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General warns of China's rapid space advances

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — U.S. Space Command's new leader warned of China's rapidly advancing space capabilities this week following meetings with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts.

"We're seriously focused at U.S. Space Command on our pacing challenge, which is the People's Republic of China," Space Force Gen. Stephen Whiting told reporters during an online press conference from Japan's capital Wednesday.

The Tokyo stop was part of a tour that has included visits to South Korea and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii.

Beijing is "moving at breathtaking speed in space," Whiting said, noting that China is rapidly developing a range of counter-space weapons that threaten American space capabilities.

"They're also using space to make their terrestrial forces — their army, their navy, their marine corps, their air force — more precise, more lethal and more far-ranging," he said.

SEE CHINA ON PAGE 7



AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

The new leader of U.S. Space Command, Space Force Gen. Stephen Whiting, visits Japan's Ministry of Defense in Tokyo on Wednesday.



ROSE GUXEX/U.S. Air Force

U.S. members of the base honor guard present the American and Nigerian flags during a Veterans Day ceremony at Air Base 201, in Agadez, Niger, on Nov. 11. Niger's ruling junta ended an agreement last month that allows U.S. troops to operate in the West African country.

Not closing door on Niger, Chad

Top US official: No final decision on all troops leaving counterterrorism footholds

By **TARA COPP**
Associated Press

There has been no final decision on whether all U.S. troops will leave Niger and Chad, two African countries that are integral to the military's efforts to counter violent extremist organizations across the Sahel region, a top U.S. military official told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Niger's ruling junta ended an agreement last month that allows U.S. troops to operate in the West African country. The State Department said Wednesday night that U.S. and Nigerian



Grady

"in a manner that addresses the needs and concerns of each side," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said.

The government of neighboring Chad in re-

officials would meet Thursday in the capital, Niamey, "to initiate discussions on an orderly and responsible withdrawal of U.S. forces."

That meeting comes as the two countries have been "unable to reach an understanding" to continue cooperation

cent days also has questioned its agreement with the U.S., Joint Chiefs Vice Chairman Adm. Christopher Grady, the nation's second-highest-ranking military officer, said in an interview.

The agreements allow the U.S. to conduct critical counterterrorism operations within the countries' borders and have supported military partner training in both nations. The reversals have prompted concern that U.S. influence in Africa is losing ground to overtures

SEE NIGER ON PAGE 3

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES

| Country | Super E10 | Super unleaded | Super plus | Diesel | Azores | Change in price | Turkey | Change in price |
|-----------------|------------|----------------|------------|------------|--------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
| Germany | \$4.077 | \$4.620 | \$4.983 | \$4.401 | .. | .. | \$4.833 | .. |
| Change in price | +4.0 cents | +4.0 cents | +3.8 cents | -2.3 cents | .. | .. | +3.8 cents | .. |
| Netherlands | .. | \$4.952 | \$5.220 | \$5.053 | .. | .. | \$4.649 | \$4.755* |
| Change in price | .. | -5.1 cents | -5.0 cents | -8.3 cents | .. | .. | +3.8 cents | No change |
| U.K. | .. | \$4.620 | \$4.983 | \$4.401 | .. | .. | .. | .. |
| Change in price | .. | +4.0 cents | +3.8 cents | -2.3 cents | .. | .. | .. | .. |

Fuel prices are updated daily. These prices are effective April 26. The change in price is from April 19.

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

| Country | Super E10 | Super unleaded | Super plus | Diesel | South Korea | Change in price | Guam | Change in price |
|-----------------|------------|----------------|------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
| Japan | .. | \$4.629 | .. | \$4.039 | \$3.749 | .. | \$4.319 | .. |
| Change in price | .. | +4.0 cents | .. | -3.0 cents | +4.0 cents | .. | +4.0 cents | -2.0 cents |
| Okinawa | \$3.719 | .. | .. | \$4.039 | \$3.779** | .. | \$4.689 | .. |
| Change in price | +4.0 cents | .. | .. | -3.0 cents | +4.0 cents | +4.0 cents | +4.0 cents | .. |

*DieselEFD **Midgrade
Pacific prices for the week of April 26 - May 2

EXCHANGE RATES

| Military rates | | Commercial rates | |
|-----------------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|
| Euro costs (April 26) | \$1.04 | Bahrain (Dinar) | 0.3769 |
| British pound (April 26) | \$1.22 | Britain (Pound) | 1.2474 |
| Japanese yen (April 26) | 151.00 | Canada (Dollar) | 1.3724 |
| South Korean won (April 26) | 1344.00 | China (Yuan) | 7.2464 |
| | | Denmark (Krone) | 6.9691 |
| | | Egypt (Pound) | 47.9019 |
| | | Euro | 0.9345 |
| | | Hong Kong (Dollar) | 7.8299 |
| | | Hungary (Forint) | 367.78 |
| | | Israel (Shekel) | 3.8041 |
| | | Japan (Yen) | 155.65 |
| | | Kuwait (Dinar) | 0.3080 |
| | | Norway (Krone) | 11.0064 |
| | | Philippines (Peso) | 57.87 |
| | | Poland (Zloty) | 4.04 |
| | | Saudi Arabia (Riyal) | 3.7507 |
| | | Singapore (Dollar) | 1.3620 |
| | | South Korea (Won) | 1379.31 |

Switzerland (Franc) 0.9152
Thailand (Baht) 37.10
Turkey (NewLira) 32.5468

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

INTEREST RATES

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| Prime rate | 8.50 |
| Interest Rates Discount rate | 6.00 |
| Federal funds market rate | 5.33 |
| 3-month bill | 5.40 |
| 30-year bond | 4.78 |

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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MILITARY

Airmen drill on redeploying radioactive plane

Specialties converge for Radiant Falcon

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

SPANGDAHLEM AIR BASE, Germany — Airmen at this F-16 fighter wing installation in rural southwestern Germany are learning how to safely receive and relaunch an aircraft exposed to nuclear radiation.

Held over three days this week and led by American instructors, Radiant Falcon was the first exercise of its kind held at Spangdahlem.

Classroom lessons on Tuesday were followed by a dress rehearsal Wednesday. Airmen were covered from head to toe in yellow protective suits, rubber boots, gloves and a gas mask.

The airplane has been exposed to some type of radiation and is returning to a deployed location, Staff Sgt. Donel Wanton, a bioenvironmental engineer for the 52nd Fighter Wing, said in summarizing the exercise scenario.

The response involved more than 30 airmen from various career fields, including emergency responders, medical personnel, refuelers, aircraft equipment handlers, weapon crews and maintainers.

The array of specialties showed the Air Force's emphasis on having airmen be able to quickly deploy in small groups and do multiple jobs, Spangdahlem officials said.

Electronic personal dosimeters, about the size of a credit card, were clipped to their suits to monitor indi-



PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL/Stars and Stripes

Staff Sgt. Christopher Richardson, left, and Airman 1st Class Jason Trinh check F-16 maintainers for radiation exposure during exercise Radiant Falcon on Thursday, at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany.

vidual radiation exposure, and other tools detected the level of radioactive particles in the air and on the aircraft. The job is to check the pilot, ensure that the airmen recovering the aircraft are protected and decontaminate the plane, Wanton said.

Airmen began putting on the suits when they were told the plane was about 20 minutes out. Some imagination was required, as the F-16 was already parked next to them inside a hardened aircraft shell.

Under the scenario, adversaries had used tactical nuclear weapons

against allies. A counterstrike mission may have flown through radioactive material, explained Joe Potaczek, one of two instructors from Alliance Solutions Group in Newport News, Va.

"The idea is 'How does the Air Force continue the mission?' he said. "How do we keep the aircraft flying and keep the people safe at the same time?"

The exercise wasn't tied to current events in Europe or elsewhere, Spangdahlem officials said.

Wanton said the training can ap-

ply to a variety of situations, such as radiation exposure from a nuclear plant accident, like the one in Fukushima, Japan, following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Potaczek's organization has conducted similar exercises with mobility and fighter units in the U.S., particularly with Air Mobility Command and Air Combat Command. But the training is relatively new in Europe. U.S. Air Forces in Europe—Air Forces Africa's first Radiant Falcon was held a year ago at Ramstein, officials said.



Tech. Sgt. Kayla Bradford waits for a radiological assessment on an F-16 Fighting Falcon during exercise Radiant Falcon.

The company's instructors have also been to Aviano Air Base in Italy and plan to conduct similar training at England's RAF Lakenheath next month, Potaczek said.

For the Spangdahlem exercise, airmen entered data into an Excel spreadsheet and calculated hypothetical radiation exposure. That information allows commanders to gauge risks, Wanton said.

With gas masks on, airmen learned how to communicate with hand signals, such as tapping on their head if they felt ill.

Maintainers had to carefully inspect the plane's air intake, looking for nicks or dents on the engine blades, said Tech. Sgt. Kayla Bradford, a phase dock inspection chief at Spangdahlem.

"That would mean that something got sucked up in there" that could be contaminated, such as a bird, sand or rocks, she said, adding that such damage might indicate that the plane needs a new engine.

Super Hercules makes USAF history with Texas-Guam flight

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

An Air Force C-130J Super Hercules from Texas recently set a new endurance standard on a one-stop, daylong flight halfway around the globe to Guam.

The 26-hour, 33-minute flight on April 18 from Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, with one refueling stop in Hawaii, was a maximum endurance feat that established the Super Hercules as fit for marathon operations, according to a news release from the 7th Bomb Wing.

Designated Hazard Leap, the 317th Airlift Wing mission was the first of its kind in Air

Mobility Command history by a C-130J equipped with external fuel tanks, the release said.

The mission was flown by two aircrews with the 40th Airlift Squadron, according to the Air Force.

The squadron's C-130Js are not equipped for aerial refueling but can carry two external tanks, Tech. Sgt. Dana Cable, a spokeswoman for the 7th Bomb Wing, said by email Wednesday.

The tanks not only allow the Super Hercules to fly farther, they deliver a fuel supply for other aircraft at its destination, Capt. Anna Santori, a Hazard Leap pilot, said in the re-

lease.

"The external tanks have new capabilities for us, allowing us to fly farther without refueling," she said. "It gives us about 17,000 pounds of fuel, which translates to roughly four extra hours of flying."

The preflight preparation involved careful planning of the flight route, analyzing wind patterns and devising contingency plans for unforeseen circumstances such as thunderstorms or modified flight paths, Santori said.

"Crews began shifting their circadian rhythm 48 hours prior to departure," 2nd Lt. Cyan Brown, also with the 7th Bomb Wing, said by email Wednesday.

While in the region, the aircraft and crews will participate in the Balikatan exercise in the Philippines, according to the release.

They will focus on deploying forward area and refueling point equipment and flying Marines from Lal-Lo to Batan Island in the Luzon Strait near Taiwan, Brown said.

The aircraft will return to Guam without needing to refuel, proving that the C-130J can maneuver between the second and first island chains with a minimal footprint and the need for robust ground services, Brown said. The island chains are successive geographic barriers between China and the Pacific Ocean.

Niger: Russian military trainers arrived in Niger this month to provide security

FROM PAGE 1

from Russia and China.

"We are all trying to establish ourselves as the partner of choice," Grady said. "It's up to us to establish why we think our partnership with them is important. We certainly want to be there. We want to help them, we want to empower them, we want to do things by, with and through (them)."

While U.S. officials said Saturday that the military would begin plans to withdraw troops from Niger, they said discussions on a new agreement were ongoing.

"There's still negotiations underway," Grady said. "I don't believe there is a final decision on disposition of U.S. forces there."

Relations have frayed between Niger and Western countries

since mutinous soldiers ousted the country's democratically elected president in July. Niger's junta has since told French forces to leave and turned instead to Russia for security. Earlier this month, Russian military trainers arrived to reinforce the country's air defenses and with Russian equipment to train Nigeriens to use.

The government of Chad also recently requested that U.S. forces leave, and officials from the State Department, U.S. Africa Command and the Pentagon will work to make the case for U.S. forces to stay, Grady said.

"The team has got to get on the ground there and work it through," Grady said.

He said that if both countries ul-

timately decide the U.S. cannot remain there, the military will have to look for alternatives to run counterterrorism missions across the Sahel, a vast region south of the Sahara Desert.

"If we are asked to leave, and after negotiations that's the way it plays out, then we are going to have to recalculate and figure out a new way to do it," Grady said.

MILITARY

IG finds lack of reported harassment claims

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

More than 4,500 soldiers said in a survey that they have experienced sexual harassment in the Army but less than 100 filed a formal complaint, according to a review released Wednesday by the Pentagon's top internal investigator.

The review conducted by the Defense Department inspector general said an anonymous Army survey of more than 27,000 soldiers found 4,674 had experienced or witnessed sexual harassment in the ranks. But the service reported only 73 formal complaints of sexual harassment were received between January 2021 and January 2023, according to the review.

Defense Department Inspector General Robert Storch said in a statement that the large differ-

ence in perceived incidents and reported incidents was due to the Army's failure to use and understand surveys and reports on the problem.

"Sexual harassment, bullying, and hazing should not be tolerated under any circumstances," he said.

The review focused on eight brigades at two garrisons — Fort Cavazos, Texas, and Fort Liberty, N.C. However, the recommendations are for all Army installations and units.

The review concluded the Army was missing the significance of the gap and whether the sexual harassment reporting system was too confusing or cumbersome.

"[The Army] may miss opportunities to identify possible barriers to reporting," according to the IG report.

The Pentagon review focused on how Army brigade commanders use two tools: The Defense Organizational Climate Survey, which asks soldiers anonymously for their opinions on a wide range of topics on Army life, including sexual harassment, and Command Climate Assessments, which are reports by commanders that take surveys and filed complaints into account in determining the level of perceived problems within their ranks.

The review found commanders failed to compare year-over-year results on the climate survey to establish trends. Questions on hazing and bullying were often omitted.

The climate assessments were drawn up without a proper understanding of what the results of the surveys meant and what the

trends identified as issues within each command.

As a result of the review, investigators recommended:

- Senior Army leaders ensure brigade commanders compare year-over-year results of the climate surveys.

- Commanders need to identify harassment risk factors in their Command Climate Assessment action plans.

- Command Climate Action plans need to be more specific in how they will implement "objectives, goals, and milestones."

- Plans should list the names and ranks of specific individual officers and others responsible for implementing initiatives.

- Plans should identify and implement ways to remove any barriers that might keep soldiers from filing complaints about al-

leged mistreatment.

The review also recommended a higher level of responsibility within the Army's civilian and uniformed leadership to ensure policies are followed and plans implemented.

The IG report recommended the assistant secretary of the Army for manpower and reserve affairs coordinate the implementation of the recommendations with the deputy chief of staff, G-9 (installations).

Agnes Gereben Schaefer and Lt. Gen. Kevin Vereen hold those positions now.

The G-9 is responsible for housing, military construction, infrastructure investment, child care, energy and water security, resilience and sustainability, and environmental management and stewardship.



GARY CONTENTO/AP

Smoke rises after a Douglas C-54 Skymaster plane crashed into the Tanana River outside Fairbanks, Alaska, on Tuesday.

Pilot reported fire on vintage plane, tried to return to airport

BY MARK THIESSEN
Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — One of the two pilots of a vintage military plane that was delivering heating oil to a remote Alaska Native village reported a fire on board shortly before the aircraft crashed and burned outside Fairbanks, killing both of them and leaving debris over a wide area, a federal transportation official said Wednesday.

The pilot made radio contact about the in-flight emergency shortly after taking off Tuesday, said Clint Johnson, head of the National Transportation Safety Board's Alaska regional office. They were attempting to return to Fairbanks International Airport when they lost contact, he said.

The C54D-DC airplane — a military version of the World War II-era Douglas DC-4 aircraft — crashed about 7 miles outside Fairbanks. It hit a steep hill, slid down an embankment to the bank of the Tanana River and burst into flames. No survivors were found, according to Alaska State Troopers.

Troopers said recovery efforts resumed Wednesday with the aid of cadaver dogs, but they noted that thin ice and open water on the river were making their efforts difficult. The pilots' names have not been released.

The partial remains that have been recovered will be sent to the State Medical Examiner's Office in Anchorage for identification, troopers said.

The roughly 80-year-old plane departed Fairbanks just before 10 a.m., loaded with 3,200 gallons of heating oil destined for Kobuk, an Inupiat village of less than 200 people located about 300 miles northwest of Fairbanks.

Mike Emers was working in his office at Rosie Creek Farm, the only outdoor cannabis farm in Alaska, when he heard an explosion, looked out the window and saw the plane on fire.

"I knew it was going down. I just didn't know where," he said.

Video from farm security cameras showed the aircraft flying until one of its four engines — the one closest to the fuselage — exploded. The plane then banked and plummeted.

Veteran sentenced to prison time for funding monkey torture videos

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

A former Air Force officer who pleaded guilty to animal crushing charges after crowdfunding graphic videos of monkeys being tortured and killed was sentenced this week to four years in prison, the Justice Department said.

David Christopher Noble, 48, also will require supervision for three years after release as part of the sentence handed down Wednesday in Oregon federal court.

"David Noble's depraved actions not only inflicted unspeakable agony upon innocent creatures but also tainted the very essence of humanity's moral fiber," Robert Hammer, special agent for the Department of Homeland Security, said in a statement Wednesday.

He pleaded guilty in January after investigators found that his phone contained about 50 animal abuse videos, which prosecutors described as "stomach-churning" and "horrific," a government memo in June said.

Prosecutors said Noble administered an online group in which for at least a year, members pooled funds to produce, brainstorm and share videos showing the torture and killing of monkeys in Indonesia.

The Indonesian videographers who helped produce the videos most likely would not have done so without the funding and encouragement of Noble and others in the group, authorities

said.

As the administrator of the group, Noble under the moniker of "Bones" decided on the admission of new members, changed the forum's name to evade detection, used his control to remove members who were perceived to be "liabilities," an indictment against him said.

In one instance, Noble sent money to fund a 10-minute video in which an infant monkey was slowly tortured and mutilated, prosecutors in Las Vegas said in a memo.

The DOJ statement gives Noble's place of residence as Prineville, Ore., but he moved to the Las Vegas area after police searched his home, according to the Las Vegas Review-Journal. He was arrested in Henderson, Nev., in June, the Justice Department said.

After the video was posted to the group, Noble expressed approval and sent additional money as a tip, the memo said.

In one message cited by prosecutors in Las Vegas, he wrote, "I love the screams as his bones are shattered over and over!"

Authorities also found months of chat messages related to the videos, according to a grand jury indictment of Noble in May.

Noble served six months in military detention and was dismissed from the Air Force in 2006 after being court-martialed for fraud and an unprofessional relationship, prosecutors said. The DOJ did not list his rank at the time of his expulsion.

MIDEAST

Hamas official: Truce, Palestinian state linked

By **ABBY SEWELL**
Associated Press

ISTANBUL — A top Hamas political official told The Associated Press the Islamic militant group is willing to agree to a truce of five years or more with Israel and that it would lay down its weapons and convert into a political party if an independent Palestinian state is established along pre-1967 borders.

The comments by Khalil al-Hayya in an interview Wednesday came amid a stalemate in months of talks for a cease-fire in Gaza. The suggestion that Hamas would disarm appeared to be a significant concession by the militant group officially committed to Israel's destruction.

But it's unlikely Israel would consider such a scenario. It has vowed to crush Hamas following the deadly Oct. 7 attacks that triggered the war, and its current leadership is adamantly opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state on lands Israel captured in the 1967 Mid-east war.

Al-Hayya, a high-ranking Hamas official who has represented the Palestinian militants in negotiations for a cease-fire and hostage exchange, struck a sometimes defiant and other times conciliatory tone.

Speaking to the AP in Istanbul, Al-Hayya said Hamas wants to join the Palestine Liberation Organization, headed by the rival Fatah faction, to form a unified government for Gaza and the West Bank. He said Hamas would accept "a fully sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the return of Palestinian refugees in accordance with the international resolutions," along Israel's pre-1967 borders.



KHALIL HAMRA/AP

Khalil al-Hayya, a high-ranking Hamas official who has represented it in negotiations for a cease-fire and hostage exchange, sits in front of a backdrop with a photograph of the old city of Jerusalem during an interview Wednesday for The Associated Press, in Istanbul.

If that happens, he said, the group's military wing would dissolve.

"All the experiences of people who fought against occupiers, when they became independent and obtained their rights and their state, what have these forces done? They have turned into political parties and their defending fighting forces have turned into the national army," he said.

Over the years, Hamas has sometimes moderated its public position with respect to the possibility of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. But its political program still officially "rejects any alternative to the full liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea" — refer-

ring to the area reaching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, which includes lands that now make up Israel.

Al-Hayya did not say whether his apparent embrace of a two-state solution would amount to an end to the Palestinian conflict with Israel or an interim step toward the group's stated goal of destroying Israel.

There was no immediate reaction from Israel or the Palestinian Authority, the internationally recognized self-ruled government that Hamas drove out when it seized Gaza in 2007, a year after winning Palestinian parliamentary elections. After the Hamas takeover of Gaza, the Palestinian Authority was left

with administering semi-autonomous pockets of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The Palestinian Authority hopes to establish an independent state in the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza — areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war. While the international community overwhelmingly supports such a two-state solution, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line government rejects it.

The war in Gaza has dragged on for nearly seven months and cease-fire negotiations have stalled. The war began with the deadly Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel in which Hamas-led militants killed about 1,200 people. Militants dragged some 250 hostages into the enclave. The ensuing Israeli bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities.

Israel says it has dismantled most of the initial two dozen Hamas battalions since the start of the war, but that the four remaining ones are holed up in the southern city of Rafah. Israel argues that a Rafah offensive is necessary to achieve victory over Hamas.

Al-Hayya said such an offensive would not succeed in destroying Hamas. He said contacts between the political leadership outside and military leadership inside Gaza are "uninterrupted" by the war and "contacts, decisions and directions are made in consultation" between the two groups.

Israeli forces "have not destroyed more than 20% of (Hamas') capabilities, neither human nor in the field," he asserted. "If they can't finish (Hamas) off, what is the solution? The solution is to go to consensus."

Photos show new port construction for Gaza aid effort

By **JULIA FRANKEL AND JON GAMBRELL**
Associated Press

JERUSALEM — The building of a new port in the Gaza Strip ahead of a U.S. military-led operation to bring more desperately needed food and other aid into the besieged enclave as Israel's war on Hamas grinds on is well underway, according to satellite images analyzed Thursday by The Associated Press.

The construction appears to have been moving quickly over the last two weeks, judging from the images, and some officials say the port could become ready as early as a week from now.

The port sits just southwest of Gaza City, which once was the territory's most-populous area before the Israeli ground offensive rolled through, pushing over 1 million people south toward the town of Rafah on the Egyptian border. Its construction comes as Israel faces widespread international criticism over the slow trickle of aid into the area, where the United Nations says at least a quarter of the population sits on the brink of starvation.

However, the site has already been targeted by a militant mortar attack, according to the Israeli military. An official from the Hamas militant group that has run Gaza since 2007 has warned that any foreign military presence at the pier would be target for attack — potentially complicating the aid efforts even further.

The satellite pictures, taken by Planet Labs PBC, show that heavy construction at the site started over two weeks ago. The area sits just north of a road bisecting Gaza that the Israeli military built during the fighting.

A U.N. official, speaking on condition of anonymity to



PLANET LABS PBC/AP

This satellite picture shows construction of a new aid port near Gaza City, Gaza Strip, on Wednesday.

discuss behind-the-scenes deliberations, said the port "is directly at the end of the new road the IDF has put in place." The official used an acronym for the Israeli military.

Heavy trucks and machinery could be seen in an image taken a week ago by Planet Labs, with the cleared area appearing even larger in an image taken Wednesday. A dirt berm separates the area from nearby buildings. Other details correspond to an on-the-ground image of the aid pier seen by the AP.

The port will likely have three zones — one controlled by the Israelis where aid from the pier is dropped off, another where the aid will be transferred, and a third where Palestinian drivers contracted by the U.N. will wait to pick up the aid before bringing it to distribution points, the U.N. official said.

Still, the official said several sticking points remain around how the Israelis would handle the port's security. The military is reportedly seeking to install remote-controlled gun positions, which the U.N. opposes.

Navy authorizes combat awards for actions in Red Sea, Gulf of Aden

By **MATTHEW ADAMS**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy is now authorizing combat awards for sailors serving in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, the service has announced.

Sailors in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden can now receive the Combat Action Ribbon, as well as personal military decorations that include "C" and "V" devices for combat and valor, Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro wrote in a memo released Wednesday.

The Air Medal is authorized on a strike/flight basis, which is given for sustained flight operations. Sailors can also receive personal military decorations with "R" for direct hands-on efforts during combat operations.

Awards can be issued for incidents dating back to Oct. 19, 2023, when Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen began firing anti-ship missiles and drones over the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, according to the Navy.

On Oct. 19, the USS Carney shot down cruise missiles and several drones that were launched by

Houthis.

Since 2014, Houthi rebels have been involved in a civil war with the government in Yemen, which is located on the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula and shares borders with Saudi Arabia and Oman. Its coastline runs along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The Carney's actions at the time came amid spiking violence and attacks in the Middle East in the two weeks after Hamas militants launched a surprise assault against Israel on Oct. 7, killing more than 1,000 Israelis.

Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, the commander of the 5th Fleet at the time, visited the Carney in January to award medals to several sailors who helped shoot down 14 Houthi drones on Dec. 16. The 5th Fleet's area of responsibility includes the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Arabian Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean.

For the latest combat awards, imminent danger pay is not authorized for the region. The awards are limited to times when the sailor received hostile-fire pay.

MILITARY

Army air defense commander in Germany is fired

By PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — The commander of an Army air defense unit in Germany has been fired after just six months in charge, the service confirmed Thursday.

Lt. Col. Eric Ackles took command of 1st Battalion, 57th Air Defense Artillery Regiment in October, when it reactivated in Ansbach, amid growing concerns of Russian aggression on the Continent.

“A thorough investigation” led to his termination Monday, according to the 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command, of which 1st Battalion is a subordinate.

“Lt. Col. Ackles was relieved due to a loss of trust and confidence in his ability to command,” 10AAMDC spokesman Capt. Alec

Watkins said in an email. “We take all allegations and investigations seriously.”

The command didn’t disclose further details.

Ackles’ removal hasn’t affected the battalion’s mission, Watkins said, adding that its soldiers “maintain a high level of readiness.”

The unit specializes in the short-range Avenger system, which uses surface-to-air missiles to shoot down aerial threats.

Two of its three battalions are based in the Bavarian town of Ansbach, while the third is in Vicenza, Italy.

U.S. air defense teams were rushed into countries on NATO’s eastern flank following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 amid fears of the fighting spilling over into alliance nations.

At a NATO summit in Madrid



PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

Army Lt. Col. Eric Ackles speaks at the 1st Battalion, 57th Air Defense Artillery Regiment’s reactivation ceremony in October at Katterbach Kaserne in Ansbach, Germany.

a few months later, President Joe Biden announced the creation of the 52nd Air Defense Artillery Brigade, based in Sembach, Germany, to provide command and control for all Army air and missile defense forces in Europe. He also announced that the 1st Battalion would reactivate.

Ackles served in various positions prior to his most recent post, including as a platoon leader and battery trainer.

The Florida native enlisted in the Air Force in 2002, where he was certified as an air traffic control specialist. He transferred to the Army in 2005, according to

a biography provided at his assumption of command ceremony.

The military often cites “loss of confidence” when describing why commanders are fired, without providing specifics. The reasons can vary from poor performance and leadership to factors unrelated to work.

Air Force detonates WWII-era bomb discovered on Okinawa

Stars and Stripes

KADENA AIR BASE, Okinawa — Air Force officials said 18th Wing Explosive Ordnance Disposal technicians safely detonated a 500-pound bomb believed to be left over from World War II Thursday evening.

The ordnance was discovered Tuesday by workers building a home for the 33rd Rescue Squadron and its complement of new HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopters on Kadena, 18th Wing spokeswoman Master Sgt. Natasha Stannard said by email Thursday.

Explosive ordnance disposal experts determined the bomb could not be “removed or defused in its condition” and should be detonat-

ed in place, she said.

“During the operation, members from the 18th Civil Engineer Group, to include Explosive Ordnance Disposal technicians and Pavement and Equipment personnel, performed site preparations, set safety cordons, and properly disposed of the ordnance, ensuring the long-term safety of the base and surrounding community,” according to a news release from the 18th Wing Public Affairs office.

Engineers from the 18th Civil Engineering Group, including EOD technicians and pavement and equipment personnel, were tasked with carrying out the controlled detonation, Stannard said.

Buildings within a 1,574-foot ra-

dius, including 66 people in 34 households, were temporarily evacuated. Other nearby residents were asked to stay inside their houses during the operation.

Japanese police planned to close Route 58 from the Mizugama intersection to the Kadena rotary.

“Government officials, the local police and others did a phenomenal job. They were great partners through the entire process,” Brig. Gen. Nicholas Evans, 18th Wing commander, said in the release.

Approximately 10,000 tons of ordnance were dropped on the island during the Battle of Okinawa between March and September 1945, according to Okinawa prefecture’s General Bureau website.



KEISHI KOJA/Stars and Stripes

A 500-pound unexploded bomb was found at this construction site on Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, on Tuesday.

Marine dies during ‘routine military operations’ at Camp Pendleton

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

A Marine died Tuesday during “routine military operations” at Camp Pendleton, Calif., the Marine Corps said in a news release the next day.

The Marine, who was not identified, was a member of the Marine Light Attack Helicopter Training Squadron 303, Marine Aircraft

Group 39, part of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. No details of the circumstances of the death were provided.

The Corps did not identify the deceased Marine, citing a policy of withholding the name until 24 hours after next of kin have been notified of the death, the news release states.

It is the second death of a Marine

during training within a week.

Sgt. Colin Arslanbas died April 18 during a late-night training exercise near Camp Lejeune, N.C. Arslanbas, 23, was assigned to the Maritime Special Purpose Force with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Two other Marines have died during training at Pendleton in recent months.

In December, Sgt. Matthew Bylski, 23, died in a rollover accident while training there. Bylski was an amphibious combat vehicle crewman assigned to Battalion Landing Team 1/5 of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Fourteen other Marines were in the vehicle, which was on land when it flipped. None were seriously injured.

In August, Lance Cpl. Joseph Whaley, 20, died during a live-fire training exercise at the service’s infantry school at Pendleton.

The Marine Corps Times reported in September that Whaley was “fatally injured due to negligent discharge during live-fire small arms training exercise,” citing a report by the Naval Safety Command.

MILITARY

Blinken raises China trade practices at talks

BY MATTHEW LEE

Associated Press

SHANGHAI — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken raised what the U.S. describes as unfair Chinese trade practices during his first full day of meetings in China on Thursday with local government officials in the financial hub of Shanghai.

Blinken met with the city's top official, Communist Party Secretary Chen Jining, and "raised concerns about (Chinese) trade policies and non-market economic practices," the State Department said in a statement.

It said he stressed that the U.S. seeks healthy economic competition with China and "a level playing field for U.S. workers and firms operating in China."

"The two sides reaffirmed the importance of ties between the people of the United States and (China), including the expansion of exchanges between students, scholars, and business," it said.

China's multibillion-dollar trade surplus with the U.S. along with accusations of intellectual property theft and other practices seen as discriminating against U.S. busi-



MARK SCHIEFELBEIN, POOL/AP

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, right, is welcomed by Yang Tao, Director General of the Department of North American and Oceanian Affairs of the Foreign Ministry, as he arrived Thursday, at the Beijing Capital International Airport in Beijing, China.

nesses in China have long been a source of friction in relations.

China, for its part, has objected strongly to U.S. accusations of human rights abuses and Washington's support for Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing con-

siders its own territory and warns could be annexed by force.

Asked about Blinken's comments, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China has "always conducted economic and trade cooperation in

accordance with market principles, firmly supported the multilateral trading system, and fully complied with the rules of the World Trade Organization."

"We hope the U.S. will also earnestly respect the principle of fair competition, abide by the WTO rules, and work with China to create favorable conditions for the sound and stable development of China-U.S. economic and trade relations," Wang told reporters at a daily briefing.

Blinken also spoke with students and business leaders before flying to Beijing for what are expected to be contentious talks with national officials, including Foreign Minister Wang Yi and possibly President Xi Jinping.

Blinken arrived in Shanghai on Wednesday shortly before President Joe Biden signed a \$95 billion foreign aid package that has several elements likely to anger Beijing, including \$8 billion to counter China's growing aggressiveness toward Taiwan and in the South China Sea. It also seeks to force TikTok's China-based parent company to sell the social media platform.

China has railed against U.S. assistance to Taiwan and immediately condemned the aid as a dangerous provocation. It also strongly opposes efforts to force TikTok's sale.

Still, the fact that Blinken made the trip — shortly after a conversation between Biden and Xi, a visit to China by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and a call between the U.S. and Chinese defense chiefs — is a sign the two sides are at least willing to discuss their differences.

"I think it's important to underscore the value — in fact, the necessity — of direct engagement, of speaking to each other, laying out our differences, which are real, seeking to work through them," Blinken told Chen, according to the State Department statement.

Chen agreed with that sentiment and said the recent Biden-Xi call had helped the "stable and healthy development of our two countries' relationship."

"Whether we choose cooperation or confrontation affects the well-being of both peoples, both countries, and the future of humanity," he said.

China: US, Japan team up on surveillance satellites

FROM PAGE 1

The general, who took charge of Space Command in January, also met Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara and top military leaders.

Whiting held up Japan's new Space Operations Group, which he also visited this week, as an example during his talks in Japan and South Korea.

"Their focus on space domain awareness along with ours to keep track of those threats in space that we see — and many of those are emanating from China — has put an impetus on us developing improved space domain awareness capability," he told reporters.

Japan is preparing to field a deep-space radar that will provide better understanding of what China is doing in space, Whiting said.

The U.S. is partnering with Japan to launch new satellites that will monitor space from orbit, he said, adding that he visited a Mitsubishi satellite factory during his trip.

Chinese activities on the Moon are also on Space Command's radar.

"Those appear to be exploratory and scientific on the surface, but the Chinese aren't very transparent with what they do in space," he said. "So, we hope

there's not a military component to that, but we would certainly welcome more transparency."

Whiting said he's interested in having space domain awareness reach lunar orbit.

"We want to make sure that any activities that happen on the Moon are indeed for science purposes and exploration and that no one is going to the Moon for military purposes," he said.

Space Command operated from 1985 to 2002 and was reestablished in August 2019. It differs from the Space Force, an independent service branch established in December 2019.

Space Command guards America's space assets and protects U.S. and allied forces from potential space-enabled attacks, Whiting said.

The U.S. military has been collaborating and training in the space domain with Japan and South Korea, the general added.

"We find that when we operate in a unified fashion with our allies and partners, that builds deterrence and ensures that there will never be a day without space for our militaries and for our national populations," he said.

Whiting was next headed to Kwajalein Atoll, where the Air Force recently conducted its first hypersonic missile test in the Western Pacific.

DODEA schools push back on probe faulting discrimination reporting

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Discriminatory conduct at Defense Department schools is underreported and stronger policies are needed to better track cases of bad conduct, DOD investigators concluded in a new report.

Policy gaps hinder the Department of Defense Education Activity's ability to identify the extent of discriminatory actions in its schools, the report found.

"Discriminatory behavior undermines the values of fairness, equality, and respect. When discrimination is underreported, it can perpetuate harmful practices, erode trust and create a hostile environment," the department's inspector general, Robert Storch, said in a statement released.

DODEA took issue with most of the IG report, dismissing virtually all of its findings and recommendations and arguing that the IG misinterpreted the school system's policies and procedures.

