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End of the road

RILEY ANFINSON/U.S. Army

A truck transports humanitarian aid from the U.S. Army vessel LSV-1, across the Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore pier, and onto the beach in Gaza, June 12. The pier was only operational for about 20 days, military officials have said.

Pier mission for Gaza aid ends after navigating weather, security concerns

BY MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military pier used off the coast of Gaza intermittently during the last few months to transport humanitarian aid into the war-torn enclave will cease to operate, the Pentagon announced Wednesday.

"The temporary pier has achieved its intended effect. Now that that maritime surge mission was successful, it's now transitioning from a temporary pier in Gaza to a port in Ashdod, Israel," said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, deputy commander of U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East.

As the humanitarian mission shifts, Cooper said the new hybrid method of delivering aid from Cyprus to the port of Ashdod to North Gaza has been utilized for the past few weeks. He said more than 1 million pounds of aid was delivered into Gaza through this route in the last several weeks.

> **"While I am glad it has finally concluded, we cannot buy back the $230 million needlessly spent."**
>
> **Sen. Roger Wicker**
> on the JLOTS operation

The floating pier — known as Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore, or JLOTS — was meant to provide another way to deliver aid to Gaza. Health officials have warned for months that millions of Gazans face extreme hunger as Israel continues its war against the Hamas militants who launched a surprise assault in October from the enclave.

The JLOTS operation was first announced March 7 during President Joe Biden's State of the Union address. The following day, Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the top Pentagon spokesman, said the temporary pier would be operational within about 60 days.

But poor weather conditions and concerns about onshore security plagued the operation.

SEE ROAD ON PAGE 8

Triumphant Trump to accept GOP nomination

BY JONATHAN J. COOPER AND JILL COLVIN
Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Donald Trump takes the stage Thursday at the Republican National Convention to accept his party's nomination again and give his first speech since he was cut off mid-sentence by a flurry of gunfire in an assassination attempt at a rally in Pennsylvania.

Trump's address will conclude the four-day convention in Milwaukee. He appeared each of the first three days with a white bandage on his ear, covering a wound he sustained in the Saturday shooting.

Trump has said the shooting led him to change his RNC speech, from what was going to be "a humdinger" made up largely of attacks on President Joe Biden to one more focused on bringing the country together.

"Honestly, it's going to be a whole different speech now," Trump told the Washington Examiner.

Trump wrote the speech, and it is expected to be more personal than his usual comments, according to two people familiar with the planned remarks who were not authorized to speak publicly. He is also expected to lay out a stark contrast with the Democrats' pol-

SEE TRUMP ON PAGE 9

NATION
Families of troops killed in Kabul criticize Biden
Page 9

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Germany	$3.905	$4.423	$4.780	$4.235
Change in price	-0.7 cents	+0.1 cents	-0.4 cents	-3.9 cents
Netherlands	..	$4.807	$5.080	$4.948
Change in price	..	-0.5 cents	-0.7 cents	-2.2 cents
U.K.	..	$4.423	$4.780	$4.235
Change in price	..	+0.1 cents	-0.4 cents	-3.9 cents
Azores	..	..	$4.630	..
Change in price	..	..	-0.4 cents	..
Turkey	..	..	$4.446	$4.590*
Change in price	..	..	+0.4 cents	no change

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

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Japan	..	$4.419	..	$3.879
Change in price	..	no change	..	-4.0 cents
Okinawa	$3.549	..	..	$3.879
Change in price	+1.0 cents	..	..	-4.0 cents
South Korea	$3.579	..	$4.49	$3.909
Change in price	+1.0 cents	..	no change	-4.0 cents
Guam	$3.609	$4.129	$4.479	..
Change in price	-1.0 cents	no change	no change	..

***DieselEFD **Midgrade**
For the week of July 20-26

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates

Euro costs (July 19)	$1.07
British pound (July 19)	$1.27
Japanese yen (July 19)	154.00
South Korean won (July 19)	1346.00

Commercial rates

Bahrain(Dinar)	.3769
Britain (Pound)	.7706
Canada (Dollar)	1.3687
China(Yuan)	7.2604
Denmark (Krone)	6.8371
Egypt (Pound)	48.2509
Euro	.9164
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8088
Hungary (Forint)	357.78
Israel (Shekel)	3.6390
Japan (Yen)	156.60
Kuwait(Dinar)	.3056
Norway (Krone)	10.7652
Philippines (Peso)	58.32
Poland (Zloty)	3.93
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7509
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3418
Sooouth Korea (Won)	1383.13
Switzerland (Franc)	.8841
Thailand (Baht)	36.01
Turkey (NewLira)	33.0595

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

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	8.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	5.50
Federal funds market rate	5.33
3-month bill	5.43
30-year bond	4.38

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

FRIDAY IN EUROPE

SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

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

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MILITARY

Damaged turbine a factor in Stennis delays

Maintenance of aircraft carrier in the midst of undergoing its midlife overhaul

By Caitlyn Burchett
Stars and Stripes

A damaged steam turbine generator is contributing to the delayed maintenance of the USS John C. Stennis as the aircraft carrier undergoes its midlife overhaul, service officials said.

The unplanned repairs to one of the ship's eight steam turbine generators pushed the ship's maintenance back by 14 months to October 2026, Naval Sea Systems Command spokesman Alan Baribeau said. The same problem was discovered when overhauling the USS George Washington, he said.

Steam turbine generators convert heat from nuclear reactors into mechanical energy and electricity, acting as a power plant to keep the warship's many systems running.

The Stennis entered HII's Newport News Shipbuilding site in Virginia in May 2021 for maintenance. Aircraft carriers are overhauled after about 25 years to extend their lifespans to a cumulative 50 years. The overhauls incorporate upgrades to propulsion equipment, infrastructure and electronic systems, as well as refueling the carrier's nuclear reactors.

"Each refueling and complex overhaul work package includes planned inspections and routine refurbishment of the eight turbine generators. These inspections on both George Washington and John C. Stennis revealed one generator on each ship with significant damage (beyond 'normal wear and tear') that resulted in unplanned growth work and contributed to schedule extensions on both ships," Baribeau said.

Simon Pike/U.S. Navy

The Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis is moved to an outfitting berth in Newport News, Va., on April 8.

The turbine damage, he said, contributed to the majority of the Stennis' overall schedule delay.

Overhauls for Nimitz-class carriers typically take about four years. The Navy estimates the Stennis overhaul will take about 5½ years. The USS George Washington, which was delivered to the Navy in 2023, took six years.

Receiving material late and labor challenges are also contributing factors to the Stennis overhaul delays, as was the case for the Washington, Baribeau said.

The Navy is conducting a study to review and better identify consistent overhaul issues. The goal of the study, Baribeau said, is to improve contracts so the shipbuilder can better plan and procure material to minimize schedule impacts.

Additionally, the Navy has worked to improve budget estimates for the USS Harry S. Truman overhaul based on an assessment of previous labor hours.

"Improved budgeting, advance planning and material procurement are expected to result in improved execution performance on future refueling and complex overhauls," Baribeau said.

HII's Newport News Shipbuilding was awarded a $913 million contract for the advanced procurement for refueling and overhaul of the Truman, the Pentagon announced in January. The advanced procurement work is set to be completed in 2026. The announcement did not set a time frame for the Truman to arrive at Newport News.

In the meantime, the Navy asked for additional funds through fiscal 2026 to provide off-ship housing for Stennis sailors.

The Stennis was the first aircraft carrier to move all sailors off the ship during its multiyear refueling and complex overhaul. The change was made following a string of suicides aboard the Washington while it was in the shipyard.

A probe conducted by U.S. Fleet Force found Washington sailors experienced poor living conditions, up to three-hour commutes and isolation during the overhaul.

The service announced a $120 million contract in June to build a multilevel parking garage in Newport News for sailors and shipyard workers.

The garage, which is slated to be complete April 2026, will provide an additional 2,000 parking spaces.

Blue Ridge sailors visit helicopter crash site during Vietnam port call

By Alex Wilson
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. 7th Fleet's flagship recently wrapped up a five-day port call on Vietnam that included a visit to the site of an Army helicopter lost during the Vietnam War.

The USS Blue Ridge steamed into Cam Ranh Bay alongside the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Waesche on July 8 as part of the amphibious command ship's summer deployment, 7th Fleet spokeswoman Lt. Jamie Moroney told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday.

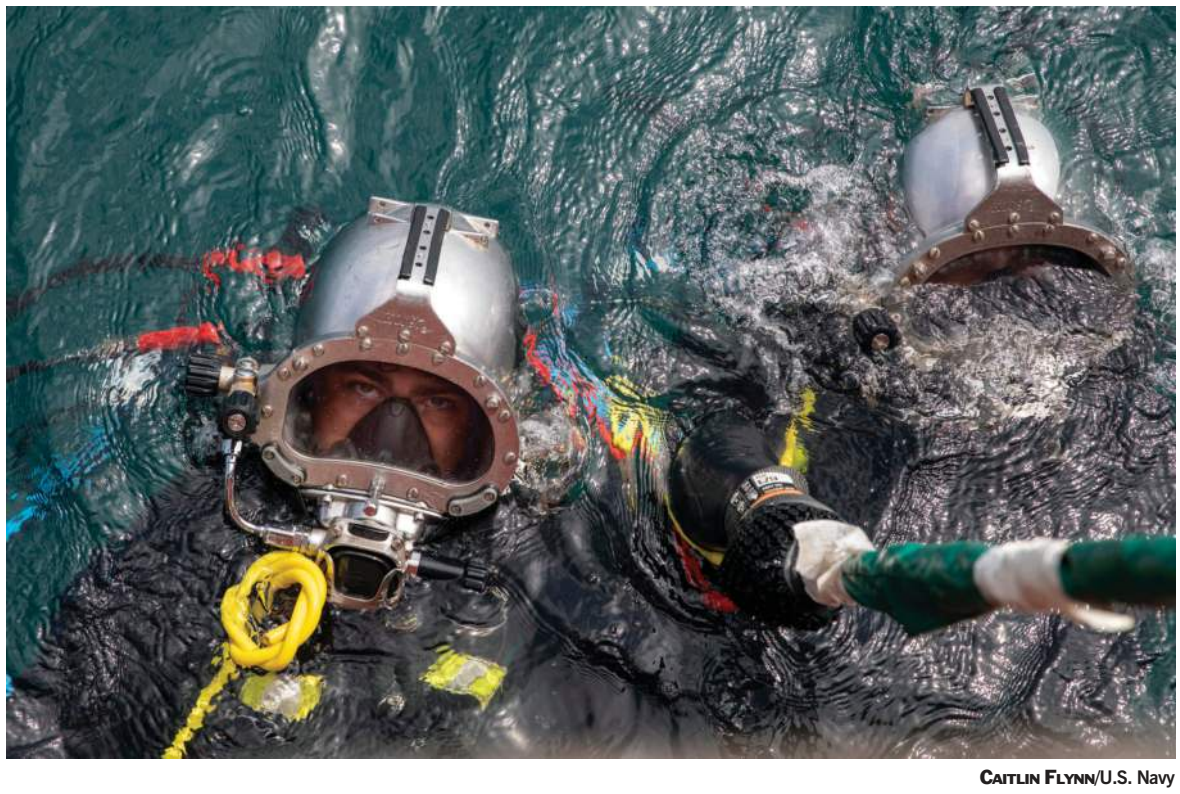
A day after their arrival, senior crew members of the two ships visited the site of a CH-47 Chinook that crashed more than 50 years ago and claimed the lives of all five crew members and five passengers, according to a 7th Fleet news release Monday.

The site in the South China Sea is about five miles off the coast of Nha Trang City in Vietnam's Khanh Hoa province, with excavation taking place about 100 feet below the surface.

The helicopter, call sign Warrior 143, crashed Oct. 26, 1971, after it lost radio communication in bad weather during a supply mission to Cam Rahn Bay, according to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's website.

The remains of four soldiers were recovered immediately after the crash; another two were recovered in subsequent excavations. The agency continues to probe the site to find the last four soldiers' remains, according to the 7th Fleet news release.

The most recent excavations began May 2, with personnel working from a barge almost every day, barring bad weather and an occasional holiday, said U.S. Army Capt. Weston Iannone, the recovery team leader.



Caitlin Flynn/U.S. Navy

Deep sea divers with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency prepare for a dive supporting the investigation of a 1971 helicopter crash site in Nha Trang Bay, Vietnam, on July 9.

"We're all here from 7 a.m. until about 4 p.m. — us, the Vietnamese, all the contractors and security you see," he said in the release. "This is not to float our own boat. Really, it's a combined, multinational effort across all services just to bring them all home."

Blue Ridge's skipper, Capt. Nicholas DeLeo, described the visit as a "moving experience," according to the release.

"I was greatly impressed by the hard work and focus demonstrated by the DPAA site team," he said. "Their effort to recover our missing-in-action service members truly demonstrates our country's support of the men and women who wear the uniform."

The Blue Ridge arrived nearly 13 months after the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan stopped in Da Nang with two cruisers and 10 months after President Joe Biden met with the country's leaders in Hanoi.

Biden's visit signaled a diplomatic upgrade in the U.S. relationship with Vietnam to a level Vietnam already shared with China and Russia, according to the Council on Foreign Relations.

Among other opportunities, the improved relationship with the U.S. means increased military-to-military ties between the two old foes, who now share a common interest in countering China's ambitions in the region, according to a council blog post in September.

In December, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Vietnam, followed in June by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

U.S. Army

A U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook lowers a water trailer to a hilltop camp in Tam Ky, Vietnam, on Sept. 15, 1967.

During their stay, crews from the Blue Ridge and Waesche took part with locals and foreign dignitaries in sports events, ship tours, a visit to a local orphanage, maritime security discussions and other engagements, Moroney told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday.

"These visits provide an opportunity to pursue new areas of cooperation and partnership and are a testament to the vital importance of the U.S.-Vietnam relationship," she wrote.

The Blue Ridge concluded its visit Friday, according to the news release.

Before Vietnam, the ship stopped in Manila on June 18 for the first time in five years and on June 28 visited Laem Chabang, Thailand, according to 7th Fleet news releases.

PACIFIC

US, Asian leaders send message to 'regional threats'

AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Adm. Kim Myung-soo, left, shakes hands with Japanese Joint Staff chief of staff Gen. Yoshihide Yoshida during their meeting with top U.S. military leaders at Camp Ichigaya, Tokyo, on Thursday.

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The highest-ranking military officers from the U.S., Japan and South Korea gathered here Thursday to talk cooperation amid rising challenges from China, North Korea and Russia.

The meeting marked the second trip to Japan since November for Air Force Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown after becoming chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"I expect that the three of us sitting here in Tokyo today sends a message to the regional threats, but also globally on the strength of the relationship, our alliance and the work that we do," Brown told reporters while sitting next to his Japanese and South Korean counterparts at Camp Ichigaya, headquarters of Japan's Ministry of Defense.

Alongside him were Japanese Joint Staff chief of staff Gen. Yoshihide Yoshida and South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Adm. Kim Myung-soo.

The trio were joined by the head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. Samuel Paparo; U.S. Forces Japan commander Lt. Gen. Ricky Rupp; and U.S. Forces Korea commander Gen. Paul LaCamera.

Chinese aggression in the East and South China seas, North Korean missile tests and Russia's invasion of Ukraine are among the challenges faced by the three democracies.

The United States has long encouraged its allies to cooperate on security, but those efforts have been frustrated by historical disputes stemming from Japan's rule over Korea before and during World War II.

Nevertheless, their military cooperation has surged since President Joe Biden, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held their first summit together in August at Camp David, Md.

The leaders pledged to boost their military ties to confront North Korean "threats that affect our collective interests and security."

Since then, the three nations have held unprecedented trilateral drills involving their air forces, navies and coast guards.

Last month, for example, they carried Freedom Edge, training near Japan and South Korea that involved multiple aircraft and ships.

It focused on missile, air and cyber defense, anti-submarine warfare, maritime interdiction and search and rescue.

"Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success," Brown told his Japanese and South Korean counterparts, quoting 19th century American author Edward Everett Hale. "The three of us have a responsibility to ensure the momentum continues."

Efforts to change the status quo by force in the East and South China seas, Russian aggression in Ukraine, a deteriorating situation in the Middle East and military cooperation between Russia and North Korea were challenges outlined by Yoshida ahead of the Tokyo meeting.

"It's extremely important for us three nations to demonstrate our unity to ensure regional stability," he told reporters.

Japan's Joint Staff, in a statement issued after the meeting, said the leaders also visited Yokota Air Base, USFJ's home in western Tokyo. There, they reaffirmed cooperation for real-time trilateral missile warning data sharing to counter North Korean threats.

"They condemned [North Korea]'s continued development of its unlawful nuclear and ballistic missile programs and provocations as well as the growing military cooperation between [North Korea] and Russia," the statement said.

It noted "escalatory, dangerous, and aggressive behavior supporting unlawful maritime claims by [Beijing] in the South China Sea and throughout the region," adding that the military leaders reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait

Top military officers from the three nations plan to meet in South Korea next year, the statement said.

Parades, folk dancing return to Tanabata festival

BY KELLY AGEE AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Fussa, a Japanese city that neighbors this airlift hub in western Tokyo, is bringing back its popular Tanabata festival in full for the first time in five years.

The festivities, which will include parades of traditional folk dancers for the first time since the pandemic, begin at 3:30 p.m. Friday and conclude Sunday on the main shopping street that runs west of Fussa Station.

The festival, which began in 1951 as a summer event to promote the shopping street, includes three parades, an official with the Fussa city sales promotion section told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday.

The Yokota Tanabata Dancers, a group of active-duty service members and spouses, plan to take their place again at the event.

"I'm excited," Jessica Stephens, a member of the group since 2010 and the spouse of Master Sgt. Jeffrey Stevens, said via Facebook Messenger on Thursday.

Stephens danced at many festivals with the group until her family relocated to Cannon Air Force Base, N.M. They returned in 2020 for a second tour in Japan.

"I have been very fortunate to be a part of this group for almost a decade, so it's nostalgic for me to dance, seeing the crowds' smiling faces, smelling the food and passing by all the shops that have been decorating the streets of Fussa for many years," she said.

Also known as star festivals, Tanabata celebrates the only day of the year when two lovers, the stars Altair and Vega, can meet.

The block-party atmosphere of the full event in Fussa was paused during the COVID-19 pandemic, although a scaled-down version last year attracted about 530,000 visitors, more than the average 400,000 visitors, the city official said. The three parades are the hallmark of Fussa's Tanabata Festival. The mikoshi and float parade is scheduled from 3:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. Friday. A mikoshi is a palanquin, or enclosed litter carried with poles, that in Shinto beliefs is used to carry a deity from a main shrine to a temporary shrine during a festival.

AARON KIDD/Stars and Stripes

Dancers parade during the Fussa Tanabata Festival near Yokota Air Base, Japan, Aug. 4, 2017.

The folk dancing parade follows immediately afterward and lasts until 8:40 p.m. Any city resident or worker at a company in Fussa may participate in that parade with prior registration, the city official said.

The hoshi-no parade, or Star Parade, features illuminated floats and is scheduled from 7:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday.

Many government officials speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

The Yokota Tanabata Dancers practice 6:30-7:30 p.m. Thursdays from March to November at the Taiyo Community Center, Stephens said. Ayako Hiruma is the instructor.

"Sensei Ayako is a wonderful teacher," Stephens said. "She has a lot of heart for dance."

Parade dancing is repetitive movement, Stephens said.

"It is easy to pick up and if you mess up," she said. "Honestly no one cares; we just keep a smile on our faces and the crowds are extremely forgiving."

Leaders look to enhance Japan role in Pacific region

Associated Press

TOKYO — Leaders of 18 Pacific island nations and areas agreed to an enhanced role of Japan in the region's development while opposing any attempted coercive activity, in a joint declaration adopted at their summit Thursday, as Tokyo seeks greater engagement to counter China's influence.

The Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting, or PALM, launched under a Japanese initiative in 1997, has become Japan's key diplomatic tool to deter China's security and economic influence in the region by strengthening its ties with the Pacific Island Forum members, stressing its willingness to maintain unity as a partner.

The leaders agreed that Japan provides greater support and cooperation in climate change, maritime security and defense, economic development and other areas, according to the declaration.

PACIFIC

Marine rotational force joins allies in Australia

CRISTIAN BESTUL/U.S. Marine Corps

Marines stand at attention during the opening ceremony for Predator's Run at in Australia's Northern Territory on Monday.

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps kicked off a 25-day littoral combat exercise this week with thousands of troops from three allied nations in Australia's Northern Territory.

Predator's Run, which began Monday and concludes Aug. 8, includes troops from Australia, the Philippines, and the United Kingdom, Marine Rotational Force-Darwin said in a news release Tuesday.

Littoral combat encompasses operations in or near coastal areas.

Four thousand troops, including 1,400 Marines are involved in the drills, 1st Lt. Colton Martin, a spokesman for the rotational force, told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday.

The Marines' Force Design initiative adopted littoral combat as an approach to possible conflict with China in the Indo-Pacific. Since 2022, the Corps has created two littoral regiments on Hawaii and Okinawa, with a third coming to Guam.

The new doctrine calls on Marines to disperse across small islands in the region and attack enemy forces with anti-ship missiles.

There are a variety of reasons Predator's Run is taking place in Australia, rather than on Southeast Asia islands where battles could be fought, according to Ross Babbage, a former Australian assistant defense secretary.

"There are many operational elements and systems needing refinement to conduct complex littoral operations well," he said by email Wednesday. "It is best to sort those things and conduct much of the necessary training in safe and well understood areas possessing advanced instrumented ranges and other excellent facilities."

It is also generally less expensive to train in Australia's vast spaces, he added.

Members of the 2,000-strong rotational force, which arrived in Australia in March, are at Mount Bundey Training Area, south of Darwin, to kick off the exercise, according to the release.

However, the drills, led by the Australian army's Darwin-based 1st Brigade, will take place across the Northern Territory and on Melville Island, in the eastern Timor Sea.

The exercise will employ as much of the rotational force as possible, showcasing expeditionary capabilities and innovative tactics. The force has been reinforced for the drill by the 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion deployed from Camp Pendleton, Calif., according to the release.

Participating units include 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, Combat Logistics Battalion 5 and Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 268.

"This training is essential to test and refine our ability to execute and integrate battle drills at each echelon, focusing on offense, defense, and counterattack," 2nd Battalion commander Lt. Col. Clinton Hall said in the release.

"By applying simplicity to complex operations and focusing on combined arms in support of maneuver, we strengthen our mutual capabilities with our allies."

Marines will conduct day and night operations and air assault drills aboard MV-22B Ospreys. All tiltrotors in the U.S. military returned to service in March after a three-month standdown. Flights temporarily ceased during the investigation into a fatal crash of an Air Force Osprey in November in southern Japan.

"This exercise will test our flexibility and adaptability in a complex but controlled environment to execute the core mission of a [tiltrotor] squadron in a medium threat environment while based out of an expeditionary site," Lt. Col. Brandon Pope, the squadron's commander, said in the release.

"Our ability to provide assault support to the [Marine Air Ground Task Force] and the joint force relies on our capacity to integrate in all phases of an operation," he said.

Sobriety checks to continue for Marines based in Japan

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps plans to continue outgoing sobriety checks Friday and Saturday at all Japan installations and increase off-base patrols as a response to discontent on Okinawa over two service members' indictments for alleged sexual crimes.

The service is expected to announce Friday that it will continue at least one more weekend of "enhanced" gate checks that began July 12 and 13. Those checks include Breathalyzer tests for service members and civilians leaving Marine bases in Japan by vehicle or on foot, Marine Corps Installations Pacific spokesman Capt. Brett Dornhege-Lazaroff said by phone Thursday.

Breathalyzer tests may be randomized if traffic delays grow too long, he said.

Gate sentries will check for liberty tier cards and liberty buddies where required and make sure people understand the liberty orders, Dornhege-Lazaroff said.

Random incoming and outgoing gate checks will increase throughout the week, along with patrols in popular nightlife areas such as Gate 2 Street outside Kadena Air Base and Kokusai Street in Naha, he said.

The commander of III Marine Expeditionary Force, Lt. Gen. Roger Turner, is working to make liberty rules for Marines on Okinawa apply to all service branches on the island, Dornhege-Lazaroff said Tuesday. Turner and U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel wrote in a July 12 opinion piece that the U.S. military will "introduce one set of liberty time rules" across all service branches.

No change in liberty policy has been announced, thus far.

"At this moment there is nothing to share publicly; things are still being worked on," U.S. Forces Japan spokesman Gunnery Sgt. Jonathan Wright said Thursday by phone.

Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki and other prefectural officials delivered formal complaints to Emanuel, U.S. Forces Japan commander Lt. Gen. Ricky Rupp, 18th Wing commander Brig. Gen. Nicholas Evans and the Japanese government over two recently disclosed indictments, calling for changes to the status of forces agreement governing U.S. troops on the island.

Senior Airman Brennon R. E. Washington, 25, of Kadena's 18th Logistics Readiness Squadron, pleaded not guilty July 12 in Naha District Court to charges of kidnapping and sexually assaulting a minor in December.

In a second case, Japanese prosecutors on June 17 charged Marine Lance Cpl. Jamel Clayton, 21, with attempting to sexually assault a woman in Yomitan village on May 26.

Brandon Shippee, a Marine veteran and shift manager at the Camp Kinser shoppette, said he was required to take a breath test before leaving Camp Kinser at 11 p.m. July 12. The procedure delayed him five minutes, he said. But he said his wife waited up to 30 minutes to leave Camp Foster.

"It's not a bad thing for them to do I guess; I just don't think it should be every car, all the time," Shippee said while waiting for a ride at Foster on Thursday.

Cpl. Dominic Mahon, 26, of the 9th Engineer Support Battalion at Camp Hansen, said his experience leaving Hansen at 8 p.m. July 12 "wasn't that bad."

He was not required to take a breath test, but checks began just after he returned to base at 2 p.m. Saturday, he said.

"I think everybody was scared of what was going to happen, but they did (it) like, 'Hey, we're going to see how it goes right now,' " Mahon said while shopping Thursday at Foster's exchange. "I think they should do that more, because then it would prevent future instances from happening."

MILITARY

Sailors help save passengers' lives on disabled boat

By Alison Bath
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Quick action by Navy sailors on routine patrol in the eastern Mediterranean Sea helped save the lives of 30 people stranded on a boat adrift for days.

Sailors assigned to Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 79 spotted people indicating distress aboard the vessel Tuesday during flight operations and reported the sighting to the destroyer USS Bulkeley, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet said in a statement Wednesday.

While working with the Joint Rescue Coordination Center, Bulkeley requested that a nearby commercial ship, Seaways Sabine, help the stranded single-engine inflatable small boat.

Crew members from Seaways Sabine ultimately found 31 people aboard the boat, three of whom needed medical attention, according to the statement.

Corpsmen from Bulkeley traveled by boat to the commercial vessel to offer medical assistance to the three unresponsive people. One died following an extended period of CPR, the Navy said.

The other two people were in stable condition and taken to the nearest suitable port by the merchant ship. The remaining 28 passengers on the boat were being taken by Seaways Sabine to Port Sidi Kurayr, Egypt, the Navy said.

"This incident, while unfortunate, underscores our Navy's ability to respond to those in need and showcases the readiness and capabilities of our team," said Cmdr. Arturo Trejo, commander of Bulkeley, one of four destroyers deployed to Naval Station Rota in Spain.

Each year, tens of thousands of migrants and refugees attempt risky sea crossings from the coasts of Libya, Tunisia, Turkey and other countries seeking safe haven and economic opportunities in Europe.

Many die when often overcrowded and unseaworthy boats are overcome by rough seas or become disabled.

Last month, 64 people were reported missing after the boat they were in caught fire and capsized off the southern coast of Italy near Calabria. Although 11 people were rescued, one died soon after, The Associated Press reported June 18.

In another shipwreck the same day, dozens of people were rescued from a sinking wooden boat near the Italian island of Lampedusa, but rescuers found the bodies of 10 people trapped below the deck, AP reported.

Brian Erickson/Stars and Stripes

Maj. Gen. Andrew Gainey receives the colors of U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa during a change of command ceremony at Caserma Ederle, Italy, on Thursday.

Gainey takes reins of US Army's African task force based in Italy

By Brian Erickson
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — The U.S. Army's Southern European Task Force, Africa has a new leader after a change of command ceremony Thursday at Caserma Ederle.

Maj. Gen. Andrew Gainey takes over at SETAF-AF for Maj. Gen. Todd Wasmund, who led SETAF-AF for the past two years.

Gainey takes over a force that provides U.S. Africa Command a crisis-reponse force and a headquarters to synchronize Army activities on the continent.

"Words cannot express how humbled and honored I am," Gainey said upon taking command at the ceremony.

Prior to assuming command of SETAF-AF, Gainey was in charge of U.S. Army Europe and Africa's 56th Artillery Command, headquartered in Mainz-Kastel, Germany.

Gainey's arrival comes as the Army finds its Africa mission in flux.

In the wake of a coup last summer in Niger, tensions flared with the new ruling military junta over the U.S. presence in the country. The withdrawal of 1,000 American personnel from Niger was recently finalized.

In addition, the return of great-power competition has brought an increase in challenges from Russia and China for influence on the continent.

Russian private military contractors have made inroads from Libya to the Central African Republic, and Niger is also turning toward Russia as a replacement following the U.S. pullout.

SETAF-AF's outgoing commander, Wasmund, plans to retire later this year, task force officials said. U.S. Africa Command chief Gen. Michael Langley thanked him Thursday.

"We all know how you have invested so much working side by side with our partners and bringing lasting security, stability and prosperity," Langley said.

4 hurt, including 3 soldiers, in US military convoy crash

By Alexander Riedel
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Four people were injured when three U.S. military trucks collided with each other and a car traveling on highway A6 near Feuchtwangen on Wednesday.

Three U.S. soldiers and the 33-year-old car driver were seriously injured and taken to surrounding hospitals, chief inspector Rüdiger Gärtner, an Ansbach police spokesman, said in a statement Thursday.

Officials with the 21st Theater Sustainment Command confirmed three soldiers were injured but were not immediately able to provide information on their unit and medical conditions Wednesday.

The accident, which occurred near the Bavarian state border around 8:30 a.m., led to significant traffic disruptions, said chief inspector Stefan Kull, an Ansbach police spokesman.

The convoy of five U.S. military trucks was traveling toward Heilbronn when it pulled up to a traffic jam, police said.

"The leading truck was able to brake in time, as was the second truck," Gärtner said. "However, the (third) driver was unable to brake in time and hit the semitrailer in front of him. The same happened to the following semitrailer."

The trucks did not carry explosives or hazardous materials, according to police, and U.S. military police are assisting with the investigation.

The accident happened in the two westbound lanes between Feuchtwangen-Nord and the Feuchtwangen/Crailsheim interchange, roughly 30 minutes from U.S. Army installations in Ansbach. The highway was closed in the direction of Heilbronn from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., Gärtner said.

Teixeira to face a military court-martial

Associated Press

BOSTON — Massachusetts Air National Guard member Jack Teixeira, who pleaded guilty in March to federal criminal charges for leaking highly classified military documents, will now face a military court-martial.

Teixeira admitted to illegally collecting some of the nation's most sensitive secrets and sharing them on the social media platform Discord. He is facing military charges of disobeying orders and obstructing justice.

The U.S. Air Force said in a statement Wednesday that he will be tried at Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts but no date has been set.

At a May hearing, military prosecutors said a court-martial is appropriate given that obeying orders is the "absolute core" of the military. But Teixeira's lawyers argued that further action would amount to prosecuting him twice for the same offense.

Teixeira, who was part of the 102nd Intelligence Wing at Otis Air National Guard Base in Massachusetts, worked as a cyber transport systems specialist, essentially an information technology specialist responsible for military communications networks.

Teixeira was arrested just over a year ago in the most consequential national security leak in years.

He pleaded guilty on March 4 to six counts of willful retention and transmission of national defense information under a deal with prosecutors that calls for him to serve at least 11 years in prison. He's scheduled to be sentenced in that case in September.

Authorities in the criminal case said Teixeira first typed out classified documents he accessed and then began sharing photographs of files that bore SECRET and TOP SECRET markings.

The leak exposed to the world unvarnished secret assessments of Russia's war in Ukraine, including information about troop movements in Ukraine and the provision of supplies and equipment to Ukrainian troops. Teixeira also admitted to posting information about a U.S. adversary's plans to harm U.S. forces serving overseas.

The stunning security breach raised alarm over America's ability to protect its most closely guarded secrets and forced President Joe Biden's administration to scramble to try to contain the diplomatic and military fallout.

The leaks embarrassed the Pentagon, which tightened controls to safeguard classified information and disciplined members it found had intentionally failed to take required action about Teixeira's suspicious behavior.

MILITARY

Navy exonerates 256 Black sailors in 'mutiny'

By Tara Copp
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Navy has exonerated 256 Black sailors who were found to be unjustly punished in 1944 following a horrific port explosion that killed hundreds of service members and exposed racist double standards among the then-segregated ranks.

On July 17, 1944, munitions being loaded onto a cargo ship detonated, causing secondary blasts that ignited 5,000 tons of explosives at Port Chicago naval weapons station near San Francisco.

The explosion killed 320 sailors and civilians, nearly 75% of whom were Black, and injured another 400 personnel. Surviving Black sailors had to pick up the human remains and clear the blast site while white officers were granted leave to recuperate.

The pier was a critical ammunition supply site for forces in the Pacific during World War II, and the job of loading those ships was left primarily to Black enlisted sailors overseen by white officers.

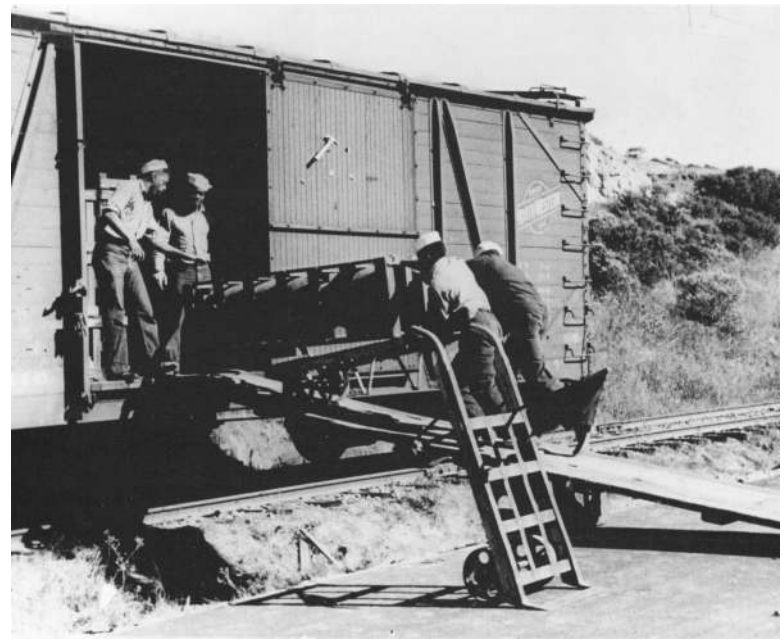
Before the explosion, the Black sailors working the dock had expressed concerns about the loading operations. Shortly after the blast, they were ordered to return to loading ships even though no changes had been made to improve their safety.

The sailors refused, saying they needed training on how to more safely handle the bombs before they returned.

What followed affected the rest of their lives, including punishments that kept them from receiving honorable discharges even as the vast majority returned to work at the pier under immense pressure and served throughout the war. Fifty sailors who held fast to their demands for safety and training were tried as a group on charges of conspiracy to commit mutiny and were convicted and sent to prison.

Naval History and Heritage Command, Mare Island Navy Yard/ AP

The wreckage of the Building A-7 Joiner Shop in the center and munitions pier beyond, from the July 17, 1944 explosion at Port Chicago naval weapons station near San Francisco.



Naval History and Heritage Command/National Park Service/AP

African American Sailors of a naval ordnance battalion unload bombs from a rail car, circa 1943/44, in Port Chicago, Calif.

The whole episode was unjust, and none of the sailors received the legal due process they were owed, Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said.

