by Positano and its jumble of pastel houses and the sophisticated resort town of Amalfi. Highlights of this tour include the drive past the resort town of Praiano with its pretty domed church and through the Vallone del Furore, a steep gorge. Should time allow, the 12-mile side trip to breathtaking Ravello is well worth the detour.

Ireland: The Wild Atlantic Way is the term for the 1,600-mile-long coastal road hugging Ireland's western and southern coastline from Donegal to West Cork. Although any stretch offers gorgeous coastline and an authentic peek at rural life, the part known as Atlantic Drive in County Mayo is considered one of the jewels in the crown. Two 12-mile loops pass by Iron Age forts, pristine beaches and castle ruins. The drive up to Minaun Heights affords sweeping, 360-degree vistas and a view to Achill Island. Online: tinyurl.com/3h8cunbf

Norway: The Trollstigen Mountain Road, opened in 1939, is regarded as a masterpiece of engineering. Norway's most famous tourist road links the towns of Åndalsnes in Rauma and the village of Valldal in Trollstigen and offers fantastic mountain scenery en route. Drivers delight at its 9% incline and 11 hairpin turns, each with its own name. The Stigfossen waterfall is an added attraction. The road opens in late May and closes in late October. Online: fjordnorway.com/top-attractions/trollstigen

Romania: The Transfagarasean is a 56-mile highway passing between the village of Bascov and the DN1 highway leading to the city of Sibiu. Along its way, it passes between the Moldoveanu and Negoiu, Romania's two highest peaks. Reaching altitudes of 6,699 feet, the road is notorious for its hairpin turns, long S-curves and sharp descents. Tunnels and viaducts add to its visual appeal. The road is usually open between late June and late October. Online: tinyurl.com/23zpr3y7

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

The city awakens

Return to a mostly normal rhythm
a breath of fresh air for Parisians

By ANGELINA RASCOUET
Bloomberg

When Parisians woke up May 19, they found a city reborn. Overnight, the curfew had been pushed back to 9 p.m. from 7 p.m. The streets surrounding Opera Garnier went from pin-drop silent to bustling, with locals eager for the first “cafés en terrasse” since October. Not too far away, in the lively Pigalle district, the excitement was such that bistro owners served their first pints before 10 a.m.

It was the first sign that Paris was gradually waking up from months of stringent restrictions.

That process has been slow, and it’s still ongoing. Some landmarks, such as the Eiffel Tower, remain shut — its reopening is slated for July 16. But the seven-day average of new daily cases has declined by 83% since the end of March, and as of June 8, 55% of France’s adult population has received a first vaccine dose. That’s allowed most shops, museums, theaters and terraces to return to a mostly normal rhythm, albeit with 50% occupancy restrictions through the end of June.

International tourists have been notably absent thus far, but those, too, are coming soon.

As of June 9, visitors from a “green” region, including the EU, Israel, Japan, Singapore and Australia, can come to France without a COVID-19 test so long as they’re fully vaccinated. Tourists from “orange” countries such as the U.S., Canada and the U.K. will still need to show a negative PCR or antigen test, even if they’ve been inoculated. If you’re coming from a red-zone country, like Brazil, India or South Africa, a minimum seven-day quarantine remains in place.

Travelers seem eager to work within the confines. “We’re seeing initial signs that American customers are coming back this month and next,” says Isabelle Bouverier, hotel director of the Left Bank’s most luxurious hotel, Le Lutetia. But she says it’s too early to know whether the tourism season will be saved. These days, Palace hotels such as hers have just 8% to 15% of their rooms full — compared to 70% in a normal summer — according to UMIH Prestige hotel industry group.

If Paris received around 10 million tourists during summer 2019, the Tourism Office expects half as many visitors this year. But that’s just one reason that Paris may look and feel a little different than you remembered.

The dining scene: The pandemic shook Paris’ dining scene to its core. For more than half a year, restaurants were fully unable to serve guests on their premises. With state aid continuing, it’s hard to gauge how many venues have shut down permanently. Many dining rooms went dark temporarily; fearing they might dilute their brand with delivery services, they opted not to do business at all until brighter days arrive.

That time is now. With balmy temperatures, luxuriously late sunsets and a curfew that’s been newly reset at 11 p.m., Parisians have taken back their dining habits with gusto. In some streets with narrow sidewalks, it’s hard to move around without bumping into a chair or a wooden deck.

For those seeking ample outdoor space as well as refined cuisine, Loulou makes a great bet. It’s located next to the Louvre and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and serves Italian and Mediterranean cuisine from a green outdoor space on the Tuileries gardens. “We’re lucky we’re in a garden that’s very much protected from the city’s tumult — a little haven of peace in a metropolis,” says Loulou co-founder Gilles Malafosse.

Also claiming excellent outdoor spaces right now are Bistrot Paul Bert, Chez l’Ami Jean and Le Comptoir du



iStock

Biking is the new walking in Paris, as private car traffic has been banned on some major roads.

Relais — all of them classic Parisian bistros and beloved fixtures of the city’s dining scene.

Culture makes a comeback: Plenty of new cultural and shopping destinations have opened just in time for tourism’s big restart. Here are a few ideas for how to spend your days, depending on whether you’re still COVID-cautious or ready to party like it’s 2019.

If you’re COVID-wary: Paris and its surroundings offer multiple green escapades, whether it’s the Jardin des Plantes and its zoo, Claude Monet’s Giverny residence or the gardens of the Château de Versailles. If riding the commuter rail defeats the purpose, there’s always something happening in the Luxembourg Gardens, which, now more than ever, serve as a nucleus of Parisian life.

If you need a gentle reentry: Francois Pinault’s long-awaited temple to contemporary art, the Bourse de Commerce, opened on May 22 just a few blocks north of the Louvre. Its current exhibition showcases works by Cindy Sherman, David Hammons and Urs Fischer — whose nine monumental wax sculptures are like supersized candles that are slowly melting under an enormous glass dome.

Pair it with a visit to the Musée Carnavalet in the Marais, which traces the city’s history from prehistoric to current times. It’s Paris’ oldest museum, but also its newest, having reopened a week after the Bourse following a four-year renovation. Among the highlights: a room of objects belonging to the literary giant Marcel Proust.

If you want to pretend the pandemic never happened: Although all restrictions will lift on June 30, the government has yet to greenlight nightclubs. And while fashion shows are returning to a physical format — menswear fashion week will start on June 22, followed by Haute Couture week on July 5; the after-parties are still very much TBD.

Instead, the summerlong carnival known as Wonderland is coming to eastern Paris, allowing up to 1,000 people to simultaneously enjoy dance and yoga lessons, a skate ramp, a basketball court and a petanque strip, as well as stand-up comedy shows and outdoor concerts.

How to get around: Biking is the new walking in Paris, thanks to a decision by the Mairie de Paris (city hall) to ban private car traffic on some major roads.

The Right Bank’s Rue de Rivoli, which connects the Place de la Concorde to the Bastille, is now essentially a cycling lane (nicknamed the “corona lane”). Tourists are able to rent bikes with the Velib app and get on one of the ubiquitous gray-and-green bicycles docked all across town.

“Paris will look a lot more different if you haven’t come since March 2020, thanks to the bike lanes and the terraces,” says Frederic Hocquard, who oversees tourism at the Mairie. “We’ve reorganized public space to



JEANNE FRANK /Bloomberg

A replica of the 16th-century sculptor Giambologna’s “Rape of the Sabine Women,” one of nine wax figures that comprise Urs Fischer’s 2011-2020 work “Untitled,” slowly melts under a glass dome at the “Ouverture” exhibition May 14 in the Boerse De Commerce in Paris.

make it more friendly and welcoming.”

Parisians are also still commuting by bus, metro, tramway and commuter trains. At rush hour, physical distancing isn’t really possible, but strict mask wearing is de rigueur; those who don’t comply face a 135 euro (\$165) fine. Most drivers of taxis and ride-hailing service vehicles offer plexiglass barriers in their cars.

The lingering COVID etiquette: When shopping, it’s still very common to see customers queuing up outside stores and waiting for a nod from a sales assistant to get in.

Masks are still mandatory, indoors and outdoors, except when eating, drinking, working out or smoking. That said, Parisians are increasingly relaxed about lowering their face coverings when walking around town, especially as temperatures rise. Those who don’t respect the 11 p.m. curfew risk a 135 euro fine.

And while the French were reknowned for their two kisses on the cheeks — aka “la bise” — that habit has all but disappeared. For now, at least, they’re opting for elbow or fist bumps.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

A Yellow Meilove rose was one of the early bloomers in the Rosarium at Park Rosenhoehe in Darmstadt, Germany. When in bloom, the roses are the highlight of the park founded by a grand duchess in the early 19th century.

Slow-blooming beauty

It’s a little early for the roses at Rosenhoehe in Darmstadt, but the park has more to see

BY MICHAEL ABRAMS
Stars and Stripes

Most other Nature had fooled us. With the roses in our yard blossoming, we thought we would take a little trip up to the Rosenhoehe in Darmstadt and check out all the roses blooming there.

But when we got to the park on the east side of this central German city, we found nary a rose in bloom.

True, irises were blooming, as were geraniums in flowerpots. The poppies were shining bright red in the meadows, but only a lone Yellow Meilove rosebush was flowering in the park’s Rosarium.

It seems that nature wasn’t as far along here in the open spaces. But still, there was plenty else to see.

The Rosenhoehe — it means rose height in German — is a landscaped park founded by Grand Duchess Wilhelmine, a member of the house of Hesse-Darmstadt, at the beginning of the 19th century. She used it as her private retreat.

The park includes an herb garden, orchards, about 1,500 trees, buildings and artworks. But for most, the main attraction is the Rosarium.

Established by a descendant of Wilhelmine’s, Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig, around 1900, this park within a park features a huge variety of roses laid out in a terraced, geometrical form.

Perennials blossom in between the roses and a pond blooms with water roses and lilies. At the Rosarium’s eastern end is the graceful Rosendom, a wooden cupola that by season’s end is covered with climbing roses.

Unfortunately, the thousands of rosebuds were not yet blooming. Many of the perennials were, and a multitude of frogs croaked among the water roses.

Two sculptures are worth noting here: “Auffliegende Taubenschwarm,” with 17 interlocking doves taking flight, and “Blaetterdach,” an artwork that resembles a forest of trees.



A frog sits on a lily pad in the pond in the Rosarium at Rosenhoehe Park in Darmstadt, Germany.

All at the Rosenhoehe is not about beauty, though. Grand Duchess Wilhelmine had what is now the Old Mausoleum built here after the death of her 5-year-old daughter. Later it was expanded and along with the New Mausoleum is the final resting place of many from the house of Hesse-Darmstadt.

While the mausoleums are closed to the public, there are several graves nearby.

The most beautiful is that of Princess Elisabeth, the daughter of Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig by his first wife. It is watched over by a graceful Art Nouveau angel made by artist Ludwig Habich.

Ernst Ludwig lies nearby, as do the five members of his family that were killed in a plane crash on their way to England, a month after his death in 1937.

East of the Rosarium are the orchard meadows with dozens of fruit trees. The meadows between the trees are rarely mowed, leaving a wild habitat for flora and fauna.

On the very eastern end is the Spanish Tower, a small castle-like structure, a folly that no one is sure who built. It is used as an art gallery today.

Next to it is an overlook, with a view of the farms and fields east of the park.

We stopped here to rest before wandering back through the western end of the park with its thick foliage. A great number of trees are planted here, including sequoias, sycamores, ginkgos and Weymouth pines.

At one time — no one is quite certain when — a circle of chestnut trees was planted. Today, it’s a nice place to picnic.

On the QT

Directions: The Rosenhoehe is on the eastern edge of Darmstadt. The Lions’ Gate (Loewentor) is just off Wolfskehlstrasse, where there is some parking. If you arrive in Darmstadt by train, take the F bus from the main station to the Spessarttring stop, then walk down Wolfskehlstrasse.

Times: Open daily, all day.

Costs: Free

Food: Nothing at the park. Bring a picnic basket. In the summer, the Biergarten is nearby on the corner of Spessarttring and Dieburgerstrasse. Closed Mondays, opens at 3 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, noon on Sundays.

Info: Online: park-rosenhoehe.info. There is an English-language button on the site.

Mike Abrams



The Auffliegende Taubenschwarm, or Soaring Flock of Doves, by the sculptor Gottfried Schlotter, is one of the artworks in Rosenhoehe Park.



An angel by the Art Nouveau artist Ludwig Habich looks onto the grave of Princess Elisabeth, the daughter of Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig, who died in 1903.

There was once a small palace nearby, the Palais, which was destroyed by Allied bombing in 1944. All that’s left is the ruins of the former main entrance.

We walked out of the park the way we came in, through the imposing Loewentor, or Lions Gate. Originally built for the nearby artists colony in 1914, it features six pillars topped by six stone lions.

After a nice morning of fresh air, we retreated to our yard to admire our blooming roses, knowing we would eventually return to the Rosenhoehe and see the Rosarium in full bloom.

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WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON/Stars and Stripes
The Chuck Norris, a signature dish at Burgerheart, topped with bacon, tomato, caramelized onions, ranch and burger sauce, looks as appetizing as it tastes.



The sweet potato fries are a perfect complement to any burger at Burgerheart.



One of the signature burgers at Burgerheart is the Surf & Turf, a German beef patty topped with black tiger prawns.

A meal to feel good about

Modern burgers pair with an ethos of sustainability at Burgerheart Regensburg

BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON
Stars and Stripes

Summer is just around the corner and for most people in Bavaria, including several thousand U.S. service members, the idea of outdoor dining is finally a reality again. Regensburg, a city of about 150,000 an hour south of the U.S. Army garrisons at Grafenwoehr and Vilseck, is a fun day trip and has several good lunch options. If your cravings tend toward burgers, fries and refreshing drinks during one of Bavaria's heat spells, I'd recommend Burgerheart for its creativity and selection. The chain started in Wuerzburg in 2013 and now has 17 locations, each with an emphasis on sustainability and social responsibility. They've eliminated plastic waste and teamed up with some leading German charities to donate meals to the less fortunate for each burger that they sell, the company's website says. That's all great, but the food still has to pass muster, and for the most part, it does. Before your meal comes, the mango lemonade is a choice you won't regret. If you'd like beer or wine afterward, they've got that too. "Burger" in Germany often means just about any kind of sandwich involving a bun, and that's the case here — there are all manner of plant-based patties on the menu, along with grilled cheese and fried chicken sandwiches at some locations. But when I'm reviewing a burger restaurant, beef is going to be a deciding factor. My first choice was the Surf & Turf



Sip on a refreshing mango lemonade while you sit at a table on the walk outside Burgerheart and wait for your meal.

burger, featuring a German beef patty topped with black tiger prawns, tomato, rocket salad and vegan tomato mayonnaise on a brioche bun. For my money, I'll always insist on vegan mayo with my beef. I wasn't a fan of the Surf & Turf's bun; it was dry and tasted like eating a bunch of cotton swabs. I'd swap it out for one of the other buns available. But I was impressed with the prawns and the patty. The second burger I indulged in was the Chuck Norris burger. Norris spent some time in the Air Force, and this burger is as American as it gets, with bacon, tomato, caramelized onions, ranch and burger

Burgerheart Regensburg

Address: Schwarze-Baeren-Strasse 10, 93047 Regensburg
Hours: Open daily from 11:30 a.m. – 10 p.m., takeout and delivery only. For updates on restrictions and indoor dining, visit Updates online at facebook.com/burgerheart.regensburg.
Prices: Between 6 and 15 euros. Most credit cards accepted.
Menu: Available in German and English on their website: shop.burgerheart.com/storedata/list-Store. They have English menus in the restaurant.
Phone: +49 0941 46627330

Immanuel Johnson

sauce on a sesame seed bun. The onions and the bacon really made the burger, and I'd recommend this to first-timers. To make whatever burger you choose that much better, get the sweet potato fries if they're your thing, along with a side or two of the aioli sauce. If you still have room, the caramelized cheesecake with orange cream has the right balance of sweetness and flavor without being overpowering; it goes nicely with a glass of sweeter wine. Burgerheart compares pretty well with other burger joints in town. Max+Muh is another good pick. It's less expensive and has a tasty Caprese with a mozzarella-olive patty and tomato relish. But if I had to recommend one to someone headed to Regensburg on a day trip, I'd choose Burgerheart and its more plentiful options.

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Balsamic-glazed steak is perfect for Father's Day

BY LINDA GASSENHEIMER
Tribune News Service

When I think of Father's Day, steak always comes to mind. For this easy dinner, the steak is cooked in a sweet and tangy balsamic glaze that coats it. I like to save preparation time by using frozen chopped onions from the freezer case and sliced mushrooms from the produce department. Watercress adds a little bite to the salad, and the croutons add a crunchy texture. Here's a hint on storing watercress. Wash and dry the bunch of watercress, wrap a damp paper towel around the bottom of the stems and place in a plastic zip bag. It will keep for a week in the vegetable drawer of the refrigerator.



LINDA GASSENHEIMER/TNS

Balsamic-glazed steak with tomato and watercress salad is perfect for Dad.

Balsamic-glazed steak

Ingredients
2 teaspoons olive oil
1/4 cup frozen chopped onion
1/2 cup sliced portobello mushrooms
1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
3/4 pound grass-fed strip steak
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Directions

Heat oil in a medium-size nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the onion and mushrooms. Saute 3 minutes. Remove to a plate and set aside. Add the balsamic vinegar and cook until it is slightly reduced, about one minute. Add the steak and saute 4 minutes. Turn over and saute 4 minutes for a one-inch steak. A meat thermometer should read 135 for medium rare and 130 for rare. Return the onion and mushrooms to the skillet for a minute. Add salt and pepper to taste. Remove steak from skillet, cut into two portions place on two dinner plates. Spoon onions and mushrooms on top. Yield 2 servings.

Tomato and watercress salad

Ingredients
2 large tomatoes, cored and cut into wedges
2 cups watercress leaves
1 cup whole wheat croutons
4 tablespoons reduced-fat oil and vinegar dressing
Directions
Core tomatoes, cut in half and cut each half into 6 wedges. Place in a bowl with the watercress. Add the dressing and toss well. Divide between two plates and sprinkle with croutons. Yield 2 servings.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY THERON GODBOLD/Stars and Stripes

The Garlic Master pizza rice bowl from Domino's Pizza Japan includes a double serving of garlic, pancetta, pork sausage, black pepper and tomato sauce served over buttered rice and offers a nice blend of flavors.

Hold the crust

Pizza rice bowls at Domino's Pizza Japan make for a tasty twist on a popular dish

BY THERON GODBOLD
Stars and Stripes

In the 1979 American comedy film "The Jerk," Steve Martin's character espouses the virtues of pizza in a cup.

Four decades later, Domino's Pizza locations across Japan are doing the same for a similar offering — pizza in a bowl — and with rice to boot.

In a nutshell, these pies, introduced late last month, include all the same cheesy and meaty toppings as their doughy counterparts, but with a bed of buttered rice replacing the crust.

A tongue-in-cheek video on the Domino's Pizza Japan website tells how the pizza bowl's creators came up with the idea after failed experiments with pizza sushi, pizza tempura and pizza ramen. "No good," a bearded man says after biting into a pie comically topped with a hard-boiled egg, whole slices of chashu pork and spring onions.

There are seven pizza bowl combinations available, ranging in price from 799 yen to 999 yen (about \$7.30 to \$9.10). Here's the full roster:

Deluxe (pepperoni, Italian sausage,



AFTER
HOURS
JAPAN

mushrooms, green peppers, onions and tomato sauce); Garlic Master (a double serving of garlic, pancetta, pork sausage, black pepper and tomato sauce); Charcoal Grilled Chiki-Teri (teriyaki chicken, teriyaki sauce, spinach, corn, mayo and tomato sauce); Goryeo Galbi (Korean-style beef ribs, cheese, green peppers and garlic); and Char-grilled Beef (char-grilled beef, cheese, spinach and mushrooms).

Two options have white sauce: Seafood Special (shrimp, octopus, mussels, two types of clams, two types of cheese, and cherry tomatoes); and Five Cheese (bocconcini, camembert, parmesan, gouda and cheddar).

I tried the Deluxe and Garlic Master. The former, which seemed to me the safest option, came out looking almost exactly like any deluxe pie you'll get in the States.

The flavor was spot-on as far as the toppings go, and I really enjoyed it. But, as



Pizza rice bowls, introduced in May by Domino's Pizza Japan, include all of the same cheesy and meaty toppings as their doughy counterparts, but with a bed of buttered rice replacing the crust. They are great to grab for a portable lunch.

I continued to eat, a nagging feeling kept telling me something was missing. I came away realizing how important that soft, buttery crust is for tying everything together on pizza. Rice was a poor substitute.

The Garlic Master ended up being my favorite, maybe because I wasn't forced to compare its flavors to a crusted counterpart. More pilaf than pizza, the bite of the

garlic and pepper blended well with the mildness of the buttery rice and melted cheese. Highly recommended.

Each bowl serves one person, according to the pizza giant, and I agree that they would be great to grab for a quick lunch or takeout for dinner. Just be open to something a little out of the ordinary.

