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EDITION



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STARS AND STRIPES

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GAO: Troops in Japan, S. Korea also benefit US

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The roughly \$8.5 billion spent each year by the Pentagon to house tens of thousands of American troops in Japan and South Korea benefits the Asia-Pacific region and the U.S. homeland, according to a congressional watchdog group.

The U.S. military spent approximately \$34.3 billion between 2016 and 2019 to station more than 83,000 troops permanently in Japan and South Korea, which paid dividends by maintaining strong alliances with those nations, deterring aggression of potential enemies, and ensuring stability in the broader region, according to a Government Accountability Office report published Wednesday. The report was mandated by Congress in the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act as then-President Donald Trump's administration considered removing some U.S. troops from countries around the world, including South Korea.

The GAO said its new report leaned largely on nongovernment experts and reviewed Defense and State Department policies. It was released as Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Wednesday visited Seoul, the South Korean capital, as part of his first international trip as the Pentagon's leader. Austin visited Japan earlier this week.

Austin, in public remarks in Seoul on Wednesday and Tokyo on Tuesday, said he visited those two nations first to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to the long-standing partnerships, which are seen as critical in efforts to dissuade Chinese and North Korean aggression in the region. Austin has said he considers China's growing military ambitions his primary inter-

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PHOTOS BY KELVIN RINGOLD/U.S. Army

Spc. Stephanie Bryant, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, prepares food during a "Taste Fest" at Fort Hood, Texas, on March 12. Some base cafeterias have begun experimenting with more meatless meals as the Army looks to fight obesity and increase soldier fitness.

How the Army hopes to fight fat and boost DFAC usage with rebranding

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Base cafeterias will always be "chow halls" for many, while others call them DFACs. But the Army is trying to add a new term to the lexicon: warrior restaurant.

In an effort to change how and what soldiers eat, the service has begun rebranding its dining facilities, modernizing them and upgrading their offerings to prioritize fresh or frozen ingredients over heavily processed foods.

"Warrior restaurant" is the preferred nomenclature, Sgt. Maj. Ken Fauska of the Ar-



A pan-seared teriyaki tofu steak with couscous and grilled asparagus is on display March 12 at Fort Hood.

my's Joint Culinary Center of Excellence said in a statement in January. Use of the term has been percolating on social media, mostly through the facilities' official accounts and by Army leaders promoting them.

"I miss just calling it a DFAC," Command Sgt. Maj. Jason Towns said in a recent tweet. "It's still a challenge to remember to call it a Warrior Restaurant."

The dining facility overhaul comes as the Army looks to combat obesity and boost soldier fitness, and after Army and Air Force officials

SEE WARRIOR ON PAGE 5

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Germany	\$3.128	\$3.516	\$3.770	\$3.466	Azores	..	..	\$3.670	..
Change in price	+8.2 cents	+9.1 cents	+8.5 cents	+4.8 cents	Change in price	..	..	+8.5 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$3.904	\$4.201	\$3.985	Belgium	..	\$2.721	\$2.952	\$2.906
Change in price	..	+5.7 cents	+5.8 cents	+5.7 cents	Change in price	..	No change	No change	No change
U.K.	..	\$3.415	\$3.669	\$3.365	Turkey	..	..	\$3.555	\$3.871*
Change in price	..	+9.1 cents	+8.5 cents	+4.8 cents	Change in price	..	..	+8.5 cents	No change

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Japan	..	\$3.559	..	\$3.259	South Korea	\$2.929	..	\$3.569	\$3.269
Change in price	..	+8.0 cents	..	+5.0 cents	Change in price	+8.0 cents	..	+8.0 cents	+5.0 cents
Okinawa	\$2.919	..	..	\$3.259	Guam	\$2.929	\$3.319	\$3.569	..
Change in price	+8.0 cents	..	..	+5.0 cents	Change in price	+8.0 cents	+9.0 cents	+8.0 cents	..

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
For the week of March 19-25

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (March 19)	\$1.17	Bahrain(Dinar)	.3770
Dollar buys (March 19)	0.8162	Britain (Pound)	1.3902
British pound (March 19)	\$1.36	Canada (Dollar)	1.2449
Japanese yen (March 19)	106.00	China(Yuan)	6.5087
South Korean won (March 19)	1,095.00	Denmark (Krone)	6.2408
		Egypt (Pound)	15.6997
		Euro	.8393
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7654
		Hungary (Forint)	309.50
		Israel (Shekel)	3.2973
		Japan (Yen)	109.18
		Kuwait(Dinar)	.3021
		Norway (Krone)	8.4747
		Philippines (Peso)	48.66
		Poland (Zloty)	3.88
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7504
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3441

South Korea (Won) 1,128.03
Switzerland (Franc) .9297
Thailand (Baht) 30.87
Turkey (NewLira) 7.3675

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

INTEREST RATES

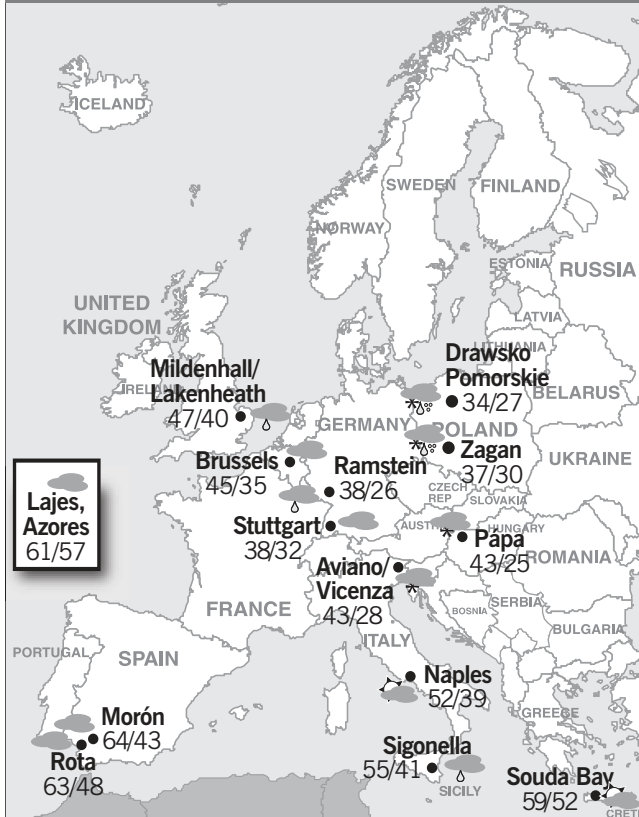
Prime rate	3.25
Interest Rates Discount rate	0.75
Federal funds market rate	0.07
3-month bill	0.02
30-year bond	2.44

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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PCSing? STARS AND STRIPES RELOCATION GUIDE

Every Friday in the European and Pacific editions of Stars and Stripes AND online daily at www.stripes.com/relo

MILITARY

Men more shy about unisex bathrooms

By NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A study of Special Forces service members found that male and female troops hold drastically different views on gender-neutral bathrooms, with many men firmly opposed to them.

About 33% of men who participated in the study said they would be willing to share a unisex bathroom with women, while 61% of women said they would be willing to share a unisex bathroom with men.

Male service members cited hygiene, risk and privacy as their

main concerns.

The study, titled “Maintaining Male Exclusivity: Porcelain Privilege in the Military,” was published recently in the journal *Armed Forces and Society*. Researchers at the University of Kansas conducted focus groups with members of the U.S. Army Special Forces about their thoughts on women integrating into combat roles. Researchers didn’t ask service members about bathrooms, but the issue kept coming up, they said.

“We weren’t focused on bathrooms originally, but they kept coming up, more than 300 times,”

said Shannon Portillo, associate dean for academic affairs at the university’s Edwards Campus. “We were focused on larger questions of military integration, but we saw a stark gender difference on this topic. The results clearly showed men were concerned about continuing a sex-separated atmosphere.”

The researchers held 27 focus groups with a total of 198 participants at Fort Bragg in North Carolina and Fort Leavenworth in Kansas.

The study found that there is still resistance of women integrating into Special Forces positions.

Bathrooms were often cited as a reason male service members were against the integration. Historically, researchers said, bathrooms have been used as a way to keep women out of certain workplaces, such as police stations, firehouses and Congress.

When male-dominated workplaces have been integrated, some workers attempted to fight back by “doubling down on the existing sexist culture,” said Alesha Doan, a professor in KU’s department of women, gender and sexuality studies. The researchers found this same dynamic in their study of service

members.

“Men’s discomfort with potentially sharing toilets and team room spaces with women, in contrast to the women’s readiness for such conditions, is an indication that the underlying logic of sexism needs to be addressed,” the study states.

The study did not include or ask about transgender service members because it was conducted when transgender people were barred from military service, the researchers wrote.

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Disproportionately more whites nominated to academies

By NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Members of Congress nominate white students to military service academies at disproportionately high rates, leading to an underrepresentation of minorities there and among the military’s pool of general officers.

The Connecticut Veterans Legal Center explained the discrepancy Wednesday in a report titled, “Gatekeepers to Opportunity.” Researchers analyzed data from 1994 to 2020 using congressional nominations to the country’s three largest service academies: U.S. Air Force Academy, U.S. Naval Academy and U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

White students received 74% of nominations from lawmakers, despite comprising only 54% of the total U.S. population age 18 to 24, researchers found. Only 6% of the nominations went to Black students, and 8% went to Hispanic students.

“The congressional nominations system is leaving Black and Latinx students behind,” said Liam Brennan, executive director of the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center. “[The] bottleneck ultimately impacts diversity at the highest levels of military leadership.”

Admission to a service academy is highly competitive, and all applications must secure a nomination from a member of Congress or another source, such as the president, vice president, secretaries of each military branch or the superintendents of the academies. Lawmakers account for most nominations — resulting in 60% to 70% of the student populations.

Researchers heard from lawmakers that students of color applied for the nominations at lower rates, contributing to the underrepresentation. However, there is no data available about the



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Cadets practice social distancing as they march to their seats to start the graduation ceremony for the class of 2020 at the U.S. Air Force Academy at Air Force Academy, Colo.

racers of students who applied. That information is only sporadically collected and isn’t subject to the Freedom of Information Act, said Sarah Purtill, a law student intern at the center.

A measure passed by Congress in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2021 will change that. The Panorama Act requires the Department of Defense to report data on the race, ethnicity and gender of applicants to service academies.

A 2019 report by the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center showed that lawmakers nominated more than three times as many male students as female students.

In the newest report, researchers included a list of recommen-

dations to Congress that they believe would help boost diversity at the academies. They asked that lawmakers reach out to Title I schools, which enroll large numbers of students from underrepresented backgrounds. They also want Congress to require the Defense Department to expand its Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Course program into more Title I schools.

The Connecticut Veterans Legal Center also recommended that the Pentagon allow some lawmakers to nominate more students. The supplementary nominations would be given to lawmakers who are shown to equitably nominate minority students.

“While some congressmem-

bers are making good-faith efforts to promote students of color, the data point to a clear and urgent need for improvement across Congress and in the academy admissions process at large,” Brennan said.

In its report, the center listed the lawmakers in the current congressional session who were doing the best and worst at nominating students who represented the populations of their districts.

The nominations of Rep. Ed Case, D-Hawaii, most closely matched the population he represents, which is 34% Asian or Pacific Islander, 24% white, 16% Hispanic and 4% Black. The nominations of Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Fla., stray the furthest from

the population in his district, which is 59% Black, 25% Hispanic, 13% white, 2% Asian or Pacific Islander.

In the Senate, Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., most closely matched the population he represents, which is 89% white and 3% Hispanic, 3% Asian or Pacific Islander and 2% Black. The nominations of Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, depart most from his district, which is 45% Hispanic, 34% white, 13% Black and 4% Asian and Pacific Islander.

As a result of the discrepancies, minority students don’t have equitable access to the academies and the opportunities they present, the report states.

The consequences extend past the academies and into the military, said Richard Brookshire, executive director of the Black Veterans Project.

“Beyond the academy walls, these disparities are compounded: Black soldiers and sailors are overrepresented in the enlisted ranks and underrepresented among general officers,” Brookshire said. “And over one-half of service members of color have witnessed evidence of white supremacy or racist ideologies in the military.”

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., said in a statement Wednesday that she supported changes to the nomination system. Gillibrand was a sponsor of the Panorama Act that passed through Congress in January.

“Our nation’s service academies cultivate exceptional officers, but we must do more to ensure they reflect our country’s diversity,” she said. “[The] congressional nomination system must be refocused to strengthen the diversity of our service academies. I will keep working until every student has an equal chance to serve, regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic status.”

PACIFIC

N. Korea, denuclearization top agenda in Seoul talks

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

North Korea and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula topped a list of issues the U.S. secretaries of state and defense tackled with their South Korean counterparts during meetings this week in Seoul.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin held a press conference with South Korea's defense minister, Suh Wook, and foreign minister, Chung Eui-yong, following Thursday's so-called 2+2 talks.

The allies' goals are clear, Blinken said: the denuclearization of North Korea, reducing the threat that country presents and "improving the lives of all Koreans, including North Koreans who suf-

fer systematic abuses at the hands of their leaders."

The ministers' discussion also focused on diplomatic efforts to resolve the nuclear issue and the need for a strategy that includes Japan, Chung said.

There is potential for future diplomacy with North Korea, Blinken said, adding that China has a critical role to play in working to convince North Korea to denuclearize.

"Virtually all of North Korea's economic relationships, its trade, go through China," he said.

Readiness remains the top priority for U.S. forces on the peninsula, Austin told reporters.

Asked about the impact of scaled back joint military exercises on the peninsula, a change en-

acted in 2018 after former President Donald Trump's first summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, Austin said the military is always looking for ways to make training better.

"We have looked to be flexible; we have looked to be adaptive and we have always been effective," he said, adding that future training on the peninsula will be determined in coordination with South Korea.

Meanwhile, North Korea announced it would disregard any U.S. offer of dialogue unless it changes its "hostile policy," after Washington contacted Pyongyang in an effort to restart nuclear talks.

North Korea's foreign minister, Choe Son Hui, issued a statement rejecting the offer Thursday as the



South Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin speaks at a press conference in Seoul with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and their South Korean counterparts, Minister of Defense Suh Wook and Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong, on Thursday.

U.S. and South Korean officials met in Seoul.

"What has been heard from the U.S. since the emergence of the new regime is only a lunatic theory of 'threat from North Korea' and groundless rhetoric about 'complete denuclearization,'" Choe said, calling the offer for

talks a "time-delaying trick."

He repeated Pyongyang's position that no "dialogue of any kind" is possible unless the U.S. dials back its hostility.

Stars and Stripes reporter Yoo Kyong Chang contributed to this report.
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Air Force chaplain cleanses Yokota Air Base homes of spirits

By ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The headquarters of U.S. Forces Japan may also be home to supernatural activity, according to a couple who claim to help anyone dealing with paranormal disturbances to rid their homes of unwanted spirits.

Chaplain (Capt.) Lance Brown, of Yokota's 374th Wing Staff Agency, and his wife, Karen Brown, who is working on a master's in counseling, have been performing home cleanses, or anointings, for the past eight years in homes where "odd things occur."

Supernatural activity is reported so often at this base in western Tokyo that it inspired a Facebook group, Yokota Ghost Hunter Club. Its members post about paranormal phenomena they've experienced at their homes and workplaces.

Lance Brown is endorsed by the Pentecostal Church of God, and the home cleanses are not officially sanctioned by the Air Force, he told Stars and Stripes in an interview earlier this month.

"Ghosts or spiritual demonic activity, things of an evil nature, God combats that," he said. "We have the ability to be that beacon of hope as people invite us."

The Browns said their cleansings are sometimes about helping someone cope with anxiety, heartbreak or a troubled past than about literal evil spirits, though Lance said they are not suggesting the supposed presence of spirits is "all in the person's head."

Laurie Pope, who lives in one of Yokota's garden units, said she started to feel uncomfortable in



ERICA EARL/Stars and Stripes

Chaplain (Capt.) Lance Brown and his wife, Karen Brown, perform cleanses at Yokota Air Base.

her home last year.

"My 3-year-old daughter has been experiencing sleep regression the past year," she told Stars and Stripes over Facebook Messenger early this month. "There have been several times when I would be watching her video monitor and I would see orbs of light in her room. There have been a few instances where I'd be in my bedroom and I would see a white streak of light run past the foot of my bed. And, more recently, my daughter has been saying she's seeing monsters and that she's scared."

Pope and her husband, Master Sgt. Austin Pope of the 374th Maintenance Squadron, decided that since Laurie Pope is six months pregnant, they needed to do something to help their daughter feel less afraid and sleep through the night before bringing a new baby home.

The family found the Browns on Facebook, and, despite not identifying with any religion, decided to give it a try.

"I know it won't happen overnight, but I'm hoping we can all live more comfortably in our home regardless if there was a spirit existing here," Laurie Pope said.

The Browns' anointing process starts with talking to the family about what is happening at home.

"We discuss what they are seeing, hearing and sensing to determine if it's just a creaky house or if something evil is going on here," Lance Brown said. "Some people call it a 'spidey sense,' but we refer to it as a discernment of spirits, a heightened sense of things that are different or off."

They then apply anointing oil — a mixture of frankincense, myrrh, aloe and herbs — to anything that needs to be blessed, including people and objects. They also use in-

cense and holy water.

"It's not as intense as movies like 'The Exorcist' or anything like that," Karen Brown said. "After we have left, the situation has never gotten worse, ever."

The Pops, who had their home anointed March 1, are hopeful that the process worked for her family.

"My daughter still isn't sleeping through the night," Laurie Pope said. "But I feel a much greater sense of peace being home alone, especially at night."

The Browns do the cleanses free of cost, judgment or disclosure, they said. People need not be religious to have a home cleansing, and the Browns said their objective is not to convert anyone's belief systems.

The couple said they received more calls at Yokota over the past year than they did at their previous assignment in Fort McConnell Air Force Base, Kan. The Browns we-

ren't certain exactly how many calls they have received on Yokota but explained that they receive a steady flow of requests, and had a cleansing arranged for right after their interview with Stars and Stripes.

Belief in hauntings, dark spirits and exorcisms is rooted in several factors, including religious beliefs about the afterlife and people's desire to connect and find patterns and significance in unusual or seemingly inexplicable incidents, according to Michael Shermer, a science historian and the founder of The Skeptics Society in Altadena, Calif.

"Incidents seem significant when you are looking for it," he said in a phone interview March 9.

The uncertainty and restrictions associated with the yearlong coronavirus pandemic possibly amplifies stress and emotion, Lance Brown said. Add to that the feeling of isolation and separation from family and friends that comes with living in a foreign country.

"These feelings can make someone more heightened to portals for spiritual activity," he said.

The Browns declined to share the details of specific cleansings, but said they have experienced fear and emotional responses themselves during some visits.

"It's not anything of Hollywood, but evil is a very real thing," Lance Brown said. "You just sense an absolute darkness, and your skin tingles and the hair on the back of your neck raises and you get a sense of 'I don't want to be here.'"

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MILITARY

Warrior: Dining facilities promote healthy eating to draw more troops in

FROM PAGE 1

began exploring a university campus-style dining plan that would let soldiers use meal cards outside DFACs, at places where they've been paying out of pocket.

To draw customers in, some DFACs have begun experimenting with more meatless meals, some of which were offered last week to troops at Fort Hood, Texas, during a "Taste Fest" at the Always Ready Warrior Restaurant.

After a four-day training event with a Florida-based chef, Fort Hood culinary specialists served up samples of vegan breakfast burritos with scrambled tofu, vegan spelt pancakes topped with fresh berries, stuffed avocados with quinoa salad and pan-seared teriyaki tofu steak with couscous and grilled asparagus.

To promote healthier eating, facilities are also placing salad bars more prominently, deep-frying deep fat fryers and switching to air frying ovens.

On social media, chow halls boast about meals with more whole grains, lean meats, fruits and vegetables — sometimes pitting them against fast food joints or other competitors.

"Don't waste your money at Burger King ... hmmm!" said a recent 3rd Infantry Division Food Service post on Facebook with photos of fruits, vegetables and what looked like baked fish file.

DFAC meals are subsidized through food allowances, which let soldiers who live in the barracks use meal cards to pay for breakfast, lunch and dinner. But many sol-



KELVIN RINGOLD/U.S. Army

Pfc. Edwin Villareal, center, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, explains the new vegan and vegetarian items during Taste Fest on March 12, at Fort Hood, Texas.

diers fail to use about half that entitlement.

That means each soldier leaves about \$170 a month "on the table," partly because of difficulty getting to DFACs at meal times for various reasons, Rep. Tim Ryan, D-Ohio, said during a committee hearing last year.

There is a "lack of participation in large

volumes in the chow halls," former Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy told lawmakers at the hearing.

Soldiers know about them, but "the million-dollar question" is how to get them eating there, said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Michael Barnes, a food service adviser at Fort Polk, La.

While some DFACs have been stressing their value and menu variety, bases are also launching food trucks, in-barracks kiosks and late-night or extended meal times to better serve the troops.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston touted the "transition to the warrior restaurant" at the Association of the U.S. Army's annual meeting and expo in October, saying the mess hall makeover aims to create "someplace you'd be proud to eat with your squad."

They're adding ID card scanners to cut down on wait times, starting to allow credit card payments and working to improve the food quality.

Installations are partnering with chefs off-base to improve kitchen staff mentorship and training. The service has recruited Food Network chef Robert Irvine, a fixture at holiday USO shows downrange in recent years, to help find ways to attract younger troops to the DFACs.

"If you give soldiers what they want, they will eat there," Irvine said in August.

But will anyone really call them by the new name, especially without a catchy military acronym? Last weekend, U.S. Army WTF Moments posted a variation of the "woman yelling at cat" meme depicting the renaming struggle.

"Warrior Restaurant? WTF!" retired Army Brig. Gen. Bill Shea wrote in response. "It's a Chow Hall!"

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PACIFIC

Okinawa drill focuses on sea lane control

By MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

IE SHIMA, Okinawa — U.S. Marines, soldiers and airmen for nearly two weeks polished a new approach to island warfare in the Western Pacific designed to deny surrounding seas to potential adversaries.

They deployed small groups of highly trained troops, fast-moving artillery and stealthy fighter jets to grab territory from which rockets could launch.

Exercise Castaway, which concludes Saturday on this island just off Okinawa's northwest coast, demonstrates how a relatively small, widely dispersed force could seize and hold useful territory in the early stages of a conflict.

The tactic is called expeditionary advanced base operations. The potential adversary, left unsaid, is widely understood to be China.

Castaway is the second exercise like it since Noble Fury in October, but it's the most comprehensive expeditionary advanced base exercise, so far, 3rd Marine Division spokesman Maj. Kurt Stahl told Stars and Stripes on Monday.

Noble Fury involved Marines and sailors practicing an island airfield seizure and deploying a Marine M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS. Castaway largely went through the same motions but had the added layers of an actual wartime scenario.

They also demonstrated how to sustain the force for a period afterward. The long-range fire of the HIMARS would deny adversaries easy movement through the surrounding seas.

The exercise started March 8 and involved a force more than 300 strong. Marines from 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion joined by U.S. Army Green Berets of 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group and airmen of the



PHOTOS BY MATTHEW M. BURKE/Stars and Stripes

Marines guard an M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System on Monday during Exercise Castaway on Ie Shima, Okinawa.

Air Force 320th Special Tactics Squadron led the way. Behind them came the main force from the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines.

From Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni came four F-35B Lightning II stealth fighters, capable of short runway take-offs and vertical landings, to provide air cover and seek potential targets.

A week into the scenario, the HIMARS from 3rd Battalion, 12th Marines' Sierra Battery rolled out the back of a Marine C-130 Hercules airlifter, raised its tubes for a mock fire, then disappeared into the nearby jungle.

"What we're doing is working on establishing an austere position where we can basically prosecute long-range precision fires, and that allows us to basically deny the sea lane," said 3rd Battalion, 12th Marines commander Lt. Col. Roe Lemons Jr. after the battery ar-



rived. "For us, it's like a road intersection, but on the water."

The expeditionary advanced base concept relies on an "alternative forward force," that is "difficult to target" and "lethal, yet resilient," according to a June 2018 handbook prepared by the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory at Quantico, Va. These smaller, widely dis-

persed forces can administer punishing, precision strikes without having to destroy all of an adversary's forces.

Marines in the field referred consistently to a "peer" adversary. But Castaway was clearly designed to counter an increasingly assertive China, according to Toshiyuki Shikata, a security expert and former lieu-

"For us, it's like a road intersection, but on the water."

Lt. Col. Roe Lemons Jr.
3rd Battalion, 12th Marines
commander

tenant general for the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force.

"It works as a deterrent to have both a larger diplomatic framework and military exercises," he told Stars and Stripes by phone Tuesday. Castaway "shows the U.S. military's capability to deploy reliable weapons in a timely and appropriate manner. It is important to show rather than just talking about it."

The exercise took place as U.S. attention becomes more focused on the Indo-Pacific region. The U.S. secretaries of defense and state met with their counterparts in Seoul and Tokyo this week, a show of solidarity for rivals China and North Korea.

On March 9, the head of Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. Philip Davidson, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that China could launch an attack on Taiwan in the next six years.

The U.S. helps deter China from using force to assert control over Taiwan by selling it arms and by routinely sending Navy warships through the 110-mile-wide Taiwan Strait.

And the U.S. is also committed to helping Japan defend the Senkaku Islands, a handful of barren, rocky islets whose possession is contested by China and Taiwan.

Stars and Stripes reporter Hana Kusumoto contributed to this report.
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GAO: Report finds US presence in Japan, S. Korea boosts regional security

FROM PAGE 1

national threat.

The long-standing alliances with Japan and South Korea, Austin said this week, contribute to "a free and open Indo-Pacific" region.

The GAO report reached the same conclusion, including analysis that American troops in Japan and South Korea were important to maintain supply lines and trade routes through the region.

GAO found permanent U.S. military presences in Japan and South Korea had other benefits,

including regular assurances those country's military forces could fight alongside U.S. troops, close proximity to respond to natural disasters or security events in the region, and support for nuclear nonproliferation among its allies in the region.

The experts polled by GAO also agreed the U.S. military presence in Japan and South Korea strengthened the overall relationships the United States maintains with those host nations.

The size of U.S. forces in South Korea and Japan has changed minimally during the period that

the GAO studied, and the organization said experts concluded locals were largely supportive of the U.S. military presences in their countries.

However, the GAO also said locals in some locations near U.S. bases object to U.S. troops' presence, especially on Okinawa, Japan, and can strain bilateral relationships.

A long-held and often-delayed U.S. plan to remove some 9,000 Okinawa-based Marines to other locations including Guam, Hawaii and the U.S. mainland could help quell those issues, experts

said.

In all, the United States spent some \$20.9 billion in Japan between 2016 and 2019 to maintain the roughly 55,000 troops there, the GAO reported.

It spent another \$13.4 billion in South Korea for the approximately 28,500 troops stationed in there.

Those totals largely include money spent on troops' salaries, military operations, and construction and maintenance of military and family housing facilities, according to the GAO.

Japan and South Korea provided the United States some direct

funding to offset some of the costs to U.S. taxpayers, according to the GAO.

Japan paid the United States some \$12.6 billion and South Korea paid some \$5.8 billion, between 2016 and 2019, to support pay for labor, construction, utilities and training costs.

South Korea and the United States announced this month a deal to increase South Korean payments for housing American troops there by 13.9% for 2021.

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WAR/MILITARY

Russia hosts Afghan forum to boost talks

By **VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV**
Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia hosted a peace conference for Afghanistan on Thursday, bringing together government representatives and their Taliban adversaries along with international observers in a bid to help jump-start the country's stalled peace process.

The one-day gathering is the first of three planned international conferences ahead of a May 1 deadline for the final withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops from the country, a date fixed under a year-old agreement between the Trump administration and the Taliban.

Moscow's attempt at mediation comes as talks in Doha between the Afghan government and the Taliban, still waging an insurgency, have stalled. Washington and Kabul have been pressing for a cease-fire while the Taliban say they will negotiate it as part of peace talks with the Afghan government.

"We hope that today's talks will help achieve progress in the inter-Afghan talks," Russian Foreign

Minister Sergey Lavrov said at the start of the meeting.

The Moscow conference is attended by U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, Abdullah Abdullah, head of Afghanistan's National Reconciliation Council, and Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. Representatives of Pakistan, Iran, India and China are also participating.

Moscow, which fought a 10-year war in Afghanistan that ended with Soviet troops' withdrawal in 1989, has made a diplomatic comeback as a mediator in Afghanistan, reaching out to feuding factions as it jockeyes with the U.S. for influence in the country. In 2019, it hosted talks between various Afghan factions.

Lavrov on Thursday urged the Afghan government and the Taliban to take a constructive stance and make compromises, adding that international participants should help create the necessary conditions for reaching a deal.

"The Afghan parties interested in the national reconciliation can reach peace only through negotia-



ALEXANDER ZEMLIANICHENKO/AP

Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, center, arrives with other members of the Taliban delegation Thursday for an international peace conference in Moscow.

tions and compromises," Lavrov said. "It's important to sign an agreement that would serve the interests of all key ethnic and political forces of the country and determine the vector of its development."

He emphasized that it was important to quickly reach a peace deal "amid the deteriorating military-political situation" before the summer when an upsurge in fighting is likely.

The U.S. has waged a war in Afghanistan for 20 years following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks masterminded by al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden from Afghanistan, making it America's longest conflict. But despite the U.S. spending nearly \$1 trillion, al-Qai-

da is still present in Afghanistan, and an affiliate of the Islamic State group has taken root in the east of the country.

Many Afghans fear the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops could lead to an upsurge in fighting between the country's rival factions.

The Taliban now want more prisoners released from Afghan prisons and their leaders removed from the U.N.'s so-called blacklist.

The Taliban, who during their rule imposed a harsh brand of Islam on Afghanistan, now control about half of the country, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has warned that it could make quick gains without U.S. and NATO troops.

Guam-based airman killed in motorcycle crash ID'd

Stars and Stripes

Andersen Air Force Base on Thursday identified Staff Sgt. Will Gonzales as the airman killed Tuesday in a motorcycle crash about 12 miles from the installation.

Gonzales, of the 36th Security Forces Squadron, died when he lost control of his motorcycle and collided with a raised cement median, Guam Police Sgt. Paul Tapao told the Pacific Daily News.



The accident **Gonzales** occurred on Santos Hill near a residential area, Casa de Isa, according to the newspaper report.

Guam police are still investigating the crash.

Gonzales worked at the armory, according to a 2019 news release from the 36th Wing.

"Will was an outstanding member of Team Andersen and he will be deeply missed," Brig. Gen. Jeremy Sloane, the wing commander, said in a statement from Andersen on Thursday.

"We express our deepest sympathies to Will's family and friends as we navigate through this difficult time together."

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Helicopter crash kills 9 Afghan troops

By **RAHIM FAIEZ**
Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A helicopter crash overnight has taken the lives of at least nine Afghan military personnel in a central province, the defense ministry said Thursday.

In a statement, it said that four crew members of the MI-17 helicopter along with five security personnel were killed in the crash, in the Behsud district of Maidan Wardak province. It gave no further detail except to say that investigations were ongoing.

Separately Thursday, a bombing killed four state employees commuting in a minibus in the capital Kabul, police said. Ferdaws Faramarz, spokesman for the Kabul police chief, said a woman was among the dead and nine other people were wounded in the attack in the city's north.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the Kabul attack, but government employees have been targeted before. On Monday, another bombing on a minibus carrying state workers in Kabul killed three women and a 3-year-

old child and wounded 13 others, according to security officials.

Afghanistan is experiencing a nationwide spike in bombings, targeted killings and other violence as peace negotiations in Qatar between Taliban insurgents and the Afghan government stall.

The Islamic State's local affiliate has claimed responsibility for some of the violence, but many attacks go unclaimed, with the Afghan government putting the blame on the Taliban. The insurgents have denied responsibility for most of the attacks.



MARIAM ZUHAIB/AP

Security personnel inspect a damaged minibus after a bomb explosion in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Thursday.

HAVE YOU BEEN INJURED?

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VIRUS OUTBREAK

Doctors go virtual to cut virus exposure

By NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military has seen a surge in the use of virtual medical care, as patients avoid doctor's offices and health care workers work to minimize their exposure to the coronavirus.

The Defense Health Agency long planned to expand its use of telemedicine, which could include everything from a nurse displaying an X-ray of a soldier's broken foot and discussing rehabilitation, to doctors in different countries diagnosing cancer.

"We basically in a couple of months had a growth in what we were planning to do in a couple of years," said Jamie Adler, lead for the Defense Health Agency's Virtual Health Clinical Integration Office. "With patients and many providers at home, we really had to step up."

Health caregivers across the military have found that many appointments can be done just as well and more conveniently using technology as simple as a cell-phone.

Need a child's rash seen to? "The parent sends us pictures, then we can make the diagnosis and talk to them," said Dr. Rafael Nunez, of U.S. Army Health Center Vicenza. The clinic this week limited the number of patients al-

lowed inside as Italy's coronavirus cases spiked and most of the country again locked down.

Patients like virtual care because it's discreet and convenient, said Col. Andrew Baxter, Regional Health Command Europe nurse executive.

Doctors like it because it's efficient, allows for more collaboration and provides more timely appointments and access to health care. Commanders like it because it saves travel costs and mission days.

In a way, virtual health care is a back-to-the-future endeavor, Baxter said. "It's kind of going back in time to the house call."

The U.S. military in Europe had a five-year head start adapting virtual care because of the dispersal of troops under its responsibility. Its clinics provide primary care to operational troops deployed to Europe, Africa, Afghanistan and the Middle East.

"We have small groups of soldiers throughout Europe, sometimes in the middle of a field," Baxter said.

The region's telemedicine calls swelled from 7,000 in 2019 to more than 20,000 over the past year, Baxter said.

Among them was a surgical dressing change performed by a medic in remote Bulgaria as a sur-



U.S. ARMY HEALTH CENTER VICENZA

Dr. Rafael Nunez, a pediatrician at the U.S. Army Health Center in Vicenza, Italy, speaks on the phone March 9, with a parent about their child's diagnosis in one of many virtual health appointments he has daily.

geon in Germany instructed. In another case, troops in Ukraine resolved behavioral health issues with an Army provider in Poland.

Behavioral health is especially suited to virtual sessions, Baxter said. Troops with anxiety, depression, PTSD or other problems are known to dislike being seen seeking help. A virtual visit may draw no more attention than a phone call.

Complex physical ailments can also be addressed.

Endocrinologist Maj. Harris Baloch, a specialist in glandular disorders like diabetes and hypothyroidism, prefers seeing patients in person for a first appointment and physical exam at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, the largest U.S. military hospital in Europe. After that, he sees them primarily through secure video.

Baloch also confers frequently with other physicians that way. A recent video conference to discuss an England-based Lakenheath Air Base patient's case and devise testing and treatment included her Lakenheath doctor, a kidney

specialist at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, Va., and Baloch.

"It prevented the evacuation of the patient," Baloch said.

For a few months last year when Landstuhl had no oncologist, a Walter Reed National Military Medical Center doctor filled the gap.

"Even Landstuhl might not have the specialty a patient needs," Baxter said. "This brings us global reach."

Virtual medicine had grown more slowly in the continental U.S. than in Europe until now, Adler said.

"The need wasn't staring them in the face" until the pandemic happened, he said.

Along with the increased use came new guidance on how to use the technology safely, confidentially and effectively. Additional Defense Department security requirements were developed to safeguard appointments, Adler said.

Although most telemedicine uses phones and video, other applications have emerged. In Decem-

ber, some clinics began to continuously monitor COVID-19 patients' blood oxygen levels at home.

"One of the big advantages of virtual health care is it can and does reduce the need to use more complex services," he said. "If you can consult, you can avoid a visit to the emergency room."

However, there will always be a place for doctors and nurses to interact in person.

"If you have the resources and the specialists or you're there for a physical exam it makes sense to deliver it in person," Adler said. "I think there'll be a balance."

"But it'll be a new balance. We've discovered we can do things we didn't know we could do. And if you can talk to a mental health provider or a primary care physician in the privacy and comfort of your home ... I think patients are going to insist we continue to do this."

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Japanese PM won't extend Tokyo emergency limit

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said a coronavirus state of emergency will expire Sunday as planned in the capital city and three surrounding prefectures that make up the greater Tokyo metro area, Japanese media reported Thursday.

Suga said the 2½-month-old emergency would end, but the public should remain cautious and avoid activities likely to spread the virus, according to The Japan Times.

Meanwhile, a pair of U.S. military bases in Japan reported five new infections as of 6 p.m. Thursday, two at Naval Air Facility Atsugi, 26 miles southeast of central Tokyo, and three at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa.

A panel of health experts that advises the government on the coronavirus recommended lifting the emergency first declared Jan. 7 and extended twice as case numbers peaked and ebbed and hospitalizations increased, The Mainichi newspaper reported Thursday. The emergency at one stage covered 11 prefectures, mostly on Honshu, the largest of the four main islands and where Japan's largest cities are located. Only Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama and Chiba remain under the declaration.

Travel restrictions are easing at U.S. installation in Japan, but all or part of Tokyo is still off-limits to U.S. military personnel — uniformed and civilian — except for work or essential services. Only Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo permits its population to visit the city center. Some activities and

businesses, such as bars and large indoor gatherings, are still prohibited.

The government's emergency measures are largely voluntary. Employers encourage telework and commuters are expected to reduce their travel on mass transit. Businesses, especially restaurants, are incentivized to close between 8 p.m. and 5 p.m.

Tokyo on Thursday reported another 323 people tested positive for the coronavirus, according to public broadcaster NHK. Daily counts in the city of 14 million the past month have typically hovered between 220 and 350, according to metro government data. On Wednesday, new infections reached 409, the highest one-day count since Feb. 18.

NAF Atsugi reported one person tested positive before exiting

a mandatory quarantine for travelers entering the country. The second person acquired the virus from a previously infected individual, according to a base Facebook post.

At Kadena, one person tested positive before exiting quarantine, according to a base Facebook post. The other two new patients became ill with COVID-19 symptoms, self-isolated and tested positive for the virus. Public health authorities quarantined an unspecified number of close contacts.

In South Korea, the commander of Camp Humphreys, Col. Michael Tremblay, on Thursday closed base convenience stores, a post office and other facilities to accommodate contact tracing after someone tested positive there earlier in the week, he said in a

Facebook Live video.

South Korea reported 445 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, including 155 in Gyeonggi province, where Humphreys and Osan Air Base are located, and 124 in Seoul, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency.

The South Korean military mobilized 1,664 medical and administrative support personnel to aid epidemiologic surveys, quarantines, the transportation of COVID-19 vaccines and other tasks, defense ministry spokesman Moon Honk-sik said Thursday.

The Korean military reported three new cases of COVID-19 for a pandemic total of 632, Moon said.

Stars and Stripes reporter Yoo Kyong Chang contributed to this report.
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NATION

Jobless claims rise to 770K; layoffs still high

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits rose last week to 770,000, a sign that layoffs remain high even as much of the U.S. economy is steadily recovering from the coronavirus recession.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department showed that jobless claims climbed from 725,000 the week before. The numbers have dropped sharply since the depths of the recession last spring but still show that employers in some industries continue to lay off workers. Before the pandemic struck, applications for unemployment aid had never topped 700,000 in any one week.

The four-week average of claims, which smooths out weekly variations, dropped to 746,000, the lowest since late November.

A total of 4.1 million people are continuing to collect traditional state unemployment benefits, down 18,000 from the previous week. Including separate federal programs that are intended to help workers displaced by the health crisis, 18.2 million Americans were receiving some form of jobless aid in the week of Feb. 27, down by 1.9 million from the week before.

The continuing layoffs are oc-



CHARLES KRUPA/AP

A man walks past the signs of an employment agency March 2 in Manchester, N.H.

curing even as the overall job market has shown solid improvement. Last month, U.S. employers added a robust 379,000 jobs, the most since October and a sign that the economy is strengthening as consumers spend more and states and cities ease business restrictions.

With vaccinations accelerating, hopes are rising that Americans

will increasingly travel, shop, eat out and spend freely after a year of virus-induced restraint.

President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion relief package is also expected to help accelerate growth, especially with most adults this week receiving \$1,400 stimulus checks that should fuel more spending. An extension of \$300 weekly unemployment benefits into early

September will provide support, too, along with money for vaccines and treatments, school re-openings, state and local governments and ailing industries ranging from airlines to concert halls.

"Labor market strains are ongoing, but we expect filings (for unemployment aid) to start declining as restrictions are lifted and more normal operations resume," Ru-

beela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics, said in a research note. "As businesses return to full capacity, job and income prospects will improve and, combined with fiscal support, will provide a powerful lift to the economy."

At the same time, the nation is still roughly 9.5 million short of the number of jobs it had in February 2020. And Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell suggested Wednesday after the Fed's latest policy meeting that the overall economic outlook remained cloudy.

"The state of the economy in two or three years is highly uncertain," Powell said at a news conference after the Fed signaled that it expects to keep its key interest rate near zero through 2023 despite some solid economic gains and concerns about rising inflation pressures.

