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STARS AND STRIPES

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CONTINGENCY EDITION

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 2023

Free to Deployed Areas



ERIN MCCARTHY/U.S. Army

Washington is poised to announce another round of military aid for Ukraine involving armored Bradley fighting vehicles and, for the first time, highly mobile Strykers.

Managing all the risks

NATO says Ukraine weapons shipments won't hurt West's defense

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Delivering modern battle tanks to Ukraine won't diminish the ability of allies to defend their own territory, NATO's top military officer said Thursday, as tensions mount over Germany's reluctance to allow its tanks to be used by Ukraine to fight Russia.

"I think we can manage any risks that we're dealing with," said U.S. Army Gen. Christopher Cavoli, NATO's supreme allied commander, at the conclusion of a meeting of defense

chiefs in Brussels.

Cavoli's comments came a day ahead of another round of high-level discussions happening at Ramstein Air Base, where Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will be meeting with dozens of allies to determine what additional weaponry Ukraine's military needs.

Within NATO, pressure is mounting on members to send more armored weaponry, including tanks. Germany in particular has come under withering criticism for balking at the idea of dispatching its Leopard tanks.

EUROPE

US weighs Strykers in Ukraine aid package
Page 8

Berlin also is standing in the way of other allies sending Kyiv their own German-made tanks to Ukraine.

SEE RISKS ON PAGE 8

Study: Air Force must enhance its defense in Europe, Pacific

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Distance may not equal better protection when it comes to countering a potential Russian or Chinese bombardment of overseas Air Force bases, according to a new study.

The Rand Corp., in an analysis sponsored by the U.S. Air Force, said that enhancing defenses in Europe and the Pacific is imperative given recent advances by adversaries in hypersonic weaponry.

"The general impression over the past few decades that U.S. air bases were somehow sanctuaries was a historical anomaly," the Rand report said. "With the return to a more historical norm of air base vulnerability, investments to improve air base survivability must now be made."

Whether it's an installation built for the long term — such as Ramstein Air Base in Germany — or a temporary site in a remote location, any base within striking dis-

SEE DEFENSE ON PAGE 7

"The general impression over the past few decades that U.S. air bases were somehow sanctuaries was a historical anomaly."

The Rand report

BUSINESS/WEATHER

United Airlines warns of more disruptions ahead

Associated Press

The CEO of United Airlines said Wednesday that other airlines won't be able to handle all the flights they plan to operate this year, leading to more disruptions for travelers.

Scott Kirby said airlines that operate as if this is still 2019, before the pandemic, are bound to struggle. He said the industry is dealing with a shortage of pilots and other workers, outdated technology and strain on the Federal Aviation Administration, which manages the

nation's airspace.

"The system simply can't handle the volume today, much less the anticipated growth," Kirby said. "There are a number of airlines who cannot fly their schedules. The customers are paying the price."

As an example of what can go wrong, Kirby referred to massive cancellations in late December. Southwest Airlines — which Kirby did not mention by name — scrubbed nearly 17,000 flights in late December after a winter

storm upset the schedule and overwhelmed the airline's crew-scheduling system.

"What happened over the holidays wasn't a one-time event caused by the weather, and it wasn't just at one airline," he said. Alaska, Spirit and Frontier also had double-digit percentages of canceled flights in late December.

All of those airlines faced another obstacle last week. More than 1,300 U.S. flights were canceled and 11,000 delayed on a single day after an FAA system broke down.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (Jan. 20)	\$1.06
Dollar buys (Jan. 20)	0.9013
British pound (Jan. 20)	\$1.20
Japanese yen (Jan. 20)	127.00
South Korean won (Jan. 20)	1206.00

Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
Britain (Pound)	1.2354
Canada (Dollar)	1.3475
China (Yuan)	6.7765
Denmark (Krone)	6.8819
Egypt (Pound)	29.7983
Euro	0.9250
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.8304
Hungary (Forint)	365.23
Israel (Shekel)	3.4120
Japan (Yen)	128.36
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3053
Norway (Krone)	9.9052
Philippines (Peso)	54.76
Poland (Zloty)	4.36
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7567
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3436

South Korea (Won)	1237.62
Switzerland (Franc)	0.9163
Thailand (Baht)	33.02
Turkey (NewLira)	18.7981

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

INTEREST RATES

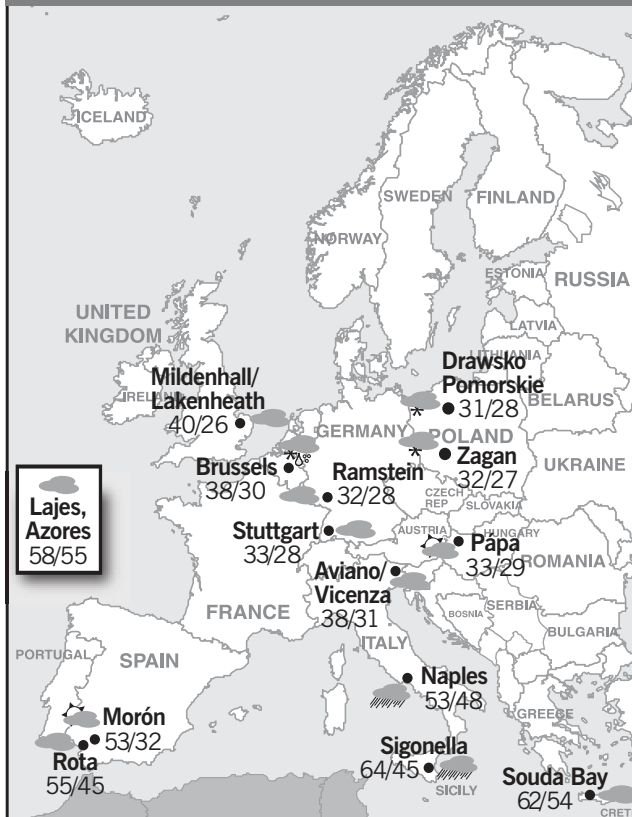
Prime rate	7.50
Interest Rates Discount rate	5.00
Federal funds market rate	4.33
3-month bill	4.66
30-year bond	3.54

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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STARS AND STRIPES MILITARY MATTERS



MILITARY

New rifle named M7 because M5 was taken

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

When soldiers get their hands on the Army's new rifle, it will be known as the M7, the service said Wednesday.

More than five years in the making, the Next Generation Squad Weapon will replace the M4 rifle that all soldiers carry.

Army officials said during an April news conference that Sig Sauer would make the weapons. About 40 of the rifles are projected to roll out later this year.

Originally dubbed the M5, the Army changed course after learning Colt Industries makes a 5.56 mm carbine rifle known as the M5, according to a news release from the Army's Project Manager Soldier Lethality program located at Picatinny Arsenal, N.J.

The Army's M7 uses 6.8mm ammunition, which is also used in the service's new automatic rifle — the M250. That weapon will replace the M249 squad automatic weapon.

Both new weapons now have an "X" designation before their names, which is given to an item before it has been fully tested and cleared for production, according to Army standards. Once the Army determines the rifles are ready to produce and field, the X will be dropped.

The new rifles are the first time in more than 65 years that the Army has deviated from ammunition size 5.56. The new ammunition size will provide more capabilities, Brig. Gen. William Boruff, the executive officer of the joint program for armaments and ammunition, said in April.

Overall, the Army said the new weapons offer capability improvements in accuracy, range and overall lethality. They are lightweight, mitigate recoil, provide improved barrel performance, and include integrated muzzle sound and flash reduction.

thayer.rose@stripes.com
Twitter: @Rose_Lori



U.S. Army

The Army announced Wednesday that its new rifle will be named the M7 once soldiers are equipped with it.

Marine, Air Force generals emerge as Joint Chiefs chairman contenders

By DAN LAMOTHE
The Washington Post

BRUSSELS — The Biden administration has launched its search to find the next chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, landing on the top generals in the Air Force and the Marine Corps as leading contenders, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown, chief of staff of the Air Force, and Gen. David H. Berger, commandant of the Marine Corps, will likely be interviewed by President Joe Biden before the commander in chief settles on whom he would like to replace Army Gen. Mark A. Milley, who has served as the Pentagon's top uniformed officer since fall 2019, these people said. They spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the administration's internal deliberations.

By law, Milley must rotate out of the position by the end of September. He is expected to retire.

It's possible that other candidates could emerge, the people familiar with the matter said, particularly from the Army. Anyone who has served as either a service chief



JOSHUA CRUMBACK/U.S. Marine Corps, left; TREVOR GORDNIER/U.S. Air Force, right

U.S. Marine Corps Gen. David H. Berger, left, and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown, speak at different events in August.

or a combatant commander is eligible, opening the position to senior officers in roles such as the chiefs of U.S. Central Command, Indo-Pacific Command or U.S. European Command. One such candidate is Gen. Paul M. Nakasone, an Army officer who leads U.S. Cyber Command and the National Security Agency, these people said.

A Navy officer is unlikely to be considered, because the No. 2 job is filled by Adm. Christopher W. Grady, who was confirmed by the Senate to serve as vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Historically, the chair job has rotated between the military services, making an Army officer following Milley less likely. Biden's eventual nominee must also be confirmed by the Senate.

Whoever becomes the Pentagon's next top general will take over at a tumultuous time. The Defense Department, at Biden's direction, has committed about \$25

billion in security assistance to help Ukraine fend off the bloody, nearly year-old invasion by Russia while turning its attention to an ascendant China and the fear that it could attempt an incursion of Taiwan.

Over the past few years, the military has repeatedly been dragged into partisan political squabbles in Washington as well, creating additional challenges for the Pentagon and raising alarm among scholars who study civil-military relations and want the military to be seen as apolitical.

News of the potential candidates to replace Milley was first reported by the Wall Street Journal as he continued a weeklong tour of Europe. On Wednesday, he held a meeting with NATO defense chiefs here in Brussels, after meeting Tuesday just outside Ukraine in southeastern Poland with Gen. Valery Zaluzhny, the top officer in Ukraine's armed forces.

Brown, 61, has served as the top

officer in the Air Force since 2020, and was previously the commander of Pacific Air Forces. A fighter pilot, he has also led troops in the Middle East and Europe, and has called for the United States to speed up how quickly the military innovates.

Brown became the first Black person to lead a branch of service and would be the second Black chairman of the Joint Chiefs if selected, following Army Gen. Colin Powell.

While awaiting his confirmation to become Air Force chief of staff, he memorably released a video describing his experience as a Black man in the military after the police killing of George Floyd. He said in it that he was aware of the "immense expectations" that came with his historic promotion, "particularly through the lens of current events plaguing our nation."

Floyd's murder set off protests, some violent, across the country, including one in Washington for which Milley drew scrutiny for appearing in his camouflage uniform alongside President Donald Trump. Milley later apologized, and Brown was confirmed in the Senate by a vote of 98-0 four days after his video regarding Floyd.

Berger, 63, has served as the top Marine since July 2019. An infantry officer, he has commanded forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Pacific. He, too, has sought to innovate within his service, directing his commanders to break away from 20 years of insurgency wars in the Middle East, shed tanks and heavy artillery, and adopt more long-range missiles and drones for po-

tential conflicts on Pacific islands. His vision for reshaping the Marines has faced objections, including from frustrated retired generals. Berger was confirmed by the Senate for his current job with a voice vote.

Milley's chairmanship has been defined by the crises of the Trump administration, the chaotic fall of Afghanistan and, more recently, his focus on helping the Ukrainian government. In recently released testimony to the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, he told lawmakers that he knows he has become a "lightning rod for the politicization of the military," and expressed frustration with critics who have sought to "smear" him and other senior Pentagon leaders.

The general cited as one example the backlash he received after previously telling lawmakers that he wanted to "understand white rage" and what prompted people to assault the Capitol. His comment came in response to Republican criticism of leaders at the U.S. Military Academy who allowed cadets to learn about critical race theory, an academic framework that centers on the idea that racism is systemic and not just demonstrated by prejudiced people.

"I think it's fundamental to the health of the republic that we have an apolitical military," Milley said in his testimony. "And apolitical means nonpartisan, neither Democrat nor Republican, and we execute the lawful orders of the civilian leadership that's appointed over us. The key is 'lawful' orders, and therein lie some judgment calls."

Delayed delivery for readers in S. Korea

Because of the Lunar New Year holiday, Monday's edition will be delivered to readers in South Korea on Tuesday, along with that day's edition.

PACIFIC

S. Korea to expand military drills with Japan

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The South Korean military intends to deepen its ties with Japan this year by restarting joint military exercises suspended since 2018, according to Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup.

Lee, in a report Monday by the Segye Ilbo newspaper, said the Ministry of National Defense will promote its security cooperation with Japan this year through joint missile-warning drills, antisubmarine and maritime interdiction exercises, and search-and-rescue training.

“The real-time intelligence operation system among [the United States, Japan and South Korea] will be further upgraded,” he said in the report. “It is our goal to hold the trilateral meeting to hold discussions on it as soon as possible.”

Lee cited North Korea’s military threat in the region for the increased cooperation. Pyongyang fired about 75 missiles last year in 36 days of testing, an annual record. Its latest launch happened Jan. 1. U.S., South Korean and Japanese warships conducted an antisubmarine drill on the East Sea, or Sea of Japan, in September. The drill was “defensive” in

nature and a “measure to restore the levels of ... trilateral cooperation,” the defense ministry said in a statement at the time.

The South Korean navy also attended Japan’s International Fleet Review in November, the first such appearance by Seoul in seven years.

Lee’s comments are part of South Korea’s broader shift in diplomatic relations with Japan. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, who was inaugurated in May, vowed to mend ties with Japan after a long-standing division between the countries.

The Japanese and South Ko-

rean government have historically been at odds over several issues. The two have a territorial dispute over Dokdo, also known as Takeshima, remote islets between South Korea and Japan, and have argued whether Tokyo ought to compensate South Korean forced-labor victims from World War II.

Military relations have also been strained in recent years. In 2018, Japan’s Ministry of Defense said a South Korean navy destroyer pointed a fire-control radar at a Japanese patrol aircraft off the Noto Peninsula, a move described by the ministry as an “extremely hazardous act that may

cause unintended consequences.”

South Korea’s defense ministry said the destroyer was conducting a search-and-rescue operation using a different radar system.

Yoon, President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida pledged during a summit in Cambodia on Nov. 13 to work together “out of a shared concern for ... the nuclear and missile threats North Korea poses,” according to a White House statement that day.

Stars and Stripes reporter Yoo Kyong Chang contributed to this report.
choi.david@stripes.com
Twitter: @choiboy

Americans unlikely to fight in Taiwan if China invades, experts say

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

TAIPEI, Taiwan — International support could be key to deterring a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, according to Taipei-based defense experts who say U.S. forces aren’t likely to fight on the island or in the strait separating it from mainland China.

A Chinese effort to reunify Taiwan by force is a possibility that many U.S. defense leaders take seriously, based on regular threats by Chinese President Xi Jinping and stepped-up Chinese military activity around the island in response to an August visit by former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. President Joe Biden in September said U.S. troops would defend Taiwan if China invaded and made a similar statement while visiting Japan in May. Walk-backs by his staff, however, suggest a deliberate policy of strategic ambiguity meant to deter conflict by leaving the possibility of U.S. intervention uncertain.

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has said she is confident the United States will come to the island’s defense if China attempts to invade.

In an Oct. 26 interview with CNN, she confirmed the presence of small numbers of U.S. Marines and special operators on the island.

Defense experts in Taipei, however, think it’s unlikely that significant numbers of U.S. troops will deploy to Taiwan in a crisis.

Professor I-Chung Lai, a former Taiwanese artilleryman who works at the Prospect Foundation, also doesn’t think U.S. warships would enter the Taiwan Strait to oppose an invasion, because the waterway is so close to Chinese forces on the mainland.

The time it would take to send aid means European nations probably won’t play a military role in any Taiwan Strait crisis, Lai said.

“We do not think Europeans are going to play a significant military role in the Taiwan Strait,” he told Stars and Stripes Jan. 10, noting the vast distance from Europe to the Far East.

However, the internationalization of Taiwan’s security is still important, Lai said.

“What the U.S. is doing is to encourage other friendly nations to have a public concern regarding



SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

Taiwanese marines exit an armored vehicle during training near Kaohsiung, Taiwan, on Jan. 12.

security and stability across the Taiwan Strait,” he said. “It makes the Chinese aware that things happening there wouldn’t just be about the U.S., Taiwan and China.”

Taiwan needs to prepare to defend itself, which is why it recently extended military service for young men from four months to a year, Lai said.

The Ukraine model, in which the U.S. and allies send arms and supplies to help defend the country after Russia invaded last year, does not apply to Taiwan, according to Ming-Shih Shen of Taipei’s Institute for National Defense and Security Research.

Ukraine borders NATO mem-

ber Poland, simplifying the movement of air and arms, the former Taiwanese infantryman said Jan. 10.

“Taiwan is an island,” Shen said. “If China blockades Taiwan, how can the U.S. supply Taiwan?”

China is capable of effectively blockading Taiwan, Vice Adm. Karl Thomas, commander of the U.S. 7th Fleet, told the Wall Street Journal for a Sept. 20 article.

“They have a very large navy, and if they want to bully and put ships around Taiwan, they very much can do that,” he said.

A blockade isn’t an all-out lethal attack, Thomas said, and the international community could “work

together on how we’re going to solve that challenge.”

It’s possible the U.S. could resupply Taiwanese forces from Japan or the Philippines, Shen said.

However, Taiwan needs to prepare munitions and supplies on the island. It also needs energy stocks. Taiwan would run out of natural gas in eight days and oil in three months in the event of a blockade, he said.

“If we don’t have power, many weapon systems can’t operate,” he said. “We are thinking about these problems and preparing.”

robson.seth@stripes.com
Twitter: @SethRobson1

US soldier who worked with Patriot missiles found dead in South Korea

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — A U.S. soldier in charge of one of the world’s most advanced missile systems died Wednesday outside her home near Camp Carroll, according to Eighth Army and South Korean police.

Staff Sgt. Theresa Garris, 28, of Stroudsburg, Pa., was found unresponsive in Chilgok county by first responders, Eighth Army



Garris

spokesman Lt. Col. Neil Penttila told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday.

Garris was discovered around 3 a.m. in the parking lot of her apartment, a Chilgok Police Station investigator told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday.

Initial evidence suggests Garris, who lived on the fourth floor,

fell from her unit, the investigator said.

South Korean officials customarily speak to the media on the condition of anonymity.

Garris served with 2nd Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 35th Air Defense Artillery Brigade as a Patriot launching station enhanced operator and maintainer at Carroll, roughly 130 miles south of Seoul, Penttila said.

The job involves ensuring Patriot missiles are “ready to fire

the moment an airborne threat is detected,” according to a career description on GoArmy.com.

The command said the death is under investigation, but foul play is not suspected.

“Every member of the Dragon Brigade is a member of our family and losing one is hard on the entire unit,” brigade commander Col. Scott McLellan said in an Eighth Army statement. “Together we will move forward, remember the past, and take care of

each other during this tough time.”

Garris arrived in South Korea on Sept. 15, 2021. Her awards include the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Korea Defense Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Army Superior Unit Award and Army Good Conduct Medal.

Stars and Stripes reporter Yoo Kyong Chang contributed to this report.
choi.david@stripes.com
Twitter: @choiboy

PACIFIC

Air Force spouse cleans homes of neighbors with deployed partners

By JEREMY STILLWAGNER
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Danielle Gomez takes seriously the concept of “pay it forward.”

An act of kindness from a stranger inspired her to offer free housecleaning services to the families of deployed service members at Yokota, she told Stars and Stripes on Dec. 30.

When her husband, Master Sgt. Max Gomez, deployed in 2019 she was disappointed to find that no one from his unit checked on her or their children while he was away.

“My neighbor was the one who was there 100%, and we didn’t even really know her,” said Gomez, 35, of Los Angeles. “She would cook food for us, offer to watch my kids, invite us on trips, and it made all the difference. Her impact on how I felt I could better serve the community was the driving force behind this.”

Since October, Gomez says she’s cleaned seven homes on base for free, in residential towers and garden duplexes. She posted

“I felt like it could be a resource that maybe some people would be willing to take my offer on.”

Danielle Gomez
Air Force spouse

her offer in the Yokota Community Facebook group and asks nothing in return. She said she provides all the cleaning materials and equipment and can return on another day, if asked.

Desiree Thompson, 33, took Gomez up on her offer in October while her husband, Senior Airman Christopher Thompson, was deployed. Thompson took a day to spend time with her kids and not worry about the house, she said Jan. 6.

“It was an incredibly relieving feeling,” Thompson said. “As a spouse, you want to be strong and it’s difficult sometimes to ask for help, but seeing her post about it and knowing she wants to help makes it a little easier to make that step and ask for help.”

Thompson had trouble accepting that Gomez expects nothing in return, but Gomez refused any compensation.

Gomez said she and her family, including their three children, have always looked for ways to help their military neighbors wherever they’re stationed. She started looking for ways to make a difference at Yokota soon after arriving in November 2018.

Many spouses at Yokota also work, and a deployed partner means juggling child care, their jobs and their social lives. Gomez wanted to make sure the stay-behind spouses know they don’t have to take on all those responsibilities themselves. She also wants to help them maintain a positive mindset while their spouse is deployed.

“I’ve not been in the workforce



JARRETT SMITH/U.S. Air Force

An act of kindness from a stranger inspired Air Force spouse Danielle Gomez to offer free housecleaning services to the families of deployed service members at Yokota Air Base, Japan.

for 10 years, so I felt like I have the time, I have the energy, and I have the means, so I felt like it could be a resource that maybe some people would be willing to take my offer on.”

Gomez has since extended her cleaning services to single parents on active duty and encourages others to find ways to give back to

the community and help each other through difficult times.

“It doesn’t have to be cleaning,” she said. “It could be as simple as going out for a coffee date. People can come up with so many ideas if they wanted to.”

stillwagner.jeremy@stripes.com
Twitter: @JeremyS_Stripes

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MILITARY

Army urged to keep standards high for recruits

By DOUG G. WARE
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army's top general warned Wednesday that lowering entry requirements for recruits is dangerous as the U.S. military looks for ways to attract troops who want to serve and can pass the physical and academic tests.

Gen. James McConville, the Army's chief of staff, said the challenges to increase recruiting numbers are formidable. By the end of 2022, the Army was hoping to have 473,000 troops, but ended up with about 465,000 after lowering its goal twice.

It's not just the Army. The other service branches are also having difficulty finding recruits who can meet physical and academic requirements.

"Here's what we do know. We have a lot of young men and women who want to serve — and they can't pass the academic requirements or they can't pass the physical requirements," said McConville, who became the Army's chief of staff in 2019.

To join the Army, a recruit must be between the ages of 17 and 35, medically and physically fit, and in good moral standing. Further, they must be a high school graduate, or the equivalent, and pass the Army's placement exam known as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test. According to Pentagon data, 23% of Americans between the ages of 17 and 24 meet all eligibility requirements.

"We are facing unprecedented challenges recruiting new soldiers. Among a myriad of causes, America's youth are less qualified for service than ever before," said Army Brig. Gen. Patrick Michaelis, commander at Fort Jackson, S.C. "Since the all-volunteer force was established in 1973, this is the hardest Recruiting Command has had to work to meet recruiting goals."

Army officials have said the pandemic has also made recruiting more difficult, as ASVAB test scores are down almost 10% since the start of the crisis.

"They just can't pass it," McConville said. "It's harder for people today to pass it than it was before."

He also pointed to a university study done that found about half of high school ROTC students are also failing the ASVAB test. But despite these recruiting hurdles, he said he remains opposed to relax-

ing entry requirements because the standards are there for a reason.

"This could be a very dangerous time and unimaginable things can happen," McConville said, stressing the importance of troops' intellect and physical capabilities during conflict.

"What we are not willing to do is ... we don't want to lower standards," he said, noting Defense Secretary Lloyd

Austin shares his opinion. "We think that quality is more important than quantity."

"What we are willing to do is we're willing to invest in young men and women. We have started what we call the Future Soldier's Prep Course at Fort Jackson, and we're getting ready to stand one up at Fort Benning [in Georgia]."

The pilot prep course started last year and its chief goal is to train young Americans to pass the entry requirements when they're ready to join. To test its effectiveness, the Army put about 3,000 young men and women through the prep course and saw remarkable improvement.

"It got about a 95% success rate. Either they are improving their scores or they are losing body fat," McConville said. "When they go into initial military training, they have got a heads up on their peers."

He said the prep course could save the Pentagon money by helping to weed out recruits before they get to the stage where the military starts investing in their futures.

"I think we are going to have to do this if we don't want to lower standards," McConville said. "We want to give people an opportunity to do great things."

"In fact, we want them to be all they can be," he added, harking back to the Army's "Be All You Can Be" slogan from the 1980s and 1990s — a slogan so fondly remembered that the service is bringing it back in 2023 as part of its evolving recruiting plans.

Another avenue that the Army wants to follow, McConville said, is finding recruits in families that don't have a lot of military connections. He emphasized more than 80% of recruits have traditionally come from military families.



McConville



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER GREEN/Stars and Stripes

A team of explosive ordnance disposal specialists work to identify improvised explosive devices during the Korea EOD Team of the Year competition at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, on Jan. 11.

US Army competition identifies best EOD troops in South Korea

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — Soldiers from the Army's sole explosive ordnance disposal unit in South Korea recently competed for the title of Korea EOD Team of the Year.