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WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Anime fantasy brought to life

Feel like you're shopping in a Ghibli-esque village at Nukumori No Mori near Hamamatsu

BY ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

Known for its beaches and green tea farms, Japan's Shizuoka prefecture is also home to a fantasy village that's a little off the beaten path.

On the outskirts of Hamamatsu, Nukumori No Mori, which means "the warm forest," is a small, charming shopping and dining area modeled after stereotypical visions of fantasy realms.

Designed by Japanese architect Shigeyoshi Sasaki, the village's atmosphere emulates vibes from Studio Ghibli, the Legend of Zelda and European fairy tales.

While Nukumori No Mori has no affiliation to Studio Ghibli, it is easy to feel like one of the anime fantasy films' characters while roaming the winding paths past fanciful cottages and storefronts selling things like pottery, baked goods and jewelry. During my visit this spring, I felt like I might spot a mythical being like Totoro around a corner or see shops selling phoenix feathers or unicorn tears.

The magic comes from the secluded forest setting and the fact that every structure down to the public toilets fits the theme.

To add to the otherworldly environment, Nukumori No Mori is home to an owlery where guests can pet and interact with the birds.

Admission to the village is 400 yen, or about \$3.65, per person, while seniors over 70 and children younger than "junior high school aged" are free. A ticket to the owl shop costs 1,000 yen.

I also stopped for lunch at the village's centerpiece restaurant, Douceur. It has the type of whimsical tavern atmosphere where you could imagine Dungeons and

ON THE QT

Directions: To find Nukumori No Mori, enter "Nukumori Koubou" on Google Maps. Because of the village's secluded location, travel by car is recommended. From Tokyo, take the Ken-O Expressway toward Shizuoka and exit at the Hamamatsu-nishi interchange. The trip costs about \$40 each way in tolls. Google Plus code: QM84+5W Hamamatsu, Shizuoka

Times: Open daily from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. The main restaurant and some of the shops are closed Thursdays.

Costs: Entry is 400 per person.

Food: You'll find a French restaurant, small cafes and sweet shops throughout the village.

Information: Phone: +81534861723; Online: nukumori.jp

Erica Earl

Dragons characters dining.

Douceur serves French-inspired prix fixe meals ranging from 1,500 yen to 4,100 yen for lunch and 3,000 yen to 6,000 yen for dinner. I was able to walk in around 2 p.m. on a Saturday without calling ahead, but reservations are recommended for larger parties. The eatery is closed on Thursdays.

Because the journey to Nukumori No Mori is far at nearly 3½ hours from Tokyo by car, I suggest making a full "cottage-core" aesthetically themed weekend out of the trip by adding a visit to the Kakegawa Castle and tea picking in nearby Kakegawa or Makinohara to the itinerary.

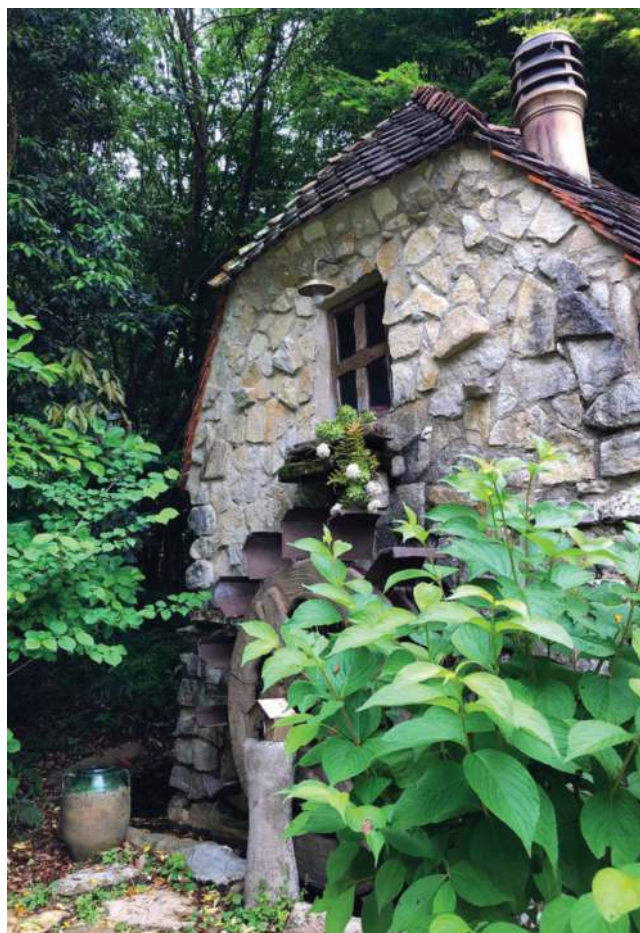
Nukumori No Mori has free parking, but spaces are limited so arrive early. The village is open daily from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. While arriving by public transportation is possible, the village's secluded, hillside location invites a drive.

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PHOTOS BY ERICA EARL/Stars and Stripes

Designed by Japanese architect Shigeyoshi Sasaki, Nukumori No Mori's atmosphere is reminiscent of Studio Ghibli, the Legend of Zelda and European fairy tales.



Far left: Nukumori No Mori, a whimsical shopping and dining village in Shizuoka prefecture, Japan, allows visitors to escape to a fantasy-like forest location.

Left: To add to its otherworldly environment, Nukumori No Mori is home to an owlery where guests are invited to pet and interact with the birds.

Above: Nukumori No Mori's whimsical theme is carried out in every part of the village, including the public toilets.

WEEKEND: FOOD



Oishii's Omakase Berries cost \$50 for a package of eight and are currently not available outside of New York City. Packages with more or fewer berries are also for sale.

Only the berry best

Oishii strawberries, billed as the berry with no equal, are compared to similar fruit from grocery store, farm

BY HANNAH SELINGER
Special to The Washington Post

Some months ago, a curious new strawberry began appearing in social media feeds. The berry, which comes in packages of three, six or eight, was a uniform pale red. Each berry in each plastic carton looked almost exactly the same — heart-shaped, symmetrical and indented on the surface where, in a store-bought strawberry, yellow seeds would appear. One more notable thing: They cost between \$5 and \$6.25 apiece.

The Omakase Berry, a Japanese variety grown by the New Jersey-based company called Oishii, bills itself as an entirely different strawberry experience. Its website even offers advice when it comes to eating them: Allow berries to sit at room temperature for 10 to 15 minutes; let the berries' aromatics "fill the room"; inhale the "bouquet"; eat.

Oishii grows its berries indoors vertically, leveraging technology that its co-founder and CEO, Hiroki Koga, 34, explored in Japan.

The first run of berries (the Omakase cultivar) has been geared toward the luxury market and is available only in the New York City area. But the company is in the process, Koga said, of expanding its market share. Some of the varieties the company is experimenting with can be grown in a much more cost-efficient way, he said, "which means that we should be able to place these into the market at a significantly affordable, reasonable price, compared to what it is today."

Koga says Oishii's low yields are guided by the same principles as fine wine production: An intentionally depleted crop,

achieved by such tactics as crop-thinning, forces the plant to push more of its nutrients and flavor into fewer berries, yielding a more concentrated flavor. The growing environment, according to Koga, is also optimized so that berries yield the maximum amount of nutrients and sweetness — finding the optimal temperature and breeze; controlling plant management, water frequency and pruning; and leveraging artificial intelligence to help predict yields.

I wanted to know how the Omakase Berry — billed by Koga as a berry with no American equal — would stand up to other domestic fruit. I arranged my own taste comparison, using three different strawberries: Oishii's Omakase Berry, available only in the New York City area; widely available Driscoll's strawberries; and first-of-the-season strawberries from Balsam Farms, in Amagansett, N.Y., down the road from where I live.

Appearance

Perhaps most striking about the Omakase Berry is its utter uniformity. Each orangy berry — I purchased a package of eight for \$50 — looks exactly the same.

The Driscoll's berries (\$3.99 for the company's standard 16-ounce plastic clamshell) were far deeper in pigment — the company aims for "deep red," said Scott Komar, 58, the company's senior vice president for global research and development — and were larger, overall, than the Omakase, though there was variability in size. They were covered in tiny yellow seeds.

My local strawberries (a quart for \$9) were smaller, deeply pigmented and visually much less consistent.



JENNIFER BEESON GREGORY/The Washington Post
Driscoll's organic strawberries cost \$3.99 for a standard 16-ounce plastic clamshell.



JENNIFER BEESON GREGORY/The Washington Post
Locally grown strawberries, like these at the Kuhn Orchards (Cashtown, Pa.) booth at the Fairlington Farmers Market in Arlington, Va., June 6, are more varied in every way.

Aroma

Oishii isn't lying when it says the aroma of its berries will fill the room. Opening the box, I was assaulted with the most strawberry-smelling fruit I'd ever encountered. Aroma, Koga said, is one of the classic characteristics of the Omakase Berry.

In this category, there was no competition. My Driscoll's berries did not have much of a scent. Driscoll's places a high premium on flavor and color, and the variety I tried may not have been bred, specifically, for aroma.

My Long Island berries smelled very much like strawberries, although their scent was not nearly as potent as the Omakases'.

"I think there's probably more variation on local strawberries, as there are with probably everything that's locally produced," said Balsam Farms co-owner Ian Calder-Piedmonte, 41. Other berries that come from "incredibly controlled" environments "where it's sunny every day" are more likely to be consistent in size, shape, flavor and even aroma. On Long Island, he said, "I think there are a lot more variables."

Taste

The Omakase Berry was, without question, the sweetest that I sampled.

The Driscoll's berries were the firmest

of the three, with a consistent mouthfeel and flavor. It seemed to me that the objective in their breeding was a distinct balance between sweet and tart.

As for my local berries, there was something compelling about the unpredictability. They also varied between sweet and tart.

And, as Calder-Piedmonte pointed out, the distinct advantage of a local strawberry is that you're eating it the day it's picked.

"They really are harvested that day or the day before," he said. Many berries are picked and then held in refrigerators (or refrigerated trucks) for days before they reach the consumer, and flavor can diminish each day.

Then came the Omakase Berry. The berry, Koga said, was "specifically selected out of 250 cultivars that exist in Japan," optimizing for "very strong aroma and high sweetness level."

"Because most of the conventional strawberries here in the U.S. have a very high acidity and very low sweetness level, we just wanted to differentiate our product," he added. This berry, with its heightened sweetness, is the type of berry that sits heavy on the tongue. Eat one, consider it, let the sugar coat the palate. That's more than enough. The point isn't to keep eating. The point, in fact, is to stop. So I did.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

‘A different urgency took hold of me’

Dublin Literary Award winner says her own travels inspired her new novel about unaccompanied migrant children

By **BERENICE BAUTISTA**
Associated Press

Valeria Luiselli is pleased to have passed the libraries’ test with her first novel written directly in English, “Lost Children Archive” (“Sound Desert”), which received the Dublin Literary Award.

The \$122,000 award, sponsored by Dublin City Council, is the top monetary prize for a single novel published in English. The finalists are nominated by libraries around the world.

“That really seems to me to be the most beautiful thing about this award,” Luiselli said in a recent interview with The Associated Press from New York, where she lives. “It

is a prize that is not linked, like all other prizes, to the speed of the market, but to the speed of reading.”

Published in 2019, “Lost Children Archive” addresses the issue of migrant children traveling unaccompanied to the United States, something that the author has witnessed first-hand as a translator and interpreter for children at the immigration court of New York.

In the novel, a family made up of a couple of sound documentary creators and their children set out on a road trip from New York to the southern border, something Luiselli did in 2014. This and other trips gave rise to her story about displaced children that is intertwined with the domination and elimination of the Apache culture.

“Crossing this country a different urgency took hold of me, the urgency to write about political violence towards the communities that this country considers outsiders,” Luiselli explained. “Thinking about the cycles that are repeated in the history of violence against certain communities, almost always violence motivated by the deep racism in this country, traveling and touring this country and seeing that, I decided to write ‘Lost Chil-



ANGEL SOTO/AP

Valeria Luiselli, shown in 2017, is the 2021 winner of the Dublin Literary Award.

dren Archive.”

The 37-year-old author has been previously praised by librarians. In 2020, her novel won the Andrew Carnegie Medal, presented by the American Library Association. Before “Lost Children Archive,” she had published books translated from Spanish into English, including the novels “Faces in the Crowd” and “The Story of My Teeth,” a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and winner of

the Los Angeles Times award for best fiction; and “Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions,” winner of the American Book Award.

She has written extensively in Spanish. Luiselli, daughter of a diplomat father and Zapatista mother, was born in Mexico City in 1983, but has since lived in South Africa, South Korea, India and several European countries. She has lived in the United States for 13 years, where

she awaits the birth of her second daughter with her partner, a Somali man raised in Canada.

Her “center of gravity,” however, remains in Mexico.

“I grew up in a house where we were constantly reminded of our Mexican roots,” she said. “I grew up with a feeling that we lived abroad, and that home was there in Mexico, that that was our home and that one day we would return.”

In “Lost Children Archive,” the mother is of Nanu indigenous origin, a Mexican ethnic group. One day she meets Manuela, a speaker of Triqui, an indigenous language of Oaxaca, and asks to record her speaking this language to document it. Manuela tells her that her daughters were on their way to meet her from Mexico but were arrested and could be deported. The mother becomes obsessed with the children who get lost while traveling with her own children and imagining what would happen if they were them.

In 2019, nearly 70,000 migrant children were in U.S. custody. Children are often held in a network of shelters, such a convention centers or military installations, a situation that Luiselli calls “absurd.”

“It’s absurd ... It has become a way to feed the great monster of the private prison industry in the United States,” said the writer. “Basically they imprison migrants and with that they earn billions of dollars. Instead of giving them due process, instead of allowing a boy or a girl to live with their relatives while they process their visa, they are imprisoned in a children’s center.”

Luiselli highlighted other contemporary writers who have addressed the issue of migration and borders, such as Samanta Schweblin, Gabriela Jauregui, Brenda Lozano, Cristina Rivera Garza, Dolores Dorantes, Natalie Diaz and Fernanda Melchor, whose “Hurricane Season” was a finalist for this year’s Dublin Literary Award.

“I can only think of women who are writing very interesting things about the border,” she said. “There is a generation of writers right now with a very powerful voice ... on topics that haunt and hurt us.”

‘Cheated’ a detailed account of latest baseball scandal

By **JEFF ROWE**
Associated Press

Just as Major League Baseball seemed to have emerged from the steroid scandal, revelations of the Houston Astros’ electronic cheating scheme in 2017 and 2018 further sullied baseball’s image.

“Cheated: The Inside Story of the Astros Scandal and the Colorful History of Sign Stealing” is a revealing, detailed and ultimately sad account of yet another ethical failure in baseball.

Author Andy Martino writes with a novelist’s touch, ratcheting up the tension as he pro-

ceeds. And while he doesn’t say so directly, Major League Baseball leadership emerges as less

than bold and forceful in dealing with the Astros, Red Sox and other baseball cheaters, in part perhaps because of a culture of “everybody’s doing it” and

baseball players’ code of dispensing their own justice through pitchers’ nailing offend-

ing hitters with a well-aimed fastball.

From baseball’s origins, teams have studied pitchers, looking for nuances in their motions that perhaps signal the pitch they are about to release. The Houston Astros took that legitimate intelligence gathering to a new level, using cameras to look at the signals the catcher was giving to the pitcher and then relaying them to their hitters. Delivery of the last link to the hitter was caveman primitive — bangs on a trash can in the dugout.

Perhaps more than any other sport, baseball is a game of intel

and strategy.

If a hitter knows what pitch is coming — fastball, curveball, change-up — he can position himself for that particular pitch. The pitcher is trying to fool the hitter; the hitter is trying to outsmart the pitcher.

As anger over revelations of the Astros, Red Sox and other teams’ cheating was gathering during spring training in 2019, COVID-19 pushed aside the baseball season. So with time to think, did baseball resolve to clean itself up?

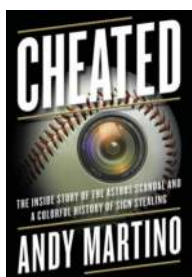
Apparently not.

On May 26, the chief umpire

for the St. Louis-Chicago game noticed a dark splotch on the hat of the Cardinals’ reliever as he took the mound; the umpire directed the pitcher to change his hat. That prompted Cardinal’s manager Mike Shildt to storm from the dugout in protest; he was promptly ejected.

Later, Shildt acknowledged that pitchers’ use of sunscreen and other illegal substances to doctor the ball to produce more movement is “baseball’s dirty little secret.”

Baseball’s next scandal presents a familiar excuse — everyone is doing it.



WEEKEND: MUSIC



A new kind of nightmare

Danny Elfman writes a quarantine solo album with ‘venom’ pouring out

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

When Danny Elfman started creating music during quarantine, what came out was a surprise even to him. “When I opened my mouth to sing, more venom than I ever knew that I had in me came pouring out,” he said recently. “I didn’t really know what I had to work with, other than a lot of frustration and anger. And I think that’s what needed to express itself.”

The result is a sonic howl — part glam rock, part orchestral, part punk, with driving, industrial songs that are liable to disintegrate or tear off into a different direction. The title for the ambitious 18-track double album is perfect: “Big Mess.” It’s his first solo collection in more than 30 years.

“I was either writing really heavy or like really hyper energized, fast and kind of crazy,” Elfman said. “I found myself writing personally in a way that I haven’t before. And that was also surprising to me.”

Grammy- and Emmy-winning Elfman, a former leader of new wave band Oingo Boingo, has for so long turned his talent to fueling film scores like “Batman,”



ANTI/AP

music — until lockdown. Then emerged rock. “I think a lot of us kind of found parts of ourselves that we weren’t expecting.”

“Big Mess” is clearly a pandemic diary, exploring

“Beetlejuice,” “Big Fish,” “Edward Scissorhands,” “Milk,” “Good Will Hunting,” “Men In Black” and “Silver Linings Playbook,” as well as the opening theme for “The Simpsons.”

He says he had found a balance for his racing mind by alternating film projects and classical

isolation and alienation. Elfman samples Donald Trump in “Choose Your Side” and tackles quarantine in “Love in the Time of COVID,” which has the lyrics “Living a life in a nutshell / Staying inside is a tough sell.”

The album had a curious birth. Elfman had been approached in 2019 by the Dark Mofo festival in Tasmania, Australia, and asked to create a crazy performance piece. He decided to combine strings and a rock band, something he calls “chamber punk.”

He created a 12-minute instrumental but ran out of time to create a full hourlong set. He returned to it during lockdown and it became “Sorry,” the album’s first cut. Then the other songs came tumbling out.

Laura Engel, the executive producer of the album, has worked with Elfman for over 40 years, said he always likes moving forward, exploring new sonic territory and never being tied to a single genre.

“I learned early on that anything I do with Danny, it’s never going to be linear,” she said. “It’s always going to surprise me and it’s always going to be just a little bit more fun, more interesting and more brilliant than most anything else you could ever do.”

Top: Danny Elfman poses in his studio on May 26 in Los Angeles to promote his 18-track double album, “Big Mess,” above.

MARK J. TERRILL/AP

SEE ELFMAN ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

Chris Thile

Laysongs (Nonesuch)

On his new solo album, Chris Thile contemplates being alone. The theme is God, as Thile — armed only with his mighty mandolin and his experience as a lapsed fundamentalist — takes on the topics of faith, doubt, community and isolation.

Thile has long pushed musical boundaries as a member of Nickel Creek and Punch Brothers, and in projects with such fellow virtuosos as Yo-Yo Ma and jazz pianist Brad Mehldau. But “Laysongs” falls into a different category.

Thile grew up in a Christian household, once wrote a song titled “Doubting Thomas” and now describes himself as a weak agnostic. On the album cover he stands with his back to a church sanctuary, looking over his shoulder.

And so he sings about death, the devil, music as medicine and the human struggle with belief. His lyrics defy gravity — Thile rhymes “Dionysus” with “purple kisses” — and as he considers what’s sacred, he occasionally turns profane.

The mostly original music isn’t gospel, spiritual or contemporary Christian 7-11 songs (the kind that repeat the same seven words 11 times), but rather a wild blend of jazz, folk and classical elements, from Hazel Dickens to Bartók. Tempos and meters shift, and then there’s no beat at all. As always, Thile’s playing is an unpredictable delight, ranging from furious strumming to pointillistic fusillades, and at times his eight-string rings like a church bell.

It’s the sound of someone wrestling with riddles that even his enormous talents can’t solve.

— Steven Wine
Associated Press



Tom Jones

Surrounded by Time (S-Curve)

Though still probably best known for lounge-y ’60s hits such as “It’s Not Unusual” and “What’s New Pussycat?,” Tom Jones has always been able to go toe-to-toe with his more acclaimed peers in rock and R&B. Now, at 80, the Welsh eminence continues a remarkable late run with “Surrounded by Time.”

With its Moog-dominated atmospherics, the album is less overtly rootsy than Jones’ three previous, excellent collaborations with producer Ethan Johns. But like all first-rate interpreters, the singer again invests himself in a disparate collection of songs and uses them to fashion his own story. And, with the exception of a too-busy “The Windmills of Your Mind,” the accompaniment here enhances rather than detracts.

