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# EUROPE & PACIFIC WEEKEND EDITION



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# STARS AND STRIPES®

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Indian Navy via AP

**U.S.-owned ship Genco Picardy was damaged in an attack Wednesday from a bomb-carrying drone launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Gulf of Aden. The U.S. military launched strikes from the Red Sea on Houthi-controlled sites Wednesday, hitting missiles deemed a threat.**

## US strikes more Houthi sites

### Move comes after drone attack from Yemen on American-owned ship

By TARA COPP  
AND LOLITA C. BALDOR  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military fired more ship- and submarine-launch missile strikes against Houthi-controlled sites Wednesday and Thursday, directly targeting the group in Yemen.

Wednesday's strikes were launched from the Red Sea and hit 14 missiles that the command deemed an "imminent threat." The strikes followed an official announcement Wednesday that the U.S. has put the Houthis back on its list of specially designated global terrorists. The sanctions

that come with the formal designation are meant to sever violent extremist groups from their sources of financing.

"Forces conducted strikes on 14 Iran-backed Houthi missiles that were loaded to be fired in Houthi controlled areas in Yemen," U.S. Central Command said in a statement posted on X late Wednesday. "These missiles on launch rails presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and U.S. Navy ships in the region and could have been fired at any time, prompting U.S. forces to exercise their inherent right and obligation to defend themselves."

On Thursday, CENTCOM said the United States conducted a fifth strike that afternoon targeting another missile launcher site, and two missile launchers were destroyed.

On Thursday, President Joe Biden said U.S. military strikes against Houthi rebels will continue, but he acknowledged that the American and British bombardment has yet to stop shipping attacks by the militants on vessels in the Red Sea.

"When you say working, are they stopping the Houthis, no. Are they going to continue, yes," Biden said in North Carolina.

Despite the sanctions and military strikes, including a large-scale operation Friday carried out by U.S. and British warships and warplanes that hit more than 60 targets across Yemen, the Houthis are continuing their harassment campaign of commercial and military ships.

The latest incident occurred Wednesday when a one-way attack drone was launched from a Houthi-controlled area in Yemen and struck the Marshall Islands-flagged, U.S.-owned and -operated M/V Genco Picardy in the Gulf

SEE STRIKES ON PAGE 6

## Navy to give pregnant sailors more say in reassignment

By ALISON BATH  
Stars and Stripes

Pregnant sailors serving at sea now have more say in the jobs they get when reassigned to shore duty, the Navy recently announced as part of a policy change.

Under the update, pregnant sailors will fill ashore assignments that best fit their skills and the service's needs for a minimum of two years, according to a Navy administrative order that took effect Tuesday.

The change also gives the sailors more discretion in choosing their reassignment location. Previously, pregnant sailors on sea duty were transferred based on open ashore jobs near their current assignment.

"This keeps a sailor on their career track with meaningful and challenging assignments while also meeting critical needs the Navy has for their knowledge, skills, and abilities," the service said in a fact sheet posted to the official MyNavy HR website the same day.

The policy change allows the service to fill roles ashore that otherwise would remain open.

There are about 5,500 pregnant

SEE PREGNANT ON PAGE 3



U.S. Navy

**A recent U.S. Navy policy change gives pregnant sailors assigned to sea duty better reassignment options, the service recently said.**

# BUSINESS/WEATHER

## EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	Azores	..	..	\$4.206	..
Germany	\$3.467	\$4.008	\$4.356	\$4.272	Change in price	..	..	-3.6 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$4.447	\$4.719	\$4.925	Turkey	..	..	\$4.022	\$4.610*
U.K.	..	\$4.008	\$4.356	\$4.272	Change in price	..	..	-3.6 cents	-4.5 cents

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Jan. 19. The change in prices is from Jan. 12.

## PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel	South Korea	\$3.139	..	\$4.029	\$3.949
Japan	..	\$3.999	..	\$3.909	Change in price	-2.0 cents	..	-4.0 cents	+4.0 cents
Okinawa	\$3.109	..	..	\$3.909	Guam	\$3.169	\$3.709	\$4.059	..
Change in price	-1.0 cents	..	..	+3.0 cents	Change in price	-2.0 cents	-3.0 cents	-4.0 cents	..

\*DieselEFD \*\*Midgrade  
Pacific prices for the week of Jan. 19-25

## EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Jan. 19)	\$1.06	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
British pound (Jan. 19)	\$1.24	Britain (Pound)	1.2671
Japanese yen (Jan. 19)	144.00	Canada (Dollar)	1.3499
South Korean won (Jan. 19)	1307.00	China (Yuan)	7.1273
		Denmark (Krone)	6.8655
		Egypt (Pound)	30.9262
		Euro	0.9209
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8212
		Hungary (Forint)	352.11
		Israel (Shekel)	3.7699
		Japan (Yen)	148.02
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3079
		Norway (Krone)	10.5404
		Philippines (Peso)	55.88
		Poland (Zloty)	4.05
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7508
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3450
		South Korea (Won)	1340.48

Switzerland (Franc) 0.8682  
Thailand (Baht) 35.65  
Turkey (NewLira) 30.1286

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

## INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	8.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	6.00
Federal funds market rate	5.33
3-month bill	5.40
30-year bond	4.31

## WEATHER OUTLOOK

### FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



### FRIDAY IN EUROPE



### SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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## STARS AND STRIPES

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## MILITARY

# NATO to stage largest drill in Europe since Cold War

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

A record number of U.S. and allied troops will launch a new series of war games next week in Europe, where top NATO commanders said Thursday that a “whole of society” effort is needed to prepare for potential conflict with Russia.

U.S. Army Gen. Christopher Cavoli, NATO’s supreme allied commander and head of U.S. European Command, said some 90,000 allied troops are slated to take part in Steadfast Defender, which would make it the largest gathering of troops for an exercise on the Continent in decades.

The drills taking place in the Baltics, Poland and other countries will include reinforcements from North America.

“This reinforcement will occur during a simulated emerging conflict scenario against a near-peer

adversary,” Cavoli said at the conclusion of a two-day defense chiefs meeting in Brussels.

Adm. Rob Bauer, the Dutch chairman of the NATO military committee, said the exercise serves as preparation for possible conflict with Russia.

“I’m not saying it is going wrong tomorrow, but we have to realize it’s not a given that we are in peace,” Bauer said. “And that’s why we have the plans.”

Russia remains locked in a nearly two-year-old war with Ukraine, and both sides continue to suffer high numbers of casualties.

About 300,000 Russian troops have been killed or injured in the fighting, Bauer said. The Kremlin also has lost an extensive amount of military hardware.

But while the ground forces have been degraded, the Russians have stepped up production of

missiles and other weaponry, Bauer and Cavoli said.

“They are sparing no effort in their reconstitution,” Cavoli said. “They are devoting an enormous fraction of their budget to the military over the coming years ... and they are running their defense industrial base just as fast as they can right now.”

In Europe, military officials from countries including Germany, Belgium and Sweden have warned in recent weeks that allies have a short window to prepare for possible conflict with Russia.

While Russia’s military industrial base is on a war footing, many allies have expended ammunition stockpiles to arm Ukraine.

Bauer, who has repeatedly sounded the alarm about the need for allies to step up their industrial production capability, said societies in Europe that have grown accustomed to peace also need to be-



NATO/IMS

The chair of the NATO Military Committee, Dutch Adm. Rob Bauer, left, and U.S. Army Gen. Christopher Cavoli, NATO’s supreme allied commander, right, talk before a session of the alliance’s defense chiefs meeting in Brussels on Wednesday.

come more prepared.

“It is the whole of society that will get involved (in a war) whether we like it or not,” Bauer said.

Last week, Swedish military commander-in-chief Gen. Micael Byden warned that all Swedes should mentally prepare for the possibility of war. That caused alarm, and citizens have begun stockpiling supplies.

Bauer said it’s a good sign that

Swedes were getting ready.

“The fact that people find (the possibility of war) a surprise and as a result buy radios and batteries, that is great,” he said. “It starts (with) the realization that not everything is plannable, not everything is going to be hunky-dory in the next 20 years.”

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## 911 call shows aide to Austin asked ambulance to arrive to house quietly

Associated Press

An aide to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin asked first responders to avoid using lights and sirens in requesting an ambulance be sent to Austin’s northern Virginia home after he had complications from surgery for prostate cancer that he had kept secret from senior Biden administration leaders and staff.

Austin was hospitalized Jan. 1 and admitted to intensive care after developing an infection a week after undergoing surgery. He was



Austin

released from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on Monday. On the Jan. 1 call to the Fairfax County Department of Public Safety, a man who identified himself as a government employee described Austin as alert. The identity of Austin and the caller were redacted from a copy of the 911 audio, which was obtained

by The Associated Press under the Freedom of Information Act.

In the four-minute call, the reason for needing the ambulance also was redacted.

The caller said Austin was not having chest pains.

“Can I ask, like, can the ambulance not show up with lights and sirens? Um, we’re trying to remain a little subtle,” the aide said, according to the recording.

A dispatcher responded that the ambulance it would comply once it got near the home.

## Pregnant: Sailors can stay in position with approval

FROM PAGE 1

or post-partum sailors in the Navy, which is consistent with historical averages. About 10% of those sailors are assigned to sea duty, the Navy told Stars and Stripes on Thursday.

In November, the Navy had about 14,000 open, or gapped, positions ashore.

That number fluctuates due to operational adjustments such as permanent changes of station and ship decommissionings, service officials told Navy Times on Wednesday.

Sailors already serving ashore who are within 13 months of a projected rotation may have that date extended, or they may move locally to fill a vacancy, according to

the fact sheet.

The policy also allows pregnant sailors serving at sea to remain in their assignments with the approval of their commanding officer and health care provider. Sea and shore commands can apply to be exempt from accepting pregnant sailors if the job is hazardous, the Navy said.

Shore orders will be canceled for service members at sea who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth.

Those sailors will continue to serve their full assignment at sea. But they will be granted convalescent leave with guidance from their medical provider, according to the Navy fact sheet.

The update follows several re-

cent changes to reproductive health care policies across the services.

In February, the Navy updated its policy following a Defense Department initiative that allows service members to delay notifying their commanding officers of a pregnancy until up to 20 weeks of gestation, except in the case of certain medical and occupational health hazards, or other special conditions.

The change also prohibits DOD health care providers from notifying a sailor’s command of a pregnancy until the 20th week, with the same exceptions.

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## Fired Navy submarine commander arrested for DUI in Georgia

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Navy captain fired last week from command of a guided-missile submarine was arrested and charged with driving under the influence of alcohol near Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base just days before his dismissal, local jail records show.

Capt. Geoffry Patterson was arrested by local police in St. Marys, Ga., and booked into the Cumberland County jail just after midnight Jan. 8, according to local jail records. He faces charges of DUI, improper lane change and no insurance, according to the jail records. St. Marys in Cumberland County is a southeast Georgia town just outside the gates of the Navy’s submarine base, where Patterson was assigned as a commander of the Ohio-Class USS Georgia.

Patterson, 53, was dismissed as the sub’s commander Jan. 12 by Rear Adm. Thomas “T.R.” Buchanan, commander of Submarine Group 10 who cited a “loss of confidence in his ability to command.”

A Navy statement issued Monday provided no specific details about Patterson’s dismissal, nor did it mention he had been arrested.

A Navy spokesman on Thurs-

day declined to comment on Patterson’s arrest or whether his dismissal was linked to the incident, citing an ongoing investigation.

Patterson had commanded the boat’s blue crew — one of two crews assigned to the submarine — since May 2022, according to the Navy.

Two crews alternate aboard U.S. submarines — one crew



Patterson

takes the boat on patrol, and the other typically remains at its homeport. Capt. Christopher Osborn, the USS Georgia’s gold crew commander, is now in

charge of the submarine, Navy officials said. The Georgia is one of four ballistic-missile submarines converted to carry conventional land-attack Tomahawk cruise missiles and carry special operations forces. The Georgia was converted in 2007, according to the Navy.

The guided-missile subs can carry up to 154 Tomahawk cruise missiles and up to 66 special operations personnel, according to the Navy.

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## MILITARY

# Families can renew ID cards online in States

## DOD working to expand option for those overseas

By **ROSE L. THAYER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

Military family members and retirees living in the United States can now renew their identification cards online and receive the new cards in the mail through an expansion of a pilot program that began nearly one year ago, the Defense Department announced.

The change impacts about 1 million people carrying the department's Uniformed Services Identification Card, which is issued to family members and retirees so they can access service benefits and privileges. The cards are different from the Common Access Cards issued to military personnel and civilian employees.

Each year, the Defense Department issues 4.5 million ID cards,

according to the Defense Manpower Data Center. About 2.5 million of those are USID cards.

A pilot program for online renewal began in February 2023, and remains limited to those living within the U.S. An expansion to non-U.S. addresses is in the works, according to the department.

"We think modern capabilities like renewing a driver's license online make it easier for people to get what they need when they need it without burdening them with having to take a trip somewhere," Mike Zarlenga with the Defense Manpower Data Center said in a statement. "We're excited about this, and it sounds like people see online renewal as making their lives easier, based on the

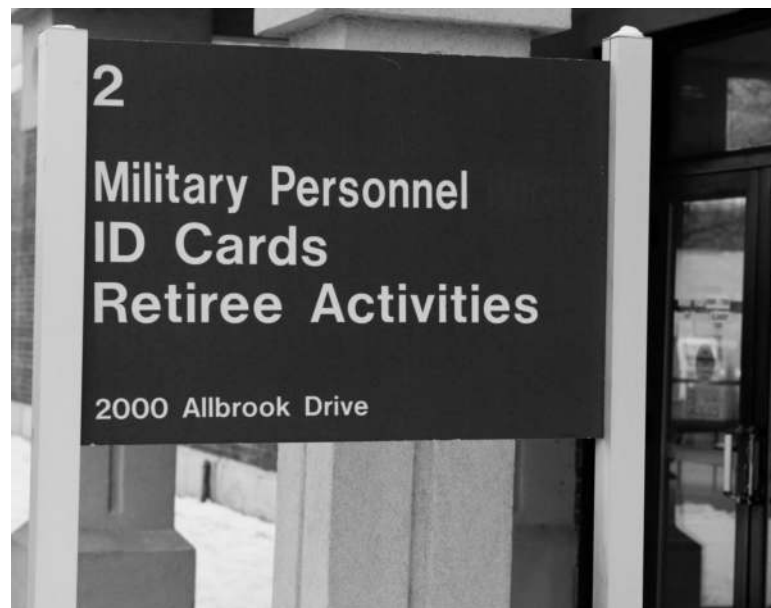
feedback we're getting."

The change also will free up appointments for military and civilian personnel who must continue to renew in person or for those people getting a military ID card for the first time.

"We want to make sure that people visiting that office can get an appointment when they need one, and they can get their CAC and resume their mission or duties with minimal impact to them or to the department," Zarlenga said.

More information about the online USID card renewal pilot program, including restrictions and requirements, is available on the [cac.mil](http://cac.mil) website.

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WESLEY FARNSWORTH/U.S. Air Force

The Military Personnel Flight, which includes the ID Card section at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, provides a variety of services to military members, reservists, civilian employees and families.

# Osprey pilot's family starting scholarship fund in his memory

By **JONATHAN SNYDER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The parents of an Air Force pilot who perished with seven other crew members aboard a CV-22 Osprey in late November have started a campaign to create a scholarship in his memory, his mother said.

Maj. Jeff Hoernemann, 32, of Andover, Minn., died with the others when their Osprey went down off the coast of Yakushima, an island in southern Japan. All but one of the crew members' remains were recovered. The search for Air Force Maj. Eric "Doc" Spendlove, of St. George, Utah, was suspended Jan. 11.

Hoernemann served as a CV-22 instructor pilot and chief of weapons tactics for the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 353rd Special Operations Wing, at Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo.

"The world would be a better place if it was a little more like Jeff," his cousin Maj. Derek Wibben said during Hoernemann's funeral livestreamed Jan. 4 by Grace Lutheran Church, Andover, on YouTube.

The GoFundMe campaign, started Monday by Hoernemann's parents, Catherine and Tom Hoernemann, by Thursday had raised more than \$4,800 toward their \$75,000 goal.

"The idea of creating this scholarship came about shortly after we lost him in such a tragic manner and was solidified in the

weeks leading up to and including the day of his funeral," Catherine Hoernemann told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday. "We, as his parents, knew that Jeff had a lot left to offer this world, and that his time here with us was way too short to accomplish all of his goals."

His parents were inspired after receiving letters and hearing stories from their son's friends in and out of the military about how much impact he'd had on their careers and personal lives, she said.

"We felt that the best way to honor his passions was to offer a scholarship for future aviators and educators," she said.

Jeff Hoernemann, 32, graduated from Andover High School in 2008, where he competed in track, cross country, Nordic skiing and swimming.

He graduated from North Dakota State University with a bachelor's in mechanical engineering and an Air Force commission through ROTC, according to his obituary on the Thurston-Lindberg Funeral Homes website. He began active service on March 1, 2015.

"Jeff loved the Air Force, flying the Osprey, his wife, family and friends unconditionally," his mother said. "He frequently told us that he really enjoyed mentoring the newer CV-22 pilots and teaching as an instructor pilot."

In addition to his parents, he



Maj. Jeff Hoernemann

leaves behind his wife, Jess Boozer, brother Jared Hoernemann and grandparents Ray and Ardelle Hoernemann, according to his obituary.

During his career, he was recognized with Meritorious Service medal, Air Medal with "C" Device, Aerial Achievement Medal, Air and Space Commendation Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, Air and Space Achievement Medal, Meritorious Unit Award, Combat Readiness Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, National Defense Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal with Bronze Star and Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, according to his obituary.

"He found and brought out the good in everyone and with every encounter with Jeff left you feeling better," his mother said. "We miss him and love him with all of our hearts."

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# Savings plan benchmark eliminates Hong Kong, broadens investments

By **JONATHAN SNYDER**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The federal government's retirement vehicle is changing the benchmark for its international fund this year to one that eliminates holdings in companies from Hong Kong.

The Thrift Savings Plan, or TSP, will track its I Fund against the Morgan Stanley Capital International All Country World Investable Market Index excluding United States, excluding China, excluding Hong Kong, or MSCI ACWI IMI ex USA ex China ex Hong Kong, according to a November announcement by the savings plan directors.

TSP is a retirement savings and investment plan for federal government employees and uniformed services members.

A benchmark index is a standard against which the performance of similar funds, fund managers and investors are evaluated.

Export bans and investment restrictions that affect businesses in Hong Kong created uncertainty that outweighs the benefits of including them in the TSP I Fund, the plan's international index fund, according to the release.

President Joe Biden signed an executive order in August that restricts outbound investment to China, Hong Kong and Macau in areas deemed critical to U.S. national security. "These include three main industries: advanced computing chips and microelectronics, quantum technology, and artificial intelligence," according to The Council on Foreign Relations.

The current I Fund benchmark, the Morgan Stanley Capital International Europe, Australasia and Far East Index, has never invested in mainland China but since 2001 has had less than 4% of its investments in Hong Kong, according to the release.

The MSCI ACWI IMI ex USA ex China ex Hong Kong is also larger than the current benchmark, with holdings in 5,621 large-, mid- and small-cap stocks in 21 developed markets and 23 emerging markets, according to the release. The MSCI EAFE Index includes 798 large- and mid-cap stocks in 21 developed markets.

TSP participants shouldn't expect this transition to happen all at once, a Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board spokeswoman told Stars and Stripes by email Jan. 8.

"The change is a process that will take multiple months to complete," Kim Weaver said. "We aren't announcing when we are going into specific countries to prevent front running — in other words, people buying stock ahead of our entrance."

This adjustment to the I Fund will more than double the number of countries included in the fund and will change the number of equities by 700%, the release said.

The Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board expects the new I Fund benchmark to outperform its current benchmark, according to the release.

As of October, TSP participants had invested \$68 billion in the I Fund, the release said.

## MIDEAST

# Israel hits southern Gaza; no word on medicines

Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — An Israeli airstrike on a home killed 16 people, half of them children, in the southern Gaza town of Rafah, medics said early Thursday. The military continued to strike targets in areas of the besieged territory where it has told civilians to seek refuge.

There was meanwhile no word on whether medicines that entered the territory Wednesday as part of a deal brokered by France and Qatar had been distributed to dozens of hostages with chronic illnesses who are being held by Hamas.

More than 100 days after Hamas triggered the war with its Oct. 7 attack, Israel continues to wage one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history, with the goal of dismantling the militant group that has ruled Gaza since 2007 and returning scores of captives. The war has stoked tensions across the region, threatening to ignite other conflicts.

More than 24,000 Palestinians have been killed, some 85% of the narrow coastal territory's 2.3 million people have fled their homes,

and the United Nations says a quarter of the population is starving.

Hundreds of thousands have heeded Israeli evacuation orders and packed into southern Gaza, where shelters run by the United Nations are overflowing and massive tent camps have gone up. But Israel has continued to strike what it says are militant targets in all parts of Gaza, often killing women and children.

Dr. Talat Barhoum at Rafah's el-Najjar Hospital confirmed the death toll from the strike in Rafah and said dozens more were wounded. Associated Press footage from the hospital showed relatives weeping over the bodies of loved ones.

"They were suffering from hunger, they were dying from hunger, and now they have also been hit," said Mahmoud Qassim, a relative of some of those who were killed.

Internet and cellphone services in Gaza have been down for five days, the longest of several outages during the war, according to internet access advocacy group NetBlocks. The outages complicate rescue efforts and make it difficult to obtain information about the



NASSER NASSER/AP

**A Palestinian woman flashes a V-sign toward Israeli troops during an army raid in the Tulkarem refugee camp, West Bank, on Wednesday.**

latest strikes and casualties.

The war has rippled across the Middle East, with Iran-backed groups attacking U.S. and Israeli targets. Low-intensity fighting between Israel and Hezbollah militants in Lebanon threatens to erupt into all-out war, and Houthi rebels in Yemen continue to target international shipping despite United States-led airstrikes.

The Israeli military said it fired an interceptor at a "suspicious aerial target" — likely a drone or missile — approaching over the Red Sea on Thursday, triggering air raid sirens in the southern Israeli coastal city of Eilat. The Houthis have launched drones and missiles toward Israel that mostly fell short or were intercepted and shot down.

Iran has meanwhile launched a series of missile attacks targeting what it described as an Israeli spy base in Iraq and militant bases in Syria as well as in Pakistan, which carried out reprisal strikes against what it described as militant hideouts in Iran early Thursday.

The agreement to ship in medicines was the first to be brokered between the warring sides since November. Hamas said that for every box of medicine bound for the hostages, 1,000 would be sent for Palestinian civilians, in addition to food and humanitarian aid.

Qatar confirmed late Wednesday that the medicine had entered Gaza, but it was not yet clear if it had been distributed to the hostages, who are being held in secret locations, including underground bunkers.

Both France and Hamas had said the International Committee for the Red Cross, which helped facilitate the hostage releases, would have a role in distributing the medications. But on Thursday, the Red Cross said "the mechanism that was agreed to does not involve the ICRC playing any part in its implementation, including the delivery of medication."

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## MIDEAST

# Pakistan fires retaliatory strikes at Iran

The Washington Post

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — Pakistan launched a series of retaliatory strikes Thursday on militants in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan province, its Foreign Ministry said, amid an increasingly tense situation in the Middle East that now appears to be straining relations between the nuclear-armed Pakistan and its neighbor.

Iranian state media reported that at least nine people, including three women and four children, were killed in the strikes, while Pakistani officials cited only the deaths of "a number of terrorists."

The Pakistani attacks, carried out with "drones, rockets, loitering munitions and standoff weapons," were launched in response to Iranian strikes inside Pakistan on Tuesday that killed two children, according to Pakistani officials. Both sides said they had targeted separatist militant groups that pose cross-border threats.

Pakistan's caretaker prime minister, Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, cut short his visit to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzer-



ANJUM NAVEED/AP

**Members of Muslim Talba Mahaz Pakistan chant slogans at a demonstration to condemn an Iranian strike in the Pakistani border area, in Islamabad, Pakistan, on Thursday.**

land, and Pakistani officials said their military — one of the largest in the region — remained on high alert.

While the Pakistan-Iran border region has seen occasional outbreaks of violence in recent years, this week's attacks came amid growing concerns over rising in-

stability in the region following the launch of Israel's war with Hamas militants, who are supported by Iran. Over the past week, the United States carried out several strikes against Iranian-backed Houthi militants in Yemen, who have been attacking shipping in the Red Sea; Iran,

meanwhile, attacked targets in Iraq and Syria on Tuesday.

The strikes between Iran and Pakistan appeared somewhat unrelated, in that they targeted militant groups that primarily pose local challenges and pursue limited regional goals.

Pakistan said its strikes targeted members of the separatist Baluchistan Liberation Army and Baluchistan Liberation Front, which view themselves as representing the Baluch community that lives across Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan.

Jaish al-Adl, the Sunni group that Iran said it targeted Tuesday, also views itself as a Baluch separatist group. Pakistani officials dispute that the groups targeted by the Iranian and Pakistani strikes this week truly represent the Baluch communities.

Amid mounting volatility across the region, Tehran "likely calculated this was an opportune moment to strike in Pakistan," said Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center.

While Thursday's Pakistani re-

taliatory strikes mark an escalation that Iran may not have expected, the severity of Pakistan's response could also "create openings for de-escalation," said Kugelman, especially as "the Pakistan-Iran relationship is not a hostile one and channels for dialogue are readily available."

But "if either side strikes again, all bets are off, and we'd have a real risk of a conflict," he said.

The strike in Pakistan was one in a string of recent Iranian attacks in the region, coming later the same day that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said it launched missiles at Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdistan region, targeting what it called an "espionage headquarters" of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency. Iraqi and Kurdish officials denied the claims.

The Revolutionary Guard also said it launched missiles in Syria, claiming to hit "the commanders and the main agents" behind two explosions this month in the Iranian city of Kerman that killed at least 95 people, an attack claimed by the radical Islamic State.

## Strikes: US to keep up military action in region

FROM PAGE 1

of Aden. The U.S. has also strongly warned Iran to cease providing weapons to the Houthis. On Jan. 11 a U.S. raid on a dhow intercepted ballistic missile parts the U.S. said Iran was shipping to Yemen. Two U.S. Navy SEALs remain unaccounted for after one was knocked off the vessel by a wave during the seizure and the second followed the overcome SEAL into the water.

There have been several incidents since the Friday joint operations.

The Houthis fired an anti-ship cruise missile toward a U.S. Navy

destroyer over the weekend, but the ship shot it down.

The Houthis then struck a U.S.-owned ship in the Gulf of Aden on Monday and a Malta-flagged bulk carrier in the Red Sea on Tuesday.

In response Tuesday, the U.S. struck four anti-ship ballistic missiles that were prepared to launch and presented an imminent threat to merchant and U.S. Navy ships in the region.

Hours later, the Houthis claimed responsibility for the attack on the Malta-flagged bulk carrier Zografia.

The ship was hit, but no one was injured and it continued on its way.



NOGA AMI-RAV/Stars and Stripes

## Proposed EU maritime force in the Red Sea would work with US

BY ALISON BATH  
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The European Union is moving to establish its own naval security force in the Red Sea that would work together with a U.S.-led initiative already protecting ships against Iranian-backed Houthi militant attacks.

EU states gave initial backing earlier this week to a plan for a European maritime security mission that would operate independently but coordinate patrols with the multinational Operation Prosperity Guardian, Reuters reported Wednesday.

If approved, Italy and France, which already have ships in the area, would join Germany in being the first to contribute ships to the EU mission, according to Reuters.

Italy hopes to fast-track the approval process so the security mission can begin quickly, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told reporters in Rome the same day.

"The political decision for us must be taken by next Monday," Tajani said. The original plan was to get approval by Feb. 19.

It's not clear why Italy and other plan backers, such as France and Germany, want to establish a separate task force. The EU already leads similar maritime missions in the Strait of Hormuz and off the Horn of Africa.

In announcing Operation Prosperity Guardian last month, the Pentagon named Italy, France and Spain among more than 20 countries involved.

But Europe is grappling with backing U.S. security efforts in the Red Sea amid growing protests at home over civilian deaths and suffering in the Israel-Hamas war, analysts have said. Some have called for the EU to step up its naval presence in the Red Sea and reinforce coordination among member nations.

"The EU should develop its own track of maritime security cooperation with regional powers, including



ELEXIA MORELOS/U.S. Navy

**German navy frigate Mecklenburg-Vorpommern sails the Baltic Sea in July 2023.**

with countries like Saudi Arabia and the (United Arab Emirates), which have shown growing interest in developing their naval forces in recent years," Camille Lons, a visiting fellow with the European Council on Foreign Relations, said in a Dec. 12 article on the council's website.

Since Nov. 19, more than 28 ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden have come under attack by Houthi militants using drone and anti-ship ballistic missiles. The latest targeted a U.S.-owned commercial ship hit by a one-way attack drone Wednesday. The ship sustained damage but there were no injuries.

The U.S. and U.K., with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands, coordinated the first retaliatory strikes against Houthi military strongholds in Yemen earlier this month. The U.S. alone has launched additional strikes targeting Houthi military capabilities.

U.S. officials have said the strikes are not related to Operation Prosperity Guardian.

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## PACIFIC

# Red Hill fuel facility cleanup to take years

By **WYATT OLSON**

*Stars and Stripes*

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Final cleansing of the 20 massive tanks that make up the Red Hill underground fuel storage facility in Hawaii will take three to four years, the deputy commander of the Navy task force in charge of the work said Wednesday.

The projected end to remediating the soil and aquifer contaminated by the facility, however, remains open-ended, Rear Adm. Marc Williams said during a Facebook Live presentation.

Williams, the chief engineer for the Navy Closure Task Force, was joined by Brig. Gen. Michelle Link, his counterpart on Joint Task Force-Red Hill, which has been overseeing the emptying of

roughly 104 million gallons of fuel from the facility.

That task force will be phased out over the next few months, with the Navy task force this spring assuming sole responsibility for the lengthy process of closure and remediation.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in March 2022 ordered the World War II-era facility closed in the wake of a jet fuel spill in late 2021 that contaminated the Navy's water distribution system that served roughly 93,000 people.

The recently stood-up Navy Closure Task Force has reached initial operating capability, with about 80 of the 200 personnel who will join its ranks by the end of March, Williams said.

The next three to four years will

be spent in part disassembling pipelines to empty residual fuel that could not be removed by any other means other than demolishing pipes.

The most time-consuming jobs, however, will be removing sludge from the bottoms of the 20 tanks and then cleaning the interior steel linings in the tanks, Williams said.

The entrance to each tank is about 190 feet above the bottom, he said. Tanks will be opened, ventilated and made safe for humans to enter, he said.

"Workers will be lowered down," he said. "The sludge will be collected in a very manual way. Essentially, think of buckets and shovels and it will be taken up, out."

The sludge will be "container-

ized" and then shipped to the mainland to be disposed of at facilities approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, he said.

The sludge will be handled with the highest level of oversight and scrutiny given to hazardous waste, even though the sludge is not categorized as hazardous, he said.

The "current concept of operations" for final cleaning of the interior of the tanks calls for using water from the Red Hill well shaft, which was contaminated by the November 2021 jet fuel spill.

Water has been continuously pumped out of that well since early 2022 as a means of preventing petroleum contamination from migrating into the aquifer from that site.

That water will be used to pressure wash the linings of the tanks, which each stand about 250 feet tall and 100 feet wide.

Williams equated the interior area to be cleaned in each tank as the surface area of 30 tennis courts.

Workers will be lowered in "buggies" to pressure wash from top to bottom, he said. The water will be collected, "appropriately treated," and then disposed," he said.

A timeline for remediating the site will become clearer as the task force undertakes a site assessment to determine the best way forward, he said.

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## US envoy Emanuel in Tokyo says 'There is a new Japan emerging'

By **ALEX WILSON**

*Stars and Stripes*

TOKYO — The U.S.-Japan alliance will "determine the future" of the Indo-Pacific region over the next 30 years as the two countries grow closer via military and economic ties, the U.S. ambassador to Japan said Thursday.

Japan's economic growth, cultural influence and expanding military capabilities confirm his belief that the alliance will dictate the United States' future in the region, Ambassador Rahm Emanuel told reporters Thursday.

He made a similar statement during his confirmation as ambassador in December 2021.

"Now, to be true, when I said that, I thought I was doing a sound bite or trying to be pithy — I didn't think of it as prescient," he said at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan.

"But I think anybody that looks back over the last two years sees a Japan that has emerged in a different way and with a different capability."

Prior to his arrival in Japan, Emanuel said, experts warned him

that Japan moves and adapts at an "incredibly slow" pace.

"I have a message for all the experts back in Washington: 'You don't know Japan today, you're wrong,'" he told reporters. "All the experts — despite their many degrees and years of experience — their predictions of the future, of where Japan would be, were myths."

Japan's efforts to grow its military spending and adapt to a post-COVID-19 world has been so rapid that the onus is now on the U.S. "to make changes at the same pace that Japan has made changes," Emanuel added. The country's defense spending is slated to rise to 2% of its current GDP by 2027.

"We have to ask ourselves if our own actions will be bold enough and fast enough to meet the changes taking place throughout the region," he said.

A former Illinois congressman, mayor of Chicago and chief of staff for President Barack Obama, Emanuel is blunt and, at times, confrontational. Since becoming ambassador, he's also criticized China and its president, Xi Jinping.

"China preaches cooperation but practices coercion," he said in a Dec. 18 post to X. "On Aug. 24, Beijing banned all Japanese seafood imports. Four months later, Chinese fishing vessels are still fishing in Japanese waters, and Chinese party leaders are still eating fish caught there."

Emanuel cited a December report from the Pew Research Center that found most adults in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea view China as a major threat.

Emanuel did not mention that the same survey found that most respondents in all three countries view the U.S. as at least a minor threat, with 53% of Japanese adults saying the U.S. poses a major threat to Japan.

Emanuel contrasted the Pew survey with a February 2023 report from the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute that found Japan to be "the most trusted major power in the region."

The difference, he said, is that China's outreach to other countries only aids the Chinese Communist Party, "while Japan's aid benefits the intended beneficiaries."



JENESSA DAVEY/Stars and Stripes

**U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel takes questions at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan in Tokyo on Thursday.**

Emanuel isn't trying to be a critic, he told Stars and Stripes during the news conference.

"I'm trying to call out what I think is hypocrisy and lack of honesty and transparency," he said, referring to the seafood import issue.

He ultimately returned to the subject of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

"There is a new Japan emerging, a more competent Japan," he told Stars and Stripes. "Our alliance is emerging, because of that, from protection to an alliance based on the principle of projection."

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## Japan signs agreement to purchase 400 Tomahawk missiles from US

*Associated Press*

TOKYO — Japan signed a deal with the United States on Thursday to purchase up to 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles as part of its ongoing military buildup in response to increased regional threats.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government has pledged to double its annual defense spending to around \$68 billion by 2027, which would make Japan the

world's third-biggest military spender after the United States and China.

Defense Minister Minoru Kihara announced in December a decision to accelerate deployment of some Tomahawks and Japanese-made Type 12 surface-to-ship missiles beginning in fiscal year 2025, a year before the original plan. The government says Japan is facing its "severest" security environment since World War II because

of threats from China and North Korea, causing it to increase military cooperation with the U.S., Australia, Britain and other friendly nations.

In November, the U.S. approved a \$2.35 billion sale of two types of Tomahawks — 200 Block IV missiles and 200 upgraded Block V versions. They can be launched from warships and hit targets 1,000 miles away, officials said.