The findings called on DODEA to update policies related to the reporting, tracking and oversight of discrimination. The IG also recommended that schools implement a policy that requires tracking of all informally resolved complaints of discriminatory conduct in a standardized format.

The review examined DODEA databases that track reports of dis-

crimination involving both students and personnel. Investigators looked at data from 2020 to 2023 and found 120 reports of student discrimination and seven involving personnel or others associated with the schools. The bulk of the complaints came in 2023, with 87 student reports. It wasn't clear how many of those reports were substantiated.

The IG said the increase seen in 2023 was likely connected to better reporting rather than a rise in incidents, and it attributed that to improvements in DODEA's reporting process.

Still, the spike highlights "the significant historical underreporting of discriminatory conduct incidents," the IG said.

The IG also highlighted a 2021 DODEA-administered customer satisfaction survey completed by 9,718 students. About 11% responded that they had been made fun of for the color of their skin, origin or religion at least once on school property.

Those numbers also suggest possible underreporting, the IG said. DODEA officials, however, rejected that argument, saying the survey didn't ask whether students had reported their experiences to school officials.

The IG, however, stood by its findings.

"We found that underreporting

of discriminatory conduct incidents reduced DoDEA's ability to prevent and address discriminatory conduct," the IG said.

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EUROPE

US using seized Russian assets comes with risks

BY FATIMA HUSSEIN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The big U.S. aid package for Ukraine and other allies that President Joe Biden signed Wednesday also allows the administration to seize Russian state assets located in the U.S. and use them for the benefit of Kyiv.

That could mean another \$5 billion in assistance for Ukraine, coming from Russian Central Bank holdings that have already been frozen in the U.S. The seizures would be carried out under provisions of the REPO Act, short for the Rebuilding Economic Prosperity and Opportunity for Ukrainians Act, that were incorporated into the aid bill.

But it's not likely the U.S. will seize the assets without agreement from other members of the Group of Seven nations and the European Union.

The U.S. and its allies immediately froze \$300 billion in Russian foreign holdings at the start of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. That money has been sitting untapped — most of it in European Union nations — as the war grinds on. But roughly \$5 billion of it is located in the U.S.

The frozen assets are immobilized and can't be accessed by Moscow — but they still belong to Russia. While governments can generally freeze property without difficulty, turning that property into forfeited assets that can be sold for the benefit of Ukraine requires an extra layer of judicial procedure.

The new U.S. law requires the president and Treasury Department to start locating Russian assets in the U.S. within 90 days and to report back to Congress within 180 days. A month after that period, the president will be allowed to “seize, confiscate, transfer, or vest” any Russian state sovereign assets, including any interest, within U.S. jurisdictions.

But the U.S. wants to keep consulting with global allies and act together, which is likely to slow down the process.

The legislation states that “any effort by the United States to confiscate and repurpose Russian sovereign assets” should be done alongside international allies, including the G7, the 27-member European Union and other nations as part of a coordinated effort.

The European Union already has begun to set aside windfall profits generated from frozen Russian central bank assets. The bloc estimates the interest on that money could provide around \$3.3 billion each year.

Still, some European leaders have expressed hesitation about moving forward with a plan to seize Russia's assets in Europe.

Critics of the REPO Act say the weaponization of global finance against Russia could harm the U.S. dollar's standing as the world's dominant currency.

To confiscate Russia's assets could prompt nations like China — the biggest holder of U.S. Treasuries — to determine it is not safe to keep their reserves in U.S. dollars.

Russia fines actress who hosted ‘almost naked’ party

Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia — A Moscow court on Thursday imposed a \$560 fine on a TV presenter and actress who gained notoriety for hosting an “almost naked” party, saying her social media posts calling for peace discredited the military.

Anastasia Ivleeva sparked an explosion of public indignation in the increasingly traditionalist country when she hosted a party in December encouraging guests to wear almost nothing.

Ivleeva did not appear in court Thursday for the non-criminal case, in which she was fined for two social media posts in the early

days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The court found her guilty of violating a law penalizing remarks discrediting the military, although the law was passed several days after the posts.

Ivleeva became the focus of a scandal after hosting a bash at a Moscow nightclub whose invitations stated the dress code as “almost naked.” A well-known rapper showed up wearing only socks wrapped around his genitals and feet.

Conservative legislators and others unleashed a storm of criticism, contending the images were unseemly, even unpatriotic, for a country embroiled in war.



ANDREW DICKSON, U.S. ARMY/AP

U.S. Army Sgt. Ian Ketterling prepares the crane for loading the Army Tactical Missile System on to the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System in Queensland, Australia, on July 26.

Ukrainians using missiles secretly given by US on Russian-held areas

BY LOLITA C. BALDOR
AND TARA COPP
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ukraine for the first time has begun using long-range ballistic missiles provided secretly by the United States, bombing a Russian military airfield in Crimea last week and Russian forces in another occupied area overnight, U.S. officials said Wednesday.

Long sought by Ukrainian leaders, the new missiles give Ukraine nearly double the striking distance — up to 190 miles — that it had with the midrange version of the weapon that it received from the U.S. last October.

“We’ve already sent some, we will send more now that we have

additional authority and money,” White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said. The additional ATACMS were included in a new military aid package signed by President Joe Biden on Wednesday.

Biden approved delivery of the long-range Army Tactical Missile System, known as ATACMS, in February, and then in March the U.S. included a “significant” number of them in a \$300 million aid package announced, officials said.

U.S. officials would not provide the exact number of missiles given last month or in the latest aid package, which totals about \$1 billion.

Ukraine has been forced to ration its weapons and is facing in-

creasing Russian attacks. Ukraine had been begging for the long-range system because the missiles provide a critical ability to strike Russian targets that are farther away, allowing Ukrainian forces to stay safely out of range.

Information about the delivery was kept so quiet that lawmakers and others in recent days have been demanding that the U.S. send the weapons — not knowing they were already in Ukraine.

Adm. Christopher Grady, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the White House and military planners looked carefully at the risks of providing long-range fires to Ukraine and determined that the time was right to provide them now.

Poland lays claim to leadership role in Europe as war threatens stability

Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland — Poland's foreign minister on Thursday called on NATO to increase its defense preparedness and said his government wants to be at the center of decision-making in the European Union, seeking to reestablish the country as a reliable international partner as the war in Ukraine rages across the border.

Setting out his vision for Poland at the heart of Europe, Radek Sikorski warned that a Russian attack on NATO would end in defeat for Moscow, but NATO must increase its defenses.

The previous national conservative government in Poland clashed frequently with the EU,

especially over the rule of law.

While Warsaw always maintained strong ties with the United States, its influence within the EU waned under the former government.

Arguing that EU membership brought many benefits, Sikorski said: “That is why it is so important for Poland to return to the group of countries creating Europe, and not defending themselves against Europe.”

Ahead of the speech, the foreign ministry said Sikorski's vision was closely aligned with that of French President Emmanuel Macron, who was also laying out his ambitions for Europe to be a more assertive global power in a speech on Thursday.

Senior Polish officials have welcomed Macron's outspoken support for Ukraine but also want Paris to increase its deliveries of military aid.

“It is not we — the West — who should be afraid of a clash with Putin, but the other way around,” Sikorski said. “It is worth recalling this, not to increase Russians' sense of threat, because NATO is a defense pact, but to show that an attack by Russia on any of the Alliance members would inevitably end in its defeat.”

“Russia's military and economic potential pales in comparison to that of the West. If we do not lack the will, Russia will lose. Putin's only hope is our lack of determination.”

NATION



DEMETRIUS FREEMAN/The Washington Post

President Joe Biden speaks at the White House after signing a \$95 billion foreign aid package Wednesday that also included a divest-or-ban provision for TikTok.

Legal questions loom as TikTok promises to sue over possible ban

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Legislation forcing TikTok's parent company to sell the video-sharing platform or face a ban in the U.S. received President Joe Biden's official signoff Wednesday. But the newly minted law could be in for an uphill battle in court.

Critics of the sell-or-be-banned ultimatum argue it violates TikTok users' First Amendment rights. The app's China-based owner, ByteDance, has already promised to sue, calling the measure unconstitutional.

But a court challenge's success is not guaranteed. The law's opponents, which include advocacy organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union, maintain that the government hasn't come close to justifying banning TikTok, while others say national-security claims could still prevail.

For years, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have expressed concerns that Chinese authorities could force ByteDance to hand over U.S. user data, or influence

Americans by suppressing or promoting certain content on TikTok. The U.S. has yet to provide public evidence to support those claims, but political pressures have piled up regardless.

Here's what you need to know.

■ **Is a TikTok ban unconstitutional?** That's the central question. TikTok and opponents of the law have argued that a ban would violate First Amendment rights of the social media platform's 170 million U.S. users.

Patrick Toomey, deputy director of the ACLU's National Security Project, said a TikTok ban would "stifle free expression and restrict public access" to a platform that has become central source for information sharing.

Among key questions will be whether the legislation interferes with the overall content of speech on TikTok, notes Elettra Bietti, an assistant professor of law and computer science at Northeastern University, because content-based restrictions meet a higher level of scrutiny.

ByteDance has yet to officially file a lawsuit, but Bietti said she expects the company's challenge to primarily focus on whether a ban infringes on these wider free-speech rights. Additional litigation involving TikTok's "commercial actors," such as businesses and influencers who make their living on the platform, may also arise, she added.

■ **Could TikTok successfully prevent the ban in court?** TikTok is expressing confidence about the prospects of its planned challenge.

"Rest assured, we aren't going anywhere," TikTok CEO Shou Chew said in a video response posted to X Wednesday. "The facts and the Constitution are on our side, and we expect to prevail again."

Toomey also said that he is optimistic about the possibility of TikTok being able to block the measure in court, noting that both users and the company "have extremely strong" First Amendment claims.

Fellow reservists say they warned of killer's decline

By DAVID SHARP
AND PATRICK WHITTLE
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Maine — Fellow U.S. Army reservists who witnessed the mental and physical decline of a colleague who would commit Maine's deadliest mass shooting told a commission investigating the killings Thursday that they tried to intervene before the tragedy.

Six weeks before Robert Card killed 18 people at a bar and bowling alley in Lewiston, his best friend and fellow reservist Sean Hodgson texted their supervisors, telling them to change the passcode to the gate at their Army Reserve training facility and arm themselves if Card showed up. The Lewiston killings happened Oct. 25 — exactly six months prior to Thursday's hearing.

"I grieve every day for the many lives that are lost for no reason and those that are still affected today," Hodgson said prior to testifying Thursday.

Hodgson told superiors on Sept. 15: "I believe he's going to snap and do a mass shooting." That message came months after relatives had warned police that Card had grown paranoid and said they were concerned about his access to guns.

The failure of authorities to remove guns from Card's possession in the weeks before the shooting has become the subject of a monthslong investigation in the state, which also has passed new gun safety laws since the tragedy.

Card also was hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital for two weeks in July, and the Army barred him from having weapons while on duty. But aside from briefly staking out the reserve center and visiting

Card's home, authorities declined to confront him. He was found dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound two days after the shootings.

In an interim report released last month, the independent commission launched by Gov. Jane Mills concluded that the Sagadahoc County sheriff's office had probable cause under Maine's "yellow flag" law to take Card into custody and

seize his guns. It also criticized police for not following up with Hodgson about his warning text.

On Thursday, another fellow reservist, Daryl

Reed, told the commission he witnessed firsthand the mental and physical decline of a colleague who went from a "normal guy" who traded stocks and loved hunting and being outdoors to becoming paranoid and believing others were calling him a pedophile.

Card also acquired expensive night vision equipment that he said he used for hunting, Reed said. Reed said fellow reservists started to become concerned Card could become a danger to colleagues, and they informed their superiors.

The commission also heard from the state's director of victim witnesses services, and more Army personnel were expected to testify.

Cara Cookson, director of victim services for the Maine Office of the Attorney General, described through tears the daunting task of responding to the enormity of the tragedy with a "patchwork of resources."



Card

Man claiming to be veteran convicted of wire fraud, money laundering

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — A federal jury on Tuesday convicted a Texas man of wire fraud and money laundering after he befriended his victims, told them he was a veteran of the Army's elite Delta Force and they needed to hand over hundreds of thousands of dollars so he could protect their children from being kidnapped by Mexican drug cartels.

Saint Jovite Youngblood, aka Kota Youngblood, 52, was first arrested July 31, after more than a

year of swindling more than \$821,000 from his victims, according to court documents. The FBI's investigation found at least 22 victims dating back to 2010 "to whom Youngblood told intricate stories of investment opportunities or dangers posed that were often intertwined and difficult to keep straight."

Youngblood told the people, who are not named in court documents, that he was able to provide protection for them against drug cartels because of his past military experience and the contacts

he had within the National Security Agency. He also claimed he "freelanced for the Department of Defense" to solve problems throughout the country.

Youngblood, who lived in Manor, a town about 15 miles northeast of Austin, claimed to serve 22 years in the Army's 82nd Airborne Division and Delta Force, which is primarily devoted to counterterrorism operations, such as capturing and killing a high-value target, breaking up terrorist cells or conducting hostage rescues.

Yet FBI investigators found no

military service records for him.

With one of Youngblood's victims, he would post negative reviews online that alleged criminal behavior about the victim's businesses. Youngblood told the victim that it was the cartel's way of threatening him and payments would make the online harassment stop.

Youngblood had his victims pay with checks through a business associate he described as an antique dealer who commonly deposited large checks, according to court records. The payments to protect

their families would double as business investments and give returns, Youngblood told them.

He instead gambled the money away during trips to Las Vegas, according to court documents. The FBI arrested Youngblood at the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport as he planned to depart on one of these trips, according to KVUE News, a local TV station.

Sentencing for Youngblood is pending with U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman in the Western District of Texas.

NATION

Supreme Court unsure of Trump immunity claim

By MARK SHERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court seems highly skeptical of former President Donald Trump's claim of absolute immunity from prosecution, but it's less clear that the justices are headed for a quick resolution.

Chief Justice John Roberts was among at least five members of the court Thursday who appeared likely to reject the claim of absolute immunity that would stop special counsel Jack Smith's prosecution of Trump on charges he conspired to overturn his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

But in arguments lasting more than 2 1/2 hours in the court's first consideration of criminal charges against a former president, Roberts also was among several justices who suggested that the case might have to be sent back to lower courts before any trial could begin. Roberts indicated he was unhappy with the reasoning adopted by the

federal appeals court that ruled against Trump.

The timing of the Supreme Court's decision could be as important as the outcome. Trump, the presumptive 2024 Republican presidential nominee, has been pushing to delay the trial until after the November election, and the later the justices issue their decision, the more likely he is to succeed.

Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, two of Trump's three high court appointees, suggested that former presidents might have some immunity and that in this case, lower courts might have to sort out whether that applied to Trump. That could further delay a trial.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett, the other Trump appointee, seemed less open to arguments advanced by Trump lawyer D. John Sauer.

Smith's team is asking for a speedy resolution. The court typically issues its last opinions by the end of June.



MARIAM ZUHAB/AP

Demonstrates stand outside the Supreme Court as the justices prepare to hear arguments Thursday over whether Donald Trump is immune from prosecution in a case charging him with plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Trump, the first former president charged with crimes, had said he wanted to be at the Supreme Court on Thursday. Instead, he was in a courtroom in New York, where he is standing trial on charges that he falsified business records to keep damaging information from voters when he directed hush money payments to a former porn star to keep quiet her claims that they had a sexual encounter.

Trump's lawyers argue that for-

mer presidents are entitled to absolute immunity for their official acts. Otherwise, they say, politically motivated prosecutions of former occupants of the Oval Office would become routine and presidents couldn't function as the commander in chief if they had to worry about criminal charges.

Lower courts have rejected those arguments, including a unanimous three-judge panel on an appeals court in Washington, D.C.

The election interference conspiracy case brought by Smith in Washington is just one of four criminal cases confronting Trump.

Smith's team says the men who wrote Constitution never intended for presidents to be above the law and that, in any event, the acts Trump is charged with — including participating in a scheme to enlist fake electors in battleground states won by Biden — aren't in any way part of a president's official duties.

Ariz. indicts 18 in election tampering case, including Giuliani and Meadows

Associated Press

PHOENIX — An Arizona grand jury has indicted former President Donald Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows, lawyer Rudy Giuliani and 16 others for their roles in an attempt to overturn Trump's loss to Joe Biden in the 2020 election.

The indictment released Wednesday names 11 Republicans who submitted a document to Congress falsely declaring that Trump won Arizona in 2020. They include the former state party chair, a 2022 U.S. Senate candidate and two sitting state lawmakers, who are charged with nine counts each of conspiracy, fraud and forgery.

The identities of seven other defendants, including Giuliani and Meadows, were not immediately released because they had not yet been served with the documents. They were readily identifiable based on descriptions of the defendants, however.

Trump himself was not charged but was referred to as an unindicted co-conspirator.

With the indictments, Arizona becomes the fourth state where allies of the former president have been charged with using false or

unproven claims about voter fraud related to the election. Heading into a likely November rematch with Biden, Trump continues to spread lies about the last election that are echoed by many of supporters.

"I will not allow American democracy to be undermined," Democratic state Attorney General Kris Mayes said in a video released by her office. "It's too important."

The indictment alludes to Giuliani as an attorney "who was often identified as the Mayor" and spread false allegations of election fraud. Another defendant is referred to as Trump's "chief of staff in 2020," which describes Meadows.

Descriptions of other unnamed defendants point to Mike Roman, who was Trump's director of Election Day operations; John Eastman, a lawyer who devised a strategy to try to persuade Congress not to certify the election; and Christina Bobb, a lawyer who worked with Giuliani.

A lawyer for Eastman, Charles

Burnham, said his client is innocent. Bobb did not respond to a text message seeking comment, nor did a lawyer who is representing Roman in a case in Georgia.

George Terwilliger, a lawyer representing Meadows, said he had not yet seen the indictment but if Meadows is named, "it is a blatantly political and politicized accusation and will be contested and defeated." Giuliani's political adviser, Ted Goodman, decried what he called "the continued weaponization of our justice system."

The 11 people who had been nominated to be Arizona's Republican electors met in Phoenix on Dec. 14, 2020, to sign a certificate saying they were "duly elected and qualified" electors and claiming that Trump carried the state. A one-minute video of the signing ceremony was posted on social media by the Arizona Republican Party at the time. The document was later sent to Congress and the National Archives, where it was ignored.



Giuliani



Meadows

NY appeals court overturns Weinstein rape conviction

By MICHAEL R. SISAK
AND DAVE COLLINS

Associated Press

NEW YORK — New York's highest court on Thursday overturned Harvey Weinstein's 2020 rape conviction, finding the judge at the landmark #MeToo trial prejudiced the ex-movie mogul with "egregious" improper rulings, including a decision to let women testify about allegations that weren't part of the case.

"We conclude that the trial court erroneously admitted testimony of uncharged, alleged prior sexual acts against persons other than the complainants of the underlying crimes," the court's 4-3 decision said. "The remedy for these egregious errors is a new trial."

The state Court of Appeals ruling reopens a painful chapter in America's reckoning with sexual misconduct by powerful figures — an era that began in 2017 with a flood of allegations against Weinstein. His accusers could again be forced to retell their stories on the witness stand.

The court's majority said "it is an abuse of judicial discretion to permit untested allegations of nothing more than bad behavior

that destroys a defendant's character but sheds no light on their credibility as related to the criminal charges lodged against them."

In a stinging dissent, Judge Madeline Singas wrote that the majority was "whitewashing the facts to conform to a he-said/she-said narrative," and said the Court of Appeals was continuing a "disturbing trend of overturning juries' guilty verdicts in cases involving sexual violence."

"The majority's determination perpetuates outdated notions of sexual violence and allows predators to escape accountability," Singas wrote.

Weinstein, 72, has been serving a 23-year sentence in a New York prison following his conviction on charges of criminal sex act for forcibly performing oral sex on a TV and film production assistant in 2006 and rape in the third degree for an attack on an aspiring actress in 2013.

He will remain imprisoned because he was convicted in Los Angeles in 2022 of another rape and sentenced to 16 years in prison. Weinstein was acquitted in Los Angeles on charges involving one of the women who testified in New York.

NATION

Near-death patient receives pig kidney and heart pump

By LAURAN NEERGAARD
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Doctors have transplanted a pig kidney into a New Jersey woman who was near death, part of a dramatic pair of surgeries that also stabilized her failing heart.

Lisa Pisano's combination of heart and kidney failure left her too sick to qualify for a traditional transplant, and out of options. Then doctors at NYU Langone Health devised a novel one-two punch: Implant a mechanical pump to keep her heart beating and days later transplant a kidney from a genetically modified pig.

Pisano is recovering well, the NYU team announced Wednesday. She's only the second patient ever to receive a pig kidney — following a landmark transplant last month at Massachusetts General Hospital —

and the latest in a string of attempts to make animal-to-human transplantation a reality.

This week, the 54-year-old grasped a walker and took her first few steps.

"I was at the end of my rope," Pisano told The Associated Press. "I just took a chance. And you know, worst case scenario, if it didn't work for me, it might have worked for someone else and it could have helped the next person."

Dr. Robert Montgomery, director of NYU Langone Transplant Institute, recounted cheers in the operating room as the organ immediately started making urine.

"It's been transformative," Montgomery said of the experiment's early results.

But "we're not off the hook yet," cautioned Dr. Nader Moazami, the

NYU cardiac surgeon who implanted the heart pump.

"With this surgery I get to see my wife smile again," Pisano's husband, Todd, said Wednesday.

Other transplant experts are closely watching how the patient fares.

"I have to congratulate them," said Dr. Tatsuo Kawai of Mass General, who noted that his own pig kidney patient was healthier overall going into his operation than NYU's patient. "When the heart function is bad, it's really difficult to do a kidney transplant."

More than 100,000 people are on the U.S. transplant waiting list, most who need a kidney, and thousands die waiting. In hopes of filling the shortage of donated organs, several biotech companies are genetically modifying pigs so their organs are



SHELBY LUM/AP

Lisa Pisano looks at photos of her dog after her surgeries at NYU Langone Health in New York on Monday. Doctors transplanted a pig kidney into Pisano, who was near death, part of a dramatic pair of surgeries that also included a fix for her failing heart.

more humanlike, less likely to be destroyed by people's immune system.

NYU and other research teams have temporarily transplanted pig kidneys and hearts into brain-dead bodies, with promising results. Then the University of Maryland transplanted pig hearts into two men who were out of other options,

and both died within months.

Mass General's pig kidney transplant last month raised new hopes. Kawai said Richard "Rick" Slayman experienced an early rejection scare but bounced back enough to go home earlier this month and still is faring well five weeks post-transplant. A recent biopsy showed no further problems.

Family of NY man believed held by Taliban asks UN for help

By ERIC TUCKER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawyers for an American believed to be held by the Taliban for nearly two years are asking a United Nations human rights investigator to intervene, citing what they say is cruel and inhumane treatment.

Ryan Corbett was abducted Aug. 10, 2022, after returning to Afghanistan, where he and his family had been living at the time of the collapse of the U.S.-backed government there a year earlier. He arrived on a valid 12-month visa to pay and train staff as part of a business venture he led aimed at

promoting Afghanistan's private sector through consulting services and lending.

Corbett, of Dansville, N.Y., has since been shuttled between multiple prisons, though his lawyers say he has not been seen since last December by anyone other than the people with whom he was detained.

In a petition sent Thursday, lawyers for Corbett say that he's been threatened with physical violence and torture and has been malnourished and deprived of medical care. He's been held in solitary confinement, including in a basement cell with almost no sunlight

and exercise, and his physical and mental health have significantly deteriorated, the lawyers say.

Corbett has been able to speak with his family by phone five times since his arrest, including last month. His family has not been able to see him — his only visits have been two check-ins from a third-party government — and their characterizations of his mistreatment are based on accounts from recently released prisoners who were with him and his openly spirited tone in con-

versations.

"During Mr. Corbett's most recent call with his wife and children, Mr. Corbett indicated that the mental torture and anguish have caused him to lose all hope," said the petition, signed by the Corbett family attorneys, Ryan Fayhee and Kate Gibson.

The petition is addressed to Alice Edwards, an independent human rights investigator and the special rapporteur for torture in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the

U.N. It asks Edwards, who was appointed by the U.N. Human Rights Council, to "urgently reach out to the Taliban to secure Mr. Corbett's immediate release and freedom from torture, as guaranteed by international law."

The U.S. government is separately working to get Corbett home and has designated him as wrongfully detained.

A spokesperson for the Interior Ministry in Afghanistan said this week that it had no knowledge of Corbett's case.

Officials: Supply still safe as bird flu virus found in milk

The Washington Post

Viral fragments of bird flu have been identified in samples of milk taken from grocery store shelves in the United States, a finding that does not necessarily suggest a threat to human health but indicates the avian flu virus is more widespread among dairy herds than previously thought, according to two public health officials and a public health expert who was briefed on the issue.

The Food and Drug Administration said Tuesday that it had been testing milk samples throughout the dairy production process and confirmed the detection of viral particles "in some of the samples," but it declined to provide details.

The presence of genetic fragments of the virus in milk is not unexpected. Pasteurization typically works to inactivate pathogens, said

Jennifer Nuzzo, director of the Pandemic Center at the Brown University School of Public Health. It generally does not remove genetic material, Nuzzo said, but typically renders pathogens unable to cause harm to people.

The greater concern, however, "is that it's showing up in a lot more samples, meaning the infection is more widespread in dairy herds than we thought," said one public health official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to share information not yet made public.

In a statement, the FDA said some of the samples collected have "indicated the presence" of the bird flu virus based on testing that detects viral particles but does not distinguish whether they are active or dead.

Additional laboratory testing is underway.

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WORLD

Report: Burkina Faso's military killed hundreds in Feb. raids

By JESSICA DONATI
Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal — Military forces in Burkina Faso killed 223 civilians, including babies and many children, in attacks on two villages accused of cooperating with militants, Human Rights Watch said in a report published Thursday.

The mass killings took place on Feb. 25 in the country's northern villages of Nondin and Soro, and some 56 children were among the dead, according to the report. The human rights organization called on the United Nations and the African Union to provide investigators and to support local efforts to bring those

responsible to justice.

"The massacres in Nondin and Soro villages are just the latest mass killings of civilians by the Burkina Faso military in their counterinsurgency operations," Human Rights Watch Executive Director Tirana Hassan said in a statement. "International assistance is critical to support a credible investigation into possible crimes against humanity."

The once-peaceful nation has been ravaged by violence that has pitted jihadis linked to al-Qaida and Islamic State against state-backed forces. Both sides have targeted civilians caught in the mid-

dle, displacing more than 2 million people, of which over half are children. Most attacks go unpunished and unreported in a nation run by a repressive leadership.

Witnesses and survivors told HRW that the Feb. 25 killings were believed to have been carried out in retaliation for an attack by Islamist fighters on a military camp near the provincial capital Ouahigouya, about 15 miles away.

A Burkina Faso government spokesperson didn't respond to requests for comment. Officials previously denied killing civilians and said jihadi fighters often disguise themselves as soldiers.

2 military horses that ran loose through London streets are in serious condition

Associated Press

LONDON — Two military horses that bolted and ran miles through the streets of London after being spooked by construction noise and tossing their riders were in serious condition after undergoing operations, a U.K. government official said Thursday.

The animals were among a group of four horses that broke

free during routine exercises Wednesday near Buckingham Palace and caused chaos as they galloped loose through central London during morning rush hour. A fifth horse that tried to bolt hadn't been able to break free.

Two of the horses underwent operations and one was transferred to an equine hospital, the British Army posted on X.

"Three of them are fine, two of them are unfortunately in a relatively serious condition and obviously we will be monitoring that condition," defense minister James Cartlidge told Sky News. "They are in a serious condition, but as I understand, still alive."

Three soldiers thrown were hospitalized with injuries, but were expected to fully recover.

Haiti PM resigns, paving way for new government

By DANICA COTO
Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Ariel Henry resigned Thursday as prime minister of Haiti, leaving the way clear for a new government to be formed in the Caribbean country, which has been wracked by gang violence that killed or injured more than 2,500 people from January to March.

Henry presented his resignation in a letter signed in Los Angeles, dated April 24, and released on Thursday by his office on the same day that a council tasked with choosing a new prime minister and Cabinet for Haiti was sworn in.

Henry's remaining Cabinet meanwhile chose Economy and Finance Minister Michel Patrick Boisvert as the interim prime minister. It was not immediately clear when the transitional council would select its own interim prime minister.

Addressing a crowded and sweaty room in the prime minister's office, Boisvert said that Haiti's crisis had gone on too long and that the country now found itself

at a crossroads. The members of the transitional council stood behind him, as well as the country's top police and military officials.

"After two long months of debate ... a solution has been found," Boisvert said. "Today is an important day in the life of our dear republic."

He called the transitional council a "Haitian solution" and directing his remarks toward them, Boisvert wished them success, adding "I believe the determination is there."

After the speeches, the soft clink of glasses echoed in the room as attendees served champagne flutes toasted with a somber "To Haiti."

The council was installed earlier Thursday, more than a month after Caribbean leaders announced its creation following an emergency meeting to tackle Haiti's spiraling crisis. Gunfire could be heard as the council was sworn in at the National Palace.

The nine-member council, of which seven have voting powers, is also expected to help set the agenda of a new Cabinet.

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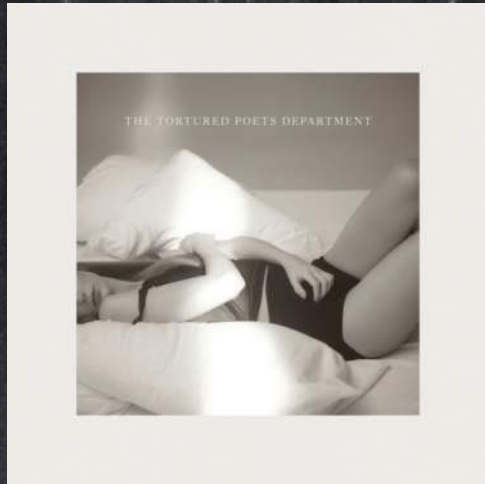


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WEEKEND



Emily Henry has a new 'Funny Story'
Books, Page 27



Poetry, or torture?

Music reviewers have alternate takes on Taylor Swift's latest sonic offerings

Music, Pages 28-29

Taylor Swift released four versions of cover art for her latest album, "The Tortured Poets Department."

REPUBLIC RECORDS/AP

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Tech neck: More than just pain in neck

Ergonomics specialist discusses the condition, caused by poor posture, and offers tips to mitigate its symptoms

By RICK THIESSE

Mayo Clinic News Network

The typical average adult head weighs approximately 10-12 pounds. But did you know that bending it forward at a 45-degree angle to look at a cellphone or tablet can dramatically increase your chances of having “tech neck?”

“That’s like having an 8-pound bowling ball as your head. Then you have 72 pounds at your elbow and 96 pounds on your shoulder,” says Brian Langenhorst, industrial and ergonomics specialist at Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse, Wis. “I probably see tech neck on a weekly basis at businesses, schools and industry.”

Tech neck is any form of chronic neck or shoulder pain, soreness, or stiffness caused by poor posture while using technology such as phones or computers. Looking down at electronic devices causes the neck muscles to strain and the shoulders to slump forward.

“People will notice some musculoskeletal fatigue,” Langenhorst explains. “They may notice pressure on nerve supply, which then can have some referred pain, and pressure on nerve supply within the neck that can have referred pain within the arms and hands.”

Over time, this position can deform your shoulder, chest and neck muscles and put pressure on your spine.

“You may have eight to 10 hours at work on a computer. Then you’re home for two to four hours on a computer or on your phone. That’s extremely fatiguing to your neck and body,” Langenhorst says.

“With cellphones, we’re having to bring them closer to maintain visual comfort,” Langenhorst adds. “What I find all too often is many people don’t move enough. They are staying in a static position for extremely long periods of time.”

On average, people spend three hours and 15 minutes on their phones each day. Individuals check their phones an average of 58 times each day. Almost half (46%) of



DREAMSTIME/TNS

The typical average adult head weighs approximately 10-12 pounds. Bending forward at a 45-degree angle to look at a cellphone or tablet can dramatically increase your chances of having “tech neck.”

Americans believe they spend an average of four to five hours on their smartphones each day. A 2020 study discovered that Americans will spend nearly nine years of their life using their phone.

“Static positioning is actually more work and more effort than dynamic movement,” Langenhorst offers. “Your body is going to ask you, do you want to have visual comfort or postural comfort? The key here is that vision always wins because we change our posture to accommodate vision.”

Tech neck also can cause issues beyond your neck and shoulders. Extra spinal pressure in your neck can lead to lower back pain, headaches and herniated disks (slipped or bulging disks). Altered neck muscles and poor posture also can strain jaw joints and muscles, creating temporomandibular joint pain.

“Just think about kids and when they’re home. They have their tablet, desktop or phone at home for homework. Just look at their posture and see what their posture looks like. Are they in a pretty good position? If they’re not, they’re probably in all sorts of kind of goofy postures,” Langenhorst says. “They can probably get away with it while they’re a little bit younger and invincible. But soon, even in their early 20s, muscle fatigue is going to kick in, and we’re going to notice some more strain and sprain. Make sure they’re doing some consistent stretching and movement that we build into our day.”

One tip Langenhorst also recommends is placing pillows on your lap allowing your forearms to be supported on those pillows. He also suggests trying to hold the phone at more of an upright, angled position.

“It’s not great, but it’s better than not being supported,” Langenhorst shares. “As we age, the disks of our spine become narrowed, we start to lose some of the cushiness that’s there. That can generate a little bit more pressure on the nerve roots that come out of the level of the neck. As you get older, meaning 45 and older, those disk spaces become narrower. That can put pressure on your nerves within your neck. Some people could notice a level of fatigue and discomfort, then generating into pain. Pain can then generate into disability.”

Tips to improve tech neck

Other ways to improve your computer posture include:

- Place your screen 20-30 inches away from your eyes (about an arm’s length).

- Use a computer monitor or laptop stand to help elevate your screen to the right level (or stack some books).

- Sit with your head, hips and spine stacked. “My eye height should be about ½ inch to 1½ inches higher than the screen because we have a 15-degree eye gaze. When I’m looking straight ahead, my neck muscles and my back muscles and my upper shoulder muscles get a chance to relax. This prevents putting uneven pressures on the nerve supply or the muscle groups,” Langenhorst adds.

- Keep your wrists straight and your elbows bent at about 90-degree angles.

- Keep your knees in line with your hips and your feet flat on the floor.

“The greatest challenge is we’re not working or staying in a neutral or straight posture. I want to be able to have my head in an upright position, ears over shoulders, shoulders over hips,” he says.

Neck pain is the fourth leading cause of disability, with an annual prevalence rate exceeding 30%. Most episodes of acute neck pain will resolve with or without treatment, but nearly 50% of people will continue to experience some degree of pain or frequent occurrences.

Attach phone to metal surfaces with Ohsnap 4 Luxe

By GREGG ELLMAN

Tribune News Service

Ohsnap’s Snap 4 Luxe is a multifunctional accessory that truly makes smartphones hands-free. It attaches to the back of a phone and is ready to stick to any metal surface around your house or office. With the accompanying Snapmount 2.0 wall mount, it can be put anywhere.

While Apple MagSafe comes to mind, it is not limited to phones with that feature; Ohsnap lists compatibility with almost every phone made in the last 15 years. The Snap 4 is made with reusable adhesive; to reactive it, just run water over it and let it dry.

While the Snap 4 is attached, the smartphone is still wireless charging-friendly. It offers full access to the wired charging port, and MagSafe chargers can be used right on top of it.

The magnetic, auto-aligning phone grip is thin so your phone remains pocket-friendly (2.28 inches in diameter and 0.09 inches thick). It is made with aerospace-grade aluminum to match the look of smartphones. It easily slides open, allowing you to grip it with your hand or fingers or lock it in place as a kickstand.