Three teams of three soldiers within the 718th Ordnance Company (EOD), 23rd Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Battalion vied for three days in an event that ended Jan. 13.

Contestants rotated through three short lanes that included several challenges, such as using metal detectors to find unexploded ordnance, dealing with a hidden, simulated improvised rocket launcher and a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device.

The competition and their daily duties are particularly challenging due to South Korea's mountainous terrain, 1st Lt. Andrew Bejean, a 718th Ordnance Company platoon leader and an event organizer, told Stars and Stripes on Jan. 11.

"We definitely have to do a little bit of work climbing up mountains, doing response calls on various UXOs," he said.

Another soldier said the competition also serves as a learning opportunity for EOD troops.

"It's always a good time to learn and teach the younger soldiers," said Staff Sgt. Mark Gersper, a contestant and a 718th Ordnance Company team leader. "There's always curveballs — it's in the nature of our job. We're always expecting the unexpected."

Despite the nine months of schooling a soldier goes through to become an EOD specialist, "you're never done and there's always more to learn," he said.

"A lot of times, the team leader has so much to



Army Staff Sgt. Mark Gersper removes simulated unexploded ordnance during the Korea EOD Team of the Year competition.

focus on and you kind of get the horse-blinder effect — you're hyper focused," Gersper said. "So having a team member who can give you a reality check and pull you back in is vital."

Staff Sgt. Austin Beekman, of Spokane, Wash.; Sgt. Brandon Leap, of Long Island, N.Y.; and Spc. Hunter Thomason, of Kalispell, Mont., were declared the best EOD team on the peninsula at the end of the competition.

In February, they'll go up against their colleagues from Hawaii and Alaska for U.S. Army Pacific's EOD Team of the Year title.

That winning team will advance to the Department of the Army's competition at an undetermined date.

Swedish defense minister invited to Turkey

Associated Press

STOCKHOLM — Swedish Defense Minister Pål Jonson said Thursday that he had been invited to Ankara by his Turkish counterpart, the first visit by a Swedish official to Turkey since an effigy of the Turkish president was hung from a lamppost in Stockholm, sparking tensions between the two governments.

"I have I received an invitation from Defense Minister (Hulusi) Akar to go to Ankara, and I hope and look forward to making that trip at the end of next week," Jonson said in an interview with Swedish broadcaster SVT.

Turkey has denounced as "absurd" a decision by a Swedish prosecutor not to open an investigation into the protest outside

Stockholm City Hall. Ankara canceled a visit by the speaker of the Swedish parliament in reaction.

Swedish District Attorney Lucas Eriksson told The Associated Press that he had decided not to open a criminal investigation into the hanging of an effigy of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Stockholm, saying no illegal act was committed.

MILITARY

New Army portal takes getting used to

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

Three days into the Army's full rollout of its nearly \$600 million one-stop shop for all things personnel-related, feedback from soldiers using the system is decidedly mixed.

The Integrated Personnel and Pay System-Army aims to make it easier for soldiers to find their next posting, submit awards, track their paychecks and accomplish anything a human resources department would do.

The system first was scheduled to expand to active-duty soldiers in late 2021, but was delayed until September 2022. By August, however, user tests showed the platform wasn't ready, leading to the latest delay.

Some of the more charitable comments from soldiers on social media in recent days said that any system this complicated is going to be buggy at first and take time to get used to.

Others were less charitable.

More than 50 chat threads on Reddit discuss IPPS-A, drawing hundreds of comments. They include people frustrated with pending applications and actions, as well as personnel confused about such details as why soldiers' employee ID numbers aren't the same as their DOD ID numbers within IPPS-A.

"This system is by far the most confusing thing I've experienced in the army, it makes sweeping the sun off the rocks look logical," a self-described Army personnel

soldier wrote on Reddit Dec. 30, before the system's rollout to all soldiers.

Others offered more specific feedback, criticizing the platform's "talent profiles" and marketplaces, where soldiers compete for future assignments.

An Army spokesperson reached via email Wednesday was not able to address concerns or provide an additional statement by Thursday.

Some unit leaders may also be treading lightly into the new system. On the popular Army WTF Moments Facebook page, a soldier shared a conversation where his superiors asked him to use the system but also to submit paper copies of his leave forms.

Other Pentagon services intro-

duced web portals and did away with paper leave forms long ago.

The Navy and Air Force's recent efforts to modernize its HR systems, however, likewise disrupted the services' ability to log evaluations, fitness reports and discharge paperwork for their members.

While complaints and snark made up the majority of the IPPS-A comments, a few were happy, including a self-described Army human resources specialist who submitted an award for his soldier.

"So much easier," Twitter user @medium_tony wrote. "Admin data populated automatically. Nobody can kick it back for misplaced commas or unit name preference. Not even editable! Yay,

IPPS-A!!"

The Army has acknowledged previous development issues and said it is committed to work closely with soldiers to address issues.

Anticipating problems, the Army already said that recently promoted soldiers whose pay did not yet update will receive back pay now that IPPS-A is online, the service said.

"We will remain flexible and outcome-based during the Go-Live launch and beyond, in order to ensure that our units and data users are ready, and the system continues to operate as needed," said Young Bang, principal deputy assistant secretary of the Army for acquisition, logistics and technology, said in a service statement Tuesday.

Vets: Santos used charity to take funds

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

Marine Corps veteran Michael Boll said he had followed the unraveling of Rep. George Santos' lies with amusement as the freshman Republican from New York took his seat in Congress this month.

Santos' list of fabrications is long: a faked Jewish heritage, a resume full of jobs that he didn't work and colleges that he didn't attend. The Long Island congressman's false claims first came to national attention in December, sparking ridicule, calls for his resignation and investigations as more untruths were uncovered.

But Boll said he stopped laughing when his friend and mentee, disabled Navy veteran Richard Osthoff, told him two weeks ago that Santos — under the alias Anthony Devolder — had stolen \$3,000 in donations for Osthoff's dying service dog in 2016. In its report on the case, The Washington Post said Anthony Devolder was one of the aliases used by Santos before he got into politics.

"We're talking about two of the worst possible things that a man or any woman could do — go after a veteran and a dog," Boll said. "I was just disgusted and really angry that this person basically benefited throughout all his bad behaviors and became a congressman."

Boll, the founder and president of the New Jersey Veterans Network support group for veterans in need, connected with Osthoff at a low point in Osthoff's life. Osthoff was living in a tent in Howell, N.J., just so he could be close to his dog Sapphire's veterinarian.

The pit bull mix had developed

an 8-inch tumor on her stomach and urgently needed surgery.

"This dog was not just an ordinary dog, she was his lifeline," Boll said. "He loved this dog."

Through a veterinary technician, Osthoff connected with Santos and the Friends of Pets United animal charity that he claimed to run. Santos, under the Devolder

alias, set up a GoFundMe to raise funds for Sapphire's surgery and successfully collected \$3,000, Osthoff said.

The planned operation never took place, however. Osthoff said Santos became cagey about the money, forcing him to drive to a specific veterinarian on Long Island. The veterinarian deemed Sapphire too sick for the surgery.

"He was making me jump through hoops, making me do things that I knew right then and there that something was going on here," Osthoff said. "I told him he was mining my dog and my family's and friend's hearts for money and he said, 'That is the most offensive thing anybody's ever said to me.' He just became belligerent after that and nasty."

Boll then stepped in as a mediator. He told Santos to either provide refunds to donors or give the money to Osthoff's veterinarian to cover future medical bills for a new service dog.

"Anthony did not agree [with] that, he didn't like those ideas at all," Boll said. "Anthony said he wasn't going to give the money at all to Rich and that he was going to give it to another veterinarian or



RICH OSTHOFF/Facebook

Navy veteran Richard Osthoff has accused Rep. George Santos of stealing \$3,000 that was intended to cover treatment for Osthoff's service dog, Sapphire.

another place."

Boll, a retired police sergeant, advised Osthoff to file a fraud complaint with law enforcement but Santos' fake identity made that impossible.

"Obviously, Anthony does not exist," Boll said.

Sapphire died Jan. 15, 2017. Osthoff said Santos did not help pay for the dog's euthanasia or cremation and never reimbursed Osthoff for his travel to Long Island, as Santos had promised.

"I never got any money from him," Osthoff said. "He refused."

No official registration records of Friends of Pets United have been found.

The House Ethics Committee has been formally asked to investigate Santos and the congressman also faces multiple federal and local investigations.

Osthoff is now happily living with a new service dog. Santos did not respond Wednesday to a request for comment but has denied even knowing Osthoff, telling the news website Semafor that the veteran's claims were fake.

"No clue who this is," Santos said.

Defense: Larger bases may be more resilient than small

FROM PAGE 1

tance of Russia and China must be prepared to operate while under attack. That means taking additional protective steps, such as hardening those sites and making aircraft harder to target, Rand said.

In the Pacific and Europe, U.S. Army air and missile defense systems like the Patriot and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense systems have traditionally defended bases from cruise and ballistic missile attacks.

"However, the increasingly capable adversary missiles — some of which are ballistic missiles armed with hypersonic glide vehicles — now challenge the legacy U.S. defenses," Rand said.

Keeping a base able to operate during a battle will require "distributed operations," including dispersal of parked aircraft, fuel systems and munitions, the report said.

For that reason, larger air bases could be more resilient than smaller ones since they allow wider dispersal. But given the range and speed of hypersonic weapons, basing at greater distances from an adversary's border offers a false sense of security.

"Counterintuitively, distant operating locations may not be more survivable than those closer to the threat if the farther bases can be brought down by a small number of missiles," the report said.

In recent years, the Air Force has emphasized a concept known as Agile Combat Employment, which aims to shift some operations from large, fixed airfields to more and smaller locations. In theory, adversaries would have



TYLIR MEYER/U.S. Air Force

A U.S. Air Force F-16C at Kadana Air Base, Japan, on Monday.

more difficulty targeting U.S. planes.

But there are limitations to the ACE concept, Rand said. Communication systems available for ACE are "extremely limited" because of logistical and resource constraints, Rand said.

Also, Chinese and Russian capabilities to "degrade, deny, and target an opponent's use of the electromagnetic spectrum" complicates matters.

Any solution will require a mix of options, the report said.

"ACE should be one — but not the sole — U.S. Air Force investment in enhanced air base resilience," Rand said.

The report also noted that the Air Force in the Pacific faces bigger challenges than in Europe.

Among the advantages in Europe: more high-quality airfields available across the Continent, all accessible by road and rail, Rand said.

"In addition, NATO fighter bases generally have hardened shelters for fighter aircraft, and many of those bases have other hardened facilities," Rand said.

The primary problem in Europe is protecting larger aircraft such as tankers, bombers and those with an intelligence role. They would need to operate from more remote bases to avoid advanced Russian aerial threats, Rand said.

EUROPE

US weighs Strykers in Ukraine aid package

BY JENNIFER JACOBS,
DARYNA KRASNOLUTSKA,
AND PETER MARTIN
Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — The United States plans to send about 100 Stryker armored vehicles to Ukraine as part of a new package of military aid worth about \$2.5 billion, adding another more powerful weapons system that it had previously withheld, people familiar with the matter said.

The U.S. was poised to unveil a new aid package as part of a broader announcement by Western allies of new hardware for Ukraine that's set for Friday, when defense ministers meet at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, according to the people, who asked not to be identified discussing private deliberations.

The people added that the plans remain incomplete and could change.

Spokespeople at the State and Defense



EUGEN WARKENTIN/U.S. Army

U.S. soldiers conduct drivers' training in November on Stryker A1 vehicles in Ansbach, Germany.

Department declined to comment. Politico reported earlier that the U.S. is likely to include Strykers, which are built by a division of General Dynamics Corp. and would come from U.S. inventories.

"I won't get ahead of announcements," John Kirby, spokesman for the National Se-

curity Council, told reporters in Washington on Wednesday. "But you can imagine that every time there's a Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting, there are announcements by many of the countries that attend in terms of what they are willing to contribute."

The U.S. Army says in an online description that there are 18 variants of the Stryker, including an "anti-tank guided missile" vehicle and personnel carriers. "Stryker vehicles provide the warfighter with a reliable, combat-tested platform that includes significant survivability and capability enhancements since the original fielding in 2002," according to the Army.

The U.S. isn't expected to provide its main battle tank, the M1 Abrams, given its heavy demands for fuel and maintenance.

"The Abrams tank is a very complicated piece of equipment," Under Secretary of Defense Colin Kahl told reporters at the

Pentagon on Wednesday. "It's expensive, it's hard to train on. It has a jet engine. I think it's about 3 gallons to the mile of jet fuel. It is not the easiest system to maintain. It may or may not be the right system."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Tuesday that he was in talks with allies over potentially supplying German-made Leopard tanks.

But Germany won't provide its Leopard tanks — or allow other countries to send them — unless the U.S. agrees to send the Abrams, *The Wall Street Journal* reported, citing senior German officials it didn't name.

"We believe that the provision of modern tanks will significantly help and improve the Ukrainians' ability to fight where they're fighting now and fight more effectively going forward," Kirby said, without suggesting the U.S. will relent on its resistance to sending its Abrams tanks.

Risks: Tanks touted as key for Ukraine's effort

FROM PAGE 1

German hesitance prompted Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki on Thursday to say that Warsaw was prepared to ignore German demands.

If Berlin doesn't offer permission to transfer Leopard tanks already in Polish possession, "we will do the right thing ourselves," Morawiecki said during an appearance at the International Economic Forum in Davos.

Germany has said it will send tanks to Ukraine only if the United States sends its Abrams tanks. But U.S. officials said this week that the idea of sending Abrams tanks — which require more complicated training and have unique maintenance needs — is on hold for now.

Instead, Washington is poised to announce another round of military aid for Ukraine involving armored Bradley fighting vehicles and, for the first time, highly mobile Strykers.

Those offerings, along with other gear, add up to more than \$2

billion in aid, *The Associated Press* reported Wednesday. The details are expected to be formally announced during the talks at Ramstein on Friday.

The meeting at Ramstein will mark the second day on the job for German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius, who met Austin in Berlin on Thursday. Pistorius took over after the resignation of Christine Lambrecht, who critics said hadn't moved



Cavoli

forward quickly enough on plans to upgrade Germany's military.

Meanwhile, Cavoli said neither Western tanks, or any other system, are a "silver bullet" for Ukraine. But tanks would provide an advantage, said Cavoli, who also heads U.S. European Command.

"A balance of all systems is needed. In the end, a tank simply comes down to, conceptually, a balance between firepower, mobility and protection," Cavoli



MICHAEL SOHN/AP

A Leopard 2 tank is pictured during a demonstration event held for the media by the German Bundeswehr in Munster near Hannover, Germany, in 2011.

said, describing that combination as the "holy trinity" for ground forces.

So far, Western weapons have proven superior to Russia's on the battlefield in Ukraine, and Cavoli indicated he would expect the same to hold true for tanks.

"I think it's clearly the case that Western technology, modern

Western technology, is outperforming Russian technology," he said.

Ukraine has continued to walk a fine diplomatic line in seeking the weapons it needs to drive Russia from its land. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has praised the United States, Germany and other nations for

their help.

But on Wednesday, speaking by video link to a meeting on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, he made reference to "lack of specific weaponry," adding that "we cannot just do it with motivation and morale."

EU assembly wants special court for Russia's war in Ukraine

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The European Union's assembly called on the member states on Thursday to back the creation of a special court to judge any war crime of aggression by Russia in Ukraine.

The nonbinding resolution was approved by a 472-19 vote with 33 abstentions in the European Parliament, and underscored the EU's willingness to make sure Moscow should be

brought to justice for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The legislature called on the EU "to work in close cooperation with Ukraine to seek and build political support in the U.N. General Assembly and other international forums ... for creating the special tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine."

The call came despite the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court saying his court

was capable of effectively dealing with war crimes committed in Ukraine.

Karim Khan at the time pushed back against the plan by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to establish such a special court.

The European Parliament said, however, that it "considers that the establishment of the special tribunal would complement the investigative efforts of the

ICC and its Prosecutor, as it would focus on alleged genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Ukraine."

The Hague-based ICC has launched an investigation into war crimes in Ukraine but can't prosecute the crime of aggression — the act of invading another country — because the Russian Federation is not a signatory to the Rome Statute, the treaty

that created the court.

Since Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, his military forces have been accused of abuses ranging from killings in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha to deadly attacks on civilian facilities, including the March 16 bombing of a theater in Mariupol that an Associated Press investigation established likely killed close to 600 people.

NATION



BRIAN MELLEY/AP

Sunny Wang, water resources manager for Santa Monica, Calif., gestures toward reverse osmosis membranes used to purify storm and sewer water on Tuesday. Wang said the project will eventually save an average of about 40 million gallons per year.

Calif. storms feed systems set up to capture rainwater

BY SUMAN NAISHADHAM
AND BRIAN MELLEY
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — As Californians tally the damage from recent storms, some are taking stock of the rainwater captured by cisterns, catches, wells and underground basins — many built in recent years to provide relief to a state locked in decades of drought.

The banked rainwater is a rare bright spot from downpours that killed at least 20 people, crumbled hillsides and damaged thousands of homes. Los Angeles County, which has 88 cities and 10 million people, collected enough water from the storms to supply roughly 800,000 people for a year, said Mark Pestrella, director of the Los Angeles County Public Works department.

In the four years since Californians approved a measure to invest hundreds of millions of dollars each year to build small and medium-sized infrastructure projects that collect rainwater, experts say progress has been gradual, but not insignificant.

In Santa Monica, a new water project captured nearly 2 million gallons of runoff that once treated gets used for plumbing, irrigation or pumped back into the city's aquifer.

Sunny Wang, water resources manager for the city, said the project will eventually save an average of about 40 million gallons per year.

The vast majority of rainwater in California's cities eventually flows into the ocean. In Los Angeles, a complex system of dams and paved flood control channels steer water away from roads and buildings and out to sea as fast as possible. The century-old infrastructure was designed to prevent urban flooding.

From the concrete-lined Los Angeles River alone, which starts in the San Fernando Valley and ends in the ocean in Long Beach, 58,000 acre-feet of stormwater was sent out to sea during the recent storms, said Kerjon Lee, spokesman for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works. That's about 20% of Nevada's allotment from the Colorado River each year.

"It's a big number we're capturing,

but it's a small percentage of the watershed," Wang said. "Billions of gallons of stormwater enter Santa Monica Bay each year, so 40 million sounds like a lot but it's just a first step towards more investments we need to make."

Santa Monica says its Sustainable Water Infrastructure Project is the first of its kind in California. Most people would hardly know it exists.

Hidden under a newly paved parking lot next to a county courthouse, the wastewater treatment plant filters and purifies sewage and runoff simultaneously to produce water that exceeds state and federal drinking water regulations.

Pestrella said the stormwater captured over the past few weeks could be enough to prevent the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, which supplies major population centers including Los Angeles and San Diego, from imposing the strictest water restrictions next spring and summer.

To escape the drought, Pestrella added, "we need at least three years of this kind of rain."

Treasury buys time for Biden, GOP on debt deal

BY JOSH BOAK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The countdown toward a possible U.S. government default began Thursday with Treasury implementing accounting measures to buy time as frictions between President Joe Biden and House Republicans raise alarms about whether the United States can sidestep a potential economic crisis.

The Treasury Department said in a letter to congressional leaders it has started taking "extraordinary measures" as the government has run up against its legal borrowing capacity of \$31.381 trillion. An artificially imposed cap, the debt ceiling has been increased roughly 80 times since the 1960s.

"I respectfully urge Congress to act promptly to protect the full faith and credit of the United States," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen wrote in the letter.

Markets so far remain relatively calm, given that the government can temporarily rely on accounting tweaks to stay open and any threats to the economy would be several months away. Even many worried analysts assume there will be a deal.

But this particular moment seems more fraught than past brushes with the debt limit because of the broad differences between Biden and new House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who presides over a restive Republican caucus.

Those differences increase the risk that the government could default on its obligations for political reasons. That could rattle financial markets and plunge the world's largest economy into a wholly preventable recession.

Biden and McCarthy, R-Calif., have several months to reach agreement as the Treasury Department imposes "extraordinary measures" to keep the government operating until at least June. But years of intensifying partisan hostility have

led to a conflicting set of demands that jeopardize the ability of the lawmakers to work together on a basic duty.

Biden insists on a "clean" increase to the debt limit so that existing financial commitments can be sustained and is refusing to even start talks with Republicans. McCarthy is calling for negotiations that he believes will lead to spending cuts. It's unclear how much he wants to trim and whether fellow Republicans would support any deal after a testy start to the new Congress that required 15 rounds of voting to elect McCarthy as speaker.

Asked twice on Wednesday if there was evidence that House Republicans can ensure that the government would avert a default, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said it's their "constitutional responsibility" to protect the full faith and credit of the United States.

She did not say whether the White House saw signs at this stage that a default was off the table.

"We're just not going to negotiate that," Jean-Pierre said. "They should feel the responsibility."

McCarthy said Biden needs to recognize the political realities that come with a divided government. The speaker equates the debt ceiling to a credit card limit and calls for a level of fiscal restraint that did not occur under President Donald Trump, a Republican who in 2019 signed a bipartisan suspension of the debt ceiling.

"Why create a crisis over this?" McCarthy said this week. "I mean, we've got a Republican House, a Democratic Senate. We've got the president there. I think it's arrogance to say, 'Oh, we're not going to negotiate about pretty much anything' and especially when it comes to funding."

Any deal would need to pass the Democratic-run Senate.

Alec Baldwin to be charged with manslaughter in 'Rust' set shooting

Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. — Actor Alec Baldwin and a weapons specialist will be charged with involuntary manslaughter in the fatal shooting of a cinematographer who was killed on a New Mexico movie set, prosecutors announced Thursday.

Santa Fe District Attorney Mary Carmack-Altwies issued a statement announcing the charges against Baldwin and Hannah Gutierrez Reed, who supervised weap-

ons on the set of the Western "Rust." Halyna Hutchins died shortly after being wounded during rehearsals at a ranch on the outskirts of Santa Fe on Oct. 21, 2021. Baldwin was pointing a pistol at Hutchins when the gun went off, killing her and wounding the director, Joel Souza.

Assistant director David Halls, who handed Baldwin the gun, has signed an agreement to plead guilty to negligent use of a deadly weapon, the district attorney's office said.

Involuntary manslaughter can involve a killing that happens while a defendant is doing something that is lawful but dangerous and is acting negligently or without caution.

The charge is a fourth-degree felony, punishable by up to 18 months in jail and a \$5,000 fine under New Mexico law. The charges also include a provision that could result in a mandatory five years in jail because the offense was committed with a gun.

Santa Fe County Sheriff Adan Mendoza, who led the initial investigation into Hutchins' death, described "a degree of neglect" on the film set. But he left decisions about potential criminal charges to prosecutors after delivering the results of a yearlong investigation in October. That report did not specify how live ammunition wound up on the film set.

Baldwin — known for his roles in "30 Rock" and "The Hunt for Red

October" — has described the killing as a "tragic accident."

He sought to clear his name by suing people involved in handling and supplying the loaded gun that was handed to him. Baldwin, also a co-producer on "Rust," said he was told the gun was safe.

New Mexico's Office of the Medical Investigator determined the shooting was an accident following the completion of an autopsy and a review of law enforcement reports.

NATION

Abortion foes set for first post-Roe march

By DAVID CRARY
Associated Press

Anti-abortion activists will have multiple reasons to celebrate — and some reasons for unease — when they gather Friday in Washington for the annual March for Life.

The march, which includes a rally drawing abortion opponents from across the nation, has been held annually since January 1974 — a year after the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision established a nationwide right to abortion.

This year's gathering — 50 years after that decision — will be the first since the high court struck down *Roe* in a momentous ruling last June. Since then, 12 Republican-governed states have implemented sweeping bans on abortion, and several others seek to do the same. But those moves have been offset by other developments.

Abortion opponents were defeated in votes on ballot measures in Kansas, Michigan and Kentucky. State courts have blocked several bans from taking effect. And myriad efforts are underway to help women in abortion-ban states either get abortions out of state or use the abortion pill for self-managed abortions.

"It's almost like the old wild, wild West ... everything is still shaking out," said Carol Tobias, president of the National Right to Life Committee.

With numerous Democratic-governed states taking steps to protect and expand abortion access, Tobias likened the current situation to the pre-Civil War era when the nation was closely divided between free states and slave states.

"I will not be surprised if we have something like that for a few years," she said. "But I do know that pro-lifers are not going to give up — it's a civil rights issue for us."

The theme for this year's March for Life is "Next Steps: Marching Forward into a Post-Roe America." Scheduled speakers include Hall of Fame football coach Tony Dungy and Mississippi Attorney General Lynn Fitch, who won the Supreme Court case that over-



JOSE LUIS MAGANA/AP

Anti-abortion activists march toward the U.S. Supreme Court during the March for Life in Washington on Jan. 21, 2022. This year's march will be the first since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

turned *Roe*.

The president of March for Life, Jeanne Mancini, depicted the June ruling as "a massive victory for the pro-life movement."

"But the battle to build a culture of life is far from over," she said. "March for Life will continue to advocate for the unborn and policies that protect them until abortion becomes unthinkable."