The signing of the purchase

agreement on Thursday was attended by Kihara and U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel.

Japan and the United States agreed to expedite the deployment "in response to the increasingly severe security environment," Kihara said.

Emanuel said training of Japanese service members for the Tomahawks will start in March.

Late last year, Japan's Cabinet eased a ban on exports of lethal

weapons, allowing the sale of Japanese-made weapons and components made under license from other nations to those countries. The government quickly approved a shipment of Japanese-made Patriot missiles to the United States to complement the U.S. inventory.

Japan is accelerating its deployment of long-range cruise missiles capable of hitting targets in China or North Korea.

## PACIFIC

# N. Korea leader bides his time with tough talk

BY DAVID CHOI  
Stars and Stripes

Facing an unprecedented, three-way military partnership and a “pugilistic” South Korean president, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has responded with a belligerent tone toward the South, according to analysts this week.

North Korea announced it will undergo a “decisive policy change” in relations with the South due to its alliance with the U.S., the state-run Korean Central News Agency reported Dec. 31.

The policy shift includes abandoning all efforts to reunify with South Korea, which KCNA described as “a strange clan, who is no more than a colonial stooge of the U.S.”

North Korea’s tone is “on par with past rhetoric” and comes as Kim faces a united front beyond its southern border, Patrick Cronin, the Asia-Pacific security chair at the Hudson Institute in Washington, D.C., said Thursday.

In mid-January, North Korea through KCNA characterized South Korea as its “primary foe,” threatened to annex the country in the event of a war and proposed

amending its constitution to do away with the goal of peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

Kim could be “adjusting to his perception that there are no good diplomatic options to dealing with Washington and Seoul for at least another year,” Cronin told Stars and Stripes by phone.

“I think Kim will want to get back to the diplomatic table, but he’s looking for an opportunity,” Cronin said. “The U.S. is just one of many big actors; Kim still wants to engage with a U.S. that will give him more of what he wants than he sees right now.”

## Southern strategy

North Korea’s confrontational stance may be a response “to the more pugilistic and assertive Yoon administration,” he added.

Yoon, a member of the conservative People Power Party, has vowed to meet North Korea’s threats by force by boosting military cooperation with the U.S. and mending diplomatic ties with Japan.

At the same time, Yoon has promised Kim economic incentives in exchange for steps toward denuclearization. Both Yoon and President Joe Biden have repeat-



In this undated photo provided on Dec. 18 by the North Korean government, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspects what it says is an intercontinental ballistic missile being prepared to launch from an undisclosed location in North Korea.

edly offered to meet with Kim without preconditions.

In October, a U.S. bomber with South Korean and Japanese fighter-jets flew their first-ever airpower drill together. The three held maritime drills in international waters south of South Korea’s Jeju Island this month and in November.

In December, the three activated a real-time, data-sharing system that Yoon, Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in 2022 said will “improve each country’s ability to detect and assess” North Korea’s missile launches.

“If North Korea provokes us, we will punish them several times over,” Yoon said during a cabinet

meeting Monday.

The communist regime on Sunday launched an intermediate-range solid-fueled ballistic missile and earlier this month fired over 300 artillery rounds toward its southern maritime border.

North Korea’s rhetoric toward the South and its military partners are provocative but “not dramatically different” from its past remarks, particularly when dealing with a conservative South Korean president, according to Rob York, the program director for Regional Affairs at the Pacific Forum foreign policy research institute in Hawaii.

“The ruling ideology in North Korea is essentially anti-Japan, anti-U.S.; and the conservative

government in South Korea has really been seen as an extension of pro-Japan collaborationism,” York said by phone Wednesday.

The strengthening of this trilateral partnership “would seem to close the door, not that many of us really thought that it was open, with negotiations with the current government in South Korea,” he said.

North Korea may shift its stance after the South’s National Assembly elections in April; he questioned whether Kim has “genuinely backed away from hoping to reunify the Korean Peninsula under their control.”

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## Air Force to close aging housing tower at Yokota Air Base

BY SETH ROBSON  
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The Air Force plans to close a 50-year-old apartment tower that has provided temporary homes to newly arrived military families at this airlift hub in western Tokyo.

The Kanto Lodge, the Air Force Inn at Yokota, will close its temporary lodging facility in building 4304 on the east side of the base on Feb. 15, according to a recent announcement by the 374<sup>th</sup> Force Support Squadron.

The facility is in one of three multistory apartment buildings at Yokota built in 1974, according to Staff Sgt. Wren Fiontar, a spokesman for Yokota’s 374<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing.

Air Force Inns will convert some units at the Kanto Lodge to adjoining temporary lodging and pet-friendly rooms, according to wing spokesman 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Danny Rangel.

Closing the east side tower will



KELLY AGEE/Stars and Stripes

Building 4304, a temporary lodging facility at Yokota Air Base, Japan, seen here Thursday, is closing in February.

reduce the total number of temporary lodging units on Yokota from 150 to 124, he said in a Dec. 28 email.

“This amount will accommodate our PCSing (permanent change of station) families, regardless of size and pets,” he said.

“Members PCSing to and from Yokota can expect minimal impact; our Lodging operation will still have plenty of room to support large families and pets.”

The next four oldest of Yokota’s 21 apartment towers were built in 1977, Fiontar said in a Jan. 11 email.

“Typical lifespan for a concrete facility is 50 years but can be extended with consistent maintenance and repairs,” he said.

The facility provided temporary lodging in three-bedroom units that could accommodate up to six people, he said.

Lydia Christy, an Army spouse and mother of three, said she stayed in the facility when her family and their two pets arrived at the base five years ago.

“Having the space for our family of five was absolutely amazing and way better than trying to force ourselves into a one bedroom one pullout couch hotel room,” she

said in a Facebook post Wednesday. “It felt like being in a home before our home was ready.”

The Air Force should convert one of its other towers, closer to other facilities, into a temporary lodging facility, she said.

“It is so important to have and was a huge part of our introduction to this base,” she said.

Building 4304 was last renovated in 2010; all five east-side apartment towers have had new doors, windows installed and their exteriors painted, Fiontar said.

“Additionally, the 1970’s towers were all fully renovated between 2004-2012, which extended the useful service life by 20 years,” he said.

One of Yokota’s oldest apartment towers is scheduled for demolition in 2034. Four others will be renovated between 2031 and 2035, he said.

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## NATION

# Trump tops long day in court with NH rally

By MICHELLE L. PRICE

Associated Press

PORTSMOUTH, N.H. — Dan Steele knows what a long day in court is like. So he was extra appreciative on Wednesday that former President Donald Trump journeyed to New Hampshire after spending the day in a New York courtroom, where he sat defiantly during his trial to determine damages for defaming a magazine writer after she accused him of sexual assault.

A retired trial lawyer for the Justice Department, Steele said he hasn't dug into the details of the wide array of cases against Trump. That includes four prosecutions — including two by Steele's former employer — plus the defamation lawsuit, which comes on the heels of a \$5 million verdict for E. Jean Carroll in her initial sexual assault lawsuit against Trump, plus a fraud case filed by the New York Attorney General's office. But Steele dismissed them as "all campaign interference by the Democrats because they can't beat him any other way."

"Every time he goes into a courtroom," Steele, 75, who retired in 2016, said approvingly of Trump, "he always comes out with more support."



MATT ROURKE/AP

Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump arrives at a campaign event in Portsmouth, N.H., on Wednesday.

Steele and a few hundred other supporters spent hours waiting for Trump, who delayed his New Hampshire appearance to hold a late-afternoon news conference after the court concluded in which he slammed the judge in the case as "a radical Trump-hater."

The former president spoke more than two hours later than scheduled in a location that was much smaller than his normal venue — a hotel ballroom that could only accommodate some 300 people. He concluded his long day with a rambling speech that

lasted more than an hour.

He mocked his rivals in the primary, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley. Then he went off-message, touting a cognitive test he took as president, his administration's campaign against the Islam-

ic State and other familiar themes. Eventually, he came around to bemoaning his legal woes.

"You know I've been indicted more than Al Capone," Trump told the crowd. "You ever heard of Al Capone? Probably the greatest mobster of them all."

New Hampshire is the next state in the Republican nominating contest, and Trump seems intent on mixing court with campaigning.

The crowd in New Hampshire cheered wildly as Trump came onstage and hooted warmly at some of his standard campaign lines. Trump was in an obviously good mood, enjoying back and forth with a receptive crowd after a day of being forced to sit still and admonished to keep quiet in court.

"Would you trust Joe Biden to run your store while you go off to New Hampshire to find a small hill to go skiing?" Trump asked at one point, riffing on his likely Democratic rival in November like a standup comic.

Later, he quipped about former President Jimmy Carter, who is currently in hospice care in Georgia with terminal cancer. "He's happy because his presidency is now considered brilliant in comparison to Joe Biden," Trump said.

## DeSantis shifts away from NH days before vote

Associated Press

HAMPTON, N.H. — Ron DeSantis has decided to shift his presidential campaign away from New Hampshire just six days before the state's first-in-the-nation Republican primary while his leading super PAC executes another round of layoffs, moves that reflect the Florida governor's rapidly shrinking path to the 2024 GOP nomination.

DeSantis won't ignore the state completely over the coming days, but he's reallocating the majority of his staff to South Carolina, the home state of rival Nikki Haley, with its primary in just over a month. That's according to senior campaign officials who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to share internal discussions.

At the same time, the pro-DeSantis super PAC Never Back Down has transferred several of its Iowa staffers to other early states, while laying off the rest. It's unclear exactly how many people were laid off, although a super PAC official speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal strategy said those who lost their jobs would be paid through the end of January.

The strategic shifts by DeSantis' operation underscore his weakness in the 2024 Republican nomination race after he finished a distant second to front-runner Donald Trump in Iowa's caucuses Monday. DeSantis had made Iowa the centerpiece of his White House bid, yet Trump bested him by 30 percentage points there. Haley finished 2 percentage points behind DeSantis.

Trump appears to be tightening his grip on the



MICHAEL DWYER/AP

Republican presidential candidate Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis arrives for a campaign event Wednesday at Wally's bar in Hampton, N.H.

GOP nomination, although he could be vulnerable in New Hampshire's Jan. 23 primary. A CNN/University of New Hampshire poll conducted this month found that about 4 in 10 likely Republican primary voters in New Hampshire chose Trump, while about one-third picked Haley.

DeSantis' rivals seemed to enjoy the Florida governor's struggles.

Trump spokesperson Steven Cheung said in response to the governor's shift away from New Hampshire, "DeSantis is still running?"

Haley's campaign greeted the news with a dig, too. "South Carolina is a great state," Haley spokesperson Olivia Perez-Cubas said in a statement to the AP. "We hope they enjoy their vacation time here."

By shifting toward South Carolina, DeSantis' team is trying to take advantage of Haley's perceived weakness in her home state, where Trump appears to have a significant advantage over both of them. Yet DeSantis' allies believe that Haley will be forced to drop out of the race altogether if she loses South Carolina's Feb. 24 primary, giving DeSantis an opportunity to reemerge as a viable Trump alternative.

## Maine judge delays rule on Trump ballot removal until Colo.'s case ruling

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — A Maine judge on Wednesday put on hold a decision on former President Donald Trump's ballot status to allow time for the U.S. Supreme Court to rule on a similar case in Colorado.

Trump's lawyers appealed in state court when Secretary of State Shenna Bellows removed the Republican front-runner from the presidential primary ballot but then asked the judge to pause proceedings to allow the U.S. Supreme Court to rule on the Colorado case, which could render the lawsuit moot.

Superior Court Judge Michaela Murphy concluded she lacked authority to stay the judicial proceedings but she wrote that she did have authority to send the case back to the secretary of state with instructions to await the outcome of the U.S. Supreme Court case before withdrawing, modifying or upholding her original decision.

In her decision, the judge said the issues raised in the Maine case mirror the issues raised in the Colorado case before the U.S. Supreme Court. She wrote that her decision "minimizes any poten-

tially destabilizing effect of inconsistent decisions and will promote greater predictability in the weeks ahead of the primary election."

"Put simply, the United States Supreme Court's acceptance of the Colorado case changes everything," she wrote.

Bellows concluded last month Trump didn't meet ballot qualifications under the insurrection clause in the U.S. Constitution, citing his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. She became the first election official to ban Trump from the ballot under the 14th Amendment. Trump contended Bellows was biased and overstepped her authority.

The nation's highest court has never ruled on Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, which prohibits those who "engaged in insurrection" from holding office. Some legal scholars say the post-Civil War clause applies to Trump for his role in trying to overturn the 2020 presidential election and encouraging his backers to storm the U.S. Capitol after he lost. Activists conducted a campaign urging election officials to bar Trump under the clause.

## NATION

# 'Cascading failures' and 'no urgency'

## DOJ report finds police failed in handling of Uvalde, Texas, shooting

By ACACIA CORONADO  
AND JAKE BLEIBERG  
Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas — Police officials who responded to the deadly school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, “demonstrated no urgency” in setting up a command post and failed to treat the killings as an active shooter situation, according to a Justice Department report released Thursday that identifies “cascading failures” in law enforcement’s handling of the massacre.

The Justice Department report, the most comprehensive federal accounting of the haphazard police response to the May 24, 2022, shooting at Robb Elementary School, identifies a vast array of problems from failed communication and leadership to inadequate technology and training that federal officials say contributed to the crisis lasting far longer than it should have.

Even for a mass shooting that has already been the subject of intense scrutiny and in-depth examinations, the nearly 600-page Justice Department report adds to the public understanding of how police in Uvalde failed to stop an attack that killed 19 children and two staff members.

Uvalde, a community of more than 15,000, continues to struggle with the trauma left by the killing of 19 elementary students and two

teachers, and remains divided on questions of accountability for officers’ actions and inaction.

The shooting has already been picked over in legislative hearings, news reports and a damning report by Texas lawmakers who faulted law enforcement at every level with failing “to prioritize saving innocent lives over their own safety.”

In the 20 months since the Justice Department announced its review, footage showing police waiting in a hallway outside the fourth-grade classrooms where the gunman opened fire has become the target of national ridicule.

Attorney General Merrick Garland was in Uvalde on Wednesday ahead of the release of the report, visiting murals of the victims that have been painted around town. Later that night, Justice Department officials privately briefed family members at a community center in Uvalde before the findings were made public.

Berlinda Arreola, whose granddaughter was killed in the shooting, said following Wednesday night’s meeting that accountability remained in the hands of local prosecutors who are separately conducting a criminal investigation into the police response.

“I have a lot of emotions right now. I don’t have a lot of words to say,” Arreola said.

The review by the Office of



ERIC GAY/AP

**Dora Mendoza, right, is hugged by a friend as she leaves a meeting where Attorney General Merrick Garland shared a report on the findings of an investigation into the 2022 school shooting at Robb Elementary School, Wednesday, in Uvalde, Texas. Mendoza is the grandmother of 10-year-old Amerie Jo Garza, who was killed in the shooting.**

Community Oriented Policing Services was launched just days after the shooting, and local prosecutors are still evaluating a separate criminal investigation by the Texas Rangers. Several of the officers involved have lost their jobs.

Uvalde County District Attorney Christina Mitchell said in a statement Wednesday that she had not been given an advance copy of the Justice Department’s report but had been informed it does not address any potential criminal charges.

How police respond to mass shootings around the country has

been scrutinized since the tragedy in Uvalde.

In Texas, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott initially praised the courage of officers’ response and blame was later cast heavily on local authorities in Uvalde.

But an 80-page report from a panel of state lawmakers and investigations by journalists laid bare how over the course of more than 70 minutes, a mass of officers went in and out of the school with weapons drawn but did not go inside the classroom where the shooting was taking place.

The delayed response coun-

tered active-shooter training that emphasizes confronting the gunman, a standard established more than two decades ago after the mass shooting at Columbine High School showed that waiting cost lives.

As what happened during the shooting has become clear, the families of some victims have blasted police as cowards and demanded resignations.

At least five officers have lost their jobs, including Uvalde’s school police chief, Pete Arredondo, who was the on-site commander during the attack.

## Power line falls on car during Oregon ice storm, killing 3

By CLAIRE RUSH  
AND HALLIE GOLDEN  
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — A power line fell on a parked car in northeast Portland, Ore., on Wednesday, killing three people and injuring a baby during an ice storm that turned roads and mountain highways treacherous in the Pacific Northwest.

Shortly before noon, dispatchers started receiving frantic calls about a downed power line and people appearing to be electrocuted, according to a statement from the city’s fire department. A branch had fallen on a power line, causing it to fall onto an SUV, the statement said.

As the chaotic situation unfolded, a resident grabbed the baby from one of the people lying in the street in a bid to save its life, according to the statement. The three killed — two adults and one teenager — were found dead upon firefighters’ arrival, and the baby was taken to a hospital. It is be-



KGW/AP

**Authorities work the scene Wednesday, in Portland, Ore., after a power line fell on a vehicle, killing three people and injuring a baby during an ice storm that turned roads and mountain highways treacherous in the Pacific Northwest.**

lieved the victims were electrocuted after they got out of the vehicle, the statement said.

The power company later deenergized the line, the statement

added without specifying which company.

Around Portland, driving and even walking were virtually impossible as slick ice coated roads

and sidewalks. Icicles dangled from roofs and cars, and ice encased branches, plants and leaves like thick glass.

A large swath of the region was under warnings Wednesday for as much as 1 inch of ice, promising only to add to the damage wrought by a deadly, powerful storm that hit over the weekend. The warning area was reduced later in the morning to parts of southwest Washington and northwest Oregon, including Portland, and further limited to the western edge of the Columbia River Gorge in the afternoon.

Freezing rain could return to the region Thursday evening through Friday morning, the National Weather Service said. The areas most likely to be impacted include the eastern Portland metro area and the western Columbia River Gorge.

Portland transportation officials asked the public to stay off the roads through Thursday morning, and numerous school

districts, including Oregon’s largest, canceled classes for a third straight day as roads remained slick.

The three deaths Wednesday added to at least seven deaths linked to fallen trees and suspected hypothermia during the previous weekend’s storm.

Daniel Buck, who lives just a few steps from where the deaths took place in northeast Portland, told The Associated Press he heard an explosion and then saw a person running out of a car with a downed power line laying on top in flames. When he got closer, he said, he saw that person and two others on the ground about 35 feet away from the car, where the rest of the power line had fallen. He said he saw one of the victim’s pant legs on fire.

“All of them were making contact with the live wire, so nobody could touch them to help,” said Buck, who described the victims as residents of a nearby apartment. “It was just terrible.”

## NATION

# Anti-abortion activists: More to do

BY DAVID CRARY  
Associated Press

A year ago, anti-abortion activists from across the U.S. gathered for their annual March for Life with reason to celebrate: It was their first march since the Supreme Court, seven months earlier, had overturned the nationwide right to abortion.

At this year's march, on Friday, the mood will be very different — reflecting formidable challenges that lie ahead in this election year.

"We have undeniable evidence of victory — lives being saved," said John Seago, president of Texas Right to Life. "But there is also a realization of the significant hurdles that our movement has right now in the public conversation."

Participants at the march in Washington will salute the 14 states enforcing bans on abortion throughout pregnancy. They will proclaim that thousands of babies have been born who otherwise might have been aborted, even as studies show the total number of abortions provided in the U.S. rose slightly in the year after that enforcement began.

Moreover, anti-abortion leaders know that their side has a seven-state losing streak in votes on abortion-related ballot measures. Even in red states such as Ohio, Kansas and Kentucky, the outcomes favored keeping abortion access legal.

In this year's election, several more states are expected to have abortion-rights ballot measures, and Democratic candidates in many tight races are likely to highlight their support for abortion access.

"We have been around for more than 50 years, and I don't know of any year that was easy," said Carol Tobias, president of the National Right to Life Committee.

"But it definitely got harder after Dobbs," she added. "We have a lot of work ahead of us."

Tobias was referring to the Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* ruling in June 2022, overturning the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion nationwide. The key consequence of *Dobbs* was to return decision-making on abortion policy to individual states. Some Democratic-governed states — such as California, New York and New Jersey — have strengthened protections for abortion access. Roughly 20 states with Republican-controlled legislatures have either banned abortion or sought to impose new restrictions.

After *Dobbs*, "I didn't want anyone to get the false sense that we were at the end of our work," said Brent Leatherwood, an abortion opponent who heads the Southern Baptist Convention's public policy wing.

"We've gone from a focal point at the federal level to 50 different focal points," he said. "It



JOSE LUIS MAGANA/AP

**Anti-abortion activists hold a cross as they rally outside of the U.S. Supreme Court during the March for Life in Washington, on Jan. 20, 2023. Participants at this year's march will salute the 14 states enforcing bans on abortion throughout pregnancy.**

may be another 50 years before we truly establish a culture of life, where preborn lives are saved and mothers are supported."

Even the current claims of lives being saved due to the *Dobbs* decision are subject to question. While abortions have decreased to nearly zero in states with total bans, they have increased elsewhere — notably in states such as Illinois, Florida and New Mexico, which are near those with more restrictions.

Anti-abortion leaders are keenly aware that their opponents in the debate depict the wave of state bans as an infringement on women's rights and a potential danger to their health.

Thus the theme of this year's March for Life strives to convey support for women facing unexpected pregnancies: "Pro Life: With Every Woman, For Every Child."

"Pregnancy care centers and maternity homes are the very backbone of our movement," March for Life president Jeanne Mancini wrote in a recent opinion piece.

She and her allies have encouraged states to offer support programs for new mothers in need — helping them find housing, jobs and health insurance.

Among the scheduled speakers at the march is Jean Marie Davis, executive director of Branches Pregnancy Resource Center in Brattleboro, Vt. Davis says a similar center in New Hampshire helped her break free several years ago after she became pregnant while ensnared in a sex-trafficking operation.

Other scheduled speakers include House

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and U.S. Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., a co-chair of the Congressional Pro-Life Caucus.

Mancini said last year's march drew tens of thousands of people; she's hoping this year's march will be bigger.

J.J. Straight, part of an American Civil Liberties Union team working to protect and broaden abortion access, says her side also feels determined, especially in light of the recent ballot-measure results.

"We've seen a tremendous pushback to the anti-abortion agenda," she said. "There's a huge coalition of folks, regardless of their party and other demographics, who absolutely draw the line at this kind [of] interference in their health care."

Among the reasons for uncertainty for all parties is the inconsistent way that federal and state courts have adjudicated abortion-related cases. There have been numerous legal challenges to the various state laws banning or restricting abortion, some failing and others succeeding at least temporarily.

One of the biggest unknowns, heading toward to Election Day on Nov. 5, is how power in Washington will be divided between the two major parties. Abortion-rights supporters fear a Republican sweep of Congress and the White House might trigger a bid to impose a federal abortion ban. Conversely, some abortion opponents fear a Democratic sweep might lead to a law overriding the state abortion bans that are now in effect.

# Mo. group: Abortion compromise beats ban

Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — A Missouri abortion-rights campaign announced Thursday that it's throwing support behind an amendment that would enshrine access to the procedure in the state constitution while allowing restrictions in later stages of pregnancy.

Missourians for Constitutional Freedom said it is committing to a proposal, one of 11 versions, that would let lawmakers regulate or ban abortion after what's called viability, with an exception for the protection of the life and physical and mental health of the woman.

Supporters include the ACLU of Missouri, local Planned Parenthood affiliates and Abortion Action Missouri.

"Missouri's cruel and restrictive ban on abortion is tying the hands of doctors and preventing necessary care," said Dr. Iman Alsaad, an adviser to Missourians for Constitutional Freedom and chief medical officer of Planned Parenthood Great Plains, in a statement. "Today, Missourians are taking a critical step to make their own medical decisions and kick politicians out of the exam room."

The campaign faces steep opposition in its bid to get the proposal on November's ballot, with the petitions tied up in court for months after being challenged by Republican Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft. A campaign launched Tuesday seeking to quash any initiative petition to bring abortion back to the state.

And Missourians for Constitutional Freedom has funding difficulties, ending 2023 with no money in the bank.

Also complicating the effort is a competing ballot measure by a Republican that would allow abortion up to 12 weeks, and after that only in cases of rape, incest and in medical emergencies up until fetal viability. The term is used to describe whether a pregnancy is expected to continue developing normally or whether a fetus might survive outside the uterus. It's generally considered to be around 23 or 24 weeks into pregnancy but has shifted earlier with medical advances.

The decision by Missourians for Constitutional Freedom acknowledges concerns by some that a more expansive proposal would fail to pass in the state, which was among the first to outlaw almost all abortions after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned. Current Missouri law includes an exception for medical emergencies, but not in cases of rape and incest.

# Congress to vote on averting shutdown, keeping government funded

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congress was expected to extend current federal spending and keep the government open with votes in the Senate and House on Thursday, avoiding a shutdown and punting a final budget package until early March.

The stopgap bill comes after a bipartisan spending deal between House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and Senate Majority Leader

Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., earlier this month and a subsequent agreement to extend current spending so the two chambers have enough time to pass individual spending bills. The measure will run to March 1 for some federal agencies whose approved funds are set to run out Friday and extend the remainder of government operations to March 8.

Johnson has been under heavy pressure from his right flank to

jettison the budget accord with Schumer, and the bill to keep the government open will need Democratic support to pass the Republican-majority House. But Johnson has insisted he will stick with the deal as moderates in the party have urged him not to back out.

The stopgap legislation will be the third time Congress has extended current spending as House Republicans have bitterly disagreed over budget levels and the

right flank of the caucus has demanded steeper cuts. Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy was ousted by his caucus in October after striking an agreement with Democrats to extend current spending the first time, and Johnson has also come under criticism as he has wrestled with how to appease his members and avoid a government shutdown in an election year.

"We just needed a little more

time on the calendar to do it and now that's where we are," Johnson said Tuesday about the decision to extend federal funding yet again. "We're not going to get everything we want."

Most House Republicans have so far refrained from saying that Johnson's job is in danger. But a revolt of even a handful of Republicans could endanger his position in the narrowly divided House.

# WAR IN UKRAINE

## Fearing attack, Russian city cancels Epiphany events

Associated Press

A Russian city near the Ukrainian border canceled its traditional Orthodox Epiphany festivities on Friday due to the threat of attacks as Kyiv's forces pursue a new strategy with the war approaching its two-year milestone.

The city of Belgorod has scrapped events in which the faithful plunge into ponds and pools through holes in the ice on the feast of Epiphany every Jan. 19, the state news agency Tass reported, citing the regional emergencies ministry. The annual celebrations are widespread in Russia.

Cross-border attacks have become increasingly frequent in recent weeks in Belgorod, the largest Russian city near the border with

about 340,000 people, and can be reached by relatively simple and movable weapons such as multiple rocket launchers. It is about 60 miles north of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city.

On Dec. 30, shelling in the center of Belgorod killed 21 people and wounded 110, regional officials said, in what was one of the deadliest attacks on Russian soil since the start of Moscow's full-scale invasion of its neighbor.

Border villages have been targeted sporadically during the war by Ukrainian artillery fire, rockets, mortar shells and drones launched from dense forests, where they are hard to detect. But until Thursday, no major public events were known to have been called off.

In Moscow, meanwhile, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov dismissed a U.S. proposal to resume a dialogue on nuclear arms control, saying it's impossible while Washington offers military support to Ukraine.

Speaking at an annual news conference, Lavrov accused the West of fueling global security risks by encouraging Ukraine to ramp up strikes on Russian territory and warned that Moscow will achieve its goals in the conflict despite Western assistance to Kyiv.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pledged to hit more targets inside Russian border regions this year. The goal is to disrupt life and unsettle Russians, especially ahead of a March 17 election in Russia when President Vladimir

Putin is seeking another six years in power.

Ten rockets fired from Ukraine were shot down, with one woman injured by falling wreckage, Belgorod regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said Thursday.

Long-range cross-border missile, drone and artillery strikes have been a feature of the war, especially when fighting on the front line eases off during winter.

Russian forces have repeatedly blasted civilian areas of Ukraine. On Thursday, a multistory building was hit in Kupiansk, in the eastern Kharkiv region, killing a 57-year-old woman and wounding two men, according to regional Gov. Oleh Syniuhov.

Near Kupiansk, Russian troops

also shelled the village of Maly Burluk, killing an elderly woman, Ukraine's presidential office said. A 10-year-old boy and a 13-year-old girl were wounded, it said.

In the southern city of Kherson, shelling killed a driver in his car and a passerby on the street. Seven people were wounded in the region, including an 81-year-old woman, according to the presidential office.

It was not possible to independently verify either side's battlefield claims.

Ukraine's air force said it intercepted 22 out of 33 Shahed drones launched by Russia overnight. The Kremlin's forces also fired two S-300 missiles at the Kharkiv region for the second night in a row, officials said.

## France ramps up weapons production for Ukraine

Associated Press

PARIS — France announced more planned deliveries of its Caesar artillery system to Ukraine on Thursday and accelerating weapons manufacturing as it seeks to avoid depleting its own military stocks while continuing to support the war effort against Russia's invasion.

"The logic of ceding materiel taken from the armies' stocks is reaching its end," the French defense minister, Sébastien Lecornu, said in an interview with Le Parisien. "From now on, the solution is to directly connect French defense industries with the Ukrainian army."

France also launched a drive to fund the delivery of 78 Caesar self-propelled 155 mm howitzers to Ukraine this year. Ukraine has already paid for six of the guns itself and France will provide 50 million euros to deliver 12 more, Lecornu said separately in a speech. France is also seeking 280 million euros from other allies of Ukraine to pay for the 60 other Caesars, the minister said.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov, speaking by video link, said Russian forces are firing five times more artillery shells, even 10 times more in some places, than Ukrainian forces along the front lines and that stronger artillery "is one of four key needs to win this war."

"Shortage of ammunition, shell hunger, is a very real and pressing

problem," he said.

Lecornu said increased supplies of shells for Ukraine are on their way. From this month, France will supply 3,000 shells for 155 mm guns per month, up from 1,000 shells per month at the start of the war and 2,000 per month since last April, Lecornu said.

The production of other hardware is also increasing.

French manufacturer Nexter used to take 30 months to make one Caesar but now requires half that time, Lecornu told Le Parisien. Caesars are among an array of Western-supplied artillery systems that have given Ukrainian gun crews an edge, especially when paired with high-precision munitions, against Russian artillery batteries using older Soviet-designed systems.

Thales now takes six months — down from 18 months — to deliver one of its GM200 radars that have been provided to Ukraine for its air defenses, and MBDA's production time for the Mistral short-range air-defense missile has also been reduced, the minister said.

Following Russia's Feb. 24, 2022, invasion of Ukraine, France was among countries that quickly released weapons from its own armories to help shore up Ukrainian defenses. France also has supplied light tanks, long-range cruise missiles, air defense systems and other hardware, support and training.



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# WEEKEND



Divorce a common source of material  
**Music, Pages 28-29**



## Hydration inspiration

What does your choice of water bottle say about you?  
To fans of \$50 flasks, this is not a silly question.

**Lifestyle, Page 26**

LA TIMES, iSTOCK PHOTOS/Stars and Stripes illustration

## WEEKEND: GADGETS &amp; TECHNOLOGY



JONATHAN BARAN/The Washington Post

Washington Post tech reporter Chris Velazco tests the Xreal Air 2 Ultra glasses last week at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Velazco says there's value in seeing what companies believe is the future.

## Is it trash or a treasure?

Gadget nerd gives his 3 rules for deciding which technology products might make your life better and what will wind up in your junk drawer

BY SHIRA OVIDE  
The Washington Post

I bet you've bought a technology doodad hoping it would make your life better — but hated it.

Maybe it was a robot vacuum that always gets stuck in corners, a printer that never seems able to print or virtual reality goggles that your kid lost interest in after two weeks.

My colleague Chris Velazco has tried many technology products in his years as a professional gadget nerd. Last week, he scoped out the Consumer Electronics Show, a Las Vegas cavalcade of wacky and occasionally wonderful technology.

Chris told me what tech gear he's loving (and not) right now. And he dished advice on how to tell if a gadget could make your life better or would probably wind up in a junk drawer:

**Shira: A quick check of how tech-obsessed you are: How many devices in your home are connected to the internet?**

**Chris:** Twenty-five, my Wi-Fi router app says. That number is abnormally low, because I'm in Vegas and not on my couch. There are devices I can't identify. What on Earth is "C02GP555Q05N"? I should look into that.

**What are your rules for gadget buying to make sure we're getting something that we won't regret?**

I'll mention three.

■ Trust your gut. If you buy a gadget, set it up and don't feel right away that it improves your life, you should probably return it.

■ Don't rush your purchase. When something shiny and new comes out, it tends to be too flawed to buy right away. Also, nearly all electronics will go on sale. You can wait.

■ Be picky about reviewers. Start by asking yourself what you really want to know. Do you want comparisons between competing products? A sense of how a gadget might fit in your life?

Seek out trusted people. In addition to The Washington Post's Help Desk (shameless plug!), I'll call out David Cogen on YouTube for day-in-the-life reviews and Linus Tech Tips for the mix of technical rigor and lolz. Julian Chokkattu at Wired and Allison Johnson at the Verge are great and acces-

sible and aren't afraid to get nerdy when needed.

**What's your favorite current tech thing in your life?**

I swear I'm not an Apple fanboy, but the MacBook Pro with Apple's self-designed computer chips is the best return on investment of anything I've purchased in years. I *never* worry that I'll run out of battery.

**What's a technology that doesn't seem worthwhile to you?**

I'm not into wireless charging. I'd much rather plug a device into a charger and keep using it than stick it on a wireless charging pad where I can't tap or type as it recharges.

**What's a technology that's too complicated or frustrating even for you?**

Beyond basic things like lights, I can't get into smart-home stuff. I live in a rental and can't tear out fixtures and rewire things. Even if I could, I worry I'd spend the next 20 years making everything smart.

**But no way you'd install internet-connected toilets that you talk to, right?**

Those might be OK. What's life without the occasional weird luxury?

**Most of the products at CES are gimmicks or perennially the next hot thing that never gets hot (see: home robots, face computers, driverless cars). Why does this matter to normal humans?**

There's value in seeing what companies believe is the future and thinking about what we could gain or lose.

Take home robots. Companies like Samsung and LG are predicting that people will have AI robots in their homes within a couple of years. I doubt it.

But it's a chance to ask questions: What do I want a home robot to do? How cheap would one have to be before I might splurge on one? Are these companies doing the right things at all?

**From all the years you've been writing about technology, what's something you predicted would be huge and amazing — and you were wrong?**

A decade ago, when the first Oculus virtual reality headset and Samsung's Gear VR were released, I thought many of us would be playing games and doing tasks in virtual reality. I was off-base about how popular it would be.

## GADGETS

## ACCENTUM headphones can last for up to 50 hours

BY GREGG ELLMAN  
Tribune News Service

If you're shopping for headphones, when you try the new Sennheiser ACCENTUM wireless headphones, you won't look further.

A quote in a Sennheiser press release launching the headphones accurately stated, "Consumers are getting breathtaking Sennheiser sound without sacrificing the battery life or wireless freedom that makes them so enjoyable to use all day long."

Sound performance, comfort and cost are the essential things to consider when headphone shopping, and the ACCENTUM headphones ace every category. Once paired up via Bluetooth 5.2, which also allows multipoint connectivity, you'll hear the Sennheiser sound and know they are of the utmost quality.

The Sennheiser companion Smart Control app can enhance and adjust the sound with 5-band equalizer presets and other manual adjustments. The app also manages Bluetooth connections.