The former sex symbol has some winking fun with Cat Stevens’ “Pop Star,” and he audaciously tackles stoner-savant Todd Snider’s “Talking Reality Television Blues.” That song and Jones’ take on Tony Joe White’s “Ol’ Mother Earth” a lament for the ravaged environment, both speak to pressing matters.

While the singer admits frailties on Michael Kiwanuka’s “I Won’t Lie” and Bobby Cole’s “I’m Growing Old,” the invigorating gospel of “Samson and Delilah” and the brash declarations of Malvina Reynolds’ “No Hole in My Head” reveal his booming voice to be as robust as ever.

Jones finishes with a nine-minutes-plus version of Terry Callier’s “Lazarus Man.” As “Surrounded by Time” makes clear, Jones’ story is less one of coming back from the dead and more that of an artist continuing to find ways to maximize his gifts and remain stirringly relevant.

— Nick Cristiano
The Philadelphia Inquirer



St. Vincent

Daddy’s Home (Loma Vista)

Every St. Vincent album comes with a fresh concept and persona. On 2014’s “St. Vincent,” singer and shape-shifter Annie Clark was a “near future cult leader.”

On 2017’s “Masseduction,” she was “like a dominatrix at a mental institution,” peeling off wicked guitar solos while done up in latex and high heels.

With “Daddy’s Home,” Clark time-travels back to 1970s New York. She’s calling the new aesthetic “Gena Rowlands in a Cassavetes film,” evoked in a “color palette of the world of ‘Taxi Driver.’”

Musically, that means touches of early ’70s Stevie Wonder funk and swirling Pink Floyd prog, hard-hitting horns on the opening “Pay Your Way In Pain,” and gauzy interludes on several tracks that turn into drifting mood pieces. She continues to work with New Jersey producer-to-the-stars Jack Antonoff — also a go-to guy for Taylor Swift, Lorde and Lana Del Rey, among others.

“Daddy’s Home” also has an autobiographical bent, on the title track, which is about the return of Clark’s father from prison after serving 10 years for his role in a stock-manipulation scheme.

After that news broke in the tabloid press, Clark decided to take control of the narrative in the endearingly tender song. “You still got it in your government green suit, and I look down and out in my fine Italian shoes,” she sings. “We’re tight as a Bible with the pages stuck like glue.”

At its best, the new album is richly rewarding. “Down and Out and Downtown” gurgles with an inviting warmth.

But “Daddy’s Home” often fails to connect: The mean streets Clark is inhabiting have been well trodden, and the soulful milieu she’s chosen isn’t a natural fit for an artist who has previously specialized in operating at a cool distance.

— Dan DeLuca
The Philadelphia Inquirer



Elfman: Songs on ‘Big Mess’ include one from musician’s Oingo Boingo days

FROM PAGE 28

Elfman wrote much of the album in a house outside Los Angeles, where he, his wife, Bridget Fonda, 16-year-old son, Oliver, and their dog fled to ride out the pandemic.

The house didn’t have a recording studio, only a little writing room. Elfman had a computer, one hand-held microphone, a single electric guitar and a pair of faulty headphones — not the best equipment for putting together a double album. But he pressed on.

He decided not to fix any of his vocals when it came time to go to the studio and invited musicians — including drummer Josh Freese, bassist Stu Brooks and guitarists Nili Brosh and Robin Finck — to record their parts, one at a time, per COVID-19 protocols. “I just kept most of my original guitars and vocals from the demos,” said Elfman.

While 17 of the 18 songs are originals, fans of Oingo Boingo will notice Elfman has reworked one of the band’s old songs, “Insects” from 1982. Not surprisingly, the new one is darker and more political. He had

intended it to be part of a set at Coachella and was thinking who could be the insects of today? His answer: U.S. senators.

“These are my bloodsuckers of today. These are like the human insects,” he said. So the new lyrics go: “Old white men, they’re back in power again / They’re sucking all the power and pride.”

“It was scary because I was like, ‘This is just me. I don’t have any protection here.’ When you write third person, you’re protected — you’re protecting yourself.”

from the head of another. The songwriter said it captures how he felt with various parts of him “living together, but aren’t good room-mates.”

Elfman, ever the productive songwriter, has already moved on, finishing a cello concerto and working on back-to-back film scores.

He’s also returning to the stage with a live concert of Tim Burton’s “The Nightmare Before Christmas” on Oct. 29 at the Banc of California Stadium.

He hopes to be able to play “Big Mess” live one day in some form and show off what he learned during quarantine. One thing was to ditch his regular writing

for a character and just write from the heart.

“It was scary because I was like, ‘This is just me. I don’t have any protection here,’” he said. “When you write third person, you’re protected — you’re protecting yourself. And I felt very unprotected for much of this record. Then I had to kind of make a decision at a certain point to not care.”

He laughs darkly that the dystopian America he found himself writing about in the 1980s is looking more recognizable in the 2020s. “‘1984’ seemed a lot closer to me in 2020 than it did in 1984.”

For the cover artwork, 3D scans of Elfman were transformed into a disturbing digital sculpture by Sarah Sitkin. It’s an unsettling trio of Elfmen, with one painfully emerging

on the decision to write from his point of view rather than that of a character

Alan Jackson

Where Have You Gone (ARC/Capitol)

The “you” in “Where Have You Gone” is country music itself. In the title song and leadoff cut of his first album in six years, Alan Jackson laments what he sees as the disappearance from the radio of the country verities: fiddle and steel, “words from the heart ... sounds from the soul.” And he vows: “I won’t let them fade.”

That’s no surprise coming from the superstar who for three decades has deftly melded country traditionalism and commercial accessibility. And it’s not the first time he has taken a shot at a Nashville establishment he views as betraying the music’s roots. Remember his duet with George Strait, “Murder on Music Row.”

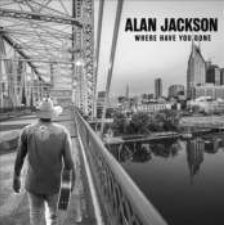
Throughout the 21 songs on “Where Have You Gone,” most written by Jackson, he lives up to his pledge, and with impressively consistent results considering it is essentially a double album.

He chronicles the joys and pains of everyday life with plainspoken grace against generous helpings of fiddle and steel. Among the most touching numbers, two of them, “You’ll Always Be My Baby” and “I Do,” are described as having been “written for daughters’ weddings,” while “Where the Heart Has Always Been” was “written for Mama’s funeral.”

This being country, there are also plenty of references to booze: “Wishful Drinkin’,” “Way Down in My Whiskey,” “I Was Tequila,” “Beer:10.”

In “Back,” amid a litany of staples of country life (“Bourbon on the table, Jesus on the wall”), Jackson sounds uncharacteristically boastful: “Back, I’m bringing country back / Back where it belongs, back on track.” We’ll see, but he himself has never lost the faith, nor the fire to keep his aim true.

— Nick Cristiano
The Philadelphia Inquirer



WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Casting the next ‘Jeopardy!’ host

Show’s executive producer says the process won’t rely on ‘gut instinct’ as in past

BY LYNN ELBER
Associated Press

“Jeopardy!” needed a host, and Lucille Ball had an enthusiastic suggestion for creator Merv Griffin: The smooth-voiced, debonair emcee of the “High Rollers” game show.

That was 1984. Decades later, filling the void left by the late Alex Trebek involves sophisticated research, a parade of guest hosts doing their best to impress viewers and the studio that’s expected to make the call before the new season begins taping later this summer.

Think of Sony Pictures Television as clutching the rose, and Mayim Bialik, Anderson Cooper, Katie Couric and “Jeopardy!” champs Ken Jennings and Buzzy Cohen among the suitors so far, with more to come including Robin Roberts, Dr. Sanjay Gupta and LeVar Burton.

Sony has “the most robust team of people I have ever seen looking at this and analyzing it in a very cerebral way,” said executive producer Mike Richards. “It’s a real change from the way casting has traditionally been done on television.”

“It’s usually been a gut instinct of the head executive: ‘How about that person?’” Richards said.

That was producer-entertainer Griffin’s approach when he brought a syndicated version of “Jeopardy!” to TV, five years after the quiz show’s last network iteration wrapped in 1979 on NBC.

A word from Ball, of “I Love Lucy” fame, and Trebek’s skill and experience sealed his hire.

Audience and critical regard for the Canadian-born Trebek grew over the



JEOPARDY PRODUCTIONS, INC./AP

Guest host Mayim Bialik appears on the set of “Jeopardy!” Bialik is among the subs who have filled in for the late Alex Trebek while the show’s studio looks for his replacement.

years, which makes finding a worthy replacement both a gesture of respect for the late host and the means to protect a corporate asset. While ratings have shifted under the guest hosts, “Jeopardy!” remains among the top-ranked syndicated programs in viewership.

Trebek helped build the show’s “display of excellence with his own excellence. And it’s tremendously difficult to find somebody to replace him, not only because of the status that he had in the American imagination,” said Deepak Sarma, a Case Western Reserve Uni-

versity professor and Netflix cultural consultant. “Anyone who is going to take his position will be judged in the end against this model of perfection.”

Game show hosts of Trebek’s era were usually radio and TV broadcasting veterans steeped in the genre, and almost invariably white men. Among the “Jeopardy!” subs are men and women of color and prospects from a variety of fields, including NFL quarterback Aaron Rodgers.

The approach makes sense to Louis Virtel, a longtime fan whose vantage point is informed by writing for a game show

(“Match Game”) and competing on “Jeopardy!” in 2015.

“It’s great to see all these different fill-ins. I’m open to suggestions, and I think most people are,” said Virtel, a “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” writer and co-host of the “Keep It” podcast. “‘Jeopardy!’ is a one-of-a-kind show, and the replacement should be tailored to the game.”

What makes for a good “Jeopardy!” host?

“I think establishing a sense of comfort (so) the audience just eases into the game,” Virtel said. “Also a sense of stakes, that a real tough game is being played. It’s called ‘Jeopardy!’ for a reason. The host is there to make sure we’re all on our toes.”

But taking over for an authority figure like Trebek is harder on women and others not typically seen in such roles, said Sarma.

“The sorts of expectations placed on a person of color in a leadership position are usually higher than those placed on a white person in position of power,” he said, and any error or “slight movement against the norm is jumped upon ... as some tremendous mistake.”

There could also be backlash from those resentful that Trebek isn’t replaced like-for-like, which Sarma said isn’t far-fetched in this period of social discord.

“Sony is in a pickle,” he said.

Series producer Richards, the second temporary host after Trebek’s pancreatic cancer death last November at age 80, holds an optimistic view despite the prospect of online trolls and whatever their gripes about the newbie may be.

“My hope is that whoever is chosen will be given a chance to prove why they were chosen, without too much static,” he said. “Ultimately, we are trying to put out the best product for our fans. That tends to narrow your focus to a pretty nice North Star, as opposed to, ‘What’s the internet going to say?’”

‘Jeopardy!’ announcer not ready to leave show after 37-year tenure

BY LYNN ELBER
Associated Press

Johnny Gilbert, who decided to stick with “Jeopardy!” after Alex Trebek’s death, faced the wrenching question once again as production for next season neared.

This time it would mean adjusting to the quiz show’s yet-to-be-named host, as opposed to the succession of celebrities who have been filling in since Trebek succumbed to pancreatic cancer last November.

“It’s not easy for me because I worked with Alex for 37 years, and I never thought of anybody replacing him,” he said. “Nobody can do it like he did it, you know.”

No one does it like Gilbert either, who at age 92 has decided he’s not ready to call it quits on the show business career he

began pursuing as a teenager.

Last year, when he was reluctant to continue after losing his admired and longtime colleague, others with the show urged Gilbert to consider his role as a comforting touchstone for viewers who also were in mourning for Trebek.

“If you just listen to the way Johnny articulates each name, each word, he has a voice and even more importantly, delivery, unlike anyone else,” said Mike Richards, the show’s executive producer. Without Trebek, “the fact we can still rely on Johnny is obviously very important to us as well.”

“This is ‘Jeopardy!’” is Gilbert’s richly booming introduction that opens each episode and belies his years. In turn, he’s acknowledged with thanks from

the host and, occasionally, has been shown at an otherwise off-camera stage perch.

During the pandemic, he’s been taping his contributions remotely from the Los Angeles-area home he shares with his wife, Sheree Gilbert. They’ve been together for several more years than his “Jeopardy!” stint, the sort of marital and career longevity that’s rare in Hollywood.

Gilbert expressed reservations about whether the Sony Pictures Television series would bring him back when taping resumes in late July or early August for season 38. He’s served as warm-up host for the studio audience as well as the show’s announcer.

“I’m not as young as I used to be,” Gilbert said. But there is a tradition of longevity in the field,



JEOPARDY PRODUCTIONS, INC./AP

Show announcer Johnny Gilbert appears on the set of “Jeopardy!” He worked with host Alex Trebek for 37 years before Trebek’s death.

including the late Don Pardo of “Saturday Night Live.” He was the show’s voice for 38 seasons until his 2014 retirement at age 96.

“Jeopardy!” producer Richards, who’d stepped in as the show’s second fill-in host, quickly brushed aside the notion that

Gilbert’s tenure was in anyone’s hands but his own.

“Johnny will be the announcer of ‘Jeopardy!’ as long as he would like to be the announcer of ‘Jeopardy!’” Richards said. “I have told him that, and it’s just how he is, humble. He’s never taken the job for granted.”

WEEKEND: TELEVISION



Netflix

Left to right: Wanda Sykes as Lucretia, Journey Christine as Maya, Kim Fields as Regina and Page Kennedy as Duck star in the Netflix sitcom "The Upshaws."

Finding the 'last piece of the puzzle'

Fields brings a wealth of sitcom experience to 'The Upshaws,' her 1st role as a series regular in decades

By RODNEY HO

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

When Atlanta actress Kim Fields first joined the new Netflix sitcom "The Upshaws," she assumed it would focus primarily on the comedic interplay between Mike Epps and Wanda Sykes and she'd just float in and out as the supportive wife.

But as she read through the episodes, Fields realized Regina Upshaw was the emotional ballast for the entire show.

Fields, 52, hasn't been a regular on a U.S. sitcom in 23 years, since Fox's "Living Single," but returns with a vengeance. "The Upshaws" spent several days at No. 1 on Netflix's trending list and received plaudits from critics and fans alike.

"We're overjoyed with the feedback from a media standpoint, from viewership, from colleagues and peers," Fields said in a recent interview with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Fields plays Regina, a harried mom of three married to likably flawed Bennie Upshaw (Epps). He parries with Regina's older sister, the ever acerbic Lucretia Turner (Sykes), who helped finance Bennie's car repair shop. Bennie and Lucretia barely tolerate each other for the sake of Regina, while flinging ever more outrageous insults at each other.

The biggest wrinkle for Regina? Bennie has a child from another woman, Tasha, a

complicating factor in Regina's life that still causes major friction.

Regina Y. Hicks, an executive producer on the show, said Epps and Sykes were already aboard when they hunted for the right actress to play Regina, a woman Lucretia and Bennie "loved so fiercely, they could put up with each other."

When they brought Fields in for a chemistry test with Sykes and Epps, Hicks breathed a sigh of relief.

"The main note that really struck me was the show's irreverence. I loved the edginess and the tone even in the name of being a sitcom. It still has a strong nod to classic TV shows. And yet it's very relevant and resonates now with viewers."

Kim Fields
"The Upshaws"

"We found the last piece of the puzzle," she said. "She has more multi-cam [sitcom] experience than the other two."

Indeed, Fields has been in the public eye for more than four decades, arriving on the scene as Tootie, the adorable girl on roller skates in season one of "The Facts of Life" in 1979, who grew into a confident young woman over 201 episodes. In 1993, she joined Fox's "Living Single," a pre-

cursor to NBC's "Friends," where she played a superficial boutique buyer seeking a rich mate.

"The Upshaws" is structured like those sitcoms of yore but allows the adults to fling curse words broadcast networks would excise even to this day.

"The main note that really struck me was the show's irreverence," Fields said. "I loved the edginess and the tone even in the name of being a sitcom. It still has a

strong nod to classic TV shows. And yet it's very relevant and resonates now with viewers."

Regina is a health care administrator seeking to move up the ranks, but she keeps getting overlooked. She also needs a master's degree to improve her odds at getting a higher-paying job; but can she raise her kids, hold a full-time job and afford to go to school at the same time? It's

the type of dilemma millions of middle-aged women face and to Fields, "a kind of deep dive into a character I've never played before. She has a lot of elements that are not Kim. So I'm able to really act."

Fields has spent most of the past two decades focused more heavily on work behind the camera, directing and producing.

Tyler Perry, for one, gave her a chance to direct more than 60 episodes of his "House of Payne" and "Meet the Browns" for TBS in the 2000s.

Fields said working behind the scenes allows her "to really have a voice in the entire vision of a project, which you usually don't have when you're just an actor."

But acting is still part of her DNA. In 2017, she played a chipper Floridian next-door neighbor to a British family who had just moved to America in six episodes of the British comedy "Living the Dream." She recently appeared in single episodes of Netflix's "Cobra Kai" and HBO's "Insecure." She starred in a Lifetime Christmas movie in 2019, "You Light Up My Christmas," featuring some fellow actors from "The Facts of Life."

Fields has also dabbled in reality TV. She competed on ABC's "Dancing with the Stars" and spent a season on Bravo's "The Real Housewives of Atlanta."

"I like to surprise people and challenge myself," she said. "You don't see me coming!"

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

'It was like a pressure cooker'

Experts explain what burnout is and why it has become more prevalent during the pandemic

By ANGELA HAUPT

Special to The Washington Post

Summer Sides is a go, go, go type of person. But by late last year, all the fitness instructor wanted to do was pass mindless hours in her home, undisturbed — venturing no farther than her backyard. She was suffering, she said, from massive burnout.

Sides, 37, who lives in Greensboro, N.C., had opened a yoga studio March 1, only to shut it down 18 days later and pivot to the Wild West of online programming. At the same time, she was taking care of her dad, who had suffered a stroke the previous year.

She started getting migraines, and brain fog clouded her days. By winter, she was utterly depleted.

"I didn't mentally have the capacity to figure out another piece of spaghetti to throw at the wall," she said. "It was like a pressure cooker: One thing after another kept getting added in, and all of a sudden there wasn't enough space and the lid was going to blow."

As weary Americans emerge from a harrowing global pandemic — and, in many cases, a period of heightened personal and professional demands — experts say burnout is a common affliction.

"People are overwhelmed and exhausted and still feeling like they ought to be doing more," said Amelia Nagoski, who wrote the 2019 book "Burnout" with her sister, Emily Nagoski. "I think it's almost everybody everywhere."

"Burnout" has become a popular catchall phrase in the "language of the people," said Christina Maslach, a professor emerita of psychology and a researcher at the Center for Healthy Workplaces at the University of California, Berkeley.

"Some people use it to mean they're bored — like, 'Oh, I'm getting so burned out on Pilates.' Or, 'I haven't had a creative idea all week.' So it's like a lightbulb has burned out, as opposed to a fire that has burned out," she said. It makes sense that people have latched on to the term: "It's very catchy — the visual imagery of flames and ashes and all that kind of stuff."

But experts, who have been using the term for more than 50 years, rely on a more precise definition. In 1981, Maslach, who wrote some of the earliest literature on professional burnout, developed a diagnostic tool that is still used widely in research studies.

According to the Maslach Burnout Inventory, burnout occurs when three factors are present at the same time: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. (In 2019, the World Health

Tips for avoiding burnout

Seek support from friends and family. "Self-care cannot be the cure for burnout," author Amelia Nagoski said. "Burnout is all of us caring for each other." Aim to be surrounded by a "protective bubble of love," she said: people who will remind you of your value and whom you can lean on as you work through your burnout.

Take breaks. Build these into your daily schedule. Spend your breaks resting or doing something you really enjoy, like reading a favorite book or going for a swim. Take vacations or, when needed, even longer time off from work.

Prioritize exercise for well-being. We often exercise because of social pressures, such as achieving the so-called perfect body. In that context, working out might not help relieve stress, Nagoski said. But judgment-free exercise can. Think "dancing to Beyonce in the kitchen or punching something in the basement," she said.

Build transitions into your day. At the end of every workday, mindfulness expert Leah Weiss knows she could easily log a few more hours — but she's clear about her values, such as spending time with her kids. She recommends implementing a routine that can help you transition from your work persona into home mode. "Maybe that's walking the dog or putting on a soundtrack as you close your work for the day or taking some mindful breaths," she said. "It's something that reminds you why the rest of your life matters, and not to sacrifice that."

Get creative. Painting, writing poetry, sewing and any other form of creative expression are terrific ways to push through the chronic stress that defines burnout, Nagoski said. Working with your hands helps you "burn up all your feelings," she said, by allowing you to channel your emotions into an object or process.

Angela Haupt

Organization recognized burnout as an occupational syndrome — not a medical condition — based on those same three components.)