On Sunday, those pressing for abortion access will rally. Biden administration officials said Vice President Kamala Harris will speak in Florida, where Democrats have been on guard for new efforts to restrict abortion from Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, a potential 2024 presidential candidate. The speech is a continuation of Harris' focus on reproductive rights in recent months, including meetings with activists, health care providers and state lawmakers from around the country.

Prospects for any federal legislation restricting abortion nationwide are negligible for now, given that any such measures emerging from the Republican-led House would face rejection in the Democratic-led Senate.

The main battlegrounds will be in the states.

Since June, near-total bans on abortion have been implemented in Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia. Legal challenges are pending against several of those bans. Elective abortions also are unavailable in Wisconsin, due to legal uncertainties faced by abortion clinics, and in North Dakota, where the lone clinic relocated to Minnesota.

Bans passed by lawmakers in Ohio, Indiana and Wyoming have been blocked by state courts while legal challenges are pending. In South Carolina, the state Supreme Court on Jan. 5 struck down a ban on abortion after six weeks, ruling the restriction violates a state constitutional right to privacy.

The Guttmacher Institute, a research group which supports abortion rights, says the overall result is "a chaotic legal landscape that is disruptive for providers trying to offer care and patients trying to obtain it."

"When people do not have access to abortion care in their state, they are forced to make the difficult decision to travel long distances for care, self-manage an abor-

tion or carry an unwanted pregnancy to term," Guttmacher staffers Elizabeth Nash and Isabel Guarnieri wrote last week.

Looking ahead, some anti-abortion leaders hope the Republicans nominate a 2024 presidential candidate who will aggressively push for nationwide abortion restrictions, rather than keep it as a state-by-state matter.

"The approach to winning on abortion in federal races, proven for a decade, is this: state clearly the ambitious consensus pro-life position and contrast that with the extreme view of Democrat opponents," said Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of SBA Pro-Life America.

Dannenfelser says she's not surprised by the divisive ups-and-downs that have unfolded since the June ruling.

"This is what it looks like when democracy is restored and we have a voice in the debate," she said. "For 50 years, we had no voice because the judiciary was always going to shield public opinion from having an effect on the law."

"We always knew it wouldn't be a straight line (after *Roe*'s repeal)," she said, adding "we know neither side is going to lay down

and die."

Multiple public opinion polls since June have found that a majority of Americans support access to legal abortion. According to an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll conducted in July, 53% of U.S. adults said they disapproved of the Supreme Court's repeal of *Roe*, while 30% approved.

Professor Kathleen Sprows Cummings, director of the University of Notre Dame's Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, suggested the anti-abortion movement may suffer from a perception among many Americans that it's more concerned with controlling women's bodies than helping them cope with unintended pregnancies.

"It's about consolidating their political power, more than about babies," she said.

Some abortion opponents are trying to counter such perceptions. In Texas, for example, anti-abortion groups are urging lawmakers to spend more money on services for pregnant and parenting Texans, including expanding Medicaid coverage for mothers.

According to Texas Right to Life, the state's new abortion ban has had a major impact — it says 68 abortions were recorded by state health officials in July 2022, compared to 4,879 in July 2021.

The group noted the data does not include illegal, unreported abortions — which are widely believed to be increasing as women obtain abortion pills by mail from overseas or from Mexico.

Charles Camosy, a medical humanities professor at Creighton University School of Medicine who opposes abortion, has analyzed the high-profile election defeats suffered by the anti-abortion movement. Voters in Kansas and Kentucky rejected constitutional amendments that would have declared there is no right to abortion; Michigan voters approved an amendment enshrining the right to abortion in the state constitution.

"Pro-lifers have clearly and badly lost the PR battle since June and this has shaped how people are voting," Camosy said via email.

Mother and her 1-year-old son killed in Alaska polar bear attack

Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — A polar bear chased several residents around a tiny, isolated Alaska Native whaling village, killing a mother and her 1-year-old son in an extremely rare attack before another community member shot and killed the bear, authorities said.

The fatal mauling, the first in more than 30 years in Alaska, hap-

pened Tuesday next to the front entrance of the school in Wales, an isolated Bering Strait coastal community located on the westernmost tip of the North American mainland — about 50 miles from Russia — that is no stranger to coexisting with polar bears.

School officials rushed people into the building after the polar bear was spotted, Bering Strait School District chief administra-

tor Susan Nedza told the Anchorage Daily News from her office in Unalakleet.

"The bear tried to enter with them," Nedza said, but Principal Dawn Hendrickson "slammed the door" to keep it out.

"It's terrifying. Not something you're ever prepared for," said Nedza, who didn't return messages to The Associated Press on Wednesday.

School district officials pulled the shades in the school and locked down the building. They eventually got word out that they needed someone to "take care of the bear."

Summer Myomick of Saint Michael and her son, Clyde Ongto-wasruk, were killed in the attack, Alaska State Troopers said in a statement.

Myomick's parents declined in-

terviews with The Associated Press when reached Wednesday at their home.

"It's very, very sad for Saint Michael right now, and Wales," said Virginia Washington, the Saint Michael city administrator. She said Myomick split time between the two communities.

"She was a very sweet lady. She was very responsible," Washington said.

NATION

Flavored cannabis marketing is criticized for targeting kids

By **BOBBY CAINA CALVAN**
Associated Press

NEW YORK—When New York’s first licensed recreational marijuana outlet opened last month, the chief of the state’s Office of Cannabis Management, Chris Alexander, proudly hoisted a tin of watermelon-flavored gummies above the crowd.

Outside the Manhattan shop, he displayed another purchase — a jar containing dried flowers of a cannabis strain called Banana Runtz, which some aficionados say has overtones of “fresh, fruity banana and sour candy.”

Inside the store run by the non-profit Housing Works, shelves brimmed with vape cartridges suggesting flavors of pineapple, grapefruit and “cereal milk,” written in rainbow bubble letter print.

For decades, health advocates have chided the tobacco industry for marketing harmful nicotine products to children, resulting in more cities and states, like New York, outlawing flavored tobacco products, including e-cigarettes.

Now as cannabis shops proliferate across the country, the same concerns are growing over the packaging and marketing of flavored cannabis that critics say could entice children to partake of products

labeled “mad mango,” “loud lemon” and “peach dream.”

“We should learn from the nicotine space, and I certainly would advocate that we should place similar concern on cannabis products in terms of their appealability to youth,” said Katherine Keyes, a professor of epidemiology at Columbia University who has written extensively about the rise in marijuana use among young people.

“If you go through a cannabis dispensary right now,” she said, “it’s almost absurd how youth oriented a lot of the packaging and the products are.”

Keyes added that public health policymakers — and researchers like her — are trying to catch up with an industry and marketplace that is rapidly expanding and evolving.

New York, which legalized recreational marijuana in March 2021, forbids marketing and advertising that “is designed in any way to appeal to children or other minors.”

But New York’s state Office of Cannabis Management has yet to officially adopt rules on labeling, packaging and advertising that could ban cartoons and neon colors, as well as prohibit depictions of food, candy, soda, drinks, cookies or cereal on packaging — all of which, the

agency suggests, could attract people under 21.

Under state law, a minor in possession of marijuana would face a civil penalty of not more than \$50. Licensed cannabis retailers who sell to minors face fines and the loss of their licenses, but no jail time.

California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island have bans on most flavored tobacco products, including e-cigarettes and vapes. An increasing number of cities, including New York City, also have similar bans.

But those rules need to be broad-



STEFAN JEREMIAH/AP

Flavored cannabis gummies are displayed at the Housing Works Cannabis Co., New York’s first legal cannabis dispensary, last month.

dened to include marijuana, said Linda Richter with the Partnership to End Addiction, who says the issue has yet to be widely addressed.

States often look to the federal government to set those standards, but marijuana remains illegal on the

federal level.

“That’s a real issue where you don’t have the weight of the federal government in terms of standards of packaging and marketing,” to set parameters to avoid appealing marketing to young people, Richter said.

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WORLD

New Zealand PM, icon to many, to step down

By NICK PERRY
Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who became a global icon of the left and exemplified a new style of leadership, said Thursday that she would leave office.

Just 37 when she became leader, Ardern was praised around the world for her handling of the nation's worst-ever mass shooting and the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic. But she faced mounting political pressures at home and a level of vitriol from some that hadn't been experienced by previous New Zealand leaders.

Still, her announcement came as a shock throughout the nation of 5 million people.

Fighting back tears, Ardern told reporters in Napier that Feb. 7 would be her last day as prime minister after five and a half years in office.

"I know what this job takes, and I know that I no longer have enough in the tank to do it justice. It is that simple," she said.

Lawmakers in her Labour Party will vote for a new leader on Sunday.

Ardern became an inspiration to women around the world after first winning the top job in 2017. She seemed to herald a new generation of leadership — she was on the verge of being a millennial, had spun some records as a part-time DJ, and wasn't married like most politicians.

In 2018, Ardern became just the

second world leader to give birth while holding office. Later that year, she brought her infant daughter to the floor of the U.N. General Assembly in New York.

She notched up center-left victories while right-wing populism was on the rise globally, pushing through a bill targeting net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, overseeing a ban on assault weapons, and largely keeping the coronavirus out of New Zealand for 18 months.

In March 2019, Ardern faced one of the darkest days in New Zealand's history when a white supremacist gunman stormed two mosques in Christchurch and slaughtered 51 worshippers during Friday prayers. Ardern was widely praised for her empathy with survivors and New Zealand's wider Muslim community in the aftermath.

After the mosque shootings, Ardern moved within weeks to pass new laws banning the deadliest types of semi-automatic weapons. A subsequent buyback scheme run by police saw more than 50,000 guns, including many AR-15-style rifles, destroyed.

Ardern said she didn't have any immediate plans after leaving office, other than family commitments with her daughter, Neve, and her fiancé, Clarke Gayford, after an outbreak of the virus thwarted their earlier wedding plans.



Ardern

Russia, China to hold drills

Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG — Russia and China will conduct naval drills in the Indian Ocean off the coast of South Africa next month in another indication of their strengthening relationships with Africa's most developed country amid the war in Ukraine and global financial uncertainty.

The South African armed forces said Thursday that they and the Russian and Chinese navies will engage in "a multinational maritime exercise" from Feb. 17-27 off South Africa's east coast near the cities of Durban and Richards Bay.

The drills will happen around the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 and will bring more focus on the refusal of South Africa — a leading voice on its continent — to side with the West and condemn Russia's actions.

The announcement also comes

days before Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is due to visit South Africa and hold talks with South African counterpart Naledi Pandor.

The South African government said last year that it had adopted a neutral stance over Ukraine and called for dialogue and diplomacy, but the upcoming naval drills have led the country's main opposition party to accuse the government of effectively siding with Russia.

The South African government denies it has taken sides and has called for the end of the war in Ukraine.

But the South African National Defense Force, which incorporates all of its armed forces, said next month's naval exercise would "strengthen the already flourishing relations between South Africa, Russia and China." The aim of the drills was "sharing operational skills and knowledge," the SANDF said.

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MOVIES

Keeping the conversation going

Wilson's song 'Til You're Home' in 'A Man Called Otto' about the continuing relationship we have with lost loved ones

By MICHAEL ORDOÑA
Los Angeles Times

Rita Wilson had a “visceral feeling” watching the gentle Swedish comedy “A Man Called Otto,” in which a curmudgeonly widower’s plans for suicide are derailed by the lives of those around him. As she has expanded her career beyond acting, she has found more ways to express what she’s driven to explore; she knew she had to develop an American remake starring her husband, Tom Hanks. But when director Marc Forster suggested Wilson contribute a song to “A Man Called Otto,” she didn’t write about how nice it is to have friends, or that we all have something to live for.

She wrote about the continuing relationship we have with those we love who are no longer here.

“I’ve always understood loss,” says Wilson, co-writer (with David Hodges) of the Oscar-shortlisted original song, “Til You’re Home.” To illustrate, she details her parents’ harrowing journeys to the United States from Greece and communist Bulgaria and how she realized as an adult she had a brother, her father’s first child, only to learn he had died as an infant. When she lost her father in 2010 (her mother died in 2014), the director Mike Nichols told her, “The conversation continues.”

“I didn’t understand when he said it. Then you start having conversations with the people you’ve lost. You’re talking to your dad, you’re talking to your friends ... and you hear them back,” she says, laughing at how that sounds. “It’s because you know them so well, you hear what their answer’s going to be.”

Wilson is best known as an actress and producer (and sometime rapper), but she has released five albums as a singer and sometime songwriter and written songs for a number of movies — not bad for someone whose first recorded compositions came out when she was in her 50s. She had piano lessons as a girl, but never got to the point of considering herself a musician. As a child of the singer-songwriter era of the ’60s and ’70s, she “was under the distinct impression that, in order to be a singer, you had to play your own instrument and write your own music. Joni Mitchell, Carole King, Stevie Nicks, Carly Simon, you know, all of those ladies.”

Her longing to make music was intensified by her job as a ticket taker at the old Universal Amphitheatre in Los Angeles (despite the joy of seeing those singer-songwriter performances being tempered by the less joyous task of cleaning the bathrooms after). She says, “I remem-



JOHN PHILLIPS/Getty Images for Sony Pictures

Producer Rita Wilson attends the London photocall for “A Man Called Otto” on Dec. 16.

ber sitting on the steps watching shows under the full moon, watching Joni Mitchell. I had a palpable aching, a feeling in my gut: ‘How do you do that?’”

Wilson started modeling and acting and eventually became a producer (with massive hits such as “My Big Fat Greek Wedding” and “Mamma Mia!”). She got to sing professionally as well, but couldn’t imagine herself writing songs until her friend, singer-songwriter (and “American Idol” judge) Kara DioGuardi, offered to help her write her first songs in the early 2000s.

“I said, ‘But I don’t play an instrument. I don’t read music,’” Wilson says. “She goes, ‘Neither do I. Do you have something you want to say?’”

And that’s when something clicked for Wilson, whose acting career — while lucrative — hadn’t been exactly creatively fulfilling. “It’s that ‘warm, kind, nurturing

mother-sister-wife-friend’ — I love that, but I like to say I’ve exhausted the canon on those roles. There was a lot I had to say, but there wasn’t a place to say it.”

More sage advice came when Wilson and Hanks were driving around with another successful musician friend, Bruce Springsteen, just chatting with the Boss about songwriting:

“I said, ‘All right, Bruce, I have a question for you. You’ve been writing songs all your life. What makes me think’ — this will make me cry — ‘What makes me think I can start writing music now?’ And he said, ‘Because, Reets, creativity is time independent.’”

“And to me, that was like ... it was full permission.”

Wilson says her music career got rolling after that, with the same drive that led her to producing, to generating the material she wanted made. Watching “Ove,” it’s

true she and Hanks were looking for a comedy with substance, but there were layers in it that made it necessary for her to spend years developing and producing the project.

“I’m a first-generation American. I understood that my parents were treated differently because they had accents and they weren’t educated, but they were smart,” she says, drawing a parallel to Otto’s new Latino-immigrant neighbors in the American film. “There was this cranky guy who was just an awful person. And yet I understood him in some way. I turned to Tom and I almost couldn’t get the words out. ‘We have to get the rights to this movie. And you have to play this role.’”

“It was about grief; it was about loss. It was about choosing life, ultimately.”

Throughout the film, Otto’s mind drifts into key memories with his wife as if they were happening then.

Wilson says, “If you’re away from your house or [your loved one is] out of town or they have a long day at work, you try to keep that list in your head of all the things that you’re going to tell them about your day. ‘This happened.’ ‘I dinged the car in the parking lot at the market.’ ‘I had a great conversation with my mom today,’ or whatever those things are.

“I can’t wait to tell you all these things that happened. Can’t wait ‘til you come home.”

She decided the movie’s song should be that conversation, the first verse sung from Otto’s wife Sonya’s point of view, wherever she is; the second from Otto’s.

“The love that you left / Is burned in my heart / With dreams in my mind / Of the next time that I / Have you in my arms,” Wilson sings in “Til You’re Home.” But who should take up the other part? She realized there was a chance to reflect how deeply Otto was affected by neighbors Marisol and Tommy.

“I thought, is there a way that Otto could bring Marisol and Tommy with him in a way as he’s on his next journey? That would be so cool. And I woke up in the middle of the night and I was like, ‘Sebastián Yatra!’”

That’s why it’s the Colombian star’s voice singing “The best gift of this life / Is to see you up close / Now and again / In the palm of my hand / I feel your touch.”

The full song plays in the movie’s end credits, but it also pops in elsewhere to give it extra resonance.

“David Hodges sings it in the body of the film,” Wilson says. “In flashbacks, it feels very tender. We wanted it to have a vibe that it could have been a popular song from the ’70s or ’80s or ’90s. [As if] Otto and Sonya said, ‘This is our song.’”

“I didn’t understand when he said it. Then you start having conversations with the people you’ve lost. You’re talking to your dad, you’re talking to your friends ... and you hear them back. It’s because you know them so well, you hear what their answer’s going to be.”

Rita Wilson

Remembering when director Mike Nichols told her, “The conversation continues,” after her father died in 2010

MUSIC

A 'heart full of soul'

Remembering Jeff Beck as he leaves us with a shining body of work

On that night, he wasn't the star. Or, at least he wasn't supposed to be. The date was Monday, Aug. 20, 2018. A packed audience filed into the Filene Center at Wolf Trap just outside of Washington, D.C., and I was there with my dad. It was a Jeff Beck concert, but our selling point was Vinnie Colaiuta. We've both spent our lives playing drums, my dad more of a drum nerd than I, and one of our shared heroes was/is Colaiuta, who has worked with everyone from Chick Corea, to Sting, to Frank Zappa, to, of course, Jeff Beck. The guitarist always puts together good bands when he tours, anyway, so with Colaiuta involved, the show became can't-miss.

And I'm glad we didn't miss it. Colaiuta was his spectacular self, Beck's longtime bass player Rhonda Smith didn't disappoint, and we were even treated to a rendition of a song we were begging to see the band perform, Billy Cobham's "Stratus." We had an inkling Beck might do the song, which we knew would be a highlight, but we didn't quite think he'd perform it as the second track of the night. Imagine the curiosity, then, when about 15 minutes into the show, our highly anticipated performance had already come and gone.

In a way, it was perfect. Instead of sitting on our hands, spending an hour and 15 minutes waiting for and wondering about when we would hear the night's main attraction, we were treated to ... well ... a Jeff Beck concert (with Vinnie Colaiuta on drums, of course). The result was

LINER NOTES

By Colin McGuire



mesmerizing. Beck played with no nonsense, a reflection of what so many people — including himself — purported him to be as a human: A man who suffers no fools, gets bored easy, is never satisfied and knows nothing about fear.

I recalled that set last week when word of Beck's passing broke. The memories I hold continue to resonate like the feedback he so clairvoyantly introduced with the Yardbirds, some 60 years ago now. Everything he did was effortless, treating the guitar like an adult easily masters a child's toy. He wasn't ripping solos while standing on his head in front of a giant pyro machine; he was calculated yet smooth, soulful yet rigid. Anytime your eyes would wander elsewhere on the stage, they would almost instantly find their way back to Beck.

He demanded your attention without asking for it.

And that translated far beyond the live setting. Listen back to his most legendary studio work, including on one of the best American albums ever made, Stevie Wonder's "Talking Book." Not only is his guitar tasteful and layered, but as legend has it, Beck himself was the one to stumble upon the iconic

ESSENTIAL LISTENING

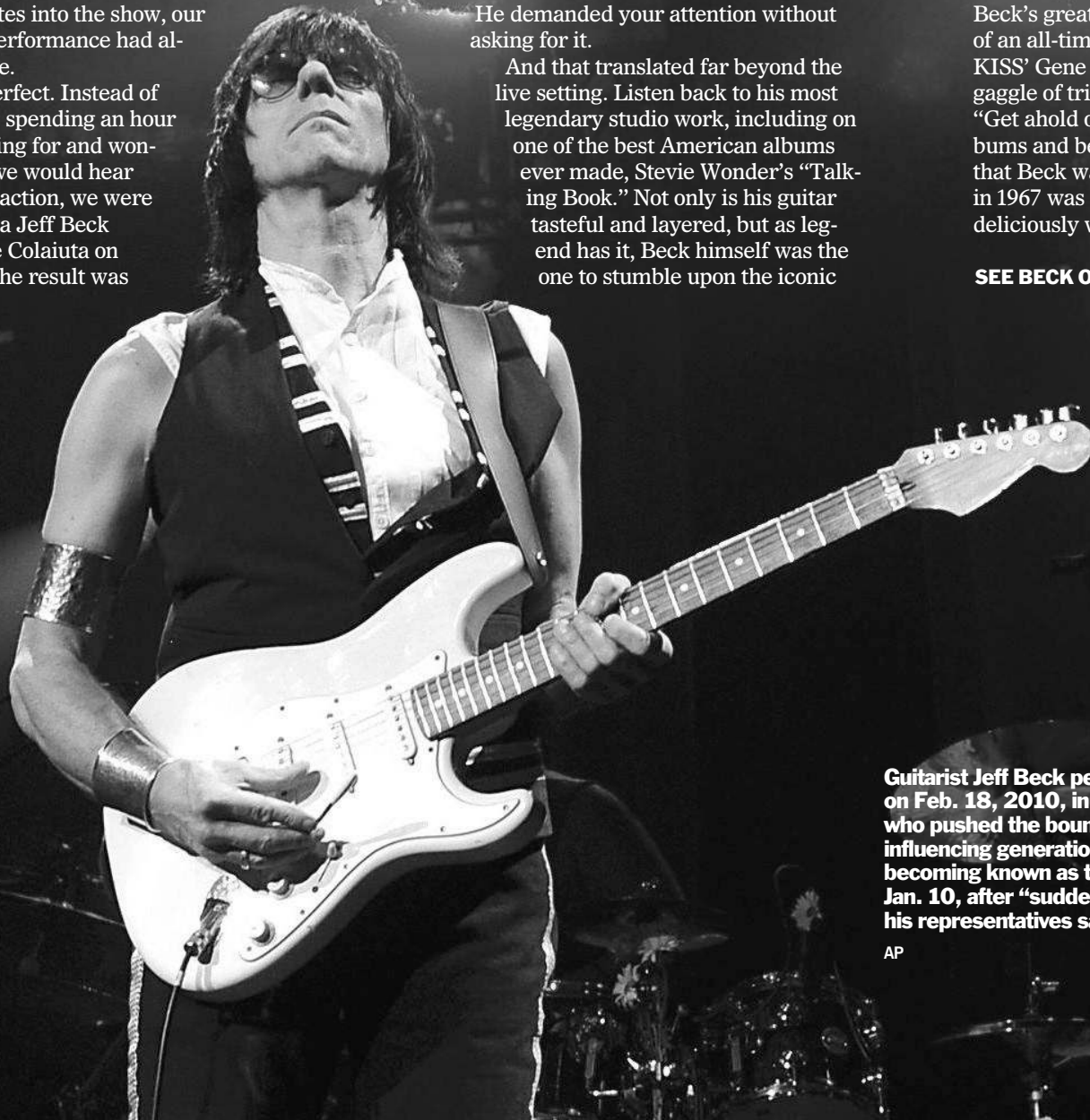
Though Jeff Beck left behind an enormous amount of memorable work, here are five of the best tracks, all worthy of a spin in his memory:

- "Heart Full Of Soul" (1965)
- "Beck's Bolero" (1968)
- "Cause We've Ended As Lovers" (1975)
- "Freeway Jam" (1975)
- "THX138" (1999)

drum beat that colors the introduction of "Superstition," one of Wonder's most celebrated hits. The guitarist was fooling around on the drums one day when Little Stevie walked in and told him to keep going. The rest was history.

Yet even with that in mind, perhaps some of Beck's greatest work came devoid of the platform of an all-time pop hit such as that 1972 classic. As KISS' Gene Simmons, of all people, noted within a gaggle of tributes that poured out last Wednesday, "Get ahold of the first two Jeff Beck Group albums and behold greatness." He's right. The stuff that Beck was getting away with all the way back in 1967 was revolutionary at best, unfair at its deliciously worst. His imagination pushed his

SEE BECK ON PAGE 15



Guitarist Jeff Beck performs at Madison Square Garden on Feb. 18, 2010, in New York. Beck, a guitar virtuoso who pushed the boundaries of blues, jazz and rock 'n' roll, influencing generations of shredders along the way and becoming known as the guitar player's guitar player, died Jan. 10, after "suddenly contracting bacterial meningitis," his representatives said. He was 78.

AP

MUSIC

Ab-Soul

Herbert (Top Dawg Entertainment)

Ab-Soul's "Herbert" is peppered with messages — a voicemail from his praying grandma, snippets of encouragement from his inner circle and so on. But it's the rapper's reflections on himself and his life that define his latest project, making it the lauded lyricist's most beautifully vulnerable set yet.

"Herbert" is named for the man behind the Ab-Soul rap persona, born Herbert Anthony Stevens IV. The music finds Ab-Soul looking back, all the way to childhood, like on the Kal Banx-produced "Hollandaise," in which he recounts memorizing songs from '90s duo Kriss Kross and typing "freestyles" for an Internet audience via AOL dial-up.

Now with his fifth album release, the 35-year-old finds the music just as all-consuming, and yet never enough. "Gotta go hard in the paint / Gotta night-ride when they call it a day / All work, no play, crank up the ball and the chain," he raps.

On title track "Herbert," Ab-Soul continues to delve, examining his burdens — from developing the rare and painful Stevens-Johnson syndrome at age 10 to dealing with complications now, decades later. "Eye doc said I need new corneas / I rather need those than a corner," he raps in celebration of his survival.