Each ear hears the sound from powerful 37 mm drivers. The sound is designed to allow listeners to enjoy crisp, deep bass and brilliant highs. Most of my testing was done with classic rock playlists, which were pumped out precisely that way. When I took the headphones on a neighborhood walk, turning on the hybrid active noise cancellation helped block unwanted outside sounds.

A pair of built-in microphones are there for hands-free calls, which work great with the wind-reduction mode. Controls and ports are on the bottom of one earcup.

The ACCENTUM headphones are comfortable enough for all-day use. Both the earcups and adjustable headband are padded. And when your listening is done for the day, the headphones fold up flat.

A USB-C charge (cable included) will produce up to 50 hours of playtime. A 10-minute

quick charge will give you up to five hours of listening. The USB-C connection can also be used for wired listening.

Online: sennheiser-hearing.com; \$179.95, available in black; white with sandstone accents will be available soon

Scosche's MagicMount Travel folding 2-in-1 wireless charger is another must-have. The charger is built to be used everywhere: at home, at work or even on the seat back trays of an airplane. Wherever you choose, the charger is as efficient and versatile as they come.

It's built as a two-position stand, simultaneously charging MagSafe-compatible iPhones (model iPhone 12 and later) in landscape or portrait mode and AirPods with MagSafe charging cases. The travel charger is built with soft-touch vegan leather and can also be laid flat.

When using the MagicMount Travel flat, it wirelessly charges non-MagSafe wireless charging-enabled Androids, iPhone and AirPods models. iPhones charge up to 7.5 watts and AirPods up to 5 watts. Samsung phones can charge up to 10W but only with the charger in the flat position.

A 4-foot premium braided right-angle power cable is included. The MagicMount Travel is \$79.99 and is available in black or white.

With some smartphones having a USB-C charging port and others having an Apple Lightning connection, Scosche's new StrikeLine HH 2-in-1 USB-C to USB-C/Lightning cable is perfect.

The patented \$39.99 dual cable has a hammerhead design with MFi-certified USB-C and Lightning connections on one end, and another USB-C connection on the other. It has aluminum connector housing; the 4-foot tangle-free USB-C braided cable is available in black or white.

Online: scosche.com



SENNHEISER/TNS

Sennheiser ACCENTUM wireless headphones offer 50 hours of sound from 37mm drivers.



The Scosche StrikeLine HH 2-in-1 charge and sync cable has USB-C and Lightning connections on one end, and another USB-C connection on the other.

SCOSCHE/TNS

## WEEKEND: MOVIES

## Q&amp;A

# 'Til death do us part

## Actors Cuoco and Oyelowo discuss killer dynamic in new comic thriller 'Role Play'

By PETER LARSEN  
The Orange County Register

In the comic thriller "Role Play," sweetly naive Dave learns that Emma, his cheerful wife and the loving mother of their two young kids, is a world-class assassin. Suddenly, he's thrown into an unfamiliar world of danger.

Dave, played by David Oyelowo, gets beat up, shot at and tied up after following Emma, played by Kaley Cuoco, and discovering just exactly what very special skills are required in her line of work.

It's essentially the world's worst-ever Take Your Husband to Work Day, an idea that makes both Oyelowo and Cuoco burst out laughing when it's posed to them on a recent video call.

Cuoco, who found stardom on "The Big Bang Theory," shifted to edgier fare with "The Flight Attendant" and "Based On a True Story," both of which had a similar mix of action and comedy. Oyelowo, who played Martin Luther King Jr. in "Selma" and had starring roles in such films as "The Butler" and "Nightingale," is mostly known for dramatic roles.

The movie, now streaming on Amazon Prime Video, also features Bill Nighy as a drolly hilarious hit man and Connie Nielsen as a very bad stepmother.

In an interview edited for length and clarity, Cuoco and Oyelowo talked about what drew them to "Role Play," how they found the tone of the film and why learning that your spouse is an assassin and then working through it can be helpful to viewers going through rough patches in their own relationships.

Also, we talk about a future for the characters in the last question, so consider this a spoiler alert.

**Orange County Register:** Kaley, this movie fits in with a couple of your other recent projects. Talk a little about the appeal of comedic thrillers.

**Cuoco:** You know, I love this space. I love the tone. I love a tone that hits everything. One minute, you're making a silly face and laughing, the next minute you're crying, and the next minute, you're kicking ass. Like, that's kind of a gift to be able to tap into all those things in one.

And obviously, I enjoy the kind of cat-and-mouse, wink-to-the-camera type of thing. This one was cool, too, because I'd never done kind of the physical, the fight sequences, and playing that sort of a badass.

I was really, really wanting to

do something like that. And then mixing it with the family aspect, and being this wife who's keeping the secret, but loves her family. Then, when David came on, it just was like this piece that had been missing for so long, because I had been sitting with the script for many years before we met. So it was kind of cool to finally see what it was meant to be.

**David, it feels like you do dramatic things more than this kind of project. What was it like for you to shift into this world?**

**Oyelowo:** It was a lot of fun. I'm always looking for exploring new avenues. Yes, I've done a lot of more dramatic things, but in life, I'm a bit of a goofball, and people have seen less of that.

But I think that's what really drew me to this. The fact that he



PRIME VIDEO/TNS

**Kaley Cuoco, left, and David Oyelowo play a married couple in "Role Play." In the film, David (Oyelowo) discovers that Emma (Cuoco), his wife and the mother of his children, is also a world-class assassin.**

is a family guy like me. The fact that, like me, he's someone who would do anything to fight for his family.

I also love the fact that, yes, I'm known for more dramatic roles, and Kaley's probably known for more comedic roles. And there's a bit of a role reversal here. She's the straight guy to my guy who's sort of flailing in the wind and trying to figure it all out in the midst of the film.

To be honest, secretly, I just wanted to be in her orbit just to learn some of that stuff, and hopefully be able to exhibit it on screen. Little did I know that we would have the degree of chemistry we had. I love her as a human being, and so to get to do this with her was a joy on top of what I anticipated it would be.

**Cuoco:** We're big fans of each other and then became really true buddies. As cool as it was to do this film, that's been the really neat thing that's come out of this.

**I want to go back to something you said a minute ago, Kaley, about the different tones in this movie, and how you and David found the right balance between a realistic portrayal of a family and a very unrealistic one where the wife is going off to do hits around the world.**

**Cuoco:** I mean, it's a little bit, at moments, you know, excitable.

**Oyelowo:** Good word, excitable.

**Cuoco:** There were a lot of conversations about that. I remember when we first were doing 'Flight Attendant,' that was the constant conversation:

'What's this? What's the tone?' That's all we'd be discussing. So I was laughing when we were shooting this. I'm like, 'Yes, I understand asking these questions.'

Because it was not confusing, but it shifts constantly. It wasn't just one thing, and that's the kind of thing that I love. I feel like that's also like real life. I find it to be more relatable.

Obviously, her career choice is not relatable, but we've been saying earlier that this marriage, they love each other, and she loves this family and obviously so does he. And it's kind of a metaphor for going through something very difficult. Whatever that is in your own life, that you're fighting to get through, that is really what this commitment is about.

**David, your role is also difficult in that you have to kind of convince us a little bit that you would stick with your wife even after you find out what she does. That you wouldn't just take the kids and go, and go hide somewhere.**

**Oyelowo:** Well, in my own life, it's less unrealistic for me. My wife and I, we've been married 25 years now, and we've done things that other people deem unrealistic. Like, we started out before we got married, and we said we were never going to be apart for more than two weeks, which is insane given that she's an actress as well. But we've managed it. And I do think that those are the things that really do keep a marriage together in the

insanity of this world.

And so for me, Dave's choice is exemplary of what it sometimes takes to keep the family going, keep a marriage together. Obviously, it's outsized; it's fantastical. It's a movie. But I think we want to entertain the audience while also bringing them into something that might reflect something that they may be going through.

It was fun to explore something grounded whilst doing it in this sort of very fantastical, aspiration kind of way that hopefully the audience can relate to as well.

**[NOTE: This next question is a bit of a spoiler, so don't read on if you want to remain completely unaware of plot points.]**

**At the end of the movie, we don't see [character redacted] dead, and in movies we often know that when characters are not shown dead, there's the possibility they might not be. Is that the case here that [character redacted] maybe appears in a potential sequel with you two?**

**Cuoco:** That's very interesting. It's actually the first time anyone said that, so that's an interesting idea.

**Oyelowo:** You may have seeded something. I thought [character redacted] was dead.

**Cuoco:** I did, too. So very interesting.

**Oyelowo:** Well, we will see. **Give me a thanks in the credits when it happens.**

**Cuoco:** 100%.

**Oyelowo:** Done deal.

## WEEKEND: MOVIES

## Introducing Americans to Aki Kaurismäki

'Fallen Leaves' stars say tragicomic romance bringing new attention to, appreciation for 'the maestro in Finnish cinema'

By LINDSEY BAHR  
Associated Press

There are two types of cinephiles in the world: current Aki Kaurismäki fans, and future Aki Kaurismäki fans.

Alma Pöysti and Jussi Vatanen, the Finnish stars of his latest, the tragicomic romance "Fallen Leaves," are getting to meet both during their whirlwind tour of America at the height of Hollywood's awards season.

In the span of just a few days, they'd attend the Golden Globe Awards, where both the film and Pöysti were nominated; get the news that the National Society of Film Critics had selected "Fallen Leaves" as the best non-English-language film of the year; take a quick detour to San Francisco for a screening; and head back to Los Angeles in time for the Governors Awards.

They are running out of superlatives to describe the experience, Vatanen said in a joint interview with Pöysti, but both can agree that it's been "overwhelming."

The film is about two lonely people in working-class Helsinki, Ansa and Holappa, who meet at a karaoke bar and attempt to embark on a romance despite missed connections, lost phone numbers, general awkwardness, middle-age solitude and other such obstacles to true love. Its deadpan charms have transcended cultures and brought new attention to and appreciation for Kaurismäki 20 films in, even if he himself shies away from press and the spotlight. Thus it's up to the actors to be emissaries for the film. But it's the opposite of a chore — it's a privilege.

"This film brings joy and hope and comfort to people," Vatanen said. "It's great to be an ambassador of that."

Pöysti said she's almost jealous of the people who are finding Finland's most famous director through "Fallen Leaves."

"They have so many nice things to discover," she said. "His humor gets you, whatever age you are, wherever you come from, whatever language you speak. And that's a true gift, to be able to do that. Humor is one of



PHOTOS BY MUBI/AP

Alma Pöysti, right, and Jussi Vatanen embark on a romance in working-class Helsinki in "Fallen Leaves." Vatanen describes the film as "just a small love story." "It's not covered in anything. It's simple emotions, simple humanity and it still, I guess because of that, touches people."

the hardest things to translate into different cultures, and Aki does that very uniquely and masterfully. But also his deep humanism is at the core of it all."

And you don't need a specialty video store to access his films, either: The Criterion Channel is currently streaming 15 Kaurismäki films, including the so-called proletariat trilogy ("Shadows in Paradise," "Ariel" and "The Match Factory Girl"), a category that "Fallen Leaves" fits neatly within, as well as "Le Havre" and "The Other Side of Hope." "Fallen Leaves" is also available to stream on MUBI.

Both Vatanen and Pöysti grew up under Kaurismäki's influence, not just his films but the culture of film appreciation he helped build in Finland with festivals and theaters and "spaces for people to meet around cinema," Pöysti said. The opportunity to then actually be in one of his films was one that neither took for granted.

"He truly is the maestro in Finnish cinema," Vatanen said. "To have a chance to work with him, it's like a dream which you never had because it just felt so distant."



Pöysti and Vatanen in another scene from "Fallen Leaves." Pöysti says the characters "are not dating professionals at all." Vatanen added: "It's a bit like they've read a handbook of dating."

"Fallen Leaves" is a film lover's film to its core, with references to Jim Jarmusch, David Lean and Charlie Chaplin. Ansa and Holappa's movie date is to "The Dead Don't Die," but there are also movie posters in the background of many scenes — and it didn't stop when the cameras turned off, either.

"It was like an endless movie quiz on set," Vatanen said. "There was no chance you could beat Aki in film knowledge."

Pöysti added that the filmmak-

ers debated the poster choices "passionately."

They've been on the road with "Fallen Leaves" on and off for almost a year, since it debuted at the Cannes Film Festival, on through the New York Film Festival and its theatrical debuts around the world.

And now, they've found themselves in the flurry of Oscar season. "Fallen Leaves" is on the shortlist for best international feature representing Finland. But they don't want to talk about

that possibility just yet, before nominations are announced on Jan. 23.

"We don't want to jinx anything," Pöysti said.

Besides, it's more fun to talk about the film anyway, which Pöysti likes to say is "more salt" than "sugary love story."

"They lead very rough lives. But humor is somehow what gets you through the day," she said. "And these are not dating professionals at all. They're behaving like perhaps how you're supposed to maybe be on a date. But I don't think either one of them has been on a date, perhaps ever."

Vatanen added: "It's a bit like they've read a handbook of dating, you know, like, ask her for a coffee and then the movies and maybe a dinner."

One thing they do not ask each other is their names, which Vatanen said is actually not the craziest thing, coming from Finland. The Finnish, he said, are "the silent bunch of Europeans."

"You could almost also perhaps call it flirting, that you don't get all the information right away. You have to somehow earn it," Pöysti added. "And they are extremely shy. Saying your name might be a very, very vulnerable thing to."

And they've enjoyed hearing everyone's reactions to "Fallen Leaves" at screenings around the world and knowing that people leave the film feeling hopeful.

"I love the fact that it's just a small love story," Vatanen said. "It's not covered in anything. It's simple emotions, simple humanity and it still, I guess because of that, touches people,"

They did get a few precious hours of downtime one day during their trip, too. Naturally, they went to the movies: A retrospective screening of Robert Altman's "The Long Goodbye" at the New Beverly Cinema.

In the land of movie stars, they expected to go under the radar. But much to their surprise, there were some moviegoers there who recognized them and wanted to talk about Kaurismäki and "Fallen Leaves."

"It was quite crazy," Vatanen said.

**"They have so many nice things to discover. His humor gets you, whatever age you are, wherever you come from, whatever language you speak. And that's a true gift, to be able to do that. Humor is one of the hardest things to translate into different cultures, and Aki does that very uniquely and masterfully. But also his deep humanism is at the core of it all."**

Alma Pöysti  
star of "Fallen Leaves"

## WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

## Sticky situations

Vengeful Statham back in 'The Beekeeper,' a silly thriller that ends up a rather grim and slipshod John Wick rip-off

BY JAKE COYLE  
Associated Press

Secret agents and murderous assassins seem to lurk in increasingly mundane places.

Remember "The Accountant" with Ben Affleck? Or "The Tax Collector" with Shia LaBeouf? Or more recently, how about "The Bricklayer" with Adam Eckhardt? You probably don't — none of these films were exactly Oscar winners. But there's probably a notary public somewhere wondering when he's going to get his Liam Neeson treatment.

"The Beekeeper," the new Jason Statham revenge thriller, may have them all beaten — or at least bee-ten. The film, directed by David Ayer (who also did "The Tax Collector"), has found probably the widest disparity yet between innocuous occupation and savage killer. As bodies accrue, so do the double takes from those confused by the source of all the mayhem. Again and again they utter in disbelief: "A beekeeper?"

Believe it, honey. "The Beekeeper" carries that ludicrous premise as far as it can, and then well beyond.

The bee metaphors — there is even, rather impressively, a "To bee or not to bee" reference — come fast and furious in "The Beekeeper," a movie that flirts with a so-bad-it's-good vibe but is too serious to quite pull it off. It can be divertingly bonkers, but ends up a rather grim and slipshod "John Wick" rip-off.

The film, scripted by Kurt Wimmer,

begins the action with one of the more absurd inciting incidents in recent memory. Statham is a humble beekeeper for Eloise Parker (Phylicia Rashad) on a New England farm. She soon falls victim to a phishing scam that robs her of all her money, including the \$2 million charity fund she manages. Eloise calls a number that pops up on her screen and is talked into sharing her passwords by a smarmy scammer (David Witts) who's simultaneously using the call as a lesson to a room full of hackers who cheer him on like the predatory stock brokers of "The Wolf of Wall Street."

Eloise doesn't press CTRL-ALT-DELETE or even call the fraud department of her bank. She kills herself. And guess who's mad? The beekeeper.

Eloise's daughter, Verona (a good Emmy Raver-Lampman), is an FBI agent who throws herself into the case. But meanwhile, Statham's beekeeper, after a well-placed call, gets the location of the call center. He turns up with a few tanks of gasoline and some terse words about, you know, the hive, and burns down the place, killing a few people along the way.

That brings the attention of higher-ups. Only the guy in charge is a 28-year-old twerp named Derek Danforth (Josh Hutcherson, enjoying himself) who brashly underestimates his new enemy at every step of the way. His entitlement is owed to his rather good connections. He's protected by the former head of the CIA, Wallace Westwyld (Jeremy Irons), and happens to



AMAZON MGM STUDIOS/AP

Jason Statham plays both a literal beekeeper and a retired member of the Beekeeper clandestine secret service in David Ayer's revenge thriller "The Beekeeper."

be the son of the U.S. president (Jemma Redgrave).

Fingers get cut off and bodies accumulate as our man — his name turns out to be Adam Clay — tears through the criminal apparatus with ruthless blunt force. Statham, who has both the look and personality of a bullet, dispatches anyone in his path with the kind efficiency I dream of bringing to opening a pickle jar. A few twists of the wrist, and he's done.

Clay — brace yourselves! — isn't just an actual beekeeper. He's a retired Beekeeper, an elite, clandestine secret service that operates well off the government books and that adopts a surprising amount of its mission statements from the natural way of bees. They have a whole secret order, bringing "The Beekeeper" into plainly "Wick"-ian — and less fun — territory.

Yes, this silly beekeeper thriller goes all the way to the top. As the movie's rene-

gade protagonist makes his way closer and closer to the White House, with blood and chaos in his wake, "The Beekeeper" begins to feel like an uncomfortable B-movie cross-pollination of today's conspiracy theory-marred political landscape, with a violent, self-appointed guardian of America slashing his way toward the president. Most of the dead bodies are secret service.

Disquieting thoughts, maybe, for a beekeeper movie. Ayer's movie is mostly just having some cynical world-building fun, even if its hero feels like a part more suited to Mr. Bean. And, besides, while John Wick was first propelled into action by the death of his dog, Clay doesn't bat an eye when his honeycombs get blown to smithereens. This guy doesn't even really care about bees.

"The Beekeeper" is rated R for strong violence, pervasive language, some sexual references and drug use. Running time: 105 minutes. Now playing in select AAFES theaters.

## 'I.S.S.' space-themed thriller revives Cold War paranoia

BY JAKE COYLE  
Associated Press

With war raging in Ukraine and U.S.-Russia relations below freezing, the Cold War movie may be alive again, too.

After decades when fears of mutual destruction and nuclear fallout filtered into movies from "Fail Safe" to "WarGames," anxiety over current Russian-American geopolitics plays a provocative role in the new space thriller "I.S.S."

Gabriela Cowperthwaite's film is set aboard the International Space Station, which the opening credits note is a symbol of post-Cold War U.S.-Russia collaboration. The astronauts and cosmonauts are a friendly band of fellow scientists, but that harmony is significantly challenged when bombs begin falling across the Earth's surface. Gazing down below, bioengineer Kira Foster (Ariana DeBose) initially thinks the bright flashes all over North America are volcanic eruptions.

It's an intriguing premise that "I.S.S." can't translate into a coherent thriller. But it's striking



BLEECKER STREET/AP

Ariana DeBose plays a bioengineer, one of three Americans on board the space station, in "I.S.S." In the film, their allegiances with their Russian cohabitants get tested after war breaks out on Earth.

that exactly 60 years after "Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb," we are again offered the chance to sit in the dark and contemplate the horror of a speculative U.S.-Russia war. History may not repeat itself, but movie genres might.

One reason why "I.S.S." isn't successful, though, is that it feels more cribbed from past Cold War movies than it does any current reality. It was penned by Nick Shafir, whose script landed on the blacklist in 2020, several years before the war in Ukraine began. And its chamber-piece

framework — the space station is essentially the film's sole setting — carries over many of the dynamics that defined Cold War movies of the late 20th century. Among the three Americans and three Russians on board are hawks and doves; each nationality mirrors the other.

Kira is the new arrival at the space station. Nearly everything is shared, she's told, and talking politics is a no-no. "We definitely don't talk about what's going on down there," she's told. From space, it's said, there are no visible borders on the planet below.

Commander Gordon Barrett (Chris Messina) heads up the American group. It's he who gets an urgent transmission from Houston after the war has started. It's mildly charming to think that amid nuclear fallout, someone will be immediately concerned with the fate of a floating science lab. ("Abort the experiments!") But the message also supplies an ominous new mission: Take control of the space station.

A new suspicion grips the I.S.S.

The Russian contingent — Weronika (Masha Mashkova), Alexey (Pilou Asbaek) and Nichola (Costa Ronin) — likewise grows more wary of their cohabitants. Allegiances get tested, particularly in the case of Gordon and Weronika, who seem more than colleagues.

Cowperthwaite ("Blackfish," "Our Friend") doesn't have the knack for close-quarters suspense that might have led to something more like a low-budget, geopolitical "Gravity." But she's also not done favors by the script's clumsy twists. Is a zero-gravity repair mission outside the space station the best thing for Gordon to do moments after the onset of global warfare?

But "I.S.S." will suffice as a high-concept B-movie. And given how much mileage the movies once got out of Soviet villains, it may just be the beginning of a new cycle. It's notable that of the film's plot machinations, all-out warfare wasn't the least implausible invention.

"I.S.S." is rated R for some violence and language. Running time: 95 minutes.

## WEEKEND: GAMES



BRIAN BOWERS/Stars and Stripes

Adventurers waded through flooded subterranean chambers as they battle undead enemies in a recent Lord of the Rings Roleplaying game in Washington, D.C.

# Middle-earth comes to the tabletop

Lord of the Rings Roleplaying bends Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition rules, narrative, gameplay to better fit Tolkien's world

BY BRIAN BOWERS  
*Stars and Stripes*

Many think of Dungeons & Dragons as a tabletop role-playing version of J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings."

However, Frodo never pulled out a Wand of Magic Missiles to blast an orc. And Aragorn never worried about being enveloped by a quivering Gelatinous Cube. There isn't all that much magic in "The Lord of the Rings" — at least not like the arcane spectacles players expect when playing D&D. And the wicked beasties populating Middle-earth are a lot less diverse than those contained in the D&D "Monster Manual."

For those looking for a fantasy world a lot closer to Tolkien's Middle-earth, Free League Publishing has created The One Ring and The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying. The two games are basically the same, but LOTR Roleplaying relies on rules for D&D's fifth edition — a format that's popular for its accessibility and focus on fun.

Since I'm most familiar with D&D 5e system, I opted to give that version a shot.

The 5e rules are so thoroughly integrated into the

game's format that the core rulebook doesn't even cover points that are the same. That means, for example, that the rulebook doesn't cover combat except to direct players toward the rules in the D&D "Player's Handbook." However, don't think that you will need to plunk down another \$50 for the D&D handbook. The basic 5e rules are available for free to download on PDF from the website of D&D's creators, Wizards of the Coast.

The Lord of the Rings core rulebook focuses on differences between the freewheeling nature of D&D and the sort of gameplay necessary for a world that's closer to that in Tolkien's works.

The differences include seemingly small things, like redefining what constitutes a long rest and what skills are available to characters. But each brings the game more in line with Tolkien's world. For example, D&D's "arcana" and "religion" skills have been eliminated because they aren't relevant and "explore," "hunting" and "travel" have been added to reflect the skills needed by long-distance travelers.

Other changes are more significant.

The game whittles the number of character races down to human, elf, hobbit and dwarf — eliminating dragon-

born, gnomes, devilish Tieflings, catlike Tabaxi and a slew of others. Humanity is divided into three branches — Rangers, men of Bree and Bardings, each with its own characteristics and bonuses.

The game also reworks the adventures' job titles — referring to them as "callings" rather than "classes." The fighter callings are: captain, think of Boromir; champion, a standard fighter; and warden — think of Aragorn and the ranger class in traditional D&D. The rogue class has become the treasure hunter calling. And elements of the bard and monk, along with a hint of roguishness, appear in the messenger calling.

Gone are clerics and sorcerers, since Tolkien never mentioned priests and only a handful of extremely powerful wizards — like Gandalf — inhabited Middle-earth. All of D&D's magic-using classes are replaced by the calling of scholar, which can focus on either lore or healing. Instead of casting powerful spells — hurling fireballs or raising fallen comrades from the dead — characters perform "crafts" that can influence the course of the action in more subtle ways. Crafts enable characters to heal,

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# WEEKEND: GAMES

## Tabletop: Players praise new skills, immersion, adventure construction

### FROM PAGE 18

communicate with animals, boost weapon skills, read runes and more. Unfortunately, there are only eight basic crafts to choose from instead of the scores of spells in D&D.

When characters reach a new level, they gain rewards — such as new weapons or armor — and can select from a list of their culture's virtues, which boost certain skills and abilities.

In addition to recasting the nature of gameplay, the game adds several mechanics that bring things into line with the narrative flow of both "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings." It places a greater emphasis on the journey to the adventure site. Mishaps or boons that occur during the trip can affect the party's status and health before it even faces its first Orc. This explains the addition of the journey-related skills.

And in a nod to the many meetings between the Fellowship of the Ring and powerful kings, councils, stewards and wizards, the game includes mechanics covering such interactions. This involves a series of dice rolls weighted by the party's status and the seriousness of the matter being discussed.

One of the most significant new mechanics involves the looming evil that seeks to dominate Middle-earth. Players will frequently acquire Shadow Points. Perhaps they greedily picked up treasure that had been tainted by Orcish hands or stupidly killed an innocent villager. These actions generate Shadow Points, which can eventually lead to a bout of madness. Think of Gollum, or even Boromir's breakdown when he tried to take the One Ring from Frodo. There's also the problem of Sauron's ever-watchful eye. Certain deeds — good or bad — can draw his attention and cause problems for the party.

Another addition is the presence of patrons — figures who impart advice or present quest opportunities. They also grant certain bonuses to the party. Most patrons are familiar to Tolkien fans, including the adventurer Bilbo Baggins, the wizard Gandalf, the dwarf Balin and the mysterious and mischievous Tom Bombadil.

Finally, the game features a Fellowship Phase at the end of each adventure. During this time, the party gathers to recuperate and undertake special tasks. The best example of this in Tolkien's books is the sojourn at Rivendell after Frodo was wounded.

During the Fellowship Phase, characters are able to remove some Shadow Points, meet with their patron, gather information, study magical items or bolster the fellowship and gain Fellowship points. These points can be spent to gain advantage on various dice rolls during the adventure. Advantage lets you roll the die twice and use the best score.

However, the game is not a retelling of "The Hobbit" or "The Lord of the Rings." Its action is set between the two works. Smaug the dragon has been eliminated and the surrounding region is thriving. Sauron is reemerging as a shadowy threat, but his armies are not yet marshalling.

To help players and their "Loremaster" immerse themselves in this world, the core rulebook outlines the people, places, enemies and lore of Middle-earth.

These are expanded upon in additional



Free League Publishing photos

**Gandalf appears on the cover of the core rulebook of The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying game. The core rulebook outlines the people, places, enemies and lore of Middle-earth. These are expanded upon in additional well-organized and pleasingly illustrated volumes that contain additional background information as well as adventures that are ready to play.**



**An archer takes aim in an illustration from the core rulebook of The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying game.**

volumes titled "Ruins of Eriador," "Tales of Eriador" and "Shire Adventures," for those who prefer the pint-size hobbits. These well-organized and pleasingly illustrated volumes contain additional background information as well as adventures that are ready to play.

But you can only go so far by reading and comparing rulebooks. That's where my friends and family came in handy.

I acted as Loremaster for two different groups of players, leading them through an adventure featured in the core rulebook. It revolved around cutthroat brigands, soggy ghouls, skulking dwarves and a noble wraith in a ruined city cursed by the infamous Witch-king of Angmar.

Although as Loremaster, I had to do quite a bit of study to familiarize myself with the new format, the players discovered that the reliance on 5e rules made the transition very quick and smooth.

As could be expected, one of the elven



**Orcs rally in an illustration from the core rulebook of The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying game.**

scholars grumbled a wee bit about stepping back into a bard-like supporting role in combat, but even he gave the overall package glowing reviews. The champions, wardens and treasure hunters were all pleased with the new abilities — and with the relative lack of magic, which permitted them to focus on combat without having to worry about being blindsided by a powerful spell.

In fact, most felt that the loss of magic was balanced by the abilities gained across the board. For example, one of the hobbit treasure hunters reveled in his use — and probably abuse — of a rule allowing him to move in combat without provoking opportunity attacks. This permitted him to flit across the battlefield dealing deadly sneak attacks almost at will.

But the whole reason to play this game is to immerse yourself in Tolkien's world. That too was a success. Bumping into



**Gandalf enjoys a pipe in an illustration from the core rulebook of The Lord of the Rings Roleplaying game.**

Bilbo Baggins, drinking ale at the Prancing Pony in Bree and fighting familiar foes brought Middle-earth to life.

In addition, the players thoroughly enjoyed the well-constructed adventure, which provided ample opportunities for action and interaction. They said this — as well as the game's unique rules — encouraged actual role-playing rather than just enduring a string of shallow skirmishes.

They embraced it all and are planning their return for more adventure in Middle-earth.

**Online:** [freeleaguepublishing.com/games/the-lord-of-the-rings-roleplaying](http://freeleaguepublishing.com/games/the-lord-of-the-rings-roleplaying)

## WEEKEND: TRAVEL

# Castle Quarter tells Prague's long history

Prague is one of Europe's best-preserved cities, having been spared from last century's bombs. Nowhere is this more evident than in the hilltop Castle Quarter, which looms above the city and dominates the skyline. Filled with high art and grand buildings from the past 1,200 years, this area is packed with history. Even today, you feel like clip-clopping through these streets in a fancy carriage.

Dominating the neighborhood is Prague Castle. Czech leaders have ruled from here for more than a thousand years. The castle is hailed as the biggest anywhere, with a 1,500-foot-long series of courtyards, churches and palaces. If exhausting is a measure of big, I'll buy that claim.

My first stop was St. Vitus Cathedral, the most important church in the Czech Republic — and the most crowded part of the castle complex. The centerpiece of the cathedral is Alphonse Mucha's masterful 1931 Art Nouveau window depicting the saints Methodius and Cyril, considered the fathers of Slavic-style Christianity.

The cathedral is also home to the tombs of royal and religious VIPs, such as Ferdinand I, the first Habsburg emperor, and St. John of Nepomuk, a national saint whose tomb boasts more than a ton of silver. Because of the church's proximity to the royals' home, the king had his own

boxed pew in a private balcony — connected by an elevated corridor to his private apartment so that he could attend Mass in his jammies.

The historic heart of the church is the fancy Wenceslas Chapel. It contains the tomb of St. Wenceslas, patron saint of the Czech nation (and the "Good King" of Christmas carol fame), who united the Czech people back in the 10th century. He lifted the culture, astutely allied the powerless Czechs with the Holy Roman Empire and began to fortify Prague's castle as a center of Czech government. Wenceslas' story may be more legend than history, but he remains an icon of Czech unity whenever the nation has to rally.

After crossing the square, I visited the Old Royal Palace, seat of Bohemian princes since the 12th century. Back in the day, the palace's large hall was filled with market stalls, giving nobles a chance to shop without actually going into town. The space was even big enough for jousts, with a staircase that was designed to let a mounted soldier gallop in. Until the late 1990s, this is where parliament gathered to elect the president.

Finally reaching the bottom of the castle



Rick Steves



Rick Steves

**Regally perched on a hill above town, Prague Castle is surrounded by a church, cathedral and several palaces built by nobles who sought influence with the king.**

complex, I wandered into Lobkowitz Palace, which displays the private collection of a prominent Czech noble family, including paintings, ceramics and musical scores.

A highlight is the fabulous audioguide, narrated by members of the Lobkowitz family — including the prince of the palace himself, William Lobkowitz. Formerly a Boston real-estate broker, William returned here in 1990 to reclaim his family's properties and eventually restore them to their former state. The audioguide brings the place to life and lets you get to know the family — who lost all their possessions to the Nazis, got them back after World War II and then lost them all again to the communists.

After turning in the audioguide, I asked the clerk to thank the prince for me. She asked me if I'd like to meet him. So William and his wife Sandra ended up taking me through the palace for a more intimate peek at things. We talked about post-Nazi restitution challenges and triumphs, and the fact that many nobles have gotten a bad rap since the French Revolution. As William put it, "We're just real people who own lots of big palaces." On reflection, I decided "noble" might now best describe the effort William and his family are making to preserve valuable pieces of the Czech cultural heritage.

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

## Folk music festivals proudly celebrate their regional roots

Of all the endless ways to spend leisure time and travel, an almost-universal crowd pleaser is listening to music. Indoor or outdoor, music festivals offer the public plenty of room to roam and discover new acts. A festival with a lineup described as "folk" is a good bet for stumbling upon acts with sounds that give away their regional roots.

**Dublin, Ireland:** At the end of each January, Dublin's premier entertainment and nightlife district becomes a showcase for traditional Irish and folk music. Since its



Karen Bradbury

launch nearly two decades ago, TradFest Temple Bar has brought dozens of the Irish folk world's biggest names to the stage during a traditionally slow travel time of the year. Genres from rock to rap also join the programming.

From Jan. 24-28, the streets and pubs of the Temple Bar district will once again spring to life as acclaimed and aspiring artists play for an enthusiastic public. Another feature of the festival is its use of venues outside the district from cathedrals to stadiums to City Hall. This year's lineup features more than 50 concerts set in venues including Malehide Castle and the Collins Barracks of the National Museum of Ireland. Tickets to individual concerts can be booked online in advance. Online: tradfest.com

**Rudolstadt, Germany:** On the first full weekend of July each year, the small town of Rudolstadt in the state of Thuringia welcomes tens of thousands of visitors to a folk, roots and world music festival of almost unfathomable dimension. For four days, some 300 concerts take place across 30 stages. Performances are given by artists representing roughly 40 countries, including one nation chosen as that particular edition's special guest. There's also a featured style of dance put under the spotlight. Other unique features of the festival include workshops devoted to each year's selected dance style, buskers performing



etnokrakow/pl

**The EtnoKraKow/Crossroads Festival showcases talented artists of the Polish and international ethno and world music scene. The festival will take place in early July.**

on the city streets, the presence of instrument makers and a two-day children's festival. Last year, the price for a combi-ticket to all days of the festival and a camping spot came in at 150 euros plus fees. The 2024 edition of the festival runs July 4-7. As festival tickets often sell out, it may be wise to book as soon as they become available on or around Feb. 1. Online: rudolstadt-festival.de

**Brussels, Belgium:** The Brosella Festival is a weekend-long celebration of not just folk music but also many jazz and ethno acts. Slated for July 6-7 in 2024, this annual cornucopia of sound is served up beneath the trees of the lush and spacious Osseghem Park found at the foot of the Atonium. A standing feature of the city's longest-running festival is its booking of both famous acts and on-the-rise hopefuls. The children's corner provides young attendees with age-appropriate concerts alongside dance, games and hands-on activities. The festival sets its prices in a

democratic fashion, allowing would-be attendees to decide for themselves how much they can afford to pay for a ticket. Early-bird tickets purchased at the lowest possible price came in at 12 euros in 2023. Children under 12 enter the festival for free. Online: brosellafestival.be

**Cambridge, England:** First held in 1965, the Cambridge Folk Festival counts as one of the longest-running folk festivals in the world. Known and loved for its eclectic programming, the festival pairs folk artists from around the UK and Ireland with contemporary acts, American country legends, singer-songwriters, famous names and rising stars. Cherry Hinton Hall Park, the setting for the festival, is only a 15-minute drive away from Cambridge's bustling city center. A decade ago, a special stage referred to as The Den was created to give artists under the age of 30 a chance to present their music, opening up the festival to a new generation of performers. Festival-goers can also enjoy activities from instrument making to willow sculpture, knitting, songwriting, drawing, storytelling and tai chi. The festival unfolds July 25-28, and tickets are already available. The cost of an adult festival pass in 2024 is 230 UK pounds (about \$294) plus fees. Online: cambridgelifelive.org.uk/folk-festival

**Krakow, Poland:** A stunningly beautiful medieval backdrop is the icing on the cake of the EtnoKraKow/Crossroads Festival, a showcase of stars and rising talents of the Polish and international ethno and world music scene. Festival organizers place an emphasis on fostering endangered traditions and supporting initiatives that create an atmosphere of tolerance, integration and intercultural dialogue through art and music. A range of workshops familiarizes attendees with the musical cultures of the world. Performances range from intimate chamber concerts to lively open-air parties. While exact dates for the 2024 edition have yet to be announced, the festival usually takes place over four days during the first week of July. Online: etnokrakow.pl

## WEEKEND: TRAVEL

## Where in the world are US Steel's eagles?

Fans of the Pa. birds bringing foam versions along on their travels

By MARY ANN THOMAS  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The bald eagles living at the U.S. Steel Irvin Works plant near Pittsburgh — or rather, 4-inch-tall versions of them — are popping up all over the world.

