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J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

Senior Airman Robin Mercer and Staff Sgt. Colton Panizo push a pallet of humanitarian aid off a cargo plane while deployed to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, on Wednesday. The air base will be a hub for earthquake aid in Syria and Turkey.

Incirlik becomes integral

US troops help transform air base into global hub for earthquake aid

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

INCIRLIK AIR BASE, Turkey — The boxes being moved from the flight line by U.S. airmen, in the aftermath of one of the worst natural disasters in decades, are a window into a global outpouring of humanitarian aid: medical equipment from Texas, blankets from China, sleeping bags from Kazakhstan.

The base, a small outpost about eight miles from Adana in the country's south, was once known mainly for hosting Cold War spy planes and, according to widely cited unofficial reports, nuclear weapons.

But since the Feb. 6 earthquakes and aftershocks that struck Turkey and Syria, leaving at least 46,000 people dead and many injured, Incirlik has become the central hub for worldwide disaster relief to Turkey, with the United States alone pledging \$185 million in aid.

The pace of relief efforts has slowed in the weeks after the initial earthquakes, but the commander of the air wing on base said he expects aid distribution to continue far into the future.

"It won't stop for months, if not years," Col. Calvin Powell said Thursday in an interview. "As long as the Turkish government chooses to

use Incirlik Air Base as a primary port for inflow of aid from outside the region and distribution to within the region, the 39th Air Base Wing will be integral to that operation."

Incirlik sits about 125 miles away from the epicenter of a 7.8 magnitude quake that struck in the early morning hours of Feb. 6, followed by a 7.5 magnitude earthquake that hit nine hours later.

The earthquakes leveled houses across the region and killed more than 40,000 in Turkey and almost 6,000 in Syria, said a report Tues-

SEE AID ON PAGE 5

Polish leader asks Biden for more firepower

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Poland wants to see larger stockpiles of U.S. weaponry on its soil, which would allow allies to respond faster in a crisis, the country's head of state said this week.

President Andrzej Duda said in an interview Wednesday on Polish television that he had brought up the issue with his American counterpart, Joe Biden, during talks in Warsaw.

Duda asked that Army equipment and weapons be moved "to places created especially in Poland in order to strengthen the potential of the American presence in terms of infrastructure."

"My proposal was received with great attention," he said on national broadcaster TVN24.

Biden's two-day visit to Warsaw concluded Wednesday with a meeting between leaders of Poland and other NATO countries on the alliance's eastern flank for discussions about regional security.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine one year ago, the number of American troops operating out of Poland has been on the rise. About 10,000 U.S. service members are now carrying out missions to the country on a rotational basis.

But even before the invasion,

SEE FIREPOWER ON PAGE 5



JOHN SCHOEDEL/U.S. Army

U.S. soldiers operate an M1A2 Abrams tank during an exercise in Bemowo Piskie, Poland, on Feb. 16.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES								
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel				
Germany	\$3.761	\$4.290	\$4.597	\$4.758	Azores	..	..	\$4.486
Change in price	-1.1 cents	+0.6 cents	+0.3 cents	-6.8 cents	Change in price	..	..	+0.3 cents
Netherlands	..	\$4.461	\$4.726	\$4.806	Turkey	..	..	\$4.285
Change in price	..	-6.5 cents	-6.7 cents	-16.5 cents	Change in price	..	..	\$5.077*
U.K.	..	\$4.226	\$4.533	\$4.694	Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective Feb. 24. The change in price is from Feb. 17.			
Change in price	..	+0.6 cents	+0.3 cents	-6.8 cents				

PACIFIC GAS PRICES								
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel				
Japan	..	\$4.259	..	\$4.419	South Korea	\$3.449	..	\$4.289
Change in price	..	No change	..	-7.0 cents	Change in price	-1.0 cent	..	no change
Okinawa	\$3.429	..	..	\$4.419	Guam	\$3.439	\$3.969	\$4.269
Change in price	-1.0 cent	..	..	-7.0 cents	Change in price	-1.0 cent	+1.0 cent	No change
					*DieselEFD **Midgrade			
					For the week of Feb.25-March 3			

EXCHANGE RATES		
Military rates		
Euro costs (Feb. 24)	\$1.03	South Korea (Won)
Dollar buys (Feb. 24)	0.9206	Switzerland (Franc)
British pound (Feb. 24)	\$1.17	Thailand (Baht)
Japanese yen (Feb. 24)	131.00	Turkey (New Lira)
South Korean won (Feb. 24)	1,268.00	
Commercial rates		
Bahrain (Dinar)	.3769	
Britain (Pound)	1.2057	
Canada (Dollar)	1.3522	
China (Yuan)	6.8942	
Denmark (Krone)	7.0167	
Egypt (Pound)	30.6316	
Euro	.9428	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8466	
Hungary (Forint)	358.81	
Israel (Shekel)	3.6178	
Japan (Yen)	134.90	
Kuwait (Dinar)	.3069	
Norway (Krone)	10.2741	
Philippines (Peso)	54.94	
Poland (Zloty)	4.46	
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7516	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3418	
(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	7.75	
Interest Rates Discount rate	5.25	
Federal funds market rate	4.58	
3-month bill	4.83	
30-year bond	3.92	

WEATHER OUTLOOK



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MILITARY

‘Pilot error’ caused crash aboard carrier

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

A junior officer’s failure to complete a landing checklist during a specialized maneuver last year caused a fifth-generation fighter to crash into an aircraft carrier, injuring six sailors and destroying the \$115.3 million jet, the Navy determined.

The pilot, an unnamed lieutenant assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 147, failed to complete his checklist before attempting to land the F-35C Lightning II aboard the USS Carl Vinson on Jan. 24, 2022, according to the accident investigation report provided to Stars and Stripes on Thursday by Naval Air Forces Pacific spokesman Cmdr. Zachary Harrell.

As a result, the pilot failed to transition from a manual control mode to automatic, the F-35C did not behave as he expected and it subsequently crashed onto the flight deck, according to the report.

Video footage of the crash leaked on social media in February 2022 shows the fifth-generation fighter striking the Carl Vinson’s deck, bursting into flames



Reddit

Leaked footage shows an F-35C Lightning II stealth fighter crash aboard the USS Carl Vinson in the South China Sea on Jan. 24, 2022.

and skidding across the deck before falling into the South China Sea.

The Navy recovered the jet from the ocean floor on March 2, 2022, more than a month after the crash.

On his approach, the pilot attempted an expedited recovery maneuver, also referred to as a “Sierra Hotel Break” by pilots. However, his “lack of familiarity” with the maneuver and the loss of “situational awareness” led to the crash, Vice Adm. Karl Thomas, 7th Fleet commander, said in the report.

“This mishap was the result of pilot error,” Thomas wrote in his endorsement. “The mishap pilot (MP) attempted an expedited recovery breaking overhead the carrier, an approved and common maneuver, but the MP had never performed this maneuver before and it reduced the amount of time to configure the aircraft and conduct landing checks.”

During an expedited recovery maneuver, pilots use gravity to rapidly decelerate their aircraft during a 360-degree turn before landing on an aircraft carrier; the

maneuver can reduce the time necessary to recover an aircraft, according to the report.

During this maneuver, however, the pilot failed to transition from a manual control mode to an automated one. Unaware of this mistake, the pilot’s subsequent adjustments and corrections to the aircraft’s thrusts were not what he expected, according to the report.

A signal officer attempted to wave off the pilot, but the aircraft crashed into the flight deck just four seconds later.

The impact cut the F-35C’s main landing gear and bounced its tail into the air; the landing deck’s arresting wire caught one of the fighter’s air-to-air missile brackets. The jet ultimately began a counterclockwise spin that continued until it fell off the deck and into the ocean.

Crash debris injured four sailors on the flight deck and another on the landing signal officer platform; the pilot was also hurt.

The impact and debris caused millions of dollars in damages. Debris struck a nearby EA-18G Growler, resulting in \$2.3 million in damage; another \$120,000 in

damage was done to the carrier’s deck.

And the F-35C, which the report said was purchased for \$115.3 million, was “struck from the inventory.”

As a result of the investigation, Vice Adm. Kenneth Whitesell, commander of Naval Air Forces, made several recommendations, including the development of helmet-mounted indicators for pilots and external indicators for signal officers to notify them that an aircraft does not have the automated command mode during a landing approach.

The Field Naval Aviator Evaluation Board determined during the investigation that expedited recovery maneuvers should not be banned because, although it was a factor in the crash, the primary cause was the pilot’s failure to switch command modes.

The pilot, meanwhile, has been removed from flight status but remains in the Navy, USNI reported on Tuesday, citing an unnamed Navy spokesman.

wilson.alex@stripes.com
Twitter: @AlexMNWilson

US releases imagery of Chinese balloon from U-2 spy plane

By DAN LAMOTHE
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon on Wednesday released imagery of a U-2 spy plane soaring over the suspected Chinese surveillance balloon that transited the mainland United States this month, providing a new glimpse of the information U.S. officials gathered about the craft before shooting it down over the Atlantic Ocean.

The photograph appears to have been taken from the cockpit of the single-seat U-2 Dragon Lady, a high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft in service since the 1950s. U-2s can cruise at altitudes greater than 70,000 feet, allowing it to look down on the Chinese airship that officials said had reached heights of 60,000 to 65,000 feet.

The image shows an Air Force pilot, clad in a pressurized suit and helmet, maneuvering the aircraft as the balloon passes below. Large solar panels attached to the airship appear to be visible, with equipment strung from a canopy that U.S. military officials have described as 200 feet tall. The craft’s payload was estimated to be the size of two to three buses.

Air Force officials said the pho-

tograph was captured Feb. 3 over the “Central Continental United States.” A day later, the airship moved off the coast of South Carolina and was shot down by a Sidewinder missile launched from an F-22 Raptor fighter jet.

The photo was published Tuesday on the website Dragon Lady Today, a site devoted to the U-2 and its history. A Pentagon spokesperson, Sabrina Singh, confirmed that the image was authentic during a news conference Wednesday afternoon, and the Defense Department released it publicly about an hour later.

The single-engine U-2 was used extensively during the Cold War. With a distinctive narrow wingspan stretching 105 feet, it has been used to photograph Soviet nuclear complexes, observe Islamic State compounds in the Middle East and conduct surveillance missions over Ukraine just before Russia’s invasion last year.

The Chinese balloon initially appeared off the coast of mainland Alaska on Jan. 28 before moving over the state and into Canadian airspace. It surfaced over northern Idaho on Jan. 31 and was observed by civilians over Montana on Feb. 1. Defense



Department of Defense

In an image provided by the Department of Defense, a U.S. Air Force pilot looks down at the suspected Chinese surveillance balloon as it hovered over the central continental United States on Feb. 3.

officials scrambled for jets and considered shooting it down then, but they decided it was safer to bring it down off the coast of the Atlantic Ocean.

U.S. officials first publicly acknowledged the balloon’s presence over the United States on Feb. 2, alleging that it was part of a Chinese surveillance program. Beijing, in response, said that the balloon was conducting meteorological research, not spying, and that its path over North America

was an unintended consequence of having been blown off course.

The incident has further strained relations between the world powers, with each side openly chastising the other, and it created enormous political blowback for President Joe Biden. Democrats and Republicans have sharply criticized his decision not to down the balloon as soon as it first detected in North American airspace. The Pentagon has said the delay enabled it to soak up val-

uable intelligence about the technology.

The administration has since declassified more information about Beijing’s suspected surveillance activities globally. One U.S. official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because the issue remains highly sensitive, said this month that photos taken by the U-2 showed the airship was capable of intercepting electronic signals and far exceeded the capabilities of a weather balloon.

MILITARY

Chemicals found at school, Okinawa seeks soil samples

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Okinawa prefecture again wants to sample soil and water on Marine Corps Air Station Futenma after detecting PFOS at a neighboring elementary school in December.

Tests by the prefecture's Environmental Preservation Division found contamination at three sites in Ginowan, including Futenma Daini Elementary School, that was 16 times higher than at the Itoman control site where no U.S. base is nearby, the division said in a Feb. 15 statement.

The prefecture cannot rule out MCAS Futenma as a source of the pollution, according to the statement. Marine Corps Installations Pacific did not respond to an email Wednesday requesting comment.

The chemical compounds PFOS and PFOA are both subgroups of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, otherwise known as PFAS, and are used to make coatings and products that resist heat, oil, stains, grease and water, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

They are also found in firefighting foam commonly used on U.S. military bases.

Prefectural officials invited on to MCAS Futenma in July 2021 to collect treated wastewater samples found combined PFOS and PFOA levels below the safe drinking water standard of 50 nanograms per liter, according to an October 2021 statement by the prefecture.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency updated its health advisories in June to say no level of PFOS or PFOA in drinking water is safe. The synthetic compounds accumulate in the body over time, according to the agency.

Okinawa's environmental division also tested two other sites in Ginowan, where MCAS Futenma is located, and a site in Kadena

town, according to the Feb. 15 statement.

The PFOS levels detected in Ginowan were below the residential soil safety standard set by the U.S. EPA, but much higher than the agency's threshold for groundwater protection.

Okinawa citizens and local politicians requested the December tests after sampling by a private group last year revealed potential issues at Futenma Daini Elementary School, the division spokesman said. Some government officials are required to speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

The sampling centered on the school due to its proximity to MCAS Futenma. It is just beyond the fence on the base's northern boundary.

The school registered PFOS levels of 6.6 micrograms per kilogram and 0.7 micrograms for PFOA, far below the EPA's noncarcinogenic residential screening level for a child, the environmental division statement said.

The EPA screening levels mark the threshold for potential health effects, according to the EPA website.

However, 6.6 micrograms per kilogram is 173 times the EPA's screening level of 0.038 micrograms per kilogram for groundwater protection.

The other Ginowan sites logged 0.6 and 0.7 micrograms per kilogram for PFOS and 0.4 and 0.4 for PFOA, according to the environmental division's statement.

The EPA's noncarcinogenic residential screening level for a child is 130 micrograms per kilogram for PFOS and 190 for PFOA. The control site in Itoman registered 0.4 micrograms per kilogram for PFOS and 0.5 micrograms for PFOA, according to the statement.

burke.matt@stripes.com
Twitter: @MatthewMBurke1
koja.keishi@stripes.com
Twitter: @KeishiRKoja



JIMMIE PIKE/U.S. Air Force

Contractors take topographical measurements prior to testing and excavating contaminated soil at the Maui Space Surveillance Complex site on the island of Maui, Hawaii, on Tuesday.

Cleanup preparation complete at Maui Space Force diesel spill site

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Cleanup of fuel-saturated ground at a mountaintop observatory on Maui could begin as soon as Thursday, the commander of U.S. Space Forces Indo-Pacific, which operates the site, said Wednesday.

About 700 gallons of diesel fuel spilled Jan. 29 at the Maui Space Surveillance Complex atop the 10,000-foot summit of Haleakala, a dormant volcano.

The spill was caused by a malfunctioning float in the fuel tank for the site's generator that is used during power outages of the grid. The Space Force uses several telescopes in the complex to track satellites and space debris.

The Department of the Air Force developed a plan to excavate, clean and return the soil in coordination with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Hawaii Department of Health — as well as several other state agencies — and local community leaders.

"We've been working closely with the Department of Health," Brig. Gen. Anthony Mastalir, head of U.S. Space Forces Indo-Pacific, said Wednesday during a news conference at the site that also included Secretary of the Air Force

Frank Kendall.

"I expect to get word back today or tomorrow," Mastalir said. "At that point, we are ready to begin excavation."

A Honolulu-based contractor will do the job, he said.

"The Department of the Air Force is very embarrassed by the fact that this has occurred," Kendall said.

"Our ongoing response to this fuel spill is a top priority," he said. "That's why I'm here today."

The spill "harmed our reputation" and "calls into question the trust placed in us by local communities," Kendall said.

He said he was nevertheless "fully optimistic" the site could be fully remediated.

Mastalir said earlier this month that evidence suggested the float failed due to a power surge, which resulted in fuel continuing to be sent to the tank even though it was full. An alarm that should have gone off when the tank was filled also failed, he said. Mastalir said Wednesday that Hawaii Gov. Josh Green had asked the Space Force to inspect all its generator fuel tanks in the state.

"Currently the Space Force has six generators operating in the state of Hawaii," he said. "We have thoroughly checked out all

six of those generators to make sure that they were operating in compliance. We don't see any issues similar to what we have found here at Haleakala."

Kendall said technicians had compiled "important lessons" regarding the generator site, which are being shared across the Department of the Air Force to prevent similar incidents in the future.

The fuel spill has taken on outsize prominence for the Department of the Air Force because it follows a Navy fuel leak in late 2021 that contaminated groundwater and created a public backlash to the military's presence in the state.

That jet fuel leak on Oahu came from the Navy's World War II-era Red Hill underground fuel storage facility and led to the temporary relocation of thousands of residents living in military communities on and near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

Last fall, while Navy officials were preparing to drain the Red Hill tanks for the site's permanent closure, toxic firefighting foam was accidentally released at the facility.

olson.wyatt@stripes.com
Twitter: @WyattWolson

Navy SEAL dies in parachute training accident in Arizona

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A Navy SEAL was killed Sunday in a military free-fall parachute mishap in Arizona, according to multiple media outlets.

Chief Special Warfare Operator Michael Ernst died while training in Marana, Ariz., according to a

Wednesday report by the Navy Times, which cited a statement from Naval Special Warfare Command. The San Diego-based command did not respond Wednesday to phone and email messages from Stars and Stripes.

The Massachusetts native, assigned to an East Coast naval spe-

cial warfare unit, was pronounced dead at Banner University Medical Center in Phoenix, according to the Navy statement, which was also cited by local news station KOLD and USNI News.

"Mike was an exceptional teammate," Rear Adm. Keith Davids, the Naval Special Warfare com-

mander, said in the statement. "He was a dedicated NSW sailor who applied his talents and skills towards some of our nation's hardest challenges, while selflessly mentoring his teammates. Mike and his family will always be part of the NSW family, and he will never be forgotten."

Ernst enlisted in August 2009. His awards and decorations include a Silver Star, Defense Meritorious Service Medal and three Combat Action Ribbons, according to Navy Times.

robson.seth@stripes.com
Twitter: @SethRobson1

MILITARY

Aid: Distribution from air base could last for months, possibly years

FROM PAGE 1
day by the Los Angeles-based International Medical Corps.
More than 1 million people in Turkey are now living in tents, Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay said last week, according to The Guardian. And as many as 26 million people in Turkey and Syria may need humanitarian assistance over the coming years, the World Health Organization stated last week.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters at the base Sunday that the widespread devastation from the quakes will require a huge effort to rebuild, but that the U.S. is “committed to supporting that effort.”

Thus far, these efforts have seen airmen, working with Turkish troops and volunteers, unload 423 aircraft filled with 13,374 tons of food, supplies and equipment since Feb. 6, the Air Force said Thursday in a statement.

The base has also welcomed 4,234 troops and civilian aid workers from around the world, as well as 36 rescue dogs since the earthquake, the Air Force statement said.

This influx of personnel includes Marines and sailors from Task Force 61/2, who coordinate with the U.S. Agency for International Development. Army helicopters are among the 15 U.S. rotary aircraft flying aid missions from Incirlik.

Airmen at the base recalled being awoken by the first Feb. 6 earthquake, followed by the frantic rush to process the arriving aid.

At first, the constant stream of aircraft dropped off aid so quickly that it overwhelmed the resources troops had to distribute it, recalled Tech. Sgt. Jacob Siluano, the sergeant in charge of aircraft services for the 728th Air Mobility Squadron.

“We were not anticipating something as big as this magnitude,” Siluano said.

The unit normally services one

“We might look physically OK, but mentally we are not good.”

Mehmet Birbiri
local adviser for Incirlik air wing’s public affairs office

or two aircraft a day. Since the earthquake, they’ve handled five times the number of aircraft they’d normally get in a whole year, Siluano said.

The unit used to take a 12-hour shift to get 12 trucks out the door and into the disaster zone, but now it can process 90 trucks in that time, he said.

What changed was an influx of airmen from across the world who were flown in, often on short notice, to help with unloading planes. These reinforcements brought forklifts and other heavy equipment.

The U.S. military also doubled their available space for loading trucks by using the “Ring of Fire,” an area normally used to train firefighters.

About 1,080 Turkish citizens work with U.S. troops on Incirlik Air Base, the air wing said.

While the air base escaped significant damage, the earthquake rocked Adana, which has a metro population of about 1.8 million, and displaced many of Incirlik’s workers, said Mehmet Birbiri, the local adviser for the air wing’s public affairs office.

Turkish workers on the base, who were given time off after the disaster, are starting to come back to work this week. Some have brought their children because their schools are too damaged to hold classes. One shopkeeper told Stars and Stripes he was mourning a friend and his family, who died in the disaster.

Birbiri recalled the shock of



PHOTOS BY J.P. LAWRENCE/Stars and Stripes

Staff Sgt. Colton Panizo, an air freight supervisor deployed to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, unloads pallets of humanitarian aid meant for earthquake survivors in Turkey.



Airmen unload pallets of humanitarian aid, including medical beds, from a cargo plane at Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, on Thursday.

rushing out of his apartment on Feb. 6, running down nine flights of stairs with his wife, and having to leave his home after the earth-

quake.
Many of the workers on base are afraid another earthquake will strike the area, he said. On Mon-

day, a magnitude 6.3 aftershock hit southern Turkey, just as many citizens were ready to return to their homes.

“We might look physically OK, but mentally we are not good,” Birbiri said.

While talking in his office, he turned on a nearby television. The first thing on was news coverage of the devastation outside Incirlik’s walls.

He said he wonders how long it will take for the area to feel safe again.

“You see a storm, it’s coming, and it passes,” Birbiri said. “But here, this earthquake, we don’t know how long it’ll last.”

lawrence.jp@stripes.com
Twitter: @jplawrence3

Firepower: Duda offers US extra space for weapon stockpiles

FROM PAGE 1
Poland had emerged as a center of gravity for the U.S. military in Europe, where several thousand troops have been positioned on a steady basis since 2014.

Duda’s comments about a desire for more military equipment come as allies near completion on a major weapons depot in Powidz, which now functions as a logistical

hub in Poland for the Pentagon.

As early as this spring, a new Army pre-positioned stock site is expected to open after years of construction. It is one of the largest NATO-funded infrastructure initiatives in decades.

The site covers more than 650,000 square feet of warehouse space, which is expected to eventually be filled with battle tanks,

armored combat vehicles and artillery.

The Army began setting up various weapons depots around Europe after Russia’s aggression in Ukraine in 2014, resulting in the occupation and illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.

The purpose of the depots was to have ready-to-use combat gear in places that U.S. soldiers could

quickly man in a crisis.

During his discussions with Biden, Duda said the two leaders also spoke on the need to detail procedures for deploying forces to the eastern front in crisis scenarios.

“The point is that there should be designated units from the U.S. that will come to help in case of need,” Duda said.

Such units also need to be desig-

nated within the rest of the alliance, he added.

NATO is expected to refine regional defense plans for how units will mobilize to reinforce the eastern flank, when heads of state gather this summer for a summit in Vilnius, Lithuania.

vandiver.john@stripes.com
Twitter: john_vandiver

EUROPE

More disastrous path could lie ahead

Fighting likely to escalate in Ukraine as spring approaches

Associated Press

For Russia, it's been a year of bold charges and bombardments, humiliating retreats and grinding sieges. Ukraine has countered with fierce resistance, surprising counteroffensives and unexpected hit-and-run strikes.

Now, on the anniversary of Russia's invasion that has killed tens of thousands and reduced cities to ruins, both sides are preparing for a potentially even more disastrous phase that lies ahead.

Russia recently intensified its push to capture all of Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland of the Donbas. Kyiv and its Western allies also say Moscow could try to launch a wider, more ambitious attack elsewhere along the more than 600-mile front line.

Ukraine is waiting for battle tanks and other new weapons pledged by the West for it to reclaim occupied areas.

What's nowhere in sight is a settlement.

The Kremlin insists it must include the recognition of the Crimean Peninsula, which it annexed illegally in 2014, along with the acceptance of its other territorial gains. Ukraine categorically rejects those demands and rules out any talks until Russia withdraws all forces.

While Russian President Vladimir Putin is determined to achieve his goals, Ukraine and its allies are standing firm on preventing Russia from ending up with any of its land.

Experts warn that Europe's largest conflict since World War II could drag on for years, and some fear it could lead to a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO.

New objectives

In recent months, Russian forces have tried to encircle the Ukrainian stronghold of Bakhmut and push deeper into the Donetsk region. Along with fulfilling its goal of capturing the entire Donbas, Moscow aims to wear down Ukrainian forces and prevent them from starting offensives elsewhere.

Bakhmut has become an important symbol of tenacity for Ukraine, as well as a way to tie up and destroy the most capable Russian forces. Both sides have used up ammunition at a rate unseen in decades.

Ukrainian military analyst Oleh Zhdanov said Russia has poured more troops and weapons into the Donbas and attacked other areas in an apparent bid to distract Uk-

rainian forces.

"Russia currently has the initiative and the advantage on the battlefield," he said, noting Kyiv's acute shortage of ammunition.

Russia has relied on its massive arsenal, and boosted production of weapons and munitions, giving it a significant edge. While Ukrainian and Western intelligence agencies observed that Moscow is running out of precision missiles, it has plenty of old-style weapons.

But even though Ukraine and its allies expect a wider Russian offensive beyond the Donbas, it could be a gamble for Moscow, which mobilized 300,000 reservists last fall to bolster its forces.

Igor Strelkov, a former Russian security officer who led separatist forces in the Donbas when fighting erupted there in 2014, warned that any big offensive could be disastrous for Russia because its preparation would be impossible to conceal and attackers would face a devastating response. He said an offensive would also raise logistical challenges like those that thwarted Russia's attempt to capture Kyiv at the war's start.

"Any large-scale offensive will quickly and inevitably entail very big losses, exhausting the resources accumulated during mobilization," Strelkov warned.

Justin Bronk, a senior research fellow at RUSI in London, predicted any Russian offensive would fail, but said it could drain Ukraine's resources and keep it from preparing its own large-scale counteroffensive.

"The big question is how much damage does the Russian offensive do before it runs out of steam, because that will dictate the Ukrainian position," he said, noting that its aim could be to disrupt Kyiv's ability to stage a counteroffensive.

Bronk said Ukraine spent the winter building up its mechanized brigades that had spearheaded autumn counteroffensives in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions and suffered losses.

He said Ukraine has a window of opportunity of six to eight months to reclaim more land, noting that Russia could launch another mobilization to recruit up to 500,000 more troops who could be readied for combat after at least six months of training.

Zhdanov said Ukraine could launch a new counteroffensive in late April or early May after receiving new Western weapons, including battle tanks. He predicted Ukrainian forces will likely attack from the Zaporizhzhia region to



VADIM GHIRDA/AP

Ukrainian troops of the 3rd Separate Tank Iron Brigade take part in an exercise in the Kharkiv area, Ukraine, on Thursday, the day before the one year mark since the war began.

try to reclaim the ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk and cut the Russian corridor to Crimea.

"If Ukraine reaches the Sea of Azov coast, it will nullify all the Russian gains," Zhdanov said, turning Putin's victories "to dust."

Stalemate or upheaval

Observers see little prospect for talks. Both sides are "irreconcilable on their current positions," said Bronk.

Major Ukrainian battlefield successes this summer could fuel "significant political turmoil in Russia, because at that point, Putin's own position within the leadership becomes very, very difficult to see as tenable," he said.

At the same time, if Ukraine fails to reclaim more territory before Russia builds up its troops, it could lead to a "long-term stalemate and sort of a grinding attritional war that just kind of goes on and on," Bronk added, playing into Moscow's plan "to prolong the war and just wait for the West to get exhausted."

Fiona Hill, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who served in the past three U.S. administrations, also saw little prospect for a settlement.

"The Russians are digging in for the long haul. They have no intention of losing," she said. "Putin has made it very clear that he's prepared to sacrifice whatever it takes. His message there is basi-

cally saying you can't possibly counteract me, because I'm willing to do whatever and I've got so much more manpower."

Hill said Putin is hoping for Western support for Kyiv to dissolve — "that it goes away and that Ukraine is left exposed, and then that Russia can force Ukraine to capitulate and give up on its territory."

Tatiana Stanovaya of the Carnegie Endowment said Putin continues to believe he can achieve his goals by pressing the campaign.

"For him, the only way he admits it can end is capitulation of Kyiv," she said.

The nuclear option

Putin has repeatedly said Russia could use "all available means" to protect its territory, a clear reference to its nuclear arsenal.

Moscow's nuclear doctrine states that it could use those weapons in response to a nuclear strike or an attack with conventional forces threatening "the very existence of the Russian state," a formulation that offers broad room for interpretation and abrupt escalation.

Some Russian hawks urged nuclear strikes on Ukrainian bridges and other key infrastructure to force Kyiv and its allies to accept Moscow's terms.

Bronk said he doesn't expect Russia to resort to that, arguing it

would backfire.

"Actually using them generates almost no practical benefits at all and certainly nothing to compensate for all of the costs, both in terms of immediate escalation risk — irradiating things they want to hold on to and be part of — and also pushing away the rest of the world," he said.

It would be certain to anger China, which doesn't want the nuclear taboo broken, he added.

Hill also noted that Russia got some pushback from China and India, who were worried about Putin's nuclear saber-rattling. She added that Putin sees nuclear threats as a powerful political tool and will keep issuing them in the hope of forcing the West to withdraw support for Ukraine.

"Putin's just hoping that everybody's going to blink," she said. "He's not going to give up the idea that he could use a battlefield tactical nuclear weapon."

But Hill added: "If he thought he would get the results that he wanted from it, he would use it."

Stanovaya, who has long followed Kremlin decision-making, also said Putin's nuclear threat is no bluff. If he sees that Ukraine can attack in a way that threatens Russian territory and lead to Moscow's defeat, "I think he would be ready to use nuclear weapons in a way that he can show that it's a question of survival for Russia," she said.

NATION

Storms bring plights aplenty to wide swath

BY CLAIRE RUSH
AND JIM SALTER
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Winter storms sowed more chaos across the U.S. on Thursday, shutting down much of Portland after the city experienced its second snowiest day in history and paralyzing travel from parts of the Pacific Coast all the way to the northern Plains.

The nearly 11 inches of snow that fell in Portland stalled traffic during the Wednesday evening rush and trapped drivers on freeways. Some spent the night in their vehicles or abandoned them altogether as crews struggled to clear roads.

The storms brought heavy snow to places that rarely see it, knocked out power to hundreds of thousands of homes and grounded or delayed thousands of flights.

For the first time since 1989, the National Weather Service issued a blizzard warning for the Southern California mountains. Forecasters predicted “multiple rounds” of snow, with accumulations of up to 3 to 5 feet predicted for the Sierra Nevada region.

Snow was also expected over some lower foothills and valley areas near the Pacific Coast, the weather service said, “given the depth of cold air that has infiltrated the West.”