It was "a horrific situation for those Black sailors that remained," Del Toro said.

The Navy's office of general counsel reviewed the military judicial proceedings used to punish the sailors and found "there were so many inconsistencies and so many legal violations that came to the forefront," he said.

Thurgood Marshall, who was then a defense attorney for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, defended the 50 sailors who were convicted of mutiny. Marshall went on to become the first Black justice on the Supreme Court.

On Wednesday, the 80th anniversary of the Port Chicago disaster, Del Toro signed paperwork officially clearing the sailors, who are now deceased. Del Toro handed the first pen to Thurgood Marshall Jr., the late justice's son.

The exonerations "are deeply moving," Marshall Jr. said. "They, of course, are all gone, and that's a painful aspect of it. But so many fought for so long for that kind of fairness and recognition."

President Joe Biden said the decision to exonerate is "righting a historic wrong."

In the appeal of their courts martial convictions, then-NAACP attorney Marshall wrote that "justice can only be done in this case by a complete reversal of findings," Biden said in a statement. "With this action, we are answering that call."

The events have stung surviving family members for decades, but an earlier effort in the 1990s to pardon the sailors fell short. Two additional sailors were previously cleared — one was found mentally incompetent to stand trial, and one was cleared on insufficient evidence. Wednesday's action goes beyond a pardon and vacates the military judicial proceedings carried out in 1944 against all of the men.

"This decision clears their names and restores their honor and acknowledges the courage that they displayed in the face of immense danger," Del Toro said.

The racism that the Black sailors faced reflected the military's views at the time — ranks were segregated, and the Navy had only reluctantly opened some positions it considered less desirable to Black service members.

The official court of inquiry looking into why the explosion occurred cleared all the white officers and praised them for the "great effort" they had to exert to run the dock. It left open the suggestion that the Black sailors were to blame for the accident.

Del Toro's action converts the discharges to honorable unless there were other circumstances surrounding them. After the Navy upgrades the discharges, surviving family members can work with the Department of Veterans Affairs on past benefits that may be owed, the Navy said.

US Army honors Nisei combat unit that helped liberate Tuscany

Associated Press

ROME — The U.S. military is celebrating a little-known part of World War II history, honoring the Japanese-American U.S. Army unit that was key to liberating parts of Italy and France even while the troops' relatives were interned at home as enemies of the state following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

Descendants of the second-generation "Nisei" soldiers traveled to Italy from around the United States — California, Hawaii and Colorado — to tour the sites where their relatives fought and attend a commemoration at the U.S. military base in Camp Darby ahead of the 80th anniversary Friday of the liberation of nearby Livorno, in Tuscany.

Among those taking part were cousins Yoko and Leslie Sakato, whose fathers each served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which went onto become the most decorated unit in the history of the U.S. military for its size and length of service.

"We wanted to kind of follow his footsteps, find out where he fought, where he was, maybe see the territories that he never ever talked about," said Yoko Sakato, whose father Staff Sgt. Henry Sakato was in the 100th Battalion, Company B that helped liberate Tuscany from Nazi-Fascist rule.

The 442nd Infantry Regiment, including the 100th Infantry Battalion, was composed almost entirely of second-generation American soldiers of Japanese ancestry, who fought in Italy and southern France. Known for its motto "Go For Broke," 21 of its members were awarded the Medal of Honor.

The regiment was organized in 1943, in response to the War Department's call for volunteers to form a segregated Japanese American army combat unit. Thousands of Nisei — second-generation Japanese Americans — answered the call.

Some of them fought as their relatives were interned at home in camps that were established in 1942, after Pearl Harbor, to house Japanese Americans who were considered to pose a "public danger" to the United States. In all, some 112,000 people, 70,000 of them American citizens, were held in these "relocation centers" through the end of the war.

The Nisei commemoration at Camp Darby was held one week before the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Livorno, or Leghorn, on July 19, 1944. Local residents were also commemorating the anniversary this week.

Elena Baladelli, U.S. Army/AP

Yoko Sakato, left, and Valerie Matsunaga, right, relatives of soldiers who fought in the 442nd Infantry Regiment during the World War II, flank U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Michael A. Rosado, as they attend a commemoration at Camp Darby, Tuscany, central Italy, on July 11.

In front of family members, military officials and civilians, Yoko Sakato placed flowers at the monument in memory of Pvt. Masato Nakae, one of the 21 Nisei members awarded the Medal of Honor.

"I was feeling close to my father, I was feeling close to the other men that I knew growing up, the other veterans, because they had served, and I felt really like a kinship with the military who are here," she said.

MILITARY

Audit: US failed to vet $293M in Afghan aid

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

Millions of dollars in U.S. taxpayer funds intended for development aid in Afghanistan may have helped extremists in the Taliban-run country, a government watchdog agency says.

An audit by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction found that two State Department bureaus funding projects in the country couldn't prove that they had complied with requirements for vetting aid recipients.

The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement failed to provide proper documentation for at least $293 million of aid they distributed, SIGAR said in a report of its findings released Wednesday.

"There is an increased risk that terrorist and terrorist-affiliated individuals and entities may have illegally benefited from State (Department) spending in Afghanistan," the report said.

The audit examined five bureaus that had active awards in Afghanistan between March and November 2022. Three were able to demonstrate that they had complied with counterterrorism vetting requirements.

The State Department acknowledged the other two bureaus' compliance gaps and, in a statement published with SIGAR's report, agreed with its recommendation to immediately ensure that proper vetting measures are taken.

PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

A man walks by a bus stop in Kabul, Afghanistan, February 2021, months before international forces left the country.

The U.S. has provided over $2.5 billion in assistance to Afghanistan — through the United Nations, other public international organizations and nongovernmental organizations — since it pulled all of its troops from the country in August 2021 after nearly two decades of fighting.

More than $1.7 billion of that funding has come from the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development to support humanitarian activities implemented by other organizations, SIGAR said.

International donors paused aid to Afghanistan when international forces withdrew from the country and the Taliban took control. Some aid started to flow back several months later, and humanitarian groups say it's still desperately needed.

About half the country of 43 million people remains trapped in poverty, with 15 million Afghans facing food insecurity, according to an April report by the World Bank.

But the Taliban have tried to obtain U.S. aid funds "through several means, including the establishment of nongovernmental organizations," SIGAR said.

The attempts to siphon off the money underscore the need for the State Department to "fully and consistently assess the risks posed by its implementing partners."

The findings of a separate SIGAR investigation published in May showed that at least $10.9 million in U.S. taxpayer money had ended up in the hands of the Taliban since international forces withdrew, largely through taxes that partners paid to the group.

The Afghan Taliban are not a U.S.-designated terrorist organization, but the group maintains close ties with al-Qaida, according to U.S. assessments. In July 2022, the U.S. killed al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri in Kabul.

The Haqqani Network, which is a designated foreign terrorist organization and a longtime ally of al-Qaida, is also an official semi-autonomous component of the Taliban.

"As State continues to spend U.S. taxpayer funds on programs intended to benefit the Afghan people, it is critical that (it) knows who is actually benefiting from this assistance in order to prevent the aid from being diverted to the Taliban or other sanctioned parties," SIGAR said.

Road: Poor weather plagued the operation

FROM PAGE 1

The pier has been at the port of Ashdod since it was removed at the end of June due to bad weather.

Aid operations using the pier began May 17, but the Pentagon announced less than two weeks later that it would be removed for repairs after suffering damage from rough seas and bad weather. It became operational again June 7. Cooper told reporters at the time that the issue with the pier was "solely from unanticipated weather."

A week later, CENTCOM again announced the pier was being temporarily removed due to high seas. It was reattached June 19 before being removed for the final time.

Security concerns also disrupted the distribution of aid. The United Nations suspended deliveries from the pier on June 9, a day after the Israeli military used the area around it for airlifts after a hostage rescue that killed more than 270 Palestinians. U.S. and Israeli officials said no part of the pier was used in the raid. However, U.N. officials said any perception in Gaza that the project was used might endanger aid work, The Associated Press reported.

As a result, aid transported onto the beach using the pier piled up for days. The World Food Program recently hired a contractor to move the aid from the beach to prevent the food and other supplies from spoiling, according to the AP.

The pier was only operational for about 20 days, military officials have said. About 1,000 American troops were involved in the effort. Three service members were injured during the operation, with one soldier being transported from Israel to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio last month in critical condition. Cooper said Wednesday that the soldier is no longer in critical condition but remains in the hospital.

The Pentagon originally determined the pier would cost $320 million but defense officials later dropped the estimate to about $230 million. Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh had said lower-than-expected costs for contracted trucks, drivers and commercial vessels, and the United Kingdom's contribution of a vessel lowered the U.S. price tag by about $90 million.

MALCOLM COHENS-ASHLEY/U.S. Army

A U.S. soldier directs traffic across the Trident Pier, and onto U.S. Army vessel LSV-1 on June 22.

Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, has been a vocal critic of the operation.

"While I am glad it has finally concluded, we cannot buy back the $230 million needlessly spent, and significant questions remain about the Biden administration's poor planning for this mission," Wicker said in a statement.

Cooper said the military expects to save another $20 million, but he would not say from where the reduction would come.

NATION

Trump: Vance casts himself as fighter for forgotten working class

FROM PAGE 1

icies, according to one of the people.

His moment of survival has shaped the week, even as convention organizers insisted they would continue with their program as planned less than 48 hours after the shooting. Speakers and delegates have repeatedly chanted "Fight, fight, fight!" in homage to Trump's words as he got to his feet and pumped his fist after Secret Service agents killed the gunman. And some of his supporters have started sporting their own makeshift bandages on the convention floor.

Speakers attributed Trump's survival to divine intervention and paid tribute to victim Corey Comperatore, who died after shielding his wife and daughter from gunfire at the rally.

"Instead of a day of celebration, this could have been a day of heartache and mourning," Trump's vice presidential pick, Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance, said in his convention speech Wednesday.

In his first prime-time speech since becoming the nominee for vice president, Vance spoke of growing up poor in Kentucky and Ohio, his mother addicted to drugs and his father absent, and of how he later joined the military and went on to the highest levels of U.S. politics.

Vance introduced himself to a national audience Wednesday after being chosen as Trump's running mate, sharing the story of his hardscrabble upbringing and making the case that his party best understands the challenges facing struggling Americans.

Speaking to a packed arena at the Republican National Convention, the Ohio senator cast himself as a fighter for a forgotten working class, making a direct appeal to the Rust Belt voters who helped drive Trump's surprise 2016 victory and voicing their anger and frustration.

JABIN BOTSFORD/The Washington Post

Vice-presidential nominee J.D. Vance, 39, speaks at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee on Wednesday. The Ohio senator shared the story of his hardscrabble upbringing and said his party best understands the challenges facing struggling Americans.

"In small towns like mine in Ohio, or next door in Pennsylvania, or in Michigan, in states all across our country, jobs were sent overseas and children were sent to war," he said.

"To the people of Middletown, Ohio, and all the forgotten communities in Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Ohio, and every corner of our nation, I promise you this," he said. "I will be a vice president who never forgets where he came from."

The 39-year-old Ohio senator is a relative political unknown, having served in the Senate for less than two years. He rapidly morphed in recent years from a bitter critic of the former president to an aggressive defender and is now positioned to become the future leader of the party and the torch-bearer of Trump's "Make America Great Again" political movement.

The first millennial to join the top of a major party ticket, Vance enters the race as questions about the age of the men at the top — 78-year-old Trump and 81-year-old President Joe Biden — have been high on the list of voters' concerns. He also joins Trump after an assassination attempt against the former president — in which Trump came perhaps millimeters from death or serious injury — underscoring the importance of a potential successor.

But Trump's decision to choose Vance wasn't about picking a running mate or the next vice president, said Indiana Rep. Jim Banks, who introduced the senator at a fundraiser earlier Wednesday.

"Donald Trump picked a man in J.D. Vance that is the future of the country, the future of the Republican Party, the future of the America First movement," he said.

In his speech, Vance shared his story — an embodiment of an American dream he said is in now in short supply.

"Never in my wildest imagination could I have believed that I'd be standing here tonight," he said.

Vance gained prominence following the publication of his best-selling 2016 memoir "Hillbilly Elegy," which tells the story of his blue-collar roots. The book became a must-read for those seeking to understand the cultural forces that propelled Trump to the White House that year. Vance spent years as a Trump critic, assailing the former president with insults, before he changed his mind.

Vance, who had never attended, let alone spoken at a previous Republican convention, spent much of his speech talking up Trump and going after Biden, using his relative youth to draw a contrast with the 81-year-old president.

Vance says he was in fourth grade when "a career politician by the name of Joe Biden supported NAFTA, a bad trade deal that sent countless good American manufacturing jobs to Mexico."

"Joe Biden has been a politician in Washington as long as I've been alive," he added. "For half a century, he's been a champion of every single policy initiative to make America weaker and poorer."

The crowd inside the convention hall welcomed Vance warmly. They erupted into chants of "Mamaw!" in honor of his grandmother, and chanted "J.D.'s Mom!" after he introduced his mother, a former addict who has been sober for 10 years.

Vance was introduced Wednesday night by his wife, Usha Chilukuri Vance, who talked of the stark difference between how she and her husband grew up — she a middle-class immigrant from San Diego, and he from a low-income Appalachian family. She called him "a meat and potatoes kind of guy" who respected her vegetarian diet and learned to cook Indian food for her mother.

Trump, again wearing a bandage over his injured ear, watched Vance speak from his family box and was often seen smiling.

Most Americans — and Republicans — didn't know much about Vance before Wednesday night. According to a new poll from the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, which was conducted before Trump selected the freshman senator as his choice, 6 in 10 Americans don't know enough about him to have formed an opinion. That includes 61% of Republicans.

Democrats have attacked Vance for his past support for a national abortion ban, his criticism of U.S. involvement in Ukraine, and his eagerness to blame Democrats for Trump's assassination attempt.

But the young senator steered clear of such controversies in his remarks, which were light on the red-meat conservative attacks that convention audience typically expect.

Biden's campaign responded with a blistering statement calling Vance "unprepared, unqualified, and willing to do anything Donald Trump demands."

"Tonight, J.D. Vance, the poster boy for Project 2025, took center stage. But it's working families and the middle class who will suffer if he's allowed to stay there," said Michael Tyler, Biden campaign communication director.

Families of troops killed in Kabul criticize Biden at convention

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Relatives of some of the 13 American service members killed during the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan appeared on stage at the Republican National Convention on Wednesday in an emotional moment that revived one of the low points of President Joe Biden's presidency.

Many of the Gold Star families have criticized Biden for never publicly naming their loved ones. On stage Wednesday, one of the family members named each of the 13 service members, and the crowd echoed back each name as it was read aloud.

"Joe Biden has refused to recognize their sacrifice," Christy Shamblin, the mother-in-law of Marine Sgt. Nicole Gee, told the crowd. "Donald Trump knew all of our children's names. He knew all of their stories."

The crowd chanted "Never forget!" and "U.S.A.!" as Trump and the entire convention hall stood.

The display on the RNC's third day was an implicit response to Biden's repeated rebukes of Trump and his allegations that the former president doesn't respect veterans. Biden has often brought up a claim by retired Gen. John Kelly, who was Trump's chief of staff, that Trump referred to slain World War II soldiers as losers and suckers. Trump denies the allegation.

"President Biden cares deeply about our service members, their families, and the immense sacrifices they have made," Adrienne Watson, a National Security Council spokesperson, said in a statement. "That's why the President attended the dignified transfer of the 13 brave service members who lost their lives in Afghanistan on August 26, 2021; as well as, of the three who lost their lives in Jordan earlier this year. As he said then and continues to believe now: Our country owes them a great deal of gratitude and a debt that we can never repay, and we will continue to honor their ultimate sacrifice."

The U.S. service members and 60 Afghans were killed by a suicide bombing at the Kabul airport in August 2021 as the U.S. worked feverishly to evacuate Americans and Afghans who helped the West during two decades of war.

The parents and loved ones of those service members have been in the political spotlight ever since, appearing before congressional hearings and doing news interviews.

Republicans have claimed that Biden's decision to remove U.S. soldiers after the two-decade war in Afghanistan was a strictly political move. But the agreement for the U.S. to withdraw from Afghanistan was signed by Trump's administration in February 2020. The deal called for American troops to be out by May 2021, but Trump left office that January without leaving a plan in place for the actual withdrawal of forces.

Several months before the peace deal with the Taliban was signed in Doha, Qatar, Trump had contemplated inviting the Taliban leadership to Camp David in Maryland to sign an agreement. Those plans, which were vehemently objected to by senior military officials, were put on hold after a Taliban attack that killed a U.S. soldier.

Criticism of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan resonates with voters across party lines. Former Biden supporters, such as former New Hampshire House Speaker Steve Shurtleff, have cited the botched withdrawal as one reason why he wants Biden to step aside.

NATION

Dems making fresh push for president to exit race

SARAH L. VOISIN/The Washington Post

Over the past week, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., right, and Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., have told President Joe Biden that some lawmakers in their party don't think he can win reelection and want him to end his bid.

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former president Barack Obama has privately expressed concerns to Democrats about President Joe Biden's candidacy, and Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi privately warned Biden that Democrats could lose the ability to seize control of the House if he didn't step away from the 2024 race.

Pelosi also showed Biden polling that he likely can't defeat Republican Donald Trump, according to people familiar with the matter who insisted on anonymity to discuss it.

Obama has not spoken directly to Biden, two other people said. He has conveyed to allies that Biden needs to consider the viability of his campaign but has also made clear that the decision is one Biden needs to make.

Time racing, Democrats at the highest levels are making a critical push for Biden to reconsider his reelection bid, as unease grows at the White House and within the campaign at a fraught moment for the president and his party.

Biden has insisted he's not backing down, adamant he's the candidate who beat Trump before and will do it again. Pressed about reports Biden might be softening to the idea of leaving the race, his deputy campaign manager Quentin Fulks said Thursday: "He is not wavering on anything."

In recent days the president has become more committed to staying in the race, according to another person familiar with the matter.

But influential Democrats from the highest levels of the party apparatus, including congressional leadership headed by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, are sending signals of concern. Some Democrats hope Biden will assess the trajectory of the race and his legacy during this pause.

Using mountains of data showing Biden's standing could wipe out the ranks of Democrats in Congress, frank conversations in public and private and now the president's own time off the campaign trail after testing positive for COVID-19, many Democrats see an opportunity to encourage a reassessment.

If Democrats are seriously preparing the extraordinary step of replacing Biden and shifting Vice President Kamala Harris at the top of the ticket, this weekend will be critical to changing the president's mind, other people familiar with the private conversations said.

One said it's now or never ahead of a planned virtual roll call to nominate the party's choice in early August, ahead of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Over the past week, Schumer and Jeffries, both of New York, have spoken privately to the president, candidly laying out the views of Democrats on Capitol Hill, including Democrats' concerns.

Separately, the chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Rep. Suzan DelBene of Washington, spoke with Biden last week armed with fresh data. The campaign chief aired the concerns of front-line Democrats seeking election to the House.

And Wednesday, California Rep. Adam Schiff, a close ally of Pelosi, called for Biden to drop his reelection bid, saying he believes it's time to "pass the torch."

Biden, in a radio interview taped just before he tested positive for COVID-19, dismissed the idea it was too late for him to recover politically, telling Univision's Luis Sandoval that it's still early and that many people don't focus on the election until September.

"All the talk about who's leading and where and how, is kind of, you know — everything so far between Trump and me has been basically even," he said in an excerpt of the interview released Thursday.

Some national polls do show a close race, though others suggest Trump with a lead. And some state polls have contained warning signs too, including a recent New York Times/Siena poll that suggested a competitive race in Virginia.

To be sure, many Democrats want Biden to stay in the race. And the Democratic National Committee is pushing ahead with plans for a virtual vote to formally make Biden its nominee in the first week of August, ahead of the Democratic National Convention that begins Aug. 19 in Chicago.

Dems mull expelling Menendez from Senate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sen. Bob Menendez has shown no sign he will voluntarily resign from the Senate following his conviction on bribery charges, leaving Democratic senators contemplating an expulsion effort to force him from office.

While Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat, has six months remaining in his term, Democrats have made clear they don't want him in office any longer. Within minutes of the guilty verdict on Tuesday, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called for his resignation and New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, who would name Menendez's replacement, said that the Senate should expel Menendez if he refused to step down.

Expulsion, which requires a two-thirds majority, is an exceedingly rare step in the Senate. The last time it was even seriously considered by the chamber was almost 30 years ago, and only 15 senators — almost all during the Civil War — have ever been expelled.

Still, senators are preparing to make the push.

"He must stand up now and leave the Senate. He must do that, and if he refuses to do that, many of us, but I will lead that effort to make sure he is removed from the Senate," Sen. Cory Booker, New Jersey's other Democratic senator, told MSNBC late Tuesday. "That is the right thing to do. That is the just thing to do."

After a jury found Menendez, 70, guilty of accepting bribes of gold and cash from three New Jersey businessmen and acting as a foreign agent for the Egyptian government, the senator did not comment on his political plans in brief remarks as he left the courthouse. But he vowed to appeal the verdict.

"I have never violated my public oath. I have never been anything but a patriot of my country and for my country," Menendez told reporters.

It was a familiar refrain from Menendez, who has taken a defiant stand ever since he was first indicted in September last year.

While under indictment, Menendez stepped down as chair of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but continued to attend classified briefings — a move that irked his fellow senators. And while they mostly ostracized him in the day-to-day workings of the Senate and over half of the Senate Democratic caucus called for his resignation, there was little they could do to force him from office, especially when Schumer maintained that Menendez should get his day in court.

SETH WENIG/AP

Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., speaks to reporters as he leaves federal court in New York, on Tuesday.

Now that Schumer has urged Menendez to resign, there will be a concerted effort to put as much pressure as possible on Menendez to voluntarily step aside. That started Tuesday as the Senate Ethics Committee released a statement saying that it would "promptly" complete an investigation into Menendez that started when he was first indicted. The committee also made it clear that recommending expulsion to the Senate was on the table.

In the meantime, any individual senator could move to hold a snap vote on expulsion for Menendez, though that effort could be blocked by an objection from any other senator — including Menendez himself.

Biden tests positive for COVID-19 while on trail

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — President Joe Biden tested positive for COVID-19 while traveling Wednesday in Las Vegas and is experiencing "mild symptoms" including "general malaise" from the infection, the White House said.

Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden will fly to his home in Delaware, where he will "self-isolate and will continue to carry out all of his duties fully during that time."

The news had first been shared by UnidosUS CEO Janet Murguía, who told guests at the group's convention in Las Vegas that the president had sent his regrets and could not appear because he tested positive for the virus.

Dr. Kevin O'Connor, the president's physician, said in a note that Biden, 81, "presented this afternoon with upper respiratory symptoms, to include rhinorhea (runny nose) and non-productive cough, with general malaise." After the positive COVID-19 test, Biden was prescribed the antiviral drug Paxlovid and has taken his first dose, O'Connor said.

Biden was slated to speak at the UnidosUS event in Las Vegas on Wednesday afternoon as part of an effort to rally Hispanic voters ahead of the November election. Instead, he departed for the airport to fly to Delaware, where he had already been planning to spend a long weekend at his home in Rehoboth Beach.

The president's diagnosis comes amid intense scrutiny of his health and stamina after a disastrous debate with former President Donald Trump that sparked a flurry of concern among Democrats that Biden is not up to the rigors of winning another presidential term.

Biden gingerly boarded Air Force One and told reporters traveling with him, "I feel good." The president was not wearing a mask as he walked onto Air Force One.

The president had previously been at the Original Lindo Michoacan restaurant in Las Vegas, where he was greeting diners and sat for an interview with Univision.

Biden has been vaccinated and is current on his recommended annual booster dose for COVID-19. The vaccines have proven highly effective at limiting serious illness and death from the virus, which killed more than 1 million people in the U.S. since the pandemic began in 2020.

Biden last tested positive for COVID-19 twice in the summer of 2022.

NATION

NTSB chief: People underestimate pot's impact on drivers

Associated Press

DETROIT — A horrific crash that killed six high school girls in Oklahoma two years ago has the head of the National Transportation Safety Board urging parents to warn teenagers about the risk of driving after using marijuana.

Chairwoman Jennifer Homendy made the appeal to parents Thursday as her agency released the final report on the March 22, 2022, collision between a tiny Chevrolet Spark hatchback and a gravel-hauling semi in the small town of Tishomingo.

The board, after an investigation by its staff, determined that the crash was caused by the 16-year-old driver slowing for an intersection, then accelerating through a stop sign because she likely was impaired by recent marijuana use and was distracted by having five teen passengers in the car, the NTSB report said.

In an interview, Homendy also said the cannabis problem isn't limited to teens. As more states have legalized recreational marijuana, teens and adults tend to underestimate the risks of driving under its influence.

"There's a perception that in states where it's legal that it's safe and legal to drive impaired on marijuana," she said.

In its report on the crash, the NTSB cited studies showing that marijuana decreases motor coordination, slows reaction time and impairs judgment of time and distance, all critical functions for driving.

Currently it's legal for people 21 and older to use marijuana recreationally in 24 states plus Washington, D.C., according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Oklahoma doesn't allow recreational use, but like most states, it's legal for medical purposes. Driving while impaired by marijuana is illegal in all states and Washington, D.C.

The NTSB, which investigates transportation-related crashes but has no regulatory power, put out a safety alert Thursday urging parents to talk to young drivers about how marijuana can impair driving, and how they can make responsible choices to avoid driving while impaired or riding with impaired drivers.

Homendy said states that have legalized marijuana are behind in making sure people know that it's illegal to drive under its influence. Over half of Americans live in a state where recreational cannabis use is legal, she said.

"Unfortunately, I think state laws that are legalizing recreational and medicinal use of marijuana have really come before thoughts or action on what are they going to do about traffic safety," Homendy said. "They are far ahead on legalizing it, but very behind when it comes to traffic safety."

States, she said, need to collect more data on how legalizing marijuana has affected traffic safety, and they need to start enforcing laws against driving while impaired by cannabis.

"Enforcement has got to be there in order to deter," she said.

One study on crashes in Washington state, which has legalized recreational marijuana use, showed that more drivers involved in fatal crashes tested positive for marijuana after it became legal, the NTSB said.

The NTSB recommended in the report that the Oklahoma State Department of Education develop a drug and alcohol abuse curriculum for local school districts that tells students about the risk of cannabis-impaired driving.

Court refuses to lift order blocking LGBTQ+ rule

Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky. — A federal appeals court on Wednesday refused to lift a judge's order temporarily blocking the Biden administration's new Title IX rule meant to expand protections for LGBTQ+ students.

The ruling from the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals kept in place a preliminary injunction issued last month by a federal district judge in Kentucky.

That order blocked the new rule in six states — Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia — though similar legal fights are taking place in Republican-led states across the country.

"As we see it, the district court likely concluded correctly that the Rule's definition of sex discrimination exceeds the (U.S. Education) Department's authority," a three-judge panel of the 6th Circuit said in its majority ruling.

The Education Department did not immediately respond to an email and phone call seeking comment.

Kentucky Attorney General Russell Coleman hailed the latest ruling as "a victory for common sense."

More apply for jobless benefits

Associated Press

U.S. filings for unemployment benefits rose again last week and appear to be settling consistently at a slightly higher though still healthy level that the Federal Reserve has been aiming for.

Jobless claims for the week ending July 13 rose by 20,000 to 243,000 from 223,000 the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday. It's the eighth straight week claims came in above 220,000. Before that stretch, claims had been below that number in all but three weeks so far in 2024.

Weekly unemployment claims are widely considered as representative of layoffs.

The Federal Reserve raised its benchmark borrowing rate 11 times beginning in March of 2022 in an attempt to extinguish the four-decade high inflation that shook the economy after it rebounded from the COVID-19 recession of 2020.

The Fed's intention was to cool off a red-hot labor market and slow wage growth, which it says can fuel inflation.

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WORLD

European leaders boost Ukraine at UK summit

By Jill Lawless
Associated Press

WOODSTOCK, England — Leaders from across Europe expressed support for Ukraine and concern about the direction of the United States on Thursday at a security-focused summit clouded by worries about whether the U.S. will remain a reliable ally if Donald Trump wins a second presidency.

Newly elected U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer welcomed some 45 heads of government to a grandiose English country mansion to discuss migration, energy security and the threat from Russia as he seeks to restore relations between the U.K. and its European Union neighbors four years after their acrimonious divorce.

The venue for the European Political Community gathering, Blenheim Palace, was the birthplace of Britain's World War II Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Starmer said the leaders were gathering "as a new storm gathers over our continent."

"Our first task here today is to confirm our steadfast support for Ukraine, to unite once again behind those values that we cherish and to say we will face down aggression on this continent together," Starmer said, adding that the threat from Russia "reaches right across Europe."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was a key guest at the meeting, aimed at shoring up Europe's support for his country's defense and discussing ways to defend democracy. The U.K. accuses Moscow of seeking to undermine European democracies with cyberattacks, disinformation and sabotage.

Others making the trip to Blenheim Palace, a Baroque country mansion 60 miles northwest of London, included German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. EU chief Ursula von der Leyen stayed away as she fought to secure a second term as European Commission president from lawmakers in the European Parliament, which she received. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was also a no-show.

KIN CHEUNG/AP

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, right, hugs Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as President of the European Council Charles Michel, left, looks on before the start of a session at the European Political Community meeting in Woodstock, England, on Thursday.

The meeting is the fourth for the EPC group, a brainchild of Macron. It was established in 2022 as a forum for countries both inside and outside the 27-nation EU after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine shattered Europe's sense of security. Previous meetings of the group have been held in the Czech capital, Prague; Chisinau, Moldova; and Granada, Spain.

Trump's skepticism about NATO has long worried U.S. allies. Trump's choice of Sen. J.D. Vance, an opponent of U.S. military aid to Ukraine, as vice presidential running mate has heightened concerns.

"European countries must stand on their own legs more than ever," said Netherlands Prime Minister Dick Schoof.

Russian court says closing arguments in espionage trial of US reporter to be Friday

Associated Press

YEKATERINBURG, Russia — Closing arguments in the espionage trial of U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich will be held Friday, a Russian court said, as the proceedings picked up speed in a case that has seen the reporter held in pre-trial custody for over a year.

Gershkovich attended a trial session for a second day behind closed doors on Thursday, the court said. He faces charges that he, his employer and the U.S. government vehemently deny.

Gershkovich

Unlike previous sessions in which reporters were allowed to see Gershkovich briefly before the proceedings began, there was no access to the courtroom and he was not seen, with no explanation given. Espionage cases are typically shrouded in secrecy.

Gershkovich, 32, was arrested on March 29, 2023, while he was on a reporting trip. Authorities claimed that he was gathering secret information for the U.S. The American-born son of immigrants from the USSR, Gershkovich is the first Western journalist arrested on espionage charges in post-Soviet Russia.

The U.S. State Department has declared him "wrongfully detained," thereby committing the government to seek his release.

Spain set to hit triple digits under 1st heat wave of year

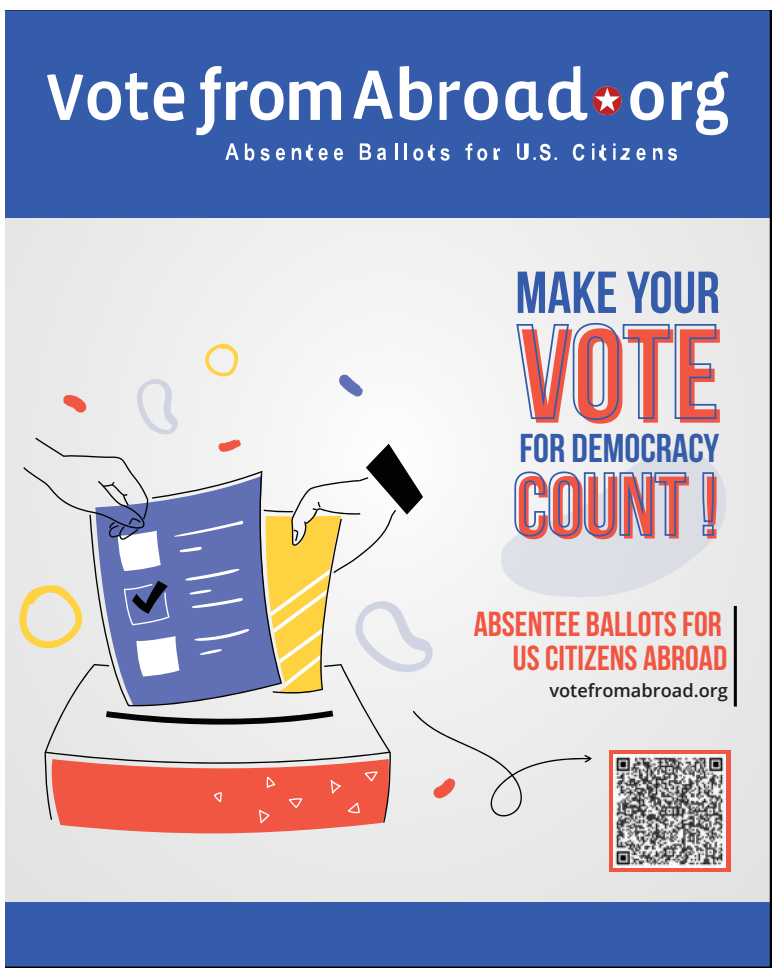
Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain — Spain sweated under its first official heat wave of the year with temperatures expected to reach 104 degrees Fahrenheit in a large swath of the country on Thursday, while Italy, Greece and other areas of southern Europe also struggled to stay cool.

After a relatively bearable spring compared to record heat in 2023 and 2022, millions of Spaniards will be sweltering at least through Saturday before feeling any relief. The nation's weather authority said the only areas to be spared will be the northwest and northern Atlantic coasts.

Weather forecasters said a large mass of hot air traveling across the Mediterranean from northern Africa will settle over central and southern Spain.

The hottest area will be the southern Guadalquivir river basin where thermometers could reach 111 F. Six regions are under alerts for high temperatures.



WEEKEND

Lake Street Dive spreading joy

Music, Pages 30-31

Career twists and turns

With leading-man looks and a seemingly innate grasp of show business, 'Twisters' star Glen Powell seems destined to become an A-list actor — if he isn't one already

Movies, Pages 16-18

As a leading man, Glen Powell says, "you're there to look stupid and you're there to have fun and you're there to be vulnerable. That's it."

JANE GREER/For The Washington Post

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WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Don't hold the phone

Start making these changes to lessen the device's impact on your health

BY HEATHER KELLY
The Washington Post

When people warn about the dangers of screen time, they are usually thinking about its impact on mental health or interpersonal relationships.

What about the physical issues that come with clasping a metal rectangle in your hand for hours at a time? Or holding it close to your face so you can make out your poorly lit streaming TV shows clearly?

There are so many ways a phone can impact your health, beyond toxic content, that smartphone makers are building in tools to help counteract it. Before you get carpal tunnel syndrome, a case of eyestrain or another migraine, try some small changes.

Here are some things experts say you should be doing differently when using your smartphone, organized by body part:

Your hands

We talk a lot about the right and wrong way to type or sit at a desk, but how should you be clutching your favorite little screen?

The key is keeping a neutral wrist position, says Lauren Shapiro, an assistant professor of orthopedic surgery at the University of California, San Francisco. That means the wrist is straight or has just a light bend in it.

"Flexing the wrist, extending the wrist, and a tight grip or grasp will put more stress and strain on the body," Shapiro says.

She recommends taking breaks to avoid extended periods of use. Make sure your phone isn't too big for your hand and opt for hands-free tools when possible, such as voice dictation or a phone call instead of texting.

If you are using an attachment on the back of your phone to hold it, make sure you're not resting the entire weight of your phone on one spot, like a single finger.

There's not enough research to make a direct causal link between hand injuries and the increase in phone use, Shapiro says. However, it's likely that holding a smartphone or tablet incorrectly and too often could contribute to issues such as thumb arthritis, carpal tunnel and tendinitis.

Call your doctor if you are experiencing numbness and tingling, clicking or locking of the fingers, or persistent or severe pain and/or numbness in the hand, arm or shoulder on your phone-holding side.