By most barometers, business activity in the economy's vast and hard-hit service sector is still far from normal. The data firm Womply said, for example, that as of early last week 63% of movie theaters, galleries and other entertainment venues were closed. So were 39% of bars, 32% of gyms and other sports and recreation businesses and 30% of restaurants.

IRS will delay tax filing due date until May 17

Associated Press

Americans will be getting extra time to prepare their taxes. The Internal Revenue Service says it's delaying the traditional tax filing deadline from April 15 until May 17.

The IRS announced the decision Wednesday and said it would provide further guidance in the coming days. The move provides more breathing room for taxpayers and the IRS alike to cope with changes brought on by the pandemic.

"The IRS wants to continue to do everything possible to help taxpayers navigate the unusual circumstances related to the pandemic, while also working on important tax administration responsibilities," IRS

Commissioner Chuck Rettig said in a statement.

The decision postpones when individual taxpayers must file their return and when their payment is due. The IRS said taxpayers who owe money would not face any further penalties or interest if they pay by May 17. The new deadline also applies to individuals who pay self-employment tax.

Taxpayers do not need to take any action to take advantage of the new deadline. Those who need more time beyond May 17 can request an extension until Oct. 15.

The new deadline does not apply to estimated tax payments that are due on April 15; those remain due by that day.

The decision to extend the deadline comes after an intense year

for the chronically underfunded IRS. The pandemic hit in the middle of last year's tax filing season, setting the agency back in terms of processing. The IRS has also been a key player in doling out government relief payments, and is currently helping to send out the third round of payments in the middle of the current tax filing season.

Additionally, the extension gives the IRS time to issue guidance on recent tax law changes. The American Rescue Plan excludes the first \$10,200 of unemployment benefits from federal taxes for those making less than \$150,000.

"Never before has the law changed so substantially in the middle of tax filing season," Patrick Thomas, director of Notre

Dame Law School's Tax Clinic, said in a statement.

The IRS must issue guidance for taxpayers and tax preparers alike as millions of returns already filed likely do not account for this change.

A number of lawmakers and professionals from the tax community have urged the tax filing season be extended to accommodate for these pressures. The House Ways and Means Committee applauded the move.

"This extension is absolutely necessary to give Americans some needed flexibility in a time of unprecedented crisis," said Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass. and Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr., D-N.J., chairman of the panel's oversight subcommittee.



PATRICK SISON/AP

The traditional April 15 tax filing due date is delayed until May 17.

Rettig was to to speak to the committee Thursday about how the IRS is managing this filing season and the need for this extension.

The IRS continues to urge people to file as soon as possible, particularly those who are owed refunds. In some cases filing will help taxpayers more quickly get any remaining relief payments they are entitled to.

Treasury Department says \$242B in new relief payments already sent

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Treasury Department says it has sent out 90 million economic impact payments totaling \$242 billion since President Joe Biden signed a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief plan last week.

The bulk of those payments were made by the IRS as direct deposits, which recipients

starting seeing in their bank accounts last weekend, officials said Wednesday.

In addition, Treasury has mailed out roughly 150,000 checks worth about \$442 million.

Processing of the payments began last Friday, the day after Biden signed the American Rescue Plan, which authorized

direct payments of up to \$1,400 to qualifying individuals.

Treasury said the first batch of payments went to eligible taxpayers who provided direct-deposit information on their 2019 or 2020 tax returns. Included were people who don't typically file a return but who used a non-filers tool at IRS.gov last year to be included in two

earlier rounds of COVID-19 relief payments.

Officials said additional batches of payments will be sent in coming weeks by direct deposit and through the mail as a check or debit card.

No action is needed by most taxpayers to receive the payments, which will be automatic and similar to how people re-

ceived their first and second round of economic impact payments in 2020.

The payments, which are being made to cushion the blow from the coronavirus pandemic, started with \$1,200 payments in the first round last spring and \$600 payments in a second round of payments approved by Congress in December.

NATION



ELI HARTMAN/AP

Department of Homeland Security officers wait for the arrival of migrant children and teenagers from the southern border of the United States at the site of a temporary holding facility that opened south of Midland, Texas.

Despite headwinds, House set to OK Dems' immigration bills

By ALAN FRAM
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democrats seem poised to claim victory in the House's first votes this year on immigration, but moving legislation on the divisive issue all the way through Congress to President Joe Biden is an uphill fight.

The House was set to vote Thursday on one bill giving over 2 million young "Dreamer" immigrants and others legal status and a chance for citizenship. A second measure would do the same for around 1 million immigrant farm workers. Both seemed certain to pass.

But party divisions and solid Republican opposition mean pushing legislation through the Senate on immigration remains difficult, especially for Biden's goal of a sweeping measure helping all 11 million immigrants in the United States illegally become ci-

tizens. The partisan battle shows little promise of easing before next year's elections, when Republicans could use it in their effort to regain House and Senate control.

Work on the legislation comes as the number of migrants attempting to cross the border has been growing since April and has hit its highest level since March 2019. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said Tuesday that figure is on track to reach a 20-year high.

Scores of groups supporting the bills include the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Among those arrayed in opposition is the conservative Heritage Action for America.

GOP lawmakers have been singularly focused on the growing wave of migrants, including children, trying to enter the U.S. from Mexico and blaming Biden administration policies for it. Though neither House bill would

affect those trying to cross the boundary, top Republicans were urging rank-and-file lawmakers to oppose both measures.

"By failing to include enforcement provisions to deal with the tide of illegal immigration or provisions to address the humanitarian crisis at the border, the bill would only worsen the flow of illegal immigrants to the U.S.," an email No. 2 House GOP leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana sent his colleagues said of the "Dreamers" measure.

Democrats were showing no signs of wavering from either bill, similar versions of which the House approved in 2019. Seven Republicans voted for the "Dreamers" bill and 34 backed the farm workers measure that year, but GOP support was expected to plummet this time as the party rallies behind demands for stiffer border restrictions.

Republicans seize on immigration as crossings increase

By JILL COLVIN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Delegation trips to the border. Apocalyptic warnings. A flurry of news conferences.

Republicans still divided over former President Donald Trump's legacy are seizing on his signature campaign issue, turning their focus to immigration as they try to regain the political upper hand.

Faced with President Joe Biden's early popularity, good news about vaccinations and Americans' embrace of the COVID-19 relief bill Washington Republicans opposed, the GOP is leaning in on the highly charged issue amid a spike in border crossings. They hope immigration can unite the party heading into next year's elections, when control of Congress is at stake.

"Heading into the midterms, I think that Republicans are increasingly realizing that this can be one of the most potent issues, both to motivate our voters, but equally as important, to appeal to" swing voters — especially in suburban swing districts — who voted for Democrats in 2020, said former Trump aide Stephen Miller, the architect of his immigration policies. He said the issue has been a subject of discussion in his recent conversations with lawmakers as child border crossings have surged, straining U.S. facilities.

The situation at the southern border is complex. Since Biden's inauguration, the country has seen a dramatic spike in the number of people encountered by border officials, with 18,945 family members and

9,297 unaccompanied children encountered in February — an increase of 168% and 63% from the month before, according to the Pew Research Center. That creates an enormous logistical challenge, since children, in particular, require higher standards of care and coordination across agencies.

Still, the encounters of both unaccompanied minors and families remain lower than at various points during the Trump administration, including in spring 2019. That May, authorities encountered more than 55,000 migrant children, including 11,500 unaccompanied minors, and around 84,500 migrants traveling in family units.

But that hasn't stopped Republicans from seizing on the issue, led by Trump himself. They blame Biden, who has been deeply critical of Trump's approach, for rolling back many of the former president's hard-line deterrence policies. And they liken Biden's new, kinder tone to an invitation to would-be border crossers.

"They're destroying our country. People are coming in by the hundreds of thousands," warned Trump in an interview Tuesday night with Fox News Channel.

Democrats and immigration activists see it differently. They deride the policies Trump implemented to deter asylum as cruel and inhumane, and an abdication of the country's humanitarian responsibilities. That includes the decision to forcibly separate more than 3,000 children from their parents, with no system in place to reunite them.

Jan. 6 commission stalls, for now, amid ongoing partisan dissension

By MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Legislation creating an independent, bipartisan panel to investigate the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol is stalled, for now, with Democrats and Republicans split over the scope and structure of a review that would revisit the deadly attack and assess former President Donald Trump's role.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has pushed for the commission, which would be modeled after the panel that investigated the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington. But unlike 9/11, which engendered some unity in Congress almost two decades ago, the insurrection by Trump's supporters has pulled Democrats and

Republicans further apart, even on the basic question of what should be investigated.

It's a symptom not just of the partisan tensions that run high in Congress but of a legislative branch reeling from the fallout of the Trump era, with lawmakers unable to find common ground, or a common set of facts, even after a mob smashed into the Capitol and threatened their lives.

Democrats say Republicans helped provoke the attack by aiding and abetting Trump's falsehoods about the election — many signed onto a failed lawsuit challenging Joe Biden's victory — and question whether GOP lawmakers had ties to the rioters. Some Republicans, including Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson, have down-

played the severity of the attack.

"The problem is the scope," Pelosi said Wednesday. "Are we going to seek the truth or are we going to say we're not stipulating that anything really happened that day?"

Republicans immediately objected last month to Pelosi's proposal for the commission, which would create a panel of four Republicans and seven Democrats to "conduct an investigation of the relevant facts and circumstances relating to the domestic terrorist attack on the Capitol." She has signaled she is open to negotiations on the commission's partisan makeup but has drawn a harder line on the scope.

The legislation does not mention Trump or his calls for his sup-

porters who broke into the Capitol to "fight like hell" to overturn his presidential election defeat. But Republicans swiftly decried the broad latitude that the commission would have to investigate the causes of the insurrection. They also objected to a series of findings in the bill that quoted FBI Director Christopher Wray saying that racially motivated violent extremism, and especially white supremacy, is one of the biggest threats to domestic security.

The Republicans said the investigation should not just focus on what led to the Jan. 6 insurrection, but also on violence in the summer of 2020 during protests over police brutality — a touchstone among GOP voters and an idea that Democrats say is a distraction from the

real causes of the violent attack.

"We can pass a bill, but that's not the point," Pelosi said in an interview on MSNBC. "You want it to be bipartisan. And it cannot be bipartisan if the scope of it is to not draw any conclusion about what happened that day as the premise for how we would go forward and investigate it."

Failure to set up a commission would leave it to committees in the House and Senate to explore what went wrong on Jan. 6, which is what some lawmakers prefer. Those investigations are well underway on a bipartisan basis and have already identified problems with Capitol Police. But those probes are unlikely to attain the stature and credibility of an outside investigation.

NATION

Storms move on, leaving trail of damage in South

By JAY REEVES
Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Storms that left splintered homes and broken trees across Alabama and Mississippi moved into Georgia and Florida on Thursday, rousing residents with early morning warnings as forecasters said the threat of dangerous weather would move up the south Atlantic seaboard.

About 20,000 homes and business were without power and the weather service said at least two people were hurt when an apparent tornado struck southwest Alabama, destroying a house, but the region appeared to escape the kind of horrific toll many feared after ominous predictions of monster twisters and huge hail.

“Overall, we have a lot to be

grateful for, as it could have been much worse,” Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said in a statement.

Forecasters issued a string of tornado warnings around the region where Alabama, Georgia and Florida intersect, but there were no immediate reports of major damage.

The National Weather Service office in central Alabama said teams were fanning out Thursday to assess damage in at least 12 counties where tornadoes may have touched down.

Scattered severe thunderstorms were expected to spread into portions of eastern Georgia, through the Carolinas into extreme southeast Virginia, according to the National Weather Service’s Storm Prediction Center. Other isolated severe storms



VASHA HUNT/AP

Debris is tangled in an uprooted tree laying on a weather-damaged property Thursday in Clanton, Ala., the morning following a large outbreak of severe storms across the southeast.

were possible from southern Ohio into the central Appalachians.

“Significant tornadoes, wind damage and large hail will be possible from morning into afternoon,” the Storm Prediction Center said. “Severe thunderstorms will also be possible from parts of the eastern Gulf Coast into the southern and central Appala-

chians.”

Damage was reported in Louisiana, Tennessee and Mississippi, where video showed an apparent tornado at Brookhaven. High winds blew down signs and trees in northeast Texas, and hailstones the size of baseballs were reported near the Alabama-Mississippi line, the weather service said.

More than 70,000 homes and businesses were without power at one point from Texas to Alabama, and radar showed additional storms moving across the region as initial cleanup work began.

Alabama was under a state of emergency, and communities across the South used social media to share the location of tornado shelters.

Asian Americans grieve, organize in wake of attacks

Associated Press

Asian Americans were already worn down by a year of pandemic-fueled racist attacks when a white gunman was charged with killing eight people, most of them Asian women, at three Atlanta-area massage parlors.

Hundreds of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders turned to social media to air their anger, sadness, fear and hopelessness. The hashtag #StopAsianHate was a top trending topic on Twitter hours after the shootings that happened Tuesday evening.

“I think the reason why people are feeling so hopeless is because Asian Americans have been ringing the bell on this issue for so long. ... We’ve been raising the red flag,” said Aisha Yaqoob Mahmood, executive director of the Atlanta-based Asian American Advocacy Fund, which does political and advocacy work across Georgia.

Many were also outraged that the suspect, Robert Aaron Long, 21, was not immediately charged with hate crimes. Authorities said Long told police the attack was not racially motivated, and he claimed that he targeted the spas because of a “sex addiction.” Six of the seven slain women were identified as Asian.

Law enforcement needs “some training understanding what a hate crime is,” said Margaret Huang, president and CEO of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks hate groups. “This man identified targets owned by Asians.”

The gunman “was very clearly going after a targeted group of people,” Huang said.

Being Asian American herself, Huang said the shootings felt personal. She is wor-

ried that not classifying the attack as a hate crime will “absolutely discourage others from coming forward and seeking help.”

She also cringed at the comments of a sheriff’s captain who said of the gunman, “It was a really bad day for him.”

The remark “appeared to be trying to explain and justify” the suspect’s actions. “Hopefully it was a misstatement,” Huang said.

Since then, it has come out that a Facebook account tied to Cherokee County sheriff’s Capt. Jay Baker promoted a T-shirt with racist language about China and the coronavirus last year. The account was deleted Wednesday night. Asian American activists say it undermines public trust in the investigation. Baker did not respond to voicemails and an email requesting comment on the Facebook post. The sheriff’s office also did not respond to a message seeking comment.

Mahmood said Asian American business owners in the Atlanta area were already fearful because of incidents like graffiti and break-ins. The shootings will raise that worry to new heights.

“A lot of Asian American business owners in the beauty parlor industry and food service — these are often the most visible front-line faces in the community,” Mahmood said.

Her organization is partnering with other groups such as the Atlanta chapter of Asian Americans Advancing Justice to offer resources in multiple languages, including mental health assistance, self-defense training and bystander training.

Meanwhile, from Phoenix to Philadel-



CURTIS COMPTON, ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION/AP

Jesus Estrella, of Kennesaw, Ga., stands outside Youngs Asian Massage on Wednesday, in Acworth, Ga., where four people were fatally shot Tuesday.

phia, Asian American organizations nationwide organized events aimed at showing unity.

Asian Americans United, the Asian Pacific Islander Political Alliance and several other partner groups held a vigil Wednesday afternoon in Philadelphia’s Chinatown neighborhood.

“After the month and year we had, we knew our folks needed the time to come together safely just to grieve and heal and mourn and speak to what’s happening,” said Mohan Seshadri, Asian Pacific Islander Political Alliance co-executive director.

As much despair as Asian Americans feel, Seshadri said, the shootings also mark a flashpoint.

“Our folks are pissed off and ready to fight,” Seshadri said. “The way we get through this is together by organizing our people and feeling solidarity.”

Chauvin jury grows despite \$27M accord

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Concern appears to be fading that a massive settlement for George Floyd’s family will derail the trial of a former police officer accused in his death, with most potential jurors saying they avoided news of the settlement or could set it aside.

Two jurors seated before news of the city’s \$27 million settlement broke last week were dismissed Wednesday after being re-questioned by Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill, but five others were retained.

One of those who was retained, a Black man, told Cahill he heard about the settlement on the radio Friday but that he could put it aside and decide the case only on the evidence that was presented.

“It hasn’t affected me at all because I don’t know the details,” he said.

Two new jurors were seated later in the day, putting the jury back at nine. Five are men and four are women. According to the court, four are white, two are multiracial and three are Black, and their ages range from 20s to 50s.

Cahill has set March 29 for opening statements if the jury is complete by then. Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson, who requested jurors be recalled for re-questioning because of the settlement, has also asked that the trial be delayed or moved elsewhere. Cahill said he would rule Friday on those motions, but he has previously rejected moving it, saying publicity about Floyd’s death has reached every corner of the state.

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WORLD

Biden labels Putin 'killer,' draws fire

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that U.S. President Joe Biden's remarks about him reflect America's own past and current problems.

Biden was asked in an interview whether he thought Russian President Vladimir Putin is a killer and said "I do." Russia on Wednesday announced it's recalling its ambassador in Washington for consultations.

Asked about Biden's remarks during a video call with residents of Crimea marking the anniversary of its 2014 annexation from Ukraine, Putin charged that they reflect the United States' own troubled past.

The Russian leader pointed at America's past history of slaughtering Native Americans and slavery, arguing that the painful legacy has weighed on the U.S.

"Otherwise where would the Black Lives Matter movement come from," he said.

He added that Russia would still cooperate with the U.S. where it answers Moscow's interests.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov deplored what he called "very bad remarks by the U.S. president" that made it clear that "he doesn't want to normalize relations."

"We will proceed accordingly," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters, noting that "there was nothing like that in history." He wouldn't answer if Russia could go as far as to rupture diplomatic ties with the U.S.

Commenting on the Russian move Wednesday, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki emphasized that "we will be direct, we will speak out on areas where we have concerns, and it will certainly be, as the president said last night — certainly, the Russians will be held accountable for the actions that they have taken."

The exchange of tough statements comes on the heels of a declassified report from the U.S. national intelligence director's office that finds Putin authorized influence operations to help Donald Trump in last November's presidential election.

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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Tesla on autopilot drives into trooper's patrol car

MI LANSING — A Tesla on autopilot crashed into a Lansing-area state trooper's patrol car early Wednesday, Michigan State Police said.

Neither the trooper nor the 22-year-old Lansing man who was driving the Tesla were injured in the 1:10 a.m. crash on Interstate 96 in Eaton County, police said.

The crash occurred as the trooper was investigating a collision between a car and a deer, WLNS-TV reported. The patrol car's emergency lights were activated when the Tesla drove into it, police said. The Tesla's driver was issued citations for failure to move over and driving with a license suspended.

Tesla has said previously that its autopilot and "full self-driving" are driver-assistance systems and that the driver must be ready to intervene at all times.

Man sentenced for lying about hurricane damage

FL ORLANDO — A Florida man has been sentenced to three years in federal prison for lying about damage caused by Hurricane Irma.

Steven Rembert, 49, of Orange County, was sentenced Monday in Orlando federal court, according to court records. He pleaded guilty in December to disaster assistance fraud.

In September 2017, Rembert falsified records concerning his primary residence when submitting an application for assistance to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, according to an indictment.

Police: Man threw Molotov cocktail at day care

PA PHILADELPHIA — A man threw a Molotov cocktail at a north Philadelphia day care center, breaking a window, but no children were present and there were no injuries, police said.

The fire resulting from the incendiary device thrown just after 9 a.m. Tuesday at the Germantown Avenue day care center burned only outside the building and didn't reach inside, police said.

Police said the man, who was wearing a black mask, got into the passenger side of a vehicle and fled but was apprehended nearby. The driver of the vehicle wasn't found at the location.

The fire marshal declared the blaze an arson. The suspect was arrested and was being processed, police said.

Rescuers save 2 from truck dangling over gorge

ID BOISE — Authorities say a set of camp trailer safety chains and quick, careful work



DARYN SLOVER, (LEWISTON, MAINE) SUN JOURNAL/AP

A fine field trip fishing

Craig Hollowell of Greene, Maine, his son Dexter, 8, and dog, Millie, collect their ice fishing traps Tuesday after fishing on the Androscoggin River in Turner, Maine. Hollowell said one nice perk to remote school days is that it allows him more time to spend with his son. After finishing a few homework assignments Tuesday morning, the third grader said he and his dad pulled in one Northern pike, two pickerel and one bass.

by emergency crews saved two people after their pickup truck plunged off a bridge, leaving them dangling above a deep gorge in southern Idaho.

Idaho State Police responded to the accident at about 2:45 p.m. Monday, said ISP spokeswoman Lynn Hightower. A trooper found a man and a woman inside the pickup truck that was dangling, nose-down, off the side of the bridge spanning the Malad Gorge. The gorge is narrow but is roughly 100 feet deep below the bridge.

The only thing keeping the 2004 Ford F-305 pickup from falling was the set of "safety chains" attaching it to the 30-foot camper trailer, which remained on the bridge. A state trooper and local sheriff's deputy first used an additional set of chains from a nearby semi-truck to help support the dangling pickup truck until additional rescuers with cranes and rope rescue gear could arrive.

Emergency crews rappelled to the hanging truck and attached a harness to each occupant, who were taken to hospitals with non-life-threatening injuries, Hightower said. Two small dogs inside the pickup were also rescued.

Cemetery with presidents, Confederates is damaged

VA RICHMOND — Gravestones and memorials were toppled and spray-painted at a cemetery in Virginia that holds the graves of two U.S. presidents as well as Confederate soldiers and generals.

The Richmond Times-Dispatch

THE CENSUS

12M The amount of money, in dollars, that a Washington state man pocketed from mislabeling, pyramid and real estate investment schemes. Christopher Claypool, of Spokane, pleaded guilty Monday to conspiring to commit wire fraud and money laundering in federal court in Portland, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported. Prosecutors will seek a four-year prison term for Claypool, 52, a former manager of a Washington-based company that produced and sold grass seed and turfgrass to independent Oregon growers, if he follows the conditions of his pre-sentencing release, including paying \$8.3 million in restitution plus unpaid taxes. Prosecutors said Claypool's schemes include packaging seed varieties with false and misleading labels, embezzling more than \$12 million while posing as a foreign sales partner and conspiring with a travel agency to inflate costs of his international travel.

reported that \$200,000 worth of damage was done Saturday at the Hollywood Cemetery.

The cemetery spans 135 acres and overlooks the James River in Richmond. More than 18,000 Confederate soldiers and generals are buried there.

The damage was done in the Presidents Circle section of the cemetery. That's where Presidents James Monroe and John Tyler are buried. Their graves weren't disturbed.

Mom sentenced after daughter's hit-and-run

NE LINCOLN — A Lincoln woman has been sentenced to jail but may be able to avoid time behind bars for helping her daughter dump her car after she was involved in a hit-and-run crash that killed a pedestrian.

The Lincoln Journal Star reported that Kimberly Cowell, 52, said at her sentencing Tuesday that she responded "in the worst way possible" after the Oct. 18 crash that left Tina Mortensen

dead.

Court documents said police found the car that was involved in the crash partially submerged in a creek. Surveillance video showed a car belonging to Cowell's daughter, Casey Maxfield, and a car that police said was Cowell's pulling into a parking lot in the area.

"I mistakenly thought what I could do to help my daughter instead of thinking about the person she hit," she said.

Lancaster County District Judge Robert Otte sentenced Cowell to 360 days in the county jail but allowed her to get into a program that will allow her to stay out of jail and be monitored.

Woman with stowaway history arrested again

IL CHICAGO — A woman with a history of stowing away on airliners was arrested Tuesday for attempting to sneak onto a flight at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, authorities said.

The arrest of Marilyn Hartman,

69, came two weeks after a judge rejected a plea deal that would have given her probation for a previous attempt to stowaway on a flight. Hartman is being held on a trespassing charge.

Hartman allegedly left the facility where she had been staying while on electronic monitoring. The device allowed Cook County sheriff's deputies to track her as she headed for O'Hare. Deputies activated an alarm on Hartman's device as she neared Terminal 1, where she was arrested.

School board votes to drop nickname, mascot

IA CAMANCHE — An eastern Iowa school board has voted to drop the district's "Indians" nickname and mascot following renewed appeals this year to do so from Native American tribes and organizations.

The Camanche Community Schools board voted 5-1 Monday night to stop use of the mascot by the end of the school year, the television station KWQC reported. The mascot was adopted in 1961 when the school opened.

"Quite honestly, our school mascot is a stereotype," Camanche Superintendent Thomas Parker said.

A new mascot was not immediately chosen.

The decision comes as teams on all levels across the country are changing or reconsidering mascots considered to be culturally insensitive.

From wire reports

MARCH 29

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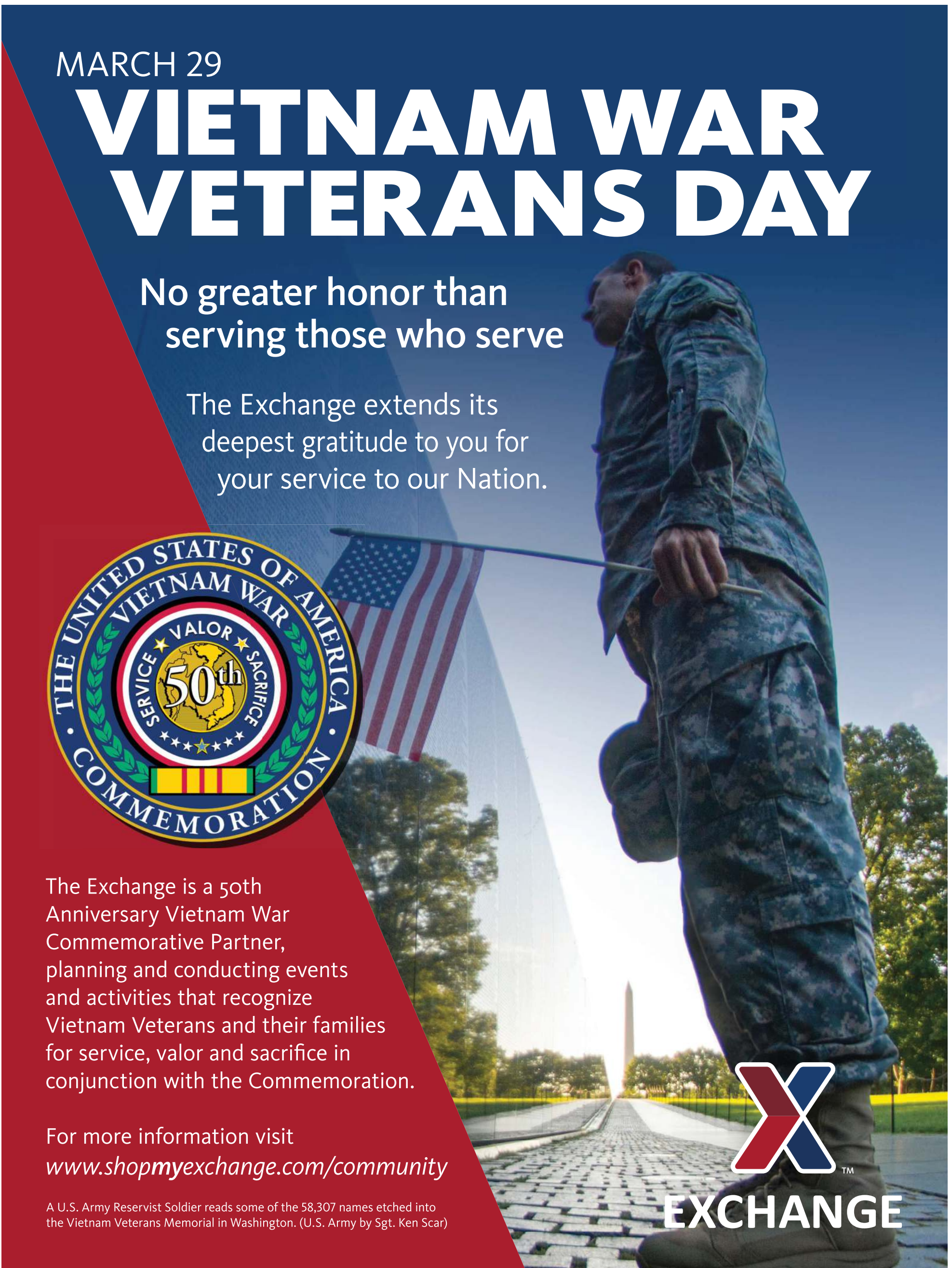
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A U.S. Army Reservist Soldier reads some of the 58,307 names etched into the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. (U.S. Army by Sgt. Ken Scar)



EXCHANGE



FACES



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Ringo Starr gestures as he presents the award Sunday for record of the year at the 63rd annual Grammy Awards at the Los Angeles Convention Center. Starr released a new 5-track EP titled "Zoom in" on Friday.

Better with friends

For 'Here's to the Nights,' Ringo Starr adds even more star power

BY MARCELA ISAZA
Associate Press

If Ringo Starr calls to ask if you'll sing on a song for him, who could possibly say no?

The beloved Beatle dug into his contacts for help on the chorus of "Here's to the Nights," his most recent song written by Diane Warren, and he recruited quite a choir.

Paul McCartney. Sheryl Crow. Dave Grohl. Lenny Kravitz. Joe Walsh. Ben Harper. Finneas. Chris Stapleton. Yola. Jenny Lewis. Corinne Bailey Rae. Eric Burton (of the Black Pumas). Steve Lukather.

"Here's to the nights we won't remember, with the friends we won't forget," they all sing. It's a perfect sentiment for the 80-year-old drummer who, as McCartney once sang, "has memories longer than the road that stretches out ahead."

"Everyone was really kind to me to do what they did," Starr told The Associated Press recently.

Two people did say no, actually. Ringo won't reveal who, but they must have been REALLY busy.

Starr's EP of five new songs comes out Friday. The project gave him something to do during COVID-19 lockdown in his Los Angeles home. He said he divided much of his time between making music, painting and working out.

"Last year I left the house no more than seven times, and I think I'm exaggerating," he said. "I'm a prime target for this COVID. Now I've had my shots. I feel groovy and there's nowhere to go!"

One place was Sunday's Grammy Awards, where he presented the record of the year honor to Billie Eilish, who — let's do the math here — was born 31 years after the Beatles broke up.

Even a Beatle gets the blues, and Starr said he felt it during the long layoff. He had to cancel gigs with his All-Starr Band last year and, most recently, post-

poned hopeful plans to go back on the road in May and June. It's just too soon.

"I was really sad in the beginning because I couldn't go on the road," he said. "I love to play. I love the audience. They love me. I'll go anywhere to be loved!"

He chuckled at that remark. It's one of the things he has in common with his other surviving Beatles mate. They both stay very active musically, love to perform and, with vegetarian diets, are both in the type of shape that others their age would envy.

For Starr, his vehicle for the past three decades has been the All-Starr Band, a simple concept that continually regenerates. He invites a rotating crew of veteran musicians, the main requirement being they must have been part of some hit songs, in order to keep the set list varied and fresh.

He said he was so insecure the first time he brought along two fellow drummers: Levon Helm and Jim Keltner.

It turned out to be great fun for Starr, who loves being in a band, as is obvious from his beaming face when he sits behind a drum kit.

"Every time I'd finish an All-Starr tour, I'd come home and tell Barbara, 'that's it, I've done it, I've had enough,'" he said. "She'd say, 'certainly, darling.' Weeks later, I'd be saying I've got to get on the road. I've got to call people. That's just who I am."

He's also promoting a limited-edition book, "Ringo Rocks: 30 Years of the All-Starrs."

It's not a bad track record for a sickly boy who grew up in a rough section of Liverpool, an only child who joined a band that gave him three brothers for life.

"It was a super-incredible connection of peace and love," Starr said. "It was so great. I still miss John and George, but that's how life is. Paul and I are still great friends and we support each other."

Cannon repentant after anti-Semitic remarks

Los Angeles Times

Nick Cannon, whose career took a hit last summer after he made anti-Semitic comments during a podcast with former Public Enemy rapper Professor Griff, says he's working to understand how he hurt people with his remarks.

"Ultimately I've always said that apologies are empty. Apologies are weightless," Cannon said in an interview Tuesday night on ABC's miniseries "Soul of a Nation." That, he said, is why he's going through a repentance process where, in the future, he hopes to make different decisions when placed in a similar situation.

Cannon explained that the initial purpose of his comments about "melanated" and "non-melanated" people "was to say we are all the same people. That's ultimately what I was saying. How can you hate when you believe that you come from the same people that are saying you are being hateful?"

He acknowledged his mistakes, saying, "I hurt people. I'm gonna lean into it. I want to understand why I hurt you. What did I say? What are these tropes? Educate me."

MTV and parent company ViacomCBS cut ties with its longtime "Wild 'N Out" host last summer after the controversial "Cannon's Class" episode in which the performer claimed he and his fellow

Black people were "the true Hebrews."

The network's move earned a swift rebuke from Cannon, who then demanded full ownership of the program.



Cannon

He later issued an apology on social media and connected with Jewish leaders, and last month he was brought back on board at the

show.

"Nick has not only apologized and taken responsibility for his comments but he has also worked to educate himself and others through engagement with Jewish leaders and on his platforms," an MTV Entertainment Group representative said in a statement to the LA Times in early February.

Tuesday's episode of "Soul of a Nation" — the third in a six-part newsmagazine series that centers around Black life in America — was hosted by gospel singer BeBe Winans and focused on issues of faith.

"My journey's not going to stop whether the person watching this forgives me or not," he told ABC News' Linsey Davis. "I'm still gonna hopefully do this process, be on the right side of history, and bring people closer together."

AMC opening more movie theaters

It's showtime! AMC Theatres says it will have 98% of its U.S. movie theaters open on Friday, with more expected to open by March 26.

Movie theaters all over shuttered their doors a year ago as the coronavirus pandemic swept the globe. While some movie theaters have opened over the past few months with limited capacity and enhanced safety protocols, the announcement by AMC to open nearly all of its U.S. theaters by month's end means more people will have more locations to choose from if they want to see a film on the big screen.

AMC said that California is expected to open 52 of its 54 locations by Monday. The company is preparing to resume operations at the rest of its California locations once the proper local approvals are in place. AMC previously opened more than 500 of its theaters elsewhere around the country.

Grammy Award ratings drop 51% to record low

Grammy producers avoided the Zoom awkwardness of other pandemic-era awards shows and gave music-starved fans performances

by the industry's biggest stars. And viewers still stayed away.

CBS' Grammys telecast reached 9.2 million — television and streaming — viewers Sunday, the lowest number on record and a precipitous 51% drop from last year, the Nielsen company said.

That followed the Golden Globes' 63% decline in ratings a few weeks ago and record low ratings for the Emmy Awards last fall.

That's enough for television executives to worry about whether this is just pandemic-related or if they can no longer depend on these traditional attention-getting events. The Oscars, coming up next month on ABC, has often been the year's most-watched television event after the Super Bowl.

Other news

■ Conductor **James Levine**, who ruled over the Metropolitan Opera for more than four decades before being eased aside when his health declined and then was fired for sexual improprieties, has died. He was 77. Levine died March 9 in Palm Springs, Calif., of natural causes, his physician of 17 years, Dr. Len Horowitz, said Wednesday.

From wire reports

WEEKEND



Zack Snyder fans finally get 'Justice'

Movies, Page 20



KINGS OF LEON

Q&A: Caleb Followill on the family band's eighth studio album and the prospects of getting back on the road

Music, Page 32

ILLUSTRATION BY SEAN MOORES/Stars and Stripes; RCA Records, iStock photos

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

You've got a friend in AI

College students forming connections with chatbots

BY NINA AGRAWAL
Los Angeles Times

The text message from Billy arrived on students' phones the week of final exams. "It took a lot of hard work, perseverance, and strength to get here, but you've finally made it to the other side — the end of the semester! I wanted to take a minute and say that I am so proud of you ..." Three emoji hearts concluded the message.

A flood of Cal Poly Pomona students responded:

"You're a King Billy. Never change."

"Love you Billy thank you." Heart heart heart.

"Thanks Billy, we did it together."

The responses flowed into the data bank of Billy Chat, a robot that uses artificial intelligence to text. Billy and other "chatbots" were launched at California State University campuses in 2019 to help students stay on track to graduate. But after students were sent home last spring at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Billy evolved into more of a friend, blurring the line between artificial and real when the world turned away from human touch and connections.

To Billy and other bots with names such as "Cougar-Bot" and "Cunny," students poured out feelings of loneliness, despair and worry for themselves and their families.

"We have these students saying these things that I did not expect them to so openly share," said Tara Hughes, the "voice" of Ekxobot at CSU Channel Islands. "Students saying, 'I really miss my roommate, they were my best friend.' Some who went home and ended up becoming caregivers for their parents ... or now became a sole breadwinner."

The CSU chatbots like Billy, whose name was inspired by the school's mascot, Billy Bronco, were designed with a different purpose in mind.

A few years ago, Elizabeth Adams, associate vice presi-



IRFAN KHAN/TNS

Cecilia Santiago-Gonzalez, Assistant VP, Strategic Initiatives for Student Success, left, and Communication Specialist Zoe Lance are managers of Billy Chat, an artificial intelligence text-messaging robot for student communication at Cal Poly Pomona. The "chatbot" was designed to help students stay on target to graduate.

dent of undergraduate studies at Cal State Northridge, heard about Georgia State University using a text bot to help reduce the summer drop-off in students who plan to enroll in college but ultimately don't.

She and officials at other CSU campuses — Pomona, San Marcos, East Bay, Channel Islands, Sonoma State and Humboldt State — got a grant to develop bots with the aim of helping students succeed, especially first-time freshmen and new transfers.

Billy and the other bots generally work like this: A human being plans out their "campaigns" to text a group of students — for example, those in entry-level courses that have high fail rates — with reminders about deadlines, tips on securing financial aid, and information about support services.

Each bot is programmed with a knowledge base to respond to hundreds of questions. Some are generic: "What is the deadline to file for federal financial aid?" Some are campus-specific: "How can I get cheap textbooks for my classes?" New questions help build the bots' brains.

If the bots don't understand or don't know the answer, they forward the message to a human being. Same goes if

a student texts a word or phrase the bot recognizes as a red flag, like a question about how to withdraw or thoughts about self-harm.

Billy and the other bots communicate in the casual tone of texting with friends — lots of endearing emojis, GIFs and memes. Ekxobot sends at least one "dad joke" per semester, along with holiday wisecracks. For Halloween, it was: Why do ghosts like to ride in elevators? It raises their spirits.

There can be downsides. Occasionally students troll or curse at the bots. "Let's be civil, please," the bots might respond, or, "You're hurting my ears with that language."

And some students, including those whom universities most crucially want to reach, remain unmoved by the bots.

But by and large engagement is high, with 90% or more of students on some campuses passively or actively opting in. Andrew Magliozzi, chief executive of AdmitHub Inc., the technology partner for CSU's bots, said the "resounding reason" given in focus groups is that students feel "they're not being judged by it and thus are willing to be more vulnerable to a robot than they might be to a person."

Clear sound from the smallest wireless earbuds

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

The original Earin's was the first true wireless earbud I tried way back in 2016. Earin was the first company to launch true wireless, a category that was new to everyone. True wireless uses no cables, wires or anything to connect the left to the right to the music. Bluetooth takes care of the connection.

Now Earin's third generation of the true wireless earbuds are out with the launch of the A-3. The tiny earbuds, which Earin states are the smallest and lightest on the market, are a complete package with outstanding clarity and crisp audio quality along with an attractive design.

The A-3s have a stemless design and sit comfortably in your ears. Each has a customized 14.3mm dynamic driver. I'm not one for keeping music at head-banging levels, which makes the A-3s a great

choice. Even when I took the music to the higher levels, the sound was as consistent and clear.

Each ergonomically designed earbud is charged with the included magnetic Qi wireless case, giving about 5 hours of playtime and 30 hours total with the charging case, which also has a USB-C connection. A full earbud charge takes 1.5 hours and the case itself takes 3 hours with the USB connection.

A nice feature I found with the A-3s is there's no specific designation for left or right earbuds, making each universal. Once you pair them with Blue-

tooth (5.0), just pull them out of the case and they are ready. Autoplay has them starting when in your ears and the music stops when you pull them out. Auto standby mode kicks in when it detects that the A-3s

are not in use for over 5 minutes.

Earin's patented left and right earphones detection automatically tells each earbud which ear they are in. On-ear controls are touch sensors, controlling all the basics including hands-free calls and music choices.

With an IP52 rating, the A-3s are sweat, water and dust resistant.

Online: Earin.com; \$199

The Euro BC SkiTooth Bluetooth hands-free kit for skiers is not something I was going to try in the environment it was created for, since I've never skied. Instead, I entrusted my friend, Jeff Swinger, who is a skiing enthusiast in Utah and has tried and tested several other similar devices while skiing.

Some of Swingers' thoughts of the SkiTooth headset: "Over the past few years I have tried multiple types of headphones in my helmet while skiing, from standard wired earbuds to other Bluetooth devices. But with the SkiTooth, it snapped in for a quick installation into my helmet in seconds as well as pairing with my iPhone via Bluetooth."



EURO BC/TNS

The Euro BC SkiTooth Bluetooth headset works with most helmets.