For smartphone case compatibility, the Snap 4 site

states that it works with most flat cases. Any case above 0.07 inches thick may present issues with wireless charging, but almost all cases are under 0.07 inches (2 mm).

The Snapmount 2.0 wall mount works with the Snap 4 for mounting. It has reusable adhesive to place it where needed and then the two can be attached together. The Snapmount uses MagSafe technology to auto-align your phone for a secure mount. When it’s connected, you’ll have the choice of keeping it in portrait or landscape positions or anywhere in between.

Online: ohsnap.com; \$39.99

Ugreen has launched two power banks: the 5,000mAh and 10,000mAh. Both supply power for charging anywhere with additional features.

The 5,000mAh power bank (\$19.99) is portable and has a pocket-sized design (4.2-by-2.7-by-0.5 inches). It’s built with magnetic charging for compatible iPhones (MagSafe); line the battery up with the back of an iPhone to provide 7.5W of magnetic charging. Ugreen lists compatibility with the iPhone 15/14/13/12 Series.

Other features include a fast output and input and a rapid charge. The USB-C port supports a maximum pow-



OHSNAP/TNS

Ohsnap’s Snap 4 Luxe can be attached to metal to truly make a smartphone temporarily hands-free.

er of PD 15 watts.

It has a skin-friendly, non-slip silicone material on the outside and is available in dark gray and off-white.

Ugreen’s 10,000mAh magnetic power bank (\$49.99) is designed for the iPhone 15/14/13/12 Series and has many of the same features and double the power. The battery can charge an iPhone 15 Pro up to 1.9 times. Both batteries can charge a pair of devices simultaneously, one magnetic and the other with the wired USB-C port.

An LED indicator displays the remaining battery level. Online: ugreen.com

WEEKEND: MOVIES



REBECCA CABAGE, INVISION/AP

Mike Faist, Zendaya and Josh O'Connor pose for a portrait to promote their film "Challengers" on April 19 in Beverly Hills, Calif. Zendaya's Tashi plays the wife and coach of Faist's Art, who is competing against O'Connor's Patrick.

Serving up a love triangle

Co-stars Zendaya, Josh O'Connor, Mike Faist and director Guadagnino discuss their tennis film 'Challengers'

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

How sexy can a qualifying tennis tournament in New Rochelle, N.Y., be? When the on-court drama involves Zendaya, Josh O'Connor and Mike Faist, the answer turns out to be, quite a bit more than your average USTA singles match in Luca Guadagnino's "Challengers."

The film, directed by Guadagnino from a script by playwright Justin Kuritzkes, may have the appearance of a sports movie. Much of the action happens in between baselines. There are break points and short shorts. But in Guadagnino's film, what's being volleyed isn't just a fuzzy little yellow ball.



Guadagnino

"The ball is the ephemeral, invisible force of desire," says Guadagnino, the director of "Call Me By Your Name" and "Bones and All." "I wanted to show desire going back and forth."

The result, by a score of about six-love, is the love triangle of the year. "Challengers," which Amazon MGM Studios releases in theaters this weekend, takes the melodrama of the threesome and gives it a breathless, bi-curious spin. That's especially due to the multilateral chemistry between Zendaya, O'Connor and Faist — all actors in their late 20s or early 30s, all very capable of smoldering when called upon.

It's a big-screen statement especially for Zendaya, who's also a producer on the film. She plays Tashi, the wife and coach of tennis superstar Art (Faist, the "West Side Story" breakout). Tashi was only relegated to the sidelines because of a career-ending knee injury — though it did little to sap her ambition. When Art, whose passion for tennis is fading, is matched in New Rochelle against an old friend, Patrick (O'Connor, star of Alice Rohrwacher's recent "La Chimera"), their complicated past is, deliciously, resurrected.

Zendaya gravitated to the project not because it seemed a natural fit for her, but because it wasn't.

"Because it sounded like a challenge. Because it is so different from me," Zendaya said in an interview alongside her co-stars. "Sometimes when you're a little afraid to tackle something like that, you're like, 'Ooh, maybe I should do it.' I don't want to walk into something and be like, 'I got this. This is going to be easy.'"

"Challengers" was originally set to open last fall's Venice Film Festival before it was postponed due to the actors strike. But the delay has only given more time for the buzz around the film to grow. That has a lot to do with the attention on everything Zendaya does, but it also has to do with how the film puts three exciting young actors in the center of the frame, and doesn't let go.

"What's special is that the three of us got to lead the movie. That is cool," O'Connor says. "An opportunity to do something like that is so rare."

"Sometimes I've been a part of big ensembles," adds Zendaya, who co-starred in the recent "Dune: Part Two." "But it's just the three of us. We are the cast. While we obviously have other amazing actors that contribute, this is the core thing here. Tennis training and the rehearsal period, it was just us. So thank god that we like each other."

Guadagnino, known for his organic way of working, compares the weeks he and the three stars spent together

SEE TENNIS ON PAGE 16

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Owning court and camera

Luca Guadagnino's tennis love-triangle film 'Challengers' an ace because of star Zendaya

By **MOIRA MACDONALD**
The Seattle Times

Is there anyone in cinema right now who has a gaze as coolly assured as Zendaya's? In Luca Guadagnino's tennis love triangle "Challengers," she owns the movie and the camera, eyeing it as if daring it to reveal her thoughts.

As Tashi Duncan, a tennis megastar-turned-coach after an injury, she's utterly believable as a young woman accustomed to being looked at, an athlete frustrated by not having perfect control over her body, a person trying to figure out what life looks like when you can no longer do what you were born to do.

Zendaya is the main reason to watch "Challengers," which is made with great style but ultimately is, well, a romantic triangle with an awful lot of artfully sweaty tennis. The two other points of the triangle are men Tashi has known since her years as a teenage tennis phenom: Art (Mike Faist, Riff in Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story") and Patrick (Josh O'Connor), long-time friends and rivals on the court and off.

Justin Kuritzkes' screenplay moves us around in time; we

learn early on that Tashi and Art are married and that she's his coach — a complicated dynamic — and that both now have little contact with Patrick, who's down on his luck. Using a crucial tennis match between Art and Patrick in the present as a framing device, we're whooshed into various moments in their mutual past to understand the relationships and back again, quicker than an ace serve.

Set to a throbby, intoxicating score, "Challengers" homes in on the details of tennis: the perfectly beaded sweat, the grunt-and-thwack sound of a player unleashing a racket on a ball, the way a top athlete seems to know just where the ball will be coming, even before it's hit. Zendaya's Tashi is never still on the court, dancing a tensile tango with the ball as partner, revealing the person her character is by the way she reacts in the moment.

But the real drama of "Challengers" is meant to happen off the court, and here Guadagnino, whose specialty is swoony love stories ("Call Me By Your Name," "I Am Love"), reminds us that he's very good at the sweet romance of kissing scenes,



PHOTOS BY METRO GOLDWYN MAYER PICTURES/AP

Mike Faist, Zendaya and Josh O'Connor in "Challengers." Zendaya's character, Tashi, has known Faist's character, Art, and O'Connor's character, Patrick, since she was a teen. Zendaya is utterly believable as a young woman accustomed to being looked at, an athlete frustrated by not having perfect control over her body, a person trying to figure out what life looks like when you can no longer do what you were born to do.

and at creating a charged mood between two (or three) people. (There's a wildly over-the-top windstorm near the end that surely categorizes as A Bit Much, but makes for great drama.)

If "Challengers" sometimes feels a little too talky, or if sometimes we're too aware that neither of these men seem quite worthy of Tashi — well, that's the way the ball bounces. It's not a perfect movie, but Zendaya makes it a great pleasure.

"Challengers" is rated R for language throughout, some sexual content and graphic nudity. Running time: 131 minutes. Now playing at select on-base theaters.



Art (Faist) left, and Patrick (O'Connor) are longtime friends and rivals, both on the court and off. Tashi is married to Art and coaches him.

Tennis: Stars say they wrestle with their careers, like their characters

FROM PAGE 15

preparing in Boston to "kids on the beach creating castles of sand." Though Faist has some ability, the rest were hopeless at tennis. Guadagnino hadn't picked up a racket in his life before stepping onto the set in "Challengers." Famed tennis coach Brad Gilbert was brought in to help.

But "Challengers" isn't really about tennis, that's just the arena where attraction and emotion in the film ultimately spills out. When it's pointed out to Guadagnino that the tennis scenes are essentially his movie's sex scenes, he responds, "Thank you."

Faist, O'Connor and Zendaya all connected in different ways not just to how desire ebbs and flows but to how the characters are each juggling their fluctuating passions with their careers.

"It is this constant navigation in what we do. Once a project is over then you're kind of in limbo. You're always trying to find that thing that sparks something inside of you," Faist says. "It was something I really resonated with, that idea of falling in and out of love with your craft."

For Zendaya, the idea of having your craft ripped away, as it was for Tashi, fueled arguably her finest film performance yet. "Challengers" is also the first time she's leading a theatrical release.

"I'm grateful that I picked a career that I can keep doing for as long as I want to. I can be 80 years old and still be making movies if I get lucky enough to be able to

or if that's something I still want to be doing then," Zendaya says. "I can't imagine that idea of that life or thing that makes you happy or gives you power being ripped away from you. I deeply empathize with that."

"The ball is the ephemeral, invisible force of desire. I wanted to show desire going back and forth."

Luca Guadagnino
director, "Challengers"

Producer Amy Pascal first brought "Challengers" to Zendaya, a fittingly full-circle moment considering that Pascal cast Zendaya in her big-screen breakthrough, 2017's "Spider-Man: Homecoming." "Challengers," though, signals a shift into more mature screen roles for the 27-year-old who from a young age as a Disney TV star had the responsibly of fame and providing for her family on her shoulders.

"Something I deal with personally is the idea of what I should want, or what people want for me," Zendaya says. "I empathize with that in Tashi but also in Art because he's playing for two people. He's not just selfishly playing

for his own joy anymore; he's playing for someone else. Sometimes our work can feel like that, too.

"We're playing for the benefit of other people, what people want for us, rather than what really would just make you happy."

For Zendaya, Faist and O'Connor, "Challengers" allowed them to, when not busy steaming up the screen, wrestle with their own ambitions. O'Connor, who portrayed Prince Charles on "The Crown," shot "La Chimera" — playing a character he more closely identified with — in between a very different role in "Challengers."

"He is front-footed, he's overly confident — all these qualities that I've always admired and always wanted that I've never quite been able to have. Just to play it and be in his shoes for a few months was bliss," O'Connor says. "That's what I'll hold on to with Patrick. I really like Patrick. I know he's problematic, but I really like him. I find him hilarious and charming and he knows himself. And those are all qualities that I don't necessarily have, but I admire in him."

The connections and challenges each star brought to "Challengers" added up to a remarkably intimate drama and a potentially career-shifting experience. Even Guadagnino, who generally prefers editing to shooting, found his time on hard court with Zendaya, O'Connor and Faist to be enthralling.

"It was joyous and it was a nice and it was energetic," Guadagnino says. "It was a good company."

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

Just band merch?

Biographical drama 'Unsung Hero' about Smallbone family has capacity to inspire, but film limited by filmmaker bias

BY KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

Cinematic memoir can be a complex creative endeavor. Film is a collaborative medium, and memoir requires a certain acknowledgment of the author's creation. Without that self-reflection, memoir can slip into murky, confusing territory. This space is where the new film "Unsung Hero" exists, which is billed as "A For King + Country Film."

If you're not yet aware of the Grammy-winning Christian pop duo For King + Country, comprised of brothers Joel and Luke Smallbone, "Unsung Hero" will introduce you to their folksy family lore, if not their musical successes. The film is a biographical drama about the Smallbone family from Australia, who emigrated to Nashville in the early 1990s, following father David's dreams of working as a promoter in the music industry.

"Unsung Hero" is co-written and co-directed by Joel Smallbone (with Richard L. Ramsey), and he also stars in the film playing his own father, David, who eventually managed the music careers of For King + Country, and Joel's sister Rebecca St. James. Their siblings work in the family business as managers, lighting directors and documentarians (they all make cameos in the film), and there's a sense of can-do collaboration among the tight-knit Smallbone family. This theme runs throughout the film, and so it makes sense that Joel would undertake the telling of his family's own story in such an intimate way.

Therefore, "Unsung Hero" is like a much more expensive extension of the camcorder home movies that serve as a

running motif throughout. This isn't just a music biopic or a family drama, it's a presentation of a family narrative as told, and embodied, by the family itself. A valid endeavor, to be sure, but important context when considering the work as a cultural product.

Joel Smallbone is an appealing actor, even if it is a bit distracting that he's portraying his own father (he has described the experience as a "therapy session"). Joel is also a character in the film, as a child (Diesel La Torraca), while Daisy Betts plays Helen, the Smallbone matriarch and Joel's mother. Helen is, of course, the unsung hero of this story, the heart and spine of the family who insists on staying together while David makes one last-ditch attempt to make it in the music industry in Nashville. Helen is the emotional center of the family and Betts is the emotional center of this film, her character unflagging in her determination, keeping spirits up as David's dreams are slowly crushed.

The attractive Aussies arrive in the United States without a stick of furniture awaiting in their rental home, and they nest in beds of clothes while they get on their feet, with the help of a couple from their church (Lucas Black and Candace Cameron Bure). They clean houses and landscape yards, clip coupons and accept the charity that comes their way, reluctantly, on David's part.

While David struggles with the dampening of his dreams, his daughter Rebecca (Kirrilee Berger) is just starting to embrace her musical aspirations. But she can't chase them until her father gets over his own emotional obstacles and deep hurt at being rejected by the industry. It takes



LIONSGATE/TNS

"Unsung Hero" is based on the true story of the Smallbone family, represented above, a large brood from Australia who emigrated to Nashville in the early 1990s, following father David's (and eventually his children's) dreams of working in the music industry.

him some time to understand the advice given to him by his own father James (Terry O'Quinn) back in Australia, that his family isn't in the way of what he wants, they are the way.

"Unsung Hero" follows a predictable narrative path of struggles and salvation, but it's not a traditional music biopic — it doesn't start with a record deal, it ends with one. The focus is on their hardships to get to that record deal, which is clearly what matters to filmmaker Joel Smallbone. It's not the success, the Grammys, the stadium concerts, but the ways they stuck together, eked it out, allowed themselves to dream while sleeping on beds of clothing, thanks to their mother, who nev-

er let David's challenges get in the way of her kids' imaginations.

It's a humble story, and it has the capacity to inspire in its simple message of perseverance, but the film itself, as an artistic product, feels limited in its observational scope, because the filmmaker doesn't have any distance from the material. Smallbone is a fine actor, but alongside Ramsey, he's a limited filmmaker. Their visual style is drab at best, and the storytelling lacks the kind of self-reflection that might elevate this project. As it is, "Unsung Hero" feels more like band merch than an insightful family portrait.

"Unsung Hero" is rated PG for thematic events. Running time: 114 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.

'Boy Kills World' is a midnight movie not worth staying up for

BY ADAM GRAHAM
The Detroit News

Hi kids, do you like violence? "Boy Kills World" is a bloody action thriller revenge comedy built for hyperactive, video game-addled 12-year-old boys who think that blood and punching and Uzis spraying bullets while being held sideways are so, so awesome and the pinnacle of this thing we call life. Maybe some of them will see this movie and have all their beliefs reaffirmed. Others are likely to find this fanboy fantasy an agonizing and dreary barrage of hyperviolence, devoid of anything approaching human emotion.

Bill Skarsgård stars as he who is known as Boy — this world is so cruel he doesn't even have a name! — a deaf and mute man hell-bent on revenge after his

family is murdered by the evil Hilda Van Der Koy (Famke Janssen). Van Der Koy is the head of a dynasty in a dystopian future where enemies are picked off for fun and sport in an annual event dubbed "The Culling." Reference points include "The Hunger Games," "The Running Man," "Kill Bill" and "Scott Pilgrim vs. the World," among others.

Boy is tutored in the jungle by a shaman, played by Yayan Ruhian, who trains him to be a killing machine and sends him on his path of rage. Meanwhile, Boy's inner voice is supplied by H. Jon Benjamin ("Archer"), who essentially narrates the film in his best Movie Trailer Guy voice, an effect that immediately wears out its welcome.

Credit is due to the fight choreographers and stunt crew, who

work overtime to elevate stylized fighting into a sort of ballet of violence. But in the hands of first-time feature filmmaker Moritz Mohr, it's literally overkill: The endless punching and kicking and shooting and killing is all numbing and loses its impact, a reminder that one meaningful punch lands harder than 10,000 pointless ones.

Skarsgård looks the part, his gaunt features and lanky frame accentuated in a sleeveless vest that is the same color red that Michael Jackson wore in the "Thriller" video. But boy oh boy, "Boy Kills World" is a slog, a movie built for midnight audiences that proves it's sometimes better to just go to bed.

"Boy Kills World" is rated R for strong bloody violence and gore throughout, language, some drug use and sexual references. Running time: 111 minutes. Now playing in select on-base theaters.



ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS/TNS

Bill Skarsgård's Boy is hell-bent on revenge in "Boy Kills World."

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES



NINTENDO/TNS photos

Little Kitty Big City lets players take on the role of a cat who falls from a windowsill and must return home.

From a cat's-eye point of view

Little Kitty Big City creator says the project isn't about 'controlling' a feline but rather thinking, acting like one

BY GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

Matt Wood wants us to get inside the mind of a cat. That's the driving force behind his indie project Little Kitty Big City. Inspired by his own feline friends, Mario and Roxy, and conceived with help from his children, he crafted a game focused on the nameless, at least initially, feline protagonist who falls from the safety of a windowsill and ends up on the streets of a Tokyo-like city.

The goal of Little Kitty Big City is to return home, but that's easier said than done. The cat was literally living the high life and reaching the top of a tall building seems to be an impossible task. When playing the game, players will notice that the feline can't stand water. Wood and his team at Double Dagger Studio use puddles as barriers.

The gameplay is freeform as players control the cat and wander around the city. The cat talks and it speaks to other creatures such as a manipulative crow and an older and wiser feline. It also gets into mischief. It can grab shoes with its mouth and hide them in another part of a room. Players hold the B button to jump: They can hop up on kitchen counters or leap across fences.

Players use the triggers to control the paws. That can lead the feline protagonist to knock pots and other items off shelves to break.

"I wanted you to be the cat from the cat's perspective," Wood said. "I don't want you to be a human controlling a cat."

That's one of the reasons why humans in the game don't have faces. To cats, Wood said people are more like objects that serve functions such as grabbing them food or giving them affection. In one instance, the cat will encounter an artist staring at a blank canvas. The cat can inspire the human by knocking over the paint and walking on the canvas, getting paw prints all over it.

Meandering elsewhere, the feline can move a box, discover a hole and slip away beneath a fence. The animation of the cat crawling underneath areas is perfect. From there, I saw the kitty tripping a human walking and obviously staring into a phone. When the human tumbles over, the cat can steal the smartphone and run away. That kind of intentional mayhem will remind players of the Untitled Goose Game.

One of the missions that the players will get is from the crow, who wants shiny objects. The cat has to gather them in order to get a fish from the bird, and that reward builds up stamina. The cat only has so much energy to climb. Players searching the environment will also find Gochapon capsules that hold costume items. Players can dress up their cat just for fun.

Lastly, Little Kitty Big City is intentionally family friendly. The cat can't get hurt. If it falls, it lands on its feet. It can hunt and pounce on birds, but the creatures escape and leave a feather.

Wood said he conceived of the game with his children, and they came up with several ideas. Ideally, players should play



Humans in Little Kitty Big City are faceless. Game creator Matt Wood says this is because cats see people more like objects that serve functions.



Players will find capsules throughout the world and that holds costumes that the cat character can wear.

the campaign with a kid by their side to offer input on what the cat should do.

Expect Little Kitty Big City to launch later this year on the Nintendo Switch.

Grounded now multiplatform

BY GIESON CACHO
The Mercury News

Microsoft made a splash when the company announced it would be taking more of its games to other platforms.

One of those is Grounded, Obsidian Entertainment's "Honey I Shrank the Kids"-inspired survival game. Players take on the role of one of four kids, who end up the size of insects and are trapped in a backyard. They'll have to set up a base and survive in this Lilliputian wilderness.

On the Xbox Series X, it was a beautiful game showing off the power of the system with gorgeous lighting shining through grass blades and reflections on the water. The PlayStation 5 version shows comparable visuals, but the Nintendo Switch version is the more impressive.

Even though the Switch isn't as powerful as the newer consoles, Grounded ran well. It doesn't have the visual fidelity of Sony or Microsoft's systems, but the game still ran with a smooth framerate and graphics were still good enough to shine on the 7-year-old console.

Shyla Schofield, senior communications manager for Obsidian, credited Double Eleven for working on the port and squeezing all the power from the system and optimizing the game for it. What's even more notable is that during the process of optimizing the game for other systems, the developers figured how to improve its performance on PC and Xbox. Schofield said that's something fans noticed, but the developers couldn't comment on the reason until now.

When it comes cross-platform play, Nintendo and PlayStation players have native audio communication, but they'll have to sign up for a Microsoft account. Fans can also get around the voice communication barrier through third-party services such as Discord. The Microsoft account is required for other Grounded features, though, and that includes Playgrounds, which lets players create their own Grounded levels. It's comparable to Mario Maker, Schofield said. Players will also need an account for progress to be saved from one console to another.

If players want to enjoy Grounded on non-Microsoft platforms, they'll have to buy another copy of the game, but why would you want to do that? Schofield said having cross-play lets parents play with their children, who may have a Switch. It allows them to be in the same room and coordinate.



MICROSOFT/TNS

Now that Grounded is multiplatform, Nintendo Switch and PlayStation 5 players can play with each other, but they'll need a Microsoft account to communicate.

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

Briton's apartment now a historic site

Flat added to National Heritage List, preserving late eccentric artist's painted, carved and sculpted 'fantasy world'

By DANIEL WU

The Washington Post

When Claire Jones stepped into the apartment of her husband's late uncle for the first time, she discovered what looked like the trappings of a carnival.

A giant concrete sculpture of a roaring lion's head stood in the living room, enveloping the fireplace. Looming in the next room was a giant Minotaur head. Papier-mâché sculptures littered the hallways and colorful murals adorned every wall and ceiling, even in the bathroom.

Jones and her family had known Ron Gittins as an eccentric and solitary artist. But they hadn't realized until shortly after he died in 2019 at age 79 that he had carved, sculpted and painted his passion onto the walls of his rented apartment in Birkenhead, a riverside town in northwestern England where he lived alone.

It couldn't stay, Gittins' landlord had said. But Jones knew she wanted to preserve the scene.

"I was just kind of like, 'We can't just let this go,'" she told *The Washington Post*.

For years, Gittins' family worked to protect his whimsical life's work, insisting that the apartment, "Ron's Place," was an irreplaceable art installation worthy of preservation. This month, the British government agreed. Historic England, a national body that designates historically significant sites in England, added Ron's Place to its National Heritage List, the family announced in early April.

The designation, which forbids an owner from making changes to Ron's Place without governmental consent, places Gittins' apartment among the ranks of the medieval churches and Victorian villas that usually receive such recognition in the country, securing an unlikely legacy for Gittins' creation. The apartment received a Grade II listing, which is given to "particularly important buildings of more than special interest," according to Historic England.

"This was Ron, who led a very small, private life," said Paul Kelly, a board member of the Wirral Arts and Culture Community Land Trust, an organization created to manage Ron's



PHOTOS BY THE HISTORIC ENGLAND ARCHIVE/Historic England

Above and below, sculptures, paintings and murals decorate Ron's Place, the late artist Ron Gittins' Birkenhead, England, apartment that is now a historic site. Among the unique elements: a floor-to-ceiling lion sculpture, a giant Minotaur head and a smaller Egyptian sarcophagus with a model mummy inside.

Place. "Suddenly, he was being recognized as having done something of interest on that scale. ... What an extraordinary thing."

Gittins, a self-employed artist and theater performer, was an outcast of sorts among his family, his niece Jan Williams wrote to *The Post*. He showed up at reunions in flamboyant outfits and spoke in codes, joking that he was a secret agent. He was known in Birkenhead as the local eccentric who sometimes strutted around town dressed as a Roman centurion.

He was, Williams said, "colorful, larger than life, loud, opinionated, argumentative yet affectionate."

Gittins kept his family at a distance. He let few people into his apartment, which his rental agreement had permitted him to decorate "to his own taste," according to the Ron's Place website, ronsplace.co.uk.

Walking into Gittins' home after his death felt like finally discovering the world he'd been inhabiting, Williams said. The lion's head glistened with eyes made from shards of glass, and a frying pan sat in its mouth. Scattered around the apartment were smaller models, like an Egyptian sarcophagus that opened up to reveal a model mummy. While sorting through



Gittins' possessions, Williams found a postcard he had written addressed to her, saying that he couldn't wait to show her his creations.

"Ron had created a fantasy world for his own pleasure," Williams said. "A sort of stage set where he played the leading role."

Williams, herself an artist and photographer, led the effort to save Gittins' apartment. She first arranged to keep renting the apartment from his landlord, fundraising to cover the cost and forming a community organization to manage the space. Endorsements trickled in from singers, authors and sculptors

who visited Ron's Place at the family's invitation. They landed a story in the *Guardian* and a video feature from the BBC.

In November 2022, the building that housed Ron's Place was put up for auction. Buyers circled, and Williams scrambled to raise the hundreds of thousands of dollars they needed to win a bidding war. It ended in a "fairytale-style" miracle, Williams said: On March 1, 2023, the last day of the auction, a donor emailed with an offer to lend Williams' organization most of the money it needed to purchase the building for about \$400,000. The donor told Williams she had learned about Ron's Place that

morning, while reading the newspaper on her commute.

"It felt as if it was meant to be," Williams said.

In a Hail Mary bid to delay the sale, Williams had also petitioned Historic England to list Ron's Place as historically significant. It was a long shot — the designation is normally given to churches, inns and manors with centuries' more history than Gittins' apartment.

Historic England, however, heeded her request, even after Williams and the land trust secured ownership of Ron's Place. When Sarah Charlesworth, an evaluator with Historic England, visited the apartment later that year, she immediately noticed the same floor-to-ceiling lion statue that had greeted Williams and Jones years earlier.

"I was actually thinking 'This is a slam dunk' as soon as I came in," Charlesworth said.

Ron's Place seemed to her like a striking example of "outsider art" — artwork created by people with no formal artistic training and without the intention of being exhibited or sold. It was, Charlesworth said, a facet of Britain's history just as worthy of preservation as its churches and castles.

"Listing is not just about stately homes and chocolate box cottages," she said. "It is about being representative and inclusive and making sure that we do represent all aspects of the nation's history."

The apartment is closed to visitors as it undergoes repairs. Williams and Kelly, the Wirral Arts and Culture Community Land Trust board member, said the organization has plans after acquiring the entire building that houses Ron's Place, which also includes a garden and three upstairs apartments. They hope to preserve Gittins' artwork on the ground floor as a museum and art space and renovate the other apartments into low-cost housing units for artists.

It's an unlikely legacy for Gittins after devoting much of his life to the secret world in his apartment, Kelly said. But he thinks Gittins would be pleased to see others taking notice.

"Ron was a real outsider," Kelly said. "But ... this has been recognition for his work. He would be loving it."

"Listing is not just about stately homes and chocolate box cottages. It is about being representative and inclusive and making sure that we do represent all aspects of the nation's history."

Sarah Charlesworth
an evaluator with Historic England

WEEKEND: FOOD

How to cook 'misunderstood' vegetables

Chef, cookbook author Becky Selengut offers tips for 'taking the unapproachable and breaking it down for the novice'

BY REBEKAH DENN

Special to The Washington Post

Misshapen, patchy and frankly blobby, the celeriac drew Becky Selengut like a gray-green magnet.

The table at the University District Farmers Market in Washington, D.C., was heaped with orange carrots and young leeks, but the chef reached past them to the celery root's scabby skin. Taking plastic googly eyes kept at hand for such occasions, she pressed them onto the tuber. It suddenly looked like a friendly snowman.

It's hard to be intimidated by celeriac — or rutabaga, radicchio, eggplant or okra — when it's wiggling googly eyes at you.

"You're going to laugh," said Selengut, who began pasting eyes on produce while teaching a "Misunderstood Vegetables" cooking class and writing a related new cookbook.

Laughing is second nature for Selengut, a tall, sharp and very funny New Jersey native who inexplicably hated tomatoes in her childhood. Working in fine-dining restaurants after graduating from Seattle Culinary Academy, Selengut was often the only woman on her shifts, a gay woman facing annoying questions about her qualifications from male counterparts:

"I tried to be one of the guys, and I eventually used humor to get in with these guys, and I ended up loving them like a band of brothers, depending who was there."

She moved on to working as a private chef and teaching, podcasting and improv comedy and writing cookbooks. In her words, she's made a career from "taking the unapproachable and breaking it down for the novice."

For misunderstood vegetables, that means disarming cooks into opening their minds — along with their veggie dips, pot pies and pasta sauces.

Which vegetables are misunderstood?

In Selengut's years of asking students that question, it means any vegetable they would walk past in the grocery store without ever thinking to buy. At an individual level, that decision depends on students' cultures and backgrounds. Mostly. (Nobody understands rutabaga, apparently.)

Other candidates for the "misunderstood" title are vegetables that people disliked the one time they tried them because they were poorly prepared, or vegetables where only a single preparation comes to mind. (Think tomatillos — most students hit a dead end after "salsa.")

Selengut has plenty of practical advice on all those categories: For those who revile beets as "metallic dirtballs," for instance, she suggests adding flavors that offset their sweet-soil earthiness.

"Just like you wouldn't want a margarita that had no lime juice, you have to have that balance," she said.

She pairs beets with acidic ingredients, creaminess and crunch, as with a brilliant magenta hummus blending roasted beets with tahini, garbanzo beans and lemon juice, garnished with fragrant, crunchy



PEGGY CORMARY/For The Washington Post

Some of the vegetables Becky Selengut wants to help cooks understand, from left: eggplant, rutabaga, okra and radicchio.

pistachio dukkah.

It's not always that simple, because food is about context as well as flavor.

"My misunderstood vegetables may not be yours," Selengut said. Indian students tend to appreciate eggplants; native Italians generally recognize radicchio, because they're common in those respective cuisines. Textures are an issue for many American cooks; as Fuchsia Dunlop stresses when writing about Chinese food, Western palates typically reject textures that are popular in Chinese dishes. (Dunlop calls out "sliminess" and "slitheriness.")

Slime is a turnoff for many diners trying out okra — but again, context is all. Southerners often know that its mucilaginous texture can benefit stews and gumbos by adding thickness and body, or they know how to cook it in ways that eliminate the goo. Add in its complicated history: "Ships carrying enslaved Africans brought okra to America; it is a storied food that cannot be separated from the complex and brutal way it arrived on our shores," Selengut wrote.

Understanding like that begets more understanding, and Selengut started realizing an important corollary: Human empathy and vegetable empathy aren't so far apart.

"It's human nature to put people in categories, to other them, to say that they're ugly, to say that they don't know anyone like that or they wouldn't want to know anyone like that," she said.

If a student found nettles horrible and hate-worthy because they were stung by the wild greens on a springtime hike, for instance, Selengut might show them how blanching deactivates the stingers.

"They're the most delicious thing" when blended into pesto or mixed with potatoes into a vibrant nettle colcannon, she said. Haters transform into evangelists.

How is that any different, she asked, from someone meeting someone who's gay

for the first time and realizing "my God, they're actually funny and they're lovely and they're wonderful?"

Here are a few common vegetables Selengut singles out as being misunderstood, with her suggestions on how to increase your understanding:

Radicchio

Radicchio, "revered" in Italy, is typically misunderstood in the United States because it can't typically be munched on its own like romaine lettuce or arugula. It requires some advance preparation, Selengut said, particularly for "super tasters" who might react to it more negatively.

"Yes, it's very bitter. So how do you use that bitterness?" Selengut said. "Think of it like bitters, and what do bitters in a cocktail do? They create depth."

■ Radicchio is a member of the chicory family and has several varieties. If you're looking for a milder version, try yellow-green Castelfranco over the more common red Chioggia.

■ Fruit or a balsamic glaze helps balance its flavors, as do creamy ingredients.

■ Submerge thin ribbons of radicchio in water for 30 minutes to tame its bitterness.

■ Grill or roast it to add sweetness and complexity — but don't burn it, which would add more bitter notes.

Eggplant

While some people love eggplant, many others see it as "a slug making love to a worm on my dinner plate," Selengut wrote. The slug-seers, to her mind, have fallen victim to improper cooking techniques.

"Eggplant to me is the fish of the vegetable world," Selengut mused while at the farmers market. "It has a window of perfect doneness." Go too far and it gets "snotty," pull back too soon and it's cotton-dry.

■ Eggplants have such different sizes, varieties and other variables that it's hard to provide cooking times. Look instead for visual signs of doneness — when they're "caramelized, aromatic, tender and almost wet-looking in the middle without any white or light patches of undercooked flesh."

■ Different varieties have somewhat different qualities: Italian eggplants are denser and a bit more flavorful than the larger and more common black "globe" eggplants, while long and slight Japanese eggplants cook quickly, and small, green Thai eggplants are better cooked lightly.

■ Due to their high water content, give eggplants plenty of room as they cook.

■ For the same reason, cook them under high enough heat to evaporate moisture quickly so they cook rather than steaming.

Rutabaga

Selengut calls rutabaga "the superfood nobody is talking about," perhaps the most ignored and undervalued vegetable in the produce department. It's inexpensive, super-rich in vitamin C and also full of fiber, potassium and other nutrients.

Look for firm, smooth-skinned roots that feel heavy for their size.

■ Use a sharp chef's knife to peel them before use.

■ Store for up to two months in cool areas.

■ Rutabagas take longer to cook than other root vegetables; bake or boil for 10 minutes separately before adding them to a mixed group.

■ Swap them out for some of the potatoes in mashed potatoes or gnocchi for more flavor and nutrition.

Okra

Okra wins the rueful prize as the most misunderstood vegetable of all, to Selengut's eyes — "historically, culturally and culinarily." She gained practical insights into it by learning "to use the mucus for good and not evil" — and some deeper appreciation by studying its history and speaking with such experts as culinary historian Jessica B. Harris. (Harris herself has called okra "the Rodney Dangerfield of vegetables" for the lack of respect it gets.)

"I can learn to appreciate something culinarily when I learn something historically. Things taste better when I get the context," Selengut said.

■ Choose smooth, brightly colored pods with no brown spots.

■ Use as soon as possible — don't let the pods get soft or brown.

■ Don't wash okra pods until you are ready to use them, and dry them well after washing.

■ Most of the commonly recommended methods for reducing okra's gelatinous texture — cooking whole, soaking in vinegar, drying overnight — don't have the desired effect. What does work, Selengut says, is cooking with high heat, allowing plenty of air circulation around the pods and cooking with acidity.

■ Looking for an okra substitute? Try cactus paddles.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Finding peace among the Mykonos crowds

I'll never forget the moments after I'd jumped ship in Mykonos: While enjoying a glass of ouzo in a tiny taverna, I watched my mighty cruise ship sail away and take with it the 3,000 tourists who had inundated the charming port just an hour before. Having pushed their postcard racks back indoors, it seemed the shopkeepers were satisfied that they'd made their money for the day, and suddenly a sleepy charm blanketed both the locals and the visitors who remained on perhaps the most famed island in the Aegean Sea.

Mykonos is the classic Greek-island stop and, along with Santorini, it's the most touristy. But being on Mykonos that day reminded me how enduringly charming the Greek islands are — if you can avoid those crowds.