The ideal way to hold a phone may be not holding it at all. Prop it up or use a stand that doubles as a charger and place it around eye level.

Your ears

Before you start blasting "Pink Pony Club" over your headphones, make sure you aren't dialing the volume up too far and risking hearing loss. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders recommends keeping the noise under 70 decibels. On an iPhone, you can choose the maximum volume under the Sounds & Haptics > Headphone Safety setting. You can also control a child's maximum volume in the Screen Time controls. On an Android device, you can find options in the Sounds and Vibrations settings.

iStock

Your eyes

Staring at a smartphone or tablet screen for extended periods of time can cause eyestrain. The fix is distance, breaks and a little sunshine.

When you're looking at your phone, it should be at least a foot away from your face to prevent eyestrain, says Raj Maturi, a spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology and an ophthalmologist at the Midwest Eye Institute. Take a break from looking at the screen about every 20 minutes, but don't just stare at your wall. Go outside.

"When you're outside in bright sun, your pupils go down to a very small size," Maturi says. "This automatically relieves the pressure on your eyes."

You can try the 20-20-20 rule, which is taking a 20-second break every 20 minutes to stare at something at least 20 feet away from you. You can also take longer but less frequent breaks. However you go about it, make sure you find ways to let your irises and pupils relax.

In addition to eyestrain, staring at screens too much could contribute to more permanent eye problems, especially in younger users, experts say. There isn't enough evidence yet to tie extended phone and screen use to a rise in myopia, but Maturi says the correlation is quite strong.

Apple has an optional feature called Screen Distance in Settings > Screen Time that will warn you when your screen is too close to your face.

Your brain

A screen can trigger tension headaches or migraines in someone who suffers from them, according to Charles Flippen II, associate dean of the Center for Continuing Professional Development at the David Geffen School of Medicine at University of California, Los Angeles.

Some of the reasons include not moving enough, your neck position, a sensitivity to light and a decrease in how often you are blinking, which dries out the eyes.

The fix, as you may have guessed by now, is using your device in moderation and taking regular breaks. If you're light sensitive, you can turn down the brightness or avoid looking at a bright screen in a dark room. To avoid straining your neck, make your phone as close to eye level as possible.

There's another huge way our smartphones are impacting our brains: They're eating into our sleep. Flippen, who is the Richard D. and Ruth P. Walter Professor of Neurology, recommends no screens in bed and for at least an hour before you go to sleep. If you have to look — and do you, really? — turn on settings to minimize blue light, which could suppress the production of melatonin. On iOS devices, turn on the Night Shift setting. On Android devices, go to the Display settings and look for the blue light or night settings.

"For good rest, you want to clear your head of all the leftovers from the day and the best way to do that is just to put the phone down," Flippen says.

EKSATELECOM/TNS

EKSAtelecom's S30 Open-Ear Air Conduction True Wireless Headset has VoicePure Environmental Noise Cancellation for loud settings.

EKSAtelecom S30 not only good for work but play too

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

The EKSAtelecom S30 Open-Ear Air Conduction True Wireless Headset is not as big and bulky as other work headsets. It also features advanced artificial intelligence technology and a long battery life.

Since it's truly wireless, you get two earpieces (left/right) with Bluetooth 5.3 and about a 100-foot range. According to EKSAtelecom, the headset is built with VoicePure Environmental Noise Cancellation, with a noise reduction depth of more than 50 dB.

Each earpiece has a noise recognition microphone and a pickup microphone. The S30 headset can be paired with two Bluetooth devices simultaneously with a multipoint connection. So, if you have two phones, pair both to the headset and whichever one rings will automatically connect.

The small design makes it ideal for work-from-home users, with its built-in boom microphone, which is perfect for conference calls and Zoom meetings. It is also ideal for traveling, exercising, hands-free calls or listening to music.

The open-ear design includes an adjustable ear hook on each side. For clarity, the air conduction system utilizes a distinctive acoustic design and specific unit speakers to emit sound in a targeted direction, according to EKSAtelecom.

Inside each earpiece is a 16.2 mm speaker for sound; the EKSAtelecom S30 TubeBass technology produces bright highs and deep lows. This translates to crisp and clear voices on both ends for calls and meetings, along with the right amount of bass for music.

With a fully charged case giving you 3 ½ total charges, you should expect 16 hours of playtime at 70% volume on each charge, with a total of 70-plus hours before the charging case needs a refuel. Talk time is rated at nine hours at 70% volume and 40 hours with the charging case. The case itself charges in two hours, but if you need a quick boost, five minutes of charging time can yield 60 minutes of listening time.

With an IPX5 waterproof rating, the EKSAtelecom S30 is resistant to light rain showers and poolside splashes. It is listed as compatible with iOS, Android, Windows and macOS.

Online: eksatelecom.com; on sale for $149.99 from $169.99

Cyber Acoustics' new **AC-304C USB-C stereo headset with AI Noise Reduction** is an excellent choice for a basic work headset.

The over-the-head design is ideal for blocking background noise, allowing your caller to hear your voice with crystal-clear clarity. It connects with an attached USB-C cable, which includes a USB-C to USB-A adapter. An in-line controller controls the volume and muting with an LED indicator.

It is designed for all-day comfort. Soft pads made with bio-leatherette material cover each ear and weigh just 2.6 ounces. The USB cable is 8 feet long, with 5 feet from the controller to the headset and 3 feet from the controller to the USB connector.

The USB-C and USB-A connections provide plug-and-play capability on a PC or Mac computer system. Cyber Acoustics lists compatibility with all video conferencing platforms, including Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Slack, Google Meet, WebEx, Nice, RingCentral, Avaya, Genesys, etc.

It has a headband, and the boom microphone folds up and down for use when needed. Aside from its great performance, the AC-304C USB-C stereo headset is budget-friendly at $99.99. A storage carrying bag is included.

Online: cyberacoustics.com

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Persistence pays off for Destiny 2

Ten-year space opera reaches satisfying end with Bungie's latest expansion, The Final Shape

BY DOMINIC BAEZ
The Seattle Times

When Bungie released the first Destiny game in 2014, the Bellevue, Wash.-based developer spoke of a 10-year story: one of Light and Darkness, of aliens and gods, of Guardians who will harness fantastic, otherworldly power to first save Earth, then the solar system — and then everything.

Between then and now, Bungie has released multiple expansions and a proper sequel, 2017's Destiny 2, each adding lore and depth to the space opera. But it hasn't always been a smooth ride: From the stratospheric highs of expansions like The Taken King and The Witch Queen to the gutter-like lows of Curse of Osiris and Lightfall, the Destiny experience has been an erratic one. That inconsistency has negatively affected the player base, which in turn has caused issues for Bungie. (In October, Bloomberg News reported that the company laid off 8% of its staff after disastrous sales and player retention numbers for Destiny 2's Lightfall expansion.)

So you can imagine why Bungie needed a win with The Final Shape, the latest expansion for Destiny 2 and the conclusion to the 10-year Light and Darkness Saga storyline. (No, this isn't the end of Destiny 2 as a game; more on that later.) The expansion, which was delayed to June from February, would be a capstone of a decadelong journey for longtime players and a reason for new players to join the fray; if it failed, well ... more than the universe would be at stake.

Bungie should be breathing a sigh of relief: Not only does The Final Shape exceed expectations, it concludes with one of the best missions in the entire Destiny pantheon, a jaw-dropping ode to fans on a par with the climactic final battle of "Avengers: Endgame."

A quick recap: Guardians (player characters) have been battling the evil forces of The Witness for years. At the end of the last expansion, The Witness, which wields the power of Darkness, had pierced the shell of the Traveler, a godlike entity aligned with the Light that gave Guardians their original powers. That left The Witness within arm's reach of its longtime goal: to use the powers of the Traveler to force its vision of a perfect, never-changing universe on every living creature. (Shades of Thanos, for sure.) But, of course, the Guardians can't let this happen.

This is where The Final Shape begins: Guardians gain access to the Traveler's Pale Heart, an idyllic yet corrupted new location where the story takes place. As gushing waterfalls and disturbing statues of hands and faces pass by (The Witness, which is infecting the core of the Traveler, seems to be a fan of body horror), we slowly unveil a seven-hour story that dives into The Witness' past, with a slow drip of engrossing details about how the dark entity thinks — and how to defeat it. The moments in between are filled with meaningful conversations with old friends (including a longtime sarcastic favorite we haven't seen in years), which further connect TFS with Destiny's past. (It bears repeating: TFS heavily leans into nostalgia. There are moments galore that won't land the same if you haven't been a longtime player.) Aside from one plot thread from a previous expansion that unexpectedly and unnecessarily resurfaces (and feels so out of place that it marks the low point of the current expansion), TFS has among Destiny's best plots.

All throughout, TFS maintains Destiny's well-known enjoyable gameplay while adding exciting new weapons (The Call, a sidearm that fires minirockets, deserves a special callout) and abilities for Guardians. The new Prismatic subclass (which dictate your Guardian's abilities) is a highlight of TFS: Instead of imbuing you with a particular affinity (think fire or ice), Prismatic lets you mix and match abilities from the other subclasses, allowing for a mind-boggling number of builds for players to explore. Adding to that depth are new super abilities and aspects for each Guardian class, including Solar for Warlocks, Void for Titans and Arc for Hunters.

The gem of TFS, though, is its final mission, a first-for-Destiny 12-person activity that, without spoiling anything, is among the best the game has ever offered. But in an asinine decision, upon TFS' June 4 release, the mission itself was locked behind the expansion's new raid, Salvation's Edge. (Raids are the pinnacle of Destiny 2's endgame content, among its hardest challenges.) No one could play the mission until the raid, which wasn't released until June 7, was first beaten. Luckily, raiders were able to do so within a day (it took the first team 19 hours to do so), allowing everyone to compete in the final mission. Here's hoping Bungie never sections off story content like that again.

And there will be more Destiny 2 content; while TFS is the end to the Light and Darkness Saga, Bungie has already released a new content drop, the first of what it's calling Episodes, that will explore the aftermath of TFS.

There's a throwaway line early on in TFS, cheerfully quipped by a beloved character: "If you can't be efficient, be persistent." Never has there been a better description for Destiny — and with TFS, that persistence paid off. You'll cheer as the forces of good gather, Avengers-style, for one last fight. You may cry when everything is said and done. A few stumbles aside and even with questions left unanswered, TFS is a satisfying payoff to a 10-year journey.

Platforms: PC, PlayStation 5/4, Xbox Series X/S and Xbox One

Online: destinythegame.com/the-final-shape

Bungie photos

The Witness, which yields the power of Darkness, is within arm's reach of its ultimate goal of controlling the universe in Destiny 2: The Final Shape.

In Destiny 2: The Final Shape, gamers gain access to the Traveler's Pale Heart, an idyllic yet corrupted new location where the story takes place. Here players will dive into the Witness' story, learning how the dark entity thinks and how to defeat it.

Bungie should be breathing a sigh of relief: Not only does The Final Shape exceed expectations, it concludes with one of the best missions in the entire Destiny pantheon, a jaw-dropping ode to fans on a par with the climactic final battle of "Avengers: Endgame."

WEEKEND: MOVIES

A movie star in the making

Actor Glen Powell is primed for the A-list, but he isn't taking anything for granted

BY SONIA RAO
The Washington Post

Glen Powell gestures to the asphalt where his dreams were almost crushed. He was 13 years old, playing pickup basketball on this very portion of the Austin Studios lot with fellow child actors from the third "Spy Kids" movie, when he accidentally knocked one of his co-stars to the ground. They were taking a break from filming the popular children's franchise, on which Powell, whose character is simply referred to in the credits as "long-fingered boy," was only working for the day. This was his first acting gig. Would he ever be allowed on a film set again?

The other kid was fine. So, it turned out, was Powell. As he relays this memory on a May afternoon, it seems ludicrous he ever worried about such a mishap derailing his acting career. But Powell has always been farsighted. He knows that what you do in the present can determine your future. This apparently manifested as anxiety during his childhood. As an adult, it became business acumen.

Which might help explain why Powell, 35, seems to be everywhere this year. He appears on the covers of glossy magazines. He sneaks into all your social media feeds. He shows up on daytime talk shows, where he tells Gayle King that he isn't chasing love but will accept it if it "hits me in the face."

Not only has Powell gained credibility among critics by becoming a regular weapon in Richard Linklater's arsenal — most recently in the action-comedy "Hit Man," which the actor cowrote — but he might also be on the verge of reliable blockbuster stardom. After an attention-grabbing supporting role in the massively successful "Top Gun: Maverick," Powell stars in the disaster film "Twisters," Lee Isaac Chung's sequel to Jan de Bont's 1996 smash hit featuring Helen Hunt and Bill Paxton.

Paxton, admired for grounding big-budget productions with palpable humanity, is a hard act to follow. Skeptics raise an eyebrow at Powell, who has been described as the next Matthew McConaughey because of his wide grin, chiseled look and Texan geniality. He is already set to expand his résumé with a diverse slate of film and television projects — plus a potential Broadway musical — and keeps a notebook full of advice from the likes of Tom Cruise. But does that translate to trajectory? Is Powell the next McConaughey or Cruise? Could he become a Paul Newman or a Robert Redford, earning artistic respect on par with his jawline and smile wattage?

If you call up the experts — say one, or two, or eight people who have worked with Powell sometime in his 22-year career — they'll tell you this isn't a flash in the pan. Powell is one of the hardest-working actors around, they say. He gets to know every person on a set. He's the real deal.

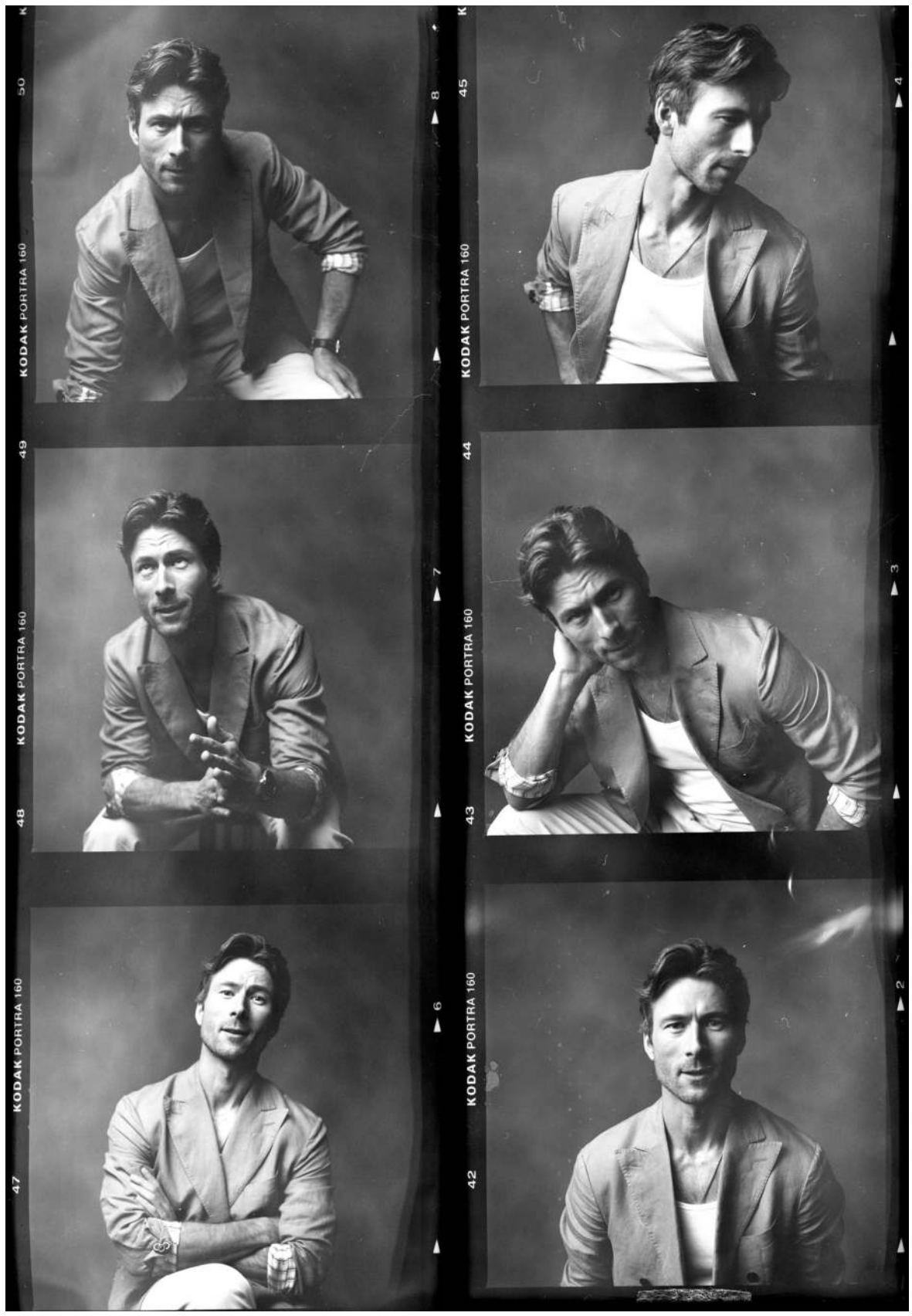
But in Hollywood, as Powell himself has long been aware, nothing is guaranteed.

"There's been a lot of talk, and I've had to answer, 'Is Glen a movie star?'" Linklater says. "Anyone who's worked with Glen in the past 10 years knows he's a f—-ing movie star. That's not really a question. Does the culture even have a place for a new movie star is the bigger question."

The Hollywood Reporter recently deemed Powell a member of "the new A-list" thanks to "the one-two punch" of festival darling "Hit Man" and the romantic comedy "Anyone But You," which grossed $220 million worldwide — numbers unheard of for the genre these days. But in this age of superhero franchises and obscure streaming algorithms, the traditional definition of a movie star — someone who can carry an opening weekend — seems almost extinct. Though Netflix claims "Hit Man" performed well by landing in its "Global Top 10" list three weeks in a row, Powell is not yet a proven leading man at the box office. Universal is positioning "Twisters" as a tentpole movie, betting on the combined effect of its stars and spectacle.

The film's fate could help determine Powell's.

Last year, Powell found a valuable business partner in Sydney Sweeney, his "Anyone But You" co-star. He went along with her idea to lean into (false) dating rumors as a way to keep making headlines during the lead-up to the rom-com's release. That part of the plan worked out, but the film was still a slow burn at the box office. (After making just $6 million in its opening weekend, it became a global hit.) Writer-director Will Gluck naturally attributes the word-of-mouth momentum to audiences falling "in love with Syd and Glen," which required the very pretty human beings to seem, well, relatable.



JANE GREER/For The Washington Post

After casting Glen Powell in "Anyone But You," director Will Gluck asked him, "How far are you willing to go to take the shine off your penny?"

"When you have someone who looks like Glen, you need a character who is kind of self-effacing as well," Gluck says. "It's hard to pull off. I had long talks with Glen about how I'd want him to play it. 'How far are you willing to go to take the shine off your penny?' He was 100% game."

While some actors might shy away from rom-coms, afraid to be typecast or not taken seriously, Powell acknowledges their staying power. He was raised on the genre in northwest Austin, where he grew up as the middle kid between two sisters, Lauren and Leslie. The Powell siblings watched, then rewatched, movies such as "10 Things I Hate About You" and "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days." They quoted "Legally Blonde" to one another. At Austin Studios, Powell earnestly argues that rom-coms are "the most universal film language" because "we all share the desire to love and be loved."

Of course, love tends to be imperfect and messy — and rom-coms only work if the central characters also reveal themselves as such. As a leading man in the genre, Powell says, "you're there to look stupid and you're there to have fun and you're there to be vulnerable. That's it." There isn't much room for pride or ego. You've got to be in on the joke, or the joke is on you.

Powell broke out with another romantic comedy: the 2018 Netflix film "Set It Up," in which he and Zoey Deutch play overworked assistants who try to lighten their workloads by tricking their temperamental bosses into falling for each other. Powell's character is a bit of a finance bro. Screenwriter Katie

SEE POWELL ON PAGE 17

Powell: Actor keeps a notebook full of wisdom from industry elders

FROM PAGE 16

Silberman says the actor's "inherent warmth" allows him to thrive "when he's playing a jerk — at the beginning, at least — because you care about him so much that you want him to get what he wants."

Think of Tom Hanks in "You've Got Mail," she says. Why else would you root for the big-box villain?

"There's a saying: To play dumb you have to be really smart, and to play mean you have to be really kind," Silberman continues. "There is such a deep, undeniable joy and warmth in [Powell] that allows you to take that and run with it in whatever direction you're going."

This quality is an asset in any genre, including disaster films. While casting the "Twisters" role of Tyler Owens, a self-described "tornado wrangler" whose storm-chasing antics have amassed a substantial YouTube following, Chung ("Minari") looked for a performer with a "deep well of empathy and seriousness and goodness in them" to balance the cockiness. He wasn't sure whether Powell was that guy. Then, Chung stumbled upon one of Powell's morning show appearances.

Powell had brought along his parents, Glen Sr. and Cyndy, who have long supported his acting career — to the extent that they have even cameoed in his projects. (Cyndy, a stay-at-home mom who served as her son's manager early on, appears as an adult spy in the "Spy Kids" film, for instance; years later, she and Glen Sr. played unsuspecting airplane passengers in a gag from "Anyone But You.") Watching Powell goof around with his parents, Chung realized what the actor could bring to "Twisters."

"I suddenly saw this side of him that really reveals who he is as a person — his upbringing and his relationship to his family," Chung says. "Underneath it all, he has this deep humanness."

Parents love to brag about their children, but Cyndy brings the receipts. Powell's kindergarten teacher once told his parents he had a remarkable presence and "was either going to be an actor or president," she says. (Maybe he'll be both, the way everyone talks about this guy. He *is* 35.) After Powell turned in a middle school poetry assignment, his teacher suspected him of plagiarism because, she said, "there is no way a sixth grader could have written this." She called his parents in and asked him to respond to a writing prompt while seated in their view. The teacher read his work and said, as Cyndy recalls, "I really have to apologize to you and Glen."

The family motto has always been to "advance on all fronts," Cyndy says. When the kids showed an interest in something new, she and their father, an executive coach for corporations, encouraged them to try it out. Powell was an athletic child, but he also ran around with a video camera. After he landed an agent and was cast in "Spy Kids 3D," Cyndy accompanied him to Austin Studios, where he hovered around various crew members, unofficially shadowing them.

"If I couldn't find him on set, he was with the DP or behind a cameraman," she says.

Powell has returned to the studio lot to work with the Austin Film Society, which Linklater founded. The day after he gives me a tour of what he remembers from working on "Spy Kids 3D" — the site of the basketball incident is a highlight, as is the green screen where he shot his scene — the actor is inducted into the Texas Hall of Fame. His parents join him on the red carpet, trolling their son with signs that read, "Stop Trying to Make Glen Powell Happen" and "It's Never Gonna Happen."

Also present at the ceremony? Powell's high school teacher F.J. Schaack, who says Powell was "the only one writing screenplays" in his creative writing class. Schaack texts me a few photographs of Powell's assignments from back then. They are unmistakably the work of a teenage boy. A screenplay excerpt describes a county jail inmate mooning a woman from inside his cell. A written ode to Christopher Walken admires how the actor is "flawed to the point of perfection."

Schaack was the one to introduce Powell to Linklater's body of work, including "Dazed and Confused" (1993) and "Before Sunrise" (1995). Soon after, Powell landed a tiny role in Linklater's 2006 adaptation of the nonfiction bestseller "Fast Food Nation." But it wasn't until he auditioned to play a cheerfully pompous baseball player in the sports comedy "Everybody Wants Some!!" nearly a decade later that he left a real impression on the director.

JANE GREER/For The Washington Post

Richard Linklater says Powell didn't leave a major impression on him until showing up to audition for the 2016 film "Everybody Wants Some!!" The director recalls Powell "swaggering as this charming, charismatic, good-looking, smoldering, young-adult man."

"He came in swaggering as this charming, charismatic, good-looking, smoldering, young-adult man," says Linklater, who recalls thinking to himself, "Holy s—-, when did Glen Powell get so crazy smart and funny?"

During the pandemic, Powell emailed Linklater to discuss a 2001 Texas Monthly article he read about Gary Johnson, an unassuming man who posed as a professional hit man while working with the Houston police. He wore a wire to collect evidence to use in court against the people ordering hits. Linklater said something like, "Great. I've been obsessed with that for years. Here's why I don't think it works as a movie." The events were too repetitive. There was no clear story arc.

Linklater credits Powell with having the idea to use the Texas Monthly piece as a jumping-off point. "I was like, 'You can do that?'" the director says. The article ends with a story about Johnson helping a woman seek therapy and safe shelter — as opposed to ensnaring her — after learning she was a victim of abuse. Powell wondered what might have happened from there. Did Gary regret his decision to help her? What might their relationship have looked like?

When Powell moved to Los Angeles, he paid the bills by working on screenplays. But "Hit Man" — on which he and Linklater are credited for the screenwriting and journalist Skip Hollandsworth for the original story — is his first feature to make it across the finish line. He admires actors who have "these real writer sides" to them, listing George Clooney and Matt Damon as examples.

"You can be an actor for hire, and that is a worthy profession," he says. "You don't have to be at the keyboard. But I do think you have to be a fan of good writing — and to understand why you engage with good writing — to stay in the game. Otherwise, once you get on set, it'd just be luck."

Though "Everybody Wants Some!!" and "Set It Up" put Powell on the map, his biggest movie to date is "Top Gun: Maverick." In the long-awaited sequel — which was the second-highest-grossing film of 2022, raking in nearly $1.5 billion worldwide — he plays an arrogant Navy fighter pilot with the call sign "Hangman," referencing his willingness to "leave you out to dry."

Tom Cruise's character puts an end to all that, teaching the young folks how to support one another. The actor himself shared a great deal of advice with Powell, who scribbled it down in the notebook he keeps full of wisdom from industry elders. Powell learned early on to make the most of proximity to greatness. After Denzel Washington cast him in the 2007 film "The Great Debaters," the then-teenager met Washington's big-shot agent, Ed Limato, who helped discover stars such as Richard Gere and Kevin Costner. Limato urged Powell, then a freshman at the University of Texas, to move out to Los Angeles — which he took as gospel. (Powell notes that Limato, who

"There's been a lot of talk, and I've had to answer, 'Is Glen a movie star?'" Anyone who's worked with Glen in the past 10 years knows he's a f—-ing movie star. That's not really a question. Does the culture even have a place for a new movie star is the bigger question."

Director Richard Linklater

went on to sign him, is also the one who discovered McConaughey, whom Powell later befriended through Linklater.)

He began the notebook on the set of the 2014 ensemble film "The Expendables," when Sylvester Stallone, who cowrote the screenplay, taught his co-star about how to adapt elements of older genres, such as westerns, for a modern audience. But it's Cruise whose advice could fill chapters, Powell says, most of it gathered on the "Top Gun: Maverick" set. "There's not one part about that movie that felt small," Powell adds of the blockbuster production, but Cruise reminded the cast that "every frame in this movie is an emotional frame. It's all about the story, and all has to be driven back there."

Few understand the movie business the way Cruise does. He knows what people want from him and works overtime to deliver. At the European premiere of "Twisters," which he attended in support of Powell, Cruise could even be seen showing him how to pose with popcorn.

Listening to Powell describe his own approach to selecting projects, it's clear which of Cruise's lessons resonates most. (Hint: It isn't the popcorn pose, which he didn't quite master.) "It's like, if I can keep audience trust over the course of my whole career, or if I can just continue to make good movies, then [I] keep getting to spin the roulette wheel," he says, sipping a Celsius energy drink he's grabbed from an office fridge.

Powell had wanted to be a part of "Twisters" since he learned that Joseph Kosinski, his director on "Top Gun: Maverick," was developing the disaster film's story. The actor brought a Cruise-like energy to the set. The first scene he shot was Tyler's introduction, in which the character arrives to Oklahoma in a tricked-out pickup truck. He hoots and hollers and sticks his head out the window while yelling, "If you feel it," to which a crowd of fans screams back the rest of the fictional YouTuber's catchphrase, "Chase it!" Chung says he didn't give the background actors any specific directions. They just responded to Powell's energy. "And I knew we had a movie," he adds.

"Twisters," like the original film, is ambitious in its use of special effects. At one point, Tyler and Kate (Daisy Edgar-Jones), the scientist who chases storms with him, drive into the eye of a tornado. And that's when Cruise's reminder comes to mind.

While working on the film, Powell shared a childhood story about witnessing a destructive tornado near his aunt's house in East Texas.

"He had this line where he said he didn't know he was supposed to be scared until he looked at her," Chung remembers. "And I put that into the movie ... because our movie is so much about the emotion of fear, and what you do with fear."

It's the kind of relatable detail that cultivates the broadest audience but also serves the story.

"That's where I want to play," Powell says. "Making a movie of that size for people to collectively experience in a theater is the hardest thing to do. ... I watched Cruise nearly destroy himself trying to bring 'Top Gun: Maverick' to life. I watched it every day, and I was like, 'This is worth my time.'"

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

Tyler Owens (Glen Powell), left, and Kate Carter (Daisy Edgar-Jones) are two sides of the same coin in "Twisters." While both rely on carefully collected data and gut instinct, each wants to track tornadoes for a different reason: Owens for the viral content, Carter to give people a warning.

New spin on disaster film

'Twisters' delivers on thrills, character moments and special effects

BY MARK MESZOROS
The News-Herald (Willoughby, Ohio)

"Twisters" director Lee Isaac Chung made headlines recently in defending the decision to keep the topic of climate change out of the sequel to the 1996 natural disaster-fueled blockbuster "Twister."

"I just wanted to make sure that with the movie, we don't ever feel like (it) is putting forward any message," he said in an interview with CNN. "I just don't feel like films are meant to be message-oriented."

At first, this feels like a missed opportunity. However, having seen "Twisters" — which is blowing into theaters this weekend with incredible force — we like it just the way it is. Chung has made a well-crafted, consistently entertaining sequel that benefits both from stars Daisy Edgar-Jones and Glen Powell and nearly 30 years of impactful special effects development that help make the original feel, well, nearly three decades old.

Chung rose to prominence as the writer-director of 2020's acclaimed "Minari," a semi-autobiographical film. And while he subsequently directed an episode of the "Star Wars" series "The Mandalorian," he's never helmed anything with the scale and action-heavy nature of "Twisters." Working from a screenplay by Mark L. Smith ("The Revenant") — with the story credited to "Top Gun: Maverick" director Joseph Kosinski — Chung doesn't let the occasional silly plot development or the fact the movie has too many characters get in his way. He balances all the hurricane-force thrills the movie requires with myriad satisfying character moments.

Many of those circle around Edgar-Jones' Kate Carter. We meet her in the movie's prologue, during which she is getting help with friends — including boyfriend Javi — chasing storms in Oklahoma for a college project. (In one noticeable nod to "Twister," they are using a version of the "Dorothy" machine featured heavily in that movie.)

They are out to collapse — or, as they like to say, "tame" — a tornado. However, let's just say they meet a cyclone that gets the best of them.

Five years later, Kate, having given up chasing, is working as a storm tracker for the United States Weather in New York City when Javi shows up out of the blue. Now working for a private company using a portable version of a weather-tracking radar system he used in the military since their time together, he says he needs to spend one week in Oklahoma to help him test the tech in what's expected to be a once-in-a-generation tornadoes-filled event.

"You have a gift," he says. "I can't do this without you."

In Oklahoma, she meets his crew of uniformed "Ph.D.s," as well as a group of rough-around-the-edges storm chasers from Arkansas — "hillbillies with a YouTube channel," as someone puts it.

Leading them is cool and cocky "tornado wrangler" Tyler Owens (Powell), who takes an immediate interest in Kate, calling her "city girl." Initially, she gives him the cold shoulder — and some misleading information regarding where to find their next twister — but, of course, the pair will grow closer as "Twisters" proceeds.

In Kate and Tyler, we have two sides of the same coin, storm trackers who rely on both carefully gathered data and gut instinct. But while she is most interested in giving people more of a warning a tornado may be coming their way, he and his lot concern themselves primarily with shooting fireworks up through a cyclone and, importantly, getting potentially viral footage of it. Or so she thinks.

Thanks both to Smith's script and the performances of Edgar-Jones and Powell, Kate and Tyler form an appealing tandem; if not the soul of the story, she's its conscience, while he provides its requisite bravado and adventurous spirit.

"Top Gun: Maverick" alum Powell continues to display the movie-star charisma he exhibited in last year's "Anyone But You," while "Normal People" and "Where the Crawdads Sing" star Edgar-Jones is compelling via subtle acting choices instead of big moments.

Understandably, some may be disappointed that "Twisters" doesn't connect more to the original, but this follow-up more than lives up to its predecessor.

And, OK, so "Twisters" is not "An Inconvenient Truth." It's a popcorn movie chock-full of barns being torn apart, cars being hurled through the air and a few innocent people meeting highly inconvenient ends.

Even with a soundtrack packed with country jams, it really rocks.

"Twisters" is rated PG-13 for intense action and peril, some language and injury images. Running time: 122 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

Daredevils find love, new followers in overly polished documentary 'Skywalkers'

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

The force is not strong in "Skywalkers: A Love Story," a shallow "Man on Wire" for social media influencers about a pair of Russian daredevils who stealthily scale urban heights to attain the precious treasure of a much-liked Instagram post.

There's a novel thrill to the high-wire relationship of Angela Nikolau and Ivan Beerkus, a Moscow couple who squabble atop skyscraper spires the way others might at the grocery store checkout line. But in this polished, self-promotional documentary, few of their interactions don't feel self-consciously calculated for public consumption.

"Skywalkers: A Love Story," now on Netflix, comes with an ominous warning: "This film contains extremely dangerous and illegal activities. Do not attempt to imitate."

The same, of course, could have been said before the worm riding of "Dune: Part Two" or much of what transpires in "Cocaine Bear." But in the case of "Skywalkers: A Love Story," the caution label feels warranted. Nikolau and Beerkus each have backgrounds in athletics (Nikolau was an acrobat). But not much makes them "rooftoppers" besides that one day they started climbing cranes and haven't looked back since.

"Skywalkers," directed by Jeff Zimbalist and co-directed by Maria Bukhonina, follows Nikolau and Beerkus through a relationship that begins with an invite to climb something in China. Beerkus, the more experienced of the two, is looking for a new angle to appeal to his sponsors. As they continue to travel the world together, their social media fame grows. Soon, they're in love, too, and their photos kissing perched high on skylines only help their viral numbers.

They claim to aspire to "art," but the images they create look more like screen savers.

Along the way, they've learned some helpful tips. Never stay on top for more than 15 minutes — a lesson they picked up after their lingering atop Notre Dame caused a commotion. Mostly, they sneak into sites that are under construction by posing as workers. The way up can be tricky. On the way down, they notice, no one ever asks them questions.

The big mission that bookends "Skywalkers" is their attempt to rooftop Malaysia's Merdeka super-skyscraper, which proves to be an especially daunting task. In that way, the movie is similarly structured to a host of other documentaries, especially James Marsh's "Man on Wire," about Philippe Petit's high-wire stunt between the twin towers in 1974.

But "Skywalkers" bears none of the romance of "Man on Wire," a film as much about its poignant location as its daredevil protagonist. We never get a much deeper sense of either Nikolau or Beerkus, either; even their most personal interactions feel scripted. There's also something a touch less poetic about their day-to-day enterprise like trying to get "a drone guy" on the phone. For more modern majesty at great heights, you'd be better off returning to Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi and Jimmy Chin's "Free Solo," about Alex Honnold's climb of El Capitan in Yosemite.

Just as Petit was compelled by his passion for the twin towers, Honnold's motivation came out of reverence for El Capitan. Insane as their climbs might be, you couldn't doubt their genuine fervor. The object of real adoration in "Skywalkers," though, might be a selfie stick.

"Skywalkers: A Love Story" is rated R for language. Running time: 100 minutes. Now streaming on Netflix.