The headset installs to the sides of the helmet with the audio facing your ears and the controls facing out. Once it's paired with your device it's easy to change volume and song choices as well as use the integrated microphone for phone calls — all without removing your ski gloves. The sound was impressive with a better than average base.

The SkiTooth features dual microphones for hands-free calls along with a speaker for each ear connected on a durable wire. A rechargeable battery is rated for 15 hours of use. Euro BC expects the SkiTooth to be available later this year.

Online: europhils.com; \$69



EARIN/TNS

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WEEKEND: MOVIES

A rare year for movies

A lack of love for 'Da 5 Bloods' and a film with no lead are among the many snubs and surprises in the Oscar noms

By LINDSEY BAHR
Associated Press

It's a rare year when most of the Oscar nomination surprises are good ones, but 2020 was also a rare year for moviegoing and awards campaigns. Perhaps it shouldn't be a surprise in a year where we watched everything from our couches that Netflix, the most popular streaming service, walked away with the most nominations by far. But there were still some shockers Monday morning.

Here's our rundown of the snubs and surprises in the 93rd Academy Award nominations.

Female directors get their shot

For 92 Academy Awards, only 5 women had ever been nominated for best director and never more than one in the same year. This year there are two: Chloé Zhao for "Nomadland" and Emerald Fennell for "Promising Young Woman." This not surprising because of their quality, but because history has shown that female directors have been grossly overlooked by the academy. And there's still progress to be made. There has still never been a Black woman nominated for best director (Regina King would have been a worthy first for "One Night in Miami...") and there's still only one woman who has ever won: Kathryn Bigelow for "The Hurt Locker" in 2009. Maybe come April 25, that statistic will double.



AMAZON STUDIOS/AP

Maria Bakalova, left, and Sacha Baron Cohen are shown in a scene from "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm."

Sometimes fan fever works

And you thought you were the only ones who loved Maria Bakalova and Paul Raci? "Sound of Metal" became a bit of a Cinderella story this year, but no matter how many positive reviews, Oscar pundits and movie fans seemed resigned to the fact that Raci's breakout performance as a deaf counselor to Riz Ahmed's character would be overlooked come Oscar nominations time. Same with "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm's" Bakalova, who seemed at first to be an out of the box choice for a supporting nomination. But, hey, Oscar voters have eyes too and, more often than not, taste.



NETFLIX/AP

From left: Isiah Whitlock Jr., Norm Lewis, Clarke Peters, Delroy Lindo and Jonathan Majors are shown in a scene from "Da 5 Bloods." The Spike Lee film was a surprising snub in this year's Oscar nominations.



GLEN WILSON/Warner Bros. Pictures

From left: Daniel Kaluuya, Ashton Sanders, Algee Smith, Dominique Thorne and LaKeith Stanfield in a scene from Warner Bros.' "Judas and the Black Messiah."

So who is the lead in 'Judas'?

Turns out neither Judas nor the Black Messiah was the lead in Warner Bros.' "Judas and the Black Messiah," as LaKeith Stanfield and Daniel Kaluuya both walked away with supporting actor nominations. Kaluuya played Illinois Black Panther Party Chairman Fred Hampton and Stanfield played the FBI informant who infiltrated the organization in the late '60s in the Shaka King film that debuted at this year's Sundance Film Festival.

A Razzie and an Oscar nomination for Close

It's not uncommon for Oscar contenders to also get a Razzie nomination in the same year (think Sandra Bullock for "The Blind Side" and "All About Steve,") but rarely is it for the same performance. This year, the dubious honor goes to Glenn Close for her portrayal of Mamaw in Ron Howard's adaptation of J.D. Vance's "Hillbilly Elegy." The Netflix film was widely panned by critics (it has a terrible 25% on Rotten Tomatoes at the moment), but Close seemed to emerge relatively unscathed for her no-nonsense, baggy t-shirt clad grandmother. The 73-year-old has also never won an Oscar despite having been nominated eight times.

Tom Hanks misses out

Where did Tom Hanks go wrong? He delivered one of his best performances in years in Paul Greengrass' Western odyssey "News of the World" as a Civil War veteran who endeavors to return a young German girl raised by Native Americans to her distant relatives. Hanks is one of the most nominated actors of all time (with six to date) and made history with back-to-back wins for "Philadelphia" and "Forrest Gump." But despite being nominated last year for playing Fred Rogers, he's struggled to break



UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

Tom Hanks in a scene from "News of the World."

through in a meaningful way. But for it to be a real snub, you'd have to remove one of the best actor nominees (Riz Ahmed, Chadwick Boseman, Anthony Hopkins, Gary Oldman and Steven Yeun) this year and I'm not sure any should actually get bumped. Perhaps it was just a particularly tough year.

Raise a glass to 'Another Round'

Danish director Thomas Vinterberg broke through the noise to snag one of the coveted five best director nominations this year for "Another Round," in which four friends engage in a social experiment to see what their lives are like if they're "buzzed" all the time. Starring Mads Mikkelsen, the film was well received, but seemed like a long shot for the major Oscars categories. In fact, Vinterberg said Monday that he wasn't even paying attention when the directing category was announced. "It was a complete surprise," Vinterberg said. "We, of course, never, ever saw that coming and that created more sort of a sense of ecstasy and the element of celebration escalated drastically." It also got a nod for best international film.

Where's 'Da 5 Bloods'?

Maybe Netflix just had too many legitimate awards contenders this year or maybe it just came out too early in 2020, but Spike Lee's "Da 5 Bloods" seems to have gotten unjustly lost in the shuffle and it's unclear why. Although favorably reviewed, the film about Black Vietnam veterans, was snubbed entirely by the Golden Globes, and now only has one Oscar nomination to its name: For Terence Blanchard's score. Lead actor Delroy Lindo has inexplicably missed out on nominations from both the Golden Globes and the Screen Actors Guild.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS



HBO Max photos

Jason Momoa (Aquaman), Gal Gadot (Wonder Woman) and Ray Fisher (Cyborg) are ready for action in "Zach Snyder's Justice League."



Ciaran Hinds is Steppenwolf in "Zach Snyder's Justice League."

Chance for redemption

4-hour Snyder cut of 'Justice League' is fuller than Whedon's but not richer, deeper

By JUSTIN CHANG
Los Angeles Times

Even before Superman rises from a watery grave, eyes aflame and chest bared, the resurrection metaphors pretty much write themselves in "Zach Snyder's Justice League." By "Zach Snyder's Justice League," of course, I don't mean the director-disavowed mess that was released under his name four years ago, but rather the director-approved mess that has now whooshed, blasted and mostly meandered its way into an HBO Max queue near you.

Clocking in at a jaw-dropping, enervating four hours, this maximalist undertaking is a bid for redemption in an industry that rarely bestows second chances. Or second comings, to judge by the near-messianic fervor that has swirled around the long-anticipated "Snyder cut," which will surely be greeted in some quarters as the reconstituted "Heaven's Gate" of superhero epics. O come, all ye DC Comics faithful, the logic goes, and watch as Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman and other franchise stars join forces to save the world (again!) and redeem a filmmaker's long-stifled vision in the bargain.

This may in fact be something to see, or at least sample. It's rare, after all, for personal ambition to run afoul of Hollywood's superhero-industrial complex. Witness the Marvel Cinematic Universe, a smooth-running assembly line in which every last joke, twist and explosion feels pre-chewed for easy digestion. Its DC Comics rivals have felt erratic by comparison: Despite pleasurable outliers like Patty Jenkins' "Wonder Woman" and James Wan's irresistibly goofy "Aquaman," the enterprise has proceeded in

clunky fits and starts, in thrall to a house style light on wit and heavy on gloom. As evidenced by his dour "Man of Steel" and the even more leaden "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice," Snyder has been the chief architect of that grimly self-serious aesthetic.

The disappointing critical and commercial reception to "Batman v Superman" was enough to make Warner Bros. think twice about keeping Snyder at the helm of "Justice League." During production in 2017, the studio turned the film over to Joss Whedon, a practiced crowd-pleaser who had already delivered two successful superhero mashups in the "Avengers" series; Snyder, who had been hit hard by personal tragedy, stepped away from the picture.

Having sat through this new "Justice League" in its 242-minute entirety, I can note that the two films represent utterly antithetical approaches to a project that might have benefited from a third, middle-ground option. Forced to choose between the two, the Snyder cut is probably the one I respect more, which doesn't mean it's the one I prefer: The two-hour "Justice League" was, for all its baggage, a watchable exercise in damage control, with welcome moments of levity that cut through the murky torpor of Snyder's storytelling. True, it butchered its convoluted mythology and left crucial material on the cutting-room floor — to which I can only say that by the end of the Snyder cut, I sort of wanted to kiss the cutting-room floor.

But before that end — which includes a very different slam-bang finale and a dreary epilogue teasing upcoming DC agenda items — there are fleeting pleasures and unlikely sources of fascination.

Most of the same plot points and personalities are in place, though with immediate differences in tone, duration and rhythm. (And visuals: Every shot, gleamingly photographed by Fabian Wagner, is framed not in widescreen but in the boxier 1.33 aspect ratio.) Moments retained from the theatrical version seem to play out in double time, padded with equally attenuated new material: At the beginning, you get what feels like an eternity of Lois Lane (a still-wasted Amy Adams) staring mournfully into space.

Superman (Henry Cavill) is dead, and the world mourns in unison, this time not to an anguished cover of "Everybody Knows" (though Snyder's love for Leonard Cohen is evident elsewhere), but rather to the drawn-out sound of Clark Kent's dying scream. That scream travels the globe, setting off troubling reverberations within the three Mother Boxes — ancient, indestructible repositories of power tucked away in far-flung hiding places.

As various crooning, undulating female voices flood the soundtrack, the camera whooshes through the Themysciran temples of the Amazons, valiant sisters of the righteous Diana Prince/Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot). It travels to Iceland and descends into the underwater enclaves of Atlantis, from which that trident-wielding bodybuilder Arthur Curry/Aquaman (Jason Momoa) is partially descended. It lingers with unusual intensity on a wandering Bruce Wayne (Ben Affleck), bent on forming a powerful team of fighters to fill the void left by Superman's demise and combat the various supervillains ready to take advantage of it.

Regrettably, the movie has far too much time for Steppenwolf (voiced by Ciarán Hinds), the latest intergalactic destroyer

of worlds (yawn) to make the mistake of invading Earth. As befits his operatic moniker, Steppenwolf wears a double-horned helmet that might have been inspired by Brunhilde and hails from the fiery planet of Apokolips, which sounds like the worst chapstick ever. You'll spend a lot more time than you'll want getting to know his butt-ugly family tree, especially his power-mad nephew, helpfully named Darkseid (Ray Porter). Even genocidal conquerors can't get away from their annoying relatives.

"We have families!" an endangered bystander shrieks, to which Steppenwolf snarls, "Then you have weakness" — a revealing line in a movie structured around multiple layers of ancestral guilt and parent-child conflict. Both Victor Stone/Cyborg (Ray Fisher) and Barry Allen/The Flash (Ezra Miller) have daddy issues to sort out. Wonder Woman and Aquaman have tricky relationships with their mythic ancestors. Batman's parents ... well, you know. Amid this maelstrom of intergenerational angst, Martha Kent (Diane Lane) shines ever more brightly as a beacon of heroic motherhood: When she and a resurgent Superman get a long-overdue hug, we're reminded of the power of adoptive families and cross-species alliances. In a way, the Justice League itself, a motley crew whose represented factions haven't always gotten along, is meant to be reiteration of that principle.

It's a nice idea in theory, tested here by game, charismatic participants and a filmmaker who's clearly trying to do them, well, justice. He wants you to love these characters, individually and in tandem, as intensely as he does (plus a host of briefly seen background players, among them Jesse Eisenberg's Lex Luthor, Willem Dafoe's Vulko and J.K. Simmons' Commissioner Gordon). But if this "Justice League" is a fuller, more stylish film than its butchered predecessor, I'm reluctant to call it a richer or deeper one.

What Snyder has contrived here feels less like a vital re-energization of the form than a ponderous guided tour through a museum's worth of familiar superhero-movie tropes and conventions: Look at this, look at that, try not to look at your watch. Like the Flash himself, Snyder wants to slow time to a crawl, to deconstruct every gesture, to make his obsessions your own. He wants the movie to go on forever. Mission accomplished.

"Zach Snyder's Justice League" is rated R for violence and some language. Running time: 242 minutes. Available on HBO Max.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Seeking substance among the noise

‘Chaos Walking’ explores gender dynamics in an out-of-this-world dystopian future

By MICHAEL O’SULLIVAN
The Washington Post

The film “Chaos Walking” is, in some respects, what you might call a space Western: It opens in a small community of settlers — subsistence farmers, from the look of things — who carry long guns and wear pelts like 19th-century fur trappers. There’s even a character called Preacher (David Oyelowo) and a horse named Whiskey.

But these clichéd trappings are set in a dystopian future, on a distant, Earthlike planet some 60 years’ journey from our own. The natives (called Spackle, for what can only be misguided reasons) have been at war with the colonists for years, both of whom appear to coexist in an uneasy truce.

This is the slightly silly cowboys-and-Indians setting that situates the movie, a sci-fi plot based on the first book of a YA trilogy by Patrick Ness, who co-wrote the screenplay with Christopher Ford. Although the screen version, directed by Doug Liman (“Edge of Tomorrow”) departs in some ways from the book, it also centers on Todd (Tom Holland), a young man whose journey will entail uncovering dark secrets about the past.

Although not quite 13 years old in the first book, “The Knife of Never Letting Go,” the character’s film counterpart is several years older here. Living in an all-male community named Prentisstown

after the mayor (Mads Mikkelsen), Todd has been taught that the women were all killed by the Spackle. The remaining men, for their part, suffer from something called Noise: the general inability to keep one’s thoughts private, rendered here as a kind of lavender-hued, smokelike aura — part auditory, part visual hallucination — that emanates from the head, and represents the chatter many of us here in the Old World already find hard to silence.

Mayor Prentiss is very good at hiding his Noise. Preacher says it makes him look like a woman. (Women, before they disappeared, were immune to the Noise, hence unknowable and mysterious. Men are — ahem — more predictable.) “I take that as a compliment,” Prentiss replies. Todd, like some others, can use his Noise to create illusions: a snake, for instance, that isn’t really there. Although many understandably find the Noise, well, annoying, Preacher calls it a gift: one of truth. And yet the gift can be manipulated to lie, a feature that will figure prominently more than once.

The plot swings into action when Viola (Daisy Ridley), a scout from Earth, crash-lands in the woods near Prentisstown, leading its residents to go ape. Todd, who is too young to have ever seen a girl or woman, other than his mother, behaves as you might expect, babbling like an idiot about Viola’s pretty “yellow hair” and wondering aloud, as with all his thoughts, about whether she’ll kiss him. Prentiss



Lionsgate photos

Daisy Ridley, left, is the first woman Tom Holland has seen in “Chaos Walking.”

wants to use Viola to harness the power of her mothership, hovering in orbit, to destroy the Spackle.

A chase ensues.

There are some very interesting ideas percolating here: about gender dynamics, for instance, and colonial hegemony. (Todd calls the Spackle aliens; Viola points out that they were there first, and it’s Man who is the interloper.) One not-so-interesting idea: In the book, Todd’s dog, Manchec, is also afflicted with the Noise. The movie is better off without another talking-dog trope.

But more often than not, these good ideas get drowned out by, for lack of a better word, the film’s extraneous Noise: the Spackle, the queasy sexual objectification, the weird “Tombstone”-in-Alpha-Centauri aesthetic. (The horses were brought frozen, in cryochambers, we learn late in the film.) Too frequently and too loudly, the sci-fi bells and whistles of “Chaos Walking” overwhelm its quieter,



Mads Mikkelsen, right, and Nick Jonas are pictured in “Chaos Walking.”

more engrossing elements, making it hard to hear what the film really seems to be saying.

“Chaos Walking” is rated PG-13 for violence and strong language. Running time: 109 minutes. Now playing in select theaters.

Hopkins conveys the horror of severe memory loss in ‘The Father’

By ANN HORNADAY
The Washington Post

In the intricate, exquisitely crafted movie “The Father,” Anthony Hopkins plays Anthony, an elderly gentleman living in a well-appointed flat in London, which he’s been sharing with his daughter Anne (Olivia Colman) until she informs him that she’s moving to Paris to be with a man she’s recently met.

Such is the inciting incident in what promises to be a wrenching but touching story of filial loyalty, agonizing separation and self-discovery. But very little is what it seems in this meticulously constructed jewel box of a film, which reveals ever more complicating and contradictory facets as the reality of Anthony’s experience becomes progressively clearer.

Or murkier. Directed by Florian Zeller, here adapting his own play with the help of screenwriter Christopher Hampton, “The Father” is ostensibly about a man grappling with the onset of dementia, when simple recall and daily logic can become quandaries of existential depth. Is the woman he calls Anne really Anne? Or is it another character entirely, played by Olivia Williams? Is Paul (Rufus Sewell) Anne’s husband or an interloping malefactor?

Anthony turns on the headlights for Laura (Imogen Poots), a sweet-natured caretaker Anne wants to hire before she departs for France. His twinkling, avuncular



SONY PICTURES CLASSICS/AP

Olivia Colman, left, plays the daughter of a man battling dementia opposite Anthony Hopkins in “The Father.”

flirtation will ring true to anyone who has witnessed firsthand how convincing cognitively challenged people can be, when reflexive charm and muscle memory take over from the confusion that threatens to sink the whole ship.

Hopkins slips seamlessly into his role as the vulnerable, imperious, terrified and cantankerous Anthony; he’s lovable and exasperating in perfectly equal measure as he swims against the invisible tide of aging and mental

decline. “The Father” provides sensitive, superbly compassionate insight into many things, including the fragility of dignity, the ghost prints left by grief and love, and the abiding mysteries of consciousness itself.

Aided by a masterful production design by Peter Francis, Zeller plunges viewers into Anthony’s mind as it shifts and seizes, trying to make sense of a present that insists on blurring into the past. Not since “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind” has a filmmaker so thoroughly put the audience inside the experience of a protagonist, to such shattering emotional effect.

As grim as the subject is, viewers might expect “The Father” to be a downer. But it’s such a powerful theatrical experience, and such a handsome chamber piece for the combined talents of its accomplished cast, that it’s improbably bracing. Its ingenious hall-of-mirrors construction transforms what could be a dull, maudlin wallow into a lively, improbably inviting battle of wits — between Anthony and the people who love and torment him, and between Zeller and the audience.

“The Father,” ultimately, is a paradox: as nuanced as it is bluntly direct, as tough as it is tender. In its own elegant, confounding, chimerical and compassionate way, it’s a lot like life.

“The Father” is rated PG-13 for strong language and mature thematic material. Running time: 97 minutes. Now playing in select theaters and streaming March 26.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



Capcom photos

Capcom made some stylistic departures from the original title when it created *Ghosts 'n Goblins: Resurrection*, a challenging reboot that offers multiple paths to explore.

BY GIESON CACHO

The Mercury News

This isn't *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. My eyes reeled at what Capcom did for a modern reboot to the series. It cut out the sprites as expected, but instead of replacing them with carefully crafted cel-shaded polygons, the developers opted for a paper-marionette style. The stylistic choices made the campaign feel like a storybook come to life.

While my eyes continued to be repulsed by the visuals, my brain and thumbs felt the opposite. After dying in the same area for the 13th time, my mind was convinced that this revamp belonged as part of the franchise. The frustration was palpable. The levels feel unfair at times. Nevertheless, despite the punishing difficulty, *Ghosts 'n Goblins Resurrection* dangles the opportunity of success just enough that defeated players aren't entirely discouraged.

Unlike past games, players can adjust the difficulty and even use the Page mode, which gives novices the option to immediately respawn after a death, with unlimited lives. That and the Magical Metronome setting, which lets players slow the game down, gives novices a chance to beat the challenging campaign. And if that's still too difficult, players can enlist a friend to help out in a co-op mode that lets a buddy control support characters that create platforms, protect the protagonist or carry him across obstacles.

To get the true experience, though, players should tackle the

campaign on Knight level of difficulty as Arthur once again tries to save the Princess from an army of demons. On startup, players face choices as they traverse the game's five zones. In the first two zones, players get the choice of areas to explore. Choosing one means they can't explore the other, but that doesn't hurt the experience because *Ghosts 'n Goblins Resurrection* is meant for multiple playthroughs.

Although the time limit pushes players to complete the levels, they should spend time exploring and investigating the multiple paths. They'll find treasure chests, secret levels called hell holes and, most importantly, Umbral Bees. These spritelike creatures are worth grabbing because they're used to unlock magic and skills in the Umbral Tree. This is the progression system that shows *Ghosts 'n Goblins Resurrection* does have modern trappings.

The Bees grant Arthur the power to summon lightning, turn enemies into frogs and even turn the hero into a boulder. In addition, they can unlock skills that let players carry more weapons or let them cast spells more quickly. Depending on how they play, one part of the tree will be more beneficial than the other, but the only way players can reach the most powerful branches is by meticulously collecting Bees hidden in each level.

Being a reboot, *Ghosts 'n Goblins Resurrection* borrows heavily from the previous two arcade games. Hard-core fans will recognize the level design and enemies, but the unique visuals make it feel unfamiliar. The visual interpreta-

tion of the classic design stands out, for better or worse.

Like the previous games, the campaign involves trial and error as players learn enemy patterns and the ins and outs of each level. They'll understand that a log that drifts back and forth between a river shuttles back and forth twice before completely crossing over to the other side. They'll memorize the flight paths of flying stone snakes that Arthur must jump atop to complete the Caverns of the Occult.

Knight mode was too difficult for me during the Cerberus boss fight, so I lowered the difficulty. The difference is that attacks are more powerful and Arthur could survive four hits instead of the normal two in the easier option. That made the game more manageable, but a big part of survival involves getting the right weapons, magic and skills for each level.

I found the Crossbow to be the most effective weapon. Meanwhile, new weapons such as the Hammer and Spiked Ball weren't as effective because of their limited range. Attacking from a distance and at advantageous angles are important in combat, especially in boss fights. I leaned heavily on magic to get an edge in other circumstances, taking advantage of a few frames of invincibility while casting to help get through adversaries and relying on the resurrection spell to get a second chance at tough confrontations.

Even after completing the campaign, *Ghosts 'n Goblins Resurrection* offers players more incentive to play through the game again with Shadow versions of



Pigman will be a familiar foe for veterans of the series. He is one of the enemies that Arthur must face.



Arthur needs to save the princess from an army of demons.

every stage. It's a remixed version of the normal stage and adds candles that obscure enemies, increasing the difficulty. To help players out, the game lets Arthur keep the powers from the Umbral Tree so experts can conceivably earn every ability in the game.

Although it doesn't look like any of the previous games, *Ghosts 'n Goblins Resurrection* is part of the series through and through. The maddening difficulty is in its

DNA along with key gameplay components. The only issue is that it doesn't go far enough to modernize or advance the gameplay. The Umbral Tree is nice, but I would have really liked a double jump similar to the one in *Ghouls 'n Ghosts*. Instead, it sticks solidly to the core arcade games and the nostalgia they induce.

Platform: Nintendo Switch
Online: ghostsn-goblins.com/resurrection

WEKEND: TRAVEL

Safe travels

A free COVID test becoming part of hotel hospitality packages

By ANDREA SACHS
The Washington Post

As a senior manager of member services at Exclusive Resorts, Lambie Swenson assists vacation club members with choosing a destination and accommodations based on their interests and travel style. Since the coronavirus outbreak, her field of expertise has expanded, earning her a new title: COVID navigator.

"It's an extra hat I wear," Swenson said from her Oregon home, "but wouldn't it be fantastic if I didn't have to wear this hat later in the year?"

Since the onset of the global health crisis, Swenson has been spending about 20 hours a week handling members' queries and concerns about the pandemic and their travel plans. She addresses many issues in "Know Before You Go," a dossier shared on the members-only site. The overview for Peninsula Papagayo in Costa Rica, for instance, includes guidance on coronavirus test sites, mandatory health insurance and capacity limits at national parks. She pulls the information from official government sources and laces it with anecdotes from staff on the ground plus feedback from members who have firsthand knowledge of the destination.

"Members want to know what's open and what's closed, are people wearing masks, and how many days will they need to quarantine," she said. "People want to feel safe, but they also want everything to be open and feel like they're on vacation."

The idea of a COVID specialist is still a novelty in the hospitality industry, but over the year, hotels have been introducing new amenities that speak to these anxiety-riddled times. In the early months of the pandemic, hotels were loading up guests with complimentary masks and hand sanitizer. A second wave of perks is now upon us, triggered by a January announcement that all air travelers entering the United States must provide proof of a negative "viral test." (Acceptable tests include antigen tests and nucleic acid amplification tests, or NAAT, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.)

"You have to make people feel absolutely comfortable when they stay with you," said Robert Cole, a senior research analyst at Phocuswright who specializes in lodging and leisure travel. "The hotels need to communicate that they have a way to protect you. That they have your back."

The most popular perk of 2021 is the coronavirus test. A news release from January declared, "On-site CORONAVIRUS TESTS Are Hotels' New Luxury Amenity." A public relations firm was pitching the feature at hotels in Miami Beach and Los Angeles, even though a negative test result is not required for domestic travel. However, some guests might find a test reassuring after sitting on a crowded plane or packed beach for several hours.

The particulars — cost, type of test, location — vary. Some properties have arranged free antigen tests administered on the hotel's premises; others offer polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests conducted for a fee at a local clinic or hospital, with logistical assistance from the front desk. A few provide both. Meliá Hotels International, for instance, set up complimentary antigen testing at 10 of its hotels in Mexico and the Dominican Republic. A current promotion featuring a barefaced couple frolicking on the beach includes a free fourth night and an antigen test. Meliá's staff can also help guests schedule a PCR test for an additional cost. Sandals and Beaches resorts in the

"We had to step up our testing infrastructure. We have not had any situation yet where Americans were stranded because they couldn't get a test."

Edmund Bartlett
Jamaican minister of tourism

Caribbean have two tests available to guests, both free: the antigen for American visitors and PCR for Canadians. Montage International, which runs Montage and Pendry hotels and resorts, has pushed the health care amenity even further by partnering with One Medical. Guests at its U.S. properties can sign up for a free 30-day membership. Now, you can get a coronavirus test and ask about that rash on your arm.

At Baha Mar in the Bahamas, Americans must undergo a trifecta of tests during their stay: one at arrival, a second on the fifth day (as mandated by the government) and a third before flying home (per U.S. law). Since December, when the Grand Hyatt Baha Mar reopened, the company has administered more than 42,000 free tests. The number will probably skyrocket: On March 4, SLS Baha Mar and Rosewood Baha Mar welcomed back visitors.

To safeguard tourists and residents, Jamaica established Resilient Corridors, zones that contain about 80% of the island's tourism businesses. More than 40 hotels residing in these areas — from Negril to Port Antonio in the north and the Milk River in Clarendon to Negril in the south — have on-site testing. The government also installed 15 testing operations in the corridors, for guests whose hotels do not offer the service.

"We had to step up our testing infrastructure," said Edmund Bartlett, the country's minister of tourism. "We have not had any situation yet where Americans were stranded because they couldn't get a test."

Scheduling a test can be as easy as booking a spa treatment or in-room massage. At the W South Beach Hotel in Miami, guests reserve an appointment through the concierge desk or by scanning a QR code in their room. The test site, which is run by Sollis Health, resides in a former beauty salon adjoining the hotel. At Dorado Beach, a Ritz Carlton Reserve, in Puerto Rico, a doctor will make a

house call — or, rather, a guest-room call — for \$400. Blue Desert Cabo in Mexico has a similar arrangement: A test-kit-carrying medical professional will drop by your villa for a nominal fee. "It's that simple," said Sean McClenahan, president of Blue Desert Cabo. In addition, the property's staff will schedule the appointment so that it falls within the 72-hour window required by the U.S. government.

Rest assured, the bellman is not sticking a cotton tip up your nose. The hotels are collaborating with medical facilities, such as hospitals and labs. But Robert Bollinger, a professor of infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins University's School of Medicine, said guests should make sure the health care workers are following safety standards and practices. (Bollinger does not advocate non-essential travel.) The test, for one, should come from an approved kit, and the professionals should be wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). He warned that if the steps are not conducted correctly, the patient could receive an incorrect result and inadvertently expose other travelers to the virus.

"The biggest challenge is when the person performing the test does not collect the specimen properly and you get a false negative," he said. Bollinger suggests taking a second test if you are concerned. He added that a negative result does not mean you have a pass to roam. "If you have symptoms or have had a recent COVID-19 exposure," he said, "don't get on the plane, even if you test negative."

Several hospitality players have introduced free insurance policies — or promises — that handle the worst-case scenario: a guest testing positive. Travel Safe with Meliá and Sandals' Travel Protection Insurance, for example, cover the patient's medical costs and up to two weeks of lodging. Karisma Hotels & Resorts properties in Mexico's Riviera Maya, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica will also accommodate a quarantining guest free for up to two weeks. Baha Mar's Travel with Confidence initiative includes a \$150 daily food and beverage credit with its courtesy convalescence suite. If the traveler would rather return to the States than recover in the Bahamas, the company will fly the guest and up to four family members sharing the same room to South Florida at no cost. A sign of the times: The aircraft is not a swanky charter plane but an air ambulance.



PARADISUS LOS CABOS/The Washington Post

In response to a U.S. law that requires international arrivals to show proof of a negative coronavirus test, Meliá Hotels International set up test sites at 10 of its hotels in the Dominican Republic and Mexico.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Westminster Abbey: The soul of England

As we've had to postpone our travels because of the pandemic, I believe a weekly dose of travel dreaming can be good medicine. Here's a reminder of the fun that awaits us at the end of this crisis.

Wearing a red robe and a warm smile, Eddie works as a verger at London's Westminster Abbey. As a church official, he keeps order in this space — which is both very touristy and very sacred.

I tell him I'm working on a Rick Steves guidebook, and he says, "I'd like a word with that Rick Steves. He implies in his guidebook that you can pop in to worship or pay respects to the Unknown Soldier in order to get a free visit to the abbey."

Showing him my photo on the back cover, I say, "Well, I am Rick Steves."

I'm really charmed by Eddie, who explains that it's his responsibility to sort out believers (who get in free to pray), tourists (who must pay the entrance fee), and scammers (who fold their hands reverently, hoping to avoid paying). Together, we agree on a new tactic: Rather than promote deception for the sake of free entry, I'll encourage my readers to attend a free worship service.

The musical evensong service is a glorious experience that occurs several times a week. Everyone is welcome, free of charge.

Eddie takes me into a room where no tourist goes: the Jerusalem Chamber, where scholars met from 1604 to 1611 to oversee the translation of the Bible from ancient Greek and Hebrew into English, creating the King James Version.



Rick Steves

Appreciating the danger of translating the word of God from dead ancient languages into the people's language and the importance of these efforts in the 16th and 17th centuries, I get goose bumps. Similarly, when visiting Germany's Wartburg Castle, I felt goose bumps when stepping into the room where Martin Luther translated the Bible for the German-speaking world.

Eddie then escorts me to the abbey, and I quickly become immersed in the history that permeates it. This is where every English coronation since 1066 has taken place. At a coronation, the archbishop of Canterbury stands at the high altar. The coronation chair is placed before



DOMINIC ARIZONA BONUCELLI/Rick Steves' Europe

Westminster Abbey: British pageantry in a Gothic jewel box.

the altar on the round, brown pavement stone, which represents the Earth. After a church service, the new king or queen sits in the chair, is anointed with holy oil, and then receives a ceremonial sword, ring and cup. The royal scepter is placed in the new ruler's hands, and — dut-dutta-dah — the archbishop lowers the crown onto the royal head.

As I walk, I listen to the audio tour narrated by actor Jeremy Irons. With his soothing voice in my ear, I enjoy some private time

with remarkable artifacts. The marble effigy of Queen Elizabeth I was made from her death mask in 1603 and is considered her most realistic likeness. The graves of literary greats of England are gathered, as if for a posthumous storytelling session, around the tomb of Geoffrey Chaucer (Mr. Canterbury Tales). Poppies line the tomb of Britain's Unknown Soldier, with the US Medal of Honor (presented by General John J. Pershing in 1921) hanging from a neighboring

column. More recently, the statue of Martin Luther King Jr. has been added as an honorary member of this heavenly English host.

My favorite stained-glass window features saints in robes and halos mingling with pilots in parachutes and bomber jackets. It's in the Royal Air Force Chapel, a tribute to WWII flyers who "earned their angel wings" in the 1940 Battle of Britain. These were the fighters about whom Churchill said, "Never ... was so much owed by so many to so few." The book of remembrances lists the names of each of the 1,497 pilots and crew members who died defending freedom.

Grabbing a pew to ponder this grand space, I look down the long and narrow center aisle of the church. It's lined with Gothic arches and glowing with colored light from the windows.

It's clear that this is more than a museum. With saints in stained glass overhead, heroes in carved stone all around and the bodies of England's greatest citizens under the floor, Westminster Abbey is more than the religious heart of England — it's the national soul as well.

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

Worms, Germany, remembers Luther's historic moment

Alongside the Rhine, in the well-worn city of Worms, history is always palpable. This is ever the more so this year, as the city marks the 500th anniversary of one of the key events in the life and times of Dr. Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer whose ideas went on to split the Christian church and reshape European society.

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483, in Eisleben, Saxony. In 1501, he entered the University of Erfurt, on track to fulfilling his father's wish for him to become a lawyer. Caught in a terrifying thunderstorm in 1505, Luther is said to have invoked St. Anne, the patron saint of miners, for protection, vowing to become a monk if he were to survive the ordeal. He joined an

Augustinian order, but monastic life proved difficult and enlightenment elusive. In 1510, Luther made a trip to Rome, but the opulence, corruption and priestly incompetence he witnessed in the capital of Christendom left him more disillusioned than ever. In 1517, he revealed his 95 theses questioning practices of the Catholic Church. Although it's disputed as to whether he actually nailed these to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, the theses, along with the continuing publication of writings seen as heretical, led to his excommunication by the pope. In 1521, he was called to appear before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms. On April



KAREN BRADBURY

Worms, Germany, is set to celebrate Martin Luther this spring.

18, when asked to repudiate his writings, Martin concluded his prepared speech with the following words: ... I cannot and will not retract, for we must never act contrary to our conscience.... Here I stand. God help me! Amen!

A series of events slated to take place in April and beyond recall this key moment in European history. While ever-evolving COVID-19 containment measures will influence these activities, the "Widerrufsverweigerung Worms 1521" (Refusal to recant Worms 1521) includes a reenactment of Luther's arrival by wagon in

Worms at 4 p.m. April 16. The "Luther Moment," in which the market square by the Holy Trinity Church will serve as a giant screen for the projection of images and video mapping, is scheduled to begin at 11 p.m. on April 17.

The Lutherweg is a 220-mile hiking trail linking up a number of places connected to Martin Luther. As it winds its way from the Wartburg Castle to Worms, it passes through rural landscapes and historical sites in the states of Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and Thuringia. From April 16-18, modern-day pilgrims are invited to retrace the final legs of Luther's journey to Worms, each day covering a distance ranging from seven to 13 miles. The route passes through vineyards and handsome wine villages, and most start and end points are connected by train. Kultursinn Rhein-Selz offers several different packages for walkers consisting of maps, informational materials and vouchers for take-away products. Online: kultursinn-rhein-selz.de

"Here I stand — Conscience and Protest - 1521 to 2021" is the title of an exhibition to be held at the Worms City Museum. With Martin Luther's refusal to recant as its starting point, the exhibition traces the development of freedom of conscience and protest and explores the idea of civil courage. Pioneers for equal rights including Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and others are also spotlighted. The exhibition runs July 3-Dec. 30; adult entry costs 9 euros. Online: museum-andreasstift.de

For a couple weeks in July each year, Worms hosts an open-air theatrical production, usually based on the Nibelungen saga. This year's spectacle, Luther, is a world premiere that tells the tale of intrigues between powerful players in the affairs of state and how one man manages to shake the church to its core. Performances are in German only. The festival runs July 16-Aug. 1. Ticket prices start at 29 euros. Online: nibelungenfestspiele.de

Luther's appearance in Worms created a strong bond between the city and the Reformation movement. The Lutherdenkmal (Luther Monument), unveiled in 1868, recalls the early history of the Reformation with statues of politicians and humanists connected with Luther, the coats of arms of the towns and cities that joined the movement, three allegorical figures symbolizing the movement's impact, and Luther himself, holding a Bible aloft.

The Bishop's Palace that hosted the Diet of Worms was destroyed in 1689. The Heylshof Garden, a shady space near the city's cathedral, now occupies the site of Luther's interrogation. Here, an educational walkway features a plaque with Luther quotes, a bronze relief of the former palace being split in half by a bolt of lightning, and a bronze sculpture titled "Luther's Big Shoes," inviting visitors to literally step into Luther's footprints.

Rick Steves' "Luther and the Reformation," available on YouTube, makes a compelling introduction to the reformer's remarkable biography.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

A view with a table

'Devil's Table' is a rock to remember in Rheinland-Pfalz

By **BRIAN FERGUSON**
Stars and Stripes

At 46 feet tall, it stands high among the trees of the Palatinate Forest, next to the quaint town of Hinterweidenthal, Germany.

Teufelstisch, or the "Devil's Table," is an imposing, almost menacing, rock formation that seems to come out of nowhere. It's also a great place to hike, and right now it seems deserted.

The story goes that the devil, tired and hungry from his trip through the woods, created a table and chair from two huge rocks. After finishing his meal, he took the chair for later, but left the table. The next day the villagers discovered the rock formation, as if it appeared overnight.

The real story, which is less cool, is that the sandstone rock formation was created by erosion over millions of years.

Hiking trails crisscross the deep forests surrounding the Devil's Table, the most famous rock in the Palatinate. However, the playground and the restaurant next to the rock were closed the day we went due to coronavirus restrictions, so we were the only people on the trail.

The adventure playground at the bottom of the hill looked fun, and I was disappointed I didn't get to go down the long slide. The park also has a miniature golf course, table tennis, a picnic area and lots of play equipment.

We spent much of the day exploring the forest and checking out the numerous trails that lead to and from the Devil's Table. Several lead to other unusual rock formations. Each trail is marked and relatively easy to walk, and with no one around to get in the way, it was easy to get unobstructed photos.

Parking at the bottom of the hill, less than a quarter of a mile from the rock, is cheap, costing just 50 cents for one hour. When the lot is full, people sometimes park farther away along the side of the road.

The hike isn't far, but it's all uphill. The good news is that it makes the downhill trip back to the car easy.

For those who want something a little more demanding, the Eppenbrunner loop to the Devil's Table, Hollow Rocks and Eulenfels is a nine-mile trail located near Eppenbrunn that features a river and is rated as moderate, according to Alltrails.com.

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On the QT

Directions: Easy to find on Google Maps, the Devil's Table is about 45 minutes south of Kaiserslautern. The app takes you right to a parking area close to the rock.

Hours: The surrounding hiking trails are open year round.

Costs: The Devil's Table and playground are free. Public parking, close to the playground, is 50 cents per hour.

Food: There are restaurants in Hinterweidenthal that offer takeout service.

Brian Ferguson



The sandstone base of the Devil's Table formation shows the signs of millions of years of erosion.



The Devil's Table is a 46-foot-tall mushroom-shaped rock in the Palatinate Forest in Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany.

PHOTOS BY BRIAN FERGUSON/Stars and Stripes

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Specializing in sugary goodness

Cupcakery and Royal Donuts eateries in Regensburg deliver sweet satisfaction

BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON
Stars and Stripes

I grew up watching dessert challenges on Food Network, and what I found in a Bavarian city a day trip away from several U.S. bases can certainly compete with what I've seen on television.

I tried two different places; the first being Cupcakery Regensburg, which takes pride in gourmet cupcakes. They're like those you may find at Washington, D.C.'s Georgetown Cupcake, but more affordable and without the wait.

The second, Royal Donuts, opened in February. The chain boasts 70 locations in Germany, and their specialty is, of course, a donut fit for a king or queen.

Both venues are only open for takeout due to pandemic restrictions. Still, it was a pleasant experience when ordering and receiving my goodies from both places.

A worker at Royal Donuts who identified himself only as Felix told me they specialized in donuts with individual toppings and different fillings.

They also have vegan donuts and croissants, croissant-donut hybrids better known in the U.S. as cronuts.

"There is always a line; every day we are completely sold out. On the weekends, we are sold out one hour before we close," Felix said.

If you are craving a donut, I would go here instead of a Dunkin' Donuts.



**AFTER
HOURS
GERMANY**

Of those I tried, my favorite was hands-down the Bouncy Bomb — it's topped with coconut and chocolate icing, and filled with Nutella cream. You really need to try this.

Right down the street, Cupcakery's offerings are unique to the area, if very familiar to Americans.

Peter Valta, who owns Cupcakery, says they have been around for eight years.

"I wanted to try something new and offer a new product in [Regensburg]," Valta said.

The carrot cake cupcake is my favorite. I also enjoyed the raspberry cupcake of the few I tried, all of which were winners.

"The triple chocolate, raspberry and blueberry are some of our most popular," Valta said.

He also encouraged newcomers to stop by and check out the assortment.