Large amounts of moisture in the air also created an increased risk of flash flooding, forecasters said. Some coastal areas could see waves as high as 10 to 14 feet through Thursday, forecasters



RICK BOWMER/AP

Traveler Shea Cooper, of Lone Peak Cheer, applies makeup as she waits in Salt Lake City International Airport after the group’s flight was canceled by snow, on Wednesday.

said.

At one point Wednesday, more than 65 million people in more than two dozen states were under weather alerts. The weather service said temperatures in some parts of the upper Midwest could plunge to 40 degrees below average.

That forecast stood in sharp contrast to the predictions for the mid-Atlantic and Southeast, which could see 40 degrees above average.

The wintry mix hit hard in the northern U.S., closing schools and offices and forcing churches to call off Ash Wednesday services.

In Wyoming, roads across much of the southern part of the state were impassable, state officials said.



JAKE MAY, THE FLINT (MICH.) JOURNAL/AP

Joel Watson uses two shovels to clear the downtown sidewalks as sleet and snow continue to gather amid a long, impending storm on Wednesday, in Lapeer, Mich.

Rescuers tried to reach stranded motorists, but high winds and drifting snow created a “near-impossible situation,” said Sgt. Jeremy Beck of the Wyoming Highway Patrol.

In the Pacific Northwest, high winds and heavy snow in the Cascade Mountains prevented search teams from reaching the bodies of three climbers killed over the weekend in an avalanche on Washington’s Colchuck Peak.

In Arizona, several interstates and other highways were closed due to high winds, falling temperatures and blowing snow. The state Department of Transportation advised people not to travel. Forecasters said snow could fall at a rate of 2 to 3 inches per hour on Thursday.

In California, a blizzard warning was in effect through Saturday for higher elevations of the Sierra Nevada, where forecasters predicted several feet of snow, 60 mph gusts and wind chills as low as minus 40 degrees.

In the state capital of Sacramen-

to, the weather service said it had received reports of something that might be either hail or graupel — soft, wet snowflakes encased in supercooled water droplets.

Electrical grids took a beating in the north as heavy ice and gusty winds knocked down power lines. In California, lines were fouled with tree branches and other debris.

A Michigan firefighter in the village of Paw Paw died Wednesday after coming in contact with a downed power line, authorities said. Van Buren County Sheriff Dan Abbott called it a tragic accident that was “no fault of the firefighter.”

As of Thursday morning, more than 681,000 customers were without power in Michigan; over 84,000 in Illinois; over 58,000 in Wisconsin; about 42,000 in California and about 32,000 in New York state, according to the website PowerOutage.us.

Weather also contributed to nearly 1,800 U.S. flight cancellations on Wednesday and another

759 by Thursday morning, according to the tracking service FlightAware. Another 6,000-plus flights were delayed across the country.

Few places were untouched by the wild weather, including some at the opposite extreme. Long-standing record highs were broken in Nashville, which topped out Wednesday at 80 degrees, breaking a 127-year-old record for the date, according to the weather service.

Indianapolis, Cincinnati and Atlanta were among the cities setting records, as well as Lexington, Ky., and Mobile, Ala.

As of Thursday morning, the weather service reported 16 inches of snow in the Minneapolis suburb of Savage and 10.1 inches at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, with only a little more expected.

Temperatures could plunge as low as minus 20 degrees Thursday and to minus 25 Friday in Grand Forks, N.D. Wind chills may fall to minus 50.

NTSB: No alert for train crew until just before derailment

Associated Press

EAST PALESTINE, Ohio — The crew operating a freight train that derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, did not receive a critical warning about an overheated axle until just before dozens of cars went off the tracks, federal safety investigators said in a report Thursday as U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg made his first visit to the crash site.

An engineer slowed and stopped the train after getting a “critical audible alarm message,” according to a preliminary report by the National Transportation Safety Board. The crew then saw fire and smoke and alerted dis-

patch of a possible derailment, the report said.

The axle investigators are focused on had been heating up as the train went down the tracks, but did not reach the threshold for stopping the train and inspecting it until just before the derailment, the report said. The train was going about 47 mph at the time, just under the speed limit of 50 mph, according to safety investigators.

Ohio Republican Lt. Gov. Jon Husted told CNN ahead of the report’s release that its findings had the potential to form the basis of a criminal referral from the state. He also said railroad company Norfolk Southern should tempora-

rily relocate people who continue to feel unsafe, or even consider buying their property.

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro’s administration has already made a criminal referral of Norfolk Southern to the state attorney general’s office.

NTSB released its preliminary findings as Buttigieg went on a tour of the crash site Thursday after getting criticized for not coming sooner, and amid mounting criticism of the overall federal response to the Feb. 3 derailment.

The Biden White House has defended its response to the train derailment, saying officials from the Environmental Protection Agen-

cy, the transportation safety board and other agencies were at the rural site within hours of the derailment. The White House says it has also offered federal assistance and FEMA has been coordinating with the state emergency operations center and other partners.

Another Biden administration official, EPA Administrator Michael Regan, has been to East Palestine multiple times, most recently Tuesday as the EPA ordered Norfolk Southern to pay for the cleanup.

Among those criticizing Buttigieg was former President Donald Trump, who came to Ohio on Wednesday. The Department of

Transportation said Buttigieg is visiting now that the EPA has declared the emergency phase of the crash to be over and the start of long-term cleanup efforts is underway.

Asked Thursday about the Trump visit, Buttigieg said that if the former president felt strongly about increased rail safety efforts, “one thing he could do is express support for reversing the deregulation that happened on his watch.”

As remediation of the site continued, Norfolk Southern announced late Wednesday it had agreed to excavate the soil under two tracks.

NATION

US sees spike in extremist killings over last decade

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of U.S. mass killings linked to extremism over the past decade was at least three times higher than the total from any other 10-year period since the 1970s, according to a report by the Anti-Defamation League.

The report, provided to The Associated Press ahead of its public release Thursday, also found that all extremist killings identified in 2022 were linked to right-wing extremism, with an especially high number linked to white supremacy.

They include a racist mass shooting at a supermarket in Buffalo, N.Y., that left 10 Black shoppers dead and a mass shooting that killed five people at an LGBT nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colo.

“It is not an exaggeration to say that we live in an age of extremist mass killings,” the report from the

group’s Center on Extremism says.

Between two and seven extremism-related mass killings occurred every decade from the 1970s to the 2000s, but in the 2010s that number skyrocketed to 21, the report found.

The trend has since continued with five extremist mass killings in 2021 and 2022, as many as there were during the first decade of the new millennium.

The number of victims has risen as well. Between 2010 and 2020, 164 people died in ideological extremist-related mass killings, according to the report.

That’s much more than in any other decade except the 1990s, when the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City killed 168 people.

Extremist killings are those carried out by people with ties to extreme movements and ideologies.

Several factors combined to drive the numbers up between



JOSHUA BESSEX/AP

A group prays at the site of a memorial for the victims of the Buffalo supermarket shooting outside the Tops Friendly Market on May 21, 2022, in Buffalo, N.Y.

2010 and 2020. There were shootings inspired by the rise of the Islamic State group as well as a handful targeting police officers after civilian shootings and others linked to the increasing promotion of violence by white supremacists, said Mark Pitcavage, a senior research fellow at the ADL’s Center on Extremism.

The center tracks slayings linked to various forms of extre-

mism in the United States and compiles them in an annual report. It tracked 25 extremism-related killings last year, a decrease from the 33 the year before.

Ninety-three percent of the killings in 2022 were committed with firearms. The report also noted that no police officers were killed by extremists last year, for the first time since 2011.

With the waning of the Islamic

State group, the main threat in the near future will likely be white supremacist shooters, the report found. The increase in the number of mass killing attempts, meanwhile, is one of the most alarming trends in recent years, said Center on Extremism Vice President Oren Segal.

“We cannot stand idly by and accept this as the new norm,” Segal said.

Rapper’s killer gets 60 to life

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A Los Angeles judge on Wednesday sentenced the man convicted of gunning down Nipsey Hussle to 60 years to life in prison after hearing testaments to the immense cost of the killing of the hip-hop star and neighborhood leader, and of the lifetime of mental illness, abuse and struggle of the man who shot him.

Superior Court Judge H. Clay Jacke II handed down the sentence to Eric R. Holder Jr., 33, who was found guilty of the 2019 first-degree murder of the 33-year-old Grammy-nominated hip-hop artist outside the clothing store Hussle founded, the Marathon, in the South Los Angeles neighborhood where both men grew up in very similar circumstances.

“I am very mindful of what was presented as to Mr. Holder’ mental health,” Jacke said. “I am also mindful of the devastation caused to the victims and their families. I believe this sentence balances the two.”

After the monthlong trial, jurors



MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP

Rapper Nipsey Hussle

in July also convicted Holder of two counts of attempted voluntary manslaughter and two counts of assault with a firearm for gunfire that hit two other men at the scene who survived.

Jacke sentenced Holder to 25 years to life for the murder, 25 more for a firearm sentencing enhancement and 10 for assault with a firearm. He set several other sentencing additions and ordered that others run concurrent.

He also gave Holder credit for the nearly four years he has served since the shooting.

Herman “Cowboy” Douglas, a close friend of Hussle who gave an impact statement, said Hussle’s store and surrounding businesses that he owned and supported have been closed down.

Fla. television reporter killed while covering fatal shooting

Associated Press

A Florida television station identified Thursday a 24-year-old reporter who was fatally shot while covering a shooting death in an Orlando area neighborhood, as well as its photojournalist who was critically injured in the rampage.

Spectrum News 13 reporter Dylan Lyons and photojournalist Jesse Walden were in their unmarked news vehicle on Wednesday afternoon when a man approached and shot them, Orange County Sheriff John Mina said in a news conference. The man then went to a nearby home where he fatally shot a 9-year-old girl and critically injured her mother.

The sheriff said they’ve detained Keith Melvin Moses, 19, who they believe is responsible for both shootings.

“I want to acknowledge what a horrible day this has been for our community and our media partners,” Mina told a room full of reporters. “I work closely with all of you and know many of you and know the very difficult job that you do and also the very important job that you do for our community and for law enforcement. No one in our community — not a mother,

not a 9-year-old and certainly not news professionals — should become the victim of gun violence in our community.”

Mina said they don’t immediately have a motive for any of the shootings.



Moses

We’re still trying to work all that out.”

Mina said the News 13 vehicle did not look like a typical news van with TV station markings.

Deputies had initially responded to the Pine Hills area, just northwest of Orlando, on Wednesday morning following reports of a woman in her 20s being shot.

Moses “was an acquaintance of the woman this morning, but as far as we know, had no connection to the reporters and no connection to the mother and the 9-year-old,” Mina said.

According to witnesses, a man approached the news vehicle later

Wednesday and opened fire, hitting the two reporters.

The man then walked to a nearby home and shot the mother and daughter.

WFTV crews, who were also reporting on the morning shooting, tried to give medical aid to the Spectrum 13 journalists.

Mina said Moses is already facing a murder charge for the initial victim, and charges are expected soon for the other four victims. Moses’ criminal history includes gun charges, as well as aggravated battery, assault with a deadly weapon, burglary and grand theft offenses, the sheriff said.

“Our hearts go out to the family of the journalist killed today and the crew member injured in Orange County, Florida, as well as the whole Spectrum News team,” White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Twitter.

“Please, please, say a prayer tonight for our co-worker who is in critical condition. And while you’re at it, please say a prayer for every victim of gun violence in this country,” Spectrum 13 journalist Celeste Springer said during her live on-air report Wednesday evening.

NATION



MATT FREED/AP

Former President Donald Trump speaks at the East Palestine Fire Department as he visits the area in the aftermath of the Norfolk Southern train derailment Feb. 3 in East Palestine, Ohio, on Wednesday.

Trump lawyers blast election probe after grand juror speaks

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Former President Donald Trump's lawyers in Georgia are criticizing the Fulton County investigation into potential illegal election meddling after the foreperson of the special grand jury seated to help the probe went public this week.

Emily Kohrs first spoke out in an interview published Tuesday by The Associated Press, a story that was followed by interviews in other print and television news outlets. She described some of what happened behind the closed doors of the jury room — including how some witnesses behaved, how prosecutors interacted with witnesses and how some witnesses invoked their rights not to answer certain questions.

Trump attorneys Drew Findling and Jennifer Little said that despite having concerns about the panel's proceedings from the start, they kept quiet out of respect for the grand jury process. But they said

revelations offered by Kohrs this week compelled them to speak up.

"The end product is the reliability of anything that has taken place in there is completely tainted and called into question," Findling said in an interview with the AP on Wednesday evening. He said he held "no chagrin for a 30-year-old foreperson" who was part of "a failed system."

"She's a product of a circus that cloaked itself as a special purpose grand jury," he said.

The special grand jury was impeached at the request of Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, who is investigating whether Trump and his Republican allies committed any crimes as they tried to overturn his narrow 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden in Georgia. The panel did not have the power to indict but instead could offer recommendations for Willis, a Democrat who will ultimately decide whether to seek indictments from a regular grand jury.

Findling and Little expressed concern that the special grand jury, which they said should be basing its recommendations to the district attorney on evidence and testimony presented in the jury room, was allowed to watch and read news coverage of the case and was aware of some witnesses' efforts not to testify. Kohrs said prosecutors told the jurors they could read and watch the news but urged them to keep an open mind.

Kohrs also shared numerous anecdotes from the proceedings that she found amusing and was very expressive in television interviews, sometimes laughing or making faces.

Findling and Little said the district attorney's office, which was advising the special grand jury, should have done a better job of educating the grand jurors about the solemnity of the process and the rules and limitations.

Willis' office has declined to comment on Kohrs' media appearances.

Court seems to favor tech giants in terror lawsuit

By JESSICA GRESKO
AND MARK SHERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court seemed skeptical Wednesday of a lawsuit trying to hold social media companies responsible for a terrorist attack at a Turkish nightclub that killed 39 people.

During arguments at the high court several justices underscored that there was no evidence linking Twitter, Facebook and Google directly to the 2017 attack on the Reina nightclub in Istanbul. The family of a man killed in the attack says the companies aided and abetted the attack because they assisted in the growth of the Islamic State group, which claimed responsibility for the attack. A lower court let the lawsuit go forward.

What the court does with Wednesday's case and a related one it heard a day earlier is important, particularly because the companies have been shielded from liability on the internet, allowing them to grow into global giants.

If the court bars the lawsuit involving the attack in Turkey from going forward it could avoid a major ruling on the companies' legal immunity. That outcome would leave the current system in place, but also leave open the possibility that the justices could take up the issue again in a later case.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett was among the members of the court who suggested that the suit against the companies lacks the kind of facts required under a federal anti-terrorism law to hold platforms responsible.

Barrett suggested that a lawsuit against a company such as Twitter would need to have more, such as

direct messages, comment threads or other evidence that the platform was being used to coordinate activities for a terrorist attack, "not just general recruitment or radicalizing people."

Justice Neil Gorsuch, participating remotely for a second straight day because of illness, said he was having difficulty with the argument of a lawyer for the family of Nawras Alassaf, who was killed in the nightclub attack. Gorsuch told lawyer Eric Schnapper that he was "struggling with how your complaint lines up with the three requirements of the statute" that the companies knowingly helped a person commit a terrorist act.

The justices seemed more willing to accept the arguments of a lawyer for Twitter, Facebook and Google, Seth Waxman. At one point during two and a half hours of arguments, Justice Sonia Sotomayor told Waxman to help her sketch out what an opinion would look like if the court ruled for his clients. "Write it for me," she said.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh summarized Waxman's argument this way: "When there's a legitimate business that provides services on a widely available basis ... it's not going to be liable under this statute even if it knows bad people use its services for bad things."

Seeming to agree with that idea, Justice Samuel Alito suggested that it would be outlandish if telephone companies were held responsible for criminal activity of people using their phones.

The law the case involves is the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, which allows Americans injured by a terrorist attack abroad to sue for money damages in federal court.

Democrats considering break with tradition to get Biden more judges

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Even as Democrats celebrated the 100th judicial confirmation of Joe Biden's presidency, they are clamoring for more — and some are flirting with ending a century-long Senate practice to help make it happen.

The rising friction over what in Washington parlance is known as the "blue slip" is creating tensions on the Senate panel that handles judicial nominations and prompting stern warnings from Republicans about a dangerous escalation in the partisanship that already

dominates the judicial confirmation process.

The clash over Senate procedure could have major ramifications for Biden as he seeks to fill as many court vacancies as possible during the final two years of his term. Aghast at the speed with which Republicans approved judges during the Trump era, Democrats have made the confirmation to the courts a top priority, vowing to fill every seat possible. Their focus on the nominations is even greater now that Republicans control the House and can stall much of Biden's broader leg-

islative agenda.

Since at least 1917, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee has sent a blue-colored form, or "blue slip," to the senators representing the home state of a judicial nominee. A blue slip returned with a positive response signals the senator's approval of moving forward with a nomination hearing. But if the blue slip is not returned or comes back with a negative response, that means the home state senator objects, which can doom the nomination.

Republicans during Donald Trump's presidency determined

the lack of a positive blue slip would not stop them from moving forward with considering appellate court nominees — and they did so 17 times. Democrats were livid, pointing out that Republicans blocked several of President Barack Obama's appellate nominees by declining to return a positive blue slip.

Now, Democrats are being encouraged to follow suit and do away with the blue slip when it comes to the district judges whose courts serve as the starting point for federal civil and criminal cases.

"In many respects, it is an archaic holdover from a different era," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. "I think we're maybe reaching the point of deciding whether it will be continued."

Advocates for doing away with the blue slip say fast action is critical if Democrats want to have the kind of success Trump had in year three of his presidency, when he secured more than 100 judicial confirmations out of 231. They believe Democrats can't afford to wait months on Republican senators to give their go-ahead for a nominee.



WAYNE PARRY/AP

The body of a humpback whale lies on a beach in Brigantine, N.J., after it washed ashore on Jan. 13. On Tuesday, the Marine Mammal Commission said there is no evidence linking offshore wind preparation activities with recent whale deaths along the East Coast.

Marine agency: Whale deaths not linked to wind prep work

Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — An independent scientific agency that advises the federal government on policies that could impact marine mammals said there is no evidence linking site preparation work for offshore wind farms with a number of whale deaths along the U.S. East Coast.

In a statement released Tuesday, the Marine Mammal Commission became the third federal agency to reject a link between the deaths and the offshore wind energy industry, despite a growing narrative among offshore wind opponents that probing the ocean floor to prepare for wind turbine projects is killing whales. Last month, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management said there is no evidence linking offshore wind development with whale deaths.

The commission said 16 humpback whales and at least one critically endangered North Atlantic right

whale have washed ashore dead on the East Coast this winter.

“Despite several reports in the media, there is no evidence to link these strandings to offshore wind energy development,” the commission said.

The deaths are part of an “unusual mortality event” involving humpback whales declared by the National Marine Fisheries Service in 2016. The agency said 40% of the whales that could be examined at necropsy, or post-mortem, showed evidence of a ship strike or entanglement with fishing gear. Others were floating at sea or otherwise inaccessible.

The commission said the number of whale strandings is not unusual. Ten or more humpback whales have stranded each year since 2016, with a high of 34 in 2017, it added.

It said the number of whales in the northeast is growing, something other agencies have noted as well. As the population grows, more whales are choosing to spend the

winter in the northeast, where they are more vulnerable to ships or fishing gear, instead of migrating to warmer areas.

The commission’s report comes as offshore wind opponents are pushing for investigations into whether offshore wind is killing whales, even though the federal government has been investigating whale deaths since 2016.

Earlier this week, two Republican congressmen from New Jersey announced legislation aimed at investigating, pausing or halting offshore wind projects. Rep. Chris Smith’s bill would require an investigation into the environmental approval process for offshore wind projects. A bill by Rep. Jeff Van Drew would impose a moratorium on all existing offshore wind projects and prohibit all future projects.

About 30 New Jersey mayors have signed a letter calling for a moratorium on offshore wind projects and a probe into whether the whale deaths are related to such work.

US revises down GDP estimate to 2.7% growth rate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy expanded at a 2.7% annual rate from October through December, a solid showing despite rising interest rates and elevated inflation, the Commerce Department said Thursday in a downgrade from its initial estimate.

The government had previously estimated that the economy grew at a 2.9% annual rate last quarter.

Meanwhile, the Labor Department reported Thursday that the number of Americans filing for jobless aid fell last week as the labor market remains resilient in the face of the Federal Reserve’s interest rate increases meant to cool the economy.

Applications for unemployment benefits in the U.S. for the week ending Feb. 18 fell by 3,000 last week to 192,000, from 195,000 the previous week, the Labor Department said Thursday. It’s the sixth straight week claims were under 200,000.

The four-week moving average of claims, which evens out some of the weekly volatility, inched up by 1,500 to 191,250. It’s the fifth straight week that figure has been below 200,000.

The Commerce Department’s revised estimate of last quarter’s gross domestic product — the economy’s total output of goods and services — marked a deceleration from the 3.2% growth rate from July through September. While overall growth was solid in the fourth quarter, business spending barely rose, and consumers spent cautiously, suggesting

that the economy lost momentum at the end of 2022.

More recent data issued this month, though, shows that the economy has since rebounded. Consumers boosted retail sales in January by the most in nearly two years, and employers added a surprisingly outsize number of jobs. The unemployment rate reached 3.4%, the lowest level since 1969.

Some of the surprisingly strong economic gains in January likely reflected much warmer-than-usual weather. Few economists expect similar outsize gains in hiring or spending in the coming months. Most analysts think growth is slowing to a roughly 2% annual rate in the current January-March quarter.

And the Federal Reserve is expected to keep raising its benchmark interest rate over the next few months and to keep it at a peak through year’s end to try to defeat still-high inflation.

Higher borrowing costs make mortgages, auto loans and credit card borrowing more expensive. Those higher rates could discourage consumers and businesses from spending, hiring and investing and could eventually push the economy into a recession.

Inflation, measured year over year, has cooled since it reached 9.1% in June, having slowed to 6.4% in January. Yet on a monthly basis, price gains accelerated from December to January, raising the prospect that the Fed will raise its benchmark rate higher than it has previously signaled.

No cow needed: Oat and soy can be called milk, FDA proposes

Associated Press

Soy, oat, almond and other drinks that bill themselves as “milk” can keep using the name, according to draft federal rules released Wednesday.

Food and Drug Administration officials issued guidance that says plant-based beverages don’t pretend to be from dairy animals — and that U.S. consumers aren’t confused by the difference.

Dairy producers for years have called for the FDA to crack down on plant-based drinks and other products that they say masquerade as animal-based foods and cloud the real meaning of “milk.”

Under the draft rules, the agency recommends that beverage makers label their products clearly by the plant source of the food, such as “soy milk” or “cashew milk.”

The rules also call for voluntary extra nutrition labels that note when the drinks have lower levels of nutrients than dairy milk, such as calcium, magnesium or vitamin D. They would continue to allow labels that note when plant-based drinks have higher levels. Fortified soy milk is the only plant-based food included in the dairy category of U.S. dietary guidelines because of its nutrient levels.

The new guidelines are aimed at



PATRICK SISON/AP

The ingredients label for soy milk are seen in a grocery store in New York.

providing consumers clear nutrition information, FDA Commissioner Dr. Robert Califf said in a statement. The draft rules do not ap-

ply to nondairy products other than beverages, such as yogurt.

The National Milk Producers Federation, an industry trade group, applauded the call for extra nutrition information on drink labels, but said they rejected the FDA’s conclusion that plant-based drinks can be called milk because it’s a “common and usual name.”

The Good Food Institute, a group that advocates for plant-based products, objected to the extra labeling in a statement, saying “the guidance misguidedly admonishes companies to make a direct comparison” with cow’s milk, even though key nutrients are already re-

quired to be listed.

In recent years, the number of plant-based drinks has exploded to include dozens of varieties, including cashew, coconut, hemp and quinoa-based beverages. Although the drinks are made from the liquid extracts of plant materials, they are frequently labeled — and described — as “milks.”

In the U.S., almond milk is the most popular variety, but oat milk has been seeing the fastest growth. Still, nondairy sales are dwarfed by traditional milk.

The agency will accept comments on the draft guidelines through April 23.

MIDEAST



An Israeli paramilitary Border Police officer uses tear gas in clashes with Palestinians in the West Bank city of Nablus, on Wednesday.

Gaza rockets, Israeli strikes follow deadly West Bank raid

By TIA GOLDENBERG
Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Palestinian militants in Gaza launched rockets at southern Israel and Israeli aircraft struck targets in the coastal enclave early Thursday after a gun-battle triggered by an Israeli raid in the occupied West Bank killed 10 Palestinians.

The bloodshed extends one of the deadliest periods in years in the West Bank, where dozens of Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since the start of the year. Palestinian attacks on Israelis in 2023 have killed 11 people.

The Israeli military said Palestinian militants fired six rockets and two anti-aircraft missiles from the Gaza Strip toward the country's south early Thursday. Air defenses intercepted five of the rockets and one landed in an open field, according to the military. The missiles did not hit their targets.

Israeli aircraft then struck several targets in northern and central Gaza, including a weapons manufacturing site and a military compound belonging to the Hamas mil-

itant group that rules the enclave. There were no reports of injuries in Israel or Gaza from the rocket attacks or strikes.

The violence comes in the first weeks of Israel's new far-right government, which has promised to take a tough line against Palestinians, and as security forces step up arrest raids of wanted militants in the West Bank. Israel says the raids — begun in the wake of a series of deadly Palestinian attacks last spring — are meant to dismantle militant networks and thwart future assaults.

"We have a clear policy: to strike terror powerfully and to deepen our roots in our land," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a meeting of his Cabinet. "We will settle accounts with whoever harms Israeli citizens."

Among the 10 killed in Wednesday's raid in Nablus were Palestinian men aged 72 and 61, and a 16-year-old boy, according to health officials. Scores of others were wounded. Various Palestinian militant groups claimed six of the dead as members.

Iran acknowledges accusation it enriched uranium to 84%

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran on Thursday directly acknowledged an accusation attributed to international inspectors that it enriched uranium to 84% purity for the first time, which would put the Islamic Republic closer than ever to weapons-grade material.

The acknowledgement by a news website linked to the highest reaches of Iran's theocracy renews pressure on the West to address Tehran's program, which had been contained by the 2015 nuclear deal that America unilaterally withdrew

from in 2018. Years of attacks across the Middle East have followed.

Already Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who recently regained his country's premiership, is threatening to take military action similar to when Israel previously bombed nuclear programs in Iraq and Syria. But while those attacks saw no war erupt, Iran has an arsenal of ballistic missiles, drones and other weaponry it and its allies already have used in the region.

The acknowledgment Thursday came from Iran's Nour News, a website linked to Iran's Supreme Na-

tional Security Council, overseen by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Nour News separately is sanctioned by Canada for having "participated in gross and systematic human rights violations and perpetuated disinformation activities to justify the Iranian regime's repression and persecution of its citizens" amid nationwide protests there. The comments follow days of muddled comments by Iran not directly acknowledging the accusation by inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran had enriched up to 84%.



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WORLD

Deadly ISIS attacks on rise across Syria

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Islamic State has carried out its deadliest attacks in more than a year, killing dozens of civilians and security officers in the deserts of central Syria, even as people of northern Syria have been digging out of the wreckage from the region’s devastating earthquake.

The bloodshed was a reminder of the persistent threat from ISIS, whose sleeper cells still terrorize populations nearly four years after the group was defeated in Syria. The attacks also underscored the extremists’ limitations.

ISIS militants have found refuge in the remote deserts of Syria’s interior and along the Iraqi-Syrian border. From there, they lash out against civilians and security forces in both countries.

But they are also hemmed in by opponents on all sides: Syrian government troops as well as Kurdish-led fighters who control eastern Syria and are backed by U.S. forces. American raids with their Kurdish-led allies have repeatedly killed or caught ISIS leaders and, earlier this month, killed two senior ISIS figures.

ISIS attacks this month were largely against a very vulnerable target: Syrians hunting truffles in

the desert.

The truffles are a seasonal delicacy that can be sold for a high price. Since the truffle hunters work in large groups in remote areas, ISIS militants in previous years have repeatedly preyed on them, emerging from the desert to abduct them, kill some and ransom others for money.

On Feb. 11, ISIS fighters kidnapped 75 truffle hunters outside of Palmyra. At least 16 were killed, including a woman and security officers, 25 were released and the rest remain missing.

Six days later, on Friday, they attacked a group of truffle hunters outside the desert town of Sukhna, just up the highway from Palmyra, and fought with troops at a security checkpoint close by. At least 61 civilians and seven soldiers were killed. Many of the truffle hunters in the group work for three local businessmen close to the Syrian military and pro-government militias, which may have prompted ISIS to target them, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor.

Smaller attacks in the area killed 12 other people, including soldiers, pro-government fighters and civilians.

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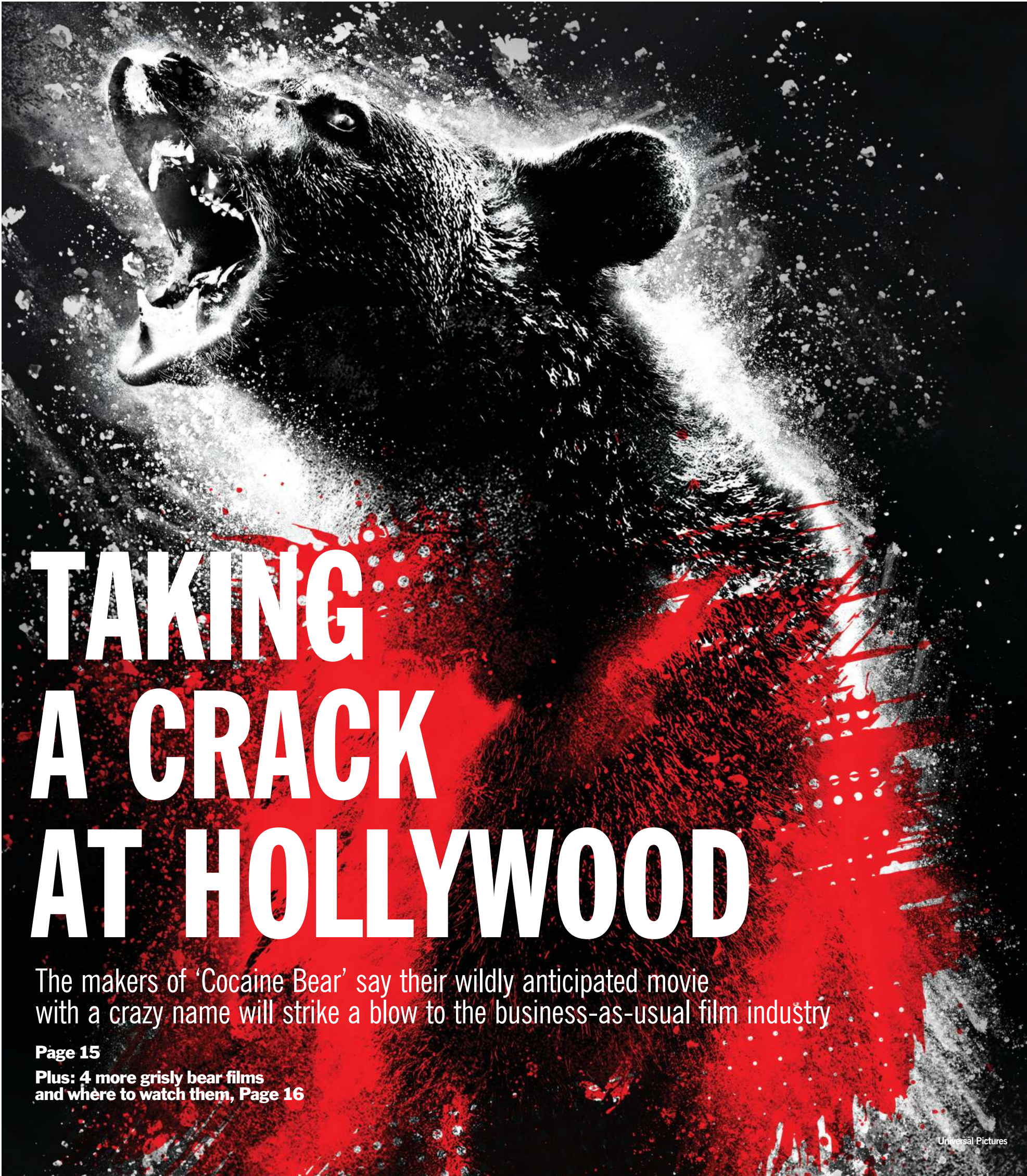
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WEEKEND



Paramore stuck
at surface level
Music, Page 28



TAKING A CRACK AT HOLLYWOOD

The makers of ‘Cocaine Bear’ say their wildly anticipated movie with a crazy name will strike a blow to the business-as-usual film industry

Page 15
**Plus: 4 more grisly bear films
and where to watch them, Page 16**

Universal Pictures

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Staying safe online

Busting 4 myths about digital privacy and security

BY SHIRA OVIDE
The Washington Post

Perhaps you’ve seen this hack: If you post your email address on your Instagram profile or personal website, skip the symbols and write them out instead — shira dot ovide at washpost dot com.