Since this summer, “Claire” and “Irvin” have been seen roosting in England’s Stonehenge and Windsor Castle, the redwoods in California, Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello in Virginia, the South Pole and Steelers and Penguins games.

“They travel well,” said Phyllis Miele-Chlebowski, a retired school teacher from Mount Pleasant, Pa., who took them to Europe this fall.

She dubbed the West Mifflin steel mill raptors “the royal eagles” when she posed them in front of Windsor Castle.

Kids ran up to Miele-Chlebowski to ask if they could have Claire and Irvin — the eagles that nest at the U.S. Steel mill in West Mifflin are named after the Irvin Works and Clairton plants.

“I had to politely tell them ‘They’re traveling with me,’” Miele-Chlebowski said.

She’s not the only fan of the real-life bald eagles snapping pics of the foam figurines at iconic and ordinary destinations. It’s been a running gag since this summer, when lightning zapped equipment that livestreams the bald eagles’ nest for a few weeks. Fans were left in the dark.

“People were asking, ‘Where in the world is Claire?’ Nobody could see her anymore,” Miele-Chlebowski said.

Soon she was turning up on Facebook in places around the country and the world. U.S. Rep. Guy Reschenthaler, R-Pa., posed with a figurine of Claire at the South Pole.

The idea of spiriting the foam eagle figurines to far-flung destinations was hatched by U.S. Steel’s Irvin Works plant manager Don German, who promotes the plant’s resident eagles with a live webcam of the mill’s nest and public presentations.

“I thought, wouldn’t it be neat to do a finding Waldo type of thing,” he said.

German and his wife, Diana, started posting photos of the Claire and Irvin figurines at the beach, a redwood forest, a winery, a hunting camp and in their Jeep. Really, anywhere they went.

Other eagle fans jumped in,



DIANA GERMAN/TNS

A U.S. Steel bald eagle stress toy visits Thomas Jefferson’s home, Monticello, in Charlottesville, Va.



PHYLLIS MIELE-CHLEBOWSKI/TNS

Claire and Irvin at Windsor Castle in England this fall.



DIANA GERMAN/TNS

Claire and Irvin in San Francisco with the Bay Bridge in the background.

including one from Europe who had the raptor couple chilling on the Swedish coast.

Miele-Chlebowski took the eagles to Costco and plunged them into the frozen fish section. Her Facebook post had the birds discussing the high price of seafood and how they got a much better deal fishing in the Monongahela River.

She is a late-blooming bald eagle aficionado among more than 10,000 followers on multiple Facebook pages for the West Mifflin eagles.

Recently, she added the eagle couple to her sparkly Christmas tree along with a stick since the birds often bring and move sticks around in their nest.

German launched the podcast “Eagle Talk” in 2022 after one of the mill’s eaglets was knocked from the nest, then rescued, rehabbed and released back into the wild.

He began an educational mission on eagles, reaching more than 5,000 people with presentations at schools, libraries and clubs throughout the Mon Valley and Western Pennsylvania.

“It’s cool how U.S. Steel’s product is mined, melted and made in America,” he said. “To have our national bird choose our plant as their home is an honor.”

Around the time he started “Eagle Talk,” one of German’s co-workers showed him a generic foam rubber bald eagle that can be squeezed to reduce stress. He just had to have one and has custom-ordered 9,000 of the tiny eagles.

“I thought it would be cool to have the eagle squishy toy to give to the kids,” he said.

Another reason to love the stress-ball eagles is that they are the same size as a newly hatched eaglet, German noted.

With multiple runs of eagles in different sizes, he named the largest one Claire because female eagles are larger than males.

German effortlessly rattles off fun facts about the birds: They see four to five times better than humans and can spy a rabbit 2 miles away. Their grip strength is three to four times greater than that of a human hand.

Miele-Chlebowski attended German’s talks more than once.

“I was just mesmerized by all the facts and info about eagles,” she said.

U.S. Steel’s squishy, stress toy bald eagles are not for sale. German gives them away at his talks, as well as for the steel makers fundraisers for Tamarack Wildlife Center in Crawford County, which rehabilitates injured birds.

To watch the steel mill eagles online, visit [ussteel.com/eagles](http://ussteel.com/eagles).

## WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

## Learning about the lost 'Little America'

Stadtmuseum Kaiserslautern temporary exhibit explores history of K-Town housing complex for US troops, their families

By J.P. LAWRENCE  
*Stars and Stripes*

A bygone era when U.S. troops and their families stationed in Kaiserslautern, Germany, lived in a community affectionately dubbed "Little America" is being brought to life at the city's museum of local history.

An exhibition at Stadtmuseum Kaiserslautern that runs through Jan. 28 traces the life span of the American Fliegerstrasse housing complex, which occupied the north slopes of the city until its demolition in 2011.

The exhibition, "Fliegerstrasse, Blutacker und Amiswisse," is in the Wadgasserhof, a building constructed by monks during the Middle Ages. It is across from the Theodor Zink Museum, where permanent displays focus on Kaiserslautern's growth over the years.

A visit provides an interesting look into how Germans viewed relations with the Americans in the area prior to 9/11, when security tightened and fences went up between area residents and U.S. military personnel.

In the 1950s, Americans began moving into a block of 10 large housing complexes on a hill on the north side of town. Postcards from the time show huge houses in rows, offset from the road by spacious lawns in the quintessential American suburban design. German children would wander into the unfenced neighborhood to go sledding with their American pals.

A vivid theme of the exhibit is one common to stories of German and American relations in the area: the clash between the human desire to connect and the bureaucratic need to control access and maintain security.

The depiction of a sign at the Fliegerstrasse basketball court at the museum illustrates this best. An English message in the top half says use of the court by anyone not affiliated with the U.S. military is forbidden. The bottom half, with the warning in German, is completely blacked out by defiant graffiti.

Despite warnings from military police, Germans and Americans kept meeting at the basketball court to play, according to emails showcased at the exhibition.

They were written by Ralf Vester, who grew up in Kaiserslautern and went to school next to the housing complex.

"They were something special, the Americans," Vester wrote. "That was always a touch of the big, wide world for us children and young people."

But after 9/11, security measures tightened at U.S. bases across Germany. In 2003, the Americans tried to fence off the housing area with roadblocks, even though it was in the middle of the city. After this failed, homes started to go vacant.

The area was handed over to the German government in 2009 and demolished in 2011. Today, apartment complexes stand where service members once lived.

I was struck by the durability of the impression the residents of Little America made on the people in the area.

And yet, for an exhibit that portrays relations between Germans and Americans, there is a distinct lack of text in the language of the latter. All but one of its captions are in German without English translation. Much of what I learned came from Google Translate and speaking to staff at the museum, who acknowledged that there should have been more translations.

I also enjoyed the free permanent exhibits at the Theodor Zink Museum next door, especially the tabletop diorama of historical Kaiserslautern.

The presentation on the impact of World War II on the region, which survived heavy bombing by U.S. and allied forces, was haunting. The permanent exhibits had binders with an English guide, which was helpful.

While the museum is small, it's laid out well and worth an afternoon trip for those wanting to know more about the region's growth.



Stadtmuseum Kaiserslautern

Kaiserslautern once had a neighborhood along Fliegerstrasse where American military officers and their families lived, as shown by this postcard from the 1950s. A temporary exhibit, which runs through Jan. 28 at the Stadtmuseum Kaiserslautern, traces the life span of this neighborhood, affectionately dubbed "Little America."

## Stadtmuseum Kaiserslautern

**Address:** Steinstrasse 48, Kaiserslautern, Germany  
**Hours:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday through Friday; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; closed Monday and Tuesday  
**Cost:** The permanent exhibition in the Theodor Zink Museum is free. The cost for the temporary exhibit is 4 euros for adults and 2.50 euros for students with a student identification card.  
**Information:** Phone: 0631 365-2327; online: [tinyurl.com/4jztb364](http://tinyurl.com/4jztb364)

J.P. Lawrence



J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

A child on a school trip looks over a diorama of historical Kaiserslautern at the Theodor Zink Museum. Its permanent displays focus on Kaiserslautern's growth over the years.



J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

A section of the Theodor Zink Museum shows the effects of World War II on the region.



J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

The American homes at Fliegerstrasse, above, were demolished in 2011, as seen in this photo on display by Herbert Rohmer.



J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

Photos of the basketball court at Fliegerstrasse taken in the early 2000s show how the area was a meeting space for Americans and Germans.

## WEEKEND: FOOD &amp; DINING



PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL/Stars and Stripes

The modern interior of Alte Post Restaurant leaves little to remind the visitor that the hall once housed a community postal office. The dining venue now offers a unique culinary experience in the heart of Neckarsulm, Germany.

# Meals worth writing home about

Alte Post, at old postal office in Neckarsulm, offers innovative cuisine with service of yesteryear

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL  
Stars and Stripes

In the days when horse-drawn carriages were the fastest transportation across the German countryside, it was common on long journeys to stop at postal stations, where both animal and traveler could refresh.

Alte Post restaurant in the quaint town of Neckarsulm, which borders urban Heilbronn and is less than an hour from Stuttgart's Robinson Barracks, stands as a testament to this history of travel.

The eatery, whose name means old post office, reopened in 2019, seamlessly integrating into the elegant Welcome Hotel Neckarsulm next door.

Looking to avoid lackluster fast-food fare on a recent drive on the A6 highway, my wife suggested that we make a pit stop there.

I was struck by the upscale modern ambiance inside. A glass structure links the new hotel with the historic charm of the Alte Post. White-gloved servers glide between tables, offering service of yesteryear elegance with a welcoming informality.



## Restaurant Alte Post

**Address:** Obere Bahnhofstrasse 8, Neckarsulm, Germany

**Hours:** Monday through Sunday, 5:30-10 p.m.

**Prices:** Appetizers start at 7.50 euros for the mixed salad. Burgers start at 15.50 euros for the teriyaki burger and top out at 19.50 euros for the XXL burger. A 7-ounce rump steak is 29.50 euros.

**Information:** Online: [tinyurl.com/y2xykv6](http://tinyurl.com/y2xykv6)

Alexander Riedel

The menu, meanwhile, is a treasure trove of culinary creativity and variety.

Traditional German dishes receive contemporary twists, like the succulent roast beef in a local wine-based sauce accompanied by savory German ravioli. The signature teriyaki XXL burger is another meaty alternative.

While in the summer the restaurant's beer garden beckons visitors to the outside seating, coming in from a crisp winter

night, I chose to warm up with the pumpkin mango curry soup as an appetizer. The rich, creamy blend, decorated with roasted pumpkin seeds and pumpkin chips, hit the spot.

My wife opted for the smoked salmon, which was touted as being sourced straight "from Norwegian fjords." The fresh slice of fish came dapperly draped atop hash browns with a pumpkin zucchini chutney and arugula salad.

Despite the upscale surroundings, I didn't shy away from sampling a favorite comfort food and chose the signature veggie burger.

Far from the usual fast-food imitation, Alte Post's upgraded version featured a marinated, grilled cheese patty nestled in a rye bun, accompanied by a cognac cocktail sauce and a mix of grilled vegetables, avocado and arugula. The accompanying battered sweet potato fries were a crispy delight.

My wife's choice, the pork tenderloin fillets wrapped in bacon and sage and served with a creamy chanterelle sauce and almond romanesco, was equally a win, she told me.

Romanesco broccoli, for those who have not tried it, has a bright-green flower bud reminiscent of fractal geometry but is in fact a form of cauliflower.

The chanterelle sauce, with its earthy and subtle peppery notes, complemented the tender, juicy pork tenderloin, leaving my wife singing its praises.

Although more than satisfied with our meal, we could not conclude our visit without trying the pumpkin creme brulee, accompanied by homemade Hokkaido pumpkin ice cream.

The flawlessly crisp sugar crust provided an enjoyable contrast to the rich, pumpkin-infused custard. Paired with the smooth ice cream, it was a winter treat that would make any pumpkin spice fan rejoice.

With its historic foundation and innovative cuisine, Alte Post offers more than just a quick stop on the road. Just like the postal stations of yore, it reminded us that a good meal can be a journey in itself and a treat worth writing home about.

I'll be sure to pencil in another stop next time.

[riedel.alexander@stripes.com](mailto:riedel.alexander@stripes.com)  
@lexRiedel



A bowl of pumpkin mango curry soup. The dish is topped with roasted pumpkin seeds for added texture.



Norwegian smoked salmon atop hash browns, complemented by pumpkin zucchini chutney and an arugula salad.



Alte Post's signature veggie burger, featuring a grilled cheese patty in a rye bun. It's served with cognac cocktail sauce, grilled vegetables, avocado, arugula and battered sweet potato fries.



Pork tenderloin fillets wrapped in bacon and sage, accompanied by a creamy chanterelle sauce and almond romanesco.



A serving of pumpkin creme brulee with homemade Hokkaido pumpkin ice cream.

# WEEKEND: TRAVEL

## A natural approach to thrills

Junglia theme park is in the works for northern Okinawa, not far from Marine bases

BY MARI HIGA  
Stars and Stripes

A new destination park with a jungle theme is planned for northern Okinawa, not far from two Marine Corps bases and the area where U.S. Marines train for jungle warfare.

Junglia, where the attractions focus on nature, is scheduled to open in summer 2025, Japanese marketing company Katana announced in Tokyo in November. The park will take advantage of its proximity to Yambaru National Park, a subtropical forest region that's been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since July 2021.

The park will be filled with attractions such as balloon rides, zip lines and a safari experience in which guests are chased by dinosaurs, according to a Dec. 7 email from Japan Entertainment, a Katana subsidiary.

Junglia could draw attention to the main island's forest ecosystem. Okinawa is already the most popular beach resort region in Japan, but the Yambaru region is one of the areas least visited by tourists, according to a 2012 study co-sponsored by the prefectural government and the Japan Travel Bureau Foundation.

A new destination could also boost Okinawa's tourism industry, which continues to recover its visitor numbers following the COVID-19 pandemic. About 430,000 foreign visitors stayed on the island in 2022, compared to nearly 862,000 in 2020, according to the Japan Tourism Statistics website.

The site for the approximately 150-acre theme park is a former golf course extending between Nago city and Nakijin village, about 27 miles from Camp Gonsalves, home of the Marines' Jungle Warfare Training Center.

The theme park will extend over 150 acres with an initial investment of about \$470 million in construction, according to the press release.



Japan Entertainment photos

One of the attractions planned for Junglia, a theme park coming to northern Okinawa, is a safari ride that includes a dinosaur chase.

Junglia is designed to provide an "exciting and luxurious experience" to its guests, according to Japan Entertainment. Lodging is not yet in the plans, but they do include a forest spa where the guests can enjoy the setting.

"At Yambaru, the vast world natural heritage site full of mystery and vitality, the excitement created through experiences of authentic and genuine quality that are unique to the area, unrelated to the virtual reality that is commonplace in everyday life, resonates with the energy of the vast nature and amplified to the point where it feels so good that you want to scream," the press release states.

The project would benefit Okinawa by creating a tourist attraction in the northern part of Okinawa and creating employment for the locals, according to the marketing firm.

It is partnering with the prefecture as well as with Nago city and Nakijin village for branding and job creation effort.

Building the park on a former golf



Junglia is scheduled to open in northern Okinawa in summer 2025.

course will minimize its environmental impact and the company has made several assessments on environmental impacts, it said.

The ticket price is not set yet, but the

park aims to host many guests from all over the world and from within Okinawa as well, according to the email.

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STARS AND STRIPES

# WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER GREEN/Stars and Stripes

A 10-ounce steak with cheesy mashed potatoes, green beans and corn from the O House Restaurant at Osan Air Base, South Korea.

# Straight from the greens to a tasty steak

O House Restaurant at Osan Air Base treats hungry patrons to fine food, superior service

By CHRISTOPHER GREEN  
Stars and Stripes

In your quest for enticing dining opportunities while stationed overseas, don't overlook your immediate neighborhood, specifically the installation you call home.

Osan Air Base in South Korea, for example, has an exemplary restaurant that serves up steak just the way you like it, with service to make you feel special.

The O House alongside The Lakes at Osan Golf Course is its own hole-in-one.

The 18-hole course and driving range makes for a picturesque setting for a family sit-down or a special occasion. You wouldn't know it from the outside, but the elegant dining area is very spacious.

Doors at the O House open at 6:30 a.m. sharp. The breakfast menu features eggs, bacon, sausage and steaks. Lunch and dinner provide countless choices, including salads, seafood pasta, porterhouse and tomahawk steaks.

There are also Korean and rice dishes such as beef short ribs and tofu kimchi.

On a recent visit, I ordered the top blade, 10-ounce steak, medium rare, with cheesy mashed potatoes, grilled green beans and grilled corn on the cob.

The steak was tender with a



The O House Restaurant alongside The Lakes at Osan Golf Course is its own hole-in-one.



## O House Restaurant

**Location:** Building 1774 on Osan Air Base, South Korea  
**Hours:** 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Sunday.  
**Prices:** From about \$9 for breakfast to \$45 for a 10-ounce Tomahawk steak at dinnertime.  
**Dress:** Casual  
**Directions:** Near the golf course.  
**Information:** Online: ohouseab.com

Christopher Green

deep, rich flavor. The potatoes were creamy and flavorful, the green beans crispy and the corn smoky and delicious.

All of that cost about \$25. I cleaned my plate.

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@ChrisJGreen8

# Savory oatmeal shakes up breakfast

By ELLIE KRIEGER

Special to The Washington Post

If your oatmeal is stuck in the sweet zone, this recipe is an alluring invitation to break away. Sure, a bowl of the hot cereal is reliably good with, say, a drizzle of maple syrup, fresh fruit and a sprinkle of cinnamon, but that is just one half of the story.

Oatmeal goes savory, too. Just like other whole grains, such as brown rice, quinoa, buckwheat and cornmeal, it is versatile enough to go in either flavor direction. Exploring the grain's savory side opens a vast new realm of meal possibilities. Oats pair especially well with savory ingredients that can stand up to the grain's deep, earthy flavor — mushrooms, onions, root vegetables (carrots, beets, parsnips and celery root), peppers, winter squash, herbs and sharp cheeses, for example. For a memorable and satisfying dinner, try cooking steel-cut oats as you would risotto, using any of those add-ins.

This recipe brings savory oatmeal to the breakfast table with vegetarian toppings that have bacon-and-egg vibes. The bacon-like half of that duo comes from sliced shiitake mushrooms sautéed in olive oil until brown and crisp, then sprinkled with smoked paprika and salt. They are placed, along with a fried egg, atop a bowl of hot oatmeal, which has been seasoned with Parmesan and swirled with a

spoonful of basil pesto.

You can use any cut of plain oats, prepared any way you like, with or without milk, but omit the salt since the Parmesan cheese and toppings fill that role.

It's a nourishing breakfast (or lunch or light dinner) that brims with mouthwatering flavor, provides steady energy for your morning and is sure to shake up your notion of what oatmeal can be.

## Oatmeal with Shiitake 'Bacon,' Egg and Pesto

2 servings

Total time: 25 mins

### Ingredients

2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more as needed

4 ounces fresh shiitake mushrooms, stems removed and thinly sliced

1/8 teaspoon smoked paprika

1/8 teaspoon fine salt, plus more to taste

1 cup old-fashioned rolled oats or quick-cooking oats

1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

2 large eggs

1 tablespoon pesto

Freshly cracked black pepper

### Directions

In a medium nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally, until browned and crisp, about 6 minutes. Sprinkle the mushrooms with the paprika and salt and cook, stirring, for 10



Tom McCorkle/For The Washington Post

Take oatmeal in a savory direction, in this case with shiitake "bacon," egg and pesto.

seconds more. Remove from the heat and transfer the mushrooms to a plate.

Cook the oats according to the directions on the package, without adding salt. Once the oats are cooked, stir in the Parmesan cheese, remove from the heat and cover to keep warm.

Return the skillet to medium heat. There should still be some oil in the pan but add 1 teaspoon more, if needed. Crack the eggs into the pan and cook until the whites are set and the yolk is to your desired consistency, flipping them, if you like.

Divide the oatmeal between two bowls. Swirl 1 1/2 teaspoons of the pesto into each bowl, then top each with half of the shiitake "bacon" and one of the eggs. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and serve right away.

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## WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

# Are you a Stanley or Hydro Flask person?

LA Times reporter surveys locals about their water bottle preference to see it offers any insight into their identities

BY JAIMIE DING  
Los Angeles Times

If you've spent any amount of time on TikTok or talking to your 12-year-old niece, you've probably heard of the Stanley cup by now.

The 40 oz. insulated tumbler with a handle has led to long lines, fights and a crazy resale market.

We're only days into the new year, and already some marketers have gone so far as to proclaim 2024 the "Year of the Water Bottle." Hydration vessels, they say, may be this year's "most covetable, most fashionable accessory."

But the Stanley cup is just the latest in a long line of water bottle trends, aided by social media virality and declared cool by the arbitrators of the internet — teenage girls. Before Stanley, it was Hydro Flask, and before that, S'well. Owala took off on social media last year as well.

At the ripe old age of 24, I've remained faithful to my plastic Nalgene bottle, a brand that has seen its own surges in popularity, for more than five years. It's covered in stickers from my college days and practically indestructible, perfect for my outdoor climbing trips and propensity for dropping things. I prefer to drink my water at room temperature rather than ice cold — controversial, I know — and I don't want to lug around anything heavy. I'm an unabashed Nalgene person, and I won't be replacing it anytime soon.

Given the fierce devotion with which some fans wield their Stanleys, I wanted to know if water bottles really have become the latest extensions of our identities. So I spent a day traversing my city, Los Angeles, to see what locals have to say. Here are my entirely unscientific findings:

## Stanley: The trendsetter

One of the most coveted items currently by tweens across America, it seems, is the Stanley Quencher tumbler. Target shelves were devoid of them when I checked, but 15-year-old Kimora Johnson knew where to find one — Urban Outfitters.

Johnson proudly toted her light teal blue Stanley as she walked out of school in Culver City, Calif., on Jan. 8. It matched her nails.

"I just like the color and it keeps my water cold. It's really nice," she said. She was quite pleased to have snagged one over winter break after seeing it all over TikTok, Instagram and the news.

The cup's popularity was likely initially sparked by a woman's viral TikTok video in November of a Stanley cup that survived a car fire, ice inside intact. In response, the Stanley company offered to replace her cup — and her car. Since then, influencers and popular collaborations have propelled the Stanley cup to new heights. (Stanley couldn't be reached for comment on the trend.)

University of Southern California master's student Hannah Gomez, on the other hand, initially thought people were talking about the National Hockey League's Stanley Cup. She received the popular Stanley tumbler as a gift from her younger sister and did not realize the cachet it would have.

"I've gotten, like, five comments on it today," the 26-year-old said after I accosted her on her way to grab dinner. "People don't usually stop you for your water bottle."

She likes the handle design and straw, which she said makes her drink more water throughout the day. Plus, it kept her

water ice cold from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Runyon Canyon hikers Priscilla Ramirez and Diana Gonzalez said they bought one for its ability to keep water cold — a must at Gonzalez's warehouse job in the summer — but they also were intrigued after hearing it could float in a pool. They confirmed that it does, indeed, float in a pool.

Gonzalez considered buying a red Stanley featured in Target's Valentine's Day collection but quickly changed her mind after seeing the hubbub around them.

"I wanted it, but I will not go and fight for one," said Gonzalez, 33. For hiking purposes, they opted to buy something cheaper at Marshalls.

## Hydro Flask: The populist

In 2020, the Hydro Flask was the "it" water bottle, the kind that middle schoolers put at the top of their Christmas lists just like the Stanley cup of today. Teens carried them separately rather than in their backpacks, covering them with stickers and artwork. They were a statement that you were cool and eco-conscious.

According to the company, the average Hydro Flask purchaser ranges in their teens to mid-30s and "live full and active lives." Of all the reusable water bottles I could identify in public, I saw the most Hydro Flasks.

At USC, students lugged their Hydro Flasks across campus in backpacks and on skateboards in all different colors.

Leslie Compean, 22, carried a white Hydro Flask she received from her sister for Christmas. She already owned a gray bottle from the same brand but wanted a larger one.

"I feel like I'm a simple person," Compean said. Even if unintentional, it seemed



PHOTOS BY DANIA MAXWELL, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

Kimora Johnson poses with a Stanley cup branded water bottle outside her high school in Culver City, Calif. She recently purchased the cup, which has been selling out at retailers, from Urban Outfitters. She said she had seen it on social media and the news.



Leslie Compean shows off her Hydro Flask water bottle at the University of Southern California. She said she doesn't care about trends, but it "does the job."



Priscilla Ramirez, photographed at Runyon Canyon, packs a Hydrapak water bottle she purchased from Marshalls because she said it keeps her water cold.

to match her white shoes, paired with black pants and a mustard yellow sweater.

She doesn't care about trends, she said, but this bottle "does the job."

Over at Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade, Alfredo Torales, 39, sat outside during his lunch break with a black Hydro Flask. It came from the ever-growing lost-and-found pile at the high school his wife works at.

"These boys always leave Hydro Flasks

behind as if they're worth nothing," Torales said. "If no one scoops it up after a few weeks, she brings them home."

## Owala: The color-forward accessory

Unlike other reusable water bottles, Owala screams color.

Each iteration of its flagship FreeSip

SEE BOTTLE ON PAGE 27

## WEEKEND: BOOKS &amp; LIFESTYLE

## ‘True North’ a funny, masculine romance

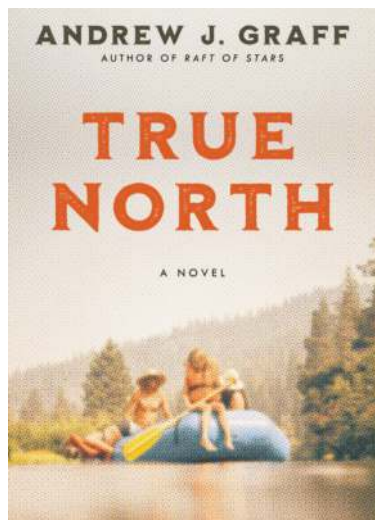
By RON CHARLES

*The Washington Post*

With much of the world locked in a season of ice, “True North,” Andrew J. Graff’s warmhearted story about a summer of white-water rafting, sounds like the vacation we all need. Graff’s second novel offers just enough drama to be exciting and just enough reassurance that everybody will get home safe.

But the stakes couldn’t be higher for Sam Brecht, the optimistic young man who puts this adventure in motion. Desperate to save his failing marriage, he’s already run through a series of bold visions, including a pick-your-own blueberry farm that, somehow, never got off the ground. Now, with two kids and a new baby, Sam suspects he’s about to lose his job as a high school art teacher, so he needs a sure thing.

I’m no financial adviser, but when your best side hustle starts with buying a brand-new 23-foot-long Winnebago, you’re on the scenic route to bankruptcy. And yet that monster vehicle is only the smallest part of Sam’s last-ditch scheme. With money from his retirement savings — surely vast, given his degree in ceramics — he’s also bought a run-down rafting company in Wis-



consin. Back in the day, he and his wife, Swami, had fallen in love near a river. “Maybe,” he thinks, “another river could make everything right again.”

This would be a brilliant plan if the fundamental problem with Sam’s marriage was dehydration. But what really alarms Swami is her husband’s impracticality and self-delusion, chronic conditions that have started to present as incompetence and deceit.

“Swami’s annoyance with Sam’s dreaming had grown exponentially,” Graff writes. “When they first met, Swami liked to play along. She never thought he was serious, but she’d humor

him. The summer after his first year of student teaching in college, Sam mused over a bottle of beer that he wanted to move to West Virginia near the New River and sell pottery from a van.”

College students: If you find yourself dating this man, take his best pot as a memento and run.

By the time “True North” begins, Swami’s sexy smile has sagged into an exasperated frown. And that’s before she finds out Sam plans to extend their summer adventure through October.

Even before this conflicted family reaches the Woodchuck Rafting Co., Sam hits a deer that puts their Winnebago out of service. When strangers finally tow them to the site of their new life, they discover a dilapidated barn, some old rafts and a collection of moldy life jackets. Sam surveys his wasted empire and thinks: “He and Swami would make this place thrive again. ... They’d be rolling in river cash.”

Well, they’ll be rolling in something.

Graff keeps piling on the troubles. Sam’s Uncle Chip, who sold him the business, is a Falstaff-like character with a creative understanding of business. The Woodchuck staff are good-hearted but undisciplined folks. A

multibillion-dollar mining corporation is sniffing around the property despite the discovery of Indian burial mounds. And a slick, well-financed rafting company has just opened up nearby with plans to siphon off all of Woodchuck’s customers. Sam’s dream looks sunk before it even launches onto the water.

Graff, who served in Afghanistan after 9/11, has developed a kind of cuddly machismo. His first novel, “Raft of Stars,” is about a pair of 10-year-old boys who strike out on their own in northern Wisconsin. With “True North,” he’s shifted to a hero who sometimes feels only slightly older.

I’d like to read this novel in a couples book club. I suspect Sam will remind every woman of her first husband. But leaving the 9-to-5 grind, heading into the woods and saving the Woodchuck Rafting Co. is a fantasy lots of men will respond to. That’s no accident. “True North” is structured as a masculine romance: Sam gets to be the well-meaning, adorable dad who keeps screwing up, gosh darn it, while Swami is cast as the irritable shrew who needs to realize the error of her ways.

“Sam had let her down more than she’d ever imagined pos-

sible,” Graff concedes. “But she had let him fall.”

Sam turns for advice to Uncle Chip, who drove off his own wife years ago. “You need a grand gesture,” Chip advises. “That’s what they do in all those Hallmark movies.” Sam scoffs, but his uncle seems to have a preternatural grasp of the feel-good plot they’re all moving through. By the end, even the Native Americans who haunt the edges of this story are happy.

In these bleak times, who can argue with that?

Having grown up in Wisconsin’s Northwoods, Graff has a visceral feel for the flow of the river. This is a story muscled with rushing water. “As Sam’s life savings and marriage were dwindling away, the river rose,” Graff writes. “It was getting harder and harder to guide boatloads of inexperienced paddlers.” But Sam loves it too much to give up. “In the middle of a wave or a drop, in all that swoop and boom and spray, it was impossible to think about anything else.”

Indeed, the most terrific passages of “True North” send us shooting through rapids in prose that feels both precise and chaotic. Don’t be surprised if waves crash over the margins of these pages. But you’re safe. Very safe.

## Bottle: Some brands focus on specific demographics

FROM PAGE 26

bottle has at least three different colors for the body, rim and spout. Online, they have names like “Can You See Me?” with bright pinks and reds, and “Gemstone Chic,” with rich jewel tones.

“Water bottles are a cool tool for self-expression,” said Chad Sorensen, senior brand manager for Owala. “We give you an outlet, a vehicle to do that.”

Sorensen said the brand has picked up older Generation Z and millennial women in particular as fans. As the water bottle space has become more and more about fashion, the company aims to market its products accordingly.

Denai Blackshire, 32, carried a white, black and gray Owala while hiking at Runyon Canyon that matched her gray sweats.

“When you go hiking, you still want to look aesthetically put together,” Blackshire said. An ex-partner bought her the water bottle after she said she wanted to hike more. Her main requirement: It had to be cute.

She also thought the design was clever — a straw for sipping and a larger spout for guzzling. It was named one of Time’s Best Inventions of 2023.

Owala has seen particular success with nurses, Sorensen said, who are stuck wearing the same thing every day but can use a colorful water bottle to “mix it up.”

Sorensen likens the water bottles to sneakers — you technically need only one,

but you have multiple to match different wardrobes. Owala drops a limited-edition color every other Tuesday, like sneaker drops, and once they’re gone, they’re gone.

## S’well: The stylish classic

When I was in high school, everyone had a S’well bottle. I would call it the first “fashionable” water bottle, with an array of artsy finishes, including rose gold metallic, glossy faux marble and a smooth, understated wooden print.

It has a distinctive slim neck design and is small enough to fit in the side pocket of most backpacks. The downsides: It’s hard to fit ice cubes in the opening, and the svelte bottles are less visible carried inside a backpack.

Alex Holt, 44, carried one with a stainless steel finish during a morning hike at Runyon Canyon. He chose that one because it matches his lunch box.

“It’s like your branding,” his co-workers told him. He said it’s also sturdy and keeps his water cold, sparkling or still.

“The idea is that we have them for a really long time,” Holt said, rather than changing them with trends.

S’well declined to comment.

## Nalgene: The sturdy workhorse

Carrying a backpack and roller skates, Goksu Okar wandered around the Santa Monica REI’s water bottle section, carefully examining the plethora of brands that were available — Yeti, Nalgene, Stan-

ley, Hydro Flask, Camelbak and more.

After a few minutes, she settled on a plastic Nalgene bottle. (I silently cheered.)

Okar, 32, said she already had a “really big” water bottle that she drinks from all day and wanted a smaller, more portable one. If she wanted to spend more, she would’ve bought a Yeti (\$28 for a similar style). But the Nalgene is cheap and seemed sturdy — what more could she ask for? Before we could get into more specifics, she ran off to catch the bus.

While Nalgene bottles can’t keep your water cold, they’re relatively inexpensive. The standard 32-ounce wide-mouth bottle is only \$16.99, while the other brands in this roundup cost \$30 or more. And if you break it, the company will replace it.

Eric Hansen, Nalgene’s marketing director, described the average customer as: “18-45, professional, active, engaged and passionate.” But above all, they’re loyal. The company has received stories and photos of customers with tattoos of the Nalgene bottle silhouette. The brand has even received invitations to weddings and graduations.

## The best water bottle? Anything reusable

“My rule of thumb is, don’t spend more than \$20 on a water bottle,” said 18-year-old Sofie Fisher. “Maybe \$25.”