Both places are about hour away from Grafenwoehr and Vilseck, with plenty of choices for parking garages. The train station is about a 10-minute walk from either store.

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PHOTOS BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON/Stars and Stripes

The line at Royal Donuts in Regensburg, Germany, is always long, and the store sells as many as 1,000 donuts on busy days, a store employee said.

Cupcakery Regensburg

Location: Domstrasse 1, 93047 Regensburg

Hours: Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Prices: Approximately 3 euros per cupcake.

Menu: Varies. Their Facebook page announces a cupcake of the week: facebook.com/Cupcakery-243960772323269 in English and German.

Information: cupcakery-regensburg.de/cupcakes; info@cupcakery-regensburg.de; phone 0941-38 2222 94.

Immanuel Johnson

Royal Donuts Regensburg

Location: Drei-Helm-Gasse 3, 93047 Regensburg

Hours: Monday from 12 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday: Closed Wednesday to Saturday from 12 p.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Prices: Between 2 and 5.50 euros per donut.

Menu and Information: royal-donuts.de in English and German; info.regensburg@royal-donuts.de; facebook.com/Royal-Donuts-Regensburg-101288678483542

Immanuel Johnson



A selection of Cupcakery's best creations. The triple chocolate, raspberry and blueberry are among the most popular at the Regensburg, Germany, bakery.



Cupcakery specializes in gourmet cupcakes to satisfy dessert cravings.



Royal Donuts in downtown Regensburg, Germany, usually has a line out the door, and probably would even without the social distancing requirements.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

An excellent virus-free adventure

How a family's summer vacation in New Zealand was weirdly normal

By RACHEL PANNETT

Special to *The Washington Post*

The flight attendant proffered a glass of bubbly. I glanced at my watch: 9:45 a.m. "A little too early for me," I said. "Never mind," she replied. "I'll put it on ice for you."

Late last year, while much of the world was wondering whether it was safe to step outside the door, my family embarked on an activity largely unthinkable on this side of the globe: an international vacation.

Two-thirds of destinations worldwide are completely or partially closed to international tourism, according to a report published Monday by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, as the emergence of new coronavirus variants has led many countries to retighten restrictions.

Border closures are most prevalent in the Asia-Pacific region. So while Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, was able to jaunt to Mexico recently, across the Pacific, similar journeys are a relic of a halcyon age when few of us knew the color scheme of our manager's living room.

Australia closed its border a year ago and requires two-week stays in quarantine hotels for returning nationals. Officials recently extended a ban on Australian citizens leaving the country through mid-June and indicated that the border is unlikely to fully reopen this year.

Our family managed to thread the needle on some of the world's toughest travel rules because of an unusual set of circumstances: We hold multiple citizenships, including New Zealand and Australian passports, and we were visiting an ill relative in New Zealand, so we were granted an exemption to leave Australia. I had just finished up a job, and our school-aged children were beginning their summer vacation Down Under, so we had time to spare if our plans came unstuck.

The in-flight experience, aside from wearing masks, recalled the glamour — and legroom — of the golden age of air travel. There were four flight attendants for just 11 passengers, seated many rows apart.

It had been nine months since I had been on a plane; it was a crammed 45-minute commuter run to Canberra, the Australian capital. This time, I spent three hours glued to the window, marveling at the wonder of flying. And, I eventually drank the bubbly.

The one downside on arrival was two weeks' mandatory quarantine, which we passed in a daze of Netflix and imaginative activities dreamed up by our two young boys. One afternoon, they designed a sports tournament around events that, while raucous, would stop short of destroying the hotel room. Rows of water bottles and a rubber ball became an indoor bowling alley; a balloon made a passable stand-in for a soccer ball.

On Day 5, our 9-year-old said he had figured out an escape route: The main driveway was heavily guarded. But there was another gate at the end of a walkway, unmanned, and the barrier — metal gates of the kind used at music festivals — could easily be pried open. "Granddad could meet us there in a limo," chimed our 6-year-old, embracing the prison-break fantasy.

When we eventually emerged, what greeted us was perhaps the world's most weirdly normal place.

On our first night in Auckland, we attended a disco at a local elementary school; a sea of children and parents were dancing beneath colored lights and mirror balls. The next day, we took in a craft fair, lunch at a cafe and a Christmas parade. All maskless.

Coronavirus? What virus? The only obvious sign of a global pandemic was the QR codes displayed in stores for customers to log details so health officials could follow up if there were an outbreak.

New Zealand effectively vanquished the virus with a strict lockdown early last year. The small town where we were based over the summer had recorded just a single case, and that was more than a year ago. Rare outbreaks



PHOTOS BY RACHEL PANNETT/The Washington Post

The author's family goes on a fishing expedition at Waitangi, Bay of Islands, on the North Island of New Zealand.

— such as one at a high school in Auckland last month and another in the city in August — are quickly stamped out with partial lockdowns and contact tracing to get ahead of any community transmission.

Without international travelers, New Zealand is a throwback to the 1950s. Back then, according to historians, ordinary New Zealanders remained suspicious of the "frivolous" industry of tourism.

Eschewing the jet boats, helicopter rides and five-star hotels popular with foreign visitors, New Zealanders flocked this summer to remote nature spots. Extended families crowded into canvas tents and rustic holiday homes. The only nods to the coronavirus on a recent camping trip: sanitizer and a cartoon illustrating hand hygiene outside a public bathroom.

On the shores of Lake Wakatipu in Queenstown, previously a popular Instagram spot, people shelved their selfie sticks and picnicked. That same day, Feb. 6, the United States recorded 115,650 coronavirus cases and 3,031 deaths.

"New Zealand is a dangerous place," remarked 9-year-old Leo one day, as he compiled a list of adventures that made his summer sound like a scene from the 1986 coming-of-age movie "Stand By Me." Clambering over volcanic rocks to find the best fishing spot, diving into rock pools (avoiding tree roots), hiking through abandoned railway tunnels, cycling narrow trails with perilous drops to the river below, meandering down dusty roads just to see what was at the end of them. The magic of spotting kiwi birds in the wild, their half-whistle, half-scream calls echoing in the dusk.

Tourism was facing a backlash before the pandemic. In New Zealand, "freedom campers" in rented vans left trails of waste. Cruise ships piled up. Tens of thousands of helicopter trips annually deposited visitors on glaciers that were once the realm of expert climbers.

This summer, locals reclaimed hikes such as the Routeburn trail, which winds through ancient forests connecting the Fiordland and Mount Aspiring national parks. On a recent day, we passed only a handful of people — including an old friend from college, the kind of chance meeting possible in a sparsely populated country.

One day, we quizzed the boys on whether they wanted to return to Australia, although practically we needed to — having left our Sydney apartment in haste with a freez-



Locals take advantage of the lack of international tourists to visit Cape Reinga, at the tip of New Zealand's North Island. The country remained virtually untouched by the virus due to the government's implementation of a strict lockdown in the early stages of the pandemic.

er full of food, a worm farm and hungry guppies to feed.

"I'd like to live on a boat. Buy some food, travel around and visit my friends sometimes," mused Charlie, 6, after a day spent around the idyllic port of Opua, in New Zealand's far north.

But with school resuming, it was time to return to reality. My husband had been working remotely for the summer, but people were slowly drifting back to their offices as Sydney went more than a month without a community case of the virus. I was starting a new assignment with *The Washington Post*.

Days after we flew in under a rare, quarantine-free travel bubble, my cellphone chimed with an alert from health officials: Monitor for symptoms after a fresh community outbreak in Auckland. The virus lives on.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Adapting to survive

Online funerals, Zen apps keep Japan's Buddhist temples afloat

BY AYAI TOMISAWA
Bloomberg

Memorial services held online. Zen meditation apps. Buddhist temple-led matchmaking services. As the coronavirus pandemic forces institutions around the world to change the way they do things, those new endeavors are some of the ways that Buddhist groups in Japan are trying to survive. Their temples are part of the landscape: there are about 77,000, more than the number of Japan's ubiquitous convenience stores.

COVID-19 has caused further pain for Buddhist organizations already struggling in recent years due to Japan's shrinking population and sagging interest in religion among the young. One estimate is that temples' total income has halved in the five years to 2020. And now the virus has kept believers at home, reducing donations they make for services such as memorials for the deceased.

Buddhist temples have thrived in Japan for more than a millennium. But they need money to operate, and the pandemic has prompted some priests and monks to think of new ways to generate income. It's a reflection of the way that industries worldwide from travel to dining and retail are having to improvise as COVID-19 restrictions batter their usual business.

Ryosokuin, a Zen temple with more than 660 years of history in Kyoto, is one such innovator. Faced with a drop-off in services such as memorials and a plunge in tourism, the organization boosted its online operations. It developed a meditation app that's been downloaded more than 15,000 times that it expects to eventually monetize, and it's organized an online Zen meditation community called UnXe, meaning "cloud-sitting."

"When we lost visitors and donations fell, we realized that our conventional way of supporting our operations no longer works," said Toryo Ito, deputy chief priest at the temple. "We need to adapt to a management style which meets with the times."

Buddhism has a history stretching back to the sixth century in Japan, but few periods have brought such



PHOTOS BY NORIKO HAYASHI/Bloomberg

Staff operate computers during a live broadcast of an online memorial service at Tsukiji Hongwanji temple in Tokyo. Temples in Japan, having seen a marked difference in revenue over the past five years, have found ways to adapt.

challenges. Over a third of temples may disappear by 2040 as the population ages, according to Kenji Ishii, a religious studies professor at Kokugakuin University in Tokyo.

Temple income is falling, too. The total figure likely dropped about 51% since 2015 to \$2.4 billion (263 billion yen) in 2020, according to estimates by Hidenori Ukai, the chief priest at the Shokakuji temple in Kyoto and a freelance journalist.

The pandemic is adding to financial troubles across a broad swath of Japanese society. While the economy is recovering, a state of emergency in major cities has continued to weigh on consumer spending. And businesses that serve customers face-to-face such as retailers have been hit especially hard, resulting in a spate of bankruptcies for restaurants and hotels.

Tsukiji Hongwanji, a four-century-old temple near Tokyo's old fish market, is another organization trying to make the best of the virus period. It started online memorial services last May for families that don't want gatherings for the deceased, and has done about 70 such events, according to Yugen Yasunaga, a representative director and priest at the temple.

The organization is also venturing into areas that staid temples aren't traditionally known for, like matchmaking services, a cafe and yoga classes, said Yasunaga, who worked in a major Japanese bank for more than two decades before starting his career at Tsukiji Hongwanji.

"Just like Amazon.com responds to the various needs of



Tsukiji Hongwanji in Tokyo is venturing into areas that staid temples aren't traditionally known for, like a cafe, matchmaking services and yoga classes.

customers online, a temple can do the same," he said.

Another area that Japanese religious institutions are increasingly exploring is environmental, social and governance investing. Tokuunin, a Zen Buddhist temple in central Tokyo, bought 40-year social bonds sold by the University of Tokyo.

"At a time when we can barely get any returns from long-term savings, we're happy that we can contribute to helping society while earning enough returns to cover inflation," said Yuzan Yamamoto, its chief priest.

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WEEKEND: FOOD

By TIM CARMAN
The Washington Post

Mia Farrow just wanted a good cup of coffee. So like anyone in search of answers, the actor took to Twitter to crowdsource ideas on how to brew the best cup. She got a lot of answers. More than 8,000 responses by March 5, some more serious and helpful than others.

As with most subjects, Twitter is not the ideal platform to discuss coffee brewing. A complex topic is naturally reduced to easy answers — your preferred method is deemed perfect, no further discussion needed! — without understanding that many factors play into your favorite cup, starting with your palate. What I prefer in coffee may not be what you like.

What's true all down the line, however, is that you must start with fresh coffee. Unless of course you enjoy the wet cardboard flavors of beans that have sat on a shelf for months, and if you do, you can probably stop reading here and move straight to the comments, where you can explain that a can of Folgers and a percolator are all you need to start your morning. (To be honest, that's where I started with coffee, too, so I know where you are.)

To help Farrow — and, by extension, many of us — I spent one morning testing five brewing devices, all using the same coffee: a natural Guatemalan from Vigilante Coffee, an excellent roaster based in Maryland. You could argue that a natural coffee — in which beans are processed with the coffee cherries still intact, absorbing some of the sugars and fruit flavors — isn't ideal for such a test as mine, but it was the freshest coffee I had in the house. It was just a week off the roast.

Aside from showing the pros and cons of each brewing method, I wanted to offer a glimpse at how each leads to different flavors in the cup. This will always be the case, no matter what beans you have on hand. Brewing devices may work well with some beans, but less so with others. Rarely is one ideally suited for all. The goal is to find the device that works best for you most of the time.

For each device, except for the pour-over, I relied on a recipe and method that is publicly available, so that you can refer to it at home (though I'll confess that one recipe wasn't worth a hill of beans).

AeroPress

Pros: Small and portable, which is why many of us took it on the road, back when there was a road to travel. Speedy, too: You can have caffeine in your system in just a couple of minutes, which is important on busy mornings.

Cons: Produces only espresso (usually without crema unless you follow specific techniques) or a small cup of coffee. Because of its quick, pressurized process, you typically don't extract the full



Brewing the perfect cup

Author evaluates 5 different methods of brewing a natural Guatemalan coffee, detailing their pros and cons, resulting taste and ease of cleanup

range of flavors.

Method: The classic recipe on AeroPress's site, plus about five ounces of water for an Americano.

Taste: A rather thin cup. The tropical fruit flavors of the Guatemalan natural were reduced to background notes, though there was a lovely hint of dark chocolate bitterness.

Cleanup: A breeze. Just knock the used filter and grounds in the trash or compost and rinse the three small pieces of equipment.

Stagg X pour-over dripper

Pros: Double-walled and insulated, so it can better maintain a constant temperature throughout brewing. Its compact chamber keeps the grounds tightly packed, giving you more control over brew

time and extraction.

Cons: Produces only one cup, which will frequently be too hot to drink at first, a problem for those looking for a quick fix. You need custom paper filters.

Method: Basic 16:1 ratio of water to freshly ground coffee, using 204-degree water. (Note: The water temperature will drop as soon as it hits the room-temperature grounds.)

Taste: Bright and full-bodied, although it took several minutes for the coffee to cool to the point where I could appreciate its flavors: Tart pineapple, ripe mango, a light cinnamon sweetness in the background. The tart fruit lingered on the palate like rock candy.

Cleanup: Simple. Dump the

filter and wet grounds straight into the trash or compost. Only one small piece of equipment to clean.

Chemex

Pros: The custom-bonded filters: They produce a sweet and balanced cup with less bitterness and fewer oils than with other pour-over devices. You can brew a few cups at once. The brewer, designed 80 years ago by chemist Peter Schlumbohm, is a thing of beauty.

Cons: The custom-bonded filters. They're not cheap, and they can mute the more complex flavors found in single-origin beans. The glass brewer is fragile. I've broken one and live in fear of the next disaster.

Method: The recipe from Elemental Coffee, which uses a center-pour technique.

Taste: Fruit forward, surprisingly bright. Bitter elements were AWOL, with an almost metallic flavor as the cup cooled.

Cleanup: Easy to dump the filter and grounds, but cleaning the hourglass-shaped brewer can be a pain, requiring a long-handled brush.

Clever dripper

Pros: This cross between a French press and a pour-over dripper requires no water-pouring skills and little oversight. Gives you pinpoint control over brew time and has a convenient stopper that allows coffee to drip straight into your favorite mug.

Cons: Unless the beans are ground fairly coarsely, the coffee can be overextracted. The plastic tends to stain after repeated usage. It's easy to forget about, leading to grounds that steep too long.

Method: The recipe from Prima Coffee.

Taste: A cup with more floral aromas than the other devices. The fruit and acidity started to pop as the coffee cooled, though I noted a strange astringent after-taste, like wine with a lot of tannins.

Cleanup: Nothing to it. Dump the filter and grounds in the trash or compost, and rinse the device. Note: It is not dishwasher safe.

French press

Pros: Requires no filters, no water-pouring skills and little oversight. Gives you precise control over brew time. With no filter, oils remain, often making for a full-bodied and flavorful cup.

Cons: Grounds can seep in. The French press wastes a lot of water warming up the glass carafe before steeping. Depending on the size of your press, you may need more than one kettle's worth of water. As with the Clever, it's easy to forget about, leading to over-extraction.

Method: I trusted Stumptown Coffee's recipe for a French press, which turned out to be a mistake. The ratio of coffee to water looked off from the start. When I punched the numbers into my calculator, it turned out to be 18 parts water to 1 part coffee. I decided to prepare it a second time with a similar, two-part pouring technique but with a 13:1 ratio.

Taste: The Stumptown recipe led to a thin and tea-like cup. There was some nice, light acidity to the coffee, but I found it underwhelming. The second recipe produced a far better cup: acidic, fruity, sweet, superb on almost every count.

Cleanup: There's no way around it: It's messy. Used grounds collect at the bottom of the carafe, and it can be a pain to sweep those cleanly into the trash or compost. The problem is such that people have developed "hacks" to better clean it.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

‘Border’: Life next to a bully nation

By MICHAEL DIRDA

Special to *The Washington Post*

Erika Fatland’s “The Border” is subtitled “A Journey Around Russia,” to which she has added the explanatory phrase “Through North Korea, China, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Norway and the Northeast Passage.” Over the course of eight months in 2017, she traveled to all these places, seeking answers to one unspoken question: What is life like when you live next door to an aggressive bully?

All of those countries, except for Norway, has suffered an invasion by Russia at some point. They have also been torn apart by innumerable regional conflicts. Again and again, this young Norwegian journalist

listens to accounts of survival and loss in the midst of war, displacement, ethnic and racial enmity, famine and genocide.

Fatland opens her book by describing a voyage along the Arctic coast of Russia. Starting with North Korea and then working her way west, she mixes brief histories of the 14 nations she visits with descriptions of their major cities and accounts of excursions into their backlands or to leading cultural sites. Despite sometimes considerable privation, nearly everyone she meets is welcoming, though often cautiously guarded.

To travel to Mongolia’s Ulan Bator, Fatland scrupulously avoids taking any train continuing on to Moscow: “If there was one thing I had learnt on my previous travels ... it was to avoid

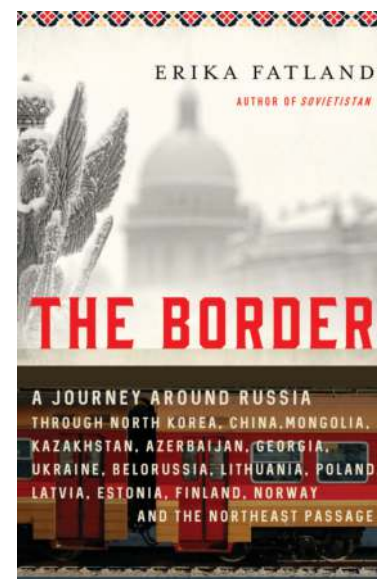
Russian trains at all cost.” Those previous travels are recounted in her much-lauded 2019 book, “Sovietistan: A Journey through Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan,” all those “stans” being nations that emerged after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Ulan Bator, it turns out, “is not only the world’s coldest capital, it is also the most polluted.” Half the residents live in tents or yurts. Fatland is both admiring and appalled at the sheer grandiosity of “the world’s largest statue of a horseman, a stainless steel monstrosity that stands 40 metres high and weighs 250 metric tons.” It represents Mongolia’s founding warlord, Genghis Khan, whose armies “conquered a seventh of the world’s surface. On horseback.”

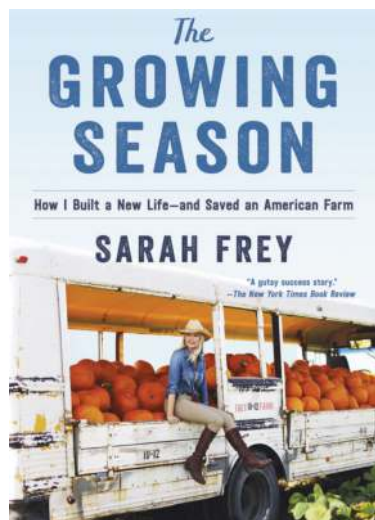
For Fatland, nearly all government-sponsored tours verge on absurdist bureaucratic comedy, often culminating in a worshipful visit to some Great Leader’s kitschy monument or memorial.

Border crossings, however, are never laughing matters. Some customs officials don’t know what contact lenses are. At one point, she encounters two conspiracy theorists who are convinced that Vladimir Putin is actually dead. “Everyone knows that. The real Putin died of cancer many years ago. The person who says he is Putin now is his look-alike.” The proof? “The real Putin could speak fluent German,” but “the lookalike always has to use an interpreter when he is talking to Angela Merkel.”

Like other long information-packed books, “The Border”



should be enjoyed in small chunks, if only because of a certain sameness in the kind of stories it contains. All in all, though, Erika Fatland deserves both applause and thanks for this impressive mix of history, reportage and travel memoir.



The Growing Season

Sarah Frey

In this memoir, Frey describes her inspiring climb from “brutally” impoverished Illinois farm girl to agribusiness titan.

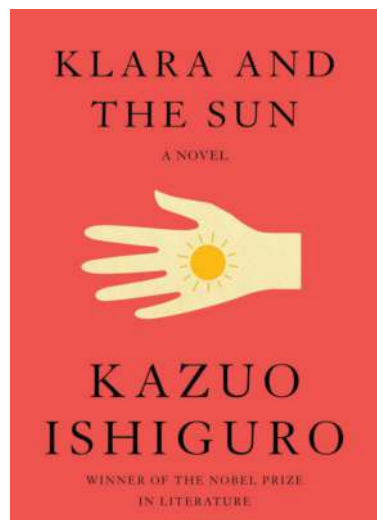
Frey was the youngest of 21, including half-siblings, and she and her parents and four older brothers survived off the land and by their wits. Frey’s father’s schemes included faking his death when he left his wife and 13 children to be with Frey’s married mother of two.

Starting at age 8, Frey joined her mother on her “melon route,” buying watermelons and cantaloupes from other farmers to sell to stores. At 15, to get away from the chaos at home, Frey and a brother moved into a rundown house on family property and fixed it up. As soon as she had a driver’s license and a truck, Frey started her own melon route.

When the bank was about to foreclose on the family farm, Frey bought it for her own.

Through tragedies and setbacks, Frey has remained resolute and devoted to her business and family. Her charisma and chutzpah leap off the page.

— Marci Schmit/Star Tribune



Klara and the Sun

Kazuo Ishiguro

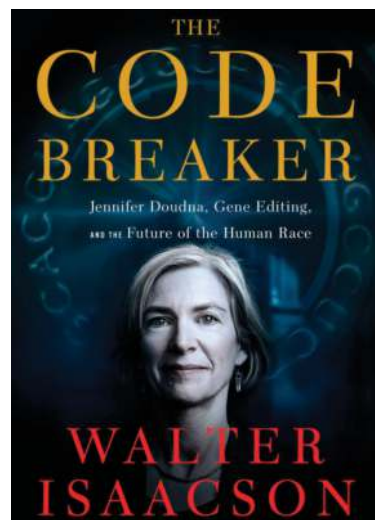
Nobel-winning writer Ishiguro takes readers on a journey through the mind of Klara, one of many artificial friends who have been built to keep lonely children company. Klara is a one-of-a-kind machine whose keen observational abilities are consistently praised by the human beings who meet her. She may be a machine, but her thoughts and emotions are deeply real.

Klara is chosen at the store by a young girl named Josie who connects with her immediately. She comes home with her to learn that Josie has a serious illness. Klara endeavors to ensure that Josie is safe and healthy for as long as possible.

Ishiguro creates a fascinating world through Klara’s eyes as she works to understand how humans operate.

The novel is an intriguing take on how artificial intelligence might play a role in our futures. It is a poignant meditation on love and loneliness, and asks us to ponder whether someone like Klara can ever truly embody the human spirit.

— Molly Sprayregen/AP



The Code Breaker

Walter Isaacson

In “The Code Breaker: Jennifer Doudna, Gene Editing and the Future of the Human Race,” Isaacson’s central character is the likable biochemistry researcher and Nobel Prize winner, Jennifer Doudna, but the science is challenging for the ordinary person to embrace.

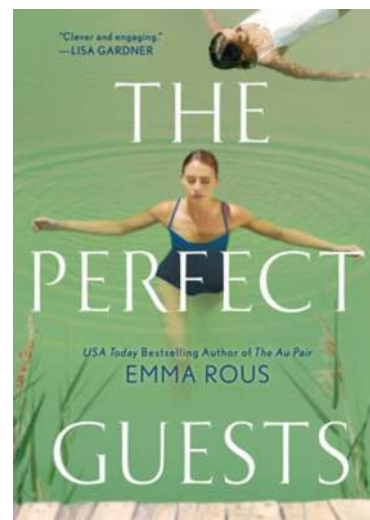
Star of the book is CRISPR — Clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats — the ability of scientists to modify genes that can allow them to, for example, repair defective genetic disorders such as cystic fibrosis.

At 512 pages, “Code Breaker” is a hefty reading-time investment. Despite the dense subject matter, Isaacson conveys his story with steady enthusiasm.

Doudna and her colleagues are developing some of the pivotal breakthroughs in human history, providing the prospect of giving humans the ability to eliminate the threat of many diseases by modifying those genetic strands.

It’s a short step to creating designer humans. That ability raises moral and ethical concerns humans have not yet faced.

— Jeff Rowe/AP



The Perfect Guests

Emma Rous

Mystery, lies and intense family drama all crash together in Rous’ latest novel.

Set in 1988 at Raven Hall, a remote Gothic estate near London, the story revolves around two young teens. Beth is orphaned, living in a drab children’s home; Nina is an only child at the grand manor. When Nina’s parents decide to bring Beth home as a friend to Nina, both girls find friendship and happiness for the first time.

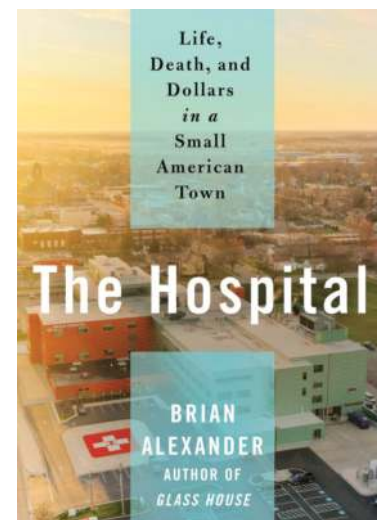
Then Nina gets sick just before a rare visit from her grandfather from the States, whom she’s never met. The parents panic and ask Beth to stand in for her.

Thus starts a web of deceit and betrayal. Fast forward to 2019, when the girls are grown, and a young musician/actress who’s down on her luck gets an invitation to participate in a murder mystery at Raven Hall.

Soon we learn that the actors have been hand-picked and have no idea that they all are playing parts tied to their pasts.

“The Perfect Guests” is a suspenseful and engaging read.

— Ginny Greene/Star Tribune



The Hospital

Brian Alexander

It’s hard to avoid a sense of sadness and shame while reading “The Hospital: Life, Death and Dollars in a Small American Town,” when it becomes clear that a health care company’s insatiable drive for profit has overcome the high ideals of patient care, of helping people in their hours of greatest need.

As Alexander shows, the history of the hospital in Bryan, Ohio, parallels America’s struggle to come to some consensus on how to provide health care.

Again and again, Alexander finds people avoiding seeing doctors because they can’t pay for the service, skipping medications because they can’t afford them, struggling to overcome poor dietary habits and imprisoned in an economy of government aid and low-pay service jobs.

Alexander’s book shows the cruel gulfs in American health care — how some can get the best health care while the tens of millions of lower-income people lack health care, get little-to-no preventative care, self-ration their medicines and die young.

— Jeff Rowe/AP

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Q&A



Ready TO ROCK again

By JOHN CARUCCI
Associated Press

With the longest gap between album releases, the Nashville-based rockers Kings of Leon have returned with their eighth studio album, “When You See Yourself.”

Frontman Caleb Followill said the family-based band was firing on all cylinders in the studio. He points out “100,000 People” as one of the songs teased ahead of the new record.

“I feel like all the years of us working together came together on that song. It’s a great story. It has its little hook to it and everyone plays the right parts,” he said.

That would be his brothers Nathan and Jared, along with their paternal cousin Matthew.

The foursome finds themselves in pretty good company — the original lineup of the Beach Boys had the same core

of brothers and a cousin. Followill feels honored by the comparison. But he doesn’t downplay the challenges of playing with close family.

“You really have to check your ego at the door, especially when you’re making music, because we don’t really have that buffering thing that we would if we were just friends,” Followill said.

But they’ve been playing together so long, “shooting from the hip” has become the norm for the guys, but that doesn’t mean they’re not competitive.

“We all want to be better than the other one. And I’m always better than the other ones,” Followill joked.

Caleb Followill on Kings of Leon’s evolution and their new record, “When You See Yourself”

Recently, he spoke to The Associated Press about the new record, plans for a world tour and the decision to tease the album’s lead single, “The Bandit,” over social media.

AP: How did the choice to tease the record over Instagram evolve?

Followill: Our fans knew that we had been in the studio because we had kind of started teasing them from the studio. So, when everything did shut down, our fans were like,

“What the hell? We know you made some music.

Why not now — more than ever — would you put it out because we’re all sitting at home and wanting it?”

Was the writing based on real-world problems like the COVID-19 pandemic?

It was before the pandemic. But we weren’t without our problems, obviously. I try not to let too much of that stuff get into the music because I want the music to kind of be a fun escape or a sad moment you can enjoy. There are a lot of people out there that do it

Matthew Followill

Kings of Leon, from left: Nathan, Caleb, Matthew and Jared Followill.

successfully and tackle the issues and do it well. I’ve never really tried to do that. And who knows? But, yeah, I try to keep out of it as much as I can.

How did the band evolve with the new record?

As a band, we are at kind of a great moment right now. I feel like musically we’re all on the same page. We all wanted to be in there to work, and it didn’t feel like it was a chore. I feel like that chemistry is something that we haven’t really felt since maybe the early days.

This band has an interesting trajectory — a rock band from Nashville that gets hugely successful in Britain. What was that first performance like over there?

SEE READY ON PAGE 33

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

Nick Jonas

Spaceman (Island)

Make room, Paul McCartney, Snow Patrol and Taylor Swift. Add Nick Jonas to the growing list of artists who have made fabulous albums during the pandemic.

Jonas' 11-track electronic-rich "Spaceman" is an airy and slightly unmoored love letter from a lusty man who is drinking alone, a little crazed and maybe paranoid. "Too drunk and I'm all in my feelings," he sings in the excellent "2Drunk." "Should I send that text? Maybe not / But I miss the sex."

In other words, we are all Nick Jonas.

The pandemic seems to have scrambled the newlywed, who should have been enjoying his honeymoon period with actor Priyanka Chopra. The unrushed Troye Sivan-like "Don't Give Up On Us," the opening track, is alarming coming so soon in a love affair.

Not to worry: "Delicious" is so steamy it should come with a explicit warning. "This Is Heaven" is a more PG love song, sounding like something Lionel Richie would record, complete with an old-school horn solo.

Things get naughty again on "Sexual" — "Tongue tied / Follow your neck down to your thighs." In a nice nod to his Indian-born love, he's included an electric sitar.

"Deeper Love" — which samples from "I Want to Know What Love Is" by Foreigner — might actually remind listeners of an updated version of Steve Winwood's "Higher Love."

Jonas co-wrote every track with producer and multi-instrumentalist Greg Kurstin and the songwriter and singer Mozella. He was separated from Chopra last summer when she filmed in Germany and explored that loss and discomfort. It all comes together on the title track, which is chilly and brilliant as it captures us all in lockdown, like terrestrial astronauts. "Mask off minute I get home / All safe now that I'm alone." Few songs have better captured the unease and alienation of the past year.

— Mark Kennedy
Associated Press



Lake Street Dive

Obviously (Nonesuch)

Lake Street Dive's seventh studio album takes its name from the first word in the first song — "Obviously." Here's another thing that's obvious: You need to make this band part of your life.

Call them what you like — alt-country, indie-pop, pop-folk — the hard-to-classify Lake Street Dive offers top-notch songwriting with progressive lyrics and one of the most underrated vocalists in music today.

Originally formed in 2004 by students attending the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, the band consists of singer Rachael Price, Mike "McDuck" Olson on trumpet and guitar, Bridget Kearney on upright bass and Mike Calabrese on drums. The newest member, keyboardist Akie Bermiss, harmonizes beautifully with Price on "Same Old News," and wrote the beautiful and wistful "Anymore."

The 11-track "Obviously" follows "Free Yourself Up" from 2018, which featured one of the band's hits, "Good Kisser." This time, "Feels Like the Last Time" has a rootsy vibe and "Sarah" is a cappella.

"Nobody's Stopping You Now" was penned by Price as a letter of encouragement to her teenage self, and "Know That I Know" is a funky and funny trumpet-led ode to lovers ("You're Captain Kirk to my Spock / I'm Dee Dee Ramone and you're punk rock.")

"Obviously" was produced by Mike Elizondo, who has worked with Dr. Dre, Eminem, Carrie Underwood and Fiona Apple. Lake Street Dive have never sounded better, full and clear with every instrument given a chance to shine in every song.

Superb musicians, they can change direction on a dime. Kearney teases as much with the terrific first song "Hypotheticals," singing: "Obviously, we're at the beginning of something / I don't expect you to know where it's gonna go." Well, we'll ruin the surprise — it's gonna go great.

— Mark Kennedy
Associated Press



Willie Nelson

That's Life (Columbia)

In the 1970s, Willie Nelson up-ended expectations by following his breakthrough albums "Shotgun Willie" and "The Red Headed Stranger" with a project dear to his heart: "Stardust," a set of Great American Songbook standards that turned out to be an enormous success.

It also got the attention of one of his favorite artists. "That cat is a blues singer," Frank Sinatra said at the time. "He can sing my stuff, but I don't know if I can sing his."

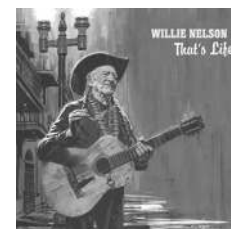
Nelson, who turns 88 next month, remains astonishingly productive. This is the eighth album he's released in the past five years, and the second of songs associated with Sinatra, following 2018's "My Way." This new album's cover painting is an homage to Ol' Blue Eyes' melancholy 1955 masterpiece "In the Wee Small Hours."

Like "My Way," "That's Life" is a collaboration with Nashville producer Buddy Cannon and pianist Matt Rollings, a former member of Lyle Lovett's Large Band. The arrangements put Nelson in a satisfying, sentimental comfort zone that never strains too hard to reinvent standards like "I've Got You Under My Skin" and "Luck Be a Lady."

Instead, Nelson puts his own spin on the songs naturally, with his sui generis sense of ease that comes across in everything he talk-sings. He swings effortlessly, just a touch behind the beat.

Among the treats are a frisky "I Won't Dance" with Diana Krall, and the title cut, which Nelson is characteristically gentle with, recounting a lifetime as "a puppet, a pauper, a pirate, a poet, a pawn and a king." "That's Life" also wisely includes deep cuts that aren't so familiar, like the forlorn "Cottage for Sale" and the weary "Lonesome Road," a subject that Nelson knows more than a thing or two about.

— Dan DeLuca
The Philadelphia Inquirer



Ready: Although the new album was written pre-pandemic, KOL singer says it fits the times

FROM PAGE 32

We were in the middle of recording our first album when we got the call that we had to go to London ... We had only played a handful of shows in America, so we were very green. And when we did get to London, as soon as we landed, we got in the car and our song was on. It was like, 'Whoa! Stop the car! We're all going to dance around.' And we got back in the car.

And the performance?

The other bands on stage were seasoned. They were out there doing solos behind their heads and stuff. And we were all just scared to death. But, oddly enough, it seemed like everyone was there to see us. And we were playing later than all these bands that were so good. And I just told the boys, 'Just play it as fast as you can, play it as loud as you can and let's distract them, so they don't notice that our skill level isn't that great yet.'

What was the underlying theme that makes this album stand out?

I think one of the things that's really special is the fact that it was written before all of this and when you get into the lyrics, it seems very much like it was written about this time.

With vaccinations ramping up, what are your plans for touring?



AMY HARRIS, INVISION/AP

Caleb Followill of Kings of Leon performs during KAABOO 2019 in San Diego, Calif., on Sept. 13, 2019. The band could soon be on the road again.

I feel like it's moving quick. We're just now hearing that things are kind of starting to look like it's a go. So, after spring break, I think we'll all get

in there and start getting the show together. And these songs lend themselves to be kind of beautiful. We're going to try to put on a hell of a show.

Kings of Leon

When You See Yourself (RCA)

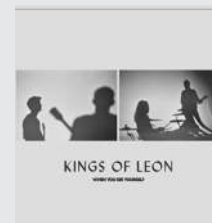
Although recorded pre-pandemic, Kings of Leon's "When You See Yourself" feels remote, contained and lonely. The Followills went from being the Southern Strokes to arena-rock stalwarts after the success of 2008's "Only by the Night." But their increasing love of texture and atmosphere rather than the rock riffs that they do so well dilutes "When You See Yourself," their eighth album.

As on 2016's "Walls," the Followills enlist producer Markus Dravs (Arcade Fire, Florence + the Machine) and keyboardist Liam O'Neil, and the arrangements often push O'Neil's synthesizers and Jared Followill's bass to the forefront, suppressing the impact of Caleb's vocals and Matthew's guitars.

Many of the mid-tempo songs, such as the slowly pulsing "100,000 People," stay in one place for their duration. "I'm going nowhere, if you've got the time," Caleb sings on "Supermarket," and although it's an invitation, it comes across as half-hearted, especially from a band that has written a clutch of great driving songs.

The pace picks up occasionally, on U2-lite rockers such as "Golden Restless Age" and "The Bandit," but the hazy, thick production mutes them. They'll probably sound great when (if?) heard in an arena. Only "Echoing" has some of the band's former swagger, but coming near the end of the often-plodding "When You See Yourself," it feels like an afterthought.

— Steve Klinge
The Philadelphia Inquirer



WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

Defining a legacy

The Kriegers have a plan to memorialize their late father by getting one of the words he coined officially recognized in the dictionary

BY SADIE DINGFELDER
Special to *The Washington Post*

In the early aughts, Hilary Krieger was sitting in her parents' Boston home, when her friend accidentally squirted himself with an orange slice.

"I said, 'Oh, the orange just orbisculated,'" she recalls. "And he said, 'It did what?'"

The two made a \$5 bet, and Krieger gleefully grabbed the family dictionary. She flipped to the "O" section and stared at the spot on the page where "orbisculate" should have been.

"My first thought is, 'What's wrong with this dictionary?'" she says.

Aghast, Krieger burst into her dad's study and told him the shocking news: Orbisculate is somehow not in the dictionary!

"And he looked kind of sheepish, and that's when I found out that he made up this word when he was in college and had just been using it our whole lives, as if it were a real word," Krieger says.

He'd always defined it as "when you dig your spoon into a grapefruit and it squirts juice directly into your eye," she said.

Though the family also applied it to other fruits and vegetables that unexpectedly spritzed.

Out \$5 and wondering what other fake words might be lurking in her vocabulary, Krieger was mad at the time. But she quickly came to see her dad's made-up word as a gift, one that encapsulates his mischievous and inventive spirit.

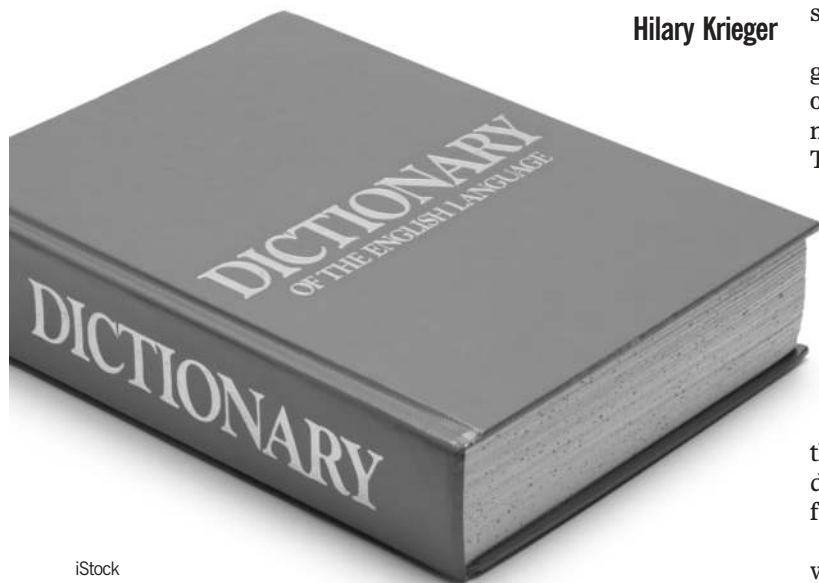
"It speaks to his creativity and the idea that, even when something's painful and annoying like getting grapefruit juice in your eye, you can laugh and have fun with it," she said.

Two decades later, Krieger found herself telling that funny story again and again, in some very sad circumstances. Her father, Neil Krieger, died of complications from COVID-19 in April at age 78. Since the Kriegers couldn't have a proper funeral, Hilary Krieger, who now lives in New York, spent a lot of time on the phone talking with friends and family, and the orbisculate story kept coming up.