The idea is to stop spammers from scooping up your email address. Sorry. This spam-fighting trick doesn’t work. You are not fooling crooks.

This piece of anti-spam fiction is an example of the digital self-protection myths that drain your time and energy and make you less safe. Today, let’s kill off four privacy and security bogus beliefs, including that you need a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to stay safe online. (No, you probably don’t.)

Myth No. 1: Stop spammers by writing out “at” and “dot” in your email address

As I mentioned already, this anti-spam trick doesn’t work.

Digital security experts told me that bad guys can use software to easily translate your “at” and “dot” into a regular old email address.

Myth No. 2: Digital criminals are dumb

I mock the pathetic emails and texts I receive that are obvious scams. Oh, really, Oprah is texting me a “secret way to lose that gut”?!?

But do not underestimate spammers and scammers. Crime is a big business. The Federal Trade Commission said it received 2.8 million fraud reports in 2021 with reported losses of more than \$5.8 billion. That’s likely an undercount. (You can report scams or other fraud to the FTC.)

Most crooks are savvy about exploiting your fear, greed and hunger for connec-

tion. Scammers might win your trust over weeks or months on LinkedIn or a dating app before asking you to invest in their business.

A common crime starts with a phone call that seems to come from your bank or the Internal Revenue Service claiming there’s an emergency with your money and asking for account information or payments. Crooks love sending emails that promise you can win a valuable prize if you click RIGHT NOW on a link.

If you believe that you would never fall for any of these tricks, your overconfidence plays right into the bad guys’ hands.

Myth No. 3: You need a VPN to stay safe online

Virtual private networks are apps or other software that help you hide what sites you’re using.

VPNs are commonly used in countries where governments censor the internet or surveil people online. Many companies make their employees use VPNs to protect their computer networks from intruders. That’s reasonable.

But for most people in the United States and other democracies, “There is no real reason why you should use a VPN,” said Frédéric Rivain, chief technology officer of Dashlane, a password management service that also offers a VPN.

Rivain said he uses a VPN to watch online broadcasts of French rugby matches that aren’t available in the United States. (A VPN can make it look as though you’re logging in from Marseille when you’re really in Denver.)

Many VPNs are also dodgy and may do far more harm than good. Last year, Washington Post technology columnist Geoffrey A. Fowler recommended three VPNs that he found safe. But for most of



you reading this, skip the VPN.

If you’re researching sensitive subjects like depression and don’t want family members to know or corporations to keep records of your activities, Rivain said you might be better off using a privacy-focused web browser such as Brave or the search engine DuckDuckGo.

If you use a VPN, that company has records of what you’re doing. And advertisers will still figure out how to pitch ads based on your online activities.

Also, if you’re concerned about crooks stealing your info when you use Wi-Fi networks in coffee shops or airports and want to use a VPN to disguise what you’re doing, you probably don’t need to. Using public WiFi is safe now in most circumstances, my colleague Tatum Hunter has reported.

Myth No. 4: Your email address and phone number are secrets

The foundation of the spam-fighting hack from Myth No. 1 is the belief that your email address is private information. It’s not.

If you start with the assumption that anyone might have your phone number or

email, you are better prepared to treat anything as a potential trick from a stranger.

What that means in practice is to slow down and “always verify,” says Girish Chander, partner group manager for Microsoft 365 Security.

If you receive an urgent phone call that seems to be from your bank, hang up and dial the phone number from your account statements or from a web search, Chander said. If you’re messaging with a stranger or even someone you think you know over Instagram, be wary — especially if they start asking for money.

If you receive an email that seems to be from Amazon or your real estate agent, pause before you click on a link or document in there. It’s safer to log into your Amazon account from the app rather than clicking on the link in an email. Call your real estate agent to make sure they sent the document.

It’s awful to be suspicious of everyone and to treat every text like it might be a nuclear bomb. But the internet is a non-stop scam machine, and a little paranoia is healthy.

Ugreen Nexode, iHome PowerValets are efficient chargers

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

When charging expensive USB devices, you want a charger that is fast, user-friendly and safe. Not all chargers are the same, even those that have the same connectors: The Ugreen Nexode 100W desktop USB charger with advanced gallium nitride (GaN) technology stands out.

The alternating current (AC)-powered charger is built with four ports for multi-device compatibility (three USB-C and one USB-A) and has safety protocols for protecting your device during charging.

If you are unfamiliar with GaN terminology for charging, join the club. It’s a somewhat new technology that more advanced chargers are using. GaN semiconductors are said to be much more efficient, smaller in size and faster to charge compared with traditional silicon-based devices.



UGREEN/TNS

The Ugreen Nexode 100W USB charger is built with four ports for multi-device compatibility.

The Ugreen Nexode charger has fast charging. Smart power distribution automatically detects and provides the proper current for the particular device.

Ugreen lists internal technology as Power Delivery 3.0 and Quick Charge 4+, allowing users to access ultra-fast power-ups for their devices. In addition, Thermal Guard technology protects



iHOME/TNS

iHome's PowerVale nightstand clock supports Qi wireless charging and USB charging.

charging devices with temperature monitoring.

The Ugreen Nexode charger works simultaneously with laptops, smartphones, tablets, etc.

The 100-watt charger is \$99.99, and a 65-watt version with dual USB-A and dual USB-C ports is \$59.99, both on Amazon. A 6-foot AC power cable is included.

Online: ugreen.com



iHOME/TNS

iHome's PowerVale Snap has alarm clock features as well as Magsafe and USB charging.

The PowerVale and PowerVale Snap from iHome are simple but highly efficient nightstand clocks and accessory chargers.

The PowerVale 2-in-1 wireless charger (iW24) has a front-facing 12/24-hour clock display with an auto-dimming sensor.

The AC-powered PowerVale has an internal backup battery to ensure either of the two alarms

goes off on time in the event of a power outage. The pair of alarms can be set for two times per day.

For charging, on top of the LED display is a Qi wireless charging pad. Non-wireless charging devices can connect via a USB charging cable to a USB charging port on the back.

The iPhone PowerVale Snap (iW23) has the same LED display, auto-dim, snooze and alarm clock features. The wireless charging pad behind the display can connect to MagSafe-compatible smartphones (or cases), wireless charging cases for AirPods and other compatible earbuds cases.

The PowerVale Snap has two USB ports (USB-A and USB-C) on the back for wired charging.

Both are AC-powered and include a power adapter and a lithium metal battery for backup.

Online: iHomeaudio.com; PowerVale \$52.99, PowerVale Snap \$62.99

WEEKEND: MOVIES



UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

Keri Russell in a scene from “Cocaine Bear,” a film directed by Elizabeth Banks and very loosely based off a 1985 news story of a bear that died after ingesting a stash of cocaine.

Striking a blow to staid Hollywood

Much of what’s in theaters feels pre-packaged, but ‘Cocaine Bear’ creators think it can be an untamed exception

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

On Dec. 22, 1985, The Associated Press reported the following from Blue Ridge, Ga.:

“Investigators searching for cocaine dropped by an airborne smuggler have found a ripped-up shipment of the sweet-smelling powder and the remains of a bear that apparently died of a multimillion-dollar high.”

Police found a sad scene. A 175-pound black bear dead near a duffle bag and some \$2 million worth of cocaine that had been opened and scattered over a hillside. The parachutist, a former Kentucky narcotics investigator, had fallen to his death in a backyard in Knoxville, Tenn. His unmanned airplane crashed into a North Carolina mountain. Back in Georgia, the bear, examiners said, had overdosed.

The story is in many ways too much. Too absurd. Too ‘80s. Even the screenwriters of the “Fast & Furious” movies would think it far-fetched. The stranger-than-fiction tale quickly receded from the headlines and, before some began to stoke the myth of “Pablo Escobear,” it mostly stayed buried in news media archives.

That changed when screenwriter Jimmy Warden delivered to producers Phil Lord and Christopher Miller a script titled “Cocaine Bear.” They were on board from page one.

“When the movie’s pitched, you hear the word ‘Cocaine,’ you’re like, I’m not sure what to think of this,” Lord says. “Then when you hear the word ‘Bear,’ you’re

like: I’m all in.”

Yes, “Cocaine Bear” is a real movie. And after it opens in theaters this weekend, it might even be a hit. Since the trailer first debuted, Elizabeth Banks’ very, very loosely based-on-a-true-story R-rated comedy has stoked a rabid zeitgeist. At a time when much in Hollywood can feel pre-packaged, the makers of “Cocaine Bear” think it can be an untamed exception.

“When the movie’s pitched, you hear the word ‘Cocaine,’ you’re like I’m not sure what to think of this,” Lord says. “Then when you hear the word ‘Bear,’ you’re like: I’m all in.”

“Hopefully the film lives up to the title,” Banks says, smiling. “That was the goal.”

Little on the movie calendar has captured the public imagination quite like “Cocaine Bear.” Its trailer, watched more than 25 million times, immediately went viral. The movie, itself, is like a meme sprung to life — a kind of spiritual heir to “Snakes on a Plane” crossed with a Paddington Bear fever dream. Everything about it is propelled by a tongue-in-cheek sense of humor and can-you-believe-this-is-a-real-movie wink.

“I’m the bear who ate cocaine,” reads one of the film’s official tweets. “This is my story.”

While most studio movies are driven by well-known intellectual property and few original comedies manage to attract audiences in theaters, “Cocaine Bear” is here to strike a blow to business as usual in Hollywood. “Cocaine Bear” is here to be bold. “Cocaine Bear” is here to party.

“You have to demonstrate theatricality to get the greenlight. It just means you have to swing the bat a little harder,” Lord says. “In this world that’s increasingly

mechanized, things that don’t feel mechanized have really special value.”

Miller and Lord have in recent years shepherded some of the most vibrant and irreverent films to the screen, including “The Lego Movie,” “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse” and “The Mitchells vs the Machines.” They like to take apart old conventions and give them an absurdist, post-modern spin.

“Certainly, this movie was not mandated by a corporation,” Miller says, laughing. “It’s a thing we somehow snuck through the system. That’s how we love to make all our movies, like: ‘I can’t believe they let us get away with this.’”

Warden had been a production assistant on their 2012 action comedy “21 Jump Street.” After hearing about the 1985 story, Warden wrote the script on spec and hoped his old bosses would like it. Intrigued at the screenplay’s possibility, the producers found an unexpectedly open reception from Universal Pictures chief Donna Langley.

“What’s funny is that we thought it would be difficult because of the subject matter. But surprisingly, they were excited right from the jump and didn’t shy away from the movie, its tone or even its title,” Miller says. “We thought at some point, someone was going to say, ‘Well you can’t call it ‘Cocaine Bear.’ You have to call it ‘A Walk in the Woods.’”

Since her directorial debut in 2015’s “Pitch Perfect 2,” Banks has carved out a second career behind the camera. She last helmed 2019’s “Charlie’s Angels.” With Universal’s backing and Lord and Miller producing, “Cocaine Bear” struck her as not just a viable, actually-happening project but one where she could marry a gory animal attack movie with comedy.

“Most people are surprised that it is a real thing, and very surprised that I’m the person that made it,” says Banks, laughing. “I just got a text from someone who was like, ‘I’ve been hearing about this movie and I had no idea you made it.’”

Though its title meant “Cocaine Bear” would be limited from some advertising platforms, the filmmakers describe the

SEE COCAINE ON PAGE 16

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Cocaine: Director said it was risky using CGI lead who wasn't on set

FROM PAGE 15

studio as interested in leaning into what made the film distinct from all the options viewers are inundated with. Nothing, it turned out, could cut through all the noise like “Cocaine Bear.”

“They love things with strong flavor. That’s the word I hear a lot in my marketing meetings,” Banks says. “It’s harder and harder to find things that are theatrically exciting. The hope was that we were making something people needed to leave their house to see.”

The film, itself, takes the basis of the real story and imagines what might have transpired if the bear didn’t quickly die but went on a coke-fueled rampage through a national forest, terrorizing park wardens, campers and drug dealers seeking the lost shipment. After an initial taste, the bear goes after more cocaine with all the zeal of Yogi pursuing a picnic basket.

The bear, named Cokie, was a computer-generated concoction created by Weta FX with Allen Henry, a stunt man and student of Andy Serkis, performing motion capture. He wore all black and walked on all fours with prosthetic arms. The rest of the cast includes Keri Russell, Margo Martindale, Alden Ehrenreich, O’Shea Jackson and Ray Liotta. It’s one of Liotta’s final performances before his death last May, and one that connects back to his similarly cocaine-laced performance in “Goodfellas.”

“I’ve said that this film felt very risky. The risk was: I was never going to have the lead character of the movie on the set of the movie,” Banks says. “That was truly what scared me the most. If the bear didn’t work, the movie falls apart.”

Lord and Miller hope that there’s a rising realization within the film industry that movies that are audaciously original can pack theaters. Lord points to the Academy Awards favorite “Everything Everywhere All at Once” as recent proof.

“It could win best picture and it’s the zaniest idea out there,” Lord says. “For the scale of that movie, it’s a huge hit. What we’re after is demonstrating that these movies can be original and fun and surprising and they can be hits.”

“I can’t think of a movie that came out last year that wouldn’t have been maybe a little bit better if there had a been a co-

Players eating up Cocaine Bear video game

The marketing team behind Elizabeth Banks’ “Cocaine Bear” released a bonkers video game this month inspired by the forthcoming film. And the internet is eating it up.

Billed as an 8-bit video game, Cocaine Bear: The Rise of Pablo Escobear challenges players to eat “as much cocaine as you can” and “as many people as you can” while going on a drug-induced rampage through the forest, Pac-Man style. The game — which debuted days after a trailer for “Cocaine Bear” aired during the Super Bowl — can be found on the movie’s website and played on multiple devices, including computers and smartphones.

The interactive marketing play is, of course, intended to promote the film.

Shameless and absurd as it may be, Twitter users couldn’t get enough of the Cocaine Bear video game in the wake of its release. Plenty have happily strolled into the marketing team’s game-ified bear trap, sharing their scores and praising the film’s “incredible,” “genius” promotional campaign on social media.

In an interview earlier this month with Variety, Banks deemed her latest feature “an enormous risk” and joked that the gory, chaotic title “could be a career ender.” But as wacky as the premise may seem, Banks earnestly shared that she feels “a deep sympathy for the bear.”

“I really felt like this is so [messed] up that this bear got dragged into this drug run gone bad and ends up dead,” she told Variety. “I felt like this movie could be that bear’s revenge story.”

Los Angeles Times

caine-fueled bear on a rampage as part of it,” Miller said. “Imagine if ‘The Banshees of Inisherin’ had a big bear just running through biting that guy’s fingers off.”

If it’s successful, “Cocaine Bear” could, of course, become a franchise of its own. A sequel isn’t out the question. “LSD Armadillo”? “Quaalude Tortoise”? Banks, for now, is deferring: “Somebody will put something into the AI chat bot and it will spit out something ridiculous and the internet will write it for us.”



UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

“Cocaine Bear” is not the only movie to feature a rampaging bear. Here are four others from past decades to check out, but be forewarned, they aren’t good.

Barbaric behavior

Check out other horror films with bears, 1 with major stars

By JIM HARRINGTON
Bay Area News Group

The fact that so many moviegoers are so excited for the arrival of “Cocaine Bear” just underscores one thing: People love goofy horror movies. Especially if they have bears in them.

To get into the spirit, we took a look back at some leading bear horror flicks from past decades.

We went searching for ones that share a similar spirit — intentionally or not — with “Cocaine Bear.” In other words, don’t expect to see “The Revenant” on the list. Sure, the 2015 Leonardo DiCaprio vehicle does include a bear scene, but it also won multiple Oscars — thereby assuring that no self-respecting bad-horror-comedy fan would ever want to see it.

Oh, but there are plenty of bad bear flicks to be had. Here are five you should definitely see:

‘Prophecy’ (1979)

If you are only going to watch one goofy mutant bear movie in your life, make sure it’s this glorious schlockfest from director John Frankenheimer, who — as unlikely as it may seem — also helmed such acclaimed efforts as “The Manchurian Candidate,” “Birdman of Alcatraz” and “Seven Days in May.”

The film is dreadful in all the right ways for the “so-bad-it’s-good” brigade, who will treasure this wonderfully clichéd tale about mankind messing with nature and then nature messing back.

The most important thing to know about “Prophecy,” however, is that its exploding sleeping bag scene is one of the greatest moments in moviemaking history.

Where to watch: Amazon Prime, Paramount+, Epix, Sling TV, more.

‘Grizzly II: Revenge’ (2020)

Sure, you could stick with the legendary original film — 1976’s “Grizzly” — which was a massive hit despite being pilloried by critics as a “Jaws” rip-off. Or you can

straight to the sequel, which might make Part 1 seem like “Citizen Kane” in comparison.

The movie, which boasts no more than an 8% approval rating from scribes on Rotten Tomatoes, tells the story of a gigantic mama bear who goes on a bloody rampage after her cub was killed by poachers. And, believe it or not, it features three (at the time) little-known actors by the names of Charlie Sheen, George Clooney and Laura Dern.

Also, “Grizzly II: Revenge” was released some 37 years after it was originally shot, which is always a great sign.

Where to watch: Amazon Prime, Google Play, Redbox, Vudu, YouTube, more.

‘Bear’ (2010)

Four people driving through a remote area decide to take a shortcut in this Roel Reiné-directed horror film. And, as shocking as it may sound, that turns out to be a very bad idea. They end up getting stuck in the woods in their minivan and having to fend off one mighty ticked-off bear.

The bear in question — listed in the credits as “Blue” — is by far the best actor in the cast. Although, granted, that’s a mighty low bar to clear. The human characters are just plain obnoxious and apparently believe that bickering among each other is the best way to overcome the deadly situation. There’s also a scene where the bear (kinda, sorta) does drugs.

Where to watch: Redbox, Vudu, Roku Channel, Fawesome, Tubi, more.

‘Grizzly Rage’ (2007)

We’ve seen toothbrushes that were more terrifying than this Canadian horror flick. But don’t let that stop you from watching the actors — who alternate between robotic rigidity and zealous overacting — in this tale of a 4x4 trip gone incredibly wrong. The bear, as per usual in these films, definitely delivers the best moments on screen.

Where to watch: Amazon Prime, YouTube, Crackle, Roku Channel, more



PAT REDMOND, UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

From left, O’Shea Jackson, Jr., Ayoola Smart, Alden Ehrenreich and Ray Liotta in a scene from “Cocaine Bear.” The role was one of Liotta’s last before he died in May.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Sanitized and scattered

‘Jesus Revolution’ has interesting material, but doesn’t use it well

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

It’s been fascinating to watch the rise, and evolution, of the faith-based movie over the years, and director Jon Erwin has been a part of that. He’s carved out a niche for himself, collaborating with his brother Andrew and focusing on true stories with a musical element, including “I Still Believe,” about Christian music star Jeremy Camp, and “I Can Only Imagine,” about the band MercyMe. The Erwin brothers also co-directed the documentary “The Jesus Music,” which has a direct tie to his latest narrative feature film, “Jesus Revolution,” which focuses on the same topic, the Jesus movement that took place in Southern California in the late ’60s and early ’70s.

For “Jesus Revolution,” Jon Erwin co-directs with Brent McCorkle, the writer of “I Can Only Imagine,” the pair working from a script by Erwin and Jon Gunn adapted from a book by Greg Laurie and Ellen Vaughn. Laurie is, in fact, the subject of “Jesus Revolution,” played by Joel Courtney. But the film, which is part biopic, part period piece depicting a larger movement, juggles three different subjects while trying to tell the story of the Jesus movement, including Laurie, Laurie’s mentor, Chuck Smith, played by Kelsey Grammer, and hippie evangelist Lonnie Frisbee (Jonathan Roumie).

As depicted in “Jesus Revolution,” Smith and Frisbee were huge influences on Laurie, a young teen growing up in Newport Beach, Calif., with a troubled mother (Kimberly Williams-Paisley). When a comely young hippie gal, Cathe (Anna Grace Barlow), breaks him out of military school, Greg dabbles in the drug-fueled hippie lifestyle, before a few near-death experiences find he and Cathe searching for a different kind of high.

At the same time, Chuck Smith is struggling to reconcile his concern over the hippie movement with his daughter Janette’s (Ally Ioannides) rebellion, and his dwindling church attendance. When Janette brings home a wandering hippie, Lonnie Frisbee, Chuck initially balks, but soon realizes that Lonnie’s message is closer to Christ’s than he thought. It also has to help that with his beard, long hair and hand-painted cape, Lonnie looks a lot like the common depictions of (white) Jesus. Soon, Chuck’s preaching at Calvary Church is less fire and brimstone and more peace and love, with a rock band, Love Song, to boot.

The storylines converge when Lonnie brings in Greg, who becomes a young leader in the burgeoning Jesus movement, while the three men navigate the ups and downs that this growth entails. It’s an interesting enough

story, with text at the end of the film claiming that it was the “largest spiritual awakening in America” and a Time magazine cover story, “The Jesus Revolution,” woven into the narrative.

Unfortunately, despite the interesting history, the film itself is a dry, scattered slog, neutered of all the thorny, contradictory details of the real story. Give Lonnie Frisbee’s Wikipedia page a quick scan to see just how much material the filmmakers excised from his fascinating, troubled life. Though the intent is to focus on Greg Laurie’s life, including flashbacks to his childhood, screenwriters Erwin and Gunn can’t quite pick a lane in their focus, giving us three rather shallow storylines about three different men, with often unnecessary details that bog down the film’s momentum — at two hours, it feels long.

“Jesus Revolution” is also, obviously, a completely uncritical portrait of the Jesus movement. Because this is a faith-based film, it simply presents the genesis of this “spiritual awakening” and explosion of these churches, without examining any of the potential dark sides or ramifications of how this evangelical Christian movement has impacted American culture and politics in the decades since.

“Jesus Revolution” is rated PG-13 for strong drug content involving teens and some thematic elements. Running time: 120 minutes. Now playing in select AAFES theaters.



LIONSGATE/AP photos

Greg Laurie, played by Joel Courtney, left, is the subject of “Jesus Revolution,” adapted from a book. Also shown: Anna Grace Barlow.



Kelsey Grammer, above, and Jonathan Roumie, below, also star in “Jesus Revolution,” which attempts to juggle three different subjects.



Leading lady Andie MacDowell returns in ‘My Happy Ending’

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

The beguiling Andie MacDowell, a leading lady in films like “Groundhog Day” and “Four Weddings and a Funeral,” has taken on more supporting roles in the past several years. While she’s always memorable, it’s nice to see her step into a leading role once again (and a non-romantic one at that) with “My Happy Ending,” a heartfelt drama directed by Tal Granit and Sharon Maymon.

“My Happy Ending” is written by Rona Tamir, based on a play by Anat Gov. The events unfold over several hours in a single setting, which exposes the theatrical roots of the story, though Granit and Maymon add a touch of magical realism to liberate the film’s cinematic potential.

MacDowell stars as Julia Roth, an American mega-star who travels to a small British clinic for chemotherapy. The name, her apparent star caliber and the many comments about her fabulous hair make this fictional Julia seem a lot like Julia Roberts, and coupled with the English setting, it calls to mind another film about a movie star trying to go unnoticed — “Notting Hill.”

Our Julia’s star is on the wane, having just endured a West End flop, and she’s attempting to go incognito at the chemo clinic. She hasn’t told anyone, including her manager or daughter, about her diagnosis of colon cancer, and she thinks she can muscle through a few rounds of chemo on her own, without being discovered. Privacy proves to be a challenge at the clinic, which doesn’t have private rooms, only curtained-off areas, but it turns out that the



ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS/TNS

Tamsin Greig, left, plays longtime friend and manager to and Andie MacDowell’s celebrity suffering a medical crisis in “My Happy Ending.”

lack of secrecy is exactly what Julia needs.

Just across the curtain are three women: the wacky, wig-swapping Mikey (Sally Phillips), a wise, curmudgeonly older woman, Judy (Miriam Margolyes), and a quiet but busy young mother, Imaan (Rakhee Thakrar). After a few awkward exchanges in which it becomes clear that every conversation can be overheard (which is often used to comedic effect), Julia surrenders to her surroundings and finds comfort in these women, who understand, better than she does, the challenges that she’s facing.

The premise of “My Happy Ending,” set in one room over one day, is somewhat slight, but there’s nothing insubstantial about a woman coming to a profound realization about her life thanks to a surprising encounter with unexpected new allies. MacDowell brings her signature soulful charm to the role of Julia, who starts out as guarded and fearful, and blossoms into a powerful advocate for herself. Plus, casting Phillips, whom you might recognize as one of Bridget Jones’ best friends, is like a cinematic cheat code — her comic energy is natural and undeniable, but here she is allowed to color in all the shades of the emotional rainbow, from euphoria to regret.

Granit and Maymon allow the characters, and the audience, to escape the clinic through the women’s shared guided visualizations, which they call “holidays,” escapist fantasies to an island rainforest, or Burning Man or just back home. Julia’s “holidays” are scattered, but as she focuses on what would make her happy, not impressing the other women or pleasing her strident longtime friend and manager, Nancy (Tamsin Greig), it helps her to understand what she wants to do in the face of such a daunting diagnosis. The support of the other women allows her to speak her truth, and her choice, clearly to both Nancy and her doctor (Tom Cullen).

“My Happy Ending” may at times feel modest, but the lessons imparted are far from disposable. A happy ending doesn’t always have to look the same for everyone; each one is different and deeply personal.

“My Happy Ending” is rated R for language and brief drug use. Running time: 89 minutes.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Return to Dream Land comes to Switch

Deluxe version of Kirby game first on Wii features better visuals, new powers and minigames, an epilogue campaign

BY GIESON CACHO
Bay Area News Group

Nintendo never gets rid of good ideas. It just stores them like seeds, waiting for the right time to plant them. They’ve done it with the Mii, which was originally an experiment for the Famicom Disk System, and it took producer Yoshio Sakamoto almost 20 years to complete his vision of Metroid Dread. Hardware limitations kept that game on the back burner.

The recent Kirby games on the Switch originated from an 11-year gap when Nintendo didn’t release a main console series entry starring the pink puffball. The issue was that HAL Laboratory was working on a Kirby console title but the developers couldn’t get the concepts right. They were eventually referred to as the three lost Kirby games.

Although the games were called “lost,” the ideas for them were actually slumbering and later incorporated into Kirby and the Forgotten Land and Kirby Star Allies. But the game that broke the console drought was Kirby’s Return to Dream Land, which was released on the Wii in 2011. Now more than a decade since its release, the multiplayer platforming game is coming back as a remake on the Switch.

Helping a new ally

Return to Dream Land Deluxe follows the puffball and his friends Bandana Waddle Dee, King Dedede and Meta Knight as they help Magolor, an alien that crashed his ship on Planet Popstar. The main campaign has Kirby and company roaming around to find five pieces of his ship so that he can return to his homeworld of Halcandra.

The entry features three areas of play, amiibo support and of course updated visuals. (The original came out on the standard definition Wii. This 2D Kirby title returned the series to its roots but it featured polygon characters instead of sprites.) The puffball keeps his signature ability to swallow enemies and copy their abilities, and players will recognize some of his classic powers such as the sword, fire breath and hammer. The update adds a new Gundam-type ability that makes him look like the iconic Mecha with the firepower to match.

Additional players can join as different Kirbys or one of his allies. Because they aren’t Kirby, they won’t have his ability to swallow foes but they will always have a weapon at their side.

In multiplayer mode, players



Nintendo photos

In Return to Dream Land Deluxe, Kirby and his friends help Magolor, an alien that crashed his ship on Planet Popstar. The main campaign has Kirby and company roaming around to find five pieces of Magolor’s ship so that he can return to his homeworld of Halcandra.



Another area of play is called Merry Magoland and features 10 mini-games. Eight are from the original and two are new. Here, players can earn points to get masks to wear in the campaign.

can pull off team attacks, share health power-ups and stack atop each other like a totem pole. The gameplay can be a bit chaotic with up to four players, but because Kirby is the star of the show, the camera will always focus on him and if friends are lagging behind, they’ll teleport to where player one is.

Lastly, Kirby has a Super Ability, which is an extra strong power that’s time limited. Players can do things like turn into a giant snowball and roll over foes. The puffball can also suck up

giant blocks that block the group’s path.

Minigames for fun

The second area of play is called Merry Magoland and features 10 minigames in which players can compete for fun. Eight are from the original and two are new. One activity, Kirby on the Draw, requires players to shoot targets before anyone else does to get points. The mini-games have 100 missions to complete and with the points that players earn they can get masks



Kirby’s Return to Dream Land Deluxe supports drop-in and drop-out multiplayer for up to four people. Additional players join as different Kirbys or one of his allies.

to use on their characters in the rest of the game.

Lastly, Return to Dream Land Deluxe features an epilogue that’s unlocked when players beat the game. It’s called Magolor Epilogue: The Interdimensional Traveler. It supports up to four players just like the regular campaign except this time around, players control the alien. It has a different feel from the Kirby adventure because Magolor doesn’t have any of the puffball’s moves. He shoots magic at enemies and his jumps are less

floaty. It has more of a “Super Mario Bros.” feel.