NETFLIX/AP

"Skywalkers: A Love Story" follows Angela Nikolau and Ivan Beerkus, daredevils who stealthily scale urban heights for social media.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Sampling spicier sectors of Athens

I used to think of Athens as a big ugly city with obligatory ancient sights, fine museums, the Plaka (the extremely touristy old center), and not much else. "The joy of Greece is outside of Athens," I wrote. "See Athens' museums and scram."

But with each return visit I enjoy the city more than ever before, having realized that it's a many-faceted city that's getting its act together, still building on the infrastructure improvements it's enjoyed since hosting the 2004 Olympics.

I discovered much of that energy in the offbeat neighborhoods just outside the tourist-packed core, largely thanks to the summer visit when I met Matt Barrett, who splits his time between Greece and North Carolina. He splashes through his adopted hometown like a kid in a wading pool, enthusiastically sharing his discoveries and observations on his generous website, Athens Survival Guide.

He took me to Exarchia, a student district just a short walk from Omonia Square, on the north end of the city's center. This area has long been the locus of Athens' nonconformist past and fertile ground for keeping its feisty free-spiritedness alive. Slathered in colorful graffiti, it's defiant, artsy and full of life.

From the small Exarchia Square, side streets spin off into grungy neighborhoods. Because of the cheap rent and abundance of students (three universities are nearby), the streets are lined with cafés, bars, art centers and bookstores. Each evening, Exarchia is a thriving festival of alternative lifestyles. The juxtaposition between Exarchia and the adjacent upscale diplomatic district of Kolonaki is striking.

Rick Steves

The Psyrri district, closer to the Acropolis, is a swankier neighborhood. Until recently, it was a grimy area of workshops and cottage industries, famous locally as a hotbed of poets, musicians, revolutionaries and troublemakers. But now it's become one of central Athens' top after-hours zones. The mix of trendy and crusty gives the area a unique charm. The options include slick, touristy tavernas with live traditional music, highly conceptual café/bars catering to cool young Athenians, and clubs with DJs or live music for partying the night away.

Just beyond Psyrri, Athens' Central Market isn't cute or idyllic, like a small-town French halles, and it's not nearly as touristy as, say, Barcelona's La Boqueria market. The Central Market — an 1886 glass and iron arcade and the surrounding lanes — is refreshingly real: a thriving marketplace where workaday Athenians stock up on ingredients. A walk through the market is a treat for all the senses — sights, smells and sounds.

CAMERON HEWITT/Rick Steves' Europe

Restaurants sit next to vibrant street art in Athens' "rickety-chic" Psyrri neighborhood.

The spice sellers are the great-great-grandchildren of those ethnic-Greek refugees from the Greco-Turkish war of the 1920s, who arrived bringing a pungent whiff of exotic Istanbul bazaars.

You'll see bushels of rice, grains, nuts and dried fruits. Keep an eye out for bunches of partially dried flowering herbs tied up with string — this is Greek mountain tea, an herbal mixture revered for its healing properties. You'll also see classic Greek oregano, thyme, basil and the precious Greek red saffron.

The meat and fish hall, the gut of the market, is a vivid parade of proteins. Vegetarians might want to skip this section. Tables are piled high with beef, pork, chicken, lamb, and goat and livestock is proudly pictured on some signs above the stalls. Little delivery scooters nudge their way past pedestrians.

Around the corner, displays do their best to make the hard-to-sell meat look appetizing: hooves, tripe, liver and other organs. You may also see barrels of snails — a cheap source of protein during times of hardship, when locals developed a taste for the little critters that persists today.

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Take a trip that combines outdoorsy activities, cultural events

It's not always easy to come to an agreement about what to do on a weekend or during those precious vacation weeks. With a little planning beforehand, friends and families can easily combine athletic endeavors with cultural events. Here are just a few ideas:

SUP and a fest

Take full advantage of Frankfurt am Main's riverside location by experiencing stand-up paddling and a fest in a single day. A few companies offer board rentals and introductory courses; for example, MAIN SUP offers a two-hour basic course including a short paddle along the shoreline on summer evenings and during the afternoons on Saturdays and Sundays. Each participant pays 49 euros. Online: main-sup.de/kurse-and-touren

Karen Bradbury

Two August festivals would combine well with the above; the first, Mainfest (Aug. 2-5), is a classic inner-city volksfest with rides, gaming booths, bratwurst, beers and the like. Museum and culture lovers shouldn't miss the Museumsufer Fest (Aug. 23-25), when countries and clubs serve typical cuisine or showcase their music and culture on stage. Entry into several world-class museums is included in the ticket price. Online: museumsufer.de

River rafting alongside music and sport

In long-past centuries, the Isar River was used to transport timber to Munich. Following in this tradition, adventurers of today can board rustic log rafts in the town of Wolfratshausen and catch a ride to Munich-Thalkirchen, a journey of some 20 miles. The rafts, equipped with tables and benches, are steered by a skillful crew. Along the river's calmer stretches, guests can swim alongside the rafts, but when the craft pass through the locks, everyone hops aboard. Depending on the river's water level, the journey can take anywhere from five to seven hours. Raft trips are offered from May through mid-September. The cost of a trip, which includes drinks and snacks, is about 200 euros per adult passenger. Online: tinyurl.com/438by77h

iStock

Adventurous travelers could swing by the Randa Suspension Bridge near Zermatt, Switzerland, as part of a visit to the town's Aug. 11 Folklore Festival.

Combine rafting with a visit to Munich MASH Aug. 2-4, when sports including basketball, wakeboarding, skateboarding and BMX are played by the pros. Music lovers could combine the rafting outing with a concert by Adele, who will make her only European appearances here on 10 different dates in August. Online: tinyurl.com/bdetm368

Suspension bridge trek and folklore

Just outside of Zermatt, Switzerland, is the Europaweg Skywalk, the Alp's longest pedestrian suspension bridge. Also referred to as the Charles Kuonen or Randa Suspension Bridge, the 1,621-foot-long bridge hangs at the dizzying height of 7,218 feet above sea level. The bridge, open since 2017, affords breathtaking views over the Mattertal, the deepest-cut valley in Switzerland. The bridge can be experienced as part of a day hike and is easily reached by means of a 20-minute train ride from Zermatt to Randa. The ascent and descent to the bridge makes for a hike of about four to five hours. Online: tinyurl.com/24k9znsj

Back in the not-so-big city, Aug. 11 is when Zermatt celebrates its annual Folklore Festival, an event that's been bringing a days-of-old feel to the town for more than 50 years. On the day, some 30 groups clad in traditional costume share the music and dance of their forefathers. Festivities go from 11 a.m.-8 p.m., and admission is free. Online: tinyurl.com/5h9rwyc4

Historical hike followed by fireworks

High in the hills across the Neckar River from Heidelberg, Germany, sits a relic from the dark past, a Third Reich-era theater known as a Thingstätte, one of about 40 such structures built in the country between 1933 and 1939. The oval-shaped amphitheater was used for rallies, plays and seasonal celebrations promoting the National Socialist movement. After World War II, the venue was used for jazz and rock concerts, as well as an annual celebration of Walpurgis Night. Just behind the amphitheater are found the ruins of an ancient monastery. A nearby beer garden offers rest and restoration following the semi-arduous climb up the Heiligenberg, or Holy Mountain. A hike up and down the mountain would take about 2.5 hours or more, depending on starting point.

The hike would combine nicely with the night of Heidelberg Castle Illuminations, set for Sept. 7 this year. At about 10:15 p.m., flares will bathe the castle with a red glow, reminiscent of the 1689 and 1693 dates when troops of the Sun King Louis XIV set fire to the structure, leaving behind the ruins we see today. The spectacle is immediately followed by fireworks over the Neckar River. Online: tinyurl.com/3efmbb6j

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

When in Europe, don't seize the day

To avoid the swarms of tourists in the most popular parts of the Continent, you need to learn to embrace being a night owl

By Natalie B. Compton and Andrea Sachs
The Washington Post

All day, ferries come and go, depositing hundreds of people onto the tiny Italian island of Capri. The tourists cram into restaurants and shops and stand in snaking lines for a scoop of gelato or a ride on the funicular. The pedestrian traffic is stop-and-start. And then the magic hour arrives.

In the early evening, the last ferry departs, signaling a changing of the guard. The day-trippers are gone, and the overnight guests start emerging from their self-imposed isolation. They reclaim Capri, at least for the night.

If you come in the evening, you'll see a completely different island, residents say. One that's more chic and relaxed, with more gowns and hair down.

It's another gangbusters season for European travel, and the usual suspects are dealing with the usual headaches: baking heat and swarms of tourists. If you're going to the most popular parts of the Continent — Italy, France, Greece, Spain — you're bound to end up feeling hot and cramped during some part of your trip. But you can dodge some of that discomfort and jet lag at the same time, by shifting your daily schedule.

No, not earlier. Much later.

Here's how to embrace being a night owl in Europe:

iStock

People enjoy the nightlife in cafés and restaurants in Rome's Trevi district. Italians prefer to eat around 9 p.m., so many eateries offer a last seating around 9 or 9:30. After 10, you're better off at gastropubs or wine bars. Pizzerias also serve until 11 p.m. or midnight.

Escape the heat

Temperatures begin to climb rapidly during the busiest times at the acropolis, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., said Ioannis Giannakakis, CEO and co-founder of Athens Walking Tours. Because the Greek treasure is open between sunrise and sunset, he recommends going before that peak period, or closer to closing as the heat begins to drop.

For those scorching hours to kill in the afternoon, "do nothing," Giannakakis said. "Have some drinks, sit by the pool, take a nap." You'll avoid the hottest parts of the day, plus much of the crowds, and you can prepare for your evening activities.

Dodge the cruise-ship crowd

In cities that get flooded with cruise crowds, there is a predictable rhythm to the influx. Usually, cruise travelers disembark in the morning, explore all day, then must report back to the ship by the early evening. If you time your sightseeing around this exodus, "you will avoid more people," longtime Dubrovnik tour guide Ivan Vukovic said.

The same is true of places that attract a day-tripper crowd that needs to catch a ferry to its home base. You'll see the phenomenon across Italy's islands, like the aforementioned Capri, Ischia and Ponza, said Simone Amorico, CEO of the private tour operator Access Italy.

Sightsee at the end of the day ...

Near closing time, when the typical tourist is starting to think about happy hour or dinner plans, popular sightseeing spots thin out.

"That's why I always recommend visiting major sights in the afternoon," said Sandra Weinacht, who co-owns the tour company Inside Travel Experiences.

There are caveats to this tip. Going closer to closing means you'll have less time to enjoy a place. Alternatively, you can look for sites that stay open late.

Paris' most popular museum, the Louvre, doesn't close until 9 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays, and it offers tours on Fridays at 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. The Yves Saint Laurent museum stays open until 9 p.m. on Thursdays. In Rome, tour guide and author Katie Parla said, both the Colosseum and the Roman Forum are amazing to admire at night from outside; the latter is open until 7:15 p.m.

... or visit sites after hours

Private guides and organized tours can open doors after hours, too, for a fee.

You can find night tours of the Colosseum that can be more expensive than daytime options, around $100 per person. Privatizing the Louvre for a visit, on the other hand, requires a "donation" of at least 30,000 euros. Weinacht and Access Italy can organize private visits for higher-end clients to peak-crowded places like the Vatican Museums. Giannakakis said you can do a VIP tour of the acropolis after 8 p.m., but it will cost about 5,000 euros for a group of up to five people.

Look for unique evening experiences

Many popular tourist destinations offer special evening programs over the summer that can make a night visit more appealing, even if you're not going for a traditional tour.

At the Chateau of Versailles, the palace hosts nighttime fountain shows, complete with fireworks, that run until nearly midnight every Saturday, plus a few other special dates. In Rome, Parla recommends seeing an opera performance at the Baths of Caracalla, the site of the city's second-largest Roman public baths, dating to A.D. 200s.

Dine as the Romans do

Americans and Europeans diverge on dinnertime preferences. Embrace the European ethos and lean late.

In Paris, "if you are willing to eat at 9 or 9:30, it's easier to get a good reservation, and you'll be surrounded by locals," said Meg Zimbeck, who runs the food tour company and review site Paris by Mouth.

Croatians "don't eat before 9 p.m.," Vukovic said. He recommends booking a table for at least that time, if not later, and then enjoying the country's nightlife, as bars stay open until 2 a.m. and nightclubs till 5 a.m.

In Greece, whether in a bustling city or on a quaint island, Giannakakis said locals wait until at least the sun sets for more comfortable alfresco dining. To accommodate that schedule, it's not uncommon for kitchens to stay open until midnight.

Italians prefer eating around 9 p.m., Amorico said, with many restaurants offering a last seating around 9 or 9:30 p.m. If you want to sit down after 10 p.m. with a local crowd, stick to wine bars and gastropubs. Pizzerias also serve until 11 p.m. or midnight.

Know when going out late is less effective

Staying up late isn't a foolproof way to avoid all crowds. In destinations with less cruise traffic, more overnight guests and nocturnal locals, you may still encounter a bustling scene well into the night. Amorico said that's true of Rome, where he prefers sticking to early-morning exploring. If you hit the churches when they open at 8 a.m., you'll find them empty, he said.

Weinacht added that another way to avoid cruise traffic is to stick to local neighborhoods over tourist hot spots. In Rome, for example, Prati is much quieter than the Vatican area next door. In Barcelona, Eixample will be calmer than Las Ramblas, no matter what time of day.

PHOTOS BY STEVE WARTENBERG/AP

Cyclists ride on the Voie des Vignes, or Route of Vines, a little south of Beaune, in the Burgundy region of France. The route goes through numerous and famous wine villages, along rivers and canals, past chateaux, cathedrals and abbeys.

A fountain appears in the village of Meursault, France, on the Voie des Vignes. Villages like this one are lined with tasting houses and cafés, and have statues dedicated to wine or the people who make the wine.

A view from atop the Cirque du Bout du Monde, or Circus at the End of the World, near the vineyards of Beaune, France. A cirque is a steep-walled and semicircular basin on a mountain or steep ridge.

Good for the grape, good for the cyclist

On an 11-day adventure, writer finds a memorable spot in vineyard-rich Burgundy by biking off the beaten path

BY STEVE WARTENBURG
Associated Press

Here's what I discovered on my recent and first trip to the Burgundy region of France: What's good for the grape is good for the cyclist.

Especially if you enjoy climbing some of the many rocky ridges that line this beautiful, vineyard-filled region in east-central France. It's up there, off the beaten and popular path, that I found my spot, a circus of sorts and perhaps the perfect and most picturesque vantage point in Burgundy.

During my 11-day cycling adventure in Burgundy, I pedaled along the popular Voie des Vignes (Route of Vines), through numerous and famous wine villages, along rivers and canals, past chateaux, cathedrals and abbeys. There's an endless and always-scenic variety of riding routes in Burgundy waiting to be explored by bicycle.

Dijon is the region's historic capital city, the mustard capital of France and home of the impressive Palace of the Dukes of Burgundy. The train ride from Paris takes about 90 minutes. From Dijon, I took a short connecting train ride to Beaune and eventually Tournus and did day-trip rides from my two "base" towns. Beaune is a walled city surrounded by vineyards; Tournus, on the banks of the Saone River, features an impressive Romanesque cathedral.

The region's pinot noir (red) and chardonnay (white) wines are considered among the best in the world, and the well-marked Voie des Vignes route from Beaune south to Santenay (about 14 miles) is the perfect introductory Burgundy ride.

I was immersed in vineyards and weaved my way along the narrow, well-paved and mostly flat access roads through Pommard, Volnay, Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet and Chassagne-Montrachet, familiar names to oenophiles. These villages are lined with tasting houses and cafés, and several have old, stone churches, a fountain of some sort and statues dedicated to wine or the people who make the wine.

The grapes were just beginning to appear on the vines, and workers were scattered about in groups of two or three, carefully clipping, pruning and tending. The limestone and clay soils that vines sink their roots into are part of why Burgundy wines made from their grapes are so complex, tasty and prized. Cliffs help shield the precious vines from the wind.

The cliffs and ridges also presented a challenge I couldn't resist. I've learned over the years on numerous cycling trips that the panoramic views from up high almost always make the climb worthwhile.

And so, from Santenay, instead of heading back the way I'd come, as many cyclists do, I decided to explore the ridges. The first 5 miles to the village of Nolay were a gentle climb on a bike path through vineyards, forests and then fields of wheat.

And then the real climbing began.

I'm an experienced and fairly confident climber, but the next 2 miles were a bit of a challenge. And by a bit, I mean a relentless, heart-pounding, leg-quaking ascent that topped out at a little over about 1,640 feet. I made it to the summit of the ridge, and then down the other side to Orches, an old stone village resting below a long line of cliffs.

Those cliffs hadn't been visible from the Voie des Vignes.

"I wonder if I can get up to the top?" I asked myself, and started another climb.

Once at the top, I walked carefully (the only way to walk while wearing clip-in bike shoes near the edge of a rocky, slippery cliff) as close to the edge as I dared. The view was panoramic and spectacular. The cliffs stretched out to the left and right and below were hillside villages and then the vineyard-filled valley. I could see Beaune off in the distance.

I had found, by a fortunate accident, the Cirque du Bout du Monde. Translated, this means Circus at the End of the World. Cirque also means a steep-walled and semicircular basin on a mountain or steep ridge. That's exactly what this was, although the end of the world part is puzzling. This seemed like the start of the world to me.

The Cirque du Bout du Monde is off the bike-route radar, and I had the cliffs and views all to myself.

I took several photos, some videos and then ... I stopped and stood there, taking it all in for several minutes. There was a big smile on my face, and I was filled with joy as I listened to the birds chirping and marveled at the view. Finding unexpected treasures like this is one of my favorite things about cycling trips.

Over the next several days, I rode to the medieval, hilltop village of Brancion; through the milelong Tunnel du Bois Clair, a former railroad tunnel and now the longest bicycle tunnel in France; to the famed Chateau de Cormatin and Abbaye de Cluny; on bike paths along the Saone River and the Canal du Bourgogne; and on an endless string of small country roads.

Despite all these scenic cycling routes and historic sights, I couldn't stop thinking about the Cirque du Bout du Monde. And so, I returned and made the climb to the top of the cliffs on my final day of riding. The views were just as spectacular as I had remembered.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

The Frankfurt skyline as seen from the Goetheturm. The sightseeing tower is in the forest on the south side of the Main River, on the edge of the city.

Fantastic views of Frankfurt

The Goetheturm rises 142 feet above the ground, giving climbers who ascend the tower's 196 steps a lookout point to admire the city's urban and green landscapes

BY MICHAEL ABRAMS
Stars and Stripes

One, two, three, four, five, I counted as I began climbing the Goetheturm in Frankfurt. When I got to 10, I still had 186 steps to go before reaching the top platform of the tower.

Not making the ascent any easier was hearing my 5-year-old granddaughter, two landings above, telling me to hurry up so we could get to the lookout point.

Named after Frankfurt's favorite son — the writer, poet, politician and naturalist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe — the sightseeing tower rises 142 feet above the ground below.

When you make it to the top, which I finally did, what awaits is probably the best view of the Frankfurt skyline. And a magnificent scene it is, a row of skyscrapers towering over and along the Main River.

The climb actually wasn't as bad as it sounds. After every third flight of stairs there is a landing with a bench to rest on if needed. You can stop and look at the view.

At first just trees, then as you go higher, the city. To the east, south and west, you see mostly trees and maybe high-rise apartment buildings in nearby towns, sticking out over them. But to the north you see what is often called Mainhatten, after another city full of skyscrapers.

The closest one is the Neuer Henninger-Turm, a luxury apartment building with a restaurant on its upper floor in the city's Sachsenhausen district, on the Main's south bank. It replaced the original tower, one of Frankfurt's popular landmarks, which was a grain silo and part of the Henninger brewery complex.

The rest of the high-rise buildings are on the river's north bank. The Commerzbank Tower, at almost 850 feet, is Germany's tallest building and until 2003 was the tallest in Europe. Not much shorter, at 842.5 feet, is the pencil-shaped Messeturm at the city's fairgrounds.

Frankfurt's tallest structure, the 1,107-foot-tall Europaturm, a communications tower, can be seen in the distance far to the north. What for centuries was the city's tallest building, the Imperial Cathedral of St. Bartholomew, better known as the Dom, measures only 312 feet.

The original 142-foot wooden Goetheturm, built in 1931, burned down in 2017, much to the dismay of Frankfurt's populace. Almost immediately, plans were made to rebuild it as close to the original as possible. The new wood-and-steel tower opened in 2021.

But wonderful views are not always that interesting for 5-year-olds, especially when there is a playground waiting below.

The descent was easy, and the little one headed straight to the big slide that runs down the side of a hill. The spacious playground has swings, teeter-totters and a water playground where the kids can pump water down and through pipes and pools, and if not careful, get pretty wet.

More fun is offered by the wooden maze that winds around a fountain at its center. It's pretty easy to navigate, but we did get caught going the wrong way once or twice.

There are also plenty of paths to hike or bike on near the Goetheturm. We strolled down the main one, the Sachsenhäuser Landwehr.

It passes a clearing known as Goetheruh, or Goethe's rest, where there is a large sandstone column, lying on its side, which was sculpted by the Scottish artist and lyricist Ian Hamilton Finlay. People sometimes pose resting on it.

If you continue down the path, you'll come to Scheerwald, another popular playground. We decided to walk back to the tower, exploring the flora and fauna, mostly red Spanish slugs, along the way.

The little one wanted to hit the swings, so I decided to climb the tower's 196 steps again for one more wonderful view of Mainhattan.

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On the QT

Location: Am Goetheturm, Frankfurt. The entrance to the tower and playground is off Wendelsweg. There is free parking across from the tower.
Hours: Daily, May 1 to Oct. 31, 8 a.m. to sundown, or at the latest 8 p.m.
Cost: Free
Information: Online: tinyurl.com/t55s8x5d for the tower and playground; goetheruh.de for the restaurant

Michael Abrams

The Goetheturm is 142 feet high.

Looking down on some of the 196 steps of Frankfurt's Goetheturm.

A girl poses for a photo at the fountain in the playground maze at the foot of the Goetheturm sightseeing tower.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Cat's out of the bag at Katzentempel

Reservations recommended at the Trier branch of the German café franchise, where you 'can has cheezburger' and more

BY CHRISSY YATES
Stars and Stripes

Trier is Germany's oldest city, known for its Roman ruins and the Karl Marx House, but it is also home to the newest branch of a place filled with feline fun and quirky cat-themed food.

The Katzentempel cat café opened in April in the pedestrian zone of Trier. The franchise, which has 16 locations across the country, calls itself "the first restaurant in Germany where cats live."

All of the "temple cats" come from animal welfare organizations, the café says. The five Trier cats — Alex, Christina, George, Izzi and Meredith — were named for "Grey's Anatomy" characters. They're young, and were a bit shy at dinnertime.

I know what you're likely thinking: "But is it clean?" The kitchen is in an area the cats can't enter and they have a private room in the back, where they can slink off for naps, meals and potty breaks.

The café does have a few rules for the safety of the cats and guests: no flash photography; don't chase or pick up the cats; do not feed the cats; supervise small children; and don't wake a sleeping cat.

The cats are also given plenty of vertical space to climb and ledges to hang out on. That said, I did watch an employee move and lightly chide George, who attempted to sleep atop a table in the front window.

I was happy to see I share a first name — Christina — with one of them. But of course, she was MIA for most of my meal. She likely clocked out for a power nap. She's just like me, for real.

The long food menu, offered in German and English, doubles as a bit of a manifesto. The chain is very proud to be not only vegan, but also sustainability focused and low-gluten. I appreciated the very detailed additives and allergen chart; it allowed me to avoid the specific tree nuts that trigger my allergies.

The menu featured bowls, burgers, sandwiches and salads for lunch and dinner. There are all-day breakfast options that were heavy on carbs like bread and had beans or vegan "scrambled eggs" as protein options.

Everything is a bit on the pricey side, perhaps because Katzentempel doesn't charge an entry fee and the organic cat food it uses isn't cheap.

AFTER HOURS GERMANY

Katzentempel

Address: Brotstrasse 6, 54290 Trier, Germany
Hours: Mon-Thu: 10 a.m.-8 p.m., Fri: 10 a.m.-9 p.m., Sat: 9 a.m.-9 p.m., Sun: 9 a.m.-8 p.m.
Prices: 10 euros to 12 euros for most salads and burgers, 16.50 euros for bowls, desserts 6 to 8 euros, daily lunch special for 11-13 euros
Information: Phone: 0651 99166190; Online: katzentempel.de/standorte/trier, 16 locations across Germany

Chrissy Yates

My friend ordered a "Cheezeburger" and I got the Tiger Bowl, as I was very curious about the vegan approximation of pulled pork.

"It tastes like pork ... well, what I can remember of what pork tastes like," said my friend, who has been a vegetarian for five years.

I agree, as the texture wasn't too far off and the light barbecue sauce was flavorful. At first, I tried each element in the bowl and was underwhelmed. I expected the kimchi veggies to have a spicier kick. However, after a good mixing, the creamy hummus and the tart orange balsamic sauce worked well with the crunchy almond topping.

As for the burger, it was "messy, so messy; it's like there's too much sauce," my friend said as the vegan cheese slid off during her third bite. The cheese didn't seem to have much of a flavor on its own, which may be why the burger was loaded with barbecue sauce.

I paired my meal with the pina y gato, a coconut pineapple mint lemonade, which was sadly too sweet. I ordered a bottle of water just so I could dilute it a bit as I sipped it down.

I can't have dinner without dessert, so I debated whether to get the tiramisu or a paw-shaped, chocolate-peanut tart on a stick. I picked the former. I didn't miss the dairy in the whipped cream, but the edible flowers felt like eating tea leaves.

Reservations are highly recommended during peak times. I witnessed the host turn many potential guests away as the cat's out of the bag regarding this eatery's cool theme.

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PHOTOS BY CHRISSY YATES/Stars and Stripes

Izzi, a tuxedo cat, takes a nap near the front window of Katzentempel, a cat café in Trier, Germany, June 8. The café's five cats were named for "Grey's Anatomy" characters.

In the foreground: the Tiger Bowl and the pina y gato, a coconut pineapple mint lemonade at the Katzentempel restaurant in Trier.

The "Cheezeburger" at Katzentempel in Trier is made with vegan cheddar-like cheese and comes with a side salad.

The tiramisu at Katzentempel cat café in Trier is made without eggs and dairy.

Patrons walk into Katzentempel cat café in Trier on June 8. The franchise, which has 16 locations across Germany, calls itself "the first restaurant in Germany where cats live."

George, described on the website as "the clumsy one," takes a nap on one of the seats at the Katzentempel cat café in Trier on June 8.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Get your bearings

Bear Tree Park near Camp Humphreys has exotic gardens and a wide variety of wildlife

By Luis Garcia
Stars and Stripes

Bear Tree Park in Sejong City is a delightful spot to enjoy nature and animals in South Korea.

This family-friendly, 86-acre park a 35-minute drive from Camp Humphreys features several botanical gardens and a variety of small animals.

But the main attraction is the more than 100 bears of the Asian black and brown species.

At Bear Village, you walk above and between their enclosures. Some are more active than others and will come toward you looking for a snack. Others will lie down, play among themselves or bathe in their small pools.

The park also has several koi ponds where more than 1,000 curious fish will swim up to you upon arrival and throughout your visit.

The rose garden, one of several flower gardens around the park, has mesmerizing and colorful varieties, including the David Austin English rose and the floribunda Queen Elizabeth.

The Secret Garden features cacti and other flowers from tropical environments.

In the zoo you'll find Asian black bear cubs, deer, peacocks, goats and smaller animals like guinea pigs and rabbits.

If you get hungry, a restaurant on the second floor of the Welcome House serves ribeye steaks, barbecue pork ribs, a selection of pastas, pizzas and rice bowls. Prices range from 11,000 won, or about $8, to 37,000 won, about $27.

Another option is the Bear Tree Cafe, where you'll find drinks and desserts.

Offering a blend of fun for all ages and a family-friendly environment, Bear Tree Park is a great place to take your family on a weekend getaway.

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PHOTOS BY LUIS GARCIA/Stars and Stripes

Bear Tree Park in Sejong City is a delightful spot to enjoy nature and animals in South Korea.

Asian black bears are among the species that hang out at Bear Tree Park.

The park has several koi ponds that contain more than 1,000 friendly fish.

On the QT

Directions: 217, Sinsong-ro, Jeondong-myeon, Sejong, South Korea. From Camp Humphreys, exit from Dodu-ri gate, then take Route 43 towards Asan, Dunpo, for about 25 miles and exit at Bear Tree Park. From that exit, turn right and go another 220 yards, then right again into Bear Tree Park's parking lot.
Times: Open daily, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. April to October; 9 p.m. to 6 p.m. November to March.
Costs: Admission is 12,000 won for adults, or about $9; 10,000 won for ages 13-18; 8,000 won for ages 3-12.
Food: Grab grub at either the Welcome House restaurant or Bear Tree Cafe.
Information: Phone: 044-866-7766; Online: beartreepark.com

Luis Garcia

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Tokujuji Tea Ceremony

Location: 741-1 Miyajimacho, Hatsukaichi, Hiroshima 739-0513
Hours: Call 0829-30-9888 to make a reservation.
Prices: 12,000 yen
Dress: Casual
Directions: An 8-minute walk from JR Miyajima Ferry
Information: Online: okeikojapan-miyajima.com

Kelly Agee

PHOTOS BY KELLY AGEE/Stars and Stripes

The hostess prepares for a tea ceremony at Tokujuji, a 300-year-old Zen Buddhist temple on Itukushima, an island near Hiroshima.

Make time for tea at Zen temple

Buddhist site near Hiroshima hosts an hourlong, English-friendly ceremony

BY KELLY AGEE
Stars and Stripes

Immerse yourself in a Japanese tea ceremony while wearing a kimono at Tokujuji, a 300-year-old Zen Buddhist temple on Itukushima, an island near Hiroshima.

Though the style of drinking powdered green tea, whisked in a chawan, or bowl, was introduced to Japan from China in the late 12th century, it wasn't popularized until the 14th century.

That's when Sen no Rikyu, from present-day Osaka prefecture, revolutionized Japanese tea culture and perfected the Japanese tea ceremony and elevated it to an art form.

Okeiko Japan, a community culture school, runs the English-friendly hourlong tea ceremony experience.

Before participating in the ceremony, you may change into a kimono. There is a wide variety of sizes, styles and colors to choose from. The host helps dress guests. For women there are also hair ornaments, or kanzashi, including pins, barrettes and fabric flowers and fabric hair ties.

Outside of the temple, you may participate in a photoshoot with accessories, including a fan and a parasol.

Next you are guided to the chashitsu, the tearoom for the chanoyu, or tea ceremony, which is a detailed and step-by-step process. The host guides you through the experience.

The ceremony starts when the master enters the room and bows. The guests return her bow and are presented with wagashi, a Japanese sweet.

The tea master purifies and prepares the utensils. The chawan, a bowl in which the tea is made and served, is preheated with hot water. That water is discarded and the bowl is wiped with a chakin, a small rectangular cloth.

The host prepares the tea by placing two large scoops of matcha powder into the chawan and adding hot water with a chashaku, a tea ladle made of bamboo, from a mizusashi, or pot. The ladle is filled all the way.

Half of the water is poured on top of the matcha powder. The other half is poured gently back into the mizusashi and the ladle is placed on top of the pot.

The tea is then whisked with the right hand with a chasen, made from a single piece of bamboo, for about 30 seconds. This process is called temae.

Then the sen soeki serves the tea.

Pick up the bowl with your right hand and place it on your left hand, then turn it clockwise twice and bow.

On the last sip of tea, good manners dictate you make a slurping sound.

After the chawan is empty, it is customary to observe and appreciate the bowl's design as well as read the seal on the bottom, which indicates where it was made.

It's then the guest's turn to make their own tea during this experience and the host will take video of guests participating in this process.

Other classes offered at Tokujuji are calligraphy and lucky charm making; the temple also offers kimono rentals.

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Though the style of drinking powdered green tea, whisked in a chawan, or bowl, was introduced in the late 12th century, it wasn't popularized until the 14th century.

Tokujuji is a 300-year-old Zen Buddhist temple on the island of Itukushima.

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SHOCHIKU/AP

Kabuki actor Danjuro Ichikawa plays Tomomori, a warrior defeated in battle, in "Hoshiawase Jusandan" at the Kabukiza Theater in Tokyo on July 1.

Adapting Kabuki for today's audiences

Thirteenth Danjuro has made efforts to update a traditional Japanese show by trimming scenes, modernizing dialogue

BY YURI KAGEYAMA
Associated Press

On stage, Danjuro Ichikawa, one of the biggest stars of Japan's Kabuki theater, is a virtuoso in switching roles.

In his latest production, he plays 13 parts, including a princess, a sushi chef and a fox. He hobbles offstage as a feeble old man, then dashes back on moments later as a fierce warrior. He gets in a few sword fights, dies tragically more than once and takes flight on wires.

Offstage, he's wondering if it's time for the often rigid role of a Kabuki star to change.

The 13th man to bear the name Danjuro Ichikawa — which has been passed down between generations of Kabuki stars for more than 300 years — he's a household name in Japan, showing up in ads, movies and TV shows.

Kabuki, an all-male theatrical tradition that combines music, dance and acrobatics, remains popular, but Danjuro grants that it can be out of step with modern tastes. Audiences accustomed to TikTok videos and streaming don't always have the patience for four-hour performances in archaic formal Japanese. Social distancing restrictions during the pandemic hit theaters hard, and audiences are still coming back.

Danjuro has made efforts to update Kabuki in "Hoshiawase Jusandan," at the Kabukiza Theater in Tokyo through July 24, trimming longer scenes and modernizing some dialogue.

"Traditional culture might be hard to follow and get tiresome, but I hope people will have fun. The action moves quickly because I'm one person playing 13 roles," Danjuro told The Associated Press.

Dapper and tanned, Danjuro, 46, can be disarmingly playful for a famous artist. Amid discussions of the future of live performance, he gamely posed for photos, striking the kind of pose you'd see on the romantic lead of a manga comic book.

EUGENE HOSHIKO/AP

Danjuro, a household name in Japan, plays 13 parts in his latest Kabuki theater production.

The all-male theatrical style can be intensely conservative, preserving many of its traditions nearly unchanged from the Edo court.

Today's Danjuro took on the name in 2022, after going through earlier names he and all the previous Danjuros have gone through: Shinnosuke, and then Ebizo.

Training starts in childhood. When he was 20, about to go on stage for the first time as the monk Benkei — a role that his father, grandfather and all the Danjuros before him had made famous — the pressure was so intense he ran away and spent the night sleeping in the park. He did get back in time for the show.

Today's Danjuro inherited the name from his father, Danjuro XII, who died in 2013 at 66 of leukemia.

The death cost him both a beloved parent and a teacher he desperately needed. At 35, he was still a novice by Kabuki standards, in which beautiful maidens are often played by octogenarian masters. He had to turn to uncles and veterans from other families to learn the craft, defying criticism from peers and even family who said only a Danjuro can teach another Danjuro.

But these days, critics say the 13th Danjuro is living up to his name.

Despite the art's firm commitment to tradition, Danjuro says, Kabuki stories contain universal emotions that young people and foreigners who are new to the genre can connect with.

In "Hoshiawase Jusandan," he plays a fox who disguises himself as a warrior to stalk a court dancer who's carrying a drum made from the hide of his parents.

When at the climax, a merciful samurai gives the fox the drum, Danjuro takes flight on wires, bouncing with joy over the crowd toward the third-floor balcony seats, accompanied by drums, flute and song.

The showy, somewhat dated effect could look like something out of a circus — but it sells a moving scene that contrasts the human folly of war and revenge with the simple love shown by an animal.

For all his worry, Danjuro says he trusts that the power of human performance will survive.

He's training his son Shinnosuke to take his place, and taking care of his health to be sure future generations of Shinnosukes have a chance to know their ancestor.

One day, Shinnosuke will become Ebizo, and later, he'll be Danjuro XIV.

"One must live," Danjuro said. "That's my responsibility."