"I began to think, 'Orbisculate is such a great word; Why isn't it in the dictionary? Orbisculate should be in the dictionary!'" said Krieger, who is an editor at

"It speaks to his creativity and the idea that, even when something's painful and annoying like getting grapefruit juice in your eye, you can laugh and have fun with it."

Hilary Krieger



iStock



Family photo

Neil, Susan, Jonathan and Hilary Krieger are photographed in Boston in 2018. Hilary and Jonathan launched a campaign to get their late father Neil's made-up word "orbisculate" into the dictionary. Neil died of complications from COVID-19 in April 2020.

NBC News.

Krieger, 44, called her brother Jonathan Krieger, 35, who lives in Boston and runs an online trivia company — and together, they hatched an elaborate plan to get the word officially recognized. To make it happen, they'd need help from friends and strangers.

Merriam-Webster adds about 1,000 new words to its master database every year, words that then trickle down to the company's various print and online dictionaries. The most recent batch of new words, released in January, is full of pandemic-related vocabulary like "long-hauler" and "pod." Technology-related words are also well represented — "reaction GIF" for example, and the use of @ that means to challenge — as in "don't @ me."

Editors at the dictionary's whisper-quiet office, in Springfield, Mass., are constantly scouring newspapers, academic journals, books and even cartoon captions for new words.

"What we're looking for is usage in publications with a large and broad readership," says senior editor Emily Brewster.

Brewster and her colleagues generally track words for years or even decades before nominating them for dictionary status. This ensures that flash-in-the-pan coinages, like Will

Smith's use of "jiggy," to mean trendy (briefly popular in the '90s), can't sneak in. But if a word really takes off, it can shortcut the process.

"The word that has the record for most quickly entering the dictionary is COVID-19, at 34 days," she says. "The term before that was AIDS."

In addition to diseases, any words that describe concrete phenomena that affect many

people tend to get picked up quickly, Brewster notes.

"That's one of the things 'orbisculate' has going for it — there is no single word that captures the squirting in the eye that certain fruits do," she says.

Getting a word into the dictionary isn't easy, but the Kriegers' 50-point plan as described on their website, is spot on, Brewster says. Encouraging people to use "orbisculate" in a wide variety of contexts, such as comic strips, news stories and the name of a Ben & Jerry's sorbet flavor, will leave a compelling trail of evidence for lexicographers to follow.

"If they were able to accomplish all of that, the word's status as an established member of the English language would be pretty irrefutable," she says.

Even if they don't succeed in getting the word added to the dictionary, the Kriegers' project may help buffer them against some of the feelings of despair and hopelessness that have struck them and many families who have lost loved ones to the coronavirus, says psychologist Robert A. Neimeyer, director of the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition. Among the many reasons that virus-related grief is especially shattering is that social distancing separates mourners from their friends and family.

"We are unable to gather together and we're denied the simple reassurance of a human hug," Neimeyer says.

The Kriegers' orbisculation campaign may help them push back against feelings of isolation, he adds.

"This family has come up with a creative way of memorializing their father, by building a community around this thing that's distinctive about him," Neimeyer says.

That community, which the

Kriegers named Orbisculation Nation, even has a uniform of sorts — a citrus-festooned T-shirt, which you can buy on their website, orbisculate.com, for \$25 or \$28. (Proceeds go to Carson's Village, a charity that helps families in mourning.)

The Orbisculation Nation is helping the Kriegers check off items on their list for orbisculation domination, with a goal of putting the word to use publicly enough that it has a chance of becoming legitimate.

One family friend went rogue and put a homemade orbisculation warning sign on a pile of grapefruit in a grocery store (Goal No. 14).

People the Kriegers don't know, but who were just inspired by the campaign, used the word in an online crossword puzzle (Goal No. 1) and a homemade cartoon (Goal No. 19). And when the "Because Language" podcast announced online voting to determine their word of the year, the Orbisculation Nation put their favorite word over the top.

It's such a good word, it might have won even without their online campaign, says podcast host Daniel Midgley.

"Orbisculate felt like a refreshing splash of citrus in an otherwise grim year of words," Midgley says.

It has been nearly a year since Neil Krieger's death, and his children are still reeling from the loss. But their campaign to get their father's word into the dictionary has helped them recapture a little of the joy that has been missing from their lives.

"I could picture him being really excited about the fact that *The Washington Post* is interviewing us," Jonathan Krieger says.

"He'd say, 'It's dynamite!' It's dynamite — that's a thing he always used to say."

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

‘Waffles + Mochi’, the Obamas’ food series for kids, arrives on Netflix

BY ROBERT LLOYD
Los Angeles Times

“Waffles + Mochi,” a food-themed series for children of all ages that began streaming Tuesday, comes from Barack and Michelle Obama’s Higher Ground Productions — one of the first products of a big slate of programs for Netflix that the former president hopes “won’t just entertain, but will educate, connect and inspire us all.”

Michelle, as “Mrs. Obama,” runs a toy-town supermarket, where she oversees a talking shelf (Taleia Gilliam, as Shelfie) and a talking mop (Diona Elise Burnett, as Steve) and tends a rooftop garden where she may be typically found in the company of an officious bee named Busy (Jonathan Kidder). Co-created by Jeremy Konner (“Drunk History,” of all things) and Erika Thormahlen, on whose 2006 independent pilot “What’s Cooking with Waffles and Mousemeat” the present series would seem to be based, “Waffles + Mochi” isn’t formally innovative, like “Teletubbies” or “Wonder Pets,” but rather a well-balanced mix of familiar ingredients: a fanciful set, documentary visits to far-flung places, real kids being real, comical or calming adults, and puppets.

As to our puppet heroes: Waffles is the child of a Yeti and a frozen waffle, a furry thing with waffles for ears; Mochi (Russ Walko, puppeteer; Piotr Michael, voice) is a strawberry mochi ball. They come from the Land of Frozen Food, “where ice cream never melts and dreams, well, they get frozen too.”

But they watch Julia Child on television and long for something more, and something more to eat. As luck would have it — there is no more substantial rationale — a truck belonging to Mrs. Obama’s grocery store gets stuck outside their house one day, and they stow away to the snowless city there to meet new friends and learn about non-frozen food.

Each episode has a different subject (corn, rice, tomatoes, potatoes, eggs and so on) and a similar structure. A problem arises, possibly of the puppets’ own making — they have poured salt all over the chocolate chip cookies, or broken the last jar of pickles in the store, or stripped the shelves of herbs and spices (and the store of color), having mistakenly labeled them as being free. After chatting with (or avoiding) “Mrs. O,” as she is sometimes called, they set off in their flying, talking MagiCart to learn something or fix a problem.

They visit other lands, for real, including Italy, Peru and Japan — the budget is on the screen — to cook alongside famous chefs and interview food experts. There may be a cartoon, sometimes featuring the Taste Buds (voiced by Kate Berlant and John Early), a sort of oral “Inside Out,” or a song. And then they return, report and repair (if necessary) and earn a merit badge. Each episode comes with a kind of moral too, suggested by the subject — potatoes will tell you something about inner beauty, pickles are about patience, salt prompts a conversation about moderation. Everything turns out well. Even mistakes are OK, we are told.



MIKE ROSENTHAL, ABC/TNS

“Grey’s Anatomy” stars Chandra Wilson as Dr. Miranda Bailey. Wilson says that she believes “Grey’s” provides a mirror to viewers, reflecting not only what a diverse hospital looks like but also the way the pandemic has affected those who have lost friends and family.

‘Looking at something familiar’

Wilson discusses her role on ‘Grey’s Anatomy,’ its diversity and the Jan. 6 Capitol riot

BY CRYSTAL PAUL
The Seattle Times

Chandra Wilson has spent the past 16 years portraying Dr. Miranda Bailey on the long-running television series “Grey’s Anatomy” that’s set in Seattle — season 17 returned to ABC stateside last week. Over the years, the show has been lauded for its diversity in casting and for how it’s tried to use its characters and storylines to give more representation to women of color in medicine and in positions of leadership.

We caught up with Wilson for a phone interview on Jan. 6, and talked to the actor about a variety of topics.

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

The Seattle Times: You’ve been playing this powerful woman on TV and started out doing so when there weren’t that many. I’ve seen articles about how empowering it is and how it’s a sign of change to see you in this role. How does that feel in moments like [the Capitol insurrection]?

Chandra Wilson: Power is a really interesting word in entertainment. Because I keep thinking of power as someone who provides jobs, someone who opens doors for someone to come and follow through. To the extent that I’ve done that as an actor and been inspirational and made people say “you know what, I am going to go through with this career” or “I am going to go to this audition” or even those who aren’t in entertainment to say “I am going to go to medical school because I’ve seen Dr. Bailey on television,” that’s as real to me as anything else.

I 100% feel the responsibility of that and am glad to honor that every single chance that I get, but people also conflate that with a strong woman in the way that Miranda Bailey is. I’ve always been one of those people who has a different use for

“strong woman,” because I find it difficult to find a woman who isn’t. Anybody that gets up on a daily basis and has to live their life. You don’t know the strength that it takes to do what someone does on a daily basis until you’ve walked in their shoes.

You said the day of the Capitol insurrection was a powerless feeling day. But some are saying that this goes deeper than one day. Is that intentional? Are you feeling like “this, too, shall pass?”

I feel like I basically can only go from moment to moment. Maybe there’s some self preservation there so as not to be completely disappointed by something that may occur, but we bring the past with us wherever we go in order to proceed forward. The hope is that we can take this and turn today into something better tomorrow. [The Capitol insurrection] is the culmination of at least four years of this ramp up — if not the eight years before that — where America has shown herself for what still hasn’t been taken care of. This past year, 2020, has just brought to light the things that were there that we either suppressed or we say “we’ve dealt with it” or tried to sweep it aside. We never deal with the original sin of our nation in any collective way. It’s given voice to speech, especially from [former President Donald Trump] that is resonating with ... 74 million Americans.

I don’t want to walk around this world as an angry person. I don’t want to be looking at people who don’t look like me and be mad, wondering what’s going through your head ... I’m looking at what’s happening today and then I’m thinking, “Now what do we do?” ... I want to see today in its purest form and then how do I fix tomorrow?

How much of your own philosophy do you bring into your portrayal of Dr. Bailey? When you first started portraying

this character, it was a character that hadn’t really been seen on TV before. A Black woman doctor? That was the first time I was seeing it. Where did you draw from for a character that hadn’t really been seen before?

Miranda Bailey was so not me, so not me that I wasn’t recognizable on the street, because my demeanor, everything about me in my opinion was really different from her. The things we have in common was our work ethic and being goal-oriented ... and wanting simultaneously to have family, to honor family, to be in family, to take care of family. That’s about where our similarities ended.

I didn’t even recognize in the beginning the significance of a Miranda Bailey being on television until I finally saw the first episode of “Grey’s” and I looked at it and I was like, “I’m looking at something familiar,” because this is what hospitals look like. And that was really exciting to me as an actor and as someone who saw that we’re going to be providing a mirror.

What do you feel is the power of the arts and theater in moments like this?

We always look to the arts to provide mirrors to us. We look to the arts to give us an excuse to feel what we feel.

For instance, the episode with Bailey’s mom passing away, many people during coronavirus that have lost family members, because of all the noise, because of all the bureaucracy, because of not being able to have a funeral, haven’t been able to mourn the way they need to mourn and it won’t be acknowledged in any kind of national way. Things that were sent back to me in letters or emails or tweets were “I cried today. Watching Bailey and her mom, I got to cry today.” That’s what the arts does, it gives you permission to feel, and to see, and to think, and to do whatever it is that you need to do without being preached at.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

Can't get lost in a daydream?

Experts explain why daydreaming isn't easy and offer tips for making the experience more enjoyable and meaningful

By ALLYSON CHIU
The Washington Post

You've gotten your kids logged on for another day of virtual school. You've unsuccessfully checked a number of websites in search of coronavirus vaccine appointments for your parents. You've answered your urgent work emails and finally have time for a coffee break. As you sit there, you wish you could take a brain break, too, and daydream about something, anything, that would allow you to step off this hamster wheel that has become pandemic life, if only for a few minutes.

Daydreaming. Sounds simple, right? But a growing body of research suggests that intentionally trying to have a pleasant daydream is surprisingly difficult, and consequently, the experience is not always as enjoyable as people may assume.

"We think that on command you should be able to think about whatever you want and you should be able to think about things that are enjoyable," said Nick Buttrick, a post-doctoral researcher at Princeton University who has co-written papers on thinking for pleasure over the years. "That doesn't seem very hard, but thinking is difficult, and one of the key things we've learned from doing all of these studies is people need prompts, people need help."

Still, Buttrick and other experts say that with some guidance and practice you can get better at daydreaming — and that it may be worthwhile to try.

"One thing that's been hard with the pandemic is that we've lost the future, in a sense," said Erin Westgate, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Florida who has also published research on thinking for pleasure. "We know that looking forward to good things coming our way in the

future is half the pleasure. Losing that is a real loss."

Instead of looking forward to future events, many people are now worrying about them, Westgate said, asking questions such as, "When will I get to see my family?" or mourning the experiences they've been missing out on.

Daydreaming is one way to "restore that sense of anticipation and the pleasure we get from imagining positive futures, without the need for those things to actually happen," she said. "Because imagination and daydreaming don't have to be grounded in reality, they offer a potential way to escape, mentally, from what's happening in the present, or to connect with people we can't be around right now, in person."

But daydreaming on command is unexpectedly taxing on the brain, Westgate said, no matter a person's demographics or background.

"You're essentially the director and screenwriter and actor and audience of this whole sort of mental production," she said. "That's a lot to manage. It requires a lot of working memory. It really taxes your ability to play all these simultaneous roles at the same time."

Directing yourself to think pleasant thoughts also seems to be at odds with how people's brains are naturally hardwired, Neda Gould, a clinical psychologist and director of the Mindfulness Program at Johns Hopkins, said. "We're primed to be aware of negativity and distress."

Furthermore, instructing your brain to daydream at a particular moment "violates the basic rules of daydreaming," said Eric Klinger, a professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Minnesota at Morris.

"When there isn't some urgent task the brain is working on, then the brain just naturally goes into this string of things that are in the person's life at that time, current concerns kinds of

"You're essentially the director and screenwriter and actor and audience of this whole sort of mental production. That's a lot to manage. It requires a lot of working memory. It really taxes your ability to play all these simultaneous roles at the same time."

Erin Westgate

assistant professor of psychology at the University of Florida

things, and works them over and usually very briefly," said Klinger, who has researched thought flow and daydreaming. He added: "When someone asks you to daydream, that becomes a task, at least initially, which disrupts the natural flow of consciousness of a brain at 'rest.'"

In a recently published paper titled "What makes thinking for pleasure pleasurable?" which draws on two small studies involving college students, Westgate, Buttrick and their co-authors found that daydream-inducing thoughts should be both pleasant and meaningful.

"It's very easy to think about hedonic pleasures, for instance, eating an ice cream cone or something like that, but you can't really think about that for five minutes," Westgate said. "Even if you did, it wouldn't be very meaningful, and it probably wouldn't actually be that enjoyable."

So how do you come up with pleasurable yet meaningful thoughts that may lead to good daydreams?

According to Buttrick, the secret is preparation. "Having a plan seems to be the thing that matters the most," he said, noting that research suggests compiling a go-to list of topics that you would like to think about.

"The less you have to concentrate on doing the editing, the better," he said.

Westgate said she used to keep index cards on hand with possible ideas but has since started keeping notes on her phone. These days, she enjoys daydreaming about her future garden and scuba diving trips.

Meanwhile, Buttrick said he's been thinking about plans with family and friends once pandemic life comes to an end, and the two kittens he shares with his partner.

It's also critical to pick the right time to daydream, Westgate said.

"You need to have the mental resources to be able to do it without distractions that are keeping you from focusing on your thoughts," she said.

You may, for instance, find it easier to let your thoughts wander to enjoyable subjects while showering or brushing your teeth, Westgate said.

Gould, on the other hand, suggests setting aside some time to actively engage in this type of thinking: "When our attention is divided between two tasks — and, of course, even brushing our teeth and taking a shower has cognitive components to them — then we're not really doing either task with full engagement."

Once you find what works for you, experts recommend treating daydreaming like any other skill you're trying to improve.

"The more we practice, the better we get at it," Gould said. "If there is some benefit for our mood from practicing this, the more we do it, the easier it will be to call on as a resource or a tool when we're down."



Experts say that learning how to daydream may require practice but can provide an escape from the negativity of the pandemic. They say having a go-to list of topics from which to choose and picking the right time to daydream both help.

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WEEKEND: FAMILY



iStock

The CDC has said fully vaccinated individuals two weeks past their final dose may visit indoors with unvaccinated members of a single household, allowing grandparents the joy and relief of finally seeing their grandchildren.

‘You are allowed to hug ...’

Doctor’s prescription to fully vaccinated grandmother goes viral

BY PAULINA FIROZI
The Washington Post

Even after both coronavirus vaccine doses, Evelyn Shaw couldn’t shake the nervousness brought on by months of isolation. She was worried, her family says, about reentering a world she so carefully tiptoed around for more than a year.

The salve was delivered in the form of a handwritten note on a prescription pad, with seven words she needed to hear: “You are allowed to hug your granddaughter.”

Her first hug in a year was captured in a short clip shared on Twitter by one of her daughters. She’s embracing her granddaughter, Ateret Frank, through the hiccup of tears and a sigh of relief.

“She read the note and she burst out crying,” Laura Shaw Frank, one of Evelyn’s daughter’s, told *The Post*. “She felt safe. Finally.”

A simple hug. It’s the kind of moment many are starting to experience as vaccinations ramp up — one of life’s simple joys that for many has felt distant over the last year, at times tainted by worry or guilt.

Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released much-anticipated guidelines giving fully vaccinated people a sense of how they can socialize and return to daily activities. The guidance, which said individuals two weeks past their final dose may visit indoors with unvaccinated members of a single household, freed many vaccinated grandparents to visit near-by children and grandchildren.

Even before the CDC guidance came out, Evelyn’s family knew she had been worried. When Ateret visited her doctor for a checkup, she mentioned her grandmother’s concerns. That’s when her doctor — who is also her grandmother’s physician — wrote the prescription.

Ateret took the slip home, wrote a personal note, and sealed both in an envelope to give her grandmother when she was two weeks out from her second dose.

Jessica Shaw, who shared the image of the prescription note on Twitter, said she was moved by what their family doctor did to ease her mother’s concerns.

“To be able to say, this is medicinal for you too, this is important,” Jessica said. “The mental health and the toll this has taken is also my job to address. It’s also my way of encouraging you and pushing you out of this nest of isolation she’s been in for the last year and saying you can do this, I know you and I am telling you that not only is this safe for you, this is important for you; I am prescribing this.”

Vin Gupta, a critical care pulmonologist at the Uni-

versity of Washington, said when he saw the clip of Evelyn embracing her granddaughter, he thought, “we need more of this.”

He said earlier in the pandemic, it may have been more effective for health officials to highlight the severity of the virus to encourage people to comply with public health measures. Now, to urge people to hold on for just a bit longer, until vaccinations ramp up and more people can return to their lives, it may be more helpful to “message on hope.”

“It would be a folly not to take those examples and say this is happening, we are veering toward normalcy, and we can get there safely and in the quickest way possible if we do what we are doing for a few more months,” he said.

Jessica said she was overwhelmed by the response from people who saw the moment and said, “I’m going to have this moment, too.”

“We’re in mile 21 of this marathon and I hope it gave them a little bit of fuel to keep going,” she said. “This is what you’re going to have, too. My mom’s not alone. Everyone’s going to have this moment.”

The family said throughout the year, they FaceTimed with their mother, often. They all live near each other in New York. So when the weather was nice, they would visit her in person outside and more than six feet away.

“My mom, who is widowed and who lives alone — it’s hard because you want your parent to have support, to have emotional support,” Jessica said. “And you know you are the person — my siblings, my kids, her other grandkids — those are the ones who give her support. But that was the thing that could be the most dangerous. That was really hard for her.”

Gupta said he wasn’t surprised that Evelyn would need an extra nudge from a personal doctor to feel comfortable seeing her family.

“I get constant inquiries along these lines,” he said, adding that it may take time and direct communication from health care providers to encourage people to return to their lives.

“People need to know it’s OK; they want assurance,” Gupta said. “It gives you a sense of how rattled, anxious and how scared people are.”

Laura said as she watched her daughter and mother finally embrace, she was reminded of a Jewish blessing.

“There’s a blessing that you say when you reach an auspicious moment, you thank God for keeping you alive, enabling you to be there for that moment,” she said. “It had a lot of significance as a moment of change.”

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Hoping to re-create the pre-COVID conga line

I had booked the March 2020 trip to Key West as a much-needed getaway after a cold, dark winter serving as caregiver (scullery maid) to my husband Francis when hip replacement surgery rendered him pathetic and helpless. I just needed one glorious week of hot sun, palm trees, tropical drinks, and no one asking me to put on his socks and make him a sandwich to feel human again.

My teenage daughter came along to keep me company. As the most easygoing of our children, Lilly wouldn’t complain about our cheap motel or having no rental car. We spent our days scouting beaches on our rented beach bikes, and nights people-watching along Duval Street. We ate the motel’s continental breakfast of yogurt cups and cellophane-wrapped muffins, then treated ourselves to lunches or dinners out, sometimes scrapping crowded restaurants in favor of ice cream, or takeout eaten in our motel while watching movies.

The news anchors on television said that the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic because of that “coronavirus” thingamabob, but no one in Key West seemed concerned. Whatever it was, it was very far away.

On our last night, Lilly and I, sunburned and flip-flopped, rode our bikes to Mallory Square to watch the street performers one more time. Silhouetted against a brilliant sunset, we watched a juggling mime dangle precariously from a 30-foot stack of chairs. Cuban music wafting from a nearby open-air bar caught our attention, and we floated toward the sounds. Lilly and I wished we could move like the salsa dancers gyrating in the subtropical heat.

An hour later, we were in a sweaty conga line with 20 strangers, grabbing slippery shoulders, jumping to the rhythm, kicking side to side, grinning from ear to ear.

It was a blast — the perfect ending to our trip.

The next morning as we nibbled stale muffins in the motel lobby waiting for the airport taxi, the local news anchors announced that Florida’s governor issued an executive order shutting down all restaurants and bars in the state.

Our world had suddenly become a dangerous place. As we wrapped scarves around our faces, my eyes darted to strangers, doorknobs, handrails and communal spaces that might be deadly in this frightening new world.

Back at home in Rhode Island, Francis, Lilly and I — along with our daughter Anna, who was sent home from college — hunkered down for what we thought would be a month or two of quarantine. But as the deadly virus spread rapidly, our expectations and standards changed with each nightly coronavirus briefing. One by one, things I once thought safe were called into question. Should I disinfect the mail? Does a sneeze travel 15 feet? Can the dog get it? Should I wear gloves? Do masks really work? How long does the virus live on the surface of an apple? A cardboard box? The steering wheel? The light switch?

In March, the shutdown began. In April, stimulus checks were issued. In May, Anna graduated from college online. In June, U.S. COVID-19 cases reached two million. In July, fireworks were canceled. In August, schools didn’t reopen. In September, global COVID-19 deaths surpassed one million. In October, President Trump tested positive. In November, vaccine trials were completed. In December, the first COVID-19 vaccines were administered. In January, cases declined in the U.S. In February, almost 50 million Americans reported receiving at least one dose of the vaccine.

One year later, I began to hope again. Hope that I might begin writing in coffee shops again, instead of being stuck at home all day. Hope that Lilly might go to college in the fall. Hope that I might lose the eight pounds I gained during quarantine. Hope that I might go on another getaway trip.

Hope that I might once again dance with strangers in a sweaty conga line.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com, and in Lisa’s book, *The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com*. Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

TAKE TWO

BY CELESTE WATTS AND JEFF CHEN / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Celeste Watts, of Bloomfield Hills, Mich., is a retired elementary school teacher. After years of solving puzzles in her spare time, she decided to try making one herself. Her first 14 attempts for The Times were rejected, but she persevered. For this one, she collaborated with Jeff Chen, a writer and professional crossword constructor in Seattle, whom she calls "a gifted, patient mentor." The theme idea is Celeste's. Jeff helped her execute it. Finally, success! "One off my bucket list!" — W.S.

ACROSS

- 1 After the fact, as a justification
- 8 Co-star of "The Golden Girls"
- 17 Knock over, so to speak
- 20 Quaker fare
- 21 Go poof
- 22 Drop the ball
- 23 ILLUS__RA__ORS
- 25 What a third wheel might see, in brief
- 26 Setting for most of "Life of Pi"
- 27 Tests the weight of
- 28 One of the Greats?
- 30 Oscars of the sporting world
- 33 Good sign for an angel
- 34 Intl. org. headquartered in Geneva
- 37 Some bad sentences
- 39 ACC__L__RATOR
- 44 Grapple, in dialect
- 47 Exercise too much, say
- 48 A as in Arles
- 49 LUXUR____ACHT
- 54 "___ Agnus Dei" (Mass phrase)
- 55 Peak in Turkey mentioned in both the "Iliad" and the "Aeneid"

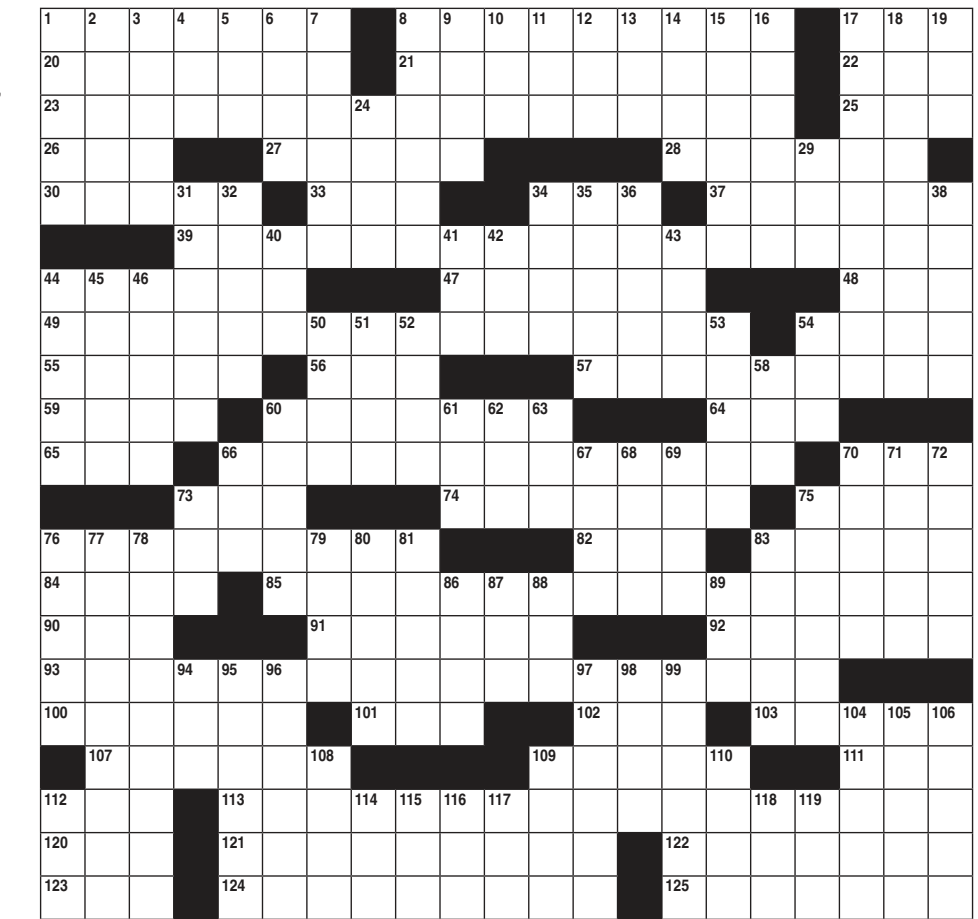
- 56 Runner Sebastian who once held the world record for the mile
- 57 What you might get from a trailer
- 59 Sport played at British boarding schools
- 60 Post production?
- 64 ___mater, membrane surrounding the brain
- 65 Popular 90-min. show
- 66 ENDANGER__EN__
- 70 Man's name that coincidentally is Latin for "honey"
- 73 Word with small or fish
- 74 Weak
- 75 What may result in a handshake
- 76 Help to one's destination
- 82 The Blue Jays, on scoreboards
- 83 Comeback to a challenge of authority
- 84 Bitter
- 85 CONFIG__ __ATION
- 90 Actor Somerhalder
- 91 Most in the style of comedian Steven Wright
- 92 Unfocused
- 93 POL__T OF __IEW
- 100 Go all out
- 101 French fashion inits.
- 102 "Kinda sorta"
- 103 Pan-cook, in a way

- 107 Supermodel Bündchen
- 109 Pepé___ (cartoon skunk)
- 111 Drop off
- 112 Admit (to)
- 113 __OTIC__
- 120 Hit the weed?
- 121 Have guests over
- 122 Guest, e.g.
- 123 Place full of guests
- 124 Start of a seasonal request
- 125 Some kitchen utensils

DOWN

- 1 Entourage
- 2 Hall's partner in pop
- 3 Part of a thong
- 4 "OK, you can stop the story right there"
- 5 Old-fashioned "cool"
- 6 One might speak under it
- 7 Co-star of Kline in "A Fish Called Wanda"
- 8 Start of a compilation heading
- 9 Times for some vigils
- 10 Letters on many towers
- 11 Busy mo. for C.P.A.s
- 12 Go bad
- 13 Three-sport event, for short
- 14 A chest often has a large one
- 15 States
- 16 Recharge
- 17 Photocopy, e.g.
- 18 It's the law!

- 19 Item said to have been burned in protest, once
- 24 Musical prefix with beat
- 29 Memphis-to-Nashville dir.
- 31 Emphatic assent
- 32 Lively dance genre
- 34 Hone
- 35 Contract details
- 36 Beehive State city
- 38 Aerodynamic
- 40 Bishop's jurisdiction
- 41 Antagonist
- 42 Hotel-room staples
- 43 Top-notch
- 44 Booties
- 45 Playwright Chekhov
- 46 Garbage
- 50 Drink similar to a slushie
- 51 About 460 inches of rain per year, on Kauai's Mt. Waialeale
- 52 HBO satire starring Julia Louis-Dreyfus
- 53 ___ bar
- 54 Org. that takes the lead on lead?
- 58 Baby fox
- 60 How a flirt may act
- 61 Football stat. Abbr.
- 62 NaOH
- 63 Radio broadcaster: Abbr.
- 66 Legislation that was part of F.D.R.'s New Deal
- 67 Ethnic group of Rwanda and Burundi
- 68 Two, for four



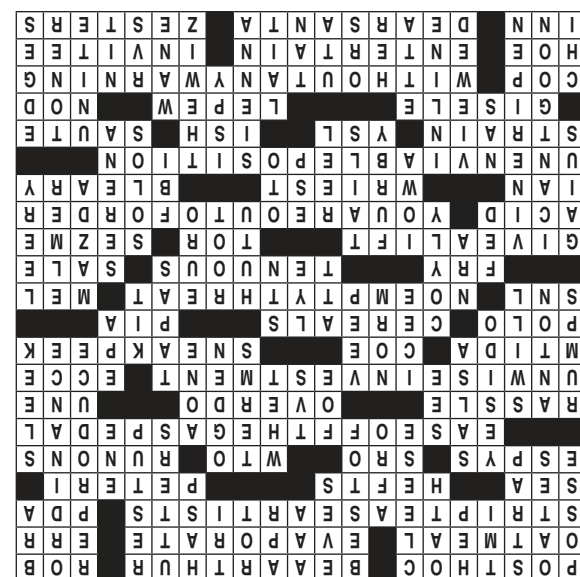
- 69 Coin with 12 stars
- 70 "Zoom-Zoom" sloganer
- 71 Hollywood composer Bernstein with 14 Oscar nominations
- 72 Guarded
- 73 Like pets and parking meters
- 75 ___ Slam (tennis feat)
- 76 Julius Caesar's first name
- 77 Words of hopelessness
- 78 Mature naturally, in a way
- 79 ___ Writers' Workshop
- 80 Electronic Hasbro toy
- 81 One side of the coin
- 83 Arias, typically
- 86 Scottish folk dance
- 87 Alternative explanation for a lucky guess, in brief
- 88 Ear: Prefix
- 89 Letters on some badges
- 94 "Stillmatic" rapper
- 95 Seen
- 96 Kind of skate
- 97 Brown shade
- 98 Kids' observation game
- 99 Hit musical with an "Emerald City Sequence"
- 104 Yoke
- 105 HP product
- 106 Narrowly beats (out)
- 108 Singer James
- 109 Drink for un bébé
- 110 A full moon will do this
- 112 Life force, in China
- 114 ___ Majesty
- 115 Hosp. areas
- 116 The Jazz, on scoreboards
- 117 Brown shade
- 118 Things for happy campers?
- 119 Picky person's pick?

GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE

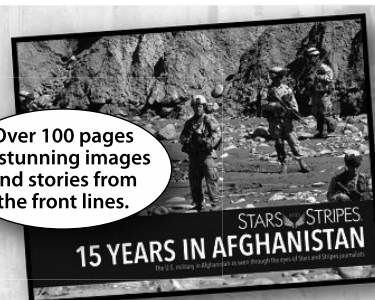


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Biden's tax hike wouldn't spare the middle class

By MICHAEL R. STRAIN

Bloomberg Opinion

President Joe Biden is reportedly considering the first major tax increase in several decades. It won't be clear whether higher taxes are worth paying until more is known about the spending programs they would finance.

But it's not too soon to say that at least one aspect of Biden's approach doesn't add up: the promise to leave middle-class taxpayers alone.

A top White House economist made clear on Monday that Biden doesn't want to impose costs on anyone earning less than \$400,000 per year. At the same time, the White House is likely to push for a higher corporate tax rate. These goals are incompatible. If the corporate rate goes up, it will reduce the incomes of the middle class.

The corporate tax rate was lowered from 35% to 21% as part of the 2017 tax law. Biden is said to be considering an increase to 28%. Tempting though it is to wish that faceless entities like corporations would shoulder the burden, sparing individuals the pain, in reality corporate taxes are always financed by people. The only question is which ones.

Economists used to think that the burden of corporate taxation fell almost entirely on the owners of capital in the form of lower share prices or, say, smaller dividend checks.

That view became outdated as it became easier for capital to cross national borders. Workers, by contrast, are much less internationally mobile. This leaves them more vulnerable when business owners are forced to pony up higher taxes on their business income.

A higher corporate rate lowers the after-

tax return on additional investment. Less investment makes workers less productive, which in turn makes them less valuable. If workers are less valuable, then businesses will reduce efforts to attract and retain them, putting downward pressure on starting salaries and restraining wage growth. So the burden of the corporate tax increase would fall on workers in the form of lower wages.

Like any economic theory, this one has holes. For example, to the extent that corporate profits are generated by a brand name and not by additional investment, then a higher tax rate wouldn't be expected to lower wages. But the theory is the right place to start.

The idea that wages go down when business taxes go up is the consensus view of economists. The Tax Policy Center (a joint venture of the Urban Institute and Brookings Institution) assigns 20% of the burden of the corporate tax to workers in its economic models. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office concludes that workers bear 25% of the tax's burden.

The noisy and rancorous debates over the 2017 tax law will make it harder to sort out the pros and cons of Biden's proposal now because both sides of that debate retreated to political talking points that gave short shrift to economic knowledge.

It takes time for a change in the corporate rate to affect wages, but supporters of the 2017 cut argued that wages and incomes would quickly increase. Some corporations decided to credit the 2017 law when issuing one-time bonuses in late 2017 and 2018, rather than the tight labor markets that actually drove them. Opponents pointed to stock buybacks, arguing that corporations didn't

use their tax savings appropriately, and ignoring the key fact that the mechanism by which tax changes affect wages is through changing incentives for future behavior.

That misleading debate will color Biden's attempt to raise the corporate rate. But the conversation will be even more distorted by former President Donald Trump's trade wars. Supporters of Biden's proposed corporate-rate increase will argue that the 2017 cut didn't boost investment or wages. That argument would be a lot less persuasive if Trump hadn't restrained investment through his trade policies, which acted to reduce business spending at the same time the 2017 tax law was encouraging it.

Still, the quality and winner of the political debate won't change the fact that workers — very much including those with incomes below \$400,000 — will see their wages fall if Biden hikes the corporate rate. That's only one reason not to do it. Future prosperity will be strengthened if the U.S. continues to be thought of as the place for corporations to set up shop and do business. A tax rate at least as low as the ones in Europe and most other advanced economies is one way to help ensure U.S. global competitiveness.

If you tax something, you get less of it. Does the U.S. want less corporate income? I don't think so.

Biden's proposal to pay for new spending instead of financing it by piling on more debt is refreshing and laudable. But Mr. President, please look elsewhere to raise revenue.

Bloomberg Opinion columnist Michael R. Strain is director of economic policy studies and Arthur F. Burns Scholar in Political Economy at the American Enterprise Institute and the author of "The American Dream Is Not Dead: (But Populism Could Kill It)."

The all-electric vehicle future is now — or is it?

By CHARLES LANE

The Washington Post

Is the day of the electric vehicle at hand? Judging by the headlines, you'd have to say yes. General Motors has announced an "aspiration" to sell only EVs by 2035. Volkswagen just held a "Power Day" to tout investments in batteries and charging stations. Competition from GM, VW and others hurt Tesla's stock price a bit, but its market capitalization, \$675 billion, still exceeds all but five other U.S. corporations.

Time for a reality check on what this means for cutting carbon emissions — starting with two numbers.

The first is 281.4 million, which is how many vehicles there are in the United States' light-duty fleet, 99% of them powered by internal combustion engines. The second is 19.6, which is how many years it would take for this fleet to become 90% electric — assuming it stayed at around 280 million and that every new vehicle sold from now on is an EV.

What's more, even in this implausible scenario, which is derived from the U.S. fleet's turnover rate as estimated by MIT professor David Keith, the reduction in carbon emissions would not be as dramatic as you might think.

As of 2040, the U.S. electric grid will still run on 11% coal and 40% natural gas, according to Energy Department forecasts. That is, the fuel for our imagined 90% plug-in fleet would still be half fossil.

It's hard to do an apples-to-apples comparison between the carbon emissions associated

with gasoline, carried and consumed in motor vehicles, and that associated with electricity from a natural gas-coal blend, transmitted via the grid (with inevitable energy losses). The bottom line, though, is that a 90% EV fleet would not reduce carbon output by 90% — far from it. Such are the real-world challenges of trying to transform U.S. energy consumption, one car-buying decision at a time.

To repeat: The above is a mere thought experiment. On March 10, The New York Times published a more realistic projection from IHS Markit, an economic forecasting firm, in which EVs reach 60% of new-vehicle sales over the next three decades. In that scenario, 20% of cars would be plug-ins by 2040; emissions reductions would be correspondingly modest.

Even this projection seems ambitious, given consumer preferences: Seventy-six percent of the 14.5 million new vehicles sold in 2020 were either SUVs or pickups.

The real difference-maker would be an electric equivalent of popular models, available at the same price, which in turn depends on rapid advancements in EVs' most expensive component, the battery. The number of such vehicles available today is: zero. Tesla's Model X SUV starts at \$79,990; the most practical version of its planned Cybertruck pickup is \$69,900. Volkswagen has an all-electric SUV, the ID.4. The model Car and Driver magazine tested retails for \$45,190 — and in cold weather its battery ran out after just 190 miles.

Meanwhile, a consumer could have a fully loaded Toyota RAV-4 gas-powered hybrid for

thousands of dollars less than the ID.4, with none of the "range anxiety" — and still feel good about a green purchase. (It gets 41 mpg on the highway.)

That American car-buyers now keep vehicles for an average of 12 years, up from 9.6 years in 2002, according to IHS Markit, is a tribute to the automotive industry's quality improvements. It also reflects rising new-car prices, which put them out of reach for lower-income families. Either way, vehicle electrification will produce disappointing near-term carbon emissions unless the U.S. fleet turns over far faster, and dealers sell far more new plug-ins, than would occur if consumers were left on their own.

There may be ways to change that — but probably not without spending lots of taxpayer money, perhaps through a proposal by Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., for a 10-year, \$392 billion program to subsidize trade-ins of older gas-powered vehicles for plug-ins. Another option: coercive steps, such as Britain's ban on new internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle sales after 2030. Achieving an all-electric fleet by 2050 could require the United States to put in a 2035 new-ICE ban, the Times reports.

For now, carmakers, politicians, Silicon Valley and Wall Street are pushing an upbeat EV narrative in which the U.S. automotive fleet goes clean and green painlessly, with no trade-offs or hard choices for anyone.

Charles Lane is a Washington Post editorial writer specializing in economic and fiscal policy, and a weekly columnist.