What’s notable about the multiplayer mode in the epilogue is that Magolor has a combo meter and if several players are battling enemies, it jumps up quickly. At the same time, if one player gets hit, they lose that combo. The higher the combo that players score, the more magic points they get to improve Magolor’s powers.

Platform: Nintendo Switch
Online: kirbysreturntodream-landdeluxe.nintendo.com

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Rising to Germany's top at the Zugspitze

One of my favorite places to be in Europe is atop the Zugspitze — the highest point in Germany. Standing on this 9,700-foot peak, you can't help but marvel at the thought that, for at least a few moments, you are standing above everyone else in the entire country. From here, facing south, I feel like a maestro conducting an orchestra of snowcapped peaks as the mighty Alps stretch seemingly forever to the right and left.

The Zugspitze also marks the border between Germany and Austria. Before Europe united, you had to show your passport just to walk across this mountaintop.

Lifts from both countries meet at the top. As if waging an epic battle of alpine engineering, just a few years after the Austrians built a cable car to their Zugspitze station, the Germans drilled through the mountain in 1931 so that a cogwheel train could deposit nature lovers on a glacier just below their side of the summit (the German side now runs a cable car as well).

Today, whether you ascend from the Austrian or German side, you can straddle the border between two great nations while enjoying an incredible view. Restaurants, shops, a small museum and tele-

scopes await you at the summit.

Up top are two separate terraces — Bavarian and Tirolean — connected by a narrow walk that had been the border station. Crossing used to be a big deal — you'd get your passport stamped at the little blue house and shift your currency from shillings to marks.

The views are equally breathtaking on either side of the border. On the German side, the Zugspitzplatt Glacier stretches before you. From here, ski lifts fan out as if reaching for the ridge that defines the German-Austrian border.

Below, in the snow, stands the Hochzeit-skapelle — wedding chapel — which was consecrated in 1981 by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (a.k.a. Pope Benedict XVI).

The German side has the oldest building up here — the rustic, tin-and-wood weather tower, erected by the Deutscher Wetterdienst (German weather service) in 1900. The first mountaineers' hut was built in 1897 but didn't last. The existing one — entwined with mighty cables that cinch it down — dates from 1914. In 1985, observers clocked 200-mph winds up here —



Rick Steves



RICK STEVES/Rick Steves' Europe

A golden cross marks the top of the Zugspitze — the highest point in Germany.

those beefy cables are necessary.

On the German side is a golden cross that marks the highest point in the country. This side also has a sleek, modern restaurant offering lofty views.

World War II left its mark on the summit. The Austrian side was higher until the Germans blew its top off during the war (to make a flak tower that targeted Allied airplanes).

The Austrian station, which is much more visitor-friendly than the German one, has a fine little museum that tells the story of how the Zugspitze was first climbed in 1820. The museum also includes three interesting videos: a six-minute, 3D mountain show; a 30-minute, making-of-the-lift show; and a 45-minute

look at nature, sport and culture of the region. Looking down the valley from the Tirolean Terrace, you can see the Austrian towns of Erwald and Lermoos in the distance, and the valley that leads to Reutte, one of my favorite overnight stops in the region.

In the summer, it's easy to actually "summit" the Zugspitze from the viewing platform, as there are steps and handholds all the way to the golden cross. While the Germans glory in the Zugspitze, their nation's highest point, their neighbors are less impressed: There are many higher mountains in Austria.

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

Looking ahead to Easter markets, strong beer and bonfires

On Ash Wednesday, which fell on Feb. 22 in 2023, Christians entered Lent, a 40-day time period set aside to prepare for Easter through abstinence from certain pleasures, fasting and prayer. While traditionally a season of solemnity and self-reflection, a look at Europe's cultural calendar for the weeks ahead reassures us that fun and festivity isn't entirely off the agenda. Here are some ways to get in sync with the season:

Easter egg markets

Eggs, associated with new life from time immemorial, have long been given astounding makeovers for Easter. While prettily dyed and decorated versions are ubiquitous this time of year, some artists take the craft of embellishing eggs to another level. Their talent and creativity is on full display at multiple Easter egg exhibitions. In contrast to more generic Easter markets at which a variety of plants and handicrafts are sold, egg artistry stands front and center at the following events in Germany:



Karen Bradbury

Seligenstadt Monastery, Seligenstadt: This handsome medieval city on the Main River just east of Frankfurt is home to the largest Carolingian basilica to be found north of the Alps. Its monastery hosts the Easter egg exhibition Feb. 25-26. Adult entry 3.50 euros, children age 12 and under enter free. Online: tinyurl.com/25t2za3m

Schloss Filseck, Uhhingen: This castle east of Stuttgart welcomes admirers of the egg to its market March 4-5. Entry costs 4 euros. Online: tinyurl.com/2afn9k7r

Eberbach Monastery, Eltville Am Rhein: The famous monastery in the Rheingau region west of Wiesbaden welcomes visitors to its market March 4-5. (Note this market features the same exhibitors as the Seligenstadt event.) Adult entry 6 euros, children age 12 and under enter free. Online: tinyurl.com/8msw6xb5

Schloss Schwetzingen, Schwetzingen: Held at the site of a stately castle to the west of Heidelberg, this market



MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

These eggs, decorated with traditional symbolic motifs, were for sale at an Easter egg market in Seligenstadt, Germany. The markets are popular in the Easter season.

features international artists and craftsmen. Entry to both the market and castle gardens costs 8 euros. Online: tinyurl.com/5dkfacsn

Erwin-Hasenzahl-Halle, Michelstadt: This half-timbered beauty of a town in the Odenwald, south of Frankfurt, hosts its annual display March 18-19. Adult entry 3 euros, children under 14 enter free. Online: tinyurl.com/ysjj5bhw

Redoutensaal, Erlangen: This newcomer to the Easter egg market scene takes place north of Nuremberg April 1-2. Adult entry 3.50 euros, children age 12 and under enter free. Online: tinyurl.com/mtv7drws

Strong Beer festivals

Centuries back, Lent meant monks and practicing Christians would abstain from solid foods, but not from drinking. Because water was often too polluted for consumption, beer was a staple product. Starkbier, or strong beer, appeared on the scene when the Paulaner monks,

whose monastery was just outside Munich, came up with the idea of brewing an extra hearty beer to sustain them through the Lenten period. The trend caught on, and other breweries began producing these brews, also known as Doppelbocks. They're still available today, and the tradition of naming them with an -ator suffix after the original "Salvator" brewed by Paulaner makes them easy to identify. A number of Munich's breweries hold fests in honor of these calorific and potent brews, the most famous of which is Paulaner Nockherberg's Starkbierfest. For three weeks, the venue hosts parties featuring Oktoberfest-style bands and culinary specialties of the season. While many evenings are sold out already, places remain available on several dates from March 12-April 2. Online: paulaner-nockherberg.com

Other Strong Beer festivals taking place in Munich include those at the Augustiner-Keller (Saturdays through April 1); the Löwenbräukeller (March 10-11, 15-18 and 22-25) and the Donisl tavern, where Hacker-Pschorr beers are poured (March 10-11, 17-18 and 24-25). Online: tinyurl.com/yckwppd5

Burning of winter

The tradition of bonfires to symbolically burn away the vestiges of winter persist throughout pockets of Europe. The towns and villages of Austria's Vorarlberg region keep up the custom with their "Funken," bonfires accompanied by music and fireworks, on the Saturday and Sunday immediately following Ash Wednesday (Feb. 25-26 in 2023). Online: tinyurl.com/3e8z2ufs

The town of Bouge, Belgium, close to the Walloon capital of Namur, is also the site of a tremendous bonfire set alight to mark the arrival of spring, followed by an impressive display of fireworks. The event begins this year at 6 p.m. on Feb. 26. Online: tinyurl.com/vdkzjya3

Residents of towns throughout the Duchy of Luxembourg also mark the first weekend of Lent with massive bonfires known as Buergrunnen or Fêtes des Brandons, an attempt to put the worst of winter weather behind.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Retracing my ancestors' Great Migration

Amtrak trip with son honors courage, stokes connection with past family members

BY SHEEKA SANAHORI
The Washington Post

“Welcome to Yazoo, MS,” declares a bright red banner with white letters painted onto the side of a gas station. Yazoo City, Miss., was the Amtrak train’s first stop after leaving Jackson.

My face was glued to the train’s window. I was trying to memorize every church facade, empty lot and oak tree as the train picked up speed, heading north.

My 5-year-old son, Amir, was happily munching on snacks, excited to sleep on a train. I’d explained the significance of this trip, but I knew a deeper appreciation would develop once he was older. We were riding the train to retrace the journey north that our ancestors took on the Great Migration, paying homage to their brave decision to seek a better life.

I knew my ancestors’ train ride from Mississippi to Missouri would have been more arduous than mine, but I wondered whether this was the same landscape my family saw when they journeyed north. Many of them made the trek from across Mississippi to cities in the northern Midwest, but for simplicity’s sake, we followed the path most likely taken by my great-grandmother Viola Mays. Born in Crystal Springs, Miss., she first moved to St. Louis before heading farther north to Chicago a few years later.

An estimated 6 million Black Americans left their homes permanently in the South in a mass movement that scholars call the Great Migration. Families settled in cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Cleveland and New York from about 1910 to 1970. They were in search of better jobs than the South’s sharecropping system could provide. They were also attempting to escape racial terror.

“This movement of people is nearly unparalleled in American history. There are very few instances in which we have such a large number of people moving within the United States,” said Keneshia Grant, an associate professor of political science at Howard University who studies Black migration. “They are strategizing, they are calculating about their lives and how to make their lives better, and they’re doing it over an extended period of time.”

As the train pulled away, I clutched the framed black-and-white picture of my great-grandmother that I brought on our trip. Her choice to move deeply affected the life I have today.

Discovering family travels

I knew my great-grandmother; she was my oldest living relative before she died in her 90s. But the few memories I have with her are a blur from childhood. The strongest images I have come from the small details my father has shared about being raised by Mama Mays. He shared how she doted on plants, including her Moses-in-the-cradle that he propagated and still has today. He shared her recipe for collard



Photos by Sheeka Sanahori

Sheeka and her son, Amir, on the St. Louis Wheel at Union Station. St. Louis was the first stop on their Amtrak trip to retrace her ancestors’ journey on the Great Migration.



Sheeka Sanahori’s great-grandmother Viola Mays and an unnamed man in a postcard photo. Sanahori visited the spot this photo was likely taken, at the National Park Service’s museum in St. Louis.

greens and how she used to sell dinners in the neighborhood for extra cash.

My dad gave me a picture of Mama Mays proudly standing behind the counter of her own restaurant. I imagined her triumph of a dream realized.

Of all the beautiful details I’ve collected about her, the part I don’t know much about is her story on the Great Migration. To retrace her steps, I needed to research my family’s history. For those interested in doing the same, there are several avenues you can take to figure it out.

“Talk to the elders, because if they didn’t migrate, then their parents did,” said Preston Smith II, a professor of politics at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts.

He says there also may be clues in where family members live now. “It’s regionally focused,” he said. For instance, if a family is in Boston, he said, then they may have come from the Carolinas.

I started my research with the family Bible. In the first few pages, my grandmother had written relatives’ information, including names, birthdays and birthplaces. I learned from her notes that her mother, my great-grandmother, was born in Crystal Springs, Miss., a rural town near Jackson.

Heirlooms may not be available to everyone to get clues into family routes.

“We don’t have a family Bible that someone’s been carrying around. We don’t have pictures; we just were poor, so we don’t have this stuff,” Grant said of her family who traveled south, a lesser-known migration route during the same period. Some families living in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia relocated to Florida, as her maternal line did. Fortunately, there are public records that can help fill in the gaps. Grant recommends Black-owned newspapers as a source.

“The Chicago Defender is a great source of information, not just about Chicago but about Black America,” she said, adding that many major cities have Black newspapers. “So you can search your ancestor’s name in the newspaper and see if they’re doing things that will let you know where they are.”

Census records began recording Black Americans by name beginning in 1870. Military records may also reveal birth dates and birthplaces, which is what I used in my family’s research. My great-uncle’s World War II draft record indicates that he was born in St. Louis in 1922, which means my great-grandmother had already moved north by the time she gave birth to him.

Trains of the 20th century

In the earlier decades of the Great Migration, most people left the South via train. Families on the East Coast took the Atlantic Coast train to Richmond, then connected to different rail lines going farther north. Families based in Mississippi took the Illinois Central north to Memphis, then onward to cities such as St. Louis and Chicago. The Southern Pacific Railroad would have taken passengers based in Louisiana and Texas westward to

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WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Fun on smaller scale

Universal Studios has plans to open kids’ ‘extension’ in Dallas, Halloween Horror Nights experience in Las Vegas

BY BRADY MACDONALD
The Orange County Register

Universal Studios has big plans to take on regional amusement park chains in the United States and around the globe with a pair of smaller scale and lower-cost theme park concepts aimed at families with young kids and horror movie fans.

Universal Parks & Resorts is already planning a global expansion of its recently announced concepts for a kids-focused theme park near Dallas and a Halloween Horror Nights experience in Las Vegas, according to a Comcast quarterly earnings call last month.

“So we’re definitely having an eye towards expanding internationally, not just domestically, and they won’t all be places for a big, giant primary theme park,” NBCUniversal CEO Jeffrey Shell said on the earnings call. “We will look at different concepts for different markets.”

Last month, Universal Parks & Resorts unveiled plans to open a new theme park aimed at families with young children in the North Texas city of Frisco and a new

permanent horror-themed experience at the Area15 entertainment district near the Las Vegas Strip. Opening dates have not yet been announced for the as-yet-unnamed theme park concepts, but work is set to begin in 2023 on both projects.

The smaller scale theme park “extensions” could fuel growth at Universal’s larger destination parks in California, Florida, China, Japan and Singapore, Comcast CEO Brian Roberts said on the earnings call.

Universal’s smaller scale family-oriented theme park concept near Dallas “will work in a lot of places around the world that may not support a full-scale theme park like we have in Orlando or Beijing, but could support something else,” Shell said on the call.

The proposed 97-acre Universal Kids resort will include attractions based on DreamWorks and Illumination films, according to the earnings call. Concept art shows themed lands and attractions dedicated to Shrek, Trolls and Jurassic World.

The Halloween Horror Nights experi-



Concept art for the Halloween Horror Nights experience that Universal Studios is planning to open in Las Vegas and which could be expanded to other locations globally.

ence coming to Las Vegas could be expanded to a number of locations around the world, Shell said on the call.

Universal’s library of classic horror characters includes Frankenstein, Dracula, Werewolf of London, Wolf Man and The Mummy. Halloween Horror Nights has also worked with a new generation of horror filmmakers like Jason Blum (“Insidious,” “The Purge”), Jordan Peele (“Nope,” “Us”) and James Wan (“Saw,” “The Conjuring”).

Universal’s theme park division expects to increase capital spending in 2023 as

work begins on the Horror Nights and Universal Kids theme park extensions and continues on the new Universal Beijing theme park in China and the upcoming Epic Universe theme park in Florida.

“The required investment to develop these extensions is nowhere near the scale of Epic or Universal Beijing, but rather enable us to leverage our already large market opportunity and could serve as a model that contributes even higher growth at theme parks in the future,” Comcast President Mike Cavanagh said on the earnings call.

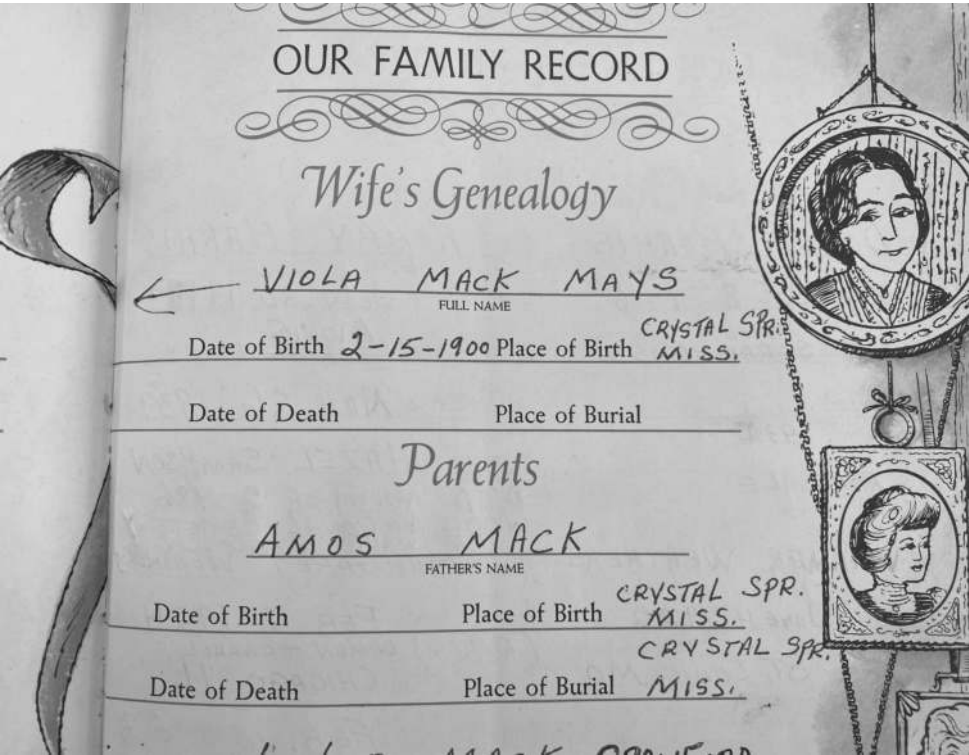
Migration: Duo rode from Jackson to Memphis, stopped in St. Louis

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California, according to “The Routledge Historical Atlas of the American Railroads.”

Another book, “Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance,” explains that Black passengers leaving the South in the early 1900s would have been forced to ride in segregated train cars that were typically the oldest — and often the most dangerous to be in in the event of a crash. Jim Crow cars also typically carried luggage of passengers in other cars and were shared spaces for smoking white passengers and law enforcement transporting prisoners.

In later decades of the Great Migration, riding the train gave way to taking Greyhound, driving cars and, eventually, flying.



To retrace her great-grandmother’s steps, Sheeka Sanahori started her research by looking through her family Bible. This record she found inside it shows the names, locations and birthdays of her great-grandparents.

to disembark the train in Memphis after 10 p.m. (after my son was asleep) and re-board into a new car to reach our roomette. The twin-size bunk beds take up nearly all the space in each private roomette.

Amtrak uses some of the original train lines used by passenger train companies during the Great Migration.

Not all sections are in service, though, such as from Carbondale, Ill., to St. Louis, which was part of the line I intended to

retrace on the Illinois Central.

To fill some of those gaps, Amtrak drives passenger vans. Once we arrived at the Carbondale station in southern Illinois shortly after 3 a.m., we boarded a 15-passenger van for a two-hour ride to St. Louis.

Echoes of past in St. Louis

One of the highlights on our visit to St. Louis was Gateway Arch National Park and the boat ride up and down the Missouri River. Back on land inside the Na-

tional Park Service’s museum, a small exhibit toward the end gave me deja vu.

It was a photo studio reproduction, including a set that mimicked the back of a train, perfectly lined up to an antique accordion-style bellows camera. A display describes that travelers who were about to leave St. Louis would pose for photos there. I’d seen this scene before.

I found the digital image I took of my great-grandmother’s black-and-white photograph, one I dated to have been taken between 1918 and 1924. In it, she’s standing with a man on a reproduction train. The sign beneath her says, “Leaving St. Louis bound for the North.” Her photo mirrored the image so closely, it knocked the breath out of my chest. It felt like a final synchronistic gift, a thank-you for acknowledging the moves she made in her lifetime.

A deeper connection

No matter how you choose to ride, learning about the courage of those who participated in the Great Migration makes for an inspiring way to remember them.

“I think this part of our history should also be a focus,” Smith said. “Many of us lament that we don’t know our ancestors from the continent, and it’s clearly a problem. But we do know our ancestors from the South. They survived a lot of hardship, making that trip and also settling.”

I wish I knew more about my great-grandmother’s motivation to leave home. She died when I was a teen; it was also a loss of the personal connection to an important piece of American history.

Even though it has been more than two decades since I’ve seen her, I felt closer than ever to her while riding along the path of the old Illinois Central line.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Hidden in plain sight

Don't leave the Eternal City without visiting these 5 under-the-radar Roman treasures

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

For many tourists, a day in Rome means seeing the Sistine Chapel, visiting the Colosseum or climbing the famed Spanish Steps. But along the well-worn cobblestone streets to and from those and other Roman wonders are a plethora of often overlooked treasures that reveal other facets of the Eternal City. Finding them can be difficult unless you know where to look. We've compiled five below, but more about these and others can be found at online travel sites such as @livevirtualguide on Instagram:

Pietre d'inciampo, or stumbling stones

These bronze cobblestones placed throughout the Jewish Ghetto at Via della Reginella, and in other locations in Rome, are in front of the homes of Holocaust victims.

Each stone bears the victim's name, birth year, date of arrest, the Nazi concentration camp they were taken to and the date of their death. Called stolpersteine in German, such memorials can also be found in Germany, Austria and elsewhere.

Also visit: The Jewish Museum, which includes the Great Synagogue of Rome, boasting the city's only square dome. At the end of Via della Reginella, just outside the ghetto, you can see the late Renaissance-era Turtle Fountain.

Passeto del Biscione

This covered passageway leading from Via di Grotta Pinta to Piazza Biscione is just steps away from where Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C.

The entrance to the walkway may seem off-putting, but don't let it keep you from stepping inside to see the recently restored frescoes with cherubs, garlands and a blue sky that line the ceiling and upper walls.

There also is a shrine to the Madonna at one end of the short passageway, thought to be originally part of the Theater of Pompey, completed in 55 B.C.

Also visit: Campo de Fiori's market, with fruit and vegetables, flowers and other items. Skip the restaurants that line the piazza and head to Roscioli at Via

del Giubbonari 21. The salumeria/cucina has an extensive wine cellar and offers some of the city's best cacio e pepe.

Fountain of Lovers at Trevi Fountain

This small but charming font is situated to the right of the heavily visited Trevi Fountain, nestled alongside a stone wall toward the back.

According to legend, young lovers who were to be separated, often because of military service, would drink from the Fountain of Lovers, with its two arcing waterspouts, to remain forever faithful and in love.

The fountain also had a practical purpose: allowing residents access to the waters of the Acqua Vergine aqueduct, according to the website Waidy Wow.

Also visit: Vicus Caprarius, or City of Water, at Vicolo del Puttarello 25 for an underground look at how the Trevi Fountain is fed. The archaeological site features an ancient Roman apartment complex beneath the Trevi district.

Galleria Sciarra, on Via Marco Minghetti, 10

With just a minute or two of walking from the Trevi Fountain, you can take in the ornate frescoes and architecture in the hidden courtyard of this Art Nouveau building dating to the late 19th century, according to the travel blog My Adventures Across the World.

Among the building's features are frescoes in the Liberty style, an Italian variant of Art Nouveau. Mostly depicting women,



PHOTOS BY ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

According to local legend, couples who were to be separated, often due to military service, would drink from the Fountain of Lovers with its two arcing waterspouts to ensure their fidelity and love would last.



Bronze pietre d'inciampo, or stumbling stones, near homes in the Jewish Ghetto, memorialize victims of the Holocaust.

they were painted by Giuseppe Cellini in 1887, according to the blog.

At the top of the building some four stories above is a glass-and-iron canopy that allows light into the courtyard, which is a public passageway today.

Also visit: IKONO, an interactive art gallery for people of all ages featuring more than 12 immersive activities, including a ball pit, a hall of lanterns and a maze of mirrors and lights.

The gallery, at Via del Seminario 111, is a four-minute walk from the Galleria and is also near the Pantheon.

Nasoni

There are more than 2,500 of these public fountains, some quite grand and artistic, throughout Rome. Many of them are in the city's historic center, according to the blog Wanted in Rome.



The Passeto del Biscione is a covered walkway, steps away from where Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C. The walkway's ceiling and upper walls are covered with recently restored frescoes.

For example, there is one in front of the Hadrianeum, an ancient Roman temple near the Pantheon, dedicated in the year 145.

These fountains, which run constantly, offer clean drinking water for residents and visitors alike, making it unnecessary to buy bottled water during your visit.

Simply fill up with the same water pumped into Roman homes. Bonus: a small trough below the spigot allows dogs to drink.

Also visit: The free immersive exhibit at the Hadrianeum at Piazza di Pietra, open to the public from 1-5 p.m. weekdays. A 22-minute film takes viewers through time, retracing events that happened at the temple.

Much of the original structure is gone but elements of its facade, including 11 Corinthian-style



There are more than 2,500 public water fountains, or nasoni, in the city, such as this one in front of the Hadrianeum.

columns, remain. The modern building behind them is home to the city's chamber of commerce, according to www.turismoroma.it/en/events/hadrianeum.

bath.alison@stripes.com
Twitter: @alisonbath_

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING



Under the Eagle-Pod Orlem, located in Newmarket, England, has Polish staff members who are happy to introduce newcomers to Polish cuisine. The restaurant's rustic, wooden decor gives it the look and feel of a lake cabin in the forest.



Under the Eagle-Pod Orlem has been in business for 10 years. The restaurant is roughly 15-20 minutes from the bases of RAF Lakenheath, RAF Mildenhall and RAF Feltwell in England.



Under the Eagle-Pod Orlem
Address: 12b, 12c Crown Walk, Newmarket, England
Prices: Starters, soups and sides range between 6 and 13 pounds; main dishes and specialties range from 8 to 30 pounds
Hours: Monday, Tuesday and Thursday-Sunday, noon-10 p.m.; closed Wednesday
Information: Phone: 01638 664130; Online: facebook.com/UnderTheEagle.PodOrlem/menu; Reservations online at opentable.co.uk

An eagle eye for flavorful food

Polish restaurant in Newmarket excels in cuisine, atmosphere

By KYLE ALVAREZ
Stars and Stripes

After living near RAF Mildenhall and two other bases hosting U.S. troops for nearly two years, I thought I had found most of the nearby restaurants worth visiting.

I'm happy to say I was wrong.

Under the Eagle-Pod Orlem has been serving Polish dishes in Newmarket for nearly 10 years and is in one of the busiest areas of town, but it's a section I'd never checked out on foot.

The distinctive style makes the restaurant really stand out. The entryway and all the furniture are made of wood, giving the place the feel of a lake cabin in the forest.

I took my little girl on a daddy-daughter lunch date, and we both were amazed by the aesthetics and ambiance of the interior.

Our server, a native of Poland, was friendly and more than willing to answer my many questions, which I greatly appreciated, since it was my first time eating Polish food.

My daughter, who turns 5 soon, is a picky eater, so I wasn't sure how the lunch would go. We



Left: The meat-filled dumplings at Under the Eagle-Pod Orlem were a hit for the lone adult at the table. Right: The meringue-based dessert Pavlova, with fresh fruit on top, was a pleaser for both father and daughter.



began with the Polish board of snacks appetizer.

It came with assorted meats, smoked cheese and a few slices of herring in an onion sauce that was totally new to me.

The cheese was smoked only on the tips and could be peeled like a form of string cheese. My daughter loved it. The well-marinated herring was all for me, fortunately.

My daughter ordered dumplings with wild meat for her main dish, while I ordered potato pancakes with goulash.

Unfortunately, my daughter didn't like the texture of the soft-wrapped dumpling. Some things

are best left to adults.

The wild meat reminded me of what is normally found in a kibbeh, the Lebanese ground meat croquette, but with Polish style.

My goulash was fantastic. It was so good, in fact, that I started a conversation with another customer and his son, recommending that they order it. It turned out that was why they were there to begin with.

The best way I can describe the meal is it reminded me of a roast beef potato stew, but with a unique flavor profile.

There was a hint of spice, but it never hit the threshold of being too much.

Both the meat and the sauce were cooked perfectly, the former falling apart with just the slightest touch of my fork.

This meal had a surprise, however: a few dollops of cranberry jam and sour cream. This pairing lent a freshness to the deep, savory flavors of the stew.

The final piece of this delicious ensemble was the potato pancake, which was toasted and crunchy on the outside but soft enough in the middle.

For dessert, we ordered a Pavlova, which I had never eaten. But I remembered an obscure reference to it in one of my daughter's favorite shows,

"Bluey," so I had heard of it.

If your experience with children's animation is not as extensive as mine, Pavlova is a meringue-based dessert with whipped cream and fresh fruit on top. It's a big deal in Australia.

Once my daughter heard me read the name out loud, she couldn't help but get excited about the prospect of having the same dessert as a beloved cartoon character.

We both liked it and thought it was a lovely way to end such a heavy meal.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



WINIFRED BROWN/U.S. ARMY/U.S. Army Garrison-Japan
Army Community Service at Camp Zama, Japan, is hosting a walking tour of decorations for Hinamatsuri, or Girls' Day, March 3 at Zama Shrine.

Treat your inner child

Popular walking tour at Camp Zama shows you're never too old for dolls

BY CLAIRE JENQ
Stars and Stripes

Hundreds of ornate dolls will soon adorn the steps of a Shinto shrine near the U.S. Army's headquarters in Japan. Army Community Service at Camp Zama is hosting a walking tour of decorations for Hinamatsuri, or Girls' Day, at nearby Zama Shrine on March 3.

Similar Hina dolls will be displayed that day at homes across Japan as the country wishes for the health and happiness of their daughters.

Attendees will meet at the Camp Zama Community Recreation Center at 10 a.m. and walk together to the off-base shrine.

About 40 people from Camp Zama attended the free event last year, and ACS is expecting a similar turnout this year, tour coordinator Maiki Mayhew said by email Feb. 15.

In the Shinto religion, Hina dolls are believed to contain a soul. Rather than toss out old



NORIKO KUDO/US Army Garrison - Japan
Army Community Service at Camp Zama, Japan, is hosting a walking tour of decorations for Hinamatsuri, or Girls' Day, at nearby Zama Shrine on March 3.

dolls, they're donated to shrines for safekeeping and sometimes undergo a ritual funeral called ningyo kuyo.

The hundreds of dolls in Zama Shrine's collection are exhibited annually on a vibrant red backdrop and include emperors and empresses as well as their courtiers wearing traditional multi-

On the QT

Directions: Zama Shrine is about a 6-minute walk from Camp Zama's Gate 1.

Times: The walking tour is 10 a.m. March 3; however, the shrine's Hinamatsuri display can be viewed between 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. March 2-3 and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. March 4.

Costs: Free

Food: Coffee is sold at a small café on the shrine's grounds.

Information: Online: zamajinja.or.jp

Claire Jenq

layered robes modeled after royalty from the Heian period.

Zama Shrine's collection of Hina dolls will span approximately 77 steps leading to the shrine's main building, making this a must-see event to enjoy the traditional artistry of Hinamatsuri.

jenq.claire@stripes.com
Twitter: @Claire_Jenq

English-language map created for skiing in Niseko

BY YUJI HORIUCHI
Japan News

Amid the growing popularity of skiing in the wilderness outside ski resort boundaries, a map in English showing the Niseko mountain range and its surrounding backcountry trails is now available for foreign visitors.