Fisher had some thoughts about water bottle trends after school in Culver City on Jan. 8 as she waited for her ride.



DANIA MAXWELL, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

Leslie Compean shows off her Hydro Flask water bottle at the USC University Village. The bottle was a gift from her sister for the holidays.

“Fads have been, like, a thing forever,” she said. It’s more important to “try to reuse what you have and not consume more.”

Fisher uses a Tripalink-branded water bottle she thinks her mom bought on Facebook Marketplace. (Tripalink is a property management startup.)

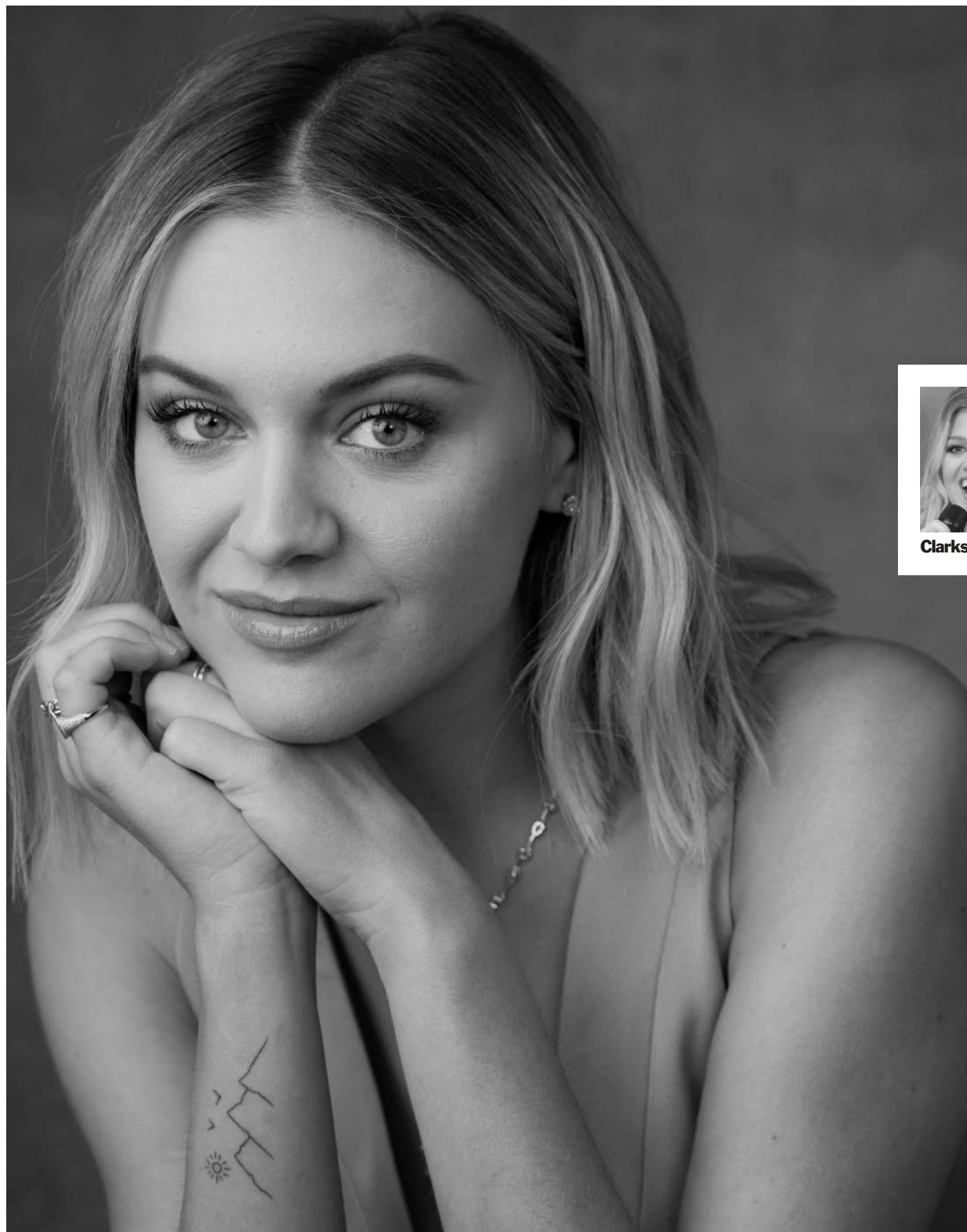
She doesn’t care for Stanley or any other trendy bottle.

“It’s forced consumerism,” she said.

But if you’re still using single-use plastic bottles?

It’s 2024. Not a great look.

## WEEKEND: MUSIC



CHRIS PIZZELLO/AP

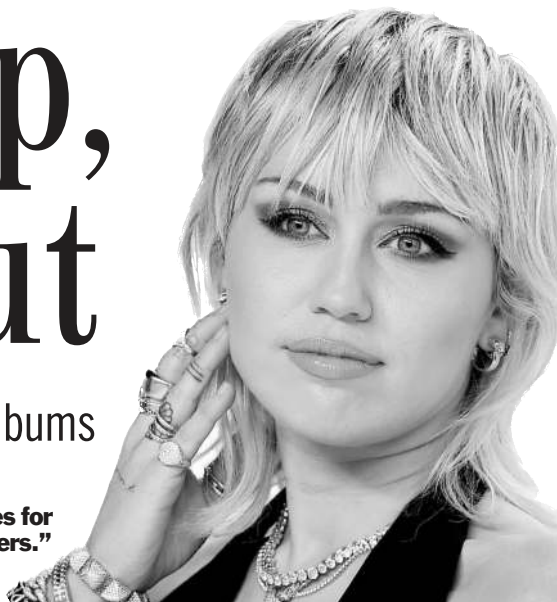
Kelsea Ballerini's Grammy-nominated album "Rolling Up the Welcome Mat" challenges stereotypical domestic roles.

# Breaking up, breaking out

Cyrus, Clarkson and Ballerini reimagine divorce albums

The end of her marriage to Liam Hemsworth led to new, empowering avenues for Miley Cyrus, right, expressed perfectly on the 2023 breakup anthem "Flowers."

JORDAN STRAUSS/AP



By MARIA SHERMAN  
Associated Press

**W**hen the 2024 Grammy nominations were announced, one thing was immediately apparent: Women outpaced men in the major categories.

The leading artists — superstars like SZA, Taylor Swift and Olivia Rodrigo — reflect an incredible diversity of skill with acclaimed albums that mine all corners of the human experience.

One such corner: divorce.

An influx of new releases from

Kelly Clarkson, Miley Cyrus and Kelsea Ballerini reimagine the divorce album in all its complexity. While the music industry has long been youth-obsessed, there may be something to the fact that these musicians are all women in their 30s and 40s and consequently possess a kind of self-



Clarkson

assuredness and rich, emotional maturity. In a culture where relatability is currency, relationship stories with the weight and wisdom of age register as fresh. If all popstars are teen-aged, where does that leave the rest of us? Perhaps the depth of a breakup ballad is felt more acutely when a public split plays out in tabloid headlines — and there's a lot more to lose.

Cyrus' malleable pop "Flowers," one of AP's picks for best songs of 2023, is a pep talk-turned-empowerment banger — the sound of a woman learning about herself again after a decadelong relationship ended in divorce. She's raked in five nominations, including album of the year for "Endless Summer Vacation."

Then there's Clarkson's "Chemistry" — a big-belter release she's described as a "relationship album" that's up for best pop vocal album.

And in the world of country, which has a long tradition of women performing songs about divorce and domesticity, Ballerini's "Rolling Up the Welcome Mat" is up for the genre's best album.

These records vary greatly but share a similar emotional core: They were written while grappling with marriages falling apart.

In 2020, Cyrus split from actor Liam Hemsworth and Kelly Clarkson ended her marriage to Brandon Blackstock. Two years later, Ballerini and her husband Morgan Evans divorced.

Musically, those endings opened up new realities. Clarkson pursued courageous ballads that stretched her elastic vocal range, Ballerini experimented with pop production and Cyrus wielded her weather-worn voice like a weapon. Their albums came out of painful periods in which each performer was redefining herself.

Ballerini is part of a long lineage of women in country making music about divorce and heartbreak — running the gamut in tone from ven-

SEE DIVORCE ON PAGE 29

## WEEKEND: MUSIC

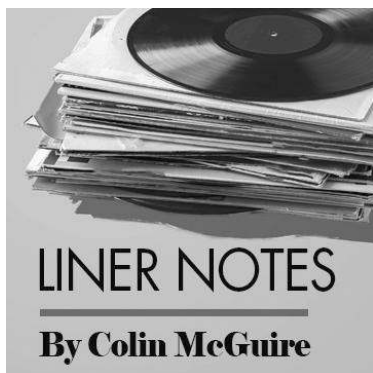
## Magazine musings

**M**an. What happened to music magazines?

There was a time when these things ruled any music nerd's world. Spin was more than just a website with a bunch of lists. NME was the übercool publication that anyone stateside perpetually wanted to get their hands on. CMJ always had its fingers on the pulse of whatever was next (case in point: Their first-ever published magazine had Elvis Costello on the cover). And Mojo was so influential, Tom Petty named an entire album after it (OK, not really, but he did use the name for an album, so same-same?).

I ask because to my eternal surprise, I received a brand new subscription to Rolling Stone magazine for Christmas. I wasn't expecting it for a bevy of reasons. One, it's wildly expensive. Honestly. Have you checked out the price for that thing lately? A year's subscription costs almost as much as a front row seat at any amphitheater in America. Two, I didn't ask for it. And three, Rolling Stone in the year 2024 is ... well, it's different than the Rolling Stone I subscribed to for years when it didn't cost an arm and a leg, the pages were infinitely smaller and the coverage was mostly focused on music — a novel idea for a publication that has rewritten its legacy to claim itself as an essential voice in all of popular culture and not just the aspects of it that make noise.

I haven't read anything in it yet but I did, in fact, leaf through it, and good gracious, did that experience make me feel old. I let my former subscription end some four or five years ago, and who knew those four or five years could age a music fan in pro-



found ways. There were artists' names I couldn't pronounce, genres of music I figured absolutely must have been made up, and a focus on capital-J journalism that, frankly, an outlet like Rolling Stone doesn't really need to do.

For decades, people picked up the latest issue to read informed, trusted opinions on the newest, hippest music. Or, well, that and artist profiles that were borne out of rare access and knowledge that at the time was exclusive. Interested in getting to know Paul McCartney? Here's a cover story. Sure, it was most likely slanted, and yes, we only learned what McCartney and his team wanted us to learn, but it was better than nothing, and it gave us a tiny glance into a world with which so many of us music geeks were fascinated.

These days? Nope. It's a different place. We wanted access and the universe shifted to provide us with more access than we ever wanted. Social media, the Information Age, vlogs, blogs and everything in between has made the illusion of celebrity so cheap that even the most mundane of individuals can be lauded for their Twitch streams and viral videos. Learning about rock stars merely isn't as fun when the mystery isn't as shrouded.



SEAN MOORES/Stars and Stripes

**Magazines once were a rich source of information for music nerds.**

And then there's the criticism. The entire definition of a tastemaker and/or critic has warped its way into undefinable territory over the last decade or so. We can thank Pitchfork for that. All the way back in 1996, when nobody was thinking about the internet beyond how obnoxious it was to deal with how long it took a landline connection to make a computer work, that website got in on the ground floor of what would become an oversaturated world of know-it-alls and cool kids. From there, the game changed. Why risk those papercuts when you could merely type in a website's name, click a review and impress your friends with knowledge of the new Bon Iver album?

Beats yet another no-news profile of Mick Jagger, right?

If this reeks of old-man-yelling-at-clouds, that's probably a fair assessment, but that's not the full assessment. Of course there are positives to music journalism evolving into more technological

places — hey, not only can you read this review, but now you can listen to the reviewed album at the same time! Plus, while it's easy to be disgruntled by the sheer amount of modern-day music critics who probably might be better off pursuing a career in accounting, nobody can deny that it's long been valuable to open up the conversation beyond what a group of a few dozen white men think in a smoky room in San Francisco.

That in mind, when I unexpectedly picked up the latest copy of Rolling Stone and held it in my hands, knowing that I was in for at least a year of it coming to my doorstep, I couldn't help but feel a little giddy about the fundamental process of receiving a music magazine in the mail again. I had flashes of the days when I'd read articles about artists I never had interest in, only because I had read all the articles I wanted to read multiple times. Before long, finishing an issue from front to back felt like a

rite of passage, something to be proud of. Being exposed to that feeling again was a weird kind of thrill that's reserved for only us middle-aged folk who lived through the days when you knew Magazine A would be in your mailbox and you had to finish it before Magazine B arrived only a handful of days later.

And so now I go forth, a brand new subscription in my name, awaiting the mailman to come once a month so I can read about things like "country-rock-shoe-gaze" or someone named Madi Diaz. Or, for that matter, I can have internal debates about the latest "200 best singers of all time" list, which proves to be an update from the same "200 best singers of all time" list that the magazine compiled a minute-and-a-half ago. It's with open arms; I welcome all of it.

Even if I still find myself asking the question every now and then: Man. What happened to music magazines?

Perhaps I'm about to find out.

## Divorce: Records explore full breadth of artists' love and pain

**FROM PAGE 28**

geful to celebratory. Marissa R. Moss, author of "Her Country: How the Women of Country Music Became the Success They Were Never Supposed to Be," points to Loretta Lynn's groundbreaking 1973 hit "Rated X" as setting the precedent for future musicians.

What's interesting, now, is the modern ways in which divorce is articulated on these records.

Ballerini's album — particularly the song "Penthouse" — challenges stereotypical domestic roles and "demonstrates financial power," Moss said.

"I bought the house with the fence, enough room for some kids," Ballerini sings. Later, her home becomes claustrophobic, an allegory for her marriage: "And I thought that would make it all better, and maybe forever wouldn't feel like the walls

closing in."

The record gets at the idea that even when women attain financial autonomy and remake traditional marriage roles, they're still not necessarily able to find freedom within its confines.

"I don't think a quote-unquote divorce album is the first time that I have felt like it's different being a woman in country music, that's for sure," Ballerini told The Associated Press, about gender expectations in the genre.

Men, too, have long written about marriages ended, but in the current moment, women lead the charge.

Other artists writing in and around divorce include Adele, Kacey Musgraves and Carly Pearce, another 2024 Grammy nominee.

Ballerini, for her part, understands why people relate deeply to the songs on her

album that deal with divorce.

"It's something that was taboo to talk about, especially from a woman's perspective, for a really long time," she said. It goes "back to, like, giving a voice to myself and validating my own feelings and my own life and my own journey and hoping that other women feel that too and feel validated."

People often expect divorce records to contain exclusively sad songs. While Ballerini, Clarkson and Cyrus exorcise grief on their albums, they express gratitude as well. These records are sad and empowering, often both at once.

"The feeling people seem to have is that sad music is expressing their own sadness, not the sadness of the artist — but you feel like the artist is trying to express your sadness," Joshua Knobe, a Yale professor and researcher, said.

He led a team of academics whose 2023 study found that listeners are drawn to melancholic music for similar reasons as they're compelled by sad conversations — because they are seeking connection.

Or, as Ballerini said, listeners want to feel validated.

"People like success. They like talking with people who succeed," Knobe continued. "But that's not the thing that makes people feel a profound connection to another human being."

If negative emotions register as more complex than positive ones, perhaps that makes for more opportunities to connect. Divorce records often traverse a spectrum of feelings, with Cyrus, Ballerini and Clarkson's songs allowing the listener to experience the breadth of the artists' love and pain. That is no doubt noteworthy.

Or perhaps award-worthy.

## WEEKEND: TELEVISION

# Murderous motivation

TV's world of mysteries expanding with abundance of recent additions

By ROBERT LLOYD  
*Los Angeles Times*

The mystery story is a relatively recent innovation, whether dated from Edgar Allan Poe's 1841 short story "Murders in the Rue Morgue," with its amateur detective C. Auguste Dupin, or Wilkie Collins' 1868 novel "The Moonstone," which established many of the conventions still in use today, or even the 1887 debut of Sherlock Holmes, so popular that his creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, could not kill him. But the form has made up for lost time, with mystery series filling entire bookstores and invading every other storytelling platform — theater, film, radio and perhaps most prolifically, television, where it has held fast while other genres have come and gone. It's fantastically adaptable. Comedy, tragedy, cozy, gritty, formulaic, metafictional, historical, futuristic, highbrow, lowbrow, middle brow — something for every taste.

The advantage of a mystery, from a broadcaster or streamer's perspective, is that no matter the quality, viewers, once even a little invested, will stick around until the end just to find out who did it, or how they did it, or why they did it, even though the solution may be the least interesting aspect of the tale; often, if not inevitably, it will be a version of something you have seen before, there being relatively few reasons people kill one another, and ways to do it, and to establish a phony alibi. This doesn't really matter much, because above all, a mystery is an armature on which to hang a bunch of distinct, disparate characters, without the necessity of character development. (Though that is certainly allowed.) And because in this world, familiarity counts as novelty.

Although the mystery is evergreen, we seem to be in a period of expansion. Why? The pop psychologist in me would suggest in a world without answers to crises in the near and the long term, they propose successful solutions, based on demonstrable facts, arrived at through human intelligence. Tension is released instead of ongoing. And villains typically, though not always, get their comeuppance.

The critic in me, on the other hand, would observe that in follow-the-leader Hollywood, success breeds imitation, or repetition. On the big screen we have lately had Rian Johnson's "Knives Out" and "Glass Onion" and Kenneth Branagh's Hercule Poirot adaptations. On television, we've seen "A Murder at the End of the World," Agatha Christie for the 2020s; Natasha Lyonne's "Columbo"-inspired "Poker Face" (created by Johnson); "Dark Winds," set in the 1970s, starring Zahn McClarnon as a Navajo tribal police chief; the satirical yet tightly structured "The Afterparty," with Tiffany Haddish as its eccentric gumshoe. Even "Wednesday" was a mystery story, with Charles Addams' dour teen its dark Nancy Drew, played by Jenna Ortega. And the starry comedy "Only Murders in the Building" is getting a secondary airing on ABC — strike-related, but whatever — after three seasons on Hulu, with a fourth to come.

In the space of a single week, four prestige major mysteries of different flavors, each with its particular pleasures, have premiered. There is "Night Country," the fourth season of "True Detective" (HBO) — I would call it long-awaited, but I'm not sure anyone expected to see it again — set within a sunless Arctic Circle, with Jodie Foster and Kali Reis its philosophically contrary investigators; "Monsieur Spade" (AMC), from Scott Frank ("The Queen's Gambit") and Tom Fontana ("Oz"), which finds Dashiell Hammett's detective, played by Clive Owen, living in the south of France two decades after "The Mal-



AMC

Clive Owen plays Sam Spade in "Monsieur Spade," which continues the story of Dashiell Hammett's San Francisco detective — now living in the south of France — two decades after the "The Maltese Falcon" film.

tese Falcon"; the fanciful, oceangoing "Death and Other Details" (Hulu) with Mandy Patinkin as the "world's greatest detective," maybe; and "Criminal Record" (Apple+), in which London police detectives Cush Jumbo and Peter Capaldi clash over a possible miscarriage of justice.

The excellent "True Detective: Night Country" leads this pack. The anthology series, created by the novelist Nic Pizzolatto, began as an HBO-brand elevation of the police procedural, a metaphysical whodunit in which the dialectical double act of Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson, a refined version of the odd-coupling seen in "Beverly Hills Cop" and countless other cop adventures — was the real subject of the show, or in any case, the reason for its success. The current season, created, directed and mostly written by the Mexican writer and director Issa López ("Tigers Are Not Afraid"), seems fashioned to follow closely in the footsteps of the first, but now those footsteps are tracking through the snow.

There are the same scenes of driving and talking and the presentation of differing points of view, one more empirical, one more spiritual. There is the recurring, sometimes chilling presence of a mysterious folk symbol, "older than the ice, probably." And there is one reference so specific that it can only be described as fan service.

Set in the fictional Alaskan small town of Ennis, the story begins on the day of the last sunset before night moves in for six months, and runs through Christmas and New Year's. Snowbound crime shows are nothing new, but given the demands and costs of production, they are uncommon, and special. And there's something beautifully unsettling about all the darkness surrounding this isolated town, an environment that, without the proper gear, will kill you, and where it always seems to be the same time of day, or night.

"Tigers Are Not Afraid" was a horror film shot through with magic realism, and both those elements find a home in "Night Country." Indeed, it begins more like a horror movie than a crime show, with a herd of suddenly stampeding reindeer, and then a delivery man discovering that the scientists at a remote research station, whose exact business no one seems to know, have all disappeared, leaving the legend "WE ARE ALL DEAD" written on a white board. (There is no actual on-screen violence in the show, but plenty of shocking images and an ongoing sense of dread. You breathe a sigh of relief whenever someone enters a space where the lights are on and people are around.)



Apple TV+

Cush Jumbo plays an impulsive London police detective in "Criminal Record," which has the quality of crisp reality peculiar to British series.

A severed tongue discovered on the site seems to link the disappearance to the unsolved murder of an Indigenous midwife and activist. It piques the interest of trooper Evangeline Navarro (Reis), who brings her suspicions to Ennis police Chief Liz Danvers (Foster). Navarro and Danvers, physical and philosophical opposites, though they share a consuming doggedness, have a lot of old business, which will be revealed through the season, and explains much — though not everything will be explained. Foster is every bit as good as anyone who has paid her the least bit of attention since the Disney days would expect her to be; but Reis, a boxer-only-recently-turned-actor, is terrific as well.

Echoing the investigators' conversations about the living and the dead, God and the beyond, the show plays along the lines of the natural and the supernatural, without fully throwing in with either — it leaves some things mysterious and open to discussion: that Rose (Fiona Shaw), the local bohemian, actually sees her dead husband, is merely a fact in this world, but at the same time, people do things for human reasons. This isn't a story of demons.

SEE MYSTERIES ON PAGE 31

## WEEKEND: TELEVISION

**Mysteries:** Relationships just as important to most series as whodunit

## FROM PAGE 30

Ennis is one of those small isolated communities where everyone knows everyone or knows someone who does, but at the same time is afflicted by a general air of loneliness and disconnection. Even as the investigation proceeds, by fits and starts, we are involved in various well-drawn (or sketched) family and relationship and community dramas. Danvers' teenage stepdaughter (Isabella Star LaBlanc) wants to explore her Indigenous heritage, much to Danvers' unexplained displeasure; Deputy Peter Prior (Finn Bennett) is devoted to his boss and his job to the point of endangering his marriage and his relationship with his underling policeman father (John Hawkes); Navarro's younger sister Julia (Aka Niviána) has mental health issues. And this is certainly not the first mystery story in which corporate interests — the local mine — are set against the needs of the people. (See: "Dark Winds.") It has political resonance, but it's also the most commonplace element in a largely extraordinary series.

"Monsieur Spade" begins in the mid-1950s, as the San Francisco detective attempts to deliver the daughter of the late Brigid O'Shaughnessy — the femme fatale Spade delivers to justice at the end of "The Maltese Falcon," who, in this world, has subsequently gone free and later died — to her father in a small town in the south of France. The story then jumps ahead into the early 1960s; Spade, who has traded his suit and fedora for polo shirts and sunglasses, is now a French-speaking, amiable member of the community, a rich widower who fills his bags at the farmers market, pets local dogs and swims naked in his swimming pool. Teresa (Cara Bosson), the daughter, is a sullen, clever, dangerously independent teenager living in a convent, where Spade pays for her keep. And then things get nutty, with six murdered nuns, a mad monk and an Algerian golden child over whom various parties fight for possession.

Owen is the right age and shape and can do the accent, but it does seem odd not to have cast an American actor in this quintessentially American role. Unlike Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, and most every other literary detective, Spade is based on a single book and film, which makes Humphrey Bogart inseparable from the character, even as it's unfair to reckon another actor against him. (It's impossible to imagine Bogart submitting to a prostate examination on screen, as Owen does here, though that is, of course, the point.) Owen studied Bogart's speech patterns for the role, but he lacks his music; his portrayal is oddly static, his delivery so dry as to be almost monotonous. His Spade is forever cracking wise, but few of his remarks register as funny, either to this viewer or his interlocutors. ("Do you know where the word 'sabotage' comes from?" "The dictionary.") It occurred to me that this might be intentional, to signify his being a man out of his time or place, but that feels like overthinking; the effect in any case is to render the character oddly inert, as busy as the screenplay keeps him. Still, the angrier or more frustrated or active Spade grows, the more effective Owen becomes, which does pep up the later episodes.

And, as in "The Maltese Falcon," he is



HBO

**Kali Reis and Jodie Foster play philosophically contrary investigators in "True Detective: Night Country," the fourth season of the show, which now takes place in a sunless Arctic Circle where a bunch of a scientists at a remote research station have disappeared.**



Hulu

**Violett Beane and Mandy Patinkin star in "Death and Other Details," a Christie-style country house mystery set on a bespoke ocean liner. The two go from being adversaries to collaborators over the course of the series.**

only one of a colorful cast of characters, including an impressive Bosson; a very appealing Denis Ménochet as the local police chief, who merits a series of his own; Louise Bourgoin as Marguerite, a Juliette Gréco-esque singer with whom Spade co-owns a bar; and Matthew Beard and Rebecca Root as Spade's new British neighbors who don't seem for a moment to be who they claim and might loosely be termed the Sydney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre of the piece. Whatever the demerits of Owen's performance, it isn't fatal to an enjoyable series; he gets the job done, and is particularly good in his scenes with Bosson, whose Teresa he regards with paternal annoyance. And the series departs on a final shot and line so lovely, it's worth the getting there.

"Death and Other Details" is a Christie-style country house mystery in which the country house is a sort of bespoke ocean liner, chartered by the Collier family, who are pitching a business deal to Chinese investors, with whom various Colliers also have personal relationships. (It's a caval-

cade of personal relationships.) Among the travelers are Imogene Scott (Violett Beane), the Colliers' ward, who as a child saw her mother blown up in a car in the Colliers' driveway, and Rufus Cotesworth (Patinkin), a detective who reneged on his promise to the girl to find the killers. In the course of the series, the two will go, I don't need to tell you, from adversaries to collaborators. There is a lot of hanky-panky going on among the main characters — the ship is filled with extras who have no influence on the story — and a little romance and a lot of relationship issues, which means you do not have to wait long for a sex scene. The series hops around a lot in time and memory — Rufus and Imogene appear as witnesses in one another's flashbacks — and is not perfectly plausible, in big and little ways, but its energy and reveals upon reveals make that moot. Patinkin, in an indefinable accent, is his usual Big Presence, but Beane holds her own, and the arrival of Linda Emond as Interpol agent Hilde Eriksen pays constant comic dividends.

The absorbing "Criminal Record" takes us to modern-day London, and has that quality of crisp reality peculiar to British series (see also: "Slow Horses"); it doesn't have a documentary feel, but there are few layers of cinematic gloss separating the view from the viewed, and as a result one feels closer to the characters, the action and the environment. The locations are appropriate; the details of a police station and the institutional bureaucracy feel exactly right. The series has a persuasive immediacy.

The story begins with an anonymous call to the police from a woman, fearing for her life from a violent boyfriend, in the course of which she tells the operator that he's claimed responsibility for a murder for which another man sits in prison. This falls into the lap of Detective Sergeant June Lenker (Jumbo), who runs with it further than any of her associates would like, particularly the original investigator, Detective Chief Inspector Daniel Hegarty (Capaldi), a respected officer who clearly has something to hide and, remembering the case, describes the convicted Errol Matthis as "the poor man's O.J." ("Excuse me?" asks Lenker, to no response.) He's calm and collected; she's impulsive and patient, with a tendency to alienate her colleagues, bend and break rules and a disinclination to wait for backup — support is always too many minutes away — charging into dangerous situations with sometimes bad results.

The narrative proceeds with the usual red herrings, flurries of action and suspense and unsuspected revelations, some of which are telegraphed long before they arrive. Answers will be forthcoming, but, as with "True Detective," the real mystery resides within individuals, and how they are with one another — not only the relationship between Lenker and Hegarty, working sometimes together, and sometimes against each other, but between parents and children and partners. And Capaldi and Jumbo work beautifully together. There's no mystery in that.

## WEEKEND: HEALTH &amp; FITNESS

# Time to clear the air about e-cigarettes

Public health experts say the surgeon general should release a report clarifying the benefits, dangers of vaping

By MIKE STOBBE  
Associated Press

Sixty years ago, the U.S. surgeon general released a report that settled a long-standing public debate about the dangers of cigarettes and led to huge changes to smoking in America.

Today, some public health experts say a similar report could help clear the air about vaping.

Many U.S. adults believe nicotine vaping is as harmful as — or more dangerous than — cigarette smoking. That's wrong. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and most scientists agree that, based on available evidence, electronic cigarettes are far less dangerous than traditional cigarettes.

But that doesn't mean e-cigarettes are harmless. And public health experts disagree about exactly how harmful, or helpful, the devices are. Clarifying information is urgently needed, said Lawrence Gostin, a public health law expert at Georgetown University.

"There have been so many confusing messages about vaping," Gostin said. "A surgeon general's report could clear that all up."

One major obstacle: E-cigarettes haven't been around long enough for scientists to see if vapers develop problems like lung cancer and heart disease.

"There's a remarkable lack of evidence," said Dr. Kelly Henning, who leads the public health program at Bloomberg Philanthropies.

## Smoking and vaping

Cigarette smoking has long been described as the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention puts the annual toll at 480,000 lives. That count should start to fall around 2030, according to a study published last year by the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, thanks in part to a decline in smoking rates that began in the 1960s.

Back then, ashtrays were everywhere and more than 42% of U.S. adults smoked.

On Jan. 11, 1964, U.S. Surgeon General Luther Terry released an authoritative report that said smoking causes illness and death — and the government should do something about it. The report is considered a watershed moment: In the decades that followed, warning labels were put on cigarette packs, cigarette commercials were banned, governments raised tobacco taxes and new restrictions were placed on where people could light up.

By 2022, the adult smoking rate was 11%.

Some experts believe e-cigarettes deserve some of the credit. The devices were billed as a way to help smokers quit, and the FDA has authorized a handful of e-cigarettes as less-harmful alternatives for adult smokers.

Vaping's popularity exploded in the 2010s, among both adults and teens. In 2014, e-cigarettes surpassed combustible cigarettes as the tobacco product that youth used the most. By 2019, 28% of high schoolers were vaping.

U.S. health officials sounded alarms, fearing that kids hooked on nicotine would rediscover cigarettes. That hasn't happened. Last year, the high school smoking rate was less than 2% — far lower than the 35% rate seen about 25 years ago.

"That's a great public health triumph. It's an almost unbelievable one," said Kenneth Warner, who studies tobacco-control policies at the University of Michigan.

"If it weren't for e-cigarettes, I think we would be hearing the public health community shouting at the top of their lungs about the success of getting kids not to smoke," he said.

## Vaping's benefits and harms

Cigarettes have been called the deadliest consumer product ever invented. Their smoke contains thousands of chemicals, at least 69 of which can cause cancer.

The vapor from e-cigarettes has been estimated to contain far fewer chemicals, and fewer carcinogens.

Some toxic substances are present in both but show up in much lower concentrations in e-cigarette vapor than in



iStock

**The vapor from electronic cigarettes has been estimated to contain far fewer chemicals, and fewer carcinogens, than cigarette smoke. Studies, however, have been limited in their ability to separate the effects of the two.**

cigarette smoke.

Studies have shown that smokers who completely switch to vaping have better lung function and see other health improvements.

"I would much rather see someone vaping than smoking a Marlboro. There is no question in my mind that vaping is safer," said Donald Shopland, who was a clerk for the committee that generated the 1964 report and is co-author of a forthcoming book on it.

But what about the dangers to people who have never smoked?

There have been 100 to 200 studies looking at vaping, and they are a mixed bag, said Dr. Neal Benowitz, of the University of California, San Francisco, a leading academic voice on nicotine and tobacco addiction. The studies used varying techniques, and many were limited in their ability to separate the effects of vaping from that of smoking cigarettes, he said.

"If you look at the research, it's all over the map," Warner said.

Studies have detected bronchitis symptoms and aggravation of asthma in young people who vape. Research also indicates vaping can affect the cells that line the blood vessels and heart, leading researchers to look for a link to heart disease. Perhaps the most cited concern is nicotine, the stimulant that makes cigarettes and vapes addictive.

Animal studies suggest nicotine exposure in adolescents can affect development of the area of the brain responsible for attention, learning and impulse control. Some research in people suggests a link between vaping and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms, depression and feelings of stress. But experts say that the research is very limited and more work needs to be done.

Meanwhile, there's not even a clear scientific consensus that vaping is an effective way to quit smoking, with different studies coming up with different conclusions.

## Clearing the air

Last month, the World Health Organization raised alarms about the rapidly growing global markets for e-cigarettes, noting they come in thousands of flavors that attract young people.

In 2016, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy said efforts were needed to prevent and reduce e-cigarette use by children and young adults, saying nicotine in any form is unsafe for kids.

About four months before the report's release, the FDA began taking steps to regulate e-cigarettes, believing they would benefit smokers.

The agency has authorized several e-cigarettes, but it has refused more than 1 million product marketing applications. Critics say the FDA has been unfair and inconsistent in its regulation of products.

Meanwhile, the number of different e-cigarette devices sold in the U.S. has boomed, due largely to disposables imported from China that come in fruit and candy flavors. But vaping by youths has recently been falling: Last year, 10% of high school students surveyed said they had used e-cigarettes in the previous month, down from 14% the year before.

Why the decline?

"It's hard to say what's working," said Steven Kelder, a University of Texas researcher.

He mentioned a 2019 outbreak of hospitalizations and deaths among people who were vaping products with THC, the chemical that gives marijuana its high.

The illnesses were traced to a thickening agent used in black market vape cartridges, a substance not used in commercial nicotine e-cigarettes. But it may be a reason many Americans think of e-cigarettes as unsafe, Kelder said.

Sherri Mayfield, a 47-year-old postal worker, remembers the 2019 outbreak and reports of rapid illnesses and deaths in youths. Vaping "absolutely" needs to be studied more, Mayfield said last week while on a cigarette break in New York with some co-workers.

"Cigarettes aren't safe," but at least it can take them decades to destroy your health, she said.

The surgeon general's office said in a statement that the 1964 report "catalyzed a 60-year movement to address the harmful effects of smoking" and suggested similar action was needed to address youth vaping.

Murthy's website, however, currently lists neither vaping nor smoking as a priority issue.

## WEEKEND: FAMILY



Gerry Turner's journey on "The Golden Bachelor" ended happily when he proposed marriage to finalist Theresa Nist in September. The two got married Jan. 4.

# Ready to fall in love again

'Golden Bachelor' inspiring seniors to seek romance, bust dating stereotypes

By JENNA ROSS  
Star Tribune

Laura Davis had never watched "The Bachelor" or its many iterations. But the 63-year-old Minneapolis resident tuned in for "The Golden Bachelor," starring daters with hearing aids.

Davis, who has been "single for 100 years," found it goofy, kooky. And then, somehow, inspiring.

"Maybe," Davis thought, "I should think about getting back out there sometime."

Her hope didn't spring from Gerry Turner, the weepy 72-year-old widower at the reality TV show's center. It came from the women. Those daring, darling women, some of whom "didn't think they would ever be able to actually have feelings for a man again," said Davis, who was briefly married in the '80s. She watched as they fell in love.