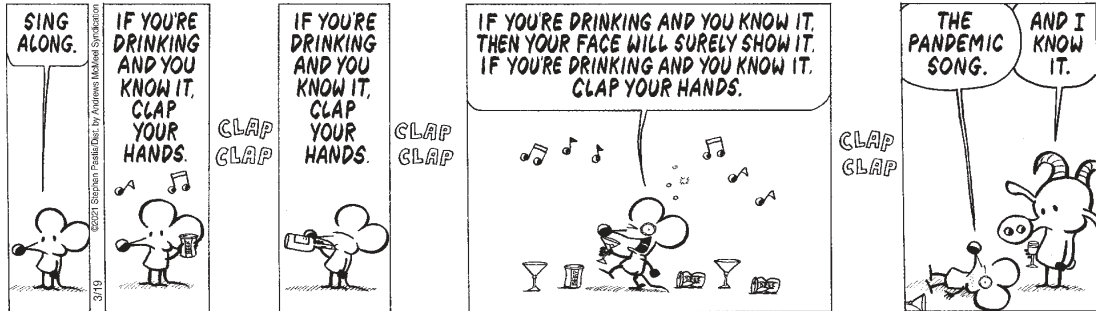
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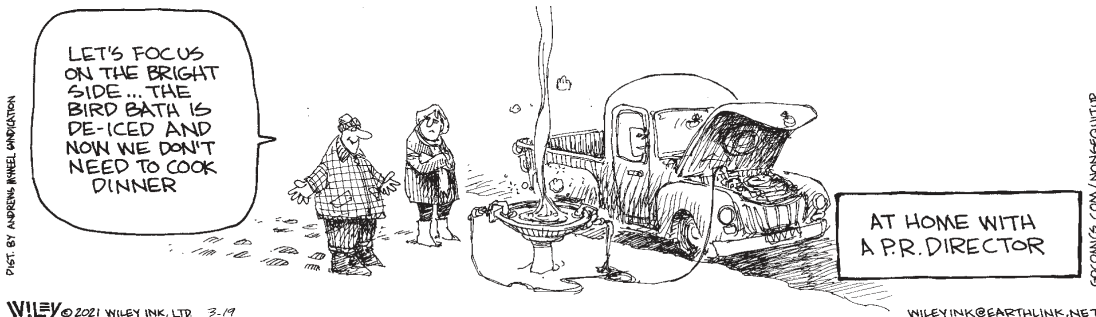
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



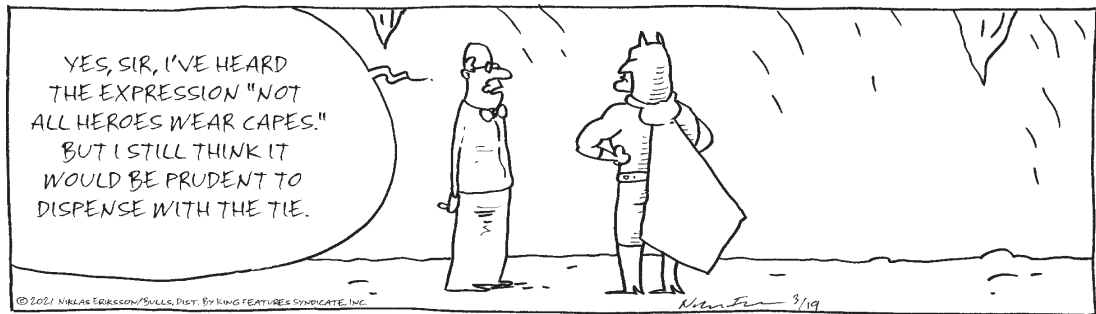
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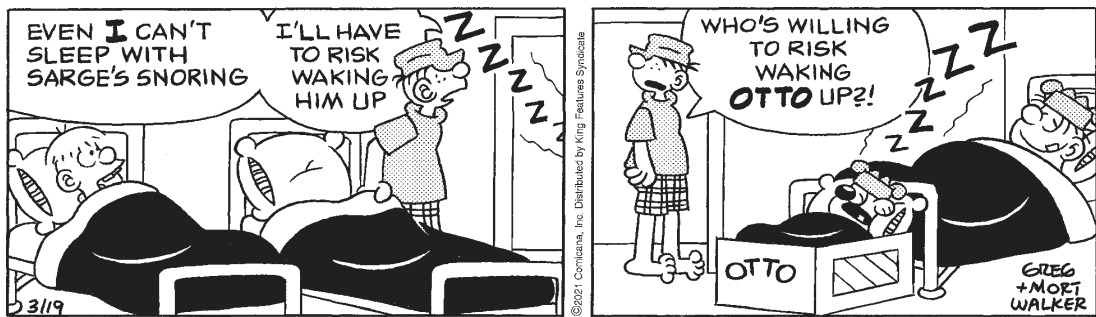
Candorville



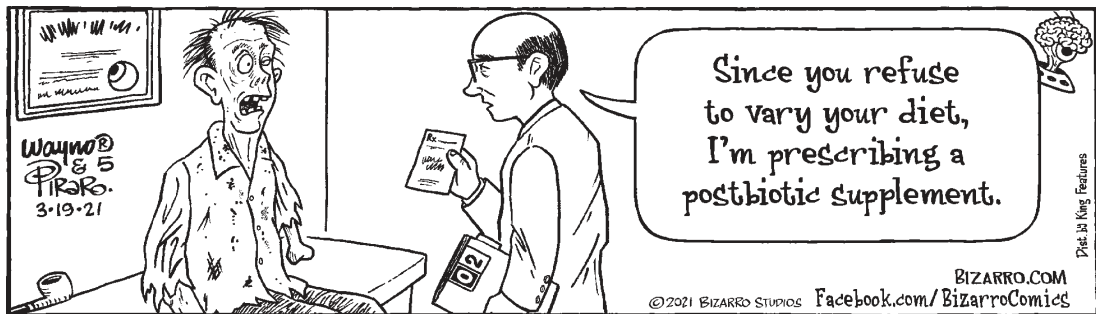
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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45	46	47				48	49					
50						51				52		
53						54				55		

ACROSS

- 1 River blocker
- 4 Nevada city
- 8 Flag feature
- 12 "Where did — wrong?"
- 13 Baseball's Moises
- 14 Fade away
- 15 Get the better of
- 17 Author Bagnold
- 18 Wicker material
- 19 Napkin's place
- 21 Peculiar
- 22 Not passive
- 26 Eucalyptus muncher
- 29 Letter addenda, for short
- 30 Standard
- 31 Sea flier
- 32 Corpulent
- 33 Nightclub of song
- 34 Actor Stephen
- 35 Chess piece
- 36 Factions
- 37 "Nothing for me, thanks"
- 39 Coffee holder
- 40 Shock partner
- 41 Obliterates initials
- 45 Pride parade delivered
- 50 "Nope!"
- 51 "Les États- —"
- 52 Gun lobby org.
- 53 Bands' bookings

- 54 Diplomacy
- 55 Cry

- 24 Smoke an e-cig
- 25 Eventful periods
- 26 Russell of "Waitress"
- 27 Utah city
- 28 Scrambled wd.
- 29 Skillet
- 32 Disappear gradually
- 33 Humidor item
- 35 Trim the grass
- 36 Most certain
- 38 Solemn promises
- 39 Army doc
- 42 "— and Lovers" (D.H. Lawrence novel)
- 43 Modern money
- 44 Wild guess
- 45 Schlep
- 46 4, on a phone
- 47 Glitch
- 49 Genetic letters

DOWN

- 1 French perfume brand
- 2 Water, in Mexico
- 3 Abolitionist Lucretia
- 4 Holiday Inn rival
- 5 Serengeti antelope
- 6 Neither here — there
- 7 Endure longer than
- 8 Used a broom
- 9 Light brown
- 10 Blackbird
- 11 Flushed
- 16 Stylish wrap
- 20 Rm. coolers
- 23 Apple product

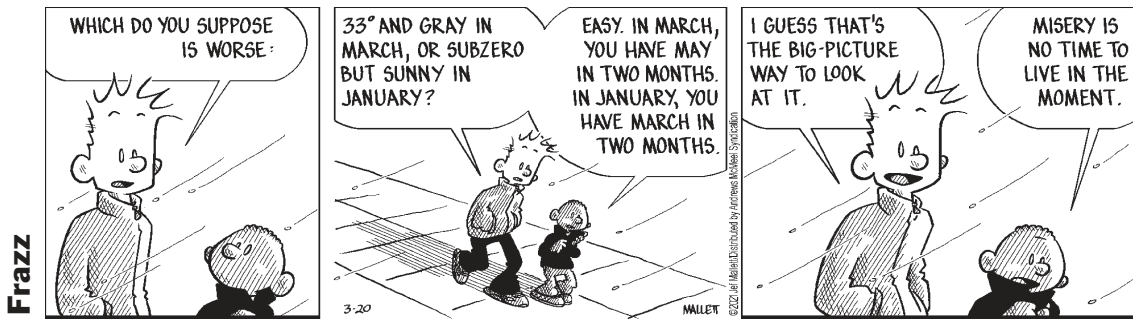
Answer to Previous Puzzle

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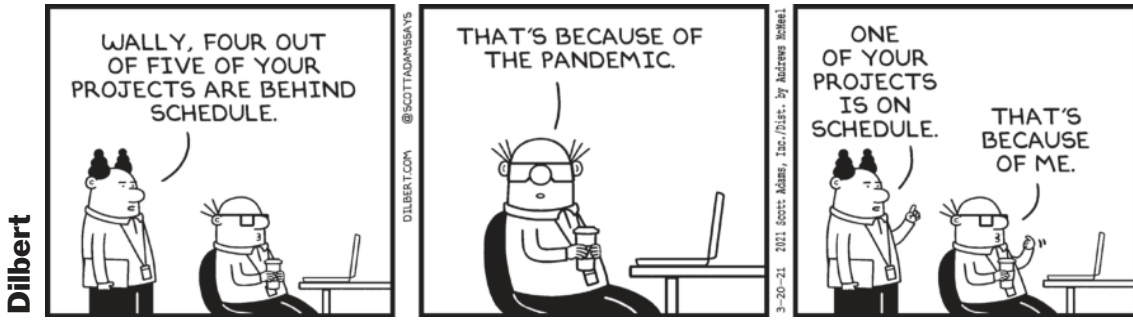
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CRYPTOQUIP

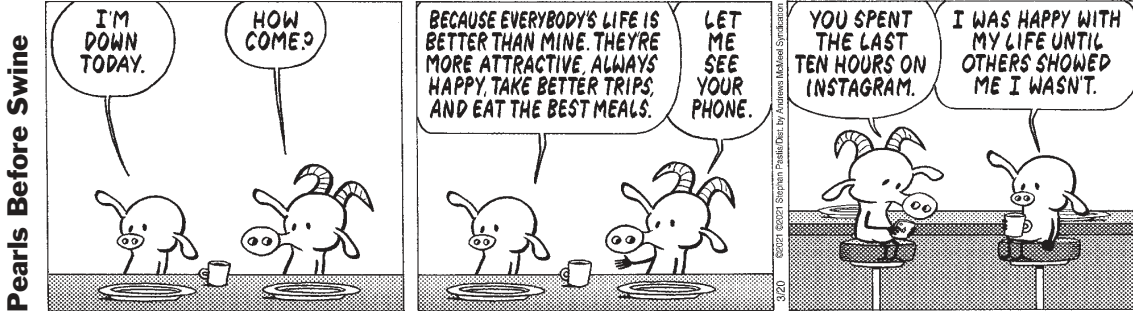
PO ZFDZIF MFIPFEF WDQMAOQI
 FEFVAY HNAQH IIR ADDX
 ZIHN F, P'W YHR ATR HUF
 ATPVXPVK ATPVKY AUQF.
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: TRENDY TELEVISION TALENT SHOW WITH ASPIRING SINGERS FROM A FLORIDA PORT CITY: "MIAMI VOICE."
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Z equals P



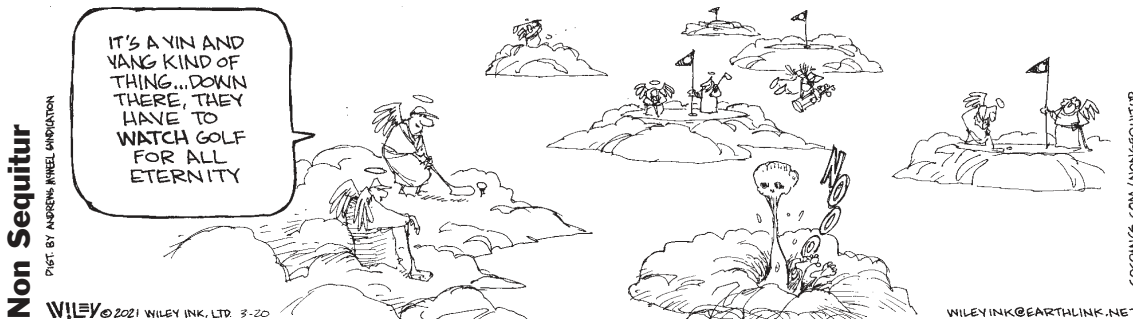
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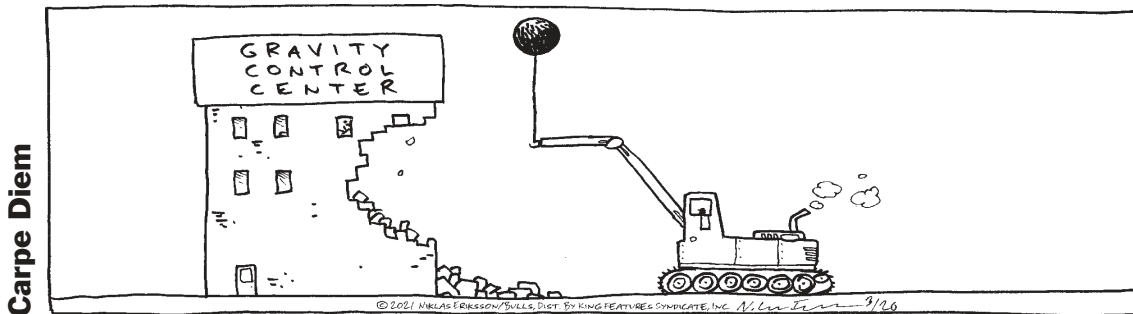
Pearls Before Swine



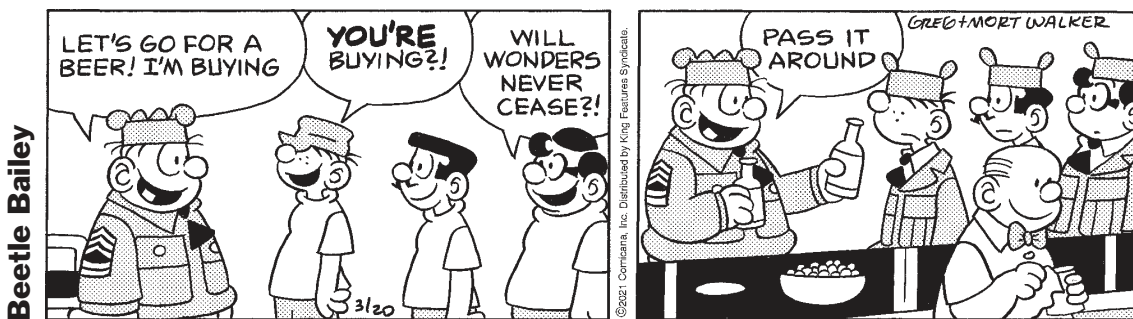
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro

Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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56								57				

ACROSS

- 1 Groom carefully
- 6 Difficult situation
- 12 "Burnt" crayon color
- 13 Bar supply
- 14 "Ben-Hur" star
- 15 Discounted
- 16 "Beetle Bailey" dog
- 17 Vatican leader
- 19 Reuben bread
- 20 Blender sound
- 22 June honoree
- 24 Unpaid TV spot
- 27 Mimics
- 29 Conked out
- 32 Actor who voiced Sid the Sloth in "Ice Age"
- 35 — gin fizz
- 36 Ganges wrap
- 37 Fanatic
- 38 Thumbs-up
- 40 Dresden denial
- 42 Belief
- 44 Campus VIP
- 46 Wax-coated cheese
- 50 "The Woman in Me" singer Twain
- 52 Figures of speech
- 54 Taking heed of
- 55 Unkempt
- 56 Black Sea port
- 57 Lucy's pal

DOWN

- 1 Artist Mondrian
- 2 Take five
- 3 Following behind
- 4 6, on a phone
- 5 Primitive flutes
- 6 Fall into a beanbag chair
- 7 Like notebook paper
- 8 Mensa measures
- 9 Protector
- 10 Sacred
- 11 Fir or yew
- 12 HBO competitor
- 18 Pasta sauce herb
- 21 "2001" computer
- 23 Wood-shaping tool
- 24 Nightwear, for short
- 25 Note after fa

- 26 Maritime greeting
- 28 Can't-miss
- 30 Outback bird
- 31 Speck
- 33 Born
- 34 Three, on a sundial
- 39 Whirls
- 41 Equine comment
- 42 "Money — object"
- 43 Not barefoot
- 45 Sitarist's music
- 47 Lavish affection (on)
- 48 Human rights lawyer Clooney
- 49 Flavor enhancer, for short
- 51 Serbian city
- 53 Not "dis"

Answer to Previous Puzzle

D	A	M		R	E	N	O		S	T	A	R		
I	G	O		A	L	O	U		W	A	N	E		
O	U	T	S	M	A	R	T		E	N	I	D		
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G	I	G	S				T	A	C	T		S	O	B

3-20

CRYPTOQUIP

ULGF CR FLP ACIIVP TX STQE
 UTEJUPPJ CX STQ GEP
 AGJCWZ ETMPR XTE G
 VCKCWZ? TKPE-FLP-LPAM IGS.
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF PEOPLE BELIEVE DOUBTFUL EVENTS ACTUALLY TOOK PLACE, I'D SAY THEY ARE THINKING THINGS TRUE.
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals D

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Announcements 040

Automotive 140

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SCAM FADS

Classifieds scams can target both sellers and buyers with classified advertisements.

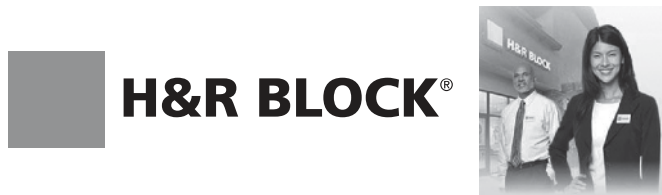
Be aware of the common red flags.

Some of the latest Scam fads are:

- Vehicle buyers wanting to buy sight unseen and have the vehicle shipped through an agent using paypal.
- People saying Free Dog (different breeds) for adoption.

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SCOREBOARD/BASEBALL

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Men's NIT

First Round
Wednesday, March 17
At Denton, Texas
 Richmond 76, Toledo 66
At Frisco, Texas
 W. Kentucky 69, Saint Mary's (Cal) 67
Thursday, March 18
At Denton, Texas
 Davidson (13-8) vs. NC State
At Frisco, Texas
 Boise State (18-8) vs. SMU (11-5)
Friday, March 19
At Denton, Texas
 Colorado State (18-6) vs. Buffalo (16-8)
At Frisco, Texas
 Mississippi (16-11) vs. Louisiana Tech (21-7)
Saturday, March 20
At Denton, Texas
 Memphis (16-7) vs. Dayton (14-9)
At Frisco, Texas
 St. Louis (14-6) vs. Mississippi State (15-14)

CBI

Quarterfinals
Monday, March 22
 Stetson (11-14) vs. Bowling Green (14-11)
 Coastal Carolina (16-7) vs. Bryant (15-6)
 Longwood (12-16) vs. Pepperdine (12-12)
 Bellarmine (13-7) vs. Army (12-9)

NCAA Men's Division II Tournament

Quarterfinals
At Evansville, Ind.
Wednesday, March 24
 Lincoln Memorial vs. Colorado Mines
 West Texas A&M vs. Daemen
 NW Missouri St. vs. West Liberty
 Flagler vs. Truman

Women's NCAA Tournament

ALAMO REGION
First Round
Sunday, March 21
At San Antonio
 Stanford (25-2) vs. Utah Valley (13-6)
 Oklahoma St. (18-8) vs. Wake Forest (12-12)
 Missouri St. (21-2) vs. UC Davis (13-2)
 Oregon (13-8) vs. South Dakota (19-5)
 Georgia (20-6) vs. Drexel (14-8)
 Northwestern (15-8) vs. UCF (16-4)
 Louisville (23-3) vs. Marist (18-3)
At Austin, Texas
 Arkansas (19-8) vs. Wright St. (18-7)
HEMISFAIR REGION
First Round
Sunday, March 21
At San Antonio
 South Carolina (22-4) vs. Mercer (19-6)
 Georgia Tech (15-8) vs. Stephen F. Austin (24-2)
 West Virginia (21-6) vs. Lehigh (10-5)
At San Marcos, Texas
 Oregon St. (11-7) vs. Florida St. (10-8)
Monday, March 22
At Austin, Texas
 UCLA (16-5) vs. Wyoming (14-9)
At San Marcos, Texas
 Texas (18-9) vs. Bradley (17-11)
At San Antonio
 Alabama (16-9) vs. North Carolina (13-10)
 Maryland (24-2) vs. Mount St. Mary's (17-6)

PRO BASEBALL

Spring training

Wednesday's games

Tampa Bay 10, Pittsburgh 9
 Boston 9, Minnesota 1
 Philadelphia 2, Detroit 0
 Miami 3, N.Y. Mets 2
 N.Y. Yankees 1, Toronto 0
 L.A. Dodgers 4, Chicago White Sox 3
 Oakland 10, Kansas City 5
 San Francisco 11, Colorado 8
 Baltimore 5, Atlanta 2
 St. Louis 4, Houston 4
 Chicago Cubs 8, San Diego 2
 Texas 3, Arizona 0
 Cincinnati 12, Cleveland 7
 L.A. Angels 7, Seattle 4

Thursday's games

Washington vs. N.Y. Mets at Port St. Lucie, Fla.
 Chicago Cubs vs. Cleveland at Goodyear, Ariz.
 Kansas City vs. Chicago White Sox at Glendale, Ariz.
 Oakland vs. San Diego at Peoria, Ariz.
 L.A. Dodgers vs. Arizona at Scottsdale, Ariz.
 Milwaukee vs. L.A. Angels at Tempe, Ariz.
 Miami vs. St. Louis at Jupiter, Fla.
 Cincinnati vs. Texas at Surprise, Ariz.
 Seattle vs. San Francisco at Scottsdale, Ariz.

Friday's games

Tampa Bay vs. Boston at Fort Myers, Fla.
 Toronto vs. Detroit at Lakeland, Fla.
 St. Louis vs. N.Y. Mets at Port St. Lucie, Fla.
 L.A. Angels vs. Kansas City at Surprise, Ariz.
 Chicago Cubs vs. Oakland at Mesa, Ariz.
 Arizona vs. Milwaukee at Phoenix
 Cleveland vs. Colorado at Scottsdale, Ariz.
 Baltimore vs. Pittsburgh at Bradenton, Fla.
 Minnesota vs. Atlanta at North Port, Fla.
 Washington vs. Houston at West Palm Beach, Fla.

RIVER WALK REGION

First Round
Sunday, March 21
At San Antonio
 UConn (24-1) vs. High Point (22-6)
 Iowa (18-9) vs. Cent. Michigan (18-8)
 Kentucky (17-8) vs. Idaho St. (22-3)
 Michigan (14-5) vs. Florida Gulf Coast (26-2)
 Baylor (25-2) vs. Jackson St. (18-5)
At Austin, Texas
 Syracuse (14-8) vs. S. Dakota St. (21-3)
 Tennessee (16-7) vs. Middle Tennessee (17-7)
At San Marcos, Texas
 Virginia Tech (14-9) vs. Marquette (19-6)
MERCADO REGION
First Round
Sunday, March 21
At San Marcos, Texas
 NC State (20-2) vs. NC A&T (14-2)
At Austin, Texas
 South Florida (18-3) vs. Washington St. (12-11)

Monday, March 22

At San Marcos, Texas
 Gonzaga (23-3) vs. Belmont (20-5)
 Rutgers (14-4) vs. BYU (18-5)
At San Antonio
 Indiana (18-5) vs. VCU (16-10)
 Arizona (16-5) vs. Stony Brook (15-5)
 Iowa St. (16-10) vs. Michigan St. (15-8)
At Austin, Texas
 Texas A&M (23-2) vs. Troy (22-5)

Women's NIT

FORT WORTH REGIONAL
At Fort Worth, Texas
First Round
Friday, March 19
 Rice (18-4) vs. Arizona St. (11-10)
 Missouri (9-11) vs. Fresno St. (16-10)
 Houston (16-7) vs. San Francisco (15-10)
 New Mexico (15-4) vs. Cal Baptist (24-0)
CHARLOTTE REGIONAL
At Charlotte, N.C.
First Round
Friday, March 19
 Delaware (21-4) vs. Fordham (12-4)
 Clemson (11-13) vs. Ohio (14-8)
 Florida (11-13) vs. Charlotte (10-10)
 Villanova (15-6) vs. UMass (14-7)

MEMPHIS REGIONAL

At Collierville, Tenn.
First Round
Friday, March 19
 Nebraska (12-12) vs. UT Martin (20-5)
 Colorado (10-10) vs. Louisiana-Lafayette (16-6)
 Mississippi (11-11) vs. Samford (14-9)
 Tulane (17-8) vs. Illinois St. (15-7)
ROCKFORD REGIONAL
At Rockford, Ill.
First Round
Friday, March 19
 Dayton (14-3) vs. N. Iowa (14-12)
 Bowling Green (20-6) vs. Creighton (9-11)
 DePaul (14-8) vs. Saint Louis (12-4)
 Drake (16-11) vs. Milwaukee (19-7)

NCAA Women's Division II Tournament

Quarterfinals
At Columbus, Ohio
Tuesday, March 23
 Drury vs. Charleston, W.Va.
 Lander vs. Azusa Pacific
 Lubbock Christian vs. Daemen
 Belmont Abbey vs. Central Miss.

Philadelphia vs. N.Y. Yankees at Tampa, Fla.

Texas vs. L.A. Dodgers at Glendale, Ariz.
 Chicago White Sox vs. Seattle at Peoria, Ariz.
 Cincinnati vs. San Francisco at Scottsdale, Ariz.

Saturday's games

Pittsburgh vs. Detroit at Lakeland, Fla.
 Houston vs. St. Louis at Jupiter, Fla.
 Toronto vs. Philadelphia at Clearwater, Fla.
 Boston vs. Atlanta at North Port, Fla.
 Colorado vs. Chicago Cubs at Mesa, Ariz.
 Cleveland vs. Chicago White Sox at Glendale, Ariz.
 L.A. Dodgers vs. San Diego at Peoria, Ariz.
 Kansas City vs. Arizona at Scottsdale, Ariz.
 Oakland vs. L.A. Angels at Tempe, Ariz.
 Miami vs. Washington at West Palm Beach, Fla.
 N.Y. Yankees vs. Baltimore at Sarasota, Fla.
 Tampa Bay vs. Minnesota at Fort Myers, Fla.
 Seattle vs. Texas at Surprise, Ariz.
 Milwaukee vs. Cincinnati at Goodyear, Ariz.

MLB calendar

March 27 — Last day to offer a retention bonus to an eligible player attending spring training with a minor league contract.
March 30 — Last day to place a player on waivers for 45 days termination pay.
April 1 — Opening day, active rosters reduced to 26 players.
July 11-13 — Amateur draft.
July 13 — All-Star Game, Atlanta.
July 25 — Hall of Fame induction, Cooperstown, N.Y.
Aug. 12 — New York Yankees vs. Chicago White Sox at Dyersville, Iowa.
Aug. 22 — Los Angeles Angels vs. Cleveland at Williamsport, Pa.
Dec. 1 — Collective bargaining agreement expires, 11:59 p.m. EST.

TENNIS

Mexican Open

Wednesday
At Fairmont Acapulco Princess
Acapulco, Mexico
Purse: \$1,053,910
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Men's Singles
Round of 16
 Dominik Koepfer, Germany, def. Milos Raonic (4), Canada, 6-4, 6-2.
 Felix Auger-Aliassime (7), Canada, def. Sebastian Korda, United States, 6-3, 6-4.
 Lorenzo Musetti, Italy, def. Frances Tiafoe, United States, 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (1).
 Grigor Dimitrov (5), Bulgaria, def. Miomir Kecmanovic, Serbia, 6-4, 6-2.
 Alexander Zverev (2), Germany, def. Laslo Djere, Serbia, 6-4, 6-3.
 Casper Ruud (8), Norway, def. Tallon Griekspoor, Netherlands, 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (3).
 Stefanos Tsitsipas (1), Greece, def. John Isner, United States, 6-3, 6-2.
 Cameron Norrie, Britain, def. Fabio Fognini (6), Italy, 6-4, 6-3.

Dubai Duty Free Championships

Wednesday
At Dubai Tennis Stadium
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Purse: \$1,897,805
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Men's Singles
Round of 16
 Denis Shapovalov (3), Canada, def. Hubert Hurkacz (13), Poland, 6-4, 6-3.
 Jeremy Chardy, France, def. Karen Khachanov (8), Russia, 6-7 (3), 6-4, 6-4.
 Jannik Sinner (16), Italy, def. Roberto Bautista Agut (4), Spain, 6-4, 3-6, 7-5.
 Aslan Karatsev, Russia, def. Lorenzo Sonego (17), Italy, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.
 Kei Nishikori, Japan, def. Aljaz Bedene, Slovenia, 6-4, 6-4.

COLLEGE HOCKEY

Wednesday's scores

EAST
 UMass Lowell 6, Boston College 5, 2OT
 UMass 5, Providence 2

AP SPORTLIGHT

March 19

1950 — Babe Didrikson Zaharias shoots a record 298 and beats Clair Doran by eight strokes to capture the U.S. Women's Open.

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League
BOSTON RED SOX — Optioned RHP Tanner Houck to the alternate training site. Reassigned C Kole Cottam, RHP Daniel Gossett, LHP Stephen Gonsalves, 1B Josh Ockimey, 1B/3B Triston Casas, OF Jarren Duran, and INF/OF Yairo Munoz to minor league camp.
DETROIT TIGERS — Optioned OF Derek Hill to Toledo (Triple-A East).
HOUSTON ASTROS — Optioned RHPs Ronel Blanco and Austin Hansen, OF Pedro Leon and C Scott Manea to minor league camp.
TEXAS RANGERS — Assigned RHPs Drew Anderson, Jason Behr, Jharel Cotton and Luis Ortiz to minor league camp.
National League
PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Reassigned INF Ji-hwan Bae and Cs Christian Kelley and Arden Pabst, RHP Yerry De Los Santos and LHP Blake Weiman to minor league camp.
SAN DIEGO PADRES — Optioned RHPs Mason Thompson to El Paso (Triple-A West), Jordan Humphreys and Reggie Lawson to San Antonio (Double-A Central). Assigned Pedro Avila, Ivan Castillo, Ethan Elliott, Brady Feigl, Juan Fernandez, Mason Fox, Robert Hassell III, Jagger Haynes, Jonny Homza, Chase Johnson, Patrick Kivlehan, Justin Lange, Aaron Leasher, Parker Markel, Joshua Mears, Evan Miller, Jacob Nix, James Reeves, Jacob Rhome, Eguay Rosario, Wynston Sawyer, Steven Wilson to minor league camp.
BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association
MIAMI HEAT — Traded F Meyers Leonard and a draft consideration to Oklahoma City for F Trevor Ariza.
FOOTBALL
National Football League
ARIZONA CARDINALS — Acquired OL Rodney Hudson and a seventh-round pick in the 2021 NFL Draft from Las Vegas in exchange for a third-round 2021 pick. Agreed to terms with WR A.J. Green on a one-year contract. Re-signed LB Tanner Vallejo to a two-year contract.
ATLANTA FALCONS — Acquired TE Lee Smith from Buffalo in exchange for a seventh-round 2022 NFL Draft pick.
CHICAGO BEARS — Released DB Buster Skrine. Agreed to terms with QB Andy Dalton, DB Deon Bush and OL Germain Ifo on one-year contracts.
CLEVELAND BROWNS — Agreed to terms with S John Johnson and DE Takkarist McKinley on a one-year contract.
DALLAS COWBOYS — Released P Chris Jones.
DENVER BRONCOS — Agreed to terms with CB Ronald Darby on a three-year contract.
DETROIT LIONS — Signed DE Romeo Okwara to a contract extension. Re-signed LB Jalen Reeves-Maybin. Released CB Desmond Trufant.
HOUSTON TEXANS — Signed CB Vernon Hargreaves III to a contract extension. Released C/G Zach Fulton.
INDIANAPOLIS COLTS — Waived DT Andrew Brown. Claimed DT Andrew Brown off waivers from Houston.
JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS — Re-signed TE James O'Shaughnessy and K Aldrick Ros-

Marton Fucsovics, Hungary, def. Dusan Lajovic (11), Serbia, 6-1, 4-6, 6-4.
 Andrey Rublev (2), Russia, def. Taylor Fritz (15), United States, 6-3, 6-1.
 Lloyd Harris, South Africa, def. Filip Krajinovic (14), Serbia, 7-6 (5), 6-4.

Monterrey Open

Wednesday
At Club Sonoma
Monterrey, Mexico
Purse: \$235,238
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor
Women's Singles
Round of 16
 Viktoria Kuzmova, Slovakia, def. Harriet Dart, Britain, 6-4, 6-3.
 Anna-Karolina Schmiedlova, Slovakia, def. Jasmine Paolini, Italy, 2-6, 6-2, 6-2.
 Sara Sorribes Tormo (7), Spain, def. Kaja Juvan, Slovenia, walkover.
 Leylah Annie Fernandez, Canada, def. Kristina Kucova, Slovakia, 6-1, 6-4.

St. Petersburg Ladies Trophy

Wednesday
At Sport Club Dinamo
St. Petersburg, Russia
Purse: \$565,530
Surface: Hardcourt indoor
Women's Singles
Round of 32
 Anastasia Gasanova, Russia, def. Katarina Zavatska, Ukraine, 6-2, 6-7 (6), 7-5.
Round of 16
 Vera Zvonareva, Russia, def. Fiona Ferro (3), France, 6-7 (6), 7-5, 7-6 (2).
 Svetlana Kuznetsova (4), Russia, def. Xinyu Wang, China, 6-1, 7-5.
 Ekaterina Alexandrova (1), Russia, def. Tereza Martincova, Czech Republic, 6-3, 6-4.
 Jaqueline Adina Cristian, Romania, def. Jelena Ostapenko (17), Latvia, 6-3, 7-6 (9).

BY RONALD BLUM

Associated Press

NEW YORK — If a minor league player says an umpire is acting like a robot this year, he might be right.

Computer umpires for balls and strikes are coming to a low-level minor league but are a while away from the big leagues.

Major League Baseball plans to use Automated Ball-Strike technology (ABS) in eight of nine ballparks at the Low-A Southeast League, which starts play May 4 across Florida as minor league baseball resumes after a one-year break caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Major League Baseball Umpires Association agreed in its labor contract that started in 2020 to cooperate and assist if Commissioner Rob Manfred decides to utilize the system at the major league level. MLB intends to include the subject in talks this year to replace the agreement with the players' association that expires Dec. 1.

"It's hard to handicap if, when or how it might be employed at the major league level, because it is a pretty substantial difference from the way the game is called today," Chris Marinak, MLB's chief operations and strategy officer, said Wednesday during an on-line presentation on 2021 innovation and fan engagement.

MLB tracks the accuracy of ball-strike calls by its plate umpires but doesn't release the figures. Umpire Angel Hernandez, in a lawsuit filed against Major League Baseball, said his accuracy on ball-strike calls increased from 92.19% in 2012 to 96.88% in 2016.

The independent Atlantic League became the first American professional league to let a computer call balls and strikes at its All-Star Game in July 2019 and experimented with ABS during the second half of that season. It also was used in the Arizona Fall League for top prospects that year, drawing complaints of its calls of breaking balls.

"The goal here is really to focus on demonstrating system reliability and to start to get more athlete feedback from more players, coaches and umpires," Marinak said. "The technology is really in pretty good shape."

Computer umpires coming to minors

MLB

Comeback kids

Orioles' Mancini leads list of players who are back in action after missing part or all of 2020 season

By ROB MAADDI
Associated Press

Trey Mancini had surgery for colon cancer last year on the same day Major League Baseball shut down spring training due to COVID-19.

Baseball returned later in 2020 and Mancini is back now, healthy and ready to go.

His comeback story has been a highlight of spring training. Mancini is not only the best player on the Baltimore Orioles, he's the most popular.

"There were times, especially when I was diagnosed early on where I wasn't totally sure if I was ever going to play baseball again," Mancini recalled upon his return. "Just being able to feel like myself, feel great and participate in everything fully is something I'm very appreciative of and I don't take for granted at all."

Mancini, who turns 29 next week, had a breakout season in 2019, batting .291 with 35 homers and 97 RBIs. He singled in his first at-bat in nearly a year and got a standing ovation from a socially distanced crowd at the ballpark.

Here are five more players looking to rebound in 2021:

Stephen Strasburg

The 2019 World Series MVP pitched five innings last season before carpal tunnel surgery. He struck out four of the six batters he faced in his spring training debut this week, and the 32-year-old righty is expected to make four more appearances for Washington before the season.

Corey Kluber

The two-time AL Cy Young Award winner has thrown only 36 2/3 innings over the past two seasons, one since May 2019 when he

was hit on the right forearm by a comebacker. Kluber tore a muscle in his right shoulder in his Texas debut last July 26 and agreed to an \$11 million, one-year deal with the New York Yankees in January.

The Yankees are hoping the 34-year-old righty can regain the form that made him one of baseball's best pitchers in Cleveland from 2013-18.

Yordan Álvarez

The 2019 AL Rookie of the Year played just two games for Houston last season before having surgery on both knees. The Astros are easing Álvarez back this spring training, and he hasn't appeared in a game yet.

He hit .313 with 27 homers and 78 RBIs in only 313 at-bats in 2019, helping Houston win the AL pennant.

Mitch Haniger

A 2018 All-Star outfielder with Seattle, Haniger hasn't played since June 2019 due to multiple injuries and surgeries. He's swinging the bat well this spring and is a welcome addition to the Mariners' lineup.

Haniger hit .285 with 26 homers and 93 RBIs in 2018. He slumped to .220 with 15 homers and 32 RBIs in 63 games in 2019 before injuries derailed him.

Chris Archer

A two-time All-Star with Tampa Bay, Archer is back with the Rays after 2 1/2 disappointing seasons in Pittsburgh. The righty missed last season due to surgery for thoracic outlet syndrome and was 6-12 with a 4.92 ERA in 33 starts with the Pirates. He signed a \$6.5 million, one-year deal, returning to the AL champion Rays.



PAUL SANCYA / AP

The Baltimore Orioles' Trey Mancini, who hit .291 with 35 homers in 2019, missed last season after having colon cancer surgery.



DAVID J. PHILLIP / AP

Arizona Diamondbacks starting pitcher Zac Gallen only threw 72 innings last season but says he's ready to ramp back up to 200 innings if needed this season.

Workload worries: Teams ponder how to protect pitchers

By DAVID BRANDT
Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — If the Arizona Diamondbacks want to win a lot of games this season they probably need right-hander Zac Gallen to throw a lot of quality innings.

If the franchise wants to be good for the next several years, it's also imperative that the 25-year-old — who finished ninth in the NL Cy Young voting last season — stays healthy.

The challenge of balancing the present and the future is nothing new for Major League Baseball teams, who are particularly careful with star young pitchers. But the calculus might be even tougher in 2021 because pitchers are coming off a much smaller workload during the pandemic-shortened 2020 season.

Gallen, who finished with a 3-2 record and a 2.75 ERA last season in 72 innings, is adamant he's ready to ramp back up to nearly 200 innings if needed, even if it appears unlikely the D-backs would push him that hard.

"I'm going to pitch until they tell me to stop pitching," Gallen said. "And then I'll probably still say, 'No, let me go back out there.'"

There's little doubt teams will be very careful extending their pitchers to the usual 180 to 200 innings that a typical starter logs in a 162-game season. There's even talk about using six-man rotations for some teams, including the Seattle Mariners, who used the strategy for much of 2020 during the 60-game schedule.

"Our primary thought behind it is to preserve the health and well-being of our pitchers," Seattle



JAE C. HONG / AP

Colorado Rockies manager Bud Black said he plans to stick with a five-man rotation, going against the trend of teams using six starters.

GM Jerry Dipoto said. "In an era where teams are trying to find a competitive advantage by throwing their starters for shorter lengths of time and just running them harder, we feel like our advantage, our competitive advantage is by keeping our pitchers healthy and having our best pitchers pitch over the length of the season, rather than the potential dangers of running them into the injury."

But the strategy might not be a great decision for every team. The five-man rotation has been a durable staple for MLB teams over the past 30 to 40 years, even as sabermetrics have changed many of the game's strategies.

The math is fairly simple. In a five-man rotation, pitchers make about 32 starts per season. Assuming an average of about six innings per start, that's 192 innings through a 162-game schedule.

In a six-man rotation, the number of starts goes down to 27. At

six innings a start, that's 162 innings in a season, or 30 less than a pitcher in a five-man rotation.