While the map includes useful information on safety precautions and manners, local tourism officials are concerned about an increase in accidents.

Released last December, the map is called Niseko Backcountry. It covers the topography of the Niseko mountain range, Mt. Yotei and Mt. Shiribetsu. It is waterproof, tear-resistant and foldable, measuring 66 centimeters in length and 97 centimeters in width when fully open.

Place names are written in English and Japanese, with approximately 50 trails shown. It also includes information on what to do in case of emergency, on being prepared for an avalanche, the location of parking lots and so forth.

It was created by Robert Thomson, 42, together with colleagues. Thomson is an associate professor at Hokusei Gakuen University who is originally from New Zealand. He also runs the outdoor information website HokkaidoWilds.org.

Work on the map began in 2021, and it was completed after conducting on-site interviews and exchanging opinions with local guides and authorities, with some trails identified as dangerous being deleted.

The aim of the publication is to effectively convey safety rules and etiquette to foreign skiers visiting the Niseko area. Their numbers are expected to rise again now that the central government has eased the entry restrictions imposed to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Handing out leaflets is common, but they're often ignored," Thomson said, referring to fliers with safety warnings to skiers. "You have to supply a product that skiers actively seek out themselves, in order to get information across."

"There were no maps tailored to foreigners before and there should have been one," said Akio Shinya, 75, director of the Niseko Avalanche Research Institute. "Having people read the map will be effective in preventing accidents, [but] conditions in the mountains change every day. So it will depend on how you make use of the map."

The map costs 2,000 yen and can be obtained at ski equipment stores and lodging facilities in the Niseko area, as well as online.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Happy times for wallet and belly

Fast-casual Japanese spot located near Osan Air Base is affordable, delicious

By CHRISTOPHER GREEN
Stars and Stripes
Happy Teriyaki is a great place to stop for lunch if you're looking to spend less than \$10 near Osan Air Base, South Korea.

It was challenging to find this restaurant on the second floor of a tall building across from a fabric store and clothing shops. But, once inside, I was immediately greeted by a friendly hostess who seemed genuinely excited to see me.

The interior was very clean and organized. It has modest décor, but might be a good spot for a business lunch or dinner date.

While Happy Teriyaki describes itself as an "Asian Fusion" restaurant, the menu is mostly Japanese-style foods like katsu fried cutlets, yakisoba noodles and, of course, the eponymous teriyaki.

I ordered the lunch special of chicken teriyaki and gyoza and tea.



Happy Teriyaki offers "Asian Fusion" dining within walking distance of Osan Air Base.



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER GREEN/Stars and Stripes

Chicken teriyaki with gyoza from Happy Teriyaki near Osan Air Base, South Korea.

At 10,000 won, my total came to about \$9. My plate arrived with hefty portions of chicken, rice and vegetables. The teriyaki sauce glistened atop the chicken and every bite delighted the senses and teased the taste buds. Overall, I was satisfied. Here are some other lunch options that caught my eye: yaki-

soba chicken (13,000 won), spicy pork and vegetable stir fry (14,000 won), chicken katsu (12,000 won) and egg drop soup (3,000 won). I'll definitely be returning to this hidden gem, not only for the great food, but also the reasonable prices. green.christopher@stripes.com Twitter: @ChrisJGreen8

Happy Teriyaki
Location: 24, Jungangsijang-ro 6beon-gil, Pyeongtaek-si, South Korea
Hours: Daily, 11 a.m.-10 p.m.
Prices: Lunch specials are 10,000 won.
Dress: Casual
Directions: A short walk from the main gate at Osan Air Base.
Information: 031-665-7942; happy-teriyaki.business.site

Traditional Filipino breakfast is a tasty garlic fried rice for any meal



Garlic Fried Rice with Chicken is a fine breakfast in the Philippines, and makes a fine meal any time elsewhere.

By CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL
Associated Press
In Filipino homes, the smell that wakes up many families is not coffee brewing or bacon frying, but slices of garlic sizzling in oil. It's for a fried rice known as sinangag, a way to use up the previous day's rice by packing it chock-full of crisp, toasted garlic. Sliced garlic is deeply browned in oil to create golden garlic chips that are mixed into the rice along with a flavorful oil that infuses the entire dish. In this recipe from our book "Cook What You Have," which draws on pantry staples to assemble easy, weeknight meals, we add chicken to transform it into a main dish that can be eaten any time of the day. Soy sauce, scallions and a small amount of sugar give the rice complexity. For the best texture, use cooked rice that's been refrigerated until firm. To make enough for this recipe, in a large saucepan, combine 2 cups water and 1½ cups jasmine rice (or regular long-grain white rice) that's been rinsed and drained. Bring to a simmer over medium-high, then reduce to low, cover and cook for 15 to 18 minutes.

Let the rice stand, covered, for 10 minutes, then transfer to a wide, shallow bowl. Cool to room temperature, then cover and refrigerate until well chilled.
Garlic Fried Rice with Chicken
Start to finish: 35 minutes
Servings: 4
Ingredients
8 ounces boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed and cut into ½- to ¾-inch pieces
2 tablespoons soy sauce, divided
½ teaspoon white sugar
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
3 tablespoons grapeseed or other neutral oil, divided
8 medium garlic cloves, thinly sliced
3 scallions, thinly sliced, white and green parts reserved separately
4 cups cooked and chilled long-grain white rice, preferably jasmine rice (see headnote)
Directions
In a medium bowl, stir together the chicken, 1 tablespoon soy sauce, the sugar and ¼ teaspoon salt. In a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high, heat 1 tablespoon oil until shim-

mering. Add the chicken in an even layer and cook without stirring until browned on the bottom, 2 to 3 minutes. Stir the chicken, then cook, stirring occasionally, until well browned all over and cooked through, another 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer chicken to a plate; set aside. Wash and dry the skillet. Set it over medium-low and add the remaining 2 tablespoons oil and the garlic. Cook, stirring only occasionally at first then more often once the garlic begins to color, until some of the slices are light golden brown, about 5 minutes. Add the scallion whites and cook, stirring, until most of the garlic is golden brown, about 2 minutes. Add the rice, breaking up any clumps, followed by the remaining 1 tablespoon soy sauce and ¼ teaspoon salt. Cook over medium-high, stirring and scraping the bottom of the pan to incorporate the garlic and any browned bits, until the rice is heated through, about 2 minutes. Add the chicken and any accumulated juices; cook, stirring, until warmed through, about 1 minute. Off heat, taste and season with salt. Transfer to a serving dish, then sprinkle with the scallion greens and pepper.

WEEKEND: FOOD & BOOKS

Timeless and tasty

Today ‘kitchen bible’ cookbooks are more inclusive but still strive to teach newbies essential skills, stable recipes

By Sandra A. Gutierrez
Special to The Washington Post

Of the thousands of cookbooks published each year, only a few have staying power. Among them are multi-edition corporate cookbooks from such enduring brands as Good Housekeeping, Betty Crocker and Better Homes & Gardens, which have all released updated versions in the past few years, the latest of which is the “Better Homes & Gardens 100th Anniversary New Cook Book.”

These are “kitchen bibles” for many, handed down for generations, with recipes that reflect a slice of American home-cooking history and its evolution over more than a century. Before Amelia Simmons wrote what is considered to be the first American cookbook, “American Cookery,” in 1796, cooks in the United States — those who could read — had access to only European cookbooks.

“In the late 19th century, you start to get these American kitchen bibles that were larger than one person’s voice,” food historian Laura Shapiro said. “These were, above all, teaching cookbooks. They were educational [and] were supposed to lead you right from the first step of your life in the kitchen. The first one that you could call ‘corporate’ was the ‘Fannie Farmer Cookbook’ [originally called ‘The Boston Cooking-School Cookbook’] back in 1896.”

These huge books peaked during the 20th century. The “Good Housekeeping Everyday Cookbook” was published in 1903, with recipes described as “the meals granny used to make,” including buttermilk biscuits and meatloaf. “Better Homes & Gardens” and “The Joy of Cooking” published their first editions in 1930 and 1931, respectively, followed by “Betty Crocker’s Cookbook” in 1950. (The original Better Homes & Gardens cookbook was released 93 years ago, but because its 10-cent, 56-page recipe pamphlets began a century ago, the latest book celebrates 100 years of recipe publishing.)

Technological advances, such as access to running water, packaged food and the replacement of wood-burning stoves with gas and electric, revolutionized home cooking. As American women became more mobile, many moved away from their homes — and thus, from their mothers and grandmothers who used to pass down techniques and recipes, Shapiro said.

“Suddenly, you needed a book, you needed printed recipes, which, over time, became the way a lot of people learned to cook,” she said. “People were not only cooking from what was in season or grown in the backyard.”

Certain common features of these books are timeless: They are approachable, with easy-to-find ingredients and simple techniques.

These cookbooks are “for the person that’s graduating, who is getting married,” said Jan Miller, editor of the 17th edition of the “Better Homes & Gardens New Cook Book.” “Sometimes, people don’t even crack it open and start to use it until they have a family and they feel they really need to step up their cooking game. I hear so many moms say, ‘I bought this for my son.’ It’s for anyone who is stepping into their kitchen and maybe doesn’t have as much experience as they would love.”

One thing that’s changed about the books is the voice in which they are written. In its early incarnations, the “Good Housekeeping Cookbook” featured a fictional teenager called Susan.

“I remember I took that book away with me when I moved from home,” Shapiro said. “And when I started cooking in the ’70s, it was already a big, authoritative



SCOTT SUCHMAN/For The Washington Post

Cookbooks from well-known brands aim to broaden their appeal beyond the white housewives of the mid-20th century, while retaining their status as “kitchen bibles.”

bible — if already dated in terms of the food — but there was something so comforting, so reassuring about the tone of voice. They would say, ‘This is Susan’s meatloaf; this is how Susan makes her cookies,’ as if saying, ‘We’re on this, don’t worry; we have your back.’ And then they walked you down the recipe.”

In 1921, Betty Crocker was created for a contest by a flour milling company now known as General Mills, and went on to become the most famous fictional cookbook character. For more than a century, she has represented the American housewife. But while the first kitchen bibles were written in a white woman’s voice, today they strive for a more institutional and inclusive tone.

What these books still have in common is that they teach cooking and offer basic information, such as temperature charts, chopping primers, culinary terms and proper techniques.

For instance, the “Better Homes & Gardens New Cook Book” offers diagrams, step-by-step photos and specific text that assumes the cook needs even the most basic information.

“We try to make sure that it will speak to home cooks and help them get through whatever is happening in the economy or in their lives at that moment.”

Jan Miller
editor, “Better Homes & Gardens New Cook Book,” 17th edition

“For a period of time, we were losing our skills,” Miller said. “There was a generation that learned to cook from mom; then we skipped a generation, and now so many people are taking their food content from TV shows, from the internet. I want to answer all of their queries and needs on that page, because I don’t want them to have to go in search of another source.”

Chances are that if you are familiar with this category of books, it’s because you have a history with one of them. Maybe you saw it on your grandmother’s kitchen counter or at a friend’s house. You may even have a favorite: probably the one someone first gave you.

For Shapiro, it’s the “Good Housekeeping Cookbook” her mother passed along. For food scholar Anne Amienne, author of “Eat Feed Autumn Winter” (under the pen name Anne Bramley), it’s the “Better Homes &

Gardens Cook Book,” which she says became her kitchen companion. The only child of a single, working mom who didn’t have time to cook, she often found herself alone in the kitchen.

“I would just follow this book and would learn things from it. It’s where I learned that I could make a cake that didn’t come from a mix,” she said.

Amienne owns several editions of the book, spanning the 1960s to the ’90s, and she still reaches for them because of the “good, stable recipes that are not fancy — they just work. I always use the pancake, the waffle, the cornbread and the dumplings recipe,” she said.

Recipes that work and stand the test of time are essential, but the editors also continue to work to address changes in American society. To that end, while the cookbooks are still aimed at inexperienced home cooks, they have expanded their scope beyond white women to reach men and people of color, and to reflect the changing demographics of the United States.

“I think appetizers are great metrics for how culture changes,” Amienne said. “In the ’60s you get those pineapple-nut balls, and then in the ’80s and ’90s you see more global things. And even though there was guacamole in the ’60s edition, it had mayonnaise.” By the ’90s, the mayonnaise was edited out and cilantro added.

The latest edition has plenty of recipes adopted and adapted for modern American palates, including fresh iterations of pho, hummus, shakshuka, chilaquiles and bulgogi.

Shapiro thinks that these books “are always going to be important” and that the internet probably will never replace them because each volume is an authoritative source of the everyday basics home cooks need to know.

And she noted that the lasting power of these books also lies in their emphasis on teaching how to cook economically.

Especially during inflationary times, money can’t be wasted on recipes that fail. Corporate cookbooks have fully staffed test kitchens and big budgets that afford a rigorous testing process — something often missing from random online recipes.

Miller, reflecting on the economic downturn cooks face today, agrees.

“We’ve certainly ridden that wave of the economy since the initiation of the ’30s into the ’40s, all through the war-time, and then into the ’70s, when there was so much penny-pinching going on,” said Miller, who is now the executive food editor of Better Homes & Gardens magazine. “We try to make sure that it will speak to home cooks and help them get through whatever is happening in the economy or in their lives at that moment.”

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Fresh thoughts about ‘Fresh Prince’

Journalist Chris Palmer wanted to read a book about one of his favorite '90s sitcoms, but he couldn't find one. So he wrote one.

BY PETER LARSEN

The Orange County Register

For Chris Palmer, the neon-hued pop culture of his youth in the '80s and '90s might have faded into a warm nostalgic glow, but he never stopped caring for the things he loved back then.

"I'm someone who is super into nostalgia and things from when I was young, in my teenage years," says Palmer, who as a journalist has written about the intersection between sports — mostly NBA basketball — and culture for 25 years.

"Whether it's music, film, TV, sports teams, art or whatever," he says. "I read a lot of stuff about that."

So, when his teenage obsession with the NBC sitcom "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" reignited a few years ago, Palmer says he did what he always does in that situation.

"I wanted to read a 'Fresh Prince' book, and I searched for one, and I quickly realized that one didn't exist," Palmer says. "So basically, I wrote one. This is a book that I wanted to read on the show that so many people loved. I just ended up doing it myself."

That book, "The Fresh Prince Project: How 'The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air' Remixed America," is out this month, its dust jacket designed in tones of hot pink, lime green and electric blue that will instantly hurtle readers back in time to 1990 when the "Fresh Prince" turned a cheerful younger rapper named Will Smith into an overnight hip-hop TV star.

Palmer, talked with every major member of the "Fresh Prince" cast except for Smith, who was writing his own memoir

at the time, and the late James Avery, who played Smith's Uncle Phil on the show.

He interviewed writers, producers and directors who worked on the show, watched and re-watched all 148 episodes of "The Fresh Prince," and pored over interviews and articles about the show.

Here, in an interview edited for clarity and length, is Palmer's story all about how his life got turned upside down in the years he worked on the book.

The Orange County Register: You were 13 or 14 when the show began. Did you already know the music of DJ Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince at that point?

Palmer: That was definitely the entryway because they had 'Parents Just Don't Understand,' and that was on constant radio play. So there was the show, and I was like, 'Oh, wow, that's the Fresh Prince, and this is a cool kind of hip-hop show.' And that kind of thing didn't exist back then.

I didn't know what the show was going to be about. They just sort of took this rapper, who had this kind of fun, almost cartoonish kind of comedic persona, and put it into a TV. So I remember watching the preview commercials and just being excited.

How was it different from other shows that you watched, or shows that featured Black characters and themes?

So 'The Cosby Show' obviously was the main predecessor to 'The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.' But I didn't really watch that. It was

slightly before my time in terms of what I was interested in. And it never seemed that funny to me. The appeal of 'The Fresh Prince' was that it was very funny. There was a lot of silliness and quick quips back and forth. It was a show that was much more in my wheelhouse.

When you look back at it 30 years later, not as a 14-year-old but as someone who writes about pop culture, what's groundbreaking about this show?

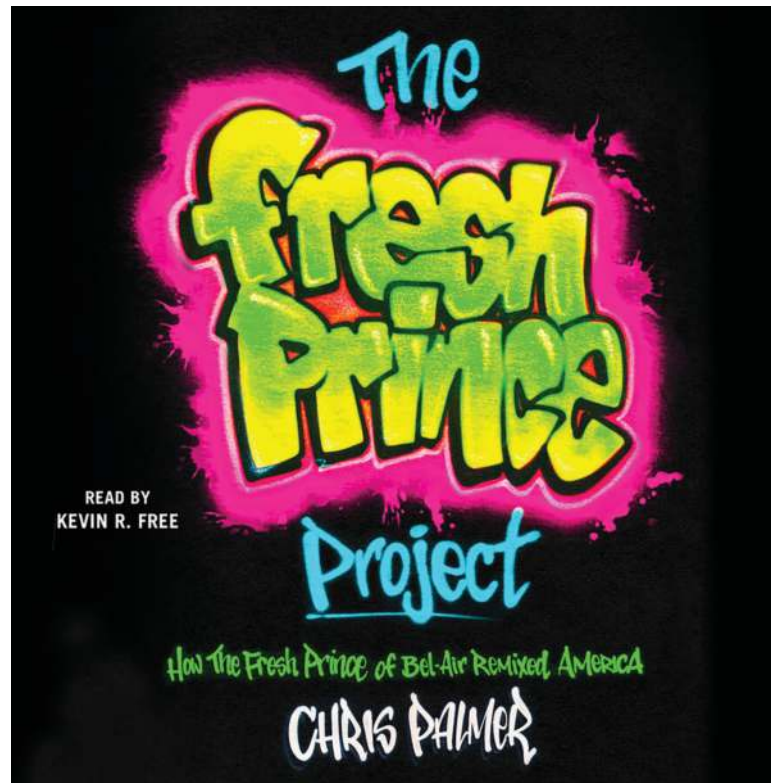
The No. 1 thing is just that hip-hop vibe because that had never been on TV before. We'd seen Black families. You'd seen Black shows. 'The Cosby Show.' 'Diff'rent Strokes' wasn't really a Black show but it had two main Black characters. Then the old classics like 'The Jeffersons' and 'Good Times.' Those were just about Black families but there was no hip-hop vibe.

The other thing that I really do like about 'The Fresh Prince' — it's a pretty simple template, which is 'fish out of water.' And there are many, many, many fish-out-of-water sitcoms. What was new about this one, you take Will, who was basically from the 'hood, and instead of putting him with a white family, you put him with a Black family that is just as different in this telling as a regular rich white family would be.

And you can explore a lot of very different kinds of topics just because of that one dynamic.

How did you choose which themes from the show — issues such as colorism, driving while Black and fatherhood — to emphasize in the book?

The show is super-broad comedy that sort of dips its toes in these weighty issues. And you never knew when they would



come. Back then, they called them 'very special episodes.' And even though the show was about fun, the heavier stuff is kind of what people remember.

I noticed a sort of connective tissue between these episodes; they all dealt with a particular, important topic that didn't have anything to do with the comedy. So I just broke down each episode, and the theme that they represented, and tried to apply that to modern-day America and how things are now. I just wanted to sort of use this to show people that it was something that was in tune with these kinds of issues way back then.

We've talked about how 'The Fresh Prince' connected with Black viewers in the way it addressed Black culture. But it also connected Latino, Asian, White and other viewers. How did it appeal so broadly?

When I was talking with (show creator) Andy Borowitz, he was

saying that in order for this show to be accepted, obviously Black viewers are going to like the show because of this new, fresh guy, Will Smith. Funny, charismatic, he's cool. But in order for a show to be successful, you have to play well in the Midwest or the South or all these types of areas. And the majority of viewers with every single TV show are going to be white.

This was 1990, and they had to figure out how they could put out this show that was authentic and true to African American culture but also had to be digestible for a broader audience. The producers, Andy and Susan (Borowitz), did a really good job of balancing the authenticity of the show while keeping it super broad.

Someone watches a sitcom, they don't want it to be preachy, they want to laugh. If it's funny, if it's cool and you're laughing, that's the main thing. Then you kind of sneak in your heavier episodes and moments.

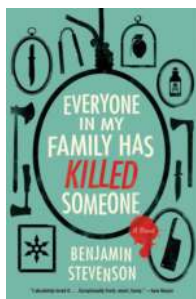
‘Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone’ a sly, subversive comedy

BY MAUREEN CORRIGAN

The Washington Post

If "Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone" weren't so sly it would be insufferable. It's a showoff of a novel, flaunting its erudite mastery of the conventions of Golden Age British mystery fiction in every twist, turn and red herring of its plot. Any thriller brazen enough to preface its story with Ronald Knox's classic 1929 "Decalogue" — otherwise known as the "Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction" — runs the risk of being too clever by half.

The "Decalogue" was composed by Knox to codify the concept of "fair play" among his fellow mystery writers. It contains such gems as Rule III: "Not more



than one secret room or passage is allowable." Readers unfamiliar with such arcane aspects of detective fiction history need not worry. Benjamin Stevenson, who is also a successful stand-up comedian, knows how to talk to two audiences at once — and to entertain as he educates.

Here's the premise: Our narrator, Ernest "Ern" Cunningham, makes his living churning out mystery-writing manuals. Crime, so to speak, is a Cunningham family profession. As Ern cheekily boasts in

the novel's Prologue: "Everyone in my family has killed someone. Some of us, the high achievers, have killed more than once." The opening of the novel finds Ern driving to Sky Lodge, an isolated Australian ski resort, for a dreaded family reunion. One can understand the trepidation. The impetus for the reunion is the release of Ern's brother, Michael, from prison after killing a man. Ern is the guy who put his brother behind bars courtesy of his eyewitness testimony. Before long, the guest list begins to be pruned through a series of bizarre murders.

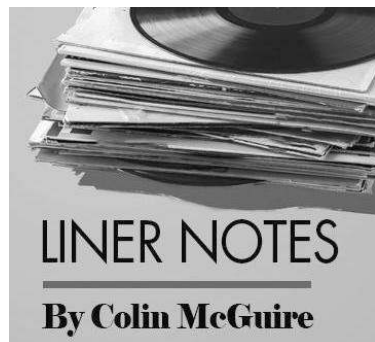
Ern drifts off to sleep his first night in his chalet, but, soon enough, he tells us: "I woke to a hammering at the door. Of course I did. You've read these kinds of

books before." That metadramatic direct address to readers defines the signature style of this weird hyper-self-aware mystery. Ern is constantly stepping out of the fictional frame in an exaggerated effort to "play fair" with the reader, much as the Golden Age mystery writers he reveres mostly did.

An inside/outside style like this is tricky. The technique of interrupting the flow of a story to remind readers they're reading a story can become tiresome. Fortunately, Stevenson wards off what readerly impatience he risks via the zest of his comic imagination. In "Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone," Stevenson not only "plays fair," he plays the mystery game very, very well.

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Still in the business of misery



Paramore's 6th album fails to go beyond a surface level

From pop-punk to art-punk. Or something like that, at least.

Six years after 2017's "After Laughter" and five months after the release of this album's first single (which doubles as its title track), Paramore's sixth album in nearly 20 years is ... OK? Fine? Just kind of there? Use any of those words, and you wouldn't be wrong. Perhaps the expectations were too high after the group returned from a needed hiatus with a flurry of festival dates last summer/fall and the new-for-them aesthetic of the "This Is Why" music video caused some to think an intriguing new musical direction was on the horizon.

But that's not what happened. Instead, these 10 songs are the sound of a band exploring only the first layer of a new vision that in other artists' hands could be thrillingly complex. Take "Running Out Of Time," which ostensibly amounts to "This Is Why"-lite as its mellow groove turns into the same aggressive stab-funk that once made its brethren so promising. Here, however, the trick feels old as it never quite kicks into third gear. "C'est Comme Ça" is a better take on it — and perhaps the second-best song of the set, if not the most infectious — but the arthouse approach feels like more of a Fairweather gimmick than it does an enlightened commitment.

Maybe that's why the best moments come when singer/leader Hayley Williams opts against fitting 50 words into a 10-second stanza and merely returns to her earnest self. Songs like "Big Man, Little Dignity" and "Liar" are a welcome break from the madness because of how pretty Williams' voice can be whenever the band decides to



Zachary Gray

Paramore recently released their sixth studio album, "This Is Why" (right).

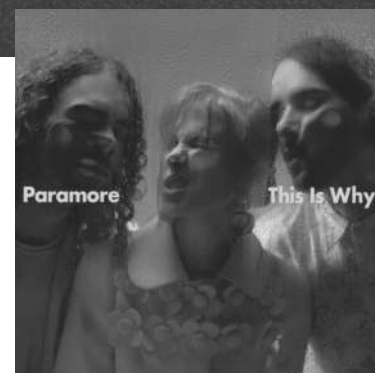
slow down. Plus, when Taylor York's guitar wants to weep, it cries tattooed tears shed through the lens of punk rock honesty and soulful yearning. The combination of that and Williams' croons creates something so sad, it's soothing.

Even so, "soothing" isn't the right word for "This Is Why." Instead, that prize goes to "incomplete."

Clocking in at just under 40 minutes, the album feels rushed not just because of its intentionally unapologetic lo-fi ethos, but

also because it adds up to a thought without resolution. Heading into The Great Unknown is only interesting if you never find the known.

With this set, Paramore found what they were looking for early and from there, simply gave up.



WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

Brad Mehldau

Your Mother Should Know:
Brad Mehldau Plays The Beatles
(Nonesuch Records)

Brad Mehldau and the Beatles make a captivating jazz combo.

It helps that Mehldau’s piano stylings have a range worthy of the Fab Four. He bridges the divides between Debussy and Professor Longhair, between rock and Rachmaninoff, his rhythms tipsy at times as he evokes saloon music and comic opera.

And that’s just on a 6½-minute rendition of “Maxwell’s Silver Hammer,” one of the 11 tunes on his new live solo album, “Your Mother Should Know: Brad Mehldau Plays The Beatles.”

The album pairs jazz’s most lyrical living pianist with songwriting masters of melody, and Mehldau finds fresh radiance in the familiar tunes by exploring their elasticity, which is considerable. These performances show how Beatles songs invite improvisation thanks to their lilt, sturdy construction and sophisticated chord changes. Plus, as Mehldau observes in his liner notes, they swing.

He plays “Your Mother Should Know” as jaunty, sunny ragtime, and “She Said She Said” calls to mind film noir. A slow, gentle account of “Here, There and Everywhere” twinkles with discordant splashes and hints of Thelonious Monk, while “I Saw Her Standing There” is rollicking boogie-woogie that would be at home in the French Quarter.

Mehldau has long excelled as an interpreter of rock, the Beatles included, and to show the breadth of their influence, he closes the album with David Bowie’s “Life on Mars?” Mehldau’s version seesaws from Broadway buildups to blues reflections before a closing symphonic flourish, which provides the exclamation mark the album deserves.

— Steven Wine
Associated Press



Big Hassle Media

Married couple Alaina Moore and Patrick Riley of Tennis continue to chart their own course on “Pollen.”

Tennis

Pollen (Mutually Detrimental)

The band Tennis started at sea. Alaina Moore and Patrick Riley formed the musical collaboration in 2010 while on an extended sailing trip. In the years since, the alt-pop duo has remained fiercely independent. On their sixth album, “Pollen,” they continue to chart their own course.

The nine meticulously crafted pop songs on this album come across light and breezy, but Tennis rewards a close listen by juxtaposing its smooth sounds with biting lyrics and clever instrumental detail.

The self-described control freaks have worked hard to maintain artistic control. Their creative process continues to include long stretches at sea, unplugged from media and beyond the reach of industry trends. When on solid ground, they record from their home studio and release on their own label, Mutually Detrimental.

On “Pollen,” Tennis moves away from the DIY sound of their early albums and leans hard into a glossy pop. The release is peppered with a broad variety of influences, including ’60s girl-group vocals, ’70s glam guitar punches, and synth-y ’80s keyboards. Other acts such as Beck and Weezer present retro sounds with a dose of irony. Tennis plays it straight with earnest curation of classic and contemporary sounds.

As a married couple, Tennis falls well outside the rock-star lifestyle. Their previous outing, “Swimmer” (2020), explored themes of long-term companionship. “Pollen” continues the domestic introspection, but with a turn toward restlessness and mortality. “Pollen Song” sits at the album’s emotional and musical core. The sunny acoustic guitar belies Moore’s melancholy delivery of the lyrics, “Don’t know when my body became so fragile / Even a spring rain is too much to handle.”

— Jim Pollock
Associated Press



JD Clayton

Long Way From Home
(Mulberry Records)

Singer-songwriter JD Clayton brings an earnestness to his promising full-length debut album, “Long Way From Home,” that makes you want to forgive him for the occasional cliché.

Clayton, a northwest Arkansas native, is so forthright in his delivery that it feels easy to let him slide when things get corny. And there’s enough intriguing material here to make him an artist to watch in the space between country and Americana anyway.

At his best when singing what he knows, Clayton offers two tracks on his struggles to make it in Nashville. They range from the jaunty confidence of “American Millionaire” (he vows to become one when he becomes “one of the greats”) to the less brash but more original title cut, the album’s sturdiest song.

Singing directly to his mother back home on the latter, Clayton traffics in the predictable when he says his dreams won’t die. But when he confesses that he might have a better shot if he would lose a little weight, you get the sense that the sentiments are heartfelt.

Ultimately, that’s how Clayton overcomes the tropes — by plowing straight through them. Even when the sentiments are conventional — “You’re the only girl who’s ever set my heart free,” he sings on “Beauty Queen” — he lives inside his songs.

His stated influences of rockers like Creedence Clearwater Revival aren’t too subtle to hear. A cover of the classic “Midnight Special” hews closer to the CCR version than the one Leadbelly made famous. It’s not a revelation, but the singing and playing demonstrates the sure-footedness of Clayton and his band.

That doesn’t make him a millionaire yet, but it does leave you curious about what he might do next.

— Scott Stroud
Associated Press



Rebecca Black

Let Her Burn (Self-released)

Before songs went viral on TikTok, Rebecca Black had a viral hit on YouTube in 2011. Black was only 13 years old when she broke the internet with “Friday.” The inescapable song currently has more than 164 million views on YouTube. Almost 12 years later, Black has released her debut album, “Let Her Burn,” and shows that an artist doesn’t have to follow standard pop tropes to create a hit.

Black is willing to channel dark emotions from her past in “Misery Loves Company,” and is able to put deep lyrics to the beat on the dance floor. She also dives straight into past trauma and takes back her power in “Destroy Me.”

“My identity, so easy to destroy / Go ahead destroy me, destroy me,” Black sings.

The 10 tracks are an eclectic range from power-pop ballads to electro-pop dance songs. Black doesn’t shy away from her identity and tells audiences what it means to be a queer woman of color. “Performer” shows off Black’s lyricism and is the standout ballad on the album.

In “Doe-Eyed” and “Crumbs,” Black plays with intoxicating dance beats and explores her sexuality in her lyrics.