Emotional exhaustion is characterized by feeling depleted and like you don't have any energy, Maslach said. Depersonalization, which is also referred to as cynicism, is "a hostile, take-this-job-and-shove-it attitude," and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment means, well, exactly that. People experiencing professional burnout will be overwhelmed by their own alleged inadequacy and notice that their productivity plummets.

There's a lot of overlap between burnout and stress, said Inger Burnett-Zeigler, a clinical psychologist and associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Northwestern University. But burnout is the result of "expo-

sure to prolonged stress," she emphasized — not just one or two taxing days at work.

The pandemic has been a perfect breeding ground for the syndrome to fester: "When we think about burnout in the context of COVID, I personally can relate," Burnett-Zeigler said. "And I know a lot of folks I work with have been under extreme stress, working longer hours, balancing work with child care responsibilities, having back-to-back meetings and adjusting to working in a different environment."

Burnout can manifest physically as well as emotionally. When we're burned out, our amygdala — the brain's danger detection system — might "hijack" our frontal lobes, said Leah Weiss, a mindfulness expert who teaches a course called "Leading with Mindfulness and Compassion" at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business. This can trigger a fight-or-flight response, which makes it difficult to think clearly, draw conclusions and recall memories.

Burnout is also linked to hormonal imbalance, hair loss, changes in menstruation, stomach problems and sleep disruption, Weiss said. People suffering from it commonly report headaches, muscle aches and listlessness.

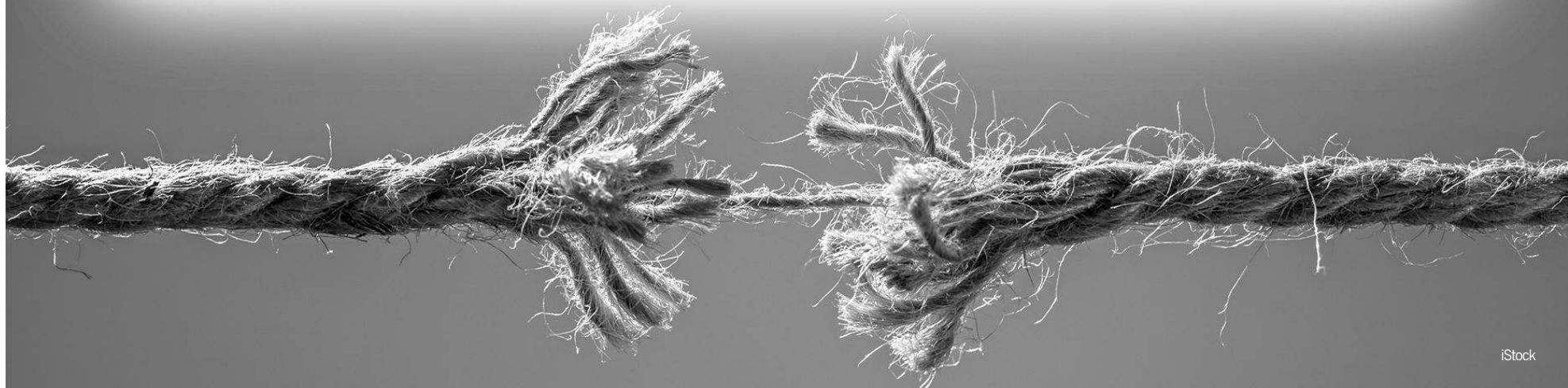
In 2017, a research article in the journal PLOS One examined the physical, psychological and occupational consequences of job burnout. The authors reviewed 61 studies and found associations between burnout and serious health problems such as increased alcohol consumption, coronary heart disease, depression, sedentary behavior, obesity and musculoskeletal pain.

As Maslach sums it up, burnout "exerts wear and tear on human beings physically, emotionally and cognitively." That's why it's so important to address it.

Experts emphasize, however, that there is only so much that employees can do on their own to prevent burnout.

Steps that employers can take, the experts said, include allowing staff to set their own schedules, checking in with them to monitor well-being, designating meeting-free days and proactively addressing microaggressions or rude workplace behavior. Employers also shouldn't normalize, or praise, working around-the-clock and should actively encourage staff to use vacation and sick days.

Maslach said that, in many ways, the timing is ideal to make meaningful workplace changes. Companies had to learn how to operate differently during the pandemic, and that "presents a golden opportunity to really think outside the box and say, 'OK, we have to change. Something has to be different,'" she said.



WEEKEND: FAMILY



iStock

Friends and family can visit newborns, but experts suggest they already be vaccinated and wear masks.

Keeping newborns safe

Experts explain what parents should do when others want to visit

By ALEXANDRA FROST

Special to The Washington Post

Bringing home a newborn is already one of the scariest and most vulnerable times for parents. Bringing one home during a pandemic adds other questions, worries and risks. Opinions abound — from pediatricians, well-meaning relatives and strangers online — and many new parents feel unsure how to protect their families while enjoying a bit of post-quarantine freedom. We asked experts what parents of newborns — and all those friends and relatives who can’t wait to visit — need to know.

Should newborns have any visitors?

Yes, newborns can have visitors, but with precautions. Parents should consider limiting the number of visitors the baby is in close contact with, according to Jorge Perez, a neonatologist and founder of Kidz Medical Services in Coral Gables, Fla.

“There is no magical number about how many visitors, and this is relevant with any newborn, before or during a pandemic and post-COVID,” Perez says. “Since babies are unprotected when they are separated from the placenta, I recommend that households with an infant limit their exposure for two to three months. The flu, RSV or other viruses are dangerous to an infant who can’t fight them off.”

What precautions should visitors take?

Similar to pre-pandemic times, visitors should be washing their hands before touching a newborn, Perez says. He recommends visitors mask up regardless of vaccination status, and potentially meet the baby outside.

Because COVID-19 is spread primarily through respiratory droplets, parents should ask visitors to avoid kissing the baby, which Perez says is just best practice for not transmitting other diseases as well.

Should unvaccinated visitors be allowed?

This can be a touchy subject, according to Tamika Cross, an obstetrician and gynecologist in Pearland, Texas, who says it’s important to give her patients autonomy over their choices. But if guests “are vaccinated it’s more reassuring than if they aren’t,” Cross says, adding that early data show that vaccines can help prevent spread of COVID-19 from people without

symptoms, but that the subject is still being studied.

And don’t forget to ask when they were vaccinated, she says, because it takes two weeks after vaccination (after the second dose for Pfizer or Moderna) for the body to build protection: “When did they get vaccinated? Yesterday, or last month? That’s important to consider. You don’t just get a vaccine and say, ‘Hey I’m coming over to visit.’ It’s still important to wear a mask, and I advise moms to have visitors wear a mask regardless,” she says.

How at risk are newborns?

It’s been well documented throughout the pandemic that children are both less likely to contract COVID-19 than adults and also less likely to get severely ill from the virus.

“The great majority of [newborns] who acquire it are minimally ill, which is great,” Chad Sanborn, a pediatric infectious-disease physician at Palm Beach Children’s Hospital at St. Mary’s Medical Center in Palm Beach County, Fla., says. “It’s a higher percentage than older children who get it, but the majority are not very sick. Of the children who develop COVID and require hospitalization, 50% will be within 1 year of age.” This trend generally holds true for other infections, such as urinary tract infections and bad pneumonia, he says.

To put the risk of a newborn contracting the virus into perspective, experts look to a recent study of mostly breastfeeding, COVID-positive mothers and their newborns. Sanborn says the risk of the babies contracting COVID-19 in this study was only 2%.

Are there risks to not having visitors?

After a year of major mental health declines across the country, the risk of not having the support of a “village” may outweigh the COVID-19 risks for some families. Many studies have tied a lack of social support to increased risk of postpartum depression.

Talitha Phillips, a labor and postpartum doula in Los Angeles, asks the families she works with to ask themselves, “Would it give you more peace having people around?”

“Especially with postpartum depression and anxiety on the rise, a lot of it stems from lack of support and lack of community and isolation. For some people, I’ll say, ‘Would it help reduce fear and anxiety if you had somebody here?’”

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Mayo the key to a healthier husband

“Where’s the mayo?” our daughter asked recently while standing in front of the open refrigerator doors. I misdirected her to a bin of condiments, and when she couldn’t find it there, I thought we ran out and suggested mustard for her sandwich instead.

“Mayo’s there. Bottom shelf, left of the cheese,” my husband Francis said without looking up from his newspaper. And there it was, exactly where he said it would be. If he had been asked to locate a green pepper, almond milk, yogurt, carrots or Brussels sprouts, we’d still be waiting.

When we were dating in the early ’90s, and Francis showed me his apartment, I recall being amazed at how few food items his kitchen contained. Of course, there was a large jar of mayonnaise in the refrigerator, but it was only accompanied by a bag of onions, a gallon of milk, a bottle of ketchup, a block of Swiss cheese and a package of bologna. Above the fridge sat a massive barrel of pretzels and a loaf of white bread. In the cabinet, nothing but garlic powder, coffee, a dusty can of soup and a box of Shake ’n Bake apparently left there by his old girlfriend.

On the counter sat a lonely toaster, and most unfortunately, his cat Buffoon’s litter box. Francis could tell by the horrified look on my face that the cat box on the counter was a potential deal breaker. On my next visit, it had been banished to the bathroom.

Like many men, Francis has never been a fan of vegetables, especially the nutritious ones. With the exception of corn (heaped in a buttered pile), potatoes (deep fried and accompanied by ketchup, practically a vegetable itself) and onions (which men like in crunchy raw rings), Francis avoids vegetables unless they are cleverly disguised.

Enter mayonnaise. Husbands may turn their noses up at carrots or cabbage, but when shredded and swimming in heaps of mayonnaise sweetened with a little sugar, these vegetables become a delicacy — creamy cole slaw.

After 27 years of marriage, I know how to get Francis to eat his veggies. While I haven’t tried spooning them into his mouth while making airplane noises like I did with our three kids, I’ve learned that steamed broccoli will make its way into Francis’ stomach when slathered with melted cheddar cheese. Green beans become edible when swimming in cream of mushroom soup and topped with crunchy fried onions. Mushrooms must be stuffed with sausage. Peppers must be filled with rice and ground beef. Squash, zucchini, eggplant and spinach are palatable when layered in lasagna with ricotta and mozzarella cheese.

Although Francis’ favorite salad — macaroni — contains no discernible vegetables, I serve him green salads on a regular basis. Keep in mind, however, that these cannot be tossed lightly in balsamic vinaigrette, unless I want Francis to nibble reluctantly at lettuce leaves and push radish slices around his plate. But with unfettered access to a bottle of ranch dressing, he’s game. If I had a nickel for every time I’ve watched him squeeze unmeasured blobs of ranch dressing onto a perfectly healthy salad with an obnoxious “ppllppp, pllpppp, ppplllp” sound ...

“Hey Dad,” our daughters have joked, “how about a little salad with that ranch?”

Before I am accused of being an overly judgmental spouse, let me admit that I have my share of unhealthy eating habits: a raging sweet tooth and a penchant for crunchy snacks. As many times as I’ve grimaced at Francis while he gobbles mayonnaise, he’s witnessed me methodically down an entire bag of Fun-Sized Almond Joys in one sitting, or turn a can of Pringles over my open mouth to tap in the final few crumbs.

Nobody’s perfect, I guess. And when all else fails, there’s always multivitamins.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com, and in Lisa’s book, *The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com*. Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

BY ROBYN WEINTRAUB / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

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FACES

Always ahead of their time

‘The Sparks Brothers’ is about a real band you’ve probably never heard of, but should know about

BY DAN DeLUCA

The Philadelphia Inquirer

There’s a scene in “The Sparks Brothers,” director Edgar Wright’s movie about the hugely influential art-pop duo Ron and Russell Mael, in which the siblings are asked why they had never before agreed to do a documentary film about their fabulously unpredictable 50-year-plus career.

“We didn’t want to do the standard documentary full of talking heads,” says Ron Mael, the brother with the mustache who’s the band’s principal songwriter. His singing sibling Russell concurs: “It would become too dry.”

To emphasize that he has no intention of letting that happen to “The Sparks Brothers,” now in select theaters, Wright resorts in the movie to a slapstick gag: He tosses water in the Maels’ faces.

“That was the physical representation of the fear of it being too dry,” says Ron Mael with a laugh, speaking from Los Angeles via Zoom. “We were worried that a documentary would be so much more boring than what we do as a band. But when we met Edgar, we realized we didn’t have to worry about that.”

On screen, Wright is identified

as a Sparks “fanboy.” And the Maels — who grew up in Southern California and studied film and theater at UCLA before recording with producer Todd Rundgren in 1971 — were fans of Wright films like 2004’s “Shaun of the Dead” and the music-mad 2017 action movie “Baby Driver.”

“He has a passion for music,” Ron Mael says. “And the other important thing was that he didn’t want to fixate on the past, but wanted to treat all the periods of our career in a balanced way.”

Over 25 albums, “our band has had a really different kind of career trajectory,” says Russell Mael, “and Edgar wanted to tell that whole story.”

Wright first saw Sparks live in London in 2015 when the band was touring as FFS with Scottish band Franz Ferdinand.

“I was dumbfounded by how amazing it was,” Wright says. “I started saying aloud to people that somebody should do a Sparks movie. ... then a friend said: ‘You should do the movie!’”

Wright tells the Sparks story in lively fashion, with traditional and stop-motion animation, vintage film clips and plenty of performance footage, including stops on Dick Clark’s “American Band-



JASON KEMPIN/TNS

Musicians Ron Mael (left) and Russell Mael of Sparks perform at Coachella in 2013 in Indio, Calif. The brothers have been recording together since the 1960s, a span that has produced 25 albums.

stand” and British TV show “Top of the Pops.”

He brings in a range of pop culture types for interviews, including Beck, Bjork, Sonic Youth’s Thurston Moore, “Weird Al” Yankovic, Flea, Go-Go’s guitarist Jane Wiedlin, comedian Patton Oswalt, author Neil Gaiman and “Gilmore Girls” creator Amy Sherman-Paladino.

It’s tempting to describe the ups and down of the Sparks saga as a “Rollercoaster,” the name of a forgotten 1977 disaster movie in which the band was the featured musical act. Those who’ve never heard of the often-satiric and under-the-radar duo might wonder: Am I watching a mockumentary? Is Sparks a real band?

Indeed, they’re real. The Maels have been either ahead of their time — or slightly out of step with it — going all the way back to 1967,

when they recorded a song called “Computer Girl,” years before bands like Kraftwerk made electronic music fashionable.

The big break came when Christine Ann Frka of The GTO’s brought the brothers to Rundgren’s attention.

“It wasn’t like anything else that I was normally getting,” Rundgren says in “The Sparks Brothers.” Talent scouting “is sometimes like butterfly hunting: You’re looking for some species that nobody has ever discovered before.”

“We’re so indebted to Todd,” Ron Mael says. “Before we did our first album, we sent our demos out to 30 record people, and the only one who responded was Todd. (The Maels have reunited with Rundgren for “Your Fandango,” the new single from his forthcoming album “Space Force.”)

Sparks is often called a cult act. “I don’t want to sound like L. Ron Hubbard,” Wright says, “but maybe my job is to recruit more cult members. ... If I can just turn one person who had never listened to Sparks into a Sparks fan, then I’ve done my job.”

Late in the film, Rundgren pays them the ultimate compliment: “There’s some comfort in the fact that something that weird can survive without becoming less weird.”

Sparks have been on a late-career run with their 2017 “Hippopotamus,” last year’s “A Steady, Drip, Drip, Drip” and another movie project that has come to fruition: They wrote the script and music for “Annette,” French director Leos Carax’s movie starring Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard, which opens the Cannes Film Festival on July 6.

Anti-vaxxers protest Foo Fighters concert at Southern California club

From wire services

Dozens of anti-vaccine demonstrators descended on Agoura Hills, Calif., Tuesday night to protest the Foo Fighters’ first full-capacity performance since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The rock band performed at the intimate Canyon Club concert venue to a sold-out crowd of about 600 vaccinated fans.

Unvaccinated community members were not permitted to attend the show, sparking outrage among those who have opted not to become immunized against the deadly illness that has taken the lives of at least 600,000 people in the United States.

“Separating humans is not OK,” one protester told KCAL News while wielding a sign condemning the vaccination policy as “modern segregation.” “Those of us who have healthy immune systems should be able to enjoy these freedoms just like anybody else.”

Tickets to the event were distributed over the weekend to fans who were willing to

wait in line and prove their vaccination status. According to CBS, the Canyon Club can accommodate up to 600 people.

Utah ‘Real Housewives’ star seeks fraud case dismissal

“Real Housewives of Salt Lake City” star Jen Shah and her defense attorneys have asked a federal judge in New York this week to dismiss charges against her in a fraud case because officers allegedly coerced her into waiving her Miranda rights when she was arrested in Utah.

Shah, 47, and her assistant have been accused in a telemarketing scheme that federal prosecutors say took advantage of hundreds of “vulnerable, often elderly, working-class people,” The Salt Lake Tribune reported. They both pleaded not guilty to multiple charges.

Shah faces multiple counts of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and conspiracy to commit money laundering.

Shah’s attorneys are arguing that she was coerced, and pointed out that Bastos knew her history with the man, who prosecutors said was also involved in the scheme with Shah and her assistant.

“Although Ms. Shah waived her Miranda rights, she did not do so voluntarily, but rather as a direct result of law enforcement deception and trickery calculated to overpower her will,” her attorneys said.

Soundgarden to regain control of social media accounts

After a year and a half of contentious litigation, Soundgarden and Vicky Cornell, the wife of late singer Chris Cornell, have reached a temporary agreement on at least one piece of the ongoing lawsuit.

Under the agreement, which both sides announced Wednesday morning, Soundgarden and its management team will take control of Soundgarden’s social media channels and website, which Vicky Cornell

had been operating. Through the courts, the band had previously sought an injunction against Cornell and accused her of locking the band out of the accounts after Chris Cornell’s death and the ensuing legal battle between the two sides.

According to the band’s representatives, the deal includes Soundgarden’s Facebook, Twitter and Instagram handles and took effect Tuesday.

Other news

■ The Tony-winning stage musical “The Book of Mormon” will return to Broadway on Nov. 5, producer Anne Garefino announced Wednesday. Broadway shows have been shuttered since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “The Book of Mormon,” which opened on Broadway in 2011, won nine Tony Awards honors that year, including best musical. The comedy centers on a pair of Latter-day Saints missionaries who are assigned to spread the word of their religion in Uganda.