Mykonos' port, Chora (more often referred to as "Mykonos town"), is a humble seafaring village crouched behind a sandy harbor, thickly layered with blinding-white stucco, bright-blue trim and bursting-purple bougainvilleas. Thank goodness for all that color, since otherwise this island — one of Greece's driest — would be various shades of dull-brown. On a ridge over town stretches a trademark row of six windmills, overlooking an embankment so pretty they call it "Little Venice."

The sea, the wind, the birds and the

weather-beaten little whitewashed churches all combine to give the town a vibrant allure. Everyone gathers in the cafés and pubs to nurse an ouzo or other drink, and to watch the sun set.



Rick Steves

While Mykonos town has some museums, they merely provide an excuse to get out of the sun for a few minutes. The real attraction here is poking around the streets: shopping, dining, clubbing or — best of all — simply strolling. The core of the town is literally a maze, designed by the Mykonians centuries ago to discourage would-be invaders from finding their way. That tactic also works on today's tourists. But I can think of few places where getting lost is so enjoyable.

When you're done exploring the town, it's time to relax at one of the enticing sandy beaches around the island. Each seems to specialize in a different niche: family-friendly or party; straight, gay or mixed; nude or clothed; and so on. (Keep in mind that in Greece, even "family-friendly" beaches have topless sunbathers.)

The low-key beach in Ornos, ideal if you brought your kids, is easy to reach and has an unpretentious charm. Or you might try



CAMERON HEWITT/Rick Steves' Europe

Strolling the maze-like streets of Mykonos' main town is a delight.

Psarou and Platis Gialos — two beaches along a cove to the east of Ornos. Psarou is considered a somewhat exclusive, favorite retreat of celebrities, while Platis Gialos feels more geared toward families. And Paradise is Mykonos' famous "meat-market" beach, a magnet for partiers.

My favorite beach is Agios Ioannis, a remote patch of sand tucked behind a mountain ridge that gives me the feeling of being on a castaway isle. Two restaurants share this sandy, idyllic Robinson Crusoe spot between Ornos and Kapari.

All these beaches have comfortable lounge chairs with umbrellas out on the sand. Just take a seat — someone will eventually come by to collect money. Be warned that in peak season — July and

August — it can be difficult to find a seat.

From Mykonos town, you can take a public bus to any of these beaches, or you can ride a boat to Paradise, then beach-hop on the shuttle boat that connects Paradise, Super Paradise, Platis Gialos and Paraga beaches. Another alternative is to rent a car, motor scooter, or all-terrain vehicle (ATV). If I wanted to drive a scooter or ATV on a Greek isle, I'd do it here, where the roads are not too heavily trafficked (you'll pass more fellow scooters and ATVs than cars), and idyllic beaches are a short ride away.

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Will travel for food: Events designed to tickle the taste buds

Food, glorious food, is not only the fuel but the impetus behind many a gourmand's travels. Here are just a few upcoming events catering to both body and soul.

Schwetzingen, Germany: Spargel Samstag, or Asparagus Saturday, is a day for celebrating the country's favorite spring veg. White asparagus is cultivated by depriving it of light as it grows, resulting in a more subtle and delicate flavor than that of its green cousin. The pedestrian zone of this city near Heidelberg best known for its stately palace is the place to sample dishes made of asparagus, enjoy live music and shop until 8 p.m. Entry is free. Online: tinyurl.com/32j9u722



Karen Bradbury

Throughout the United Kingdom: Foodie Festivals are celebrations of high-quality local food and drink held at 14 locations across the land. First launched in Edinburgh in 2006, these traveling festivals unite locally operating artisanal producers and street food traders with nationally known TV chefs, bakers and other personalities of the culinary scene. Live cooking theaters provide the chefs with the stages they need to shine and pass on skills to their viewers. Winners and finalists from TV cooking shows including "MasterChef" and "The Great British Bake Off" also take part in the Foodies tours. Tutored tastings of wine, sparkling beverages, beer, cider and other drinks are offered at the Drinks Theatre while a Kids Cookery theater gives young visitors the chance to learn basic cooking skills and discover new tastes. Music performed live on stage by top artists is the icing on the cake. The 2024 schedule of festivals includes stops in Brighton on May 4-6; Cardiff on May 10-12; London on May 25-27; St Albans on June 7-9; Bath on June 21-23; Chelmsford on July 5-7; Turnbridge Wells on July 12-14; Tatton Park on July 19-21; Winchester on Aug. 2-4; Edinburgh on Aug. 9-11; Glasgow on Aug. 24-26; Oxford on



TEDDY LAUREN/iamamsterdam

As the season warms, food festivals flood the calendar. One of them, Rolling Kitchens, turns a disused gasworks in Amsterdam into a pop-up, open-air restaurant. The event happens May 8-10.

Aug. 30-Sept. 1; Guildford on Sept. 6-8; and Norwich Sept. 6-8. Ticket prices vary according to date and who's appearing on stage. Online: foodiesfestival.com

Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rolling Kitchens, or Rol-lende Keukens in Dutch, is a food festival featuring dozens of food trucks or mobile kitchens parked at Westergas, a disused gasworks converted into a cultural space. Tasty bites from around the world are served at this pop-up, open-air restaurant. Other trucks serve cocktails, wine, beer and other drinks. Bands on stage help guests dance off the delicacies in which they've indulged. The event takes place on the long Ascension Day weekend, which falls May 8-10 in 2024. Festival hours run from 1 p.m.-11 p.m., and entry is free. Westergas is about half an hour's walk from Amsterdam Central Station; alternately, take tram number 5. Online: tinyurl.com/jey7f6tz

Gent, Belgium: Gent Smaakt, Or Gent Tastes, sees more than 60 food stands from the city and local area set

up at four locations across the city's gorgeous medieval core. The offerings at this May 8-12 festival hail from around the world and range from fiery hot Asian curries to healthy Mediterranean salads. A number of chefs, from rising stars to long-recognized culinary geniuses, are on hand to show off their skills. DJs provide a musical backdrop. While entry to the festival itself is free, a number of workshops require advance sign-up and charge an admission fee. Some of the possibilities include a demo of cooking over an open fire (May 9); a specialty coffee brewing seminar (May 10); a craft beer and cheese tasting session (May 10); an intro to the beverage known as kombucha (May 11); and an introduction to jangs, the sauces which lend Korean dishes their specific flavors (May 12). On all days, a zone set up at the Goudenleeuweplein from 2 p.m.-6 p.m. caters to young visitors; entry is free, but advance sign-up is a must. Online: gentsmaakt.be/en

Antwerp, Belgium: Antwerp Proeft is the name given to the culinary festival set up May 9-12 at the Waagnatie. Here, the signature dishes of the city's best restaurants are offered as tasting menus at a fraction of their normal prices. About 40 restaurants serving close to 90 different menus await discovery here. Belgium's top TV chefs and rising stars are on board, as are artisanal producers and the owners of specialty shops. Cooking demos and workshops, served up alongside sweeping views of the busy waters of the Scheldt, add to the festival's appeal. Entry to the festival costs 11.40 euros when tickets are ordered online in advance. Online: proeft.be

Vienna, Austria: Three days of al fresco dining await visitors to the Austrian capital's City Park on May 10-12, where more than 100 exhibitors will present their wares, a mix of mostly locally-produced delicacies from field and forest, lake and stream. Things to try here can range from cheese dumplings from the mountains of Tyrol to a spicy paprika dish from Burgenland, a region bordering Hungary. Entry is free. Online: festival.genussregionen.at

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY BRIAN ERICKSON/Stars and Stripes

A man walks his dog past the Palazzo Ercole, also known as the Painted House, just outside of the Spilimbergo city center, on April 17. The frescoes depict The Abduction of Deianira, Chiron the centaur, the Spilimbergo lineage, two scenes with children and Hercules wrestling the lion.

Mosaically momentous

Italian city of Spilimbergo with 101-year-old school synonymous with art form

BY BRIAN ERICKSON
Stars and Stripes

Midway between the beaches of the Adriatic Sea and the mountainous terrain of northern Italy is the small Italian city of Spilimbergo, home to Europe's largest natural stream and a center for the creation of mosaic artwork.

In addition, the quaint, rectangular Ancona Church — one of seven in the city — is a peaceful spot to view what is left of the Tagliamento River. On a clear day, the tips of the Julian Alps are visible on the horizon.

Throughout the city, which is 30 to 40 minutes away from Aviano Air Base by car, remnants of frescoes painted on the sides of the buildings are still visible. The Palazzo Ercole, for example, depicts the stories of Hercules and is dated by historians to have been painted in 1519.

For many, Spilimbergo is synonymous with an art form that has its roots in antiquity. A 15-minute walk from the city center takes visitors to the 101-year-old School of Mosaic Art.

On weekdays, it's possible to walk around and see smaller, more intricate mosaics in the courtyard. An in-depth guided look at the school is offered on the weekends as part of the "Discovering Spilimbergo" tour of the city.

Walking the halls of the school during the week, visitors can hear the sound of the students' crescent-shaped hammers, known as martelline, fracturing the small pieces of stone used in the mosaics.

Mosaic artwork created by students can also be found integrated throughout Spilimbergo along the community



The Ancona Church is a plain rectangular-plan, single-nave church located near the Spilimbergo city center. The church's beauty and view of the Tagliamento have led the locals to call it "the church of lovers."

playgrounds, on the sides of churches and throughout the monuments.

But the school's influence has reached well beyond the town over the years, with commissioned work on display in places like Rome and Tokyo. The mosaic lining of the dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was created inside the school.

Almost every town in the region has a weekly open-air market, and Spilimbergo is no different. The aromas of fresh bread and cheese and the pungent smell of fish stands fill the streets on Saturday mornings.

After walking across the balance-challenging cobble-



On the outside of the Church of St. Joseph and St. Pantaleon is the wall mosaic "The litanies of the Virgin Mary." It was made at the Scuola Mosaicisti del Friuli.

On the QT

Address: For the mosaic school, Via Corridoni 6, Spilimbergo, Italy; tourist office, Piazza Duomo 1

Hours: Tourist office, Tuesday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. and 3-6 p.m.; closed Mondays. Mosaic school, Monday-Friday, 8-11:30 a.m. and 1-3:30 p.m. Guided tours are given Saturdays and Sundays, but must be arranged in advance through the tourist office.

Cost: 2 euros for the tour of the mosaic school.

Information: Phone: +39 0427-2274; Online: eng.vivispilimbergo.it

Brian Erickson

stone streets and seeing its beauty, I came away convinced that the town belongs on any list of places to see in this bucolic part of Italy.

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WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Sanctuary for vegan foodies

Commitment to philosophy evident in menu, eco-friendly practices of Petiole in Bahrain

By SHANNON RENFROE
Stars and Stripes

Tucked away in the heart of Bahrain is Petiole, one of the few fully vegan restaurants in the island country.

Conceived over three years, this establishment is more than just a dining spot; it's a sanctuary for vegan food enthusiasts.

An affiliated grocery store beneath the restaurant sells goods that include natural cosmetics priced by weight, further highlighting the commitment to sustainability.

At the entrance, lush greenery, while artificial, builds on the eco-friendly ethos. Large windows spill natural light and there is a center bar with climbing vines and large glass cloches filled with desserts.

Sri Lankan chef Muhammad Sarif, with 16 years of vegan cooking experience across the Persian Gulf region, is teamed up with Bahraini executive chef Khalid Aljoaib. Their vision for a vegan-friendly Bahrain helped bring this restaurant to life.

Petiole's dedication to veganism goes beyond its menu. The restaurant takes strict measures to prevent cross-contamination, and the staff isn't permitted to wear leather shoes on the premises.

The commitment to zero waste is evident in everything from glass straws to fabric hand towels and nonplastic to-go bags. The holistic approach is commendable, and I appreciated not having to drink through a soggy paper straw.

The menu is seasonally aggressive, and I am lucky to have ordered from the spring menu. I started with a mocktail that masterfully blended rose, cardamom and citrus topped with grapefruit foam, setting a high standard with its refreshing and nuanced rose flavors.

However, the basil ginger lemonade fell short, skewing too bitter for my taste despite its promising ingredients.

The food menu, though, did not disappoint.

The vegan bang bang shrimp tacos, made from tofu, defied expectations with their oceanic flavor; it was so convincing that it had me suspecting witchcraft. That word floated through my

head several times during my sit-down lunch; it was that mystifyingly good.

The grilled Padron peppers and crispy mac and cheese balls served with a robust marinara sauce impressed with their flavors and textures, proving that vegan cheese can melt without a grainy aftertaste. The Padron peppers were perfectly cooked, and the flaked sea salt balanced the smokiness of the char.

Pro tip: Add the Padron peppers to the bang bang shrimp tacos for a more elevated experience.

For the main course, the "scallops," ingeniously crafted from compressed tofu, were a revelation. Simply slicing through them, I paused. Their texture was a precursor of what was to come. Served on a bed of creamy cauliflower and bean puree, they were perfectly seared and seasoned, highlighting the chef's ability to re-create sea flavors from plant-based sources.

The meal concluded on a high note with an array of desserts, including a maple spiced creme brulee that was a creamy cardamom-and-saffron custard with hints of cinnamon.

I was worried the saffron might be overpowering and also confused about how creme brulee could be transformed into a vegan version. It was indulgent, and the only thing absent was the burnt sugar.

I also had to try a duo of brioche-raised doughnuts, the rose pistachio and passion fruit. The heavenly sponges of carbohydrates were worth every bite.

The passion fruit flavor had a tart finish with a crunch provided by the seeds, and the rose pistachio was subtly floral with a generous dusting of pistachio crumbles.

The chamomile paloma mocktail was a refreshing finale with its vibrant blend of strawberry and fresh grapefruit to wash down the doughnut dessert.

Petiole's name refers to the part of a plant that connects a leaf to the stem, transporting water and nutrients between them. Given that the eatery aims to nourish patrons with a direct natural pathway from earth to table, the choice is fitting.

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PHOTOS BY SHANNON RENFROE/Stars and Stripes

Petiole Café in Bahrain has lush artificial greenery, a nod to the restaurant's eco-friendly ethos. Artificial greenery also adorns the exterior of the restaurant, located inside the new strip mall in Janabiyah.



Petiole Café

Address: Janabiyah, District 1 Mall.
Hours: Daily, 8 a.m. to midnight
Prices: Ranging from About 10 to 16 Bahraini Dinars (\$25 to \$30) for brunch, lunch and dinner. They also deliver via Talabat.
Information: Online: [instagram.com/petiolecafe](https://www.instagram.com/petiolecafe)

Shannon Renfroes



Petiole Café's bang bang shrimp tacos, made from tofu, are tossed in spicy vegan mayo sauce and topped with purple cabbage and cilantro.



The spring season menu at Petiole highlighted compressed tofu as seared "scallops." The dish also has cauliflower and bean puree, served with green beans and drizzled with a soy chili dressing.



The grilled Padron peppers with flaked sea salt were a lunchtime highlight at Petiole Café.

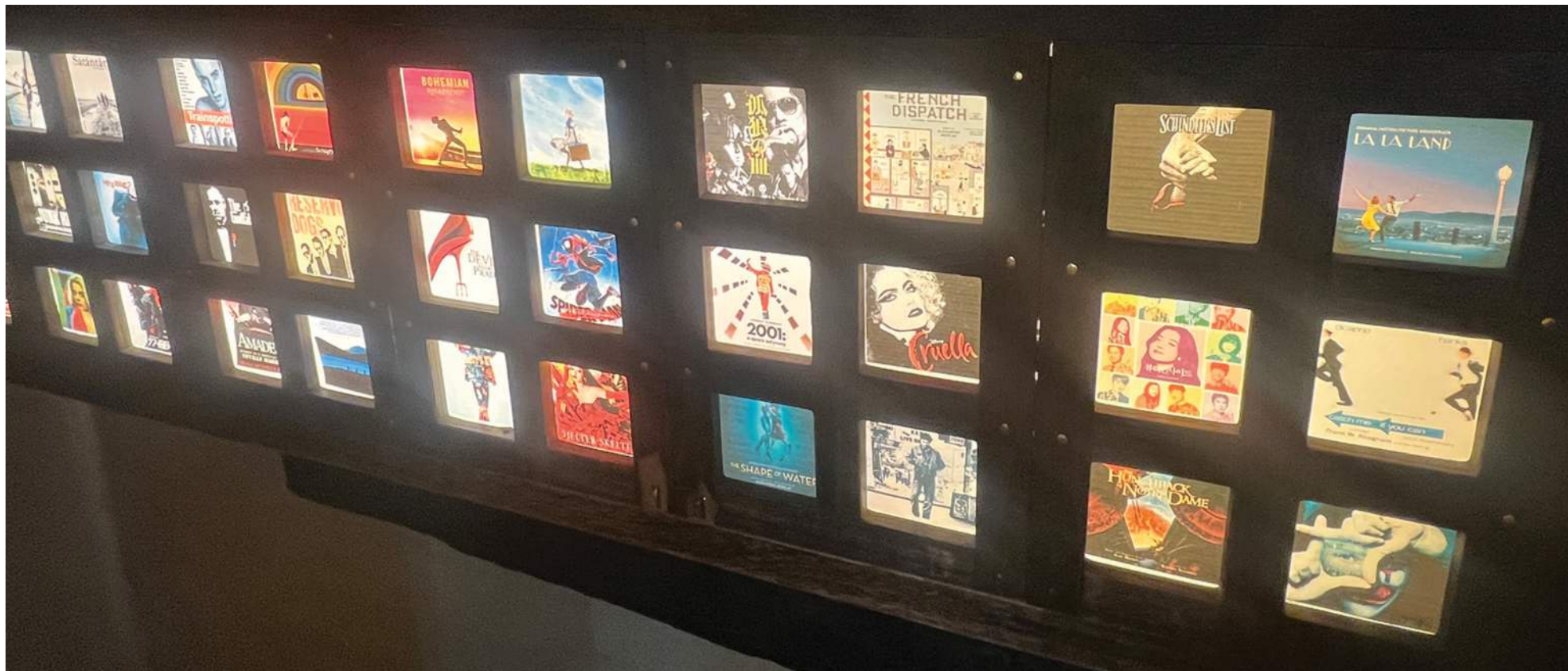


The chamomile paloma mocktail was a refreshing finale with its blend of strawberry and fresh grapefruit. There are many mocktail options on the menu at Petiole Café.



The bakery at Petiole Café in Bahrain boasts many options, including these brioche-raised doughnuts, which have rose pistachio and passion fruit flavoring.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY KELLY AGEE/Stars and Stripes

The Whales of August, named after the 1987 drama, is a movie-themed bar in Tokyo's Shibuya district where customers can order drinks named after their favorite films.

Be the star of your night out

Movie-themed bar in Tokyo has vast, inventive drink menu guaranteed to delight cinemaphiles

BY KELLY AGEE
Stars and Stripes

In an alleyway just about a block from the world's busiest street crossing, the Shibuya Scramble in Tokyo, cinephiles will find a bar built just for them.

The Whales of August, named after the 1987 movie starring Bette Davis, Lillian Gish and Vincent Price, is a movie-themed bar where customers can order drinks named after their favorite films, from "The Shining" to "Love Actually."

Finding the bar isn't hard. It's in an old, wooden building and sticks out from its neighbors. Inside, however, it's a much nicer experience than some of the surrounding establishments.

The interior is covered with movie posters, including "The Sting" starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford and the Stanley Kubrick classics "2001: A Space Odyssey" and "A Clockwork Orange."

Movie themes play all night. It was fun to make a game of matching the songs with their films. My friend and I identified the music from "Spider-Man," "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" and "The Exorcist."

The Whales of August can seat

around 100 people, and there is a 500 yen — about \$3.37 — table charge. Get there early in the evening, especially on weekends, when it fills up by 9 p.m. Reservations are not accepted.

English menus are available, and it is massive, with more than 100 movie-themed cocktails. Beside each drink is a code: S for short, L for long or F for frozen.

My favorite drink, for 750 yen, was named after "Amadeus," the 1984 fictionalized version of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's life. This drink includes chocolate liqueur from Mozart Distillery, based in Salzburg, Austria. Very sweet and perfect for chocolate fans.

I also ordered a Shawshank Redemption for 900 yen, a frozen blue liqueur drink that tastes like sherbert; and a Clockwork Orange for 939 yen, also frozen liqueur, orange flavored and topped with more oranges.

The kitchen serves a tasty beef stew with mushroom for 1,200 yen and boiled sausage and prosciutto, both for 939 yen.

The Whales of August is a must for cinephiles; the drink service is its own experience, and yet so affordable.

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The Whales of August is in an old wooden building, but the atmosphere inside is nicer than the exterior would suggest. The walls are covered with movie posters, and movie themes play all night.



The Clockwork Orange drink had frozen liqueur, was orange flavored and topped with oranges.



A poster for Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey" greets patrons at the Whales of August.

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

A slice of sanity while on the go

The pierside Elmar Uruga Terrace Cafe in Yokosuka is a tasty, peaceful haven

BY JENNESSA DAVEY
Stars and Stripes

Elmar Uruga Terrace Cafe is a comfortable place to while away the remaining minutes before you board the Uruga Ferry out of Yokosuka city, Japan.

You'll find this second-floor coffee shop in a homey neighborhood near the East Pier. A charming venue, its menu lists a variety of food and drinks.

The friendly Japanese woman who runs the cafe speaks little English but is quick to make conversation or a joke.

There are several menus to choose from: meals with bowl and pasta options; sweets, including waffles, cakes, ice cream and shaved ice; beverages, including coffee, teas and juices; and beer, wine and sake.

My host recommended the cheesecake-coffee combo for



1,200 yen — about \$7.76. You can enjoy your selection inside or outside on the patio overlooking the water. Watch the ferries arrive and depart as they make their rounds along the Uruga sea route.

Elmar Uruga Terrace Cafe is about a 10-minute walk from Uruga Station on Keikyu Main Line and about two minutes from Kano-jinja, a Shinto shrine right on Tokyo Bay.

Whether you're getting underway or just hanging out, check out this comfortable place to unwind and recharge.

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PHOTOS BY JENNESSA DAVEY/Stars and Stripes

A coffee-cheesecake combo from Elmar Uruga Terrace Cafe in Yokosuka, Japan, is a tasty indulgence.



Elmar Uruga Terrace Cafe is a charming venue with a menu that lists a variety of food and drinks.

Elmar Uruga Terrace Cafe

Location: 2-4-20 Higashiuruga, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 239-0821

Hours: Open 11:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday; closed Monday and Tuesday.

Prices: Meals between 1,3080 yen and 1,680; desserts from 300 yen to 850 yen; drinks 400 yen to 980 yen

Dress: Casual

Directions: About 10 minutes by foot from Uruga Station on the Keikyu Main Line.

Information: 090-4924-2075

Jennessa Davey

Sweet potato and a tangy glaze make turkey meatloaf special

BY JULIA TURSHEN
Special to The Washington Post

I've got a great meatloaf recipe for you today!

As you can tell, I'm excited about this one. It's a turkey meatloaf that relies on a generous amount of grated sweet potato to add moisture, texture and color to otherwise-blah ground turkey. Fresh sage and a maple-mustard glaze give it a Thanksgiving vibe. It's perfect with mashed potatoes (or rice, or noodles, or whatever) and a salad, or you can also throw a sheet pan of Brussels sprouts or broccoli in the oven while the meatloaf cooks.

This is just the kind of weeknight dinner I often crave: hearty but not heavy, familiar but a little different.

Turkey and Sweet Potato Meatloaf

Active time: 35 mins; Total time: 1 hour 15 mins

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 small yellow onion (5 ounces), finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced or finely grated
- 6 large fresh sage leaves, minced
- 1 medium-large sweet potato (9 ounces), unpeeled, scrubbed and coarsely grated
- 1/3 cup plain breadcrumbs
- 1/3 cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley



REY LOPEZ/For The Washington Post

Fresh sage and a maple-mustard glaze give Turkey and Sweet Potato Meatloaf a Thanksgiving-all-year vibe.

- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon fine salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 pound ground turkey, preferably dark meat
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste

Directions

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 375 degrees. Grease a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan with 1 tablespoon of oil.

In a medium skillet over medium-high heat, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil until shimmering. Add the onion, garlic and sage and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion begins to soften and the mixture is fragrant (your kitchen will smell like Thanksgiving). Remove from the heat and let cool for at least 5 minutes.

In a large bowl, combine the sweet potato, bread-crumbs, parsley, egg, salt and pepper. Add the onion mixture and thoroughly mix to combine. Add the turkey and gently mix until just combined (overworking ground meat can turn it tough).

Transfer the mixture to the prepared pan and smooth out the top — this will ensure that the meatloaf bakes evenly. In a small bowl, stir together the mustard, maple syrup and tomato paste until combined. Spread the mixture evenly over the meatloaf.

Bake for about 55 minutes, or until the meatloaf is golden brown, firm to the touch and an instant-read thermometer inserted into its center registers at least 165 degrees. Let the meatloaf cool in the pan for at least 10 minutes before unmolding, slicing and serving.

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WEEKEND: BOOKS



RAMON ESPINOSA/AP

Cuban writer Leonardo Padura poses for a portrait in the street in Havana on April 10. Padura has managed to turn his series of detective novels into a social and political chronicle of Cuba, especially his native Havana.

Chronicles of Cuban conflicts

Writer Leonardo Padura weaves important themes into detective novels set on the island

BY ANDREA RODRIGUEZ
Associated Press

His novels recount gruesome murders, thefts, scams, bribes and humiliating secrets. But those are not even the most important themes in the stories told by award-winning Cuban writer Leonardo Padura.

For the past four decades, Padura, 68, has managed to turn his series of detective thrillers into a social and political chronicle of Cuba, especially Havana, where he has lived all his life.

The island he depicts in his books — which have been translated to dozens of languages — has a mix of economic deprivation, Afro-descendant syncretism, corruption, mischief, uplifting music and growing inequality — all seasoned by a revolution that marked the 20th century.

“I write about the problems of individuals in Cuban society. And often, in my books, more than dramatic conflicts between the characters, you will find a social conflict between the characters and their historical time,” Padura told The Associated Press in a recent interview at his home in Mantilla, the populous Havana neighborhood where he was born, raised and married.

The scent of freshly brewed coffee is in the air, as well as the chirping sound of the birds that inhabit the patio where his dogs are buried. In a nearby studio, his wife, screenwriter Lucía López Coll, works on a computer.

It's also in this house where Mario Conde, the principal character of Padura's work, was born. The downtrodden, nostalgic, chain-smoking detective has accompanied Padura since 1991, when “Past

Perfect” — the first of the “Havana Quartet” series featuring Conde as the main protagonist — was published.

Keeping track of Detective Conde is almost like taking the pulse of Cuba in the past few years.

His last appearance was in the 2020 novel “Personas Decentes” (“Decent People”) in which, now in his 60s, Conde gets involved in the investigation of a homicide — and corruption case — against the backdrop of the 2016 historic visit of former U.S. President Barack Obama and the Rolling Stones to the island.

“This character comes from a neighborhood similar to mine,” Padura says of Conde. “He is a man of my generation. ... His view of reality has evolved because I have evolved, and his feeling of disenchantment has a lot to do with the way we have been living all these years.”

Reflecting on Cuba's situation after the tightening of U.S. sanctions during the administration of President Donald Trump and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, Padura says the island has barely crawled out of the crisis and has not yet been able to get back on its feet.

He points at the lack of food and medications, rising prices and deteriorating health and education systems, while Cubans grapple with fuel shortages and constant blackouts.

“There is a historical fatigue,” he says. “People are tired, they have no alternatives and they look for one by emigrating.”

The soft-spoken chronicler highlights yet another impact of Cuba's ongoing economic crisis: A wave of popular protests and demonstrations that had not been seen in decades.

“The main cry was for food and electric-

ity,” Padura recalls about the protests in 2021 and, more recently, in March. “But people also screamed ‘Freedom!’ The lack of food and electricity might have been solved by fixing some thermoelectric plants and with a little rice and sugar ... but the other thing has not been talked about — and I think it's something that should be discussed in depth.”

Born in 1955, Leonardo de la Caridad Padura Fuentes studied literature at the University of Havana and worked as a journalist for state-owned media in the 1980s.

He has won a number of important prizes, including the Hammett Prize, awarded by the International Association of Crime Writers, on two occasions (1998 and 2006); Cuba's National Prize for Literature in 2012, and the Princess of Asturias Award for literature in Spain in 2015.

In 2016, Netflix released “Four Seasons in Havana,” a miniseries featuring detective Conde.

Despite the international recognition, only a few of Padura's books have been published in Cuba, and when they do, only a few copies are printed. Also, because of his critical, sometimes dark view of the island, his work is barely promoted or mentioned in the official media.

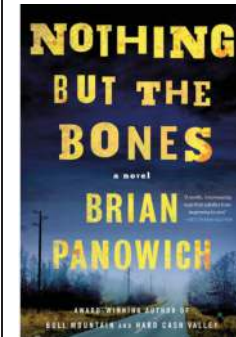
Unlike many writers and intellectuals who in recent years decided to leave Cuba, Padura — who travels extensively — is determined to stay.

“I have many reasons for living outside of Cuba but I think the ones that keep me here weigh more heavily. One of them is my sense of belonging,” he says. “I have a strong sense of belonging to a reality, to a culture, to a way of seeing life, to a way of expressing myself.”

‘Nothing But the Bones’

Brian Panowich

We first meet Nelson “Nails” McKenna as a boy in his backcountry hometown in Georgia. There, a bully picks on him and then does the same to a pretty girl Nails secretly fancies.



Enraged, Nails gives the bully a fatal beating.

Nails' friend, Clayton Burroughs, calls his brutal father, Gareth, who runs the rackets on Bull Mountain, to cover it up.

So begins this prequel to the first three Southern noir novels in Panowich's critically acclaimed Bull Mountain series.

After the killing, the story skips forward nine years and finds history repeating itself. Nails, now working as an enforcer for Gareth, is at a seedy bar when he sees a punk mistreating a young woman. Moments later, the punk is dead on the floor.

Gareth hands Nails a bag of cash, orders him to head south, and gives him a phone number to call when he gets to Jacksonville, Fla. As Nails speeds away, he discovers the young woman, who calls herself Dallas, hiding in the backseat. She persuades Nails to take her with him, and an unlikely love story emerges.

The compelling tale, its tone alternately brutal and tender, unfolds at a breakneck pace. The character development is superb, the settings are vivid and the prose is as tight as a noose.

— Bruce DeSilva/AP

‘The Rulebreaker’

Susan Page

On May 15, 1953, TV Guide ran a profile of Barbara Walters, producer of a children's program called “Ask the Camera.”

By the time she died, almost 70 years later, Barbara Walters had bypassed or broken down lots of barriers. The first woman to co-host a network morning program, first female co-host of a network evening news program and creator of daytime talk show “The View,” Wal-

ters interviewed everyone who was anyone in politics and entertainment.

Page, the Washington bureau chief of USA Today, draws on archival research and more than 120 interviews. She creates an often-riveting account of a smart, demanding, competitive and thin-skinned broadcaster who once confessed that she was doing what she knew “how to do better than anything. Not life, not how to handle life. I don't know how to do that.”

Page probes Walters' complicated and conflicted familial relationships. Her three marriages failed, Page demonstrates, because her career always came first.

Walters did not call herself a feminist or join colleagues in lobbying for an end to systemic gender discrimination. The path she paved for the women who followed her, Page writes, was, “first and foremost, one that she was cutting for herself.”

— Glenn C. Altschuler/TNS

WEEKEND: BOOKS

Q&A

Trying to balance the joy and pain of life

Bestselling rom-com author Emily Henry discusses her books, film adaptations, mental health journey

By SOPHIA ROSENBAUM
Associated Press

“Nothing forces you to face your demons like falling in love.”

And it's almost always worth it, Emily Henry says during a recent interview ahead of the April 23 release of her latest novel, “Funny Story.” She would know, having churned out a new bestselling romance read every year since 2020.

“You find out so much about yourself by how you react to the complicated feelings of falling in love, and that can lead into something very toxic and exhausting. But it also can lead into something so beautiful and life changing,” she says.

Henry talked with The Associated Press about her journey to becoming a novelist, why people shouldn't feel shame about reading romance and how her personal mental health journey influences her characters. She also dives into whether books are better than movies, with a few insights into the film adaptations of her books in the works.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

Associated Press: Before you started writing the books that became bestsellers, you were in a bit of a life rut, which anyone can relate to. What advice do you have for people who are also stuck?

Henry: You could try writing a book. That's only halfway a joke, because I really do feel like “Beach Read” was the most meta thing I'd ever done.

There's a reason that most of my books have ended with one or both characters going to therapy. For a happy ending to be sustained, for a relationship to continue growing and changing, you probably need some help.

Also getting on medicine was huge for me. I thought I was doing more or less OK until I found out what it felt like to be OK.

You write a lot about the complexities and vulnerabilities of love. What's your favorite stage of a relationship?

Because I'm in a steady, stable relationship, it's really easy to romanticize those early phases. But then when I'm talking to my single friends, I'm like, “Oh yeah, it is hell.” I feel like I have such affection for that phase when you don't know for sure how the other person feels. It's like a feeling you don't get from many other things in life.

There were a lot of different things that used to happen in romance novels that aren't happening as much anymore, or authors are reversing them. What do you think about where we are now?

Contemporary romance has tried to move toward something that's a little bit more grounded and more realistic with a focus on the health of a relationship and the positivity of it.

It's interesting that it has been treated as a guilty pleasure for so long. There's a wide variety of romance and erotica that leaves room for people to have their fantasies and that's separate from the real world.

For people who are not aware of all the ins and outs of the publishing industry, what do you think is something that people might misunderstand about it?

Try to enjoy writing before you publish, because it is really strange how much it changes once it belongs to the world.

It's sort of like you have to appreciate your single days if you're trying to wind up in a serious partnership. It can be horrible and terrible, but when it's fun, try to live that up, because that also is an experience you're someday probably not going to have again.

Speaking of trying new things, three of your novels are being adapted. How involved in that process are you?

I am very close with two of the directors who have been formally announced for “People We Meet on Vacation” and “Beach Read.” I feel really lucky that they want to know what the readers care about.

Any casting things you can leak or share?

No; you know how it is. They're all still in early-ish phases of development. So hopefully more soon.

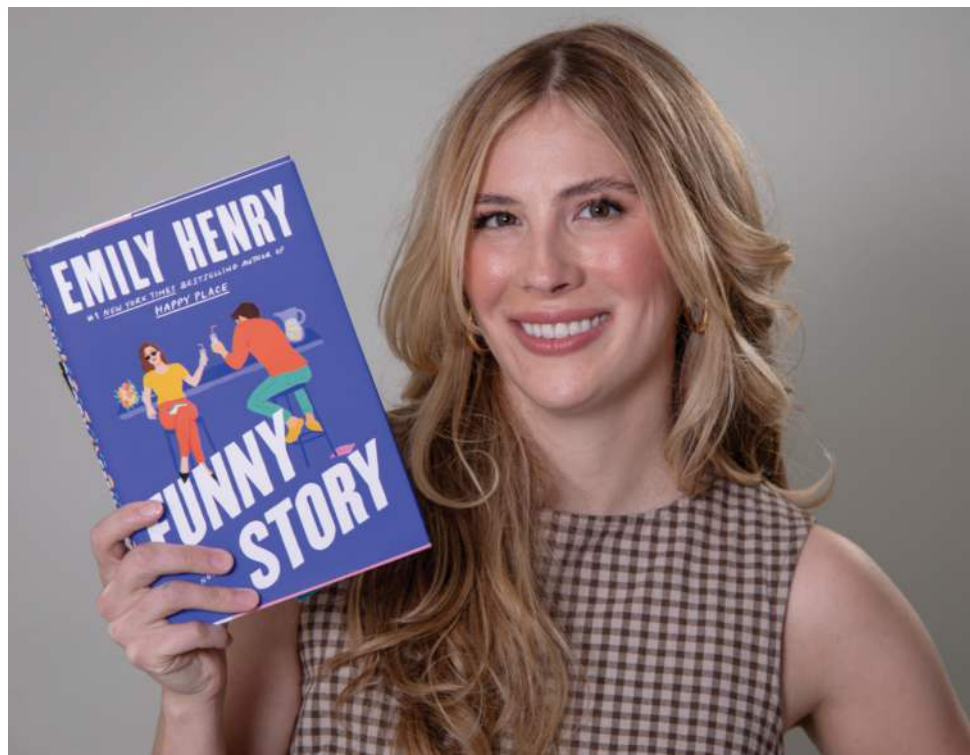
In my opinion, books are almost always better than the adaptations. Why do you think that is and how are you feeling about giving your work to that world?