Curator faked controversial potty Picassos

Tasmanian gallery owner's wife admits she created, misattributed paintings in exhibition that prompted global headlines, gender war

JESSE HUNNIFORD, MONA/AP

Kirsha Kaechele poses with a painting in Hobart, Australia. Kaechele admitted July 9 that she was the creator of three paintings that she presented at the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) as works by Pablo Picasso, which prompted a gender discrimination case when only women were allowed to view them.

BY CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-MCLAY
Associated Press

They were billed as artworks by Pablo Picasso, paintings so valuable that an Australian art museum's decision to display them in an exhibition restricted to women visitors provoked a gender discrimination lawsuit. The paintings again prompted international headlines when the gallery rehung them in a women's restroom to sidestep a legal ruling that said men could not be barred from viewing them.

But the artworks at the center of the uproar were not really by Picasso or the other famed artists billed as their creators; the curator of the women-only exhibition admitted last week she had painted them herself.

Kirsha Kaechele wrote on the blog of Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) on July 10 that she was revealing herself as the works' creator after receiving questions from a reporter and the Picasso Administration in France about their authenticity.

But they had been displayed for more than three years before their provenance was questioned, she said, even though she had accidentally hung one of the fake paintings upside down.

"I imagined that a Picasso scholar, or maybe just a Picasso fan, or maybe just someone who googles things, would visit the Ladies Lounge and see that the painting was upside down and expose me on social media," Kaechele wrote. But no one did.

The saga began when Kaechele created a women-only area at MONA in 2020 for visitors to "revel in the pure company of women" and as a statement on their exclusion from male-dominated spaces throughout history.

The so-called Ladies Lounge offered high tea, massages and champagne served by male butlers, and was open to anyone who identified as a woman.

Outlandish and absurd title cards were displayed alongside the fake paintings, antiquities and jewelry that was "quite obviously new and in some cases plastic," she added.

The lounge had to display "the most important artworks in the world," Kaechele wrote last week, in order for men "to feel as excluded as possible."

It worked. MONA — famous in Australia for its strange and subversive exhibitions and events — was ordered by the Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in March to stop refusing men entry to the Ladies Lounge after a complaint from a male gallery patron who was upset at being barred from the space during a 2023 visit.

"The participation by visitors in the process of being permitted or refused entry is part of the artwork itself," tribunal Deputy President Richard Grueber wrote in his decision, which found that the exhibition was discriminatory.

Grueber ruled that the man had suffered a disadvantage, in part because the artworks in the Ladies Lounge were so valuable. Kaechele had described them to the hearing as "a carefully curated selection of paintings by the world's leading artists, including two paintings that spectacularly demonstrate Picasso's genius."

The tribunal ordered MONA to cease refusing men entry. In his ruling, Grueber also lambasted a group of women who had attended in support of Kaechele wearing matching business attire and had silently crossed and uncrossed their legs in unison throughout the hearing. One woman "was pointedly reading feminist texts," he wrote, and the group left the tribunal "in a slow march led by Ms Kaechele to the sounds of a Robert Palmer song."

Rather than admit men to the exhibit, Kaechele — who is married to the gallery's owner, David Walsh — installed a working toilet in the space, turning it into a women's restroom in order to exploit a legal loophole to allow the refusal of men to continue.

International news outlets covered the development in May, apparently without questioning that a gallery would hang Picasso paintings in a public restroom. However, the Guardian asked Kaechele July 10 about the authenticity of the work, prompting her confession.

A spokesperson for MONA told The Associated Press that the gallery would not supply more details about the letter Kaechele said she had received from the Picasso Administration.

When the AP asked MONA to confirm that the statements in Kaechele's blog post, titled "Art is Not Truth: Pablo Picasso," were accurate, the spokesperson, Sara Gates-Matthews, said the post was "truthfully Kirsha's admission."

The Picasso Administration, which manages the late Spanish artist's estate, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"I'm flattered that people believed my great-grandmother summered with Picasso at her Swiss chateau where he and my grandmother were lovers when she threw a plate at him for indiscretions (of a kind) that bounced off his head and resulted in the crack you see inching through the gold ceramic plate in the Ladies Lounge," Kaechele wrote last week, referring to the title card on one painting.

EDEN MEURE, MONA/AP

A painting is displayed in a women's bathroom at the MONA.

The latest breakout fashion statement

Use of pimple patches in conspicuous, opaque colors and designs reflect a shift in attitudes toward acne

BY ASHLEY FETTERS MALOY
The Washington Post

Daphney Edouard, 26, doesn't mind being the youngest woman in her morning workout classes in Reston, Va. But every once in a while, the multidecade age gap between Edouard, a digital producer for Sephora, and her fitness comrades makes itself glaringly evident. Earlier this year, one classmate approached her after class and gestured at Edouard's forehead. "She was like, 'Tell me, what religion does that represent?'"

Edouard was wearing a black, star-shaped hydrocolloid acne patch between her eyebrows.

"I laughed, and she was like, 'What's so funny?'" Edouard recalls. "I just said: 'I have a pimple. This is a pimple.'"

The rest of the women in her class "were surprised I wanted to wear such a vibrant, loud pimple patch to the workout class, out in public," she says.

For a few years now, pimple patches like the one Edouard had on that day — opaque, whimsically shaped, in conspicuously nonhuman hues such as bright yellow, jet black, magenta and even rainbow — have been showing up on more and more faces in workout classes, in classrooms, at workplaces and online. Many are medicated with hydrocolloid or salicylic acid; they treat pimples while also covering them up, protecting them from both idle fingers and strangers' stares. As a skin care tool, pimple patches, which gained traction in the late 2010s, were a game-changing development in skin care technology. But they've also become a fashion trend. And although their proliferation heralds a shift in attitudes toward acne — one of the most universal discomforts of being a human — they've also begun to act as a social signifier.

The first generation of pimple patches arrived in the late 2010s. Hero's Mighty Patch hydrocolloid dots, for example, debuted in 2017, and Peace Out began offering flesh-toned and translucent versions of the same concept around the same time.

Then, in 2019, came Starface, whose pentagram-shaped Hydro-Star patches would eventually be available in a full spectrum of opaque, vibrant colors. Decorative and spunky, they were a sensation almost immediately. Hailey and Justin Bieber were photographed sporting them around in their daily lives and, crucially, showed up wearing them in photos on social media. So did Florence Pugh, Willow Smith and Nicola Peltz Beckham, and the brand even debuted its first black version of the product on models in a 2022 Puppets and Puppets fashion show.

In addition to being a hot celebrity accessory, though, Starface products earned a devoted following among adolescents and young adults. These days, 60% of Starface's business comes from Generation Z and the ascendant consumers of Gen Alpha (born in 2010 and later), according to Kara Brothers, the brand's president. Brothers spoke to The Washington Post after interviewing high school students in London, "and they were talking about how they all kind of trade pimple patches at their lockers," she says.

Cadence Lawson, 12, just finished sixth grade in Bowling Green, Ky., and can confirm: She and her classmates trade their Starface pimple patches not just for other Starface colors, but also for higher-value goods.

"It's mainly at lunch," she says. "For ice cream, or something like that."

"They're the new Pokémon cards," cracks Cadence's dad, Daniel, 34. Earlier this year, Daniel, who creates video content with his wife on several platforms as the Awesome Lawsons, starred in a skit inspired by Cadence's use of the Starface stickers. (Though, as Cadence points out, she has gotten the last laugh when her dad has borrowed the occasional Starface patch to treat a breakout of his own.)

Starface's dominance in the pimple-patch game is hard to deny. Other brands have also begun offering colorful acne patches in eye-catching shapes (see: Peace Out's rainbow offering in the shape of a two-fingered peace sign), and the popularity of Starface itself has even inspired some young people to wear the patches purely as fashion statements — with no pimple or blemish underneath.

Cadence has seen the little stars adorn plenty of acne-free faces at her elementary school; Annie Miller, 15, has seen the same in the halls of her public high school in Fountain Hills, Ariz. (Both of the girls themselves, though, say they tend to save their patches for when they have pimples.)

When Starface patches are on a jawline or chin, Annie says, she assumes they're being used to treat actual zits. On a cheek, though, or in that alluring Marilyn Monroe mole position, above the lip? That's just fashion, baby. (Hydrocolloid, a gentle active ingredient that creates a moist environment, has historically been used to speed up healing in all kinds of skin wounds and is, Brothers says, "a safe ingredient for all.")

As strange and youthfully capricious as such a trend may seem, there is centuries-old precedent for wearing stars and other adorable shapes on the face just for fun, according to Susan Stewart, the author of "Painted Faces: A Colourful History of Cosmetics."

Tiny silk patches in the shapes of "stars, crescent moons, diamonds, all those sorts of things" were often affixed to the faces of well-to-do young people in 17th-century Western Europe. The trend originated in the French royal court, where the patches were initially used to cover up the scars and skin damage from diseases such as smallpox and syphilis, "but they eventually became quite popular. Where they were worn on the face could signify 'I'm married' or 'I'm not married,' or 'I'm available' or 'not available.' Or, alternatively, 'I support this political party or that political party,'" Stewart says. The type or placement may have also indicated astrological signs, she adds, or even religious beliefs.

JOYCE LEE/For The Washington Post

The first generation of pimple patches mostly included clear or skin-colored stickies. But the second wave has introduced opaque, decorative versions. Here, Catherine Pham, who modeled for this shoot, wears Hello Kitty-style pimple patches.

Today, used as accessories, the star-shaped stickies may signify something else. Annie, the rising 10th-grader in Arizona, remembers her reaction when a classmate came to school one morning last year wearing somewhere around seven Starface stars, which didn't appear to be covering acne: "I'm like, 'You've got a *lot* of money,'" she recalls.

As Annie's mom, Sidney Miller — whose other two daughters, 12-year-old twins, also use Starface products — points out, one package of 32 can cost around $11 to $17.

"Even if they put two on a day during the school week," she says, a pack for one child would last about only three weeks. "So they constantly have to have new ones."

Miller isn't surprised to learn that children are bartering for them, "because there are probably kids who don't have the access otherwise."

To Stewart, the popularity of opaque, noncamouflaging pimple patches also represents a radical shift in attitudes toward acne. From the snow-white, lead-laced, full-face makeup of the 18th century to the thick concealers of the latter 20th and the color correctors of the 21st, the objective has virtually always been to cover up pimples by making them look like the rest of the unaffected skin around them. As if to say, *I don't even* have *acne.*

To cover up a visible blemish with an equally visible patch, though, sends an entirely different message: *I have a pimple. We're just not going to look at it.* (Or risk exacerbating it with makeup.)

"The generations coming up are certainly more comfortable in their skin, and they're definitely yearning for brands, people, workplaces that allow them to show up exactly as they are," Brothers says.

"It's certainly very different to how these sort of things have been dealt with in the past," Stewart says. "It seems quite an open-minded and a positive way of looking at things, instead of trying to achieve the unachievable."

Indeed, Gen Z seems more reluctant than previous generations to feel shame (or to shame one another) for dealing with issues, such as pimples, that can and do happen to anyone. In recent years, TikTokers have shared unedited close-ups of celebrities' skin at the Met Gala and other high-profile, high-glamour events, emphasizing that even people whose entire jobs revolve around being beautiful sometimes have uneven skin textures, hyperpigmentation, wrinkles and, yes, acne.

That attitude, it seems, is contagious. One morning, about a month after Edouard's pimple patch was mistaken for a religious symbol, she says, a different woman from her workout class arrived at that day's session and excitedly pointed to her own face.

It would, of course, come off before her work meeting later, the classmate said — but there, proudly and unapologetically, was a pimple patch.

WEEKEND: BOOKS

An afterlife skeptic's near-death experience

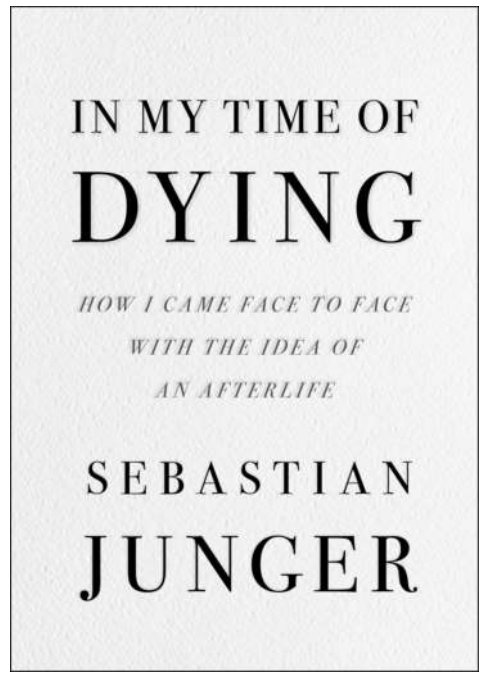
'The Perfect Storm' author Junger details what may be his scariest moment with his latest, 'In My Time of Dying'

BY STEVEN PETROW
The Washington Post

For decades now, Sebastian Junger has taken readers to some of the most dangerous, bloody and remote outposts on this planet, including the deep sea ("The Perfect Storm") and Afghanistan ("War"). In his latest book, "In My Time of Dying," Junger takes us on what may be the wildest and most frightening ride of his career — not to the point of no return, but to its very precipice.

June 15, 2020, dawned for Junger much like any other not-quite-summer day on Cape Cod. But a silent storm had been brewing in the writer, then 58. That morning he was "wrenched from sleep by a dream of my wife and daughters sobbing and holding each other while I hovered over their heads, unable to communicate with them." He screamed at them; he waved at them. It did not matter. In his dream, he learned that he had died, because as a voice explained to him, "I'd been careless." He did not immediately connect that dream to the intermittent pain he'd had in his abdomen for more than nine months. He'd been ignoring it, since it came and went, but he remembers thinking at one point, "This is the kind of pain where you later find out you're going to die."

The next morning, he was awakened not by a dream, but by the pain, which soon ebbed. That afternoon, he uncharacteristically suggested to his wife that they visit a writing studio located deep in their wooded property. In some of the most compelling prose of his career, Junger details what happened next: "My abdomen seemed to be simply made of pain and nothing else," and suddenly he was teetering between life and death. "Halfway to the hospital, a spasm shot through me that lifted my body off the stretcher. It felt like hot lava had been injected into me. A few minutes later I lost control of my bowels and a foul-smelling liquid left me, mostly blood."



Christopher Anderson

Sebastian Junger's latest book, "In My Time of Dying," details an unexpected experience he had that challenged everything he thought he believed.

The eventual diagnosis: a ruptured aneurysm in a pancreatic artery that had caused a massive abdominal hemorrhage, with enough blood loss to bring Junger perilously close to death. As surgeons worked to save him, Junger experienced the presence of his late father, who invited his son to join him. "There's nothing to be scared of," he seemed to say. "Don't fight it."

Junger, a confirmed atheist and an adherent of the scientific method, had been raised by a physicist (his father) and a painter (his mother). His upbringing had left little room for a spiritual experience like this one, which turns out to be the central conundrum of this book and, I'd venture, his life. The meeting with his father was understandably unnerving. "He was dead, I was alive, and I wanted nothing to do with him." But, it's hard to unsee what you've seen: His father had not only visited, but opened the door to the idea that an afterlife might actually exist.

Really? Show me the proof. Oh, you can't. Well, how can something be true if you can't prove it? Ted Kaptchuk, a well-regarded Harvard physician, once told a New Yorker writer that he's always "believed there is an important component of medicine that involves suggestion, ritual and belief," adding: "All ideas that make scientists scream."

Junger's experience, and the vast amount of reporting he brings to near death experiences (NDEs), could easily set off a cacophony of screams in academic medicine.

I might have been one of those skeptics myself, had I not had a life-changing near-death experience while in recovery after an all-day cancer surgery. As I once described it, "I was sliding down a tunnel toward a light. I kept resisting, but the light overpowered me until I finally agreed to let go. I experienced a sense of peace, even destiny, in those moments before I heard the ruckus around me, the medical staff desperately (and successfully) pulling me back."

Medicine might write it off as the result of oxygen deprivation to the brain. But it was as real to me as when, a decade later, my grandmother — who had been barely sentient — sat up in her hospital bed, reached up to the ceiling, and as though recognizing someone, called out, "Mother." She died soon after.

Mere hallucinations? Maybe, maybe not. Junger cites the 1926 book "Death-bed Visions," by British physicist William F. Barrett, which became a classic compendium of a phenomenon many recognized but few understood. What stood out — then as well as now, he writes — is that "the accounts are startlingly consistent not only with each other but with many accounts from today."

Ever the reporter, Junger is unwilling to write off these experiences as hallucinations (or any of the other medical explanations). He admits he was hoping for evidence of an afterlife, finding hints of it in the universality of NDEs that feature seeing the dead. After all, he writes, "there are neurochemical explanations for why people hallucinate, but not for why they keep hallucinating the same thing."

Much earlier in the book, Junger writes: "[My mother] would ask why [my father] couldn't just believe in something he didn't understand, and I would watch my father frown and ponder that question as if it, too, might prove useful in some hyper-rational way."

Can we prove an afterlife exists? No. Might one exist? Junger gives us reason to believe in that possibility. In any case, how lucky we are that Junger survived, and that we're able to join him on another mind-blowing adventure — this time to a place all of us will one day visit.

5 books that capture the drama of political conventions

Washington Post staff

The Republican National Convention, held this week in Milwaukee, had its share of spectacle. But at the moment, with the clamor over whether President Biden should continue running for reelection, it's the Democratic gathering in Chicago in August that seems to have the potential for the kind of high drama that political conventions aren't supposed to provide anymore. There was a time when the fate of the country was regularly decided during these events, and the books below are just a few that readers might turn to for context — and great stories.

"The Lincoln Miracle: Inside the Republican Convention That Changed History," Edward Achorn

On a list of consequential moments in American history, it would be hard to top Abraham Lincoln's presidential victory. Achorn's book shows just how unlikely it was — and details how it happened anyway. When Republicans gathered for their 1860 convention in Chicago, Sen. William Seward of New York was the clear favorite to win the nomination. By contrast, as Achorn writes, Lincoln "had not held elected office for more than a decade," and "his executive experience was pretty much limited to running a two-man law office." "The Lincoln Miracle" recounts the many things — some of them "spookily fortuitous" — that had to line up in Chicago for Honest Abe to become the party's man.

"Roosevelt's Revolt: The 1912 Republican Convention and the Launch of the Bull Moose Party," John C. Skipper

A former president spurned by his own party and successor fuels this story. Theodore Roosevelt, president from 1901 to 1909, decided to run again in 1912 (one could be elected to the highest office more than twice in those days) because of deep disagreements with President William Howard Taft, whom he had essentially enlisted as his heir. When Roosevelt's effort to unseat Taft as the nominee failed, he created the Bull Moose Party and ran under its banner. The progressive third party was relatively short-lived, but its effect in 1912 was decisive: Roosevelt and Taft split support, and Democrat Woodrow Wilson went to the White House with about 42 percent of the popular vote but an electoral college landslide.

"The 103rd Ballot: The Legendary 1924 Democratic Convention That Forever Changed Politics," Robert K. Murray

When it took 15 ballots to elevate Kevin McCarthy to speaker of the House in 2023, it felt like a marathon. Try 103. That's how many ballots it took Democrats to decide who they would (futilely) send up against Republican Calvin Coolidge in 1924. While the names involved might not ring many bells anymore, the grueling process still makes for a riveting view of democracy.

"Reagan's Revolution: The Untold Story of the Campaign That Started It All," Craig Shirley

In 1976, Gerald Ford got the Republican nod. But the real story, obvious in hindsight and told in Shirley's book, was the strong push by Ronald Reagan, foreshadowing his takeover of the party. Shirley is an admirer of the Gipper, and he tells the story of how Ford narrowly succeeded and how Reagan laid the groundwork for a coming revolution.

"Miami and the Siege of Chicago: An Informal History of the Republican and Democratic Conventions of 1968," Norman Mailer

Mailer's enduring work of New Journalism is by consensus the most accomplished piece of literature about conventions. While Mailer has incisive things to say about Richard Nixon and the Republicans in Miami, it's the way he captures the Democrats in Chicago, where tensions over the Vietnam War led to violent clashes between police and protesters in the streets, that bolsters the historical record.

WEEKEND: MUSIC

'JOYFUL REBELLION'

Lake Street Dive, from left: Bridget Kearney, Rachael Price, Akie Bermiss, Mike Calabrese and James Cornelison.

Shervin Lainez

Pop-soul band Lake Street Dive wants to spread a little joy around. What's wrong with that?

By David Bauder
Associated Press

Lake Street Dive chooses to spread some joy. You got a problem with that?

The veteran pop-soul band's upbeat approach permeates the new disc "Good Together," with the title track's sprightly synthesizers pushing along Rachael Price and Akie Bermiss' duet about a couple in that stage of new relationship bliss.

On "Dance With a Stranger," Price encourages audience members to make eye contact with someone they don't know and take a chance.

"Open up your heart and dance with a stranger," she sings, "until they're not a stranger anymore."

Lake Street Dive explains the perspective as "joyful rebellion," seemingly a convoluted way of explaining their nature.

"I do feel as performing artists, you're asking people to connect with you," Bermiss told The Associated Press recently. "That's part of the mission behind this record and the shows — to be connected to the audience. We wanted to call people to create joy."

The band, whose core members met while studying jazz at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, have methodically built an audience with their original music and a penchant for well-selected cover songs. A long North American tour this summer and fall includes their first-ever headlining gig at New York's Madison Square Garden.

They won't be gazing at their shoes and singing about their troubles.

"We really came into our own as a band playing small bars, where people didn't know our songs at all," Price said.

"We had to learn how to get people's attention. And the way we figured out to get people's attention is to play happy, joyful songs that had a catchy melody and a catchy phrase that you would sing along to before the song was over. This was an act of survival."

They're not Pollyannas. Bad things happen to joyful people, too. But even Lake Street Dive's breakup songs have a certain sweetness to them. One of their best-known cuts, "Good Kisser," is about a woman who tells her ex that when he's trashing her to his friends, don't ignore the good parts — like the talent referred to in the title.

The ballad "Twenty-Five," from the new disc, takes a poignant look back at a breakup. "There was a time when I imagined we'd be forever," Price sings, in the song that was penned by bass player Bridget Kearney.

But the young couple in the story couldn't bridge their differences. "I'll be an old woman with somebody else by my side," Price sings. "But I will always

SEE JOYFUL ON PAGE 31

WEEKEND: MUSIC

REVIEW

Megan Moroney

Am I Okay? (Sony Music Nashville)

It begins with the title track: "Am I Okay?" Megan Moroney, a student of country music — and an expert in the genre's ability to flip a turn of phrase and change its meaning in surprising and unexpected ways — does exactly that. It's a love song, a declaration that maybe, just maybe, this cowgirl who's always singing the blues may finally be in a healthy relationship and more confident.

While most of the songs on this 14-track collection veer into less optimistic territory, Moroney's increased confidence is heard where it matters most: in the strength of her songwriting.

Not long ago, Moroney was a student at the University of Georgia, leaving with a music business degree. While still in school, Moroney wrote songs, played shows and interned with Sugarland's Kristian Bush, who'd later produce her stellar debut album, 2023's "Lucky," one of AP's picks for best of the year, and this one. The rest, in many ways, is history: She demonstrated a natural ability for songwriting — a style she's dubbed "emo cowgirl" — eventually leading to the career-making "Tennessee Orange," a cheeky SEC football ballad that quickly became ubiquitous on country radio. Building off the success of a meteoric rise may be daunting. But she wears it well.

"Am I Okay?" is more expansive than the album that came before it, but it continues to develop Moroney's particular charms: There are rallying kiss-offs ("Man on the Moon") and soul-crushing ballads ("No Caller ID," the Vince Gill-assisted "Hope You're Happy," and the particularly effective, grieving "Heaven By Noon," written about an uncle who died on 9/11.)

Pleasures abound: "Noah" breaks the fourth wall in a way that recalls one of her clear predecessors, Taylor Swift. "Miss Universe" has the best Brad Pitt reference in a pop-country song since Shania Twain's "That Don't Impress Me Much."

"Am I Okay?" demonstrates an artist growing more assertive in her talents — but not immune to the everyday injustices of being in her 20s, a period of bad boyfriends and worse drinks. You'd be hard-pressed to find a more relatable voice in contemporary country music for young women.

— Maria Sherman
Associated Press

A new career peak with 'Vertigo'

After opening for some of pop's biggest stars, Griff now has an album of her own to tour

BY ELISE RYAN
Associated Press

British singer-songwriter Griff's career has been an undeniable whirlwind. Less than two years after releasing her first single — and finishing her A-level exams — she won the Brit Award for Rising Star. Then she opened for Dua Lipa. Then Ed Sheeran. Then Coldplay. Then Taylor Swift.

In between those gigs, solo shows and music releases, she worked on the songs that make up her debut album, "Vertigo."

"The usual steps that you take as a new artist have been a bit, like, upside-down," the 23-year-old, whose full name is Sarah Faith Griffiths, told The Associated Press in an interview. "An album is such a step hitting the ground, and it's such a milestone I've always wanted to get to."

In that sense, this moment feels like a career beginning, she said. The immersive pop album tracks the emotions that come with that kind of whirlwind — alongside those that follow other destabilizing events, like growing up and experiencing heartache.

Griff said inspiration for the project came, "funnily enough," from navigating a spiral staircase in one of the houses she wrote the album in — in this case, a cottage belonging to the musician and songwriter Imogen Heap. She said the physical reality of the experience easily lent itself to an emotional equivalent, and it's stuck with her ever since.

"That was just a very real, tangible feeling that I have had, and still have, at this stage in my life," she said.

AP

Griff performs at the Glastonbury Festival in Worthy Farm, Somerset, England, on June 24, 2022. The British singer-songwriter released her debut album, "Vertigo," on July 12.

"Tears For Fun" and "Miss Me Too" explore that dizzying emotion through layered productions, informed by the large-scale spaces she's performed in already. "Astronaut" features piano by Coldplay's Chris Martin, who encouraged Griff to rework an initial draft of the song into a ballad. "You said you needed space, go on then, astronaut," she concedes in her signature belt, the grounded approach adding weight to her accusations.

"It's almost like I'm bit greedy with emotions when it comes to songs," she said, describing her desire to pair wrenching lyrics with catchy, upbeat productions. "For me, music is all about moving people and triggering emotion."

The catharsis is shared, then, by the artist and her listeners, she said, an approach Martin has encouraged.

"He really believes that as creatives and writers, we're just kind of vessels, and creativity will flow through us and ideas will find their way to the right people," she said. "And I think that kind of philosophy is really reassuring."

Griff succeeds in her mission not only with her sound, but also the visuals she and her team produce. Since the release of the album's lead single, she's consistently worn a spiral in her hair. Song visualizers see her dancing in billowing fabrics on the same spiral drawn in sand. She, like her pop mentors, knows an album "era" is a multimedia endeavor.

Perhaps even more revealing of her inner life, however, are the more casual glimpses of Griff the creator. In preparation for her gig opening for a night of Swift's Eras Tour in London, she documented the process of turning blue and white fabric into a dress inspired by a lyric in Swift's "But Daddy I Love Him."

"I was always draping bedsheets around myself," she said of her childhood. "I was the only girl — I've got two older brothers and a lot of foster siblings — so that was my way of entertaining myself, playing dress-up. I think I just like making things."

As Swift said from the stage: "This girl, she is so creative on every single level."

True to that spirit, Griff says she is ready to keep creating.

"To be totally honest, I feel excited to get back in the studio," she said. "I feel like I've got a lot more to give."

Joyful: Band careful not to be defined by covers

FROM PAGE 30

be in love with you in my memories, when we were 25."

Price talked over the idea with Kearney, reflecting on a perspective gained with time's erasure of sour feelings. Price, 38, and her musician-husband, Taylor Ashton, are new parents.

"The idea that something has to last a long time or else it's a failure doesn't make sense in times of growing up and relationships and friendships," she said. "They can be beautiful, and they can be ephemeral."

At a recent concert, she sang "Twenty-Five" as part of a one-two punch following Bermiss' cover of his own "Alone Again," a song about loneliness delivered with such humor that he's not likely to have that problem himself if he keeps singing it.

Good cheer can be looked upon with suspicion in music. The headline of critic Jeremy Levine's review of "Good Together" in Pop Matters talks about Lake Street Dive creating "obligatory fun."

Another critic, Matt Collar of AllMusic, said the disc "feels convivial and breezy, showcasing their warm group harmonies and a nice balance of stylistic influences."

It's the group's first disc without guitarist-trumpet player Mike "McDuck" Olson, who arguably was most influential in the band coalescing at school. He left during the pandemic, no longer wanting to travel. James Cornelison replaced him on guitar. Keyboard player Bermiss joined the band in 2017, supplementing original members Price, Kearney and drummer Mike Calabrese.

"Akie's addition to the band was something that helped us create a lot more space in the music, which was something that we were looking for," Price said.

In 2022, Lake Street Dive released its second EP of cover songs, taking on The Pointer Sisters, Shania Twain, the Cranberries and the Bacharach-David classic "Anyone Who Had a Heart" in the eclectic mix.

It's a fun attention-getting device for the band, whose cover of the Jackson 5's "I Want You Back" was a viral video early in their career, with a key endorsement by Kevin Bacon. Their live take on "Bohemian Rhapsody" received notice, too.

They're careful not to let it overshadow their own music: A Nantucket show's 22-song set earlier this month had only Hall and Oates' "Rich Girl" and Bermiss' "Alone Again" as covers.

They enjoy stripping other artists' songs down to their essence, Price said.

"You learn a lot by learning songs that you love," she said. "You realize what makes a song stand on its own, what makes a groove and what's pivotal to the performance. That's influenced our own songwriting, as well. It's an education and a gateway for fans."

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

No shame, stigma with separate beds

On the contrary, specialists and couples say there could be health, relationship benefits to sleeping apart

By Leanne Italie
Associated Press

Michael Solender and his wife have been together for 42 years. They slept in the same bed for the first 10, taking to separate rooms after that.

Their sleep separation was due to his developing chronic and heavy snoring that eventually led to a diagnosis of sleep apnea and his use of a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine.

Though the machine eliminated his snoring, they continue to sleep apart in their Charlotte, N.C., home because of other issues. He's typically warm at night and she's usually cold.

"For us to maintain separate rooms for sleep just makes for a healthier relationship and a better relationship," said Solender, 66. "There's no shame attached to that. There's no stigma."

Snoring, temperature variations, cover stealers and tossing and turning often lead to partners sleeping separately. Other issues are also in play, including illness, different work shifts and partners who go to bed and get up at different times.

More than one-third of Americans said they occasionally or consistently sleep in another room to accommodate a bed partner, according to an American Academy of Sleep Medicine study last year. Men are the ones who usually hit the sofa or guest room.

And, perhaps surprisingly, it's millennials who do it most, rather than older people.

Dr. Seema Khosla, a pulmonologist and spokesperson for the academy, said achieving adequate sleep, which is usually seven to eight hours for adults, is important for healthy relationships.

Studies indicate that people who consistently experience poor sleep are more likely to experience conflict with their partners, said Khosla, who is the medical director of the North Dakota Center for Sleep, in Fargo.

"It's really a question of people prioritizing their sleep," Khosla said. "I have had patients who have been married like 60 years and they swear that separate bedrooms is a reason."

Sleeping separately, she said, "is probably more common than we think."

The same goes for sleep apnea, a leading cause of heavy snoring, Khosla said. Solender said he went to a sleep specialist after realizing the impact sleep deprivation had on himself and his wife.

"I would wake her up and would wake myself up," he said. "I never knew I had sleep apnea. I would say close to 20 years ago, I started falling asleep at red lights. I started falling asleep watching TV or sitting up and reading a book. I felt tired constantly. That's when I knew I had an issue."

Key to making separate sleep spaces work is talking about it beforehand, as Solender did with his wife.

"It's not about avoiding intimacy. It's about recognizing that you can have intimacy, you can have that time together, but then you just sleep apart. That's a really important part of the conversation. Both partners need to understand and agree," Khosla said.

She has seen some reluctance among her patients when she suggests sleeping apart.

"Usually it's somebody's spouse who is snoring or someone who has a spouse's alarm that wakes them up at four in the morning or something like that. We'll talk about it. And people will push back right away saying, oh, no, no, that's not gonna work for me," she said.

Some, Khosla said, "will sit with it for a minute and they'll think about it, and you can tell that they're kind of like, I would love to do this, but how do I tell my partner?"

Tracey Daniels and her husband have been sleeping apart for about four years. Initially, there was no big talk. She just headed to the guest room.

"It started because my husband is a horrible snorer. But also I'm a very light sleeper. He could drop a paper clip on a carpeted floor and I would wake up," said Daniels, who lives in Tryon, N.C.

Later, she said, she initiated a conversation after she was diagnosed with breast cancer and went through surgery.

"He comes and tucks me in and gives me a kiss," Daniels said.

They rotate their three dogs at night.

Dr. Phyllis Zee, chief of sleep medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and director of a sleep clinic at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago, said sleep separation is common in her practice.

"It would be a great idea to discuss sleep compatibility before you get married. I tend to see it when couples have been married and/or they've been together for some time and have been trying to negotiate this for a while," she said.

Come middle age, Zee said, sleep is less robust.

"In general, you're more prone to getting things like insomnia or sleep apnea. And so that begins to be bothersome," she said.

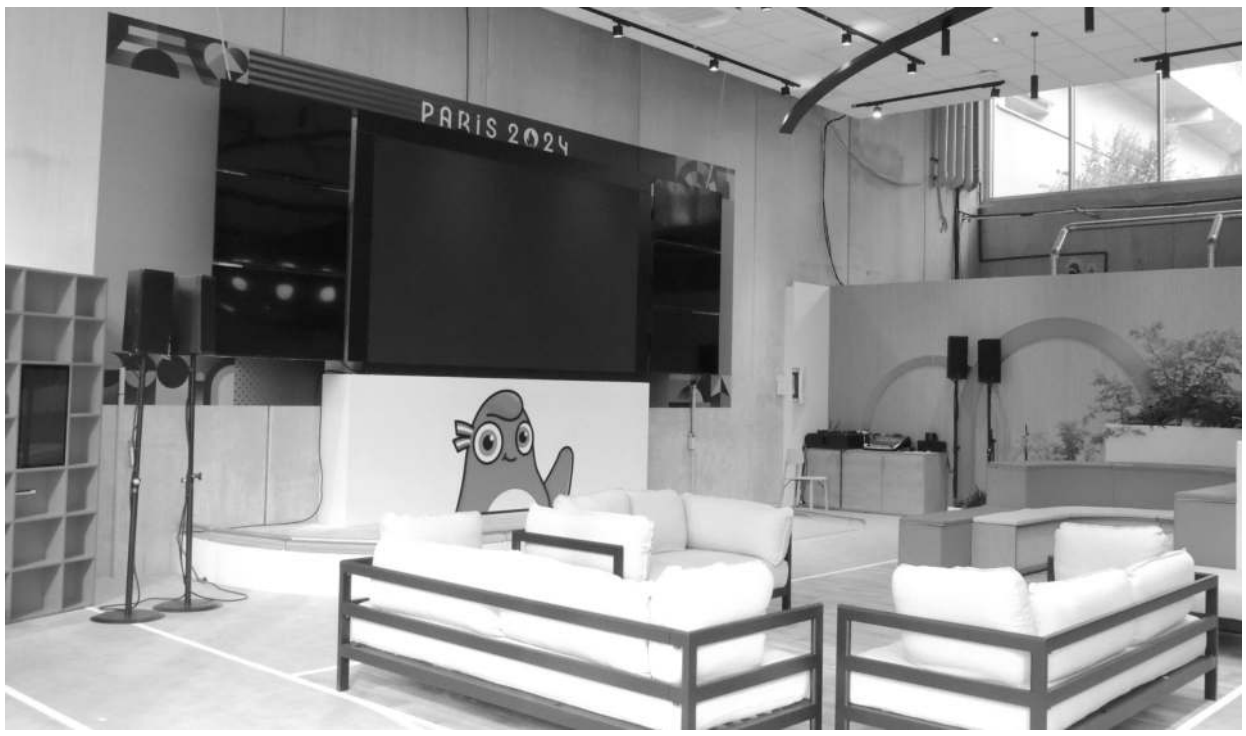
While there's no shame in sleeping apart, Zee said technology has helped make sharing a bed easier in some ways. White noise machines, cooling pillows and bedding, mattresses with dual temperature controls and dual control electric blankets can help, Zee said. Some couples have given up sharing blankets, using their own, to make sleep easier.