“Cry Hard Enough” is another standout track that has addicting dance beats but also relatable lyrics of heartbreak that would leave a person dancing with tears in their eyes.

“Let Her Burn” is the beginning of a new era for Black, and it’s her official entry into the pop world.

— Karena Phan
Associated Press



Caroline Polachek

Desire, I Want To Turn Into You
(Perpetual Novice)

Finally giving into the anticipation that has awaited since her 2019 album “Pang,” Caroline Polachek greeted 2023 with “Desire, I Want To Turn Into You,” on a fitting Valentine’s Day release date.

Between sweeping anthems, folkloric serenades and electronic teasers, the artist captures the transcendent and many elusive forces of love.

Incorporating singles known for their catchy rhythms, like 2021’s “Bunny is a Rider” and last summer’s “Sunset,” into a swath of eerie meditations, like “Crude Drawing of an Angel” and “Hopedrunk Everasking,” Polachek imbues pastoral harmonies and vocal flares into her romanticism, primeval drifting into the future.

Polachek lures listeners in with the playful “Welcome To My Island” before shifting toward the atmospheric weight of “Pretty Impossible” that lends its synthetic beats to the impassioned quest “I Believe” that flows into the emotional longing of “Butterfly Net.” Brighde Chaimbeul’s earthy bagpipe flourishes in multiple songs, and fellow artists Dido and Grimes collaborate in the fluttery “Fly to You.”

While instrumental sharpness singles her album out, Polachek’s lyrics elevate the romantic effect, either with magical realism, cheeky puns or plain desire. Throughout, Polachek captures love’s shape-shifting essence.

Among most listeners, Polachek is known for ethereal dance music that casts sunshine into an alternative ’90s pop groove. Her opera-trained voice flows between octaves with a precision mistaken for auto-tune.

She’s been likened to this generation’s Kate Bush. Once a part of pop-group Chairlift of the early ’00s, Polachek has been charging forward with her own sound, and “Desire, I Want To Turn Into You” proves her timeless relevance.

— Amancai Biraben
Associated Press



WEEKEND: TELEVISION



Apple TV+ photos

Eugene Levy visits Venice in “The Reluctant Traveler,” which premieres Feb. 24 on Apple TV+. Levy said that he loves how in Italy “you don’t have to do much to see the history.”

Leaving his comfort zone

‘Reluctant Traveler’ host Levy discusses his Apple TV+ show, how it has helped him grow

By ANDREA SACHS
The Washington Post

If “Schitt’s Creek” were a real place, Eugene Levy would never vacation there. The Canadian comedian and actor, who won Emmys as a lead actor and executive producer for the hit show, is very particular — even persnickety — about his choice of holiday destinations.

The trepid traveler, 76, admittedly carries around emotional baggage filled with neuroses and aversions. His list of dislikes includes humidity, extreme cold, reindeer meat, volcanoes, snakes, insects, hanging bridges and happy people. In spite of his curmudgeonly attitude, or possibly because of it, Levy has taken on a new role as host of his own travel show.

“The Reluctant Traveler with Eugene Levy,” which premieres Feb. 24 on Apple TV+, opens with a bewildered and bespectacled Levy standing awkwardly in a foreign setting. He grips a suitcase better suited for selling perfume samples door-to-door than roaming the globe. Over eight episodes, he ventures into such challenging environments as a Costa Rican rainforest and the frigid Lapland region of Finland, where he grits his teeth while sampling the local activities, culture and cuisine. In each show, he slowly unclenches his jaw and breaks into the genuine smile of a convert.

Last month, we interviewed Levy by Zoom while he was making the rounds at the Television Critics Association event in Los Angeles. He explained why he decided to enter the discomfort zone, the lessons he learned from the show and the contents of his vintage luggage.

This Q&A has been edited for clarity and length:



Eugene Levy meets Kees Eijrond while visiting Lisbon in “The Reluctant Traveler.” Levy said that as a result of the show, he is learning to love talking to and listening to people.

The Washington Post: How would you describe your travel style or your vacation go-to?

Levy: My ideal vacation would have been going to a resort or a beach where you could truly relax and have nothing to do but chill by a pool with a piña colada and then talk about where you want to go for dinner. I love Italy because I love the food and you don’t have to do much to see the history. The sightseeing part of things didn’t really excite me. I’d go here and I’d look at this bridge, I’d look at this museum. It was something to do, but I didn’t really truly enjoy it.

Why did you decide to challenge yourself with a travel show?

Originally it was a show that focused on hotels. I got a call from [executive produc-

er David Brindley] saying they wanted to talk to me about hosting a travel show about hotels. And I said, “Jeez, why me?” I have a very low sense of curiosity and no sense of adventure.

Maybe they thought you were interested in hotels because your character, Johnny Rose, ran one in “Schitt’s Creek”?

Maybe. I never asked them. If you’re hosting a travel show, you have to be interested in what you’re talking about, and you have to be a chatty person who is interested in people. These are all things that I was really not. The conversations triggered another angle for the show. They called me back and pitched that to me,

SEE LEVY ON PAGE 31

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Same courtroom sets, more evolved lawyer

Larroquette says he decided to return for 'Night Court' revival to figure out how to revisit character at age 75

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

You can forgive John Larroquette for thinking he'd entered a time machine when he stepped onto the sound stage of the rebooted NBC sitcom "Night Court."

The sets for the arraignment courtroom, chambers and hallways where he had first made people laugh as prosecutor Dan Fielding starting in the 1980s had been carefully remade and even the green couch in the judge's office and the cafeteria chairs were found in storage and redeployed. It was he who had changed.

"Revisiting a character that one played 35 years ago is both an interesting problem as an actor and also a bit disheartening. When I look at my face then and my face now, I'm playing my own grandfather in a way," the 75-year-old actor says.

In the reboot, Larroquette's former prosecutor Dan Fielding is convinced to return as a public defender after years out of the courtroom. He has become a lovable curmudgeon who says things like: "This is a court, not a therapist's office, no matter how many mental patients march through here."

Melissa Rauch plays prior



NBC, WARNER BROS. TELEVISION/ AP

Foreground from left, Melissa Rauch, India de Beaufort and John Larroquette in a scene from the rebooted comedy series "Night Court." Larroquette reprises his role from the original series.

Judge Harry Stone's daughter, Abby Stone, the new night court judge and the sunshine to Larroquette's gloom. Of the weirdos who show up in her after-hours court, the judge declares: "It's hard not to like them once you know what's going on underneath."

A verdict on the new "Night Court" has already been handed down: NBC ordered a second

season early after the revival earned the highest ratings for a comedy series on the network since 2017.

Larroquette suspects some of the interest is due to nostalgia and reruns but also pointed to the popularity of Rauch, a former star of "The Big Bang Theory." "I'm sure there were millions of people who were very interested in seeing what she

would do next," he says.

Rauch also produced the show and came up with the revival concept.

Larroquette is the only actor to return to the series that first aired from 1984 to 1992, starring the late Harry Anderson, the late Markie Post, Marsha Warfield, the late Charles Robinson and Richard Moll.

The original show's breakout

character was Fielding, both clever and lascivious. Larroquette won four consecutive Emmy Awards playing the part, a record at the time. But he initially resisted a return.

"I was not interested in revisiting him for many reasons, partially because of the love I have of physical comedy and the fact that I'm almost 40 years older than I was then, that I can't jump over tables. I can't quite do the things with my body that I could then so easily. And just what do you do after that amount of time? Who is he now?" Larroquette says. "The more I thought about it, the more as an actor it became an interesting sort of problem to figure out — how could I be funny at this age with him now?"

The Fielding in the reboot has matured past his sowing-his-wild-oats stage. His character finally found the love of his life between the end of the last show and its return — but lost her.

"The Dan Fielding that existed and at that time was very different from the Dan Fielding we're seeing," Rauch says. "But he's still the same person. He still thinks he's the smartest guy in the room. He's still a narcissist. And but at the same time, he's evolved."

Levy: Host hopes show has made him more adventurous

FROM PAGE 30

saying what if it's about somebody who doesn't like to travel. I said, "Okay, yeah, why don't we give that a shot?"

Did you have to prepare physically or mentally for the role?

No physical preparation. But mental preparation — I spent my career as a comedic character actor where I do everything in character. The closer the character came to who I was, the less comfortable I was. So I always opted for bigger, broader characters.

"Schitt's Creek" was about as close as I've come to playing myself on camera, but even that was a character. This travel show, it's not a character [laughs]. I'm playing me. I've never been totally comfortable being me in front of a camera. That was a scary proposition.

What are you personally hoping to get out of this show, and what do you hope your viewers take away from it?

This is not billed as a funny travel show. They could have gotten Larry David if they wanted a funny travel show. This is a straight travel show. I think the humor comes through me and my reluctance initially to engage in things I would never normally engage in. That gives it humorous overtones, and that, I think, carves it out from the other [travel] shows.

I am hoping this show really appeals to

people who love to travel. I hope it holds them. For people who don't necessarily like to travel or were as uncomfortable about traveling as I was will find a kindred spirit. I'm giving them an experience very close to what they might actually be going through and what they actually might be thinking.

How did you pick the destinations and activities?

In the beginning they had a list of locations, and the locations I said no to were locations I would probably have said no to if somebody had said, "Hey, why don't we go here?" And I would say, "Really? I don't think so. What else ya got?" I helped eliminate certain locations because I thought they wouldn't be as much fun, didn't know what the food would be like [or] was really nervous about. The more we did the show, the more I crawled out of my comfort zone. If I'm not doing things I'm not comfortable doing, I don't know what kind of show we have. But I think the thing is: Go for it.

Has this show changed how you perceive vacations?

I think soooo. I'm engaging a lot with people. I really kind of enjoyed that. I don't engage people in conversation readily in my life. I'm not that kind of person. I'm learning to love talking to people and listening to them and learning about the

culture through these people. That was an eye-opener for me.

The show has made me grow in a lot of different areas. I am more open to doing things that I may not have done in the past, but there are still things I might not necessarily want to do again, like night hiking in a rainforest. Adventuresome, sure. But I wasn't really thrilled doing it, because you're dealing with creepy-crawly things. But it's been good for me generally as an experience and hopefully helping make me a better person, a more exciting person, a more adventurous person.

What's in the suitcase?

There's nothing in the suitcase. It's a prop. But I love that suitcase. It's an old-fashioned suitcase that just seemed to be the perfect suitcase. They wanted me to have the suitcase to pick up at times. I didn't question them.

Will there be a second season, and would you consider Canada as one of the destinations?

I would love to find a location in Canada. My wife Deb said, why don't you do the whole season going across Canada? Again, another great idea. There are a lot of unbelievably exciting and beautiful locations in Canada. My God, Lake Louise in Alberta — one of the most beautiful spots in the world. So hopefully if we get a second season, that might be in the cards.



Apple TV+

Despite his aversion to the extreme cold, Eugene Levy visits the frigid Lapland region of Finland on the show.

It's time for good nutrition

fat: “We see a big difference between people that have dinner, for example, four hours before going to bed,” she said, “and those that have dinner around one hour before going to bed.”

WEEKEND: FAMILY



iStock

Researchers studied parents and found those that lacked a sense of autonomy at work were overreactive or withdrawn, and their children lacked social skills and had more behavior problems.

Why work matters at home

Researchers say moms, 'dads' job experiences linked to how they parent

By ELIZABETH CHANG
The Washington Post

Here's something that sounds obvious but that parents might not think about: How you feel about work and your experiences on the job affect how you parent. And that, in turn, can influence your child's development.

Developmental psychologist Maureen Perry-Jenkins and her colleagues found that a job that offers autonomy and support for a parent in a child's first year of life is linked to better cognitive and social outcomes and mental health for that child six years down the road.

"People spend 40 hours a week at work, and that experience affects you and your mental health, your physical health, everything," said Perry-Jenkins, a professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. That, in turn, affects how supportive and responsive a parent is. The results are outlined in Perry-Jenkins' book "Work Matters."

Work-family researchers often focus on studying schedules, parental leave, sick leave and overtime, rather than the actual work experience. Perry-Jenkins' team also made a couple of other less-common research decisions: They decided to include fathers and to concentrate on low-income employees.

Stew Friedman, an organizational psychologist at the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, found results similar to Perry-Jenkins' findings among business professionals. About two decades ago, he and Jeff Greenhaus of Drexel University looked at the "inner experience" of 900 workers: how these employees valued career and family, how much they were distracted by work at home and how much control they had over their work conditions.

Then they examined how the children were doing using the Child Behavior Checklist, which assesses emotional and behavioral problems such as anxiety, depression, aggression, social and attention issues. They found that children were better off when both mothers and fathers found work to be a source of challenge, creativity and enjoyment. Fathers whose job enhanced their sense of self and mothers whose jobs gave them a sense of authority also had mentally healthier children. This research informed the design and development of Friedman's Total Leadership program, the goal of which is to help workers improve their performance in all parts of life by creating greater

harmony among them.

The idea that a parent's inner experiences at work would affect how they parent, is "not that complicated, once you think about it," said Friedman, the co-author of "Parents Who Lead," and director of Wharton's Work/Life Integration Project. But "as you go through the grind of daily life, just trying to get through it in as human a way as you can, most people don't take the time to step back and think about those aspects."

Perry-Jenkins' team followed 370 families who were having their first child from pregnancy through the child's first grade of school. All of the participants were low-wage workers in jobs that are usually considered less desirable than white-collar positions, such as nursing aides, food service workers, beauticians, truck drivers, laborers and maintenance workers.

Mothers and fathers who had a sense of control and efficacy at work during the first year of their child's life were more responsive and supportive parents, and had children with better social skills and fewer behavioral problems. Workers who lacked a sense of autonomy at work were overreactive or withdrawn parents, and their children lacked social skills and had more behavior problems.

How the fathers felt about their jobs mattered as much as how the mothers felt about their jobs.

"The literature and everything we have out there is about mothers, mothers, mothers, mothers, mothers," Perry-Jenkins said. "Fathers can have as positive and as negative impacts on their kids' developmental outcomes from their work. That's really important, because I think we make [work and parenting] a women's issue."

All the parents clearly loved their children, Perry-Jenkins said. "But that didn't translate into good parenting. That didn't translate into good mental health. It just meant, 'I love this kid, but there's these other things that I can't access to be able to take care of this child, because life's too hard.'"

The researchers found that companies can take relatively small steps to improve the experience of their workers. For example, Perry-Jenkins said, rather than forbidding workers to leave factory or warehouse floors in the midafternoon, companies should let them check in with their children after school. These adjustments are easy to find if bosses would just ask workers what they need. "Most of them could come up with a way to do the job better and a way to make the day better," she said.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



8 ways military life makes people better

During the darkness of midwinter, it's easy to get the blues. On dreary, cold days when the snow is dingy with soot, the car is hazy with salt and your skin is as flaky as a stale croissant, you can slide into negative thinking as easily as snot slips from your toddler's nostrils.

In those bleak moments, military spouses might wonder, "Why do I live this difficult life with all of its moves and deployments? Why do I put up with the inconveniences and hardships? Is it my destiny to never pursue my career? Will our kids ever be able to stay in school long enough to make long-term friends and pursue their interests? If I have to iron another uniform, will I have a nervous breakdown? Will I stick a fork in my eye if I see one more moving sticker? Will the commissary ever carry unsweetened oat milk?!"

It's not as bad as you think. In fact, I've discovered eight ways that military life actually makes you a better person:

1. Military spouses are random-car-search ready. On the off chance that they are pulled over while driving through the base gate, military spouses periodically clean up the stale Goldfish, french fries, crayons, used tissues, juice bags and gummy bears under the seats to minimize embarrassment.

2. Military spouses never stop honing their social game. From boot camp to retirement, military spouses are forced to seek new friends. With each successive move or housing turnover, military spouses revisit their middle school insecurities and wonder, "Does anyone like me? Will I be included? Will I ever win Crystal Bingo?" To meet this continuous challenge, military spouses constantly self-assess in order to adapt to the diverse people they meet.

3. Military spouses bring it. They aren't strangers to wearing pajama pants all day; however, military spouses know how and when to gussy up for formal events. On ball days, a military spouse might pick her kids up from school in sweatpants, but by 9 p.m., she's elegantly sheathed in beaded silk, respecting protocol and gracefully setting her champagne flute on the dining table before she hits the dance floor to do the Stanky Leg.

4. Military spouses purge stuff regularly. Single Polly Pocket shoes, dried-up markers, snagged sweaters, rusted bikes, dog-chewed flip-flops and scratched furniture get discarded before each move. Half-used bottles of cocktail sauce, jars of jelly and boxes of chicken patties are given to neighbors. Bags bursting with gently used clothes and household goods are given to charity. Military spouses are rolling stones — they gather no moss, nor excess Lego bricks.

5. Military spouses are free to let their freak flags fly. Patriotic fashions, home decor and behavior that may seem obnoxious to civilians is embraced by military families. Navy families make their beds with nautical sheets. Army spouses carry camo diaper bags and hang paintings of tanks in their living rooms. Marines think nothing of barking "oorah!" in public. Air Force kids have every airplane toy ever made.

6. Military spouses develop sophisticated palates. Having to live in different locations means getting to sample indigenous cuisines. Granted, this experience isn't always enjoyable. But every bad meal is worth every local delicacy such as Roman-Jewish Fried Artichokes, Southern Shrimp and Grits, Korean Budae-Jjigae Stew and German Schneeballen.

7. Military spouses are strong and flexible. I'm not talking yoga poses here — I'm referring to military spouses' ability to adapt to varying environments, to spin multiple plates in the air, to run entire households solo, to handle constant change and to manage military life's many curveballs with grace and agility.

8. Military spouses are awesome. More than 700,000 active duty spouses and nearly 12 million veteran spouses are living proof that, despite the obvious challenges, military life has its perks.

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

CHEAP THRILLS

BY CHRISTINA IVERSON AND SAMUEL A. DONALDSON / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Christina Iverson, of Ames, Iowa, is an assistant crossword editor for The New York Times. Sam Donaldson is a law professor at Georgia State University. They met at last year's American Crossword Puzzle Tournament and started brainstorming theme ideas. This one started as a Thursday puzzle and grew into a Sunday when they had too many ideas to fit into a 15 x 15-square grid. — W.S.

- ACROSS**

1 Become hysterical, with “out”

4 Elided title

8 Restaurant competitor of Pinkberry and Sweet Frog

12 Catchy tunes, informally

16 Sigh of lament

17 Where dancers have a ball?

18 McFlurry mix-in

19 Furniture giant

20 Bad flight forecast

21 Reason

22 Hierarchy level

23 Certain U.S. time zone

24 Economizing, as represented by the circled squares?

27 “The bad news is . . .”

29 WhatsApp transmissions, briefly

30 Navy nay

31 Seizes eagerly, as an opportunity

33 Sean of “Stranger Things”

34 Part of an M.C.’s intro, often

36 Prohibition target

40 Economizing, as represented twice in 12-Down?

45 “The Crown” role

46 Colorful kind of shirt

47 Offering from Dr. Mom, in brief
- 48 Senior partners?

50 ____ Hill, neighborhood of San Francisco

51 Bussing on a bus, for short

54 Memorable mission

56 “You’ve made your point,” slangily

57 Lead-in to an opinion

60 Zip

62 From not so long ago

63 Parts of a gig

64 Scrapbooker’s project

67 Honesty, resilience or a sense of humor, perhaps

69 Shield of ancient Greece: Var.

73 Manhattan is one: Abbr.

75 Attempt

77 Work that hasn’t yet entered publication

79 Little squealer

83 Fencer’s score

86 Hebrew version of the English pronoun “I”

87 Confidentiality contract, for short

88 Welcome event

90 ____ drag (hockey maneuver)

91 Cellist’s need

93 In concert

94 Economizing, as represented in 58-Down?

99 Unwelcome, so to speak

101 Vote in favor

102 Trading places

103 Like some modern maps

105 Golfer Palmer, to fans
- 106 A/C meas.

109 “The Planets” composer

111 Economizing, as represented by the shaded squares?

115 Bad-sounding creatures?

116 Ditto, in legal footnotes

118 Word that means “ocean” in a religious title

119 Large crowd

120 It’s cried on a slide

121 Check

122 Classical poem

123 Beast with recurved horns

124 Triumphant shout at a crossword tournament

125 Freshness

126 Like some morning lawns

127 Smokey spot, for short
- 11 Tranquil discipline

12 Former name of a Kansas arena that commemorated a 1976 U.S. anniversary

13 It helps make a stew a goo

14 Poached fruit

15 Garnish for una margarita

16 Source of many a name on a campus building, informally

17 Starts eating

20 Poli ____

25 Reply to the Little Red Hen

26 Name hidden in “before long”

28 It makes a red velvet cake red

32 Cancún cash

33 Hamburger’s beef?

34 Word with pepper or tower

35 Like some ancient pyramids

37 Acceleration, e.g.

38 Quelques-____ (some, in French)

39 Quantity multiplied by acceleration in Newton’s second law

40 Pioneer in global aviation

41 Words of defeat

42 “Don’t sweat it,” informally

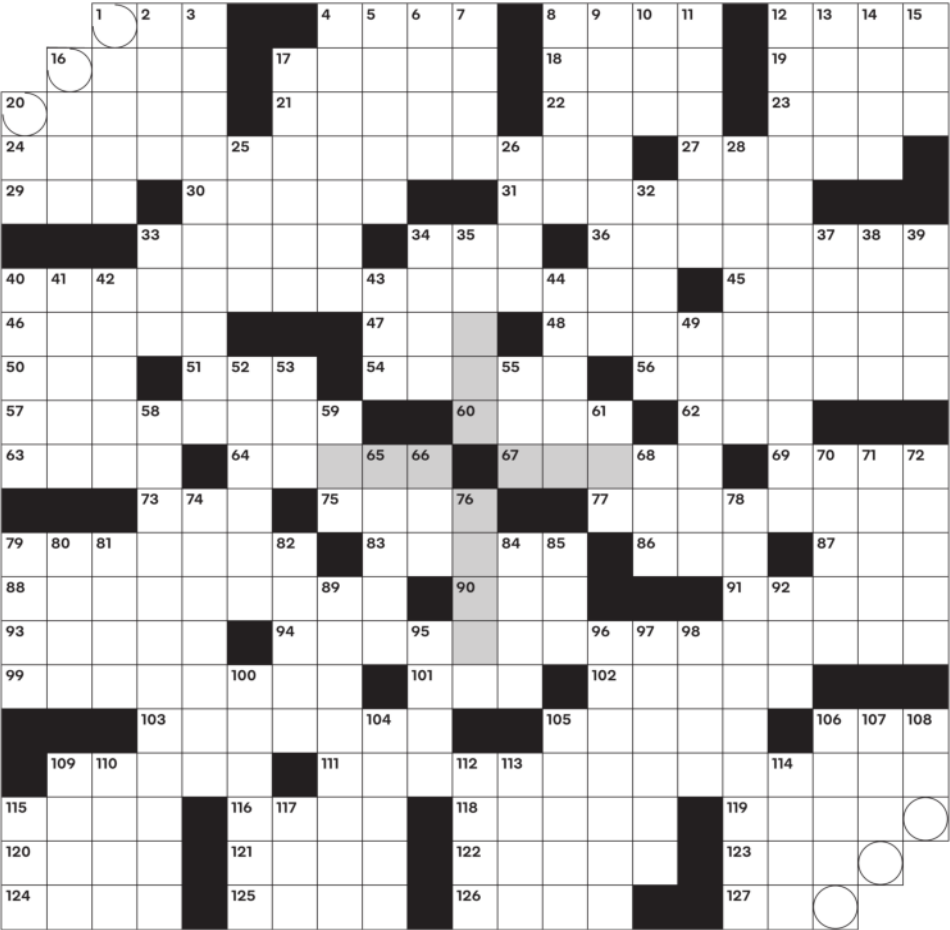
43 Educ. supporter

44 Once-popular devices discontinued in 2022

49 Cousin of a weasel

52 “What’s the ____?” (“‘Sup with that?’”)

53 Suffer



- 55 Farmyard cry

58 Not in a relationship

59 “The Last O.G.” network

61 Vile Nile reptile

65 Out-and-out

66 Foreign leader whom Nixon met in 1972

68 That’s history!

70 Kind of knife of infomercial fame

71 Like Urdu or Hindi

72 Was very ripe

74 Round figures
- 76 Montana city SW of Helena

78 The main antagonist?

79 [Ugh, this is horrible!]

80 ____ facto

81 Like some highlighter colors

82 Relish

84 Plant whose name derives from Quechua

85 Devious snicker

89 Barely gets the words out
- 92 Pros with deliveries, in brief

95 Painter Jan van ____

96 “Let’s do this!”

97 Civil rights icon ____ Helen Burroughs

98 Power structure?

100 Capers

104 Shakespeare’s “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” has five of them

105 Beaming, as with joy

106 Liberal arts college in Kentucky
- 107 Locally focused lecture franchise

108 Pac-12 player

109 Santa’s favorite Hostess dessert?

110 Wilson of film

112 Carded at a bar, informally

113 Common spot for a sunburn

114 Gaggles

115 Chain email abbr.

117 Grammy winner ____ Lipa

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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Announcements040

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Be aware of the common red flags.

Some of the latest Scam fads are:

- Vehicle buyers wanting to buy sight unseen and have the vehicle shipped through an agent using paypal.
- People saying Free Dog (different breeds) for adoption.

Automotive140

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Individuals placing classified advertising should use discretion in concluding the sale of their property. Not all potential buyers are reputable or honest. Stars and Stripes suggests that you take precautions to ensure that potential buyers are reputable and will be able to fulfill the terms of the sale. Stars and Stripes is not liable for the contractual relationship between sellers and buyers of merchandise advertised in the newspaper or on the web site.

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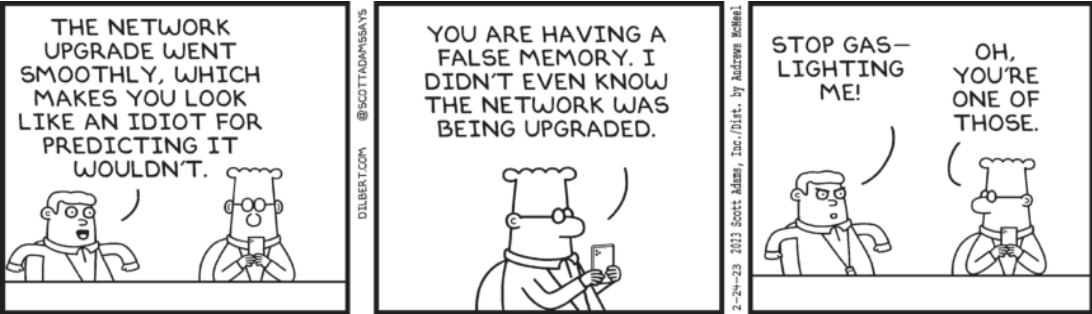
Learn more at commissaries.com/extended-eligibility



Frazz



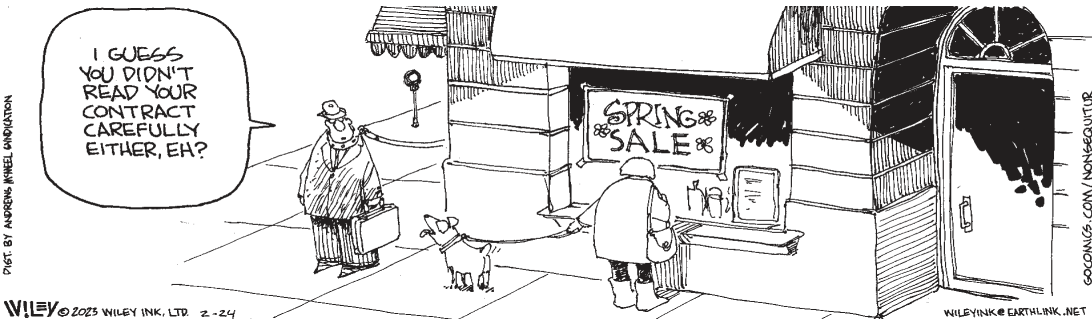
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Candorville



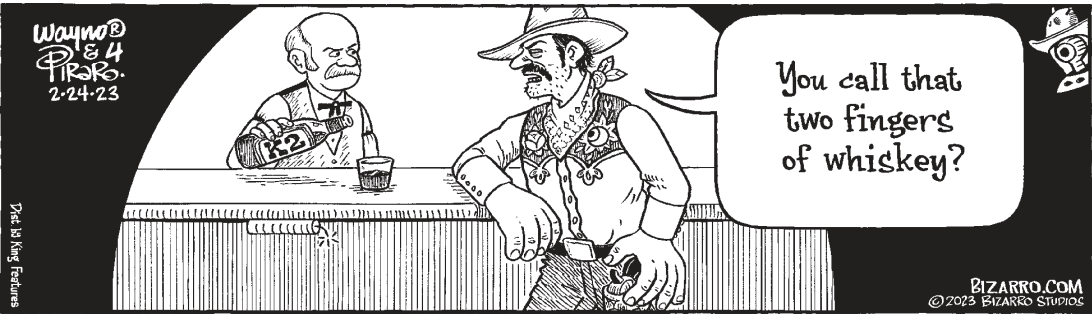
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15			16						17			
		18						19				
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32			33						34			
			35					36				
37	38	39					40					
41					42	43					44	45
46					47					48		
49					50					51		

ACROSS

- 1 Mex. neighbor
4 Web addresses
8 Not us
12 Tonic's mixer
13 Business attire
14 Prefix for "six"
15 Portable, like a smartphone
17 Tears
18 Pro votes
19 Continental cash
20 Harder to find
22 Cribs
24 Spheres
25 Return to one's residence
29 Uncle, to Pedro
30 Abounds
31 "Oy —!"
32 Construction site workers

- 50 Catcher's aid
51 Pampering, for short

- 20 Writer Philip
21 Met melody
22 Borscht base
23 Pet food brand
25 Make well
26 Winter wear
27 Simple
28 Kept tabs on
30 Reedy
33 Doctrines
34 Cleanse
36 Brag
37 Saudi native
38 Theater box
39 Debtors' notes
40 Inky stain
42 Haw's partner
43 Swiss canton
44 He gives a hoot
45 Chest muscle

DOWN

- 1 "This tastes awful!"
2 "Diamonds" singer
3 Michigan city
4 Leading man?
5 Regrets
6 Dogpatch adjective
7 Norm (Abbr.)
8 Songbird
9 Estate recipient
10 Big fair, for short
11 Chapel service
16 Salon jobs
19 Concludes

Answer to Previous Puzzle

C	H	U	B		B	B	S		L	G	B	T
H	O	R	A		L	I	N		A	E	R	O
A	L	L	Y		A	D	O		L	O	R	E
I	M	S	O	L	D		W	H	A	M		
				N	E	E	R	D	O	W	E	L
S	A	F	E	S		E	A	T		T	I	O
A	B	U	T		A	N	Y		B	R	I	O
G	E	L		S	T	E		M	A	Y	I	M
A	L	L	T	O	W	E	L	L				
				M	A	N	N		A	B	L	O
S	T	O	W		I	N	V		E	R	T	E
I	R	O	N		N	E	E		T	E	T	E
T	I	N	Y		G	A	S		S	O	O	T