What's cool about film is the exact thing that also makes it tricky for adaptation, which is it's no longer the reader and the writer collaborating.

The books will always be the books. I have started to think about the adaptations more along the lines of a Broadway show or a “Batman” franchise. Batman is Batman, but there are a lot of different Batmans.

The movies are all going to be something very special. And I think that they'll have the heart of the books, hopefully.

There's the saying, “Don't judge a book by its cover,” but what do you want people to take away from yours?



ANDY KROPA, INVISION/AP

Emily Henry, shown April 23, is currently promoting her latest novel, “Funny Story.”

‘Funny Story’ is Henry’s steamiest yet

“Funny Story” isn't a funny story at all. But it is a good one.

Emily Henry's new romance novel starts with dueling breakups that have rocked the two main characters' worlds — and forced them to bond over their shared broken hearts.

Daphne is a planner who is always on time. She's a buttoned-up librarian who hosts a lively children's reading hour and keeps her personal life closed off from her colleagues.

Miles is more subdued. He's nice, thoughtful and able to win over anyone he's talking to, especially the regulars he sees on his weekend trips to the farmers market. He doesn't have much of a relationship with his parents, for myriad reasons, but he's very close to his younger sister.

Daphne and Miles' story starts as they navigate their newly single lives now that their exes are dating ... each other.

They go through the throes of grieving together, with a soundtrack of love songs accompanying each phase. It's practically begging for a movie version, to go along with the several other Hen-

ry books already in various stages of production.

Early on, they decide to pretend they're dating to make their exes jealous. But as time goes on, they discover that they see each other as more than friends, that they really are falling for each other.

“Funny Story” is Henry's latest romance — and her steamiest one so far. It's a mixture of will-they-won't-they in a way that makes you really want them to. They're the protagonists in separate love stories who are brought together by heartbreak. Daphne and Miles are characters you can empathize with and root for.

And “Funny Story” is classic Henry. It's a meet-cute in a non-patronizing way. It's a modern love story, and one that you won't be mad is slightly predictable — because it makes you feel good and makes you believe in a thing called love.

“So many of the most beautiful things in life are unexpected,” Henry writes.

It's funny how life and love are both that way.

— Sophia Rosenbaum/AP

Primarily joy. I'm always trying to balance the joy of life and the pain of life. I want it to feel like this is the book you want to buy at the airport and read on the plane or on the beach.

I think it is successful at that. Before I read “Beach Read,” one of my friends was like, “Hey, trigger warning. It focuses on a character whose dad died,” and my dad had just died. I appreciated the warning and also felt very seen by the nuanced take of the narrative in the book.

Every book I do is taking the hardest parts of life and not trying to justify them, but trying to balance them against the best parts of life and leave the reader with the feeling that the hard s--- that you're going through is worth it for the experience of getting to love and be loved. Not necessarily romantically — any kind of love.

You cannot love anyone without accepting that there's a real chance of grief, whether that's a breakup or a loss. They go hand in hand.

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

Alternate takes: 2 views of Swift's 'The Tortured Poets Department'

Artist's 11th album is great sad pop, meditative theater

By MARIA SHERMAN
Associated Press

Who knew what Taylor Swift's latest era would bring? Or even what it would sound like? Would it build off the moodiness of "Midnights" or the folk of "evermore"? The country or the '80s pop of her latest re-records? Or its two predecessors in black-and-white covers: the revenge-pop of "Reputation" and the literary Americana of "folklore"?

"The Tortured Poets Department," released April 19, is an amalgamation of all of the above, reflecting the artist who — at the peak of her powers — has spent the last few years re-recording her life's work and touring its material, filtered through synth-pop anthems, breakup ballads, provocative and matured considerations.

In moments, her 11th album feels like a bloodletting: A cathartic purge after a major heartbreak delivered through an ascendant vocal run, an elegiac verse, or mobile, synthesized productions that underscore the powers of Swift's storytelling.

And there are surprises. The lead single and opener "Fortnight" is "1989" grown up — and features Post Malone. It might seem like a funny pairing, but it's a long time coming: Since at least 2018, Swift's fans have known of her love for Malone's "Better Now."

"But Daddy I Love Him" is the return of country Taylor, in some ways — fairytale songwriting, a full band chorus, a plucky acoustic guitar riff, and a cheeky lyrical reversal: "But Daddy I love him / I'm having his baby / No, I'm not / But you should see your faces." (Babies appear on "Florida!!!" and the bonus track "The Manuscript" as well.)

The fictitious "Fresh Out the Slammer" begins with a really pretty psych guitar tone that disappears beneath wind-blown production; the new wave-adjacent "My Boy Only Breaks His Favorite Toys" brings back "Barbie": "I felt more when we played pretend than with all the Kens / 'Cause he took me out of my box."

Even before Florence Welch kicks off her verse in "Florida!!!," the chorus' explosive repetition of the song title hits hard with nostalgic 2010s indie rock, perhaps an alt-universe Swiftian take on Sufjan Stevens' "Illinois."

As another title states, "So Long, London," indeed.

It would be a disservice to read Swift's songs as purely diaristic, but that track — the fifth on this album, which her fans typically peg as the most devastating slot on each album — evokes striking parallels to her relationship with a certain English actor she split with in 2023. Place it next to a sleepy love ode like "The Alchemy," with its references to "touchdown" and cutting someone "from the team" and, well ... art imitates life.

Revenge is still a pervasive theme. But where the reprisal anthems on "Midnights" were vindictive, on "The Tortured Poets Department," there are new complexities: "Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?" combines the musical ambitiousness of "evermore" and "folklore" — and adds a resounding bass on the bridge — with sensibilities ripped from the weapons-drawn, obstinate "Reputation." But here, Swift mostly trades victimhood for self-assurance, warts and all.

"Who's afraid of little old me?" she sings. "You should be," she responds.

And yet, "The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived" may be her most biting song to date: "You didn't measure up in any measure of a man," she sings atop propulsive piano. "I'll forget you, but I won't ever forgive," she describes



Superstar shows no mercy on this self-obsessed slog

By CHRIS RICHARDS
The Washington Post

Who's torturing whom here? Sorry, sorry. That isn't the freshest zinger to zing in the direction of this sprawling new Taylor Swift double album (including the streaming-only tracks dropped just two hours after the main album), but please know that after funneling 19 of its 31 tracks through my headphones on Friday morning, my phone died, as if by its own volition. Same for any hope I had that the overall mood might improve in the third act of this two-hour hostage situation, a despair made manifest once I located my charger and heard the lyric, "My friends used to play a game where we would pick a decade we wished we could live in ... I'd say the 1830s, but without all the racists."

As a 21st-century pop omnipresence, Swift remains mercilessly prolific and unwilling to edit for length, which makes this extended version of her new album, "The Tortured Poets Department: The Anthology," feel miserable and bottomless. The big surprise is how much of that misery is intentional. In concussive contrast to the good times she's been having in the public eye — highest grossing concert tour in the history of the species; highest grossing concert film to match; on-field kisses with her boyfriend after he won the Super Bowl — Swift's new ballads are sour theater, fixated on memories of being wronged and stranded, sodden with lyrics that feel clunky, convoluted, samey, purple and hacky. There are song titles that burn hot like distress flares ("I Hate It Here"), and lines that feel waxy with Freudian slippage ("I know I'm just repeating myself"), and a profusion of soft-edged, slow-moving melodies — produced by Swift, Jack Antonoff, Aaron Dessner and Patrik Berger — that do her lyrics few favors. As she unloads every last item from her grievance vault, it's hard for sentient listeners to not want to reciprocate.

That said, is this the album that finally grants us societal permission to say that Swift is not a great lyricist? She can be, sometimes, but greatness isn't a part-time job, and the thinning thinness of her words can make big emotions feel hollow. Plus, the objects of affection that populate these midtempo reminiscences all sound like real creeps. "At dinner, you take my ring off my middle finger and put it on the one people put wedding rings on," sings the most celebrated songwriter of her generation on her album's title track, "and that's the closest I've come to my heart exploding." Oh man. In "The Manuscript," she sings in the third person, describing a flame who once "said that if the sex was half as good as the conversation was, soon they'd be pushing strollers." During "I Can Fix Him (No Really I Can)," she gloms onto some imaginary bad boy, describing how "his hand, so callused from his pistol, softly traces hearts on my face" — which must be pretty close to what you get when you ask ChatGPT to compose a Lana Del Rey hook. Attempting to further signal her maturity, Swift deploys profanity with awkward relentlessness across too many of these songs, sounding like a child test-driving her illicit new vocabulary in hopes of convincing the greater populace that she is, in fact, 34 years old.

Her music has no problem walking up to the precipice of self-examination — Hmm, why did I want to live in the slavery era if I'm not all that into the slavery part? Hey, why didn't I barf when that dude played his cringey ring game? — but Swift almost always steps back into the

SEE GREAT ON PAGE 29

SEE SLOG ON PAGE 29

WEEKEND: MUSIC REVIEWS

Great: With very few missteps, Swift lives up to title of 'Tortured Poet,' too

FROM PAGE 28

her target, likely the same "tattooed golden retriever," a jejune description, mentioned in the title track.

Missteps are few, found in other mawkish lyrics and songs like "Down Bad" and "Guilty as Sin?" that falter when placed next to the album's more meditative pop moments.

Elsewhere, Swift holds up a mirror to her melodrama and melancholy — she's crying at the gym, don't tell her about "sad," is she allowed to cry? She died inside, she thinks you might want her dead; she thinks she might just die. She listens to the voices that tell her "Lights, camera, bitch, smile / Even when you want to die," as she sings on "I Can Do It With a Broken Heart," a song about her own performances — onstage and as a public figure.

"I'm miserable and nobody even knows!" she laughs at the end of the song before sighing, "Try and come for my job."

"Clara Bow" enters the pantheon of great final tracks on a Swift album.

The title refers to the 1920s silent film star who burned fast and bright — an early "It girl" and Hollywood sex symbol subject to vitriolic gossip, a victim of easy, everyday misogyny ampli-

fied by celebrity. Once Bow's harsh Brooklyn accent was heard in the talkies, it was rumored, her career was over.

In life, Bow later attempted suicide and was sent to an asylum — the same institution that appears on "Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?" "Clara Bow" works as an allegory and a cautionary tale for Swift, the same way Stevie Nicks' "Mabel Norman" — another tragic silent film star — functioned for the Fleetwood Mac star.

Nicks appears in "Clara Bow,"

too: "You look like Stevie Nicks in '75 / The hair and lips / Crowd goes wild."

Later, Swift turns the camera inward, and the song ends with her singing, "You look like Taylor Swift in this light / We're loving it / You've got edge / She never did." The album ends there, on what could be read as self-deprecation but stings more like frustrating self-awareness.

Swift sings about a tortured poet, but she is one, too. And isn't it great that she's allowed herself the creative license?



JORDAN STRAUSS, INVISION/AP

Taylor Swift examines some harsh realities for female celebrities on "Clara Bow," the final track on "The Tortured Poets Department."

Slog: Most famous singer alive still trying to sell herself as an underdog

FROM PAGE 28

shallow end, dulling her ideas with reflexive clichés. Lightning appears in bottles. Wrinkles appear in time. Ships are abandoned or gone down with. Plans are best laid. Hearts are cold, cold. Scripts get flipped. Poisons get picked. To zest things up, she likes tweaking certain words in rote figures of speech, or grafting them onto more melodramatic phrases until a completed line begins to resemble cathartic teenager poetry. "They say what doesn't kill you makes you aware," she sings on "Cassandra," a piano ballad that vaguely surges in the direction of Tori Amos. (Stay that course, please.) "Old habits die screaming," she sings while seething tidily during "The Black Dog." On "Loml," she feels "better safe than starry-eyed," but eventually grieves "our field of dreams engulfed in fire." On "How Did It End," she flips the old playground matrimony ditty so that she's "sitting in a tree, D-Y-I-N-G."

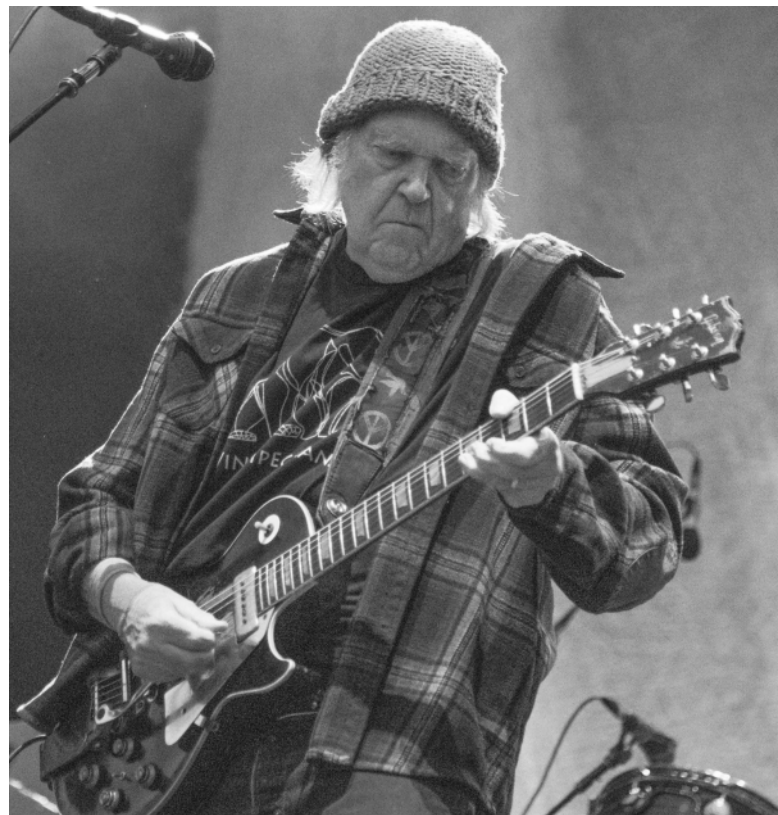
Enough. These are highly

embarrassing combinations of words made to serve an even more embarrassing narrative: the childish idea that the most famous singer alive should be pitied for living alone atop her mountaintop of money, feeling sad and aggrieved. We should all try our hardest to forget the manipulative underdog posture that Swift refuses to forfeit with each passing album, especially when the genuine tragedy-like feeling to be gleaned from all of these songs — and from nearly every Swift song that came before, too — is that Swift has traded her adulthood for superstardom.

She hasn't been an anonymous human being since she was 17, and in terms of her art, many of her horizons seem to have stopped right there. It helps to explain why at least three songs on this double album take place on playgrounds; and why another one is set at a high school party (where the sexiest lyric of her career sounds like additional AI-generated Lana worship: "You know how to ball, I know

Aristotle ... Touch me while your bros play Grand Theft Auto"). It's probably why her songs rely so heavily on the make-believe concepts of destiny, and prophecy, and fate. She has not lived a normal life. She doesn't make normal choices. Everything in her creative and professional world happens at epic heights that are difficult to comprehend and from which there is no coming down. Where are the songs about the profound sadness in all that?

Also, who cares what I want? You are a middle-aged man, you're saying. This music is not for you. The first part is true. But I would argue that pop music is for everyone. You're here, I'm here, I'm writing, you're reading, we're in this listening life together, and it's probably just fine to wish that the most widely circulated music of our lifetimes might be more imaginative and less self-obsessed. We're long overdue for a Swift album that feels even a little bit curious about the world she rules.



AMY HARRIS, INVISION/AP

Neil Young and Crazy Horse's new album, "Fur##in' Up," features performances from a Toronto club show in November.

Neil Young, Crazy Horse offer live take on beloved '90 album, 'Ragged Glory'

BY SCOTT BAUER

Associated Press

The venerable Neil Young offers a ragged and raw live take of his beloved 1990 album "Ragged Glory" with a new album, titled "Fur##in' Up."

Of course, the 2024 version doesn't have the same semi-youthful energy that the 44-year-old Young put into the original. Maybe his voice is a little shakier, the guitar solos not quite as refined, but the songs still crackle with a power that's frankly stunning coming from the not-so-young Young.

It's clear that the 78-year-old and his band Crazy Horse fed off the small crowd at the Toronto club where this was recorded in November 2023. Young is obviously having a blast on stage, so much so that he decided to re-release the songs just months after the performance. This is from a guy who has held on to some of his most beloved live shows for half a century.

Young and Crazy Horse perform nine of the 10 "Ragged Glory" songs in nearly identical arrangements to how they were recorded back in 1990.

Only one song from the original release, "Mother Earth (Natural Anthem)," is absent on "Fur##in' Up." The songs have all been retitled with lyrics from the original, except for the cover of "Farmer John."

For example, "Over and Over" becomes "Broken Circle" and "Love to Burn" becomes "Valley of Hearts."



Neil Young & Crazy Horse

Fur##in' Up (Reprise)

The somewhat profane album title is more or less the same as a song from "Ragged Glory," just with a couple of different characters in between the "F" and the "in." (It went from "F*!#in' Up" in 1990 to "Fur##in' Up" in 2024.)

For all of its virtues, some fans of the original might quibble with Young tackling the material 34 years later, especially since he doesn't differ much from the originals.

"Not everyone will want to hear it because it's not for everyone," Young writes in the liner notes. "In the spirit it's offered, we made this for the Horse lovers. I can't stop it. The Horse is runnin' — what a ride we have. I don't want to mess with the vibe, and I am so happy to have this to share."

It may be for a niche Neil audience, but that niche is sure to love it. And Young probably doesn't care what the rest think.

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Q&A

‘I think we captured joy’

Bon Jovi, whose band is the subject of a new Hulu docuseries, talks about the music industry, his voice, latest album

By ALICIA RANCILIO
Associated Press

When Jon Bon Jovi agreed to let director Gotham Chopra follow him with a documentary camera to delve into the history of his band, Bon Jovi, he didn't anticipate it would catch him at a major low point in his career.

The band was launching a tour, and despite doing all he could do to be vocally ready, the “Livin’ on a Prayer” singer struggled through songs and couldn't hit the notes the way he used to.

Critics noticed and wrote about it. A review from Pioneer Press in St. Paul, Minn., said: “It felt like he had forgotten how to sing.”

In a recent interview with The Associated Press, Bon Jovi said the reaction at the time was “heart-breaking.” After exhausting holistic options, he saw a doctor who said one of his vocal cords was atrophying.

“This was unique. It wasn't a nodule. The strong (vocal cord) was pushing the weak one around, and suddenly, my inabilities were just exacerbated,” Bon Jovi said. He underwent major surgery and is still recovering. “Every day is sort of like doing curls with weights and just getting them both to be the same size and to function together.”

This year has been a turning point. In February, he performed for an audience, for the first time since his surgery, at the MusiCares Person of the Year benefit gala where he was also named Person of the Year. The band's next album, “Forever,” hits stores June 7, and its first single, “Legendary,” is out now. The four-part, “Thank You, Goodnight: The Bon Jovi Story,” is now streaming on Hulu.

In a Q&A, Bon Jovi talks about his voice, his famous hair, the music industry and his work ethic.

Answers have been edited for clarity and brevity:

Associated Press: The work you put in behind the scenes is like that of a quarterback in between football games. Are you still rehearsing at that intensity, and how are you now?

Bon Jovi: I'm doing great. The record was easy to do. The process has been steady. Would I like it to be a light switch? Yeah. I said to the doctor, ‘I want to flip the switch and be done with this.’ It's just not how it works. Like an athlete coming back from an ACL tear or whatever, it just takes time. The therapy is still intensive and yet I'm confident that it gets progressively better.

We learn in the docuseries that your father was a barber. You've always been known for having good hair, especially in the 1980s. Does that come from your dad?

Not inasmuch where he sat down and said, ‘I've got this idea.’ Really, I was a byproduct of what was the '80s. Those were my baby pictures. I love laughing at them. Now, I can jokingly at least say, ‘After 40 years of a career, I still have all my hair.’ That is a good thing. Genetics works in my favor.

Do you ever think about acting again?

I do, on occasion. My day job then comes back to get in the way. In truth, I've got a big record coming out, and



VIANNEY LE CAER, INVISION/AP

From left, David Bryan, Jon Bon Jovi, Tico Torres and Gotham Chopra pose April 17 at the London premiere of the film “Thank You, Goodnight: The Bon Jovi Story.” The docuseries is now streaming on Hulu.



DISNEY, HULU/AP

Bon Jovi in a scene from the four-part docuseries “Thank You, Goodnight: The Bon Jovi Story.”

I'm hoping to go out on the road, so I don't have time for it. And I respect the craft far too much to think I'm going to walk on a set and hit my marks and call that acting.

Your work ethic stands out in “Thank You, Goodnight.” We see in the early days you would sleep at the music studio. Where does that come from?

If you're not going to be great, the guy that's coming in tomorrow night is going to be better. This isn't a career that you should take lightly. There's a million other young guys that are waiting to take your spot. And there are no guarantees in this business ... You have to win hearts in order to win people's hard-earned dollar. If you're asking them to stay with you for four decades, that's a task. You better be one of the greats or else good luck.

Richie Sambora is interviewed in the series. The fans love seeing him. Do you think you will ever perform together again?

We never had a big falling out. He quit 10 years ago. It's not that we're not in contact or anything like that, but he was choosing to, as a single dad, raise his child. The door is always open if he wants to come up and sing a song. I mean, there's many of them that we co-wrote together. That's a great part of both of our lives. There's no animosity here.

A lot of musicians are selling their music catalog. Would you?

For some, it makes sense because they need to. For some, it makes sense because they want to. I just find (Bon Jovi's music) to be my baby, and I have no desire at this juncture in my life to ever even consider it.

You're one of New Jersey's favorite sons like Bruce



INVISION/AP

The Bon Jovi band, whose lead singer, Jon Bon Jovi, is shown in 2020, is releasing its next album, “Forever,” June 7. Its first single, “Legendary,” is out now.

Springsteen. It's a point of pride for New Jersey residents that you're from there, but you moved to Florida?

Part-time! My license is still New Jersey. I still vote in New Jersey.

The music industry is such a singles market now. Did you ever consider just putting out some new songs and not an entire album?

See, I'm the opposite. I can only put out an album. I do all I know how to do. I have to tell the complete story. It has to be the beginning, a middle and an end because that's who and what we are.

How do you describe the new album?

What comes through is joy. My goal with this record was to capture joy, which for these last few years has been difficult, whether it's the dark cloud of COVID that the world experienced or my own personal journey. With this record, I think we captured joy.

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

'I never feel so alive being so close to death'

Orlando Bloom puts himself in peril in Peacock series 'To the Edge'



PEACOCK/AP photos

Orlando Bloom dons a special type of jumpsuit — a wingsuit — to skydive in his new TV series "Orlando Bloom: To the Edge." The wingsuit adds lift so wearers can glide longer.

BY MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Orlando Bloom wanted to test himself for his latest adventure project. Not by eating something gross or visiting a new country. He wanted to risk death — with not one but three extreme sports.

The Peacock series "Orlando Bloom: To the Edge" sees the "Pirates of the Caribbean" star shoot through the sky thousands of feet above the ground, dive into a deep sinkhole and rock climb hundreds of feet.

"While I was at moments scared for my life during the show, having come out the other end of it, I feel way more capable," Bloom tells The Associated Press.

The series, which debuted April 18, was born from the pandemic, which made outside adventures even more alluring. It met the perfect host in a man who is a natural risk-taker. When he made his Broadway debut in "Romeo and Juliet," he roared onto the stage on a Triumph motorcycle.

"I'm like a collector of experiences in some ways," Bloom says. "I've been remarkably gifted and fortunate to have some unique ones, but this was definitely like, 'Oh, wow, I'm capable of this. Therefore I can do anything.'"

First up was wingsuiting — skydiving in a special jumpsuit that adds lift so you can glide longer before opening your parachute. Bloom's goal was to jump out of a plane at 13,000 feet, fly 3 miles over the Pacific Ocean and land on the beach.

Then he heads to the Bahamas, to a 663-foot-deep hole in the ocean, with the aim of plunging to 100 feet on just one breath. After that, it's off to Utah to climb a 400-foot tower and stand on a summit the size of a pizza box.

"We all experience fear. It's how we face this fear that defines us," Bloom says in the first episode. "I never feel so alive being so close to death."

There were some heart-in-your-throat moments, like on



Bloom's 80-year-old uncle, Christopher Copeland, a master skydiver, accompanied him on his 21st jump.

his seventh skydiving jump, where Bloom needed to activate his reserve chute, something that is necessary just 1 in 1,000 times. And for his 21st jump, he did it holding hands with his 80-year-old uncle, Christopher Copeland, a master skydiver.

Usually it takes 200 solo skydives before anyone is allowed to wingsuit, but Bloom convinces his instructor in just two weeks. Katy Perry, his partner, is on hand for the first wobbly flight, embracing her man after he lands and lovingly calling him "a flying wombat."

Bloom battles ear pain to attempt the 100-foot free dive, and practicing a breath exercise leaves him in tears, struggling and sweating. Free diving requires a slowing heart, conserving energy and relaxing — the opposite of what's needed in most sports.

The rock climbing challenge sees a usual two- to three-year training process condensed into a week. There was added stress because Bloom broke his back in a fall in his 20s and really didn't want to do that again.

"Just remember, if everything hurts and you want to

puke, you're doing it right," an instructor helpfully tells him. Bloom also leans into his Buddhist belief, meditating and chanting in the run-up to each daredevil step.

Bloom joins a crowded field of adventure-seeking celeb TV hosts, which includes Eugene Levy, Zac Efron, José Andrés, Chris Hemsworth, Will Smith, Stanley Tucci, Macaulay Culkin and Ewan McGregor.

Bloom, already a guy who went to the gym twice a day, was a quick learner and even emerged with a skydiving license. But he had one-on-one help from experts usually out of the reach of regular thrillseekers, like Maureen "Mo" Beck, a gold medalist at the 2014 Spanish Paraclimbing World Championships, and Camila Jaber, the youngest female free diver to break records.

Bloom credits his instructors for their patience, expertise and teaching him to trust them and their gear. His life was in their hands but very often, their lives were in his hands.

"It wasn't just as simple as like, 'I'm just going to go with the flow here.' No, I learned the tools. There are protocols," he says. "There is a framework with which I was working. And while I was doing that, I was able to get into a rhythm, into a flow, and achieve things that I never thought I would ever do in my lifetime."

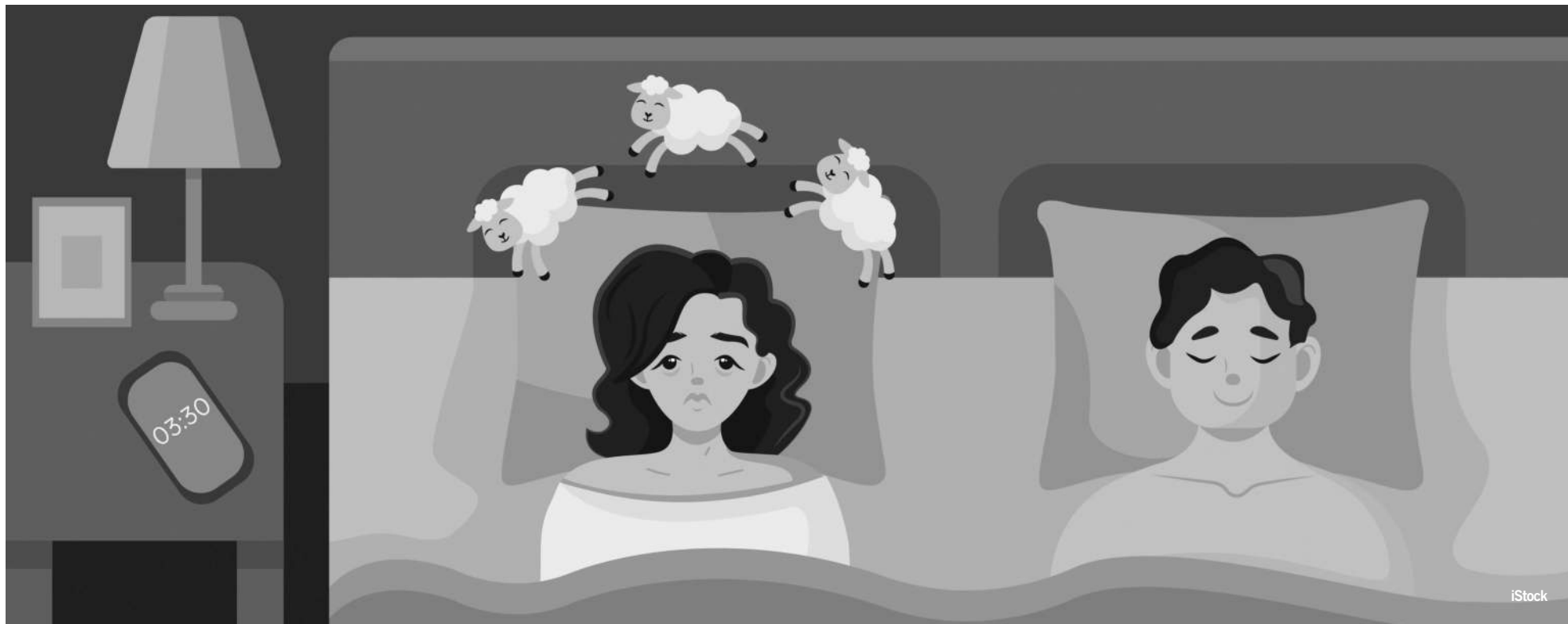
Bloom hopes viewers will tune in to see a novice achieve remarkable feats, but also to inspire them to get outside their comfort zones, be it perhaps by managing public speaking or learning a new language.

"For me, the idea of the show was like, 'Well, what is it for you?'" he asks. "What is your version of jumping out of a plane? It doesn't have to be physical or death-defying in some form or another."

Bloom says he's in a happy place, with a good career, a loving partner and great children. That made the stakes even higher for the new series.

"I'm very grateful for my life," he says. "I'm even more grateful having survived 'Orlando Bloom: To the Edge.'"

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS



Dreaming of getting more shut-eye

According to new Gallup Poll, 57% of Americans report that they aren't getting as much sleep as they want or need

BY DEEPTI HAJELA AND LINLEY SANDERS
Associated Press

If you're feeling — YAWN — sleepy or tired while you read this and wish you could get some more shut-eye, you're not alone. A majority of Americans say they would feel better if they could have more sleep, according to a new poll.

But in the U.S., the ethos of grinding and pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps is ubiquitous, both in the country's beginnings and our current environment of always-on technology and work hours. And getting enough sleep can seem like a dream.

The Gallup poll, released April 15, found 57% of Americans say they would feel better if they could get more sleep, while only 42% say they are getting as much sleep as they need. That's a first in Gallup polling since 2001; in 2013, when Americans were last asked, it was just about the reverse — 56% saying they got the needed sleep and 43% saying they didn't.

Younger women, under the age of 50, were especially likely to report they aren't getting enough rest.

The poll also asked respondents to report how many hours of sleep they usually get per night: Only 26% said they got eight or more hours, which is around the amount that sleep experts say is recommended for health and mental well-being. Just over half, 53%, reported getting six to seven hours. And 20% said they got five hours or less, a jump from the 14% who reported getting the least amount of sleep in 2013.

(And just to make you feel even more tired, in 1942, the vast majority of Americans were sleeping more. Some 59% said they slept eight or more hours, while 33% said they slept six to seven hours. What even IS that?)

The reasons aren't exactly clear

The poll doesn't get into reasons WHY Americans aren't getting the sleep they need, and since Gallup last asked the question in 2013, there's no data breaking down the particular impact of the past four years and the pandemic era.

But what's notable, says Sarah Fioroni, senior researcher at Gallup, is the shift in the past decade toward more Americans thinking they would benefit from more sleep and particularly the jump in the number of those saying they get five or less hours.

"That five hours or less category ... was almost not really heard of in 1942," Fioroni said. "There's almost nobody that said they slept five hours or less."

In modern American life, there also has been "this pervasive belief about how sleep was unnecessary — that it was this period of inactivity where little to nothing was actually happening and that took up time that could have been better used," said Joseph Dzierzewski, vice president for research and scientific affairs at the National Sleep Foundation.

It's only relatively recently that the importance of sleep to physical, mental and emotional health has started to percolate more in the general population, he said.

And there's still a long way to go. For some Americans, like Justine Broughal, 31, a self-employed event planner with two small children, there simply aren't enough

hours in the day. So even though she recognizes the importance of sleep, it often comes in below other priorities like her 4-month-old son, who still wakes up throughout the night, or her 3-year-old daughter.

"I really treasure being able to spend time with (my children)," Broughal says. "Part of the benefit of being self-employed is that I get a more flexible schedule, but it's definitely often at the expense of my own care."

There's also a cultural backdrop

So why are we awake all the time? One likely reason for Americans' sleeplessness is cultural — a long-standing emphasis on industriousness and productivity.

Some of the context is much older than the shift documented in the poll. It includes the Protestants from European countries who colonized the country, said Claude Fischer, a professor of sociology at the graduate school of the University of California, Berkeley. Their belief system included the idea that working hard and being rewarded with success was evidence of divine favor.

"It has been a core part of American culture for centuries," he said. "You could make the argument that it ... in the secularized form over the centuries becomes just a general principle that the morally correct person is somebody who doesn't waste their time."

Jennifer Sherman has seen that in action. In her research in rural American communities over the years, the sociology professor at Washington State University says a common theme among people she interviewed was the importance of having a solid work ethic. That applied not only to paid labor but unpaid labor as well, like making sure the house was clean.

A through line of American cultural mythology is the idea of being "individually responsible for creating our own destinies," she said. "And that does suggest

that if you're wasting too much of your time ... that you are responsible for your own failure."

"The other side of the coin is a massive amount of disdain for people considered lazy," she added.

Broughal says she thinks the parents in her generation are able to let go of some of those expectations. "I prioritize ... spending time with my kids, over keeping my house pristine," she said.

But with two little ones to care for, she said, making peace with a messier house doesn't mean more time to rest: "We're spending family time until, you know, (my 3-year-old) goes to bed at eight and then we're resetting the house, right?"

The trade-offs of more sleep

While the poll only shows a broad shift over the past decade, living through the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected people's sleep patterns. Also discussed in post-COVID life is "revenge bedtime procrastination," in which people put off sleeping and instead scroll on social media or binge a show as a way of trying to handle stress.

Liz Meshel is familiar with that. The 30-year-old American is temporarily living in Bulgaria on a research grant but also works a part-time job on U.S. hours to make ends meet.

On the nights when her work schedule stretches to 10 p.m., Meshel finds herself in a "revenge procrastination" cycle. She wants some time to herself to decompress before going to sleep and ends up sacrificing sleeping hours to make it happen.

"That applies to bedtime as well, where I'm like, 'Well, I didn't have any me time during the day, and it is now 10 p.m., so I am going to feel totally fine and justified watching X number of episodes of TV, spending this much time on Instagram, as my way to decompress,'" she said. "Which obviously will always make the problem worse."