"The show — as silly as it was, as unrealistic as it was — shows that it is possible."

The hit ABC-TV reality series, which culminated Jan. 4 with the live broadcast of Turner's wedding to 70-year-old widow Theresa Nist, has sparked conversations about the love lives of older adults, about what it means to pursue sex, romance and marriage in your 60s and 70s. It has rekindled a few of those love lives, too.

The show comes at a time when more seniors are single: Roughly half of women over 65 are unpartnered, according to a 2020 Pew Research survey, thanks partly to men's shorter life expectancy. But divorce rates are up for older Americans, too.

It's Just Lunch Minneapolis, a matchmaking service, hasn't seen an increase in memberships it can attribute to "The Golden Bachelor." But the show has come up in conversation with several new female clients, said Natalie Fry, membership director and matchmaker.

"It was just the little push they needed to believe they could still put themselves out there," she said.

In many ways, "The Golden Bachelor" hewed closely to the world built over two decades of "The Bachelor" and "The Bachelorette," with its glittery dates and its princess-cut engagement ring. But thanks to the contestants, the show also touched on real issues of family and memory and loss.

During one episode, some of the women donned goofy outfits for a photo shoot, a classic "Bachelor" group date. Wearing a white wedding dress for the first time in decades, Nancy Hulkower, a widow, be-

gan to cry. Turner checked in, and the two connected over the way grief can hit at unexpected times, in unexpected ways.

The construct of the date was "dopey," but the emotions were authentic, said Julie Pfitzinger, managing editor of Next Avenue, a nonprofit publication focused on growing older in America. "I think that's where I was like, OK, I get this show, now."

But Pfitzinger wishes that the series had more intentionally delved into the topics raised in some of those one-on-one chats. How might we manage blending families? How would we combine finances — or not? What if one of us gets cancer?

"That's the reality of a relationship when you're 70 and older," said Pfitzinger, whose husband died in July at age 65. "It's not all dancing in the diner."

More than four years ago, Michele Arnoldy's husband, a war veteran, died by suicide. Arnoldy, a life coach and former trauma nurse, healed herself through psychotherapy, through writing, through faith. Now, at age 66, she's ready to sell the house and start a new chapter. To find love again.

When she heard that "The Bachelor" was casting women in their 60s and 70s, she applied.

This spinoff demonstrated that "in your 60s and 70s, you still want the same things," Arnoldy said. "People label seniors as something they really aren't. We still need affection. We still like sex. ... I think it opened people's eyes."

But she wishes the show had made the women look less giddy and more mature. She guesses that was partly due to the producers, who interview the cast on camera, being much, much younger. As a coach, she would have had a different approach, posing questions that revealed their life experience, their wisdom.

Rather than: "How are you feeling about this guy?" Maybe: "What is different about Gerry that intrigues you from when you've been in love before?"

Had she been picked for the show, Arnoldy would have brought that wisdom.

"Love isn't enough," she said. "Love fades. Love ebbs and flows. What keeps the relationship going are things like friendship, compatibility, acceptance."

But she suspects she would have left the show early — and is surprised that more of the women, with all their life experience, didn't do so:

"Why would all 25 of these women want this one man? That doesn't make sense to me. I could see that in younger women who are less experienced. But I would have said, 'He's not for me.'"

## THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



# The Beautiful People: Where are they now?

It happened on a whim. We were trying to be spontaneous. We thought they'd think it was funny. We showed up at our new friends' house unannounced at 10:30 on a Saturday morning. They were not amused.

It was the late '90s and my Navy husband, Francis, and I were stationed at Joint Analysis Center, Molesworth, England. Francis worked watches while I cared for our baby.

Through Francis' work, we'd met other young military couples, who we believed, naively, would become our friends, even though they didn't have kids yet. They were still in that blissful stage of marriage when couples sleep late on weekends, stay out until the wee hours and fool around wherever and whenever the mood strikes.

Francis and I, on the other hand, were strapped with the responsibility of caring for a tiny, helpless human. To fit in, we faked devil-may-care attitudes, but our ever-present diaper bag, sensible shoes, Graco stroller and Cheerio-adorned hair were dead giveaways. Although our ages were the same, the differences between us were a vast chasm they were unwilling to cross. We had to make the effort.

On that fateful Saturday morning when we showed up at the young couple's house, we had envisioned them answering their door with wide smiles, exclaiming, "It's Francis and Lisa! What a fun surprise! Come in and stay a while!" We thought we'd chat and laugh. Maybe the guys would take our son to the park, while the wives made food for a barbecue. It would be a blast, and we'd end up being such close friends, one day our kids would call them aunt and uncle.

Uh, not so much.

"Hey! It's us! The Molinaris!" came like a slap to the poor husband when he opened his door. He asked us to wait outside, and we heard low voices coming from upstairs. We knew we'd botched it, but it was too late to turn back. The couple reappeared, wearing manufactured smiles, but with crossed-arm body language that communicated irritation. After awkward chitchat, we hightailed it home.

From then on, I labeled the young social group whose attention eluded us, "The Beautiful People." It wasn't that they were physically attractive. They were simply charmed individuals with that *je ne sais quoi* — they drank good wine, scored tickets to Wimbledon, went skiing and drove trendy cars — that rendered them socially untouchable.

We never truly bonded with the young crowd at JAC Molesworth, but some fun parents with teenage children took pity on us. We hung out casually on weekends, cooking meals, trying out pubs, playing cards, hosting parties. They didn't care about our diaper bag, and we didn't care that they were older. They'd all been there, done that and had hilarious stories to prove it. Our son never called them aunt or uncle, but we've remained friends for almost three decades.

In the years that followed our England tour, we met Beautiful People at every duty station — Norfolk, Stuttgart, Mayport, Newport. Each time, we tried to win them over, but eventually, we ended up feeling rejected and resigned ourselves to the fringes. It was there where we met our true friends, the people with whom we stay in touch to this day.

Francis' Navy community was quite small, so we occasionally cross paths with the Beautiful People from our past. Interestingly, the ravages and rewards of time have erased any perceptions of popularity. Somewhere along the way, the important things in life took precedent over social hierarchies, as we all endured deployments, raised families, changed ranks, paid mortgages, watched our skin wrinkle and our hair fall out and tried to keep our marriages intact.

Where are the Beautiful People now? They have been busy handling ups and downs, career disappointments, health conditions and at least one kid with "issues," just like the rest of us. Turns out, we have more in common than we knew.

Read more at [themeatandpotatoesoflife.com](http://themeatandpotatoesoflife.com) and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: [meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com](mailto:meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com)

# WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

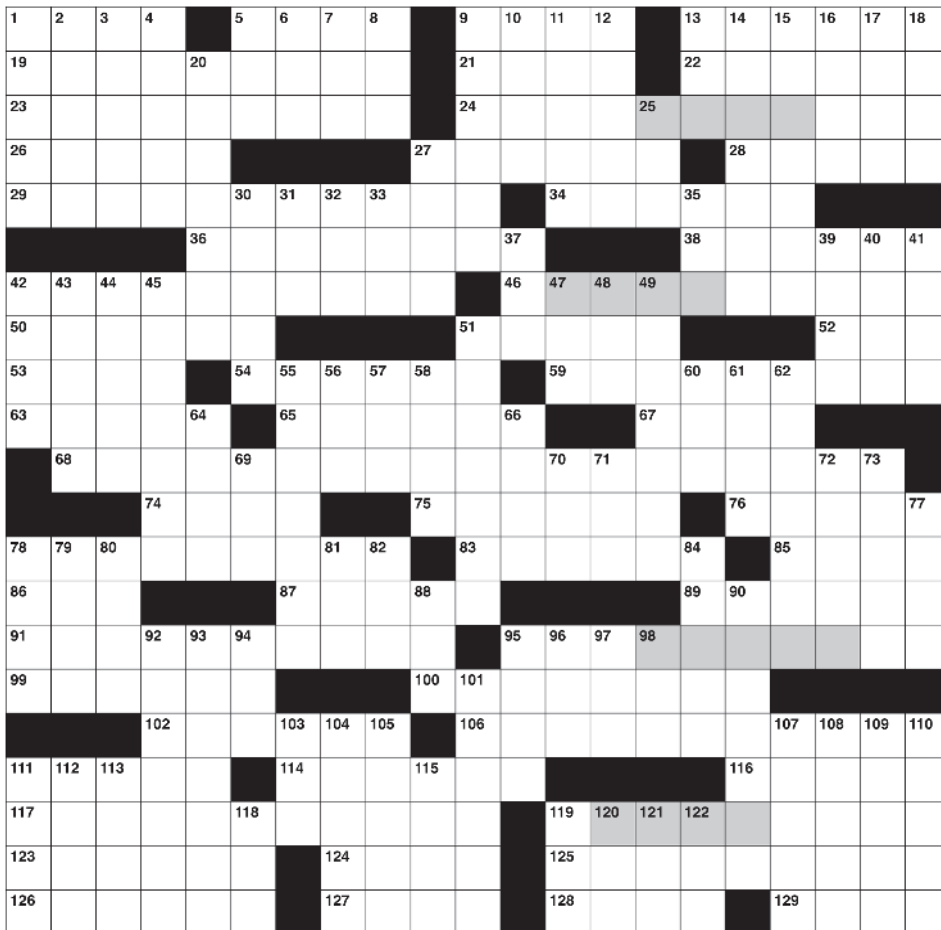
## NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

### GIMME A SECOND!

BY MICHAEL SCHLOSSBERG / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Michael Schlossberg is an internist in Bend, Ore., who has been making crosswords for The Times since 2020. He got the idea for this one after seeing 68-Across as a title at his local bookstore. Although themeless puzzles are Mike's favorites to solve, he says he doesn't construct them "because I get decision paralysis — they're too much of a blank canvas. I need to have a theme set to build around." — W. S.

- ACROSS**
- 1 "Old man"
  - 5 "Yikes!"
  - 9 Childproof-bottle contents, for short
  - 13 Purchase at a cannabis dispensary
  - 19 "Sounds 'bout right to me"
  - 21 False \_\_\_\_
  - 22 Fine parchment
  - 23 It might be pressed before work
  - 24 It might be pressed before work
  - 26 Post concerned with etiquette
  - 27 "Capeesh?"
  - 28 Up-and-down, as a relationship
  - 29 Internet harvesting tool
  - 34 "On Photography" author Susan
  - 36 1918-2004 Fenway Park phenomenon, familiarly
  - 38 Nothing-doing?
  - 42 They're home to spinners
  - 46 They're home to spinners
  - 50 Luxury fashion label
  - 51 1990s workout fad
  - 52 "The Racer's Edge" sloganer
  - 53 Says, informally
  - 54 Bay Area gallery, for short
  - 59 Late winter/early spring, weatherwise
  - 63 "\_\_\_\_ and the Night Visitors" (opera)
  - 65 Fragrant bloomers
  - 67 Animal that becomes a plant if spelled backward
  - 68 Bandleader's urging ...
  - 74 New \_\_\_\_
  - 75 Guides
  - 76 Athleisure portmanteau
  - 78 Certain beach top
  - 83 Snooty
  - 85 Many a Yemeni
  - 86 Piece de resistance?
  - 87 Tourney round
  - 89 Some goofs
  - 91 One sailing through long passages
  - 95 One sailing through long passages
  - 99 Ready and waiting
  - 100 Gadgets for truckers
  - 102 Porterhouse alternatives
  - 106 Inspiration for many a lottery pick
  - 111 Shame, e.g.
  - 114 The yoke's on them
  - 116 Chuck \_\_\_\_, TV director/producer who's known as the King of Sitcoms
  - 117 Target of many a viral marketing campaign
  - 119 Target of many a viral marketing campaign
  - 123 Lead role in 1978's "La Cage aux Folles"
  - 124 Kind of terrier
  - 125 Exclamation after a rescue
  - 126 Warm coat
  - 127 Dash
  - 128 Measurable impact, so to speak
  - 129 Bad news for an investor
- DOWN**
- 1 Spoke (up)
  - 2 Petrichor, n.: The pleasant \_\_\_\_ of rainfall on dry soil
  - 3 Bird also known as a lapwing
  - 4 150-mile-per-hour train
  - 5 Dawn figure, in myth
  - 6 Bovid named for the sound it makes
  - 7 "\_\_\_\_ was saying ..."
  - 8 Part of an ellipsis
  - 9 Skinflints
  - 10 Novelist Ferber
  - 11 Subject of a subway announcement
  - 12 Remedy for a blink-and-you-missed-it moment
  - 13 First lady?
  - 14 Start of a classic request for advice
  - 15 Bad reasoning
  - 16 Rap's \_\_\_\_ Chyna
  - 17 Hang in the shadows
  - 18 TV award
  - 20 Actress Ritter of "Jessica Jones"
  - 25 Serene, informally
  - 27 For the lady
  - 30 Country singer Stapleton
  - 31 Remote-button abbr.
  - 32 Hotshot
  - 33 Place for a porter
  - 35 Clip-on, for one
  - 37 Superfund grp.
  - 39 Bit of slander
  - 40 Titan who gave birth on Delos
  - 41 Disney subsidiary
  - 42 Story that isn't a quick read
  - 43 BOGO, e.g.
  - 44 Words after a verbal gaffe
  - 45 Accessory for a ride-share vehicle
  - 47 \_\_\_\_ cycle
  - 48 "Aladdin" sidekick
  - 49 Amazing woman, slangily
  - 51 "Agricola" author
  - 55 Petal pusher?
  - 56 Peace, in Russian
  - 57 Stadium cheer
  - 58 Big mouths
  - 60 "Told you so!"
  - 61 Ursine : bears :: anguilliform : \_\_\_\_
  - 62 Dakota tribe
  - 64 Staying power
  - 66 Part of a process
  - 69 "I've seen better"
  - 70 Cool, back in the day
  - 71 "Good" day: Abbr.



- 72 Santa-tracking org.
- 73 Really annoy, with "on"
- 77 Lift type
- 78 Just ... all right
- 79 Info in a party invitation
- 80 Apple variety
- 81 Stephen of "Michael Collins"
- 82 "Eww! Enough!"
- 84 Bittern, e.g.
- 88 Bimonthly business magazine
- 90 Election-night news
- 92 Plant that may be mistaken for a dandelion
- 93 Landlocked province
- 94 Grp. once led by Arafat
- 95 Kind of lily
- 96 Hoover, for one, in brief
- 97 "No idea," in a text
- 98 Like Ikea furniture assembly, for short
- 101 Sports jacket
- 103 "As if!"
- 104 Live and breathe
- 105 Feed
- 107 Storybook ending?
- 108 "Nice job!"
- 109 People of western New York
- 110 Sunders
- 111 Tourist mecca in southern Asia
- 112 "Never \_\_\_\_ Kissed" (1999 Drew Barrymore film)
- 113 Part of A.D.
- 115 Singer with the album "Watermark"
- 118 Hunky-dory
- 119 Email-chain abbr.
- 120 Min Jin \_\_\_\_, author of the 2017 best seller "Pachinko"
- 121 You can dispense with this
- 122 Complete collection

## GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

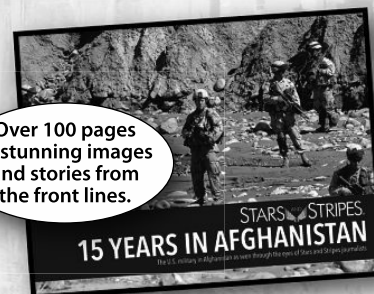
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## FACES

# Meant to be

‘Mean Girls’ writer Tina Fey realized only after casting actress Bebe Wood that they worked together years earlier

By LISA GUTIERREZ  
The Kansas City Star

There’s a moment in the new “Mean Girls” movie-musical when the verve quiets to focus on a teenage girl standing in her friend’s closet, holding a music box, facing her insecurities and realizing that her narcissistic “Plastic” bestie whose approval she craves is the problem.

It’s an awakening for one of the movie’s main characters, Toaster Strudel heiress Gretchen Wieners, as she sings the melancholy “What’s Wrong With Me?”

“Saturday Night Live” alum Tina Fey chose actress Bebe Wood to play Gretchen, a role made famous in the original 2004 movie by actress Lacy Chabert, now known as a queen of Hallmark Christmas movies. Fey wrote both the original movie and new musical version, which opened this month.

As a songwriter herself, Wood connected to the lyrics and the anguish of a teenager who sings, “Mama called me beautiful, don’t believe her anymore.”

“I think it’s the one song in the show that is really quiet and intimate. For me, it was a great way to connect with Gretchen,” Wood said recently.

She is 22 and was just a toddler when “Mean Girls,” now a cinematic cult classic, premiered.

It is a cautionary tale about the dangers of high school cliques, focusing on a trio of junior girls known as the “Plastics.” They are led by queen bee Regina George who terrorizes her fellow North Shore High students until new girl Cadly Heron engineers her take-down with unwitting help from Gretchen.

Fey based the first movie on the 2002 parenting book “Queen Bees and Wannabes” by Rosalind Wiseman. The film birthed a Broadway musical in 2018, nominated for 12 Tony Awards. Then Fey wrote this new musical version for the big screen.

Don’t, though, call it a remake. Wood considers it a “re-imagining” of the OG film.

“I feel like the core of Gretchen is the same, very much the same,” said Wood. “I don’t think anyone was trying to re-create anything.”

“But I think something that was intriguing to me is that this movie is also a musical and because of that we’re able to see more of ... the vulnerability of Gretchen.”

“Casting is like my favorite thing to be a part of,” said Fey in a recent “Tonight Show” interview with host Jimmy Fallon. She said Gretchen was the last role cast.

“It’s a hard part to cast. We saw a lot of amazing actors,” Fey said. “But you need that person who’s, like, smart but fragile, and looks like they just might come unhinged at any second.”

Fey said she watched “every single tape of every Gretchen” who auditioned. “So I spent like a whole day watching all of them and



JOHN NACION/TNS

Bebe Wood, shown Jan. 8 at the global premiere of “Mean Girls” in New York, was the last role cast for the movie musical.

then I was like, ‘This girl. I love this girl, Bebe Wood. She’s perfect! She’s Gretchen.’

“We hired her and then I went to look at her IMDb page and then I realized I had worked with her when she was 10 on ‘30 Rock.’ And I was like, ‘I pick her every time. I like you every time, Bebe Wood.’”

Wood says she knows which of the new cliques in the film she would have belonged to: the theater kids.

“There are so many messages to be taken from this movie,” she said. “All of this chaos is kinda going on in high school. Being a young person is really hard, especially with the landscape of social media.”

“I love in this movie that it feels like there’s still an unbridled sense of joy, and I think that comes from the musical numbers.”

“There are really so many fun moments in this movie and despite all the chaos ... these kids at North Shore are still able to find joy, which I think is really lovely.”



EVAN AGOSTINI, INVISION/AP

Ariana Grande says her seventh studio album, “eternal sunshine,” drops March 8.

## Grande says new album due March 8

Associated Press

Thank you, next: Ariana Grande announced on Wednesday that her new album, titled “eternal sunshine,” will be released on March 8.

Grande released her first single from “eternal sunshine” on Jan. 12, a house-informed pop kiss-off to the haters, “yes, and?”

News of the album first broke Dec. 27, when the two-time Grammy award winner teased the future full-length album on her Instagram page. It will be her seventh studio album and first since 2020’s “Positions.”

“See you next year,” she wrote in the caption of the Instagram post, which included images in a studio and in front of a mixing board, and a video where someone off screen tells her it is “almost the last day of

this album.” Grande responds, “I’m so tired,” and laughs. “But so happy and grateful. I also feel like I weigh 3,000 tons.”

On her Instagram story, she shared a screenshot captured from FaceTime with the text: “The two moods of the album.”

She also shared posts from fans who received packages from her in the mail containing red lipstick from her R.E.M. Beauty line and a note that also read, “See you next year.”

The album announcement arrived a few weeks after news broke that Grande signed to Good World Management firm, following her split with long-term manager Scooter Braun.

The new album will also be her first since her marriage and subsequent separation from real estate agent Dalton Gomez.

## ‘Oppenheimer,’ ‘Poor Things’ lead BAFTA nominations

Associated Press

Atom-bomb epic “Oppenheimer” leads the race for the British Academy Film Awards, with nominations in 13 categories including best film.

Gothic fantasy “Poor Things” received 11 nominations on the list announced Thursday, while historical epic “Killers of the Flower Moon” and Holocaust drama “The Zone of Interest” had nine each.

Other leading contenders include French courtroom drama “Anatomy of a Fall,” boarding school comedy “The Holdovers” and Leonard Bernstein biopic “Maestro” with seven nominations each. Exploration of love and grief “All of Us Strangers” was nominated in six categories, and class-war dramedy “Saltburn” in five.

“Barbie” also got five nominations but missed out on a best picture nod.

The winners will be announced at a Feb. 18 ceremony at London’s Royal Festival Hall hosted by “Doctor Who” star David Tennant.

The prizes — officially the EE BAFTA Film Awards — are Britain’s equivalent of Hollywood’s Academy Awards and will be watched closely for hints of who may win at the Oscars on March 10.

The best film race pits “Oppenheimer” against “Poor Things,” “Killers of the Flower Moon,” “Anatomy of a Fall” and “The Holdovers.”

### Taylor Swift leads 2024 iHeartRadio Music nominations

Taylor Swift leads the 2024 iHeartRadio Music Awards nominations with nine, followed closely by Jelly Roll, SZA, and 21 Savage with eight. Behind them is Olivia Rodrigo, who received six.

The iHeartRadio Music Awards honor the most played artists of the year on their stations and app, and fans can vote in several categories including best lyrics, best music video, best fan army, social star award, favorite tour photographer, TikTok bop of the year, favorite tour style and two new fields: favorite on screen and favorite debut album.

Social voting is now open at iHeartRadio.com/awards and will close on March 25.

The awards will be announced April 1 in Los Angeles.

### Other news

■ Authorities in the Dominican Republic have arrested U.S. rapper **Tekashi 6ix9ine**, who was scheduled to appear in court on Thursday on charges of domestic violence. The rapper, whose real name is Daniel Hernández, is being held at a jail in the capital of Santo Domingo, where he was arrested Wednesday, officials said. No further details were immediately available.

■ **Alec Musser**, best known for his roles as “All My Children” series regular Del Henry and a hunky water park attendee in the comedy “Grown Ups,” died Jan. 13, according to Instagram posts from his fiancée Paige Press. He was 50. A press release by the San Diego Medical Examiner’s Office confirmed that Musser died of a self-inflicted shotgun wound to the chest.

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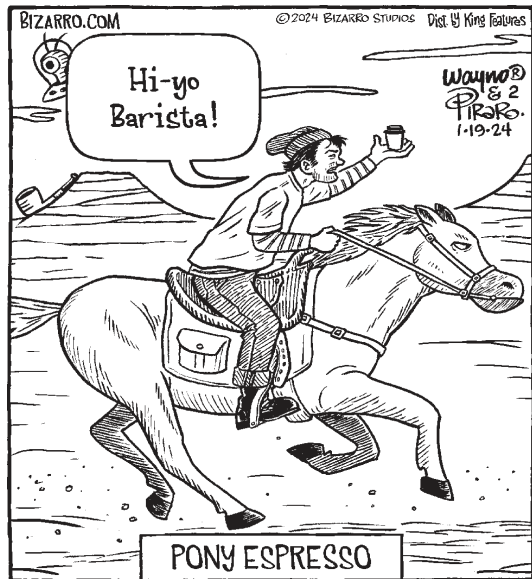
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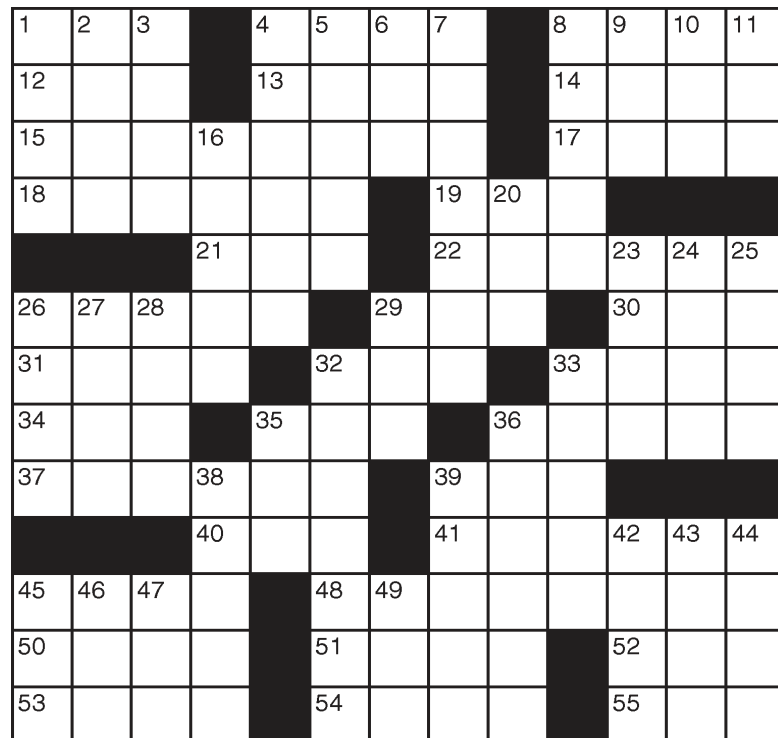
Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 Doze (off)
- 4 Crooned
- 8 "The Da Vinci —"
- 12 Actress Mendes
- 13 Taxi alternative
- 14 Graph line
- 15 Built to last
- 17 Missing
- 18 Goodies
- 19 Formerly called
- 21 Golf peg
- 22 Photo collections
- 26 Spud
- 29 Adobe file format
- 30 Estuary
- 31 Pt. of U.S.A.
- 32 "Evita" role
- 33 LAPD ranks
- 34 Badge metal
- 35 Chairman of China
- 36 Encounters
- 37 Confuses
- 39 God, to Galileo
- 40 Mandela's org.
- 41 New
- 45 Equitable
- 48 Award
- 50 Future atty.'s exam
- 51 Beloved
- 52 Victory
- 53 Bassoon's kin
- 54 Tolkien creatures

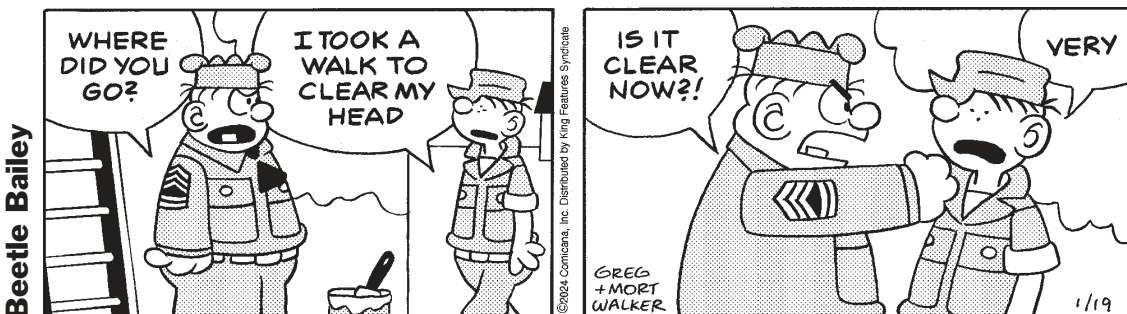
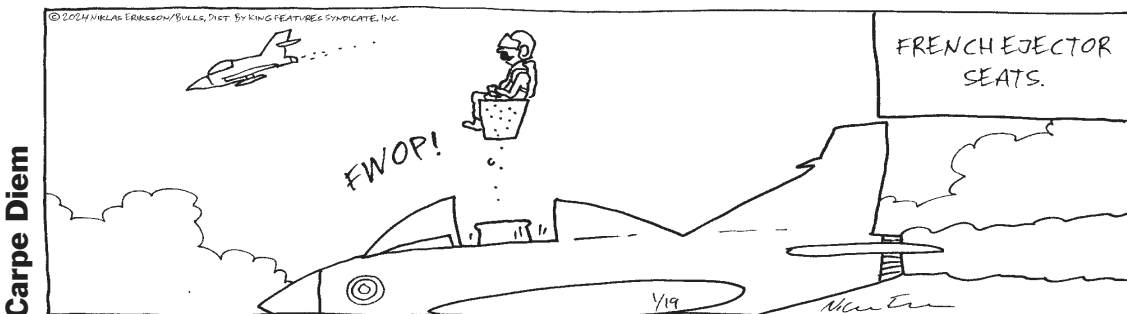
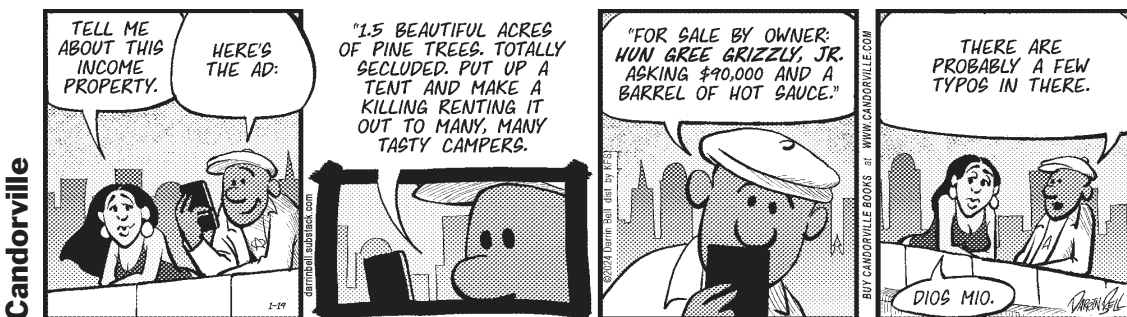
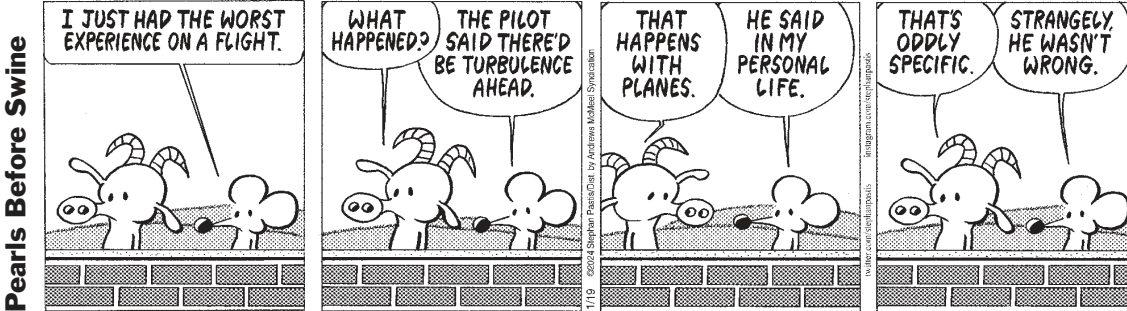
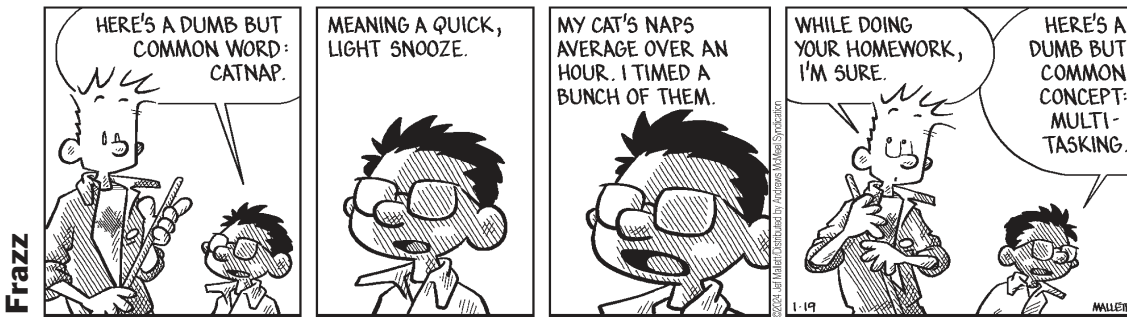
55 Messy room

- 25 Back talk
- 26 "Toodle-oo!"
- 27 During
- 28 Look after
- 29 Saigon soup
- 32 Waterfall
- 33 Capital of South Korea
- 35 Chess pieces
- 36 Juveniles
- 38 Coffee bar offering
- 39 Old gold coin
- 42 Tools with teeth
- 43 Revise
- 44 Contradict
- 45 "Let's Get Loud" singer, to fans
- 46 PC port
- 47 — Paulo, Brazil
- 49 100 yrs.

DOWN

- 1 Salamander
- 2 Done with
- 3 Valley
- 4 Historic South Carolina fort
- 5 Humiliate
- 6 Nancy Drew's boyfriend
- 7 Hurled weapon
- 8 Novelist Carr
- 9 Kitchen gadget brand
- 10 Insult, slangily
- 11 Ballpark fig.
- 16 In a while
- 20 Seasonal helper
- 23 Incite
- 24 Baseball glove

Answer to Previous Puzzle



1-19

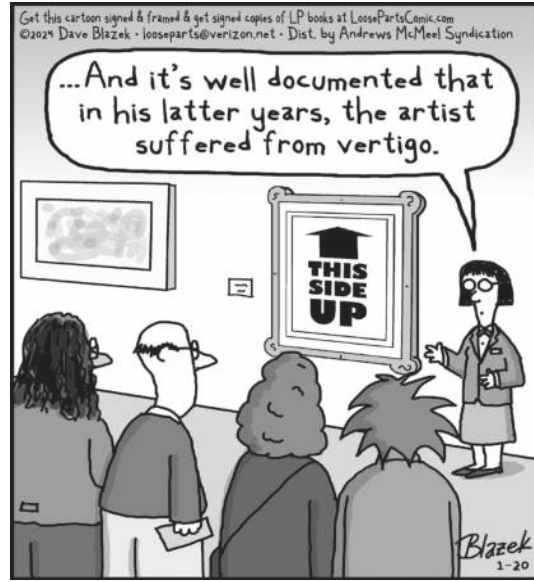
CRYPTOQUIP

MEUO MKNZL AI U GXOOXDB  
 DURI GKQ U FEKV FIZZADB  
 VQXRUI-OEIRIL SDXPSSDUPSF?  
 "RKDSIC ANFXDIFF."  
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF HISTORICAL DUTCH SOUTH AFRICANS FIND WILD SWINE UNINTERESTING, I GUESS BOARS BORE BOERS.  
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals K

Bizarro



Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

Grid for Eugene Sheffer Crossword with numbered squares.