2-24

CRYPTOQUIP

XZA YAJ S-CGYIGDJGEA RS ERX

XNTGEH XRR VLIZ RS N

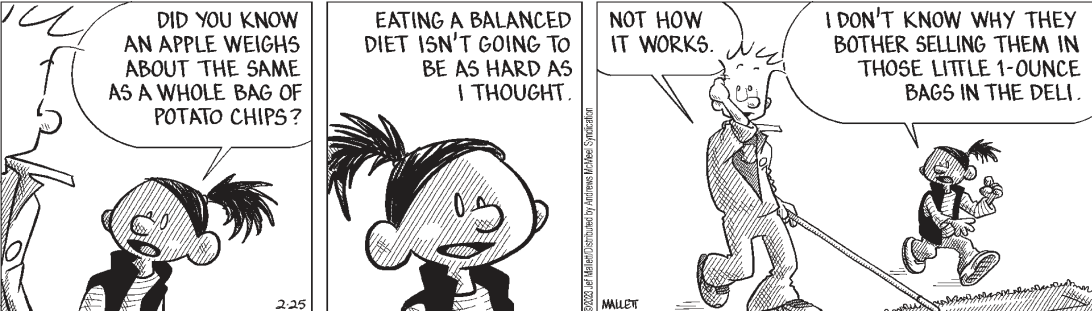
VNHGINJ CFGET NJJ NX REA

XGVA: DRXGRE IREXFRJ.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: FOR WHAT REASON MIGHT ELECTRICIANS KNOW TONS OF PEOPLE? THEY'RE CONSTANTLY MAKING CONNECTIONS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: H equals G

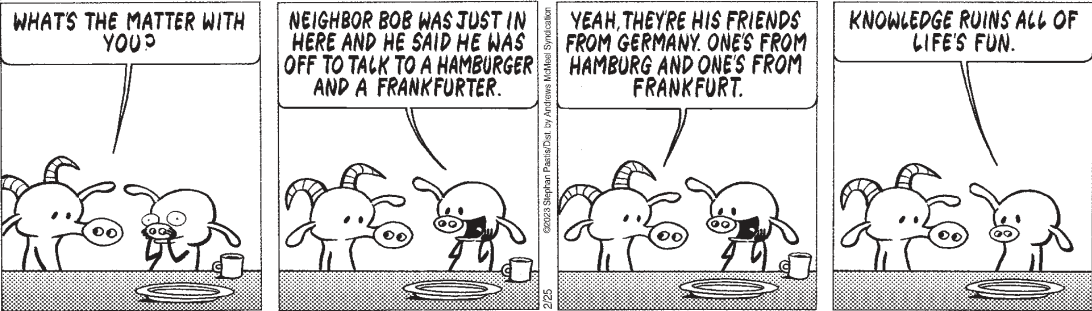
Frazz



Dilbert



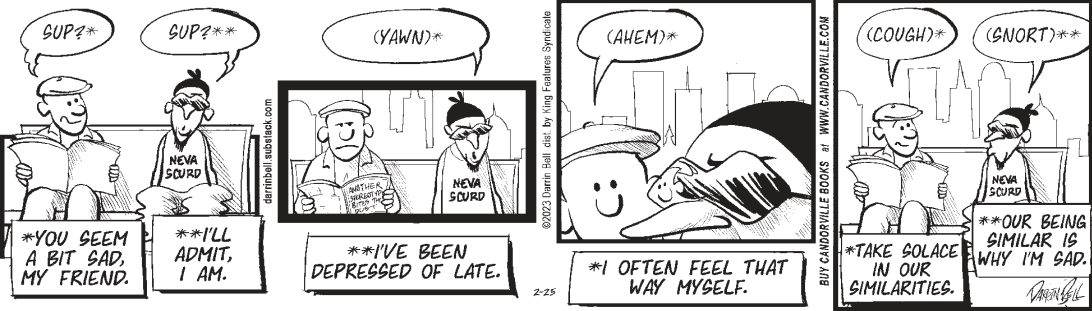
Pearls Before Swine



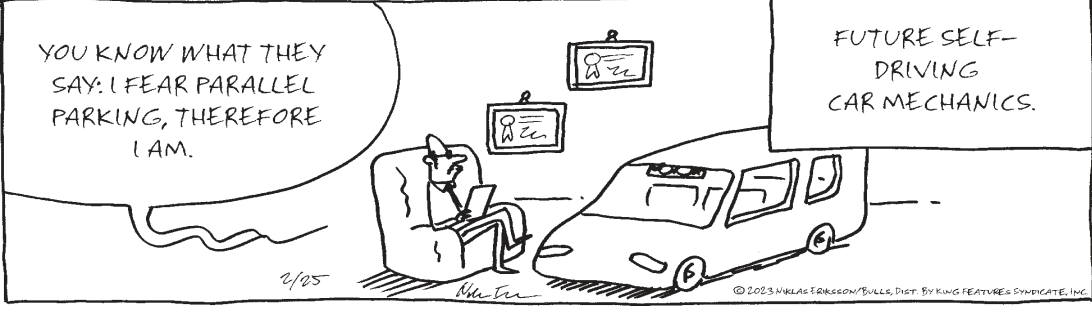
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Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
15					16					17		
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39	40	41			42	43			44	45	46	47
48					49				50			
51					52				53			
54					55				56			

- ACROSS
- 52 Vend
- 53 Privation
- 54 Utter
- 55 Exploits
- 56 Online crafts site
- 22 Modify
- 24 Egged on
- 25 That girl
- 26 Log chopper
- 27 Tanning lotion letters
- 29 Finale
- 30 Payable
- 31 Hot wok sound
- 35 Fencer's moves
- 36 Roadside stops
- 39 Firsties
- 40 Bruins' sch.
- 41 Obligation
- 43 Fashion magazine
- 45 Oodles
- 46 Heroine in a Hardy title
- 47 Relaxed
- 49 Buckeyes' sch.
- DOWN
- 1 Tropical tuber
- 2 Cold War initials
- 3 Cathedral area
- 4 "Nonsense!"
- 5 Aplenty
- 6 Concept
- 7 Capital of Croatia
- 8 Mornings, briefly
- 9 "The King and I" role
- 10 Tabby's greeting
- 11 Hit on the noggin
- 20 Granny Smith, e.g.

Answer to Previous Puzzle

U	S	A		U	R	L	S		T	H	E	M
G	I	N		S	U	I	T		H	E	X	A
H	A	N	D	H	E	L	D		R	I	P	S
		A	Y	E	S				E	U	R	O
R	A	R	E		B	I	N	S				
O	R	B	S		H	E	A	D	H	O	M	E
T	I	O		T	E	E	M	S		V	E	Y
H	A	R	D	H	A	T	S		W	E	R	E
			O	I	L	S		B	A	R	E	D
A	L	I	G	N				B	O	S	C	
R	O	O	M		H	U	L	A	H	O	O	P
A	G	U	A		E	R	O	S		A	W	E
B	E	S	S		M	I	T	T		T	L	C

2-25 CRYPTOQUIP

KBAS OBA YHSA JLSWAJ'U

BHJUA GU JAEAGQGSW LS

HYXIDGE LKLJC, KBLO

BLDDASU? UGYQAJ IACLYU.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THE SELF-DISCIPLINE OF NOT TAKING TOO MUCH OF A MAGICAL DRINK ALL AT ONE TIME: POTION CONTROL.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: W equals G

SCOREBOARD/BOXING

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Wednesday's men's scores

EAST
Boston College 63, Virginia 48
Boston U. 73, Army 67
Bryant 79, NJIT 78
Colgate 73, Lafayette 69
Dayton 72, UMass 54
Duquesne 91, La Salle 74
George Washington 89, Rhode Island 80, OT
Lehigh 78, Bucknell 62
Loyola (Md.) 90, Holy Cross 68
Maryland 88, Minnesota 70
Mass.-Lowell 75, UMBC 70
Navy 70, American 54
New Hampshire 74, Maine 62
St. John's 79, Georgetown 70
UConn 87, Providence 69
Vermont 81, Binghamton 70

SOUTH
Alabama 78, South Carolina 76, OT
Appalachian St. 78, Georgia St. 52
Auburn 78, Mississippi 74
Bellarmine 63, Jacksonville 61
Belmont 89, Indiana St. 88
Clemson 91, Syracuse 73
Davidson 74, St. Bonaventure 61
ETSU 78, The Citadel 70
Furman 70, Mercer 67
Georgia Southern 76, Coastal Carolina 68
High Point 69, Radford 64
Kennesaw St. 79, North Alabama 66
Kentucky 82, Florida 74
LSU 84, Vanderbilt 77
Liberty 85, Queens (NC) 77
Lipscomb 73, Florida Gulf Coast 64
Louisiana-Lafayette 85, Arkansas St. 74
Marshall 92, James Madison 83
NC State 90, Wake Forest 74
North Florida 77, E. Kentucky 64
Old Dominion 69, Southern Miss. 64
SC-Upstate 59, Presbyterian 57
Samford 75, Chattanooga 70
South Florida 82, UCF 75
Stetson 76, Austin Peay 51
Troy 82, Louisiana-Monroe 78, OT
UNC-Asheville 80, Charleston Southern 62
UNC-Greensboro 71, W. Carolina 52
VMI 87, Wofford 83, OT
Winthrop 95, Campbell 93, OT

MIDWEST
Bradley 76, Valparaiso 66
Butler 59, DePaul 58
Cincinnati 88, Temple 83, OT
Drake 82, Illinois St. 51
Fordham 71, Loyola Chicago 69
Ill.-Chicago 82, Evansville 76
Morehead St. 69, E. Illinois 63
North Carolina 63, Notre Dame 59
S. Illinois 86, N. Iowa 63
Wisconsin 64, Iowa 52

SOUTHWEST
Houston 89, Tulane 59
Jacksonville St. 101, Cent. Arkansas 71
South Alabama 76, Texas St. 67
Stephen F. Austin 91, Abilene Christian 89, 2OT

FAR WEST
Boise St. 82, New Mexico 77
Grand Canyon 2, New Mexico St. 0

Men's AP Top 25 schedule

Friday's game
No. 16 Xavier at Seton Hall

Wednesday's women's scores

EAST
American 61, Navy 49
Boston U. 77, Army 70
Bryant 65, NJIT 62
Colgate 71, Lafayette 52
Davidson 66, George Washington 59
Duquesne 71, Loyola Chicago 61
Fordham 74, Rhode Island 73, OT
Holy Cross 59, Loyola (Md.) 51
Lehigh 84, Bucknell 72
Maine 80, New Hampshire 67
Mass.-Lowell 67, UMBC 64
Md.-Eastern Shore 65, Coppin St. 52
Old Dominion 66, Marshall 63
Vermont 67, Binghamton 54

SOUTH
Campbell 48, Winthrop 38
Coastal Carolina 79, Georgia St. 59
East Carolina 88, Houston 83, 3OT
Gardner-Webb 89, Longwood 72
George Mason 65, Saint Joseph's 60
Georgia Southern 75, South Alabama 59
James Madison 78, Appalachian St. 62
Memphis 64, Cincinnati 53
Radford 65, High Point 55
Richmond 53, VCU 37
SC-Upstate 61, Presbyterian 56
South Florida 93, Tulsa 83
Southern Miss. 88, Troy 79
Texas St. 58, Louisiana-Lafayette 51
UNC-Asheville 65, Charleston Southern 55

MIDWEST
Ball St. 80, W. Michigan 49
Bowling Green 80, Cent. Michigan 72
Creighton 55, Marquette 44
Dayton 65, La Salle 51
E. Illinois 60, Morehead St. 49
Kansas St. 63, Kansas 45
Kent St. 82, Ohio 56
Miami (Ohio) 88, N. Illinois 67
Michigan St. 71, Minnesota 67
Nebraska 90, Illinois 57
Purdue 86, Penn St. 62
Saint Louis 77, UMass 75
Texas Rio Grande Valley 66, Tarleton St. 58
Toledo 80, Akron 76

SOUTHWEST
Arkansas St. 98, Louisiana-Monroe 73
Baylor 67, TCU 57
Oklahoma St. 73, Iowa St. 68
SMU 69, Wichita St. 51
Texas Tech 69, West Virginia 68, 2OT

Women's AP Top 25 schedule

Friday's games
No. 7 Maryland at No. 16 Ohio St.
No. 15 Villanova vs. Providence

TENNIS

Merida Open Akron

Wednesday
At Yucatan Country Club
Merida, Mexico
Purse: \$259,303
Surface: Hardcourt outdoor

Women's Singles
Round of 16
Kimberly Birrell, Australia, def. Wang Xiyu, China, 6-3, 6-2.
Cathy McNally, United States, def. Katie Volynets, United States, 6-3, 6-0.
Camila Giorgi, Italy, def. Nuria Parrizas Diaz, Spain, 7-6 (5), 6-2.
Elisabetta Cocciaretto (7), Italy, def. Wang Xinyu, China, 6-4, 6-2

Women's Doubles
Round of 16
Despina Papamichail, Greece, and Simona Waltert, Switzerland, def. Rosalie Van Der Hoek, Netherlands, and Ingrid Neel, United States, 6-2, 2-6, 10-5.
Natela Dzalamidze and Kamilla Rakhimova, Russia, def. Mayar Sherif, Egypt, and Lucia Bronzetti, Italy, 6-1, 6-3.

Quarterfinals
Cathy McNally, United States, and Diane Parry, France, def. Elixane Lechemia, France, and Anna Bondar, Hungary, 6-3, 7-6 (6).

Rio Open

Wednesday
At Jockey Club Brasileiro
Rio de Janeiro
Purse: \$2,013,940
Surface: Red clay

Men's Singles
Round of 32
Dusan Lajovic, Serbia, def. Diego Schwartzman (5), Argentina, 6-1, 6-4.
Bernabe Zapata Miralles, Spain, def. Jaume Munar, Spain, 6-3, 7-5.
Sebastian Baez (6), Argentina, def. Thomaz Bellucci, Brazil, 6-3, 6-2.

Round of 16
Hugo Dellien, Bolivia, def. Alex Molcan (9), Slovakia, 1-6, 6-2, 6-2.
Cameron Norrie (2), Britain, def. Thiago Monteiro, Brazil, 7-5, 7-5.

Men's Doubles
Round of 16
Marcelo Melo, Brazil, and Juan Sebastian Cabal (2), Colombia, def. Lucas Miedler and Alexander Erler, Austria, 6-4, 3-6, 10-7.
Fabien Reboul and Sadio Doumbia, France, def. Simone Bolelli and Fabio Fognini (3), Italy, 6-3, 4-6, 11-9.
Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni, Argentina, def. Mateus Alves and Joao Fonseca, Brazil, 7-5, 7-6 (4).
Nikola Cacic, Serbia, and Andrea Pellegrino, Italy, def. David Vega Hernandez, Spain, and Rafael Matos (1), Brazil, 7-6 (8), 4-6, 11-9.

Provence 13

Wednesday
At Palais des Sports
Marseille, France
Purse: Euro 707,510
Surface: Hardcourt indoor

Men's Singles
Round of 32
Mikael Ymer, Sweden, def. Radu Albot, Moldova, 6-3, 7-6 (5).
Arthur Fils, France, def. Roman Safiullin, Russia, 6-4, 6-3.

Round of 16
Benjamin Bonzi, France, def. Maxime Cressy (5), United States, 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-3.
Alexander Bublik, Kazakhstan, def. Gregoire Barrere, France, 6-4, 6-2.
Stan Wawrinka, Switzerland, def. Richard Gasquet (7), France, 4-6, 7-5, 6-2.

Men's Doubles
Round of 16
Nicolas Mahut and Fabrice Martin (2), France, def. John-Patrick Smith and Andrew Harris, Australia, 7-6 (6), 6-2.

DEALS

tin quarterbacks coach and Willie Taggart running backs coach and Scott Elliott strength and conditioning coordinator.

CINCINNATI BENGALS — Re-signed LS Cal Adomitis to a contract extension.

DALLAS COWBOYS — Re-signed K Tristan Vizcaino.

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Re-signed OL Calvin Throckmorton to a one-year contract extension.

PITTSBURGH STEELERS — Re-signed LS Christian Kuntz to a one-year contract.

TENNESSEE TITANS — Released LT Taylor Lewan, K Randy Bullock, LB Zach Cunningham and WR Robert Woods.

HOCKEY

National Hockey League

ARIZONA COYOTES — Acquired D Shea Weber and a 2023 fifth-round draft choice from Vegas in exchange for D Dysin Mayo.

DALLAS STARS — Recalled G Matthew Murray and LW Fredrik Olofsson from Texas (AHL).

DETROIT RED WINGS — Recalled D Seth Barton from Toledo (ECHL) to Grand Rapids (AHL).

MINNESOTA WILD — Recalled D Dakota Mermis from Iowa (AHL).

NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Recalled C Otto Koivu from Bridgeport (AHL).

ST. LOUIS BLUES — Recalled G Colton Ellis from Tulsa (ECHL) to Springfield (AHL).

SEATTLE KRACEN — Recalled RW Jesper Froden from Coachella Valley (AHL).

VANCOUVER CANUCKS — Recalled D Guillaume Brisebois and C Aatu Raty from Abbotsford (AHL). Returned LW Phil Di Giuseppe to Abbotsford.

SOCCER

Major League Soccer

AUSTIN FC — Signed M Diego Fagundez to a three-year contract.

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION — Signed D Victor Souza to an MLS Next Pro contract.

SPORTING KC — Signed manager and sporting director Peter Vermes to a five-year contract.



ASHLEY LANDIS/AP

YouTube megastar influencer-turned-prizefighter Jake Paul will be coming up against a recognized professional boxer for the first time Sunday when he takes on Tommy Fury.

Paul set to take next boxing step

Influencer takes on Fury as cruiserweight

By STEVE DOUGLAS
Associated Press

Jake Paul’s unorthodox career in boxing might just be about to get serious. The YouTube influencer-turned-prize fighter will be coming up against a recognized professional boxer for the first time Sunday when he takes on Tommy Fury, the half-brother of world heavyweight champion Tyson Fury.

Since venturing into boxing in 2018, Paul has fought a fellow influencer, a former NBA basketball player and three MMA fighters. He has won each time, building up his already-sturdy brand in the process.

Fighting Fury is widely regarded as a step up and the WBC, which is sanctioning the fight, recognizes it. Indeed, if the 26-year-old Paul — a blond, bearded social-media phenomenon — wins, he will be granted a place in the WBC’s world rankings at cruiserweight.

“Jake has dedication and respect to the sport,” the sanctioning body said, “and the WBC will not tolerate discrimination against anyone. He deserves the opportunities that any other boxer has.”

It’s hardly a move that will be popular with boxing traditionalists.

Then again, Paul is not exactly operating in those circles or attempting to please that demographic. He has forged a very different path into the boxing world and is making a success of it, given the fight against Fury has gotten pay-per-view status and is deemed big enough to be hosted for big money out in Diriyah, Saudi Arabia.

Paul rose to fame a decade ago by posting Vine videos and then as

an actor on Disney Channel show Bizaardvark. His rise as an influencer has not been without controversy, including accusations of sexual assault by two women in 2021 — he wasn’t charged with either — and his apparent use of racial slurs while rapping in some videos in 2018. He was also charged with criminal trespass and unlawful assembly in 2020 following a riot at a mall outside Phoenix.

Boxing is his most recent passion. He joined the pro ranks in 2019 and said he is “as serious as it gets” about the sport. He says he has a 30-person team supporting his training, which is largely done at the Cleveland native’s base in Puerto Rico.

“Because my life’s on the line,” he told British newspaper The Independent ahead of the Fury fight, “so I’m not going to take that lightly.”

Becoming a world champion boxer is his ultimate aim, even if that goal appeared even more remote with the news in January that Paul has signed a deal with the Professional Fighters League in mixed martial arts.

Certainly Fury doesn’t take his opponent seriously as a boxer.

“That’s like saying a pig is going to fly, isn’t it?” Fury said of Paul’s ambitions of becoming a world titleholder.

“I’m going to teach Jake Paul a lesson ... I’m going to show him he can’t just pick up a pair of gloves and say, ‘I’m going to be a world champion.’”

Fury has an interesting backstory, too, and not just because he is the half-brother of one of the most famous boxers in the world and comes from a family of bare-knuckle fighters.

MLS

Season opening amid build up to World Cup

League expands collaboration with Liga MX; both look forward to run-up of 2026 event in US, Mexico, Canada

BY ANNE M. PETERSON
 Associated Press

The push toward the World Cup in 2026 begins now for Major League Soccer.

The league, entering its 28th season this year, has a new team in St. Louis City SC and a new media deal with Apple TV. This season will also feature an expanded Leagues Cup, which will involve all of the MLS and Liga MX teams for the first time.

The tournament is part of an ever-increasing collaboration between MLS and Liga MX, with both professional leagues looking forward to the attention they'll see in the run-up to the World Cup hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada.

The 2022 World Cup in Qatar was already record-breaking, with 36 MLS players making national team rosters — double the league's players that were in Russia in 2018.

LAFC is the defending MLS Cup champion and Supporters Shield winner. The Western Conference team is loaded with talent, including Carlos Vela, Kellyn Acosta and Giorgio Chiellini, but top scorer Cristian 'Chicho' Arango was sold to Pachuca in Mexico.

Wales legend Gareth Bale, LAFC's splashy signing last June, retired in the off-season but not before he provided a memorable moment in the championship game with an equalizer late in extra time that sent the match to penalties and a victory over the Philadelphia Union.

"I think our first 11 is still pretty good, and we're quite pleased with it. And we have a few very good players off the bench, we just don't have as deep a bench as last season. So we're focusing on staying healthy, and trying to manage a lot of games in a congested schedule this year," LAFC second-year

coach Steve Cherundolo said.

Philadelphia, the Eastern Conference's top finisher last season, didn't make many huge moves in the offseason but lost key sub Cory Burke in free agency. The Union scored a league-best 72 goals and allowed just 26, fewest in MLS last season and a record for a 34-game season.

"It's going to be hard to replicate what we did defensively last year, setting a record in goals-against, and then scoring as many goals as we did is certainly going to be a challenge, but this group will fight like hell for our fans and try to get back to that MLS Cup final," Union coach Jim Curtin said.

The 28th MLS season opens this Saturday.

How about them Apple(s)

MLS kicked off a 10-year partnership with Apple with the launch of Season Pass on Apple TV+ this season. Apple has made previous forays into sports streaming, but this is its first significant involvement with a league.

MLS will receive at least \$250 million per season from Apple. The league averaged \$90 million per season under its previous eight-year agreements with Fox, ESPN and Univision.

Oh, and for those who prefer watching games at the local pub or eatery, the league has a "commercial establishments" deal with DirectTV.

New kids on the block

St. Louis City joins MLS this season as the 29th club. City opens the season on the road at Austin but returns home to face Charlotte on March 4 at the team's soccer-specific stadium, CITYPARK. The team's first home match will be played before a sellout crowd of 22,500.



JOHN MCCOY/AP

Los Angeles FC celebrates after a win over Austin FC in the Western Conference finals in October. Major League Soccer starts its 28th season this weekend.

City named goalkeeper Roman Burki, who came from Borussia Dortmund in the German Bundesliga, as its captain for the inaugural season. Defender Tim Parker was named vice captain.

"We want to play a fast-paced game. We want to keep it action packed, we want to really be working in the transition, we want to be working on the front foot, really bringing a lot of energy to the fans, hoping that they sit on the edge of their seats and not really get too comfortable, right?" coach Bradley Carnell said.

The league plans to add a 30th team, possibly making an announcement in the first half of this year.

New(ish) coaches

One of the biggest coaching moves in the offseason was made by Wilfried Nancy, who left Montreal last season to take over the Columbus Crew after Caleb Porter was dismissed. Hernan Losada, who was coach at D.C. United in 2021 and part of 2022, took Nancy's

spot in Montreal.

Luchi Gonzalez returned from his duties as an assistant for the United States at the World Cup to join the San Jose Earthquakes. Gonzalez also coached at FC Dallas from 2018-21. Ben Olsen is another former MLS coach that has a new team this season. Olsen, previously coach at D.C. United, is now with Houston.

Going bowling

On opening day the season features an El Trafico rivalry game between defending MLS Cup champion LAFC and the LA Galaxy at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

The match could break the league's all-time attendance record for a standalone game, set last year when Charlotte drew 74,479 fans to its season opener.

"We're looking forward to those games, they're always fun, they're always exciting, pretty intense. And I know our players, I know our group, and they'll be ready," LAFC coach Cherundolo said.

Playoffs expand to 9 teams from each conference

BY ANNE M. PETERSON
 Associated Press

Major League Soccer is expanding its playoffs to include the nine top finishers from each of its two conferences, 62% of the league's teams.

An opening "wild-card" round will feature matches between the eighth- and ninth-seeded teams in the Eastern and Western conferences at the stadium of the higher seed.

The first round will be a best-of-three series, with the top finisher in each conference facing the winner of the wild-card match. The second seed will play the seventh, No. 3 will play No. 6 and No. 4 will play No. 5. The higher seed will host first, with the series moving to the lower seed for the second game, and then back to the higher seed's home, if necessary.

If the first-round matches are tied at the end of regulation, the game will go directly to a penalty shootout.

The conference semifinals, finals and MLS Cup championship will all be single games, hosted by the higher seed. For the final three rounds, tied matches will go to extra time before penalties.

Seattle Sounders coach Brian Schmetzer said Tuesday he hadn't looked closely at the playoff changes so he couldn't comment in detail, but understood that Apple TV+, the league's new broadcaster, wanted more postseason games.

Schmetzer, however, was clear about wanting playoff games to be single elimination: "I like one-and-done. I am a one-and-done type of guy."

LA Galaxy coach Greg Vanney

said with the new playoff format, as well as the expanded Leagues Cup competition that included all the MLS and Liga MX teams for the first time, clubs will have a heavier load this season.

"In any of the tournaments, whether it's Open Cup, or Leagues Cup or you go relatively deep in the playoffs, you're certainly going to be (at) 50-plus games and that type of scenario," Vanney said. "And that's significantly more than what teams, I think, have generally endured. You've seen more from teams that are in Champions League — and we have teams in Champions League as well — so it's a heavy lift."

Philadelphia Union coach Jim Curtin was asked about the possibility of an expanded playoff earlier this month, when reports surfaced that more teams would

make the cut. Philadelphia played in the MLS Cup final last season, falling to LAFC on penalties after a 3-3 draw.

"I can say from the last two years, I think they've been two of the most exciting playoff series we've had as a league, and that's the one difficult thing to move away from now," Curtin said. "But this is pro sports, and it's certainly bigger than any team or any silly coach's idea, so whatever happens we'll be prepared."

In the previous format, only the top seven teams from each conference made the playoffs. The top seeds each had a first-round bye to the conference semifinals.

Decision Day, the final day of the regular season, is set for Oct. 21, with the wild-card round scheduled for Oct. 25-26. The MLS Cup final will be played on Dec. 9.

Scoreboard

Saturday's games

New York City FC at Nashville
 San Jose at Atlanta
 New England at Charlotte FC
 Houston at Cincinnati
 Toronto FC at D.C. United
 CF Montréal at Miami
 New York at Orlando City
 Columbus at Philadelphia
 Saint Louis City SC at Austin FC
 Minnesota at FC Dallas
 Los Angeles FC at LA Galaxy
 Sporting Kansas City at Portland
 Real Salt Lake at Vancouver

Sunday's game

Colorado at Seattle

Saturday, March 4

Portland at Los Angeles FC
 Toronto FC at Atlanta
 D.C. United at Columbus
 Philadelphia at Miami
 Houston at New England
 Nashville at New York
 Cincinnati at Orlando City
 CF Montréal at Austin FC
 New York City FC at Chicago
 LA Galaxy at FC Dallas
 Charlotte FC at Saint Louis City SC
 Sporting Kansas City at Colorado
 Vancouver at San Jose
 Real Salt Lake at Seattle

COLLEGE BASKETBALL



Alabama forward Brandon Miller drives against South Carolina forward Gregory Jackson II on the way to scoring the go-ahead basket in overtime Wednesday in Columbia, S.C.

Miller stars as details emerge of his connection to shooting

By PETE IACOBELLI
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Alabama standout freshman Brandon Miller was in the starting lineup and had a career-high scoring game in a win over South Carolina on Wednesday night — one day after police said he delivered a gun ahead of a fatal shooting that took place near campus in mid-January, and hours after the university said he'd remain an "active member" of the No. 2-ranked Crimson Tide and is not considered a suspect.

Alabama's support for Miller, one of college basketball's top players, made little difference to Gamecocks fans at Colonial Life Arena, who focused on the 6-foot-9 forward even before the Southeastern Conference game started. The crowd booed each time Miller touched the ball. Members of the student section chanted, "Lock him up," and "Guilty!" several times as Miller played.

Miller, who finished with 41 points, scored the decisive basket with 0.9 seconds left in OT as SEC-leading Alabama beat South Carolina 78-76.

The game capped an eventful few days for Miller, who authorities have said is allegedly connected to the shooting death of 23-year-old Jamea Jonae Harris last month. Tuscaloosa Police investigator Brandon Culpepper testified this week that Miller brought a gun to now-former teammate Darius Miles on the night of the shooting after Miles texted him and asked him to do so.

Earlier Wednesday, an attorney for Miller said his client never handled the gun officials said was involved.

"Based on all the information that we have received, Brandon Miller is not considered a suspect in this case, only a cooperative witness," the university said in a statement released before Wednesday's game. "Today's statement from Brandon's lawyer adds additional context that the University considered as part of its review of the facts. Based on all the facts that we have gathered, Brandon remains an active member of the team"

Alabama coach Nate Oats acknowledged that some of his players may have let the past few days affect their game against South Carolina. But not Miller.

"He's one of the most mentally tough kids I've ever coached," Oats said.

Neither Miller nor other players were made available to the media after the game.

Miller was on the court about 80 minutes before tipoff, warming up with teammates before fans were allowed in the building. Once the doors opened, students filled several areas around the court and focused on Miller, who didn't react while continuing his pregame drills.

He started the game slowly, missing two wide-open three-pointers, and the Crimson Tide found themselves in a battle against the Gamecocks, trailing 35-31 at the half. Miller warmed up near the end of the half, scoring on a three-pointer and a pair of high-flying jams and accounting for almost half of his team's points. He finished the half with a team-high 15 points, three rebounds, a block and a turnover.

It was a highly charged atmosphere and at least two fans were led out of the arena by police as the South Carolina crowd cheered.

Miller's attorney, Jim Standridge, said his client never handled the gun owned by Miles, who prosecutors said is accused of providing his gun to Michael Davis, who fired it and killed Harris.

"Brandon never touched the gun, was not involved in its exchange to Mr. Davis in any way, and never knew that illegal activity involving the gun would occur," Standridge said in a statement.

Miller's alleged involvement in the death of Harris was detailed Tuesday at a preliminary hearing for Miles and Davis, who both face capital murder charges in Harris' death. Culpepper testified that Miles texted Miller to bring him his handgun.