And perhaps that's what stands out about this Ab-Soul album. For all its darkness — depression, death and more — Ab-Soul finds reasons to live, like on the mantra-like "Do Better," featuring singer Zacari.

Guest Jhené Aiko brings her ethereal energy, singing alongside Ab-Soul as he bares his soul on "The Wild Side."

Other guests include Big Sean, who comes with a notable verse on "Go Off," and Joey Bada\$\$ appears on the lyrically enjoyable "Moonshooter."

Ab-Soul says "they'll never understand Herbert Anthony," but his latest release certainly brings fans closer.

— Melanie Sims/Associated Press



Madonna announces greatest hits tour

New York Daily News

After much speculation and teasing on social media, Madonna drove her fans to ecstasy, announcing Tuesday morning that she's going on a world tour to celebrate her 40-year career.

The announcement came in an NSFW video, which was posted on her YouTube page.

Featuring stars such as Jack Black, Dido, Meg Stalter and Judd Apatow, the five-minute clip re-created a scene from the singer's groundbreaking 1991 documentary "Truth or Dare."

At the end of the video, Amy Schumer dares the Grammy-winning musician to do "a world tour and play your great-

est motherf—ing hits."

"The answer is: 'F— yeah,'" Madonna responds.

The 35-city global tour will kick off in Vancouver, Canada, on July 15 before visiting multiple cities in North America, the U.K. and Europe, including Barcelona, Paris and Stockholm.

Etta Marcus

Heart Shaped Bruise (Polydor)

Etta Marcus hates being called a sad girl. Her major label debut, "Heart-Shaped Bruise," features its share of pain and loss, but the singer-songwriter comes out swinging from the opening track, "Nosebleed," singing "I'm the b*** that broke your nose."

The violence of the line, like the record title itself, is a metaphorical reference to the artist's own interior struggles, and a jarring command to lean forward and listen.

On "Heart Shaped Bruise," Marcus makes good use of the new set of musical tools at her disposal. Her sound is now more complex and expansive, incorporating new elements such as horns and strings to ratchet up the emotional intensity.

Marcus produced the new EP with her guitarist, Josh Scarbrow.

Despite the increased complexity, the recording



keeps her strengths front and center — her voice remains a strong and versatile vehicle for her lyrical dexterity.

The production pays loving attention to the many sounds that guitars can make. Marcus is a devoted fan of David Bowie, and though she never sounds like him, her skill at building complicated songs around a simple scaffolding of rhythm guitar evokes Bowie's "Hunky Dory" era.

While her earlier self-released music placed Marcus squarely in the DIY singer-songwriter camp, "Heart Shaped Bruise" is both more accessible and harder to pin to a specific genre. The more uptempo sound is a blend of pop with well-chosen moments of subtle country and jazz elements.

The interplay of horns and acoustic guitar on "Smile for the Camera," for example, give the single a strong 1980s vibe, and here the mix of uptempo sound and biting dark humor evokes complaint-rock bands of the era such as The Smiths.

— Jim Pollock/Associated Press

Whitehorse

I'm Not Crying, You're Crying (Six Shooter Records)

To start the album, she sings a drinking song. For the second tune, he sings a drinking song. On Whitehorse's "I'm Not Crying, You're Crying," the singer-songwriter-husband-wife partnership Luke Doucet and Melissa McClelland trade the lead and share their love of classic country music.

Twang has always been part of the Canadian duo's repertoire, and while writing during the pandemic, they looked to the country sounds of a half century ago for inspiration. The result is a collection of tunes that are by turns weepy, funny, hooky, bouncy and lovely, echoing 1970s Bakersfield, Los Angeles, Austin and Nashville. Along with drinking, the coronavirus lockdown is a recurring topic, and Whitehorse also sings about gambling on love, the tug of home and toilet paper.

The arrangements are spare, wisely leaving the focus on the beautifully complementary vocals. McClelland and Doucet are both fine lead singers, and their harmonies can be savory or sweet.

The voices weave around Burke Carroll's pedal steel and Doucet's distinctive electric guitar work, which makes his strings sound as thick as cable from one of the many construction cranes that dot today's Nashville skyline. On "I'm Not Crying, You're Crying," retro becomes modern.

— Steven Wine/Associated Press



Julia Wolf

Good Thing We Stayed (BMG)

Julia Wolf used to write her goals in invisible ink on her bedroom walls. The self-described shy girl wasn't ready to reveal her ambition, even to her family.

In her debut for BMG, "Good Thing We Stayed," the alt-pop performer is ready to come out of the shadows with a blend of darkness, self-discovery and humor. She displays world-slaying potential on singles such as "Hot Killer" and "Get Off My," but it is in the quieter moments, when her vocals and lyrics take center stage, that she emerges as an artist to watch.

Though Wolf is a major-label newcomer, she boasts a large online audience through YouTube videos that she created and uploaded from home.

After COVID restrictions eased, she honed her lyrical skills and presence through open-mic nights in New York City, and the performance experience has served her well.



Most lyrics are delivered over a hip-hop beat, but her lilt contains surprising echoes of earlier folk-influenced singers such as Tracy Chapman and even Judy Collins.

One of Wolf's uploaded live performances gained the attention of writer/producer Jackson Foote (Zara Larsson, Demi Lovato, Cheat Codes). Their collaboration plays to her strengths — together they keep the instrumentation spare and the songs short and punchy.

The result is a tight-knit collection of musical sketches of various aspects of youth: discovery, disappointment, trauma and growth. In the final moments of the last song, "Rookie of the Year," Wolf reveals some snippets of her training in classical piano, and this may well provide a glimpse of broader range to come in her future work.

With her January album release and a scheduled tour, Wolf is positioned in 2023 to expand well beyond the audience she built from home with a keyboard and camera. As for realizing her once-secret ambition, Wolf describes herself as a Slytherin, so perhaps it was only a matter of time.

— Jim Pollock/Associated Press

Beck: Late guitarist excelled whenever he took the stage

FROM PAGE 14

intelligence, and his intelligence never seemed satisfied. As so many of the obituaries and tributes pointed out in the wake of his passing, Beck didn't like rules, and as a result, his restlessness became one of his greatest artistic assets.

Maybe that's why his collab list reads like a pro's pro's Hall of Fame. Hendrix. Clapton. Page. The Beatles. Stewart. Wonder.

Even Ozzy had him play on his most recent record. Beck was a chameleon not because he had to be — and not even because he wanted to be. Rather, his was a talent with which one can only be born. There's a reason he said he fell in love with guitars before even reaching an age with double digits: This stuff was in his blood from the minute sound waves entered his consciousness.

Naturally, then, we should be

grateful — grateful that we were here for his art, grateful that he left us with so many timeless pieces of work that frankly ought to be studied by aspiring guitarists from here until the end of strings.

Looking back on that night at Wolf Trap, less than five years ago, consider the artists he covered. The aforementioned Cobham. Mahavishnu Orchestra. Otis Rush. Sam Cooke. Benjamin

Britten. And, of course, the Beatles.

"A Day In The Life" concluded the initial set before an encore eventually took hold. "They'd seen his face before," John Lennon initially sang on that Fab Four masterpiece. "Nobody was really sure if he was from the House of Lords."

It was fitting because if nothing else, after all the twisting solos, bent strings, world-class

musicianship and inspiring brilliance, I can attest that the thousands of people cheering for Beck's prowess that August evening were quite sure that this man came from a house on high — and not least of those spectators were me and my father.

Because if Vinnie Colaiuta was supposed to be our star, it was Jeff Beck who proved once and for all that he would forever be nothing less than a constellation.

ENTERTAINMENT



SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT/TNS

The world Naughty Dog created and the actors' performances in the video game *The Last of Us* invest players in the characters. Shown: The game's tragic protagonist, Joel.

Asking the tough questions

How the postapocalyptic title *The Last of Us* changed video games and spawned an entertainment empire

BY TODD MARTENS
Los Angeles Times

Sony's landmark 2013 game *The Last of Us* didn't make it easy on players. But the difficulty curve was more emotional than technical, for the game delivered the zombie genre at its most heady, grief-stricken and intimate.

How it started: Grim.

Joel, a down-on-his-luck single dad, can't catch a break. Then comes a viral outburst that has all of Texas going mad trying to avoid flesh eaters, which sends him and his daughter on the run. Full credits haven't even rolled before the child doesn't make it — shot dead on government orders.

While there's no shortage of violence in the video game space, *The Last of Us* did it differently. Action was treated as something to be avoided;

Joel's trigger hand would wobble, a reluctant shot in a world in which each close kill would come with suffering. In a genre where action and story were often disconnected — serious cinematic scenes against cartoonish violence — *The Last of Us* wanted to keep it real. Camera angles were often closely cropped, framing enemies — and infected humans — not as obstacles but as tragedies.

And it worked. The game went on to sell about 20 million copies for Sony's PlayStation consoles and spawned both a limited-run comic and a hit sequel. Now, "*The Last of Us*" is a hotly anticipated HBO series starring Pedro Pascal as Joel, the latest in a long line of prestigious bleak TV.

But the hype preceding the HBO series, which premiered Sunday stateside and Monday on AFN-Spectrum, has less to do with the checkered past of video game adaptations or the pedigree of the show's co-creator, "Chernobyl" architect Craig Mazin. No, it's because *The Last of Us* always felt like a mission statement, a game that wanted to prove that big-budget action shooters — "AAA games" in industry speak — could not only have a sense

of gravitas but could advance the medium in narrative, gameplay and representation. *The Last of Us* raised moral quandaries about choice, or the lack thereof, in interactive entertainment, questioned masculinity in games and ultimately proved to the industry that a gay teenage girl could be a protagonist in a genre overrun with tired machismo.

"What *The Last of Us* did for U.S. games is it showed that we could handle tremendous complexity in a narrative structure about social issues," says Jennifer deWinter, a game scholar, author and dean at the Illinois Institute of Technology. "And in an action game, a game historically made for the 'hardcore player,' *The Last of Us* starts helping us rethink what we can do in AAA games."

Neil Druckmann, the game's writer and the show's co-creator, still speaks proudly of the way *The Last of Us*

Naughty Dog, at the time known best for its "Indiana Jones"-inspired *Uncharted* series, Druckmann had tried to spin the story into a comic.

"It was always about the sacrifices my parents have made," Druckmann, an Israeli immigrant, says. "As I got older, and came closer to making it as a game, I started thinking about having my own kids and the fear of raising a kid and what could happen. While making the game, my daughter was born, and that added another layer of complexity to how I approached those characters. There's something about living some of the experience that your characters have, to imbue it with more authenticity."

"Obviously," Druckmann continues, "I've never murdered a person, so I don't quite have that experience."

After its harrowing beginning, *The Last of Us* — both the game and the HBO series — jumps 20 years into the future, where an even more hardened Joel has failed to process his grief over losing his daughter.

This is when he meets Ellie, a 14-year-old he's hired to smuggle halfway across the country.

Played by Bella Ramsey in the TV series, Ellie is bitten but not turned, and is seen as a potential key to a vaccine: a cure, at long last, for a broken world.

This is when *The Last of Us* begins to shine, as tension often comes from an underutilized gameplay tactic: conversation.

The Last of Us was the rare game that sought to avoid action, letting Ellie pester Joel with questions about what it was like to be alive before the apocalypse. Did he frequent coffee shops? Did he ever stay in a fancy hotel? What kind of music was on his old cassettes? Depending on how one played, there could be as much as two hours between action sequences. At the time of its release, no major big-budget action game had been as patient.

Those moments, says Druckmann, heightened the game's anxiety.

"The clock is ticking," he says. "The longer you stay away from those core loops, the more frustrated the

"Our approach was, as much as we can, let's treat it as grounded as possible and as realistic as possible."

Neil Druckmann

Video game's writer, TV show's co-creator

pushed boundaries, whether that was in its diversity or simply in its willingness to nudge players to feel the extremities of anguish.

"You almost never showed a kid dying in a video game," Druckmann says when asked about the game's difficult opening moments. "That was such a taboo thing. ... One thing *Grand Theft Auto* doesn't have are kids in that world. But if we're going to tell a story about the love a parent has for their child, we have to deal with the worst fear a parent has, which is any sort of harm coming to their child, and realize that through that opening sequence. Our approach was, as much as we can, let's treat it as grounded as possible and as realistic as possible."

To Druckmann, 44, the story was personal. He began developing what would become *The Last of Us* while a master's student at Carnegie Mellon University. Long before pitching it to Sony-owned development studio

SEE CHANGE ON PAGE 17

ENTERTAINMENT

Change: The Last of Us more about unprocessed trauma than zombies**FROM PAGE 16**

player might get, so you can only do these deviations for so long before you have to come back. The Last of Us is an action game, and a lot of that action is violent, so the more we get away from it, there's a certain tension that starts building."

It was all in the name of fostering intimacy, both in the game's quiet moments and its savage ones, says Bruce Straley, the game's director and one of its key world builders. One of Straley's central directorial objectives is for the player never to set down the controller — that is, to avoid long cinematic scenes in which the player has nothing to do. The Last of Us has its share of those, but by and large they're unexpectedly brief and often interrupted with opportunities to guide the character or to initiate an optional conversation.

"The goal was pretty evolutionary," Straley says. "As Neil and I were talking about the world and the characters, there was an energy in the room between us as to what type of experience this had the possibility of creating. ... This was a game we hadn't played that we wanted to play. The concept of creating a relationship between two characters that evolves over the course of the game — that's fully playable — and that got the players more involved with those characters than any other game had before, that was really exciting for us."

As Joel and Ellie traversed a ravaged America, The Last of Us started to feel less like something that belonged to the zombie genre and more like a game about unprocessed trauma. Druckmann and Straley have cited Cormac McCarthy's demanding, world-weary post-apocalyptic novel "The Road," and revolutionary Japanese game Ico, in which a horned boy must protect a young woman named Yorda, among their influences.

In The Last of Us, Joel starts to see the world through the eyes of Ellie, and Ellie, who has never been out of militarized zones, often finds the beauty in ruins. Ellie zeros in on life and survivors rather than America's horrors, and the game starts to become one of hope as control shifts between Joel and Ellie. It also becomes two distinct character studies, building to a conclusion in which Joel is confronted with the reality of what may happen to Ellie if she becomes a lab rat.

This further adds to the game's pressure. Unlike a TV series or film, in The Last of Us game we're often confined to Joel or Ellie's point of view, depending on which character we are navigating at the time. As we propel them forward through the narra-

tive, we acknowledge that they may be making choices we disagree with, even as we're the ones leading them in and out of obstacles. This is the beauty of interactive entertainment: dialogue with those characters whom we are steering through the world.

"The Last of Us, when it first came out, game scholars were like, 'It's still centering the male gaze and blah blah,'" says deWinter. "But when you compare it to one of its influences, which was Ico, when you play Ico, Yorda is a lump you drag around. She doesn't do anything. Ellie does things. Then you get to play her. ... It's such a different relationship. It's not one perspective. It was so different from Ico and it had the moral ambiguity of 'The Walking Dead.'"

The HBO series deviates from the game in multiple ways. For one, it can center entire episodes around smaller characters, such as one that focuses on gay survivalist Bill (Nick Offerman), a character that Druckmann gives credit to Straley and Mazin for fleshing out, Straley in the game and Mazin in the series. And, freed from the need for a major action sequence at a regular cadence, it can heighten intimate moments that even the most patient of games had to leave out.

"There's this concept art that we had when we were working on the game made by Hyoung Nam that I have hanging in my house," Druckmann says. "It's Joel and Ellie sitting by a campfire and laughing, and it was something I always wanted to put in the game but there was never a good spot for it. Just to stop the journey and have them talk. We get to do that in a few points in the season. We get to explore the downbeats of these characters and we get to flesh them out in ways we couldn't in the game."

The Last of Us was no sure bet. Early reaction, as Druckmann recalls of one marketing focus group, was strongly negative.

"We had the concept for the story, and some concept art, and the way it works is you show it to some gamers that they poll, and they respond to it," he says. "They hated it. They're like, 'I have to escort a 14-year-old girl across the country? My sister is 14 and she's annoying. I don't want to play a game like that.' The benefit of working at PlayStation and Naughty Dog is that PlayStation has complete trust in us. At Naughty Dog, we could look at the marketing focus group and ignore it, but it would have been a challenge to get those people to try the game. I think now things are very different."

The studio support was always there, says Asad Qizilbash, the head of PlayStation Productions, who was working in Sony's mar-

keting department when The Last of Us was released. "When they pitched it, I was absolutely enamored," Qizilbash says. "I remember we worked with Neil and everyone at Naughty Dog to do some research on how to best talk about this. Very early on, we were clear to not label this a zombie game. At that time, there was zombie fatigue, and it really wasn't. It was a heartfelt story that happened to be in a post-apocalyptic world."

That's not to say that the game wasn't violent. But it drew inspiration for that violence from award-winning literature and films as much as from its video game predecessors.

"I invited Neil to see 'No Country for Old Men,' and I remem-

ber walking out of the theater and telling him, breathlessly, 'I've never played a game that had that kind of tension in it before,'" Straley says. "The street fight in 'No Country' was one of the most intense fights I had seen on film, and I wondered if you could play something that had that level of groundedness to it, that intensity. There's something primal to having the controller in your hand and being in the world. Most fighting games at the time had pulled-out cameras where you saw hordes of 20-30 (non-playable characters) that you just plow through."

Recent history has Straley, who left Naughty Dog in 2016, thinking that The Last of Us could have been even darker.

"We weren't real enough about the level of anxiety and tension that all of the characters would have had in that world," Straley says. "If you go back to those early days of the pandemic — we're not even talking about infected breaking through your front window and chewing your face off; this is just the news that there's the possibility that you could get horribly ill, possibly die from this virus — there's so much trauma from living through that, that I think the world of The Last of Us would have had way more broken characters. I think people hold it together pretty well for the world that we put them in, compared to what I know about living through a pandemic."



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HEALTH & FITNESS

Streamlined routine, stronger body

Six exercises, once a week, might be all the resistance training most of us need

By GRETCHEN REYNOLDS

The Washington Post

Lifting weights once a week for about 15 minutes, using six basic moves, could be all the resistance exercise most of us need to build and maintain full-body strength, according to a big study of muscles, might and practical time management.

The study followed almost 15,000 men and women, aged from 18 to 80, for up to about seven years and found that performing once weekly a stripped-down weight-training routine, focused on machines available at almost any gym, increased people's upper- and lower-body strength by as much as 60%, whatever their age or gender.

The results suggest that a surprisingly small amount of weight training can produce outsize strength gains for most of us, but they also raise questions about why, then, so few of us ever lift at all.

The benefits of weight training

Being strong is "obviously important" for health and long-term well-being, said James Steele, an exercise scientist at Solent University in Southampton, England, who led the new study.

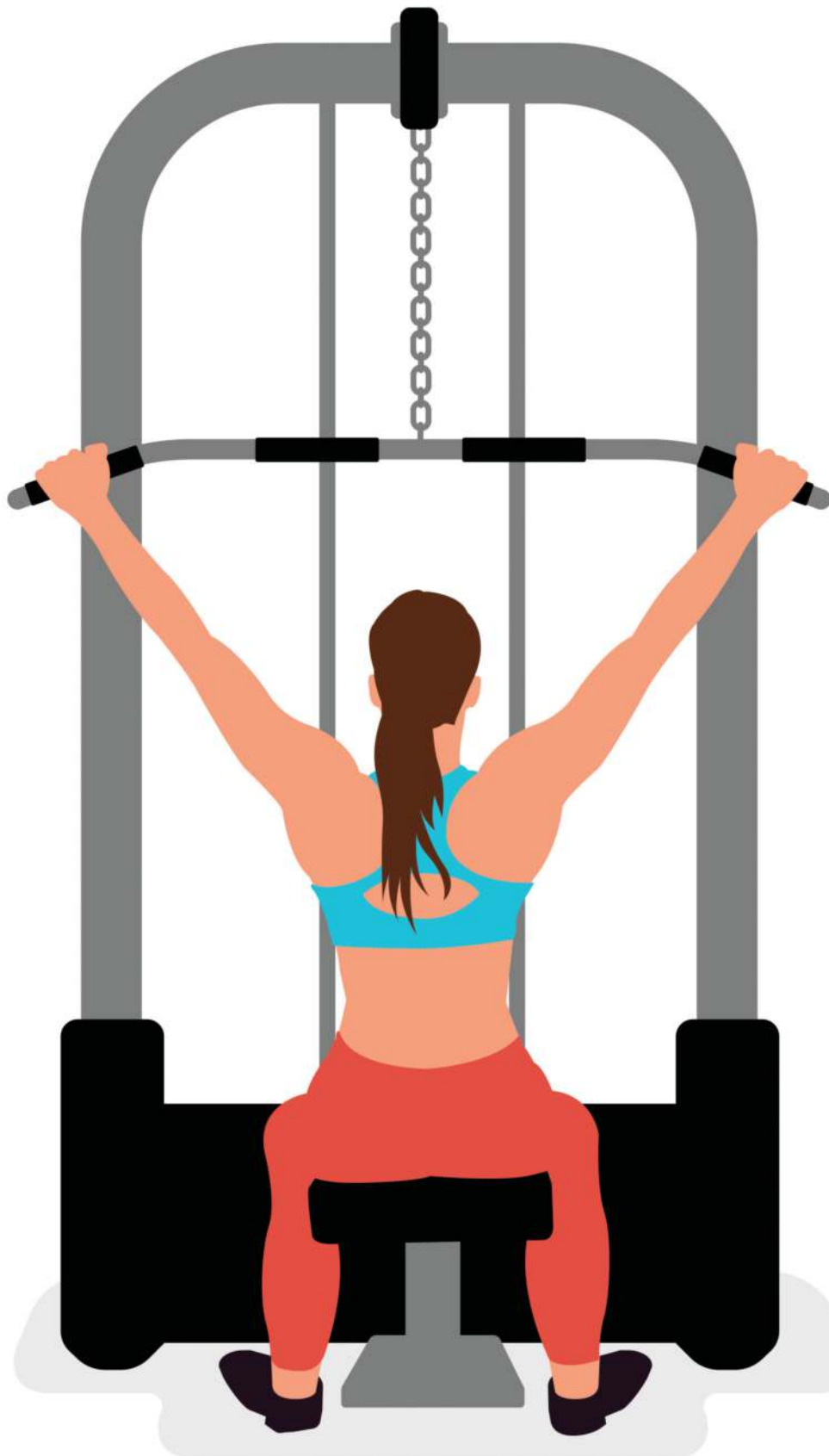
Strong people tend to live longer, for one thing. A 2022 review of studies about resistance training found that men and women who undertake strength training, no matter how infrequently, were about 15% less likely to die prematurely than those who did not lift.

Resistance exercise also can reduce anxiety, aid in weight control, maintain and build muscle mass, improve thinking, control blood sugar, help prevent falls and generally bulk up our metabolisms and moods, other studies show. These effects often equal those of endurance activities, such as walking or cycling, and in some respects, especially related to muscles and metabolic health, may exceed them.

But many of us rarely lift much more than a finger. According to recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fewer than a third of American adults say they regularly complete strength training at least two days a week, and the actual total is probably lower, because that number relies on people telling researchers about their exercise habits.

Knowing that people who rarely work out typically tell researchers they have too little time, Steele began wondering about how little resistance training might be enough for average exercisers. Some past studies had suggested relatively small amounts of weekly lifting increase strength. But most of those studies had been brief and on a small scale, and had involved men, typically young.

Fortuitously, Steele heard about a large cache of data available from a health club chain headquartered in Europe specializing in weight training for everyone. Its program consists exclusively of clients



The lat pulldown is one of the six common exercises in a stripped-down weight training routine studied by researchers.

visiting once a week, performing six weight-training exercises under the supervision of a trainer, recording how much weight they lift and going home.

The regimen did not vary from week to week or year to year, although the weights lifted would rise as people's strength grew.

Steele asked for and received anonymized data about 14,690 men and women, ranging from late teens to 80s in age, who belonged to the club and attended weekly for up to about seven years. (The health club chain, fit20 International, provided data but had no other input into the study's analysis or conclusions, Steele said.)

Each person's weekly program was consistent and simple. They completed one set each of six common exercises, in order: the chest press, pulldown, leg press, abdominal flexion, back extension and either hip adduction or abduction (alternating these hip exercises from week to week), using machines available in most gyms.

During each exercise, people lifted the weight for 10 seconds and then returned the weight to its starting position during an additional 10 seconds, making sure to breathe throughout.

They repeated each set on an individual machine until they reached what researchers call "momentary failure,"

meaning "they felt as if they could not immediately complete another repetition with proper form," Steele said.

Trainers tracked people's lifts and added weight once someone could easily complete more than about six repetitions of an exercise.

The entire routine, with about 20 seconds between one machine and the next, required about 15 to 20 minutes, depending on how many repetitions of each exercise someone managed, once a week.

A 15-minute weekly routine for more strength

This small time commitment resulted in substantial strength gains, Steele found, especially in the beginning. During the first year of lifting, most people's strength grew by about 30 to 50%, based on the weights they could manage during each workout.

After that, almost everyone's gains leveled off, with most adding perhaps an additional 10 or 20%, overall to their muscular strength in subsequent years.