ACROSS

- 1 Invite to one's loft
6 San Diego suburb
12 Hebrew prophet
13 Big Easy cuisine
14 Cosa —
15 Brain protectors
16 Pair's air
17 Cathedral area
19 \$ dispenser
20 Bigfoot's kin
22 Aachen article
24 Decks in the ring
27 Separate
29 Fraud
32 Fitness center offering
35 Spill the beans
36 Belgrade resident
37 NFL stats
38 Perched
40 Faucet problem
42 Bat wood
44 "— deal!" ("Sold!")
46 Secondhand
50 Deceived
52 Tenor Enrico
54 Disobedient
55 Sign up
56 Fits together
57 Jeremy of "Law & Order"

DOWN

- 1 Not worth — (valueless)
2 RSVP enclosure
3 Poker pot
4 Former Mideast gp.
5 Apparitions
6 Roman 705
7 Goofed
8 Broadway actress Salonga
9 King or Queen's rule
10 Landed
11 500 sheets
12 Neither Rep. nor Dem.
18 Inflatable sleepers
21 Jargon suffix
23 Twisty turn

- 24 Old CIA foe
25 Popeye's Olive
26 Atom — (nuclear devices)
28 Apartment balconies
30 Succor
31 AWOL pursuers
33 CEO's degree, maybe
34 Slugger's stat
39 Championship
41 Knitting stitches
42 Grad
43 Trig function
45 Playpen pile
47 Business attire brand
48 Old U.S. gas brand
49 Speck
51 "Gee, ya think?"
53 Singer DiFranco

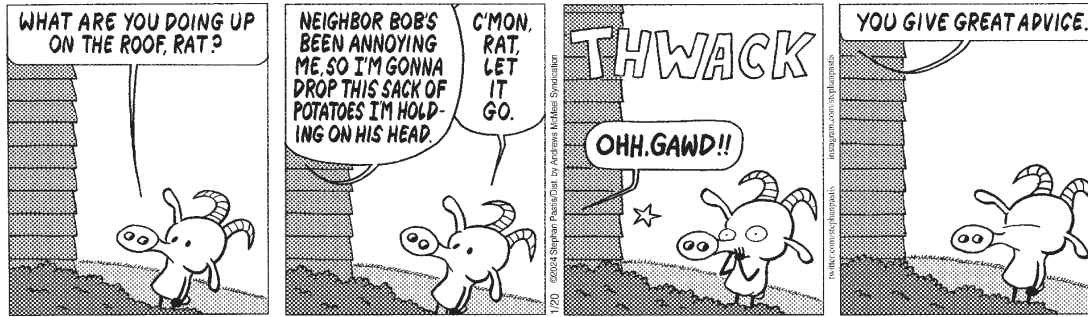
Answer to Previous Puzzle

Answer grid for previous puzzle: NOD, SANG, CODE, EVA, UBER, AXIS, WELLM, MADE, LOST, TREATS, NEE, TEE, ALBUMS, TATER, PDF, RIA, AMER, CHE, SGTS, TIN, MAO, MEETS, ADDLES, DIO, ANC, UNUSED, JUST, ACCOLADE, LSAT, DEAR, WIN, OBOE, ENTS, STY

Frazz



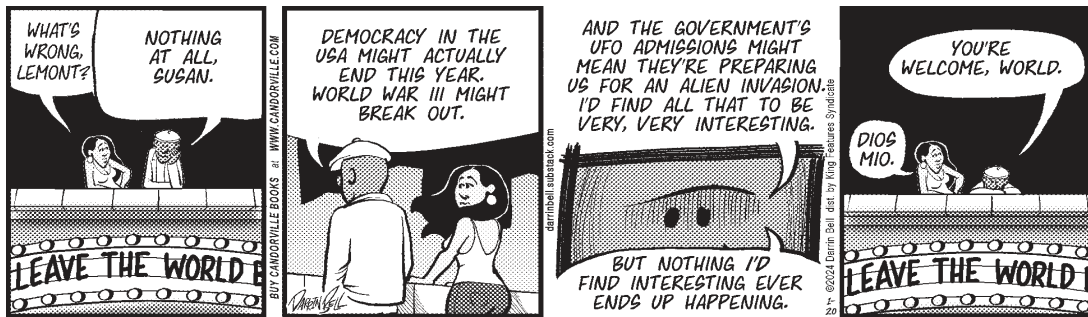
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



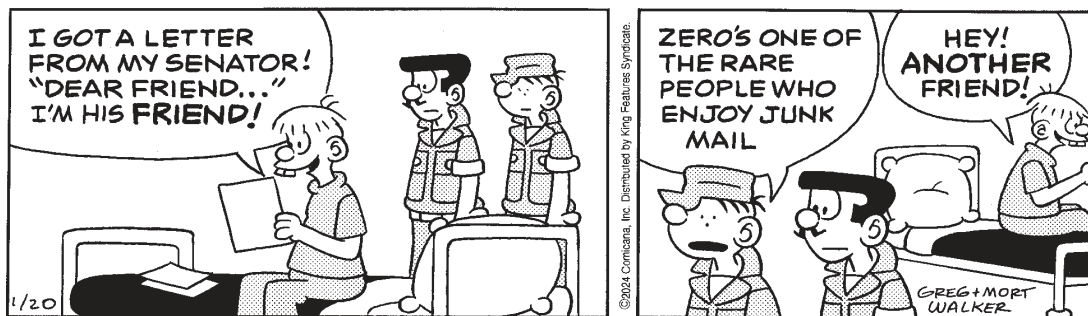
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



1-20

CRYPTOQUIP

G V M J S G V G M S X V M H V S P
G H C N I E M P M L X H R I R A F G V M
G H R F C A C J M G H U H N E M , L C V M
G H R M P S P R T T M H M A G S A F E M .
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT WOULD BE A FITTING NAME FOR A SHOP SELLING PRIMATE-THEMED KNICKKNACKS? "MONKEY BUSINESS."
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: G equals T

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## OPINION

## Biden is late but right to strike against the Houthis

BY JONAH GOLDBERG

Tribune Content Agency

With the possible exception of fights over the national debt and Supreme Court nominations, there is no topic that arouses more partisan hypocrisy than presidential use of military force. And globally, there is no issue that arouses more hypocrisy than Israel. Put them together and you have a perfect storm of double standards.

Let's establish some relevant facts.

On Oct. 7, Iran-backed Hamas launched a brutal attack on Israel, a close American ally, from Gaza. Israel counter-attacked. President Joe Biden repeatedly warned regimes in the region, specifically Iran, not to get involved. On Oct. 24, Secretary of State Antony Blinken vowed America would respond to attacks on American forces "swiftly and decisively."

Iran didn't listen (and America didn't respond swiftly or decisively). Iranian-backed militias attacked American bases in Iraq and Syria. In November, Houthis, an Iranian proxy group that controls parts of Yemen, started launching rocket, drone and missile attacks, on both Israel and on international shipping in the Red Sea with logistical support from Iran.

Houthis claimed they were merely attacking ships trading with Israel, but the attacks were indiscriminate, ensnaring ships with no ties to Israel and dislocating global trade. In December, a U.S. warship shot down three drones in self-defense.

Last week, after intense criticism for failing to make good on his warnings, Biden ordered significant attacks on Houthi assets in Yemen, with assistance from Britain and other

allies.

There isn't room to feast on the banquet of hypocrisies on offer, but let's nibble on the most obvious. One of the first things Biden did upon taking office was remove the Houthis from the official list of terrorist organizations. He now says they are terrorists.

Many on the right who blistered Biden for dithering are now angry that he didn't consult with Congress before retaliating. Many on the left, who had no objections to the Obama-Biden administration's attacks on Libya in 2011, are mad at Biden for attacking a group allied with Hamas.

Globally Israel critics, who make a big show of being supporters of international law, are rallying to the Houthi cause. One chant, heard in New York and London, "Yemen, Yemen make us proud, turn another ship around." This crowd insists that its animus toward Israel is driven by a passionate commitment to human rights, but seems to have no noticeable objections to Houthi atrocities (or Hamas atrocities), including the Houthis' restoration of slavery in Yemen.

Anti-Semitism, we're constantly told, has nothing to do with anti-Zionism. The official slogan of the Houthis is "God is great, death to the U.S., death to Israel, curse the Jews, and victory for Islam." You can tell me that "death to Israel" is merely anti-Zionist. But "curse the Jews"?

Perhaps because such hypocrisy is so hard to defend, the substance of opposition to the strikes, at home and abroad, is either to American military "escalation" or to escalation without required congressional approval (or parliamentary approval in the U.K.). Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., declared, "This is an unacceptable violation of the Constitution.

Article 1 requires that military action be authorized by Congress."

Throughout this crisis, "escalation" has been code for striking back. Even in the immediate hours after Hamas' butchery, there were demands that Israel not "escalate" by responding. As for America, many opponents of escalation had no problem with Houthi and Iranian "escalation" by indiscriminately attacking global shipping and threatening American interests.

This illustrates the weakness of the constitutional argument. In March 1801, President Thomas Jefferson dispatched two-thirds of the U.S. Navy to wage war on the Barbary pirates. He didn't formally notify Congress until December. As legal historian Robert Turner notes, "the Annals of Congress reveal no expression of concern that the president should first have obtained prior legislative sanction."

The constitutionally dubious War Powers Act requires congressional authorization for the use of force, except in cases of "a national emergency created by attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its Armed Forces." Even if, for some tendentious reason, you do not believe the Houthi attacks qualify for the exception, it's worth remembering they're just one facet of broader Iranian aggression — and escalation.

I have no objection to getting congressional buy-in, and Biden's critics have a point: If he was willing to wait this long to respond to the Houthi attacks, he could have consulted with Congress. But that's the real problem: he shouldn't have waited this long in the first place.

Jonah Goldberg is editor-in-chief of The Dispatch and the host of The Remnant podcast.

## Taiwan doesn't want to be a pawn in US-China battle

BY JOSH ROGIN

The Washington Post

Taiwanese Vice President Lai Ching-te's victory in Saturday's presidential election might initially seem like a rebuke to China and a sign that the island is drifting more toward the United States. But a closer look reveals a more complicated picture. The Taiwanese people showed they are not interested in becoming a pawn of either superpower. The U.S. approach to Taiwan over the next four years must be centered on this reality.

To be sure, China tried to prevent Lai's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) from achieving a third consecutive term in office and favored the opposition. But Beijing is content to play a long game. Chinese President Xi Jinping told President Joe Biden in November that China intends to reunify with Taiwan eventually but that there is no set date. Even though Lai, who is also known as William Lai, and the DPP have repeatedly said they have no intention of seeking formal independence, Lai's presidency might be seen as an irritant in the fragile relations between Washington and Beijing. No wonder Biden's reaction to the election was to issue a statement assuring the world that the United States does "not support Taiwan's independence."

In Washington, Taiwan is often viewed solely through the lens of the U.S.-China relationship. But that frame risks missing the message Taiwan sent this weekend. The election results show that the Taiwanese people care more about domestic issues than great-power competition. They want to strengthen ties with

the United States, but they don't want to abandon ties with China. U.S. policymakers should be humble about the implications of the polls and prepared for what comes next.

"This election was less about what's happening externally and more about what's happening internally in Taiwan," Russell Hsiao, executive director of the Global Taiwan Institute, told me.

Lai won just over 40% of the vote, which means that almost 60% of Taiwanese voters wanted change at the top. There is incumbency fatigue in Taiwan and a general dissatisfaction with the DPP's handling of several domestic issues, including the economy, jobs and housing prices. If the two opposition parties — the Kuomintang and the Taiwan People's Party — had been more competent or more unified, the result could have been different. Also, the DPP lost control of Taiwan's parliament to the Kuomintang. Leading a divided government, Lai will need to seek consensus to govern.

In Washington, most Taiwan analysis focuses on whether China will invade the island and when. Some say 2025, others say 2027. But by fixating on the military attack scenario, U.S. policymakers risk ignoring what the Taiwanese people actually care about and overlooking the various other ways China is putting the squeeze on Taiwan.

China is likely to continue using economic coercion and its huge market power to pressure Taiwan's business community to be more Beijing-friendly. Lai says he wants to diversify Taiwan's economic relationships, but U.S. initiatives to strengthen trade with the island

have been lackluster. Meanwhile, Beijing is continuing efforts to sever Taiwan from its last remaining diplomatic allies. On Monday, the small Pacific island country of Nauru announced it was cutting ties with Taipei and switching its diplomatic recognition to Beijing. That leaves Taiwan with 12 diplomatic allies remaining. U.S. policy is to help Taiwan keep those relationships, but it's not working.

China is also using many nonmilitary tactics to undermine Taiwan's democracy and mess with the Taiwanese people's minds. This includes political interference, cyberattacks, disinformation and pressure on Taiwanese of all stripes to toe the reunification line.

Military assistance is an important part of helping Taiwan, but only one part. It's easy to talk about selling Taiwan more tanks or fighter jets. Discussing a free-trade agreement is hard; figuring out how to combat Chinese Communist Party disinformation and cyberwarfare efforts is harder still. These are also battlefields for Taiwan if it wants to preserve its autonomy and succeed as a country, but U.S. policy can't keep up.

The Taiwanese people don't want to be ruled from Beijing, but they also don't want conflict. By supporting Taiwan's democratic development, promoting its economic prosperity and protecting its diplomatic space, the U.S. can craft a strategy that enables Taiwan to engage Beijing from a position of relative confidence and strength. That's the best way to keep Taiwan free and avoid war.

Josh Rogin is a columnist for the Global Opinions section of The Washington Post.

# SCOREBOARD/AUSTRALIAN OPEN

## COLLEGE BASKETBALL

### Wednesday's men's scores

#### EAST

Bucknell 73, Boston U. 57  
Colgate 64, Army 56  
Davidson 79, Fordham 69  
Lafayette 72, Holy Cross 68  
Navy 71, Lehigh 69  
Robert Morris 102, Detroit 99, 2OT  
Rutgers 87, Nebraska 82, OT  
St. Bonaventure 99, Rhode Island 64  
UConn 62, Creighton 48

#### SOUTH

Appalachian St. 76, Georgia St. 68  
Auburn 80, Vanderbilt 65  
Chattanooga 74, Mercer 60  
Florida St. 84, Miami 75  
Furman 100, VMI 60  
Gardner-Webb 74, Radford 68  
High Point 86, Presbyterian 83  
Kentucky 90, Mississippi St. 77  
LSU 89, Mississippi 80  
N. Iowa 83, Belmont 72  
North Carolina 86, Louisville 70  
North Texas 60, East Carolina 59  
SC-Upstate 73, Longwood 69  
Southern Miss. 69, Arkansas St. 66  
UAB 83, Tulane 69  
UNC-Greensboro 73, The Citadel 67  
Virginia 65, Virginia Tech 57  
Wofford 75, ETSU 73

#### MIDWEST

Bradley 70, S. Illinois 69  
Drake 77, Illinois St. 56  
Evansville 78, Valparaiso 75  
IUPUI 85, Fort Wayne 79  
Loyola Chicago 79, UMass 78  
Murray St. 73, Ill.-Chicago 58  
Northwestern 72, Maryland 69  
Oakland 70, Youngstown St. 67  
Providence 100, DePaul 62

#### SOUTHWEST

Houston 77, Texas Tech 54  
Louisiana-Lafayette 86, Texas St. 68  
Oklahoma 77, West Virginia 63  
Tulsa 107, UTSA 78  
UCF 77, Texas 71

#### FAR WEST

Arizona 82, Southern Cal 67  
San Diego St. 71, Nevada 59  
UCLA 68, Arizona St. 66

### Wednesday's women's scores

#### EAST

Army 52, Colgate 49  
Bucknell 61, Boston U. 52  
Duchesne 76, St. Bonaventure 67  
Georgetown 73, Providence 71  
Holy Cross 80, Lafayette 57  
Lehigh 81, Navy 65  
Loyola (Md.) 59, American 55  
Loyola Chicago 79, UMass 66  
Ohio St. 84, Maryland 76  
Rhode Island 55, Fordham 44  
St. John's 60, Butler 42  
UConn 83, Seton Hall 59  
Villanova 66, Marquette 63  
West Virginia 80, Houston 39

#### SOUTH

Arkansas St. 78, South Alabama 69  
Charlotte 66, Tulane 64  
George Mason 91, Saint Louis 61  
High Point 76, Presbyterian 55  
Longwood 66, SC-Upstate 58  
N. Kentucky 83, Robert Morris 51  
Radford 80, Gardner-Webb 71  
Rice 80, East Carolina 67  
Richmond 59, Davidson 54  
Winthrop 70, UNC-Asheville 64, OT

#### MIDWEST

Ball St. 79, Cent. Michigan 47  
Bowling Green 70, Akron 59  
Buffalo 65, N. Illinois 58  
Cleveland St. 72, Wright St. 61  
Dayton 71, George Washington 53  
E. Michigan 53, Miami (Ohio) 48  
Illinois 96, Rutgers 68  
Indiana 85, Minnesota 62  
Michigan St. 91, Northwestern 72  
Nebraska 62, Michigan 43  
Toledo 87, Kent St. 76  
W. Michigan 73, Ohio 55  
Wichita St. 71, Memphis 66

#### SOUTHWEST

Kansas St. 2, TCU 0  
North Texas 76, SMU 61  
Oklahoma St. 82, BYU 50  
Texas Tech 71, Iowa St. 63

#### FAR WEST

Boise St. 68, San Jose St. 64  
Colorado St. 81, Air Force 67  
Nevada 89, Utah St. 44  
New Mexico 68, Wyoming 61  
UNLV 67, San Diego St. 60

## PRO HOCKEY

### PWHL

	W	L	T	OW	OL	Pts	GF	GA
Minnesota	4	0	0	0	1	13	14	8
Montreal	3	1	0	1	1	9	13	12
New York	2	3	0	1	0	5	13	13
Boston	2	1	0	1	0	5	8	7
Ottawa	1	1	0	0	1	4	9	7
Toronto	1	4	0	0	0	3	7	17

Teams awarded three (3) points for a regulation win, two (2) points for an overtime or shootout win, one (1) point for an overtime or shootout loss, and zero (0) points for a regulation time loss.

#### Sunday, Jan. 14

New York 3, Minnesota 2, OT  
Tuesday, Jan. 16

Montreal 3, New York 2  
Wednesday's games

Minnesota 3, Ottawa 2  
Boston 3, Toronto 2

#### Saturday's games

New York at Boston  
Toronto at Montreal

#### Tuesday's game

Toronto at Ottawa

## TENNIS

### Australian Open

#### Thursday

#### At Melbourne Park

#### Melbourne, Australia

#### Purse: AUD 38,923,200

#### Surface: Hardcourt outdoor

#### Men's Singles

#### Second Round

Alex Michelsen, United States, def. Jiri Lehecka (32), Czech Republic, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.  
Casper Ruud (11), Alex Michelsen, United States, def. Jiri Lehecka (32), Czech Republic, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.  
Casper Ruud (11), Norway, def. Max Purcell, Australia, 6-3, 6-7 (5), 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7).  
Alexander Zverev (6), Germany, def. Lukas Klein, Slovakia, 7-5, 3-6, 4-6, 7-6 (5), 7-6 (7).

Cameron Norrie (19), Britain, def. Giulio Zepieri, Italy, 3-6, 6-7 (4), 6-2, 6-4, 6-4.  
Tommy Paul (14), United States, def. Jack Draper, Britain, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3, 7-5.  
Nuno Borges, Portugal, def. Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (23), Spain, 7-6 (7), 6-3, 6-3.

Miomir Kecmanovic, Serbia, def. Jan-Lennard Struff (24), Germany, 6-4, 1-6, 7-6 (5), 1-6, 7-6 (9).

Carlos Alcaraz (2), Spain, def. Lorenzo Sonego, Italy, 6-4, 6-7 (3), 6-3, 7-6 (3).  
Juncheng Shang, China, def. Sumit Nagal, India, 2-6, 6-3, 7-5, 6-4.

Tallon Griekspoor (28), Netherlands, def. Arthur Fils, France, 3-6, 6-1, 7-5, 6-4.  
Ugo Humbert (21), France, def. Zhang Zhizhen, China, 6-2, 5-7, 6-1, 7-6 (3).

Grigor Dimitrov (13), Bulgaria, def. Thanasi Kokkinakis, Australia, 6-3, 6-2, 4-6, 6-4.  
Arthur Cazaux, France, def. Holger Rune (8), Denmark, 7-6 (4), 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.

Felix Auger-Aliassime (27), Canada, def. Hugo Grenier, France, 6-1, 3-6, 6-1, 6-2.  
Hubert Hurkacz (9), Poland, def. Jakub Mensik, Czech Republic, 6-7 (9), 6-1, 5-7, 6-1, 6-3.

Daniil Medvedev (3), Russia, def. Emil Ruusuvuori, Finland, 3-6, 6-7 (1), 6-4, 7-6 (1), 6-0.  
Zheng Qinwen (12), China, def. Katie Boulter, Britain, 6-3, 6-3.

## DEALS

### Wednesday's transactions

#### BASEBALL

#### Major League Baseball

#### American League

**NEW YORK YANKEES** — Agreed to terms with RHP Marcus Stroman on a two-year contract. Designated OF Oscar Gonzalez for assignment.

**SEATTLE MARINERS** — Agreed to terms with RHP Austin Voth on a one-year contract.

**TAMPA BAY RAYS** — Named Jenn Tran chief people and community officer, Bill Wiener Jr., chief administrative officer, Dan Moeller director, special projects and field operations, Mike Deubel head groundskeeper, Luis Cucatti director, administration, Elvis Martinez, director, communications & player relations, Miguel Velez director, fan experience, Yanna Pantelis director, marketing and Brennan DiChiara senior director, strategy & analysis. Promoted Kevin Ibach to vice president, baseball operations/assistant general manager, Jonathan Erlichman to vice president, process and analytics, Joe Myers to senior director, baseball performance science, Ryan Bristow to director, pro personnel and pro scouting, Bryan King to head strength and conditioning coach, Trung Cao strength and conditioning coordinator and Bobby Kinne to pitching strategist.

**TORONTO BLUE JAYS** — Agreed to terms with CFs Pascual Archila and Andres Arias, Cs Esmeiquel Arrieche, Franklin Rojas and Randy Soto SSS J.T. Bain, Rafael Flores and Angel Guzman, OF Wilmer Blanca, RHPs Ismauri Bueno, Rafael De Jesus, Victor Espiritu, Johandi Medina, Angel Rivero and Pedro Tucent and INF Endry Reyes on minor league contracts.

#### National League

**ATLANTA BRAVES** — Agreed to terms with SS Juan Mateo on a minor league contract.

**CINCINNATI REDS** — Agreed to terms with LHP Tyler Gilbert on a minor league contract.

#### BASKETBALL

#### National Basketball Association

**INDIANA PACERS** — Waived F James Johnson. Received G Kira Lewis Jr. and cash consideration from New Orleans.

#### Women's National Basketball Association

**PHOENIX MERCURY** — Named Megan Vogel and Michael Joiner assistant coaches.

#### FOOTBALL

#### National Football League

**BALTIMORE RAVENS** — Signed WR Laquan Treadwell to the practice squad. Released WR Tarik Black from the practice squad. Waived RB Melvin Gordon.

**BUFFALO BILLS** — Signed P Matt Haack to the practice squad.

**CLEVELAND BROWNS** — Signed LB Caleb Johnson to a futures contract for 2024.

**DALLAS COWBOYS** — Signed WR Martavis Bryant and RBs Snoop Conner and Malik Davis to futures contracts for 2024.

**DETROIT LIONS** — Signed DT Chris Smith to the practice squad.

**HOUSTON TEXANS** — Signed WR Darniere Byrd to the practice squad. Released NT Rashard Lawrence from the practice squad.

**INDIANAPOLIS COLTS** — Signed WR Ter-

rell Bynum to a futures contract for 2024.

**KANSAS CITY CHIEFS** — Signed LB Cole Christiansen. Placed LB Cam Jones on injured reserve. Signed DB Kelvin Joseph and WR Shi Smith to futures contracts for 2024. Designated WR Skyy Moore to return from injured reserve. Signed DB Trey Dean to the practice squad.

**MIAMI DOLPHINS** — Signed WR Mathew Sexton to a futures contract for 2024.

**NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS** — Named Jerod Mayo head coach.

**PITTSBURGH STEELERS** — Signed WRs Marquez Callaway, Dez Fitzpatrick, Duce Watts, Kiehlahn Harris and Denzel Mims, CB Luq Barcoo, OTs Tyler Beach, Kellen Diesch, Devery Hamilton and Anderson Hardy, FB Jack Colletto, S Jalen Elliott, G Joey Fisher, DLs Jonathan Marshal and Jacob Slade and RB Aaron Shampkin to futures contracts for 2024.

**SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS** — Signed DE Austin Bryant to the practice squad. Released RB Jeremy McNichols from the practice squad. Reinstated WR Danny Gray from injured reserve.

#### HOCKEY

#### National Hockey League

**ANAHEIM DUCKS** — Returned D Robert Hagg to San Diego (AHL).

**CALGARY FLAMES** — Placed RW Walker Duehr on waivers.

**CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS** — Recalled D Louis Crevier from Rockford (AHL).

**DALLAS STARS** — Returned G Matthew Murray to Texas (AHL).

**FLORIDA PANTHERS** — Recalled C Rasmus Asplund from Charlotte (AHL).

**NEW JERSEY DEVILS** — Activated LW Timo Meier from injured reserve. Assigned F Shane Bowers to Utica (AHL).

**NEW YORK ISLANDERS** — Recalled C Kyle MacLean from Bridgeport (AHL).

**PITTSBURGH PENGUINS** — Recalled D Ryan Shea from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton (AHL). Reassigned LW Jordan Frasca from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton to Wheeling (ECHL). Returned C Radim Zohorna to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

**ST. LOUIS BLUES** — Reassigned C Tanner Dickinson from Orlando (ECHL) to Springfield (AHL). Recalled F Adam Gaudette from Springfield. Reassigned F Marc-Andre Gaudet from Springfield to Orlando.

**SAN JOSE SHARKS** — Reassigned F Mitchell Russell from San Jose (AHL) to Wichita (ECHL).

#### SOCCER

#### Major League Soccer

**ATLANTA UNITED** — Signed M Batosz Slisz through 2028, pending receipt of his international transfer certificate (ITC) and P-1 visa.

**COLORADO RAPIDS** — Signed M Wayne Frederick and F Kimani Stewart-Baynes to three-year contracts and D Nate Jones to a one-year contract.

**COLUMBUS CREW** — Signed M Taha Habroune through 2027.

**PORTLAND TIMBERS** — Signed G Maxime Crepeau through the 2025 season.

**VANCOUVER WHITECAPS FC** — Transferred F Simon Becker to Division side AC Horsens (Denmark).

#### National Women's Soccer League

**ANGEL CITY FC** — Signed M Clarisse Le Bihan to a one-year contract.

**HOUSTON DASH** — Traded F Nichelle Prince to Kansas City Current in exchange for F Cece Kizer and a 2024 international roster spot.



ANDY WONG/AP

Russia's Anna Blinkova reacts Thursday after defeating Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina in the second round of the Australian Open.

# Blinkova survives record tiebreaker

Eliminates 2023 finalist Rybakina in three sets

BY JOHN PYE

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Her hand and her legs were shaking, she'd missed nine match points but also saved six, and Anna Blinkova was 41 points into a wild tiebreaker that was the longest ever in a women's Grand Slam event.

Elena Rybakina, last year's Australian Open runner-up, was just as anxious on the other side of the net. When Blinkova lunged to retrieve a backhand, aiming just to keep the rally alive, and Rybakina's next backhand sailed wide, it finished off a 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (20) second-round victory Thursday that she'll never, ever forget.

"It took me courage," she said. "It took me some certain calmness to stay in the present moment and to play point by point no matter what happens."

Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion who was runner-up here last year to Aryna Sabalenka, saved two match points in a third set that contained six service breaks. Blinkova twice served for the match but couldn't finish off, and a double-fault in the 12th game sent it to a 10-point tiebreaker. Once there, 13 minutes after her first match points, Blinkova had two more points at 9-7 but again Rybakina saved them, and so it went on. Blinkova, smiling, later described it as the "endless tiebreaker." It went on for 32 minutes until Rybakina's backhand error ended it.

In terms of points — 42 — it was the longest tiebreaker ever in a women's major. It was a long, tough night for the tournament's No. 3 seeds on Melbourne Park's main court. Daniil Medvedev had to rally from two sets down to beat Emil

Ruusuvuori 3-6, 6-7 (1), 6-4, 7-6 (1), 6-0 in a 4-hour, 23-minute match that ended at 3:39 a.m. local time.

Day 5 started with top-ranked Iga Swiatek narrowly escaping when she rallied from 4-1 down in the third set to beat 2022 runner-up Danielle Collins 6-4, 3-6, 6-4.

Collins announced soon after that 2024 would be her last season on tour.

Swiatek, a four-time major winner, next faces No. 50-ranked Linda Noskova, who beat U.S. qualifier McCartney Kessler 6-3, 1-6, 6-4.

Fifth-ranked Jessica Pegula's run of three consecutive quarterfinals in Australia was ended in a 6-4, 6-2 loss to Clara Burel. Her fellow American, 2017 U.S. Open winner Sloane Stephens, took out No. 14 seed Daria Kasatkina 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 and advanced along with No. 11 Jelena Ostapenko, No. 12 Zheng Qinwen, No. 19 Elina Svitolina and No. 27 Emma Navarro.

The 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu's comeback major ended in a 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 loss to Wang Yafan.

Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz dropped a set for the first time in the tournament before recovering to beat Lorenzo Sonego 6-4, 6-7 (3), 6-3, 7-6 (3).

Arthur Cazaux upset No. 8 Holger Rune 7-6 (4), 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 but No. 13 Grigor Dimitrov, No. 14 Tommy Paul, No. 19 Cameron Norrie, No. 21 Ugo Humbert and No. 27 Felix Auger-Aliassime all advanced.

Two earlier matches went the distance before being decided in 10-point tiebreakers: Olympic champion Alexander Zverev fended off Lukas Klein 7-5, 3-6, 4-6, 7-6 (5), 7-6 (7) in 4½ hours and No. 11 Casper Ruud edged Max Purcell 6-3, 6-7 (5), 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7).

## COLLEGE

# VanDerveer nears coaching wins record

By JANIE McCAULEY  
Associated Press

STANFORD, Calif. — “What milestone?”

Tara VanDerveer asked the question so matter-of-factly she clearly had little idea what the fuss is all about.

Walking out of Maples Pavilion one afternoon last month after another Stanford win that added to her remarkable total, VanDerveer had to be reminded just what she's about to do now given her decorated career features such a long list of accomplishments.

Yes, that milestone. The one that will make her the winningest coach in college basketball — not just in the women's game, but all of men's and women's basketball. Surpassing the great Mike Krzyzewski.

“We can talk about this thing if it happens,” she said. “And I don't keep track, so I don't know when it's going to happen. I hope it does, though.”

The Hall of Fame coach is on the cusp of breaking Krzyzewski's record of 1,202 victories, with a chance to tie his mark when the eighth-ranked Cardinal host Oregon on Friday night. At least a couple dozen of VanDerveer's former players plan to travel to be there if she's in position to make history Sunday against Oregon State.

“It's going to be a lot of people and it's going to be awesome,” former Cardinal guard Ros Gold-Onwude said. “This is so huge.”

Even if her coach downplays it all.

Everybody is used to VanDerveer's understated nature, her humility.

“I don't think Tara's ever been somebody who makes it about herself, although she's been the steady drumbeat, heartbeat of



YOUNG KWAK/AP

**Going into Friday's action, Stanford head coach Tara VanDerveer is just one win away from matching Mike Krzyzewski's NCAA record of 1,202 career wins, a mark she is set to easily surpass.**

this program for decades,” Gold-Onwude said. “You can't deny her, you can't deny what she's meant not only to the women's game but the men's game. You can't deny her statistical significance, her historical significance, her significance over eras, her significance in the WNBA, the transfer of talent from college to the professional level.”

So many of VanDerveer's former players have gone on to successful careers in basketball and

beyond. She considers Coach K an icon who has led the way.

“Anyone that stays in it that long loves the game of basketball, and you can see his passion and you can also see the respect that he has from his players and the love that he has from his players,” VanDerveer said, “and that's what every coach aspires to.”

VanDerveer's Stanford teams won national titles in 1990, '92 and 2021, and she took a year away from coaching college to guide the

1996 U.S. Olympic team to a gold medal in the Atlanta Games. She has long been the example for other coaches, yet the five-time national coach of the year and 17-time Pac-12 coach of the year also looks to learn from her coaching colleagues.

In November near the start of her 38th season at Stanford, VanDerveer exchanged scouting reports with the Albany staff and took time to speak to the players in the program where she began her

college career, just as she did for Dawn Staley years ago when the South Carolina coach was getting started.

“She really has no ego about finding help from other people and asking other people what they think and learning from other people. Basketball, there's no patent on anything, you can take anything you want from anybody,” said Amy Tucker, VanDerveer's former player at Ohio State and longtime top assistant at Stanford. “So I think the lifelong learner has served her really well.”

A basketball junkie who also loves to play piano, cycle, water ski and swim, VanDerveer still relishes every aspect of her job, from the practices and preparation to the film study, recruiting and play-calling.

“I do,” the 45th-year coach said. “The journey. I love practice more than the games. Games make me nervous.”

Even if she no longer takes charges at practice. VanDerveer learned a hard lesson nine years ago on New Year's Eve when she stepped in front of 6-foot-5 Tess Picknell and fell.

“Tess broke my wrist,” she said. “I think I have arthritis in it because of it.”

Gold-Onwude considers it a disservice when people question how long VanDerveer might keep coaching, strictly based on her achievements and the fact she will be 71 in June.

“As long as you're doing what you love and you can still execute what it takes at a high level, why not?” said Gold-Onwude, part of the 2008 team that got Stanford to the Final Four for the first time in 11 years. “I don't necessarily love people quantifying how long someone should do something based off of their success or age.”

# Alabama's Proctor, Downs could both transfer

Associated Press

Alabama left tackle Kadyn Proctor plans to enter the transfer portal after starting as a freshman, and All-America safety Caleb Downs might join him.

Proctor announced his intentions Wednesday on social media. Downs' plans to enter the portal were announced on social media by Deuce Recruiting, where his father Gary, a former NFL running back, is national recruiting director. Gary Downs did not immediately respond to an email from The Associated Press.

If Downs and Proctor decide not to return to the Crimson Tide, it would be the biggest blows yet for new coach Kalen DeBoer.

They would be the top two players to have entered the trans-



**Alabama offensive lineman Kadyn Proctor, left, announced his decision to enter the transfer portal while a recruiting agency said that defensive back Caleb Downs, right, plans to do the same.**



VASHA HUNT/AP

fer portal so far and already departed receiver Isaiah Bond is No. 4, according to 247Sports'

composite rankings.

Downs became the first Alabama freshman dating back to at

least 1970 to lead the team in tackles. He earned second-team All-America and Southeastern Conference newcomer of the year honors from The Associated Press after making 107 tackles.

Proctor started every game at left tackle for Alabama. They were two of Alabama's top recruits in the 2023 class, with Downs ranking No. 6 in the 247Sports composite and Proctor No. 9.

Downs was the SEC's fourth-leading tackler. He also forced a fumble, recovered a fumble and made two interceptions. Downs scored a touchdown on one of his four punt returns.

Former Alabama secondary coach Travaris Robinson has left to become Georgia's co-defensive

coordinator and safeties coach.

A number of Alabama players have already transferred or entered the portal since the retirement of coach Nick Saban.

Bond left for Texas while starting center Seth McLaughlin headed to Ohio State. Several players landed at Florida State, including No. 2 rusher Roydell Williams, wide receiver Malik Benson and offensive lineman Terrence Ferguson.

Cornerbacks Dezz Ricks and Antonio Kite have also entered the portal, among others. Rival Auburn announced Wednesday that Kite has signed to play for the Tigers.

Kite saw limited action in two seasons and was redshirted in 2022.