"There's a whole market out there to mitigate some of these issues," she said.

Sleep separation is more accepted now as people have become more aware of the importance of quality sleep to overall health, Zee said.

"On the other hand, there is research to show there are benefits to sleeping together," she said. "In general, probably the top line is seek professional help before making a decision. Are the issues a sign of a sleep disorder that one can treat?"

WEEKEND: FAMILY



TOM NOUVIAN/AP

A lounge at the Olympic Village on July 15 in Saint-Denis, outside Paris. The designers of the village, where the athletes will live during the Games, are including a nursery for the first time.

Competing for accessibility

Paris Olympics could be the friendliest yet for athlete-moms with young kids

BY ANNABELLE TIMSIT
The Washington Post

Paris could be the site of many Olympic Games firsts: It aims to be the first fully gender-equal Games, the first to drastically reduce carbon emissions, and will feature the first opening ceremony not held in a stadium.

It may also be the most accessible to athletes with young children, and particularly athlete-moms — as more choose to compete after having children and become more vocal about the struggles of balancing motherhood with competitive sports.

For the first time, the Olympic Village will feature a nursery — to help athletes more easily spend time with their babies or infants amid grueling competition and training schedules. The French National Olympic and Sports Committee has also pledged to make hotel rooms available for French athletes who are breastfeeding, as part of a set of measures to create more space for "parenthood" within the Games.

Olympic organizers say these measures are needed to promote women's participation in sports — and to keep up with the times.

"Society is changing, and this meets our athletes' needs," Astrid Guyart, member of the French National Olympic and Sports Committee, told French newspaper Le Monde.

American track and field athlete Allyson Felix, who won 11 Olympic medals before retiring from the sport in 2022, told CBS the launch of the nursery, in the nonresidential area of the Olympic Village, represents "a shift in the culture" around female athletes.

"I think it really tells women that you can choose motherhood and also be at the top of your game and not have to miss a beat," said Felix, who is on the International Olympic Committee's Athletes' Commission.

To be sure, athlete-moms — and female athletes more broadly — can still face obstacles at the highest levels of sports, including unequal pay and lower public visibility. And change is slow: Ahead of the last Summer Olympics in Tokyo in 2021, the International Olympic Committee barred family from accompanying athletes, including children who were still nursing, because of pandemic restrictions, before reversing and acknowledging the "unique situation facing athletes with nursing children," after an outcry led by female athletes.

Individual athletes have led the charge to secure arrangements for themselves and their families at the 2024 Games — by advocating in the media and even appealing directly to political leaders. In January, Olympic medalist and judoka Clarisse Agbegnenou, 31, said she took French President Emmanuel Macron aside during his visit with the French national judo team and told him, "I would like to have my daughter with me in the Olympic Village to feel good and be fully committed in my final stretch of these Olympic Games."

"I tried to give some advice to help us be even better ... I think it was heard; I hope so, anyway," Agbegnenou told RMC Sport. She added that more changes were needed "on the issue of health, family."

Children and families are generally not allowed inside the Olympic Village. French Olympic organizers said "the village must remain a preserved place, where only athletes and staff coexist in a performance dynamic."

But this year, under the new policies for the Paris Olympics and Paralympic Games, the nursery will be set up in the nonresidential area in the Olympic Village Plaza, and will be open every day from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. to parents of babies and infants "and their dedicated caregivers," organizers said.

France is going even further — making special accommodations for the first time this year to allow its athletes access to a dedicated breastfeeding space at a hotel near the Olympic Village, and to stay there if they want to remain with their child, the French National Olympic and Sports Committee said.

French athletes with children of any age will also have access to a shared space to spend time together during the day. And during the Paralympic Games, athletes with babies under the age of 1 will receive "guest passes" to allow their babies into the Olympic Village twice a day so they can be breastfed. The same rule will apply for athletes with children up to 3 years old when the child has special needs or disabilities.

"It's really cool what the French Olympic Committee is doing for their breastfeeding and parent athletes," Canadian basketball player Kim Gaucher, who helped push for the IOC to reverse its policy on nursing children at the Tokyo Olympics, said in an article shared by the Canadian Olympic Committee. "This is what we want to be the norm."

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari

Navigating storms literally, figuratively

"Honey? You there? I'm having phone issues," I shouted.

"Where are you?" my husband, Francis, asked, struggling to hear through the loud music and voices surrounding me.

"Outside Bermuda Yacht Club — it's the only place I can get a Wi-Fi signal. Listen …," I continued, eager to relay an update to my travel plans before losing cell service.

Two days prior, I'd flown to Bermuda to meet up with the crew of Alliance, a 40-foot sailboat in the 2024 Newport to Bermuda Race, a bi-annual offshore competition involving more than 160 sailboats.

I wasn't on the race team, but for nine months I'd been practicing and preparing to sail on Alliance's return crew, tasked with sailing the boat back home to Rhode Island after the race. I'd dreamed of an opportunity like this since 2005, when I took beginner sailing lessons at the Norfolk Navy Base Marina. On weekends, Francis watched our three kids while I practiced.

However, like most military spouses, my dreams came secondary to military life. After two summers of lessons, a PCS to Germany brought my sailing adventures to a halt.

Three moves later, we were stationed in Newport, R.I., where I took more lessons at the base marina, hoping I'd get the chance to apply all those lessons to real sailing.

Last summer, I was ready to give up, when I met Alliance's skippers at a base social event. They invited me to be on Alliance's delivery crew, including the return sail from the 2024 Bermuda race. Finally, I had my chance!

The night before my flight to Bermuda to meet Alliance at the finish line, the boat struck an object in the Gulf Stream and sank. All crew abandoned ship and were rescued by another racing vessel.

I was crushed. Not only for my friends who'd be devastated by the loss of their sailboat, but also, selfishly, for me. I'd lost my opportunity to become a real sailor.

But maybe not.

"… I was offered a return crew position on another boat," I yelled into my phone.

"What?!" Francis blurted. "You're not going, right?"

"Alliance's folks checked everything out. They say it's a solid boat with an experienced skipper. We'll be safe, so I'm going," I said loudly.

Francis was not happy.

We sailed out of Hamilton Harbor aboard Heart of Gold, headed for Annapolis, Md. I shared a berth and responsibilities with a crew mate named Lisa Schmitt. They named us Schmitty and Mo, and put us to work.

On the third day, southerly winds became northerly as a low pressure front met us in the Gulf Stream. Switching from a port to starboard tack, all hell broke loose. Waves rose to 12 feet, wind gusted to 30 knots and a squall unleashed buckets of rain. But on Day 5, we made it to the Chesapeake Bay.

Stepping onto the dock that night after 750 miles at sea, I was filled with gratitude for the hands-on, intense learning experience I'd dreamed of for 20 years. I was a real sailor.

"You still mad?" I asked gently after Francis picked me up at the Providence Airport. He shook his head, but the look on his face told otherwise.

A couple of days later, I couldn't take it anymore. "Clearly, you're still upset, so let's have it out!" I blurted. I hated fighting with Francis, but this was necessary. I braced myself.

I said tearfully, "Why can't you be happy for me? You've done so many things while I was home with the kids — whitewater rafting on the Nile, flying in a sea plane in Alaska, looking for poachers in a helicopter in Botswana, …" I went on, naming the wild adventures Francis had had during 28 years on active duty. His face suddenly softened.

"I'm sorry," he said, hugging me, finally realizing that I was entitled to chase my dreams, too.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, "The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com." Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

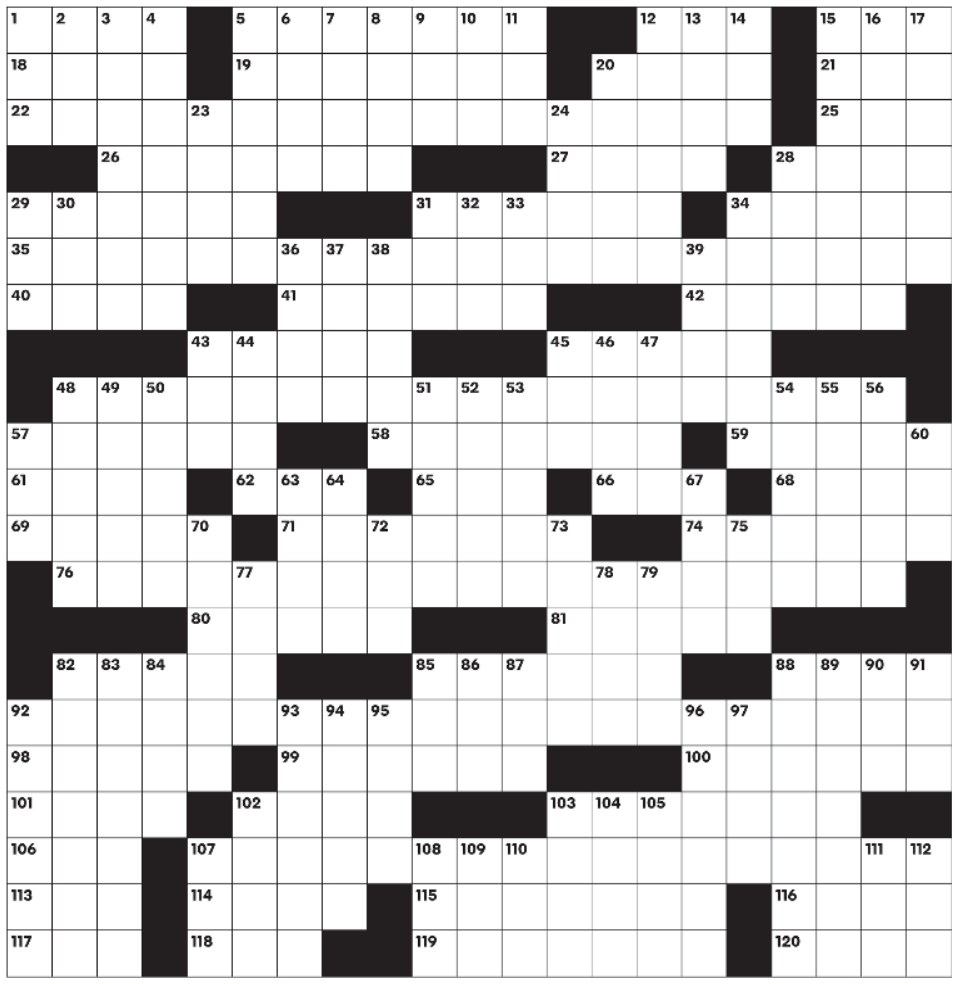
WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

DOUBLE DIGITS

BY DAVID KARP/ EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

David Karp, of Victoria, British Columbia, works for the provincial Ministry of Finance. This puzzle was built around 107-Across which makes its debut as an answer in the Times crossword. David was also happy to include 92-Across — in addition to neatly fitting this theme, it was one of his favorite shows as a kid.



ACROSS

1 Common ingredient in eye shadow
5 Anticipate a near success, so to speak
12 Sci-fi comics sound
15 Animal in the Bacardi logo
18 Wayfair alternative
19 Egg-laying mammal
20 Art ____
21 What a boring meeting never seems to do
22 Admit one was wrong
25 Attitude
26 Chemical compound in plastics and rubber
27 Clear to see, maybe?
28 Abstract painter ____ Thomas
29 Title in a Puccini title
31 Like a room with a lit fireplace, often
34 Second calling?
35 Research trials using withheld information
40 Genesis brother
41 Go (for)
42 ''Calvin and Hobbes'' girl
43 Opulent
45 Presentation prop
48 Royal whose wedding had a whopping 1,900 guests
57 City that's home to the Green Dome
58 Party
59 Writing wrongs?
61 Spartan queen of myth
62 Delivery-room figures, for short
65 Month between avril and juin
66 Cries of pain
68 Abdel Fattah el-____, Egyptian president beginning in 2014
69 Gush
71 Pioneering chemist Lavoisier
74 Like some hipster T-shirts
76 Friendly debate opponent
80 Gossip spreader
81 Your wish is his command
82 ''Likewise''
85 Run out of clothes?
88 Humorist Bombeck
92 Lab mice in a 1990s cartoon
98 F on a final
99 Slowly wanes, as support
100 To no avail
101 Infuriates
102 Four- or six-pointer, say
103 Display at a school show
106 O.E.D. ender
107 Excuse for texting errors, jocularly . . . or a hint to this puzzle's theme
113 Its egg resembles an avocado
114 Cheerful tune
115 ''Core'' things
116 Opposite of absorb
117 Shill for, informally
118 Root word?
119 Ingredient in a Bloody Caesar cocktail
120 ''No returns''

DOWN

1 Makeshift limbo bar at a wedding
2 Letters before a 34-Across
3 Abandons, as an argument
4 Marsh plant whose flower resembles a corn dog
5 World capital at the foot of the Elburz Mountains
6 Take ____ from
7 Turn one's back on
8 ''The longest distance between two places,'' per ''The Glass Menagerie''
9 The N.H.L.'s Oilers, on scoreboards
10 Bach's ''Mass ____ Minor''
11 Guitar sheet music, for short
12 Gentle breeze
13 What vinegar adds to a salad dressing
14 Aptly named mascot of the Baltimore Ravens
15 Popular brunch cocktail
16 Bring to life
17 QB's feat
20 Italian for ''tooth''
23 Inspiration for many a gospel song
24 Speech-therapy subject
28 Flight selections, say
29 Bush Jr. is the only U.S. president to hold one
30 Minister's robe
31 Pot leaves?
32 Lead-in to Clean
33 Rose of Guns N' Roses
34 Charm
36 Generate, with ''up''
37 Member of the South Asian diaspora
38 Set of guiding principles
39 Words from someone who's following you
43 ''The tongue of the mind,'' per Cervantes
44 ''omg u r 2 funny!''
45 Duke's address ender
46 On top of that
47 Bunch
48 Serious thing to play for
49 Make sense
50 Ice on one's head?
51 Lindelof who co-created ''Lost'' and ''The Leftovers''
52 Emotionally tax
53 Completing
54 Big name in chicken
55 Offer one's two cents
56 Polite denial
57 Org. that Lionel Messi joined in 2023
60 [I know it's wrong]
63 One might be raised on a farm
64 Pouty mood
67 Assistant who handles more than 25 billion requests per month
70 ''Here, have a sample''
72 Hermana de la madre
73 Urged (on)
75 GPS suggestion: Abbr.
77 Head turner at a racetrack
78 When placed under high pressure and heat, it forms coal
79 So-called ''key of life''
82 ''Please — I've heard that excuse before''
83 Ready for a massage, perhaps
84 Trash
85 Qantas hub, on luggage tags
86 ____ kwon do
87 Triage pros, in brief
88 Its capital is Asmara
89 Rates of return?
90 ''Cool'' amt.
91 ''Whichever''
92 Big name in vaccines
93 Water heater
94 Robert who owns the New England Patriots
95 Toon first seen on ''The Huckleberry Hound Show''
96 Nevertheless
97 Something a newlywed might wear — or dance to — at a wedding
102 Boom attachment
103 Custom car consideration
104 Offshore
105 App with ''Rides'' and ''Bikes'' tabs
107 Rapper ____ Rida
108 Peacock's parent
109 It might make one's hair stand on end
110 She, in Portuguese
111 Early 11th-century year
112 U.F.O. crew

GUNSTON STREET

"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE

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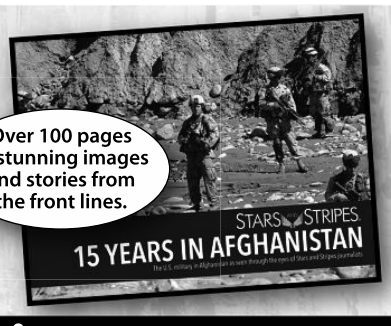

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FACES

Grateful Dead, Coppola among honorees

Newest Kennedy Center class also includes Bonnie Raitt, jazz trumpeter, Harlem theater

By Ashraf Khalil
Associated Press

An iconoclastic filmmaking legend and one of the world's most enduring musical acts headline this year's crop of Kennedy Center Honors recipients.

Director Francis Ford Coppola and the Grateful Dead will be honored for lifetime achievement in the arts, along with jazz trumpeter Arturo Sandoval, blues legend Bonnie Raitt and the legendary Harlem theater The Apollo, which has launched generations of Black artists.

This 47th Kennedy Center class will be honored with an evening of tributes, testimonials and performances on Dec. 8 at Washington's John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The ceremony will be broadcast on CBS on Dec. 23.

Starting out as a folk-infused quintet in psychedelic-era 1960s San Francisco, the Grateful Dead steadily morphed into a cultural phenomenon and one of the most successful touring acts of all time.

Fueled by the carnival atmosphere of its traveling Deadhead fanbase and an ethos that encouraged tape-trading and emphasized live performance over studio output, the Dead have spanned multiple generations and remain wildly popular. Lead guitarist and founding member Jerry Garcia died in 1995, but the band continues almost nonstop touring in multiple incarnations.

"There's a lot of ingredients that go into it," drummer Mickey Hart said, when asked about the music's longevity. "The fans say that the shows feel like home. It gives them that feeling of connectiveness and community and joy and love for life and the music."

Currently calling themselves Dead and Company with guitarist John Mayer taking Garcia's place, the band is in the midst of a several-month residency at The Sphere in Las Vegas.

Coppola

Raitt

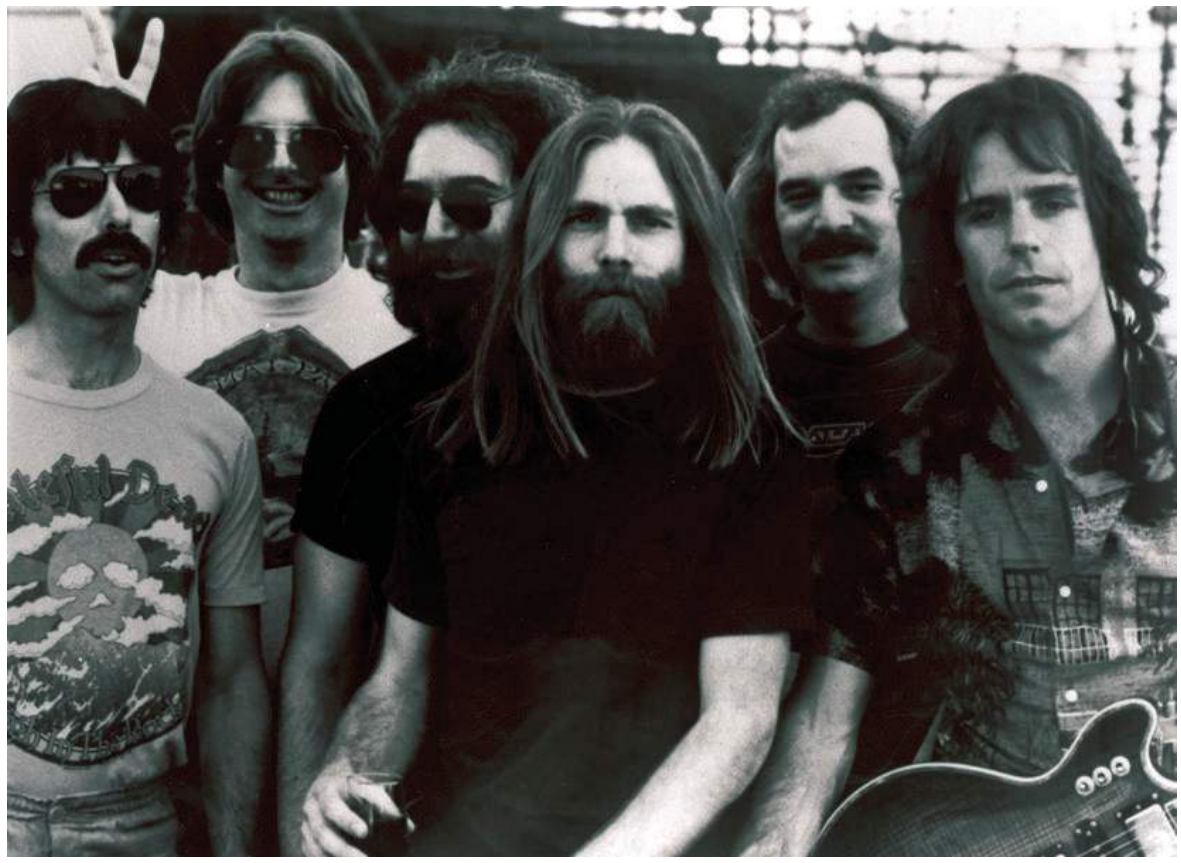
Sandoval

Coppola, 85, has established himself as a trailblazing filmmaker, winning five Academy Awards and earning a reputation as a driven artist willing to risk his reputation and finances for his vision. Even after the massive successes of "The Godfather" and a sequel, Coppola drove himself into near bankruptcy while filming "Apocalypse Now," which turned out to be another classic.

At times, he wondered whether he had ruffled too many powerful feathers along the way to ever receive Kennedy Center Honors induction.

"I've been eligible for the past 20 years, so the fact that I never received it made me feel that maybe I never would," said Coppola, who took part in fellow director Martin Scorsese's induction in 2007. "I just assumed I wasn't going to win it, so to hear that I was chosen was a surprise and a delight."

Sandoval, 74, rose to prominence as a musician in his native Cuba, playing piano and percussion but specializing in the trumpet. His work brought him into contact with jazz legend Dizzy Gillespie, who championed his music and personally helped him defect from Cuba while on tour in Europe in 1990. Shortly after his defection, Sandoval performed at his mentor Gillespie's own Kennedy Center Honors induction.


AP

Members of the Grateful Dead — from left, Mickey Hart, Phil Lesh, Jerry Garcia, Brent Mydland, Bill Kreutzmann and Bob Weir — are among the 47th Kennedy Center class of honorees.

"Modesty apart, I do think I deserve it. I worked so hard for so many years," Sandoval said. "It's a huge honor, and I feel completely overwhelmed. I have to pinch myself sometimes. I'm just a little farmer from Cuba. God has been so good to me."

Raitt's memories of the Kennedy Center Honors go back to the 1970s, when she accompanied her father, Broadway performer John Raitt, to a tribute to composer Richard Rogers.

"I got to visit the White House and hang out with the Carters," said Raitt, 74. "I got my first taste of what this weekend really means."

Over a 50-year career, Raitt has received a plethora of music awards, including 13 Grammys and induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Rolling Stone magazine named her to its lists of the 100 greatest guitarists and the 100 greatest singers of all time. But Raitt said the Kennedy Center Honors status holds a special place because it extends to all aspects of the performing arts, encompassing all forms of music, dance and performance.

"The thing that puts (Kennedy Center Honors) at the pinnacle is that it's culture-wide," she said. "It's hard for me to even fathom what this means."

It's extremely rare for the Kennedy Center Honors to select a venue, rather than a performer. But The Apollo's nine-decade run as an incubator for Black talent has qualified it as an exception.

"It's not a traditional honoree, for sure," said Michelle Ebanks, the theater's president and CEO, who cited the recent induction of the show "Sesame Street" as a similar selection. "We're absolutely delighted by the honor."

The Harlem landmark has served as a proving ground for Black performers dating back to Billie Holiday, James Brown and Stevie Wonder and extending into modern performers like Lauryn Hill.

"It's more than a theater. It's a cultural touchstone ... that's rooted in the Harlem community," Ebanks said.

'Deadpool' star Reynolds gave up his salary to keep screenwriters on set

From wire reports

Ryan Reynolds revealed that he "let go of getting paid" for "Deadpool" so the other screenwriters could be present on the set.

"When I finally got to make [the movie], it had been almost 10 years at that point," Reynolds told the New York Times. "No part of me was thinking when 'Deadpool' was finally greenlit that this would be a success. I even let go of getting paid to do the movie just to put it back on the screen: They wouldn't allow my co-writers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick on set, so I took the little salary I had left and paid them to be on set with me so we could form a de facto writers room."

Reese and Wernick revealed Reynolds' actions in 2016 during an episode of AMC's "Geeking Out." The writers said that Reynolds covered the expenses to keep them involved in the creative process.

Reynolds

"We were on the project for six years. It was really a core creative team of us, Ryan, and the director Tim Miller," Wernick told hosts Kevin Smith and Greg Grunberg. "Fox, interestingly, wouldn't pay for us to be on set. Ryan Reynolds paid out of his own money, out of his own pocket."

In his New York Times interview, Reynolds also noted that having limited time and money on the project proved beneficial.

"It was a lesson in a couple of senses," Reynolds said. "I think one of the great enemies of creativity is too much time and money, and that movie had neither time nor money. It really fostered focusing on character over spectacle, which is a little harder to execute in a comic-book movie. I was just so invested in every micro-detail of it and I hadn't felt like that in a long, long time. I remembered wanting to feel that more — not just on 'Deadpool,' but on anything."

What started as a labor of love for Reynolds has spawned two sequels. The third movie, "Deadpool & Wolverine," is set to premiere in theaters on July 26.

Other news

■ WNBA great **Sue Bird** has been honored with a signature Barbie doll. Mattel announced the collectible tribute doll on Tuesday. The doll is part of Mattel's Role Model series. Bird, 43, retired in 2022 after 21 seasons in the WNBA, all with the Seattle Storm. She helped the storm to four championships and was part of five U.S. national teams that won a gold medal, the last coming in 2021 at the Tokyo Olympics. She's now a part owner of the Storm.

■ After a widely panned performance on Monday of the U.S. national anthem at the MLB Home Run Derby, country singer **Ingrid Andress** apologized Tuesday and said she was drunk and would be checking herself into rehab. Clips of her less-than-popular rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas, went viral.

D-DAY 80TH ANNIVERSARY

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D-DAY 80TH ANNIVERSARY

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EXCHANGE

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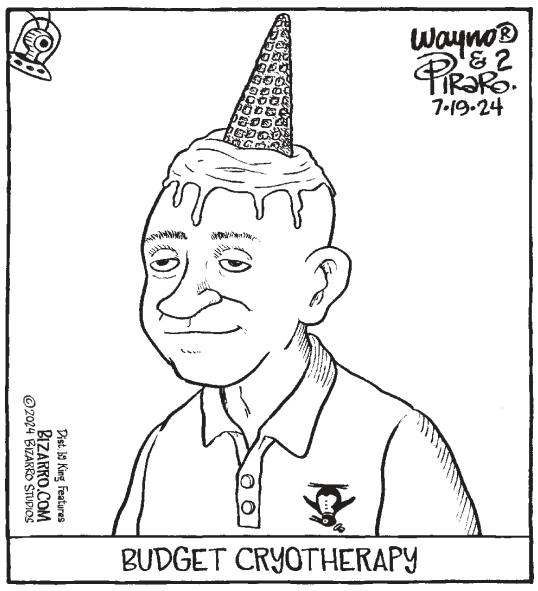
The Exchange is a Department of Defense Organization

aafes.media/vets

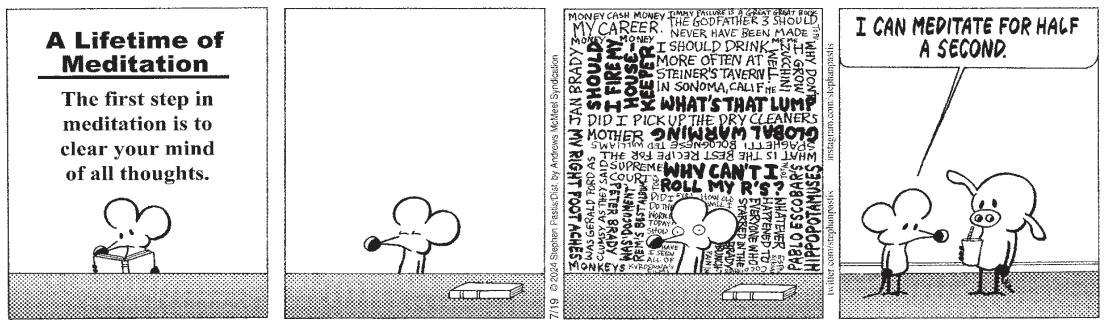
Bizarro



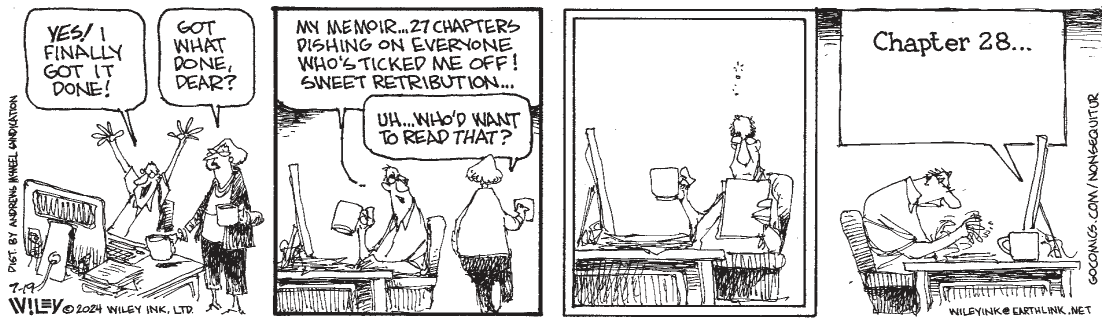
Loose Parts

Frazz

Pearls Before Swine

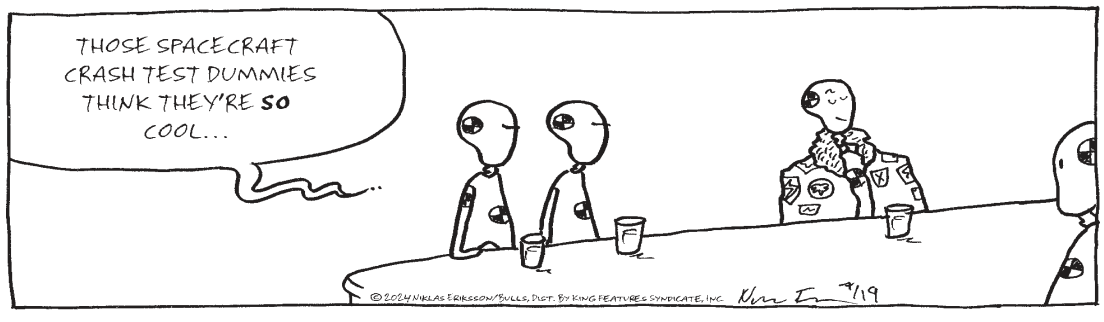


Non Sequitur

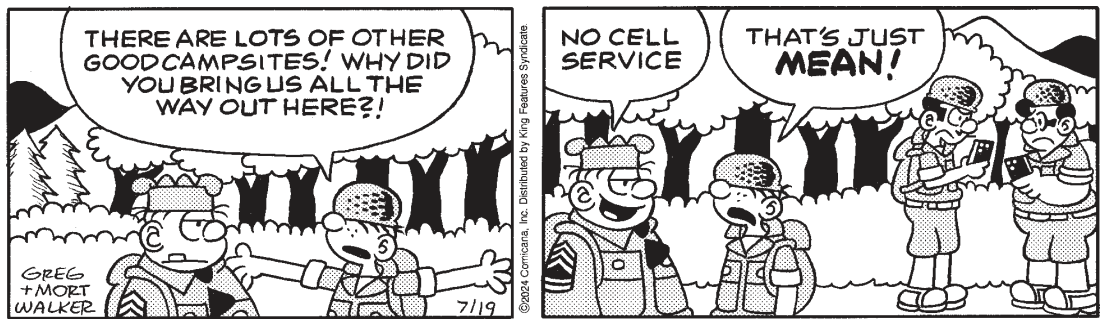


Candorville

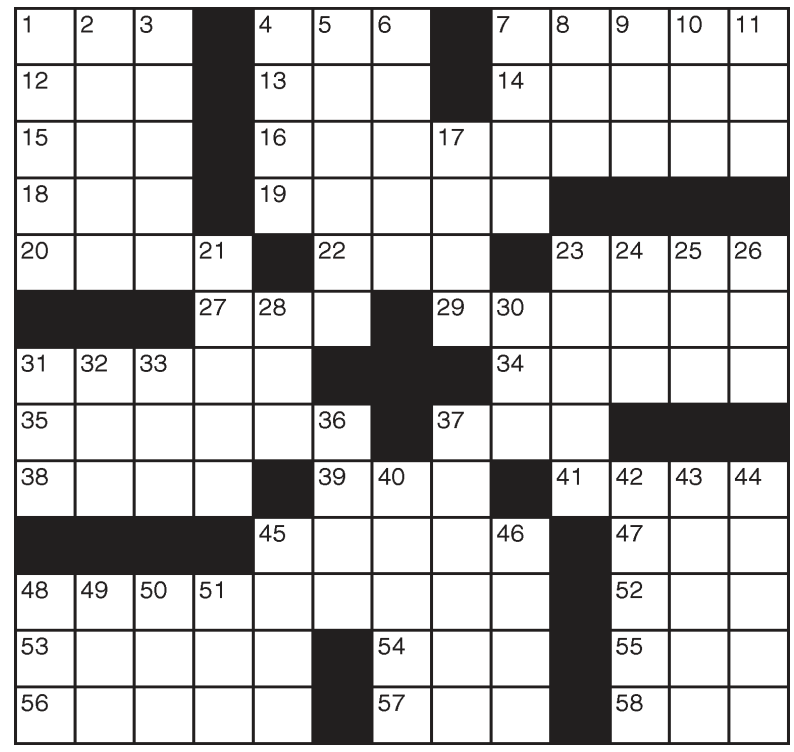
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Irate
4 Mac alternatives
7 Ballet leaps
12 "I love," in Latin
13 — chi
14 Russian range
15 "Shoo!"
16 Type of law that opposes monopolies
18 Chemical suffix
19 Fry lightly
20 Mrs. Dithers
22 Summer hrs.
23 Vipers
27 Tony winner Hagen
29 Dairy product
31 Hosiery shade
34 Overcaffeinated
35 Supernatural
37 N.J. neighbor
38 Afrikaner
39 Shock partner
41 "30 for 30" network
45 Attempts
47 Status —
48 Trattoria appetizers
52 Last (Abbr.)
53 Lift
54 Great weight
55 "Do — say!"
56 Beet variety
57 Hesitant sounds
58 Hamilton bill

DOWN

1 Wizardry
2 Acid in proteins
3 Indulgent nana, e.g.
4 School orgs.
5 Manitoba's land
6 Original position
7 Burlap fiber
8 Blunder
9 Sigma follower
10 Golfer Ernie
11 Retired jet
17 Wee
21 Foretell
23 Limber
24 California's Big —
25 Opposite of "post-"
26 Norm (Abbr.)
28 — Aviv
30 Have bills
31 Short do
32 Green prefix
33 "Rocks"
36 "See ya!"
37 Borrower
40 Squander
42 Hunker down
43 Sign of life
44 Away from the office
45 Raced
46 Deadly septet
48 Rainbow shape
49 Slangy denial
50 — Maria
51 Leb. neighbor

Answer to Previous Puzzle

W	A	S		H	A	T	S		T	A	B	S
E	F	T		O	A	H	U		E	S	A	U
S	T	O	P	T	H	A	T		L	I	R	E
		P	O	D		I	R	E	L	A	N	D
L	E	G	I	O	N		A	G	E			
A	G	A		G	O	B		O	R	D	E	R
C	A	P	S		G	I	L		S	E	R	A
E	N	S	U	E		D	O	C		A	N	N
			R	R	S		L	A	N	D	E	D
S	P	I	N	A	C	H		S	O	S		
A	L	D	A		R	E	S	T	S	T	O	P
R	O	O	M		O	M	A	R		O	N	O
I	D	L	E		D	I	D	O		P	A	X

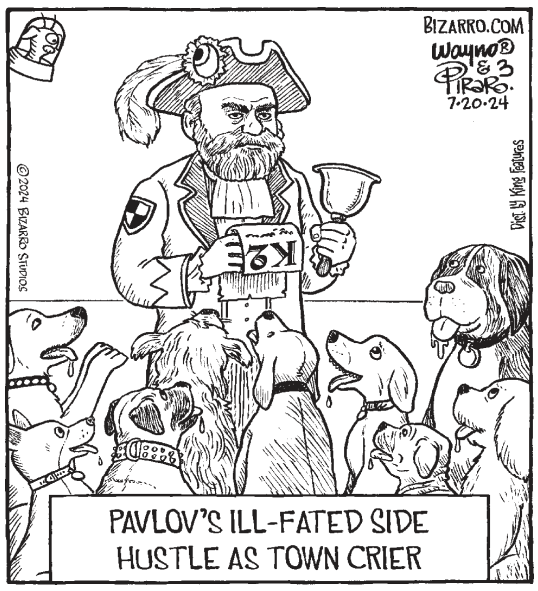
7-19 **CRYPTOQUIP**

MNMYW FOCM FRXF RGCVYVGT XFFVYHMW OT XSVGF FV SM ZMXNOHL TVCMVHM, RM TXWT, "O'ZZ SM TGOHL WX!"