Wondering if this plateau might be avoided if people switched up and varied their weight workouts, Steele next checked an online database about competitive powerlifters, who presumably altered their training often. They, too, showed ample strength gains in the beginning and then a stark leveling off after a year or so.

These findings indicate there are limits to how strong we can become.

"Adaptation is likely finite," said Jeremy Loenneke, an associate professor of exercise science at the University of Mississippi who studies muscles and strength and was not involved with this study. "Individuals can improve, but the amount they can improve will get smaller and smaller."

At the same time, we probably can reach our full strength by working out just once a week, if we are consistent, the study suggests.

"I do think the single-set-to-failure training protocol — doing as many reps as possible with that load — would be adequate to induce changes in strength for the majority of the population," Loenneke said.

We may, however, lose some potential benefits by aiming for the least possible lifting. The study did not look, for instance, at muscle mass, so we do not know if this routine would help us build or maintain bulk.

It's also possible that some people (okay, some people like me) would become bored by the same precise workout performed every week for years.

"Maintaining motivation is important," Loenneke said. "There might not be a physiologic reason why switching up a training program would help break a plateau, but perhaps there is a psychological one."

Still, for those of us entering the new year with a firm resolve to get stronger, these six exercises, once a week, represent a scientifically valid place to start.

"It's not the only route" to greater strength, Steele said. "But most people are going to get to where they should be" by following this simple, minimalist routine.

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Mentor Darnell Ferguson, left, checks in on Tina Kim in an episode of "Worst Cooks in America."

'Worst Cooks' takes on TikTok

Show's 'Viral Sensations' season throws social influencers into the culinary fire

BY FIELDING BUCK

The Orange County Register

When producers were casting Season 25 of "Worst Cooks in America," they weren't just looking for culinary failures.

They were looking for social media success.

"They didn't know anything about my cooking skills," said Tina Kim of Los Angeles. "They just contacted me and, lo and behold, they were lucky. I didn't know how to cook."

"Worst Cooks In America: Viral Sensations" features 12 contestants who are active on TikTok, Instagram and other social media. The series airs Sundays on AFN-Spectrum, and episodes are also streaming on Discovery+.

Contestants face a series of challenges and eliminations until the final episode on Feb. 5, when a survivor will win \$25,000.

The season is co-hosted by Anne Burrell, a regular, and first-timer Darnell Ferguson.

Kim, a comedian, said that she began to follow Korean soap operas during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"For two years I sat on my couch and watched K-dramas nonstop. I watched 14 hours a day. And then I said to myself, 'I'm going to start my TikTok account since I've watched every single Korean drama.'"

She has since expanded her TikTok videos to include aspects of Korean culture.

Kim wound up on Team Blue, coached by Ferguson, whom she described as very positive and welcoming. But the cooking is real, she said, and a big challenge.

"It's fun and stressful at the same time, because we're all in a pressure cooker. I think one of the challenges was only 45 minutes. And the chefs give us elaborate meals. We don't just cook the main dish. It's like, here's the side dish. And here's the sauce to go on the main dish. It's like your brain is thinking of 20 different things you have to do. And they make it hard because they make use all that different — what is it? — kitchen stuff."

Mitchell Tyler Ralston of Huntington Beach, Calif., was on Team Red, coached by Burrell. Ralston is an amateur ghost hunter and likes to make TikTok videos about paranormal activity. The "Worst Cooks" graphic

department had fun with the concept and depicted him as being tormented by the evil spirit of Chef Anne.

He rated his cooking skills as terrible, although he's comfortable making spaghetti and mashed potatoes.

Ralston said he was the first contestant to cut himself this season. Cuts and fires are commonplace on the set.

"Chef Anne told us, 'Don't be afraid of fire. If you have fire, I'm very good at putting out fire. This is the 25th season'. Luckily, I didn't burn myself too much. I cut myself way too much."

Kim and Ralston found being on camera a challenge, even though they are used to shooting their own videos.

"The hard part was smiling for hours and hours. I only have to smile for 10 seconds on my TikTok," Kim said.

Both found the experience valuable, and Ralston said it has gotten him some TikTok viewers. But it didn't turn either of them into a chef.

"I did learn a lot about the kitchen," said Kim. "It's just I'm not going to bring it into the real world."

'Only Murders' adds Streep in Season 3

From wire reports

Meryl Streep has joined the Season 3 cast of "Only Murders in the Building."

Series lead Selena Gomez broke the major casting news Tuesday by sharing an Instagram video from the set of the next season, which just started filming. In the clip, Gomez happily announces that "the gang is back" while panning to co-stars Martin Short, Steve Martin, Andrea Martin and Paul Rudd.

"Could this honestly get any better?" Gomez says — to which Rudd replies, "Well, I do think it could get a little bit better."

Streep pops up from behind the couch and offers Steve Martin a pillow as Gomez's jaw melodramatically drops in mock surprise. Martin also posted a photo on Twitter of Streep wearing a long braided wig and posing with her new castmates on set.

The Streep reveal comes several months after the premiere of the Season 2 finale, which (spoiler alert!) saw Rudd's character, Ben Glenroy, suddenly drop dead in the middle of a play directed by Short's character, Oliver. The third season will follow amateur sleuths and podcast hosts Oliver, Charles (Steve Martin) and Mabel (Gomez) as they investigate Glenroy's death.

'All Quiet on the Western Front' leads race for BAFTA awards

Visceral German-language war drama "All Quiet on the Western Front" got a field-leading 14 nominations on Thursday for the British Academy Film Awards, with genre-bending comedies "The Banshees of Inisherin" and "Everything Everywhere All at Once" each nominated in 10 categories.

Martin McDonagh's Irish tragicomedy "Banshees" has nominations including best picture, best director and best actor, for Colin Farrell. Nominations for madcap meta-verse adventure "Everything Everywhere" include nods for co-directors Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert and a best-actress nomination for Michelle Yeoh.

Baz Lurhmann's flamboyant musical biopic "Elvis" is up for nine awards, including best picture.

The BAFTAs are Britain's equivalent of Hollywood's Academy Awards. The winners will be announced Feb. 19.

Other news

China appears to have loosened its restrictions on the release of Walt Disney Co.'s Marvel movies in the world's most populous country and its second-largest box office market. The Black Panther sequel, "Wakanda Forever," and the new "Ant-Man" installment, "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania," will open in Chinese theaters on Feb. 7 and Feb. 17, respectively, Disney-owned Marvel Studios said through its Weibo social media account in China. They are the first Marvel Studios superhero movies to be released in China since 2019.

Hip-hop artist Flo Rida was awarded \$82.6 million on Wednesday after a South Florida jury found that the makers of Celsius energy drinks breached a contract with the rapper and singer, and tried to hide money from him. Flo Rida, whose real name is Tramar Dillard, and his production company, Strong Arm Productions, had sued Boca Raton-based Celsius Holdings Inc. in Broward County court in May 2021, claiming that the company had violated the conditions of an endorsement deal.

Penguin Classics, Marvel to issue new editions of 3 comics

Bestselling authors Leigh Bardugo, Jerry Craft and Rainbow Rowell are contributing forewords to new editions of three famed Marvel Comics series.

Penguin Classics is teaming with Marvel on Penguin Classics Marvel Collection, which includes "Black Panther," "Captain America" and "The Amazing Spider-Man."

Three books will be out Sept. 12: "The Avengers," with a foreword by Bardugo; "Fantastic Four," with a foreword by Craft;

and "X-Men," with a foreword by Rowell.

"These volumes provide unique, single-volume introductions to the first decade of The Avengers, the original X-Men, and the Fantastic Four," series editor Ben Saunders said in a statement Thursday. "Like our prior releases in this series, each title also features up-to-date scholarship exploring the creative contexts and cultural significance of these vital works of popular culture."

The Associated Press



PENGUIN CLASSICS/AP photos

Cover art for new Penguin/Marvel editions of "The Avengers," left, and "X-Men."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

3 get life in slaying of guard over face mask

MI FLINT — A married couple and their son convicted of first-degree premeditated murder in the fatal shooting of a security guard who demanded the woman's daughter wear a mask while shopping were sentenced Tuesday to life in prison without parole.

Larry Teague, wife Sharmel Teague, and Sharmel Teague's son, Ramonyea Bishop, were sentenced by Genesee Circuit Court Judge Brian Pickell in the shooting death of Calvin Munerlyn on May 1, 2020.

Munerlyn, 43, was shot at the store just north of downtown Flint shortly after telling Sharmel Teague's daughter she had to leave because she lacked a mask, Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton has said.

Two men later came to the store and shot the security guard to death, investigators said.

Group faces civil rights penalties for banner

NH CONCORD — A group accused of displaying "Keep New England White" banners from an overpass in New Hampshire faces state Civil Rights Act violations, the attorney general's office said Tuesday.

The complaints allege that on July 30, the Nationalist Social Club, also known as NSC-131, and two of its members trespassed and were motivated by race in hanging the banners from the overpass overlooking U.S. Route 1 in Portsmouth. About 10 people reportedly took part.

The complaints ask a judge to enter an order prohibiting the group and its members from engaging in threatening physical force or violence and discriminatory behavior for three years.

Parole denied for 90% in state, a new low figure

AL MONTGOMERY — Leola Harris use a wheelchair, must undergo dialysis three times a week and is in end-stage renal failure, her attorney said. After serving 19 years of a 35-year murder sentence, the frail woman is not a threat to anyone and should be released to a nursing home to live out her final days, he argued.

The Alabama Parole Board disagreed and last week denied her parole after a brief hearing. Harris, 71, won't be eligible again until 2028.

The rate of state inmates being granted parole in Alabama has plummeted to a new low, with 90% of eligible inmates being rejected last fiscal year, according to agency reports.

Harris was convicted of murder for the 2001 killing of Lennell Norris, who was found dead at her kitchen table. Harris testified at her trial that Norris was a friend



DELICIA LOPEZ, THE (MCALLEN, TEXAS) MONITOR/AP

End-of-day play

Players competing in a girls' high school soccer game at McAllen Veterans Memorial Stadium are silhouetted by the setting sun in South Texas.

who would come by her house at night, but maintained she did not shoot him and that someone else was in the house that night.

The three-member board granted parole to 409 inmates and turned down 3,593 others in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, according to records from the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles.

Gunfire damages another electricity substation

NC RALEIGH — A North Carolina utility said an electricity substation was damaged by gunfire early Tuesday but that it caused no power outages.

The damage comes after a gunfire attack on multiple substations in Moore County knocked out power to more than 45,000 customers for several days in early December. There have been no arrests in those shootings.

EnergyUnited said in a news release that an alarm early Tuesday alerted it to an equipment problem at the substation in Randolph County, northeast of Charlotte. It said crews found damage to the substation from an apparent gunshot and that law enforcement had been notified.

Investigators believe the attack occurred around 3 a.m. Tuesday, according to a news release from the Randolph County Sheriff's Office.

Power equipment in Washington, Oregon and Nevada also has

been vandalized in recent months.

Police: Woman shot while talking with 911, dies

IA SIOUX CITY — A Sioux City man has been charged with first-degree murder in the death of a woman who was shot while she was on the phone with 911 emergency dispatchers, police said.

Sarah Zoelle called 911 Saturday night pleading for help and saying her boyfriend, Austyn Self, was pointing a gun at her, according to court documents.

During the call, the dispatcher heard what sounded like a gunshot, according to the complaint, and Self, 23, then told the dispatcher "I shot her," the Sioux City Journal reported.

Officers found Zoelle holding a 6-month-old child and suffering from a gunshot wound when they arrived. Two other young children were in the house.

Zoelle later died at a hospital.

State gambling revenue matches all-time high

NJ ATLANTIC CITY — New Jersey's gambling revenue matched its all-time high of \$5.2 billion in 2022, but only half that amount was won by casinos from in-person gamblers.

Figures released Tuesday by the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement show the casinos, the horse tracks that take

sports bets, and online partners of both types of gambling won \$5.21 billion last year, up 10% from a year earlier and matching a level last seen in 2006. That was just before the advent of casino gambling in neighboring Pennsylvania sent New Jersey's gambling industry into a downward spiral that eventually led to the closures of five of the 12 casinos that were operating at the time.

But the 2022 number was reached with a hefty assist from internet gambling and sports betting — revenue streams that help contribute to the bottom line but are also heavily shared with third parties such as sports books and tech platforms.

In-person winnings from gamblers finally surpassed pre-pandemic levels of 2019 — a long-sought goal of the Atlantic City casino industry. The casinos won \$2.78 billion from in-person gamblers in 2022, compared with \$2.68 billion in 2019.

State to make preschool available for all kids

HI HONOLULU — Hawaii put forward a plan Tuesday to make preschool available to all 3- and 4-year-olds by 2032, which if successful would put the state in a rarified group of states managing to provide pre-kindergarten education to most of its children.

Hawaii's leaders have aspired to universal pre-K for decades. A

recent analysis found the state was moving so slowly toward that goal that it would take 47 years to build all the public preschool capacity. The state expects it will need 465 new classrooms to serve the additional students.

Lt. Gov. Sylvia Luke, who has been tasked by Gov. Josh Green to lead the state's efforts, said only half of Hawaii's 35,000 3- and 4-year-olds attend preschool, either by paying expensive tuition for private schools or obtaining one of the few spots in publicly-funded pre-K programs.

Military Kids Day set for Feb. 16 at state Capitol

KY FRANKFORT — Kentucky lawmakers are encouraging families and children in their districts to participate in Military Kids Day — an annual event at the state Capitol.

This year's event is scheduled for Feb. 16.

The event allows military children to participate in the legislative process. Hosted by the Veterans, Military Affairs and Public Protection Committee, children are invited to go on a Capitol tour, page for legislators, participate in a Capitol scavenger hunt and attend committee meetings related to military issues.

The event was initiated by state Sen. Jimmy Higdon at the request of a military family in his district.

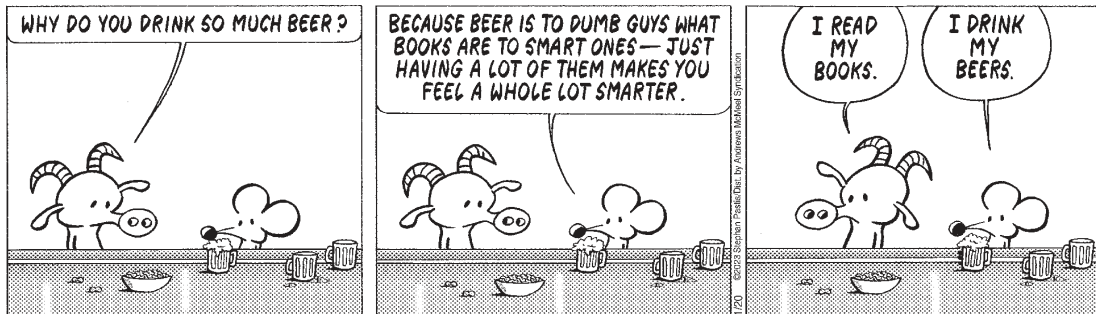
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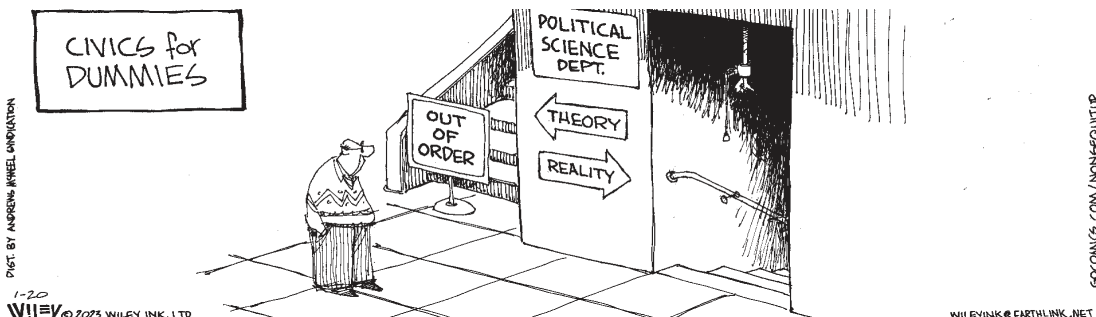
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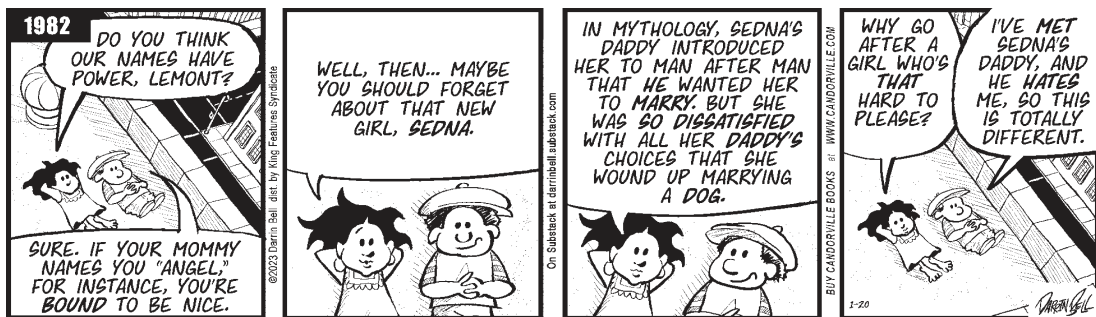
Pearls Before Swine



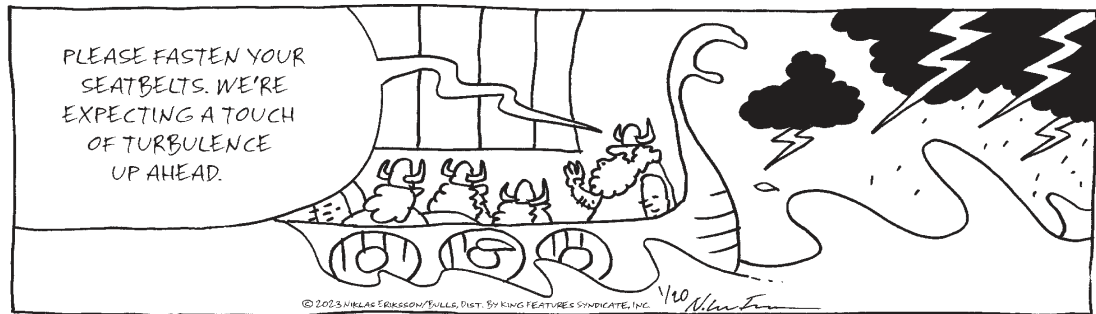
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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ACROSS

- 1 Hogwarts messenger
- 4 Balkan native
- 8 Scene stealers
- 12 Saigon soup
- 13 Whittle (down)
- 14 Sheltered
- 15 Over-sensitive
- 17 Supreme Court count
- 18 Verve
- 19 Wall St. debut
- 21 Glacial
- 22 Film reviewer
- 26 Sea spouter
- 29 Devious
- 30 — pro nobis
- 31 Corridor
- 32 Picnic dessert
- 33 Chimney buildup
- 34 "All bets — off"
- 35 Fire
- 36 Writer Dominick
- 37 Heart, slangily
- 39 Chiang — -shek
- 40 Sprite
- 41 Changes
- 45 Mast
- 48 An "A" in NCAA
- 50 Sow's mate
- 51 Actress Fisher
- 52 Tax prep pro
- 53 Vacationing

- 54 New Mexico resort
- 55 Boater, e.g.

DOWN

- 1 Makes a choice
- 2 Use an eggbeater
- 3 Places
- 4 Do a film editor's job
- 5 Non-clergy
- 6 MGM motto start
- 7 Car or truck
- 8 Asian capital
- 9 Boxer Laila
- 10 Gents
- 11 Observe
- 16 Shrimplike crustacean
- 20 Snoop
- 23 Animated figure
- 24 Press
- 25 Actress Blanchett
- 26 "Come again?"
- 27 Mata —
- 28 Sir Guinness
- 29 Do wrong
- 32 Layered dessert
- 33 Hotel offering
- 35 Cartoon frame
- 36 Texas city
- 38 "Scandal" star Washington
- 39 Painter Frida
- 42 Engrave
- 43 TV host Kelly
- 44 "Shoo!"
- 45 Govt. lender
- 46 "Wham!"
- 47 Small battery
- 49 Airport org.

Answer to Previous Puzzle

S	E	R	F	O	P	R	Y	L	A	P	
U	R	A	L	R	E	F	I	A	M	I	
L	A	E	R	C	A	K	E	W	O	N	
A	S	S	E	S	L	O	C	K	E		
			C	T	M	E	D	A	L		
R	O	L	E	G	A	G	F	E	T	E	
A	L	A	O	R	O	R	A	M			
P	E	W	S	O	R	S	S	K	I	T	
			N	I	N	N	Y	A	H		
T	U	C	C	I	G	R	A	T	E	S	
A	T	A	L	A	R	A	C	R	O	F	T
C	A	R	E	D	A	M	E	T	T	E	
T	H	E	S	E	T	S	R	E	S	T	

1-20

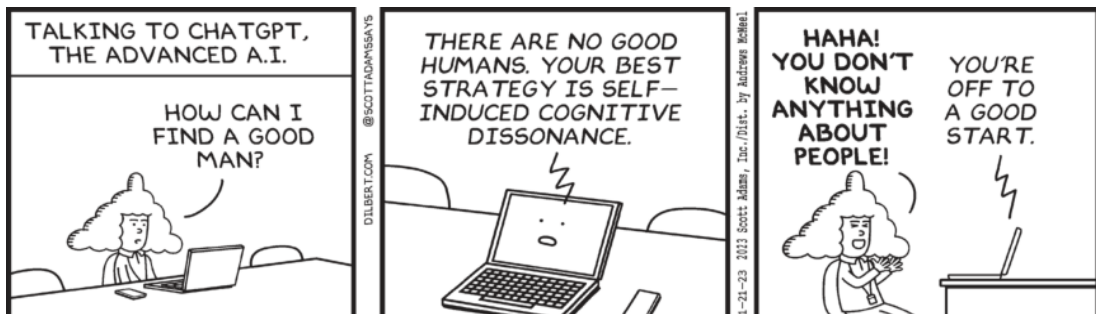
CRYPTOQUIP

UN NQLIUS NABBIUGY UZ
VAQSRK UG DJR SBIUKBIZ
BN Q JBDRA, DJQD'K LR
JQAA-DB-JQAA SQIVRDUGY.
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WE WERE HAVING A CHAT ABOUT BUILDING NARROW SHELVES, BUT I COULDN'T GET A WORD IN LEDGE-WISE.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: A equals L

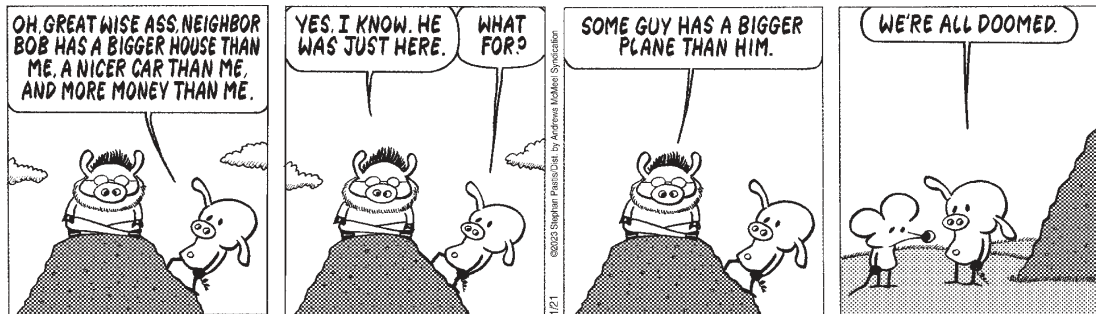
Frazz



Dilbert



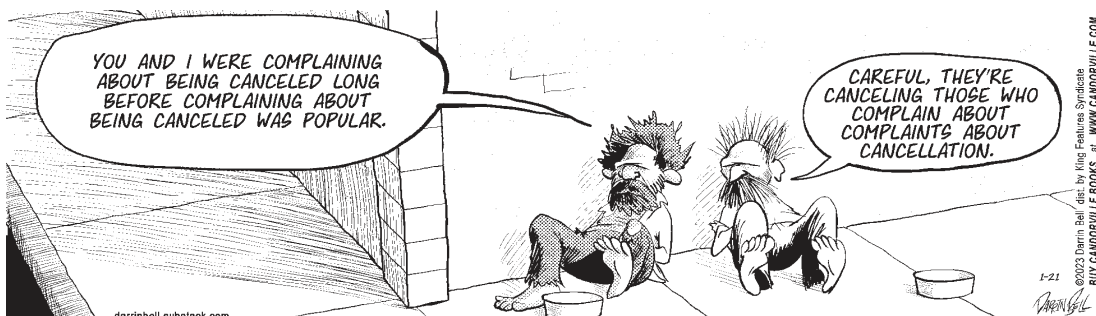
Pearls Before Swine



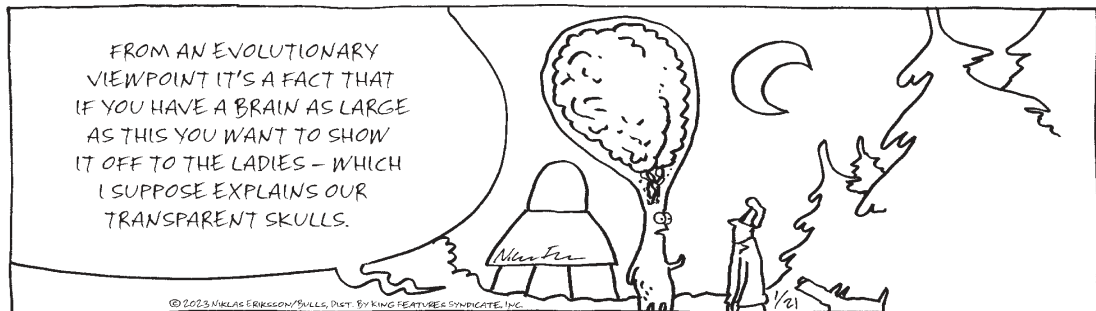
Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