WEEKEND: FAMILY



ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ, THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER/TNS

Matt Katz, host of the podcast "Inconceivable Truth," sits at his home office in Philadelphia with his hand-drawn family trees on the desk next to him. His podcast tells the story of his investigation into his father's identity.

A sperm donor surprise

Podcaster details investigation into mystery even his mom was unaware of

By ZOE GREENBERG
The Philadelphia Inquirer

Matt Katz wanted to know where his Jewish ancestors once lived in Eastern Europe, so in 2016 he spit into a plastic vial and mailed in his DNA test. He expected to be 100% Ashkenazi Jewish.

Instead, he learned that half his DNA came from Ireland. He was shocked, but perhaps more jarring, so was his mother. She confirmed through her own test that she was indeed his biological mother and also 100% Ashkenazi Jewish.

The mystery transferred to his father.

Katz, now 45, already had a complicated relationship with fathers. The man he knew as his birth father largely disappeared from his life when he was 8 and his mother remarried a man named Richard Katz. As a child, Matt legally changed his last name to match. Richard legally adopted him; he was the one Matt called Dad, the one who played catch with him and taught him to ride a bike.

Now a DNA test suggested Katz's long-estranged father wasn't even related to him. So who was his biological father? And how did his mother not know?

"My identity is all scrambled," Katz, a longtime Inquirer reporter and now a radio journalist at WNYC, said recently.

Katz's surprise DNA results launched a five-year investigation into who his father was and the ethically vexing history of donor insemination, a twisting, satisfying story he tells in a new eight-part podcast called "Inconceivable Truth." (His Google Doc for the project was titled "Daddy Issues.")

In this age of direct-to-consumer DNA tests, many people have discovered startling truths about how their families were made. Recent studies put the rates of so-called misattributed paternity — the situation Katz found himself in — between 1% and 4% of all births, according to an analysis by the New Yorker. Darker secrets have come out, too. Psychiatrists used to think that incest occurred among one in a million people. DNA testing now suggests the real number of people born to parents who are first-degree relatives (a brother and a sister; a parent and a child) may be closer to one in 7,000, according to unpublished research by British geneticist Jim Wilson recently reported in the Atlantic.

Katz's quest was unusually complicated because his

DNA revealed no grandparents, cousins, aunts, or uncles. With help from a volunteer on Facebook and another DNA test, Katz discovered that he had two half-sisters. One of them told Katz what she had only recently learned herself: She was conceived by a sperm donor.

In a recorded conversation with his mother after speaking with his half-sister, Katz asked whether his mother ever had fertility help. Yes, she said.

"Is it possible there was a sperm donor?" he asked. "Not to my knowledge," she said.

Seeking to process the new information, Katz set out to understand how babies such as him came to exist. Before assisted reproductive technology such as in vitro fertilization took off, straight couples who struggled to conceive sometimes ended up using donor insemination. At the time, (mostly male) doctors believed it was in the best interest of everyone involved if the entire process was hidden, sometimes even from those intimately involved in it.

The first successful artificial insemination occurred in 1884 and paved the way for generations of secrecy and deception, Katz found. Katz also found a memo by Alan Guttmacher, a well-known gynecologist and president of Planned Parenthood, from the 1940s laying out the ethical rules for donor insemination.

"Forget signed papers," Guttmacher wrote. "They simply act as a permanent reminder of something which should be forgotten as quickly and completely as possible."

By the 1970s, when Katz was conceived, OB-GYNs sometimes chose sperm donors from among their medical residents or other available men, never creating or deliberately discarding any records. They strived to match a donor's physical look with the father who would raise a child, so the child might never guess. They also routinely mixed donor sperm with a husband's ineffective sperm, sometimes telling couples the donor's sperm would "boost" the husband's.

Often, doctors would tell couples to go home and have sex after the insemination, encouraging the illusion that the husband was genetically related to a child actually conceived through donor insemination.

Once Katz understood that he had been donor-conceived, he set out to find the Irish doctor he believed would be his father.

"Presence is really what makes a dad," Katz said. "But I feel the pull of the biology."

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



When political opinions are mightier than the pen

It was a dark and stormy night. ... Well, actually it was partly cloudy with a light breeze. I was setting out plates, glasses and sandwiches to host my writers' group, when the doorbell rang. It was Cathryn, a smidge early, as always.

While I wrangled my yellow lab, who was obnoxiously mauling Cathryn's black jeans by the front door, she reported, "David had a last-minute task at work, so he won't be here until six-thirty. Nice doggy!"

"Gilligan! Down! Nora's stuck in bridge traffic, so she'll be late, too," I replied.

While the appetizer heated in the oven, we chatted in the kitchen. "David's piece? Oh my stars," Cathryn exclaimed. David had written a fictional satire depicting America's hypothetical future if a certain presidential candidate won the election. [No, I won't say which candidate.]

"Politics is so triggering, I'm afraid we'll argue," she said, her eyes fearful. The four members of our group spanned the American political spectrum, but I didn't think David's fictional satire could bring my good friends to fisticuffs.

"I'll give an honest critique, but I'll keep my political opinions to myself," I told Cathryn.

Soon enough, David and Nora arrived. After swapping chitchat, swigging wine and stuffing our faces with eggplant focaccia sandwiches, David read his piece.

When he was finished, "glass box critiquing" commenced, in which critics give reviews while the writer is silent. Only when the last critique is finished can the writer respond.

Nora went first, followed by me, then Cathryn. Each of us gave favorable reviews, noting David's creativity and wit. We thought we'd deftly avoided a political debate by sticking to the task at hand. But as soon as the glass box opened, David was ready to talk.

For more than 20 minutes, he ranted. Not about the writing, but about the candidate, that "BLEEP*ing *BLEEP*hole, and his *BLEEP*ing party and all the *BLEEP*ing idiots who *BLEEP*ing voted for him."

David wasn't interested in debate, concurrence or commiseration. He simply wanted to verbally spew forth accumulated political angst, as if he was pumping out his Winnebago's sewage reservoir after a road trip with his in-laws.

I had no desire to engage him in political discussion anyway. As a military spouse, I was accustomed to keeping my politics private. Halfway through David's rant, my mind disassociated from my body. While my eyes looked fixated on David, I was contemplating my next Netflix binge.

When it was over, David glanced at Nora, who was supposed to read next, and said, "Sorry," with a chuckle.

That was all it took. Nora unleashed the wrath of a woman made to sit through a man's self-indulgent monologue. "You're not sorry!" Nora said, her face blotched with anger.

"Oh, no," I uttered, before the group rapport imploded.

"I'm *BLEEP*ing pissed!" I heard Nora yell.

"Okay, let's do this!" David shouted, leaning in.

"I'm leaving!" Nora growled. Hands shaking, she whipped copies of her unread piece around the table.

"Nora, don't leave!" I plead, futilely.

"Do you want us to critique your piece?" Cathryn asked.

"I don't really give a *BLEEP*!" Nora said, before slamming the door. David, Cathryn and I sat in stunned silence.

The next day, David emailed an eloquent, warm apology to our group, diffusing the tension created by the clash. He wrote that he'd just wanted to vent to his friends, but he'd picked the wrong place and time, humbly acknowledging, "We're all flawed in funny ways, and I am particularly so."

Our political views weren't changed by the incident, but it did teach us all something about human interaction, each other and ourselves. Politics is personal. Some profess their opinions out loud, while others prefer to reserve political expression for the voting booth.

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

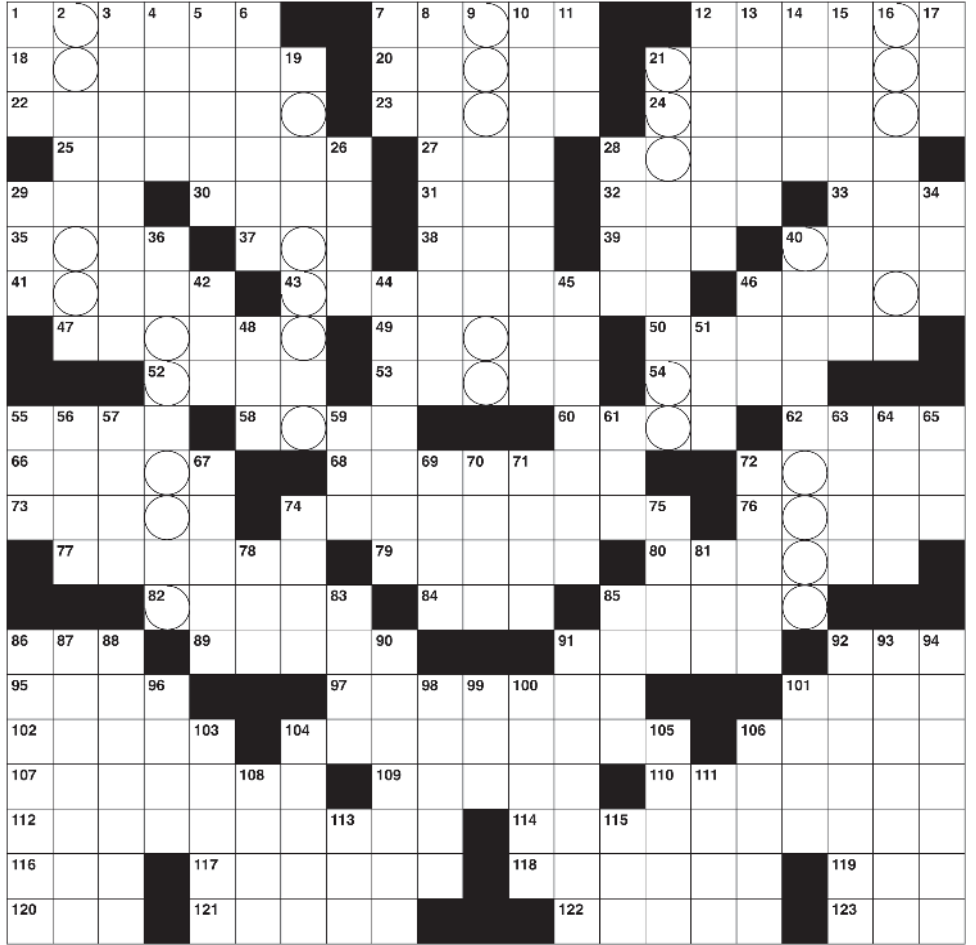
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

SAVINGS PLAN

BY JOHN RIPPE AND JEFF CHEN / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

John Rippe, of Silver Spring, Md., works in the Office of Protected Resources at the National Marine Fisheries Service. Jeff Chen, of Seattle, is a writer and prolific crossword collaborator. John specifically focuses on the 112-/114-Across in his work, and this puzzle is a tribute to its impact.

- ACROSS**
- 1 First name in 1990s alternative rock
 - 7 Hall of Fame QB John
 - 12 Showing embarrassment
 - 18 Enormous
 - 20 Target competitor
 - 21 Results of an iron deficiency?
 - 22 Buck, in slang
 - 23 A.P. Stylebook entry that lost its hyphen in 2011
 - 24 Like Constantinople from 1453 to 1922
 - 25 Under the counter, say
 - 27 One on the links?
 - 28 Carpenter's curve cutter
 - 29 Hagen who wrote "Respect for Acting"
 - 30 Lydic of "The Daily Show"
 - 31 Group of connected PCs
 - 32 Nashville attraction, with "the"
 - 33 Dust-up
 - 35 Something you might break into
 - 37 FedEx alternative
 - 38 John Denver's "Thank God _____ Country Boy"
 - 39 "Succession" family name
 - 40 App used to track fertility
 - 41 Joins a pot
 - 43 Response to "Are we there yet?"
 - 46 With sickly pallor
 - 47 Enjoys a home-cooked meal
 - 49 Psychoanalyst Alfred
 - 50 Submitted with TurboTax
 - 52 When "golden goals" are scored, for short
 - 53 Bel _____ cheese
 - 54 Covering for a pomegranate seed
 - 55 Capone adversary, informally
 - 58 Substance originally made with animal fat and wood ash
 - 60 Without much thought
 - 62 Wraps (up)
 - 66 Dirty water inside a ship
 - 68 Home to Millennium Park
 - 72 Swamp creature, informally
 - 73 Brew
 - 74 A bull market it is not!
 - 76 "Bond. James Bond," e.g.
 - 77 First-and-second bet
 - 79 Existential threat in 2021's "Don't Look Up"
 - 80 Spoke at length
 - 82 Martini & _____ (beverage brand)
 - 84 Mythical bird
 - 85 Stop on a major tour
 - 86 Gas-station convenience
 - 89 Mozart's "Così Fan _____"
 - 91 Conked out
 - 92 Biden's signature 2022 legislation addressing rising prices, for short
 - 95 Once-popular rug style
 - 97 Outstanding
 - 101 With _____ to (acknowledging)
 - 102 Bowed
 - 104 Disappear . . . like the circled creatures might do, if not for the 112-/114-Across
 - 106 Dishes
 - 107 Tiny "canvas" on which to paint
 - 109 Shows signs of disuse
 - 110 Mission honored by the "Fallen Astronaut" lunar memorial
 - 112 With 114-Across, conservation law that celebrated its 50th anniversary in December 2023
 - 114 See 112-Across
 - 116 Before now
 - 117 Not fine
 - 118 New _____
 - 119 Sushi garnish
 - 120 Web portal with a butterfly logo
 - 121 Senator Joni of Iowa
 - 122 Screens, say
 - 123 Some U.K. Lords
 - 9 BEFORE: Game with annoying pop-ups?
 - 10 Turns off
 - 11 High-fashion inits.
 - 12 Cardiac conduit
 - 13 Smith who wrote "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn"
 - 14 Country whose national animal is the elephant
 - 15 Member of an elite fighting force
 - 16 BEFORE: Theme park chain
 - 17 QVC alternative
 - 19 BEFORE: Rear-end, e.g.
 - 21 BEFORE: Having physical form
 - 26 Bouncy melody
 - 28 Meeting places
 - 29 Basic cable channel
 - 34 Route
 - 36 BEFORE: Begin operating effectively
 - 40 BEFORE: December temp worker
 - 42 I.R.S. ID
 - 44 Like some ancient Greek poetry
 - 45 Cargo
 - 46 Game console that debuted in 2006
 - 48 Mobile platform
 - 51 Loose item at the bottom of a fast-food bag
 - 55 Basic cable channel
 - 56 AFTER: Tiny amount
 - 57 Soccer star _____ Morgan
 - 59 Scoff in Offenbach
 - 61 Scat syllable
 - 63 Suffix with Paul or marion
 - 64 AFTER: Slangy "Amen"
 - 81 Back, in a way
 - 83 Langston Hughes poem about racial inequality
 - 85 Baldwin who was the first to play Jack Ryan
 - 86 All together
 - 87 Hordes
 - 88 Philip II of _____, father of Alexander the Great
 - 90 Pinnacle achievement, metaphorically
 - 91 Solar phenomenon
 - 92 How one might bolt upright
 - 93 "The Future of Law Enforcement," according to a 1987 movie
 - 94 Pop-ups can lead to them
 - 96 AFTER: Actress Rowlands
 - 98 Ooze
 - 99 Some linemen: Abbr.
 - 100 Scatterbrained
 - 101 AFTER: Shakespearean title starter
 - 103 Get down, so to speak
 - 104 Extract
 - 105 Sails in a zigzag way
 - 106 Cape Colony settlers
 - 108 Assistant of classic film
 - 111 Painter Mondrian
 - 113 Monopoly set, for short
 - 115 Before, to Shakespeare



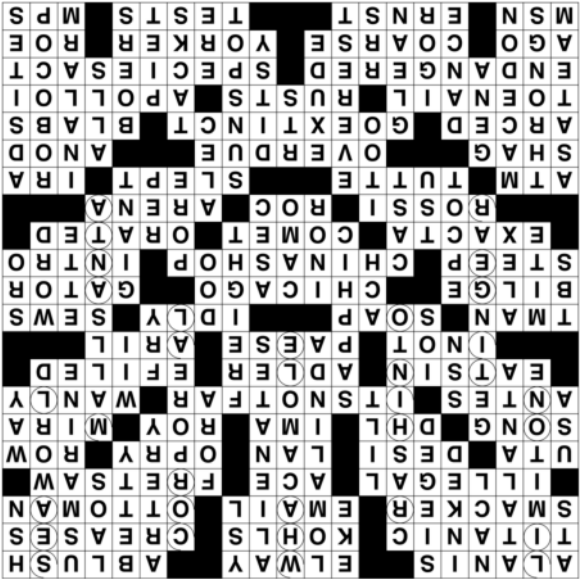
- 65 Broadway letters of success
- 67 Theme park known for its international food
- 69 "Are you _____ out?"
- 70 AFTER: Military pattern
- 71 Two shakes
- 72 Brobdingnagian
- 74 AFTER: Like some statues
- 75 AFTER: Target of a facial cleanser
- 78 Houston sch.

GUNSTON STREET



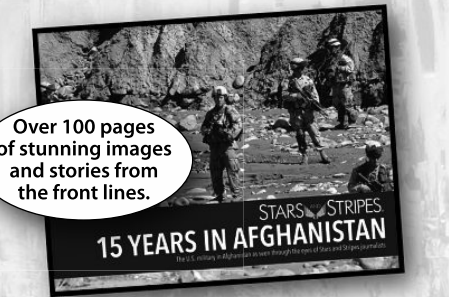
"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and online at gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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FACES

Q&A

John Lithgow heads back to high school

Actor takes art education with LA teens for PBS special

By ALICIA RANCILIO
Associated Press

At 78, John Lithgow's acting career is not slowing down. He appeared in the best picture nominee "Killers of the Flower Moon" and starred with Jeff Bridges in the FX series "The Old Man."

Recently, the two-time Academy Award nominee and multiple Emmy, Tony and Golden Globes-winning actor played the new kid in school. He learned dance, ceramics, silk-screen printing and vocal jazz ensemble with Los Angeles-area high school students. It was filmed for "Art Happens Here with John Lithgow," airing Friday on PBS with the goal of promoting arts education.

Lithgow, who has an undergraduate degree from Harvard and was a Fulbright Scholar at the London School of the Arts, spoke with The Associated Press about going back to school.

Answers have been edited for clarity and brevity.

Associated Press: One argument about education is students need to prioritize math and science and learn to code. Arts education is a bonus but not a priority. What do you say to that?

Lithgow: You've got to get kids excited about learning and eager to get to school. If there is something at school which is entire-

ly theirs, something that is a creative project where they are really and truly expressing themselves ... they're going to want to get to school. I think arts education is a huge part of that. I also think sports is a big part of that.

You act. You've performed in comic operas and conducted music. You've written books and paint. For "Art Happens Here," you lean into being a novice. What's the takeaway message?

Creating a show like this is to try to persuade people just to wake up. I mean, you've got to think about the children, especially after the children have endured two years of a pandemic. Two years of pandemic has been hard on all of this, all of us, but they've been catastrophic for kids. Kids are not used to going to school. They lost two years, and two years in the life of a child is an eternity.

How did you decide which classes to take?

I wanted it to be things that I'm not good at or had very little experience with, if any. I didn't want to do any theater. I wanted to do things that were technically difficult. I wanted to insert myself into a situation where I still had a lot to learn or a lot to remember. I wanted to be with a bunch of bright kids who were having a lot of fun with the new kid in class and trying to bring him up to speed.



PHOTOS BY ANTONIO DIAZ/AP

Actor John Lithgow, right, with a student at the Debbie Allen Dance Academy during the filming of "Art Happens Here with John Lithgow," premiering Friday.

What kind of reaction did you get from the students?

They weren't particularly dazzled by my presence. Not a lot of them, to my dismay, really knew who I was, until somebody mentioned "Shrek," you know? And that was only my voice. But they were very game, and they were such superb kids. Look, these were kids who had decided to go to dance class. They had decided to go to the LA County High School of the Arts to study voice. They were serious about what they did, and they knew this was well-intentioned.

What did you think of the experience?

It was incredible fun. It was very hard work because these were rigorous things. It's not easy showing up to do a documentary every morning for two months, but it's fun. It's a very good thing that we captured my own insecurity. I knew it was important for me to look like the fool and for the kids to



Lithgow works on a screen print drawing with a student during the filming of "Art Happens Here with John Lithgow."

look like the experts and ... watch me fail and fail until I had a tiny measure of success — and to try to capture that joy. Because joy is what it was all about.

Wilson, Heart still kicking

By RODNEY HO

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Nancy Wilson, at age 70, can still perform her signature kick move while sporting her guitar.

"I can do that and more!" she said on a Zoom call from her home in Sonoma, Calif., on the eve of the 2024 Heart tour. "I can't not dance and move."

The North American tour, which will run through mid-December, started April 20. It's the first time the band has hit the road since 2019. "I'm happy for us to be together again," Wilson said. "It's been a little too long for us to get back out there."

Wilson said a combination of the pandemic and behind-the-scenes management changes delayed Heart's return. For the first time, she and her sister, Ann Wilson, have different managers, resulting in what she called "power grabbing" disputes.

"There were extra moving parts to sort out what was highly unnecessary drama," she said. "We finally sorted it out."

The band spent more than a week in rehearsals before the tour began.

"There are a lot of things about Heart songs that are not simple," Wilson said. "There are intricacies in these songs to get right."

At the same time, perfection is not the goal: "It will be fun regardless of the mistakes that we make. In my view, it's definitely a human show."

She still gets plenty of joy being on stage performing rock classics like "Magic Man," "Barracuda" and "Crazy on You," along with "These Dreams," in which she sings lead.

The rituals before the concert, though, are far different than they were in the cocaine-addled 1980s.

"We used to be made out of rubber in our 30s," she said. "We now have a wellness space for massage and strengthening."

Over the decades, both sisters have worked in other bands, but they always come back to Heart, which Wilson dubs "the family business."



TNS

Nancy Wilson says that perfection is not the goal on the 2024 Heart tour.

"We've had a band together since I was like 9," she said. "We've always been tight and soulmates and best friends. We've had our ups and downs. Mostly outside influences have made it challenging for us to find our emotional footing with each other. But first and foremost we are sisters."

Hilton producing 'Toxic' docuseries on mistreatment of female celebrities

From wire services

Paris Hilton is reportedly working on a docuseries about media's "toxic" treatment of female celebrities — including herself — in the early 2000s.

Hilton's production company, 11:11 Media, has optioned Sarah Ditum's book, "Toxic: Women, Fame, and the Tabloid 2000s," according to multiple outlets.

Ditum, a journalist for The Sunday Times, will collaborate with 11:11 on the series, according to Variety.

The book, which hit shelves in January, centers on the misogyny that fueled tabloid coverage of celebs such as Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, Janet Jackson, Amy Winehouse, Kim Kardashian, Jennifer Aniston and Britney Spears (whose iconic 2003 song seems to have inspired the book's title).

The project is in line with Hilton's activism, including "her mission to empower survivors of the 'Troubled Teens Industry,'" her website notes. Hilton has said she

was a victim of physical, sexual and psychological abuse at residential treatment programs meant to reform misbehaving teens.

Kid Cudi cancels tour after fall at Coachella

Kid Cudi is canceling his upcoming Insano: Engage the Rage World Tour after finding out his broken ankle is "much more serious" than he thought.

The entertainer suffered the injury at the Coachella music festival in Indio last weekend after jumping off of the stage.

The U.S. leg of the Insano tour was supposed to start June 28 in Austin, Texas, and conclude Aug. 30 in Los Angeles. Kid Cudi planned to head to Europe in early 2025; it's unclear whether that part of the tour is still on.

In a video posted this week, Kid Cudi said, "This is what happens when a 40-year-old tries to prance around offstage like he's 26, like he used to do back in the day."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

State senator arrested on suspicion of burglary

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A state senator who also serves as an Air National Guard lieutenant colonel was arrested on suspicion of burglary early Monday in the northwestern Minnesota city of Detroit Lakes, police said.

Democratic Sen. Nicole Mitchell, 49, of Woodbury, was being held in the Becker County Jail on suspicion of first-degree burglary. Formal charges are pending, Detroit Lakes Police Chief Steve Todd said.

Senate Democrats hold just a one-seat majority with four weeks left in the legislative session.

Mitchell worked as a meteorologist with the U.S. military and for KSTP-TV and Minnesota Public Radio before she was elected to the Senate in 2022 from a suburban St. Paul district. She commands an Air National Guard weather unit, her official profile says.

Dispatchers received a 911 call at 4:45 a.m. from a homeowner about “an active burglary in process at her residence,” Todd said in an interview. Officers searched the home and arrested Mitchell, Todd said.

Public records and an obituary posted by a Detroit Lakes funeral home show that Mitchell’s father, who died last month, and stepmother lived on the same block of the same road as where the senator was arrested.

Charges filed after crash into building kills 2 kids

MI BERLINTOWNSHIP — A Michigan woman was charged Tuesday with second-degree murder and other crimes after prosecutors say she drunkenly smashed her SUV into a boat club that was hosting a birthday party, killing two young siblings and injuring several other people.

Marshella Chidester, 66, faces eight counts in Saturday’s crash at the Swan Boat Club in Monroe County, about 30 miles south of Detroit, court records show.

The Detroit News reported that Chidester is a former commodore at the boat club.

The crash killed 8-year-old Alannah Phillips and her 4-year-old brother, Zayn Phillips, the sheriff’s office said. Their mother and another sibling were among the injured.

Migrants indicted over alleged border breach

TX EL PASO — A Texas grand jury indicted more than 140 migrants on misdemeanor rioting charges Tuesday over an alleged mass attempt to breach the U.S.-Mexico border, a day after a judge threw out the cases.

No injuries were reported during the alleged breach on April 12 in El Paso, which authorities say began when someone in the group cut through a razor wire barrier. Mass arrests also followed a separate episode in the Texas border city in



BECKY BOHRER/AP

Quite a kayak destination

Kayakers on Mendenhall Lake draw near to the face of Mendenhall Glacier on Sunday, in Juneau, Alaska. The glacier, which is retreating and thinning, is a popular attraction, though many view it from a greater distance, from trails on the other side of the lake.

March.

On Monday, a county judge had thrown out the charges against those who were arrested this month, ruling there was insufficient probable cause. A public defender representing the migrants had argued there was not enough evidence and accused authorities of trying to make headlines.

Judge OKs phone surveys of jury pool in Idaho case

ID BOISE — Defense attorneys for a man charged in the deaths of four University of Idaho students can resume phone surveys of potential jurors in the case, a judge has ruled.

Bryan Kohberger faces four murder charges in connection with the November 2022 stabbing deaths of Ethan Chapin, Xana Kernodle, Madison Mogen and Kaylee Goncalves.

Kohberger’s defense team hired a consultant to survey potential jurors living near the university about things they might have seen, heard or read about the case. The phone survey included questions about Kohberger’s arrest, the type of car he owns, DNA evidence and a knife sheath found near one of the bodies.

When prosecutors became aware of the survey earlier this year, they asked 2nd District Judge John Judge to order the defense team to stop, arguing that the surveys violated a broad gag order the judge had issued in the case. Latah

County Prosecutor Bill Thompson said some of the questions could prejudice people who could be called to serve as jurors when the case goes to trial.

In his ruling, Judge said the surveys could continue as long as the questions do not violate his gag order. Most of the questions included information already publicly available through court documents, the judge wrote in the ruling, and so did not violate the order.

USPS to reroute mail despite ballot concerns

NV LAS VEGAS — The USPS announced on Tuesday it will follow through with its plan to reroute Reno-area mail processing to Sacramento, Calif., a move that drew bipartisan ire from Nevada lawmakers while raising questions about the rate at which mail ballots can be processed in a populous part of a crucial swing state.

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy has cast the permanent measure as a cost saving move, but federal, state and local lawmakers have complained about a lack of transparency in the process that could slow mail throughout the region.

Under the plan, all mail from the Reno area will pass through Sacramento before reaching its destination — even from one side of the city to the other.

Democratic Secretary of State Cisco Aguilar, the state’s top elec-

tion official, previously said moving operations could slow the processing of mail ballots, and “has the potential to disenfranchise thousands of Nevada voters and would unquestionably impact the results of Nevada’s elections.”

In the Tuesday statement, the USPS said “the business case” supported moving the processes to California, because most of the mail processed in Reno is destined elsewhere. The Reno facility will stay open as an area that prepares mail before it’s sent out.

Woman convicted of dismembering landlord

IL CHICAGO — A Chicago woman has been convicted of killing and dismembering her landlord and putting some of the victim’s remains inside a freezer in the boarding house where she lived.

A Cook County jury convicted Sandra Kolalou, 37, late Monday of all the charges she faced, including first-degree murder, dismembering a body, concealing a homicidal death, and aggravated identity theft, news outlets reported. Her sentencing is scheduled for June 20.

Prosecutors said Frances Walker, 69, had served Kolalou with an eviction notice from a boarding house she owned before Kolalou killed and dismembered her in October 2022.

Kolalou, whose attorneys plan to appeal the verdict, was arrested and charged after Walker’s severed

head, arms and legs were discovered inside a kitchen freezer at the home on Chicago’s northwest side.

Family: Woman charged in robbery was scammed

OH FAIRFIELD TOWNSHIP — A 74-year-old woman charged in the armed robbery of an Ohio credit union last week is a victim of an online scam who may have been trying to solve her financial problems, according to her relatives.

Ann Mayers, who had no previous run-ins with the law, faces counts of aggravated robbery with a firearm and tampering with evidence in Friday’s robbery in Fairfield Township, north of Cincinnati.

Officers arrested Mayers at her Hamilton home shortly after the robbery, Fairfield police said in a Facebook post. A handgun was found in her car, which police said she used in the robbery.

Authorities have since learned Mayers may have been a scam victim. Her relatives told detectives that she had been sending money to an unidentified individual, The Columbus Dispatch reported Wednesday.

Sgt. Brandon McCroskey told the newspaper that Mayers reportedly spoke with family members about robbing banks in the days leading up to the holdup, but they didn’t take her comments seriously.

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The Daily Guide to Navigating The Military Business Market



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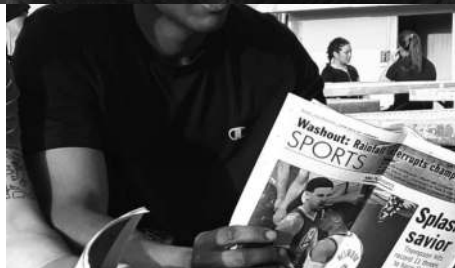


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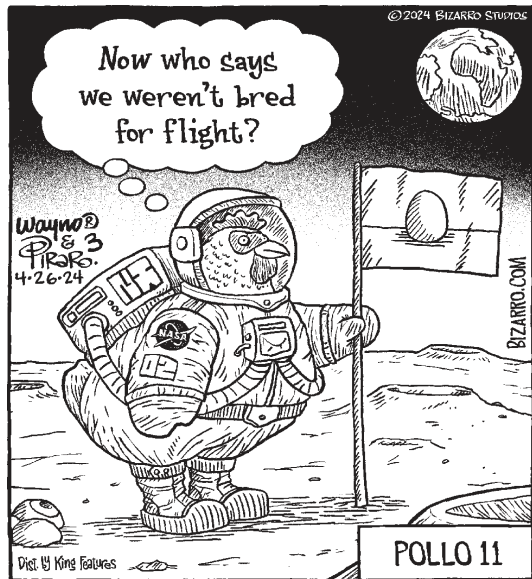
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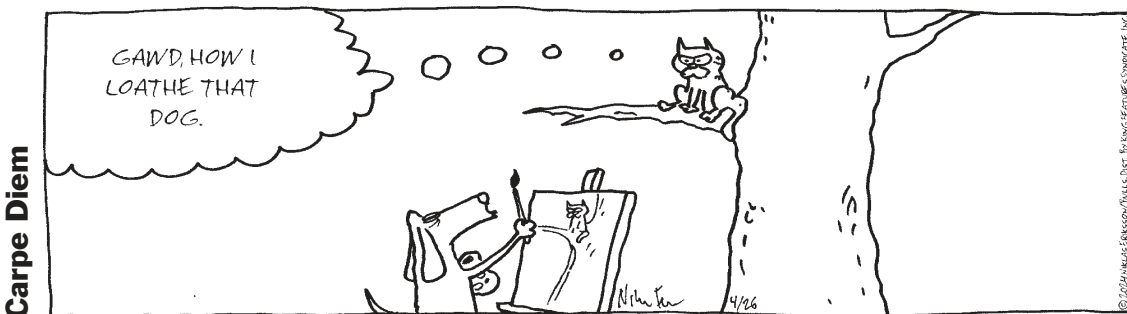
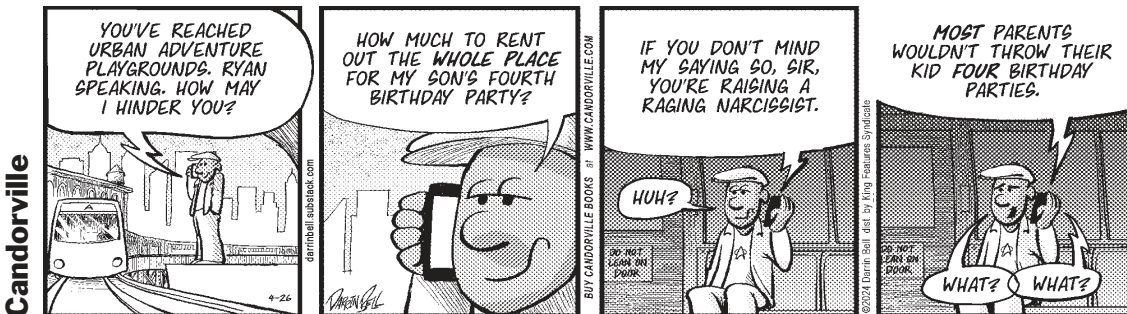
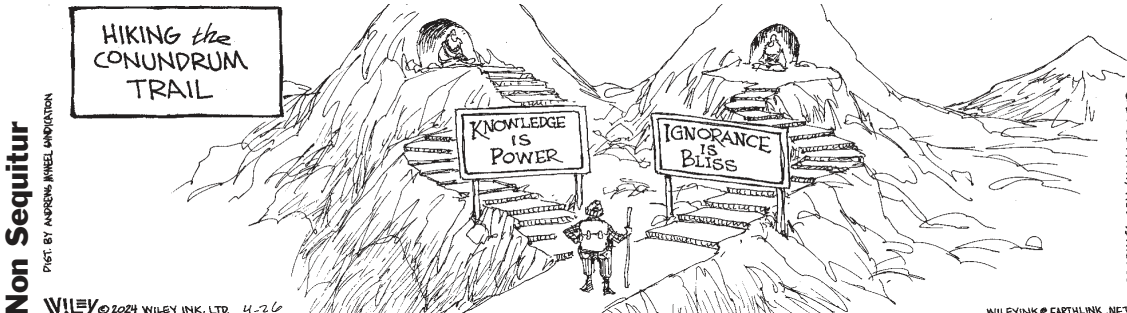
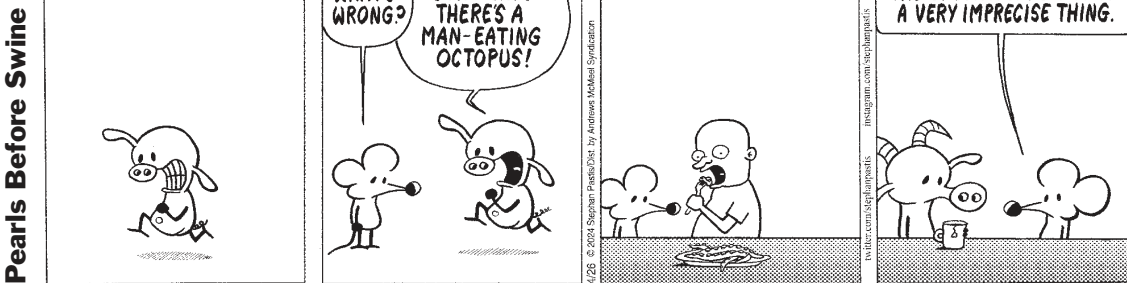
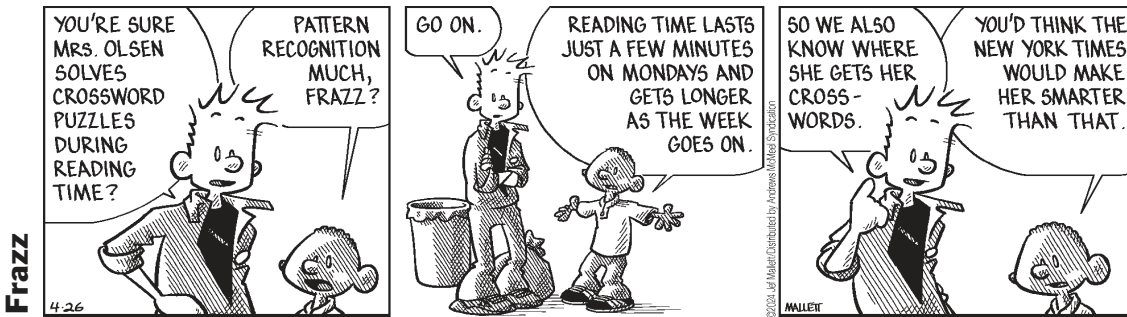


Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | | 4 | 5 | 6 | | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 12 | | | | 13 | | | | 14 | | | | |
| 15 | | | | 16 | | | | 17 | | | | |
| 18 | | | | 19 | | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | 21 | | 22 | | | | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| | | | 27 | 28 | | | | 29 | 30 | | | |
| 31 | 32 | 33 | | | | | | 34 | | | | |
| 35 | | | | | 36 | | | 37 | | | | |
| 38 | | | | | 39 | 40 | | | 41 | 42 | 43 | 44 |
| | | | | | 45 | | | | 46 | | 47 | |
| 48 | 49 | 50 | 51 | | | | | | | | 52 | |
| 53 | | | | | | | 54 | | | | 55 | |
| 56 | | | | | | | 57 | | | | 58 | |



ACROSS

- 1 Indent key
- 4 Qt. fractions
- 7 Group of plotters
- 12 Genetic letters
- 13 Churchill gesture
- 14 Martini garnish
- 15 MSN rival
- 16 Broadcast genre with "call-in" segments
- 18 Rx writers
- 19 Beer mug
- 20 Pants part
- 22 Trio after Q
- 23 Low voice
- 27 2016 Olympics city
- 29 Crude stone artifact
- 31 No-frills
- 34 Move laterally
- 35 Viral winter woe
- 37 Silent penalty
- 38 Speeding
- 39 Sony rival
- 41 Incubator noise
- 45 Catcher Posada
- 47 Status follower
- 48 Hit song by Queen
- 52 Mentalist Geller
- 53 Imbibe
- 54 Bracketed word
- 55 Charged bit
- 56 Backbone
- 57 Furtive laugh
- 58 Calif. clock setting

DOWN

- 1 Streetcars
- 2 Battery part
- 3 Lightweight wood
- 4 USMC ranks
- 5 Italian playhouse
- 6 Tennis great Monica
- 7 Muffin type
- 8 Mode lead-in
- 9 eBay offer
- 10 Bird (Pref.)
- 11 Zodiac feline
- 17 Flying toy
- 21 Navajo or Hopi
- 23 Airship
- 24 Help
- 25 Cardinal cap letters
- 26 "Thar — blows!"
- 28 Hosp. area

- 30 Buckeyes' sch.
- 31 Favorite pal, for short
- 32 "Love Story" actress MacGraw
- 33 Early riser?
- 36 Pirate's quaff
- 37 Smith of "Downton Abbey"
- 40 Collision
- 42 Furnish with gear
- 43 Continental cash
- 44 Gist
- 45 Gag
- 46 Apiece
- 48 Hwys.
- 49 Dadaist Jean
- 50 Cato's 502
- 51 Hostel

Answer to Previous Puzzle

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| J | O | G | | S | A | R | I | | T | W | A | S | | |
| A | D | E | | U | S | E | R | | U | H | O | H | | |
| G | E | N | I | T | I | V | E | | N | I | N | A | | |
| | | | | T | R | U | | S | N | E | E | Z | E | |
| B | O | L | E | R | O | | | E | L | F | | | | |
| A | B | E | | E | L | K | | L | U | N | A | R | | |
| D | I | S | C | | D | I | F | | L | I | L | A | | |
| E | S | T | O | P | | N | B | A | | T | E | T | | |
| | | | | | | N | A | P | | I | M | F | R | E |
| R | A | V | I | O | L | I | | O | R | O | | | | |
| E | P | I | C | | | A | N | D | R | O | G | E | N | |
| B | E | L | A | | | T | I | N | A | | E | L | O | |
| A | X | E | L | | | E | T | A | L | | N | I | T | |

4-26

CRYPTOQUIP

GA WJIXNJUD QSJ'W QXP
 WIJJRSXW QSGYX CGRMGTE
 BC V PJQXY, G EBXWW PSVP'W
 V MGWW NXAJKX UKDGTE.
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: HUGE FACILITY IN MANHATTAN FOR DRIVERS TO TEMPORARILY LEAVE CARS AND TRUCKS: CENTRAL PARKING.
 Today's Cryptoquip Clue: E equals G

Bizarro

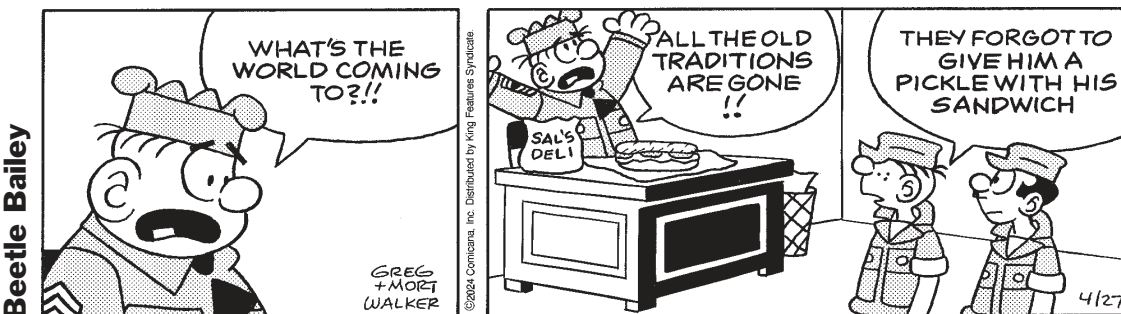
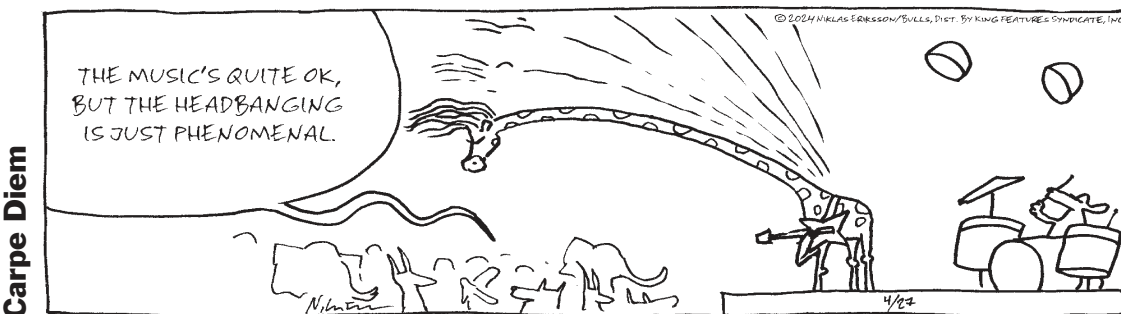
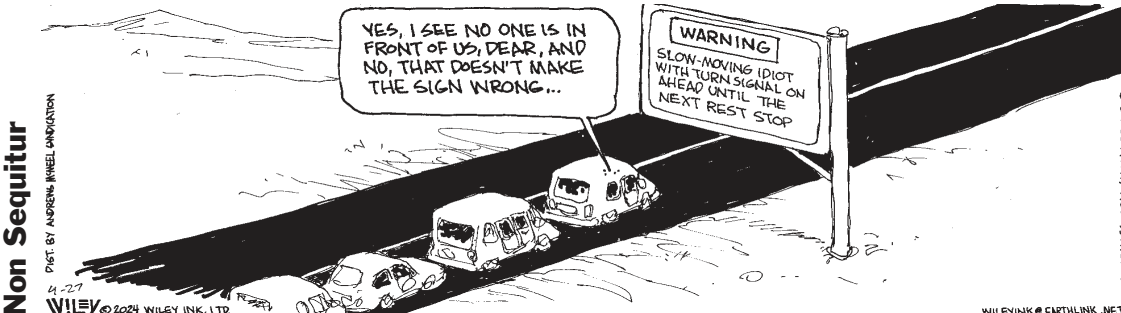
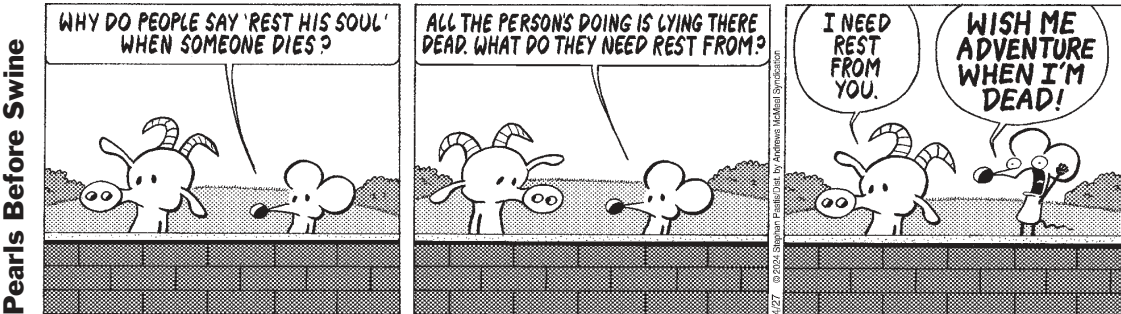


Loose Parts



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

Grid for Eugene Sheffer Crossword with numbered squares.



ACROSS

- 1 Distant
4 Exploits
8 Pleased
12 Pub serving
13 Vincent van —
14 Pasta sauce brand
15 Meadow
16 "Superfood" berry
17 Inter —
18 Kid's front-yard business
21 "Bad" cholesterol
22 Recline
23 Alpha's opposite
26 Do sums
27 Storefront sign abbr.
30 NYC gallery
31 Hosp. workers
32 Naturalist John
33 Stickum
34 Bit of butter
35 Saturn features
36 Plant seeds
37 Chick's mom
38 Slogan of solidarity
45 QB Tony
46 Comic Jay
47 Golf prop
48 Winged
49 Count counterpart
50 "Sheesh!"

- 51 Like some lingerie
52 Terrier type
53 Devious

- 24 Cattle call
25 Punk-rock subgenre
26 Curator's concern
27 Attila, notably
28 Equip
29 Fourth-yr. students
31 Idles
32 Gum flavor, often
34 "Ulalume" writer
35 Fix a shoe
36 Bedtime reading
37 Ford or Hudson
38 Russian river
39 The Big Easy acronym
40 Apple on a desk
41 Feeble
42 \$ dispensers
43 Actress Patricia
44 Contradict

DOWN

- 1 Autumn
2 Sheltered
3 500 sheets
4 Kampala's land
5 L.A.'s region
6 "Zounds!"
7 "Suddenly Susan" actress Brooke
8 Shred, as cheese
9 In — land
10 Opposite of "fer"
11 Group of two
19 "Three Sisters" sister
20 "Ice Age" sloth
23 Texter's "Wow!"

Answer to Previous Puzzle

Grid for Answer to Previous Puzzle with words like TAB, RNA, AOL, MDS, SEAT, BASIC, FINE, RADIO, DRINK, SPINE, etc.

4-27

CRYPTOQUIP

CDUB ORGCDSBC BORXMG UBY'C
OROWUYF, TVC UC UB KN
OZZGXCOTMG PVOMUCS. UC'B
XOA NKA CDG PVOACW.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF SOMEBODY WHO'S WET SMOUCHES WHILE PICKING UP A TOWEL, I GUESS THAT'S A KISS BEFORE DRYING.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: P equals Q

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OPINION

How Ukraine can make best use of new US aid

BY DAVID IGNATIUS

The Washington Post

The approval of more than \$60 billion in new military aid for Ukraine feels like the cavalry riding into town to save the day for the good guys. It's a moment to savor for a briefly bipartisan Washington — and even more for the embattled troops on the front lines in Ukraine.

But let's be frank: Delivery of a big U.S. aid package will mean a continuation of this bloody war of attrition, not an ending. While it's a psychological breakthrough for Kyiv and a setback for Moscow, any decisive change on the battlefield will depend on how Ukraine uses the American weapons — especially on its ability to put Russian positions in occupied Crimea at risk.

The potential game changers in the conflict are the newly arriving ATACM-300 medium-range missiles. These precision weapons will allow Ukraine to strike deep into Russian-occupied territory in Crimea, Donbas and coastal regions — hitting Russian airfields, supply depots, staging areas and command-and-control centers within Ukraine.

The ATACMS “will degrade Russian logistics inside Ukraine in the near term,” a senior administration official said on Tuesday. “In the longer term, Russia will have to reconsider its strategy.” That might eventually open the way for a just negotiated peace.

Russian analysts recognize they've lost momentum. With the new American aid, “some increase in Ukraine's defensive potential is possible, and offensive as well,” according to Dmitry Stefanovich, a researcher for a think tank associated with the Russian Academy of Sciences. He added that on a “symbolic” level, the U.S. aid “will clearly raise the morale of the Ukrainian armed forces.”

Vasily Kashin, another analyst in Moscow, warned of new military pressure on Russia.

“Ukraine will have additional high-precision weapons that it will use against our troops and our territory.” He added that new air-defense weapons for Ukraine “will again limit the use of Russian aviation,” which in recent weeks had been striking power plants and other targets in Ukraine almost at will.

The two Russian experts' comments were quoted this week by a Russian-language website called RTVI. They were translated and sent to me on Tuesday by retired Army Brig. Gen. Kevin Ryan, a former defense attaché in Moscow.

How quickly can the new U.S. weapons be delivered to Ukraine? William B. Taylor Jr., a former U.S. ambassador to Kyiv, believes that because the Pentagon pre-positioned ammunition and other supplies in southern Poland, the new supplies could arrive “in days.” Administration officials agree that some critical artillery ammunition could even be delivered within hours, depending on how many trucks Ukraine can assemble.

Ukraine has been running desperately low on air-defense systems, and here, too, congressional action will reduce the likelihood of disaster. Defending Ukraine's skies is a complicated problem because the country has a mix of NATO and Soviet-era systems. Congressional action will allow quick shipment of U.S. interceptors, and the Biden administration is racing to get Soviet gear from partner nations that used to be allied with Moscow.

Ukraine's sagging air defenses will also be bolstered by what the Pentagon calls its “FrankenSAM” program to adapt Soviet-built launchers to use U.S. surface-to-air missiles. That hybrid experiment has succeeded, the senior administration official said.

U.S. officials are urging the Ukrainians to use the new military aid to consolidate their lines and hold tight through the rest of 2024, rather than rush another counteroffensive

like last year's unsuccessful push toward the Sea of Azov. “We need them to build strength this year to be able to take back territory next year,” the senior administration official said.

The Russian analysts caution that Ukraine, for all its recent troubles, was not on the brink of collapse. “In fact... there has been no failure at the front, there is no abandonment of large and even small cities. Ukrainian servicemen are not surrendering en masse, etc.,” observed the RTVI commentary, adding that Ukraine has “an impressive number” of troops in reserve.

“The Russians are as tired and demoralized as the Ukrainians are,” argued Taylor. Though Moscow and Kyiv have both been buzzing with rumors of a big Russian attack, Taylor is skeptical. “If the Russians had the capability to break through, they would have done it” during the months of delay on the U.S. aid package, he said.

A model for Ukraine's resistance is Finland, which fought off Russian domination for 75 years before finally joining NATO last year. That story is told in a new Russian and English translation of a book titled “How Finland Survived Stalin,” which is being closely read in Moscow, according to Finland's ambassador to Washington, Mikko Hautala.

Josef Stalin thought he could overrun Finland, just as Vladimir Putin believed he could dominate Ukraine. Each believed he wasn't facing a real country, but rather reconquering a wayward remnant of the Russian empire. To paraphrase a line from the book: What is the idea of Ukraine? To survive.

Thanks to President Joe Biden and a strong bipartisan majority in Congress — and most of all to what might be hundreds of thousands of dead and wounded Ukrainians who fought through the darkest moments — the survival of an independent Ukraine looks more certain today than it did a week ago.

Generation Z is key to securing America's elections

BY DAVID LEVINE
AND MASSIMILIANO ALBANESE*The Fulcrum*

America's elections are under unprecedented threat. From foreign interference in the 2016 presidential race to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection, the integrity of our democratic process has been repeatedly targeted in recent years. Safeguarding it against future attacks requires an often-overlooked resource: Generation Z.

Young Americans have come of age during a time of unparalleled challenges to our democracy. They have witnessed the erosion of trust in our institutions, the rise of polarization and misinformation, and the vulnerability of our electoral systems to both domestic and foreign malicious actors. This tumultuous introduction to the political landscape has left many in Gen Z both disillusioned and eager to be part of the solution.

Yet when we speak with election officials and their partners about engaging the next generation in their work, the conversation centers mostly on poll worker recruitment and awareness-raising. While these are important initiatives, they fail to recognize the full potential of young people as partners in the fight for election security. To truly empower Gen Z to make a difference, we must invest in programs that provide them with hands-on experience and training, engaging youth to ensure a continuous pipeline of knowledge-

able individuals joining the space. The Virginia Cyber Navigator Internship Program, a collaboration between the Virginia Department of Elections and six Virginia universities, offers one powerful model.

After Russian-affiliated actors targeted voter registration databases and state election websites across the United States in 2016, Virginia lawmakers required that local election offices meet minimum requisite cybersecurity standards. However, many officials still lacked the money, personnel, or knowledge to both meet these standards and upgrade their election infrastructure security.

The VA Cyber Navigator Internship Program, which deploys college students with elections and cybersecurity training to help Virginia's local election offices improve their security posture, was created to address that gap. The students first take an election security course developed by the universities and the Virginia Department of Elections that provides specialized training on the significance of voting and the technical issues associated with securing election processes (the authors of this piece co-teach the election security course offered at George Mason University).

Upon completing this training, students are eligible to apply for the internship program. Selected students work as interns at local election offices throughout Virginia for 10 weeks in the summer.

Deploying technically savvy students with specialized cybersecurity training to assist lo-

cal election offices provides valuable hands-on experience for students while addressing a critical need for officials. However, recent developments at both the federal and state levels raise concerns about our commitment to prioritizing election security. The paltry \$55 million allocated for this purpose in the fiscal 2024 federal budget, along with some states' reluctance to collaborate with CISA, suggests a troubling failure to treat the integrity of our democratic process as the national security imperative that it is.

Investing in the education and engagement of young people cultivates a cadre of informed, committed individuals who understand the gravity of the threats we face. We can build a stronger, more resilient democracy that is better prepared to withstand the challenges posed by those who seek to undermine it. Our adversaries, both foreign and domestic, have demonstrated their willingness to exploit any vulnerability in our electoral infrastructure.

Strengthening that infrastructure demands fresh thinking and new perspectives — precisely what Gen Z has to offer. The future of our democracy depends, in part, on our ability to inspire and empower young people to take up this cause as their own.

David Levine is senior elections integrity fellow at the German Marshall Fund's Alliance for Securing Democracy, where he assesses vulnerabilities in electoral infrastructure, administration and policies. Massimiliano Albanese is associate professor and associate chair for research in the Department of Information Science and Technology at George Mason University.

GOLF/AUTO RACING

Suddenly, a double dose of dominance

By DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C. — Golf went a decade without being able to identify a dominant player. And then within the last month, the sport suddenly has two of them.

Scottie Scheffler won his first PGA Tour event in the Phoenix Open two years ago and now he has 10 tour titles, two of them at the Masters.

Not only is he the No. 1 player in the world, he has double the average points of the next player, Rory McIlroy. That hasn't happened since Tiger Woods doubled the world rankings lead over Phil Mickelson toward the end of 2009.

Nelly Korda went through 2023 without winning on the LPGA Tour — her only title was the Aramco Series in London on the Ladies European Tour — and ended the year at No. 5 in the women's world rankings. Now she is in the LPGA record book with five straight victories and is close to having double the points average of Lilia Vu, who won two majors last year.

It all seems to have happened so quickly, except that it really hasn't.

Korda possesses all the traits of a star.

She has the athletic genes — an older sister (Jessica) on the LPGA Tour, a younger brother (Sebastian) who is No. 26 in the world in tennis, a father (Petr) who won his lone Grand Slam event in tennis at the 1998 Australian Open.

Her swing is so pure that even the late Mickey Wright, regarded as the greatest LPGA player, took notice in a 2017 Golf Digest interview. That was a year before Korda won the first of her 13 LPGA titles.

Korda first rose to No. 1 when she captured the Women's PGA Championship at Atlanta Athletic Club in 2021, and then won the Olympic gold medal in Japan. What she lost was momentum — surgery for a blood clot in her left arm that cost her four months in 2022, and then a back injury in the late spring of 2023 that cost her a month.

She exudes a cool demeanor, ruthless at times, and her quiet toughness is a good fit with swing coach Jamie Mulligan. He says Korda has "shooter's adrenaline," a basket-



ERIC GAY, LEFT, CHRIS CARLSON, RIGHT/AP

Nelly Korda, left, and Scottie Scheffler watch their shots last week. Korda tied the LPGA record with her fifth straight win and second major title. Scheffler has been No. 1 for almost a year and has won two straight events, including his second Masters.

ball reference.

"If the mind is quiet, even if your heart is going, you can get yourself in the right spot," Mulligan said.

Now she is fully fit and listening to her body. Korda won before a home crowd in Bradenton, Fla., skipped the entire Asia swing, returned after seven weeks off and won four in a row.

Her victory at the Chevron Championship, her fifth straight win to tie the LPGA record, never looked in doubt. It was surprising to hear Korda talk about the grind, her nerves and that she felt "sick to my stomach." No telling how the rest of the tour must feel.

"I think there's a key in the simplicity that I have when I play."

Nelly Korda

No. 1 player on LPGA Tour

his putting seem worse than it really is. He got into some bad habits last year that made the putter look like a piece of kryptonite at the end of a shaft. That has been sorted out.

"I think there's a key in the simplicity that I have when I play," Korda said. "I honestly just take it a shot at a time, and we pick a game plan when we get to the golf course and we work and we stay in our own little bubble. It's been working so far."

That's how Scheffler makes it look.

He picks a target. He swings the club. It goes where he's looking.

No one is better from tee to green, which can make to green, which can make his putting seem worse than it really is. He got into some bad habits last year that made the putter look like a piece of kryptonite at the end of a shaft. That has been sorted out.

And that's frightening for the rest of golf.

When he polished off his latest clinic Monday morning in the rain-delayed RBC Heritage, Scheffler was asked about the worst shot he hit in the final round.

It stumped him. Scheffler finally settled on a 3-wood he tugged off the tee on the eighth hole. It just trickled into the left rough.

But that was the point of the question. He never seems to miss.

"I didn't know what you were getting at there," he said with a laugh. "And I was thinking through my shots and I was like ... yeah, I felt like I hit a lot of quality shots, and the ball was coming out of the face. It seemed like if a shot didn't end up where I wanted it to, it was probably just a little gust of wind."

Korda and Scheffler will disappear now for a few weeks.

Korda withdrew from the JM Eagle LA Championship on Monday — probably a smart move for her and the long year ahead, brutal for the LPGA just when it was poised to create room on the Nelly bandwagon — and is not expected back until May 9 for the Cognizant Founders Cup in New Jersey.

Scheffler said he will not be back until the PGA Championship on May 16-19. His wife, Meredith, is expecting to give birth to their first child by the end of the month.

Scheffler is approaching a full year at No. 1 in the world, a rarity in men's golf. Dustin Johnson (64 weeks) and McIlroy (54 weeks) are the only ones to have done that post-Woods. After that first victory, it took Scheffler only 50 tournaments to get the next nine.

This form didn't just show up overnight. It just seems that way because of his putting funk.

"I was No. 1 in the world for a long time last year," Scheffler said. "But I was never answering questions like, 'Hey, you've been playing so great.' It was more like, 'Hey, you've been playing great, BUT you've been doing this one thing really, really bad.'"

He laughed, because laughter comes easily to Scheffler. So does winning.

Power denies participating in Penske scandal

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

Will Power said Thursday he was unaware of any manipulations to Team Penske's push-to-power system until after last weekend's IndyCar race at Long Beach and never illegally used the mechanism.

Team Penske is under heavy scrutiny following the March 10 season-opening race at St. Petersburg, Fla., in which Josef Newgarden was stripped of the victory and Scott McLaughlin, who finished third, was also disqualified.

Power finished fourth and while his result was not thrown out, he was docked 10 points and all three Penske drivers were fined \$25,000. Power has not been accused of any wrongdoing by Indy-

Car but was punished because the manipulated systems were found on all three Penske cars following Sunday morning's warmup in California.

"I was disappointed to learn about the penalty that we received this week from IndyCar," Power wrote on social media. "There was an oversight by our team and I was unaware of the situation until it was brought to our attention following Long Beach.

"As per the rules, I did not utilize the P2P capabilities during any start or restart during the St. Petersburg race," he continued. "While I accept the penalty, I want it to be known that I did nothing wrong and followed the rules."

Team Penske has maintained that the push-to-pass system on its



Penske

three Chevrolets was utilized in a test session for upcoming hybrid engines and then mistakenly not replaced before the start of the season. It remained on the cars for three races and Newgarden onboard videos clearly show the reigning Indianapolis 500 winner illegally using push-to-pass to gain position on at least one restart.

McLaughlin in a Wednesday night statement said he used the system for less than 2 seconds and gained no positions on the track. He said he pushed the button out of habit.

IndyCar prohibits the use of the

push-to-pass system on starts and restarts and the button isn't even supposed to work on those occasions. The issue was discovered Sunday in California when a glitch in the system knocked push-to-pass out on all cars except the three Penske entries.

IndyCar then examined the units, found them to be illegal, and forced the team to correct the systems before the race.

Roger Penske, who owns the race team, IndyCar and Indianapolis Motor Speedway, told The Associated Press "I am embarrassed" by the scandal. Newgarden has yet to address the issue but a Friday morning news conference has been scheduled at Barber Motorsports Park in Alabama. IndyCar has yet to present the

data that proves Newgarden manipulated his way to the victory. The disqualification dropped him from first to 11th in points and the scandal hit right before Friday night's Season 2 debut episode of "100 Days to Indy" in which Newgarden is the star.

Newgarden, in addition to being the reigning Indy 500 winner, is a two-time IndyCar champion and in a contract year with Penske. He's believed to be chasing a pay raise that would put him in line with the extensions recently signed by Colton Herta and Pato O'Ward, drivers with lesser credentials than Newgarden.

O'Ward was named the St. Pete winner following the disqualifications in Arrow McLaren's first victory since 2022.

NFL



GENEVA HEFFERNAN/AP

Denver Broncos wide receiver Brandon Johnson, right, played five seasons for Tennessee, but attributes his NFL career to being able to transfer to Central Florida and play closer to home for an extra season.

Prospects going to multiple schools no longer red flag

BY ARNIE STAPLETON
Associated Press

DENVER — Playing for multiple schools no longer raises a red flag for NFL talent evaluators in this day and age of the ever busier transfer portal and financial windfalls available to college football players before they're even old enough to buy a round of drinks.

That's a good thing for the nearly one-third of the 398 prospects invited to the NFL scouting combine in February who switched schools on their way to catching the attention of pro scouts ahead of Thursday's NFL Draft.

The list of players who capitalized on relaxed transfer rules includes USC quarterback Caleb Williams, who was the odds-on favorite to go first overall to the Chicago Bears on Thursday night. Williams spent his freshman year at Oklahoma before following coach Lincoln Riley to Los Angeles, where he threw for 72 touchdowns in two seasons with the Trojans.

Another is Heisman Trophy winner Jayden Daniels, who spent two seasons at LSU after playing three years at Arizona State.

"Transfers, in terms of impacting guys and grades, no, that's not really an issue anymore," said NFL Network draft analyst Daniel Jeremiah, a former pro scout. "I know once upon a time it would come up in draft meetings. But I'm old enough to remember when I first started in '03 we had discussions in the draft about a player having tattoos!

"Think how silly that is when we

fast-forward 20 years. Some things become less important. And nobody really cares about the transfer thing anymore."

Players can also make money long before declaring for the draft nowadays, and there's still an influx of athletes who took advantage of the NCAA's decision to give them an extra year of eligibility due to the pandemic.

One player who capitalized on that extra season was Denver Broncos wide receiver Brandon Johnson, who caught just one touchdown pass in five seasons at Tennessee, including one year that he ended up redshirting after four games.

Johnson, the son of former MLB catcher Charles Johnson, transferred to Central Florida, where he caught 11 touchdown passes in 13 games in 2021, catching the attention of the Broncos, who signed him as an undrafted free agent.

"I think a lot of guys transfer for circumstances that everybody may not know about. There's a lot that goes into it," Johnson said. "So I'm glad the negative stigma is gone.

"Before, they were looked at as though, 'Oh, this guy's afraid of competition or he can't stick it out if it gets tough.' So, yeah, I can definitely appreciate this new era."

Johnson said he never would have reached the NFL were it not for the chance to play an extra season close to home.

Of the 398 players invited to this year's combine, 121 of them attended more than one college or university.

Four of them transferred mul-

multiple times, including quarterbacks Kedon Slovis (USC, Pitt, BYU) and Jack Plummer (Purdue, Cal, Louisville). Outside linebacker Ovie Oghoufo played at Notre Dame, Texas and LSU and defensive end Eyabi Okie-Anoma played for Alabama, UT Martin and Michigan before finishing up at Charlotte.

In future drafts, there's likely to be even more players who bounce around to several schools on their way to the pros. College athletes are now eligible to play immediately no matter how many times they transfer — as long as they meet academic requirements — after the NCAA fast-tracked legislation to fall in line with a recent court order.

While transferring is no longer the taboo it once was, the nascent NIL frontier provides the pro talent evaluators with another inflection point, giving them a chance to see how prospective picks might handle fame and fortune.

Jeremiah said that when talent evaluators go back to "self-scout" and see why a certain player didn't work out, two things usually come up: "They don't know how to handle adversity and then the other thing is sometimes they don't know how to handle money, fame, all that kind of stuff that goes along with it, all the distractions that money can bring.

"So now, you're getting a chance to see them in that situation, basically being a professional before they even get to you and see how they handle themselves," Jeremiah said. "I think it can be a plus."

QB Young excited for 'new faces' in Carolina following 2-15 season

BY STEVE REED
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The Carolina Panthers spent more than \$150 million upgrading their offensive line and traded for wide receiver Diontae Johnson in an attempt to help quarterback Bryce Young maximize his potential.

Whether that helps Young take a much-needed step forward after going 2-14 as a rookie starter in 2023 remains to be seen.

But the second-year quarterback appeared pretty excited Tuesday about the organizational changes this offseason following the first practice under new head coach Dave Canales.

"It's just great to get some new faces in here," Young said after the first day of minicamp. "They are all hungry, and great players. ... There is a lot of new ideas, new energy and new people. Right now the mission is just for all of that to come together, and for us to get on the same page and focus in on turning this into a winning football team."

The Panthers invested a lot in Young last year, and it's absolutely vital to their future that he shows progression.

Carolina sent four draft picks and wide receiver D.J. Moore to the Chicago Bears to move up to the No. 1 spot in the draft last year to get Young, who won the 2021 Heisman Trophy at Alabama. It's a move that ultimately cost the Panthers the No. 1 overall pick in this week's NFL Draft after they finished 2-15, the worst record in the league.

Carolina does not have a first-round pick on Thursday night.

Young's struggles with the Panthers were only amplified by the success of C.J. Stroud, who was drafted one spot behind Young by

the Houston Texans.

Young averaged just 180 yards passing per game with 11 touchdowns and 10 interceptions.

It didn't help that he spent most of the season under duress, sacked 62 times — second most in the league. Young refused to say if constant pressure impacted his confidence, choosing to talk only about the future.

But new general manager Dan Morgan certainly felt the need to shore up the middle of the offensive line, signing guards Robert Hunt from the Dolphins to a five-year, \$100 million deal and Damian Lewis from the Seahawks to a four-year, \$53 million contract.

"I have that inside-out mentality," Canales said. "It starts up front. I've always believed that about football. It starts on the offensive line and defensive line. Getting those critical pieces, those were the first moves we made" in free agency.

Morgan also wanted more playmakers in the passing game, trading for Johnson. He will be paired with reliable veteran wideout Adam Thielen and last year's second-round pick Jonathan Mingo.

Johnson caught just 51 passes for 717 yards and five touchdowns last season for the Pittsburgh Steelers. But he's shown big-time star potential with 107 receptions for 1,161 yards and eight touchdowns in 2021.

Johnson said he's a player who can get open no matter where he is on the field. He said Tuesday that Canales has told him he will be the first option on most of Young's reads, a strong indication the Panthers view him as their No. 1 receiver.

"I'm here to make him better as a quarterback, to help him grow," Johnson said.



RUSTY JONES/AP

Carolina quarterback Bryce Young averaged just 180 yards passing per game last season with 11 touchdowns and 10 interceptions.

MLB

Pirates sticking to plan with Skenes

By WILL GRAVES
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Paul Skenes is looking every bit the ace the Pittsburgh Pirates thought they were getting when they selected the hard-throwing right-hander with the first overall pick in last year's draft.

Just don't expect Pirates general manager Ben Cherington to shift whatever internal timeline the club has on Skenes' arrival in Pittsburgh.

Yes, the 21-year-old has been electric at Triple-A Indianapolis, his fastball reaching triple digits with startling regularity. He was impressive again Wednesday, allowing two runs (one earned) in 4½ innings against Omaha while throwing 50 of his 71 pitches for strikes.

Skenes is clearing every hurdle the Pirates are putting in front of him. While his stuff looks ready for major-league hitters — Skenes has posted 34 strikeouts in 17 innings — Pittsburgh remains intent on bringing perhaps the most celebrated pitching prospect in 15 years along slowly.

"He's working on things that will allow him to be a good major league pitcher more than just he's trying to be a good AAA pitcher," Cherington said Wednesday.

That means not just overwhelming opponents with his fastball, but developing the rest of his expanding repertoire. Skenes has five different pitches at his disposal, including what is being called a "splinker," a mix between a splitter and a sinker.

The 71 pitches Skenes threw on Wednesday were his most in a professional start, though Cherington declined to get into specifics on what threshold he'd like to see Skenes get to before deeming him ready for a call-up.

Pitching efficiently can be a challenge for someone who encourages so much swing-and-miss. Strikeouts also tend to run up pitch counts, though Chering-



GERALD HERBERT/AP

Pittsburgh Pirates pitching prospect Paul Skenes has a 0.53 ERA through five starts at Triple-A this season, but GM Ben Cherington said Wednesday the club is in no rush to call up the top pick in the 2023 draft.

ton stressed he's not trying to turn Skenes into someone he's not.

"The guy that's gonna live on ground balls and nine-pitch innings, that may not be him," Cherington said. "It's efficiency related to who he is as a pitcher. That's what we're going after."