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IT'D BE GREAT IF THE OCEAN WERE ACTUALLY FILLED WITH ORANGE SODA, BUT THAT'S ONLY A FANTA SEA.

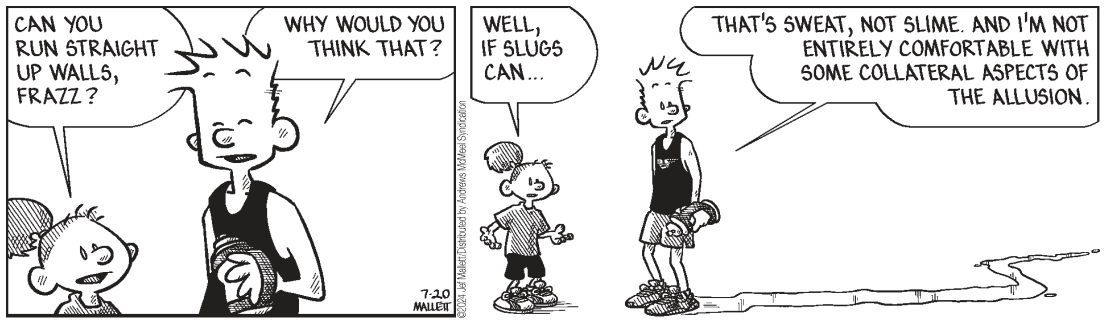
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: F equals T

Bizarro



Loose Parts

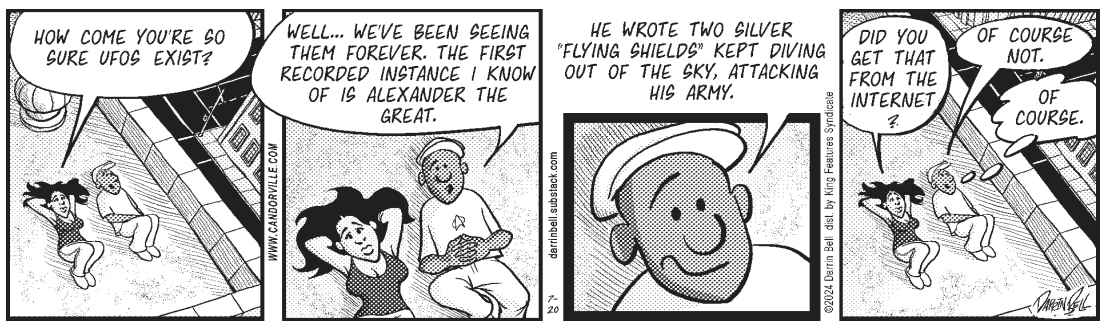
Frazz



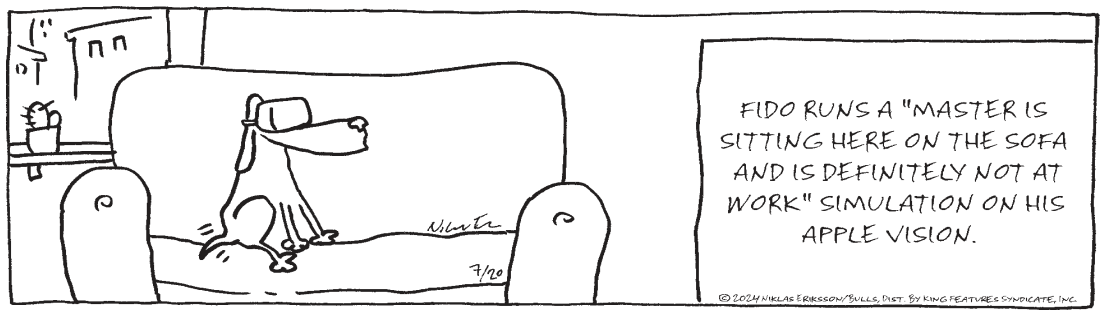
Pearls Before Swine

Non Sequitur

Candorville

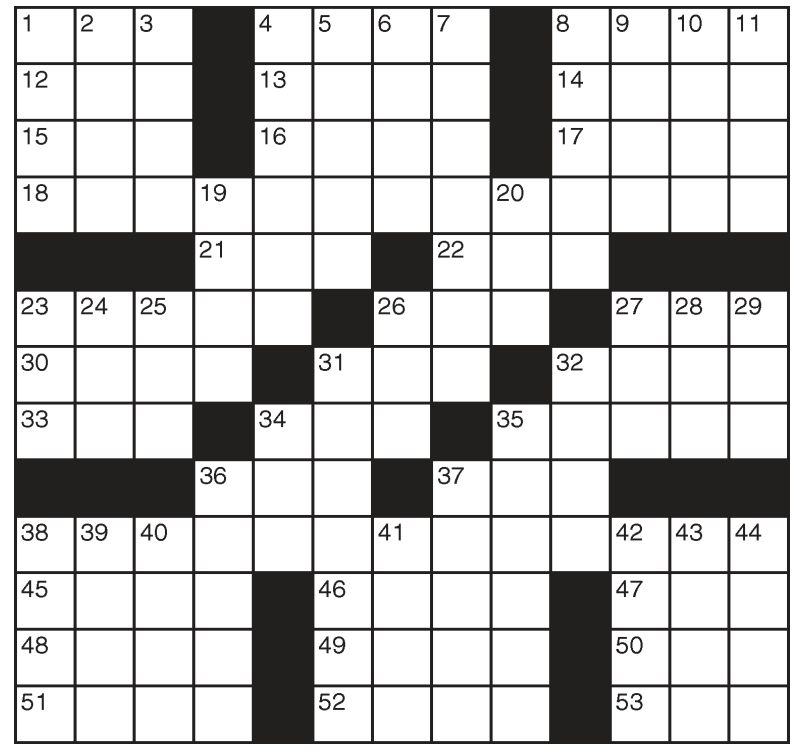


Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey

Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

1 Sandy color
4 Men-only
8 Wise one
12 "I love," to Ovid
13 Wrestler John
14 Geometric calculation
15 Brock of baseball
16 Hindu royal
17 Competes
18 Breakfast order
21 Boom times
22 Bashful
23 One in a pod
26 Spring month
27 Smack
30 Milky gem
31 Opposing vote
32 Zilch
33 Twisty letter
34 Feedbag tidbit
35 Thespian
36 — Lanka
37 Docs' org.
38 Breakfast order
45 Tennis legend Arthur
46 Spoken
47 A Gershwin brother
48 "Love — Open Door" ("Frozen" song)
49 Greeting from Dracula
50 Menagerie
51 Small combo
52 Topped with frosting
53 Ninny

DOWN

1 Bath powder
2 Mine, to Marcel
3 Subject, usually
4 Abrasion
5 Squads
6 — Domini
7 Contradict
8 Cabbage choice
9 La Scala solo
10 Pop music's Bee —
11 Sunrise direction
19 Void partner
20 Your
23 Misery
24 Some printers
25 Small batteries
26 Yoga pad
27 Fedora, e.g.
28 Altar affirmative
29 Sailor
31 Capital of Kenya
32 Final Four org.
34 Raw rock
35 Sauntered
36 Shorthand pro
37 Set — (schedule)
38 Lure
39 Cold War initials
40 Popular Asian cuisine
41 Rocker Clapton
42 Sphinx site
43 Love god
44 Asian nation

Answer to Previous Puzzle

M	A	D		P	C	S		J	E	T	E	S
A	M	O		T	A	I		U	R	A	L	S
G	I	T		A	N	T	I	T	R	U	S	T
I	N	E		S	A	U	T	E				
C	O	R	A		D	S	T		A	S	P	S
			U	T	A		Y	O	G	U	R	T
B	E	I	G	E				W	I	R	E	D
O	C	C	U	L	T		D	E	L			
B	O	E	R		A	W	E		E	S	P	N
				S	T	A	B	S		Q	U	O
A	N	T	I	P	A	S	T	I		U	L	T
R	A	I	S	E		T	O	N		A	S	I
C	H	A	R	D		E	R	S		T	E	N

7-20 CRYPTOQUIP

KMPP-VANKA DNTV QBZD SZIJAR Z SNFFU NE RDNKJAR FJR TNAJEMDNHQ MIMDRDMMAQ: QXDHTM QXDJARQBMMA.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: EVERY TIME THAT HUMOROUS ATTORNEY IS ABOUT TO BE LEAVING SOMEONE, HE SAYS, "I'LL BE SUING YA!"

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: R equals G

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OPINION

The true problem with Biden's candidacy is honesty

By Charles Lane
The Washington Post

MILWAUKEE

The Republicans gathered here are walking on air, as you would expect given the extraordinary events of the past month, which include their nominee, former President Donald Trump, surviving a close call with an assassin's bullet.

Meanwhile, their opponents, the Democrats, continue to break the first law of holes: When you're in one, stop digging. President Joe Biden's stumbling performance in the June 27 debate with Trump spectacularly reinforced the top voter concern about him — his age, 81, and fitness for another term.

Yet members of Team Biden have responded by calling in a backhoe. From the president on down, they insist he's in it to win it. The numerous Democrats who say otherwise are being politely told to stick with the program, except when they're being rudely told to "cut that crap out," as Biden reportedly barked at Rep. Jason Crow of Colorado during a recent Zoom meeting.

The damage to Democratic prospects is not just a matter of the president's repeated memory lapses and confusion; his weakened speaking voice; and his flashes of inappropriate anger such as the one Crow experienced.

Much worse is the harm to the Democrats' brand as the party of facts, truth and science.

Republicans were supposed to be the party of Big Lies, the biggest being that Biden stole the 2020 election. Yet accepting Biden's insistence on running requires Democrats to believe, or pretend to believe, a falsehood: that he's sharp, fit and ready to govern another four years.

This is not to suggest moral equivalency between gaslighting about Biden's age-related deficiencies and Trump's lies about the 2020 election, which led to violence on Jan. 6, 2021.

Still, as whoppers go, "there is no reason to worry about Biden" is a good-size one, as confirmed by both basic medical knowledge regarding octogenarians and the evidence of ordinary people's senses.

Above all, Biden's continued candidacy implicitly discredits the main Democratic campaign theme: Democracy itself is on the line in 2024. Dire warnings about what will happen if Trump regains the White House can't be both (a) valid and (b) consistent with knowingly running a flawed opponent against him.

There was plenty of time for Democrats to start organizing alternatives after their surprisingly good showing in the 2022 midterms. They neglected to do so, probably because of inertia, combined with an expectation that the GOP would not be able to bounce back from 2022, either under Trump or some other standard-bearer such as Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. They assumed, wrongly, that criminal and civil cases would weaken Trump.

Now, a few family and staff enablers are reportedly reinforcing the president's instincts, which are those of a career politician loath to surrender the ultimate prize.

Biden has taken to speaking of himself this way: "Name me a foreign leader who thinks I'm not the most effective leader in the world on foreign policy. Tell me! Tell me who the hell that is!" he reportedly said on that Zoom call with Crow and other moderate Democratic House members.

They are trying to preempt the Dump Biden efforts, most recently by announcing his nomination could soon become a fait accompli, through a virtual vote of convention delegates before they assemble in person in Chicago on Aug. 19. The loyalists might truly believe they are doing the right thing. It would be messy to replace Biden at this late date; a successor would not necessarily be more successful against Trump.

As optimists contend, Biden's standing in national polls did not crater after June 27. He could win, despite everything, just as Democratic House and Senate candidates blew up the conventional wisdom about a "red wave" by winning in 2022.

But happy talk about Biden's polls — some coming from Biden himself — overlooks the facts that major swings are rare in a deeply polarized electorate and that several post-debate polls showed downward ticks in his support.

Team Biden called for last month's debate hoping that it would deliver his campaign a positive jolt; thus, bragging that it didn't hurt, that much, is basically just spin. He continues to trail, as he has for most of the past year, in battleground states that will decide the Electoral College outcome.

That data point comes both from published polls and from internal poll results newly leaked as part of a pressure campaign being waged by Democrats who want Biden out. Alas, indirect, back-channel tactics are no substitute for a united, forthright intervention. More party heavyweights would have to do what Rep. Adam Schiff of California did on Wednesday: cease hinting and openly call for Biden to quit the race.

Again, if the Dump Biden movement fails and Biden wins anyway, the Democrats who called for a different candidate can cheerfully feast on crow at a post-inauguration banquet. If Biden does stay, though, and Trump defeats him, history could be unkind indeed to the insiders who have not only reinforced Biden's stubbornness since June 27 but also spent so much effort suppressing honest discussion before that. Along with this president's legacy, they should be thinking of their own.

Charles Lane is a deputy opinion editor and columnist for The Washington Post.

Biden now is left with just one viable political option

By Jonah Goldberg
Tribune Content Agency

One can hardly fault Donald Trump for believing divine providence is on his side. He's had the most impressive lucky streak in living political memory.

While his debate performance was exceptional only if graded on a curve, his opponent's was a debacle by any objective standard. Then the Supreme Court handed down an exceedingly fortuitous ruling on presidential immunity, which at a minimum delayed the federal cases against him until after the election. And a lone concurrence by Justice Clarence Thomas in that decision apparently inspired Aileen Cannon, a federal judge in Florida, to throw out the classified documents case against him.

Oh, and an assassin shot at him and missed. More accurately: almost missed. A bullet sliced through the top of Trump's right ear; if he had turned his head a millimeter or two in the wrong direction, he would have been dead, and the graphic footage of his murder would now be serving as the backdrop of a dark new chapter of American life.

All of this happened on the eve of the Republican National Convention, buoying the party and consolidating support for Trump's candidacy. That's certainly understandable, albeit irrational in a very human way. There's nothing logical about the idea that being shot by a disturbed young man — and registered Republican — makes Trump more qualified to be president. But it makes emotional sense.

It also deprives President Joe Biden of the central rationale for his reelection, at least for the foreseeable future. Other than abortion rights, "protecting democracy" was going to be the issue Biden rode to reelection. In the current climate, however, attacking Trump as a threat to democracy sounds like extreme rhetoric — as it has been at times. But if Biden can no longer prosecute that case against Trump — after spending tens of millions of dollars on ads laying it out — what case does he have?

I reject that idea that criticizing Trump for his attempt to steal the last election or for his own extreme rhetoric is suddenly illegitimate. But political reality is what it is. What is even more profoundly fortunate for Trump is that the assassination attempt also buoyed Biden's candidacy, though in a very different way.

The Democratic Party is not enthusiastic about Biden. In an NBC News poll conducted shortly before the shooting, only 33% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents said they were pleased with their party's nominee, compared with 71% on the Republican side. There's no reason to think the assassination attempt will cause rank-and-file Democrats to rally around Biden.

But what it has done is cause senior Democrats who were determined to push Biden off the ticket to abandon hope and reconcile themselves to losing. "The presidential contest ended last night," an unidentified "veteran Democratic consultant" told NBC News after the assassination attempt. "(Trump) was already on track to win," a Democratic Senate aide told Semafor, "and the fact that he is now a victim of political violence rather than the perpetrator undermines Biden's core appeal."

I think that's right, and all of the reporting suggests Democrats have lost the will to do anything about it.

Biden's Oval Office address Sunday was not terrible. It struck a welcome, conciliatory tone, and its shades of unnecessary partisanship were restrained partly because they had to be. Biden is an avatar of the cultural status quo: He ran to restore normalcy and "unify" the country. Whether it's fair or not to judge him on that score, he failed.

And that's why the address was a missed opportunity. Biden could have announced that he was standing down as his party's nominee and in the process tried to pull Trump with him. He should have called for turning the page and giving the country a fresh start.

Biden is an unpopular incumbent who is not going to get more vigorous or cognitively acute. And he's certainly not going to have a moment like Trump had Saturday night.

Simply put, Biden's luck has run out. But he could still put an end to his opponent's improbable run of luck.

Jonah Goldberg is editor-in-chief of The Dispatch and the host of The Remnant podcast.

SCOREBOARD/SOCCER

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League

CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Signed OF Nick Senzel. Designated SS Dany Mendick for assignment. Optioned 3B Lenyn Sosa to Charlotte (IL).
MINNESOTA TWINS — Reinstated RHP Zack Weiss from the 60-day IL.
OAKLAND ATHLETICS — Optioned 3B Armando Alvarez to Las Vegas (PCL).
SEATTLE MARINERS — Selected the contract of INF Dustin Crenshaw from Billings (PL).

National League

COLORADO ROCKIES — Sent LHP Josh Rogers outright to Albuquerque (PCL).
MILWAUKEE BREWERS — Sent LHP Dallas Keuchel outright to Nashville (IL).
LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Sent LHP Jose E. Hernandez outright to the ACL Dodgers.
NEW YORK METS — Claimed LP Alex Young off waivers from San Francisco and optioned him to Syracuse (IL). Designated LHP Tyler Jay for assignment.
SAN DIEGO PADRES — Selected the contract of OF Tirso Ornelas from El Paso (PCL) and optioned him to El Paso.
SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS — Sent LHP Kolton Ingram outright to Sacramento (PCL).
WASHINGTON NATIONALS — Sent LHP Jose A. Ferrer to the FCL Nationals on a rehab assignment.

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association

GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS — Signed G/F Daeqwon Plowden to a two-way contract.
SAN ANTONIO SPURS — Signed C Charles Bassey.
TORONTO RAPTORS — Signed F Jamison Battle.

Women's National Basketball Association

CONNECTICUT SUN — Acquired G Marina Mabrey from the Chicago Sky in exchange for Gs Rachel Banham and Moriah Jefferson and a 2025 first round draft pick.

FOOTBALL
National Football League

CHICAGO BEARS — Placed OT Kiran Amegadjie on the active/non-football illness (NFI) list and DE Jamree Kromah on the active/physically unable to perform (PUP) list. Signed QB Caleb Williams and WR Rome Odunze.
CLEVELAND BROWNS — Signed PK Dustin Hopkins to a three-year contract extension.
DENVER BRONCOS — Placed RB Blake Watson on the active/nor-football illness (NFI) list.
GREEN BAY PACKERS — Placed DB Kitan Oladap on the active/non-football illness (NFI) list. Placed OT Donovan Jennings, TE Tucker Kraft, WR Alex McGough and OT Zach Tom on the active/physically unable to perform (PUP) list.
HOUSTON TEXANS — Signed WR Quintez Cephus, DE Malik Fisher and G Chris Reed. Waived G LaDarius Henderson, WR Jaxon Janke and DE Pheldarius Payne. Placed FB Andrew Beck, LB Del'Shawn Phillips and DB D'Angelo Ross on the active/physically unable to perform (PUP) list and DE Dylan Horton on the active/non-football illness (NFI) list.
KANSAS CITY CHIEFS — Signed WR Kyle Sheets. Placed DT Derrick Nnadi, DE Charles Omenihu, G Joe Thuney and CB Jaylen Watson on the active/physically unable to perform (PUP) list and DE B.J. Thompson on the active/non-football illness (NFI) list.
LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Placed LB Junior Colson on the active/non-football illness (NFI) list.
NEW YORK JETS — Signed draft WR Malachi Corley to a rookie contract.
PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Signed LB Tyler Matakevich to a one-year contract. Waived DB Jalen Elliott.

HOCKEY
National Hockey League

CAROLINA HURRICANES — Placed C Evgeny Kuznetsov on unconditional waivers. Signed C Jack Drury to a two-year contract.
COLORADO AVALANCHE — Named Dan Hinote associate head coach of the Colorado Eagles (AHL).

SOCCER
Major League Soccer

PHILADELPHIA UNION — Added Union II M CJ Olney as Olympic call up replacement. Signed M Cavan Sullivan to a short-term agreement.

National Women's Soccer League

ORLANDO PRIDE — Signed F Ally Watt to a contract through the 2025 season.
UTAH ROYALS FC — Signed Ms Ellie Boren , Shaelan Murison and D Darielle O'Brien as national team replacement players.

COLLEGE

ALABAMA A&M — Announced head men's basketball coach was named to head coach of Senegal Women's National Basketball Team.
RUTGERS — Named Mike McRae pitching and associate head coach for men's baseball.

PRO SOCCER

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Inter Miami CF	15	4	5	50	54	38
Cincinnati	15	6	3	48	43	30
Columbus	12	3	7	43	46	20
New York	9	4	11	38	39	30
NYCFC	11	9	4	37	35	29
Charlotte FC	10	8	6	36	28	25
Orlando City	9	9	6	33	38	37
Toronto FC	8	14	3	27	33	47
CF Montréal	6	9	9	27	34	48
Nashville	6	10	8	26	26	36
D.C. United	6	11	8	26	35	50
Atlanta	6	11	7	25	33	35
Chicago	6	11	7	25	29	40
Philadelphia	5	10	9	24	42	42
New England	7	14	1	22	22	46

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
LA Galaxy	13	5	7	46	47	34
LAFC	13	5	5	44	45	30
Real Salt Lake	12	4	8	44	49	31
Vancouver	11	7	5	38	40	31
Colorado	11	9	5	38	47	41
Seattle	10	7	7	37	34	26
Portland	10	8	6	36	48	39
Houston	9	7	7	34	31	27
Minn. United	8	10	6	30	38	41
Austin FC	8	10	6	30	26	35
FC Dallas	8	11	5	29	37	38
Sporting KC	6	14	5	23	40	51
St Louis City	4	10	10	22	31	45
San Jose	4	18	2	14	31	59

Note: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Wednesday's games

New York City FC 2, Atlanta 2, tie
Chicago 1, Cincinnati 0
Charlotte FC 1, Columbus 1, tie
Miami 3, Toronto FC 1
CF Montréal 2, New York 2, tie
Philadelphia 5, New England 1
FC Dallas 3, Austin FC 1
D.C. United 3, Minnesota 2
Orlando City 3, Nashville 0
LA Galaxy 3, Colorado 2
Houston 1, San Jose 0
Seattle 2, St Louis City 0
Vancouver 2, Sporting Kansas City 1
Real Salt Lake 1, Los Angeles FC 1, tie

Saturday's games

Columbus at Atlanta
Chicago at Miami
Toronto FC at CF Montréal
FC Dallas at New England
Cincinnati at New York
New York City FC at Orlando City
Nashville at Philadelphia
Charlotte FC at Austin FC
St Louis City at Sporting Kansas City
San Jose at Minnesota
Real Salt Lake at Colorado
Houston at Vancouver
Los Angeles FC at Seattle
Portland at LA Galaxy

PRO BASKETBALL

WNBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
New York	21	4	.840	—
Connecticut	18	6	.750	2½
Indiana	11	15	.423	10½
Chicago	10	14	.417	10½
Atlanta	7	17	.292	13½
Washington	6	19	.240	15

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	17	8	.680	—
Seattle	17	8	.680	—
Las Vegas	16	8	.667	½
Phoenix	13	12	.520	4
Los Angeles	6	18	.250	10½
Dallas	6	19	.240	11

Tuesday's games

Phoenix 96, Washington 87
Seattle 89, Los Angeles 83
New York 82, Connecticut 74
Chicago 93, Las Vegas 85

Wednesday's games

Minnesota 86, Atlanta 79
Dallas 101, Indiana 93

Thursday's games

No games scheduled.

Friday's games

No games scheduled.

Saturday's games

Team WNBA vs USAB Women's Nat. Team

TENNIS

European Open

Wednesday
At Am Rothenbaum Rot-Weiss Tennis Club
Hamburg, Germany
Purse: Euro 1,891,995
Surface: Red clay
Seedings in parentheses
Men's Singles
Round of 32

Alexander Zverev (1), Germany, def. Jesper De Jong, Netherlands, 6-2, 6-2.

Men's Singles
Round of 16

Luciano Darderi (7), Italy, def. Alexander Shevchenko, Russia, 6-3, 2-6, 6-3.
Francisco Cerundolo (4), Argentina, def. Maximilian Marterer, Germany, 6-0, 6-2.
Pedro Martinez, Spain, def. Ugo Blanchet, France, 6-4, 0-6, 7-5.
Sebastian Baez (3), Argentina, def. Dusan Lajovic, Serbia, 4-6, 7-5, 6-2.

Nordea Open

Wednesday
At Bastad Tennis Stadium
Bastad, Sweden
Purse: Euro 579,230
Surface: Red clay
Seedings in parentheses
Men's Singles
Round of 16

Thiago Monteiro, Brazil, def. Casper Ruud (3), Norway, 6-3, 6-3.
Roberto Carballes Baena, Spain, def. Denis Yevseyev, Kazakhstan, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2.
Duje Ajdukovic, Croatia, def. Pavel Kotov (8), Russia, 7-6 (7), 3-6, 6-3.
Thiago Agustin Tirante, Argentina, def. Andrey Rublev (1), Russia, 7-6 (5), 3-6, 6-4.

Men's Doubles
Quarterfinals

Gregoire Jacq and Manuel Guinard, France, def. Alexandre Muller and Luca van Assche, France, 6-4, 6-1.
Rafael Nadal, Spain, and Casper Ruud, Norway, def. Roman Safiullin, Russia, and Theo Arribage, France, 6-4, 3-6, 12-10.

Swiss Open

Wednesday
At Roy Emerson Arena
Gstaad, Switzerland
Purse: Euro 579,325
Surface: Red clay
Seedings in parentheses
Men's Singles
Round of 16

Fabio Fognini (7), Italy, def. Juan Pablo Varillas, Peru, 3-6, 7-6 (5), 7-5.
Tomas Martin Etcheverry (4), Argentina, def. Botic Van de Zandschulp, Netherlands, 6-2, 2-6, 6-3.
Stefanos Tsitsipas (1), Greece, def. Hamad Medjedovic, Serbia, 7-6 (6), 6-3.
Jan-Lennard Struff (5), Germany, def. Leandro Riedi, Switzerland, 7-6 (6), 7-6 (1).

Palermo Open

Wednesday
At Country Time Club
Palermo, Italy
Purse: Euro 232,244
Surface: Red clay
Seedings in parentheses
Women's Singles
Round of 32

Erika Andreeva, Russia, def. Darja Semenistaja, Latvia, 6-1, 6-2.

Women's Singles
Round of 16

Irina-Camelia Begu, Romania, def. Arantxa Rus, Netherlands, 6-2, 7-5.
Diane Parry (4), France, def. Jil Teichmann, Switzerland, 6-2, 6-7 (4), 6-2.
Karolina Muchova (2), Czechia, def. Noma Noha Akugue, Germany, 6-7 (0), 6-2, 6-3.
Astra Sharma, Australia, def. Ajla Tomljanovic, Australia, 6-4, 3-6, 6-1.

PRO BASEBALL

MLB
American League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Baltimore	58	38	.604	—
New York	58	40	.592	1
Boston	53	42	.558	4½
Tampa Bay	48	48	.500	10
Toronto	44	52	.458	14

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	58	37	.611	—
Minnesota	54	42	.563	4½
Kansas City	52	45	.536	7
Detroit	47	50	.485	12
Chicago	27	71	.276	32½

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Seattle	52	46	.531	—
Houston	50	46	.521	1
Texas	46	50	.479	5
Los Angeles	41	55	.427	10
Oakland	37	61	.378	15

National League

East Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	62	34	.646	—
Atlanta	53	42	.558	8½
New York	49	46	.516	12½
Washington	44	53	.454	18½
Miami	33	63	.344	29

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	55	42	.567	—
St. Louis	50	46	.521	4½
Pittsburgh	48	48	.500	6½
Cincinnati	47	50	.485	8
Chicago	47	51	.480	8½

West Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	56	41	.577	—
San Diego	50	49	.505	7
Arizona	49	48	.505	7
San Francisco	47	50	.485	9
Colorado	34	63	.351	22

Tuesday's game

2024 All-Star Game: American League 5, National League 3

Friday's games

Arizona (TBD) at Chicago Cubs (TBD)
Philadelphia (Nola 11-4) at Pittsburgh (TBD)
Cincinnati (TBD) at Washington (TBD)
Tampa Bay (Eflin 5-6) at N.Y. Yankees (Cole 2-1)
Detroit (TBD) at Toronto (TBD)
San Diego (Waldron 5-8) at Cleveland (Bibee 7-4)
N.Y. Mets (Manaea 6-3) at Miami (TBD)
St. Louis (TBD) at Atlanta (TBD)
Baltimore (TBD) at Texas (TBD)
Chicago White Sox (Flexen 2-8) at Kansas City (Wacha 6-6)
San Francisco (TBD) at Colorado (TBD)
L.A. Angels (TBD) at Oakland (TBD)
Boston (Pivetta 4-6) at L.A. Dodgers (TBD)
Houston (TBD) at Seattle (TBD)

SPORTLIGHT

July 19

1910 — Cy Young wins his 500th career game as the Cleveland Indians beat the Washington Senators 5-4 in 11 innings.
1922 — Johnny Weissmuller is the first swimmer to break the one-minute barrier for the 100-meter freestyle at 58.6s.
1936 — Future Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Feller makes his MLB debut.
1957 — Don Bowden is the first American to break the four-minute mile with a 3:58.7 time at Stockton, Calif.
1980 — The Summer Olympics open in Moscow without the United States and 64 other boycotting countries.
1986 — Tim Witherspoon KOs Frank Bruno in 11 for the heavyweight boxing title.
1987 — Nick Faldo of England wins the British Open by one shot when American Paul Azinger bogeys four times on the back nine.
1990 — Pete Rose, baseball's all-time hits leader, is sentenced to five months in prison and an additional three months in a halfway house for cheating on his taxes.
2008 — In the WNBA's first outdoor game, the Indiana Fever overcome the heat and humidity in New York to beat the Liberty 71-55. Arthur Ashe Stadium, home of the U.S. Open, had a basketball court laid on top of the tennis court.
2009 — Tom Watson squanders a chance to become golf's oldest major champion. The 59-year-old misses an 8-foot putt on the 72nd hole of the British Open, then loses a four-hole playoff by six shots to Stewart Cink.

July 20

1858 — Fans are charged for the first time to see a baseball game. Approximately 1,500 fans pay 50 cents to see the New York All-Stars beat Brooklyn 22-18 at Fashion Race Course on Long Island.
1958 — The PGA championship calls for medal play for the first time and Dow Finsterwald beats Billy Casper.
1975 — Sandra Palmer wins the U.S. Women's Open golf championship by four strokes over Nancy Lopez, Joanne Carner and Sandra Post.
1976 — Hank Aaron hits his 755th and last home run.
1980 — Tom Watson wins the British Open by four strokes over Lee Trevino. Watson shoots a 13-under 271 at Muirfield Golf Links at Gullane, Scotland. Watson becomes the fourth American to win three Open titles, joining Walter Hagen, Bobby Jones and Jack Nicklaus.
2002 — Tiger Woods, trying to win the third leg of the Grand Slam, shoots his worst round (81) as a professional, knocking himself out of contention.
2015 — Zach Johnson rolls in a 30-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole and outlasts Louis Oosthuizen and Marc Leishman in a three-man playoff to win the British Open. Jordan Spieth, looking to win his third straight major, falls one shot short of joining the playoff.
2020 — Cristiano Ronaldo becomes the first man to score 50 goals in Serie A, La Liga and the Premier League.

JONATHAN TANNENWALD/AP

Cavan Sullivan, 14, became the youngest player to appear in an MLS match Wednesday night.

14-year-old is youngest ever in MLS

Associated Press

CHESTER, Pa. — Fourteen-year-old Philadelphia Union midfielder Cavan Sullivan became the youngest player in Major League Soccer history Wednesday night — and probably the youngest to play in any of the biggest professional sports leagues in the world.

Sullivan was 14 years, 293 days old when he entered Philadelphia's home game as a substitute in the 85th minute against the New England Revolution. That makes him about two weeks younger than Freddy Adu when he made his MLS debut in 2004 for DC United.

Sullivan made his debut moments after his brother, 20-year-old Quinn, scored a goal to put Philadelphia up 5-1.

Cavan Sullivan, who replaced forward Tai Baribo, got a handful of touches in the final minutes of the Union's blowout win. He even recorded his first shot on goal, blasting it at New England's net from outside the penalty area in the final minute of injury time, but it was comfortably saved by Aljaz Ivacic.

"Big congrats to Cavan Sullivan for his record breaking debut today," Adu wrote on social media. "That's a hard record to break and the kid did it. Well done and good luck my man."

Sullivan is younger than any player who has appeared in the NBA, NHL, NFL, NWSL, WNBA or Major League Baseball since at least 1970, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. Andrew Bynum, who debuted for the Los Angeles Lakers in 2005 at the age of 18 years, 6 days, holds that mark.

The youngest debut in the five biggest soccer leagues around the world since at least 1988, according to FBRef.com, was Ethan Nwaneri, who came on for Arsenal in 2022 at 15 years, 181 days.

BRITISH OPEN

Changing weather can have major impact

BY DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

TROON, Scotland — Justin Thomas made his British Open debut at Royal Troon eight years ago, and it taught him everything he needs to know about what can make this major so maddening.

It had nothing to do with gorse bushes or pot bunkers. It was about weather and tee times.

"I was in the bad one," Thomas said.

By that he meant the bad side of the draw, and it's part of the charm — or curse — of the Open.

It was fairly benign in the opening round at Royal Troon in 2016, all the way through Friday morning until 30 mph wind and a driving rain made players in the afternoon feel they were on a different course than those who played early.

So severe was the change in weather that the leading 14 players going into the weekend, including Henrik Stenson and Phil Mickelson, came from one side of the draw.

"I've never in my life grinded so hard to finish 50th," Thomas said. "I shot 77 and made the cut by one. The worst part was Saturday and Sunday. The morning was the worst and you couldn't gain any ground."

Summer daylight hours in the United Kingdom enable players to start off one tee for the entire day. Justin Leonard hit the opening tee shot on Thursday at 6:30 a.m. (0530 GMT). Sam Horsfield was the last to play, teeing off at about 4:30 p.m.

That allows the weather to play a massive role. That happens elsewhere, but it is more pronounced in links golf. Sometimes the worst of it is in the morning, as in 2008 when Rich Beem and Sandy Lyle walked off Royal Birkdale after nine and 10 holes, respectively.

The forecast for the start of the 152nd Open was for off-and-on rain during the day with gusts in the 20 mph range early in the afternoon — about the time Rory McIlroy and Jon Rahm finished their rounds — and then easing late. And then more gusts Friday afternoon.

SCOTT HEPPELL/AP

Justin Thomas of the United States plays from the rough on the 16th hole during the opening round of the British Open at Royal Troon golf club in Troon, Scotland, on Thursday.

It's worth noting the forecast seems to change by the day. No one will really know until they're in the clear, or feeling like they are being blown into the Irish sea.

In recent times, Louis Oosthuizen caught the good side of the draw in St. Andrews. It was relatively calm all of Thursday — McIlroy opened with a 63 in 2010 — and then the wind became so fierce in the afternoon that McIlroy shot 80.

Oosthuizen finished his 65-67 start right before the wind came through. His name stayed atop the leaderboard for 11 hours that day and he led by five when it was over and wound up winning by seven shots. Good golf and a good draw go a long way.

"It's part and parcel of the Open. There's always good draws and bad draws," Tommy Fleetwood said. "Generally if you get unlucky and there is a good side and a bad side, that's wiping out half the field already. The good news is if you're on the good side. That's half of them gone and you only have to beat half the field.