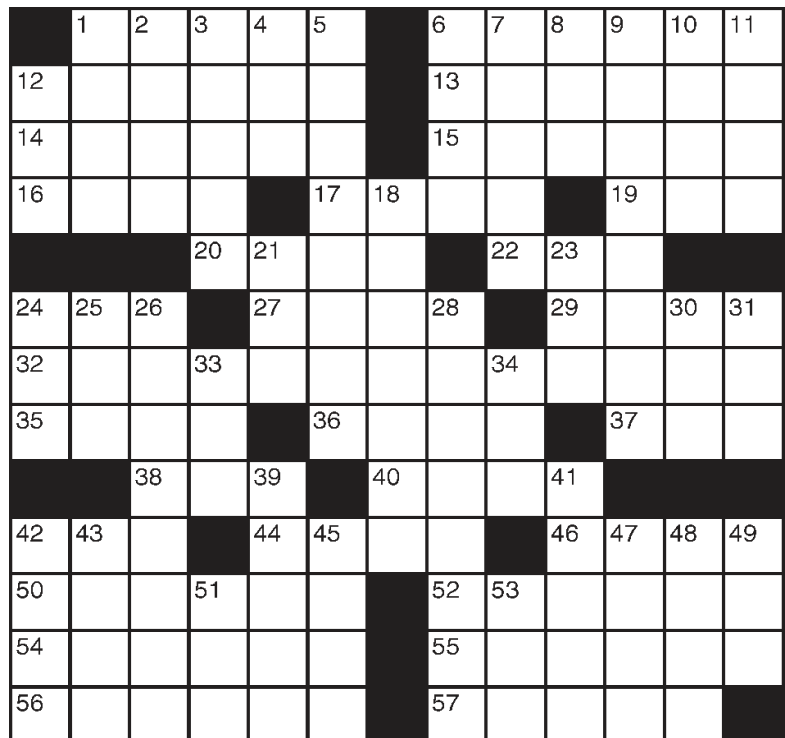
Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 Attorney- —
- 6 Stopwatches
- 12 "Homeland" star Danes
- 13 Perfect place
- 14 "Excellent!"
- 15 Harmless
- 16 Fed. agents
- 17 Swindle
- 19 Blue
- 20 Author Bellow
- 22 Perched
- 24 Early hrs.
- 27 Amused look
- 29 Level
- 32 Knitted hand warmers
- 35 Freshener scent
- 36 Logical
- 37 Enervate
- 38 Walgreens alternative
- 40 Blue shade
- 42 Visual communication syst.
- 44 In — (miffed)
- 46 Historic periods
- 50 Gets on a train
- 52 Prevents, legally
- 54 Five-alarm dishes
- 55 Blows one's top
- 56 County on the English Channel

57 Schnozzes

DOWN

- 1 Reunion attendee
- 2 Carton sealer
- 3 Property claims
- 4 Schedule abbr.
- 5 Visits internet sites
- 6 Low horn
- 7 Things
- 8 Calendar abbr.
- 9 Formal letters
- 10 Latvia's capital
- 11 Grit
- 12 Chicago winter hrs.
- 18 Atmosphere
- 21 Previously
- 23 Astern
- 24 PC program
- 25 Avril follower
- 26 "The Jungle" author
- 28 Nearly a score
- 30 Actress Gasteyer
- 31 Recipe abbr.
- 33 Gun the engine
- 34 Pot brew
- 39 "Sexy" Beatles girl
- 41 "— pray"
- 42 Alphabet quartet
- 43 Manhattan area
- 45 "Hey, you!"
- 47 Lariat
- 48 Rental units (Abbr.)
- 49 Snake's sound
- 51 "Treasure Island" monogram
- 53 "No seats"

Answer to Previous Puzzle



1-21

CRYPTOQUIP

QRD SIHNTD SEEF SPDBQDZ B
LDPO IBPCD NDTT KRDA
QPOJAC QE HTD QRD TJDLD.
JQ KBT B TQPBJA KPDSF.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF FABRIC FLOORING IS PLACED IN THE CORRIDORS OF A HOTEL, THAT'D BE HALL-TO-HALL CARPETING.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals C

STARS AND STRIPES

OPINION

Max D. Lederer Jr., Publisher

Laura Law, Chief Operating Officer

Lt. Col. Marci Hoffman, Europe commander

John Rodriguez, Europe chief of staff

Lt. Col. Michael Kerschbaum, Pacific commander

Michael Ryan, Pacific chief of staff

EDITORIAL

Terry Leonard, Editor
leonard.terry@stripes.comRobert H. Reid, Senior Managing Editor
reid.robert@stripes.comSean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation
moores.sean@stripes.comAnn Pinson, Digital Managing Editor
pinson.ann@stripes.com

BUREAU STAFF

Europe/Mideast

Erik Slavin, Europe & Mideast Bureau Chief
slavin.erik@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9350; DSN (314)583.9350

Pacific

Aaron Kidd, Pacific Bureau Chief
kidd.aaron@stripes.com
+81.42.552.2511 ext. 88380; DSN (315)227.7380

Washington

Joseph Cacchioli, Washington Bureau Chief
cacchioli.joseph@stripes.com
(+1)(202)886-0033Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News
bowers.brian@stripes.com

CIRCULATION

Mideast

Kevin R. Miller, Circulation Manager
miller.kevin@stripes.com
xsscirculation@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9136; DSN (314)583-9136

Europe

Karen Lewis, Community Engagement Manager
lewis.karen@stripes.com
memberservices@stripes.com
+49(0)631.3615.9090; DSN (314)583.9090

Pacific

Mari Mori, customerhelp@stripes.com
+81-3 6385.3171; DSN (315)227.7333

CONTACT US

Washington

tel: (+1)202.886.0003
633 3rd St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001-3050

Reader letters

letters@stripes.com

Additional contacts

stripes.com/contactus

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Ernie Gates

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Go all in to combat Russia's military machinations

BY DAVID IGNATIUS

The Washington Post

Back in 2013, Russian Gen. Valery Gerasimov succinctly stated the nightmare problem he now faces as the newly installed leader of Russia's bungled war against Ukraine: "You cannot generate ideas on command."

Gerasimov, the chief of staff of the Russian military, this month was given the thankless task of directing Russian forces in Ukraine. Since Gerasimov helped plan the botched invasion last February, this might seem like doubling down on failure. But U.S. analysts believe that Gerasimov has promised his boss, President Vladimir Putin, that he will employ more-aggressive tactics to regain the initiative.

The Gerasimov appointment comes as Ukraine, too, is moving to use new weapons and tactics to break out of what has become a bloody stalemate. For both sides, 2023 will see attempts to redraw largely static battle lines. A front line of World War I-style trenches might become a more fluid and unpredictable battle space this year.

Gerasimov dreamed a decade ago of modernizing the Russian military to conduct this sort of modern battle. In a widely read 2013 article, he said that "the very 'rules of war' have changed." Russia's traditional brute-force tactics were outmoded. "Frontal engagements of large formations of forces ... are gradually becoming a thing of the past." Instead, he argued, Russia needed "speed, quick movements, the smart use of paratroops and encircling forces," along with irregular "hybrid" forces to fight behind the lines.

It didn't work out the way Gerasimov and Putin hoped, to put it mildly. Russia tried its version of a lightning strike to capture Kyiv. But it hadn't reckoned on Ukrainian valor or Russian incompetence. Since the failure of

Putin's plan to quickly seize the capital, Russian forces have repeatedly retrenched and retreated.

Putin, who sells himself as a decisive leader, has instead been reactive, with decisions forced on him by battlefield reversals. After Ukrainian forces retook Kharkiv in a bold September counteroffensive, Putin hastily "annexed" four regions where Russia's hold was precarious. After Ukrainian special operations forces bombed the Kerch Strait bridge to Crimea in October, a desperate Putin launched a missile assault on Ukraine's civilian infrastructure that continues to this day.

The appointment of Gerasimov is Putin's latest Hail Mary pass, and U.S. officials doubt it will succeed. The biggest problem is the chaotic command structure under him. Hastily trained conscripts are being rushed to the front as little more than cannon fodder. Meanwhile, the Wagner militia, led by catering oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin, has taken a lead role in the bitter but strategically meaningless battle for Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine.

It's a crazy time for the Russian military: When a Wagner soldier posted a profane video in December denouncing Gerasimov, Prigozhin dug the knife in deeper by posting: "The guys asked me to pass along, that when you're sitting in a warm office, it's hard to hear the problems on the front line." Remember, this Wagner front line is manned partly by ex-convicts who have been promised that if they survive, they might get their freedom. What an army.

Amid this backbiting, amplified by Russian military bloggers, Putin decided to hand Gerasimov the poisoned chalice of direct command. The man he will replace, Gen. Sergei Surovikin, is said to have counseled caution in protecting the Russian army in Kherson and elsewhere — and was also friendly with Prigozhin.

Gerasimov will try to restore military order among bickering commanders and also initiate complex operations of the sort he envisioned in 2013. One expert skeptically recalls a Russian proverb: "He can't outleap himself."

As the new year dawns, Ukraine appears to be generating momentum. The United States and its NATO allies are providing a new arsenal of mobile weapons — tanks and heavy armored vehicles that would, in theory, allow the Ukrainians to conduct American-style maneuver warfare. Just as important, NATO is providing Ukrainian soldiers with a crash course in using these weapons effectively.

"This is one of those moments in time where if you want to make a difference, this is it," Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told American trainers in a visit Monday to a camp in Germany, where Ukrainian soldiers are getting a rush education in what the Pentagon likes to call "combined arms operations."

A big question is whether the Ukrainians will have enough mobile firepower to conduct the kind of maneuver warfare that NATO commanders advocate. So far, the United States has promised about 50 Bradley fighting vehicles, Germany has pledged about 40 Marder fighting vehicles and Britain has pledged 14 Challenger tanks. That's not even close to the 300 tanks that Gen. Valery Zaluzhny, the Ukrainian commander, has requested.

More mobile armor might be on the way with the possibility that Germany will release scores of Leopard tanks and Washington will provide Stryker combat vehicles. I hope so. This year might prove decisive in Ukraine. Having wisely urged Ukraine to adopt maneuver warfare against Gerasimov's battered, bunkered forces, the United States and its allies shouldn't support this effort halfway. The West has a strategy: So, go for it.

Do away with a debt ceiling that serves no purpose

BY BILL DUDLEY

Bloomberg Opinion

The U.S. is headed for yet another standoff over the federal debt limit. House Republicans say they won't raise the arbitrary cap on total borrowing unless President Joe Biden agrees to budget cuts. The Biden administration says it won't negotiate, because Congress has already made the relevant spending decisions and the government must always honor its obligations.

The impending crisis probably won't prevent the U.S. from paying holders of its Treasury securities. But that's no reason for complacency: Legislators' brinkmanship can still do a lot of damage.

The government will hit the \$31.4 trillion debt ceiling this week, according to Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. This means the real deadline will come in June or so, when the Treasury runs down its balance at the Federal Reserve and runs out of extraordinary cash-raising measures, such as tapping government investment funds.

Despite the apparent determination of some Republicans, I expect disaster to be averted at the last minute, as it has been in the past. It's hard to see how holding the government's creditworthiness hostage is a winning political strategy. The perpetrators will be blamed for the consequences, just as they were blamed for government shut-downs during the Clinton administration.

Beyond that, the narrow Republican majority in the House cuts both ways: It gives more power to the radical fringe, but also allows Democrats to prevail with just a few moderate defectors.

Suppose, though, that Congress fails to raise the limit. What then? Government spending will be limited to incoming revenue, which in summer months won't be nearly enough to pay everyone. Most likely, the Treasury will prioritize paying interest and principal on its debt securities (delaying payment on a portion of its other obligations until the standoff is resolved) — an approach that House Republicans appear to support.

Even if some Treasury securities were to end up technically in default, the Fed is very likely to (as indicated in official transcripts from 2011 and 2013) continue to accept them as collateral for cash loans, albeit at market prices. The Fed might even intervene directly to support the Treasury market, though officials have been cagey about this for fear of making default more palatable to legislators.

Still, there's vast potential for damage. Even if the debt limit is raised before the Treasury runs out of cash, financial markets will suffer. Previous standoffs, such as in 2011, led to significant outflows from Treasury money-market mutual funds into commercial banks, and to distortions in markets where people trade and borrow

against Treasury securities — particularly for securities maturing during the period when the debt limit was likely to bite. It's even possible that the government will fail to attract enough buyers at auctions of newly issued debt, as the primary dealers who are required to bid at each auction shy away from the risk of getting stuck with a large slug of Treasuries.

The closer Congress gets to the brink, the more it will undermine confidence in the U.S. dollar as the world's reserve currency and drive up the government's borrowing costs, as investors demand higher interest rates to compensate for the risk. After a close call in 2011, Standard & Poor's downgraded the country's long-term credit rating to AA+ from AAA. And if Congress goes so far as to prevent the government from meeting its obligations, the shock will be severe, in large part because markets will be expecting a resolution until the very last moment.

The debt limit doesn't contribute meaningfully to fiscal discipline. It encourages political grandstanding. It risks the default of the world's wealthiest and most powerful nation. It should be abolished.

Bill Dudley is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist and senior adviser to Bloomberg Economics. A senior research scholar at Princeton University, he served as president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and as vice chairman of the Federal Open Market Committee. This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

SCOREBOARD/NHL

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Wednesday's men's scores

EAST

Bucknell 68, Army 66
 Colgate 77, Holy Cross 71
 Lafayette 70, American 59
 Mass.-Lowell 81, UMBC 75
 Morgan St. 92, Hartford 84
 Navy 63, Boston U. 45
 Seton Hall 67, UConn 66
 St. Bonaventure 65, Duquesne 56
 Temple 73, East Carolina 58
 West Virginia 74, TCU 65

SOUTH

Auburn 67, LSU 49
 Cincinnati 85, South Florida 69
 Furman 77, Chattanooga 69
 High Point 71, Winthrop 66
 Longwood 64, Gardner-Webb 59
 Pittsburgh 75, Louisville 54
 Radford 63, Campbell 55
 SC-Upstate 61, Presbyterian 60
 Samford 69, ETSU 59
 UNC-Asheville 73, Charleston Southern 63

MIDWEST

Bradley 78, Indiana St. 67
 DePaul 73, Xavier 72
 Marquette 83, Providence 75
 Missouri 79, Arkansas 76
 Missouri St. 65, Drake 62, OT
 N. Iowa 65, Illinois St. 63
 Nebraska 63, Ohio St. 60
 Saint Louis 76, Loyola Chicago 59

SOUTHWEST

North Alabama 78, Cent. Arkansas 73
 Oklahoma St. 72, Oklahoma 56
 SMU 79, Tulsa 76, OT
 Texas A&M 54, Florida 52

FAR WEST

Grand Canyon 89, Utah Tech 85
 Oregon 87, California 58
 San Diego St. 82, Colorado St. 76, OT
 Utah Valley St. 84, Abilene Christian 54

Wednesday's women's scores

EAST

Albany (NY) 64, Binghamton 60
 Army 52, Bucknell 43
 Ball St. 81, Buffalo 59
 Boston U. 84, Navy 41
 Duquesne 68, Saint Louis 63
 Georgetown 87, DePaul 73
 Holy Cross 59, Colgate 49
 La Salle 61, Saint Joseph's 58
 Lafayette 59, American 57
 Lehigh 72, Loyola (Md.) 65, OT
 Minnesota 75, Penn St. 67
 NJIT 71, Bryant 67, OT
 Rhode Island 75, Richmond 49
 St. John's 66, Marquette 61
 UMBC 76, Mass.-Lowell 59
 UMass 66, Fordham 57
 Vermont 61, Maine 52

SOUTH

Davidson 71, VCU 60
 East Carolina 61, Cincinnati 53
 Gardner-Webb 83, Longwood 71
 High Point 79, Winthrop 42
 Presbyterian 82, SC-Upstate 53
 Radford 54, Campbell 53
 UNC-Asheville 43, Charleston Southern 40

MIDWEST

Akron 80, Cent. Michigan 65
 Bowling Green 88, Toledo 76
 Indiana 83, Illinois 72
 Iowa 84, Michigan St. 81, OT
 Iowa St. 69, Oklahoma St. 64
 Kansas 77, West Virginia 58
 Kent St. 79, E. Michigan 66
 Miami (Ohio) 74, N. Illinois 69
 Nebraska 71, Purdue 64
 Oakland 81, Detroit 66
 Providence 74, Butler 66
 W. Michigan 68, Ohio 57
 Wichita St. 73, SMU 65

SOUTHWEST

Baylor 69, Kansas St. 48
 Oklahoma 93, TCU 66
 South Florida 58, Houston 56
 Texas Tech 68, Texas 64

GOLF

PGA Tour FedEx Cup leaders

Through Jan. 16

	Points	Money
1. Seamus Power	788	\$2,106,071
2. Max Homa	743	\$2,449,805
3. Tom Kim	711	\$2,332,085
4. Jon Rahm	673	\$3,162,000
6. Brian Harman	670	\$2,007,392
6. Keegan Bradley	663	\$2,585,224
7. Mackenzie Hughes	659	\$1,928,533
8. Si Woo Kim	618	\$1,756,213
9. Adam Svensson	616	\$1,921,401
10. Tony Finau	586	\$1,880,750
11. Russell Henley	561	\$1,754,972
12. Andrew Putnam	545	\$1,746,938
13. Taylor Montgomery	543	\$1,555,500
14. Hayden Buckley	501	\$1,492,364
15. Rory McIlroy	500	\$1,890,000
16. Tom Hoge	481	\$1,832,134
17. Thomas Detry	479	\$1,202,252
18. Sahithi Theegala	468	\$1,593,615
19. Joel Dahmen	401	\$1,179,563
20. Collin Morikawa	401	\$1,722,518
21. Matthew NeSmith	399	\$1,236,493
22. Ben Taylor	395	\$1,109,290
23. Patrick Rodgers	366	\$936,628
24. Sepp Straka	359	\$1,128,793
25. J.J. Spaun	358	\$1,204,243
26. Rickie Fowler	358	\$1,292,180
27. Danny Willett	352	\$993,113
28. Maverick McNealy	351	\$1,055,638
29. Tyson Alexander	339	\$1,012,534
30. Kyoung-Hoon Lee	338	\$1,224,137

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball American League
MINNESOTA TWINS — Agreed to terms with RHP Chris Paddock on a three-year contract extension.

National League

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS — Agreed to terms with RHPs Jeison Calvo, Anderson Cardenas, Maicol Carrasco, Yordin Chalas, Greudis De Los Santos, Jesus Escobar, Walvin Mena, Eleomar Reyes, SSS Eliesbert Alejos, Enyervert Perez, Jeremy Rodriguez, CFS Pedro Catuy, Miguel Perez, Cs Leo Gallardo, Luis Martinez and LHP Wilkin Paredes on minor league contracts.

FOOTBALL

National Football League

ATLANTA FALCONS — Signed OL Kyle Hinton to a reserve/futures contract.

BALTIMORE RAVENS — Signed RB Ben Mason to a reserve/futures contract.

CAROLINA PANTHERS — Signed DB Myles Dorn to a reserve/futures contract.

CLEVELAND BROWNS — Named Jim Schwartz defensive coordinator.

DALLAS COWBOYS — Signed K Tristan Vizcaino to the practice squad.

DETROIT LIONS — Named Maggy Carlyle and Mace Aluia members of the executive team.

MINNESOTA VIKINGS — Signed OLB Curtis Weaver to a reserve/futures contract.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Signed LB Olakunle Fatukasi to a reserve/futures contract.

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES — Signed DB Tristin McCollum to a reserve/futures contract.

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS — Signed LB J.J. Russell and OT Michael Niese to reserve/futures contracts.

TENNESSEE TITANS — Named Ran Carthon general manager.

HOCKEY

National Hockey League

BOSTON BRUINS — Waived RW Vinnie Hinostroza.

DETROIT RED WINGS — Traded F Kyle Criscuolo to San Jose in exchange for F Jasper Weatherby and assigned him to Grand Rapids (AHL).

NASHVILLE PREDATORS — Reassigned D Roland McKeown to Milwaukee (AHL). Waived RW Michael McCarron.

NEW YORK ISLANDERS — Recalled D Dennis Cholowski and RW William Dufour from Bridgeport (AHL).

OTTAWA SENATORS — Returned LW Jake Lucchini to Belleville (AHL).

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS — Returned C Pontus Holmberg to Toronto (AHL).

WASHINGTON CAPITALS — Recalled C Aliaksei Protas from Hershey (AHL).

SOCCER

Major League Soccer

FC DALLAS — Signed M Paxton Pomykal to a four-year contract.

INTER MIAMI CF — Signed F Josef Martinez.

LOUDOUN UNITED FC — Signed D Yanis Leerman.

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION — Signed M Latif Blessing and D Dave Romney to two-year contracts.

ORLANDO CITY FC — Transferred M Jake Mulroney to St. Patrick's Athletic FC (Irish Premier Division).

National Women's Soccer League

NJ/NY GOTHAM FC — Waived F Cameron Tucker.

ORLANDO PRIDE — Announced the retirement of F Darian Jenkins.

WASHINGTON SPIRIT — Signed M Jordan Baggett to a two-year contract.

NHL scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Boston	44	35	5	4	74	170	95
Toronto	45	27	11	7	61	152	121
Tampa Bay	43	29	13	1	59	157	124
Florida	46	21	20	5	47	152	158
Buffalo	43	21	19	3	45	163	150
Detroit	43	18	17	8	44	134	149
Ottawa	44	20	21	3	43	131	143
Montreal	45	19	23	3	41	120	163

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Carolina	44	27	9	8	62	141	120
New Jersey	44	29	12	3	61	156	116
N.Y. Rangers	45	25	13	7	57	144	120
Washington	47	24	17	6	54	150	133
Pittsburgh	44	22	15	7	51	143	135
N.Y. Islanders	46	23	19	4	50	137	128
Philadelphia	45	19	19	7	45	127	145
Columbus	44	13	29	2	28	111	172

Western Conference

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	45	29	15	1	59	149	118
Dallas	46	26	13	7	59	159	124
Minnesota	43	25	14	4	54	138	120
Colorado	43	23	17	3	49	135	122
Nashville	44	21	17	6	48	122	128
St. Louis	45	22	20	3	47	141	160
Arizona	44	14	25	5	33	119	161
Chicago	42	12	26	4	28	98	157

Pacific Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	45	28	15	2	58	147	130
Seattle	44	26	14	4	56	161	139
Los Angeles	46	25	15	6	56	154	157
Edmonton	46	25	18	3	53	169	152
Calgary	46	21	16	9	51	144	140
Vancouver	44	18	23	3	39	152	178
San Jose	46	14	23	9	37	142	175
Anaheim	45	12	28	5	29	105	190

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

Wednesday's games

Ottawa 5, Pittsburgh 4, OT
 Boston 4, N.Y. Islanders 1
 Colorado 4, Calgary 1
 Tampa Bay 5, Vancouver 2
 San Jose 5, Dallas 3

Thursday's games

Anaheim at Columbus
 Boston at N.Y. Rangers
 Chicago at Philadelphia
 Florida at Montreal
 Minnesota at Carolina
 Winnipeg at Toronto
 N.Y. Islanders at Buffalo
 Nashville at St. Louis
 Tampa Bay at Edmonton
 Washington at Arizona
 Detroit at Vegas
 New Jersey at Seattle
 Dallas at Los Angeles

Friday's games

Ottawa at Pittsburgh
 Colorado at Vancouver

Saturday's games

Anaheim at Buffalo
 Tampa Bay at Calgary
 Minnesota at Florida
 Philadelphia at Detroit
 San Jose at Columbus
 Toronto at Montreal
 Winnipeg at Ottawa
 Carolina at N.Y. Islanders
 Arizona at Dallas
 Chicago at St. Louis
 Los Angeles at Nashville
 Colorado at Seattle
 Edmonton at Vancouver
 Washington at Vegas

Sunday's games

Pittsburgh at New Jersey
 Los Angeles at Chicago
 San Jose at Boston
 Winnipeg at Philadelphia
 Vegas at Arizona

Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday

	GP	G	A	PTS
Connor McDavid, EDM	46	38	46	84
Leon Draisaitl, EDM	44	26	44	70
Nikita Kucherov, TB	43	18	46	64
David Pastrnak, BOS	44	35	28	63
Erik Karlsson, SJ	46	15	47	62
Jason Robertson, DAL	46	30	31	61
Tage Thompson, BUF	43	32	27	59
Matthew Tkachuk, FLA	43	22	34	56
Mikko Rantanen, COL	43	31	25	56
Jack Hughes, NJ	44	29	26	55
Mitch Marner, TOR	45	16	38	54
Kyle Connor, WPG	45	22	32	54



DARRYL DYCK, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

The Tampa Bay Lightning's Steven Stamkos, left, scores against Canucks goalie Spencer Martin to record his 500th career goal during the first period Wednesday in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Stamkos notches 500th career goal

Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — Steven Stamkos scored his 500th NHL goal and then added two more for a hat trick, leading the Tampa Bay Lightning to a 5-2 victory over the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday night.