Certainly, that means pitchers get more rest. But it also means a staff ace isn't on the mound as much.

For teams like the Washington Nationals (Max Scherzer), New York Yankees (Gerrit Cole) or Los Angeles Dodgers (Clayton Kershaw and Trevor Bauer), that doesn't seem ideal.

Colorado manager Bud Black is one who plans to stick with a five-man rotation if possible.

"A lot of times it's what we can condition our players to do and right now our starting pitchers across baseball are conditioned to throw every fifth day," Black said. "We can go on and on about pitch counts and 200 innings and all the things that go in with that, but we as an industry have created some of these standards — good or bad."

Teams won't necessarily have to go to a six-man rotation to preserve their arms. There are other strategies available, including fewer innings per start or skipping an occasional start when the schedule allows.

"I'm not in the logistics business so for me to try and game-plan would be above my pay grade," Gallen said. "But there's things I imagine you could do throughout the year. Maybe take a look at days off or whatever it is, push a start back."

The goal is to avoid a situation where Gallen is shut down during important games in September or the playoffs.

"That would be the last time you would want to be sitting on the sideline," Gallen said.

NBA/HIGH SCHOOL: DODEA PACIFIC

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	28	13	.683	—
Brooklyn	28	13	.683	—
Boston	20	20	.500	7½
New York	20	21	.488	8
Toronto	17	23	.425	10½
Southeast Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	22	19	.537	—
Charlotte	20	19	.513	1
Atlanta	20	20	.500	1½
Washington	14	25	.359	7
Orlando	13	26	.333	8
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	26	14	.650	—
Chicago	18	21	.462	7½
Indiana	17	22	.436	8½
Cleveland	15	25	.375	11
Detroit	11	29	.275	15
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
San Antonio	21	16	.568	—
Dallas	21	18	.538	1
Memphis	18	19	.486	3
New Orleans	17	23	.425	5½
Houston	11	28	.282	11
Northwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Utah	29	10	.744	—
Denver	24	16	.600	5½
Portland	23	16	.590	6
Oklahoma City	17	23	.425	12½
Minnesota	9	31	.225	20½
Pacific Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Phoenix	26	12	.684	—
L.A. Lakers	27	13	.675	—
L.A. Clippers	26	16	.619	2
Golden State	21	20	.512	6½
Sacramento	16	24	.400	11

Wednesday's games

Sacramento 121, Washington 119
 Brooklyn 124, Indiana 115
 Detroit 116, Toronto 112
 Milwaukee 109, Philadelphia 105, OT
 San Antonio 106, Chicago 99
 Golden State 108, Houston 94
 Cleveland 117, Boston 110
 Denver 129, Charlotte 104
 Memphis 89, Miami 85
 Dallas 105, L.A. Clippers 89

Thursday's games

Utah at Washington
 Oklahoma City at Atlanta
 Orlando at New York
 Minnesota at Phoenix
 New Orleans at Portland
 Charlotte at L.A. Lakers

Friday's games

Sacramento at Boston
 San Antonio at Cleveland
 Brooklyn at Orlando
 Detroit at Houston
 Golden State at Memphis
 Indiana at Miami
 Utah at Toronto
 Chicago at Denver
 Dallas at Portland
 Minnesota at Phoenix

Saturday's games

Atlanta at L.A. Lakers
 Golden State at Memphis
 Sacramento at Philadelphia
 San Antonio at Milwaukee
 Charlotte at L.A. Clippers

Sunday's games

Indiana at Miami
 Oklahoma City at Houston
 New Orleans at Denver
 Orlando at Boston
 Chicago at Detroit
 Toronto at Cleveland
 Washington at Brooklyn
 Philadelphia at New York
 Dallas at Portland
 L.A. Lakers at Phoenix

Scoring leaders

Through March 17

	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Beal, WAS	36	407	265	1159	32.2
Lillard, POR	38	357	278	1158	30.5
Embiid, PHI	31	293	304	928	29.9
Antetokounmpo, MIL	39	413	265	1135	29.1
Curry, GS	39	375	198	1130	29.0
Doncic, DAL	36	360	206	1026	28.5
LaVine, CHI	39	398	175	1109	28.4
Irving, BKN	29	305	105	800	27.6

NBA relaxing safety protocols

Vaccinated persons will have more freedom

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
Associated Press

The NBA is relaxing some of its health and safety protocols for individuals who are fully vaccinated, changes including fewer mandated coronavirus tests, no quarantine requirements following contact tracing issues and even the ability to visit restaurants again.

Only one team — the New Orleans Pelicans — has publicly acknowledged a teamwide vaccination effort so far, doing so this past weekend after state rules in Louisiana were amended and made it possible for the team to start the process for players, coaches and staff. No one in the NBA will be considered fully vaccinated until two weeks after receiving the final vaccine dose.

Once that happens, rules for some of those individuals will change, the NBA said in a memo sent early Thursday to teams and obtained by The Associated Press. Daily point-of-care testing will not be required for players or head coaches prior to entering team facilities, nor will testing still be required on days off.

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said at the All-Star Game earlier this month that changes would be in store for those who choose to get the vaccine.

The contact tracing part of the new rules will be a major benefit. Being flagged by contact tracing has been an issue for many players this season, including Ben Simmons

and Joel Embiid of the Philadelphia 76ers, both of whom had to miss the All-Star Game and the start of the season's second half because a barber that they visited tested positive — but they did not. Had they been fully vaccinated, they would not have had to miss any time even after being around someone who tested positive for COVID-19.

Other benefits for those who are vaccinated, the league said, would include the ability to have other family members and friends visit their homes without a need for testing; being able to have visitors at the team hotel on road trips; eating outdoors at restaurants at home or on the road; and being able to commute to and from team facilities with other fully vaccinated individuals.



MATT SLOCUM / AP

The Philadelphia 76ers' Ben Simmons had to miss the NBA All-Star Game after coming in contact with a barber who tested positive for COVID-19.

Triple jump added to virtual track season

By **DAVE ORNAUER**
Stars and Stripes

KADENA AIR BASE, Okinawa — It's been a couple of years since Grace Carey last did the triple jump at Randolph High School in San Antonio, Texas.

But the Kadena junior says she's glad that DODEA Pacific has added it to its track and field lineup for the upcoming season. It will debut this weekend: Friday at Kubasaki and Saturday at Kadena and Humphreys.

Adding triple jump is another step in bringing DODEA Pacific's track and field program in line with schools in the U.S. and in DODEA Europe, DODEA Pacific's athletics coordinator Tom McKinney said.

"They do it in Europe, they do it in the States. It gives the athletes the opportunity to do another event," McKinney said.

Carey's coach, Doyle Robertson, says he's been lobbying for the event to be added for five years.

"It's smart," Robertson said, adding that it helps make athletes more rounded. "We had 12 running events and only four field events before this. Now, we have a fifth field event." Though the events might seem similar, Carey said there are some subtle differences: "It takes a little feel for the steps; there's a whole different rhythm to it."

Of the 12 DODEA high schools in the Pacific, only Guam has competed in the event. The boys Pacific record is 13.85 meters (45 feet, 5 inches) set by Guam's David Wilson in 1985 and the girls mark is 11.05 (36-3) in 2007 by Amelia Clark of Jakarta International.

Most schools will be competing



DAVE ORNAUER/Stars and Stripes

Kadena junior Grace Carey is trying her hand at triple jump, added this season by DODEA Pacific. Carey last did the triple jump at Randolph High School in San Antonio, Texas.

on their own during the season, with the current exception of South Korea. The season will end with a virtual Far East meet April 30-May 1 — before the annual two-week Advanced Placement testing period.

Unlike the last 10 years, athletes will not have to qualify; three athletes per school per event will be eligible, meet organizer Tim Pujol said.

"With no travel and therefore no expense, we have no reason to limit the overall number of participants," Pujol said in an email to athletics directors. But athletes are still limited to four total events and schools may only enter one team in relay events.

Okinawa

Sophomore and Division I cross

country champion Karise Johnson headlines what could be the strongest Panthers distance lineup in a decade. Another cross country veteran, senior Beau Black, is trying his hand at relays and the 400.

Senior Caleb Wise has claimed Kadena's top throwing spots. Senior Tiare Schmid and juniors Ke-vonte Speight and Trent Fowler headline the boys sprint corps, with Speight also running 300 hurdles.

Kubasaki is young, but has a strong senior relay group of Arena and Nai'a Current and Natalia Sanchez. Dragons senior Arthur Parra missed the last two cross country meets with an undisclosed medical condition, but is back and heads the Dragons' distance corps. "I'm grateful to have this opportunity and see how I bounce back from cross country," Parra said.

Korea

Daegu has a strong sprint corps of senior Alyssa Cline, juniors Kayla Randall and Steven Jones and freshman Anthony Torrance; the latter two will also do long jump. Junior Klean Book comes over from cross country to run distance races.

Senior sprinters Chasity Johnson, Freedom Cody and Deontaye Gregory return for defending DI champion Humphreys, as do senior distance runner Hannah Rickett and junior hurdler Alaina Areniego. Sprinter Darnell Wilks transfers from North Carolina. Junior Jewlya Arrington and senior Jayden Brinkerhoff will do throws.

Osan has four seniors: thrower Gregory Lunn and sprinters Ka-

dena McGinnis, Layla Barker and Xavier Nevarez, plus junior distance runners Connor Floyd and Zsa Zsa Le Blanc and thrower Ingrid Pele. Sophomore Parker Hendrickson could do big things in distance races.

Japan

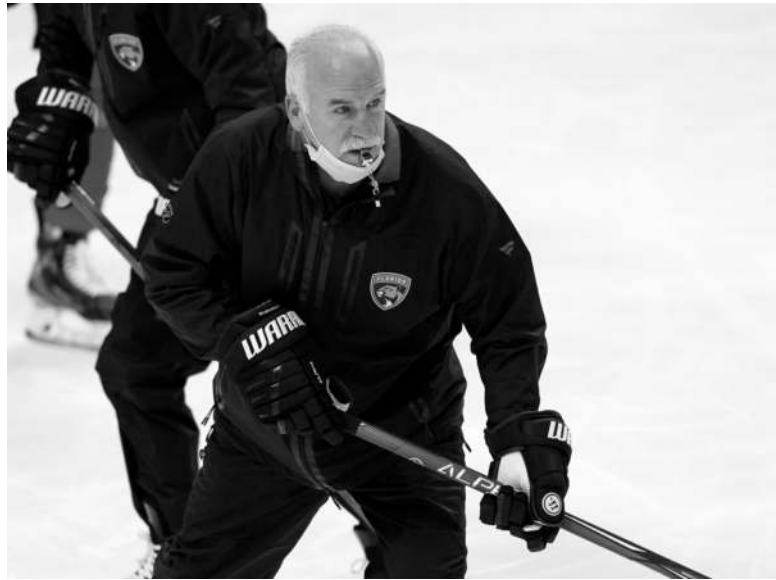
Reigning Far East Division II school champion Yokota has the past two D-II cross country champions, junior Aiko Galvin and sophomore Reagan Cheramie, but the numbers are thin, coach Dan Galvin said. "Two or three sprinters in each gender, a couple of decent throwers and our cross country team," he said.

Junior Morgan Erler took second behind Cheramie in Far East cross country and is the headline distance runner for Robert D. Edgren. Freshman Tyler Gaines, the boys Far East D-II winner, does likewise for E.J. King.

Sophomore Gabriel Escalera took third in the Far East D-II boys cross country and joins the Zama distance crew. Junior Keshawn McNeill, the reigning Far East D-II high jump champion, returns as does senior Grace Bryant, who won discus at Far East in 2019.

Nile C. Kinnick is hindered by not having a track of its own, though McKinney says DODEA is "working on that." For the moment, the Red Devils work out where they can, coach Luke Voth says, with senior sprinters Jacob Vitug and Kimaya Fletcher, junior sprinters Samantha Crisci and John Moon and junior distance runner Austin Shinzato returning.

NHL/NFL



LYNNE SLADKY/AP

Florida Panthers head coach Joel Quenneville won three Stanley Cups while coaching the Chicago Blackhawks.

Quenneville has Florida out front

Panthers just may be true Cup contenders

BY TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

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SUNRISE, Fla. — Florida coach Joel Quenneville loves horse racing. As any good bettor does, he goes through all the past performances for every horse in the field before making his wager.

He's not an expert. "Below average," he said. Perhaps Quenneville should stick to hockey. The bet he made on the Panthers a couple of years ago seems to be on the cusp of a big-time payoff.

Florida — a franchise that has made missing the playoffs an art form, with no series wins since 1996 — is at the midpoint of this season, Year 2 of the Quenneville era, tied for the most points in the NHL. At 19-5-4, the Panthers are off to the best 28-game start in their history in terms of points and winning percentage.

And for the first time in a quarter-century, the Panthers might be a true contender for the Stanley Cup.

There are plenty of reasons why: Aleksander Barkov is playing like the best in the game, goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky is back in top form after a down year, and Aaron Ekblad and MacKenzie Weegar might be the top defenseman duo in the league.

The biggest reason, though, might be Quenneville, the mustachioed guy behind the bench. He preaches simple hockey, tough hockey, team-first hockey. The Panthers are soaking up every word.

"Even if it's the most complicated play on the ice, he's OK with it so long as it works," Ekblad said. "So that's one of the things I've learned. Obviously, there's a time and place to make a simple play.

Number of third-period goals the Florida Panthers have scored this season, tops in the NHL.

SOURCE: Associated Press

And there's a time and place to make the play that's going to help us win the game."

The Panthers have trailed at some point in 14 of their 19 victories; they were down 3-1 to Chicago on Monday night before ripping off the game's final five goals for yet another comeback win. They're 4-0-0 this season against the Blackhawks, who fired Quenneville — a three-time champion coach there — only 15 games into the 2018-19 season.

The Panthers haven't had anything close to a rough patch yet. They're 8-0-1 after a loss this season, have scored five or more goals 10 times and given up five or more only twice. And they're the only team so far with a winning record this season against reigning Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay.

"Everyone is having fun on the ice," Barkov said. "And that's when everyone starts to notice you. Half of the season done, we're in a good spot."

Florida has stars on the ice, without question. But it's Quenneville who is pushing all the right buttons. He's cut down on practice time this season because of the compressed schedule and the demands on players' bodies, choosing to do more work in the video room instead. The result has been fresher legs, and Florida's 36 third-period goals entering Tuesday was tops in the NHL — a big part of all those comeback wins.

NHL scoreboard

East Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	29	19	6	4	42	103	88
N.Y. Islanders	30	19	7	4	42	87	67
Pittsburgh	29	18	10	1	37	94	82
Boston	27	15	8	4	34	73	65
Philadelphia	27	14	10	3	31	88	96
N.Y. Rangers	28	12	12	4	28	85	76
New Jersey	26	9	13	4	22	65	84
Buffalo	28	6	18	4	16	60	97

Central Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Tampa Bay	28	20	6	2	42	102	67
Florida	28	19	5	4	42	99	81
Carolina	28	20	7	1	41	97	72
Chicago	30	14	11	5	33	92	98
Columbus	30	11	12	7	29	80	99
Dallas	25	9	9	7	25	72	68
Nashville	29	12	16	1	25	71	97
Detroit	30	9	17	4	22	68	99

West Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	27	20	6	1	41	90	61
Minnesota	27	18	8	1	37	86	64
Colorado	27	17	8	2	36	86	64
St. Louis	29	14	10	5	33	89	96
Los Angeles	28	12	10	6	30	83	79
Arizona	29	12	13	4	28	70	88
San Jose	27	11	13	3	25	80	96
Anaheim	30	8	16	6	22	67	103

North Division							
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	30	19	9	2	40	102	79
Winnipeg	29	18	9	2	38	97	85
Edmonton	32	19	13	0	38	110	94
Montreal	29	13	8	8	34	93	80
Vancouver	33	15	16	2	32	92	104
Calgary	30	14	13	3	31	83	92
Ottawa	33	10	20	3	23	87	130

Wednesday's games

N.Y. Rangers 9, Philadelphia 0
Winnipeg 4, Montreal 3, OT
Los Angeles 4, St. Louis 1
Edmonton 7, Calgary 3
Vancouver 3, Ottawa 2, SO
Vegas 5, San Jose 4

Thursday's games

Boston at Buffalo
Chicago at Tampa Bay
Columbus at Carolina
Nashville at Florida
Philadelphia at N.Y. Islanders
Pittsburgh at New Jersey
Dallas at Detroit
Minnesota at Colorado
Winnipeg at Edmonton
Arizona at Anaheim

Friday's games

Calgary at Toronto
N.Y. Rangers at Washington
Vancouver at Montreal
St. Louis at San Jose
Vegas at Los Angeles

Saturday's games

Boston at Buffalo
Pittsburgh at New Jersey
Nashville at Florida
Minnesota at Colorado
Chicago at Tampa Bay
Calgary at Toronto
Columbus at Carolina
Dallas at Detroit
N.Y. Rangers at Washington
Philadelphia at N.Y. Islanders
Vancouver at Montreal
Arizona at Anaheim
St. Louis at San Jose
Winnipeg at Edmonton

Sunday's games

New Jersey at Pittsburgh
Florida at Tampa Bay
Vegas at Los Angeles
Nashville at Dallas

Scoring leaders

Through Thursday

	GP	G	A	PTS
Connor McDavid, EDM	32	18	38	56
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	32	17	32	49
Patrick Kane, CHI	30	12	30	42
Mitchell Marner, TOR	30	11	28	39
Mark Scheifele, WPG	29	12	25	37
Auston Matthews, TOR	27	21	15	36
Anze Kopitar, LA	28	8	26	34
Mark Stone, LV	26	10	24	34
Jonathan Huberdeau, FLA	28	10	24	34
Aleksander Barkov, FLA	28	12	22	34
Brad Marchand, BOS	27	12	21	33
Nicklas Backstrom, WSH	29	12	21	33
Nikolaj Ehlers, WPG	29	15	16	31
Mikko Rantanen, COL	27	14	16	30
Brock Boeser, VAN	33	15	15	30

FREE AGENT ROUNDUP

Some vets prosper as business season begins in the NFL

BY BARRY WILNER
The Associated Press

As the NFL opened its business year Wednesday, veterans Trent Williams, A.J. Green and Emmanuel Sanders prospered.

Some teams officially announced deals that consistently leaked during the "legal tampering" period that began Monday, and others stayed pretty silent. That trio of players with a total of 31 pro seasons made out very well despite not getting big offers immediately.

The 49ers held onto the best tackle who could have become a free agent by giving Williams the richest contract ever for an offensive lineman. Williams is a particularly intriguing case. His agents at Elite Loyalty Sports said the deal agreed to early Wednesday will pay Williams \$138.1 million over the next six years, surpassing the \$138 million deal David Bakhtiari got from Green Bay a year ago. Williams also will get the biggest signing bonus ever for an offensive lineman at \$30.1 million, as well as \$55.1 million guaranteed.

Green joins the Cardinals and ends a decade in Cincinnati, though he has been plagued by injuries recently and sat out 2019. Arizona, which also acquired center Rodney Hudson from the Raiders for a third-round draft pick, already has a No. 1 receiver in DeAndre Hopkins, and long-time star Larry Fitzgerald has not made a decision on returning for an 18th season. He got a one-year deal worth \$8 million. The Cardinals added veteran placekicker Matt Prater, who owns the NFL record with a 64-yard field goal made in 2013 with Denver.

Sanders, joining his fourth franchise, didn't make out quite so well as Green as he heads to Buffalo. But he gets to join All-Pro receiver Stefon Diggs catching balls from Josh Allen.

Elsewhere:

■ Quarterback Tyrod Taylor agreed to a one-year contract with Houston, giving the Texans an insurance policy if they trade Deshaun Watson or if they don't trade him and he decides to sit out this season. Watson has been unhappy with the direction of the team and has requested a trade.

■ Eight-time Pro Bowl cornerback Patrick Peterson left Arizona after 10 seasons to join the Minnesota Vikings, who agreed with the 30-year-old on a one-year contract worth up to \$10 million, according to a person with knowledge of the

negotiations, speaking on condition of anonymity to the AP because the team had yet to announce the deal.

■ The Panthers went for defense with linebackers Haason Reddick and Denzel Perryman and end Morgan Fox.

Reddick played under Panthers coach Matt Rhule at Temple. The 13th overall pick in the 2017 draft is coming off a breakout season with 12 1/2 sacks, six forced fumbles and 15 tackles for a loss.

■ Raiders coach Jon Gruden, who likes speedy wideouts as much as he enjoys watching game film, added John Brown, recently cut by Buffalo. Brown could be a veteran deep threat in Las Vegas after Nelson Agholor left in free agency for New England.

■ Seattle made its first big move to bolster its offensive line and appease quarterback Russell Wilson by acquiring veteran guard Gabe Jackson from Las Vegas for a fifth-round draft pick.

■ Kansas City agreed to a \$5 million contract for next season with three-time Pro Bowl guard Kyle Long, who will come out of retirement. Earlier this week, the Chiefs gave an \$80 million, five-year deal to Patriots offensive lineman Joe Thuney. KC's offensive line was a sieve in its Super Bowl loss to Tampa Bay.

The Chiefs also agreed to one-year deals to keep running back Darrel Williams, linebacker Ben Niemann and defensive end Taco Charlton.

■ Detroit took away one of division-rival Green Bay's offense pieces, giving a two-year contract to running back Jamaal Williams. He was a backup to Aaron Jones with the Packers, and figures to fill the same role in Detroit behind D'Andre Swift and Kerryon Johnson.

The Lions also arranged a trade with the Rams for steady defensive tackle Michael Brockers as they attempt to rebuild one of the NFL's worst units. They released veteran cornerback Desmond Trufant.

■ Washington stayed busy by agreeing with wide receiver Curtis Samuel, who becomes the No. 2 wide receiver behind Terry McLaurin. The 24-year-old shined in Carolina's victory at Washington last season, setting career highs with 106 yards receiving and 52 yards rushing. Washington also agreed with cornerback William Jackson on a contract worth \$42 million over three years with \$26 million guaranteed.

NCAA TOURNAMENT



FRANK FRANKLIN II / AP

Connecticut's James Bouknight drives past Creighton's Antwann Jones during the Big East Tournament semifinals. Bouknight averages more than 20 points a game to lead the seventh-seeded Huskies.

Backcourt players who could shine

BY DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS—Six months after Dan Hurley was hired to resurrect Connecticut, which had just gone through a messy divorce with Kevin Ollie, the former Wagner and Rhode Island coach landed the commitment that would go a long way toward helping.

That's when James Bouknight became the first player to commit to his first real recruiting class.

Fast forward a few years and not only does Hurley have the Huskies back in the NCAA Tournament, he has one of the best floor generals in college basketball leading the way. Bouknight has developed into a scoring machine, averaging more than 20 points a game, while leading seventh-seeded UConn into a first-round game against No. 10 seed Maryland.

"He's done so much for UConn basketball," Hurley said. "His decision to come here has changed the landscape."

There are a lot of coaches that have similar feelings about their own backcourts.

The NCAA Tournament always seems to put a premium on guard play, and that may be even more important during this most bizarre of tournaments. So here's a look at other backcourt wizards looking to make their mark on March.

McKinley Wright IV, Colorado

Talk about the rather shallow history of Buffaloes hoops and the discussion inevitably turns to Chauncey Billups, who parlayed a dazzling career in Boulder that included all kinds of records into a standout NBA career.

Wright has etched his name right along-

side Billups this season.

The senior guard, who returned to Colorado after initially declaring for the NBA draft, became the first Pac-12 player to top 1,700 points, 600 rebounds and 600 assists. He's averaging 15.5 points, 4.3 boards and 5.6 assists on the season.

"I continue to say this almost every media interview," Wright said during the Pac-12 Tournament, "when I got my coaches and teammates believing in me the way they do, it just makes my job so much easier."

Jordan Bohannon, Iowa

Luka Garza gets most of the headlines for the Hawkeyes as a unanimous first-team All-American, but a lot of his school-record point total has come thanks to his backcourt of Bohannon, Connor McCaffery and Joe Toussaint.

Bohannon averaged 4.5 assists this season, helping the Hawkeyes lead the nation with 19.1 per game. He also was smart with the rock, helping them to the best assist-to-turnover rate in the nation, too.

Jaquori McLaughlin, UC Santa Barbara

After beginning his career at Oregon State, the high-flying McLaughlin has found a home in Santa Barbara, leading the Gauchos to a Big West Tournament title and a game against fifth-seeded Creighton in the NCAA Tournament.

He was at his best in the conference tournament, too, averaging more than 20 points over the three games.

"Jaquori has had such a great season," Gauchos coach Joe Pasternack said. "His unselfishness is such a huge part of this

team and he just makes everyone else better. He is so deserving of everything positive that comes his way."

Michael Almonacy, Appalachian State

He began his career at Stony Brook, detoured to Division II school Southern New Hampshire, but as a graduate student at Appalachian State, Almonacy has come into his own. He leads a four-guard offense alongside Justin Forrest, Adrian Delph and Donovan Gregory that could give No. 1 seed fits if it survives a First Four game against Norfolk State.

"It's been so rewarding to prove all the doubters wrong," said Almonacy.

Tre Mann, Florida

Good luck finding anybody hotter than the Gators' sophomore guard, who is averaging 23.5 points over his past four games and dazzled with a career-high 30 points in a loss to Tennessee in the SEC Tournament quarterfinals.

Mann can do just about everything, too. He pulled down 13 boards to go with 19 points in a win over Auburn in February.

Isaiah Miller, UNC Greensboro

The three-time Southern Conference defensive player of the year can beat you on the offensive end, too. Miller averages 19.3 points and 4.0 assists, and he poured in 25 points and had 12 boards and six assists in the SoCon final.

Upsets tend to happen in the NCAA Tournament when teams play defense and avoid turnovers, and Miller's proficiency in both of those areas is a big reason why the No. 13-seed Spartans have a shot against No. 4 seed Florida State.

BYU could surprise in East, gave Zags a scare

BY TOM CANAVAN
Associated Press

Heading into the season, there wasn't a lot of talk about BYU.

This was supposed to be a rebuilding season in Provo, Utah, for coach Mark Pope and his Cougars. Well, guess again.

BYU went 20-6 starting a senior guard, three transfers and a freshman. The Cougars also are getting better heading into their first NCAA Tournament since 2015.

They threatened top-seeded Gonzaga in the West Coast Conference tournament final last week. The Cougars built a 14-point lead and were tied with 4:19 to play before the Zags (26-0) pulled away to remain perfect with an 88-78 win.

It was BYU's third straight loss to Gonzaga this season, but it has improved each game. The latest one got the Cougars the No. 6 seed in the East Regional. It's their best seed in college basketball's showcase in almost three decades.

"We're one of those teams where we wish we had three more months of the season because we just keep getting better," Pope said.

Last year, Pope's first with the team, was the one where BYU expected to make a big run in the NCAA Tournament. The Cougars went 24-8, were ranked 18th in the final poll and had three dynamic players in Yoeli Childs, Jake Toolson and T.J. Haws. The pandemic ended the season and crushed their hopes.

When the big three decided to go pro, it left guard Alex Barcello, a transfer from Arizona, as the main cog returning.

Pope got him some help. Guard Brandon Averette, who played two seasons at Oklahoma State and another at Utah Valley, and 7-foot-3 forward Matt Haarms, who played three years at Purdue, arrived as graduate transfers. Gideon George of Nigeria transferred from New Mexico JC, while freshman forward Caleb Lohner, whose father played at BYU, fit right in.

"We had a bunch of new faces, so we had to build chemistry pretty fast," Barcello said. "There were a lot of hard days, some ups and downs. But just it really started with this coaching staff.."



YOUNG KWAK / AP

Guard Brandon Averette, left, a transfer from Oklahoma State, has helped BYU improve as the season went along.

NCAA TOURNAMENT

Three deep

Baylor's talented guard trio has made Bears top seed for first time

By STEPHEN HAWKINS
Associated Press

There really are no tougher matchups for Baylor guards Jared Butler, Davion Mitchell and MaCio Teague than in those long hours they spend in the gym going 1-on-1 against each other.

It is a difficult matchup for opposing teams when that trio is on the court together for the Bears, the Big 12 champions and a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament for the first time.

"I think that it comes from chemistry. Just off the court, we want to see one another do great," Mitchell said. "We all knew we had to sacrifice just because we all knew how good we could be. Each one of us could score 20 (points) every night. That's what makes our team great. Everyone had to sacrifice something."

Butler is the first Baylor player ever to be a first-team AP All-American and was also the AP Big 12 player of the year. The 6-foot-3 junior, who bypassed the chance for early entry in last year's NBA Draft, averages 17.1 points a game while leading the conference in three-point shooting and steals.

Teague, who averages 16.2 points, is the fifth-year senior who in his final home game tied a school record with 10 made three-pointers while scoring 35 points. He is also the nation's only player with more than 1,500 career points, 500 rebounds, 250 assists, 125 steals and 250 made threes.

Mitchell, a third-team AP All-American, is the lightning-quick guard who averages 14.1 points a game and leads the Big 12 with his 51.5% field-goal shooting; Butler and Teague both shoot nearly 49% from the field to rank fourth and fifth. Mitchell has also earned the nickname "Off Night" for his reputation as a defender and making it tough on whoever he is going against in a game.

"I think it's the most sacrificial group of guys I've been around. Sacrificing their time in the gym to be better for the team, sacrificing stats for the betterment of the team, just sacrificing egos, and that's a hard thing to do among 20 and 21-year-old men," Butler said. "Everybody across the board has had to sacrifice something, and we've all done that. ... It's truly a blessing to be



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL, ABOVE, AND GERRY BROOME, LEFT/AP

Above: Baylor guard MaCio Teague, left, drives to the basket ahead of Iowa State guard Jalen Coleman-Lands. **Left:** Baylor guards Davion Mitchell, left, and Jared Butler.



around this group of guys."

All three guards got to Baylor after starting college at other schools, and all are expected to be playing their final games for the Bears (22-2) in the NCAA Tournament. Their first-round game is Friday against Hartford (15-8) at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Butler initially signed with Alabama, and enrolled in school there during the summer

of 2018, but never took part in any offseason workouts before getting released from his letter of intent and going to Baylor.

While Butler was able to play immediately for the Bears, and averaged 10.2 points as a freshman, the other guards had to redshirt that 2018-19 season after transferring. Mitchell played 34 games as a freshman at Auburn, and Teague had started 66 of his 67 games over two seasons at UNC Asheville.

The Bears are 48-6 in the two seasons since Mitchell and Teague became eligible to play. Baylor set a Big 12 record with a 23-game winning streak last year, and its 18-0 start this season was the best in school history on the way to the school's first conference title in any league since 1950.

"It really goes back to the character and makeup of them individually because they do care about the team, they care about winning. It's not about their stats, their accolades," coach Scott Drew said. "Knowing one guy gets to bring the ball up, they all do a

great job sharing, rotating and making sure everybody has a feel. ... They're concerned for each other, and concerned for winning, and knowing we're a much better team when all three are clicking."

During that season when Mitchell and Teague were having to redshirt, and unable to play for the Bears, they were constantly going against each other in ultracompetitive 1-on-1 matchups after hard workouts with coaches. Every shot taken by the 6-foot-2 Mitchell was contested by Teague's impressive 6-11 wing span — seven inches more than how tall he is.

"It's definitely helped me offensively to be able to create my shot off the bounce," Mitchell said. "And for him, I mean, I think I'm a pretty good defender, so I just make it hard for him. And you can see he can do things off the bounce. He became a better defender, just by those 1-on-1 sessions. He made it hard for me sometimes just keeping me away from the basket.... Just playing MaCio 1-on-1 help me."

101-year-old Sister Jean thrilled to join Loyola Chicago again

By ANDREW SELIGMAN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Loyola Chicago is back in the NCAA Tournament. And Sister Jean will be there, too.

The 101-year-old team chaplain's lobbying paid off Tuesday when the school reversed course and announced she will go. That means she gets to watch her beloved Ramblers in person for the first time this season when Loyola meets Georgia Tech in Indianapolis on Friday.

Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt couldn't be happier.

"I kept saying to people I want to go not because of myself," she said Tuesday. "I want to go because of



Schmidt

the team. I want to be present for them. I want to be present for (coach Porter Moser) and I want to be present for Loyola. I said you have to remember what happened in 2018."

Who can forget?

Loyola made a surprising run to the Final Four, charming the nation with one last-second victory after another. Along the way, it shined a light on the 1963 team that broke racial barriers on the way to what remains the lone NCAA

championship for an Illinois school.

Above all else, at age 98, Sister Jean became a celebrity, with national TV interviews and even her own bobblehead.

It was quite a ride. But it was not clear if she would be along — in person, anyway — this time.

Loyola (24-4) leaped into the AP Top 25 for the first time since March 1985 and hit the 20-win mark for the fourth year in a row. The eighth-seeded Ramblers come in with the nation's stingiest defense, allowing 55.5 points per game.

Sister Jean did not travel to St. Louis for the Missouri Valley tour-

namment, which Loyola won for the second time in four years. Though she is fully vaccinated, there were safety and logistical issues, and it was the same with the NCAA Tournament.

"It was a little struggle going along the journeyed path," she said, "but I finally said to one of our executives, 'You know, I'm just going to sound like the old woman in the Gospel who kept after the judge and after the judge for what she wanted. And finally the judge said, 'Let her do what she wants.'"

Sister Jean acknowledged she has felt "lonely" not being around the team. It's been "very difficult" for her to watch games on TV be-

cause the facility she lives in doesn't have all the channels. Sometimes, she listens on the radio and follows the play-by-play on-line.

When she goes to Indianapolis, she will have a nurse and security with her and will eat in her hotel room. She's not sure where she'll be seated when Loyola meets ninth-seeded Georgia Tech at Butler's Hinkle Fieldhouse, one of a half-dozen Indiana venues being used to host the tournament, but she'll be safe.

She won't be allowed up-close contact with the Ramblers because teams are isolating. But just being there figures to be a boost.

NCAA TOURNAMENT



GERRY BROOME / AP

Duke guard Tre Jones, left, and Winthrop guard Chandler Vaudrin reach for the ball during the second half of their game on Nov. 29, 2019 in Durham, N.C.

Do Winthrop, Colgate need change of pace?

BY STEVE MEGARREE
Associated Press

Winthrop coach Pat Kelsey says he learned his philosophy of basketball while playing for the late Skip Prosser at Xavier in the 1990s.

"He had a famous quote that he said all the time," Kelsey recalled. "The older he got, the faster he wanted to play. I think that applies to me."

The 45-year-old Kelsey watched his Winthrop squad win the Big South while ranking 11th among all Division I teams in adjusted tempo, according to college basketball stats guru Ken Pomeroy. Adjusted tempo measures the number of possessions a team would have per 40 minutes against an opponent with an average tempo. The only NCAA Tournament teams ranked higher in that category are Gonzaga and Alabama.

Winthrop (23-1) and Colgate (14-1), which ranks second nationally in scoring, are two of the more exciting NCAA Tournament teams from one-bid leagues because they play fast. Now they're ready to see how they fare against quality teams from stronger conferences.

Their first-round matchups suggest that Winthrop's best hope for success against Villanova (16-6) is

DID YOU KNOW?

Winthrop won the Big South while ranking 11th among all Division I teams in adjusted tempo, according to college basketball stats guru Ken Pomeroy. Adjusted tempo measures the number of possessions a team would have per 40 minutes against an opponent with an average tempo. The only NCAA Tournament teams ranked higher in that category are Gonzaga and Alabama.

SOURCE: Associated Press

to keep doing what it's done all season. Colgate may have to adapt its style to knock off Arkansas (22-6).

If Colgate tries to run, it could be playing right into the Razorbacks' hands. Although Colgate ranks fifth among all NCAA Tournament teams in adjusted tempo, Arkansas is fourth in the same category.

"During the Patriot League schedule ... it benefited us to play faster, get more shots up and try to run the score up," Colgate guard Jordan Burns said. "We didn't believe that a lot of teams had guys like ours, where we could score in a bunch of different ways every single night. Going against Arkansas, obviously we're going to have a different game plan. It's not a Patriot League team. It's not to say we won't do what we do, but it just may look a little different."

Colgate is one of the more mysterious teams in this tournament because it has faced only five opponents all season and hasn't played anyone outside its league. The

Raiders do have some confidence based on their 2019 NCAA Tournament experience, when Burns scored 32 points as Colgate was tied midway through the second half before falling 77-70 to Tennessee.

Colgate coach Matt Langel notes the Raiders don't just run up and down the floor in all situations. They need their defense to set the pace.

"A big part of our scoring and our high number of possessions and playing fast is we've been able to stop the opposition," Langel said. "We're not one of those teams that when the other team makes a basket, we're firing it inbounds and flying down the court and scoring in the first seven seconds. That's not how we're built. I think that Arkansas has been in a number of games in that way, that they're trying to get up and up and down and up and down."

The Winthrop-Villanova game represents a contrast of styles. Villanova ranks 320th ahead of adjusted tempo.

Winthrop has 11 different guys who play at least 11 minutes per game. Villanova plays a much smaller rotation and is adapting to the loss of injured guard Collin Gillespie.

"Matchups are a big deal," Villanova coach Jay Wright said. "We expect this to be a really difficult game because we don't play with that much depth. We don't play with as much speed. And they do, and they're good at it."

Hartford's Carter leading the battle against violence

BY PAT EATON-ROBB
Associated Press

Traci Carter vowed to help make a difference for at-risk youth when he lost his brother to gun violence less than a year ago. He has kept at it while leading the University of Hartford to its first NCAA Tournament appearance.

Carter, a 24-year-old graduate transfer, started Anchors Camp after his brother was slain last summer in their hometown of Philadelphia. City kids travel to a farm near tiny Madison, N.Y., where they participate in traditional camp activities but also tour Colgate University and are introduced at the camp to basic skills in fields such as plumbing, electrical work and barbering.

Hartford plays Baylor on Friday night and Carter, a point guard who averages about 12 points a game, can again showcase the work he's done off the court. He speaks openly about losing his brother, including how it happened — and how it prompted him to take action.

"Philly, we're the murder capital right now," he said. "I had to figure out something to do to make a change."

Carter's brother, 21-year-old Semaj Carter, and two nephews, ages 18 and 15, were shot last July while sitting in a car after a recreation league basketball game. One nephew was shot in the face, the other in the ribs, but both survived.

Semaj, one of six of Carter's siblings, did not.

He'd been raised primarily by a grandmother because, Carter said, their mother suffered from drug problems. Just three years older, Carter said he was a father figure to Semaj and recalls fixing his bottles when his brother was a baby.

Carter acknowledged that poor life decisions by his brother made

Semaj a target of the shooting. But Carter said his brother also had a gift for engineering and could take almost anything apart and put it back together without directions.

He doesn't think his younger brother ever saw a way to turn those skills into a better life. The goal of Anchors Camp, Carter said, is to demonstrate career paths that don't involve sports and entertainment — or drugs — but still lead to success.

Following Semaj's death, Hartford coach John Gallagher took the guard on a beach vacation as a break from Philadelphia. Carter was introduced to Jim Newfrock, a former Korn Ferry executive who owned a farm in New York.

The idea for the camp was born during conversations and three weeks later, Carter brought his nephews and six other kids from his neighborhood to Newfrock's farm. They were introduced to volunteer tradesmen and grief counselors, an experience that changed the lives of Carter's nephews.

One discovered plumbing and currently is applying for internships with the help of camp officials. Another learned the electrical skills needed to fix an outlet in the family home.

"This is how you change neighborhoods, this is how you change communities," Gallagher said. "For Traci's brother this could have been an outlet that maybe would have changed his life. Because the system is set up the way it is, there is no opportunity."

Carter is now raising funds for weeklong camps this summer and has filed paperwork to make Anchors Camp an official charity. Ever the point guard, he said he is working with Newfrock, schools and other charities to help direct campers to educational and vocational opportunities.



KASSI JACKSON / AP

Hartford guard Traci Carter, left, is a 24-year-old graduate transfer who is trying to make a difference for at-risk youth after losing his younger brother to gun violence.

NCAA TOURNAMENT

EAST REGIONAL

'Now the real work starts' for No. 1 Michigan

By STEVE MEGARGEE
Associated Press

Michigan's bittersweet weekend continued Sunday as it earned a No. 1 seed in the East Regional a day after announcing its second-leading scorer has an injury that could keep him out of the NCAA Tournament.

Isaiah Livers is out indefinitely with a stress injury in his right foot that prevented him from playing in a Big Ten Tournament semifinal loss to Ohio State. Livers said Saturday that "I don't want people to write me off yet" but spoke Sunday night about how he could contribute without playing.

"I'm just going to be the best leader I can be," Livers said. "Obviously the mental aspect is going to be challenging for me, looking at my teammates giving their all out there and I know how much work they put in, and I can't be out there."

Michigan (20-4) opens its tournament run Saturday against the winner of Thursday's matchup between Mount St. Mary's (12-10) and Texas Southern (16-8).

"With everything we've dealt with, our guys have really competed so hard, they deserve to be in this position right now," Michigan coach Juwan Howard said. "Now the real work starts."