"But that's always been part of the Open and that's the beauty of it," he said. "You have to be ready for whatever the conditions bring, along with the golf course. It's very important to embrace what can happen."

Woods may not play every major for much longer

BY DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

TROON, Scotland — Tiger Woods is playing all four majors for the first time since 2019, which at the start of the year would have been cause for great optimism.

The results paint a different picture.

He set a Masters record by making his 24th consecutive cut at Augusta National. And then he was gone by the weekend at the PGA Championship and the U.S. Open. He hasn't broken par since a 69 in the second round of the 2022 PGA Championship, and he needed that simply to make the cut.

His performance is starting to raise questions of how much longer he will play — how much longer he should play — to avoid lasting memories of a great champion slapping it around.

Leave it to Colin Montgomerie to put those thoughts into words found in a Times of London interview ahead of the British Open, when he said at one point, "What the hell is he doing?"

The entirety of what Montgomerie told the Times: "I hope people remember Tiger as Tiger was, the passion and the charismatic aura around him. There is none of that now. At Pinehurst he did not seem to enjoy a single shot and you think, 'What the hell is he doing?' He's coming to Troon and he won't enjoy it there, either."

Woods already has enjoyed one aspect of his stay at Royal Troon. That came Tuesday when he was asked about Montgomerie's comments. Woods relishes a chance to push back on criticism, particularly when the source is someone known for never winning a major.

"Well, as a past champion, I'm exempt until I'm 60," Woods said, speaking to his time at the British Open. "Colin's not. He's not a past champion, so he's not exempt. So he doesn't get the opportunity to make that decision. I do."

It brought up memories of an Open tradition some 20 years ago. Stewart McDougal was the press officer at the time, and he would ask Open champions who came into the press center to sign the table. At the end of the week, McDougal auctioned off the table for charity.

Montgomerie came in one day, saw all the signatures on the table and reached for a pen.

"I'm sorry, Colin," McDougal told him. "It's only for Open champions."

Poor Monty.

The questions are fair enough, but there is something to be said about golfers being able to decide when their time is done. And given all that Woods has done in the game, it's probably not the best idea to show him the door no matter what numbers he is posting.

His 82 in the third round of the Masters was his highest in a major. The 78 on the Old Course two years ago in what likely will be his final time at St. Andrews.

He still draws the biggest crowd and generates the loudest buzz. And two numbers worth remembering are four and 15. He had four surgeries on his lower back, the last one to fuse his spine, and two years later he won his 15th major at the Masters.

Another number worth noting is 59 — the age of Tom Watson when he was an 8-foot par putt away from winning the British Open at Turnberry in 2009. The year before, Greg Norman was 53 when he had the 54-hole lead at Royal Birkdale.

Courses for the U.S. majors might be getting too big for the 48-year-old Woods, whose body is held together by hardware. But there is something about links golf that is timeless.

"The older you get, the less you can carry the golf ball," Woods said. "But over here, you can run the golf ball 100 yards if you get the right wind and the right trajectory. ... You can play on the ground. You can burn it on the ground with a 1-iron, 2-iron, 3-wood, whatever.

"I think that's one of the reasons why you see older champions up there on the board because they're not forced to have to carry the ball 320 yards."

PETER MORRISON/AP

Having won one major in the past 16 years, Tiger Woods' future remains questionable despite his return to playing all four majors this year.

WNBA/COLLEGE FOOTBALL

TONY GUTIERREZ/AP

The Indiana Fever's Caitlin Clark drives to the basket past the Dallas Wings' Teaira McCowan in the first half of a WNBA game Wednesday in Arlington, Texas. Clark set a WNBA single-game record with 19 assists.

Clark savors long break after record-setting night

BY SCHUYLER DIXON
Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — As much as she wanted to play in the Olympics, Caitlin Clark savors the thought of some time off during the WNBA's monthlong hiatus for the Paris Games.

Never mind that Indiana's rookie sensation didn't really look as if she needed any while setting a WNBA record with 19 assists in the Fever's final game before the break.

"I feel like I've been nonstop go since, like, probably September of last year," Clark said before her milestone moment Wednesday night in a 101-93 loss to the Dallas Wings.

And that's because she has.

Two weeks after her second consecutive trip to the national championship game with Iowa, Clark was the No. 1 overall pick in the WNBA draft.

About another three weeks later, her preseason debut came in a sold-out arena on the University of Texas at Arlington campus, the same place she set the assists record in front of another sellout.

Clark's long break isn't quite here because she will play for the WNBA All-Stars against the U.S. women's Olympic team in Phoenix on Saturday night.

Soon enough, Clark will take about a week off before the Fever get into some sort of routine to try to stay sharp for after the break. Most of the roster will be home for the Olympics. Indiana's first game back is Aug. 16 at home against Phoenix.

"I think it'll be really good for myself and my body," Clark said. "You're getting close to a full year of just playing basketball nonstop. So it'll probably be a little weird for me not playing games. But I think it's definitely going to be good for my body."

Clark scored 24 points despite going 2 of 9 from deep in the loss to the Wings.

Clark leads all rookies at 17.1 points per game and leads everybody at 8.2 assists. Over the past nine games, Clark is averaging 11.9 assists.

"She's going to get a breather and get some rest. I think it's just great," Fever coach Christie Sides said. "She's just been going so hard for quite some time now. I think it's going to help her so much just to kind of decompress."

Since Iowa's opener last Nov. 6, Clark has played 65 games that counted and two that didn't — Indiana's brief exhibition season.

Along the way, Clark was an involuntary participant in discussions of race amid the meteoric rise of a young, white star, and hard fouls on her brought more attention than usual.

Chicago's Chennedy Carter had one upgraded to a flagrant foul a day after it happened, and after Carter's coach, Teresa Weatherspoon, told her guard the play wasn't appropriate.

The off-the-court drama coincided with the Fever's rough start against a difficult schedule. They rebounded from 1-8 by going 10-7 the rest of the way before the break and are now in the playoff picture.

If Indiana advances to the postseason in September, that'll be more than a year since Clark started ramping up for her final season with the Hawkeyes, which ended with a second consecutive loss in the NCAA title game.

"Honestly, I feel pretty good," Clark said. "I think the beginning of the season was probably the most difficult for me. Just the adjustment of, first of all, playing in this league. And then second of all, the schedule that we had, playing a game, having a day off, playing a game.

"I think once we really kind of got into a flow and got a few wins under our belt and had a little more practice time, things have settled down and flowed a little better. I feel like my feet are definitely getting under me more and starting to build more and more confidence."

QBs Arnold, Iamaleava are wild cards in SEC

BY RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

DALLAS — Southeastern Conference quarterbacks fall into a few categories this year.

There are the cover boys: Texas' Quinn Ewers, Georgia's Carson Beck and Alabama's Jalen Milroe who are all featured on the deluxe version of the new EA Sports College Football video game.

The experienced entrenched starters: Mississippi's Jaxson Dart, Missouri's Brady Cook and Florida's Graham Mertz are in that group.

Iamaleava

There are the new transfers such as Taylen Green at Arkansas and Brock Vandagriff at Kentucky and high-upside veterans like LSU's Garrett Nussmeier and Texas A&M's Conner Weigman, who have shown glimpses of star potential.

And then there are maybe the biggest wild cards, a couple of former five-stars who have been handed the reins to blue blood programs: Oklahoma's Jackson Arnold and Tennessee's Nico Iamaleava have the potential to turn their teams into College Football Playoff contenders.

The Sooners made their SEC Media Days debut Tuesday and Arnold was the main attraction, drawing a three-deep crowd of reporters around his dais.

"What I feel best about and have the most peace about is his ability to be able to handle the highs and the lows, the challenges, the success, the failure that a season will bring you," Oklahoma coach Brent Venables said. "Nobody is more competent or more ready, even though he's a young player, and we've got to, in some ways, be the headlights for him."

Tennessee coach Josh Heupel decided to leave his first-year starter at home, but don't mistake that for a lack of confidence for Iamaleava.

"We want him to hit the ground running," Heupel said. "He's a young quarterback. Played really well in the bowl game. He's going to continue to grow. Through all of his experiences here throughout the course of the season, he's only going to continue to get better from all of those. But we expect him to play at a really high level from the very beginning, and we need that from him."

The excitement among Volunteers fans about the Long Beach, Calif., quarterback was stoked by his performance in a 35-0 victory against a strong Iowa defense in the Citrus Bowl.

"I think it's built a little bit of aura of confidence around him," Tennessee center Cooper Mays said.

The 6-foot-6 Iamaleava ran for three touchdowns and threw a TD pass against the Hawkeyes.

Arnold also started a bowl game last season after Dillon Gabriel read the room in Norman, Okla., and went back into the transfer portal. Gabriel will be QB1 at Oregon.

The Sooners got a look at their future against Arizona in the Alamo Bowl and it was a wild ride. Arnold threw for 361 yards and two touchdowns, but also had three passes intercepted in a 38-24 loss to the Wildcats.

Arnold, from Denton, Texas, said the experience helped boost his confidence while also giving him a dose of reality.

"The turnovers are unacceptable, especially coming into the SEC," he said.

Arnold spent the offseason trying to assert himself on the field and off.

"I think my biggest part of leadership that I focused on this offseason was being a vocal leader, stepping up through conditioning or working out or whatever. Just being vocal for those guys and picking them up," he said.

Arnold and Iamaleava meet Sept. 21 when the SEC era at Oklahoma begins with a home game against Tennessee.

JEFFREY MCWHORTER/AP

Oklahoma quarterback Jackson Arnold speaks during Southeastern Conference football media days Tuesday in Dallas.

MLB/OLYMPICS

Alonso among stars who need big second half for free agency

BY DAVID BRANDT
Associated Press

PHOENIX — Pete Alonso's disappointing performance in this year's Home Run Derby wasn't a particularly big deal for the future of his big-league career.

His play over the next three months could be a different story.

The 29-year-old is one of the most coveted free agents in Major League Baseball for the upcoming offseason and could make himself a lot of money — or potentially lose a lot of it — depending on how he plays in the second half of the season.

Alonso played in his fourth All-Star game on Tuesday night, making the National League team despite a relatively lackluster first half. He's hitting .240 with 19 homers and 51 RBIs and a career-low .772 OPS. Those numbers might be pretty good for most players, but for a man who wants to hit the market as one of the game's elite players, it's not up to his standards.

Alonso said he's not worried about his personal situation. He just wants to play well so his New York Mets make the playoffs — which would happen if the season ended with the first half.

"I don't dwell on it at all because I'm just focused on winning games and I'm just really focused on doing what I can every single day to help the team in a positive way," Alonso said. "I'm honestly just focusing on performing and doing the best I can to help my team win. I'm just focused on the season at hand."

Here are a few other potential free agents who are looking to raise their stock in the second half:

1B Paul Goldschmidt, Cardinals: Does the 36-year-old slugger have anything left in the tank for another contract? He was the National League MVP in 2022, but has regressed in a hurry since that point. The first baseman is hitting just .230 with 13 homers, 37 RBIs and a career-low .664 OPS.

3B Alex Bregman, Astros: The 30-year-old has bounced back somewhat from a very slow start, posting a .256 average, 12 homers and .730 OPS through 92 games. But those numbers are still below his career averages. A big second half would help ease fears that he's on the downhill side of his career.

OF Juan Soto, Yankees: His first half hasn't been a problem. Far from it. The 25-year-old was one of the game's best players in the first half of the season, batting .295 with 23 homers and a robust .985 OPS. He's been worth 5.0 WAR through 94 games. But if he can continue this pace, or even push it forward slightly, the bidding war in the upcoming offseason could be close to the Ohtani-style extravaganza of last offseason.

SP Walker Buehler, Dodgers: The two-time All-Star returned earlier this year from his second Tommy John surgery and things haven't gone particularly well. The right-hander is 1-4 with a 5.84 ERA through eight starts, averaging just more than four innings per start. He was one of the game's elite pitchers in 2021 and doesn't turn 30 until later this month, but it's fair to wonder if he'll ever be the same.

Wild card races

Nearly 100 games into this season, there are still 25 teams with legitimate playoff aspirations.

The National League wild card race is shaping up to be particularly tight. The St. Louis Cardinals (50-46), New York Mets (49-46), Arizona Diamondbacks (49-48), San Diego Padres (50-49), Pittsburgh Pirates (48-48), San Francisco Giants (47-50), Cincinnati Reds (47-50) and Chicago Cubs (47-51) are separated by just four games in the standings.

The Cardinals and Mets would make the playoffs if the season ended today.

LM OTERO/AP

Pete Alonso, of the New York Mets, in introduced before the MLB All-Star Home Run Derby on Monday in Arlington, Texas.

JEAN-FRANCOIS BADIAS/AP

Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina plays a shot against Ukraine's Elina Svitolina during the French Open at Roland Garros on June 3. After a month on grass courts in preparation for Wimbledon, players return to clay.

Tennis players back on clay after grass at Wimbledon

BY HOWARD FENDRICH
Associated Press

PARIS — The competition surface doesn't change for most Olympic sports. A pool's a pool. A track's a track. A wrestling mat's a mat. And so on. Tennis? That's a whole other story, with tournaments contested on clay, hard or grass courts — and now there's a shift for the Paris Games.

For the first time in more than 30 years, the tennis competition at an Olympics will be held on red clay, which means players who recently made the adjustment from the dirt at the French Open in early June to grass at Wimbledon in early July will need to reverse course again in short order.

The "terre battue" at Roland Garros used for the French Open hosts Olympic matches starting July 27 — two weeks after Wimbledon wrapped up with singles titles for Barbora Krejcikova of the Czech Republic and Carlos Alcaraz of Spain — and the transition back to that site is more concerning to some athletes than others.

"That'll definitely be interesting. But everyone's kind of doing it. We'll all be in the same boat," said Jessica Pegula, an American ranked in the top 10 who is expected to play singles, women's doubles with U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff and perhaps mixed doubles, too. "I usually don't struggle too much with switching. And I like how the courts play there. It might be easier than some other places we play on clay. When the weather is warm in Paris, it plays pretty true. There's a good speed. There's not a lot to get used to."

For her, maybe.

"It's going to be the first time for me, going from grass to clay," said Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan, the 2022 Wimbledon champion and a semifinalist there this month. "It's not easy. Physically, it's not easy, (or) mentally."

One additional factor on some players' minds: There will be another brief turnaround after the Olympics to prepare for the move to the hard courts ahead of the U.S. Open, which starts in late August. That's less than a month after the medals are awarded in France.

"It's awful for the schedule," said Taylor Fritz, Pegula's teammate for the United States and someone who just reached the quarterfinals at the All England Club. "It makes absolutely no sense. It screws everything up, for sure."

Tennis becomes a different sport, in some key ways, depending on where it's being played.

"You have to adapt to it. ... It's going to be weird, obviously, going back on the clay quickly," said Cam Norrie, who will represent Britain at the Olympics, "but we're changing surface and changing variables all the time."

Clay is softer and slower, which can dull the power on serves and groundstrokes and create longer exchanges, putting a premium on stamina, while the grittiness can magnify the effect of heavy topspin. Grass is speedier and balls bounce lower. Hard courts tend to produce truer, midrange bounces and will generally reward those who go for point-ending shots.

The biggest difference among them might be the footwork. Clay requires sliding. Grass is more about choppy steps, to avoid slipping. Hard courts generally do not cause as many falls as either of the others.

"For a clay-court player, the adjustment's not that hard," 1989 French Open champion Michael Chang said. "For (people) that have grown up playing on the surface, you just know the surface so well."

So someone like Iga Swiatek, who has won four of the past five French Opens, should feel comfortable and confident on clay, by far her best surface.

The same goes, of course, for Rafael Nadal, a 14-time champion at Roland Garros. Novak Djokovic has won at least three Grand Slam titles at each of the sport's biggest events, the only man to do so, and the adjustments required come rather naturally to him.

Then again, Alcaraz, whose title at Roland Garros this year made him, at 21, the youngest man to win a major trophy on clay, hard and grass courts, had this to say about going from London to Paris: "It's not easy to change surfaces in just a week."

OLYMPICS

Tokyo champ traverses troubled waters

US canoeist Harrison seeks repeat gold in women's 200 sprint

BY CLIFF BRUNT
Associated Press

Nevin Harrison's dreams came true in Tokyo when she won the inaugural Olympic women's canoe sprint 200 at age 19.

Much of what followed the American's gold-medal moment has seemed more like a nightmare.

The Seattle native fought through chronic lower back pain that made it hard for her to get out of bed at times last summer. She has dealt with a hamstring injury and had issues with her previous coach. As her results fell short of boosted expectations, she said some questioned if she would be a one-hit wonder.

Harrison

"Once you have a big accomplishment like that, it becomes everybody's business instead of just yours," she said.

She said a sports psychologist helped her, and now she's back and ready to go for the Paris Olympics with a new coach in Joseph Harper. She said she wants to do this right.

"There was no other person that was going to get me to where I wanted to be," said Harrison, now 22. "And if I continued in that negative headspace and really was just a complete mess, that I wasn't going to reach my goals. And then I was going to kind of waste all this time chasing after something that I was blowing for myself."

Doing it right, she believes, includes making another run at gold. She wants to do it again, with the benefit of the wisdom she's gained in the past three years.

"I think a good motivator is knowing the feeling of how it feels to win a gold," she said. "It's not like, 'It would be so amazing to do that.' It's like, I know exactly how that felt, and that's exactly how I want to feel again. So it's kind of like knowing the feeling that I'm searching for, which is helpful."

Harrison said the lead-up to this Olympics is much different. She said there is more pressure this time, but she's learned to embrace the attention.

Harper said Harrison became a victim of her success. She knocked off Canada's Laurence Vincent Lapointe, a multiple-time world champion, to win in 2021. Harper said Harrison's upset motivated the competition.

"She raised the bar so high with her performance in Tokyo that it's her fault that it's not as easy as it was," Harper said. "I'm not saying it was easy, but it's her, fault that all the other girls in the world are now trying to get to the bar that she raised too. And a lot of them have reached these newer heights."

Harper said Harrison remains among the world's best because of her power and explosiveness, coupled with a rare work ethic.

It hasn't been all bad for Harrison since winning the gold — she won the world championship in the 200 sprint in 2022, qualified for the U.S. Olympic quota spot by finishing fourth at the 2023 world championships and won the U.S. Olympic trials in March.

Harper said Harrison knows how to "turn on the game face" and believes she is is a threat in Paris.

"She's very, very determined that way," he said. "Like, second place is not an option for her. I think a common theme of all the greats in all the different sports is people say that athlete hates to lose. Nobody likes to lose. But the greats hate to lose with a passion."

AP

Nevin Harrison, of the United States, competes in a women's canoe single 200m semifinal during the Tokyo Olympics. Since winning gold at 19, Harrison has battled injuries and issues with her previous coach while working her way back to this year's games in Paris.

Comeback: All signs point toward gold in 100 for Richardson

FROM PAGE 48

guments about race, drugs, anti-doping rules and an Olympic ecosphere that is still largely run (and reported on) by older, white men.

"It's not a goal of mine to be known," Richardson said. "But I definitely don't want to be known for one thing. No one does. It's important for me to be the best person I can be in all that matters to me, like family, community and the work that I do."

Media struggles

That insight came out of the two questions Richardson agreed to answer from The Associated Press as part of her sponsorship with Powerade. Many of her interviews over the past year or more have come with those sort of brand-placement trade-offs attached.

She has offered other clues on social media, including posts in which she has unflinchingly addressed her mental-health issues, mentioning her thoughts about suicide during her teen years while also offering hope to others.

At the world championships last year, there were remnants of the fracture between Richardson and the media. The behind-the-scenes Netflix series "SPRINT" showed clips of testy exchanges between her and reporters.

Reflecting on the media's role in telling her story, she said in the documentary: "I feel like in the media, every move I make, there's a lot of noise about it. You get what you get and you get what you give. OK, so that's just me."

This year, her occasional in-person exchanges with reporters — most notably at the U.S. Olympic trials, where she won her second straight national title in June — have been less tense. Her comments centered on different variations of the same theme: personal growth, accountability, family.

"I would say in the past few years, I've grown to have a better understanding of myself," Richardson said.

"I have a deeper respect and appreciation for the role I have in the sport, as well as my responsibility to the people who believe and support me."

Grandmother's guidance

The closest Richardson came to discussing the pain she endured as a child came in a friendly interview this summer with Vogue online, one she gave with the caveat that she not discuss her biological mother or the drug test.

"Everything I am, it's because of that strong, wise Black woman," she said of her grandmother, Betty Harp, who raised her and can usually be found sitting trackside for Richardson's biggest races. "Everything. I mean, I've been blessed, because I've had other people in my life who have helped me along. But the foundation, that's her."

Richardson has plenty of time to develop as an athlete and a public figure. Some sprinters don't hit their peak until their late 20s.

The cruel fact is that for the public to care, long-term, about any athlete in a sport that does not generate headlines in non-Olympic years, then winning a gold medal is the main way to build a legacy.

The favorite

All signs point toward Richardson getting that win in the Olympic 100-meter final, set for Aug. 3 at the Stade de France.

She won the Olympic trials in 10.71 seconds — the best time in the world this year. One of her main challengers, Shericka Jackson of Jamaica, pulled up lame in a tune-up race earlier this month, bringing her fitness for the Olympics into question.

Jamaica's Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce has four more Olympics and eight more Olympic medals than Richardson. Experience matters on the sport's biggest stage, but is it enough to outclass Richardson's unmatched speed in 2024?

"As an athlete, when you know you've got the talent and all eyes are on you, it's tough," sprint great Michael Johnson said. "And once you actually prove to yourself, and prove to the world that, 'Hey, I can do this,' it becomes a huge relief" that might free her up for further success.

A star is born

The gold medal is still out there to be captured, but in some ways, Richardson already has won.

Her face was plastered all over Eugene, Ore., during the Olympic trials, courtesy of her Nike shoe deal. She has been a nonstop presence in NBC's Olympic promotions.

Richardson is not the Simone Biles of these Olympics, but once gymnastics is over and the spotlight heads to the track, there will be no more compelling character.

"The entire world was involved and got caught up in the magic of who Sha'Carri is," said Olympic gold medalist Sanya Richards-Ross, who covers track for NBC. "And we've had a wonderful opportunity to watch her deal with all of that, and to mature and grow. It's been beautiful to see how she's now standing in what it means to be the face of the sprints. It comes with a lot."

A work in progress

Great as Richardson was in the 100, there was a twinge of disappointment after she finished fourth in the 200 — an event where she captured the bronze at worlds last year. That means she won't have a chance to win the hallowed sprint double, the way Noah Lyles will on the men's side.

But if there was a single moment that showed Richardson for everything she is as an athlete, it might have come in her very first race that week, a preliminary heat of the 100. She stumbled out of the starting block, nearly wobbled out of her lane and had to make up ground to win.

In brief comments after the race, she was the first to concede that she's far from a finished product — still trying to get better every day under the demanding eye of her coach, Dennis Mitchell.

Only after she crossed the line did everyone realize Richardson had run that 100 in 10.88 seconds with her right shoelace untied.

So, there she was: Imperfect, a work in progress, a mysterious racer still charting her course while owning the spotlight because, in the end, she was still faster than everyone else.

OLYMPICS

Paris police seal off Seine ahead of opening ceremony

Associated Press

PARIS — A special kind of iron curtain came down across central Paris on Thursday, with the beginning of an Olympic anti-terrorism perimeter along the banks of the River Seine sealing off a miles-long area to Parisians and tourists who hadn't applied in advance for a pass.

The words on many lips were "QR code," the pass that grants access beyond snaking metal barriers that delineate the security zone set up to protect the Olympic Games' opening ceremony July 26.

"I didn't know it started today," said Emmanuelle Witt, a 35-year-old communications freelancer who was stopped by police near the Alma bridge while biking across town. She desperately went on her phone to fill out the online form to get her QR code, unaware that the vetting process could take several days.

Those with the precious code — either on their phones or printed out on pieces of paper — passed smoothly past police checkpoints at gaps in the barriers taller than most people.

Those without got mostly turned away — with no amount of grumbling and cajoling making officers budge.

"That's too much, that's over the top, that whole thing is a pain," grumbled Nassim Bennamou, a delivery man who was denied access to the street leading to Notre Dame Cathedral on his scooter.

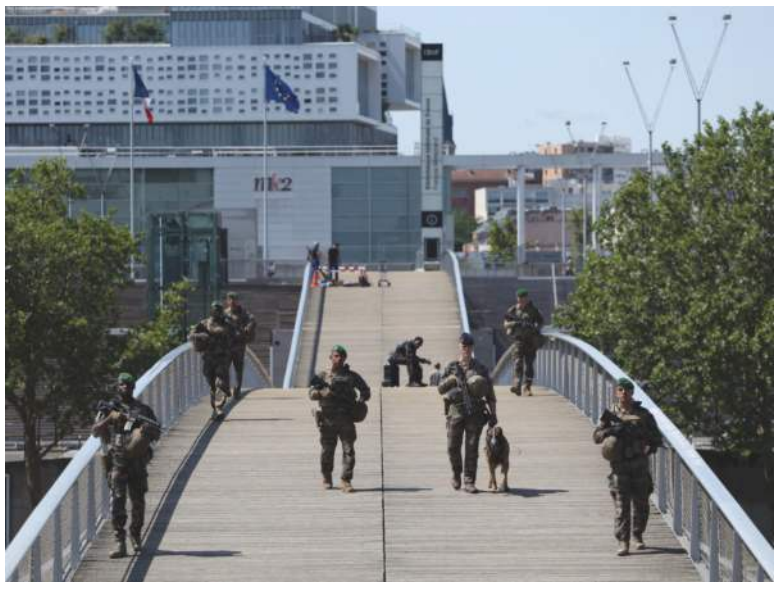
"Even the GPS is confused, I have no idea how I'm going to work today," he added.

While authorities announced the code system last year and have been meeting with local residents for months to explain the restrictions, not everyone was aware. Officers patiently explained to visitors without the pass how to reach iconic Paris monuments without going through the restricted zone.

"We had no idea we needed a QR code," said Takao Sakamoto, 55, who was denied access to the Eiffel Tower near the Bir Hakeim Metro station. Visiting from Japan with his wife, he took a photo of the tower from a distance, behind fences and police cars. "That will do," Sakamoto remarked with despair.

On the other hand, visitors who were lucky enough to come across officers who leniently let them pass without QR codes and others who'd equipped themselves with them were treated to the sight of near-empty riverside boulevards that, in normal times, heave with traffic.

"There's no one around!" sang a happy cyclist on a street he had largely to himself. With police seemingly everywhere, another man walking past a riverside café with fewer than usual customers loudly quipped: "You can leave your money and cell phones on the tables, there's definitely no thieves!"



AURELIEN MORISSARD/AP

Soldiers patrol on a footbridge over the Seine river Wednesday in Paris.

"It's surreal, it really feels like we're the only ones here," said Sarah Bartnicka from Canada. Enjoying a morning jog with a friend, the 29-year-old took a selfie with a police officer on the deserted Iéna bridge to capture the moment.

Paris has repeatedly suffered deadly extremist attacks, most notably in 2015. Up to 45,000 police and gendarmes as well as 10,000 soldiers are being deployed for Olympic security.

"I understand why they're doing this," said Carla Money, a 64-year-old American who managed to pass the barriers with her family.

The perimeter went into effect early Thursday morning and will last through the ceremony. As an exception, Paris has decided to hold the opening of its first Games in a century on the river rather than in a stadium, like previous host cities. Most of the river security measures will be lifted after the show.

STARS AND STRIPES

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OLYMPICS

Curry, US men's basketball rout Serbia

By Kyle Hightower
Associated Press

Stephen Curry was relatively quiet offensively during the U.S. Olympic team's first two exhibitions before the Paris Games.

He got a lot more assertive on Wednesday with his official Olympic debut less than two weeks away.

Curry scored 24 points, Bam Adebayo added 17 and the United States beat Serbia 105-79 to improve to 3-0 in its five-game slate of exhibitions in advance of the Paris Olympics.

Anthony Davis finished with seven points, six rebounds and six blocks, helping to lead a U.S. defensive effort that limited Serbia throughout. Anthony Edwards had 16 points, and LeBron James added 11.

Curry scored the first nine points for the U.S. in a flurry that James said was by design.

"We drew it up for that particular reason, to get him going," James said. "He sees one go through the hoop, you see what it opens up for the rest of his game, for the rest of the game for all of us. He set the tone."

The U.S. led by as many as 31 points in the last of a pair of warmup games in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The Americans go to London to play two more tuneups before heading to France. The first is Saturday against South Sudan, followed by a matchup with Germany on Monday at London's O2 Arena.

Altaf Qadri/AP

Stephen Curry takes a selfie with a fan after an exhibition game against Serbia ahead of the Paris Olympic basketball tournament.

U.S. coach Steve Kerr likes the progress his team has made and said its ability to overwhelm teams with different defensive looks will be vital.

"I think the identity of the team is our depth, the strength of the team is the depth," Kerr said. "If we can play in 4- or 5-minute bursts of intense defense, hitting bodies, rebounding, being physical, then it makes sense to play that way. We'll see if we can keep doing it."

The U.S. had an uneven start before using a 16-2 run in the second quarter to take a 56-42 advantage and led 59-45 at halftime.

Nikola Jokic had 16 points and 11 rebounds for Serbia. Aleksa Avramovic added 14 points. Serbia was playing its second game in two days, coming off a loss to Australia on Tuesday in which it rested captain Bogdan Bogdanovic.

Serbia was without Bogdanovic for the second straight game as it struggled offensively, shooting just 41% (29 of 71). The U.S. also held a 30-21 rebounding edge. Adebayo and Davis combined for 14 rebounds.

"Bam and AD together are really something," Kerr said. "Just the switching, but they can also protect the rim and be in a drop if we go to that coverage."

Wednesday's matchup was an important preview for Serbia and U.S., which will both compete in Group C at the Olympics. They open their quests for gold against each other July 28.

Finishing strong

After nearly squandering a big lead in its narrow victory over Australia on Monday, there was no such letdown for the U.S. this time.

The Americans led by 25 after three quarters and quickly increased it to 30 in the final quarter.

Lineup shuffle

The U.S. used its third different starting lineup, going with Curry, Jrue Holiday, Jayson Tatum, LeBron James and Joel Embiid.

The only constants over the three exhibitions have been Curry, James and Embiid.

One of the reason's Embiid's presence on the roster was a desire for the U.S. coaching staff this cycle was to counter bigger teams like Serbia, which features a trio of 7-footers.

Embiid's conditioning still isn't at its peak. But he was active on both ends, finding cutters on the offensive end and being an active deterrent in the lane on defense.

Dutch rower competing 2 years after life-threatening bike crash

By Tales Azzoni
Associated Press

Two years ago, doctors were by the hospital bed of Dutch rower Marloes Oldenburg asking if she wanted to donate her organs in case the risky surgery they were about to perform on her didn't go well.

She had just been airlifted to a hospital with her back broken into multiple places following a nasty bicycle crash during a trip to celebrate the silver medals she had won at the world championships a week earlier.

Doctors didn't know if Oldenburg would survive, or even walk again, so rowing wasn't really a priority at the time.

About 12 weeks later, Oldenburg was back training. And in less than a month, she will be rowing again at the Paris Olympics — still carrying the pins that were inserted under the skin of her neck, and still unable to turn her head sideways because of the surgery that saved her life and changed her perspective on sports.

"It sounds a bit weird when you are 36, but I'm really happy I'm alive. If you've been so close to death, you have to appreciate a lot," she said. "My goal really changed. Beforehand, it was: 'I need to go to the Olympics, I need to get a medal.' And now it's more like: 'I'm going to the Olympics. How cool!'"

Oldenburg had to learn how to swim again before getting back in a boat, but quickly got up to speed and will arrive in France as one of the medal favorites with the Dutch team in the coxless four event.

"It went really fast," she said. "My teammates picked me up, they supported me. After six months, we got bronze at the European (championships). And after 10 months, we became world champions. It was insane."

Oldenburg landed on top of her head after her bicycle flipped over while she went across a tiny bridge on a mountain biking route in the Netherlands. She broke the first vertebrae and damaged a main artery in the neck during the fall.

"It was stiff, I could not move," she said. "My body was, like, protecting itself. I would want to move, but my body didn't want to."

A nurse who was biking along the same route was among the first to stop to help, and he immediately told Oldenburg to try to stay still. Her husband was biking ahead of her and returned to the scene of the accident to find Oldenburg motionless — she only had feeling in her toes and fingers at that point — but was in good spirits.

"I thought: 'Well, tonight I'll be fine and we'll have dinner,'" she said. "And then the ambulance came and every time they move me, I cannot describe the pain in the neck. It was a lot."

Oldenburg was taken to a hospital and doctors said her injury "was really bad." She was immediately transferred by helicopter to a bigger hospital in Austria so they could operate on her.

The surgery lasted nearly six hours as doctors put six pins to her spine. She still couldn't move her legs right after the operation, and it took almost a month before she could walk again.

"The first thing I did when I woke up was like, 'Can I move my head a bit?'" she said. "Because they said there were two options: One is we connect everything, head and vertebrae, and the other option, which luckily is the reason why I still row, is only the vertebrae are connected."

Oldenburg was able to move her head up and down, which allowed her to row, but not laterally, which is a smaller hindrance for her on the boat. It is more of a problem when she is training, as she can't look for other boats or obstacles.

"Everybody in Amsterdam knows I cannot turn, so the whole community is always calling if there is a duck or something else," she said. "I'm never going alone. That's the price I have to pay."

Philipp Schmidli/AP

From left, Netherland's Marloes Oldenburg, Hermine Drenth, Tinka Offereins and Benthe Boonstra celebrate taking second place at the 2024 World Rowing Cup on May 26.

Oldenburg said she was able to go through the grueling recovery process by setting small goals for herself — it took her five days before she could eat a piece of bread, and two weeks before she could go to the bathroom by herself. Brushing her teeth was especially difficult because she couldn't hold her head still. She said she played "the floor is lava" at times to help with her movement.

"I celebrated the little goals. I set many goals, like 500 goals, really small goals," she said. "So instead of being really miserable because of the pain, I had a lot of pain, but making tiny goals every day was really joyful."

She stayed two weeks in the hospital in Austria and needed about six weeks of rehabilitation back in the Netherlands. She joined the Dutch team's training camp about 12 weeks after the accident even though she still "couldn't do anything."

"I had first to learn to swim again, which is totally unusual as a rower," she said. I did some swimming in a really tiny swimming pool and it was OK. So in the end, after almost four months, I was in a boat."

And "the weird thing was," she said, she was still rowing as fast as she was before the accident.

"It was just natural," she said. "The only problem, I could not turn my head!"

SPORTS

Ready to relax

Clark sets WNBA assists record, looks forward to Olympic break ›› Page 43

OLYMPICS

CHARLIE NEIBERGALL/AP

Sha'Carri Richardson celebrates her win in the women's 100-meter final during the U.S. Olympic trials on June 22 in Eugene, Ore. She is favored to win the gold in Paris.

Compelling comeback

Sha'Carri Richardson out to prove she is not just back, but better after drug suspension

BY EDDIE PELLS
Associated Press

Sha'Carri Richardson set the tone for her own comeback story a year ago when she won the 100-meter U.S. title, then the world championship, and brashly proclaimed: "I'm not back, I'm better."

Now, with a trip to her first Olympics approaching, come new questions: Is she still better than a field of the fastest women on the planet? And can she handle the pressure that is unique to the Olympics?

The 24-year-old favorite in the Olympic 100 meters has been open and honest about her quest to become a more appreciative, mindful version of the person whose positive marijuana test at the 2021 U.S. Olympic trials was her unfortunate introduction to a world that knew little about her.

In the three years that have encompassed both her stunning fall and her inspiring comeback, she has given few details of what happened. She has dropped clues about the death of her biological mother and the bout with depression following that tragedy.

All of this mystery, turmoil and, ultimately, success have made Richardson larger than life and left her enthusiastic and growing fan base wanting more. Some on social media are keenly into what hairstyle and fingernails she will show off when she runs.

It has also made her more than a mere celebrity sprinter. She is a young, famous, Black woman whose suspension evoked ar-

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Curry strong as US men rout Serbia
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