Brayden Point and Nikita Kucherov each had a goal and an assist in Tampa Bay's fifth consecutive win. Alex Killorn had two assists and Brian Elliott stopped 37 shots.

"That's a game that you're gonna remember for forever, so to do that and have that story to tell for years to come was pretty special," Stamkos said.

Andrei Kuzmenko and Quinn Hughes each scored a power-play goal in the third period for Vancouver (18-23-3).

Canucks goaltender Spencer Martin allowed four goals on 10 shots before being pulled just past the midway mark of the first period. He was replaced by Collin Delia, who made 14 saves.

The Lightning (29-13-1) also beat the Canucks 5-4 in Tampa last week.

Vancouver has not won in regulation since a 4-2 victory over Colorado on Jan. 5. The Canucks are 2-8-0 in their past 10 games.

Stamkos sent his third goal of the night — and 21st of the season — into the empty net with 1:22 left.

Hughes cut the Lightning lead to 4-2 after Stamkos was called for tripping midway through the third period.

The defenseman muscled his way to the front of the net and forced a backhanded shot up and over Elliott for his fourth goal of the season at the 9:10 mark.

Tampa Bay grabbed control with four goals in the first period. Stamkos, who turns 33 on Feb.

7, got his milestone goal at 4:40. Killorn sliced a pass across the low slot to Stamkos, and the Lightning captain tapped it in.

Tampa Bay's bench emptied, with players mobbing Stamkos in the corner in celebration as the crowd cheered.

"It's such a humbling experience when you have a moment like that and you get to celebrate it with your teammates, who are genuinely just as excited as you are. I'm so thankful for them," Stamkos said. "Obviously this is an individual statistic, but it takes so many different players along the way that have helped me get to that."

After the game, he spoke in the locker room and thanked his teammates for their help and support.

That was the moment that made Tampa coach Jon Cooper the most proud.

"I've just watched that kid grow into a man, a phenomenal leader, and to be honest, he's a generational goal scorer," Cooper said. "That's what he is and those guys don't come around that often. Enjoy him while you can and I've been extremely fortunate to enjoy him put that puck in the net hundreds of times. And it's good for him, well deserved."

Kucherov scored his 18th goal of the season on a blistering one-timer from a faceoff circle at 8:28. Point's backhanded shot at 13:18 made it 3-0. It was Point's team-leading 26th of the season.

Stamkos put away his second goal of the night at 14:35, wrapping a wrist shot around Martin's outstretched pad.

"He's first class, a first-ballot Hall of Famer, for sure. He scores goals," said Canucks defenseman Luke Schenn, who played two seasons with Stamkos in Tampa.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Stifling defense keeps Iowa State surging

BY ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

Once again, Iowa State is doing what it wasn't supposed to do.

The Cyclones made the biggest turnaround ever by a power conference team when they went from winning two games in 2020-21 to winning 22 and reaching the NCAA Sweet 16 last season.

After coach T.J. Otzelberger's second Cyclones team entered this season picked eighth in the 10-team Big 12, one of college basketball's feel-good stories continues.

Iowa State (14-3, 5-1) is ranked No. 12 in the nation and in a three-way tie for first place in the league heading into Saturday's game at Oklahoma State.

"For me, in 20 years of doing this, it's probably the most connected group I've been around," Otzelberger said. "They really care about each other, have each other's back and are down to do whatever they need to do for the team. There's a rugged toughness to how we do it, but there's a togetherness and unity at a really special level with this group and we're going to keep climbing."

Iowa State is out to its best start in Big 12 play since 1999-2000. It bounced back from a 62-60 loss at No. 2 Kansas with a 78-67 home win over No. 7 Texas on Tuesday that was the Cyclones' fourth of the season against a ranked opponent.

"The job's not finished," guard Jaren Holmes said. "We've worked hard to be in this position, but we can't worry about that now. We've got to keep pushing ahead."

The makeup of the team reflects how much Otzelberger values experience.

Four of the five starters are transfers. Holmes and Osun Osunniyi are fifth-year players who were at St. Bonaventure last season. Gabe Kalscheur is in his

fifth season, and second in Ames after transferring from Minnesota. Caleb Grill, who began his career with the Cyclones, is a fourth-year player who returned after a season with Otzelberger at UNLV.

Fourth-year players Tre King (Eastern Kentucky) and Robert Johnson (Denver) are the first two men off the bench.

The point guard is freshman Tamin Lipsey, who was thrust into the starter's role after Temple transfer Jeremiah Williams was injured in the preseason.

At 3.27 years per player, the Cyclones are the sixth-most experienced team in Division I, according to KenPom.com. And as always with an Otzelberger team, defense is the name of the game.

The Cyclones have held six straight conference opponents to 70 points or less for the first time since 2000, and a nation-leading 28.5% of opponent possessions end with a turnover.

They're the only power conference team to have forced 25 or more turnovers in a game three times this season, and one of three teams to force 30 or more in a game.

The Cyclones turned up their defense late in the second half against Texas. They held the Longhorns scoreless for almost five minutes while building a two-point lead to 12.

Iowa State leads the Big 12 and is in the top 10 nationally in points allowed per game (58.5), steals per game (10.1) and turnovers forced per game (19.1).

"When we come to practice, we take charges, we pressure the basketball, we block out, we do physical things," Otzelberger said. "You aren't just going to show up and do them in the games. You're going to play to the level of your habits, especially in the most challenging or adverse of moments."



CHARLIE NEIBERGALL/AP

Texas guard Tyrese Hunter loses the ball between Iowa State's Demarion Watson, left, and Tamin Lipsey on Tuesday. The Cyclones are in the top 10 nationally in turnovers forced per game (19.1).



JESSICA HILL/AP

UConn's Paige Bueckers looks down at teammate Azzi Fudd's knee in the second half against Georgetown on Sunday in Hartford, Conn. Fudd left the game in the first half with a knee injury and did not return.

Rash of injuries hits women

Coaches, medical pros have theories on why but no good solutions

BY PAT EATON-ROBB
Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — UConn star Azzi Fudd was battling for rebounding position in the first half Sunday when she banged knees with Georgetown's Ariel Jenkins. Fudd left the game and did not return.

It was just her second game back after missing eight games with an injury to the same right knee. It also came a week after injuries forced the fifth-ranked Huskies to postpone a game with DePaul because it did not have enough healthy players available — a step that became sadly familiar during the height of the pandemic but is rarely seen otherwise.

A few days later, Arizona State was forced to forfeit games against Utah and Colorado because the Sun Devils had too many injured players.

Programs such as Vanderbilt have also lost multiple starters to the injury report. Low roster numbers because of health issues led Lewis and Clark Community College in Illinois to cancel the remainder of its season just this week.

With injuries mounting in women's programs, experts have noted there are a number of factors in play, including the specialization of sports at a younger age, and longer recovery times contributing to those thin benches. Certain knee injuries are also more common in female athletes than in men.

Whatever the reasons, the search for solutions is always on.

At UConn, just two players have been available for every game. Coaches have burned sage in the

locker room, brought holy water to practice and had Native American dancers perform healing rituals.

Former national player of the year Paige Bueckers, who missed most of 2021-22 with a knee injury, and freshman Ice Brady both suffered serious knee injuries in the preseason. Two other players are sidelined with concussions. Other players have missed time with foot and hand injuries.

"What kind of exercises do you do in the weight room to make sure you don't get a concussion?" coach Geno Auriemma said. "There's nothing, you know. What do you do to make sure that your teammate doesn't push a kid into you, a teammate knocks you on the ground and you hit your head or where you catch your thumb and a kid shirt and break your thumb in the first first game of the year? So some of these are just weird."

Some injuries, sports medicine experts have said, may be linked to the way elite athletes are preparing for college.

Nicole Alexander, the head trainer for the WNBA's Connecticut Sun and a former trainer at Notre Dame and North Carolina, said kids are specializing in one sport earlier and playing that sport year-round.

"So they're not getting a chance to rest their bodies," she said. "You're putting the same amount of mileage on the same body parts, over and over again. So now you get these kids who are in college, but their bodies are such that it's almost like they've been playing professional ball for 10 years because that's all they've been doing."

Fudd missed two months last year with a foot injury. She also suffered ACL and MCL tears while in high school.

UCLA coach Cori Close has another theory. She thinks the apparent rise in injuries, especially knee injuries, can be linked to the pandemic.

"I definitely think because of COVID — the interruptions of prehab and training and periodization and off times and prevention work," she said. "I talked to Geno about this at UConn and several other coaches. And we think it's a dramatic effect for how the training regimens were interrupted from COVID."

Dr. Andrew Cosgarea, an orthopedic surgeon and sports injury specialist at John's Hopkins, said there is no data yet suggesting there are more injuries this year than in previous seasons. He said schools have been doing a lot of work teaching kids how to prevent ACL and other injuries by changing, for example, the way they cut, jump and land.

Cosgarea and other experts said one factor in the lack of available players is that athletes are sitting out longer because it leads to better outcomes when they return.

Dr. Anthony Alessi, UConn's team neurologist, declined to talk about specific players he's treated, but said the time it takes to return varies with each individual, but on average is now between 10 days and two weeks.

"It's multi-factorial," he said. "But, what we've found is that by making the investment in time, by gradually bringing them back to their full capacity based on their symptoms, you'll get them at full strength to the end of the season."

GOLF/AUSTRALIAN OPEN



KAMRAN JEBRELI/AP

Henrik Stenson talks to his caddie on the 18th hole during the first round of the Abu Dhabi HSBC Golf Championship on Thursday.

Trio of LIV golfers playing Abu Dhabi

By STEVE DOUGLAS
Associated Press

The European tour is weeks away from discovering whether it has the right to issue bans to those members who joined the Saudi-funded LIV Golf league in a development that rocked the world of golf last year.

While the legal dispute drags on, players such as Lee Westwood, Ian Poulter and Henrik Stenson are happy to get what they can from the tour — world ranking points, Ryder Cup qualification points — whether they are welcome on it or not.

The veteran trio are playing at the Abu Dhabi Championship this week, with the presence of Stenson the most eye-catching.

It has been six months since the 46-year-old Swede chose LIV Golf over the Ryder Cup, a decision which cost him the captaincy of the European team for this year's event in Rome and has, for some, sullied his legacy.

He hadn't played on the European tour since — his last non-LIV appearance was at the British Open in July.

"It's been great," the 46-year-old Stenson said after starting the Abu Dhabi Championship with a 4-under 68 on Thursday. "It's been a while. It's been good fun to catch up with some longtime friends that I haven't seen for a long time."

Stenson might not have many more events on the tour that propelled his career.

A British arbitration judge is expected to give his verdict in February on the legal tussle between the European tour and those who left for LIV Golf. The Desert Swing, which also comprises the Dubai Desert Classic next week, could be one last hurrah.

"It's going to be an interesting few months," Irish golfer Shane Lowry told the BBC.

Luke Donald, who replaced Stenson as European Ryder Cup captain, also is teeing it up in Abu Dhabi for one of the signature Ro-

lex Series events that have prize money of \$9 million.

That would be seen as a huge prize pot if it wasn't for Saudi-bankrolled LIV Golf offering much, much more — a fact that doesn't escape Lowry.

"I think what's happened in the last year or so, we've got sidetracked in thinking that 20 million or 100 million (dollars) is just normal and that's what we should be playing for and that's what we're worth," said Lowry, who — at No. 20 — is the highest-ranked player in the field in Abu Dhabi. "And that if we are playing for 2 or 3 million (dollars) on this tour, that is not enough."

"I still think that this tour has grown, I think with their alliance with the PGA Tour, with the prize money guaranteed to grow ... over the next 13 years every year, I think that's good for the tour. I think it's sustainable, which is the big thing. I think having a sustainable product is something that you need to have, and I do think this tour has that."

Stenson said there has been no hostility toward him, though.

"Absolutely," he replied after being asked if he felt welcome back on the tour. "No question."

So, any regrets?

"No, I made my decision and obviously Ryder Cup Europe made theirs," he said. "Yeah, it's not great but it is what it is, and Ryder Cup has been a huge part of my career."

"I wish Luke (Donald, his replacement) all the best with the team going forward and we'll see where we all end up in the long run with this."

"The way I look at it, when all of us went to play on the PGA Tour back in the day, we shouldn't have been welcomed back, either, then," Stenson said. "There's multiple tours in the world and as far as I'm concerned, as long as you fulfill your criteria and earn your right to be there, you should be able to play in as many tournaments as you like."

American Brooksby ousts No. 2 Ruud; Djokovic wins

By HOWARD FENDRICH
Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Oh-so-close to completing a straight-set upset of No. 2 seed Casper Ruud at the Australian Open, Jenson Brooksby frittered away three match points, sat down at a changeover and began yelling at himself.

"How?! How?! God!!!"

His face was flush, his emotions unhidden, his game unraveling. Soon enough, that set slipped away, as Ruud's confidence seemed to surge and Brooksby's collapse momentarily continued. And then, in a blink, Brooksby was back in charge, taking command immediately in the fourth set along the way to a 6-3, 7-5, 6-7 (4), 6-2 victory over Ruud and a spot in a surprisingly American-filled third round at Melbourne Park.

"I was getting a little more frustrated out there that I didn't close it out, and my mentality was changing a little bit," said the 39th-ranked Brooksby, who sipped from little jars of pickle juice in the fourth set at Rod Laver Arena. "Those are the situations you have to handle sometimes in matches, and you're going to face. I think the biggest question is: How do you respond? I just told myself to reset."

So leave it to a pair of 20-something Californians to rid the men's bracket of its two highest seeded players: Brooksby, 22, delivered his unexpected triumph at the same stage and in the same stadium that Mackenzie McDonald, 27, defeated No. 1 seed and defending champion Rafael Nadal a day earlier. That makes this the first Grand Slam tournament since the 2002 Australian Open that the Nos. 1-2 seeds lost before the end of the second round.

Ruud was the runner-up at the French Open to Nadal last June and at the U.S. Open to Carlos Alcaraz last September.

Like Ruud, Ons Jabeur reached the finals of two Grand Slams in 2022. Like Ruud, she came to Australia as the No. 2 seed. And like Ruud, she was bounced in the second round, beaten 6-1, 5-7, 6-1 by 2019 French Open runner-up Marketa Vondrousova in a match that ended at about 1 a.m. on Friday.

Later still, Andy Murray and Thanasi Kokkinakis faced down exhaustion and each other for more than 5½ hours in a second-round match until Murray emerged with a 4-6, 6-7 (4), 7-6 (5), 6-3, 7-5 victory that ended at just past 4 a.m.

Murray won 196 points, Kokkinakis 192. And they combined for 171 winners to only 107 unforced errors.



DITA ALANGKARA/AP

Jenson Brooksby of the U.S. reacts after winning the first set against Casper Ruud of Norway during their second-round match at the Australian Open on Thursday in Melbourne, Australia.

It was the second consecutive five-setter this week for three-time major champion Murray, a 35-year-old from Britain with an artificial hip who eliminated No. 13 seed Matteo Berrettini on Tuesday.

The exits of Nadal and Ruud make nine-time champion Novak Djokovic — who dealt with a persistent heckler and a left hamstringing that he says worries him during a four-set victory over 191st-ranked qualifier Enzo Coucaud on Thursday night — even more of a title favorite in his return to Australia.

Also a big deal: The progress of U.S. men through the year's first major championship. None has won a Grand Slam title since Andy Roddick at the 2003 U.S. Open.

By reaching the third round, Brooksby joined countrymen Michael Mmoh, Ben Shelton, Tommy Paul and J.J. Wolf, who also won Thursday, along with McDonald, No. 16 Frances Tiafoe and No. 29 Sebastian Korda, who all won Wednesday. The highest-seeded American man, though, could not make it that far: No. 8 Taylor Fritz bowed out with a 6-7 (4), 7-6 (2), 6-4, 6-7 (6), 6-2 loss to 113th-ranked Australian wild-card entry Alexei Popyrin.

Still, the eight men from the United States remaining are the most into the third round in Australia since the same number did it in 1996.

Mmoh, who lost in qualifying but got into the main draw when another player withdrew, made it this far at a major tournament for the first time by defeating No. 12 Alexander Zverev 6-7 (1), 6-4, 6-3, 6-2.

Brooksby next plays Paul; Mmoh takes on Wolf.

Scoreboard

Thursday
At Melbourne, Australia
Seedings in parentheses
Second Round
Men's Singles

Daniel Evans (25), Britain, def. Jeremy Chardy, France, 6-4, 6-4, 6-1.

Tommy Paul, United States, def. Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (30), Spain, 6-2, 2-6, 6-7 (4), 6-3, 6-4.

Jeffrey John Wolf, United States, def. Diego Schwartzman (23), Argentina, 6-1, 6-4, 6-4.

Ben Shelton, United States, def. Nicolas Jarry, Chile, 7-6 (3), 7-6 (3), 7-5.

Andrey Rublev (5), Russia, def. Emil Ruusuvuori, Finland, 6-2, 6-4, 6-7 (2), 6-3.

Jenson Brooksby, United States, def. Casper Ruud (2), Norway, 6-3, 7-5, 6-7 (4), 6-2.

Ugo Humbert, France, def. Denis Kudla, United States, 6-2, 6-7 (5), 6-2, 6-4.

Grigor Dimitrov (27), Bulgaria, def. Laslo Djere, Serbia, 6-3, 6-2, 6-0.

Alexei Popyrin, Australia, def. Taylor Fritz (8), United States, 6-7 (4), 7-6 (2), 6-4, 6-7 (6), 6-2.

Michael Mmoh, United States, def. Alexander Zverev (12), Germany, 6-7 (1), 6-4, 6-3, 6-2.

Holger Rune (9), Denmark, def. Maxime Cressy, United States, 7-5, 6-4, 6-4.

Roberto Bautista Agut (24), Spain, def. Brandon Holt, United States, 4-6, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-2.

Benjamin Bonzi, France, def. Pablo Carreno Busta (14), Spain, 4-6, 4-6, 7-6 (5), 6-1, 7-6 (4).

Novak Djokovic (4), Serbia, def. Enzo Coucaud, France, 6-1, 6-7 (5), 6-2, 6-0.

Alex de Minaur (22), Australia, def. Adrian Mannarino, France, 7-6 (3), 4-6, 6-4, 6-1.

Women's Singles

Aryna Sabalenka (5), Belarus, def. Shelby Rogers, United States, 6-3, 6-1.

Ekaterina Alexandrova (19), Russia, def. Taylor Townsend, United States, 1-6, 6-2, 6-3.

Katie Volynets, United States, def. Veronika Kudermetova (9), Russia, 6-4, 2-6, 6-2.

Elise Mertens (26), Belgium, def. Lauren Davis, United States, 6-4, 6-3.

Magda Linette, Poland, def. Anett Kontaveit (16), Estonia, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Donna Vekic, Croatia, def. Liudmila Samsonova (18), Russia, 6-3, 6-0.

Camila Giorgi, Italy, def. Anna-Karolina Schmiedlova, Slovakia, 6-4, 6-3.

Karolina Pliskova (30), Czech Republic, def. Yulia Putintseva, Kazakhstan, 6-0, 7-5.

Linda Fruhvirtova, Czech Republic, def. Kimberly Birrell, Australia, 6-3, 6-2.

Nuria Parrizas Diaz, Spain, def. Anastasia Potapova, Russia, 6-3, 6-2.

Zhang Shuai (23), China, def. Petra Martic, Croatia, 6-3, 6-3.

Laura Siegemund, Germany, def. Irina-Camelia Begu (27), Romania, 5-7, 7-5, 6-3.

Caroline Garcia (4), France, def. Leylah Annie Fernandez, Canada, 7-6 (5), 7-5.

Varvara Gracheva, Russia, def. Lucrezia Stefanini, Italy, 6-3, 6-1.

Belinda Bencic (12), Switzerland, def. Claire Liu, United States, 7-6 (3), 6-3.

Marketa Vondrousova, Czech Republic, def. Ons Jabeur (2), Tunisia, 6-1, 5-7, 6-1.

NBA/NFL

AROUND THE NBA

In Paris, ex-coach Snyder briefly gets back to work

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
Associated Press

PARIS — Quin Snyder was back in his element. Sweats, sneakers, T-shirt. Evaluating players, sharing ideas, connecting with new people and reconnecting with some others.

He was coaching again. For two days, anyway.

It's a start.

Snyder was the director of the Basketball Africa League Combine that happened Sunday and Monday in Paris. It was his first time doing anything serious around the game since making the decision last spring to end his tenure as coach of the Utah Jazz after eight seasons.

"This is a sabbatical for me. A personal sabbatical," Snyder told The Associated Press. "I think it's just healthy. It was a hard decision to come to, but this time is unique and at this point in my career, it's something really important to me."

Snyder made no effort to hide how much he was enjoying the two-day gig, which he took on because of his 20-year friendship with BAL President Amadou Gallo Fall. Joakim Noah and Dwyane Wade were among those sitting courtside for the games Monday, while Snyder watched from a corner before leading a clinic for coaches after the games were completed.

It's a big week for the sport in Paris. The Chicago Bulls and Detroit Pistons arrived in advance of their game in France's capital on Thursday night. NBA Commissioner Adam Silver arrived Tuesday and, of course, there's constant talk about Victor Wembanyama — the 19-year-old, 7-foot-3 French phenom who is widely expected to be No. 1 pick in this year's draft. Odds are, Wembanyama will be there Thursday night for the game, watching guys who he'll be playing against in about 10 months.

The Bulls landed in Paris on Monday, went right to the practice facility for a workout, and even they found themselves talking about Wembanyama.

"Hopefully, we get to meet him," Bulls center Nikola Vucevic said.

And Snyder saw all the multicultural symmetry on Monday, standing in France, watching guys hoping for a chance to play in Africa, with Americans and Italians and Greeks and more in the gym watching and no shortage of languages being spoken. Halfway



RICK BOWMER/AP

Jazz coach Quin Snyder, right, greets the Mavericks' Luka Doncic during a playoff series in April. Snyder stepped down last spring.

around the world from home, he was right at home, since Snyder is comfortable just about anywhere. He's spent time in Senegal with Fall, was part of a Russian league title as an assistant for CSKA Moscow a decade ago, coached in college, coached in the minors, coached in the NBA.

"Basketball builds bridges," Snyder said. "I had a chance to come to the Euroleague, worked in Russia for a year with Ettore

Messina. ... You can learn so much from other people, other countries, different philosophies that from a practical basketball standpoint make you better. And then all the things that come with that personally, learning about cultures and people. It's one of the beautiful things about sport."

That's why he accepted this assignment, why he spent most of a long flight to Paris going over his plans, why he worked so hard on what would be about 45 minutes leading a clinic. The game has given him a ton, so he gave a little bit back this week.

And he needed a break. Known for how hard he works — "does the guy sleep?" former Jazz guard Donovan Mitchell once asked, and was serious when he asked it — Snyder stepped down in June after leading the Jazz to six consecutive playoff appearances. He was an NBA coach of the year finalist in 2020-21, won nearly 60% of his games with the franchise and is one of only two coaches to end their tenures in Utah with a winning record. Jerry Sloan is the other.

It was time for a change. The Jazz traded Mitchell and Rudy Gobert to start reimagining their roster, Will Hardy — who was one of the coaches-in-waiting hot names in the league — took over in Utah and Snyder has enjoyed uninterrupted family time for the first time in forever.

It was not a retirement. Snyder will coach again. When, nobody knows, not even him. But the last two days reminded him how much he needs to be on the floor, talking ball with somebody.

"Hopefully," Snyder said, "I'll have the opportunity to do that again."



Chasing Kareem

A look at LeBron James' pursuit of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for the NBA's scoring record. Abdul-Jabbar has held the record since April 5, 1984:

Abdul-Jabbar points: 38,387.

James points: 38,104.

Difference: 283 points.

James' latest game: He scored 32 points Wednesday in the Los Angeles Lakers' 116-111 loss to Sacramento.

James' scoring average this season: 29.8.

Potential record-breaker: At his current rate of 29.8 points per game, with 284 points needed to pass Abdul-Jabbar, it would take James 10 more games to become the NBA's scoring leader. Assuming he does not miss any games, that makes the potential record-breaking game Feb. 7 at home against Oklahoma City.

Next Lakers game: Friday at home against Memphis.