The other first-round games Saturday in the East Regional include LSU (18-9) vs. St. Bonaventure (16-4), Colorado (22-8) vs. Georgetown (13-12), Florida State (16-6) vs. UNC Greensboro (21-8), BYU (20-6) vs. Michigan State (15-12) or UCLA (17-9), Texas (19-7) vs. Abilene Christian (23-4), UConn (15-7) vs. Maryland (16-13) and Alabama (24-6) vs. Iona (12-5).

Alabama's No. 2 seed is its highest since 2002, when the Crimson Tide also were seeded second but lost to Kent State in the round of 32.

Although Alabama hasn't advanced beyond the first weekend of the NCAA Tournament since reaching a regional final in 2004, the Tide won the Southeastern Conference's regular-season and tournament titles this year.

"I have full faith that we can take this thing, take the NCAA Tournament by storm, win the whole thing," Alabama guard Jah-

von Quinerly said after the Tide's 80-79 victory over LSU in the SEC Tournament final.

Follow the Gators?

Alabama is the first SEC team to win the league's football championship game and its men's basketball tournament in the same year since Florida did it during the 2006-07 school year.

Florida won the national titles in both football and men's basketball that year. Alabama is already halfway there after winning the most recent College Football Playoff championship.

Pitino's comeback

Rick Pitino is back in the NCAA Tournament with his fifth different school after leading Iona to a Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference Tournament title. Pitino coached Kentucky and Louisville to national titles, reached a Final Four with Providence and made



CARLOS OSORIO / AP

Michigan coach Juwan Howard holds a championship sign after the Wolverines wrapped up the Big 10's regular-season title. They earned a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament but will play without Isaiah Livers.

an NCAA Tournament with Boston University.

The only other coaches to take five different schools to the NCAA Tournament are Lon Kruger

(Kansas State, Florida, UNLV, Illinois and Oklahoma) and Tubby Smith (Tulsa, Georgia, Kentucky, Minnesota and Texas Tech).

Facing a second-seeded Alabama team should have Pitino feeling nostalgic.

His 1987 Final Four run with Providence included a 103-82 regional semifinal victory over a second-seeded Alabama squad. Chicago Bulls coach Billy Donovan scored 26 points for Providence in that game.

Surging Hoyas

Georgetown is one of the most surprising teams in the field. The Hoyas were below .500 during the regular season but earned the Big East's automatic NCAA bid by storming through the conference's tournament as the No. 8 seed and trouncing Creighton 73-48 in the final.

"I think I've had about 1,000 messages, calls," said Georgetown coach Patrick Ewing, a Hall of Fame player and star of Georgetown's 1984 national championship team. "Everyone has reached out to me. All my friends, all my associates, coaches. Everyone has reached out. Michael Jordan. Charles Barkley. You name it, they've reached out."

Return of the Huskies

UConn has won four national titles since 1999, but this marks the Huskies' first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2016.

The Huskies are facing a relatively familiar opponent in the

first round. Maryland beat UConn in a 2002 regional final during its run to the national championship. UConn defeated Maryland in the 1995 NCAA Tournament.

Scoreboard

East Regional

First Round
Saturday, March 20
At Mackey Arena
West Lafayette, Ind.

Michigan (20-4) vs. Mount St. Mary's-Texas Southern winner

At Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall
Bloomington, Ind.

LSU (18-9) vs. St. Bonaventure (16-4)

At Hinkle Fieldhouse
Indianapolis

Colorado (22-8) vs. Georgetown (13-12)

At Bankers Life Fieldhouse
Indianapolis

Florida State (16-6) vs. UNC-Greensboro (21-8)

At Hinkle Fieldhouse
Indianapolis

BYU (20-6) vs. Michigan State-UCLA winner

At Lucas Oil Stadium
Indianapolis

Texas (19-7) vs. Abilene Christian (23-4)

At Mackey Arena
West Lafayette, Ind.

UConn (15-7) vs. Maryland (16-13)

At Hinkle Fieldhouse
Indianapolis

Alabama (24-6) vs. Iona (12-5)

Second Round
Monday, March 22

Michigan-Mount. St. Mary's-Texas Southern winner vs. LSU-St. Bonaventure winner

Florida State-UNC Greensboro winner vs. Colorado-Georgetown winner

Texas-Abilene Christian winner vs. BYU-Michigan State-UCLA winner

Alabama-Iona winner vs. UConn-Maryland winner

Regional Semifinals
Saturday, March 27 or Sunday, March 28

TBD

Regional Championship
Monday, March 29 or Tuesday, March 30
Semifinal winners



MARK HUMPHREY / AP

Alabama's Keon Ellis celebrates after scoring against LSU during the Southeastern Conference Tournament championship game. The No. 2 seed is the highest for the Tide since 2002. They rely heavily on speed and three-pointers from every position.

NCAA TOURNAMENT

WEST REGIONAL

Familiar foes lay in Gonzaga's path

By JOHN MARSHALL
Associated Press

Gonzaga's road to perfection will be filled with familiar faces.

The Bulldogs were the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA Tournament bracket announced Sunday as they try to become the first team in 35 years to complete a perfect season.

Gonzaga is the top seed in the West Region for the all-in-Indiana bracket that starts this week and the next three seeds are teams it has already beaten — all by double digits.

The Zags (26-0) beat No. 2 Kansas 102-90 to open the season and took down No. 2 seed Iowa 99-88 a month later. Gonzaga also beat No. 4 seed Virginia 98-75 in late December.

Gonzaga won every game this season by double digits except for one — when star freshman Jalen Suggs was injured — and has a school-record 30-game winning streak over two seasons.

The Zags are the first team since Kentucky in 2015 to enter the NCAA Tournament undefeated and have their sights set on the 1975-76 Indiana Hoosiers, the last team to finish a perfect season.

"We finally acknowledged this is a big deal," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said. "It puts us in some incredible company. It's a heck of an accomplishment."

The Zags open the tournament Saturday against the First Four winner between Norfolk State and Appalachian State. Get by that and they will play the winner between No. 8 Creighton and No. 9 Missouri.

Beneficial scheduling

Kansas and Virginia have to be thankful the NCAA not only pushed back the start of the tournament but put them in a region that begins on Saturday.

Both teams had to bow out of their conference tournaments before the semifinals due to positive COVID-19 tests and the extra time should allow them to have their full rosters available.

No. 11 Kansas held out David McCormack and Tristan Enaruna before the Big 12 Tournament started due to positive tests, then had another before it was supposed to play No. 13 Texas.

All three players remained in Kansas City after the tournament, but McCormack and Enaruna are expected to rejoin the team this week. The third, unidentified player will have to miss the first weekend of the tournament.

"Since that's the draw we got, I might as well be comfortable with it and like it," Kansas coach Bill



DAVID BECKER/AP

Gonzaga guard Andrew Nembhard, left, and forward Drew Timme celebrate after they defeated BYU in the West Coast Conference tournament championship. The Bulldogs can become the first undefeated NCAA champion since Indiana in 1976.



CHASE STEVENS/AP

Grand Canyon's Asbjørn Midtgaard shoots against New Mexico State during the championship of the Western Athletic Conference Tournament. Midtgaard, a 7-foot, 270-pound transfer from Wichita State, will go up against Iowa's Luka Garza in the first round.

Self said. "I certainly don't dislike it."

No. 16 Virginia, which won the last national championship in 2019, had to bow out of its Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament game against eventual champion Georgia Tech due to a positive test.

Kansas opens against Big Sky champion Eastern Washington

and Virginia plays Mid-American Conference champ Ohio, which made the field of 68 for the first time since 2012.

Loping in

Grand Canyon has a difficult opening game, facing Iowa on Saturday. The 15th-seeded Antelopes will enjoy their trip to Indianapolis no matter what happens.

Grand Canyon lost to New Mexico State in the Western Athletic Conference Tournament title game for two straight years under previous coach Dan Majerle. The Antelopes finally got over the hurdle in their first year under coach Bryce Drew, beating the Aggies 74-56 in Las Vegas to reach the NCAA Tournament for the first time in eight years as a Division I program.

Drew knows a little something about NCAA Tournament drama, hitting a game-winning three-pointer for Valparaiso against Mississippi 23 years ago, so you never know.

Rest of the region

The West Region has two Pac-12 schools: No. 24 Southern California and regular-season champion Oregon.

The sixth-seeded Trojans open with the Wichita State-Drake winner and the Ducks face Virginia Commonwealth in a battle of two tenacious defenses.

Games between No. 5 and No. 12 seeds are always popular upset picks and Santa Barbara over Creighton will likely show up in a few brackets across the country.

No. 5 Creighton had a 20-win season that included victories over NCAA Tournament teams Georgetown, Villanova and two over Connecticut. The Bluejays also have one of the bracket's best players in Marcus Zegarowski,

but have had games where they've gone cold shooting, including the Big East title game.

The Gauchos are in the bracket for the first time since 2011, but have lost only once since Jan. 1 and beat UC Irvine in the Big West title game

Scoreboard

West Regional

First Round Saturday, March 20 At Bankers Life Fieldhouse Indianapolis

Gonzaga (26-0) vs. Norfolk State-Appalachian State winner

At Lucas Oil Stadium Indianapolis

Oklahoma (15-10) vs. Missouri (16-9)
Creighton vs. UC Santa Barbara (22-4)

At Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall Bloomington, Ind.

Virginia (18-6) vs. Ohio (16-7)

At Bankers Life Fieldhouse Indianapolis

Southern Cal vs. Wichita State-Drake winner

At Indiana Farmers Coliseum Indianapolis

Kansas (20-8) vs. E. Washington (16-7)
Oregon (20-6) vs. VCU (19-7)
Iowa (21-8) vs. Grand Canyon (17-6)

Second Round Monday, March 22

Gonzaga-Norfolk State—Appalachian State winner vs. Oklahoma-Missouri winner

Creighton-UC Santa Barbara winner vs. Virginia-Ohio winner

Kansas-E. Washington winner vs. Southern Cal-Wichita State—Drake winner
Iowa-Grand Canyon winner vs. Oregon-VCU winner

Regional Semifinals Saturday, March 27 or Sunday, March 28 TBD

Regional Championship
Monday, March 29 or Tuesday, March 30
Semifinal winners

NCAA TOURNAMENT

MIDWEST REGIONAL

Illini, Cougars lead intriguing region

BY DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

Illinois was still cutting down the nets in Indianapolis after a thrilling overtime victory over Ohio State in the Big Ten Tournament title game when the bracket was revealed for the NCAA Tournament.

The Illini will attempt to cut down another set of nets in Indy as the No. 1 seed in the Midwest Region.

Led by All-Americans Ayo Dosunmu and Kofi Cockburn, the Fighting Illini earned the third No. 1 seed in school history and their first since 2005, when a team led by Deron Williams and Luther Head romped through March before they finally lost to North Carolina in the national championship game.

“Call me old school,” Illinois coach Brad Underwood, “but I think there’s nothing better than hearing your name and see it come across the screen. It’s awesome and to see it up there” — on the Lucas Oil Stadium video boards — “after such a hard-fought game was really special. What a great moment what a great feeling.”

The third-ranked Fighting Illini, who will open the tournament against Colonial Athletic Conference champ Drexel, anchor an intriguing region filled with surprising upstarts and mid-major monsters.

Seventh-ranked Houston earned the No. 2 seed after romping past Cincinnati on Sunday to earn its first American Athletic Conference Tournament title. West Virginia was seeded third and Big 12 rival Oklahoma State fourth after making a run to the Big 12 Tournament title game, where Cade Cunningham and the Cowboys lost to Texas.

Fifth-seeded Tennessee drew a first-round game against No. 12 seed Oregon State, which won the Pac-12 Tournament title after the Beavers were picked to finish last in the preseason poll. March darling Loyola Chicago was the No. 8 seed and will face ninth-seeded Georgia Tech, who earned an automatic bid with a stunning Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament title.

Syracuse was considered a bubble team but squeaked into the field as the No. 11 seed. The Orange will play sixth-seeded San Diego State with the winner facing the Mountaineers or No. 14 seed Morehead State for a spot in the Sweet 16.

As for the Dragons, who get one of the hottest teams in the nation to start things off?

“Every challenge is an opportu-



MICHAEL CONROY / AP

Illinois players Ayo Dosunmu (11), Andre Curbelo (5), Trent Frazier (1), and Kofi Cockburn (21) wave to fans in the closing minute of overtime in the Illini's championship game win in the Big Ten Conference tournament Sunday in Indianapolis. Illinois defeated Ohio State in overtime and hold the top seed in the Midwest Region for the third time in school history.

nity,” Drexel coach Zach Spiker said. “We’re going to play the Big Ten champions and they’re going to play the Colonial champions — and we’ll see what happens.”

Tennessee's trouble

Tennessee, which won its first seven games before a midseason swoon, is making its third NCAA Tournament trip under Rick Barnes after losing to Alabama in the SEC Tournament semifinals on Saturday.

The Vols have a big question mark, though. Senior forward John Fulkerson's status remains in question after he missed the SEC semifinal when a pair of elbows from Florida's Omar Payne left him with a concussion and fa-

cial fracture.

Second chances

San Diego State thought it had a national title contender, when it went 30-2 with one of the losses in the Mountain West Tournament title game. But a year after the NCAA Tournament was cancelled due to COVID-19, the Aztecs finally get their shot after going 23-4 and beating Utah State for the conference tournament title.

“Everybody that plays for us contributes,” Aztecs coach Brian Dutcher said, “and it’s a different player every night.”

Slip-sliding seven-10

Seventh-seeded Clemson and No. 10 seed Rutgers could stand

for a bit more momentum heading to Indianapolis.

The Tigers were the fifth seed in the ACC Tournament and lost their first game to Miami, while the Scarlet Knights have lost four of their last seven games and were trounced by Illinois in the Big Ten Tournament.

Plucky underdogs

Oklahoma State drew a tough date with No. 14 seed Liberty, which won its third straight Atlantic Sun title. Two of the Flames' five losses came by single digits to Purdue and Missouri, two teams that also made the NCAA field.

Horizon League Tournament champ Cleveland State will play Houston as the No. 15 seed. It's the third NCAA trip for the Vikings, who reached the Sweet 16 in 1986 and won a first-round game in 2009.

Orange feeling juiced

Syracuse lost three out of four games in early January, two of them to lowly Pittsburgh, and the Orange spent the rest of the season trying to play catch-up. But they still didn't know where they stood on the NCAA Tournament bubble after they beat North Carolina State and lost to Virginia in the ACC Tournament.

“That was the low part of the season. There was every reason for negativity to come out,” said Orange coach Jim Boheim, who is taking his 35th team to the tour-

namment.

“Everybody thought we weren't going to be anywhere, maybe not even make it to the NIT at that stage. Where we were, we're happy to have the challenge in front of us.”

Scoreboard

Midwest Regional

First Round
Friday, March 19
At Indiana Farmers Coliseum
Indianapolis
Illinois (23-6) vs. Drexel (12-7)
At Hinkle Fieldhouse
Indianapolis
Loyola Chicago (24-4) vs. Georgia Tech (17-8)
At Bankers Life Fieldhouse
Indianapolis
Tennessee (18-8) vs. Oregon State (17-12)
At Indiana Farmers Coliseum
Indianapolis
Oklahoma State (20-8) vs. Liberty (23-5)
At Hinkle Fieldhouse
Indianapolis
San Diego State (23-4) vs. Syracuse (16-9)
At Lucas Oil Stadium
Indianapolis
West Virginia (18-9) vs. Morehead State (23-7)
At Bankers Life Fieldhouse
Indianapolis
Clemson (16-7) vs. Rutgers (15-11)
At Simon Skjoldt Assembly Hall
Bloomington, Ind.
Houston (24-3) vs. Cleveland State (19-7)

Second Round

Sunday, March 21
Illinois-Drexel winner vs. Loyola Chicago-Georgia Tech winner
Oklahoma State-Liberty winner vs. Tennessee-Oregon State winner
West Virginia-Morehead State winner vs. San Diego State-Syracuse winner
Houston-Cleveland State winner vs. Clemson-Rutgers winner

Regional Semifinals

Saturday, March 27 or Sunday, March 28
TBD

Regional Championship
Monday, March 29 or Tuesday, March 30
Semifinal winners



RON JENKINS / AP

Houston guard DeJon Jarreau holds the American Athletic Conference championship trophy. The Cougars are the No. 2 seed in the Midwest.

NCAA TOURNAMENT

SOUTH REGIONAL

Bears enter tournament with 1st No. 1 seed

Bears, looking to reach their first Final Four, open tournament with Hartford

BY AARON BEARD
Associated Press

Scott Drew has built Baylor into a regular NCAA Tournament team capable of making deep pushes into March.

This time, the Bears will have a shot to do it with their first No. 1 seed.

Second-ranked Baylor (22-2) headlines the South Region and opens against 16th-seeded Hartford, the America East Conference champion. The Bears had never been higher than a No. 3 seed previously, the last time coming in 2017.

Drew has guided the Bears to two regional finals but never to a Final Four in his first 17 seasons.

"It means that people think the accomplishments are worthy of a No. 1 seed," Drew said Sunday night. "It means people appreciate what (players) were able to achieve for the year. So there's always a lot of pride in being able to get a No. 1 seed.

"It doesn't necessarily guarantee you're going to be successful in the tournament, which we all know. ... Seeding numbers don't matter, it's who plays best in that 40 minutes."

Led by the backcourt of Jared Butler and MaCio Teague, the Bears won their first regular-season conference championship since 1950, though they were upset by Oklahoma State in the Big 12 Tournament semifinals. They finished atop the Big 12 despite a three-week pause related to COVID-19 concerns, followed by struggles coming out of that break

that included barely beating an Iowa State team that finished with two wins and its only regular-season loss against Kansas.

The Bears regrouped with three straight wins against NCAA Tournament teams West Virginia, Oklahoma State and Texas Tech, and they enter the tourney ranked third in KenPom's adjusted offensive efficiency (averaging 124 points per 100 possessions).

Baylor was ranked No. 2 in every AP Top 25 poll this season except one, when it spent a week at No. 3.

"I never was one of those kids that imagined to be like the one-hit wonder or what not," Butler said. "For me, I'm excited we're a 1-seed. I feel like we're in a great spot. I don't care if it's a Cinderella story or we're expected to win. Winning is the most important thing."

Here are things to know about the South Region, with all first-round games taking place Friday:

The top challengers

Ninth-ranked Ohio State is the No. 2 seed in the South after losing in overtime to Illinois in Sunday's Big Ten Tournament final. Chris Holtmann's Buckeyes (21-9) started the year ranked 23rd but spent the last six weeks of the season inside the top 10 — peaking at No. 4 for three weeks in February.

"I feel really good about this group," Holtmann said. "But we are climbing, and we are still climbing. And we're trying to stay in the moment as much as possible."

Eighth-ranked Arkansas is the



CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP

Baylor head coach Scott Drew talks to his team during its semifinal loss to Oklahoma State in the big 12 tournament in Kansas City, Mo., on March 12. The Bears are the top seed in the South Regional.

3-seed, followed by No. 20 Purdue and No. 14 Villanova to round out the top five.

Scoring punch

Fans wanting high-scoring offense should probably tune in for the matchup between Arkansas and 14th-seeded Colgate.

The Raiders (14-1) won the Patriot League title and entered Selection Sunday averaging 86.3 points, led by Jordan Burns' 17-point average. They trail only No. 1 overall seed Gonzaga (92.1) in scoring offense while also ranking among national leaders in shooting percentage (49.8%) and three-point percentage (40%).

The Razorbacks (22-6) are averaging 82.4 points to rank seventh nationally, with Moses Moody (17.4 points) leading the way.

Starting strongly

North Carolina coach Roy Williams always has his teams ready for an NCAA opener.

When his eighth-seeded Tar Heels (18-10) face ninth-seeded Wisconsin, Williams will look to improve to 30-0 in first-round NCAA Tournament games. That includes his 15-year tenure at Kansas, as well as his first 17 years at his alma mater.

Conference watch

The Big 12, Big Ten and Southeastern Conference combined to take six of the top seven seeds in

the South bracket.

The Big Ten had Ohio State and fourth-seeded Purdue, led by Trevion Williams (15.6 points and 9.0 rebounds). The Big 12 has Baylor and sixth-seeded Texas Tech, while the SEC has Arkansas and No. 7 seed Florida.

Further down, the ACC also had two teams with the Tar Heels and No. 22 Virginia Tech, which checked in as a No. 10 seed.

Abmas' roll

The bracket features the nation's leading scorer in Oral Roberts' Max Abmas.

The 6-foot-1, 165-pound sophomore is averaging 24.2 points for the Golden Eagles, who are the 15-

seed and will open against Ohio State. He led the program to the Summit League title and its first NCAA bid since 2008.

Abmas, who had 42 points against South Dakota State on Feb. 13 and 41 against Western Illinois two weeks later, is the only player in Division I to have had crossed the 40-point mark twice this year.

Scoreboard

South Regional

First Round
Friday, March 19
At Lucas Oil Stadium
Indianapolis
Baylor (22-2) vs. Hartford (15-8)
At Mackey Arena
West Lafayette, Ind.
North Carolina (18-10) vs. Wisconsin (17-12)
At Indiana Farmers Coliseum
Indianapolis
Villanova (16-6) vs. Winthrop (23-1)
At Lucas Oil Stadium
Indianapolis
Purdue (18-9) vs. North Texas (17-9)
At Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall
Bloomington, Ind.
Texas Tech (17-10) vs. Utah State (20-8)
At Bankers Life Fieldhouse
Indianapolis
Arkansas (22-6) vs. Colgate (14-1)
At Hinkle Fieldhouse
Indianapolis
Florida (14-9) vs. Virginia Tech (15-6)
At Mackey Arena
West Lafayette, Ind.
Ohio St. (21-9) vs. Oral Roberts (16-10)
Second Round
Sunday, March 21
Baylor-Hartford winner vs. North Carolina-Wisconsin winner
Purdue-North Texas winner vs. Villanova-Winthrop winner
Arkansas-Colgate winner vs. Texas Tech-Utah State winner
Ohio State-Oral Roberts winner vs. Florida-Virginia Tech winner
Regional Semifinals
Saturday, March 27 or Sunday, March 28
TBD vs. TBD
TBD vs. TBD
Regional Championship
Monday, March 29 or Tuesday, March 30
Semifinal winners,



DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann talks with Zed Key. Despite losing to Illinois in the Big Ten Conference championship, the Buckeyes are the No. 2 seed in the South Regional.



MICHAEL CONROY / AP

Forward Trevion Williams (50) leads No. 20 Purdue, which is seeded No. 4 in the regional.

NCAA TOURNAMENT

Road to March Madness fraught with adversity

Huggins' Mountaineers among teams with more challenges than typical under pandemic

By JOHN RABY
Associated Press

Two days apart in late December, West Virginia coach Bob Huggins got a double dose of bad news: A promising freshman was lost for the season with a torn Achilles tendon. Then one of the few five-star recruits in program history quit the team.

Huggins needed to make some fast adjustments. The ensuing roster tweaks helped the Mountaineers get through a rugged Big 12 season and has put them on solid ground entering the NCAA Tournament.

In a season full of adversity and challenges, in addition to dodging the usual stops and starts of the coronavirus pandemic, West Virginia didn't just survive.

It got better.

"It changed the way we played," Huggins said Wednesday. "But I think it changed the way we played for a positive."

The Mountaineers (18-9) earned a No. 3 seed and will play 14th-seeded Morehead State (23-7) on Friday in Indianapolis.

West Virginia wasn't alone in adapting on the fly. Look at Florida's resolve after losing Keyontae Johnson to a health scare, Drake losing two key players to injury in February or Ohio University pushing through a long pandemic pause to win the Mid-American Conference tournament.

The decision to quit by 260-pound Oscar Tshiebwe, one of the Big 12's top freshmen a year ago, wasn't as big a surprise to West Virginia as his production: Tshiebwe's scoring and rebounding were down compared to a year ago by the time he left.

Like Tshiebwe, 6-foot-10 freshman Isaiah Cottrell could attack the rim and was a solid passer. Cottrell gave the Mountaineers some valuable minutes off the bench before he got



KATHY BATTEN/AP

West Virginia coach Bob Huggins had to adjust quickly after learning 260-pound sophomore forward Oscar Tshiebwe had decided to quit the team in December, news that came on the heels of losing talented freshman Isaiah Cottrell for the season to a torn Achilles tendon.

hurt.

West Virginia was 8-2 at the time. Huggins decided to use a group of talented guards along with redshirt freshman forward Jalen Bridges to spread out opposing defenses who otherwise had packed the lane trying to fend off the tandem of Tshiebwe and forward Derek Culver.

West Virginia allowed an average of seven more points per game after Tshiebwe's exit, although that coincided with the conference schedule that included six ranked opponents.

"The reality is, is when Oscar left, we became a much better offensive team," Huggins said.

Johnson, the Southeastern Conference preseason player of the year, collapsed on the court during a Dec. 12 game. The Gators postponed their next four contests and Johnson was released from a hospital 10 days later.

With Johnson out for the season, the Gators went 11-8 the rest of the way. Sophomore Tre Mann took over the team scoring lead, including four of his top five performances heading into the NCAA Tournament.

Mann's role "has continued to grow here over the course of this year, and he continues to get better," Florida coach Mike White said. "Hopefully, he can finish really strong."

18-9

West Virginia's record heading into the NCAA Tournament, where the No. 3-seeded Mountaineers will play 14th-seeded Morehead State (23-7) on Friday night in Indianapolis.

SOURCE: Associated Press

Florida (19-12) is a No. 7 seed and will meet 10th-seeded Virginia Tech (15-6) on Friday.

The Hokies have had plenty of their own ups and downs. They've played just three games over the past five weeks due to COVID-19 issues.

Backup guard Cartier Diarra, a Kansas State graduate transfer, opted out of the season due to COVID-19 concerns. Second-leading scorer and rebounder Tyrece Radford served a four-game suspension after a January arrest. Jalen Cone has not played since a Feb. 6 ankle injury.

Drake (25-4) won its first 18 games, then lost leading scorer and rebounder ShanQuan Hemphill and point guard Roman Penn to foot injuries two weeks apart. The Bulldogs lost three of their final nine games yet still made the tournament.

For Ohio, the problem wasn't a grueling stretch of games, but simply a lack of them.

With fresh legs, the Bobcats won their first MAC championship since 2012 after playing three times over 36 days prior to the league tournament due to pandemic-related postponements or cancellations.

"The most proud I am of this group is their character, what they've been able to go through in the last month-and-a-half to get to this point," Ohio coach Jeff Boals said. "This group is going to have a memory of a lifetime now."

Don't count them out in the Big Dance, either. The Bobcats lost at Illinois by a basket, 77-75, on Nov. 27. They're a 13 seed and will meet fourth-seeded Virginia (18-6) on Saturday night.

Driven: Memory of 2020's missed opportunity motivation to make this year special

FROM PAGE 56

antennae," Kelsey said Tuesday. "This is a very driven team."

The Bulldogs, who've built themselves into a modern day, college basketball powerhouse, are the tournament's No. 1 overall seed and, at 26-0, are seeking to become the sport's first undefeated champion since Indiana did it in 1976.

There was little chance Gonzaga would've missed this year's Big Dance even if it hadn't won the Western Coast Conference Tournament crown again.

Not so for the other three.

"Nothing is a given," Utah State forward Justin Bean said.

And fewer prospects after the Aggies started their season losing three of their first four games. Instead, the team called on the bonds forged in winning Mountain West Conference Tournament titles in 2019 and 2020.

Utah State rolled off winning streaks of 11 and six games following the slow start. The road back hit a speedbump when the Aggies



ISAAC BREKKE/AP

The Utah State bench reacts as Aggies guard Brock Miller (22) sinks a three against San Diego State in the championship game of the Mountain West Conference Tournament.

lost to top seed San Diego State in the championship game, and Bean said there were a few moments of worry Sunday wondering if they'd see their name called. But there were the Aggies, seeded 11th and facing No. 6 seed Texas Tech on

Friday.

"We knew we had the pieces to make something special and to be something special," Bean said. "It was just up to us to work extra hard and put in the time to earn that spot."

Liberty also earned its berth with a third consecutive Atlantic Sun Conference Tournament title in as many years in the league. The regrets of a season ago, Flames coach Ritchie McKay said, didn't keep this group from pointing toward its next opportunity to play in the NCAA Tournament.

McKay got an early glimpse of that resolve when the Flames defeated a pair of Southeastern Conference teams in Mississippi State and South Carolina back-to-back in late November.

"I think we have a sense of confidence that is reflective of how hard they've worked and how united they are," said McKay, whose 13th-seeded team faces Oklahoma State on Friday.

Darius McGhee, the Atlantic Sun player of the year, said Liberty has used last year's loss of its tournament trip as inspiration this time around: "There's a lot of motivation. Guys are super excited to see how far we can go."

Winthrop believes the same

thing. Kelsey, the team's ninth-year coach, could see this past spring that players weren't hanging their heads about what they lost, but looking forward to what was possible.

The Eagles won their first 16 games before falling, 57-55, to UNC Asheville on Jan. 29. Winthrop ran off seven straight wins heading into the NCAAs, including an 80-53 victory over Campbell for the Big South Tournament crown.

Winthrop (23-1), the 12th seed in the South Region, faces No. 5 seed Villanova on Friday night.

The Eagles' Chandler Vaudrin, a 6-foot-7 point guard who leads the NCAA with three triple-doubles, believes his team's latest run was fueled as much by its lone loss as all its victories. "That loss, I think, really propelled us in the second half of the year to continue to grow and continue to play good basketball"

"Now, we're at the same place" as last year, Vaudrin said. "We did what we needed to do."

NCAA TOURNAMENT

Scoreboard

EAST REGIONAL
First Round
Saturday, March 20

Michigan (20-4) vs. Mount St. Mary's-Texas Southern winner. **AFN-Sports, 7:30 p.m. Saturday CET; 3:30 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
 LSU (18-9) vs. St. Bonaventure (16-4). **AFN-Sports, 5 p.m. Saturday CET; 1 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
 Florida State (16-6) vs. UNC-Greensboro (21-8). **AFN-Sports 2, 5:30 p.m. Saturday CET; 1:30 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
 BYU (20-6) vs. Michigan State-UCLA winner. **AFN-Sports, 2:30 a.m. Sunday CET; 10:30 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
 Texas (19-7) vs. Abilene Christian (23-4). **AFN-Sports 2, 3 a.m. Sunday CET; 11 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
 UConn (15-7) vs. Maryland (16-13). **AFN-Sports, midnight Saturday CET; 8 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
 Alabama (24-6) vs. Iona (12-5). **AFN-Atlantic, 8:50 p.m. Saturday CET; 4:50 a.m. Sunday JKT.**

Second Round
Monday, March 22

Michigan-Mount St. Mary's-Texas Southern winner vs. LSU-St. Bonaventure winner
 Florida State-UNC Greensboro winner vs. Colorado-Georgetown winner
 Texas-Abilene Christian winner vs. BYU-Michigan State-UCLA winner
 Alabama-Iona winner vs. UConn-Maryland winner

SOUTH REGIONAL
First Round
Friday, March 19

Baylor (22-2) vs. Hartford (15-8). **AFN-Sports 2, 8 p.m. Friday CET; 4 a.m. Saturday JKT.**
 North Carolina (18-10) vs. Wisconsin (17-12). **AFN-Sports 2, Mid Friday CET; 8 a.m. Saturday JKT.**
 Villanova (16-6) vs. Winthrop (23-1). **AFN-Sports 2, 5:30 p.m. Friday CET; 1:30 a.m. Saturday JKT.**
 Florida (14-9) vs. Virginia Tech (15-6). **AFN-Sports, 5 p.m. Friday CET; 1 a.m. Saturday JKT.**
 Ohio St. (21-9) vs. Oral Roberts (16-10). **AFN-Sports, 7:30 p.m. Friday CET; 3:30 a.m. Saturday JKT.**

Second Round
Sunday, March 21

Baylor-Hartford winner vs. North Carolina-Wisconsin winner
 Purdue-North Texas winner vs. Villanova-Winthrop winner
 Arkansas-Colgate winner vs. Texas Tech-Utah State winner
 Ohio State-Oral Roberts winner vs. Florida-Virginia Tech winner

MIDWEST REGIONAL
First Round
Friday, March 19

Illinois (23-6) vs. Drexel (12-7). **AFN-Pacific, 6 p.m. Friday CET; 2 a.m. Saturday JKT.**
 Loyola Chicago (24-4) vs. Georgia Tech (17-8). **AFN-Pacific, 8:50 p.m. Friday CET; 4:50 a.m. Saturday JKT.**
 Tennessee (18-8) vs. Oregon State (17-12). **AFN-Pacific, 11:45 p.m. Friday CET; 7:45 a.m. Saturday JKT.**
 San Diego State (23-4) vs. Syracuse (16-9). **AFN-Sports, 2:30 a.m. Saturday CET; 10:30 a.m. Saturday JKT.**
 West Virginia (18-9) vs. Morehead State (23-7). **AFN-Sports 2, 3 a.m. Saturday CET; 11 a.m. Saturday JKT.**
 Clemson (16-7) vs. Rutgers (15-11). **AFN-Pacific, 2:15 a.m. Saturday CET; 10:15 a.m. Saturday JKT.**
 Houston (24-3) vs. Cleveland State (19-7). **AFN-Sports 2, 12:15 a.m. Saturday CET; 8:15 a.m. Saturday JKT.**

Second Round
Sunday, March 21

Illinois-Drexel winner vs. Loyola Chicago-Georgia Tech winner
 Oklahoma State-Liberty winner vs. Tennessee-Oregon State winner
 West Virginia-Morehead State winner vs. San Diego State-Syracuse winner
 Houston-Cleveland State winner vs. Clemson-Rutgers winner

WEST REGIONAL
First Round
Saturday, March 20

Gonzaga (26-0) vs. Norfolk State-Appalachian State winner. **AFN-Atlantic, 2:10 a.m. Sunday CET; 10:15 Sunday JKT.**
 Oklahoma (15-10) vs. Missouri (16-9). **AFN-Sports 2, 8 p.m. Saturday CET; 4 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
 Virginia (18-6) vs. Ohio (16-7). **AFN-Sports 2, 12:15 a.m. Sunday CET; 8:15 Sunday JKT.**
 Southern Cal vs. Wichita State-Drake winner
 Kansas (20-8) vs. E. Washington (16-7). **AFN-Atlantic, 6 p.m. Saturday CET; 2 a.m. Sunday JKT.**
 Oregon (20-6) vs. VCU (19-7). **AFN-Atlantic, 11:15 p.m. Saturday CET; 7:15 a.m. Sunday JKT.**

Second Round
Monday, March 22

Gonzaga-Norfolk St.-Appalachian St. winner vs. Oklahoma-Missouri winner
 Creighton-UC Santa Barbara winner vs. Virginia-Ohio winner
 Kansas-E. Washington winner vs. Southern Cal-Wichita State-Drake winner
 Iowa-Grand Canyon winner vs. Oregon-VCU winner

What to watch the first week

By JOHN MARSHALL
Associated Press

The 2020 NCAA Tournament was wiped out by the coronavirus, robbing the sports world of one of its greatest spectacles.

After a chaotic season through a pandemic, March Madness is back.

You know the players are ready. So are the coaches. The fans, too.

This year's bracket will be like no other, played entirely in Indiana over a span of three weeks.

There's no Duke, no Kentucky, but plenty of new favorites and upstarts who have waited a long time for their chance.

To get you ready, we've got a rundown of the teams, players and games to watch for when the bracket fires up with the First Four on Thursday in Bloomington:

The favorites

Gonzaga. Wire-to-wire No. 1 pursuing the perfect 1976 Indiana Hoosiers.

Illinois. Tough, talented, loaded. Ayo and Kofi may be the bracket's best 1-2 punch.

Baylor. Shooters everywhere, tenacious on D, lost once all year.

Michigan. Wolverines have done great things in a short period under Juwan Howard. Hopefully Isaiah Livers' foot injury won't cause them problems.

Iowa. Hawkeyes can light it up when they're on and have one of the nation's best players in Luka Garza.

New faces

Hartford. The Hawks are in the NCAA Tournament for the first time in 27 years as a Division I program after winning the America East Tournament.

Grand Canyon. Bryce Drew worked some quick magic in the desert, needing one season to lead the Antelopes to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in eight years in DI.

Rutgers. The Scarlet Knights had their dreams crushed last season when the NCAA Tournament was canceled. They got a second chance and made the most of it, playing their way into the bracket for the first time since 1991.

Drexel. The Dragons won 12 games all season, but three of those were in the Colonial Athletic Association Tournament, putting them in the bracket for the first time in 25 years.

Star players

Luka Garza, Iowa. Big Ten beast ready to bull through the bracket.

Ayo Dosunmu, Illinois. Athletic, clutch, poised to become the latest one-name NCAA Tournament star.

Corey Kispert, Gonzaga. The



GARETT FISBECK / AP

Oklahoma State's Cade Cunningham shoots against Oklahoma's Austin Reaves. Cunningham a first-team All-America selection, might be the top overall pick in the NBA because of his dynamic all-around skills.



JOHN MUNSON / AP

Colgate's Nelly Cummings, left, drives to the basket during the final of the Patriot League tournament. The Raiders play Arkansas in a game that is likely to be the highest scoring of the first round.

sharpshooter makes the Zags go.

Jared Butler, Baylor. Shoots, leads and plays D, too.

Cade Cunningham, Oklahoma State. Potential No. 1 pick in the NBA Draft is a scorer, distributor, dominator.

Top games

Colgate vs. Arkansas, South Region, Friday. Leave the couch for a minute and you might miss a basket — or 10. And take the over, whatever it is.

Texas Tech vs. Utah State, South Region, Friday. Baskets will be hard to come by between these two defensive-oriented teams.

Loyola Chicago vs. Georgia Tech, Midwest Region, Friday. Ramblers are back for the first time since their 2018 Final Four

run. Georgia Tech was the surprise ACC Tournament champ. And hopefully Sister Jean gets a chance to go to Indy.

Oregon vs. Virginia Commonwealth, West Region, Saturday. VCU plays stifling defense. Oregon can light up the scoreboard. Strength vs. strength.

Upset potential

No. 12 UC Santa Barbara over No. 5 Creighton, West Region. There's a chance the Bluejays could shoot the Gauchos out of the gym. If they're off, watch out for UCSB, which has lost once in the new year.

No. 12 Winthrop over No. 5 Villanova, East Region. The Wildcats are without point guard Collin Gillespie for the rest of the season. The Eagles have lost once all sea-

son.

No. 10 Rutgers over No. 7 Clemson, Midwest Region, Friday. The Scarlet Knights may not have been here for a long time, but oddsmakers made them a favorite over the Tigers.

No. 12 Georgetown over No. 5 Colorado, East Region, Saturday. Workers at Madison Square Garden finally figured out who Patrick Ewing is after Hoyas won the Big East title. The Buffaloes may find out, too.

No. 13 Ohio over No. 4 Virginia, West Region, Saturday. The Cavaliers had to bow out of the ACC Tournament due to a positive COVID-19 test and have been bounced early before. The Bobcats have some upset history, too, beating Michigan on the way to the 2012 Sweet 16.

Mid-major monsters

Max Abmas, Oral Roberts. Led the nation with 24.2 points per game and shot 43% from three while majoring in biomedical chemistry. He's going to be all right after the tournament no matter what happens.

Jason Preston, Ohio. Might be the best player non-diehard college hoops fans don't know. Averaged 17.1 points, 6.9 assists and 6.7 rebounds.

Neemias Queta, Utah State. Absolutely dominating force inside at both ends.

Camron Krutwig, Loyola Chicago. The beefy, agile-footed, deft passing center of the Ramblers' Final Four is still playing.

Isaiah Miller, UNC Greensboro. Can hurt with his scoring (19.3 ppg) and will get up in your grill on D.

SPORTS

Open for business

OT Trent Williams among free agents cashing in Wednesday » **NFL, Page 46**



NCAA TOURNAMENT

Driven by disappointment

For teams robbed of postseason dreams by pandemic last season, tourney bids mean a bit more

BY PETE IACOBELLI
Associated Press

Winthrop coach Pat Kelsey smiles as he considered the nearly two-year journey to play in the NCAA Tournament.

“We did it the hard way,” Kelsey said.

Kelsey and the Eagles won the Big South Con-

ference tournament in 2020 and were among a dozen teams that earned bids and were eagerly awaiting their chance to play. Instead, the start of the coronavirus pandemic robbed those teams of that opportunity — leaving them a full year to dream, scheme and hope for another opportunity.

Just four schools — Gonzaga, Liberty, Utah

State and the Eagles — from that group of 12 reached this year’s field of 68.

“To have the disappointment that we had a year ago and to not be deterred, to have the type of focus, determination and approach they had since they got out of quar-

SEE DRIVEN ON PAGE 54

Gonzaga celebrates after defeating BYU in the West Coast Conference tournament championship on March 9. Of the dozen teams that won their conference tournaments to lock up bids to the NCAA Tournament before it was canceled last year, the Bulldogs are one of just four — along with Winthrop, Liberty, and Utah State — to earn a bid again this year after being denied the opportunity to play in the tournament last season due to the coronavirus pandemic.

DAVID BECKER/AP



Computer umpires to be used in minors » **Baseball, Page 43**