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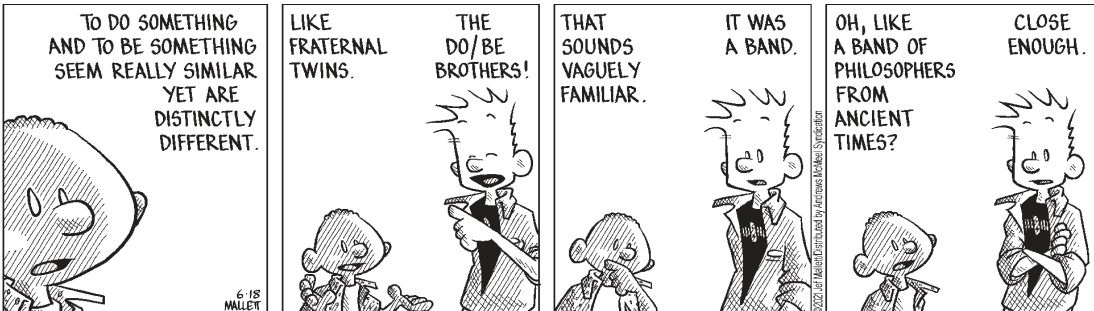
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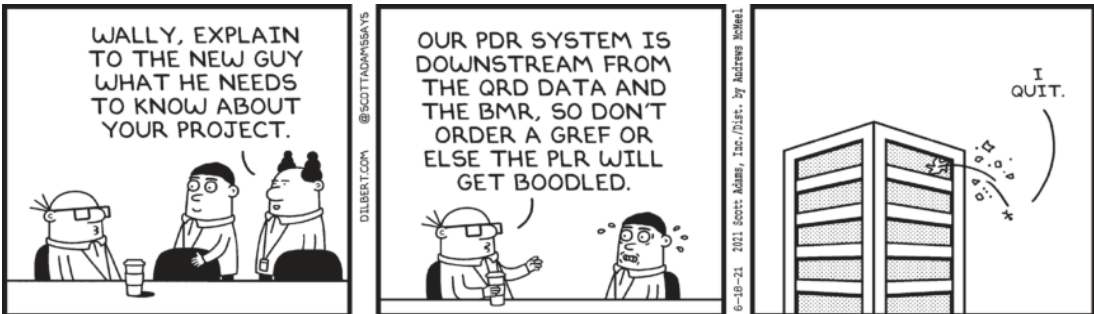
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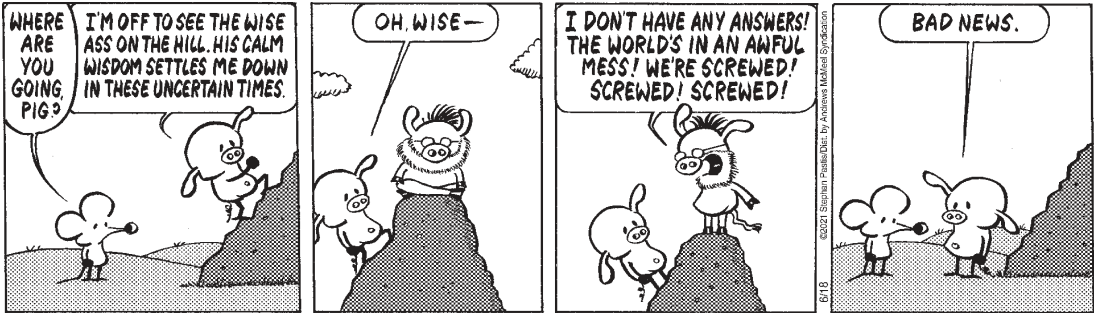
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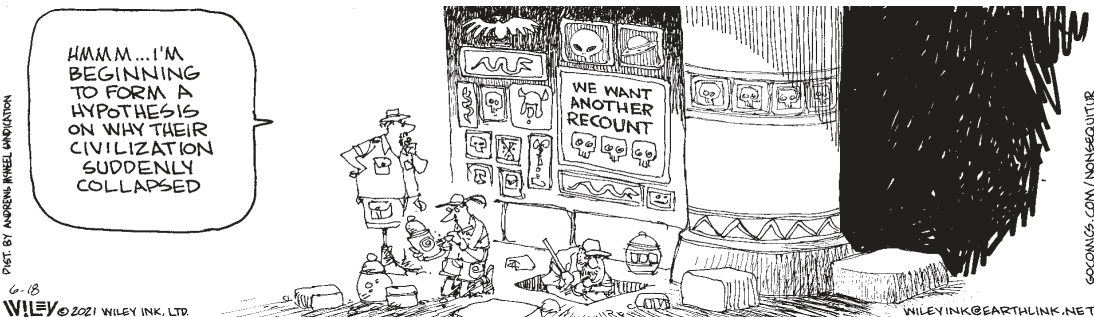
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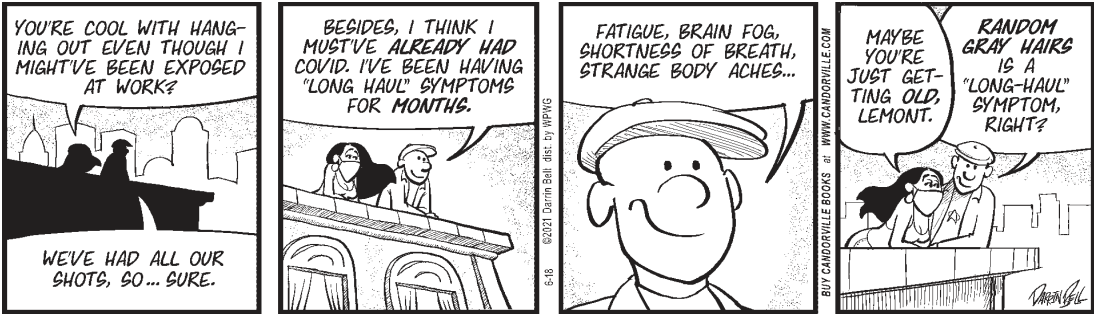
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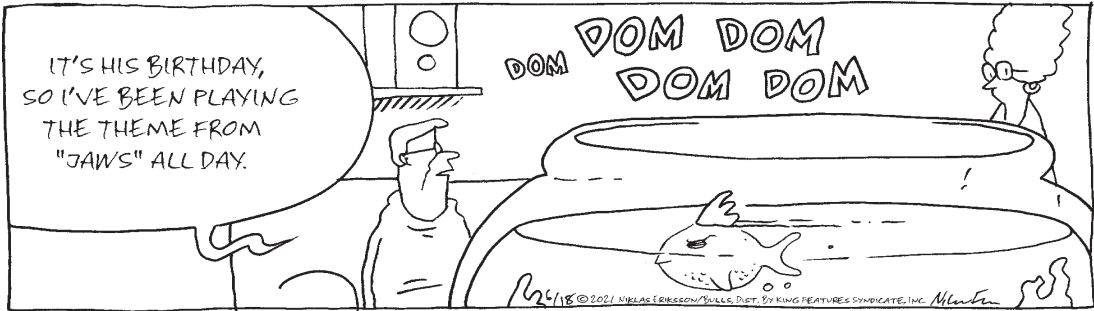
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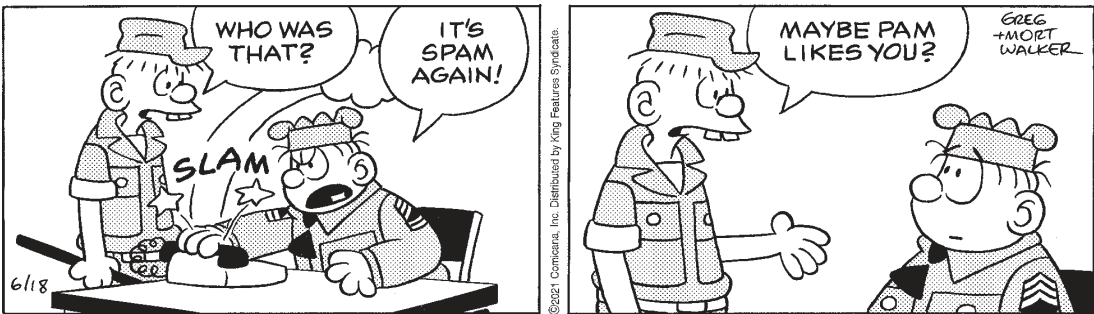
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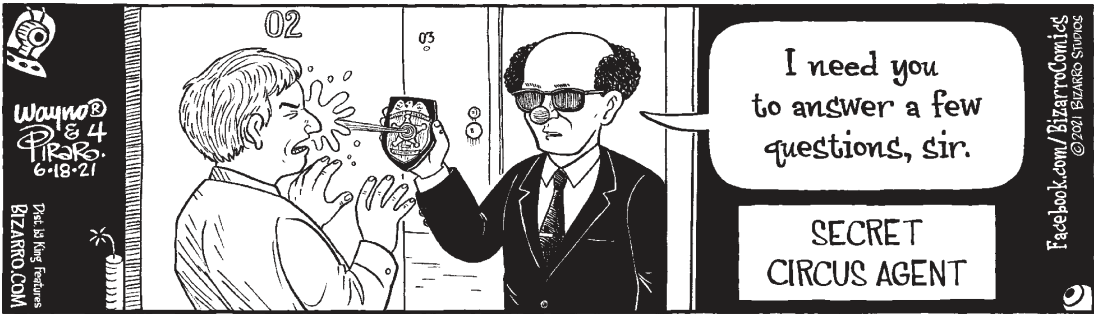
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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ACROSS

- 1 Hill dweller
- 4 Dictionary entry
- 8 Slightly
- 12 Russian space station
- 13 Miles away
- 14 "Beloved" author Morrison
- 15 Right away
- 17 Bikini parts
- 18 Nov. honorees
- 19 Urban of country music
- 20 Alex Haley book
- 22 Nile bird
- 24 Shakespeare title starter
- 25 Worked up
- 29 Cistern
- 30 Subjects, usually
- 31 Profit

51 NBC weekend
show

22 Arctic native
23 French seat
25 Charged bits
26 Human-like
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28 Sicilian volcano
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42 AOL, for one
43 Hide-hair insert
44 Architect Maya
45 Snaky fish

DOWN

- 1 Parisian pal
- 2 Diarist Anaïs
- 3 John of “Grease”
- 4 Is patient
- 5 Does in
- 6 U.K. military fliers
- 7 Parched
- 8 Optimally
- 9 Actress Spelling
- 10 Gray’s subj.
- 11 Platter
- 16 “West Side
Story” gang
- 19 Smooch
- 20 Sitarist Shankar
- 21 “The Good
Earth” heroine

Answer to Previous Puzzle

H	E	M	S		S	R	I		S	T	O	A
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T	O	M	C	O	L	L	I	N	S			
		M	I	L	E		R	O	O	K	I	E
P	E	A	T		W	O	K		R	A	N	G
E	R	T	E		I	R	E		T	R	I	O
T	E	E	S		S	A	D		S	A	T	S

6-18

CRYPTOQUIP

J P V Q K P R R N H M T B H X X

SHMMTZG SLPUVBZU RTMN EZHM

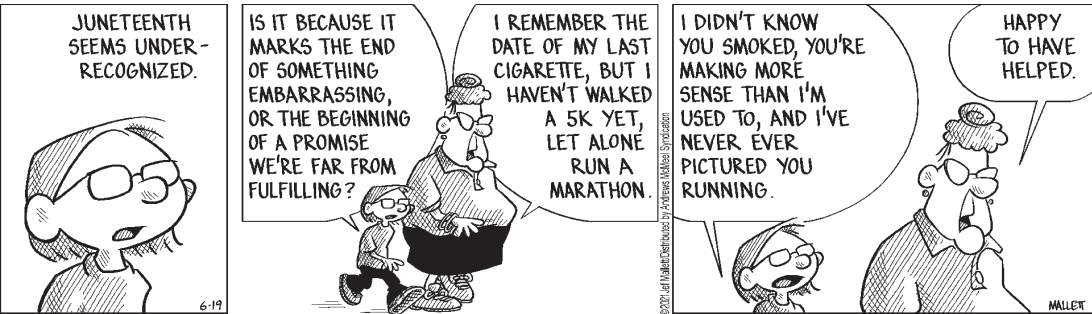
GVIGMTMVMZG XTQZ GPJ PL

XZKMTXG? GNHE-IVLFZLG.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN A FLOWER
SPREADS ITS SEEDS AND BRINGS ABOUT
FRESH GROWTH, WOULD THAT BE PLANT
PARENTHOOD?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals L

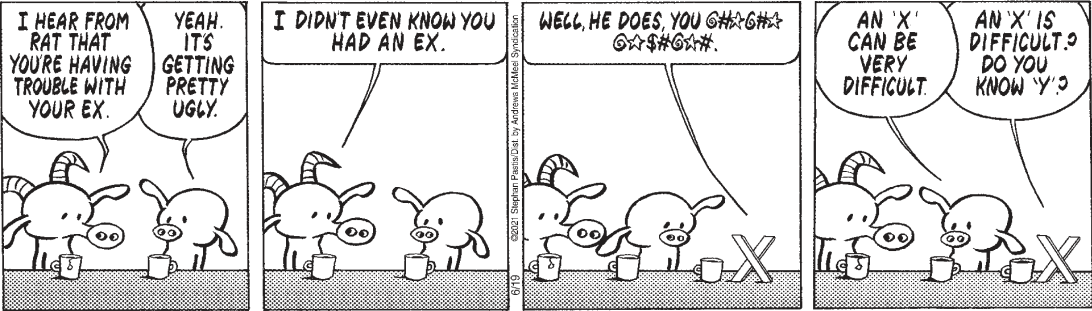
Frazz



Dilbert



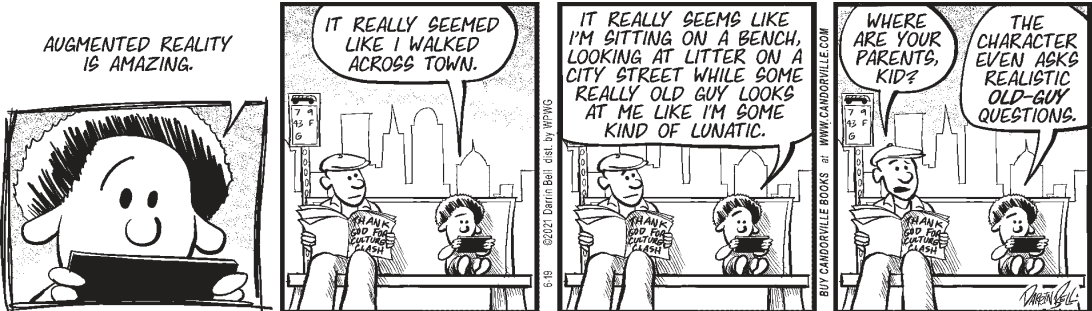
Pearls Before Swine



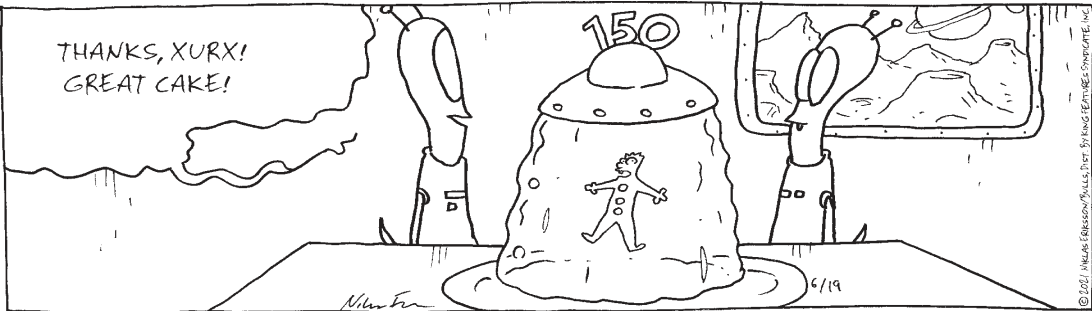
Non Sequitur



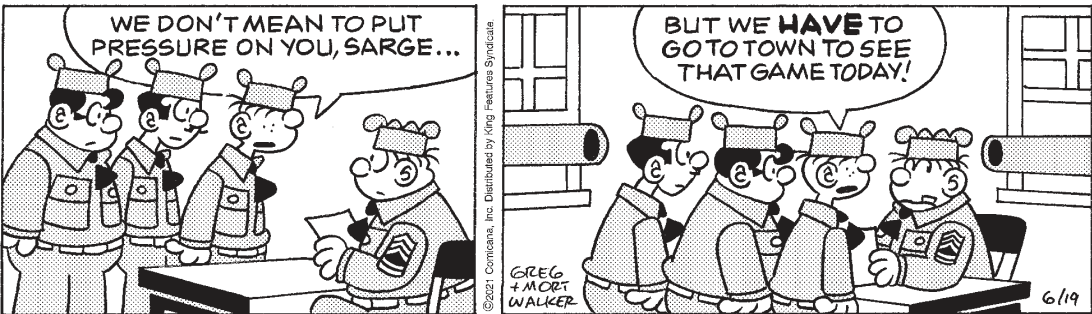
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
15					16					17		
18					19				20			
			21	22			23	24				
25	26	27					28			29	30	31
32							33					
34					35		36					
			37				38					
39	40	41			42	43			44	45	46	47
48					49				50			
51					52				53			
54					55				56			

- ACROSS
- 51 Roth svgs. plan
- 52 — noire
- 53 Bar
- 54 Home shopping channel
- 55 Wan
- 56 Use scissors
- 20 Grass cutters
- 22 Leaked slowly
- 24 Li'l Abner's surname
- 25 Corn spike
- 26 "No seats"
- 27 — -Magnon
- 29 Opposite of vert.
- 30 Lawyers' gp.
- 31 Recipe abbr.
- 35 Obligations
- 36 "Goldfinger" singer Shirley
- 39 Actor La Salle
- 40 TV's Griffin
- 41 Apple computer
- 43 Calc. or trig
- 45 Arkin of "Argo"
- 46 42, in old Rome
- 47 Puppy's cry
- 49 CEO's deg.
- DOWN
- 1 Bogus
- 2 TV journalist Lisa
- 3 Notion
- 4 Hockshop figure
- 5 Familiar adage
- 6 Intend
- 7 Bigwigs
- 8 Egos' counterparts
- 9 Gag
- 10 Vicinity
- 11 — Mawr

Answer to Previous Puzzle

A	N	T		W	O	R	D		A	T	A	D
M	I	R		A	F	A	R		T	O	N	I
I	N	A	J	I	F	F	Y		B	R	A	S
			V	E	T	S			K	E	I	T
R	O	O	T	S		I	B	I	S			
A	L	L	S		I	N	A	S	T	A	T	E
V	A	T		N	O	U	N	S		N	E	T
I	N	A	P	A	N	I	C		E	D	E	N
			A	S	S	T			P	A	R	M
G	I	L	D	A				T	A	C	O	
W	O	O	D		I	N	A	W	H	I	L	E
E	T	A	L		S	O	R	E		D	I	E
N	A	M	E		P	R	O	D		S	N	L

6-19 CRYPTOQUIP

VOZGZ VAXQR WAX PDW TP

NOZ ZJDFN FZSNZG AB D

SZNVAGI AB DGNZGTZP? RZZC

TS NOZ OZDGN AB CQZJXP.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: YOU KNOW WHAT I CALL PATTIES PRODUCED WITH MEAT SUBSTITUTES LIKE SOY OR LENTILS? SHAM-BURGERS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: J equals X



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Ernie Gates

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OPINION

Biden to Putin: Stability, sure. But democracy matters.

By E.J. Dionne Jr.
 Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON
 A scuffle between reporters and Russian security officials before President Joe Biden met with Vladimir Putin in Geneva on Wednesday was a minor event. Yet it spoke to the gulf between the thuggish habits of the Russian leader's regime and Biden's hopes for a world friendlier to democratic liberties.
 "Russian security yelled at journalists to get out and began pushing journalists," Anita Kumar, Politico's White House correspondent, wrote in her pool report. "Journalists and White House officials screamed back that the Russian security should stop touching us. Your pooler was pushed multiple times, nearly to the ground."
 It was an apt prequel to Putin's post-meeting news conference where he defended his jailing of a Russian dissident while refusing to use Alexei Navalny's name.
 In a classic display of his devotion to what-aboutism, Putin defended his regime's repression by attacking the U.S. record on human rights and brazenly insisting that he is only trying to avoid the sort of disorder the United States experienced in the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.
 Putin then spun a remarkable syllogism, arguing that since the United States regarded Russia as "an enemy," U.S.-supported human rights advocates in Russia were enemies of his state. He also flatly denied that the Russian government has played any role in cyberattacks on the United States, which strains credulity.
 Watching Putin play defense underscored the good news from Geneva: The Biden-Putin encounter could hardly have been more dif-

ferent from the bizarre get-togethers between the Russian leader and former President Donald Trump. Biden denied the Russian leader a shared podium, and there was, thankfully, no fawning over Putin, no taking Putin's word over the findings of U.S. intelligence agencies.
 On the contrary, when Biden met later with reporters, he derided any link between the jailing of Navalny and the Jan. 6 events as "ridiculous," and he used his opening remarks to reaffirm the democracy-strengthening purpose of his European journey.
 Biden said he told Putin that "no president of the United States could keep faith with the American people if they did not speak out to defend our democratic values, to stand up for the universal and fundamental freedoms that all men and women have in our view. That's just part of the DNA of our country."
 That Biden got prickly at the end of his news conference when CNN's Kaitlan Collins pressed him on why he had confidence that Putin would change his behavior — the president insisted he had expressed no such confidence — pointed to the core challenge of the high-profile meeting. (Just before he boarded his plane home, Biden apologized for being "a wise guy" in his response.)
 Biden stressed that the Putin meeting was a quest to understand differences and lay the groundwork for future discussions, not an effort to reach substantive agreements. This pointed to the problem posed by the encounter from the start. Beyond enhancing Putin's profile, it threatened to overshadow the rest of Biden's European journey, a broadly successful effort to refurbish the United States' alliances with its longtime friends in Europe.
 Throughout the trip, Biden relished reciting the anthem "America is back," referring to the sort of leadership the United States had