Oats has said the team was aware Miller allegedly brought the gun to Miles.

Standridge said in the statement that Miles asked Miller for a ride to a club. Standridge said Miles brought his "legal handgun and left it in the backseat of Brandon's vehicle. Brandon never saw the handgun nor handled it."

Miles later texted Miller to bring him the gun. Miller never got out of his vehicle, was not part of the exchange with Davis and did not interact with anyone in Harris' party, according to Standridge.

Miller quickly drove off when gunfire took place, Standridge said. When Miles was told someone was hurt and police wanted to speak to him, "he has fully cooperated with law enforcement's investigation," Standridge said.

Standridge said the events of the shooting were captured on video. "There is no dispute about Brandon's activities during this evening," Standridge said.

Hsu putting Columbia on path to 1st Ivy title

By DOUG FEINBERG
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Abbey Hsu has Columbia well on its way to a first-ever Ivy League championship in women's basketball.

A junior guard from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., Hsu has helped the Lions go 63-21 since joining the team in 2019, equaling the win total of the previous eight years combined. Before that, Columbia had posted just one winning season in the previous 33 years.

Hsu had a career-best 35 points in Columbia's 75-70 win over Harvard last Friday night. A win over Dartmouth the next day gave the Lions a 21-4 record and left them tied with Princeton atop the league standings. Those wins also gave Columbia 12 road victories on the season, tied for first in the country with No. 1 South Carolina and No. 15 Villanova.

Columbia, which earned votes in the AP poll for the first time ever this season, controls its own destiny, and wins over Brown on Saturday and at home against Cornell a week later will assure the Lions at least a share of their first Ivy League regular-season crown.

"That's been a goal since I've walked on campus," Hsu said of winning the Ivy title. "I think all the years leading up to this one are necessary steps that we had to take. We had to take some losses and we had to learn from those losses."

Columbia lost in the finals of the Ivy Tournament last year to Princeton, which went on to reach the second round of the NCAAs before falling by a point at Indiana. The Lions advanced to the quarterfinals of the WNIT and Hsu was a big reason why. She set the Ivy League record with 108 three-pointers last season. She's currently in fourth place on the conference's career three-point list and could finish the season in second.

Through all the success, it hasn't been an easy few years for Hsu, who is third on Columbia's career scoring list. Before coming to Columbia, she was at Marjory Stoneman Dou-

glas High School when the school shooting occurred five years ago.

She was in one of the buildings on the school's campus when the tragedy occurred and heard the gunshots. The anniversary of the shooting was last week. Whenever Hsu sees there's been a mass shooting at a school, such as the one at Michigan State last week, it brings up memories of what happened in Florida.

"It just doesn't really make sense," she said. "You go through something like that and it keeps happening almost like it's kind of scooted under the rug. I mean the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. There definitely has to be big steps in that direction regulation-wise. I don't know the exact answer, but obviously what we're doing is not working. There's too many lives lost."

Tragedy didn't end there for Hsu. When the pandemic cut Columbia's season short, she returned home. A short time later her father Alex, who was an internist, caught COVID-19 and became the first South Florida medical professional to die from the disease.

Hsu stayed home for a year because there was no basketball season when the Ivy League canceled sports in the 2020-21 school year. Being home gave her time to grieve and heal.

"To go through that, there is no right time," Hsu said. "But because of COVID, I was able to be home and be present with my family and had time to reflect."

Through all the heartache, Hsu has persevered, crediting her father for her hardworking attitude.

"This is part of who she is," Columbia coach Megan Griffith said. "Pre tragedies, post tragedies. I think it has made her more who she is and for her to be able to embrace adversity and hardship and come out on the other end of it stronger, tougher. It's a true testament to her character and to the character she has and that her family has bestowed upon her. She's one of the toughest kids I ever coached."



Columbia head coach Megan Griffith, left, talks with guard Abbey Hsu during the second half of the Ivy League championship game against Princeton on March 12 in Cambridge, Mass. Princeton won the game.

MLB

Milestones behind him, Cabrera hopes for fun final season

BY NOAH TRISTER
Associated Press

LAKELAND, Fla. — Two years ago, Miguel Cabrera hit his 500th home run, and last season he reached 3,000 hits.

Now there's one more reason for an extended celebration of the Detroit slugger's career.

This is his final year.

"I'm going to go out there and be me. Try to have fun, try to go out there and, when they give me a chance to play, play. I don't know what is going to be my role this year," Cabrera said. "If I can hit, I want to be in the lineup."

Cabrera sounded at ease with his decision to call it a career when he spoke at spring training Monday, joking with reporters in his usual playful way and insisting he doesn't need opponents to lavish him with attention. That will likely come whether he wants it or not.

"I brought him up in the first meeting, so that tells you that I didn't listen to his desire to not be talked about," Tigers manager A.J. Hinch said. "We're going to cherish our time with Miggy. We're

also going to let him be a player, a contributor, and just be himself."

Two decades after his big league debut as a 20-year-old Florida Marlin, Cabrera says he doesn't remember much about his first spring training — "I have a better car right now" — but he's hoping for a healthy season and more wins for Detroit.

The Tigers haven't made the playoffs since 2014, and Cabrera hasn't had a really excellent season since 2016.

Still, baseball was captivated a year ago when Albert Pujols managed to hit 24 home runs in his last season, surpassing 700 for his career.

Don't expect a similar chase from Cabrera, if only because he passed so many milestones so recently. He enters this season with 507 homers, 3,088 hits and 607 doubles — not to mention a .308 career average.

"It's been a thrill to be able to follow him. I feel privileged to have a chance to watch him play day in, day out for so many years, and the joy that he brought us," said Dave Dombrowski, who is cur-

"I'm going to go out there and be me. Try to have fun, try to go out there and, when they give me a chance to play, play."

Miguel Cabrera



CARLOS OSORIO/A

The Detroit Tigers' Miguel Cabrera said he wants to have fun in his final year. The two-time MVP, who reached 500 home runs two years ago and 3,000 hits last season, insisted he doesn't need opponents to lavish him with attention.

rently the president of the Philadelphia Phillies but ran Detroit's front office when Cabrera won the Triple Crown and the first of two straight MVPs in 2012.

Dombrowski, who was also with Florida when the Marlins signed a teenaged Cabrera in 1999, says he still exchanges texts with him when he accomplishes something big. There's certainly plenty of respect for Cabrera around the sport.

Cabrera played in 112 games last season. He said Monday that he feels good physically, but he joked that he'll have to wait and see how he feels after an 0-for-4 day at the plate. He made it clear that he's not expecting opponents to roll out the red carpet for him as his playing career starts to wind down.

"It's nice if they do something. It's nice if they don't," he said. "I don't want attention, I don't want any distraction for our team. We look forward to go out there and beat these guys."

Hinch and the Tigers, however, want to enjoy this final season with him. Cabrera may be in the spotlight sooner than usual, since he's on Venezuela's roster for next month's World Baseball Classic — along with Detroit left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez.

"It's just going to be something special," Rodriguez said. "It's his last year. We're going to go to play together in WBC for our country and then play the last season in MLB together. I know it's going to be great and I can't wait to enjoy it."



CHARLY TRIBALLEAU, AFP/TNS

Noah Song was expected to report to the Phillies spring training camp on Thursday after his transfer from active duty to the Navy reserves.

Song OK for Phillies after transfer to Navy reserves

Associated Press

CLEARWATER, Fla. — The Philadelphia Phillies said Noah Song's transfer from active duty to the Navy reserves frees up the pitching prospect to report to camp with the team on Thursday.

Song, a 25-year-old aviator from California, was taken by the Phillies in the winter meeting draft in December with hopes he would play after military service.

The 6-foot-4, 200-pound right-hander was picked from the Boston Red Sox system in the draft for unprotected minor league players. Philadelphia put him on the military list while he continued active duty.

While Song is on the military list, he won't be counted against the 40-man roster until opening day. If he makes the team out of spring training, Song will be placed on the Phillies' 26-man roster. If he doesn't make the team,

he will be traded or placed on waivers.

The Red Sox drafted Song in the fourth round — he likely would've gone much higher, but his impending military service caused teams to back off.

Song impressed in his only pro season, making seven starts for Boston's Class A Lowell affiliate in 2019, with a 1.06 ERA and 19 strikeouts in 17 innings. With a fastball clocked in the upper 90s, the right-hander dominated that year as a senior at the U.S. Naval Academy, going 11-1 with a 1.44 ERA and 161 strikeouts in 94 innings.

During his four-year collegiate career at Navy, he posted a 2.37 ERA in 58 games, with 428 strikeouts in 334⅓ innings. He pitched 14 complete games, nine of them shutouts. He throws a fastball, a slider, change-up and a curveball, but he hasn't pitched professionally since 2019.

In November 2019, Defense Secretary Mark Esper signed a memo clearing the way for athletes at military academies to delay service commitments and play pro sports after graduation. Song's request to have those rules retroactively applied to him was denied.

Song began school as a flight officer in the summer of 2020 and finished that phase last April. He started additional aviation training the next month.

Song was among the 15 players, including three Boston pitchers, taken in the big league phase of the winter meeting draft. Washington took righty Thad Ward from Boston's Triple-A roster with the first pick. Baltimore took Red Sox minor league pitcher Andrew Politi with the ninth choice and the Phillies chose Song with the 11th selection.

NHL

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference								
Atlantic Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Boston	56	43	8	5	91	210	118	
Toronto	58	35	15	8	78	200	156	
Tampa Bay	56	36	17	3	75	201	163	
Florida	60	29	25	6	64	209	210	
Detroit	56	27	21	8	62	175	180	
Buffalo	55	28	23	4	60	204	193	
Ottawa	56	27	25	4	58	172	179	
Montreal	57	24	29	4	52	156	207	
Metropolitan Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Carolina	56	38	10	8	84	192	148	
New Jersey	57	37	15	5	79	197	154	
N.Y. Rangers	57	33	15	9	75	192	156	
N.Y. Islanders	61	30	24	7	67	177	171	
Pittsburgh	56	27	20	9	63	180	178	
Washington	59	28	25	6	62	176	173	
Philadelphia	59	23	26	10	56	159	190	
Columbus	57	18	34	5	41	146	212	
Western Conference								
Central Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Dallas	58	30	16	12	72	188	152	
Winnipeg	58	35	22	1	71	182	150	
Colorado	55	31	19	5	67	173	155	
Minnesota	57	31	21	5	67	169	162	
Nashville	55	27	22	6	60	157	167	
St. Louis	57	26	28	3	55	176	209	
Arizona	58	20	29	9	49	158	205	
Chicago	57	20	32	5	45	143	206	
Pacific Division								
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Vegas	57	34	18	5	73	186	160	
Los Angeles	58	32	19	7	71	197	195	
Seattle	57	32	19	6	70	197	178	
Edmonton	58	31	19	8	70	218	194	
Calgary	58	27	20	11	65	189	180	
Vancouver	57	22	30	5	49	196	234	
San Jose	58	18	29	11	47	174	213	
Anaheim	58	17	34	7	41	145	246	
Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.								
Wednesday's games								
N.Y. Islanders 2, Winnipeg 1 Calgary 6, Arizona 3 Chicago 4, Dallas 3								
Thursday's games								
Anaheim at Washington Buffalo at Tampa Bay Edmonton at Pittsburgh Los Angeles at New Jersey Minnesota at Columbus N.Y. Rangers at Detroit Vancouver at St. Louis Calgary at Vegas Boston at Seattle Nashville at San Jose								
Friday's games								
Buffalo at Florida Minnesota at Toronto Montreal at Philadelphia Ottawa at Carolina Los Angeles at N.Y. Islanders Colorado at Winnipeg								
Saturday's games								
Edmonton at Columbus N.Y. Rangers at Washington Pittsburgh at St. Louis Anaheim at Carolina Boston at Vancouver Ottawa at Montreal Philadelphia at New Jersey Tampa Bay at Detroit Calgary at Colorado Dallas at Vegas Chicago at San Jose								
Sunday's games								
Washington at Buffalo Columbus at Minnesota N.Y. Islanders at Winnipeg Los Angeles at N.Y. Rangers Tampa Bay at Pittsburgh Nashville at Arizona Toronto at Seattle								
Scoring leaders								
Through Wednesday								
	GP	G	A	PTS				
Connor McDavid, EDM	58	44	61	105				
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	56	34	51	85				
Nikita Kucherov, TB	56	21	59	80				
Matthew Tkachuk, FLA	57	28	50	78				
David Pastrnak, BOS	56	41	36	77				
Erik Karlsson, SJ	58	18	58	76				
Elias Pettersson, VAN	55	27	45	72				
R. Jason Robertson, DAL	58	35	37	72				
Tage Thompson, BUF	55	36	36	72				
Mitch Marner, TOR	58	20	51	71				
Jack Hughes, NJ	53	35	36	71				
R. Nugent-Hopkins, EDM	58	27	43	70				
Sidney Crosby, PIT	56	25	43	68				

Penguins trying to stay afloat late

By WILL GRAVES
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The faces around Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Kris Letang have changed over the years.

Coaches have come and gone. General managers, a litany of players — some of them forever etched in Pittsburgh Penguins lore, others not so much — and owners, too.

Yet Crosby, Malkin and Letang have remained. Through heartache and triumph. Milestones and giddy early summer parades along packed downtown streets, the Stanley Cup in tow.

They are the fulcrum around which the organization revolves, their presence in the NHL playoffs practically a given for 16 years and counting.



MATT FREED/AP

Pittsburgh Penguins center Sidney Crosby collides with New York Islanders defenseman Sebastian Aho during the second period in Pittsburgh on Monday. The Penguins lost 4-2, their fourth loss in five games.

Yet nearly three-quarters of the way into their 17th season together, the group known simply as “The Big Three” finds itself in practically uncharted territory: scrambling to stay in the midst of a playoff chase.

The Penguins entered play on Thursday against Connor McDavid and Edmonton on the outside of the top eight in the Eastern Conference.

While there is plenty of time for Pittsburgh to right itself, the reality is the Penguins have rarely looked as beatable during the Crosby/Malkin/Letang era as they have over the past five middling and maddening months.

The latest proof came in a frustrating 4-2 loss to the New York Islanders on Monday night, a game in which the Penguins dominated play for the first 45-plus minutes only to crumble down the stretch on their way to a ninth straight loss to a Met-

ropolitan Division rival.

The setback marked the sixth time in 14 games the Penguins lost after leading through two periods. A team long known for its ability to finish has become vulnerable to late lapses that have cost them precious points in the standings.

“I mean, it’s not ideal when you lose games and you have leads, but the only way out of it is to find a way to win one and try to get some momentum from that,” Crosby said. “We can’t dwell on it.”

Mostly because there’s no time.

The NHL’s oldest roster finds itself facing a daunting sprint down the stretch. Pittsburgh will play its final 26 games in the span of 50 days. Not ideal for a group that, save for a brilliant 14-2-2 run from Nov. 9-

Dec. 15, has been ordinary at best.

While it’s not the first time during the Penguins’ streak of 16 straight playoff appearances that they have looked iffy as March looms, it may be the first time their options to rectify things have been so limited.

There are no young legs ready to come up from their American Hockey League affiliate in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton as Jake Guentzel, Bryan Rust and Conor Sheary did in 2015-16, an arrival that coincided with a dash to the franchise’s third Stanley Cup.

And there may be little in the way of reinforcements coming at the trade deadline. The players the Penguins have that are considered the most attractive to other clubs are the same players they can’t suc-

ceed without.

Still, coach Mike Sullivan, who signed a contract extension last fall, remains optimistic his team is close to figuring it out. His mantra of “playing the right way” hasn’t changed much from the day he was hired in December 2015.

Asked if there’s concern that Sullivan’s message may not have as much impact as it once did, general manager Ron Hextall shook his head.

“I think Sully is a terrific coach,” Hextall said when he last spoke to reporters earlier this month. “I would put him up against any coach in the league and if there’s any players that are not responding to him, I would look to move those players.”

Ovechkin back with Caps after father’s death

By STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Va. — Alex Ovechkin is back with the Washington Capitals, eager to play hockey again while he and his family are still mourning the death of his father, Mikhail.

Ovechkin missed four games over the past week to fly to Moscow. He went straight from the airport to the team’s practice facility Wednesday after landing to take part in practice with an eye on returning to game action as soon as Thursday.

“Obviously it was a hard week mentally, physically,” Ovechkin said after skating for roughly 45 minutes to get his conditioning back. “It was probably toughest situation I’ve been through my whole NHL career. But it’s life, and we move on.”

Ovechkin thanked the Capitals for their moment of silence dedicated to Mikhail prior to a game last week and for the support shown by members of the organization and



GRANT HALVERSON/AP

Alex Ovechkin, left, reacts after being selected as the first overall pick by the Washington Capitals in the NHL Draft on June 26, 2004, at the RBC Center in Raleigh, N.C. At right is Ovechkin’s father, Mikhail.

fans. He said he got the chance to speak to his dad by video call before his death at age 71 last week and expects his mother and brother to visit him in the United States soon.

“We try to do the best we can in that kind of hard moment,” Ovechkin said.

In his hard moment, Ovechkin wanted badly to get back on the ice. After only skating once during his

absence, the 37-year-old captain said this season felt like training camp.

But there also wasn’t time to waste. The Capitals went 0-4 during Ovechkin’s absence and have lost five in a row in regulation for the first time in nine years.

“I just want to come back right away, put my mind in a different position,” Ovechkin said. “We’re struggling right now, so I just want to try to do my best to bring energy, bring something to the team.”

Having been outscored 20-8 during the franchise’s longest skid since 2014 — the previous time the Capitals missed the playoffs — they’ll gladly take the lift that comes with Ovechkin returning.

“He’s our leading scorer,” coach Peter Laviolette said. “He helps in a lot of different areas: offensively, power play, leadership, size, physicality, presence, so there’s a lot of things that Alex brings to the table. I’m glad he was able to get home and be with his family, and we’re certainly glad to have him back.”

NBA

Jokic’s play ‘dope to watch’

Nuggets big man has a chance to join exclusive clubs but he doesn’t really care

By TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — The clubs that Nikola Jokic might be on the cusp of entering are highly exclusive.

There’s the three-consecutive-MVP club, with only Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain and Larry Bird as its current members. Then there’s the averaged-a-triple-double club, which includes only Oscar Robertson and Russell Westbrook.

Jokic doesn’t care about being added to either of those lists. It might happen anyway.

The best team in the Western Conference so far has been the Denver Nuggets, and the biggest reason why they’re atop the standings coming out of the All-Star break is the 28-year-old Serbian big man who was the league’s best player two years ago, was the league’s best player last year and very well might be the best again this year.

“I can’t lie,” Cleveland guard Donovan Mitchell said. “I don’t know if you all have been watching what Jokic has been doing. It’s ... outrageous, to be honest. I don’t know how many people have won it three times in a row. I definitely feel like I’m in that conversation as well, but he’s otherworldly right now.”

Jokic’s numbers: 24.7 points, 11.5 rebounds and 10.1 assists per game, on 63% shooting from the field, 39% from three-point range. Such a collection of stats is unprecedented; others have scored more, assisted more, rebounded more and shot better, but nobody has ever had all those averages and percentages in one season — especially not a big man.

Westbrook is a guard. Robertson was a guard. In their average-a-triple-double years — four for Westbrook, one for Robertson — they didn’t shoot better than 48%. Jokic is making almost two of every three shots he takes, and that’s with him as the top priority for every defense Denver faces.

“I just think that he just plays at his own pace,” Toronto’s Pascal Siakam said. “You can’t really disrupt what he does. He just plays at his own pace. He does what he wants. His passing ability, the scoring, how smart he is on the basketball court. Yeah, it’s dope to watch.”

The Nuggets are five games ahead of Memphis — Denver has 23 games left, the Grizzlies have 25 — for the top spot in the Western Conference. They’re well on their way to securing the No. 1 seed and home-court advantage throughout at least the first three rounds of the playoffs.



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Nuggets center Nikola Jokic, right, is averaging 24.7 points, 11.5 rebounds and 10.1 assists, on 63% shooting from the field, 39% from three-point range. He might be headed toward his third straight MVP.

“I don’t know if you all have been watching what Jokic has been doing. It’s ... outrageous, to be honest.”

Donovan Mitchell

Cavaliers guard who also is being mentioned as an MVP candidate

And that would be huge, given that Denver’s 27-4 home record is the best in the NBA. Evidently, teams don’t like playing at 5,280 feet above sea level. And they can’t match the way Jokic thinks, with his brain in home games at 5,287 feet above sea level. He’s played in 51 games; the Nuggets are 38-13 in those contests, 3-5 when he doesn’t play.

Denver coach Michael Malone was asked how he would create a pie chart to show the components that make Jokic great.

“Athleticism, 1%. I’ll start there,” Malone said. “Then I would say the big pieces of that Serbian pie would be IQ and unselfishness, the ability to make every one of his teammates better. What I marvel at, having coached Nikola for eight years now, the thing that I’m just blown away by is the consistency to being great. I mean, there are a lot of great players in

this league. But for Nikola to win the MVP, to win it again, and now he’s putting together an even better season ... it just speaks to the fact that he is so damn consistent.”

Conventional wisdom would have been that Jokic’s numbers, good enough to win him the last two MVP awards, would take a dip this season simply because the Nuggets were getting two of their best players — Jamal Murray and Michael Porter Jr. — back from injury.

It hasn’t happened, or at least, not much. His scoring is down slightly. Rebounds, down slightly. Assists, up slightly. Murray and Porter are getting their numbers — largely because Jokic looks for them every chance he gets — and he’s still finding the way to fill all the columns next to his name on the stat sheet as well.

“That, and the ability to make everyone around him better, is

what allows Nikola to be a historically great player in this league,” Malone said.

And it should be noted that the player who is least impressed by Jokic is, well, Jokic.

If he had his way, he’d show up, play games, hop on YouTube to watch horse racing — he owns harness horses, and was even driving one when the Nuggets’ brain trust showed up in Serbia to surprise him with last year’s MVP award — and live very quietly.

The West should be an absurd race down the stretch. Phoenix just got Kevin Durant. The Los Angeles Lakers have LeBron James trying to make a playoff push. The defending champion Golden State Warriors could have Stephen Curry back from his injury before too long. Dallas got Kyrie Irving to play with Luka Doncic. The Los Angeles Clippers will be adding Westbrook. Sacramento is poised to end its long playoff drought.

If nobody is talking about the Nuggets, Jokic won’t complain.

“We don’t need it,” Jokic said. “We know what we’re doing. We know what we’re trying to do. We believe in the basketball system that we have built over the years, so it works. It’s still working. Nothing can affect us from outside. We are thinking about ourselves and just how to get better.”

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference					
Atlantic Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Boston	42	17	.712	—	
Philadelphia	38	19	.667	3	
Brooklyn	34	24	.586	7½	
New York	33	27	.550	9½	
Toronto	28	31	.475	14	
Southeast Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Miami	32	27	.542	—	
Atlanta	29	30	.492	3	
Washington	28	30	.483	3½	
Orlando	24	35	.407	8	
Charlotte	17	43	.283	15½	
Central Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Milwaukee	41	17	.707	—	
Cleveland	38	23	.623	4½	
Chicago	26	33	.441	15½	
Indiana	26	34	.433	16	
Detroit	15	44	.254	26½	
Western Conference					
Southwest Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Memphis	35	22	.614	—	
Dallas	31	29	.517	5½	
New Orleans	30	29	.508	6	
San Antonio	14	45	.237	22	
Houston	13	45	.224	22½	
Northwest Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Denver	41	18	.695	—	
Minnesota	31	30	.508	11	
Oklahoma City	28	29	.491	12	
Portland	28	30	.483	12½	
Utah	29	31	.483	12½	
Pacific Division					
	W	L	Pct	GB	
Sacramento	32	25	.561	—	
L.A. Clippers	33	28	.541	1	
Phoenix	32	28	.533	1½	
Golden State	29	29	.500	3½	
L.A. Lakers	27	32	.458	6	
Wednesday's games					
No games scheduled.					
Thursday's games					
Boston at Indiana Denver at Cleveland Detroit at Orlando Memphis at Philadelphia New Orleans at Toronto San Antonio at Dallas Oklahoma City at Utah Golden State at L.A. Lakers Portland at Sacramento					
Friday's games					
New York at Washington Cleveland at Atlanta Miami at Milwaukee Brooklyn at Chicago Charlotte at Minnesota Houston at Golden State Oklahoma City at Phoenix Sacramento at L.A. Clippers					
Saturday's games					
Toronto at Detroit Indiana at Orlando Miami at Charlotte New Orleans at New York Denver at Memphis Boston at Philadelphia San Antonio at Utah					
Sunday's games					
Phoenix at Milwaukee Brooklyn at Atlanta L.A. Lakers at Dallas Washington at Chicago Toronto at Cleveland Sacramento at Oklahoma City Minnesota at Golden State Houston at Portland L.A. Clippers at Denver					
Scoring leaders					
Through Feb. 22					
	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Doncic, DAL	50	562	405	1666	33.3
Embiid, PHI	45	496	447	1489	33.1
Antkompo, MIL	47	532	394	1496	31.8
Lillard, POR	46	435	384	1445	31.4
Alexander, OKC	53	541	506	1635	30.8
Tatum, BOS	55	547	408	1685	30.6
James, LAL	45	517	218	1349	30.0
Mitchell, CLE	50	475	233	1365	27.3
Morant, MEM	48	466	299	1312	27.3
Irving, DAL	44	438	176	1197	27.2
Young, ATL	52	438	402	1390	26.7
Brown, BOS	48	473	204	1271	26.5
DeRozan, CHI	53	484	349	1344	25.4

NBA

Run: James could miss playoffs 2 straight years

FROM PAGE 48

someone named LeBron on the roster for the first time since 1998.

“We have a group that’s dedicated to winning, and there are certain things we have to learn about each other,” Cavaliers guard Donovan Mitchell said. “It’s not going to be all sunshine and rainbows with us. We’re still a team that’s young, but we also are figuring each other out.”

The Cavaliers are five games behind Boston, 4½ behind Milwaukee and two behind Philadelphia in the East. The rest of the race might get jumbled; 13th-place Orlando is only four games from a play-in berth.

“We’ve given ourselves a chance,” Magic rookie Paolo Banchero said.

Out West, it’s a mess.

“The West is loaded now,” Clippers forward Marcus Morris Sr. said. “I don’t know how that happened.”

Here’s how: Durant went to Phoenix. Durant’s trade to the Suns could make a team that looked vulnerable anything but vulnerable.

Denver is five games clear of Memphis for the West lead and eight games up on No. 3 Sacramento.

But starting with the Kings, there are 11 teams in the standings — Sacramento, the Los Angeles Clippers (who just got Westbrook, after he was bought out by Utah following a trade with the Lakers), Phoenix, Dallas (now with Kyrie Irving alongside Luka Dončić), New Orleans, Minnesota, Golden State, Oklahoma City, Utah, Portland and the Lakers — separated by just six games.

The seedings could flip every night out West.

“Must-see TV,” Morris said.

And James — who just passed Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for the NBA scoring record — says the 23 games the Lakers have left carry incredible significance.

He didn’t go to the playoffs last year. He can’t envision missing them again.

“I don’t want to see myself not being part of the postseason for two years straight. It’s just not part of my DNA,” James said.

Here’s some of what to know for the stretch run:

7 with 30

There are seven players — Dallas’ Dončić, Philadelphia’s Joel Embiid, Milwaukee’s Giannis Antetokounmpo, Oklahoma City’s Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Portland’s Damian Lillard, Boston’s Jayson Tatum and James — averaging at least 30 points per game.

If that holds, it’ll be an NBA record.

There’s been only one season

with more than three such players. That was 1961-62, with six — Wilt Chamberlain (50.4), Elgin Baylor (38.3 in 48 games, technically not enough to qualify as a scoring leader), Walt Bellamy (31.6), Bob Pettit (31.1), Oscar Robertson (30.8) and Jerry West (30.8).

It’s the fourth quarter

It’s not the second half of the season. It’s really the fourth quarter.

An NBA regular season has 1,230 games; 884, or 72%, have been played. So if the season was an NBA game clock, 1:30 would remain in the third quarter.

Teams have somewhere between 21 and 25 games left. Minnesota is down to a league-low eight home games remaining, while Indiana has nine. Washington has a league-high 15 home games left, while Atlanta and Charlotte each have 14.

The champs

Golden State will emerge from the All-Star break ninth in the Western Conference.

The defending NBA champion Warriors have some work to do.

No reigning champion has missed the following season’s playoffs since the Chicago Bulls didn’t get to the postseason in 1999. Before that, it was the Boston Celtics not making the playoffs in 1970.

Those Bulls lost Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen. Those Celtics lost Bill Russell and Sam Jones.

.590 and in

Over the last 20 seasons, there have been 173 teams that reached the All-Star break with a winning percentage of .590 or better.

And 171 of them made the playoffs, or 98.8%.

That’s good news for Boston (.712), Milwaukee (.707), Denver (.695), Philadelphia (.667), Cleveland (.623) and Memphis (.614).

The only teams that hit the break with that good of a winning percentage and missed the playoffs were the 2007-08 Warriors and last season’s Cavaliers.

The ’07-08 Warriors went 16-14 after the break and missed the playoffs by two games. Last season’s Cavs went 9-15 after the break, then lost two games in the play-in round.

Milestones

Upcoming milestones of note:

- Durant (26,684) is 27 points from passing Robertson (26,710) for 13th on the all-time scoring list. Durant is 263 points from passing Hakeem Olajuwon (26,946) for 12th.
- Westbrook (9,002) is 60 assists from passing Isaiah Thomas (9,061) for ninth on the all-time list.



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SPORTS



Nothing left to prove
With milestones behind him, Cabrera hopes for fun final year » **MLB, Page 44**



New Suns forward Kevin Durant speaks to the media on Feb. 16 in front of a giant mural featuring him in his Phoenix uniform. The Brooklyn Nets traded him to the Suns on Feb. 8.

Gearing up for a run

Teams get ready to make fourth-quarter push for playoffs

By TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press
Kevin Durant went to Phoenix. Russell Westbrook moved from Los Angeles to Los Angeles. Kevin Love did what once worked out nicely for LeBron James, taking his talents from Cleveland to Miami. And speaking of James, he says he's about to play some of the biggest games of his career. The All-Star break ended Thursday. Let the playoff-push fireworks begin.

INSIDE
Denver's Jokic on cusp of two exclusive clubs
Page 46
"It's not the start of a new season," Miami guard Tyler Herro said. "But I think this is when guys really raise their level of play."
Boston, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Denver, Cleveland and Memphis proba-

bly can go ahead and make playoff plans. Houston, Charlotte, San Antonio and Detroit probably can go ahead and start scheduling April vacations. That leaves 20 teams for 10 playoff spots. Sacramento is in position to end the longest drought in NBA history — 16 years and counting — and Cleveland is in line to make the playoffs without
SEE RUN ON PAGE 47



Kevin Love signed with the Miami Heat after being bought out of his contract by the Cleveland Cavaliers.
FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

MLS welcomes new team, expanded playoffs » Page 42