From The Associated Press

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	33	12	.733	—
Philadelphia	28	16	.636	4½
Brooklyn	27	16	.628	5
New York	25	21	.543	8½
Toronto	20	25	.444	13

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	25	21	.543	—
Atlanta	23	22	.511	1½
Washington	19	26	.422	5½
Orlando	16	28	.364	8
Charlotte	12	34	.261	13

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	29	16	.644	—
Cleveland	28	18	.609	1½
Indiana	23	23	.500	6½
Chicago	20	24	.455	8½
Detroit	12	35	.255	18

Western Conference

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	31	13	.705	—
New Orleans	26	19	.578	5½
Dallas	24	22	.522	8
San Antonio	14	31	.311	17½
Houston	10	35	.222	21½

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Denver	32	13	.711	—
Utah	24	24	.500	9½
Oklahoma City	22	23	.489	10
Minnesota	22	24	.478	10½
Portland	21	23	.477	10½

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Sacramento	25	18	.581	—
Golden State	22	22	.500	3½
L.A. Clippers	23	24	.489	4
Phoenix	21	24	.467	5
L.A. Lakers	20	25	.444	6

Tuesday's games

Milwaukee 130, Toronto 122
San Antonio 106, Brooklyn 98
Denver 122, Portland 113
Philadelphia 120, L.A. Clippers 110

Wednesday's games

Washington 116, New York 105
Atlanta 130, Dallas 122
Miami 124, New Orleans 98
Memphis 115, Cleveland 114
Oklahoma City 126, Indiana 106
Charlotte 122, Houston 117
Utah 126, L.A. Clippers 103
Denver 122, Minnesota 118
Sacramento 116, L.A. Lakers 111

Thursday's games

Chicago at Detroit
Golden State at Boston
Toronto at Minnesota
Brooklyn at Phoenix
Philadelphia at Portland

Friday's games

New Orleans at Orlando
Golden State at Cleveland
Miami at Dallas
New York at Atlanta
L.A. Clippers at San Antonio
Brooklyn at Utah
Indiana at Denver
Memphis at L.A. Lakers
Oklahoma City at Sacramento

Saturday's games

Boston at Toronto
Orlando at Washington
Charlotte at Atlanta
Milwaukee at Cleveland
Houston at Minnesota
Indiana at Phoenix
Philadelphia at Sacramento

Sunday's games

New Orleans at Miami
New York at Toronto
L.A. Clippers at Dallas
Memphis at Phoenix
Oklahoma City at Denver
Brooklyn at Golden State
L.A. Lakers at Portland

Leaders

Through Wednesday Rebounding

	G	OFF	DEF	TOT	AVG
Sabonis, SAC	41	124	393	517	12.6
Antetokmpo, MIL	35	80	338	418	11.9
Gobert, MIN	39	129	319	448	11.5
Adams, MEM	40	198	254	452	11.3

5 selected for games in London, Germany

By **ROB MAADDI**
Associated Press

The Buffalo Bills, Tennessee Titans, Jacksonville Jaguars, Kansas City Chiefs and New England Patriots will each play international games during the NFL's 2023 regular season.

The Chiefs and Patriots will play in Germany. The Bills, Titans and Jaguars will play in London. The Bills and Titans are the designated home teams for two games at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, while the Jaguars will host a game at Wembley Stadium as part of their multi-year commitment to playing in the United Kingdom.

The league announced the plans on Thursday.

Opponents, dates and times for the games will be released when the full schedule is announced later this year.

There will be no international game in Mexico in 2023 due to renovations taking place in Estadio Azteca in Mexico City.

"We have a long history and we continue to grow but these international games are pivotal," NFL executive Peter O'Reilly told the AP. "Those who have been there and experienced it, you just see the passion of the fans in these markets. This is the chance for them to experience the best of the NFL live and it's an opportunity for year-round engagement with the fans there. There's nothing bigger and better than an NFL game and those teams to be there in those markets and putting it on in a stadium."

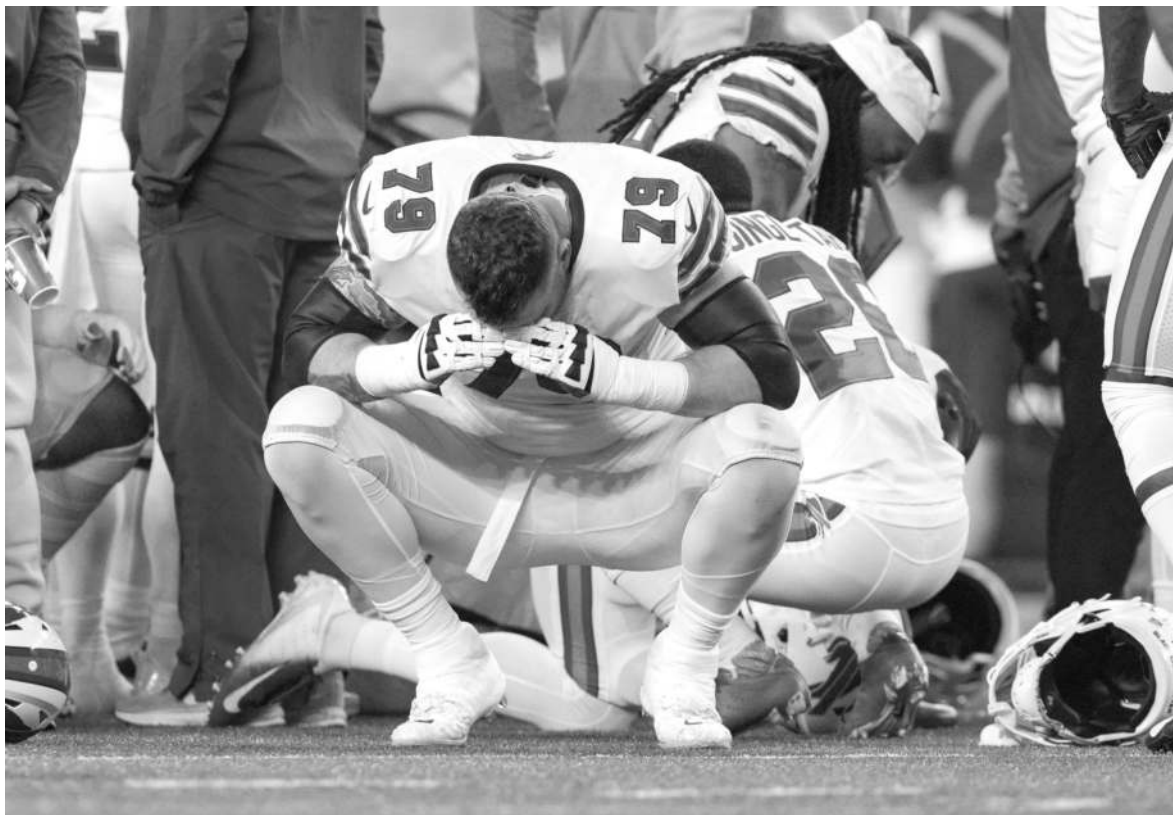
Tampa Bay defeated Seattle in Munich in the NFL's first regular-season game in Germany this season. The destination cities for the 2023 games will be announced later this year. The NFL previously confirmed that Munich and Frankfurt will host games in Germany over the next four years.

The Chiefs and Patriots are part of the league's International Home Marketing Area program in which teams secure international marketing rights in countries beyond the United States. Both teams have rights in Germany.

The Bills and Titans will play their second games in London. The Bills lost to the Jaguars in 2015. The Titans lost to the Chargers in 2018. The Jaguars will play their 10th game in London.

The five international games in 2022 set record-breaking attendance and viewership with ticket demand and number of fans increasing for the league across the world. Each game was sold out with a total of 356,116 in attendance.

NFL PLAYOFFS



JEFF DEAN/AP

Buffalo Bills offensive tackle Spencer Brown (79) and teammates react as Damar Hamlin is tended to after suffering cardiac arrest during their Jan. 2 game against the Bengals in Cincinnati.

With Hamlin recovering, Bills, Bengals shift focus

BY JOHN WAWROW
Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Damar Hamlin is back on his feet, and that's uplifting enough in allowing coach Sean McDermott and the Buffalo Bills to focus on their immediate future rather than an emotional past in preparing to host the Cincinnati Bengals in an AFC divisional playoff on Sunday.

In some three weeks time, the Bills — and the Bengals for that matter, too — have gone from having their game canceled after Hamlin went into cardiac arrest and needed to be resuscitated on the field in Cincinnati, to being consoled by the safety's remarkable recovery.

"I think the guys are in a good spot," McDermott said on Wednesday in noting Hamlin has made regular visits to the Bills facility this week.

"As he continues to improve, I think that certainly helps," McDermott added. "That experience, we'll carry with us, and there's a challenge to that. But there's also a lot of good that came from that. And I think right now, we need to focus on the positives."

The positives are numerous, and start with Hamlin back home a week after being released from the hospital. There's also the outpouring of support Hamlin received in the wake of his sudden collapse.

And McDermott believes the passing of time — and the chance to return to the field to play the fol-



AFC divisional playoff
Cincinnati Bengals (13-4)
at Buffalo Bills (14-3)

AFN-Sports
9 p.m. Sunday CET
5 a.m. Monday JKT

lowing two weekends — helped ease whatever emotional residue he and his players felt.

"I shared this with my kids on Sunday after the New England game because that's when I had a chance to slow down," McDermott said, following a season-ending 35-23 win over the Patriots two weeks ago.

"When you can go through your life 48 years and not really have an experience like that, and then that happens, you know that God's real," he added. "And you know that there's power in prayer and miracles do happen."

McDermott said Hamlin is not attending team meetings, but taking what he called "a baby step at a time" in re-establishing a normal routine by "just kind of dipping his toe back in here and getting on the road to just getting back to himself."

The mood this week in Cincinnati was similarly upbeat after the Bengals were also left stunned by the sight of Hamlin collapsing af-

ter making what appeared to be a routine tackle of receiver Tee Higgins in the first quarter.

"To see Damar getting healthier as time passes and see where it ended up, there is always going to be a strong connection between these two organizations, and that's a good thing," coach Zac Taylor.

Now it's a matter of two teams who bonded on the field and in the locker rooms in a time of crisis by agreeing the Week 17 game could not proceed, essentially picking up where they left off. Rather than having the AFC's top-seed hanging in the balance as it was supposed to be on Jan. 2, the stakes are even higher.

The one issue facing both teams involves game-planning, and whether to go with a similar approach as three weeks ago. The Bills only had one possession, which ended with a field goal. The Bengals, who led 7-3 on Joe Burrow's 14-yard touchdown pass to Tyler Boyd, were on their second offensive series when the game was called off.

"I think you've got to be careful about digging too much, trying to uncover this or that, because we spent a lot of time prior to our last game," Bills defensive coordinator Leslie Frazier said. "You have to be careful of overthinking it, overanalyzing it giving the players too much, and you end up not playing your best football."

AP sports writer Mitch Stacy in Cincinnati contributed to this report.

Thrives: Chiefs are rarely in bad spot with Mahomes

FROM PAGE 32

never failed to reach the AFC championship game in four years as a starter, twice going to the Super Bowl and once winning its MVP award while ending the franchise's 50-year title drought.

He will try to improve to 5-0 in the divisional round on Saturday night against the Jacksonville Jaguars.

"I think all the guys understood that whenever they signed with this team that we want to win the Super Bowl. And if we don't, we feel like it's not where we should be," Mahomes said. "But you can't look ahead. We have a great team that we're playing this week, that's playing great football, so how can we practice today so that we're better by the end of the week? And I think you have to have that mindset — and I think the guys do — and I think we're in a good spot."

Rarely are the Chiefs, winners of the last seven AFC West titles, in a bad spot with Mahomes on the field. In all, he is 8-3 in the postseason. He is averaging 307 yards passing per game, a number driven up by a 404-yard effort in last year's wild-card win over the Steelers. And he has thrown 28 touchdown passes against seven interceptions while adding five TD runs, including one in last year's divisional-round win over the Bills.

That night at Arrowhead Stadium may have best encapsulated Mahomes in the playoffs.

The Chiefs trailed 29-26 with less than 2 minutes left when he threw since-departed Tyreek Hill a 64-yard touchdown pass to regain the lead. And when the Bills raced the other way and scored with 13 seconds to go, Mahomes answered with two long completions to Hill and Travis Kelce to set up Harrison Butker's tying field goal as time expired.

In overtime, Mahomes completed all six of his passes, with the last the winning TD toss to Kelce in a 42-36 victory.

"Pat's a very competitive per-



AFC divisional playoff
Jacksonville Jaguars (10-8)
at Kansas City Chiefs (14-3)

AFN-Sports
10:30 p.m. Saturday CET
6:30 a.m. Sunday JKT

son," Chiefs offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy said, "and on top of that, obviously, he's a great football player. He's going to do whatever he can to make sure that he can help us be successful."

That means tirelessly working on his craft, and the results are evident: Mahomes shattered his own franchise record with 5,250 yards passing this season, to go with a league-leading 41 touchdown passes and four touchdown runs.

Mahomes has been making plays for years. And making them look easy.

Most of the time.

The last time he stepped on the field in the playoffs, against the Bengals in last year's AFC championship, he produced perhaps the worst performance of his career. Mahomes still threw for 275 and three touchdowns, but he also threw a pair of interceptions, and they gave Cincinnati a chance to rally from a 21-3 deficit for a 27-24 overtime victory.

It's a loss that has fueled Mahomes through the offseason, the regular season and right into this year's postseason.

"You build up for this all season," he said. "The regular season, you take it week by week, but you want to be here in the playoffs, and you know you're going to be playing the best football teams in the league, and that's what you want to do as a competitor. And so I'm excited to go up against a great football team at Arrowhead Stadium. That's always a good time."



RICK SCUTERI/AP

Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes is averaging 307 yards passing in the playoffs. He has 28 touchdown passes and five TD runs.

NFL PLAYOFFS

Giants' Jones changes narrative, quiets critics

BY DENNIS WASZAK JR.
Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Daniel Jones' future with the New York Giants was murky heading into this season with plenty of critics wondering if he could truly ever be a franchise-type quarterback.

Too many turnovers. Too inconsistent. Too few victories.

Jones heard it all, and some was warranted. The Giants not exercising the fifth-year option on his rookie deal last offseason spoke volumes, too. But he has silenced most of the naysayers with a solid season and a history-making post-season debut, leading the Giants to their first playoff win in 11 years.

"Yeah, I don't think I've spent a whole lot of time thinking about that," Jones said Tuesday as he and the Giants prepared for their divisional round playoff matchup Saturday night with the NFC East rival Philadelphia Eagles.

"If there's anything I've learned," Jones added, "it's about what you do the next week, so I'm focused on that and continuing to try to improve and play as well as I can on Saturday."

Jones, the No. 6 overall pick in the 2019 draft out of Duke, threw for 301 yards and two touchdowns and ran for 78 yards in New York's 31-24 victory over Minnesota last Sunday. He became the first quarterback in NFL history to have 300 yards passing, two TD passes and at least 70 yards rushing in a playoff game.

"D.J. was amazing, did everything we asked him to do," left tackle Andrew Thomas said. "When there was nothing open, (he was) scrambling and made plays for us, didn't turn over the ball."

"When he plays like that, we have a good opportunity to win against anybody."

It was the latest terrific performance for Jones in a season full of them.

The 25-year-old quarterback's

combination of throwing and running has turned him into an exciting playmaker — one of the most dynamic in the league at his position. And he has come a long way from the game manager label he was being saddled with, particularly earlier this season with his passing numbers unimpressive.

But then the plays and yards starting coming, along with the wins.

And the turnovers stayed way down, with 15 touchdown passes and a career-low five interceptions during the regular season. Jones also lost just three fumbles, a far cry from his 11 lost fumbles as a rookie.

"My focus is just trying to help him be the best he can be," coach Brian Daboll said. "He's done everything that he can do since I've been here. A great guy to work with. He works extremely hard, and I think that's where our focus is."

Even others outside the Giants facility are casting Jones in a new light — on and off the field — as a quarterback who can carry a team, and perhaps an entire franchise.

"Yeah, you hear some of it, for sure, and notice some of it," Jones said. "It's part of it. I can't control how people respond, positively or negatively. I control how I play and that's my focus."

The Giants will face the Eagles for the third time this season, with Philadelphia winning the first two meetings. Jones was 18-for-27 for 169 yards and a touchdown, and also ran for a score in New York's 48-22 loss at home on Dec. 11. Jones and most of the Giants' starters were held out of the regular-season finale, a 22-16 loss at Philly.

Still, Jones' improvement this season is clear to Eagles coach Nick Sirianni.

"Daniel Jones is dangerous in the pocket and when he gets out of the pocket, he's playing really good football," Sirianni said. "He's continuing to get better."



CHRIS SZAGOLA/AP

Giants linebacker Tomon Fox pressures Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts during the first half of the regular season finale. The Eagles won, but Hurts was slowed by a shoulder injury. He should be fine on Saturday.

Giants preparing to face 'Hurts the MVP candidate'

BY DENNIS WASZAK JR.
Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — The New York Giants are ready for a different Jalen Hurts this time around.

A fully healthy Philadelphia Eagles quarterback, that is. And that means preparing to face one of the NFL's most dynamic dual threat players.

"Everybody's saying he's having an MVP season and I agree," Giants defensive coordinator Wink Martindale said Wednesday. "Because he can beat you with his legs, he can beat you with just being a dropback quarterback, he can beat you with a sore shoulder."

"He can beat you a lot of different ways, and that's a great challenge because there's just a few quarterbacks that can do it that way."

Hurts was a full participant at Eagles practice and not even listed on the injury report Wednesday, a clear indication he has healed from the sprained right shoulder he suffered early last month at Chicago.

"He's off the injury report, so I'm expecting Jalen Hurts the MVP candidate," Martindale said. "I think if you expect anything less, you're kidding yourself because the guy's definitely a competitor."

Hurts missed two games before returning for the regular-season finale against the Giants, who sat most of their starters in the Eagles' 22-16 win. The Pro Bowl quarterback was 20-for-35 for 229 yards and an interception,



NFC divisional playoffs
New York Giants (10-7-1)
at Philadelphia Eagles (14-3)
AFN-Sports
2:15 a.m. Sunday CET
10:15 a.m. Sunday JKT

and ran nine times for just 13 yards in a playoff tune-up in which he still appeared to not be 100% healthy.

When the teams meet again in their NFC divisional round playoff game Saturday night in Philadelphia, New York is expecting to see a healthy — and dangerous — Hurts.

"He's a challenge to play against," safety Julian Love said. "He's been playing at a super high level this year because of his arm, his legs. He has really elevated his game, and we have to try to play him as best we can. He has a lot of tools in his bag. ... He's posed a threat or a problem to everybody he's played this year."

The Giants know that firsthand. In the teams' first meeting in Week 14, Hurts was 21-for-31 for 217 yards and two TDs and ran seven times for 77 yards and a score.

Hurts set career highs in his third NFL season with 3,701 yards passing, 22 touchdown throws — against a personal-low six interceptions — and 13 TD runs. Despite sitting out two games, he be-

came the first quarterback in league history to rush for at least 10 touchdowns in back-to-back seasons. He's also the first QB with 10 or more TD runs and at least a 100 quarterback rating (101.5) in a single season.

On Tuesday, Hurts acknowledged teams are focused on stopping him — and perhaps even his banged-up shoulder could be targeted by the Giants on Saturday night.

"I've got a bounty on me every week I go out there," Hurts said. "I'm going to go out there and just play my game."

Rookie linebacker Kayvon Thibodeaux wasn't aware of Hurts' "bounty" comment, but said it only makes sense for defenses to focus on stopping teams' best playmakers.

"He's a great player, so just me being an edge rusher, you see just across the league, people scheme against the great players," Thibodeaux said. "So of course teams are going to scheme against him as being one of the best quarterbacks in the league. And I would say for us, we've just got to do what we can to contain him."

That's easier said than done, of course. And especially with the Giants coming off a playoff victory in which they faced Minnesota's Kirk Cousins, who's more of a traditional pocket passer.

"It's more just being disciplined, if that's in your rush lanes or if that's in your run lanes," defensive tackle Dexter Lawrence said. "You've just got to be more disciplined with a guy like (Hurts), a dual-threat guy."



BRUCE KLUCKHOHN/AP

New York Giants' Daniel Jones throws during the first half against the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday in Minneapolis.

NFL PLAYOFFS

Unsung 49ers pass rusher Omenihu steps up

By JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

When the San Francisco 49ers needed a game-changing defensive play in their playoff opener, it wasn't one of their three first-team All-Pro who delivered.

Instead it was under-the-radar pass rusher Charles Omenihu, who seems to have a knack for rising up on the playoff stage.

Omenihu's strip sack against Geno Smith helped San Francisco take control in the second half of a 41-23 wild-card victory last week over Seattle, and it was just the latest big postseason play he's provided in his short time in San Francisco.

"We're all big-time players, so it doesn't matter who is going to step up," he said. "Thank God I've been able to. In the year and a half that I've been here, I have been able to step up in those big-time games and help my team win."

Omenihu had two sacks against the Seahawks in a performance that was reminiscent of how he played last year in the wild-card round at Dallas when he had 1½ sacks and a forced fumble.

Omenihu is now getting ready



San Francisco 49ers defensive end Charles Omenihu celebrates during the second half against the Seattle Seahawks in Santa Clara, Calif., on Saturday. The 49ers won 41-23.

JED JACOBSON/AP

to face the Cowboys again in the divisional round on Sunday when San Francisco (14-4) hosts Dallas (13-5) with a spot in the NFC title game on the line.

Since being acquired at the trade deadline of the 2021 season

from Houston for a future sixth-round pick, Omenihu has developed into a complementary piece on a defensive line anchored by All-Pro Nick Bosa and Arik Armstead.

"I figured out what worked best

for me," he said. "Just over time, I continued preparing and studying myself. I understand how I should maneuver and play in this system."

Omenihu is the latest reclamation product of defensive line



NFC divisional playoff
Dallas Cowboys (13-5)
at San Francisco 49ers (14-4)
AFN-Sports
12:30 a.m. Monday CET
8:30 a.m. Monday JKT

coach Kris Kocurek, who has excelled in his time in San Francisco at bringing in low-profile defensive linemen and turning them into valuable pieces for the defense.

The Niners have gotten key contributions this season from linemen like Omenihu, Jordan Willis and Hassan Ridgeway, who struggled to produce in their previous stops.

"He's really revamped his preparation," Bosa said about Omenihu. "He was more of a big interior guy when he came in. The time that's he's been here, he's really bought into the scheme. He's a really good player for us."

Cowboys rookie learns OL versatility quickly

By SCHUYLER DIXON
Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Tyler Smith didn't have to worry about moving around on the offensive line in college, when he was on his way to being a first-round pick of the Dallas Cowboys.

After those Tulsa days ended, Smith knew versatility could be the key to a career in the NFL. The 21-year-old probably didn't envision the left-side shuffle his rookie year has become.

Smith will likely be back at left tackle for a divisional playoff at San Francisco on Sunday night, returning to the spot he inherited when eight-time Pro Bowler Tyron Smith tore a hamstring in training camp.

"It's just lineman versatility," Smith said. "All year, we've kind of been shuffled around."

From just about the beginning.

After drafting Smith 24th overall in April, the Cowboys put him at left guard for offseason workouts, which left open the possibility of starting or backing up Connor McGovern.

After Tyron Smith's injury less than three weeks before the opener, the rookie moved to the spot the club figured he would one day take over when the elder Smith was no longer with Dallas.

Tyler Smith started the first 16 games at left tackle before center Tyler Biadasz's ankle injury led to

multiple changes up front, including sliding Smith over to left guard.

Now Tyler Smith is back at left tackle after 40-year-old veteran Jason Peters injured his hip in the wild-card win over Tampa Bay.

"I couldn't have imagined it," Smith said of all the switching. "You don't want to keep your head too far in the future and fill your head up with all these scenarios."

The most significant development came when Tyler Smith didn't move at all.

When Tyron Smith was ready for his season debut in Week 15, the Cowboys decided to leave the rookie in the spot of someone the club considers a future Hall of Famer.

Tyron Smith played right tackle for the first time since his rookie season, which said everything about the job the Cowboys thought Tyler Smith did on Dak Prescott's blind side.

Dallas also didn't move Tyler Smith after right tackle Terence Steele, an undrafted third-year player, tore an ACL 13 games into the season.

"I think his arrow keeps climbing," coach Mike McCarthy said. "He's very bright and he's up here every morning early. He does all the little things, too, so he's going to be a fine, fine player for a long time."

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Big upset Down Under

American Brooksby knocks off
No. 2 seed Ruud » Australian Open, Page 27

NFL PLAYOFFS

Where he thrives

Mahomes in his element
as postseason beginsBy DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Ask any coach or player around the NFL and they are bound to tell you that the speed of the game picks up when the playoffs arrive. There is no longer time to think on the field; decisions more often are made by in-the-moment instincts rather than carefully crafted game plans.

Perhaps that's why Patrick Mahomes thrives in the postseason.

Whether it be his preponderance of no-look passes, crazy side-arm slings or the myriad other ways that the Kansas City Chiefs quarterback sparks creativity on the field, there is arguably no better player in the NFL when it comes to playing sandlot football. His ability to make something out of nothing leaves teammates and foes alike shaking their heads.

"You build up for this all season."

Patrick Mahomes
Chiefs QB on the playoffs

"My family or friends are like, 'Oh my God, how's Patrick Mahomes?' And I'm like, 'He's just a special individual,'" said Chiefs wide receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster, whose career has been rejuvenated during his first season playing with him.

"It's just like playing 'Madden' back when you had Michael Vick, who can just run all over the field and then launch it 80 yards down the field," Smith-Schuster explained. "It's kind of like that but for more it's ILR — in real life."

What has become known simply as Mahomes Magic around Kansas City tends to shine brightest this time of year, and the results are downright incredible: He has

SEE THRIVES ON PAGE 29

Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes is 8-3 in the playoffs and will try to lead Kansas City to its fifth straight AFC championship game.

MATT PATTERSON/AP

Lightning's Stamkos nets 500th career goal, hat trick » NHL, Page 25