Delta variant should spark redoubled vaccination efforts

By Ashish K. Jha
 Special to The Washington Post

As we head into summer, the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States looks increasingly different depending on where you are. But for those not fully vaccinated, it is becoming increasingly dangerous almost everywhere.
 So far, 17 states and the District of Columbia have reached President Joe Biden's goal of vaccinating 70% of adults with at least one shot, which is building in those states an effective firewall against large outbreaks in the fall and winter. Vermont recently reported that 80% of its population has at least one shot, making it the first state in the union to possibly achieve herd immunity.
 Meanwhile, vaccination rates have flatlined in other states. In Tennessee, Wyoming, Mississippi, Idaho and a variety of states in between, the number of Americans stepping up to protect themselves and their communities has dwindled to a trickle. And in some states, a particularly alarming trend is emerging: People are skipping their second vaccine dose.
 With U.S. case numbers relatively low overall, masks disappearing and society reopening, it is not hard to imagine an end to the pandemic. But we must be clear: The pandemic is not over in the United States, nor can it end so long as COVID-19 rages across the globe. The strongest evidence of the global pandemic's influence on Americans' lives recently arrived on our shores: the delta variant of the virus. It is a profoundly concerning threat.
 The delta variant was first identified in In-

dia. It is a major reason India experienced an unprecedented spike in cases and deaths during its recent second wave. Why is the delta variant so much worse? Any variant must be judged on three dimensions: Is it more contagious? Is it more deadly? And does it escape either natural or vaccine-induced immunity?
 The delta variant may be one of the first triple threats across all those factors. The emerging and relatively strong evidence is that delta is far more contagious than any other variant recorded to date. It appears to be more deadly to those infected, and it appears to cause more infections among people with immunity than many other variants.
 So what's the impact of a COVID-19 variant that is much more contagious, possibly more deadly and that may be causing more breakthrough infections in those who are only partly protected? Well, again, let's look at the evidence: In India, the delta variant flattened the health care system and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths. In Britain, it has quickly become the dominant strain and has caused the number of daily infections to triple in just the past month. And it has arrived in the U.S. As of Wednesday, the delta variant accounts for 10% of U.S. infections and is doubling its share of new cases every two weeks. At this rate, delta will become our dominant strain in the next month to six weeks.
 For partly vaccinated Americans — those who have had just one shot of Pfizer or Moderna — the delta variant's tendency to escape an immune response is a problem. While a single shot of these vaccines previously offered 80%

been accustomed to offering since the end of World War II. The adoption of Biden's "Build Back Better" slogan as the headline phrase of the communique issued by the Group of Seven leaders underscored Europe's embrace of his approach.
 And if Biden was seeking to reinforce an older vision of the United States' global role, the substance of what Europe's leaders agreed on marked a sharp break with both the austerity policies of the past decade and the Reagan/Thatcher consensus on smaller government of the 1980s.
 On its front page Saturday, the London-based Financial Times referred to "the west's apparent conversion to social democracy." The key documents and public statements by European leaders focused on reducing inequalities, enhancing systems of social protection, acting against climate change and supporting government-led efforts to restore growth.
 Because of the inevitable media attention it fostered, the Putin meeting had more downside than upside. It threatened to dilute Biden's democracy message with a heavy dose of realpolitik, exaggerate Putin's world role and undercut the harmonization of Western governments around more progressive economic policies.
 In the end, Biden dodged the bullet. He started and ended his trip by underscoring how different he is from Trump. He gave little ground to Putin beyond the respect he showed by meeting with him. And he preached his democratic gospel to the last.
 Biden's final thought before he headed home: "As long as I'm president, we're going to stick to the notion that we're open, accountable and transparent." Perhaps that was a parting shot at Vladimir Putin.
 to 85% protection (and two shots offered 95%), a single shot of Pfizer is only 33% effective against the delta variant. Thankfully, fully vaccinated individuals get almost 90% protection. We don't know how much immunity gained from prior infections alone will protect people, but it may not be enough.
 So what does all this mean? We are entering a time when being unvaccinated is going to become exceedingly more dangerous. Society is open. Distancing is a thing of the past, and mask-wearing is declining. All of the public health protections that kept unvaccinated people safe are disappearing, but the delta variant is gaining momentum. In some states, such as Mississippi and Wyoming, vaccination rates mean that COVID cases are likely to spike this summer and fall. Even in highly vaccinated places, the delta variant may trigger the occasional outbreak. The difference will be in hospitalizations and deaths. For the vaccinated, breakthrough infections will be inconvenient, annoying or maybe even miserable. But rarely deadly. The unvaccinated will be far more vulnerable.
 Building a firewall across the nation is how we can end this nightmare of the pandemic in the U.S. If we can get all of America to vaccinate like Vermont, we can achieve the level of population immunity that will keep the delta variant at bay. This means our fate is in our hands. We have to redouble efforts to get shots into arms here in the U.S. and across the globe.

Ashish K. Jha is a physician, health policy researcher and the dean of the Brown University School of Public Health.

SCOREBOARD/TENNIS

PRO SOCCER

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
New England	5	1	2	17	11	7
Philadelphia	4	2	2	14	9	5
Orlando City	3	1	3	12	8	4
NYCFC	3	2	2	11	13	7
CF Montréal	3	3	2	11	10	9
Columbus	3	2	2	11	7	6
Nashville	2	0	5	11	9	6
Atlanta	2	1	4	10	9	7
New York	3	4	0	9	10	10
D.C. United	3	5	0	9	8	11
Inter Miami CF	2	4	2	8	8	13
Toronto FC	1	4	2	5	8	12
Chicago	1	5	1	4	4	11
Cincinnati	1	4	1	4	6	15

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Seattle	5	0	3	18	14	3
Sporting KC	5	2	2	17	16	11
LA Galaxy	5	2	0	15	11	11
Colorado	4	2	1	13	12	8
Houston	3	3	2	11	11	12
San Jose	3	5	0	9	11	12
Portland	3	4	0	9	9	11
Real Salt Lake	2	1	3	9	9	7
LAFC	2	3	2	8	8	9
Austin FC	2	4	2	8	6	9
Vancouver	2	4	1	7	6	9
Minnesota	2	4	1	7	6	11
FC Dallas	1	3	3	6	8	11

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Friday's games
Nashville at New York
Vancouver at Real Salt Lake

Saturday's games
Chicago at Columbus
Colorado at Cincinnati
Orlando City at Toronto FC
New England at New York City FC
Miami at D.C. United
Minnesota at FC Dallas
San Jose at Austin FC
Seattle at LA Galaxy
Sporting Kansas City at Portland
Houston at Los Angeles FC

Sunday's game
Philadelphia at Atlanta

Tuesday, June 22
San Jose at Orlando City

Wednesday, June 23
New York at New England
Columbus at Philadelphia
Atlanta at New York City FC
Austin FC at Minnesota
Cincinnati at Chicago
D.C. United at CF Montréal
Colorado at Sporting Kansas City
Portland at Houston
Toronto FC at Nashville
Real Salt Lake at Seattle
FC Dallas at Los Angeles FC
LA Galaxy at Vancouver

Friday, June 25
Orlando City at Miami

Saturday, June 26
Los Angeles FC at Sporting Kansas City
Cincinnati at Toronto FC
Houston at Real Salt Lake
Philadelphia at Chicago
CF Montréal at Nashville
Vancouver at Seattle
LA Galaxy at San Jose
Minnesota at Portland

NWSL

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Orlando	3	0	2	11	7	4
Portland	3	2	0	9	11	4
Washington	2	1	2	8	5	5
Gotham FC	2	1	1	7	2	1
Houston	2	2	1	7	6	6
Chicago	2	2	1	7	4	7
North Carolina	1	2	1	4	6	3
Reign FC	1	2	1	4	2	3
Louisville	1	2	1	4	2	8
Kansas City	0	3	2	2	2	6

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Saturday's games
Reign FC at North Carolina
Washington at Chicago

Sunday's games
Houston at Louisville
Kansas City at Portland
Gotham FC at Orlando

Tuesday, June 22
Chicago at Reign FC

Wednesday, June 23
Orlando at Kansas City
North Carolina at Louisville

Saturday, June 26
Louisville at Chicago
Gotham FC at Reign FC
Portland at North Carolina
Orlando at Houston
Washington at Kansas City

TENNIS

Fever-Tree Championships

Wednesday
At The Queen's Club
London
Purse: Euro 1,290,135
Surface: Grass
Men's Singles
Round of 16
Alex de Minaur (4), Australia, def. John Millman, Australia, 6-1, 6-3.
Cameron Norrie, Britain, def. Aslan Karatsev (5), Russia, 7-5, 6-2.
Jack Draper, Britain, def. Alexander Bublik, Kazakhstan, 7-6 (5), 7-6 (0).
Marin Cilic, Croatia, def. Fabio Fognini (8), Italy, 6-3, 7-6 (4).

Men's Doubles
Round of 16
Robert Farah and Juan Sebastian Cabal (2), Colombia, def. Dominic Inglot and Luke Bambridge, Britain, 6-4, 6-4.
Nicolas Mahut and Pierre-Hugues Herbert (4), France, def. Liam Broady and Ryan Peniston, Britain, 6-7 (6), 6-2, 12-10.
John Peers, Australia, and Reilly Opelka, United States, def. Ken Skupski and Neal Skupski (8), Britain, 6-7 (6), 7-6 (4), 10-2.
Gonzalo Escobar, Ecuador, and Ariel Behar, Uruguay, def. Fabrice Martin and Jeremy Chardy (6), France, 6-4, 6-4.
Nikola Mektic and Mate Pavic (1), Croatia, def. Feliciano Lopez, Spain, and Jannik Sinner, Italy, 7-6 (3), 7-5.
Philipp Oswald, Austria, and Marcus Daniell (7), New Zealand, def. Adrian Mannarino and Benoit Paire, France, 6-3, 6-4.
Aslan Karatsev, Russia, and Max Purcell, Australia, def. Bruno Soares, Brazil, and Jamie Murray (5), Britain, 6-4, 6-4.
Cameron Norrie, Britain, and Alex de Minaur, Australia, def. Rajeev Ram, United States, and Joe Salisbury (3), Britain, 5-7, 6-1, 12-10.

NOVENTI Open

Wednesday
At Gerry Weber Stadium
Halle, Germany
Purse: Euro 1,318,605
Surface: Grass
Men's Singles
Round of 16
Philipp Kohlschreiber, Germany, def. Corentin Moutet, France, 6-4, 7-6 (4).
Andrey Rublev (4), Russia, def. Jordan Thompson, Australia, 6-4, 6-4.
Felix Auger-Aliassime, Canada, def. Roger Federer (5), Switzerland, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2.
Marcos Giron, United States, def. Jan-Lennard Struff, Germany, 6-7 (1), 6-3, 6-4.

Men's Doubles
Round of 32
Yannick Hanfmann and Dominik Koepfer, Germany, def. Santiago Gonzalez, Mexico, and Marcelo Demoliner, Brazil, 7-6 (5), 6-3.
Round of 16
Horia Tecau, Romania, and Kevin Krawietz (3), Germany, def. Nikola Patic, Serbia, and Tomislav Brkic, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 7-6 (3), 6-3.
Rohan Bopanna and Divij Sharan, India, def. Lukasz Kubot, Poland, and Edouard Roger-Vasselin (2), France, 7-6 (11), 6-4.
Jonathan Erlich, Israel, and Lloyd Harris,

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Connecticut	8	3	.727	—
New York	6	5	.545	2
Atlanta	5	6	.455	3
Chicago	5	7	.417	3½
Washington	4	6	.400	3½
Indiana	1	12	.077	8

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Seattle	11	2	.846	—
Las Vegas	9	3	.750	1½
Los Angeles	5	5	.500	4½
Dallas	5	6	.455	5
Phoenix	5	7	.417	5½
Minnesota	4	6	.400	5½

Wednesday's games
Los Angeles 85, Phoenix 80

Thursday's games
Atlanta at Washington
Seattle at Indiana
Connecticut at Chicago
Minnesota at Dallas
New York at Las Vegas

Friday's game
Phoenix at Los Angeles

LPGA money leaders

	Trn	Money
1. Yuka Saso	0	\$1,000,000
2. Lydia Ko	10	\$919,964
3. Patty Tavatanakit	10	\$837,238
4. Lexi Thompson	10	\$807,771
5. Nelly Korda	9	\$773,930
6. Inbee Park	8	\$768,014
7. Nasa Hataoka	10	\$655,241
8. Brooke M. Henderson	11	\$554,603

South Africa, def. Oliver Marach, Austria, and Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi (8), Pakistan, 6-3, 6-3.
Guido Pella and Andres Molteni, Argentina, def. Raven Klaassen, South Africa, and Ben McLachlan (7), Japan, 7-6 (4), 7-6 (6).
Sam Querrey and Austin Krajicek, United States, def. Ivan Dodig, Croatia, and Filip Polasek (1), Slovakia, 5-7, 6-1, 10-6.
Sander Gille and Joran Vliegen (6), Belgium, def. Luke Saville and Jordan Thompson, Australia, 7-6 (4), 6-3.

Birmingham Classic
Wednesday
At Edgbaston Priory Club
Birmingham, Great Britain
Purse: \$235,238
Surface: Grass
Women's Singles
Round of 32
Kristina Mladenovic, France, def. Fiona Ferro (7), France, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Round of 16
Marie Bouzkova (8), Czech Republic, def. Caroline Garcia, France, 6-3, 6-0.
CoCo Vandeweghe, United States, def. Ajla Tomljanovic, Australia, 4-6, 6-4, 6-3.
Donna Vekic (3), Croatia, def. Camila Giorgi, Italy, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.
Heather Watson, Britain, def. Zhang Shuai (6), China, 5-2, ret.
Women's Doubles
Round of 16
Ons Jabeur, Tunisia, and Ellen Perez, Australia, def. Caroline Dolehide and Caty McNally (4), United States, 6-4, 7-6 (5).
Latisha Chan and Hao-Ching Chan (2), Taiwan, def. Wang Yafan, China, and Julia Wachaczky, Germany, 7-5, 6-2.
Hsieh Su-wei, Taiwan, and Elise Mertens (1), Belgium, def. Sam Stosur, Australia, and CoCo Vandeweghe, United States, 6-4, 6-4.

Bett1 Open
Wednesday
At Am Rothenbaum Rot-Weiss Tennis Club
Berlin
Purse: Euro 456,073
Surface: Grass
Women's Singles
Round of 16
Ekaterina Alexandrova, Russia, def. Eli-na Svitolina (2), Ukraine, 6-4, 7-5.
Alize Cornet, France, def. Bianca Andreescu (3), Canada, 7-6 (2), 7-5.
Belinda Bencic (5), Switzerland, def. Petra Martic, Croatia, 6-3, 6-4.
Madison Keys, United States, def. Aryna Sabalenka (1), Belarus, 6-4, 1-6, 7-5.

Women's Doubles
Quarterfinals
Veronika Kudermetova, Russia, and Marketa Vondrousova, Czech Republic, def. Alexa Guarachi Mathison, Chile, and Desirae Krawczyk (3), United States, 7-6 (4), 7-5.
Sharon Fichman, Canada, and Giuliana Olmos, Mexico, def. Asia Muhammad and Jessica Pegula, United States, 6-4, 1-6, 10-5.
Nicole Melichar, United States, and Demi Schuurs (1), Netherlands, def. Renata Voracova, Czech Republic, and Miyu Kato, Japan, 6-1, 6-3.

COLLEGE BASEBALL

World Series
At Omaha, Neb.
(Double Elimination; x-if necessary)
Saturday, June 19

Game 1: No. 9 Stanford vs. N.C. State
Game 2: No. 4 Vanderbilt vs. No. 5 Arizona

Sunday, June 20
Game 3: No. 3 Tennessee vs. Virginia
Game 4: Texas vs. No. 7 Mississippi St.

Monday, June 21
Game 5: Game 1 loser vs. Game 2 loser
Game 6: Game 1 winner vs. Game 2 winner

Tuesday, June 22
Game 7: Game 3 loser vs. Game 4 loser
Game 8: Game 3 winner vs. Game 4 winner

Wednesday, June 23
Game 9: Game 5 winner vs. Game 6 loser
Thursday, June 24
Game 10: Game 7 winner vs. Game 8 loser

Friday, June 25
Game 11: Game 6 winner vs. Game 9 winner
Game 12: Game 8 winner vs. Game 10 winner

Saturday, June 26
x-Game 13: Teams TBD
x-Game 14: Teams TBD
Championship Series
(Best-of-three)
Monday, June 28: Teams TBD
Tuesday, June 29: Teams TBD
x-Wednesday, June 30: Teams TBD

GOLF

9. Ariya Jutanugarn	9	\$546,479
10. Jin Young Ko	8	\$543,026
11. Shanshan Feng	7	\$520,964
12. Jessica Korda	8	\$509,336
13. Sei Young Kim	10	\$476,791
14. Hannah Green	9	\$464,832
15. Danielle Kang	11	\$462,336
16. Ally Ewing	11	\$450,412
17. Hyo Joo Kim	8	\$442,757
18. So Yeon Ryu	9	\$419,688
19. Megan Khang	10	\$400,799
20. Angel Yin	9	\$397,226

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball

American League

BOSTON RED SOX — Sent RHP Brandon Brennan outright to Worcester (Triple-A East). Activated RHP Yacksel Rios and added to the active roster. Optioned INF Michael Chavis to Worcester.
HOUSTON ASTROS — Placed OF Kyle Tucker on the 10-day IL. Recalled INF Abraham Toro from Sugar Land (Triple-A West).
MINNESOTA TWINS — Reinstated LHP Caleb Thielbar from the 10-day IL. Optioned RHP Griffin Jax and RHP Shaun Anderson to St. Paul (Triple-A East). Signed 2B Wilbis Santiago to a minor league contract.
NEW YORK YANKEES — Returned OF Ryan LaMarre from his rehab assignment and from the 10-day IL, then outrighted him to Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (Triple-A East).
OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Reinstated OF Ramon Laureano from the 10-day IL. Optioned OF Skye Bolt to Las Vegas (Triple-A West).
TAMPA BAY RAYS — Recalled RHP Chris Mazza from Durham (Triple-A East). Placed RHP Collin McHugh on the 10-day IL.
TEXAS RANGERS — Reinstated RHP Ian Kennedy from the 10-day IL. Optioned LHP Hyeon-Jong Yang to Round Rock (Triple-A West). Signed 3B Trey Hair to a minor league contract.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Placed RHP Carl Edwards on the 10-day IL. Optioned LHP Travis Bergen to Buffalo (Triple-A East). Reinstated RHP Patrick Murphy from the 60-day IL.
National League
ATLANTA BRAVES — Placed LHP Tucker Davidson on the 10-day IL. Recalled LHP Kyle Muller from Gwinnett (Triple-A East).
CHICAGO CUBS — Selected RHP Robert Stock from Iowa (Triple-A East). Optioned RHP Trevor Megill to Iowa. Placed RHP Dillon Maples on the 10-day IL, retroactive to June 15. Recalled RHP Cory Abbott from Iowa. Transferred C P.J. Higgins from the 10-day IL to the 60-day IL. Selected the contract of RHP Mike Hauschild from the Lexington Legends (Atlantic League).
LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Selected the contract of OF Steven Souza Jr. Designated RHP Nate Jones for assignment.
MIAMI MARLINS — Selected the contract of 3B Deven Marrero from Jacksonville (Triple-A East). Designated RHP Luis Madero for assignment.
MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Claimed RHP Ryan Weber off waivers from Boston and optioned him to Nashville (Triple-A East). Sent RHP Chad Sobotka outright to Nashville. Reinstated RHP Patrick Murphy from the 60-day IL. Reinstated LHP Travis Bergen from the 10-day IL and optioned to Buffalo (Triple-A East). Placed RHP C.J. Edwards on the 10-day IL.
NEW YORK METS — Sent RF Michael Conforto to Syracuse (Triple-A East) on a rehab assignment.

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES — Placed 2B Jean Segura on the 10-day IL. Recalled 2B Nick Maton from Lehigh Valley (Triple-A East).
SAN DIEGO PADRES — Optioned LHP Ryan Weathers to El Paso (Triple-A West).
WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Recalled INF Luis Garcia from Rochester (Triple-A East). Placed INF Starlin Castro on the restricted list.

FOOTBALL
National Football League
NFL — Suspended TE Chase Harrell for one-year for violating the league's PED policy.
ATLANTA FALCONS — Signed WR Jeff Badet.
CHICAGO BEARS — Signed OT Teven Jenkins to a four-year contract.
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS — Signed TE Dominick Wood-Anderson. Waived RB B.J. Emmons.
SOCCER
Major League Soccer
LOS ANGELES FC — Loaned G Tomas Romero, D Mohamed Traore, D Mamadou Fall, M Bryce Duke, M Alvaro Quezada, F Christian Torres, D Tony Leone and F Danny Musovski to Las Vegas Lights FC (USL).
PHILADELPHIA UNION — Signed head coach Jim Curtin to a multi-year contract extension.
COLLEGE
DREW — Named Drew Eberly head baseball coach.
MARQUETTE — Named Kelly Komara and Tasha Taylor assistant women's basketball coaches.
ST. JOHN'S — Named Aliann Pompey head coach of women's track and field and cross country. Named Tyler Watson men's basketball strength and conditioning coach.
SYRACUSE — Named Dave Pietramala assistant men's lacrosse coach.
VANDERBILT — Named Andrew Allegretta director of radio broadcasting and Kevin Ingram has been elevated to director of digital operations.

Nadal skipping Wimbledon, Olympics

Associated Press

MADRID — Rafael Nadal will not play at Wimbledon or at the Tokyo Olympics, saying Thursday he has decided to skip the two tournaments after “listening” to his body.

Nadal, who reached the French Open semifinals last week but lost to Novak Djokovic, has won the title at Wimbledon twice, in 2008 and 2010. He also won the Olympic gold medal in singles at the 2008 Beijing Games and in doubles at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games.

“The goal is to prolong my career and continue to do what makes me happy, that is to compete at the highest level and keep fighting for those professional and personal goals at the maximum level of competition,” Nadal said.
The 35-year-old Spaniard said the fact that there are only two weeks between Roland Garros and Wimbledon “didn’t make it easier” on his body to recover from “the always demanding” clay-court season.
“Sport prevention of any kind of excess in my body is a very important factor at this stage of my career in order to try to keep fighting for the highest level of competition and titles,” Nadal wrote on Twitter.