The Pirates have talked to other clubs about how to handle high-end pitching prospects, though Cherington said there is no real blueprint because every pitcher is different.

This slow, deliberate approach isn't limited to players in the minors. Pittsburgh has been intentional with dazzling rookie right-hander Jared Jones. The 22-year-old has recorded at least seven

strikeouts in each of his first five starts while being mindful of his pitch count.

Last week against the Mets, that meant getting pulled after needing just 59 pitches to get through five innings. Jones threw 91 pitches in a win over Milwaukee on Monday, including remaining in the game with the bases loaded and the Brewers threatening in the sixth. He got out of it while improving his record to 2-2 and lowering his ERA to 2.79.

"We're trying to win games and it's that balance between the battle of the day and the war over the next six months — five, six months," Cherington said, later adding "We don't have any sort of

secret, perfect recipe on how to do that, but we're trying to do the best we can every day."

While Quinn Priester could have started Wednesday against Milwaukee on four days' rest, the team opted for a bullpen game instead so that Priester — in his second season in the majors — could get an extra two days of rest before facing San Francisco on Friday. Veteran Mitch Keller took his regular turn in the rotation Thursday.

"We're going to try to find as many times early in the season to build in days (between starts)," manager Derek Shelton said. "And we just felt like this is one we could build in."

Ohtani off to torrid start in Dodgers debut

By PATRICK STEVENS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Shohei Ohtani's 450-foot home run Tuesday night at Nationals Park was the hardest hit of his career.

The Los Angeles Dodgers star's ninth-inning shot to the second deck in right field off Washington Nationals reliever Matt Barnes in the Dodgers' 4-1 win left his bat at 118.7 mph.

"I thought I hit it really good," Ohtani said Wednesday through his interpreter, Will Ireton. "I felt really good about it. Probably the best."

It is the hardest-hit home run by a Dodger in the Statcast era, which began in 2015. After hitting three doubles in Los Angeles' 11-2 win Wednesday, the designated hitter leads the majors in batting average (.371), slugging percentage (.695) and OPS (1.128). He has six home runs in his first 26 games with the Dodgers since sign-



Ohtani

"With Shohei, it's not just the slug, it's how hard he consistently hits the baseball," Roberts said. "I can't imagine a player hitting it that often, that hard consistently. That's what's remarkable to me. Even in years past, I would see him get some infield hits, but everything he hits, it seems like it's 110 off the bat."

Roberts said Ohtani was "in a class by himself" because of his ability to defend the strike zone from top to bottom and front to back while

also slugging at a high rate.

"What he's doing right now, I can't say it's never been done, but just the controlling of the strike zone, covering all the pitches, hitting to all the fields, versus left, versus right — and I get the best seat in the house every night," Roberts said. "I have a tendency to put my fan hat on at times."

Washington is the first stop in a three-city road trip for Los Angeles, which visits Toronto for a three-game series starting Friday.

It will be Ohtani's first trip to the city since meeting with Blue Jays officials when he was a free agent during the offseason. Before he signed with the Dodgers, there were false reports about him being on a flight to Toronto.

"I was just following the news and I knew I wasn't on that flight," Ohtani said. "So I was curious, too."

Scoreboard

American League

| East Division | | | | |
|------------------|----|----|------|----|
| | W | L | Pct | GB |
| New York | 17 | 8 | .680 | — |
| Baltimore | 16 | 8 | .667 | ½ |
| Boston | 14 | 11 | .560 | 3 |
| Toronto | 13 | 12 | .520 | 4 |
| Tampa Bay | 13 | 13 | .500 | 4½ |
| Central Division | | | | |
| | W | L | Pct | GB |
| Cleveland | 17 | 7 | .708 | — |
| Kansas City | 15 | 10 | .600 | 2½ |
| Detroit | 14 | 11 | .560 | 3½ |
| Minnesota | 10 | 13 | .435 | 6½ |
| Chicago | 3 | 21 | .125 | 14 |
| West Division | | | | |
| | W | L | Pct | GB |
| Texas | 13 | 12 | .520 | — |
| Seattle | 12 | 12 | .500 | ½ |
| Los Angeles | 10 | 15 | .400 | 3 |
| Oakland | 9 | 16 | .360 | 4 |
| Houston | 7 | 18 | .280 | 6 |

National League

| East Division | | | | |
|------------------|----|----|------|-----|
| | W | L | Pct | GB |
| Atlanta | 17 | 6 | .739 | — |
| Philadelphia | 15 | 10 | .600 | 3 |
| New York | 13 | 11 | .542 | 4½ |
| Washington | 10 | 13 | .435 | 7 |
| Miami | 6 | 20 | .231 | 12½ |
| Central Division | | | | |
| | W | L | Pct | GB |
| Milwaukee | 15 | 8 | .652 | — |
| Chicago | 15 | 9 | .625 | ½ |
| Cincinnati | 14 | 10 | .583 | 1½ |
| Pittsburgh | 13 | 12 | .520 | 3 |
| St. Louis | 11 | 14 | .440 | 5 |
| West Division | | | | |
| | W | L | Pct | GB |
| Los Angeles | 15 | 11 | .577 | — |
| San Diego | 14 | 13 | .519 | 1½ |
| Arizona | 12 | 14 | .462 | 3 |
| San Francisco | 12 | 14 | .462 | 3 |
| Colorado | 6 | 19 | .240 | 8½ |

Wednesday's games

St. Louis 5, Arizona 1
N.Y. Mets 8, San Francisco 2
Baltimore 6, L.A. Angels 5
Boston 8, Cleveland 0
Milwaukee 3, Pittsburgh 2
L.A. Dodgers 11, Washington 2
Tampa Bay 7, Detroit 5
N.Y. Yankees 7, Oakland 3
Cincinnati 7, Philadelphia 4
Atlanta 4, Miami 3, 10 innings
Minnesota 6, Chicago White Sox 3
Chicago Cubs 4, Houston 3
Kansas City 3, Toronto 2
San Diego 5, Colorado 2
Texas 5, Seattle 1

Thursday's games

Milwaukee at Pittsburgh
Philadelphia at Cincinnati
Boston at Cleveland
Chicago White Sox at Minnesota
Toronto at Kansas City
Houston at Chicago Cubs
Seattle at Texas
San Diego at Colorado
L.A. Dodgers at Washington
Oakland at N.Y. Yankees

Friday's games

Kansas City (TBD) at Detroit (Olson 0-3)
Oakland (Stripling 0-5) at Baltimore (Burnes 3-0)
L.A. Dodgers (TBD) at Toronto (TBD)
Chicago Cubs (TBD) at Boston (Crawford 1-0)
St. Louis (Mikolas 1-3) at N.Y. Mets (Butt 0-0)
Washington (TBD) at Miami (Luzardo 0-2)
Cleveland (Allen 3-0) at Atlanta (Sale 2-1)
Tampa Bay (Eflin 1-2) at Chicago White Sox (Flexen 0-3)
Cincinnati (Ashcraft 3-1) at Texas (Eovaldi 1-2)
N.Y. Yankees (TBD) at Milwaukee (Rea 2-0)
Minnesota (Ober 1-1) at L.A. Angels (Sandoval 1-3)
Philadelphia (TBD) at San Diego (Musgrave 3-2)
Arizona (Gallen 3-1) at Seattle (TBD)
Pittsburgh (Priester 0-1) at San Francisco (Harrison 2-1)

This date in baseball

April 26

1905 — Jack McCarthy of the Chicago Cubs becomes the only outfielder in major league history to throw out three runners at the plate, each of whom became the second out of a double play. The victims were the Pittsburgh Pirates in a 2-1 loss.
1912 — The Boston Red Sox's Hugh Bradley hits the first home run at Fenway Park.
1961 — Roger Maris of the New York Yankees hits his first of what will become a single-season record 61 home runs.

NBA

PLAYOFF ROUNDUP

Herro leads Heat to tie series with Celtics

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Miami Heat beat the Boston Celtics with an unprecedented barrage of 3-pointers Wednesday night to erase the home-court advantage the Celtics worked all season to establish.

Tyler Herro had 24 points and 14 assists, hitting six of Miami's 23 3-pointers — the most in a playoff game in franchise history — to lead the Heat to a 111-101 victory over top-seeded Boston and tie the first-round playoff series at one game apiece.

"It was a very good response," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said. "And then we also made some shots. It always looks better when you make shots."

Bam Adebayo had 21 points and 10 rebounds, and new Celtics nemesis Caleb Martin also had 21 points for the Heat, who shot 53.5% (23 of 43) from beyond the arc to bounce back after a Game 1 blowout. That broke Miami's playoff record of 20 3-pointers, set against the Bucks in the 2021 first round.

"They obviously made a conscious effort to have free reign to shoot more," Boston coach Joe Mazzulla said.

And shoot and shoot and shoot. Playing their third straight game without playoff stalwart Jimmy Butler, who was injured in the opening play-in game, the Heat shot better than 50% from 3-point range in each of the first three quarters (and a still productive 4 of 10 in the fourth).

After the Celtics cut an 11-point lead to six, 102-96, with 3:16 to play, Martin hit a 3 and Boston never got as close as two possessions again.

"You have to take 'em, based on how they were playing us the first two games," said Spoelstra, who



CHARLES KRUPA/AP

Miami Heat guard Tyler Herro, left, celebrates with Caleb Martin late in the second half of Game 2 of their first-round playoff series against the Celtics on Wednesday in Boston. The Heat won 111-101.

saw the Celtics hit 22 3-pointers to Miami's 12 in the opener. "I did not want to get annihilated in that department like we did the game before."

Jaylen Brown scored 33 points for Boston. Jayson Tatum scored 28, showing no ill-effects of Martin's hard foul that sent him crashing to the floor with under a minute to play in the Celtics' 114-94 victory on Sunday.

Tatum got up off the parquet floor.

But so did the Heat.

"It seemed we couldn't get them

to miss," Brown said. "They had a record-breaking night. ... They made a lot of shots that usually we're comfortable with."

The series moves to Miami for Games 3 and 4 on Saturday and Monday.

"It's always a good thing if you can get one on the road," Martin said. "You always look to try to steal one. We were able to do that."

Thunder 124, Pelicans 92: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 33 points and host Oklahoma City beat New Orleans to take a 2-0 lead in its first-round Western

Conference playoff series.

Chet Holmgren had 26 points and seven rebounds and Jalen Williams added 21 points for the top-seeded Thunder, who shot 59% from the field and made 14 of 29 3-pointers.

Jonas Valanciunas scored 19 points and Herb Jones and Brandon Ingram added 18 each for the Pelicans.

New Orleans continued to struggle on offense without top scorer Zion Williamson, who remained out with a strained left hamstring.

Scoreboard

First Round

(Best-of-seven; x-if necessary)

Eastern Conference

Milwaukee 1, Indiana 1

Milwaukee 109, Indiana 94
Indiana 125, Milwaukee 108
Friday: at Indiana, AFN-Sports, 11:30 pm.
Friday CET, 6:30 a.m. Saturday JKT
Sunday: at Indiana, AFN-Sports, 1 a.m.
Monday CET, 8 a.m. Monday JKT
Tuesday: at Milwaukee
x-Thursday, May 2: at Indiana
x-Saturday, May 4: at Milwaukee

Boston 1, Miami 1

Boston 114, Miami 94
Wednesday: Miami 111, Boston 101
Saturday: at Miami, AFN-Sports, 12 a.m.
Sunday CET, 7 a.m. Sunday JKT
Monday: at Miami, AFN-Sports, 1:30 a.m.
Tuesday CET, 8:30 a.m. Tuesday JKT
Wednesday, May 1: at Boston
x-Friday, May 3: at Miami
x-Sunday, May 5: at Boston

Cleveland 2, Orlando 0

Cleveland 97, Orlando 83
Cleveland 96, Orlando 86
Thursday: at Orlando
Saturday: at Orlando
x-Tuesday: at Cleveland
x-Friday, May 3: at Orlando
x-Sunday, May 5: at Cleveland

New York 2, Philadelphia 0

New York 111, Philadelphia 104
New York 104, Philadelphia 101
Thursday: at Philadelphia
Sunday: at Philadelphia, AFN-Sports, 7 p.m. Sunday CET, 2 a.m. Monday JKT
x-Tuesday: at New York
x-Thursday, May 2: at Philadelphia
x-Saturday, May 4: at New York

Western Conference

Dallas 1, L.A. Clippers 1

L.A. Clippers 109, Dallas 97
Dallas 96, L.A. Clippers 93
Friday: at Dallas, AFN-Sports, 2 a.m. Saturday CET, 9 a.m. Saturday JKT
Sunday: at Dallas, AFN-Sports, 9:30 p.m. Sunday CET, 4:30 a.m. Monday JKT
Wednesday, May 1: at L.A. Clippers
x-Friday, May 3: at Dallas
x-Sunday, May 5: at L.A. Clippers

Denver 2, L.A. Lakers 0

Denver 114, L.A. Lakers 103
Denver 101, L.A. Lakers 99
Thursday: at L.A. Lakers
Saturday: at L.A. Lakers
x-Monday: at Denver
x-Thursday, May 2: at L.A. Lakers
x-Saturday, May 4: at Denver

Oklahoma City 2, New Orleans 0

Oklahoma City 94, New Orleans 92
Wednesday: Oklahoma City 124, New Orleans 92
Saturday: at New Orleans, AFN-Sports, 9:30 p.m. Saturday CET, 4:30 a.m. Sunday JKT
Monday: at New Orleans
x-Wednesday, May 1: at Oklahoma City
x-Friday, May 3: at New Orleans
x-Sunday, May 5: at Oklahoma City

Minnesota 2, Phoenix 0

Minnesota 120, Phoenix 95
Minnesota 105, Phoenix 93
Friday: at Phoenix, AFN-Sports, 4:30 a.m. Saturday CET, 11:30 a.m. Saturday JKT
Sunday: at Phoenix, AFN-Sports, 3:30 a.m. Monday CET, 10:30 a.m. Monday JKT
x-Tuesday: at Minnesota
x-Thursday, May 2: at Phoenix
x-Saturday, May 4: at Minnesota

Minnesota's Reid wins Sixth Man of the Year award

BY BRIAN MAHONEY

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Naz Reid was having a productive season as a reserve when the Minnesota Timberwolves needed him in the starting lineup while playing without All-Star Karl-Anthony Towns.

Reid was excellent in that role, too, helping the Timberwolves to the second-best season in franchise history.

Reid was rewarded with the NBA's Sixth Man of the Year on Wednesday, edging Sacramento's Malik Monk in a close vote to become the third undrafted player to win the award for the league's best reserve.

Reid averaged career highs of 13.5 points and 5.2 rebounds in 81 games. The forward-center came off the bench 67 times, getting a feel for the game in the early minutes before getting his chance to impact it.

"I kind of joke around with my teammates a little bit, but it's kind of a saying



BRUCE KLUCKHOHN/AP

The Minnesota Timberwolves' Naz Reid was named Sixth Man of the Year after averaging 13.5 points and 5.2 rebounds.

where I feel like we have to keep the momentum going, anyway," Reid said in an interview on TNT after the award was an-

nounced. "Either we got to have the mentality to come back in the game, or to push the lead forward."

The 6-foot-9 Reid helped Minnesota do that plenty of times en route to a 56-26 record to earn the No. 3 seed in the Western Conference. They have a 2-0 lead over the Phoenix Suns in their first-round series going into Friday.

Towns was hurt in March and missed the next 18 games. Yet the Wolves hardly slowed down, going 10-3 from March 16 to April 10 while Reid started 12 of the 13 games. He averaged 17.1 points on 45.4% shooting during that span.

Reid got 45 first-place votes to 43 for Monk from a panel of 99 reporters and broadcasters who cover the league. Both players had 39 second-place votes and 10 third-place votes, giving Reid a total of 352 points to Monk's 342.

Milwaukee's Bobby Portis Jr. finished

third. Norman Powell of the Clippers was fourth and Atlanta's Bogdan Bogdanovic rounded out the top five.

Reid was undrafted out of LSU in 2019, originally joining Minnesota with a two-way contract that summer. The fan favorite played his way into a multiyear contract extension last summer, then rewarded the Wolves this season with 843 points off the bench, second-most in franchise history.

He twice reached 30 points and had 20 or more 14 times, both career bests, and said the award was special for the fans who have supported him since the beginning of his career.

"They've seen me work from Day 1. Since the moment I got here I changed my body, I changed my mentality, I changed the direction I wanted to go in life," Reid said. "I think they kind of deserve that and I think just being with me, that's super special."

NHL PLAYOFFS

Defensemen injuries already piling up

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

Deep NHL playoff runs Jason Demers went on during his playing career usually ended the same way.

“The injuries just accumulated too much,” he said. “And then you’re just not playing at 100%.”

That attrition is already showing early in the first round this spring at Demers’ old position, as defenses have been depleted by existing and new injuries, from Tampa Bay’s Mikhail Sergachev and Colorado’s Samuel Girard being out long term to Carolina’s Brett Pesce going down Monday night and Washington being down to minor leaguers to fill its many voids.

There were 70 goals scored over the first 10 games in the first round, a product of not just hot offense sparked by some of the league’s top players but team-wide struggles to keep the puck out of the net.

“It’s really hard if you don’t have some depth and guys that can step right in and can have impact,” said three-time Stanley Cup-winning defenseman Ken Daneyko, now an NHL Network analyst. “When you’re missing a top player like a Sergachev like Tampa is, it makes it that much more difficult, but you find a way to rally around other guys. You have to. And if you don’t have enough, well that’s going to be tough to make some noise in the playoffs.”

Pesce’s injury is the latest po-



PETER K. AFRIVE/AP

The Tampa Bay Lightning have been without defenseman Mikhail Sergachev since early February because of a broken leg. He’s been ruled out of the Lightning’s first-round playoff series against Florida.

tentially significant one to crop up, leaving Game 2 against the New York Islanders hobbled following a noncontact play. Coach Rod Brind’Amour said afterward the situation was “not looking good,” and it’s the first major test of depth for the slight championship favorite Hurricanes.

Tony DeAngelo would be the next veteran defenseman up.

“We’re in kind of wait-and-see mode right now,” Brind’Amour said Tuesday, acknowledging

there’s some extra time before his team goes for a 3-0 series lead Thursday night on Long Island. “Don’t want to really jump the gun yet.”

Boston will be without trade deadline pickup Andrew Peeke for at least the next two games at Toronto because of an injury Bruins coach Jim Montgomery deemed week to week.

The Metropolitan Division-rival Capitals have been dealing with blue line losses for weeks now, fin-

ishing the regular season without injured Rasmus Sandin and Nick Jensen, as well as Ethan Bear, who’s in the player assistance program.

Rookie Vincent Iorio was injured in their Game 1 defeat Sunday at the New York Rangers, pressing Lucas Johansen in for his NHL playoff debut.

Johansen joined fellow American Hockey League call-up Dylan McIlrath in Washington’s lineup. If nothing else, the team is used to

drawing from AHL Hershey.

“The same way we have with other injuries, departures that we’ve had all year: It’s going to be opportunity for other players to step up and then also not putting that on one person’s shoulders,” coach Spencer Carbery said recently. “The group — D corps, forwards — doing a little bit more to help alleviate (the absences).”

Tampa Bay has been dealing with life without Sergachev since the 25-year-old broke his left leg in early February. He has been ruled out for the first round against Florida, but has been skating and could return if the Lightning beat the defending Eastern Conference champions and advance to face Boston or Toronto.

To do so, coach Jon Cooper said Max Crozier, summoned from the minors on Monday, “might have to play” because Nick Perbix is banged up.

The Lightning got eliminated in the first round last year only after experienced D-man Erik Cernak was concussed.

Girard, who was sidelined for much of the Avalanche’s 2022 Cup run that finished by beating Tampa Bay because of a broken sternum, has been out and in concussion protocol since injuring his head April 13 against Winnipeg. Colorado is tied with the Jets 1-1 in their first-round series.

Coach Jared Bednar said Girard is skating and “progressing,” positive news that he could return when the series shifts to Denver later this week.

Way: Brind’Amour praises players, deflects credit for success

FROM PAGE 48

istically, these guys are taking care of it themselves. It’s just a matter of me letting them run with it.”

Face of the ‘Canes

The 53-year-old native of Ottawa has become the face of the franchise with long-running ties in this so-called “nontraditional” Southern market that has blossomed. He arrived in a January 2000 trade and stayed until he retired in 2010, then spent seven seasons as an assistant coach before taking over in 2018.

The peak was his captaincy of the Hurricanes’ 2006 championship winner. It’s a moment immortalized in Raleigh by Brind’Amour snatching the Cup before Commissioner Gary Bettman could even put down his microphone during the presentation, giving it a long kiss and then hoisting it with a scream.

The man who proclaimed “I bleed Hurricane red” when he took over is in the final year of his contract, though Brind’Amour said he’s optimistic that he will reach another deal in a familiar scenario from three years ago. In the meantime, as he praises players and staff while deflecting credit for Carolina’s success, there’s no minimizing

his role in the climb from a nine-year post-season drought to becoming a perennial contender.

“I mean, I don’t know a single guy for an organization that has more impact than he has here,” said Carolina center Sebastian Aho, a third-year player when Brind’Amour became head coach. “Obviously he’s done a lot, hopefully he gets one as a coach as well.”

A team reset

Brind’Amour took over amid a massive franchise reset as Tom Dundon became majority owner. He started with a fresh message to that first beleaguered group: there’s enough here to build something more.

“It’s like a dad believing in your kids,” Brind’Amour said. “If the kid doesn’t think that you believe in them, I don’t know if they reach their potential. And I think it was just more like, ‘We’re OK.’ Yeah, we gave them a plan, but everybody has a plan, every team has a plan, if they follow it they’re going to be OK.”

Carolina has reached the postseason every year dating to its unexpected 2019 run to the Eastern Conference finals. It ranks second in the NHL over the last four combined

regular seasons with 420 points and a .695 winning percentage, trailing only the Boston Bruins (424, .702). The run included three straight division titles in 2021-23, another run to the East finals last year, at least one postseason series win annually and Brind’Amour winning the Jack Adams Award as the NHL’s top coach in 2021.

The franchise had never before been to three straight postseasons since the former Hartford Whalers relocated to North Carolina in 1997.

“You see how much work he puts into it,” defenseman Brady Skjei said. “He’s been in our shoes and he knows what it’s like to be a player. You see as a player how hard he worked. You kind of want to emulate that and play for him.”

A players’ coach

That’s no different than his playing days. Brind’Amour was the weight-room warrior known for cutting no corners when it came to training and preparation. There’s a familiar ethic coursing through the Hurricanes’ playing style based on simply, relentlessly outworking the opponent.

They use an aggressive forecheck to win puck battles, maintain possession and generate scoring chances to keep the pressure

on in the offensive zone. It can minimize the chances opponents have to fire at Carolina’s goaltender.

“Every coach says that, but you have to do it,” Brind’Amour said. “The easy thing to do is talk. The coach has got the easy job. He says it and then the guy has to do it. He has to believe that it’s leading to something. And it has to lead to something for the team but also for himself. That’s the trick of pro sports, especially hockey.”

This year’s group is bolstered by a pair of developments that took place on the same day in March: the return of top goaltender Frederik Andersen after missing four months due to a blood-clotting issue and the trade-deadline acquisition of scoring forward Jake Guentzel.

Andersen is 9-1 in his 10 starts since his March 7 return, posting a league-best .951 save percentage while his 1.30 goals-against average is second among goalies with more than three starts in that span.

Guentzel’s arrival from Pittsburgh filled a long-running need for another top finisher. The two-time 40-goal scorer has been elite; he had 25 points (eight goals) in 17 games, and the Hurricanes have outscored opponents 34-6 with him on the ice, according to Natural Stat Trick.

NHL



NATHAN DENETTE, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

Boston Bruins goaltender Jeremy Swayman makes a save on the Maple Leafs' Calle Jarnkrok as the Bruins' Jake DeBrusk (74) defends during the first period of Game 3 in Toronto on Wednesday.

PLAYOFF ROUNDUP

Bruins top Maple Leafs to take 2-1 series lead

Associated Press

TORONTO — Brad Marchand broke a tie midway through the third period and the Boston Bruins beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-2 on Wednesday night to take a 2-1 lead in the first-round playoff series.

After Todd Bertuzzi tied it for Toronto with 8:35 left, Marchand put the Bruins back in front 28 seconds later. He took a pass from Danton Heinen and ripped a shot past goalie Ilya Samsonov's ear. Marchand capped the scoring with an empty-netter and also had an assist.

"We stuck with it all game," Marchand said. "We elevated to another level."

The Maple Leafs were livid at Marchand's agitating antics.

"The gamesmanship and everything, it's world class," Toronto coach Sheldon Keefe said about Marchand. "He's been in the league long enough... he gets calls. It's unbelievable, actually, how it goes. We've got to play through that."

Jake DeBrusk also scored for Boston, and Jeremy Swayman made 28 saves. Swayman made 35 saves in Boston's 5-1 victory in Game 1, then gave way to Linus Ullmark in Toronto's 3-2 victory in Game 2.

Matthew Knies also scored for Toronto, and Samsonov made 30 saves. Toronto was 0-for-5 on the power play, leaving it 1-for-11 in the series.

Scoreboard

First Round (Best-of-seven; x-if necessary)

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Carolina 2, N.Y. Islanders 0
 Carolina 3, N.Y. Islanders 1
 Carolina 5, N.Y. Islanders 3
Thursday: at N.Y. Islanders
Saturday: at N.Y. Islanders, **AFN-Sports2, 8 p.m. Saturday CET; 3 a.m. Sunday JKT**
x-Tuesday: at Carolina
x-Thursday, May 2: at N.Y. Islanders
x-Saturday, May 4: at Carolina
Florida 2, Tampa Bay 0
 Florida 3, Tampa Bay 2
 Florida 3, Tampa Bay 2, OT
Thursday: at Tampa Bay
Saturday: at Tampa Bay, **AFN-Sports2, 11 p.m. Saturday CET; 6 a.m. Sunday JKT**
x-Monday: at Florida
x-Wednesday, May 1: at Tampa Bay
x-Saturday, May 4: at Florida
Boston 2, Toronto 1
 Boston 5, Toronto 1
 Toronto 3, Boston 2
Wednesday: Boston 4, Toronto 2
Saturday: at Toronto, **AFN-Sports2, 2 a.m. Sunday CET; 9 a.m. Sunday JKT**
Tuesday: at Boston
x-Thursday, May 2: at Toronto
x-Saturday, May 4: at Boston
N.Y. Rangers 2, Washington 0
 N.Y. Rangers 4, Washington 1
 N.Y. Rangers 4, Washington 3
Friday: at Washington, **AFN-Sports2, 1 a.m. Saturday CET; 8 a.m. Saturday JKT**
Sunday: at Washington, **AFN-Sports2, 2 a.m. Monday CET; 9 a.m. Monday JKT**
x-Wednesday, May 1: at N.Y. Rangers
x-Friday, May 3: at Washington
x-Sunday, May 5: at N.Y. Rangers

WESTERN CONFERENCE
Winnipeg 1, Colorado 1
 Winnipeg 7, Colorado 6
 Colorado 5, Winnipeg 2
Friday: at Colorado, **AFN-Sports2, 4 a.m. Saturday CET; 11 a.m. Saturday JKT**
Sunday: at Colorado, **AFN-Sports2, 8:30 p.m. Sunday CET; 3:30 a.m. Monday JKT**
Tuesday: at Winnipeg
x-Thursday, May 2: at Colorado
x-Saturday, May 4: at Winnipeg
Edmonton 1, Los Angeles 1
 Edmonton 7, Los Angeles 4
Wednesday: Los Angeles 5, Edmonton 4, OT
Friday: at Los Angeles
Sunday: at Los Angeles, **AFN-Sports2, 4:30 a.m. Monday CET; 11:30 a.m. Monday JKT**
Wednesday, May 1: at Edmonton
x-Friday, May 3: at Los Angeles
x-Sunday, May 5: at Edmonton
Vancouver 1, Nashville 1
 Vancouver 4, Nashville 2
 Nashville 4, Vancouver 1
Friday: at Nashville
Sunday: at Nashville, **AFN-Sports2, 11 p.m. Sunday CET; 6 a.m. Monday JKT**
Tuesday: at Vancouver
x-Friday, May 3: at Nashville
x-Saturday, May 5: at Vancouver
Vegas 2, Dallas 0
 Vegas 4, Dallas 3
Wednesday: Vegas 3, Dallas 1
Saturday: at Vegas, **AFN-Sports2, 4:30 a.m. Sunday CET; 11:30 a.m. Sunday JKT**
Monday: at Vegas
x-Wednesday, May 1: at Dallas
x-Friday, May 3: at Vegas
x-Sunday, May 5: at Dallas

Golden Knights 3, Stars 1: Noah Hanifin broke a tie with an unassisted goal late in the second period and Stanley Cup champion Vegas beat top-seeded Dallas to take a 2-0 lead in the first-round series.
 Jonathan Marchessault scored his second goal of the series, and his franchise-record 36th in the postseason while appearing in all 90 of visiting Vegas' playoff games.

Kings 5, Oilers 4 (OT): Anze Kopitar fired a wrist shot past Stuart Skinner's glove and into the top corner on a breakaway to give visiting Los Angeles a win over Edmonton in Game 2 of their series.
 Kopitar picked up the puck near the Edmonton blue line, moved in on Talbot and shot from the slot as Oilers defenseman Darnell Nurse dove to try to block the shot.

Rebuilding Sharks fire Quinn after 2 seasons

By JOSH DUBOW
 Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — The San Jose Sharks fired coach David Quinn on Wednesday following two rough seasons as part of a massive rebuilding project.

General manager Mike Grier called it a hard decision to fire Quinn after he experienced two seasons under "difficult circumstances" but said he decided it was the best move for the franchise's future after spending the past few days meeting with coaches, players, front office staff and owner Hasso Plattner.

"After going through our process, and digesting this going through the process of evaluating everything, I just felt this was what we needed to do," Grier said. "A different voice for the group where the group is now and what's needed for the group."

Grier hired Quinn to replace Bob Boughner shortly after taking over as GM in 2022. Quinn spent two seasons in San Jose that were marked with lackluster play as the team traded away several high-priced stars like Erik Karlsson, Brent Burns, Tomas Hertl and Timo Meier, part of a major overhaul in hopes of getting the franchise back to contending.

Instead, the Sharks had a 41-98-25 record in Quinn's two seasons for the worst mark in the NHL in that span, including a league-worst 47 points this season. San Jose's 19 wins this season were the fewest in a full season since the franchise's second year as an expansion team in 1992-93.

"That didn't really factor into it too, too much," Grier said. "Obviously, it's something I'm aware of. But at the same time, going into into the season, I kind of knew what the roster was. I wasn't expecting us to be a playoff team. Did the season go a little worse than expected? Yes. But it's not all performance-related."

The last-place finish gives San

Jose a 25.5% chance of earning the No. 1 draft pick and the prize that is expected to be Hobey Baker Award winner Macklin Celebrini, who played one season for the Sharks junior team while living in the Bay Area.

The Sharks were outscored by 147 goals this season, excluding shootouts, for the 12th-worst mark ever and the worst in 30 years since Ottawa was outscored by 196 goals in 1993-94, its second season as an expansion team.

San Jose set a franchise record for fewest goals scored per game (2.18) and had the fourth-worst mark in team history in goals allowed per game (3.98). The Sharks allowed at least six goals in a game 18 times, the second-most time that has happened in a season since the start of 1996-97.

Grier put no timeline on the search for a new coach and said he's open to candidates both with and without head coaching experience in the NHL. He said the assistants would remain under contract and have the chance to stay on if the new coach wanted them, but were free to seek other opportunities if they arise.

The Sharks have missed the playoffs for a franchise-record five straight seasons after making the 2019 Western Conference finals and have the worst record in the NHL in that span. San Jose had been one of the most consistent teams in the league before this stretch, making the playoffs in 14 of 15 seasons, with five trips to the conference finals and one trip to the Stanley Cup Final in 2016 before losing in six games to Pittsburgh.

But the core of that roster was aging, and San Jose struggled the next three seasons before Grier took over and started a rebuild that has given the team significant draft capital. It has two extra first-round picks the next two seasons and an extra second-rounder this year.



GENE J. PUSKAR/AP

Under David Quinn, the Sharks were 41-98-25 record over two seasons for the worst mark in the NHL in that span.

SPORTS



Bringing the Heat

Herro scores 24 points to help Miami even series with Boston » **NBA playoffs, Page 45**

NHL PLAYOFFS



KARL B. DEBLAKER/AP

Rod Brind'Amour has taken the Hurricanes to the playoffs in all six of his years as head coach, and they're considered the favorites to win the Stanley Cup by BetMGM Sportsbook.

Doing it Rod's way

Brind'Amour has made Carolina perennial contender

BY AARON BEARD
Associated Press

MORRISVILLE, N.C. — Rod Brind'Amour remembers those early days as a first-time head coach for a franchise that had gone nearly a decade without reaching the playoffs. He realizes now just how much he didn't know back then.

"But I didn't know I didn't know it," he said, "and that was big because I didn't have any doubt."

And there hasn't been any doubt since, either, about Brind'Amour becoming one of the league's top coaches. He's now 6-for-6 in

INSIDE

Boston takes series lead Page 47

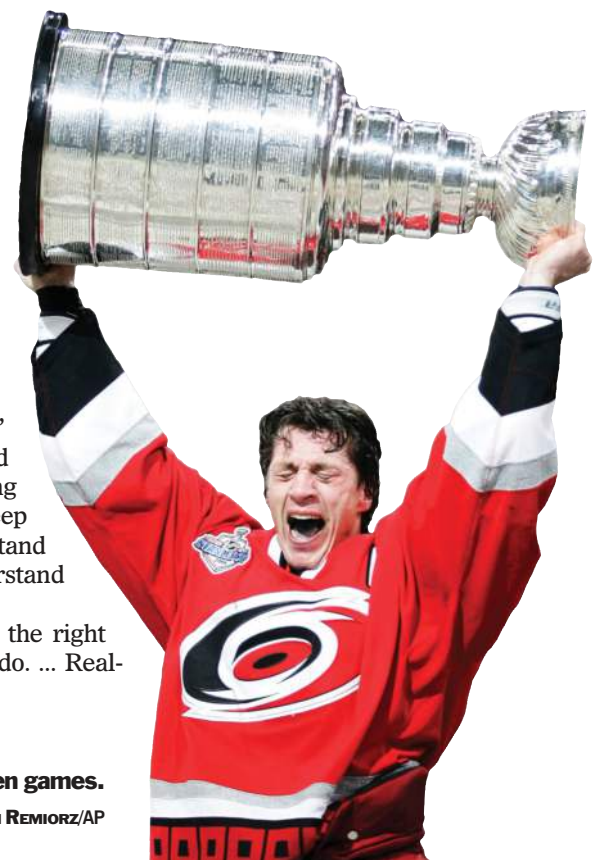
getting the Carolina Hurricanes to the post-season over years spent building a sturdy winning culture, one running at a self-sustaining hum through a talented, experienced and deep roster. That has turned Carolina into a regular among the league's elite and made the Hurricanes the favorite to win the Stanley Cup, according to BetMGM Sportsbook.

They lead their first-round series with the New York Islanders 2-0.

"You never get complacent," Brind'Amour told The Associated Press. "You're constantly having to kick them in the butt and keep them on track. But they understand where the road leads. They understand where we're trying to get to."

"You've got to keep them on the right path. Really that's all I have to do. ... Real-

SEE WAY ON PAGE 46



RYAN REMIORZ/AP

Brind'Amour hoisted the Stanley Cup as captain of the Hurricanes in 2006, leading Carolina past Edmonton in seven games.

Power says he wasn't involved in scandal

» Auto racing, Page 42



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