# NHL

## Scoreboard

Eastern Conference							
Atlantic Division							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Boston	43	26	8	9	61	144	114
Florida	44	27	13	4	58	138	114
Detroit	44	23	16	5	51	158	146
Toronto	42	21	13	8	50	150	138
Tampa Bay	44	22	17	5	49	146	149
Montreal	44	19	18	7	45	123	150
Buffalo	44	19	21	4	42	130	143
Ottawa	39	15	24	0	30	131	147
Metropolitan Division							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
N.Y. Rangers	43	28	13	2	58	143	123
Philadelphia	44	24	14	6	54	130	120
Carolina	43	24	14	5	53	148	132
Pittsburgh	42	21	15	6	48	129	113
Washington	42	21	15	6	48	101	125
N.Y. Islanders	44	19	15	10	48	130	150
New Jersey	42	22	17	3	47	144	147
Columbus	44	14	21	9	37	134	165
Western Conference							
Central Division							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Winnipeg	43	29	10	4	62	143	99
Colorado	45	29	13	3	61	170	141
Dallas	43	26	12	5	57	160	130
Nashville	44	24	19	1	49	139	138
Arizona	42	21	18	3	45	128	126
St. Louis	42	21	19	2	44	120	135
Minnesota	43	18	20	5	41	126	144
Chicago	44	13	29	2	28	99	159
Pacific Division							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Vancouver	44	29	11	4	62	168	114
Vegas	44	25	14	5	55	140	120
Los Angeles	41	21	12	8	50	135	109
Edmonton	40	24	15	1	49	142	119
Calgary	44	21	18	5	47	139	139
Seattle	44	19	16	9	47	124	130
Anaheim	44	15	28	1	31	111	150
San Jose	45	10	31	4	24	89	183

**Note:** Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

### Tuesday's games

N.Y. Rangers 5, Seattle 2  
 Washington 2, Anaheim 0  
 Colorado 7, Ottawa 4  
 Dallas 5, Los Angeles 1  
 Winnipeg 4, N.Y. Islanders 2  
 Chicago 2, San Jose 1, SO  
 Edmonton 4, Toronto 2  
 Calgary 3, Arizona 2, OT

### Wednesday's games

Montreal 3, New Jersey 2  
 Detroit 3, Florida 2, OT  
 Chicago at Buffalo, ppd

### Thursday's games

Chicago at Buffalo  
 Colorado at Boston  
 Dallas at Philadelphia  
 Minnesota at Tampa Bay  
 Montreal at Ottawa  
 St. Louis at Washington  
 Seattle at Edmonton  
 Toronto at Calgary  
 Arizona at Vancouver  
 N.Y. Rangers at Vegas  
 Nashville at Los Angeles

### Friday's games

Detroit at Carolina  
 Minnesota at Florida  
 New Jersey at Columbus  
 N.Y. Islanders at Chicago

### Saturday's games

Tampa Bay at Buffalo  
 Colorado at Philadelphia  
 Nashville at Arizona  
 Winnipeg at Ottawa  
 Dallas at New Jersey  
 Montreal at Boston  
 Toronto at Vancouver  
 Washington at St. Louis  
 Anaheim at San Jose  
 Edmonton at Calgary  
 Pittsburgh at Vegas  
 N.Y. Rangers at Los Angeles

### Sunday's games

Ottawa at Philadelphia  
 Minnesota at Carolina  
 Tampa Bay at Detroit  
 Dallas at N.Y. Islanders  
 N.Y. Rangers at Anaheim  
 Toronto at Seattle

### Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday				
	GP	G	A	PTS
Nathan MacKinnon, COL	45	23	49	72
Nikita Kucherov, TB	43	28	44	72
David Pastrnak, BOS	43	26	35	61
J.T. Miller, VAN	44	20	40	60
Artemi Panarin, NYR	43	27	33	60

# Injury bug hampering Knights

## Defending champs in solid playoff position but have holes to fill for second-half run

By MARK ANDERSON  
*Associated Press*

LAS VEGAS — The news Tuesday that Jack Eichel would be “week-to-week” after undergoing surgery for a lower-body injury was the latest of many health setbacks the Golden Knights have experienced this season.

Somehow, though, defending champion Las Vegas remains in a strong playoff position.

The Knights, who were to host the New York Rangers on Thursday, are in second place in the Pacific Division with 55 points, seven behind Vancouver entering Tuesday’s play.

“You’ve got to have that no-excuse mentality,” captain Mark Stone said. “Everyone’s got to play a little bit better version of their game.”

To underscore that point, Stone noted that the third line that included Brendan Brisson — a rookie making his NHL debut — was on the ice when Nashville went to a 6-on-5 down two goals late in Monday’s game. The Knights not only kept the Predators from scoring but later got an empty-net goal from Jonathan Marchessault to salt away the 4-1 victory.

“They’ve got to step up when that opportunity comes,” Stone said. “They kept the puck to the outside and didn’t give them anything. And our line goes out and we roll another line.”

The Knights haven’t exactly been rolling, though they are showing signs of recent life. They have won two of their past three games and three of five following a stretch of six losses in seven games.

Vegas is still searching for consistent offense. The victory over Nashville ended a three-game stretch in which the Knights didn’t score over the first two periods. Vegas has been shut out five times; the Knights were blanked just twice all of last season.

The four goals against the Predators were more than the Knights scored in their previous three games combined.

“Breaking the puck out, winning wall battles, everything comes down to that,” defenseman Nic Hague said. “All five guys coming together. I thought (Monday) was much better. It kind of brought us back to what we know and what we expect from ourselves.”

A major question is whether this season will resemble more of two years ago or a year ago. The Knights lost more than 500 man games to injuries in 2021-22, helping cost them a postseason appearance for the first time in the

franchise’s short history.

Last season, the Knights lost eight of 10 games entering the All-Star break, but came out roaring after that to secure the best record in the Western Conference and home-ice advantage in the playoffs.

If they are to make another such run this season, the Knights will have to find a way to overcome these injuries:

■ Eichel was injured Thursday against the Boston Bruins. He managed to re-enter that game and help the Knights win 2-1 in overtime, but the longer he is out of the lineup the more it could become a major problem. Eichel leads the team with 19 goals and is tied with Stone with 44 points.

■ William Karlsson hasn’t played since the Winter Classic at Seattle on New Year’s Day because of a lower-body injury. Like Eichel, Karlsson is listed as week to week. He was having his best season since his first in Vegas when Karlsson scored 43 goals and had 78 points in 2017-18. Karlsson is third on the team this season with 32 points.

■ Shea Theodore underwent surgery in late November for an upper-body injury and still hasn’t been in the lineup. He led the Knights at the time with 14 assists and also had 18 points, the club’s most offensive-minded defenseman.

■ Goalie Adin Hill has had trouble getting back in the lineup since suffering a lower-body injury in November, and was due to



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Jack Eichel suffered an injury last week that required surgery. He leads Vegas with 19 goals and is tied with Mark Stone with 44 points.

## “You’ve got to have that no-excuse mentality. Everyone’s got to play a little bit better version of their game.”

Mark Stone  
 Golden Knights captain

return to the ice Wednesday at Colorado. Coach Bruce Cassidy said Hill informed him that day he didn’t feel physically ready to return and still hasn’t been back in the net. Hill came off the bench last postseason to help carry the Knights to the Stanley Cup title.

Injuries haven’t been the only issue. Illnesses have also kept players out of games, and one nearly prevented Chandler Ste-

phenson from playing Monday. He wound up playing and delivered assists on two of Stone’s three goals.

“Sometimes you play better when you’re not feeling 100% because you don’t overextend yourself,” Cassidy said. “But nice to have him.”

If only Cassidy had more of his players available.



STEVE MARCUS/AP

Golden Knights center William Karlsson, center, is congratulated by right wing Mark Stone, left, and center Jack Eichel after scoring a goal on Dec. 17. Stone is the only one of the three able to play right now.

NBA

# Dunn propelling Jazz to hot streak

By JOHN COON  
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Making a change at point guard set the Utah Jazz back on a winning path.

No NBA team has enjoyed greater success in January so far than Utah. The Jazz have rattled off six straight victories and have a league best 12-2 record over their last 14 games. Utah has not trailed at any point during the fourth quarter through its winning streak.

Since mid-December, the Jazz have ranked in the top 10 among NBA teams in offensive rating and in the top 15 in the league in defensive rating.

One factor quietly keying the surge has been the steady play of point guard Kris Dunn.

The Jazz are 13-3 with Dunn starting and have lost just twice in 14 games since he supplanted Talen Horton-Tucker in the starting lineup. Dunn has been highly effective over that stretch, averaging 5.1 points, 6.1 assists, and 1.5 steals in 22.4 minutes per contest.

His court vision and veteran leadership have been a steadying influence for a Jazz team with several younger players playing major roles.

“Kris Dunn’s voice is more prominent now because his role is different,” Jazz coach Will Hardy said. “Kris has always talked a lot. He’s always been a great presence in our locker room and a great presence at practice with our team. But now that he’s starting, his voice is heard in a different way and at different times.”



CHRIS SZAGOLA/AP

The Utah Jazz’s Kris Dunn, right, looks to move against the Philadelphia 76ers’ Tyrese Maxey during the first half Jan. 6 in Philadelphia. Going into Thursday, the Jazz are 13-3 with Dunn as a starter.

For Dunn, this season is a sweet reward after battling to prove he still belonged in the NBA.

Minnesota selected Dunn with the fifth overall pick in the 2016 NBA Draft. Injuries plagued him during stints with Chicago and Atlanta. Ankle surgery limited Dunn to four games with the Hawks before he was eventually traded to Memphis before the 2021-22 season and waived after appearing in one preseason game.

Utah signed Dunn to a pair of 10-day contracts a year ago before adding him to the roster for the remainder of the season. He averaged 13.2 points, 5.6 assists and 4.5 rebounds over 22 games.

Dunn has settled into a comfortable role as a distributor and defender this season.

“I’ll be doing myself a disservice and the team a disservice if I try to go out there and try to go get 20,” Dunn said. “I got to play my role and I understand my role

and I have no problem playing it. Go out there and guard and distribute the ball. The main thing is keeping that energy alive.”

Dunn’s willingness to involve his teammates on offense has helped Utah start strong and build early momentum in many recent wins. His unselfish attitude has earned their trust.

“He’s not looking to score every time he gets the ball,” Hardy said. “He just kind of takes what’s in front of him.”

# Pacers get Siakam in big trade with Raptors

By TIM REYNOLDS  
Associated Press

Pascal Siakam was traded to the Indiana Pacers on Wednesday night, ending a run of nearly eight years with the Toronto Raptors during which he was a two-time All-NBA selection, two-time All-Star and part of the team that won the 2019 NBA title.

His next chapter: teaming up with All-Star guard Tyrese Haliburton on a Pacers team that started the day as the highest-scoring club in the NBA and now has even more offensive firepower for the second half of the season.

It took Indiana a sizable amount of draft capital — three first-round picks — to get the deal done, but the Pacers also managed to hang on to their four leading scorers this season and add another star to the mix.

“We’re incredibly excited to welcome Pascal to Indiana,” Pacers President Kevin Pritchard said. “As a two-time All-NBA selection and two-time NBA All Star, Pascal is a player that our organization has long admired and respected. We feel that his unique of-



RICK BOWMER/AP

Forward Pascal Siakam spent nearly eight years with the Raptors before being traded to the Pacers for three first-round picks.

ensive skillset will complement our style of play, while his defensive versatility will be a valuable asset to our team.”

Siakam leaves Toronto fifth on the team’s career list in games and points, plus third in rebounds and 10th in steals.

“Pascal is a champion, an inte-

gral part of winning teams and an example of what can be achieved with dedication, perseverance, hard work and tenacity,” Raptors President Masai Ujiri said. “We’re lucky to have seen Pascal develop into the man and player that he is today — and we are grateful for everything he has done for our city

## Scoreboard

### Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	32	9	.780	—
Philadelphia	26	13	.667	5
New York	24	17	.585	8
Brooklyn	16	24	.400	15½
Toronto	16	25	.390	16

Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	24	17	.585	—
Orlando	22	19	.537	2
Atlanta	17	23	.425	6½
Charlotte	8	30	.211	14½
Washington	7	32	.179	16

Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	28	13	.683	—
Cleveland	24	15	.615	3
Indiana	23	17	.575	4½
Chicago	19	23	.452	9½
Detroit	4	37	.098	24

### Western Conference

Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
New Orleans	25	17	.595	—
Dallas	24	18	.571	1
Houston	19	21	.475	5
Memphis	15	25	.375	9
San Antonio	7	33	.175	17

Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	29	11	.725	—
Oklahoma City	27	13	.675	2
Denver	28	14	.667	2
Utah	22	20	.524	8
Portland	11	29	.275	18

Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Clippers	26	14	.650	—
Sacramento	23	17	.575	3
Phoenix	22	18	.550	4
L.A. Lakers	21	21	.500	6
Golden State	18	22	.450	8

### Tuesday’s games

Philadelphia 126, Denver 121  
Phoenix 119, Sacramento 117  
L.A. Clippers 128, Oklahoma City 117

### Wednesday’s games

Minnesota 124, Detroit 117  
Boston 117, San Antonio 98  
Toronto 121, Miami 97  
Cleveland 135, Milwaukee 95  
Atlanta 106, Orlando 104  
New York 109, Houston 94  
New Orleans 132, Charlotte 112  
L.A. Lakers 127, Dallas 110  
Portland 105, Brooklyn 103  
Golden State at Utah, ppd

### Thursday’s games

Chicago at Toronto  
Washington at New York  
Oklahoma City at Utah  
Indiana at Sacramento  
Memphis at Minnesota

### Friday’s games

Philadelphia at Orlando  
San Antonio at Charlotte  
Denver at Boston  
Atlanta at Miami  
Phoenix at New Orleans  
Dallas at Golden State  
Indiana at Portland  
Brooklyn at L.A. Lakers

### Saturday’s games

Milwaukee at Detroit  
Philadelphia at Charlotte  
San Antonio at Washington  
Cleveland at Atlanta  
Toronto at New York  
Memphis at Chicago  
Oklahoma City at Minnesota  
Utah at Houston

### Scoring leaders

#### Through Wednesday

	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Embiid, PHI	29	339	304	1017	35.1
Doncic, DAL	35	400	238	1175	33.6
Antetokoun., MIL	39	452	296	1216	31.2
Gil.-Alex., OKC	39	434	297	1210	31.0
Durant, PHO	33	333	217	955	28.9
Mitchell, CLE	30	293	163	845	28.2
Fox, SAC	34	338	165	952	28.0
Young, ATL	38	318	273	1034	27.2
Tatum, BOS	38	348	213	1028	27.1
Curry, GS	37	313	195	988	26.7
Booker, PHO	31	281	189	813	26.2
Maxey, PHI	38	339	191	990	26.1

## NFL

# McCarthy will return as Dallas head coach despite wild-card loss

By SCHUYLER DIXON  
Associated Press

Mike McCarthy will get another chance to end a nearly three-decade stretch without a deep playoff run for the Dallas Cowboys, a decision that ends three days of intense speculation over the coach's future.

Owner and general manager Jerry Jones said Wednesday night that McCarthy will be back for a fifth season after a stunning 48-32 wild-card loss to Green Bay.

The Cowboys were the first No. 2 seed to lose to the last team to get in since the 14-team format was adopted in 2020. Dallas surged to the NFC East title in the final two weeks and had a chance to host at least two playoff games.

Instead, McCarthy's team is the first not to reach a conference title game after three consecutive 12-win playoff seasons.

"There is great benefit to continuing the team's progress under Mike's leadership as our head coach," Jones said in a statement with several references to the disappointment of the playoff loss. "Mike has the highest regular-season winning percentage of any head coach in Cowboys history, and we will dedicate ourselves, in partnership with him, to translating that into reaching our postseason goals."

McCarthy was hired to get Dallas past the divisional round for the first time since the 1995 season, the last of the storied franchise's five Super Bowl titles.

The 60-year-old coach won a Super Bowl with Green Bay 13 years ago and reached the NFC championship game three other times in 12-plus seasons leading the Packers.

McCarthy was fired midway through a second consecutive losing season in Green Bay in 2018. He was out of football in 2019 before Jones hired him. He is 167-102-2 overall and 42-25 with Dallas.

McCarthy has one year remaining on his contract. Jones' statement made no mention of an extension.

Quarterback Dak Prescott, who also has one year left on his \$160 million, four-year deal, played poorly in the first half as Dallas fell behind 27-0. A top-five defensive unit never did slow the Packers in quarterback Jordan Love's playoff debut.

Dallas allowed the most points in the franchise's postseason history while dropping to 1-3 in the playoffs under McCarthy. Prescott is 2-5 in the playoffs.

"We will start our process of review and decision-making regarding everything that impacts our team and roster," Jones said. "While we're not going to address specific players and extensions or free agents at this point, it deserves our deepest review and consideration, and it will get it."

Jones had high praise for his coach and quarterback during the season, and might want to see how the new dynamic of that relationship might grow.

"Our loss on Sunday is shared by everyone here, not just coach McCarthy. Our players. Our coaches. Our front office. Myself," Jones said. "The lens we use to view and evaluate coach McCarthy is holistic. While we're all disappointed with the result on Sunday and with our playoff record, I am 100 percent supportive of him as our head coach and ability to reach our goals."



MATT PATTERSON AP

Dallas Cowboys head coach Mike McCarthy will return for a fifth season despite leading the team to another disappointing early playoff exit



PETER JONELEIT/AP

Tampa Bay Buccaneers wide receiver Trey Palmer breaks free for a long touchdown run during a wild-card playoff game against the Philadelphia Eagles on Monday in Tampa, Fla.

# Bucs' playoff path lined with familiar opponents

By FRED GOODALL  
Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — The NFL playoffs are shaping up as a redemption tour of sorts for Baker Mayfield and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

The NFC South champions pummeled Jalen Hurts and the Philadelphia Eagles 32-9 in a wild-card matchup, advancing to next weekend's divisional round against the Detroit Lions, another team that beat the Bucs handily during the regular season.

Coach Todd Bowles reiterated Monday that the Bucs, who have gone from having one of the oldest rosters in the league to one of the youngest following the retirement of Tom Brady, have embraced the role of being underdogs all season long.

The Eagles, who collapsed after a 10-1 start to the season, beat Tampa Bay by two touchdowns in Week 3. Three weeks later, the Lions (13-5) traveled to Florida and shut down Mayfield and a sputtering Bucs offense 20-6.

Sunday offers another opportunity to redeem themselves.

"It is what it is, man. They are just the team that's in our way right now, and we're in the way," linebacker Lavonte David said.



Tampa Bay Buccaneers (10-8)  
at Detroit Lions (13-5)

AFN-Sports  
9 p.m. Sunday CET  
5 a.m. Monday JKT

"We're all trying to get to the same goal, so we're just going to go up there and play the best game we (can) play."

A victory at Detroit would set up a possible rematch with No. 1 seed San Francisco in the NFC championship game. The 49ers, who face the Green Bay Packers on Saturday, also defeated Tampa Bay earlier this season.

"I think back about the Lions game ... we just didn't play our best game offensively. We'll look back at the tape once we get into the game plan, but we're very different than we were early on in the year," Mayfield said. "That's something to be proud of, that we've continued to improve. We haven't reinvented the wheel. We

just stuck with it and gotten better at the little things."

Bowles made a number of adjustments to counter what the Eagles were able to do successfully against the Bucs in the regular season, at times employing a six-man defensive front to stop Philadelphia's running game.

Hurts threw for 250 yards and one touchdown, but a relentless Tampa Bay pass rush created three sacks and a safety that put the Bucs up by nine points in the third quarter. Two plays later, rookie Trey Palmer turned a short reception into a 56-yard TD to break the game open.

The Bucs have now won six of seven following a stretch in which they lost six of seven to damage their playoff hopes.

"It says a lot about the growth of our team from where we were in the beginning to the middle, toward the end and now — playing with confidence, playing team football," Bowles said.

"We have a great locker room. ... We lean on each other. We trust each other. Just doing your job and knowing the guy next to you is going to do his," Mayfield added. "That's accountability for yourself and for your teammates. It's just amazing to see the growth."

## NFL PLAYOFFS

# Ryans changes Texans quickly

## Enthusiasm, work ethic rubs off on players

By KRISTIE RIEKEN  
Associated Press

HOUSTON — DeMeco Ryans was in high school when a coach told him if he wanted to make a career out of football, he'd have to show great energy on every single snap.

Ryans took that message to heart and now in his first year as coach of the Houston Texans he's demanded his team display the same relentless mindset. It's transformed the Texans (11-7) from one of the NFL's worst teams to a spot in the divisional playoffs Saturday at top-seeded Baltimore, where a win will put them in the AFC title game for the first time.

"That always resonated with me, like man, when you suit up, you got to do something that's different. Do something that others aren't willing to do," Ryans said. "A lot of people aren't willing to run, play with great effort, play as physical as they can play every single snap ... So, when you do it, and you have an entire team that does it, it jumps off the tape and people all around the league truly respect what you do."

Ryans returned to Houston this season after being drafted by the Texans in the second round in 2006, winning AP Defensive Roo-



Houston Texans (11-7)  
at Baltimore Ravens (13-4)  
AFN-Sports  
10:30 p.m. Saturday CET  
6:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

kie of the Year and spending his first six seasons as a linebacker with the team. He's made the team relevant for the first time in years after the Texans had combined for just 11 wins in the previous three seasons under three different head coaches and an interim coach.

Bill O'Brien was fired after the Texans opened the 2020 season 0-4 and Romeo Crennel finished out the 4-12 campaign. David Culley came next and was let go after a 4-13 season in 2021 before Lovie Smith went 3-13-1 last season before being fired.

Though there was a buzz when Ryans, who was nicknamed "Cap" as the undisputed captain or leader of the team during his playing days in Houston, was hired last



JOHN AMIS/AP

**DeMeco Ryans returned to Houston as head coach this season after being drafted by the Texans in the second round in 2006, spending his first six seasons as a linebacker with the team.**

January, few outside of the building expected the new coach to turn things around so soon.

The Texans, who won the AFC South, were predicted to finish last in the division and oddsmakers put their over/under on wins at 6½. But those inside NRG Stadium could already see brighter days ahead with the hiring of Ryans, who spent the previous two seasons as San Francisco's defensive coordinator.

The 39-year-old Ryans is often seen jumping around and screaming on the sideline after a big play is made, looking more like one of the players celebrating than a coach.

When Steven Nelson returned an interception 82 yards for a touchdown in Houston's wild-card win over Cleveland on Saturday, highlights showed Ryans running down the sideline behind Nelson before dropping into a crouch and raising his arms high above his head when he crossed the goal line.

That energy, players say is infectious.

Defensive back Kareem Jackson also spent two years playing alongside Ryans in Houston and has enjoyed seeing how players react to him as a coach after rejoining the Texans last month.

"When he was a player, he was a guy that you wanted to play with,

you wanted to go out and do your job for him because he came with so much energy," Jackson said. "And it's the same way now with him being a coach, the energy that he brings, his positivity, his aura, you want to play for a coach like that. It makes it easy to come in and execute and want to be here."

Of course, his success has been inextricably linked to the performance of rookie quarterback C.J. Stroud, the second overall pick in the draft. Stroud threw for 4,108 yards with 23 touchdowns and just five interceptions in the regular season to help the Texans return to the playoffs for the first time since 2019.

## Twist: Overtime loss to Chiefs two years ago still haunts Bills

FROM PAGE 48

bles after two of their past three playoff runs ended in Kansas City.

There was the lopsided 38-24 blowout loss in the AFC championship game in the 2020 season.

Even worse was the heart-wrenching 42-36 overtime loss in the divisional round a year later in a game dubbed "13 Seconds" by Bills fans.

That's how much time was left in regulation for the Chiefs to gain 44 yards on two plays and set up Harrison Butker's game-tying 49-yard field goal. Kansas City won the coin toss and scored on its opening possession, which led directly to the NFL changing its playoff rules in now allowing the coin-toss loser one possession to tie the game if scored upon.

So nightmarish was the outcome, Bills coach Sean McDermott, to this day, refuses to reveal what went wrong in the team's decision to kick off into the end zone — rather than bounce it short — after Gabe Davis scored his fourth touchdown to put the Bills ahead.



CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP

**Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce (87) is mobbed by teammates after catching an 8-yard touchdown pass during overtime of their divisional-round playoff against the Bills on Jan. 23, 2022.**

This season, Buffalo earned the right to host the game with a 20-17 win at Kansas City on Dec. 10, which sparked the Bills' five-game winning streak to close the season and clinch their fourth straight AFC East title.

The Bills, however, know all too well to be careful what they wish for in knowing the task of beating the Chiefs won't be easy after splitting their previous six meetings, including playoffs, since 2020.

"We've had our battles over the years and this will be another one. I mean, you watch what they did the other night. They were dominant," McDermott said, referring to the Chiefs' playoff-opening 26-7 win over Miami on Saturday. "So we gotta get our rest and try and get a little bit healthier, if we can, and then, and get ourselves ready to go again."

Complicating matters further is the Bills are playing on an even shorter week after their playoff opener was moved from Sunday to Monday because of a lake-effect storm hitting the region.

Injuries are an even bigger issue.

Buffalo closed the game against Pittsburgh with a patchwork defense after starting linebacker Terrel Bernard (right ankle), backup linebacker Baylon Spector (back), starting cornerback Christian Benford (knee) and starting nickelback Taron Johnson (concussion) were hurt. This is a defense that began the game without starting cornerback Rasul

Douglas (knee) and starting linebacker Tyrel Dodson (calf).

The onus will be on Allen to relieve the burden, as he did against the Steelers with a no-turnover, four-touchdown outing that included an electrifying 52-yard run, the longest in franchise playoff history.

Allen is counting on "Bills Mafia" to make a difference.

"The vibe, the energy, the juice that we can use from that," Allen said. "You just can't chalk it up to anything other than momentum, something you can't see but something you can definitely feel. And they give that to us."

**Notes:** The Bills are 12-2 when their running attack, which gained 179 yards against the Steelers has topped 100 yards this season. ... Allen is 29-5 as a starter when he doesn't commit a turnover, including 4-1 in the postseason. ... McDermott faces his mentor in Kansas City coach Andy Reid. McDermott was part of Reid's staff in Philadelphia from 1999-2010.

## NFL PLAYOFFS

## COMMENTARY

## Love vs. Purdy may be next classic rivalry

By DIETER KURTENBACH  
Bay Area News Group

The NFL is at its best when it has excellent quarterback rivalries.

And, lucky them, a new one might just begin on Saturday in Santa Clara.

Every minute on ESPN and FS1 this week will be spent noting that the NFL has a great quarterback rivalry for this modern era, as Patrick Mahomes will play Josh Allen in Buffalo on Sunday.

But starting Saturday and in the coming years, we might be talking about Jordan Love and Brock Purdy the same way.

For two decades, the AFC was the superior conference because it had the superior quarterbacks.

And from 2004 to 2017, save for one season, that conference's champion was either Tom Brady, Peyton Manning or Ben Roethlisberger.

You could count on the best of the best facing each other in the playoffs every year. I don't think it's a coincidence that the league more than doubled its annual revenue over that stretch.

The NFC has lacked those kinds of show-downs this century. Russell Wilson and Colin Kaepernick played second fiddle to the team's defenses. Brady and Aaron Rodgers faced off only once during the former's time with the Buccaneers. The Rams took one quarterback to the Super Bowl and won it with another. Somehow, the Bears were in the NFC championship game during that stretch — twice.

But Purdy vs. Love has a chance to break the mold.

In his first full season as the 49ers' starter, Purdy nearly won the MVP. He led the NFL in passer rating and yards per attempt, and was second in completion percentage. With Purdy pushing the ball down the field,



Green Bay Packers quarterback Jordan Love, left, has thrown 19 touchdown passes since Thanksgiving after a rough start. Meanwhile, in his first full season as the San Francisco 49ers' quarterback, Brock Purdy, right, led the NFL in passer rating and yards per attempt.



SAM HODDE, LEFT, AND DANIEL KUCIN JR., RIGHT/AP

the Niners had the best offense in the NFL this season by a wide margin.

Save for the Christmas night debacle against the Ravens, Purdy has been elite. Don't let anyone tell you different.

And yet there's an argument to be made that he is the second-best quarterback in Saturday's game against the Packers.

Green Bay quarterback Love had a bumpy start to his first season as the Packers' starter, but patience has paid off. He has been on a heater since Thanksgiving, throwing 19 touchdowns to just one interception, posting a 115.5 passer rating over his last eight games, which includes his effectively perfect wild-card win over the Cowboys on Sunday.

These are two young quarterbacks, 24 and 25, who have figured out how to play the

game at the highest level.

And there's serious staying power here, as both have great organizations and elite head coaches behind them. Plus, they're both operating offenses predicated on the same quarterback-maximizing principles.

So why wouldn't Saturday be the start of a great rivalry?

Yes, the AFC might still have the superior quarterbacks, and sure, Purdy-Love might not turn into the NFC's version of Brady-Manning (and who would be Roethlisberger in this case?). But perhaps this matchup can be something to counter Mahomes and Allen. How about a modern version of Bart Starr and Johnny Unitas, Terry Bradshaw and Ken Stabler?

Saturday will let us know if there's something here.

Of course, the two quarterbacks won't face each other — they'll face the opposing defense. That's where the separation might be found.

Love has been spectacular as of late, but during that stretch, he hasn't faced a defense like the 49ers', which has elite players at every level and is anything but front-running. They're also rested and playing at home, which makes them exceptionally dangerous.

Purdy, on the other hand, will face a defense that had a big game against the Cowboys, but was the sixth-worst in the NFL this season, per DVOA.

Looking at the quarterback's supporting casts, yes, the Packers have young, exciting playmakers, but the 49ers boast even better players across the board, all in the primes of their careers. The Niners effectively have a Pro Bowl roster. The Packers didn't have anyone selected for the Pro Bowl this season.

Yes, there's a reason the 49ers are 10-point favorites on Saturday (and rising) — the San Francisco team is better. Perhaps the young Packers close the gap in the years to come, but on Saturday, Green Bay cannot win with anything less than Love's best.

Lucky for them, that best might be good enough.

And it might be good enough for years to come.

This is a league where success is predicated on the head coach and quarterback, and both teams are coming into Saturday's game with the best of the best at both positions. I see no reason that will change in the years to come.

So no matter what happens Saturday, expect these two quarterbacks to battle it out once or twice a year for years to come — the best of the best have a funny way of finding each other.

## Packers thrive with league's youngest roster

By STEVE MEGARGEE  
Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — This wasn't the typical formula for producing a title contender.

The Green Bay Packers followed up an 8-9 season by trading four-time MVP quarterback Aaron Rodgers to the New York Jets and letting plenty of other veterans walk away while assembling the league's youngest roster.

Green Bay has found a way to thrive in the postseason anyhow. The Packers (10-8) are the youngest team since the 1970 AFL-NFL merger to win a playoff game, at least according to one metric.

They're eager to keep it going as they visit the top-seeded San Francisco 49ers (12-5) in an NFC divisional playoff game Saturday night.

"Our mindset is to win the Super Bowl," said wide receiver Christian Watson, a 2022 second-round pick.

History suggested that was an unrealistic proposition.

The Elias Sports Bureau calculated the weighted age of each playoff roster since the AFL-NFL merger by factoring in how many games in which a player appeared. The Packers' oldest player — 32-year-old offensive tackle David Bakhtiari — suited up for only one game before going on injured reserve.

Green Bay's weighted age of 25.58 years made this the fourth-youngest playoff team, behind only the 1970 Cincinnati Bengals (25.22), 1970 Miami Dolphins (25.44) and 1974 Buffalo Bills (25.56).

None of those other three teams won a playoff game. The Packers stunned the Dallas Cowboys 48-32 in the wild-card round to earn their fourth straight victory while showing experience isn't essential to playoff success.

"Obviously, yeah, experience is huge in these situations, but I think we're just confident in our whole team and what we got," quarterback Jordan Love said. "And now it

just comes down to execution, making the most of the plays we have, and I think that's what we are doing."

Six of the Packers' 11 starters on offense Sunday were rookies or second-year pros. Fifteen of Love's 16 completions went to rookies or second-year players. The only offensive starters older than 25 were running back Aaron Jones (29), left guard Elgton Jenkins (28) and right guard Jon Runyan Jr. (26).

That young offense went through some growing pains and failed to score a single first-half touchdown for a five-game stretch earlier this season. But the Packers have produced at least 33 points in three of their past four games and set a franchise playoff scoring record against the Cowboys, rewarding the faith they always had in themselves.

"I could see just the raw talent that these young kids have," Runyan said. "I knew that at some point it was going to blossom. I was saying that early on in the season in

the media, and people didn't believe me. But it's really starting to show its true colors now, and it's really fun to watch."

The Packers are the first team since the AFL-NFL merger to have four rookies catch at least 30 passes: Jayden Reed (64), Dontayvion Wicks (39) and tight ends Luke Musgrave (34) and Tucker Kraft (31).

"Always when you give young guys opportunities, sometimes there's some bumps in the road, which it sounds like they've gone through with this year a little bit," 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan said. "But you get through those. They find a way to win that last game and get in the playoffs, and now they've got a good team that you don't look at it as a bunch of rookies. You look at guys almost in their second and third year, and they're playing like it."

Green Bay is more experienced on the other side of the ball but still had five rookie defenders — cornerback Carrington Valentine,



Green Bay Packers (10-8)  
at San Francisco 49ers (12-5)  
AFN-Sports  
2 a.m. Sunday CET  
10 a.m. Sunday JKT

outside linebacker Lukas Van Ness, linemen Karl Brooks and Colby Wooden and safety Anthony Johnson Jr. — playing more than 20 snaps against Dallas.

Green Bay's path to the divisional playoffs didn't go smoothly.

The Packers' playoff hopes seemed faint after a four-game skid dropped them to 2-5. Yet even after they sent starting cornerback Rasul Douglas to Buffalo on the trade deadline, they carefully avoided using the term "rebuilding" to describe their situation.

They instead showed how a team can get better even as it's getting younger.

# SPORTS



## Siakam has a new home

Raptors trade veteran forward to Pacers for three first-round picks » **NBA, Page 44**

### NFL PLAYOFFS



PETER AIKEN/AP

Buffalo Bills quarterback Josh Allen pushes his way through the Chiefs defense and into the end zone during their Dec. 10 game in Kansas City, Mo. The Bills won 20-17.

# Third meeting features twist



JEFFREY T. BARNES/AP

A Bills fan sits among snow-covered seats while waiting for the start of Monday's wild-card playoff against Pittsburgh in Orchard Park, N.Y.

## Bills hosting Mahomes' first playoff road game

BY JOHN WAWROW  
*Associated Press*

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Get ready for Patrick Mahomes versus Josh Allen: Playoff Edition Part III.

Only this time there's a twist — and no, it doesn't involve potential sightings of Taylor Swift at Buffalo's more popular wing joints.

The most significant change from a football perspective involves the Kansas City Chiefs (12-6) leaving the frigid comforts of Arrowhead in January by traveling to the equally frigid — and snowier — confines of Highmark Stadium for an AFC divisional-



**Kansas City Chiefs (12-6)  
at Buffalo Bills (12-6)**  
AFN-Sports  
12:30 a.m. Monday CET  
8:30 a.m. Monday JKT

will be greeted by a fanbase better known for trashing folding tables and which celebrated Buffalo's playoff-opening rout of Pittsburgh by throwing tufts of snow in the air like confetti on Monday.

Though this will be Mahomes' second trip to Western New York following the Chiefs' 26-17 regular-season win in 2020, it'll be the quarterback's first true playoff road game.

Fittingly, it's Buffalo, where the Bills (12-6) and their fans have long fantasized over how home-field advantage might turn the ta-

round playoff showdown on Sunday night.

Rather than being serenaded by the "Tomahawk Chop," the Chiefs

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