Nadal is a 20-time Grand Slam champion with a record 13 titles at the French Open.
His loss at Roland Garros last Friday was only his third in 108 matches at a tournament he won each of the last four years, including by beating Djokovic in the 2020 final.



MICHEL EULER/AP

Spain's Rafael Nadal lost a five-set match to Serbia's Novak Djokovic last week at the French Open in Paris.

AUTO RACING

Nashville welcomes NASCAR Cup debut

Track reopens after being closed for 10 years

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

Erik Moses attended his first NASCAR race in 2019 as an XFL executive looking to poach marketing ideas during a trip to Dover International Raceway. One year later, Dover poached Moses and sent him to Tennessee to reopen Nashville Superspeedway.

Moses, hired last August, will open the gates this weekend for a track that had sat dormant since Carl Edwards won the 21st and final Xfinity Series race of the 2011 season.

Better yet, Moses will host a sold-out crowd Sunday of roughly 40,000 spectators when NASCAR's premier Cup Series makes its Nashville Superspeedway debut.

It will be a seminal moment for Dover Motorsports, which opened the concrete oval in 2001 seeking a coveted Cup race. After a decade of hosting only NASCAR's minor leagues and eight IndyCar races, the company gave up trying for the big show.

"We did not build this track in 2001 to host simply Trucks and Xfinity. It was built for Cup," Moses said in an interview with The Associated Press. "Why weren't we able to attract a Cup race for 20 years,

frankly I don't know, and I don't care. My job is to ensure that this runway we have now introduces this marketplace to the best drivers in America and turns this facility into a beloved institution."

The Cup Series has not raced in the Nashville area since 1984 when Geoff Bodine won the last premier series event held at Nashville Fairgrounds Speedway. Its return comes as Nashville has become the hottest market in motorsports.

The city hosted the Cup Series annual awards ceremony in 2019 and NASCAR reintroduced itself to Nashville with an elaborate "Burnouts on Broadway" display in the heart of the entertainment district. IndyCar will return to the city in August for a street race that will cross the Korean War Veterans Memorial Bridge, and Speedway Motorsports is trying to bring NASCAR back to the Fairgrounds.

"It is pretty interesting how everybody is going to Nashville, honing in on Nashville as a great place to be, and I think it's a long time coming," said Dale Earnhardt Jr., who will be part of the broadcast team this weekend as NBC Sports begins its portion of the NASCAR television package. Earnhardt also recently joined the group backing the IndyCar event.

Is it too much racing for one market?



MARK HUMPHREY/AP

Kevin Harvick takes the checkered flag to win the NASCAR Nationwide Series Nashville 300 on April 3, 2010 at Nashville Superspeedway. The track that had been shuttered for a decade will host its first-ever Cup race on Sunday.

"Physically they are all different and are going to provide a different style of racing and a different style of entertainment," Earnhardt said. "The town does have a lot of energy. When we were there doing the burnout on the boulevard, I was upstairs in one of those buildings looking out the window watching and it was clear as day that this was a great relationship and a great partnership.

"It just felt normal, it didn't even feel new. It felt like an old friend and a buddy you hadn't hung out with in a long, long time."

Dover has made a substantial investment to finally land its Cup race. The company moved one of its two annual races from its Delaware track to get its Cup date and was rewarded with a four-year sanctioning agreement from NASCAR.

COMMENTARY

Larson looks unstoppable

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Everybody knew Kyle Larson was going to win races once he started driving Rick Hendrick's cars.

But this? This looks like a driver capable of chasing down the modern-era record of 13 wins in a season set in 1975 by Richard Petty and tied in 1998 by Larson's childhood idol Jeff Gordon.

His victory Sunday night in the All-Star race at Texas doesn't count in the win column, but it earned Larson a \$1 million payout and should have sent fear through everyone else in the field. It was his third consecutive trip to victory lane, he has not finished lower than second since May 2 and there are no signs he's slowing down anytime soon.

"That is the best car I have had here; I just couldn't get close enough to him," runner-up Brad Keselowski said. "He just motored right on back by me, like damn."

And he wasn't done after Texas, either.

Larson headed straight to Ohio early Monday morning for three nights of dirt racing. Once there, he picked up his first sprint car victory of the month in the feature at Wayne County Speedway,

"They've got everything you need to be fast and we're all playing catch-up at the moment."

Denny Hamlin

NASCAR Cup driver, saying only Kyle Larson's teammates at Hendrick Motorsports currently have a chance of beating him

where the payout was \$6,000 to the winner.

Larson won three times in his sprint cars last month — no surprise there, Larson racked up nearly 50 victories racing coast-to-coast dirt tracks last year during his nearly seasonlong NASCAR suspension — and is at last meeting the hype that surrounded him when he first entered NASCAR.

Gordon and Tony Stewart were his loudest cheerleaders when Larson arrived as a 19-year-old willing to migrate from the local short track scene to the biggest show in the country. Both Hall of Famers were adamant that Larson was the purest racer they'd seen in years and were confident he'd be a superstar in NASCAR.

But his equipment at Chip Ganassi Racing wasn't good enough to win every week and Larson notched just six victories in six in-

consistent seasons. He was fast at Ganassi but he didn't seem to know how to close out victories. Too many runs in contending cars ended because he'd hit a wall, make a mistake or maybe push too hard.

That hasn't been a problem since Hendrick Motorsports signed him late last year, bringing an end to his banishment from NASCAR for his use of the N-word while racing online during the early days of the pandemic. Larson's second chance came with NASCAR's winningest organization and his chance to drive Hendrick cars was going to put him in position to consistently race for wins at last.

It hasn't hurt that the entire Hendrick organization is red hot — Larson's All-Star race win was the fifth straight HMS victory, and the four-driver lineup has collected seven checkered flags in the 16



TONY GUTIERREZ / AP

Kyle Larson puts on a cowboy hat as he celebrates in Victory Lane after winning the NASCAR Cup Series All-Star Race last weekend at Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth, Texas.

points-paying races.

Denny Hamlin holds a 47-point lead over Larson in the standings but is winless so far this year, just months removed from last year's seven-win campaign. If anyone can beat Larson right now, Hamlin doubts it is him.

In fact, he figures only Alex Bowman, William Byron and reigning Cup champion Chase Elliott can run with Larson.

"His teammates have the same cars as him, so they have the potential to get after him," Hamlin said. "That team, they've just got everything figured out right now. They've got everything you need to be fast and we're all playing catch-up at the moment.

"We're going to have to get a lit-

tle bit better as the summer months go on if we want to compete with them in the long term."

Next up comes Sunday's first Cup race at Nashville Speedway, which has been dormant since its 21st and final Xfinity Series race in 2011. Larson will go to Tennessee with Valvoline making its debut on his No. 5 Chevrolet as the third of four sponsors so far announced for Larson this season.

It will be just the third time in 17 events that a non-Hendrick company has been featured on his car. But with this rate of success, companies aren't going to stay away from Larson much longer, which is what Hendrick banked on all along when he offered the exiled driver a return.

SWIMMING/TRACK AND FIELD



PHOTOS BY CHARLIE NEIBERGALL/AP

Katie Ledecky looks at her time after winning the women's 1500 freestyle during wave 2 of the U.S. Olympic Swim Trials on Wednesday in Omaha, Neb.

Ledecky secures Olympic berths in 2 more events

By PAUL NEWBERRY
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — The long and short of it was not an issue for Katie Ledecky.

On another memorable night for the American swimming star, Ledecky won the 200-meter freestyle and the historic 1,500 free about 70 minutes apart at the U.S. Olympic trials Wednesday, locking up two more individual events for the Tokyo Games.

This was about as tough as it gets.

First, a relative sprint over four laps — the shortest event on Ledecky's program.

Then, a grueling metric mile comprising 30 laps — the longest race in pool swimming and one that will be making its Olympic debut for the women in Tokyo.

Her short time between races was chaotically choreographed to keep Ledecky as fresh as possible for the 1,500.

"The goal was to get in the warm-down pool as quickly as I could," she said. "I tried to keep moving, hydrated and swam for 15-20 minutes before they pulled me to go back to the awards (ceremony). I ate a banana, drank chocolate milk and water, put a jacket on as I was walking."

It worked out just fine.

The 24-year-old from the nation's capital touched the wall far ahead of everyone else with a winning time of 15 minutes, 40.50 seconds — well off her 2018 world record (15:20.48) but fastest in the world this year.

Erica Sullivan was nearly a half-lap behind, but she knocked



Zach Harting made his first Olympic team by winning the men's 200 butterfly.

more than 4 seconds off her personal best to take the expected second Olympic berth in 15:51.18.

The 200 free was one of four gold medals that Ledecky won at the Rio Games. She'll get a chance to defend that title after winning in 1:55.11, a full body length ahead of the field.

Allison Schmitt, who won the event at the 2012 London Games, is headed to her fourth Olympics at age 31 after holding off Paige Madden by one-hundredth of a second for the runner-up spot behind Ledecky.

Schmitt's time was 1:56.79, which gives her a likely individual event in Tokyo as well as a spot on the 4x200 free relay. Madden and Katie McLaughlin, who was fourth in 1:57.16, will also be going to the Olympics as relay swimmers.

Ledecky already won the 400

free, though she wasn't as fast as expected. She's also heavily favored in the 800 free, another race she won at Rio, which means she could swim as many as four individual events and perhaps a couple of relays at the Tokyo Games.

Ledecky did confirm that she's scratched the 100 free.

She's already got enough on her Olympic plate.

In other races on the fourth night of the trials, Zach Harting earned his first trip to the Olympics with a victory in the men's 200 butterfly, while Alex Walsh won a thrilling race in the women's 200 individual medley — the top three were separated by just four-hundredths of a second.

Harting, a 23-year-old from Huntsville, Ala., won with a time of 1:55.06.

Harting is already making plans to get the customary Olympic rings tattoo.

"Coming in here and not making the team was not an option," he said. "I don't know if I could have handled it, so the easiest thing to do was make the team and that's what I did."

Gunnar Bentz, who was among the swimmers involved in Ryan Lochte's infamous night in Rio five years ago, touched after Harting in 1:55.34 and will get the expected second spot in the event.

Walsh won in 2:09.30, followed by Kate Douglass at 2:09.32 and Madisyn Cox in 2:09.34.

Douglass will get the expected second spot on the Olympic team, while Cox endured another heartbreak after finishing fourth in two events at the 2016 trials.

Doping, burritos, tears: Welcome to 2021 track and field

By EDDIE PELLIS
AND PAT GRAHAM
Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Track and field stumbled back onto center stage this week and found itself in a good, old-fashioned mess.

It involves — what else? — doping. But also burritos. And pork tinged with a performance-enhancing drug. And the suspension of an American record holder who was considered a contender for an Olympic medal that she will not have a chance to win.

The polarizing case of 1,500- and 5,000-meter runner Shelby Houlihan, who received a four-year doping ban only days before the U.S. Olympic trials begin Friday, is the latest in a long string of dramas that cut to one of the central weaknesses of the international doping system: It is constantly conflicted between the mission to unwaveringly follow a voluminous and minutiae-laden rulebook and the desire for fairness and common sense.

All the evidence Houlihan and her defenders have offered in a case that has meandered through the system for five months points to the fact that the 28-year-old, who finished 11th in the 5,000 meters at the 2016 Olympics, did not cheat.

Given the 53 doping tests the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency has subjected her to since 2017, none of which came back positive, the best explanation for the five nanograms of the performance enhancer nandrolone that showed up in her system could very well be hers: It came from a pork burrito she bought from a street vendor near her home in Beaverton, Ore., last December.

But according to the rules in place when Houlihan tested positive (which have been relaxed somewhat, but not in time to help Houlihan), once an athlete tests positive for such a drug, the burden

of proof falls on the athlete to show an exculpatory reason the drug entered their system.

Houlihan has a food log showing she ate the burrito on the day in question. She's had hair samples analyzed, and they showed no build-up, the likes of which would be present if she had been consistently using the drug. She's passed a polygraph test in which she says she never knowingly took nandrolone.

None of this was enough for the Athletics Integrity Unit, which oversees track's international anti-doping program and has the right to test athletes, or for the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which heard Houlihan's final appeal. Neither would absolve her of responsibility or the minimum four-year ban that comes with the violation. The full details from the CAS decision have not yet been released.

"In my view, what happened to her is entirely unjust," said Houlihan's attorney. Paul Greene, who has worked many of these cases over the years. "This result is going to live with me for the rest of my career because I know Shelby didn't do anything wrong and she's banned."

The cruelest part of it for Houlihan is that USADA, which conducts most of her testing but was not involved in this case, would almost certainly not have pursued this.

There are similar instances involving tainted meat in which USADA has received tests that show traces of performance enhancers in athletes' systems, done its own investigation and decided to bypass the four-year ban. One case involved U.S. runner Aje Wilson. Another involved three-time Olympic medalist Will Claye. Another involved 90-year-old cyclist Carl Grove, who was tested because he was a masters record holder.



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL/AP

Shelby Houlihan, the American record holder in the 1,500 and 5,000 meters, has been banned from the sport for four years following a positive test for what she concluded was a tainted pork burrito.

MLB

Rays' Hill says union 'dropped ball' on grip aids

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Veteran Tampa Bay Rays pitcher Rich Hill says the players' union "dropped the ball" when it came to this week's announcement from Major League Baseball about grip-enhancing substances.

MLB said pitchers will be ejected and suspended for 10 games starting Monday for using illegal foreign substances to doctor baseballs.

"I think this falls on the PA, the players' association," the 41-year old Hill said before Wednesday's game at the Chicago White Sox. "I think that this is where something should have been done. The players' association had the opportunity to work with MLB, and MLB used their strong hand to put it on the players, and that's unfortunate that this is what happened."

Hill said it's a little disheartening that the action was taken without the OK of the players or the union.

"I feel like they should have come together and settled this, and handled it like professionals," Hill added. "I feel like a rule change in the middle of the season is very difficult for everybody across the league."

MLB told teams on March 23 it would increase monitoring and initiated steps that included collecting balls taken out of play from every team and analyzing Statcast spin-rate data.

The midseason changes come during the final season of the current collective bargaining agreement between the owners and players, which Hill didn't rule out as a factor.

"We all know that's coming, and part of this wants me to think that

"A rule change in the middle of the season is very difficult for everybody across the league."

Rich Hill
 Veteran Rays pitcher

it's a distraction to put hitters and pitchers against each other, which again isn't going to do anything to help grow the game," Hill said. "We all want what's best for the game. We want to grow the game."

The commissioner's office, responding to record strikeouts and a league batting average at a more than half-century low, said Tuesday that major and minor league umpires will start regular checks of all pitchers, even if opposing managers don't request inspections.

While suspensions would be with pay, repeat offenders would receive progressive discipline, and teams and club employees would be subject to discipline for failure to comply.

"My argument is that, when it's a hundred degrees out and humid, we get a rosin bag. When it's 30 degrees out and freezing cold we get a rosin bag," Hill said. "I think it's also been pretty widely said throughout baseball, hitters and pitchers alike, combined, a feel that the rosin bag is not enough."



ADAM HUNGER/AP

Tampa Bay Rays starting pitcher Rich Hill said a rosin bag isn't sufficient to make sure hurlers have a good grip.

Scoreboard

American League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Tampa Bay	43	26	.623	—
Boston	42	27	.609	1
New York	35	32	.522	7
Toronto	33	33	.500	8½
Baltimore	22	45	.328	20
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	43	25	.632	—
Cleveland	37	28	.569	4½
Kansas City	30	37	.448	12½
Detroit	29	39	.426	14
Minnesota	27	41	.397	16
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Oakland	43	27	.614	—
Houston	39	28	.582	2½
Seattle	34	36	.486	9
Los Angeles	33	35	.485	9
Texas	25	43	.368	17
National League				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	35	25	.583	—
Philadelphia	33	33	.500	5
Atlanta	30	35	.462	7½
Washington	30	35	.462	7½
Miami	29	39	.426	10
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	38	30	.559	—
Milwaukee	38	30	.559	—
Cincinnati	35	31	.530	2
St. Louis	35	33	.515	3
Pittsburgh	23	44	.343	14½
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
San Francisco	43	25	.632	—
Los Angeles	41	27	.603	2
San Diego	38	32	.543	6
Colorado	28	41	.406	15½
Arizona	20	49	.290	23½
Wednesday's games				
Detroit 6, Kansas City 5				
Chicago White Sox 8, Tampa Bay 7, 10 innings				
Oakland 8, L.A. Angels 4				
N.Y. Yankees 3, Toronto 2				
Cleveland 8, Baltimore 7				
Houston 8, Texas 4				
Boston 10, Atlanta 8				
Minnesota 7, Seattle 2				
St. Louis 1, Miami 0				
Cincinnati 2, Milwaukee 1				
Colorado 8, San Diego 7				
Washington 3, Pittsburgh 1				
N.Y. Mets 6, Chicago Cubs 3				
San Francisco 13, Arizona 7				
Philadelphia 2, L.A. Dodgers 0				
Thursday's games				
Baltimore at Cleveland				
N.Y. Yankees at Toronto				
Chicago White Sox at Houston				
Detroit at L.A. Angels				
Tampa Bay at Seattle				
Arizona at San Francisco				
Chicago Cubs at N.Y. Mets				
St. Louis at Atlanta				
Cincinnati at San Diego				
Milwaukee at Colorado				
Friday's games				
Cleveland (Mejia 1-1) at Pittsburgh (Kuhl 0-4)				
Oakland (Kaprielian 3-1) at N.Y. Yankees (Taillon 1-4)				
Toronto (Ray 4-2) at Baltimore (Zimmermann 4-4)				
Minnesota (Berríos 7-2) at Texas (Foltynewicz 1-7)				
Boston (Pivetta 6-2) at Kansas City (Kowar 0-2)				
Chicago White Sox (Rodón 6-2) at Houston (Garcia 5-4)				
Detroit (Ureña 2-6) at L.A. Angels (Cobb 4-2)				
Tampa Bay (Wacha 1-1) at Seattle (Kuchel 3-3)				
N.Y. Mets (Lucchesi 1-4) at Washington (Fedde 4-4)				
St. Louis (Martínez 3-7) at Atlanta (Fried 3-4)				
Miami (TBD) at Chicago Cubs (Davies 4-3)				
Milwaukee (Burnes 3-4) at Colorado (Senzatela 2-7)				
L.A. Dodgers (Bauer 6-5) at Arizona (Smith 2-2)				
Philadelphia (Velasquez 2-1) at San Francisco (Cueto 4-3)				
Cincinnati (Santillan 0-0) at San Diego (Paddack 3-5)				



TONY AVELAR/AP

The Arizona Diamondbacks' Asdrubal Cabrera reacts after being called out on strikes by umpire Adam Beck during a 13-7 loss to the San Francisco Giants, Arizona's 22nd consecutive road loss.

Road worriers: D-backs tie mark for away futility

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Hours before first pitch, many of the Arizona Diamondbacks were busy working in an outdoor weight room at Oracle Park as others prepared for their pregame fielding drills.

The little things aren't leading to winning results right now, which makes the constant losing all the more painful. Manager Torey Lovullo is searching for answers from his own staff as well as baseball friends everywhere who might offer something that works.

Arizona dropped its 22nd straight road game Wednesday night, matching the 1963 Mets and '43 Philadelphia Athletics for the major league record with a 13-7 loss to the San Francisco Giants.

"This is obviously nothing that we ever expected, nothing that we're proud of, and we can't reverse anything that's happened over the past 40-plus days," Lovullo said. "We've got to find a way to win a baseball game tomorrow."

Buster Posey hit a three-run homer in a first inning that lasted 43 minutes, while Steven Duggar and LaMonte Wade Jr. connected in the fourth as San Francisco sent its NL West rival to a 13th consecutive loss overall. Pinch-hitter Wilmer Flores added a two-run drive in the fifth and Brandon Belt hit his ninth homer that inning.

Giants starter Anthony DeSclafani (7-2) pitched a two-hit shutout against the Nationals on June 11 and followed that with another impressive performance to win his third straight start. The right-hander allowed two runs on five hits, struck out five and walked one over five innings.

Asdrúbal Cabrera homered and Ketel Marte hit a two-run double in the D-backs' five-run sixth.

"It's really hard because we've been working hard every day,"

third baseman Cabrera said. "I feel bad for me and my teammates because I know we're working hard."

Arizona jumped ahead 2-0 in the first against DeSclafani — but that could hardly feel comfortable for the D-backs a day after they squandered a 7-0 advantage when Mike Yastrzemski hit a grand slam with two outs in the eighth inning for a 9-8 Giants' victory.

"I think last night helped us remember, or a better way to put that is reminded us, that we have big innings in us and we have the ability to grind out at-bats and wear pitchers down," Giants manager Gabe Kapler said.

On Wednesday, Josh Rojas hit the third pitch of the game for a double and scored moments later on Wade's error in left field when he over ran a liner by Marte. Eduardo Escobar doubled to left one out later.

After Brandon Crawford's one-out walk in the first, D-backs catcher Stephen Vogt tried six pickoff attempts at first before Donovan Solano's swinging strikeout. Jason Vosler followed with an RBI double against Arizona righty Merrill Kelly (2-7).

Kelly, who entered the game holding opponents to a .235 average over his previous four road starts, was knocked out after three innings. He had three of his team's nine walks.

"We're all searching for those types of answers," Kelly said of what's not working. "... At the end of the day this is our job. Whether we like it or not, whether things are going the way that we want them to go, there's nowhere to hide. We've got to come in tomorrow and try our best to forget about today and do the things that we need to do or do the things that we think we need to do in order to try to win tomorrow."

NHL PLAYOFFS

Hungry veterans seeking first title

By **STEPHEN WHYNO**
Associated Press

When the Tampa Bay Lightning won the Stanley Cup last year, it was the first time most of their players and coaches had ever lifted the trophy.

Now that they have savored the taste of winning, they want to help trade deadline pickup David Savard do the same in his 10th NHL season.



Palmieri

“We’ve all been in that situation before,” said Lightning forward Patrick Maroon, the only player to win the Cup in 2019 and 2020. “He wants to win his first championship. That’s why we play this game. We play to win. He’s been working hard for us, he’s been a great addition for us, so hopefully the guys can keep working hard for him and finding ways for him because he deserves it.”

Deserves have nothing to do with it in a sport with so many unpredictable bounces that create long-lasting legacies, but all four teams left in the playoffs have at least one player worth rooting for who is running out of chances to win it all.

The Vegas Golden Knights have captain Mark Stone, forwards Max Pacioretty, Jonathan Marchessault and Ryan Reaves and defenseman Nick Holden on the wrong side of 30 without a Cup ring. Andy Greene, Travis Zajac, Kyle Palmieri, Cal Clutterbuck, Matt Martin and Josh Bailey are in that club for New York. And Montreal Canadiens captain Shea Weber isn’t getting any younger at 35.

“Huge hunger,” said Vegas coach Peter DeBoer, who has taken two teams to the final but is looking for his first NHL championship. “Especially veterans like that: Pacioretty, Stone come

to mind just because these guys have been in the league for a while now, and they know few and how rare these opportunities are.”

Palmieri recently contemplated that rarity thinking back to his last trip to the third round: in 2015 as a fresh-faced 24-year-old with Anaheim. The Ducks lost to Chicago in seven and traded Palmieri to New Jersey that summer.

Until this run, he had played five playoff games since.

“I don’t think you necessarily took it for granted, but it’s kind of something you expected to come at the end of the year,” Palmieri said Tuesday. “Making the switch to Jersey, that’s something that you kind of lost sight of. To have the opportunity to come here and help this team to achieve a goal is something you dream about, and it’s an opportunity that I definitely don’t want to let go to waste.”

Savard never advanced this far during a decade with the Columbus Blue Jackets, so he understands that mentality. Much like Palmieri, changing teams at the deadline gave him this opportunity.

Unlike Palmieri, Savard is surrounded by teammates who have won it all recently.

“They know how to win, and that’s why it was so exciting for me to come here,” Savard said. “It’s a fun experience for me, and I’m just trying to enjoy every moment right now. It’s going to be hard to get all the way to the final and we’ve got a really good team in front of us.”

The Islanders have a general manager in Lou Lamoriello who won the Cup three times with the Devils and a coach in Barry Trotz who won in 2018 with Washington. But Nick Leddy is their only player with a Cup ring, so the hunger is deep on Long Island even if Greene was the only player alive (in diapers) during New York’s early ’80s dynasty days.



CHRIS O’MEARA/AP

Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman David Savard is in his 10th season in the NHL and has yet to win a Stanley Cup.



JOHN LOCHER/AP

Vegas Golden Knights goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury, right, blocks a shot by Montreal Canadiens center Nick Suzuki during the third period of Game 2 of their semifinal playoff series Wednesday in Las Vegas.

Price makes 29 saves, Canadiens top Knights

By **W.G. RAMIREZ**
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The Montreal Canadiens vowed to adapt after looking out of sync in the first game of their Stanley Cup semifinal series with the Vegas Golden Knights.

It’s exactly what they did Wednesday night.

Carey Price made 29 saves and the Canadiens beat the Golden Knights 3-2 to tie the series at a game apiece.

Price improved to 9-4 in the playoffs, his most victories in a postseason. He had eight in 2014.

Paul Byron, Joel Armia and Tyler Toffoli scored for Montreal, with Bryon making it 3-0 with 2:45 left in the second period.

Alex Pietrangolo scored twice for Vegas, and Marc-Andre Fleury made 20 saves.

Abandoning the rugged approach they took in Game 1, the Canadiens looked more like the team that reeled off seven straight wins in the first and second rounds, dominating in all three zones in the first 20 minutes.

“We showed some good composure,” Montreal coach Dominique Ducharme said. “At one point we felt the pressure, they were trying to come back. Overall, we showed pretty good composure. I think we can still do a better job. We wanted to support the puck better. I think we did that tonight and it paid off. I think we still can be better on a few occasions managing the puck and

Scoreboard

Semifinals
(Best-of-seven; x-if necessary)

Vegas 1, Montreal 1

Vegas 4, Montreal 1
Wednesday: Montreal 3, Vegas 2
Friday: at Montreal
Sunday: at Montreal
Tuesday: at Vegas
x-Thursday, June 24: at Montreal
x-Saturday, June 26: at Vegas

Tampa Bay 1, N.Y. Islanders 1

N.Y. Islanders 2, Tampa Bay 1
Tampa Bay 4, N.Y. Islanders 2
Thursday: at N.Y. Islanders
Saturday: at N.Y. Islanders
Monday: at Tampa Bay
x-Wednesday, June 23: at N.Y. Islanders
x-Friday, June 25: at Tampa Bay

we’ll do that.”

Game 3 is Friday night in Montreal.

The Canadiens, who improved to 6-2 on the road in the postseason, have won 21 straight playoff games when scoring three or more goals.

“Can’t go down 2-0 and expect to win the game,” Golden Knights captain Mark Stone said. “These guys play a good team game when they get the lead. We gotta do a better job with our starts and we gotta find our preparation.”

With Vegas missing top-line center Chandler Stephenson, and third-line center Nick Roy skating in his place, Montreal opened the game with a first-period advantage in shots on goal (12-4), shot attempts (24-13), scoring chances (14-4), and high-danger chances (8-1).

Armia got the scoring going af-

ter he crunched Golden Knights defenseman Alec Martinez into the end boards behind Fleury, allowing Corey Perry to gather the puck and feed Joel Edmundson in the right circle. Edmundson fired a shot that deflected back to Armia, who one-timed it past Fleury’s right skate.

Jeff Petry made his presence felt in his first game back after missing the Canadiens’ last two. He played give-and-go with Cole Caufield, who opted to pass across the slot rather than fire on net and found Toffoli, who snapped a shot through Fleury’s pads to not only push the Montreal’s lead to 2-0, but extend its first-period scoring edge in the playoffs to 12-3.

Vegas rookie Keegan Kolesar, who started the game centering the third line, switched places with Roy and gave top-line wings Stone and Max Pacioretty a bit more jump to bolster the offense.

But the Golden Knights continued to be their own worst enemy in the second period, as Pacioretty clanked a breakaway shot off the bottom of the right post. Then during a power play, Martinez broke his stick while teeing off on a shot to Price’s left, and moments later it was Pacioretty whiffing on a shot at the doorstep.

“Gotta capitalize on some of those in the second period,” Stone added. “Hit a post and had a chance in the slot, we had lots of chances to score, power play needs to score.”

US OPEN/NBA PLAYOFFS



Justin Thomas chips onto the third green during a practice round on Wednesday ahead of the U.S. Open at Torrey Pines in San Diego.

PHOTOS BY JAE C. HONG/AP

‘Like hitting through leather’

Kikuyu rough figures to be a brutal test at Torrey Pines

By JOHN MARSHALL
Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Take a bale of spinach, soak it in water, mix in some cabbage bits. Throw in some alfalfa stems and wispy wheat tops. Oh, and a catcher’s mitt.

Now drop a golf ball down to the bottom and try to hit it. Actually, just try to find the ball.

It’s called kikuyu. It could be preceded by a few four-letter words once the U.S. Open gets started Thursday at Torrey Pines.

“It’s like hitting through leather,” USGA senior managing director of championships John Bodenhamer said.

The U.S. Open is known for having deep rough that swallows golf balls and infuriates the world’s best players.

Kikuyu raises it to a maddening level. Not from a height perspective. The rough at Torrey Pines tops out at 4 to 5 inches in most places this week, well below the depths of some previous U.S. Opens.

It’s all about the density. Kikuyu is thick and matted, the broad blades roiling in different directions as they rise, like a swirl of wet wires. The unpredictable nature can mean a ball in a good lie and one that’s almost unfindable in a span of a couple of feet.

“You put it in the rough, you’re going to struggle,” two-time U.S. Open champion Brooks Koepka said.

Kikuyu — pronounced kuh-koo-yoo — is named for the Kikuyu tribe in East Africa, where the grass is native in the highland regions. It’s also found in warmer climates of Asia, Australia, South Africa and South Amer-

ica. Most other places it’s treated like a weed. Properly named Pennisetum clandestinum, kikuyu grows quickly and invasively, smothering any other grass in its path. Let it go and kikuyu will run wild, growing through cracks in the pavement, up poles — anywhere here it can grab a bit of sunlight.

Most golf courses try to eradicate it. Torrey Pines, along with Riviera Country Club and a few other Southern California courses, have embraced the killer kikuyu.

The USGA made it diabolical for the U.S. Open.

“It’s going to make for a great challenge for the players, showcase their skills,” Bodenhamer said.

Kikuyu is great for fairways. The grass is spongy and the ball sits up, almost as if it’s been placed on pool table.

Around the greens, kikuyu can be a nightmare to judge. It’s sticky, so bump-and-runs or long shots that hit fringe tend to take one hop and stop, almost as if the grass is reaching up to grab the ball.

In the rough and around the greens, kikuyu is like green blades of taffy, gripping hosels and turning over club faces.

“The rough is so thick and so penalizing that if you hit into it, it’s one of those you sit and realize, do I chip out, or do I try to get up close to the green?” 2018 Masters champion Patrick Reed said.

The kikuyu is less of a factor during the regular PGA Tour event in January. The course is overseeded with rye grass during the winter,

Last: Health a concern for playoff teams

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season. Even though the arenas are full and masks are now largely optional, the pandemic is still here and might have a say in how the rest of these playoffs go as well. Paul, who is vaccinated, has entered the protocols presumably because of a positive test — only one player tested positive this week, and he’s the only one in the protocols. As such, his status for Game 1 of the Western Conference finals next week is unknown. Another All-Star, another curvball from the basketball gods overseeing luck right now.

“Our guys are ready for the challenge,” Phoenix coach Monty Williams said. “Everybody’s



Williams

dealing with it. So, we don’t feel like we’re the only ones dealing with a situation when it comes to health and trying to stay healthy. It’s what you prepare for as a staff and as a team and we feel like our guys are ready for whatever presents itself.”

Some injuries, it can be argued, may have happened because of an accumulation of wear and tear in a compressed 72-game season. Others were simply acute, the bad-luck variety. Irving landing on Giannis Antetokounmpo’s foot and twisting his ankle had nothing to do with the Nets playing a bunch of back-to-backs this season. James labored through a high ankle sprain for the rest of the season after getting crashed into by Atlanta’s Solomon Hill. More bad luck.

And it should be mentioned that injuries also played a role in last season’s playoffs, and probably have in every season’s playoffs. Miami was without Goran Dragic and Bam Adebayo for much of the NBA Finals last fall against James, Davis and the Lakers; the Heat lost that series in six games.

But there’s no denying that this regular season was dominated by the pandemic and by injuries. It’s unfortunate, though weirdly fitting, that the playoffs are following suit.

A month or so from now, the NBA will have a new champion. Odds are, it’ll be the team that stays the healthiest the rest of the way.



Fans walk along the third fairway on Tuesday at Torrey Pines Golf Course in San Diego.

so the rough is far less punitive. After the 2019 Farmers Insurance Open, Torrey Pines superintendent Rich McIntosh opted to cut down all the rye grass so the kikuyu could continue to grow, a process he duplicated this year. Some of the rye grass is still around and there’s some poa annua — the grass on the greens — in the rough, so occasionally players will get a good lie and hit a full shot. Find the thicker stuff and they’re hacking out, hoping to get it back to the fairway. Around the greens, the kikuyu has taken hold in a gnarled mat, ready to gulp up golf balls and maybe even a few shoes.

NBA PLAYOFFS



RICK BOWMER/AP

Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert, rear, defends against Los Angeles Clippers guard Paul George during the Clippers' 119-111 win Wednesday in Salt Lake City. George had 37 points, 16 rebounds and five assists.

By George, Clippers move 1 game from eliminating Jazz

By JOHN COON
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Paul George delivered exactly what was needed to move the Los Angeles Clippers one step closer to their first conference finals berth.

With Kawhi Leonard sidelined with a knee injury, George responded with one of the best postseason performances of his NBA career with 37 points, 16 rebounds, and five assists to lead the Clippers to a 119-111 victory over the Utah Jazz in Game 5 of their Western Conference semifinals series Wednesday night.

George became the first player in franchise history to post at least 35 points, 15 rebounds, and five assists

in a playoff game.

"It was no secret. I knew I had to be big tonight and gotta be big going forward," George said.

Marcus Morris scored 25 points and Reggie Jackson added 22 for Los Angeles. It won its third straight game to push the top-seeded Jazz to the brink of elimination. The Clippers shot 51% from the field in Leonard's absence after he played a critical role in helping them win Games 3 and 4 in the series.

"Our season is alive because of his shouldering of all the work he's done," George said. "We got to hold it together and continue to keep this boat afloat until he returns."

Bojan Bogandovic made nine three-pointers and scored 32 points

to lead Utah. Donovan Mitchell added 21 points. Rudy Gobert chipped in 17 points and 11 rebounds. Six players scored in double figures for the Jazz.

Utah and Los Angeles will play Game 6 on Friday in Los Angeles.

"This series is not over," Mitchell said. "We got a lot of life left to give, a lot of juice to give and we just got to go out there and play with a level of desperation that we'd never played with before, otherwise we'll be home."

The Clippers played their first postseason game without Leonard after he suffered a knee injury in Game 4. Mike Conley missed his fifth straight game for the Jazz while rehabbing a strained hamstring.

Hornets' Ball selected top rookie

By STEVE REED
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — LaMelo Ball thought he would become NBA Rookie of the Year long before he joined the league.

That belief became a reality Wednesday night as Ball's versatility as a passer, scorer and rebounder earned the Charlotte Hornets point guard the honor despite missing 21 games with a fractured wrist.

Ball was the runaway winner, receiving 84 of the 99 first-place votes to beat out finalists Anthony Edwards from the Minnesota Timberwolves and Tyrese Haliburton from the Sacramento Kings. Edwards received the other 15 first-place votes. The award was determined by a global panel of 100 writers and broadcasters who cover the league.

"Honestly, way before the league when I was playing basketball and they were talking about the NBA stuff, that is when I knew when I'm a rookie that is one of the accomplishments I can get," Ball said.

His teammates took to social media to congratulate him with Gordon Hayward tweeting "Rookie of the year, and well deserved. Huge congrats @MELOD1P ! Can't wait to get out on the court



JACOB KUPFERMAN/AP

Charlotte Hornets guard LaMelo Ball's versatility as a passer, scorer and rebounder earned him NBA Rookie of the Year honors Wednesday, despite his missing 21 games with a fractured wrist.

with you again. Just the beginning!"

The 6-foot-7 Ball was selected third overall in 2020 after playing professional ball in Lithuania and Australia.

He led all rookies with averages of 6.1 assists and 1.6 steals per game and was third with 15.7 points and 5.9 rebounds.

Hawks rally from 26 points down to shock 76ers

By DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Trae Young ran off the court clapping and yapping toward the few Hawks fans that braved the Philly crowd and stuck around and were rewarded with a comeback victory for the ages.

"I was just showing love to the ATL fans that showed up," Young said, "and we're going to need them to show up Friday for us."

Oh yes, there will be a Game 6 in the Eastern Conference semifinals, with Atlanta — not top-seeded Joel Embiid and the Philadelphia Sixers — playing for a spot in the next round.

"If you don't believe, you got to believe now," Hawks coach Nate McMillan said.

How could they not? Atlanta fans can roll off a lengthy list of infamous collapses in its collective sports history.

Here was a comeback to remember.

Young was fouled on a three-pointer and hit all three free throws with 1:26 left to cap a 26-point rally and send the Hawks on their way to a 109-106 victory Wednesday night in Game 5.

The team won in Philadelphia for the second time in the series and can advance to the conference finals for the first time since 2015 with a victory Friday night in Atlanta.

"We knew what we had to do and we had to do it in a hurry. No quit," McMillan said.

Young scored 39 points and added to a postseason where he has become a breakout star.

"We keep fighting no matter what the score is. I'm proud of this team," Young said. "We have confidence in each other."

Scoreboard

Conference semifinals

(Best-of-seven)

x-if necessary

Eastern Conference

Brooklyn 3, Milwaukee 2

Brooklyn 115, Milwaukee 107

Brooklyn 125, Milwaukee 86

Milwaukee 86, Brooklyn 83

Milwaukee 107, Brooklyn 96

Brooklyn 114, Milwaukee 108

Thursday: at Milwaukee

x-Saturday: at Brooklyn

Atlanta 3, Philadelphia 2

Atlanta 128, Philadelphia 124

Philadelphia 118, Atlanta 102

Philadelphia 127, Atlanta 111

Atlanta 103, Philadelphia 100

Wednesday: Atlanta 109, Philadelphia 106

Friday: at Atlanta

x-Sunday: at Philadelphia

Western Conference

Phoenix 4, Denver 0

Phoenix 122, Denver 105

Phoenix 123, Denver 98

Phoenix 116, Denver 102

Phoenix 125, Denver 118

L.A. Clippers 3, Utah 2

Utah 112, L.A. Clippers 109

Utah 117, L.A. Clippers 111

L.A. Clippers 132, Utah 106

L.A. Clippers 118, Utah 104

Wednesday: L.A. Clippers 119, Utah 111

Friday: at L.A. Clippers

x-Sunday: at Utah

Embiid scored 17 points in an 8-for-8 first quarter and seemingly had the Sixers on their way toward a romp with a 26-point lead in the first half. They still led 87-69 at the end of the third before they collapsed.

Consider:

■ Embiid scored 39 points and Seth Curry had 36 and they were the only two Philadelphia players to score a field goal in the second half.

■ The Hawks outscored them 40-19 in the fourth on 16-for-22 shooting.

■ The Sixers still had a 97.5% chance of winning Game 5 with 4:23 remaining.

■ Had 10 of 15 turnovers in the second half.

"We got too comfortable," guard Ben Simmons said. "We didn't play the way we should be playing."



MATT SLOCUM/AP

Atlanta Hawks guard Trae Young shoots against Philadelphia 76ers center Joel Embiid, left. Atlanta won 109-106 in Philadelphia.

SPORTS

Price saver

Canadiens goalie has 29 saves in Game 2 win over Knights » **NHL playoffs, Page 45**



NBA PLAYOFFS

Last team standing

With All-Stars struggling to stay healthy and on-court, postseason has entered survival mode

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
Associated Press

The NBA champion this season will be the last team standing. Perhaps literally. Kawhi Leonard of the Los Angeles Clippers missed Game 5 of the Western Conference semifinals with a knee sprain and amid concerns that it could be a far more significant injury. Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving has been sidelined by a badly sprained ankle. Philadelphia's Joel Embiid is playing through a meniscus tear. Atlanta's Trae Young is putting heat packs on his shoulder that appear to be roughly the size of a small vehicle. Brooklyn's James Harden came back despite an ailing hamstring.

Those are big names, All-Star names, all nowhere near their best right now because of injuries, and there were plenty of other

Phoenix Suns guard Chris Paul could be the latest All-Star to miss a playoff game because of injury or illness after testing positive for COVID-19.

DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

"This is the best time of the year for our league and fans but missing a ton of our fav players."

LeBron James

Los Angeles Lakers forward, in a tweet on Wednesday

top players — the Lakers' duo of LeBron James and Anthony Davis, Denver's Jamal Murray and Miami's Victor Oladipo among them — that also either limped to the finish of their seasons or saw them end prematurely because of serious injury.

"This is the best time of the year for our league and fans but missing a ton of our fav players," James tweeted on Wednesday. "It's insane. If there's one

person that know about the body and how it works all year round it's ME! I speak for the health of all our players and I hate to see this many injuries this time of the year. Sorry fans wish you guys were seeing all your fav guys right now."

Consider the 27 players who were selected for the All-Star Game this season. Leonard becomes the eighth of those to have to miss a playoff game this season because of injury, joining Davis, Utah teammates Mike Conley and Donovan Mitchell, Boston's Jaylen Brown, Harden, Irving and Embiid.

Phoenix's Chris Paul might become the ninth on that list. He's not hurt. He's in protocols — that other thing that the league has had to fight with all

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Nadal sitting out Wimbledon, Olympics » Tennis, Page 41

